



London Together: What role can sport and physical activity play in driving social integration?

January 2023

Tom Keyte, inFocus | Corinna Philpott, Comic Relief

Ellie Sheppard, Mayor of London

MAYOR OF LONDON

**COMIC
RELIEF**



Contents



Executive Summary	4
Introduction	7
Introducing London Together	7
A focus on learning	7
The key learning question	7
The limitations of this report	8
Who is this report for?	8
London Together Projects	9
Chapter 1: Defining social integration	10
Strengthening relationships between and within communities	10
Reducing social isolation	11
Three levels of social integration	12
Why use sport and physical activity for social integration?	13

Chapter 2: Using sport and physical activity	13
Setting the right conditions for sport and physical activity	16
I. Choice and agency	17
II. Creating the right environment	18
III. Accessible venues	19
IV. Lived experience	19
V. Covid-19 and the balance between online and offline delivery	22
Chapter 3: The combination of sport and non-sport activities for social integration	24
3.1 Addressing the needs of individuals to fully engage in activities	24
3.2 Forming communities within a project or organisation	26
3.3 Integration into wider communities	29
Chapter 4: What does this mean for funding and delivering a grant scheme?	33
The role of sport and physical activity in social integration	33
The right conditions for using sport and physical activity	33
A wide definition of sport and physical activity	34
Defining social integration	34
Approaches to social integration	35
Learning and adapting across a grant scheme	35

Executive Summary

Introduction

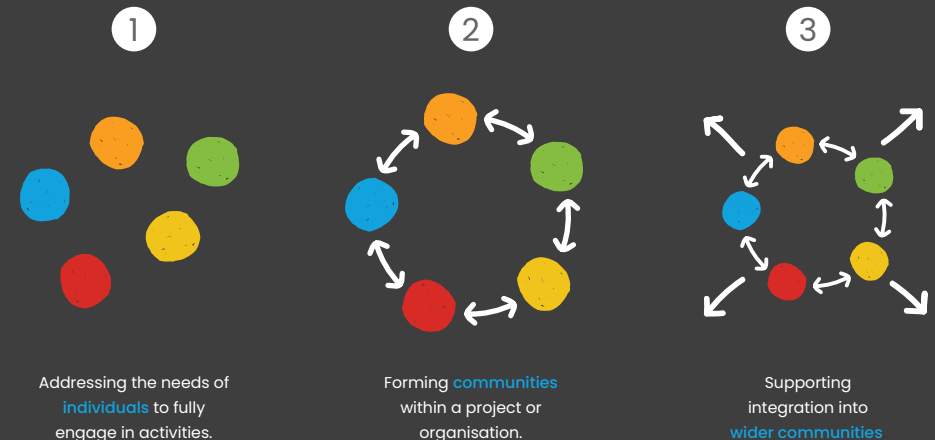
London Together was a £3 million Sport Unites partnership financed equally by the Mayor of London and Comic Relief. Between 2019 and 2022, London Together invested in 29 organisations delivering Sport for Change projects that aimed to improve social integration in different communities across London. This report draws from a series of learning webinars and reports submitted by organisations supported by the fund to focus on the following question:

What are the ideal elements/conditions needed for sport and non-sport provision to support social integration?

The primary audience for this report is any funder with an interest in funding similar areas of work (around sport and physical activity and/or social integration). The report uncovers what to look for when funding these kinds of approaches (as in, how grant schemes or individual projects or programmes have been designed to achieve outcomes).

Defining social integration

In the process of coordinating the London Together programme, and across learning from multiple rounds of funding, Comic Relief themselves went through a journey of understanding the meaning of social integration. This resulted in the formation of a model common to many of the London Together projects in working towards social integration:



Why use sport and physical activity?

Organisations taking part in London Together identified a range of (overlapping) benefits to using sport and physical activity to aid social integration. These included reducing social isolation, improving health and wellbeing, using the appeal of sport and physical activity to connect to further support, challenging perceptions or stereotypes, and utilising the positive values inherent in sport and physical activity.

Setting the right conditions

Across London Together projects there was a recognition that, while sport and physical activity can generate the benefits described above, there are challenges and barriers to using sport and physical activity that need to be addressed, such as previous negative experiences or discrimination. London Together projects adopted a range of different approaches to ensure that sessions were inclusive and accessible, including; ensuring participants have choice and agency in the design of activities, creating safe and inclusive environments and venues, recruiting volunteer and staff with lived experience, and getting a balance between online and offline activities.

The combination of sport and non-sport activities for social integration

This report explores how projects combined sport and physical activity with non-sport activity to drive social integration, through the lens of the earlier model, across the activities shown in the table to the right.

1. Addressing the needs of individuals to fully engage in activities	2. Forming communities within a project or organisation (recognising that project participants can be from diverse backgrounds)	3. Supporting integration into wider communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Addressing the often complex individual needs of participants through services that complement sport and physical activity within projects ▶ Working with partners to address needs through referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fostering positive, shared values amongst participants through taking part in sports teams and groups ▶ Bonding over a shared interest and love of sport ▶ Setting specific time and space to socialise ▶ Connecting participants with others from elsewhere within the organisation, based in different locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Signposting participants to opportunities in the community ▶ Addressing the barriers participants might face to access these opportunities ▶ Advocacy in communities with key stakeholders to more directly reduce barriers for participants ▶ Challenging perceptions and stereotypes through sport ▶ Training and upskilling of staff and activity providers to support the integration of their participants into the wider community

What does this mean for funding and/or delivering a grant scheme?

Finally, the report looks at how key learning from the London Together programme can be applied to the development or review of grant schemes involving sport and physical activity and social integration. This includes the following considerations:

1. Considering the role that sport and physical activity can play in social integration, and the right conditions for its use (for example, the extent to which sports and physical activities have been designed with the interests and abilities of participants in mind).
2. Exploring the full range of different interventions that sport and physical activity could cover (including those that may not be traditionally defined as 'sport').
3. Setting a definition for social integration at the start of a grant scheme (and across each funding round) and staying flexible in evolving this definition in light of ongoing learning.
4. Using the three levels of social integration above to consider what level of social integration to aim for, and the importance of partnership work across the three levels
5. Staying flexible as the administrator throughout the course of a grant scheme, and being open to adapting outcomes at the core of the fund, based on learning from grantees.



Introduction

Introducing London Together

London Together was a £3 million Sport Unites partnership financed equally by the Mayor of London and Comic Relief. Between 2019 and 2022, London Together invested in 29 organisations delivering ‘Sport for Change’ projects that aimed to improve social integration in different communities across London. The organisations and their projects funded by London Together are outlined on page 9.

A focus on learning

Going into London Together, sport and physical activity were relatively untested as interventions to improve social integration for both Comic Relief and the Mayor of London. The London Together programme was therefore also an opportunity to further understand where and how Sport for Change approaches can play a role in strengthening communities and reducing isolation.¹

To help to develop this understanding, Comic Relief (responsible for managing the grant making) engaged with a learning partner, inFocus Consulting (inFocus), to form a ‘learning community’ and explore different learnings from its London Together programme. Topics were chosen by the organisations funded through London Together and took the form of learning questions, with each involving 11 webinars and two live events facilitated by inFocus. Each webinar produced a learning guide that can be accessed in [Appendix A](#).

1. <https://www.comicrelief.com/funding/funding-opportunities/london-together>

The key learning question

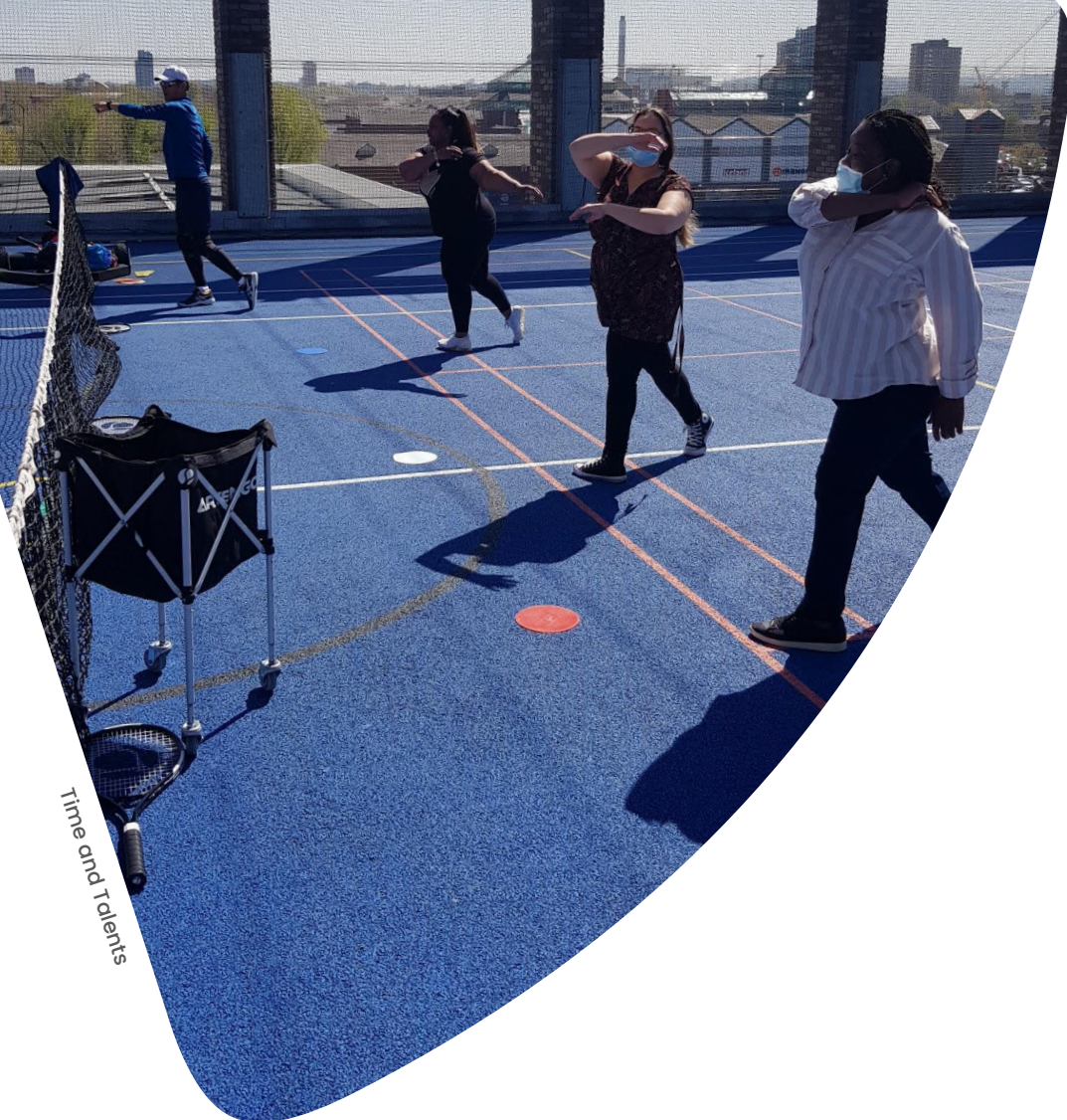
One of the key learning questions selected by London Together organisations and explored through the learning community related to how sport and physical activity can combine with non-sport activity to support social integration.

