Introduction

Twelve months on from the beginning of the first national lockdown, it is right to take stock of who, where and what we’ve funded so far and, perhaps more importantly, what we have learned.

Over the first three rounds of the fund, run from June to October 2020, we’ve supported 203 organisations, awarding more than £2.3 million. We’ve been able to support organisations from the Kent coast to the Outer Hebrides; from small community groups to national charities, each one committed to doing their best for the older people with whom they are working.

Our focus for the initial stage of the Grants Fund was to respond to the pandemic quickly and effectively. The feedback from those we supported indicates that we’ve been successful in that ambition. As so many funders have found over the past year, providing flexibility for organisations to respond to the evolving needs of older people in their community has been crucial.

We are at an early stage of understanding the difference our funding has made to the lives of older people, and what more we can do in the future. This report contains quotations from, and case studies of, older people receiving support from organisations we have funded. Their stories and testimonies provide us with a clear sense of the impact that the fund has had so far – and are the result of the hard work by staff and volunteers who we have been able to support. As we conclude our latest funding round, we will have the capacity to bring organisations together to share their learning with one another, and develop more case studies to amplify the voices of older people and to highlight the range of work supported through the fund.

Over the coming months, we’ll be doing much more listening and learning from the organisations we’ve been in contact with to date, as well as other funders and partners, and developing our approach for grant-making in the future. We’re also interested in what role we could play in better developing the capacity of organisations working with older people. Our Grants Fund work has the potential to contribute significantly to the strategic aims of Independent Age. As well as extending our ‘reach’, and supporting work with a larger number of older people through supporting work with other charities, the networks that we can develop through the Grants Fund can contribute to our learning and subsequent plans for transforming our own services.

A year ago, the Grants Fund was established as an emergency response to the pandemic. As this report sets out, in supporting a wide range of activities and organisations across the country, we have played our part in keeping vital services for older people running. Through our latest rounds, we will be supporting efforts to re-establish those face-to-face services that are so crucial in connecting individuals with their wider community. Beyond that, we will listen and learn from organisations so our efforts and funds can be best targeted and joined up with others to ‘build back better’ for the future.
Background to the Independent Age Grants Fund

The fund was designed to ensure those older people most at risk during the pandemic received support. The two groups focused on are:

- **Older people living in particularly complex and challenging situations**, for example, those:
  - needing help and support to stay safe, healthy and connected
  - with caring responsibilities for someone with high support needs
  - struggling with their own physical or mental health, adding to the complexity and challenge of their living situation
  - especially difficult to support at a distance.

- **Older people in danger of being out of sight and out of mind**, for example, those:
  - in Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
  - with no network of family, friends or community to call on
  - who are part of an isolated or very poor community
  - with needs that make it hard for them to access services, perhaps because they are homeless or hidden from view in an abusive relationship.

Examples of other groups that we hoped to reach through the Grants Fund included:

- people at risk of social isolation and loneliness
- people with disability
- people living with long-term health conditions
- people who are carers and at risk of exclusion
- people facing stigma/discrimination
- people living with HIV
- homeless people
- people living in an abusive relationship.

More broadly, we recognised the potential for the Grants Fund to contribute to Independent Age’s wider strategic aspirations, for example, by:

- making a real, immediate difference to marginalised older people
- adding value to small- and medium-sized older people’s organisations affected by COVID-19
- Achieving better understanding of the older people’s sector across the UK
listening and learning about the priorities for building the capacity of the sector and the role for Independent Age

contributing to the overall services transformation agenda at Independent Age, through learning and partnership working.

From May 2020, run over three initial rounds, an application-form-based process was launched, inviting small- and medium-sized charities (those with income below £1 million a year) working with older people to present proposals for up to £15,000, with the expectation that funded work would be completed within six months of the award.

Applications were assessed by a group of experienced grant-makers against our published eligibility and assessment criteria, with the strongest applications presented to our Grants Panel for final prioritisation.

Purpose of this report

This report provides a stocktake of what we’ve supported through the initial rounds of the Grants Fund, and our initial reflections and learning from our work to date.

It is not a formal ‘impact’ report of either all 203 organisations funded through Rounds 1–3, or the programme as a whole. Such a report would require an additional level of detailed monitoring of the funded work beyond that which was proportionate to the grant award and realistic for small- and medium-sized charities to complete in the context of the pandemic. As set out elsewhere in this report, we designed into the fund a degree of flexibility to allow organisations to meet the needs of the older people they were working with, as these evolved during the pandemic. Holding an organisation to account to deliver their intentions as set out in their original application would have been poor grant-making practice.

