



# **Comic Relief**

## **An Evaluation of Partnership Working Across Levelling the Field Projects: The Value, Characteristics, Processes and Challenges**

### **Final report**

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A special thank you to those who participated in the case studies;

- Being active, changing futures
- Brighton women's table tennis development project
- Steeper Steps
- Project 51

## Executive Summary

This evaluation explores how one Comic Relief Grants Programme (Levelling the Field) has used partnership working to deliver 'Sports for Change' projects for women and girls. It describes how the partnerships were established and delivered and outlines the benefits, challenges and key lessons learnt. It is hoped that this evaluation will help other organisations and funders to better understand the barriers and enablers to good partnership working through providing some key factors to consider in the development of these.

### Background

In 2017, Comic Relief awarded funding of between £50,000 – £190,000 to 11 projects as part of their Levelling the Field (LtF) initiative. LtF projects use sport to inspire women and girls to reach their full potential. They work to promote gender equality, reduce gender stereotypes, increase social inclusion, improve leadership skills, increase opportunities to access education training and employment and tackle violence against women and girls.

The initiative came out of two consultation events bringing representatives from the Women's and Sport for Change sectors together to explore the role Sport for Change can play in addressing issues faced by women and girls. A key element that was highlighted in these consultations were the importance of combining expertise and creating strong partnerships and collaborations. The LtF initiative was therefore launched with an emphasis on project partnerships that brought together expertise in Sport for Change and Women and Girls. Working in partnership was a mandatory requirement of the grant application process.

### Evaluation Scope and Approach

This independent evaluation explores the value, characteristics, processes and challenges of effective partnership working across the Sport for Change and women and girls sectors and the role Comic Relief has played in supporting this. The evaluation is framed around the following four learning questions:

1. What approaches have been taken by grantees to working in partnership across the projects?
2. What have been the benefits of working in partnership for the grantees?
3. How has working in partnership enhanced project outcomes?
4. How has working in partnership influenced future design and delivery plans of grantees?

The evaluation employed a range of methods including: **desk research**; **site visits** to all projects; **learning events** with projects; **telephone interviews** with project leads and staff; **case studies** of 4 projects.

### Key Findings

#### a) Approaches taken to working in partnership

Partnership models vary in the way they are set up and managed and, within LtF, 3 different partnership typologies were adopted by projects (see below). Each typology has its strengths and weaknesses. Some projects shifted their typology as adaptability within partnership models is critical for them be effective in a constantly changing context of social change.

Typology	Description	Pros	Cons
Typology 1: Integrated delivery	<i>Two (or three) organisation's working together to deliver the project (and sessions) in partnership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrated delivery (across partners) during sessions</li> <li>- Upskilling workers to work with W&amp;G and / or deliver sport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less sustainable model</li> <li>- Reliance on key workers to support W&amp;G and engage others</li> </ul>
Typology 2: Referral partnership	<i>One or two organisations being the referral path (and supporting organisations) into one organisation which delivers the majority of the sessions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunity for each partner to work to their strengths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reliance on one partner for majority of delivery</li> </ul>
Typology 3: Project Management relationship	<i>A project management organisation overseeing the project which is then being delivered by one (or more) partner organisations on the ground</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity building</li> <li>- More sustainable</li> <li>- Takes the project management away from the deliverers, allowing more time to focus on beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dilution of skills and knowledge</li> </ul>

## **b) Benefits of partnership working and related learning for organisations**

Numerous benefits of working in partnership were identified for organisations and staff. These included the sharing of expertise and resources and having improved access to target groups. Benefits can also extend well beyond project-specific delivery, as some organisations adopted new organisational systems and processes whilst others were able to form new links and relationships across projects and through partners' networks. Staff also benefitted from improving their own individual skills, health and wellbeing.

The learning across sectors has been significant. For many organisations working with specific groups of women and girls for the first time, their partners have been able to support them in gaining a much more nuanced understanding of their complex needs, how to adapt the use of sport appropriately, and the importance of safe spaces and relationships. Equally for those using Sport for Change for the first time, their sports partners have been able to demonstrate the skills and effectiveness of using such an approach in tackling issues of confidence, self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing, and social integration.

## **c) How partnership working affects outcomes for women and girls**

Outcomes for women and girls accessing the projects included increased confidence and self-esteem, development of new skills and opportunities to use these skills, development of new positive social networks and increased physical activity linked to improved mental health and wellbeing. It was clear across the projects that without bringing together the different organisations to work in partnership, it would not have been possible for the projects to deliver so successfully and meet these intended outcomes. The range of skills, expertise, networks and knowledge that combinations of partners were able to bring enabled projects to access, engage and maintain relationships and trust with specific groups of women and girls, and provide a wider range of approaches, opportunities, pathways and solutions to tackling the complex issues that they face.

#### d) Sustainability and future plans

In general, the LtF funded projects reported very positive experiences of partnership working with some strong alliances forged. All of the organisations said they'd enter into a partnership again, and some have follow-on partnership plans. Challenges encountered in partnership delivery has led to learning about how to do things differently in the future. The partner organisations believed they would be in a good position to deliver other projects in partnership as a result of their learning and experiences. Most reported they'd learnt a great deal about a different sector and some had already found ways to continue to provide either sport and physical activity within their wider organisational delivery or activity which seeks to engage more effectively with women and girls.

#### Key messages for other organisations and funders seeking to do more partnership working.

##### Identify who to partner with

- Consider the value and benefits of **building on existing connections** and relationships vs the benefits of partnering with new organisations.
- Partnering with organisations who **share the same values and ethos** can help with building trusting relationships and maintaining shared focus.
- Having **more than one partner** can be beneficial (e.g. additional expertise, potential to access more beneficiaries, learning opportunities) but can increase the amount of management, administration and communication required.
- Working with partner organisations who are **closely located physically** can help in terms of communication and delivery.

##### Devise a partnership delivery model

- Explore the various partnership delivery models and consider their pros and cons in the context of what your project is trying to achieve when deciding which approach to use.
- Remain **flexible and open-minded** about opportunities and the need to alter partnership delivery models in response to the needs of project, staff and the beneficiaries.

##### Agree partnership purpose and focus and the role of partnership agreements

- Ensure clarity about the **focus and purpose** of the partnership and review this regularly. Having a **shared vision and goals and values** can help to prioritise the intended outcomes.
- Having a clear **partnership agreement** can help to articulate the purpose, role and structure of the partnership. It can help to prioritise purpose over structure.
- Ensure **roles and responsibilities are clearly defined**, agreed and documented. Avoid making assumptions and be sure to check expectations of partners and staff.