What are the ideal elements/conditions needed for sport and non-sport provision to support social integration?

What do we mean by **sport and physical activity** and **non-sport** provision?

Sport and physical activity provision	Non-sport and non-physical activity provision
The use of any sport or type of physical activity within a project. As we explore later in the report, ‘physical activity’ encompasses a wide range of activities from gardening and gentle chair-based exercise through to team and adventure sports. Sport and physical activity can be used to attract participants to a project, or to generate outcomes for participants (e.g. improving fitness or confidence).	The use of any activities that complement sport and physical activity to work towards social integration. Non-sport activities can be delivered directly by London Together organisations or through partnerships with local organisations. These types of activities focus on addressing the wider support needs of participants – for example, health focused workshops or support with employment.

Many London Together organisations combined sport with non-sport activities to address the specific needs of participants – for example, using sport to improve wellbeing and also making referrals to specialist mental health services.



Time and Talents

The limitations of this report

While the data submitted by London Together organisations and the learning community provided plenty of rich information to feed into this report, it is important to also recognise this report's limitations. Firstly, this report is not the product of an evaluation, so it is not within scope to ascertain how effective sport and physical activity sessions have been in driving social integration. Secondly, it is not possible to compare the impact of sport and physical activity to other types of activity, or whether results would have been the same if only the non-sport components had been delivered.

Who is this report for?

Funders of grant schemes supporting organisations delivering sport and physical activity projects and programmes focused on social integration

The primary audience for this report is any funder with an interest in funding similar areas of work (around sport and physical activity and/or social integration). The report uncovers what to look for when funding these kinds of approaches (as in, how grant schemes or individual projects or programmes have been designed to achieve outcomes).

Organisations delivering sport and physical activity projects and programmes focused on social integration

This report may also be useful for organisations designing and delivering sport and physical activities focused on social integration. The report provides best practice tips and techniques on designing and running a project in this area.

London Together Projects

Empowering Socially Isolated Muslim Refugee Girls through Football, run by Afghanistan and Central Asian Association Office (ACAA). Working with Afghan and Muslim girls, aged 8-16, from refugee and recent migrant communities in Hounslow and Ealing.

Team Up Take Part, run by Time & Talents. Working with Local Adults (18+) with long-term conditions in Southwark that might currently prevent them from getting out the house and participating in group activities.

Sport for Change: supporting asylum seekers and refugees at the heart of our community, run by Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants (ICRM) and Mary's Community Centre. Working with Asylum seekers and Refugees in Islington and Hackney.

RainbowSports@Mind, run by Islington Mind. Working with LGBTQI+ service users experiencing mental health distress, and other non LGBTQI+ beneficiaries with complex mental health needs and multiple disadvantages, in Islington.

Sport for Inclusion, run by Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC) and Essex Boys and Girls Clubs. Working with visually impaired children and young people in Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, and Southwark.

Sporting Memories London Together, run by The Sporting Memories Network CIC. Working across London with older people over 50 who may have dementia, depression or are socially isolated.

Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC), run by the Bexley Disability Sports Network. Working with organisations that run or provide support for inclusive sports and physical activities in Bexley.

My Moves, run by Social Action for Health. Working with people from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities most affected by health inequalities in Tower Hamlets.

Sports Buddy, run by the Volunteer Centre Sutton. Working with disabled adults in Sutton who experience social isolation, regardless of impairment.

United through Sport, run by Active Communities Network (CAN) and Millwall in the Community. Working with young people and adults from North and Central Southwark.

Box Buddy, run by Fight4Change. Working with people suffering from mild mental health issues and the early onset of psychosis in Kennington and Lambeth.

Core Sport and Core Arts: using activity and creativity to support social integration, run by Core Arts. Working with Adults, particularly targeted at adults with mental health issues working in Hackney.

East London United, run by Salaam Peace. Working with children, young people and young adults in Hackney and Waltham Forest.

Muslim Girls Fence, run by Maslaha and British Fencing. Working with Muslim girls and women and the wider community in Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney.

Tottenham Silver Sports, run by Groundwork. Working with frontline workers, residents and stakeholders in Tottenham across various sheltered housing scheme locations.

SISPAN Getting Active Together, run by Access Sport CIO. Working with organisations who support and deliver inclusive sport and physical activity for deaf and disabled people in Southwark

Get Onside, run by Saracens Sport Foundation. Working with young offenders in His Majesty's Young Offender Institution Feltham who are approaching release.

Fitness for Friendship, run by Abby Community Centre. Working with Older people (aged 60+) living in Kilburn and nearby areas affected by social isolation and loneliness and related poor health.

London Futures, run by The Change Foundation. Working with Young adults with a learning disability in Sutton, Enfield, Kensington & Chelsea and Hackney.

London Deaf Activators, run by UK Deaf Sport and Access Sport, London Sport. Working with deaf people (men, women and young people) and deaf organisations across London.

The Bike Project Pedal Power Programme, run by The Bike Project. Working with refugee and asylum seeking women across London.

We Stand Together (Refugee Allstars) run by Croydon Voluntary Action. Working with refugees and refugee organisations in Croydon.

Every Ends, run by Football Beyond Borders and Spiral. Working with young people at risk of exclusion in Brixton.

XL Sports Project, run by XLP. Working with young people from a range of backgrounds across London.

Shared Futures, run by Celtic FC Foundation. Working with young people from diverse backgrounds across Tower Hamlets.

Stepping Out, run by Consonant. Working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Walthamstow and Tottenham.

Young Peace Leaders, run by Football for Peace. Working with Young people aged 7-14 in Newham.

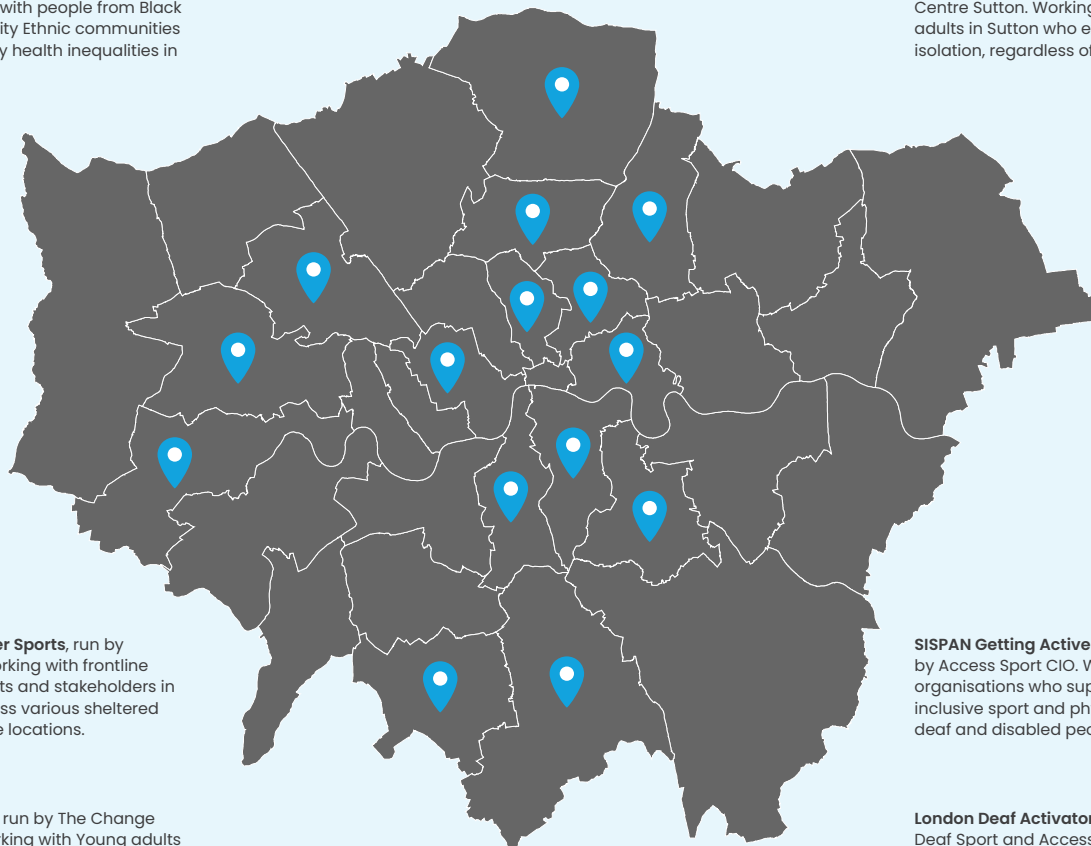


Figure 1

Chapter 1: Defining social integration



In exploring how sport and physical activity can play a role in **social integration**, it is important to define this term in the context of London Together. In the process of coordinating the London Together programme, and across learning from multiple rounds of funding, Comic Relief themselves went through a journey of understanding the meaning of social integration. One lens through which to explore this term is through the outcomes criteria (shown in detail in [Appendix B](#)) that Comic Relief set to help guide organisations applying for the fund.

