



East Finchley chosen to pilot basic income

By Fiona Macdonald

East Finchley made national and international headlines in early June when plans were announced for the first pilot of universal basic income (UBI) in England.

The concept, which has already been trialled in several countries, including Spain, Finland and the US, involves a regular and unconditional cash payment to everyone, designed to reduce poverty and ensure economic security.

Just two places in England have now been given pilot status: East Finchley, and Jarrow in Tyne and Wear. The pilots would see 30 people in total (15 in each place) receiving £1,600 a month for two years.

Pros and cons

“With the decades ahead set to be full of economic shocks due to climate change and new forms of automation, basic income is going to be a crucial part of securing livelihoods in the future,” said Will Stronge, director of research at the think-tank Autonomy, which backs the plan. However, critics argue the idea costs too much, diverting funds from public services, and that instead, financial support should be more targeted.

GBL’s involvement

Since 2021, East Finchley’s Lottery-funded community group Grange Big Local (GBL) has been working on the pilot plan, together with their Central Jarrow counterpart and researchers from Northumbria University.

GBL’s Julia Hines told *The Archer*: “It is very much a grass-roots, local proposal that came from East Finchley as much as it came from Jarrow. We were overwhelmed by the response – it made the news nationally,

and internationally in the US, New Zealand and France.”

She believes that a UBI could address problems with the current benefits system, such as “people getting into debt because of waiting periods for Universal Credit (UC) to start, or sanctions, often incorrect on appeal; people trapped in low-paid work because of thresholds; and conditions that just don’t work for people.”

Funding and participants

The East Finchley and Jarrow pilots could provide a model for other universal basic income schemes across the country and campaigners are now seeking £1.6 million in funding to launch them.

The current government has indicated that they will not support the trial financially. The GBL team expects the money to come from trusts and philanthropists and, potentially, regional mayors.

Anyone from East Finchley is allowed to put themselves forward and can remain anonymous. While participants will be drawn randomly, the organisers plan for it to be a representative group and to include 20% of people with disabilities. They are not seeking applications for the pilot until the funding has been secured.

“We are really proud that we could start a serious conversation about what is wrong with the system we have, and how we might fix it,” said Julia. “Everyone who answered our questions or came to a meeting is a part of that.”



Food on foot: Three Big Fun Walkers refuel as they head down Primrose Hill, more than halfway along the route to Westminster. Photo North London Hospice.

Downhill all the way for fun walkers... well, almost

By John Lawrence

More than 1,300 walkers set off from Cherry Tree Wood for the annual Big Fun Walk last month. Their combined efforts brought in an amazing £170,000 to support the end-of-life care services provided by North London Hospice.

The park was crowded with families, friends and individuals early on Sunday 21 May as the walkers picked up their packed lunches and set off on the 8.5 mile route to Westminster.

After walking through Highgate Wood and up the long climb to Highgate Village itself, it was pretty much downhill or flat all the way through Hampstead Heath, Regents Park, Hyde Park and St James’s Park, in coolish weather that was a mix of sun and cloud.

The traditional outdoor finishing point and brass band welcome opposite Westminster Abbey was replaced this year with free tea and coffee and comfortable seating in the basement of the Methodist Central Hall across the road, certainly a more weatherproof venue.

One participant Linda said: “What a wonderful day. Two of my daughters and I took part in the Big Fun Walk in memory of my father-in-law, who passed away in April this year, and also to raise money for the amazing hospice who were so brilliant to him, and all of our family, in a time of utter despair. The walk was tough but we are so glad we did it and everyone was so lovely and encouraging.”

North London Hospice provides free care to patients and their loved ones. Less than 40% of its costs are covered by the NHS so it needs to find millions of pounds each year to ensure its doors can remain open 365 days a year.



More for the pot: Kim Athanasiou, left, brings along some plants for Jane Marsh to sell in aid of research into Multiple Sclerosis.

Holy mint helps front garden fundraiser flourish

Beautiful weather helped Jane Marsh and her group of gardening friends and neighbours break all records this year with their charity plant sale in Bedford Road on Saturday 20 May. A massive £800 was raised for the MS (Multiple Sclerosis) Society by selling home grown plants, plus donations from friends who couldn’t come along on the day.

Jane’s fundraising efforts are always supported by the Athanasiou family, proprietors of Tony’s Continental in the High Road. Chris Athanasiou is one of an estimated 130,000 people living with MS in the UK today.

His wife Kim is a keen gardener and she has now joined Jane’s enthusiastic band of plant propagators and donors. Star of this year’s sale was her contri-

bution of pots of ‘holy mint’, which Kim says originally came from a monastery in the Cypriot mountains.

Multiple Sclerosis is a neurological condition and, although there is currently no cure, new developments are improving the management and treatment of MS all the time. To learn more about MS or make a donation, please visit the charity’s website mssociety.org.uk.

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