Nevertheless, we do have a valuable, and increasing bank of evidence, predominantly qualitative, collected from our grant-holders that shines a light on the difference that the Grants Fund has made to numerous organisations and individual older people across the country. Specifically, we have:

• a healthy sample (approximately 25%) of monitoring forms from organisations that have completed their funded work

• responses from around 85% of our grant-holders to a recent survey that provides a clearer view of the activities actually funded through our grants, and valuable feedback about our processes and approach

• begun to have detailed conversations with a number of our grant-holders to secure a deeper understanding of their organisation, the needs of the older people with whom they are working, and their future needs and priorities.
Accordingly, this report draws on data, along with relevant data captured through limited analysis of application forms (we only put in place a formal grants management system for Round 3), to begin to tease out whether, and the extent to which, we have met our initial ambitions for the fund. Over the coming months we will be developing a much more robust theory of change and appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements to underpin our new grant-making strategy and arrangements; getting these in place at the beginning is far easier than retrofitting later.

Additionally, we will be doing more work to clean and codify the significant amount of qualitative data we now hold about the organisations we have funded to date, both to inform our ongoing assessment of the Grants Fund as a whole, but also to inform future grant-making.

**Methodology underpinning the report**

As set out above, this report has drawn on data from a number of sources, most notably our recent grant-holder survey. This consisted of 19 questions, of which 15 were quantitative and four were qualitative, needing coding, categorisation and quantification. Accordingly, the data presented combines answers provided by survey respondents and our own interpretation of the information provided. Many organisations supported by the Grants Fund provide a range of services for older people and so strict categorisation is often complex. Details of our approach are available on request.

""""We are very grateful to you at Independent Age for having faith in us to deliver this project.""""
Awards made through Rounds 1–3

Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Round 1</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requesting</td>
<td>£3.1m</td>
<td>£3.0m</td>
<td>£4.0m</td>
<td>£10.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awarded</td>
<td>£755,259</td>
<td>£814,978</td>
<td>£811,980</td>
<td>£2,382,217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What organisations have we funded in Rounds 1–3?

Our survey shows that, among our grant-holders, around a third work with older people only. The larger group comprises organisations such as:

- community-based groups, providing wider services such as childcare, alongside providing a lunch club and befriending service for older people in their area
- health-based charities, such as those for visually or hearing-impaired individuals, where older people naturally form the main group of service users.

Based on discussions with a small number of these organisations, there is the potential for Independent Age to work more closely with such organisations, because our specialist knowledge is complementary. Organisations such as Haemochromatosis really values the specialist information booklets produced by Independent Age to best support those older people with whom they are working.

Although our fund has been targeted to small- and medium-sized charities with annual incomes of less than £1 million, there are significant differences between the capacity of those organisations at either end of that income spectrum. It is pleasing to note, then, that a number of smaller organisations have successfully secured money through our fund; particularly in the current climate, a small grant of £15,000 to an organisation with an average annual income of around £60,000 will secure the ongoing viability of that organisation.

Similarly, there may be additional support that Independent Age could provide to build the capacity and capability of smaller organisations over the longer term. We will be investigating options for such capacity-building work over the coming months.
What services and activities do these organisations deliver?

Drawing on the responses from our survey of grant-holders, as the table on page 8 illustrates, our Grants Fund programme has supported a really varied set of organisations. Such a range of different services reflects the needs of older people to connect with one another and their communities, and access specialist support to retain their independence as far as possible.

It is worth noting that numerous organisations deliver a range of services for older people: for example, while only seven of our sample provide only befriending services, we know that befriending is an activity provided by many organisations as part of their overall offer to older people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main service(s)</th>
<th>Number of organisations</th>
<th>Main service(s)</th>
<th>Number of organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing services</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Community connection services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple services – across categories</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation/loneliness</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Respite services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple services – info/advice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Counselling services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Day care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Art/social</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Community development services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple services – essential/doorstep</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exercise classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple services – health/care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bereavement support</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple services – social</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Home improvement advice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have services changed during the pandemic?