Below, we look at how the definition of social integration evolved over the three years and how this can help us understand the process that projects used to drive it (by strengthening relationships and reducing social isolation).

Strengthening relationships between and within communities

In the first year of the fund there was a focus on bringing people together from different groups and communities. While this focus remained in year 3, there was an additional emphasis on building and strengthening relationships between and within communities. One of the key learnings from London Together was that the individuals and groups that organisations worked with (for example, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, young offenders, the LGBTQ+ community, Muslim women) have shared experiences and backgrounds but also significant

differences. Therefore, a definition of social integration should arguably include some element of participants mixing together and building connections within a project, not just with individuals and groups externally. This is supported by this quote from the We Stand Together project, working with asylum seekers and refugees:



The target groups are not homogenous. They may have similarities but also have significant differences that need to be considered. Sport enabled participants from different countries, speaking different languages, genders, sexuality, faiths and cultures to find commonalities, which was just as important as the integration with members of the host country.

Croydon Voluntary Action, We Stand Together project



Maslaha

Many London Together projects did still focus on supporting their participants to integrate outside of the projects and into the wider community. There was also an evolution of this focus in year 3, towards outcomes that address structural inequalities outside of the 'bubble' of a London Together project. Maslaha, working with Muslim girls and women on the Muslim Girls Fence project with British Fencing, described this as follows:



Safety within a project can be established for participants by centring their needs, but when there's no strategy to create safety in the wider structures of society, as soon as participants leave the project, they're unsafe again. We've been thinking a lot about how to make sure we're not creating 'bubbles of safety' but are trying to get the decision makers around us to have stronger strategies when it comes to community programmes – what is being done within a project to dismantle wider harms that permeate if we have all acknowledged that it is exactly those wider harms that prevent participation and access in the first place?

Maslaha – Muslim Girls Fence project

Reducing social isolation

While addressing social isolation was a constant criterion across the three years of the funding, the definition of this also expanded and developed. Firstly, a focus on addressing participants' needs was added to the criteria for years 2 and 3; this came after many of the organisations highlighted the importance of first addressing the individual (and varied) needs of participants to improve engagement within a project, and then the wider community. Secondly, increased focus was placed on wellbeing in year 3, after Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns highlighted the connection between reduced social isolation and improved wellbeing.

Three levels of social integration

The learning above helped to form a model (Figure 2) that is used in this report to show the key levels, or levels, that were common to many of the London Together projects in working towards social integration.

The first level represents organisations working towards addressing the individual challenges that participants face, which might include mental health issues, language barriers and accessibility needs, so that they feel less isolated and fully engaged with project activities. Communities then form within a project or organisation – level 2 – which reflects the learning above that social integration can also occur at this level given the different backgrounds and shared characteristics of participants. In the final level, participants are supported to integrate into the wider community, in part by addressing the inequalities they may face in leaving the ‘bubble’ of a project.

These levels are not necessarily sequential, or indeed universal, across London Together projects, however they do provide a structure we will revisit later in the report to explore how London Together projects used both sport and non-sport activities to drive social integration.

Before looking more specifically at social integration and the levels above, in the next chapter we explore how projects used sport and physical activity and how they overcame barriers and challenges to its use. The use of sport and physical activity is the common element across all London Together projects.

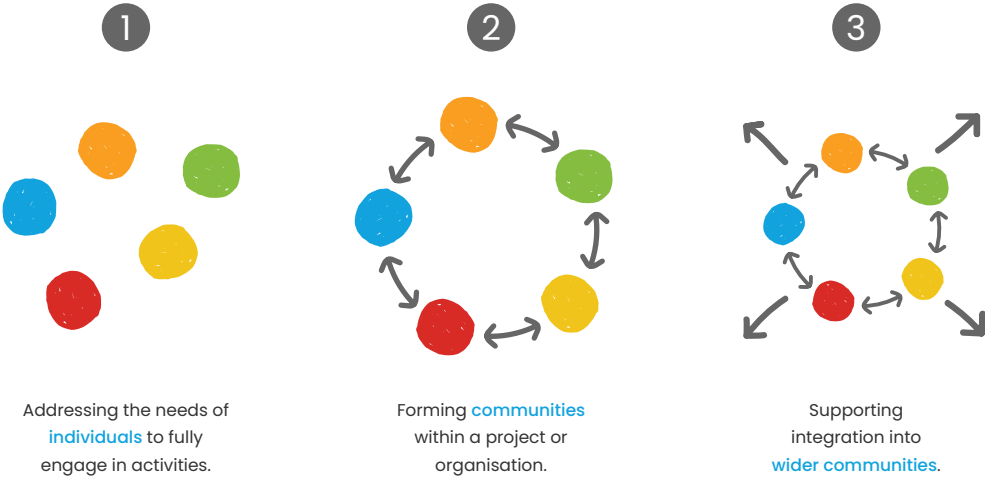


Figure 2 – Three levels of social integration



Abbey Community Centre

Chapter 2: Using sport and physical activity

Sport and physical activity underpinned the approach that all London Together organisations took in their projects to drive social integration. In this chapter, we explore why sport and physical activity were used and how London Together organisations addressed some of the barriers and challenges to this.

Why use sport and physical activity for social integration?

There are a range of (overlapping) benefits of using sport and physical activity to aid social integration. London Together organisations recognised these as:

- ▶ **Reducing social isolation:** Organisations reported that sport and physical activity helped to reduce social isolation by allowing participants to engage with others, often on a 1-to-1 level. In their Pedal Power Programme, The Bike Project found that participants' involvement and connection with other cyclists during activities led them to feeling less lonely and isolated. Time and Talents also found that their befriending scheme, built around training and weekly tennis sessions, helped to connect individuals together and formed friendships that reduced social isolation:



Our befriendees have felt a huge difference from the support of our volunteers. One befriender, was referred to our project by a GP social prescriber in early 2021. He moved to the UK 6 years ago. When he was first referred, he was feeling isolated and finding it difficult to make connections as he lacks confidence in his English. He was matched with a volunteer, who was in the process of changing professions to become a personal trainer. The two met up once a week to train in a local park together and formed a supportive and motivating friendship. With the volunteer's encouragement, he came along to our weekly tennis sessions, which gave him an opportunity to make new social connections, as well as progress his tennis skills beyond all recognition.

Time and Talents – Team Up and Take Part project

- ▶ **Improving health and wellbeing:** Many of the London Together organisations reported that regular sport and physical activities (when customised for the target audience) helped improve the general health and wellbeing of participants. For example, within Groundwork's Tottenham Silver Sports project, local residents were pleasantly surprised by their ability to participate in physical activities and reported marked improvements in their physical health, such as being able to walk better, experiencing fewer 'aches and pains', and reduced blood sugar readings. For Islington Mind, the benefits of physical activity were a key point of learning from their RainbowSports@Mind project:

We are most proud that we have been able to integrate a physical activity project into a well-established mental health service that is set to continue well beyond the end of this grant. It is quite uncommon for there to be a focus on movement and physical activity in mental health services, as often the focus is on the mind rather than the body and the former appears to come first. How successful this project is... demonstrates the importance of treating the body as equal to the mind in regards to supporting people with poor mental health and empowering clients to improve their own wellbeing. This has been a huge point of learning for us.

Islington Mind - RainbowSports@Mind project

Many London Together organisations also noticed increased confidence among participants. For example, Access Sport found that visually impaired yoga participants in their Getting Active Together project increased in confidence after taking part in the activity for the first time and realising that they could do it.

- ▶ **Using the appeal of sport and physical activity to connect to further support:** There are numerous examples of successfully using the appeal of sport and physical activity as a way to engage participants in 'wrap-around' or partner services. While participants might have attended an activity primarily to have fun and socialise with other participants (experiencing the aforementioned benefits), they were then able to engage with other services (e.g. mental health services or work placements) while they were there. For example, the Saracens Foundation observed that the appeal of taking part in regularly rugby sessions was key to the success of the prison-based Get Onside project, focused on supporting participants to get into employment after release. Using sporting events as milestones for participants also helped Saracens to motivate participants, for example, across the 8-week programme there were two matches that participants built towards. The first was a touch rugby tournament half-way through the course, attended by stakeholders and project supporters (that also acted as a networking opportunity with potential employers), and the programme concluded with a presentation match against an external team. This was also attended by friends and family and acted as a celebration of everything participants had achieved over the preceding eight weeks.
- ▶ **Challenging perceptions or stereotypes through sport and physical activity:** Sport and physical activity can also be mechanisms through which to confront stereotypes and highlight the ability of participants. The All Together Deaf Londoners Activation Programme, run by UK Deaf Sport (UKDS), created a robust and evidence-led deaf peer-to-peer network, recruiting and training deaf activator champions across a number of London

boroughs to engage, encourage and support deaf communities to integrate through activities. One of the aims of the project was to break down barriers and demonstrate the abilities of deaf people – for example, through training to increase understanding of deafness and confidence in including deaf people in activities. In another example, Maslaha chose to use fencing for their Muslim Girls Fence project, a sport that can be seen as predominantly elite and male dominated, to break down class barriers:

Fencing is a sport that we don't really associate with young girls, girls of colour, Muslim girls, and we therefore use that to challenge the fencing stereotype. Muslim girls in particular face this double discrimination – faith, gender and often race as well – so the fencing is really a launch pad, and the way they are smashing that stereotype, they then talk about other challenges and narratives that they can smash.