##### Ensure shared systems, structures and processes are in place

- Having a clear system for shared decision-making, shared responsibility and accountability structures with agreed processes for things like monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- Take time to identify potential risks and how these would be managed, and review these regularly.

### Build relationships and systems for effective communication

- Invest time and effort in building rapport and trust between partners. Openness and honesty can help in both avoiding and dealing with challenges and issues.
- Ensure **effective communication mechanisms** are in place and accessible, both formal and informal. Different communication mechanisms may be needed for strategic and operational issues. Good communication can help build closer relationships with, and between, organisations and staff.

### Be prepared to be flexible and adaptable

- Acknowledge that not all partnerships work out as planned and that there may be a need to be **flexible and adaptable** in response to issues, circumstances and needs of beneficiaries as they arise. Having open communication systems and trust and openness can help to respond to these.
- Partnerships and joint methods of working **take time and investment** to be successful – do not underestimate this.

### Add value through playing to strengths and in sharing skills, expertise and resources

- Ensuring the partnership has access to **required skills and expertise and resources** – sharing human and physical resources is a key strength and benefit of partnership working.
- Bringing together different organisations with different **skills and expertise** can result in more **successful project delivery** and create added value in meeting intended outcomes. Complementary skills add value and increase opportunities to learn from one another, particularly across different sectors or focuses.
- **Avoid reliance on individual key staff** members as this can be problematic if /when they move on. Build capacity and awareness of the partnership within partner organisations rather than individuals to help manage this risk.
- There is value to be gained from partners' different styles of working but it is important to ensure shared understanding and a common language from the start to avoid confusion

### Enable access to, and better engagement with, target groups

- Working in partnership can help increase **access to, and improve engagement with, target groups** through capitalising on established connections with target groups and communities and sharing expertise and experience of the barriers and enablers to engagement.
- Working in partnership can provide **new referral pathways** for providers and awareness and access of other pathways for beneficiaries through sharing knowledge of services and networks.
- Partnership working can increase the opportunities and pathways available to beneficiaries e.g. allowing women the opportunity to gain qualifications and/or secure volunteer or paid roles.

The report ends with some **recommendations for Comic Relief** to consider as a result of the learning from the evaluation which include: Invite previous grantees to share their experiences of working in partnership; Provide template partnership agreements; Integrate messages about partnerships into start up meetings and processes; develop guidance on partnership working for prospective grantees; provide more support to partnership projects in terms of sustainability.

## **1. Introduction, background and context**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This independent evaluation, commissioned by Comic Relief and undertaken by Sarah Frost and Kerry Swain, seeks to understand the value, characteristics, processes and challenges of effective partnership working across the Sport for Change and Women and Girls sectors.

### **1.2 Background and context to Levelling the Field**

Comic Relief's Levelling the Field (LtF) initiative funded organisations working in partnership to use sport to inspire women and girls to reach their full potential. Specific outcomes which projects were funded to contribute to were:

- Reducing gender stereotypes that have a negative impact on women and girls;
- Increasing social inclusion of women and girls;
- Increasing opportunities for women and girls to access education, employment and training;
- Improving the leadership skills of women and girls;
- Tackling violence against women and girls

For Comic Relief, a key element of this initiative was the emphasis on project partnerships that brought together expertise in both the Sport for Change and women and girls sectors. This built on long-standing experience within Comic Relief that whilst Sport for Change offers significant potential to enhance women and girls work, there were relatively few examples of partnerships between Women and Girls organisations and Sport for Change organisations that could maximise the expertise and insights of both.

In designing the Levelling the Field initiative, consultation with organisations from both these sectors highlighted the importance of opportunities for such partnerships and the need for Comic Relief as the funder to emphasise and support partnership development. As a result of this, working in partnership, based on a written partnership agreement, was made a mandatory element for all project proposals, and a slack channel was set up to enable interested organisations to explore potential partnerships over the application period.

Funding of between £50,000 – £190,000 was awarded to 11 projects across the UK who began in August 2017. A 12th project, Maslaha (funded under another Comic Relief initiative), was also included for the purposes of this evaluation as it shares many of the similarities of the Levelling the Field grants around both partnership working and the use of Sport for Change in working with women and girls.



### 1.3 Partnership Working: Evidence Summary

Partnership working refers to a range of actions related to two (or more) groups or organisations working together towards a common purpose<sup>1</sup>. The partnerships for LtF were created for the specific purpose of bringing together women and girls and Sport for Change organisations to address issues faced by different groups of women and girls. However, partnerships are created for a range of purposes and reasons and so identifying a common definition is difficult. Different partnerships are needed for different situations. Some are formed to address specific issues or deliver specific projects which may be short or long term, some may be more formal than others.

Partnership working can help improve outcomes and make best use of available resources. Not all partnerships are of equal stature and they do not always involve an equal division of power or financial responsibility. However, some degree of shared control or influence is always present<sup>2</sup> and a central characteristic of partnerships is that, *“the partners aim to achieve something they could not do alone, by pooling skills and other resources.”*<sup>3</sup>

Existing literature outlines some of the key principles, benefits and challenges of partnership working:

<b>Key principles of partnership working<sup>4</sup>:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• having a shared vision and clearly defined purpose, including shared goals and values</li><li>• openness, trust and honesty</li><li>• allowing time for trust and joint methods of working to be established</li><li>• focus on outcomes</li><li>• prioritising purpose over structure</li><li>• flexibility and ability to adapt in response to issues or tasks</li><li>• clarity over roles and responsibilities</li><li>• regular and effective communication between partner</li><li>• clear decision-making and accountability structures</li><li>• agreed systems and processes</li><li>• any risks identified and managed</li></ul>	
<b>Benefits and opportunities (adapted from Wilcox, 2004)</b>	<b>Barriers and challenges (adapted from Wilcox, 2004)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing of ideas and resources</li><li>• Gaining access to the skills, knowledge and experience of others</li><li>• Mutual support to maintain enthusiasm and commitment</li><li>• Learning from seeing things differently, through others' eyes</li><li>• Ability to secure funding that requires partnership working</li><li>• Opportunities to reach a wider audience</li><li>• Enable bespoke local solutions to be identified</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of trust</li><li>• Fear of losing a separate identity</li><li>• Unacceptable inequalities of power and control</li><li>• Failure to recognise different personality types and communication styles</li><li>• Lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities and leadership</li><li>• Confusions about the nature and style of involvement</li><li>• Time needed to develop relationships and feasible plans</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Partnership Working, Factsheet 13, Community Health and Development Network  
[https://www.cdhn.org/sites/default/files/downloads/FACTSHEETS%2013\\_Screen%20View.pdf](https://www.cdhn.org/sites/default/files/downloads/FACTSHEETS%2013_Screen%20View.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Partnership Working, Factsheet 13, Community Health and Development Network

<sup>3</sup> A short guide to partnerships. David Wilcox. April 2004. <http://www.partnerships.org.uk/part>.