Through our survey, we’ve got a sense of some small changes to the services being offered to older people as a result of the pandemic. The data below backs up what we have been hearing informally from the sector: a reduction in the group activities because of social distancing requirements, but particularly in the early stages of the pandemic; and organisations switching their normal services to provide practical support, such as food parcels and deliveries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main service provided</th>
<th>Prior to pandemic</th>
<th>During pandemic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social/leisure (eg activities, hobbies, befriending, socialising, connecting with others)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/advice/advocacy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/care services/respite</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food/catering/meals</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to IT/computers/other technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/enterprise/learning/training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“This grant has made a lasting difference in the lives of our older people group.”
Geographical coverage

As highlighted on the map below, we have funded a range of activities across all parts of the UK. More examples of work we have funded to date are set out at Annex A.

Edinburgh
To support older carers in Edinburgh, providing them with practical help and social contact as they care for their adult child.

Manchester
To support older people with life-limiting illnesses via a telephone ‘listening line’ and online counselling for those who need more specialised support.

West Midlands
To begin an online befriending group for isolated older members of the French-speaking African community and to support a group of older members to start a gardening club on an allotment.

Barnsley
To extend the visiting time of care workers to carers and the cared for with complex needs to socialise and reduce the feeling of isolation.

Cambridgeshire
To expand the current wellbeing services and enhance them to provide more specialist services (eg grief counselling) in the face of increased requests for support.

Devon
To support 600 vulnerable people living in Exeter and rural East Devon with practical help, including meals, transport to medical appointments, befriending and help at home.

Newcastle
To fund an outreach welfare advice, meals delivery service and befriending to vulnerable older adults on a deprived housing estate to reduce isolation, hardship and remain connected.

London
To support a new socially distanced programme in parks and a gardening group for men in Rotherhithe and Bermondsey to reconnect with friends and contribute to the organisation.

Cardiff
To provide online services to previous dance group participants and people isolated in care homes to improve and sustain their wellbeing, health and spirits.
As well as working with organisations like ourselves, which span the UK, we’ve funded organisations based in every region. While we did not set any specific criteria to guide our distribution of funding at the decision-making stage, it is clear from the graph below that we haven’t supported as many organisations in Wales and Northern Ireland as we might have liked. So, for Round 5, we have directed a significant part of our marketing efforts to organisations in those nations.

Your support has been crucial in helping us navigate this crisis.
What has our funding been spent on?

Based on information provided through our recent survey, the majority of organisations have used the Independent Age funding to support staff and volunteer costs. Many charities have experienced much higher demand for their services during the pandemic, and so have invested in developing and maintaining their volunteer networks so they can continue to support older people as required.

As expected, the majority of our funding has been used by organisations to maintain contact with older people, through befriending, garden visits and so on. We know how valuable such contact is to older people, and the quotations set out later in this report bear this out.
Who has our funding reached?

Although the criteria for the Grants Fund explicitly target those older people facing additional challenges or who are out of sight out of mind, it is important to determine the extent to which Independent Age was successful in reaching and funding organisations working with more marginalised, underserved or excluded groups and communities. This is even more important given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on particular communities across the UK.

In addition, Independent Age has a particular focus over the coming years to specifically challenge ageism and discrimination, and to tackle the inequalities that exist in older age, in particular the personal characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010, namely age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation.

Based on combining data from our survey with more interrogation of application data held on our system, almost 50% of the organisations supported to date are focused on individuals with protected characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of supported organisations focused on people with protected characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups experiencing racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While this appears to be a positive outcome of our grant-making process, we are keen to explore more how to best amplify the work of specific organisations working with such groups, and to share good practice. In addition, we will reflect how we can better reach organisations working with, and indeed led by, those communities that feel the impact of inequalities. While we have indeed reached some BAME communities, which we set out to do at the start of the fund, as we develop our grant-making strategy for the future, we will explore the potential for participatory approaches to grant-making. This will better draw on the strengths of individuals in groups in the communities we most want to reach, and increase the scope to build the capacity of those organisations where necessary.

More detailed analysis of the different groups of older people with whom funded organisations work has also taken place. As set out in the table below, the targeted nature of the Grants Fund has enabled us to support work with a vibrant range of different groups of older people with a variety of lived experiences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main group worked with during the COVID-19 pandemic</th>
<th>No. of grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black and ethnic minority groups/communities experiencing racism(^1)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT+ people</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People from a specific faith</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees/asylum seekers(^2)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereaved individuals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing/former care home residents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish people</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People experiencing abuse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People experiencing isolation/loneliness</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People experiencing suicidal thoughts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in poverty/on low income</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in the criminal justice system</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living with dementia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living with HIV/AIDS(^3)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who have recently left health care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with long-term and/or life-threatening health conditions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid carers</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General/unspecified</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) This category includes those groups of people who experience racial prejudice and discrimination as recognised by UK law.

