

# The Parent House: Cost of Living Crisis Research: Conducted by Parent Voice Group Summer 2023

## Introduction

The Parent House's (TPH) Cost of Living project is **funded by Awards for All Lottery funding** and was created as a result of listening to the pressures parents were, and are, facing during the Cost of living Crisis.

To this end volunteer parents were trained in Participatory Appraisal (PA) community research techniques. They went out into the community asking fellow parents various questions about their experience, and about what would help them during the Cost of Living Crisis.

The Parent House group who undertook this research are called 'Parents Voice'. They talked to **64 parents** in **9 various groups and schools** in Islington.

These were the top three issues that arose for parents at all 9 settings

- Parents were experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety and guilt
- Parents wanted advice on how to budget and save money
- Parents wanted to get support with getting employment that could support their families

In response to this during the Autumn term 2023, The PV group are currently using parents' ideas drawn from this research to prioritise these actions,

- **Set up free relevant workshops in local venues**
- **Organise an event to influence Islington services** Parents and professionals will be invited to hear about the research and the results
- **Train TPH workers in the use of Turn2us grant online calculators**
- **Train TPH staff and volunteers in the use of Money Helper online calculators**

The ideas, which were generated during the Parent Voice groups' research, can be seen in more detail in the report and appendices. This work has been led by Islington parents, the data comes from Islington parents and all presentations will be made by Islington parents.

## Mission of the research project

- provide an environment which engages parents and carers particularly those from vulnerable groups
- provide opportunities for parents and carers that will enable them to maximise their economic well-being and prepare them for working life

- to look into the effects of the cost of living crisis on the parents of Islington and to offer support and signposting through workshops and information sharing.

## Parents Voice

The Parent's Voice group is a group of volunteers who meet at The Parent House. Many parents in the group have been together for nearly 2 years. Others have joined recently, which is fantastic, they are a really vibrant group.

The group has been meeting weekly and apart from training and going out into the community, the group supports each other and works well as a team.

Future ideas for the Parent's Voice are,

- Training in online budgeting tools that they can then share with other parents.
- Helping design a Parent Advisory group that will feed into TPH Trustee meetings
- Becoming part of a core TPH volunteer group who engage with Islington parents to influence and promote services

The aims and objectives of the Parent Voice group are as follows –

### **Aim**

We will reach out to parents and listen to their concerns and ideas about the 'cost of living crisis' and then respond by spreading helpful information in creative ways to act on the needs and gaps we identify.

### **Objectives**

1. Work together as a team, continually developing and growing together.
2. Undertake Participatory Appraisal (PA) community research, asking at least 40 parents about their concerns around the 'cost of living' crisis and what would help.
3. Find out from the 40 parents in the community what else TPH could provide/deliver from the Parent House, including ideas for future workshops.
4. Listen to parents and set up an action plan, including providing workshops that meet the most outstanding needs identified by the research.
5. Provide e bulletins that include financial support, and useful, relevant information.
6. Present our information on Speakers day as a report, to be widely circulated.

## Participatory Appraisal Community Research

In order to understand parents' experiences and listen to their solutions the Parent Voice group devised and asked the following questions –

- **Question 1 – What type of financial support do parents need during the cost of living crisis?**

- Question 2 – How does the Cost of Living affect the health and wellbeing of families?
- Question 3 – What services including schools have you accessed to help with Cost of Living?
- Question 4 – What advice would you give to other parent to support their children through the Financial Cost of Living crisis?
- Question 5 – How can the Parent House support you and how can other local organisations support you?

The information generated through these questions is gathered in this report and will be shared on our website and made available to relevant Islington organisations. The parent Voice group will also Present their findings at a Speakers workshop day event in the Autumn term 2023.

Three workshops responding to the needs identified by Islington parents will be delivered in autumn/winter 2023 and will all be free of charge.

### What is Participatory Appraisal or PA?

PA is community led research which gathers information and follows up with actions. Open ended questions are used to hear views and make connections. The group used different community research tools, which they design themselves. We use visual tools in PA to overcome communication barriers including literacy, language and age

Participatory Appraisal **is** about:

- Attitudes and behaviours
- Learning from mistakes
- Reflection
- Respect for others and their views, ideas and local expertise
- A process which cannot be rushed
- Three elements - Research, Learning and Collective Action

It is based on the premise that communities have the knowledge to analyse their own needs and to develop local solutions to local concerns.

