

Queen's Crescent Community Association



Annual Report

2021–2022



Welcome

Welcome to this year's annual report. It's been a busy 12 months, re-setting QCCA after the emergency of the pandemic. But it's also been a good year, where we've supported large numbers of our most vulnerable members. We invite you to find out more.



CEO's Introduction

Last year, we celebrated the work we did over Covid. This year, we reflect on the changes that Covid has brought to QCCA as well as the voluntary sector.



The fiscal year 2021 – 2022 saw us recover from the lost income of lockdown. Our nursery attendances rose by 15% while our venue hire went up to near pre-Covid levels.

And for most people, the year was also a return to normal. Our sports were especially popular with members keen to get fit again. Our 'Healthy Families/Camden Health Kick' programme was our single biggest, with more than 500 parents and children exercising together. In total, over 900 people did sport or fitness activities with QCCA last year.

At our nurseries, parents who had pulled their children out during furlough returned to work and sent their little ones back. While hall and venue hire benefited from a rush of delayed wedding and party bookings.

Organisationally, it was a time to review where Covid had left us. The foodbank was meant to be an emergency measure during the pandemic, but we decided not to close it in July because of continuing need.

We refreshed QCCA's policies - most notably with a major review of safeguarding - and re-assessed fundraising. There were early signs of increasing competition for grant-funding when we lost the Children in Need grant in June that had supported our youth club for 13 years. As a result, our youth service began applying for smaller grants to spread the offer.

More generally, we started exploring ways to attract individual donors to help diversify income. We made QCCA's first promotional film narrated by Sir Michael Palin (see 'Thank You', page 24) and launched it in April at a fundraising event with 50 guests. We hope to build on this with a fundraising gala next year.

Several neighbourhood issues took up my time as CEO. In July, when Queen's Crescent shopkeepers said pedestrianisation of the market was losing them customers, QCCA organised meetings with council officials and planners so that the community could have its say.

And Camden Council's on-going consultation over regenerating Gospel Oak put the spotlight on the Dome in November, where its future was discussed in a Community Vision report. I firmly believe that re-building our wonderful facility in modern form on its current Weedington Road site is the best option for our whole community and have spent the year lobbying for this.

We've been pleased at the council's engagement in these and other conversations, which I believe shows a new era of co-operation post-Covid. If the pandemic proved anything, it's the value of the voluntary sector as a partner for statutory services when it comes to community outreach and programme delivery. In the next eighteen months, I anticipate and welcome much closer working between the council, local NHS services and the VCS sector in Camden as a whole.

Healthy Families

If proof were needed that families were amongst the hardest hit by lockdown, it's the success of Healthy Families.

The programme, formerly known as Camden Health Kick, was QCCA's single most popular last year with over 500 unique users, 400 of whom were from BAME communities. That figure is particularly impressive because Healthy Families didn't re-start until June 2021 and so only covers nine months of the year.

Aimed at supporting the physical and mental health of women, families and their children, the project offers a variety of free activities that different ages can do together. Users frequently told us that there was nothing else like it locally and that it was good for the whole family. 88% said that taking part had had a positive effect on their relationships with their children.

Families supported included 69 refugees and asylum seekers housed in Camden during Covid. Sometimes living four to a room, Healthy Families gave them the chance to let off steam.

Sessions included outdoor family football, men and boys' multi-sport, family yoga, women's yoga and family badminton. There have been family picnics on Hampstead Heath with sport and craft activities, including Christmas wreath making.

Our most popular weekly activity has been family Zumba, where women take part in a Zumba class while their children do multi-sport and nursery staff look after their babies in a soft play area. It's a unique, brilliant session that regularly gets over 50 people. It works because our sports hall, the Dome, is big enough for all these groups to exercise side-by-side (see also the Dome, page 14). For most, it's the only time in the week when they do something entirely for themselves without watching children.

Nearly two-thirds of Healthy Families members are female.