\(^2\) These organisations categorised the main group they work with as ‘Black and ethnic minority groups/communities experiencing racism’ in their survey response. A closer look at our data showed that their main group is, within that, asylum seekers and/or refugees.

\(^3\) These organisations categorised the main group they work with as ‘People with disabilities’ in their survey response. A closer look at our data showed that their main group is specifically people living with HIV/AIDS.
Towards an understanding of the difference we’ve made

Evaluating a small grants programme is always challenging. As a funder, distributing up to £15,000, we need to be mindful that placing significant reporting requirements on organisations can skew activity away from what is most effective, towards things that can be measured. Clearly, during a pandemic, when so many organisations were struggling with both limited funds and increased demand for their services, we made a conscious decision to design a light-touch monitoring process.

Initial feedback gives us some confidence that we’ve got the balance right for our grant-holders – for example, one organisation commented: “Independent Age have got the balance right for asking for information but at a level which doesn’t take ages to complete.”

We hope to collect more insight and understanding into the impact of our grants on individual organisations, and the older people with whom they are working, through our ongoing engagement work, future reports and reflect our learning in our future grant-making strategy.

**Reach**

Estimating the reach of a grants fund, particularly one providing funds for both stand-alone projects and core funding to organisations, is difficult. As described above, we have supported a wide range of activities, from larger-scale food and activity parcel deliveries in the early stages of the pandemic, to focused counselling and advocacy support to a small number of individual older people. The cost model of each activity varies considerably, making impact or value-for-money assessments practically impossible.

Nevertheless, we can begin to estimate the potential reach of the Grants Fund in a couple of ways:

1. Based on a sample of 49 monitoring forms, the median number of older people supported through the activities ‘funded’ through our grant was 192. If this figure was replicated across all 203 organisations, this would indicate that our fund has impacted a very large number of individual older people. We’d treat this figure with some caution for the time being, and more work is under way to interrogate this figure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median number of older people supported</th>
<th>192</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of older people supported, if replicated across all 203 organisations</td>
<td>38,976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Based on income figures for the organisations supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total income in previous reporting period for 203 organisations, as provided on application forms</td>
<td>£67.8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of older people supported, if replicated across all 203 organisations</td>
<td>38,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding provided through Rounds 1–3</td>
<td>£2.38m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Age funding represents % of last year’s income</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of older people supported last year, as reported by funded organisations on application form</td>
<td>189,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Age Grants Fund monies therefore supporting work with 3.5% of 189,710 older people</td>
<td>6,640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the enormous difference in these two figures, over the coming weeks we will be following up those monitoring forms received to date, and those we are yet to receive, to build a more accurate picture of the numbers of older people supported by our Grants Fund so far.

“Those who are engaged in gardening activities have been working in the allotment even during the lockdown.”
The stories of older people

As we’ve found through our own services during the pandemic, it is often those simple things for which individual older people are most grateful. Three quotations from older people supported by organisations we have funded illustrate this clearly.

“I am so thankful for your calls. For people who are isolated and lonely, the isolation feels like torture sometimes, and talking to someone helps. Even 15 minutes of talking to other people, makes a difference.”

“The online clubs have given me something to put in the diary and on the worst day something to wake up for.”

“Receiving the newsletters and packs from you were lifelines to the outside world during Covid while nursing my husband. The packs provided us both with much needed education about the impact of mesothelioma as well as thoughtful ideas and activities. I was at a particularly low point this week, after my husband’s funeral, when a supportive letter from you arrived giving me comfort. Heartfelt thanks for all you do.”

But we’ve also been able to support much more complex work, as the case study below highlights.

Martin’s story

Martin, aged 58, was living alone with no family, friends or support in place and had referred himself back into our navigator service in April 2020, at the start of lockdown. Grieving long term for the loss of his wife, Martin had begun an unhealthy relationship with food and stopped eating, becoming anorexic over the past four years. He has two grown children and seven grandchildren none of whom he sees or has regular contact with since the death of his wife. Dependent on a wheelchair because of anorexia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), Martin had fallen into a deep depression and refused previous support from the council. He has low self-esteem and often had suicidal thoughts, believing that life wasn’t worth living without his wife.

