CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CITIZENS ORGANISING

REWEAVING THE FABRIC OF SOCIETY
Thank you for being part of the Citizens story

We’re delighted to celebrate Citizens UK’s 30th anniversary.

Our organisation has a rich legacy of developing leaders, strengthening communities and the institutions within them and helping people win change. None of this would have been possible without our Citizens Organisers, embedded in our neighbourhoods and dedicated to building the capacity of our leaders and communities to participate in public life and achieve change.

In fact, behind every one of our major national campaigns as well as our many regional and local campaigns, there has always been a Citizens Organiser.

Alongside our Organisers there have always been our members – schools, churches, mosques, trade unions, charities and many thousands of dedicated individuals giving their time to turn out organised Citizens and create the change that their communities need.

Our thanks go to all of you for the vital role you have each played in the story of Citizens UK so far. We look forward to what the next 30 years of organising may bring.

Neil Jameson,
Founder and Executive Director

Paul Regan,
Founding Trustee
Why are we marking 30 years?

These three decades have seen us organise around many different campaigns and issues, yet what has tied them together is our commitment to reweaving the fabric of society, strengthening democracy and organising for the common good.

More than any one particular campaign, our biggest achievement has been doing just this: building something that is permanent; a broad-based alliance that can continue to bring about more justice in years to come.

Citizens UK Milestones over the past 30 years

1988

Neil Jameson creates the Citizens Organising Foundation and the first alliance in Bristol in 1989 with a group of Trustees, chaired by Eric Adams of the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

1,000 citizens pack a Roman Catholic Cathedral in Clifton and later take actions on housing and homelessness, as well as beginning to build alliances nationwide and training the first generation of citizen leaders.
1996

The East London Citizens Organisation (TELCO) launches and starts a successful campaign to make a £1.5 million scheme operated by Pura, a food factory in East London, fix the foul smells that were spilling into the local community. The group reaches an agreement with Pura to install an odour dampening device on the factory.

1997

In 1997, TELCO successfully sends the East End of London on a “recruitment drive” to get some of London’s 50,000 unemployed off the dole and re-trained for some of the 25,000 new construction jobs on the horizon. This all started after construction companies in the local area said that they wanted to employ local people, but they “lack the skills we need”.

Photo Credit - ChrisJepson.com
2000

We launch London Citizens and hold the first ever London Mayoral Assembly at Queen Mary’s University with the Mayoral candidates and present our first London Citizens manifesto.

2001

In 2001, London Citizens launch the campaign for the Living Wage. Just like today, the campaign was based on the simple belief that people should earn wages that they can live on.

It was inspired by experiences of hardship by people like Amin Husseyin, who was struggling to hold down two jobs and looking after his sick parents - until his employer started paying a Living Wage.

Over the years, the campaign has gone from strength to strength and today over 4,300 employers had become accredited Living Wage employers, putting half a billion pounds back in the pockets of low-paid workers.
2004

South London Citizens forms its first campaign. Responding to the poor experiences of those seeking sanctuary at the UK Border Agency’s HQ at Lunar House in Croydon in 2004, the alliance successfully negotiated for a £800,000 refit of Lunar House by the Home Office and changes to the way refugees and asylum seekers were treated.

2005

In 2005 London Citizens launches a campaign to ensure the 2012 Olympics have a Living Wage and Affordable Housing legacy.

Years of negotiation with the Mayor and Olympic delivery authority followed, ensuring that the first ever London Community Land Trust, a radical form of permanently affordable housing, was created on the St Clements site in East London.
In 2008, London and the newly formed Birmingham Citizens set up the Independent Asylum Commission to investigate widespread concern about the way refugees and asylum seekers were being treated by the UK Borders Agency. As a result, we found that many workers were being exploited due to their unregularized immigration status.