507
Healthy Families
users

80%
BAME

63%
women and girls

46%
children

82%
say they feel
fitter

82%
say they
wouldn't play
sport without
QCCA



'My mental health is quite a struggle for me but this is a safe space. I might tell the staff on the way in that I'm having a bit of a wobbly day and they'll understand. I'm not sure if it's because I'm fitter or happier - but it's better than any medication I've ever had.'

JANICE, 56, COMES TO YOGA AND ZUMBA

The educational and training side of Healthy Families has also been popular. It's been particularly important for us to raise awareness of key wellbeing issues because of the high levels of poor health amongst members. A survey of 84 Healthy Families users showed 64% had underlying health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or a family history of diabetes.

We've run workshops on improving sleep, healthy eating for people with diabetes and two day-long trainings on mental health for parents. The event we held for World Sight Day in October had 47 attendees.

So much was made possible by the flexibility of funders who were happy to defer pre-Covid grants until this year – including Vision Foundation, the Peter Harrison Foundation and Right to Thrive.

We've also made many wonderful new partnerships, working with diabetes partners Second Nature, family support charity the Wellness Action Alliance and Asian women's charity Hopscotch. Our picnics on the heath with Hampstead Heath volunteers' charity Heath Hands spawned a new pot of funding, which will allow us to run a women's Nordic Walking group next year.



CASE STUDY

Jasmin

The 45-year-old had enjoyed an active life on the family's farm in North Africa but felt out-of-shape after a decade in the UK as a stay-at-home mum.

Jasmin started coming to QCCA to do family Zumba with her daughter

But what started as a place to get fitter with her ten-year-old turned into a safe space where she was also brave enough to try new things.

When we ran a series of mental health workshops for parents, Jasmin says: 'I wasn't sure whether to go or not because in my culture, mental health means you are crazy. I was a bit scared.'

But the fact that QCCA was running the courses made it easier for her to sign up - not least because her husband had no objections. 'If I say I'm going to do something at the Dome, he says that's OK,' she explains.

'If he saw me walking out the house in another direction, he would ask more questions, but when you go to the Dome, it's a positive thing. The sport there is positive, my daughter enjoys it there, I enjoy it. So he assumed that the mental health course would be a positive thing as well.'

They were both right. The workshop gave Jasmin insights and tips on how to handle a young girl going into her teenage years. 'Understanding mental health makes me a better parent,' she says. 'My daughter wants to be perfect at everything, always get good marks, and she panics when she doesn't. Sometimes I think she just needs more hugs.'

"When you go to the Dome, it's a positive thing. The sport there is positive, my daughter enjoys it there, I enjoy it."



Older People's Service

Our older people's service added major new strands of activity this year in response to the pandemic.



Programme co-ordinator Mary Pierce welcomed three part-time staff members: Lifelines Champion Belinda Rogers, IAG advisor Khadija Naib and health and wellbeing co-ordinator Darla Hocking.

Their roles tackled the biggest problems facing our older members coming out of Covid; a backlog of cancelled medical appointments, mounting debts and a shortage of people to advocate for them in the absence of statutory support workers, family and friends.

Darla joined in December and helped 44 people in three months. A trained nurse, she provided members with befriending and health advice in a relaxed environment at a time when it was nearly impossible to get a face-to-face GP appointment. As well as doing basic health checks like blood pressure and blood sugar, she reviewed people's medications and explained their conditions in simple terms. It gave them the confidence to go to their doctors for more help.

286
unique users

94%
felt happier

91%
felt more socially connected

80
older people at Christmas lunch

27
housing support grants secured

Khadija joined in November and case-worked 31 clients in five months. The majority came to her with issues around housing and debt. The fact that Khadija speaks six languages was a bonus for her mainly BAME clients.

Belinda became Lifelines Champion in February and took just one month to secure £150 Household Support Fund grants for 27 older people, a total of £4050. As well as applying for grants and benefits, she co-ordinated with the council, health professionals and homelessness organisations to provide wrap-around support and advocacy for our most vulnerable members.

But the backbone of QCCA's older people's service remained the daily programme of life-enhancing activities for people over 55. We kept in telephone contact with a hardcore of older people who remained too afraid to leave the house. But for the most part, people wanted to come back to the centre, which re-instated its full older people's programme in June.