Although Martin lives in the house he raised his children in, he has been unable to manage and maintain the property since developing his many health conditions. In the past year Martin’s stairlift has broken and he has been unable to get upstairs to bed. He has been sleeping on the sofa in the back room next to the kitchen that leads out to the garden. He has been unable to wash and bathe and has had to use the downstairs toilet and wash basin to wash. There is no grab rail and he often fell trying to lift himself from the toilet to his chair.

Martin says, “there’s no point asking for help, all the services all let you down.”

Having to isolate has exacerbated Martin’s suicidal thoughts and feelings of loneliness and despair. When the navigators reopened Martin’s case at the start of lockdown, they discovered none of the previous safeguarding referrals from his case had been followed up by the council. In this past year the navigators have provided Martin with weekly, friendly calls updating him on virtual activities
available and volunteer befriending agencies that may be of interest, while making urgent referrals on his behalf to safeguarding for self-neglect, to the urgent occupational therapy (OT) team for a new assessment and to help have his stairlift fixed.

Martin says, “The navigators couldn’t do enough, I’m so grateful, they haven’t stopped trying to help me.”

The back door was broken and letting in wind and rain over the winter months and we were able to get We Care Repair to come and fix them temporarily while the OT team referred Martin to a more specialist team. The safeguarding triage team in the local authority has escalated the case and should assign a new social worker to make a full care assessment of needs. This will include practical support. Martin hasn’t been able to leave the property unaided because he is so weak and malnourished that he can’t move his wheelchair by himself.

“I don’t like to ask for help, a nice neighbour buys me a few things from the local shop.”

When the navigators were able to doorstep visit and talk to Martin directly he admitted he hadn’t been eating and surviving on cuppa soups and tea. He had no essential items and was freezing cold. We provided an urgent shop and set up a regular link with a volunteer in his area who can help with regular shopping. Martin refused meals on wheels and regular meal deliveries because of his anorexia.

“I don’t want to eat, I’m better with small things once and while.”

Martin has always been articulate and a great conversationalist, really engaging in the befriending calls and always happy to hear from us. He is open and warm yet has a hidden sadness and has low self-esteem, often feeling he isn’t worth the support we offer.

Sometimes when meeting in person he won’t answer the door if he’s feeling particularly depressed that day, but usually we can get hold of him by phone. Martin feels that our calls “brighten the day”. One main concern for the navigators was that Martin was refusing support but, over this year, we have gently built rapport and trust with him and he’s admitted, “I’m ready to accept I need more support.”

Martin agreed to all the support referrals and safeguarding. We are hoping this will continue once the service ends and that appropriate services are now in place that can support Martin longer term.

Martin is always grateful: “My door is fixed and the rain and wind isn’t coming in anymore, I don’t feel so nervous in the house, I had an intruder once and I was scared while sleeping, and I’m hoping the stairlift will be fixed very soon. I know I need to eat but this is difficult for me.”

The navigators feel that they have made many significant referrals and advocated on Martin’s behalf when other support services refused to intervene. Martin says, “the navigators have been kind and given me some motivation back to get the support I need.”
Feedback from grant-holders

We have been humbled by the thanks received from every organisation that we have been able to support through the Grants Fund. Through our recent survey, a number of organisations have also indicated the different ways the fund has helped their organisation during the pandemic, as set out in the following chart.

Grant-holder feedback

- Flexible process helped rapid response to local need
- Grateful for Independent Age’s support
- Helped continue supporting older people
- Enabled organisation to change services to respond to the pandemic
- Offset normal fundraising activities
- Enabled to expand reach/services/staff capacity
- Enabled services expand to meet additional demand
- Helped organisations survive

“Your support has been crucial in helping us navigate this crisis.”
What organisations supported through the fund say

“The Grant has been so important for the elderly who have language and cultural barriers. Our support has been vital to reduce their fear and isolation during the lockdown particularly in the absence of family or friends visiting. We have been able to respond to their needs and support them to remain in independent living safe in the knowledge that our team has been there for them during a difficult time.

“We are very grateful to you at Independent Age for having faith in us to deliver this project. It has made a huge impact on our elderly participants and it has meant that because of your funds we could continue to work with elderly people in the face of a really pressing need at the exact moment our income sources dried up. Thank you.

“Your support has been crucial in helping us navigate this crisis. Covid-19 has led to the cancellation of fundraising events and mass participation challenges, leaving us with an income deficit. We are deeply grateful to Independent Age for recognising how important and impactful our work is for older neighbours at such a disruptive and uniquely disconnecting time.