The ‘Strangers Into Citizens’ campaign was born and called for a one off regularisation of migrants with no papers: an estimated 20,000 organised people attended a rally Trafalgar Square in May 2009. Thousands of people were quietly regularised by the government due to this public pressure.
In May 2010 Citizens UK held a General Election Assembly at the Methodist Central Hall Westminster with 2,500 people from member institutions and the world media present. We successfully negotiated to have David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown as the leaders of the three major political parties attend. Candidates agreed to a number of proposals, including ending the practice of holding the children of asylum seekers in detention centres.

By 2013 Citizens has set up chapters in North and West London, Milton Keynes and Nottingham. The relationships struck with the Police Commissioner in Nottingham led to action on hate crime, including CCTV cameras in taxis and Nottinghamshire Police force pioneering misogyny hate crime.
In 2014, Citizens UK members, including newly formed Citizens Cymru Wales take up the issue of Syrian families stuck in refugee camps in the Middle East who needed to be resettled in safe countries. At that time, the UK had only resettled 50 Syrian refugees – so we built local Refugee Welcome Groups who worked with their local councils to show the government that our communities could resettle refugees.

This is also when we created the Citizens UK Council – so our members can debate and agree on our shared national priorities.

In 2015 we launched the Good Jobs Campaign to address the growing skills gap and the barriers to social mobility faced by young people. As a result, many employers become increasingly willing to hire and train young people. We also scored a major win in the campaign for a cap on credit, stopping payday lenders from fleecing vulnerable citizens.

In September 2015, David Cameron stood up in Parliament and made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK by 2020, a big win for refugee organisations and Citizens UK members who wanted positive action from the Government on this issue.
By now Citizens UK has chapters in the Midlands, Wales and a strong presence in London. London Citizens hold a huge 6,000 strong Mayoral Assembly with Sadiq Khan and Zac Goldsmith, presenting a Citizens’ manifesto and creating a working relationship with the new Mayor Sadiq Khan, which has led to major advances on real Living Wage, housing and social integration today.
Citizens UK launches the Safe Passage project, which campaigns for unaccompanied child refugees in Europe to access safe, legal routes to sanctuary. To date, over 1500 refugee children have arrived safely and legally in the UK through the routes we opened. Safe Passage UK will later become an independent, international charity in its own right.

Citizens UK continues its work on refugee issues, launching Sponsor Refugees, a foundation dedicated to helping communities raise funds and create support networks for vulnerable refugee families in conjunction with the Home Office. Over 100 groups across the UK are now sponsoring families, or working towards becoming sponsors.

We also publish the “Missing Muslims” report following our year-long Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life. The report put forward a series of recommendations to civil society, business and the Government on how we can tackle the internal and external barriers preventing more British Muslims from engaging in public life.
Today, at 30 years old, Citizens UK has over 400 member institutions working in 12 chapters on a diverse range of issues. For example, our partnership with the London Community Land Trust has led to pledges of 1,000 permanently affordable homes in London, thanks to organising around housing amongst our membership.

As our community organising work goes from strength to strength, we’ve welcomed two new chapters, Manchester and Tyne and Wear, and are in the process of launching in six more areas UK-wide. Having started with one organiser, Citizens UK now has 45 professional Citizens organisers operating through a Guild.
The great achievements we’ve had in the last 30 years have been made possible through the hard work of thousands of people who’ve taken action together on the concerns facing them and their communities.

From Sunderland to Swansea to Southampton, we now have 450 local civil society institutions investing time and money to reinvigorate local democracy and campaign for social justice.

I want to pay tribute to over 4,300 organisations who have responded to the call for fair pay, who are now proud Living Wage Employers and are helping us champion the world’s most successful Living Wage movement. And I want to give thanks to the generous support of many trusts and foundations including Trust for London, Barrow Cadbury Trust, Tudor Trust, People’s Health Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Big Lottery and Unbound Philanthropy.

It is a great honour to be appointed to lead Citizens UK and I look forward to building on Neil’s remarkable legacy.

In a time of harsh political divisions, fake news and a profound sense of mistrust in politics, our mission to build the power of the people feels more urgent than ever.
It takes a broad-based alliance of civil society institutions to build power and act for social justice and the common good.