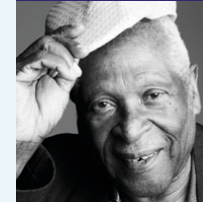
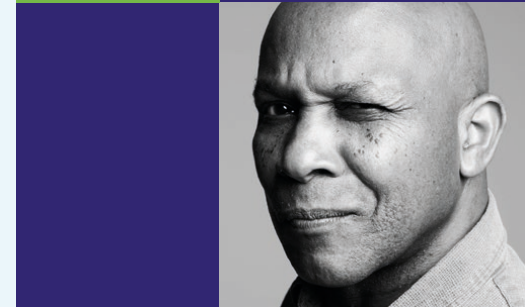


Photo credit: Rankin

Exercise and gym sessions with our fitness instructor Azmal Hussain continued to be our most popular activities. His chair-based exercise classes attracted up to 30 people. Art and drama groups were well attended as were the outings and day trips – especially in the summer.

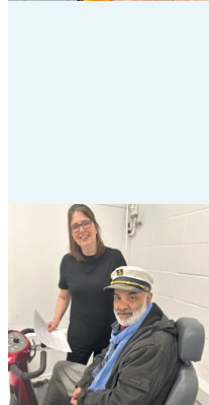
The rise of Omicron in December didn't affect attendance of our Christmas lunch which needed two sittings to meet demand.

Local people were generous with their time and skills. Celebrity photographer Rankin invited our members down to get their portraits taken in September. It was a great day and ten people can now say they've been photographed by the man who also photographed the late Queen Elizabeth II. Belsize Park hairdresser Lisa Meyer brought smiles to everyone in April when she came to the centre to give free haircuts.

The older people's service had an injection of £232,379 new funding this year from the Mercers' Company, the Masonic Charitable Foundation and City Bridge Trust.

But the prioritisation of funding to health and advocacy meant there were cuts to other activities. Chair-based exercise went down from five sessions a week to two; lunch went down from two sessions a week to one and there was reduced use of our new minibus.

These are all changes we want to reverse in the coming year, whilst continuing to offer active advocacy to the most vulnerable.



CASE STUDY

Captain John

There aren't many people who can say they've fought in three wars, speak ten languages and helped build the 'wobbly' Millennium Bridge.



But Captain John Cameron Nixon can lay claim to all three. The 93-year-old has been coming to QCCA for nearly a decade, entertaining staff and members with his stories during lunches and trips. But this year, we found a way to get him in front of a larger audience by inviting him to give talks.

So far, he's shared his knowledge on 'The History of the Union Jack' and 'The History of the Railways'. He weaves stories about his own experiences and those of his family whilst passing around personal artifacts for people to see. His talk on the railways was especially personal. He was chief engineer at British Rail in the seventies and eighties and was responsible for the running and maintenance of the InterCity 125 train.

'90% of my talks are about things people don't know about,' he says. 'I like creating something people will be interested in. I get satisfaction from it.'

'Initially the reason I came here was a social one, to meet people. When you are a single person on your own, it's beneficial to make friends.'

Captain John's relationship with QCCA started because he wanted to meet people. He's lived in Kentish Town for 40 years, but his family aren't nearby. Now he comes at least once a week because: 'Everybody knows me and they're all on talking terms with me.'

And although he goes to several other community centres in Camden, there are things that especially attract him to QCCA. 'This is very different,' he says. 'It's more informal with a friendly atmosphere. Some centres charge membership fees and charge for events. Others have a religious background. But here, everyone is welcome. It's like an open house.'

Food Bank

We planned to close our Covid foodbank in the summer of 2021, in line with the government's 'roadmap' out of lockdown.



But it quickly became apparent that the end of the pandemic didn't mean the end of people's problems. The cost-of-living crisis was beginning to show itself and many still needed support after months of living off savings or running up household debts.

Although Covid emergency funding ran out in July, foodbank co-ordinator Belinda Rogers stepped up and ran it unpaid with a small team of volunteers.