“Without the grant we would not have been able to support and reach the number of older people we did. The grant enabled us to carry out community engagement and target hard-to-reach elders from the most deprived wards in Croydon. The grant enabled us to transition from weekly face-to-face services to delivery of meal and remote services, allowing us to continue delivering culturally appropriate and vital services for the majority of our users during the pandemic. Without the grant our users would have been cut off from community support.
The grant has helped us to engage with some of the most marginalized elders especially those that are undocumented migrants and victims of crime such as domestic violence and forms of abuse. As a result of this project, we successfully applied for one year’s funding from the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to support elders who are victims of crime and abuse in south London. A very big thank you for your support.

We are indebted to Independent Age for the grant received which has enabled us to support some of the most vulnerable members of society throughout this pandemic for the duration of the funding. Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first or preferred language are often overlooked by mainstream agencies, particularly considering the language barrier. Although mainstream services for older people could be accessed through an interpreter, there is always the issue of how the cost of the interpreter will be met.

The grant has enabled us to retain its highly skilled staff, rather than furlough them, and given our staff the opportunity to transfer their skills into this new area of work. We know from the feedback received that all the older, deaf people that we have worked with have valued all the befriending support offered and many have commented that they don’t know how they would have coped in its absence.

It is so important for charities to be in receipt of this type of funding as this privilege allows us to be flexible in our approach to allocating the funding where it is most needed and has therefore given us greater autonomy, especially during these difficult times when everything can change on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis.
The Independent Age grant encouraged and helped us to attract more funding for the elderly users in particular from London Community Response to provide emergency food and care packages, emergency shopping and prescription collection and drop-off services etc. and to continue to do that.

This grant has made a lasting difference in the lives of our older people group. Those who are engaged in gardening activities have been working in the allotment even during the lockdown, and other older people are keen on joining them after the lockdown. The grant has supported the older people group to improve their social capital, increase mutual aid, reduce their isolation and give them hope of receiving support available in the community.
Learning and reflections

The feedback from those organisations supported by the Grants Fund is very positive. The flexibility and approach hardwired into the design of the fund are in line with best practice adopted by much more experienced grant-makers during the pandemic. This has enabled funded organisations to respond to the needs of the older people with whom they are working.

We have distributed funding to a wide set of organisations and made awards to all areas of the UK. Having noted we’ve made fewer awards to organisations based in Wales and Northern Ireland, we have increased our marketing efforts for Round 5 in those areas, and have seen an uplift in applications accordingly.

While we have reached some specific BAME communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and have funded a range of small- and medium-sized charities working with older people, our analysis shows there’s still more work to do. If we want to support a larger number of such organisations in the future, we may need to consider other ways for organisations to apply or make their case for funding. Based on the experience of other funders, our application-form-based approach may be a barrier to some organisations from even applying – they simply don’t have the capacity to complete a form while continuing to deliver services.

Our initial conversations with a small selection of our grant-holders indicate a strong desire for individuals and organisations to network with one another, and for Independent Age to facilitate such networking and sharing of good practice. We will be taking this forward as soon as possible, because our capacity to do this to date has been limited. Facilitating this networking was a key ambition for the fund at the outset.

Through our recent survey, we’ve also secured valuable and interesting comments from organisations about the need for, and potential role of, Independent Age to help continue to build the capacity of organisations working with older people in the future. Naturally, additional funding will always be welcome, and it is clear from feedback that a number of organisations value the information booklets we produce. But broader suggestions have also been made, covering topics such as keeping up to date with legislation, volunteer support and training in fundraising. Over the coming weeks, we will be analysing that feedback in more detail and feed that into our future grant-making strategy development.
Next steps

This report has pulled together a range of quantitative and qualitative data to start to understand what the Grants Fund has achieved to date. We will continue to analyse the data available to us, and use it both to augment this report, but also to underpin our ongoing relationship building with individual and groups of charities working with older people.

The initial phase (Rounds 1–3) of the Grants Fund was all about responding to the pandemic. Rounds 4 and 5 are focused on re-establishing the vital face-to-face services older people want and need to begin re-engaging with their communities. We need to consider how best to capture additional and appropriate quantitative data over the remainder of the year so we can continue to build our understanding of the impact of the Grants Fund.