### The Parent House

The Parent House is a small charity that has been working with families in Islington since 2000. Two thirds of our staff team are previous users of TPH.

We help parents unlock life-changing opportunities, whether that is through having a peer mentor to provide a space to think, attending one of our accredited courses, or getting the information they need at that moment. Our work has the purpose of empowerment through connection. Parents work together, supporting each other to find the solutions to the issues that they and other parents face. We believe that if parents are supported and connected then children have better outcomes.

We offer a range of accredited training courses including Mentoring, Presentation Skills and Team Work. We also provide 1-to-1 support on any issues that concern local parents. We organise group work which focuses on particular topics such as Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and knife crime. We also have an outreach group who take our work into their various communities, and parents' groups who undertake community research into topics relevant to local families.

## Our Data and findings

We have gathered data from 64 parents, who attended 9 sessions run at separate settings including schools, and support organisations. We grouped the answers to our 5 questions into key topics and the main issues that arose are listed with their questions below.

**We have added details of all the comments made by parents in the appendices at the end of this report.**

### **Question 1: What type of financial support do parents need during the cost of living crisis?**

We used a brick wall graffiti tool for this question

**The main issues which arose through asking Question 1 were,**

- **The need for food vouchers**
- **Help with energy bills**
- **Budgeting advice**

All parents' comments made in response to Question 1 are in [Appendix 1](#)

### **Question 2: What advice would you give to other parents to support their children through the financial Cost of Living crisis?**

We used a drawing of lips to seek people's advice

**The main advice given in response to question 2 was,**

- **Sell old items**
- **More home cooking**
- **Go to free activities**
- **Ask for help**
- **Be honest**

All parents' comments made in response to Question 2 are in [Appendix 2](#)

### **Question 3a: What services including schools have you accessed to help with Cost of Living? (house positive)**

We used a house design for this question, there were opportunities to put positive, negative and suggestion comments on the house using post it notes. It is called an H plan.

**Positive responses:** these were the organisations that parents said were most helpful in the COL crisis

#### **Top answers –**

- **Schools**
- **Charities**
- **Council services**

#### Schools

Support with school uniforms was mentioned frequently. COL fair managed in partnership with HOYD, The Peel Centre and Hugh Myddleton school was named as useful by more than one parent.

#### Charities

Unsurprisingly, TPH was mentioned numerous times. This is to be expected as we carried out the research. Age UK, Food Banks, The Pantry, Centre 404, Citizens Advice Borough, St Luke's Community Centre and SHINE were also mentioned.

#### Council services

Islington Council was mentioned several times including their work with Bright Start and Children Centres

All parents' comments made in response to Question 3 positive responses are in [Appendix 3a](#)

**Question 3b:** What services including schools have you accessed to help with Cost of Living? (house) negative.

**Negative responses:** these were the organisations that parents said were most unhelpful in the COL crisis

#### **Top answers**

- **Schools**
- **Parents were given no information**
- **A mix of organisations**

Parents felt that they were not given information to help them even though there may have been support 'out there'. They were concerned about there being no free school meals for secondary school children and about the lack of information once their children started at secondary schools.

All parents' comments made in response to Question 3b (negative responses) are in [Appendix 3b](#)

### **Question 3c:** What services including schools have you accessed to help with the Cost of Living? (house) suggestions –

**Suggestions:** these suggestions were made for other parents and also to service providers

#### **Top Answers**

- **more services through schools**
- **Signpost information and activities available**
- **Get support from other parents, friends and family.**
- **More information needed about grants**

All parents' comments made in response to Question 3 suggestions. Responses are in [Appendix 3c](#)

### **Question 4a:** How does the Cost of Living affect the health and wellbeing of families? (Rose) positive

We used a drawing of a rose and asked for positive answers to be put on the petals of the flower, negative on the thorns and suggestions on the ground of the drawing.