We helped 60 households throughout the year with food supplied entirely by donation. Individuals and local residents would leave bags of goods at our reception, but the mainstay came from The Felix Project and City Harvest, who delivered excess supermarket products twice a week for us to re-distribute. We managed to make some hot 'Lockdown Lunch' takeaway meals as well with the surplus at the start of the year, cooked once again by our wonderful volunteers.



In December, the foodbank was at the heart of our second ever Christmas appeal. We fundraised and bought food to supply more than 300 hampers for residents. Huge thanks to Mother Carol from St Martin's Church Gospel Oak who added £4000 to the pot from 'Love Christmas'.

As the year closed, plans were being discussed to ensure the longevity of the service. One possibility could see it being spun off as a separate entity, hosted at QCCA until a more suitable venue is found.

60
households supported
by the foodbank

100
individual beneficiaries

300
Christmas hampers produced



The Dome

The Dome has been a backbone of Queen's Crescent life for eight years, used 348 days a year, 9am - 10pm. But this year its future came under scrutiny.

In November, Camden Council published its Community Vision for Gospel Oak, with three options for the Dome: re-building on its current Weedington Road site; re-locating nearby or positioning it out of the area.

Ahead of what's likely to be another year of consultation, we want to celebrate the many people who use the Dome. QCCA both manages the space and runs free youth, sports and holiday clubs in it with our youth charity partner, GOALYC. In between, it's hired by local organisations such as French school College Francais Bilingue de Londres and disabled theatre group Quite Quite Fantastic.

Four residents' football teams play here each week. This year, it's also been a Covid testing and vaccination centre, the HQ for packing 300 Christmas hampers and screened July's women's European Cup final.

QCCA and GOALYC believe strongly that the Dome needs to stay where it is. In the coming year, we'll be consulting with the council, our community and young people to find out what they think.



348

days open a year

130

fans watching the women's Euro finals

300

Christmas hampers packed

CASE STUDY

Wednesday FC

Meet the Wednesday football team.



It's not the most original name, but it gets to the heart of what they are about: come rain or come shine, they meet at the Dome every Wednesday evening and have done for six years.

'Most of us wouldn't see each other without the football,' says part-time organiser and full-time Uber driver Mohamed Adan. 'It brings people together.'

The Wednesdays are a group of 18 men aged 20 - 40 who all live in Camden, most within walking distance of the Dome. They play in three teams on a 'winner stays on' basis, in their own monthly 'mini-league'. Mohamed is one of five Uber drivers in a squad that also includes council workers and students as well as people on Universal Credit.

They rent the pitches themselves and because not everyone can afford to pay football subs, team-mates will chip in for others when they're having a tough week. But it's the cost of the Dome that makes it sustainable.

'We couldn't afford to play without the Dome,' says Mohamed. 'There are some cheaper places, but they are further away and people don't have transport.'

And he says their weekly football is worth every penny.

'There's nothing to do round here and Camden's a dodgy area so if you don't have a job or you're a student, you don't want to get in with the wrong crowd. A lot of the players say this is the only thing they look forward to all week.'

Youth Service

There was a huge appetite for getting out of the house, getting active and reconnecting with friends after Covid. Infact the youth service saw a 109% increase in membership year-on-year across the period.



Much of the growth was anchored by an exciting sports programme, well-funded holiday clubs and a drive to encourage more girls into the Dome.

88% of all youth club members have taken part in sport this year. 189 young people had places at our free holiday clubs and we launched a new girls'-only session which is becoming one of the most popular things we do.

Normal service was resumed at the start of the year, with minimal Omicron restrictions ending in January 2022. Our first Easter camp in two years was over-subscribed and our full programme of in-person activities was in full swing by May 2021, including two core seniors' club nights and one for juniors'. Junior sessions have been particularly popular, with significant growth amongst 8-12-year-olds where parent engagement is strong. We've promoted both youth and general QCCA services by WhatsApp and email groups with mums, dads and carers.