Maslaha – Muslim Girls Fence project

the values of rugby to develop the education and employability skills of offenders. Through an intensive 8-week course of classroom and sporting sessions, the project instilled values important to Saracens Foundation such as honesty, work rate, humility and discipline, with the ultimate aim of reducing the re-offending rates of ex-offenders upon their release from prison.

All of the weekly sessions linked back to a weekly theme. So it could be teamwork, employability, resilience... there were eight different themes in total. The classroom work and the rugby activities both relate to that theme. There are lots of examples from the rugby pitch that can translate back into the morning's work in the classroom. So it might be, for example, preparing for a job... you're probably going to have to go through half a dozen interviews. Same way in rugby, you've got to try and score but the first time you're going to get tackled, you're going to get knocked back, you're going to go down. You've got to pick yourself back up, go again, learn from last time, and try and move forward, try and keep going.

Saracens Foundation – Get Onside project

- ▶ **Positive values:** Sport can foster different positive values, like teamwork and fair play, that can help to bring a group closer together. Being part of a team and playing together in the same kit can forge a strong sense of shared identity within a group. Time and Talents gave the example of one of their participants with a particular passion for football, who connected with others within the project over a shared love for the sport and gradually integrated into the project themselves. Saracens Foundation's Get Onside project, used

Maslaha also took a similar approach with their Muslim Girls Fence project, run in partnership with British Fencing, by integrating key messages into fencing activities; for example, encouraging participants to feel centred and powerful in their body when taking the ‘En Garde’ position, and associating a lunge with moving forward with confidence. Maslaha also explored the positive values embodied by famous sports people, for example, looking at how fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, the first American woman to compete in the Olympics in a hijab in 2016, battled stereotypes throughout her career.

- **Communication:** Croydon Voluntary Action noted that the increased confidence of refugees participating in their We Stand Together project helped them to build relationships. Alongside ESOL courses, the project used football as a non-verbal communication tool for social interaction, helping refugees improve their English indirectly.

Setting the right conditions for sport and physical activity

Across London Together projects there was a recognition that, while sport and physical activity can generate the benefits described above, there are challenges and barriers to using sport and physical activity that need to be addressed. For example, participants may not feel safe or confident taking part in sport and physical activities or being in the spaces in which these activities occur – perhaps because of previous negative experiences and discrimination, or a perception that these activities or spaces are ‘not for them’ (e.g. if a sport is male dominated or not seen to be culturally appropriate). Islington Mind captured this:



There are significant barriers that LGBTIQ+ people specifically face in accessing sporting activities. For example, not feeling safe in non-LGBTIQ+ spaces due to homophobia and transphobia means a lot of LGBTIQ+ people will not get engaged in sport at all. The importance of offering a space for LGBTIQ+ people who experience mental health distress to engage with their bodies is significant, as it allows a full and more holistic approach to wellbeing.

Islington Mind – Rainbow Sports@Mind project

Some participants may also lack the confidence that they will physically be able to participate in sport. The competitive element can create inequalities in a group if not managed effectively – for example, if participants are judged by other members of the group based on their ability, leading to cliques and divisions. The cost and accessibility of sporting venues and equipment can also be a barrier to taking part in sport and physical activity. London Together projects adopted a range of different approaches to ensure that sport and physical activity sessions were inclusive and accessible, addressing the barriers above:

1. Choice and agency	2. Creating the right environment	3. Accessible venues	4. Lived experience	5. Covid-19 and the balance between online and offline delivery
----------------------	-----------------------------------	----------------------	---------------------	---

I. Choice and agency

The importance of finding the right sporting and physical activities to appeal to the different interests and ability levels of participants, and consulting with participants on this, was a key learning to emerge from the London Together programme. Activities ranged across a spectrum from less strenuous exercises through to more competitive team sports.

Time and Talents found that after surveying their Team Up Take Part project participants, many preferred less strenuous, indoor options. Following this, they secured the support of a local yoga teacher who started a new yoga group for participants. At the other end of the scale, Croydon Voluntary Action found that, while participants generally wanted some social interaction and “time away from life’s challenges”, some wanted additional football coaching, competitive matches, and training.

Several projects described the importance of giving participants choice as to the extent of their participation in activities. At Croydon Voluntary Action, participants decided on the session format and how much or how little they wanted to be involved. On one occasion, participants decided to have a friendly match rather than working on specific drills. In other London Together projects, some participants chose to observe activities rather than join in. Core Arts provided taster sessions for Padel² and different dances (ballet, musical theatre jazz, and tap dancing) to offer a soft, low-commitment introduction.

2. Padel is a racquet sport typically played in doubles on an enclosed court, slightly smaller than a doubles tennis court. Scoring is the same as tennis, and the balls used are similar but with a little less pressure. [Wikipedia](#)

For Islington Mind, providing non-traditional sport and physical activity options through their RainbowSports@Mind project helped to address negative perceptions of sport and physical activity:



We engaged many of our target groups by offering a wide variety of activities which appealed to a range of service users. These had an expansive view of physical activity, ranging from gardening taster sessions to dance and yoga, which meant that clients reframed how they thought about ‘sports’. As well, there is a legacy that has shifted how many of our clients think about “sport” that applies outside of the project context. Clients now feel more able to talk about and engage with sport at the everyday level. In ensuring that the activities offered were varied and accessible, we had a tangible impact in terms of integration in our service, particularly relating to our asylum seeker and refugee clients.”

Islington Mind – Rainbow Sports@Mind project

II. Creating the right environment

Alongside the need for choice around activity type and involvement, many London Together projects stressed the importance of creating a fun, relaxed and unpressured environment for sport and physical activity sessions. For Holloway Neighbourhood Group, while their tutors were trained and qualified to deliver specialist activities, they understood that the project was more about having fun than serious exercise. As described later in the report, creating a fun, relaxed environment included making time for participants to socialise together. For Young Roots, participants expressed that the project offered a refuge away from challenging environments, emphasising the need to create appropriate spaces:



The weekly Hubs create a safe space where young people know they can access vital support, be listened to, share their burdens, socialise with their peers, reduce their sense of isolation and stress, etc. Knowing that this type of space exists is so essential to their wellbeing and development, especially in an increasingly hostile environment towards asylum seekers and refugees.”

Young Roots – Surviving to Thriving project

Young Roots described a range of different aspects that helped them to create a safe space for participants in their Surviving to Thriving project including: running activities from a familiar setting, such as a school, church hall or Islamic Cultural

Centre; supporting participants to discover the venue and activities at their own pace when they first join activities (for example, joining smaller group activities to help them to meet with other participants); identifying the needs of participants to take part in activities (e.g. getting the right kit); and not asking for too many personal details (e.g. in a registration form) when a participant first joins.



III. Accessible venues

Providing suitable access to sport and physical activity venues was also crucial to breaking down barriers to attending London Together projects. Firstly, it was important that venues and activities were free of charge and, where possible, that venues were located within the heart of communities or dispersed if a project covered a range of locations. Celtic FC Foundation, for example, deliberately used facilities that were rooted in the neighbourhoods that young people lived and socialised in for their Shared Futures project, which removed the need for travel and reduced concerns around “postcode rivalry”.

Travel to venues was a challenge for participants across a number of London Together projects. For older participants of the Abbey Community Centre’s Fitness for Friendship sessions, the challenge stemmed from their mobility issues and their dependency on public transport:



The taxi-card service is basically useless here because there are so few black cabs around. Dial-a-ride is impractical and can create stress as members have to prepare themselves to be collected and dropped off in a very lengthy timeframe (which actually can then create a knock-on stress for our project staff/volunteers in not quite knowing what time members will be supported back to their homes). And public transport, as good as it is, is not great for a person with mobility issues to use unaided.

Abby Community Centre – Fitness for Friendship project

To overcome this, the organisation secured additional funding for taxis to transport participants to and from sessions. Another innovative solution to transport challenges, this time from Islington Mind, came involved using bikes (through referrals to The Bike Project) as a mode of transport and an additional form of low-cost exercise for participants of the RainbowSports@Mind project.

Projects also took other practical steps to ensure venues were accessible, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic. Sporting Memories used ‘photo journeys’ (photos and descriptions), to show participants what to expect when they arrive at a venue, which helped to put them at ease. Many London Together organisations also highlighted the need for providing free equipment and kit to enable participants to fully engage in activities – the costs of which were sometimes an additional barrier to taking part.

IV. Lived experience

Volunteers and staff with similar lived experience and backgrounds to participants were key in supporting participants to engage in sessions and overcome psychological barriers to attendance. Staff at the Salaam Peace East London United project were all ‘experts by experience’, which the organisation found helpful for developing a rapport with participants:



Salaam Peace

Another representative from Salaam Peace commented:



[Our Community Champions] understand the journey of participants and can empathise because they live it, and participants are interacting with someone who actually lives and breathes the same air as them, lives in the same locality, and has that little bit of affinity. But they are also real examples of what can be achieved and it continues that kind of 'assembly line' of the next generation of volunteers and staff coming from people aspiring to do what they do.

Salaam Peace – East London United project



The strength of our project has been our relatively young team and the positive role models that they are. We have spent years developing local young people into current and future Community Champions. Our founder, Sab Bham, from the early part of his career pre-Salaam Peace, believed strongly in investing in youth. This investment has led to the creation of participants that are now directors at Salaam Peace. Our current set of Community Champions represent the diverse communities we engage.