**Positive:** These were the positive outcomes of the COL crisis that parents named. It is important to mention that several parents said there were no positives.

#### **Top answers**

- **Quality time together**
- **Creative cooking**
- **Thinking about budgeting**
- **Gaining more knowledge of free activities.**

All parents' comments made in response to Question 4 (positive responses) are in [Appendix 4a](#)

### **Question 4b:** How does the Cost of Living affect the health and wellbeing of families? (Rose) negative

**Negative responses:** these were the negative outcomes of the COL crisis that parents named

#### **Top Issues**

- **Stress**  
including depression, anxiety, panic and feelings of isolation
- **Financial problems**  
unable to pay utility bills and dental costs, fearing homelessness
- **Food issues**  
lack of food and lack of healthy food, women skipping meals

- **Less things are possible**  
less activities for children

All parents' comments made in response to Question 4b (negative responses) are in Appendix 4b

### **Question 4c: How does the Cost of Living affect the health and wellbeing of families? (Rose) suggestions**

**Suggestions:** these suggestions were made for other parents and also to service providers

#### **Top suggestions**

- **Ideas about cooking food**
- **Exercise and free activities**
- **Teach children about budgeting**
- **Access support**

All parents' suggestions made in response to Question 4c are in [Appendix 4c](#)

### **Question 5: How can the Parent House support you? (bottles).**

We had 2 bottle drawings - one was for help from the Parent House and the other was help from other organisations.

#### **Top answers**

- **Help to get a job**
- **Advice and Support**
- **Training and workshops**
- **Wellbeing support**
- **More SEND services**
- **Budgeting and Food support**

#### **Help to get a job**

Courses with skills for work, interview support, CV workshops, interview techniques, careers advice & accredited training

#### **Advice & Support**

Creche & Childcare support whilst getting advice, hardship funds, Islington Council: To offer vouchers or grants to parents, 1:1 support, Domestic Abuse group & parent support group

#### **Training and workshops**

By far the highest request was support through budgeting workshops and training. Added to this was mentor training, free travel oyster card to get to training, peer led groups & presentation courses plus activities for children

A significant amount of parents spoke about having difficulties in getting GP appointments.

All parents' comments made in response to Question 5 are in [Appendix 5](#)

### [What the Parent Voice group is doing as a result of this report?](#)

The Parent's Voice group gathered the results to our 9 PA sessions and then used an impact ranking form to decide the areas we could then action. This form allows the group to look at what parents have asked for then assess what potential actions would be the easiest to implement and what would make the highest impact.

What became clear was that parents wanted help in some key areas. These were the top three issues that arose at all 9 settings

- **Stress, anxiety and guilt**
- **Wanting advice on how to budget and save money**
- **How to get a job.**

These findings have led the Parent Voice group to set up free workshops on the topics identified. All of our workshops are for Islington parents.

In the Summer term 2023 we held free Sound Meditation session run by a local parent who has set up her own business. The aim of this session was for parents to develop techniques to manage the effects of stress, it was well received by the 17 parents who attended.

We are now organising free workshops for Autumn and Spring terms 2023/24

- In September 2023: **A free workshop in partnership with Mind Matters (The Peel Centre) and ICope (Islington Council) on how to manage uncertainty, guilt and anxiety.**
- During the autumn and spring terms of 23/24: **Free workshops on how to manage your money.**
- Spring term: **employment support and CV workshops**

Parent Voice parents are also currently training to use on line money calculators. They intend to share their knowledge by training other parents in the community. This 'each one, teach one' approach helps to cascade the knowledge gained by parents, whilst compounding their learning. Teaching new skills is a strong way to learn.

Parents also have a plan to organise a clothes/item swap in the New Year.

Parents in Islington have told us that they are suffering in the COL crisis. They want to help themselves, but need our support. They want training for work, techniques to cope with stress and practical support in managing their finances. They need



schools, charities and Islington council to support them in their efforts to support themselves.

We believe this research has the potential to influence Islington service providers in their decisions about how to support the communities they work with, and we look forward to meeting Islington service providers, grant makers and parents at our Speakers day workshop this winter, where we will share our results. We want you to join us in being part of the solution to the serious problems parents have raised.