<sup>4</sup> Improving partnership working to reduce health inequalities. The Kings Fund. (2009)  
<http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/articles/improving.html>

## 2. Evaluation aim and learning questions

The main aim of this evaluation is to understand the value, characteristics, processes and challenges of effective partnership working across the Sport for Change and women and girls sectors (for both projects and organisations), and the role Comic Relief has and could play in supporting this.

### 2.1 Key learning questions

Within this overall aim lie the following four learning questions:

1. What approaches have been taken by grantees to working in partnership across the twelve projects?
2. What have been the benefits of working in partnership for the grantees?
3. How has working in partnership enhanced project outcomes?
4. How has working in partnership influenced future design and delivery plans of grantees?

### 2.2 Evaluation approach

The evaluation was commissioned in January 2018 and concluded in December 2019. A multi-faceted approach was adopted which was regularly reviewed and adapted throughout the two years.

In summary, the evaluation consisted of the following elements (full details of the approach can be found in **Appendix 5.1**):

- Desk research – review of proposals, start-up forms, partnership agreements, six monthly and annual reports
- Initial site visits –to each project, interviewing leads and key workers
- Learning event - opportunity to present initial findings from the evaluation and for projects to share experiences and key learning
- Follow-up telephone interviews – in-depth interviews with project leads and key workers
- Case study visits – with 4 projects delivering using different partnership models – these case studies can be found in **Appendix 5.2** (separate document attached)
- Celebration event – an opportunity to present key findings from the whole evaluation, share learning and discuss successes and challenges amongst the projects

### 3. Key findings

#### 3.1 Approaches taken to partnership working

This section provides an overview of the projects, the approaches taken to working in partnership including **the variations of partnership models** and key **characteristics of good partnerships**.

##### 3.1.1 Overview of the projects

**Table 1** below provides a brief overview of the projects and the partner organisations funded by the Levelling the Field initiative. Each project varied in terms of the kinds of activities provided and the ways in which they sought to engage women and girls. Some projects were working on a relatively short-term basis with the women and girls offering a set number of weekly block sessions, whilst others were working on a longer-term basis, but in a more ad hoc and informal way, allowing engagement to fit around the women's and girls' lives.

For 10 of the projects the named lead organisation was a Sports for Change organisation, one project was led by a youth organisation and one by an organisation working with the Muslim community (both of which had gender as a key strand of their work).

**Table 1 Overview of the 12 funded projects**

Project title / partner organisation	Project overview
<b>Being Active; Changing Futures</b>	
Youth Sport Foundation (YSF) Together Women Project (TWP) YWCA	Working with women with multiple complex needs. The project used sport and physical activity to give women the strength, motivation, aspiration and resilience to be the agents for change in their own lives. The project was delivered on the ground by TWP and YWCA (in Leeds Bradford & Doncaster). They offered weekly sport / physical activity sessions to women they work with / support. Training was provided by YSF to staff from TWP / YWCA and women involved in the project.
<b>Brighton women's table tennis development project</b>	
Brighton Table Tennis Club (BTTC) Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) Brighton Women's Centre (BWC)	Through a combination of table tennis, life skills coaching and educational activities, BTT and its partners (FFT and BWC) aimed to improve the health, wellbeing and future life opportunities of some of the most vulnerable women in Brighton - including the traveller and gypsy community, people who are marginalised, homeless, insecurely housed or involved in the criminal justice system. Women attended a weekly group or 1:1 table tennis coaching sessions delivered at the club and weekly sessions were also provided at HMP Down View.
<b>Netball for Change</b>	
The Change Foundation The Media Trust	Netball for Change was a 10-week programme using the rules and game of netball to teach girls and young women aged 13-17 how to stay safe on social media. It aimed to empower girls and young women to think more positively about their social graph, how it can affect their prospects for the future and raise awareness of negative social influences. It took place over 3 years in 4 London boroughs.
<b>Young, Gifted &amp; Female</b>	
London Football Journeys (LFJ) LACES	London Football Journeys and Laces Community Club delivered a new football-based inter-community leadership project. The project aimed to enable girls (age 13-18) from deprived backgrounds in Lambeth, Tower Hamlets and Hackney to: reduce negative stereotypes; build self-confidence and self-esteem; access opportunities in education, employment and training; and improve leadership skills.
<b>Steeper Steps</b>	
Youth Action Northern Ireland Far and Wild	Steeper Steps was a 5-step programme based in NI which integrates physical activity with outcomes around confidence building and leadership. The idea was to use a handful of sports to increase women's comfort with their bodies and their ability and to translate that increased confidence in sport to an increase in their potential outside of sports.
<b>Overcoming Obstacles</b>	
WITH (The Welsh Institute of Therapeutic Horsemanship) Gorwell (formerly Gwnedd Domestic Abuse Service)	The project used Competitive Western Trail Riding and Horse Agility to enable women and girls from North Wales who are survivors of violence or abuse to develop essential life skills, build confidence, improve mental and physical health, create social networks, gain leadership skills and access employment and training. Women and girls attended weekly sessions along with their key workers from Gorwell.