Salaam Peace – East London United project

Salaam Peace highlighted the time and investment required in developing and supporting young people to become Community Champions and positive role models. In the course of developing participants to become staff members, Salaam Peace meets with participants every six weeks to support them through formal and informal discussions around topics such as finance, managing stress, target setting, managing time, and planning week schedules. Senior staff members at Salaam Peace recognise the importance of showing empathy around being in the same situation as the young people, and following a similar development pathway. Finally, recognising the importance of young people to the organisation is also important to Salaam Peace, for example, ensuring they are in positions of responsibility and involved in key decision-making.

For The Bike Project and their Pedal Power programme, it was particularly important to employ diverse and culturally sensitive staff, given that 82% of their female participants had low-medium levels of English proficiency and largely originated from outside of the UK and Europe. They found that involving Arabic speaking refugee women was important in ensuring that women felt supported and accompanied during their enrolment in Pedal Power:



At the beginning, Nour led the programme. She is a refugee woman herself, who's Syrian and an Arabic speaker. It was lockdown and her being able to speak to somebody in their own language over the phone, text message and via email, as a refugee woman, brought reassurance and certainly built more of an instant relationship. I guess anybody who's lived overseas has probably felt that when they've met somebody from their home country who suddenly speaks their language. I don't think it would have been as successful and engaging for women had we not had that skill set...I don't think we would have got as much engagement in terms of asking women who've never cycled before to go out, a cold, windy morning, meet with a stranger and get cycling without her lived experience. I think that's been more of a struggle later this year, because we had a change of project lead halfway through this programme, and working without those language skills and cultural experience was more challenging.

The Bike Project – Pedal Power Programme

For Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, this was also an important factor for outreach; they involved an Afghan outreach officer who was fluent in Farsi, which made communication easier and created a more comfortable environment for new participants. For other London Together organisations, engaging participants with lived experience was also important when designing activities. For example, Croydon Voluntary Action engaged participants with lived experience at the earliest opportunity when designing a project and consulted with them throughout. They also ensured that key strategic roles throughout the organisation were held by people with lived experience. Active Communities Network placed a particular emphasis on providing a voice for 'unheard' groups, leaders and residents taking part in the United Through Sport project, not only in planning activities, but in the wider direction of the work and defining the challenges and context of the whole programme.



The Bike Project

Active Communities Network highlighted some of the challenges and limitations of engaging and supporting staff and volunteers with lived experience:



Whilst in principle we found that workers from the estates and living in the community can engage and recruit well, there are challenges. Many of the residents we worked with have deep traumatic experiences and are experiencing their own inequality struggles... and many struggled to maintain motivation and cope when things went wrong. Whilst we mentored and supported group leaders, we would advocate for wider considerations of what 'lived experience' is, what it brings, and what skills should be developed. It's dangerous to promote the lived experience worker without due consideration of their backgrounds, trauma, skills, confidence and lack of connection to broader systems.

Active Communities Network - United Through Sport project

V. Covid-19 and the balance between online and offline delivery

During the Covid-19 pandemic, London Together projects moved quickly to switch to online delivery, combining online staff-led sessions on platforms such as Zoom with other resources such as videos and e-learning. Some projects replicated or replaced face-to-face delivery entirely (e.g. conducting online yoga sessions),

while some sports and physical activities were not replicable (e.g. team sports). For other projects, there was a focus on developing online programmes specifically to address issues caused by Covid-19 – for instance, UKDS developed the online programme #deafstayinworkout, which focused on supporting deaf people to stay physically active and mentally well during lockdowns.

Following the end of all lockdowns, many London Together projects continued to provide a combination of both online and offline activities, finding that this could help increase participation and inclusion. English for Action noticed particular accessibility benefits with online activities, which they wanted to retain:



Interestingly, the online sessions were more accessible for lots of people who struggled to access physical activities due to lack of childcare, gender or cultural barriers or who were time poor. We have kept a hybrid model of working to make use of this accessibility. Being able to run the sessions online made it much more accessible to women who faced cultural barriers to accessing exercise classes. They told us that being able to do the session in their own home, with their camera off if they wanted, was much more comfortable. It also allowed for children to be taken care of in the background so there were no childcare barriers.

English in Action - Strength in Numbers project

Other projects found that online activities provided opportunities for participants to meet people from a wider range of areas around London, but still acknowledged that building relationships online has its challenges. Groundwork found that fewer organic friendships occurred via their digital interactions, as participants were unable to talk one-to-one in online/phone group activities.

Other challenges to do with digital activities included (but were not limited to):

- ▶ Lack of access to digital devices or funds for accessing resources.
- ▶ Low digital literacy among participants (and a lack of support to help participants get online).
- ▶ Behavioural management struggles (e.g. at times, young people shared meeting links with individuals external to projects, causing significant disruption and safeguarding concerns).
- ▶ Issues at home presenting in online activities, or participants lacking safe spaces to take part from.

So far in this report we have looked broadly at how London Together organisations incorporated sport and physical activities into their projects. In the next chapter we delve into how both sport and non-sport activities combined together to address social integration at each level of the model in Figure 2, outlined earlier in the report.



Croydon Voluntary Action

Chapter 3: The combination of sport and non-sport activities for social integration

We have now looked broadly at how and why London Together organisations used sport and physical activity to support participants, and how they set the conditions to address some of the challenges with using this approach. We now turn in this chapter to look more specifically at how projects combined sport and physical activity with non-sport activity to drive social integration. We explore this using the levels of the earlier model (Figure 2) in turn:

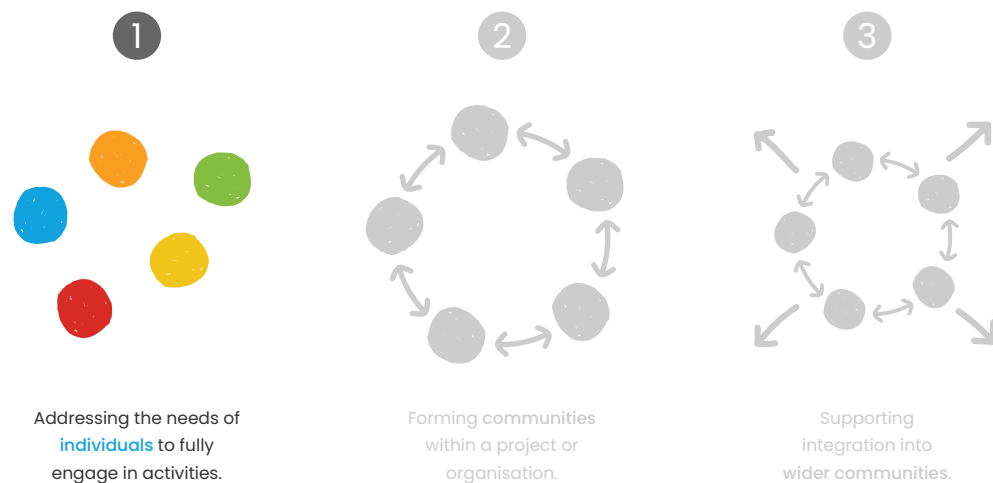


Figure 2 – Three levels of social integration

3.1 Addressing the needs of individuals to fully engage in activities

Participants joining London Together projects sometimes lacked confidence or felt anxious about engaging in social settings and developing relationships. This may have been because of isolation, language barriers, adverse childhood relationships, trauma (such as bullying or harassment), limited connections outside friends and family, and other reasons. In some cases, a lack of understanding or knowledge of other communities and internalised stereotypes needed addressing in order to foster connections and positive relationships both within a project and in wider society.

A key learning from London Together has been around the value of addressing the individual needs of participants, not only to help them reap the health and wellbeing benefits that come with sport, but to reduce their social isolation by facilitating engagement with other participants within a project – the second level.

Individual needs of participants



It is important to understand that although the sport can aid social integration, reduce isolation, [and] improve physical and mental health, often the target groups have major challenges going on in other areas of their lives.

Croydon Voluntary Action – We Stand Together project

Participants may come to projects with individual, often complex, needs and personal challenges that can impact the extent to which they can engage with and integrate into a project. Among London Together participants, these specific challenges included health issues, language barriers, lack of access to basic

services, and unemployment. At Holloway Neighbourhood Group, participants faced family stresses from the impact of drug-related and hate crimes, the high cost of housing, and an increased reliance on Universal Credit. For Groundwork, participants in the Tottenham Silver Sports project had a range of needs within the general category of 'older people', based on age, health and cultural/social backgrounds.

Addressing these needs

For some organisations, internal staff/volunteers had relevant expertise to support more complex needs. For example, Fight for Change staff were all trained in mental health awareness and mental health first aid, and received ongoing training alongside weekly case load meetings to best support participants' needs. For other organisations, the complex needs of participants were addressed by forming partnerships with local organisations. The importance of partnerships was stressed across London Together organisations:



Effective partnerships are a key factor to delivering a quality provision to young people and communities. With increasing cuts to services and waiting list growing for young people to access services within mental health and educational support there is increasing pressure on voluntary sector groups and organisations to plug gaps. Forming the right partnerships is important to enable signposting and an ability to provide adequate support to young people and families. We have learnt identifying organisations who share the same vision and ethos can strengthen the work we deliver in the community to.

Active Communities Network – United Through Sport project

There were two main ways in which partnerships were adopted to address the needs of participants:

- ▶ **Services that complemented sport and physical activity:** For example, Salaam Peace developed a partnership with City Dietitians that allowed participants to receive 1-2-1 and group advice and information on nutrition and physical and mental wellbeing. Similarly, Core Sports worked in partnership with the East London NHS Foundation Trust to conduct health monitoring from their centre, including blood, BMI, and weight assessments.
- ▶ **Referrals to services run by partners:** For example, Social Action for Health worked closely with other community organisations and GP social prescribers. Time and Talents also referred participants to their local GPs' social prescribing teams to address complex needs:



We take a holistic approach and meet the person as a whole, recognising that issues or challenges going on in their lives can affect the amount of engagement in the project or the amount of support that they need. With this in mind, we also learnt that we needed to be more specific about who would benefit from the project and could be referred by the local GP social prescribing teams, as some clients being referred had needs too complex to be supported by TUTP.