Discussions have already begun with other funders to explore the appetite for and value in future collaborations, both to increase the impact of the funding available, but also with a desire to reduce bureaucracy and build the capacity of the organisations working directly with older people.
Thanks and acknowledgements

The Independent Age Grants Fund team wishes to thank:

• all grant-holders and other organisations that have engaged with our work to date

• our corporate sponsors that generously contributed to Rounds 1–3
  – Pension Insurance Corporation, 3i, Boundless by CSMA and Ashurst

• Gilly Green and Liz Firth, for their expertise, experience and energy in establishing the Grants Fund and for their ongoing support

• our expert assessors

• the Independent Age Grants Fund Trustees, Panel and Steering Group

• Independent Age colleagues past and present involved in our work to date.
Annex A: More examples of work funded by our Grants Fund

• An organisation that works with adult and elderly BAME communities living with long-term health conditions: migrant populations, refugees, asylum seekers and people living with disabilities. A grant was awarded for a project to support 80 vulnerable elders through weekly provisions, online support and advice and bereavement counselling.

• A coffee shop prioritising socially and economically disadvantaged citizens in its local area. It provides free hot food and a drink, debt advice and welfare and housing advice. A grant was awarded to continue with delivery of meals and befriending services and to reopen the café to help older adults with financial and housing problems to access debt and legal advice.

• An organisation that offers services for frail, isolated older people including befriending visits, activity and socialising hubs and information events. A grant was awarded to expand welfare and befriending telephone and visiting services, to help a growing number of housebound older people with end-of-life conditions to reduce isolation and maintain mental wellbeing.

• An organisation that supports unpaid carers access information, advice and support by phone or home visits and facilitates peer support. A grant was awarded for a counselling service for carers to respond to an increased need for mental health support.

• An organisation that aims to produce positive social impact through coaching beneficiaries to tell and share the unheard stories of their lived experience on video. A grant was awarded to a peer-support video storytelling project for isolated older men who are struggling to cope with the impacts of bereavement.

• A door-to-door volunteer car scheme geared to help the most vulnerable rural and urban residents to attend therapy classes, hospital appointments and social programmes in South Armagh and South Down.

• To support the development of a mental wellness programme for older LGBT+ people in East Sussex, delivered through a combination of online support and the gradual, safe opening up of a drop-in centre, providing assistance, signposting or just companionship and friendships, and responding to the 70% increase in enquiries about the service since March.

• To support older people in Cambridgeshire at risk of homelessness addressing sustainability of tenancies, assisting with money management, budgeting and shopping and advising on substance misuse support.
• To support the development of a telephone befriending service and re-establish group sessions to support older carers from the African and Caribbean community in Wolverhampton, providing access to a range of wellbeing support and therapeutic counselling.

• Based around the existing Community Transport scheme in the Highlands, to pilot a social-prescription scheme working with isolated and vulnerable older people to help address underlying anxiety, depression and isolation, by connecting them to local clubs, activities and social gatherings, and identifying additional members of the community who have been overlooked by existing services.

• To establishing a programme of small groups to help older people in South Manchester rebuild confidence and resilience for the future, and help improve wellbeing by connecting individuals safely, promoting regular walks and simple exercises, sharing ideas and increasing IT skills.
Annex B: More case studies of individuals supported by organisations funded through the Grants Fund

Cora’s story
Cora is a long-standing member of the Meet Me programme but, since the lockdown, she hadn’t fancied joining in the telephone groups. She was already under a lot of mental stress dealing with treatment for cancer, and the new format of the groups took a lot of getting used to. After some assurance she gave them a go and is now a regular attendee of the making group.

The relationship and access coordinator took time each week to talk to Cora before the group, and chat about how her health was. The treatment she was undergoing was extremely difficult and meant she didn’t always feel like joining, but she didn’t really have anyone she could talk to. The coordinator put her in touch with a MacMillan Buddy for weekly phone calls, and she’s finding that the lady is easy to talk to and understands her.

Cora also struggled to join in the creative activities because of her arthritis, so the coordinator is supporting her to get some simple access equipment, like pencil grippers, that will help with her drawing.

Dorothy’s story
Dorothy was married to Jim for 69 years. He died of COVID-19 at the age of 91. She had no nearby family and was alone. Dorothy also tested positive for COVID-19, but managed to stay at home with relatively mild symptoms. When Jim was in hospital, the intensive care team would call her every evening to let her know how he was doing. Four weeks on she could not accept that he had died. She believed the hospital had made a mistake and that Jim was still alive, so she continued to wait every day for the 6pm call. Because of COVID-19, Dorothy couldn’t be at Jim’s bedside. The vital steps we all need, as part of the grieving process, were denied to her and, instead, she stayed at home alone, afraid and unwell. Our Help at Home team was supporting her with shopping and, through them, one of our Wellbeing staff started to contact her.