<b>Project 51</b>	
Sported Women in Sport	A programme of research, training and capacity building support for 36 grassroots sports, youth and community organisations. The work aimed to raise the aspirations of 11-18 year old girls living in some of the most socially deprived areas of the UK by supporting Sported member groups to increase their ability to engage and empower girls in their community and to deliver programmes that challenge harmful gender stereotypes.
<b>Girls Skateboarding Initiative</b>	
Projekts MCR Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN)	Using skateboarding to engage young women in Manchester to tackle negative gender stereotyping within the sport and more widely. These organisations ran sessions in schools to introduce girls to the sport. Moving to the skatepark they were taught to skate and then trained as community reporters. They offered leadership courses and hard media skills training with the aim of building confidence, resilience, supporting personal development and encouraging healthy choices.
<b>Refugee Women and Girls Cycling Project</b>	
The Bike Project Young Roots	This project supported female asylum seekers and refugees aged 14-65 to develop cycling skills. Through learning to cycle, refugees have better access to vital services, experience increased social inclusion as they become more connected and involved in their community, and feel increased aspirations as they feel more independent, happier and empowered. At the end of the course women graduated and took their bike home with them.
<b>Fighting Fit</b>	
Pat Benson Boxing Academy (PBBA) Women in today's Society (WAITS)	Small Heath Boxing Club and WAITS (Women Acting in Today's Society) delivered the programme, which targets and supports women and girls that are: struggling with mental health issues, victims of crime (including domestic abuse), homeless, not in education, employment or training or newly arrived to the UK. The project used weekly boxercise sessions and social groups delivered by PBBA supplemented with monthly workshops (delivered by WAITS) to help participants achieve a range of better outcomes.
<b>Get on Track - For women and girls facing disadvantage</b>	
Dame Kelly Homes Trust (DKHT) YouthFed Positive Futures Leeds YMCA West London	In Merseyside, Hayes and Leeds, 3 female-only Get on Track programmes worked with young women who were not in education, employment or training. The programmes provided training and mentoring whilst supporting the young women to deliver social action projects. The project aimed to support young women into employment/education/training, develop healthier lifestyles and gain self-esteem.
<b>Muslim Girls Fence</b>	
Maslaha British Fencing Association (BFA)	Maslaha and British Fencing aimed to challenge misperceptions of and raise aspirations among Muslim girls. The project was delivered in schools in London and Birmingham, in blocks of ten weeks. Fencing workshops delivered by BFA ran simultaneously alongside ten Maslaha workshops focusing on identity, stereotyping and creative responses to the project. The Maslaha workshops were supported by local artists and culminated in an event or performance.

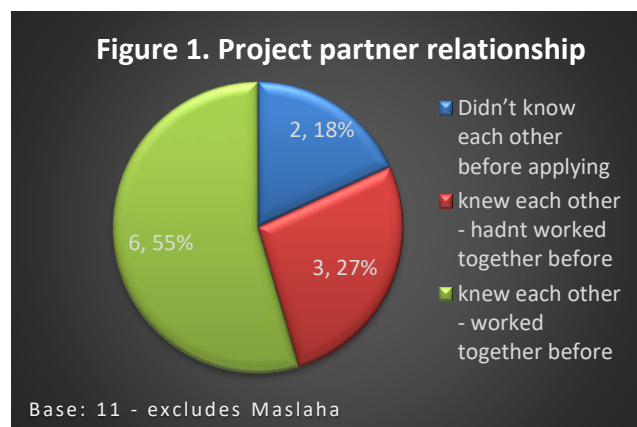
### 3.1.2 Formation of the partnerships

Comic Relief made working in partnership a requirement of the grant application process for this programme. When asked the reasons why organisations chose to work with particular partners some felt it provided an opportunity to build on an existing connection or relationship whilst others already had an idea for a project with their partner organisation but had lacked funds to implement it.

Partner organisations were asked during the early stages of the evaluation about the key **characteristics they** looked for in a partner. The main characteristics identified were:

- Shared vision, values and ethos
- Complementary strengths and expertise
- Access to relevant target communities
- Close geographical location (for some)

In the majority (9) of cases, the partner organisations **already knew of each other** either due to their profile locally or through networking events. Six of the partnerships had also worked together before. In two cases, the organisations were unknown to one another and were actively sought out for the purposes of the bid to LtF (see Figure 1).



*"We first met in 2012 and were introduced by a mutual colleague, but there was no opportunity or capacity to work in partnership at that time....the LtF fund was an amazing fit with what we both did." Lead organisation, Project lead*

*"We initially naturally started looking for another sports organisation to join us on the journey...but what transpired was that we needed to look completely outside our sector to achieve this goal...we needed the depth of upskilling in how to use social media positively, not more [sports] coaches." Lead organisation, Project lead*

In cases where partners **were not known** to each other before, there was a desire to do something unique with organisations that could offer something they couldn't and who could complement their offer.

The evaluation explored **whether knowing** partner organisations prior to applying for the funding **had had a positive impact on the partnership** development. Those partners who **didn't know each other** beforehand suggested there were **more opportunities to learn** from one another, particularly when they were working with a new client group or in a new sector. It also meant they were entering a fresh partnership with **no pre-conceptions**.

*"I think it's meant that all organisations have learnt more than perhaps if we'd have gone into partnership with a known partner". Lead organisation, Project lead*

Conversely, those partners who **already knew each other**, and especially those that had worked together and knew their partners well, felt they **had an advantage** as they were able to hit the ground running and spend more time developing the project and its delivery and less time getting to know one another and their working styles.

*"I would say having that original staff member that worked at both organisations was quite unique and beneficial, as she knew at the outset exactly the requirement for both organisations so fast tracked us quite a lot". Lead organisation, project lead*

### 3.1.3 Partnership typologies

During the early stages of the evaluation it became apparent there were several **different partnership delivery arrangements** amongst the 12 projects. Whilst none of the partnerships were identical, three broad typologies were identified and have been summarised below and illustrated in Figure 2. All projects said their typology provided **an opportunity to learn from one another**.

#### **Typology 1 – Integrated delivery** (See case study 3 as an example)

This **integrated delivery** approach utilises workers from all partner organisations within sessions and activities, providing opportunities for staff to upskill, learning from each other and their respective sectors. The approach enables staff to have regular, adhoc communication, supporting the development of relationships and allowing issues to be discussed and worked through more easily. Project activities were easier to adapt and change when necessary with less risk of having to cancel sessions if key members were absent, due to having a pool of skilled staff to draw upon.

This approach is perhaps less sustainable without future funding to allow staff from partner organisations to deliver sessions together.

#### **Typology 2 – Referral partnership** (See case study 2 for elements of this - originally started as typology 2, but changed to be typology 1).

This approach relies on one or two partner organisations being the referral path into a sport organisation who delivers the majority of sessions on the ground. Referral partners often also support by providing a more pastoral role, or additional support (e.g. counselling) for the women and girls.

This approach allows each organisation to play to their strengths providing specialist coaching and sessions for the women and girls. For some beneficiaries, this was really empowering as they were less reliant on key workers or familiar staff, helping to develop resilience and build new relationships. Due to the delivery of distinct elements, this approach enabled roles and responsibilities to be more easily and clearly defined.

Conversely, there was less flexibility built in this approach due to the delivery of discrete elements by each partner. There was often a reliance on key staff, meaning a greater risk of sessions being cancelled if staff were absent. It also led to some set-backs in projects where key staff left.