Time and Talents – Team Up Take Part project

3.2 Forming communities within a project or organisation

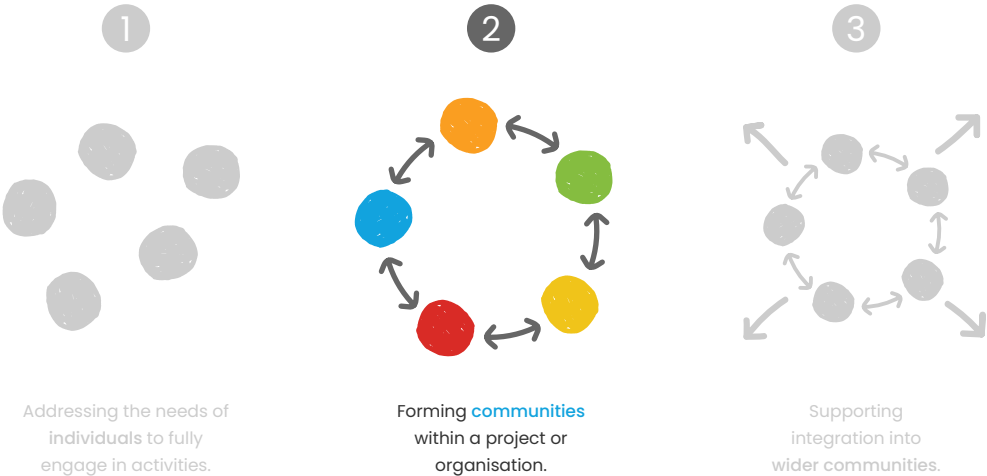


Figure 2 – Three levels of social integration

As discussed earlier in the report, participants mixing together within London Together projects is also a form of social integration, as projects include communities of individuals in their own right (Figure 2). Many London Together projects focused on forging connections between individuals within a project and building a sense of community, safety and trust within groups and between participants and staff/volunteers. For some projects, this began with participants working in pairs and small groups, before bringing together groups from different locations within the one project. In this section, we look at the different ways in which projects encouraged interaction between participants.

Teams and groups

London Together organisations found that sport and physical activity could foster positive, shared values among participants, like teamwork and fair play, which could help to bring a group closer together. Croydon Voluntary Action found that their approach helped them to reach participants often referred to as ‘hard to engage’, with the feeling of being part of a team and playing together in the same kit creating a shared sense of identity for the group, despite different languages, religions, politics, genders and sexualities. This experience was echoed by Afghanistan and Central Asian Association:



The project coordinator, outreach officer, head coach, and volunteer team have all noticed an increase in social interaction between participants, with girls creating new friendships with those from other Muslim backgrounds within the team. In addition, we also organise trips and activities, which includes both Saturday and Sunday session participants and provides another chance for the girls to mix. We have, therefore, noted a development in friendships between participants across the two sessions.

Afghanistan and Central Asian Association - Afghan and Muslim Girls FT Club

Saracens Foundation also reflected this experience:



There's 20 guys all thrown into a room together and they have to find a way to get on and become a team, learn soft skills and find a way to make the situation work, and this is precisely what happens. They come in and they form bonds and friendships with people that they might not have met on the prison wing before, but they find a way of making that situation work. That's ultimately what we're asking them to do when they're released. You might end up with a job that isn't your ultimate goal but it's something you just have to do to make it work and utilise those skills that you've acquired over those eight weeks.

Saracens Foundation – Get Onside project

Saracens Foundation also found the choice of sport to have a significant impact on team bonding. One of the factors that helped bring together the 20 participants in each run of their prison-based Get Onside project was the offering of a sport (rugby) that was unfamiliar to them and therefore required learning something new (alongside new employability skills). The unfamiliarity was a 'leveller' for the group, as all participants were able to start from generally similar experience levels.

Islington Mind found that the walking group element of their RainbowSports@Mind project provided a comfortable space for quiet and non-verbal participants to

engage with others, and participants' increased confidence carried through into the project's drop-in spaces.

Bonding over a shared interest in sport

Sporting Memories found that a shared love of a particular sport and its rich history helped to bring participants together within project activities. They observed that this reduced isolation by increasing social connections and building a sense of community and belonging among participants. Trained volunteers helped older participants reminisce together in a group setting about their experiences of watching or playing sport, using memorabilia and resources from a given sport that appealed to participants' specific interests. This was followed by at least 45 minutes of physical activity, with a range of sports and balance and strength exercises.

Setting up specific opportunities to socialise

Many of the conditions for using sport and physical activity outlined earlier in the report (like choice and agency and venue accessibility) can help to generate the conditions in which social interaction can thrive. However, there are some more specific actions that London Together organisations took to encourage social interaction between individuals and groups.

In their Women Together in Finsbury Park project, Holloway Neighbourhood Group dedicated 5 to 10 minutes before and after classes just for socialising. The Bike Project also prioritised social time and purposely factored this into sessions. They set aside time at the start and end of each session for socialising – for people to chat and get to know each other outside of the lessons. This created a more relaxed, welcoming start to the sessions, and an informal debrief at the end of a session was often followed by lunch, where instructors and participants could interact on more of an equal footing, breaking down barriers:



Pedal Power is more than just learning to ride a bike, it is about joining a community and joining a movement. We purposefully build in as much time for socialising as learning, whether that is online or in person. As one participant said, 'In Pedal Power we enjoy learning and experiencing new things with people who share the same situation as us. We are also meeting weekly online, it's like we are actually meeting in person. We enjoy our time like a family.'

The Bike Project – Pedal Power Programme

Food and drink were additional mechanisms in encouraging social interaction. Holloway Neighbourhood Group's Women Together in Finsbury Park project provided traditional food and facilitated time for women to sit together and talk about the classes they had joined. Access Sport found that after yoga sessions in Peckham for blind and visually impaired adults, participants would eat lunch together. And both Young Roots and The Bike Project highlighted the importance of providing food and drink to participants before any physical activity, not only to increase energy levels but to increase willingness and ability to socialise.

Connecting participants across an organisation

Some London Together projects connected participants with others from elsewhere within the organisation, based in different locations. For example, Young Londoners (participants) in The Change Foundation's London Futures project built wider friendship networks by taking part in charity-wide employability challenges across London. Set in Hyde Park, these challenges brought together four hubs of

Young Londoners to compete in 'BBC Apprentice'-style activities; the first being a shopping challenge followed by a get-together to play football. For some Young Londoners, these challenges saw them travel outside their boroughs, alone and often for the first time. Coaches played an important role in supporting and reassuring participants to do this. The Change Foundation team observed that participants felt more confident to explore and travel on their own across London after taking part in these challenges.

The Change Foundation team also encouraged cross-referrals between their London Futures and Girls Win programmes, which complimented each other well. Some Young Londoners took part in both programmes, which eased the transition between the different activities.



The Change Foundation

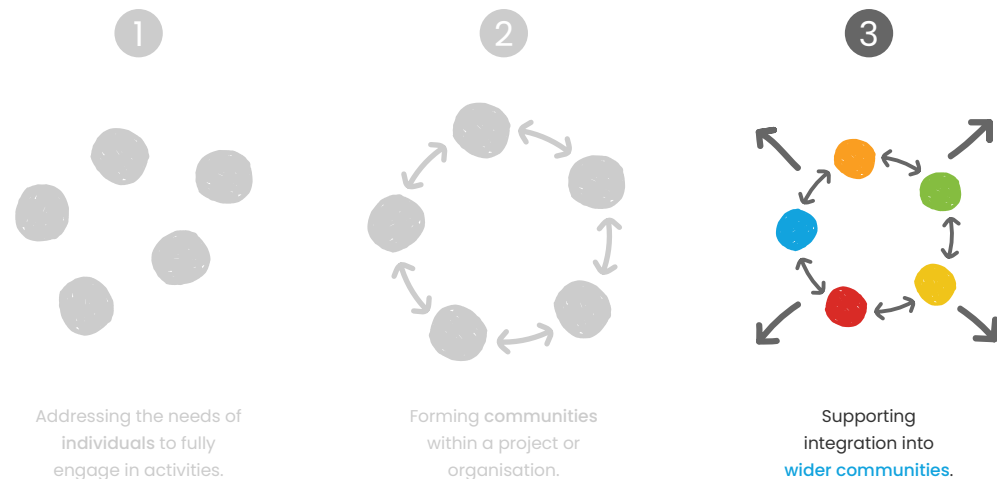


Core Arts

For Football Beyond Borders, their end-of-year office party, held specifically for the 'At Risk' cohort, allowed for cross-project interactions. The party was attended by young people from across their programmes, including their Every Ends project. Football Beyond Borders found that internal events like this created opportunities for young people to develop relationships with each other and with role models and staff, plus a chance for them to develop their leadership qualities and aspirations.

Connections were also made between participants across London Together projects. For example, The Bike Project partnered with Young Roots to deliver bikes to their young people and provide volunteer bike buddies for participants to ride with.

3.3 Integration into wider communities



Earlier in the report we highlighted one of the key learnings from London Together around the importance of integration outside of a project 'bubble', to support participants to deal with structural inequalities they may encounter. In this section, we look at the steps that London Together projects took to support participants to integrate into the wider community.