Dorothy was very angry at first. She wanted the hospital to sort out the confusion and to stop telling her that Jim was dead, when he wasn’t. There hadn’t been a funeral yet. She was told she couldn’t see his body, so how could Dorothy know for certain that Jim was gone. In our conversations with Dorothy, she was able to express her anger and frustration. She’s started to grieve for Jim, by finally acknowledging his death: “There isn’t a call is there? So, I guess he must be dead.” We will remain in contact with Dorothy, through her grief and through the isolation she feels in lockdown. She isn’t alone any more.
Mrs M’s story

Mrs M is 81 and her family lives in Australia. On her referral form, submitted by her GP in consultation with Mrs M, Mrs M noted that “since my husband died I have become very depressed and in need of company. As I am on my own now, I feel very lonely”. It became apparent, following our assessment, that Mrs M’s loneliness and extreme lack of confidence had also been exacerbated by the emotional abuse she had experienced from her husband. His controlling nature meant that Mrs M had felt unable to develop friendships and or leave her home alone for many years, despite living locally all her life. She also lacked many of the skills required to maintain her home and finances and did not share this with her family for fear of worrying them.

Mrs M has been supported by our project in a number of ways over the past three years. She has enjoyed meeting people and making friends on our peer-befriending minibus community outings, particularly enjoying intergenerational events. This allowed her to curb her sense of loneliness and distance from the community. In this reporting period we have supported Mrs M with regular calls, and risk-assessed outside (and occasionally inside, when guidance has allowed visits).

We also helped her to address her home and financial situation. Working with Mrs M and local organisations Care & Repair and Welfare Rights, we helped her to access community support that was available for little cost and improved her difficult financial situation (Mrs M told our outreach worker that she had been wearing the same uncomfortable and threadbare underwear for years because she could not afford to purchase anything new). We helped Mrs M complete assisted refuse collection forms, which have made her life easier (Mrs M, with serious health conditions, had been taking out all the bins for those in her close). We have also assisted Mrs M with iPad technology, which has allowed her to conduct face-to-face communications with her family – this has made an enormous impact on her life and wellbeing. Mrs M was very unsure about her abilities (never having owned or even tried a mobile phone or PC) but, with many weeks of support, she is now managing to make app-based calls independently – this has also reduced phone bills, because calling Australia on FaceTime is effectively free.

Mrs M, like many of our clients, wishes to maintain her independence – she said, after some months of service, that she only agreed to the GP befriender’s referral because she felt completely desperate, but she was very glad she had. Our services have been provided very gently and at Mrs M’s request. While we cannot completely rectify the effects of years of abuse, we have been able to help Mrs M to develop her confidence and to maintain her independence, even in the face of substantial health concerns. She noted on our annual questionnaire that “you have helped me a great deal. I don’t know what I’d do without you sometimes”. Mrs M’s monitoring evaluation showed that her impression of her own ‘Independence, Safety and General Confidence’ and ‘Knowledge, Confidence and Capability’ had risen from low gradings of two to the highest gradings of five following befrienders’ intervention.
With the support of Independent Age, we were able to continue to provide support for 253 older people like Mrs M from August 2020 to February 2021. We have not been able to provide our standard services, and have had to constantly modify our working practices, but we are confident that our work has been of great benefit to isolated older people at a time when they have most needed support. In many cases people have needed to know that someone is there to look out for them if they were struggling. Our clients have gained confidence and reassurance from the fact they know we will always be there when they call.

**Nigel and Donny’s story**

Donny the visiting dog is the closest Nigel has come to another being in more time than he can remember. Nigel has no friends and, as he has become older, so his mental health issues and early-stage dementia have isolated him from society, community and the outside world. This was made even worse by the pandemic.

In the earlier days of meeting, Donny the dog would frequently lie at Nigel’s feet, patiently allowing Nigel to make the first move at his own pace. It took time but, after some weeks of visiting, it was clear that a bond was forming, and Nigel was looking forward to seeing his furry friend with his constantly wagging tail coming up the path to greet him.

Donny is a Weimaraner and has been “a lifeline” for Nigel; he says that he “lives to see my visiting dog” and it has meant he now has, for the first time in three years, a reason to leave his home and go for a short walk. Needless to say, Donny and his volunteer owner are frequent visitors. And while a socially distanced stroll along a forest path sounds very ordinary to many, it is a giant step for people like Nigel. Mobility issues mean the walk is short, but being out in the fresh air is a huge boost to wellbeing, and the exercise helps maintain independence.