#### **Typology 3 – Project management relationship** (See case studies 1 and 4 as examples)

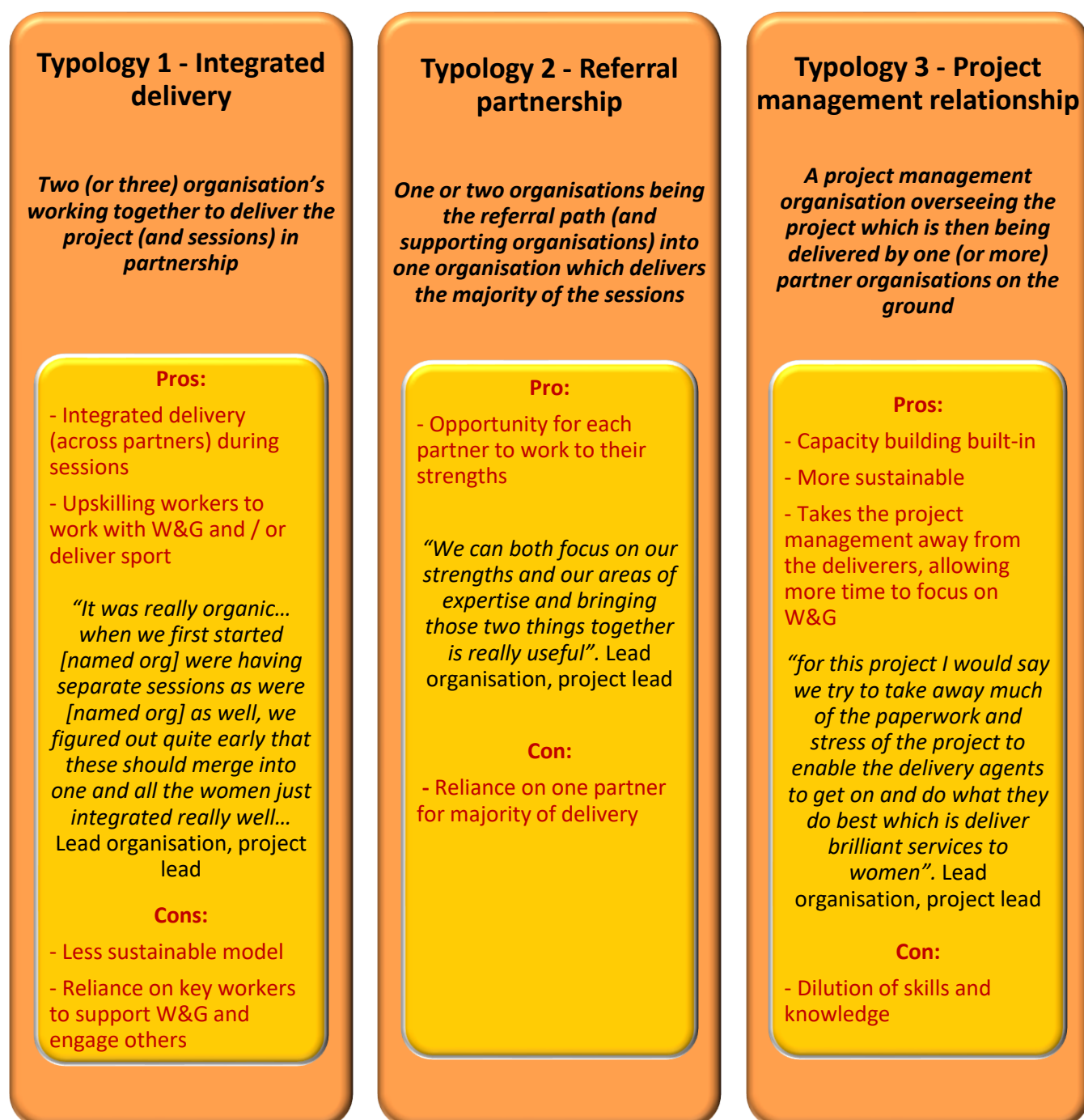
This approach utilises a project management organisation to oversee the project, which is then delivered by one (or more) partner organisations on the ground. It appears to work well for multiple partners and doesn't rely on them being closely located geographically.

In this approach the lead organisation undertakes the management, administration and co-ordination, enabling the delivery partners to focus on direct work with the women and girls and to deliver in a flexible way to meet their needs. The approach builds capacity of staff, so it has potential for longer term benefits and is a more sustainable model.

Strong and more formalised channels of communication are required as are systems being in place to discuss and agree project developments.

Over time there is a risk of the skills and knowledge being diluted if training (particularly for any new staff) is not maintained.

**Figure 2. Partnership typologies**





### 3.1.4 Partnership typologies by project and changes over time

**Table 2** below shows the projects against their partnership typologies. Column 2 shows the typology they originally adopted at the outset. However, as the projects and activities developed over time, three projects **significantly changed their approach** and changed partnership typology entirely. A further two projects had begun working more closely together and are overlapping between typology 1 and 2 (see column 3). This is explained in more detail below.

**Table 2 Project name by partnership model type**

Project	Typology (original code)	Typology (new code)
Being Active; Changing Futures	3	3
Brighton women's table tennis development project	2	1 – changed
Netball for Change	2	2
Young, Gifted & Female	1	1
Steeper Steps	1	1
Overcoming Obstacles	1	2 – changed
Girls Skateboarding Initiative	1	2 – changed
Project 51	3	3
Refugee Women and Girls Cycling Project	2	Moving towards 1
Fighting Fit	2	Moving towards 1
Get on Track	2	2
Muslim Girls Fence	1	1

The reasons why some of the projects shifted delivery style (and partnership typology) differed by projects, but included; key workers upskilling, staff roles and responsibilities changing and / or as a direct response to the women's and girls' needs.

One project set out as a referral partnership (typology 2), but as it developed, the partners worked more closely with one another sharing knowledge and expertise. This allowed key workers from the referral organisations to be able to get involved in the delivery of sessions alongside the lead delivery coaches. In turn, these coaches developed more empathy and understanding of the women and their needs, enabling them to provide better support and advice. This was seen to be an organic process shifting from a referral partnership to a integrated delivery approach (typology 1) - see Case Study 2.

*"I'm more hands on now I've gained more confidence, so I feel I can offer more on techniques"* Partner

Two other projects operating initially as referral partnerships acknowledged that over the course of the funding period, they'd begun **working more closely** with the partner(s) and were moving towards a more integrated style of delivery. Key workers became more involved in the design and delivery of each other's sessions, ensuring **a clear link and continuity between topics / issues covered** in sessions and the activities. This was a result of the increased confidence, skills and knowledge of staff in terms of working with women and girls.

