



THE VALUE OF SMALL GRANTS

A review by

Peter Minet Trust and United St Saviour's Charity

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ROCKET SCIENCE 



INTRODUCTION

United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC) and Peter Minet Trust (Peter Minet) have been awarding small grants in South London for many years. In 2017 they joined forces to commission Rocket Science to review their grants programmes to better understand the impact that they make and to help the two organisations think about how to develop them for the future.

Peter Minet supports organisations in Lambeth and Southwark with grants of up to £5,000. UStSC only works in Southwark and has two grants programmes; a 'Community Investment' programme of over £5,000 for larger strategic projects and a 'Community Engagement' programme of small grants. Only the latter was the subject of this review which looked back at the past three years of grant-making.

Measuring the impact of small grants is inherently challenging and it was never the intention to produce a full-blown evaluation. However, both organisations set out to understand whether relatively small grants were of value to the groups and charities they fund.

This document summarises the main findings of the review. In many ways it is a celebration of the two programmes and the difference that they make.



INVESTMENT OVER THREE YEARS

United St Saviour's Charity

206 GRANTS AWARDED

£440,366 INVESTED

149 DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS FUNDED

Peter Minet Trust

115 GRANTS AWARDED

£413,507 INVESTED

94 DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS FUNDED

COMBINED

321
GRANTS

£853,873
TOTAL INVESTMENT

243
DIFFERENT
ORGANISATIONS
BENEFITING

KEY FINDINGS: VALUE OF SMALL GRANTS

United St Saviour's Charity

- The grants are particularly valuable to grassroots, volunteer-led groups and organisations with a turnover of under £1,000
- They help to build the confidence and skills of small community groups that often make a huge difference in disadvantaged communities
- They frequently fill a gap in funding; few others fund one-off activities and events which help to bridge social divides that are all too common in rapidly changing parts of the city
- They often act as a catalyst to attract other funding and partnerships
- The connecting, advising and supporting role of a place-based funder is often considered as important as the funding itself
- The grants are a good way of increasing profile and knowledge of the funders across the area of benefit
- A small grant can be a good way of piloting a project or a relationship and lead on to a larger project

Peter Minet Trust

- The grants have the greatest value when they're covering core costs – 74% of grants were used to fund organisation's core activities
- They let organisations continue existing activities - 79% of grantees said this was an important benefit of the grant
- They often provide funding for projects that others won't fund
- They are becoming increasingly important to small-medium sized organisations with a turnover of £250k and under owing to increasing competition for national funding
- They regularly help organisations leverage further funding and raise grantees' profile with other funders and statutory authorities
- Peter Minet is a place-based funder and its grants meet a very localised need in Lambeth and Southwark

KEY FINDINGS: CHALLENGES FACING GRANTEES

- The biggest challenges are covering core costs, fundraising and individual time pressures
- Many grantees don't have the time needed to evaluate the impact of their work and think more strategically
- At the same time as competition for resources is increasing, demand for services is growing due to public funding cuts
- Very small organisations or groups have particular challenges around developing new projects, as well as the recruitment and retention of volunteers

Our biggest issue is sustainability. With all this short-term funding we will always be in a precarious situation

KEY FINDINGS: CHALLENGES FACING THE TRUSTS

- The costs of administering small grants are relatively high in relation to the amounts awarded
- Measuring or quantifying the impact of the grants is not always easy
- Demand for Peter Minet grants is increasing and the Trust is oversubscribed, turning down 77% of applications. This is unsustainable for the Trust and an organisational challenge for applicants
- Grantees value the opportunity to meet and share their work with funders, and funders learn much about the difference grantees are making by visiting organisations. This is a challenge for Peter Minet due to time constraints

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

UStSC and Peter Minet have listened to grantees as well as other local funders and authorities and this feedback will help guide the two organisations as they develop their programmes. Both of the trusts:

Recognise the importance of core and multi-year funding for groups and charities

Understand the increasing challenges that voluntary groups and charities are facing, particularly small, local organisations

Understand the value of offering training, connecting and networking opportunities

Appreciate the particular role of place-based funders as national funding becomes far harder to secure

See how place-based funders can help leverage other funding and champion the sector locally

Value the opportunity for place-based funders to share ideas and experiences

CASE STUDIES: WHAT PEOPLE SAY

We trained young mums who were at risk of being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in drama therapy. Some of them now work with us and others have gone on to different roles.

”

Our grant allowed us to continue to offer a safe, non-judgmental space to some of the most marginalised residents of Southwark, giving them a chance to make friends, grow in confidence and get themselves back on their feet.

”

The grant has enabled us to run about 50 social events a year, reducing isolation of elderly residents.

”

This grant has helped us to continue to deliver our programme and will open up more doors for us in terms of fundraising.

”

Our grant has given a wide group of local people the opportunity to research and creatively explore a fascinating and little-known part of Rotherhithe history.

”

The grant helped us to run Bankside's biggest street party ever.

”

Marden Square: encouraging community cohesion

Marden Square sheltered housing scheme sits within a large estate in Bermondsey. The volunteer-led community group has received two grants from UStSC. The first grant of £1,500 was awarded in March 2016 and was the first grant that the group received after setting themselves up as a Tenants and Residents Association (TRA).