Signposting to opportunities

Firstly, an awareness of the opportunities for participants to engage in the wider community proved important. Time and Talents met with local community centres and gyms to develop a list of services that participants (in their 'befriending pairs') from their project could be referred to, while Holloway Neighbourhood Group ran events for women to learn about leisure centres and facilities available to local women. Other projects referred participants directly through to follow-on activities; for example, English for Action partnered with Bromley by Bow Centre, with teachers advertising the physical activities on offer at the centre. London Futures also reported developing strong relationships with other community sport and disability organisations, using an open and flexible cross-referral process.

Addressing barriers to accessing opportunities

To address the barriers to accessing external opportunities some projects took more specific steps, such as taking participants on trips into the local community to visit sporting venues as a group. Young Roots, for example, asked participants what activities they would most like to try outside of the project, with trips to the beach, canoeing and Go Ape proving the most popular. These additional activities gave participants the opportunity to experience new parts of London and surrounding areas and to step out of their comfort zones:



One young woman had literally never put her feet in the sea and was very scared about it. By the end of the week, she went into the water in a hijab swimsuit with some staff and then got all her friends to go in. I think you also start to see areas of UK in a new light when you go with young people to them and we find that on the journeys you can have really good conversations with people because it's quite rare that you get that quite contained space to really dig a little bit deeper with them about what's going on. I think these trips would be a really good thing to sustain as you have the consistency of a regular activity, but then you've got these kind of periodic highs where you can kind of get people really engaged, by going on the one off trips.

Young Roots - Surviving to Thriving project

At London Futures, staff regularly shared opportunities to join services or activities outside of the project with Young Londoners (participants) through WhatsApp, and actively supported them to access these opportunities by attending with them or introducing them to key contacts.

More tangible forms of support included the provision of sporting kit. English for Action arranged for 12 female migrants to attend women-only sessions at the local pool at their request, and provided full-coverage swimming costumes that the women would feel comfortable wearing. Islington Mind followed a similar approach and provided gym memberships for participants.

Advocacy

Several London Together organisations worked with organisations and institutions within the community to more directly reduce barriers for participants outside of London Together projects.

In some cases, this took the form of advocacy – raising awareness among individuals and organisations and improving their understanding of how to work with participants from particular backgrounds. Croydon Voluntary Action invited sports clubs to be part of the Croydon Welcome campaign, through which they taught clubs how to open up activities to refugees and asylum seekers. They also involved other community stakeholders in sports sessions, as part of the We Stand Together project. The local Police Engagement Team participated in four sessions during Refugee Week and then ran Q&A sessions for participants on topics including stop and search and reporting hate crime. Participants felt comfortable enough to talk frankly about their experiences, which benefited both parties, and police were invited along for further meetings.

Maslaha also worked directly with the sports sector to address how to make spaces safer for Muslim and marginalised communities:



Another key achievement has been the connections we've made with various sport organisations... think about how you practically centre a community you are trying to reach and also the importance of critiquing and taking a stance against structures of harm like Islamophobia and racism before trying to 'include' people into a space that is harmful to them. These are ongoing conversations and we will continue to have them. The connections we made with the sports sector during the two years grew quite rapidly. So, making connections there and continuing to do so keeps us going towards our wider goals about facing structures of harm and ensuring that spaces are safer for Muslim communities and marginalised communities more widely, instead of assuming that there is a problem within the community itself.

Maslaha – Muslim Girls Fence project

This connection often resulted in partners making positive changes to sporting venues or provisions to ensure they were more accessible for women. For example, one leisure centre that hosted Muslim Girls Fence established a women-only night at their centre as a result of working with Maslaha, and purchased window blinds for around the swimming pool to create a safer space.

As touched upon with the example of involving the local police, in some cases, advocacy work extended beyond the sports sector to local authority and statutory services. Active Communities Network found that establishing a relationship and dialogue between local authorities and participants was essential to increasing participants' visibility and enabling them, as local leaders, to have more of a voice and be included in decision making:



The increased ownership and voice that local leaders have felt as a result of this project has been by far a huge achievement... We have seen leaders grow in confidence as their knowledge about how statutory services, local authority and funding works and this has enabled them to become more involved in decision making and feel a sense of belonging to their community. This project has also allowed us to elevate individuals and groups and increase their recognition amongst Southwark council...

Active Communities Network, United Through Sport project

Changing perceptions through sport

As described earlier in the report, other London Together organisations used sport to confront stereotypes. For example, in Muslim Girls Fence, Muslim girls and women were coached in the traditionally elite, white, male-dominated sport of fencing, which helped to challenge their assumptions and narratives around gender, race,

religion and other identities. Through this, Maslaha observed that participants physically confronted the stereotypes of fencers, as well as the expectations they felt society had of them, for example, that Muslim girls and woman are 'weak' and 'subordinate'.

Some London Together projects described that the confidence built through the previous two stages helped to act as a stepping stone for participants to integrate within the wider community. For example, Islington Mind found that participants from the LGBTIQ+ community who took part in their Stretch and Sing activities felt more able to access non-LGBTIQ+ support services and activities outside of the project, demonstrating a *"new-found confidence in being the 'odd one out' and [security] in their sexuality"*.

Training

Other London Together organisations focused on training and upskilling of staff and activity providers to support the integration of their participants into the wider community. Access Sport reported that, outside of their project and its direct impact on participants, they helped to enable 10 other clubs and community groups to run inclusive activities, and trained 85 coaches and volunteers to run inclusive sailing, circus, yoga and football sessions. UKDS found their Deaf Inclusive Training to be successful, with more and more sports coaches, volunteers and clubs wanting to receive the training so they can learn how to include deaf people in their own sessions.

From another perspective, RSBC found that by building relationships with mainstream providers, they gained a greater understanding of the concerns and challenges that these organisations have in including visually impaired children and young people, and were therefore able to provide better support and guidance to these organisations going forward.

Understanding cultural competencies

When engaging with the wider community, Active Communities Network highlighted the importance of continuing to spend time and resources on learning about communities:



Whilst we are deep rooted in Southwark, each estate, can be so different in its diversity and dynamics. We wanted to use sport to ensure communities could discover more about one another. We brought leaders together from each community and bonded them, so they could better connect and understand the challenges faced in, say, an African household or a Caribbean one compared to, say, a Latin one to a white British one. Bringing these groups together and learning about one another was missing before and something we need to keep prioritising.

Active Communities Network, United Through Sport project

Chapter 4: What does this mean for funding and delivering a grant scheme?



In this final section, we briefly look at how key learning from the London Together programme can be applied to the development or review of grant schemes involving sport and physical activity and social integration. This learning may also be relevant to funders designing grant schemes that focus on social integration without sport and physical activity.

The role of sport and physical activity in social integration

From the experience of the London Together organisations feeding into this report, sport and physical activity (when used in the right conditions) can be effective in driving social integration. This is in part because of the inherent benefits of sport and physical activity, such as improving health and wellbeing, providing opportunities for socialisation, facilitating communication and teamwork, and challenging stereotypes. The draw of sport and physical activity, in a safe and relaxed environment, can also introduce participants to 'wrap-around' support and development opportunities from partners that can address wider holistic needs beyond sport and physical activity.

As described in the introduction of this report, it should be noted that it was not in scope to ascertain the extent to which sport and physical activity sessions were effective in driving social integration outcomes. A review of projects' evidence of using sport and physical activity to work towards social integration outcomes would be a valuable next step on from this report.

The right conditions for using sport and physical activity

While highlighting the benefits of using sport and physical activity, London Together organisations also described a range of potential challenges that need to be addressed to both attract participants to projects and ensure they are provided a safe and supportive space. Challenges may include negative perceptions of sport (based on participants' past experiences) and inequalities created by competition (if participants are judged on their ability).

When funding projects using sport and physical activity for social outcomes (including social integration), we recommend assessing the extent to which organisations applying for funds have acknowledged some of these potential challenges, and whether they have taken steps to mitigate them.

Some questions to ask in relation to this when reviewing or supporting the development of a funding application could include:

1. To what extent have sports and physical activities been designed with the interests and abilities of participants in mind?
2. To what extent are activities designed and run by participants? For example, have participants been involved in deciding what sport or physical activity the project will focus on? Are there opportunities for participants to also lead activities? (Or have these opportunities been explored)
3. Do participants have a choice in the level in which they participate in activities?
4. Has thought been given to the accessibility of the environment/venue in which activities will take place, and how will a safe space be ensured?
5. Are there volunteers or staff from the same background of participants that can provide support?
6. Are there online and offline options available to participants?

Not all projects will need to have all of the steps above in place. However, exploring these questions will help reveal whether measures are in place to address some of the challenges that can occur with sport and physical activity sessions.

A wide definition of sport and physical activity

We also recommend providing a definition of sport and physical activity and exploring the range of different interventions that a definition could cover. This will ensure that activities that may not traditionally be defined as 'sport' (such as gardening, chair exercises and walking), are given appropriate consideration

when relevant to the target audience. Some London Together projects found that expanding the range of physical activities in this way helped to address negative perceptions of sport and physical activity, by showing that activities can be fun and accessible – in turn, potentially appealing to a wider audience.

Your definition could also encompass activities that focus on shared values and a love of sport, rather than exclusively focusing on physical activity. Similar to the way Sporting Memories ran sessions that encouraged participants to reminisce together in a group setting about their experiences of watching or playing sport, and how other projects visited sports venues and watched sport as a group, focusing on shared values and interests can also bring people together and encourage social interaction.

Defining social integration

It is important to explore what social integration means at the start of a grant scheme (and across each funding round), and to stay flexible in evolving this definition as you learn more about the programmes you are supporting. As described earlier in the report, Comic Relief's definition grew to include addressing the individual needs of participants, addressing social isolation, and addressing integration within and outside of a project. Thinking about the assumptions surrounding your definition of social integration at the start of a scheme can also be helpful, as this will give you a platform to challenge your assumptions using learning across the course of the scheme.