*"what [partner] covers in the workshops, I try and build activities in my sessions around that so it's not like [partner] comes in and delivers one thing and me another, it's a continuum throughout the year"* Lead organisation, project lead

Conversely, another project initially planned their partnership delivery style as an integrated delivery approach but shifted to become a referral partnership, due to a number of complexities, including staffing changes and some staff preferring to provide emotional support rather than ‘hands on’ support in the sessions. Women also became empowered during the project and key workers were able to step-back from being involved in the delivery of sessions.

Another project began with an integrated delivery approach, with the assumption that staff in both organisations would deliver sessions together. However, over time, it transpired that differing assumptions had been made about how the partners would work together to deliver sessions. Rather than delivering sessions together, one partner shared resources to help the other to develop session materials rather than co-delivering in the way that had been originally intended (moving towards a referral partnership).

*“We thought at the beginning we would be delivering services in tandem but [named partner] have become more of a referring organisation, they do accompany children and women and support them, but we have fallen into these roles where they refer and transport people and we deliver the session. Everybody from both organisations is clear on that... But we absolutely had to try it to know what would work, so it’s been quite nice to have that opportunity to see what grew organically and see what the women really wanted”.* Lead organisation, project lead

Adaptability is therefore key and partnership relationships and purpose may need to change over time as organisations, staff and beneficiaries learn, develop and understand one another better. Typologies are useful categories but cannot be rigid structures to be stuck to from beginning to end.

### 3.2 Partnership working: what works and what are the challenges

Many of the findings of this evaluation align with and reinforce existing literature relating to good partnership working as summarised in **section 1.3**. Below we identify the key elements evident in successful partnerships. The extent to which these were present varied by projects.

This section also explores the different challenges to partnership working that were experienced, including examples of how projects worked to address these. Encouragingly, for most projects, the issues didn’t detrimentally affect the partnership and were resolved to varying degrees. However, for three of the partnerships, the challenges led to significant set-backs in terms of delivery and, for one, a deterioration of relationships between partners.

This section also examines the strengths and challenges of the three different typologies and the impact that having established relationships or experience of working together had.

#### a) Shared vision and purpose

This was noted to be of key importance by the majority of organisations. Partners felt it was important to know that their partner organisations were **working towards a common purpose** and shared the same **values and ethos**. In most cases, where partners knew each other well or had worked together prior to the project, having

*“I think that [shared vision] is really important as it gives me a more consolidated path that I’m walking on and I can respond to my women using that strength, ‘cos I have the shared vision that [named partner] has ‘empowering women and realising their potential’. So, I feel that shared vision is really important. If we had different vision then how would we work together?”* Lead organisation, Key worker

a shared vision was part of the reason they chose to form the partnership. It also made it easier to build a mutual understanding of the project's purpose.

For two projects, where partners didn't know each other or hadn't worked together before, developing a shared vision was more challenging and took longer. In one case, the lead partner had made an assumption that the partner had a shared vision, but over the course of delivery had realised this wasn't the case. For another project, the lead organisation was very **experienced in partnership working** and had actively researched the delivery partners and approached them based on a clear sharing of values and vision.

## b) Complementary skills and expertise

Partners sought organisations with **complementary skills and expertise** to strengthen their offer. This sharing of skills and expertise was identified as a key strength for all partnerships. Most lead partners were sport related organisations, therefore, much of the expertise required from partners was related to working with, and engaging women and girls. However, once partnerships were established and in delivery mode, a **sharing of both sport related skills and expertise of working with women and girls** was apparent. This was especially the case for partnerships using integrated delivery approaches and project management relationships.

*"What [named partners] have brought is expertise in their field and the referral network which is key to making anything work here"* Lead organisation, project lead

Two projects operating as referral partnerships highlighted issues with **reliance** on partners for referrals and particularly where there was only one partner providing this. A couple of projects described some difficulties in getting enough referrals, particularly at the beginning. It was felt that more referral agents (partners) could benefit the project.

*"what we have realised from our work with LtF is that we need multiple partners really going forward"* Lead organisation, project lead

An **over reliance on key staff** was also highlighted by several leads; making the projects potentially vulnerable if these staff were to leave. In some instances, the delivery of the sessions was reliant on key individuals who combined experience, skills and strong relationships with the women and girls. This was more likely to be an issue for referral partnerships and project management relationships where delivery was generally down to one of the partners.

*"Over dependence on the key worker... with the numbers increasing it has been difficult to maintain the support that was delivered in the first year of the project. Difficult for key worker to have time off due to reliance and fear of change to such a vulnerable group".* Lead organisation, Annual report

## c) Effective communication mechanisms

Effective communication was seen as **essential**, and often **influenced other key features**. The projects varied in the frequency and ways they communicated, but each reported the importance of effective channels or systems for frequent, open and honest communication.

*"We have progress meetings which is a chance to assess how we are performing against our targets and identify any obstacles. Taking that time out to get together to assess and look how we improve is really important".* Lead organisation, project lead

The majority of projects stated they had regular meetings; bringing partners and key staff together to review progress and discuss issues. Some of these used formal agendas whilst others focused on reflection and discussion of experiences. These were seen as beneficial for reviewing progress and allowing new ideas to be shared.

Integrated delivery approaches allowed **more opportunities for regular, ad hoc and informal communication** between both senior staff and key workers. This often supported and enhanced the relationships between the partners on all levels.

*"Using the steering group approach has been really beneficial – empowering people to make their own decisions about their own communities – this project has used that way of working and has added to our learning about this approach".*

Lead organisation, project Lead

Some projects set up a **steering group** (or similar) which met on a regular basis and involved leads and staff from each organisation. This was considered an additional useful **communication mechanism** which one lead partner said they would continue to adopt, where appropriate, in other projects. This approach appeared to be particularly successful for project management relationships which had multiple partners across several sites and enabling a range of staff who may not otherwise connect to have the opportunity to share learning – see **Case Study 1** for more details.

*"I think it's a communication problem rather than anything else – I think agreeing these things at the start at the programme would have helped a lot...but you don't know what you don't know. Looking back...I suppose we took it for granted that they had the same level of buy in..."* Lead organisation, project lead

**Communication issues** were identified as a **challenge** by a small number of projects. Often this was poor or inadequate communication in the early stages of the partnership development; assumptions were made which led to a lack of clarity or problems later down the line.

One project also acknowledged the challenges of being different types of organisations, **operating in different sectors** or working **with different client groups**. For example, the **different use of language** had at times caused confusion or misinterpretation.