The grant was awarded to refurbish the communal garden and to hold an open day which encouraged residents and local people to visit. On the back of the grant, Marden Square residents entered the 'Bermondsey in Bloom' competition and subsequently received a 'Cleaner, Greener' grant from Southwark Council. The Council also introduced the TRA to the recycling/waste contractor, Veolia, which now donates soil conditioner to the garden on a regular basis.

The project was hugely successful – in improving the physical environment, in increasing the visibility of the sheltered housing residents, and by bringing the community together.

The grant encouraged community cohesion, enabled the volunteer-led group to form new partnerships, develop new skills, and bring in further funding and resources.



**The grant was our first
ever. With this we were
able to attract money
from other places.**



**United St Saviour's fund
our social clubs – they are
group activities for young
professionals and older
people to share laughter
and experiences.**

”

South London Cares (SLC): bridging social, generational and digital divides

SLC has received several grants from UStSC which have supported the organisation to deliver its 'Social Clubs'. At these clubs young professionals and older people meet and spend time together, taking part in varied activities such as Desert Island Discs, film nights and new technology workshops.

The Social Clubs have three objectives; they reduce isolation by bringing two of the loneliest groups in London together - young professionals and older people. They increase wellbeing by giving people greater control over their lives and relationships. They also help forge lasting connections across generational, socio-economic and digital divides.

Although not large sums, the small grants have enabled the charity to supplement its programme funding and deliver valuable and creative activities in response to specific local need and opportunities.

What's on in Rotherhithe (WORG): building community in a rapidly changing neighbourhood

WORG received a £500 grant in 2016 for 'Illuminate Rotherhithe', a community event linked to the 1620 Mayflower voyage. The event was so successful that the group continued and expanded it in 2017 - to a five-day festival. Themed around the idea of migration, many local people had something to say about their family's history and arrival to north Southwark.

UStSC's second grant supported a grand lantern, a concert and variety show with local people performing their own poems, music and comedy, alongside professional folk musicians. Performances covered the current refugee crisis, the motives of the 1620 separatists, and remembrances of air raid shelters, port and lemon and penny arrowroot biscuits.

The preparation, and the event itself, catalysed many partnerships and collaborations, with different groups and organisations coming together to build a free, inclusive and relevant festival. Those who would not otherwise have set foot in 'old' Rotherhithe became central to the success of the many events. These included a free concert with the 'Citizens of the World' choir, a screening of 'The Pilgrims' film, and a free Grand Ceilidh for families and 500 local school children.

The grant enabled the community group to deliver a series of successful community events, leverage other resources, develop many new partnerships and bring together diverse communities at a time of transformational change.

**People feel more
positive about where
they live and their
relationships with
their neighbours.**



Blue Elephant Theatre: improving the skills, self-confidence and mental health of young people

Blue Elephant Theatre creates opportunities for those who would not otherwise have access to them. In February 2017 the organisation received a grant of £5,000 to run Girls Speak Out: a theatre-based prevention programme to support 15 sexually vulnerable 14-16 year old girls. Sessions focused on increasing the girls' self-esteem, running creative workshops to encourage the group to think about positive female role models.

The sessions were run by an experienced Blue Elephant facilitator supported by three trainee facilitators, young people aged 18-26 at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) or of developing mental health issues. Many of the trainees gained important life and employment skills and went on to pursue employment opportunities with Blue Elephant Theatre or with other organisations. Blue Elephant Theatre has also developed relationships with a local school and is looking to run a similar project with a different group of vulnerable young people.

A small grant from Peter Minet covered the total costs of the project.



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Lambeth and Southwark Mind: improving mental health through peer support and yoga

Lambeth and Southwark Mind is an independent local charity that aims to improve the lives of people experiencing mental distress. The organisation has received two grants from Peter

This was an unfunded group – it wouldn't have been possible without the grant from Peter Minet.

Minet over the last three years. The larger £5,000 grant funded a peer support group which meets on a fortnightly basis providing mutual aid for people who experience psychological difficulties.

The second smaller grant of £500 funded a 12-month weekly yoga project which supports people experiencing psychosis. The Peter Minet grant enabled Lambeth and Southwark Mind to bring in other resources to support the project. The premises and the time of the facilitator were free which helped to maximise the value of the grant.

Peter Minet regularly funds existing core activities and this grant allowed a valuable programme to continue and for Lambeth and Southwark Mind to secure other funding.

Choir with no Name: supporting people with experience of homelessness

The grant from Peter Minet contributed to the core costs of the South London Choir. The Choir has an open-door policy, welcoming anyone who has experience of being homeless. The Choir meets weekly and after the session has a meal together.

Our grant from Peter Minet Trust was used to fund the running costs of our choir for marginalised people in Southwark.

The appreciative crowds who see our choirs perform re-assess their view of people affected by homelessness – they see people happy and active like everyone else.

Getting involved in the choir can be life changing for participants: they are more likely to engage with other services and support and acquire increased confidence. Another benefit of the Choir extends from its challenging people's perceptions of homelessness and what people affected by homelessness can achieve.

A BIG THANK YOU

To all of the organisations and groups funded by Peter Minet and UStSC for their inspiring work and commitment to build and strengthen communities. We are grateful to all of those that gave valuable time to complete the grants review survey, and to representatives from the organisations and groups that participated in the grants workshop and telephone interviews. The volunteers and businesses that generously support our work.

More information

Full copies of Rocket Science's research reports for Peter Minet and United St Saviour's can be downloaded from www.peterminet.org.uk or www.ustsc.org.uk

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