455
unique users

6,519
attendances

Sport anchored everything, driven by the enthusiasm of sports development co-ordinator Frances White in her first full year. 10 out of our 14 youth sessions a week involved sport of some kind, with football and cricket continuing to be popular and a new juniors' basketball team and tennis lessons. Our gym had a refurbishment and re-opened to members aged 14+ in September.

Our boys' football teams under senior youth worker Triston Thomas also had a good year. Our seniors Pathways squad from the Pathways project we run with NW5 Project and Maiden Lane Community Centre finished third in the London Youth Football Festival in February. They also won the London Youth Woodrow Wellbeing cup in March. Our juniors' team won silver at the London Youth Football Festival.





The boxing and mentoring programme Off the Hook – run on behalf of our youth service partner GOALYC - went from strength-to-strength in its second year. GOALYC and QCCA together with the Metropolitan police ran three terms with 41 at risk young people, gaining 128 AQA's in subjects like boxing, stop and search and communicating ideas. Workshops were delivered with help from partners such as the lifesaving skills charity YourStance, positive relationships charity Let Me Know and sexual health clinic Brook.

Off the Hook was one of several activities which we encouraged girls to join. After the first term attracted only boys, we had our first girls sign up in March. 23 girls attended throughout the year. Aware of the need to support girls more broadly, we re-launched our general girls'-only group in April for 10-16 year olds.

88%
of users played sport

400
played sport

189
young people signed up for holiday clubs

128
AQA qualifications gained



Combining fun youth club activities with something more active, there have been tasters in more than ten sports including tennis and street dance. No-one has (yet) refused to take part, even though 75% of our girls' group don't do sport anywhere else, including at school. The club had between 20-24 users monthly.

We've also worked hard to recruit more female staff including sports trainer Sarah Bou-Abbache. A Muslim herself, she's helped us make links with other young Muslim women.

Most of this was delivered at a time of change. We were without a youth service manager for the last quarter of the year, but our youth team remained stable and continued to run a quality service with young people at its heart.

Our aims for the next year include re-starting our Inbetweeners group to help 10-14-year-olds into seniors' youth club; re-opening our sound studio and helping young people develop tools so that they can research and campaign for positive change. Projects like Off the Hook, sports, girls' youth club and others would not have been possible without the strong collaboration with GOALYC. We look forward to working more closely with all our partners to offer vital youth provision in Gospel Oak.



Nurseries

It was a good year for our two not-for-profit nurseries. Parents returned to work after Covid and local demand was driven by the closure of three competitor nurseries close to the two sites. As a result, enrolment was strong – especially at Caversham - leading to an increase of 15% in income and giving us the opportunity to invest in the infrastructure of each building.



Caversham Nursery

Caversham Nursery saw numbers rise by a third, with 28 children registered across the year compared to 21 last year.



The loosening of Covid restrictions helped boost enrolment, with government rules lifted in January. Until then, there were a few minor disruptions. The nursery's graduation ceremony in July 2021 had to be held in the garden after a family tested positive for Covid. And Omicron meant that the Christmas nativity play was watched online by parents.

28
children registered

8
children with
free childcare

But by March 2022, things were back to normal. Parents and children finally celebrated together at a Mother's Day party, complete with cakes and cards made by the children. In classrooms, the emphasis continued to be on creativity and one-to-one support. Themes were set each term and covered 'All About Me', 'Transport' and 'People Who Help Us.'

Outdoor activities got a boost when the building's two gardens were re-landscaped with new turf and revamped play equipment. Children helped plant pear, apple and plum trees in the autumn, secured by Caversham's deputy manager Elisabeth Sather, who volunteers for a gardening charity in her spare time.

The nursery also received blackcurrent bushes as a gift from a family whose children had attended Caversham.

A lot of thought was put into helping children with additional needs. All staff benefitted from training in Makaton sign language and advanced teaching techniques including Special Time and Bucket Time. And although initiated to support a handful of children with special needs, the additional skills benefited all students. One mum whose child goes to the nursery says: 'My daughter's journey at Caversham has been exceptional. The staff worked tirelessly to ensure they met the needs of every single child, getting to know each as an individual, building on their strengths, supporting their weaknesses and encouraging growth. My daughter's made memories that will last a lifetime.'