*"One of the challenges of being different organisations is the different language that we use to refer to the same things, often we are talking about the same things, but we are using really different organisational language if you like to talk about it. I think now we are really aware of it, but it's taken a bit of time, because sometimes you are having conversations where you're not exactly sure what the other person is talking about because you don't use the same lingo!"* Lead organisation, project lead

#### **d) Good working relationships based on trust and transparency**

**Having good working relationships which were based on trust and transparency** featured as an important factor within the partnerships. Both partnership leads and senior staff from partners felt this to be essential, as did many of the project workers. This was apparent across all 3 partnership typologies and trust was stronger where there were existing relationships between partners or where explicit early efforts were made to develop solid relationships.

The development of relationships and trust takes time and for some projects, this was impeded by factors such as communication difficulties or assumptions being made about how the partnership would work or what specific roles would be.

## e) Clarity over roles and responsibilities and systems for shared decision making

Having **clarity over roles and responsibilities** was seen as essential for all the projects. In many cases these were outlined in a **partnership agreement** which was a mandatory part of the application process for this initiative. Partnership agreements varied in level of content and detail provided but these agreements played a key role in holding partners to account and ensuring systems for **shared decision making** and **shared responsibility** were in place.

There was an acknowledgement that, in some instances, lead partner organisations were better placed to make decisions. However, in most cases and where appropriate, decisions were made collectively, drawing on each other's skills, knowledge and expertise from their respective sectors.

Partnership agreements were reported as being important documents for projects to be able to refer back to if necessary. However, for some projects a **key challenge** had been developing an **effective partnership agreement**. Some felt they had not made their partnership agreement detailed enough from the outset, perhaps due to **inexperience, assumptions** about roles and responsibilities or lack of communication. These issues then caused problems further down the line within those partnerships. Those who were unfamiliar with setting up such agreements would have welcomed more advice and support from Comic Relief to ensure they fully detailed roles, responsibilities and payments.

Roles and responsibility related to management within some partnerships were highlighted as a challenge, especially where numerous organisations and players were involved. This meant complex matrix style management structures which were hard to navigate and manage and required very **strong, clear lines of communication and clarity over accountability**.

One project reported their partner had **failed to take on certain roles and responsibility** as they offered limited input into session design and reporting back to Comic Relief, which caused some frustration.

*"Making a partnership agreement a mandatory element of the project was a really useful thing to do, having that reference point so that everyone knows what is expected".* Lead, lead organisation

*"Shared decision making is absolutely important for this project... I don't have the right skillset to make decisions for women in Women's aid sector. Wherever possible all decisions are shared decisions... We also encourage the delivery organisations to make decisions also for themselves... they are sometimes best to make decisions ...we have that element of trust within the partnership".* Lead organisation, project lead

*"It has been challenging working with [Partner]...the flexibility required to deliver this kind of programme hadn't been there....there are perhaps hidden assumptions you make when you get into a partnership arrangement in terms of who is doing what.."* Lead organisation, project lead

*"we were fairly naïve at the outset and our partnership agreement was fairly loose, from speaking to others at the event we realised some had really tight agreements, with some only paying when key milestones were met"* Lead organisation, project lead

*"In terms of shared responsibility, I think we have shouldered a lot of the load in terms of reporting particularly, when we were writing our final report it was hard getting some kind of input from [named partner]. Also, when we were planning the sessions [named partner] staff were very much you tell us what to do and when and we'll do it"* Partner organisation, project lead

This lack of shared responsibility was also evident in relation to some partners' **time commitment** to their projects. A **disparity in funding allocation** between the different partners was also raised as an issue by two projects.

*"there has been one **source of tension** in that [partner] get substantially more money than us but we are expected to spend the same amount of time on the project...we are copied into every email and expected to go to every meeting...and we just can't do it. We are entirely volunteer led."* Partner Organisation, lead.

#### f) **Importance of adaptability and flexibility in partnership models**

Whilst having a clear partnership agreement in place was seen to be a strength, **having the ability to be flexible and adapt** to circumstances or issues (e.g. changing needs of their client group) was also seen as a feature of good partnerships. Through the course of project delivery, projects recognised they were unable to remain static, and many had to adapt and change in response to issues and context in order for their projects to succeed.

Being flexible and adaptable **enabled organisations to make relevant changes or transitions** in how their partnerships operated, in line with what was needed. Flexibility and adaptability was easier in integrated delivery approaches due to the partners working closely together to deliver sessions. It was more challenging for referral partnerships due to reliance on partners distinct elements (i.e. referrals or delivery). Having multiple partners also helped projects to be more flexible by having access to a wider pool of expertise.

*"If something comes up that I really can't get out of then that might have an impact on the workshop, but we are flexible and would communicate immediately to change the date, so we'd overcome those kinds of challenges."* Lead organisation, project worker

#### g) **Close geographical location**

Around half of the projects mentioned that being located near each other was a benefit that enabled partnership working and helped with regular communication and relationship building. This seemed more important for integrated delivery approaches and project management relationships.

### 3.3 **Benefits of partnership working and related learning for organisations**

The next section focuses on the **key benefits of partnership working and related learning for organisations and staff**.

#### 3.3.1 **Key benefits for organisations and staff**

The projects really **valued what each organisation could bring to the partnership** and both staff and organisations reported a number of key benefits gained.

##### a) **Sharing physical and human resources and expertise**

Being able to **share physical resources** such as venues, sports equipment and kit was seen as a real benefit and essential for the delivery of some of the projects. Of equal importance was the sharing of **human**

*"There's no point reinventing the wheel we should **use the skills of local charities around us and they can use our assets and resources** and hopefully we can create a project that's better than one delivered by just one of us."* Project lead, lead organisation



**resources and expertise** (e.g. staff's skills, experience and local knowledge). There was a real appreciation of one another's strengths as well as an awareness of their own limitations working across Sport for Change and women and girls' sectors. Most projects felt able to complement and support one another to deliver a successful project. This pooling of resources and expertise was seen as a **way to add value** through the partnership.

*The skill set of staff across our partnership... has been a powerful tool. " Annual report*

## b) Access to target groups

Those organisations who had less experience of working in the women's and girls' sector felt their partner(s) ability to **access target groups** was essential, not only to attract women and girls but to increase engagement and **maintain their attendance**, due to the strong relationships they'd already formed. This was particularly relevant in terms of reaching some of the 'harder to reach' communities e.g. traveller community and asylum seekers.

*"if it wasn't for this partnership the women [from the traveller community] would never have gone to a [named sport venue], it needs the expertise of both grassroots organisations to be able to provide this opportunity." Partner organisation, project worker*

For **national partners**, the value of working with local organisations on the ground was seen to be of real benefit in terms of understanding the local context and knowing how best to engage local young women.

