

Change for the Better

by Matthew Stadlen

An education case study, one of 100+ projects a year, highlights the impact of the Kensington + Chelsea Foundation.

THE EVENING WAS SO HOT and sticky that I had to take both my jacket and tie off, jettisoning the uniform I've come to wear on TV as a centre-left political commentator. My wife, a committed Conservative, thinks it's important, particularly as a "leftie" (!), that I look smart when I debate in public. Thursday 19 June 2025 was different, though. I wasn't up against Nigel Farage on GB News, or a right-leaning commentator on *The Jeremy Vine Show*, I was in conversation with my local Labour MP, Joe Powell, at scenic Christ Church on Victoria Road. The event was a fundraiser for the Kensington + Chelsea Foundation, a charity that aims, in small but important ways, to bridge the gap between rich and poor in the Royal Borough.

I was born and brought up in Notting Hill, long before Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts made it internationally famous. I remember going to the Golborne Road with my dad in the early 1980s to buy coal for the fire; the rag-and-bone men who used to call out their wares from horse-drawn carts; milk delivered by float. A lot has changed since those days, not least the area's elevation in the mid-nineties to one of the most fashionable in the world. But Kensington & Chelsea is, today, one of the most socio-economically divided areas in the country. Those with enormous wealth live side by side with some of the least privileged families in Britain. You can find multi-million pound houses sandwiched between social housing, a council estate on the same road as £20 million mansions. Grenfell Tower, now being dismantled but "forever in our hearts", shares a postcode with the shops and restaurants frequented by Hollywood A-listers.

So when the K+C Foundation asked me, still a Notting Hill local, to become involved with promoting their work, I said yes immediately. Their *Poverty and Prosperity in Kensington + Chelsea* report, published in late 2021, made for salutary reading: one in four children living in poverty; the worst rate of school exclusions in London; in the lowest 20% of Local Authorities for mental health scores; disparities of up to 17 years in the life expectancy of residents, depending on which wards they lived in; a higher unemployment rate than the London average.



The author with his father, 1980s.

The Foundation researches and publicises key social issues affecting the community, sets out to improve the lives and life chances of residents, and raises and directs funding to initiatives it considers will have the biggest impact and achieve enduring change. In 2024 alone, the charity raised £2.1 million, supported 106 projects across the borough and reached 18,400 residents in need. “We were efficient and effective, with 97p in every £1 spent on our charitable work,” says Director, Victoria Steward Todd.

The event I took part in with Joe Powell was the first in a series of events for Philanthropy Circle, a new network of local donors investing a minimum of £5,000 a year. That evening we raised £55,000. “It was a real honour to support the K+C Foundation’s efforts to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing our community”, Powell said. “They are a key funder for many excellent local organisations that I see make a difference every day, from improving our housing, expanding opportunity for young people, and ensuring everyone has access to health services they need.”

Two local residents who are determined to make a difference to the lives of others are Dani Duclos and Julia Coupland, Directors and co-Founders of the Grove Trust, a charity begun, like the K+C Foundation, in 2010: “We set it up to address the widening social divide amongst the residents of Notting Hill and North Kensington. At the very same time, the K+C Foundation was established with a similar goal, and would be operating across all of RBKC. We have found them to be an invaluable partner that we work alongside to knowledge-share across this space - all with the aim of helping local residents that are in need.”

The Grove Trust has put money towards a scheme funded by the K+C Foundation, which aims to tackle school exclusions at Holland Park School, a non-selective comprehensive school in the area. Louis Levin has been the Inclusions Mentor at HPS since September of last year. His job is to work with young people who are most at risk of being excluded, and provide intensive mentoring to support them to stay in school and thrive. He helps them build the tools, resilience and confidence to improve.

“The first term could not have gone any better, with so many pupils making progress and getting all kinds of positive outcomes in under four months,” says



Holland Park School Inclusions Mentor, Louis Levin, running an early morning 'Check-In' session with his mentees, January 2026.

Levin. “The feedback from the pupils, their families, statutory services and from the HPS staff, including the Head Teacher and the Senior Leadership Team, has been overwhelmingly positive.” And success, of course, can be contagious. “There has been a knock-on effect on other secondary schools in the area now taking a keen interest in what we are doing here, and we have started to meet with the primary school leaders, too.”

Billy Egleton is Vice Principal at HPS. He says that the school was already making progress on inclusion, with suspension figures falling from 158 in 2022–23, to 130 the following year, and then dropping sharply to 48 in

“So many pupils are making progress”

2024–25, but that working with the Foundation has had a significant impact. “Attendance for our disadvantaged students is up by over one percentage point compared to this time last year, placing us in the top 10% nationally for attendance. This academic year, we have issued just six suspensions, giving us one of the lowest suspension rates in the country for a fully comprehensive intake. Perhaps most importantly, students speak about the Inclusion Mentor as a trusted adult, and this role has strengthened our ability to safeguard our most vulnerable young people in ways we simply were not able to do before.”

Steward Todd, who has supported Levin in driving the project, joined the K+C Foundation in 2019. She was drawn by the idea of raising and spending money in the same community. “It’s an opportunity to really connect supporters to the work they’re funding,” she says. “I’ve been blown away by how much residents in Kensington and Chelsea care deeply about their neighbours and their community, and how generously they give their time and money to make a difference.”

The initiative at Holland Park School is just one example of the work that Steward Todd is able to develop. “As a very small charity, we try to focus our efforts on where we can have a measurable difference,” she says, “and for me the issue of school exclusions stood out as something that was both a huge social injustice and an area where the right interventions could mean that we don’t leave any of our young people behind. I have two children at secondary school and I totally understand that schools are overstretched, underfunded and dealing with increasingly complex needs.”

There’s no doubt in my mind that the social mix of RBKC represents a far better way of running a city than pushing deprived communities into the suburbs. Segregation is nobody’s friend. But proximity to

“Segregation is nobody's friend”

disparity brings into sharper relief the responsibility we all have to each other. No matter our opportunity or wealth, we share the same pavements, make use of the same services, and together form a community. The K+C Foundation offers those with more the chance to help those with less to fulfil their ambitions and shape a less divided future.

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