Next year the nursery sees the potential to build capacity further, depending on recruiting quality staff in a difficult labour market.

Holly Lodge Nursery

Holly Lodge Nursery continued to build a special connection with its community. Based in the heart of Highgate's Holly Lodge estate and open during term-times, a sizeable number of new children this year came through personal recommendation from local residents.



Overall, registration numbers were slightly down, but still high at 33 across the year compared to 35 the previous year.

Parental involvement stands out as something the nursery does well. Mums and dads were encouraged to talk to staff about anything that concerned them, in a 'whole family' approach. They were also asked to give feedback on the curriculum, which fed into forward planning.

Also outstanding was the nursery's food, which received praise throughout the year from parents, carers and staff. The colourful, healthy lunches and teas are freshly-cooked each day by Holly Lodge's in-house cook, Eden Timerga.

The first half of the year saw some light-touch Covid restrictions remaining.

Parents still dropped off their children outside while doors stayed open and mechanical ventilators remained in use. Graduation in July was live-streamed so that parents could watch. By Christmas, however, even Omicron could not dim the appetite for a nativity play and the nursery staged a live performance. Children were allowed to have one guest each. By January, like its sister Caversham Nursery, all restrictions were lifted.

In the classroom, weekly lesson themes were published a term in advance to allow teachers to plan.

There were special activities around Black History Month in October and a 'Let's Get Creative' day where parents were invited in to make art with their children.

Staff took the teaching experience outside whenever possible. Teachers and children particularly enjoyed joining forces with local residents in the autumn to plant trees around the estate for Remembrance Day.

It was also the year that Ofsted awarded Holly Lodge a rating of 'Good'. It praised staff for helping children 'get the best start in their early education' and developing independence.



33

children registered

7,600

freshly-cooked meals annually

GOOD

new Ofsted rating

Thank You

After the worst of the Covid emergency was over, people might have assumed their help wasn't needed. But the opposite was true. We'd like to sign off this year with a snapshot of a few individuals and organisations that represent the many.



Thank you to all the many, wonderful local residents who stepped up to volunteer for us - including a few well-known faces.

Photographer Rankin has been a friend to QCCA in the past but generously gave over his Kentish Town studio for the day to welcome our older people and take their portraits in September

Uli Meyer, the acclaimed director and animator behind 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', became a very familiar figure around Queen's Crescent for four months over the winter, shooting and editing our first ever promotional film.

Sir Michael Palin did us a huge favour by agreeing to present and narrate the film during a flying visit to London in between making a television series in Iraq.

And QCCA foodbank volunteer Lindsay Mackie warmly offered her home and hospitality for the film's launch, hosted by her husband Alan Rusbridger, former editor of the Guardian and guest speaker Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's former director of communications and strategy.

Grant-givers continued to back the work we do in a sector where demands are higher than ever. Last year, we were particularly grateful to the organisations that gave us money to keep our older people's service open for two years: the Masonic Charitable Foundation, the Mercers' Company and City Bridge Trust.

Hearty thanks as well to our corporate partner, Neuberger Berman, who continues to donate to keep our work going, while sending a steady stream of good-humoured volunteers our way.



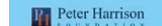
Also to champion boxer Michael Watson MBE for being so generous with his time as our Off the Hook ambassador.

And finally, to Camden Council, for its manifold support but especially this year's Community Infrastructure Levy (CiL) funding when we needed a new minibus. We were delighted to take delivery of our shiny new ULEZ-compliant vehicle at the start of 2022.

We couldn't have done this without any of you.



Our Funders



Queen's Crescent
Community Association

45 Ashdown Crescent
Gospel Oak
London
NW5 4QE

0207 267 6635

qcca.org.uk

info@qcca.org.uk

@qcca_camden

@QCCA_ltd

Registered Charity No. 1096655.

Registered CLG: 04393769



qcca.org.uk