Approaches to social integration

The three levels of social integration used throughout this report (Figure 2) can also serve as a useful reference point for identifying and comparing the approaches that organisations applying to or within a grant scheme are taking to drive social integration.

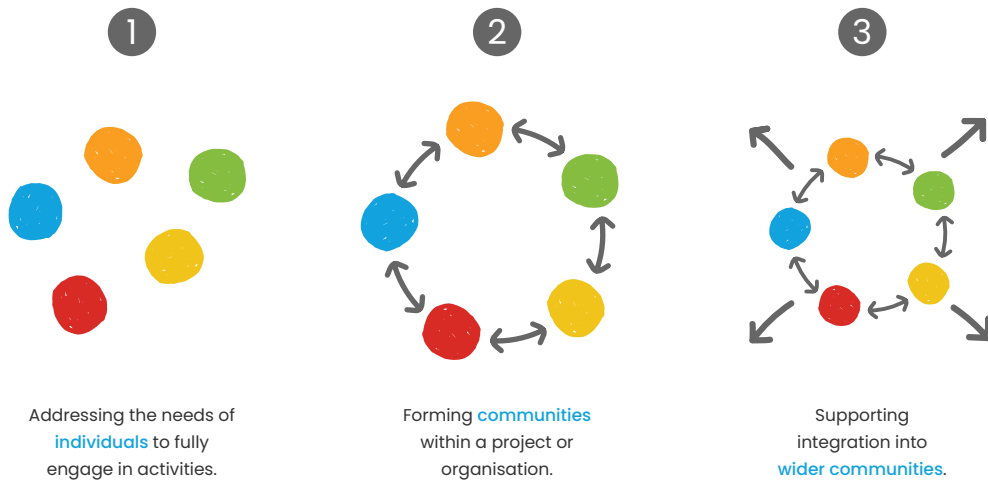


Figure 2 – Three levels of social integration

When designing or reviewing a grant scheme:

- ▶ What level of social integration are you aiming to impact? For example, are you aiming for social integration only within the projects you are funding, or within participants' wider communities? Remember that individual needs must be addressed before participants are able to participate in sport or physical activity.
- ▶ Consider the importance of partnership work, as highlighted in this report across all three levels in the diagram above, so that you are able to fill gaps in expertise or respond to the emerging needs and interests of a group.

Learning and adapting across a grant scheme

A final key learning from the Mayor of London and Comic Relief's London Together programme is around the importance of staying flexible as an administrator throughout the course of a grant scheme, and being open to adapting outcomes at the core of the fund, on the basis of learning from grantees. In the case of London Together, adapting the guidelines for the grant scheme each year based on learning from the previous year allowed for new organisations to join, deliver activities, and enhance the learning further.

This flexibility from Comic Relief was recognised by London Together organisations in their feedback across the course of the London Together programme. Many organisations described how Comic Relief understood the challenges and pressures of delivering activities during Covid-19 lockdowns, and how the flexibility to change approach enabled them to better meet the needs of participants:



From the beginning of this project to the end, Comic Relief have been an excellent source of support – particularly in the difficulties produced by the pandemic. Comic Relief have been flexible, reasonable, and understanding in regards to how we delivered this project under these restrictions. This meant that we could focus on supporting clients in the way best suited to the changing environment, without feeling we were betraying our original goals and intentions.

A London Together Organisation

Appendix A: London Together Learning Guides

Across the course of the London Together project, Comic Relief and Mayor of London engaged with a learning partner, inFocus, to form a 'learning community' and explore different learnings from its London Together programme. Topics were chosen by the organisations funded through London Together and took the form of learning questions, with each involving 11 webinars and two live events facilitated by inFocus. Each webinar produced a learning guide that can be accessed below.

Engaging with target audiences

Part I: What to consider when engaging with your target audience?

This guide explores the importance of understanding your target audience and provides practical tips for effective engagement. It covers topics such as identifying your audience, understanding their needs and preferences, and using various communication channels to reach them.

Approaches to sport and social integration

Part I: Advantages and Disadvantages of using sport for social integration

This guide discusses the benefits and challenges of using sport as a tool for social integration. It highlights how sport can foster community, improve mental health, and provide a safe space for individuals to interact and build relationships.

Response to Covid-19

The London Together response to COVID-19

This guide details the various ways in which London Together projects adapted to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes examples of digital engagement, outdoor activities, and community support initiatives.

Measuring sport for social integration activities

Part III: Data collection methods

This guide provides a comprehensive overview of different data collection methods used to measure the impact of sport for social integration activities. It covers quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the importance of data analysis and reporting.

Sport and mental health

Part II: Necessary conditions for sport to support mental health

This guide explores the factors that create an environment where sport can effectively support mental health. It discusses the role of social support, professional guidance, and a safe and inclusive environment.

Returning after Covid-19

How did London Together projects support participants to return to in-person activities?

This guide shares strategies and best practices for helping participants return to in-person activities after the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers topics like building confidence, addressing safety concerns, and providing ongoing support.

Inclusion and accessibility in sport and physical activity

How to make sport and physical activity accessible more inclusive/accessible

This guide provides practical advice on how to make sport and physical activity more inclusive and accessible for all individuals, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. It includes tips on creating welcoming environments and providing necessary accommodations.

Sustainability

What does the term 'sustainability' mean in relation to running projects?

This guide defines sustainability in the context of running projects and offers strategies to ensure long-term success. It emphasizes the importance of financial stability, community engagement, and continuous improvement.

Participatory MEL

2. What is participatory MEL?

This guide explains the concept of participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) and its benefits. It describes how involving participants in the process can lead to more relevant and effective programs.

Appendix B



Outcome definitions from London Together guidance to applicants from all three years

Year 1 (2019 Applications)

Increase opportunities to regularly bring people together from different backgrounds to reduce prejudice, negative stereotyping and increase trust between people and communities

People may not interact with those from different backgrounds as there is little opportunity to do so. Projects should increase the opportunities to bring people from different backgrounds together and consider how to strengthen bonds between different participants that leads to understanding, acceptance and celebration of people who are different from themselves. We are looking for projects that have identified groups who are most likely to have negative feelings towards different groups of people and design specific interventions to combat these perceptions.

Reduced isolation and loneliness

We are looking for projects that have identified people who may be at risk of isolation and loneliness, as well as the reasons that lead to this. Interventions must do more than just bring people together.

Increased opportunities to support people into work, employment and training

We are looking for projects that can support people into work, employment and training that has been tailored to suit their lifestyle and aspirations. The employment should be non-exploitative, beneficial to the participants and adhere to the minimum works rights and regulations.

Increased opportunities for people to volunteer in their communities for people from all backgrounds

We are looking for projects that increase opportunities for people to volunteer in their communities and have the chance to meet people from different backgrounds through this volunteering work.

Year 2 (2020 Applications)

1. Increase opportunities to regularly bring people together from different backgrounds to reduce prejudice, negative stereotyping and increase trust between people and communities

There is often little opportunity for people to interact with others from different backgrounds. Sport brings people together across divides. It provides the chance to build new relationships and work in teams.

- ▶ We'd like you to tell us how your proposed programme of activities will do more than just bring different groups of people together. We are particularly interested in approaches that strengthen bonds between different groups of people, leading to increased understanding, acceptance and celebration of different groups of people.
- ▶ Tell us about the people you're working with. Why are they at risk of experiencing prejudice? Why do they have preconceived ideas or negative attitudes? Attitudinal and/or behavioural change should be evident in the programme outcomes.

2. Reduce isolation and loneliness

Sport can help engage and motivate socially isolated groups. It can provide an environment to develop positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

- ▶ We are looking for projects that have identified people who may be at risk of isolation and loneliness, as well as the reasons that lead to this. Tell us about the people you work with; why are they isolated? What are you doing to combat this? What are the barriers they face?
- ▶ We are interested in approaches that go beyond just bringing people together. For example: activities that build participant's confidence and skills; and strengthen their connections, sense of belonging and links to their community for further and lasting support.

We recognise that some projects might address both above outcomes, and some might focus on one. We also recognise that projects addressing the above areas might have additional outcomes, such as: increasing opportunities to support people into work, employment and training; increasing opportunities for people to volunteer in their communities for people from all backgrounds; and increasing mental wellbeing.

Year 3 (2021 Applications)

1. Strengthening relationships between and within communities

We are looking to fund projects that use sport to increase trust between and within communities, challenge stereotypes and reduce prejudice.

We are interested in funding approaches that:

- ▶ Support the development of positive and meaningful relationships within and between communities, with a focus on what different communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity;
- ▶ Aim to break down any barriers, divisions, prejudice and tensions within a geographical area or between groups and encourage respect and understanding;
- ▶ Develop trust within and between communities;
- ▶ Develop people's sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods;
- ▶ Promote the inclusion of marginalised groups and individuals and advocate for structural changes to support these groups;
- ▶ Create opportunities and/or spaces for people to identify social integration issues and come up with their own sport- or physical activity-led solutions to local issues.

2. Reducing social isolation

More than a quarter of Londoners – 27 per cent – are socially isolated (defined as not having someone they can rely on a lot in an emergency). Isolation can be defined as separation from social or family contact, community involvement, or access to services and may involve staying at home for long periods of time. Factors such as unemployment and mental or physical health problems can lead to social isolation, which can then exacerbate these factors further.

We are interested in funding projects that:

- ▶ Provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identity to their local area and London;
- ▶ Go beyond just bringing isolated and/or lonely Londoners together: for example, activities that build participants' confidence and skills, strengthen their connections with individuals, groups and the wider community, or shares knowledge about how to access other services and means of support;
- ▶ Address the specific barriers preventing people from taking part in sport, participating in their community, and accessing services. Barriers might include cost, mental health problems, low English levels or accessibility and inclusivity of services;
- ▶ Positively influence individuals' behaviour, for example encouraging and enabling people to access health care when needed.