*"Our partnership delivery model is an effective way of working with regional partners, who are connected locally to a wide range of networks and understand the local landscapes and barriers for young people." Lead Partner, Annual Report*

## c) Providing new referral routes and networks

Opening up **new networks and referral routes** to other services and activities was considered an extremely useful outcome for many of the key workers. A number cited how it had not only helped the women and girls attending the project sessions, but the staff's own increased awareness of other services / projects had also benefitted other participants involved in different projects and sessions.

*"So many more services we can now refer into that we couldn't before...". Lead organisation, key worker*

## d) Developments and improvements in organisations' systems and processes

Another benefit for partners was being able to **develop new systems and procedures** based on the experience of working with partner organisations. This was particularly the case for small organisations who were able to learn from the systems and processes of larger organisations. In most instances these developments or new ways of working became embedded into their everyday practices and processes and, in some cases, fed into other project delivery. Examples of these developments included: revising or

*"We have... **strengthened our partner due diligence process** considering the under-performance in [location] and the over reliance on contacts within partners. ...we have already not progressed with two potential partners due to the extra level of scrutiny and evidence we are now asking for." Lead organisation, Annual Report*

creating **policies / procedures** around data sharing and due diligence, monitoring and evaluation **and recording systems**. Some organisations also adopted their partners' monitoring tools.

#### e) **Additional benefits for staff**

Staff reported additional benefits. These included **improved health and well-being for them and their families as** involvement in the projects had helped to increase their own activity levels and their productivity at work. **Some staff felt they benefitted through developing deeper connections with the women and girls**. They reported a level of enjoyment experienced through participation in project and in being able to deliver something that was more than just an opportunity to provide sport and physical activity, rather it was allowing the women and girls **develop stronger / deeper relationships** with each other as well as with the staff members.

#### f) **Opportunity to build connections**

Another broader benefit of being part of the LtF initiative was the **opportunity to build connections with other LtF organisations** through the learning events and networking opportunities provided. One project had visited another LtF project to learn more about other models of working that engage young women in sport underpinned by youth work. Another provided training to staff within another project enabling them to widen their sport offer not only for LtF but for other women and girls they work with. These connections also led onto further **sharing of resources and learning materials**.

*"One thing that we didn't have previously but that we do have now since forming this partnership is the **data sharing agreement** and that's been really useful and so we've been replicating that with other partners since then".* Lead organisation, project lead

*"I get the most out of the relationships with the women and I feel I have grown so much as a person over the last year, because I didn't realise I could help people, I love the fact that people come to me and want to talk and I can help and so I get so much back because I've learned so much about them and their lives"* Partner organisation, Key worker

### 3.3.2 **Key learning for organisations and staff as a result of working in partnership**

There was clear evidence of new learning for both organisations and staff across the projects. For many, this learning came from working with different organisations and within new sectors allowing them to gain new knowledge, skills and experience. Whilst much of the learning for organisations stemmed from their experience of how to work in partnership (as detailed in previous sections), there was also a large amount of **learning about working across the women and girls and Sport for Change sectors**.

Organisations and staff highlighted how they'd developed a greater understanding of the differing and often **complex needs of some of the women and girls** they were working with (e.g. young mums, traveller community). For some organisations who hadn't worked with women and girls before, learning about their needs led to some changes in activity delivery. Often these changes were small but were important in **enabling the engagement**

*"We've learnt...that we **need to be very flexible with our approach** when working with these target groups, often they are late or don't turn up, but even if we get them for 15 mins we know we can do some great things with them ... we have learnt to change and be flexible in our approach".* Key worker, lead organisation

*"Realising that it takes time to have an impact on these women's lives and to realise that some things don't just happen overnight. If we are going to have a genuine impact on the girls we are working with we need to understand that and build that into future funding bids".* Lead organisation, project lead



of those attending the sessions. Examples included; providing childcare, changing the timings of sessions / having relaxed start times; providing sanitary products in changing rooms; being more flexible and adaptable to accommodate those with multiple complex needs. Several women mentioned how they valued having access to a **female only space** where they felt safe and secure and able to share experiences with like-minded women. In addition to these practical changes, several projects reported that the development of **trust and relationships** was a crucial first step in effective engagement which took more time than they had first anticipated.

Projects also developed an increased understanding of the **barriers to engagement in sport** faced by some women and girls (e.g. low confidence or knowledge, levels of fitness), and how to address these, particularly for those who have not traditionally engaged in sporting activities before (e.g. traveller community who are often seen as a 'closed' communities, unlikely to access services outside of their community).

For organisations who had not used sport before, staff gained an increased understanding of the benefits of **using sport as a tool for engagement** as well as the **wider benefits of physical activity**, on improved mental well-being.

Projects also learnt about the value of having the **correct staff in post**. This related to (a) staff who were experienced in working with the target group and who understood their needs as well as (b) skilled coaches or delivery staff who could also connect with and relate to the women and girls. Projects learnt how the staff delivering the sporting element of projects could also be **positive role models** for the women and girls. Whilst female coaches were seen to really help with engagement and encouraging women and girls to 'have a go', others had used and felt comfortable with male instructors as positive role models of a different sort (e.g. showing that men can show empathy and be caring which may be counter to some women's prior experience of males). In all instances where male coaches were used, female workers or staff were also on hand to support and / or to do the follow up sessions.

### 3.4 How partnership working affects outcomes for women and girls

LtF projects were funded to work with women and girls to: increase social inclusion; access to education and training; reduce gender stereotypes; increase leadership skills and tackle violence against women and girls. Projects were successful in many of these outcomes, with clear increases apparent in women and girls' **confidence and self-esteem**, the development of **new skills and**

*"there is also **another layer of barriers [for women and girls] that come from being disadvantaged**, which come from lack of confidence or not knowing how clubs work or how sport works or not having the right kit or not being fit or having any positivity around healthy eating or drinking water...there are so many barriers to these girls ...I think [we] have learnt a lot about this... and it means we reach more women and girls." [lead partner]*

*"In the beginning I didn't think that sport was anyway linked to mental health but through this project I have seen that it is... also it's helped get different people together, sport does have that element" Partner organisation, project worker*

*"We have often just trained coaches in the past to deliver sport sessions, but in this instance, it wasn't enough we had to ensure that the coaches **understood the project and the issues that this group of girls face**" Lead organisation, project lead*

**opportunities** to use these skills (through volunteering, routes into employment and training, and qualifications), the development of new **positive social networks** and **understanding of other communities** and different backgrounds, and **increased physical activity** linked to **improved mental health and wellbeing**. Further project-specific examples of these outcomes can be found in the case studies (see appendix 5.2).

*"There was a time that I wouldn't even step out of the house, but it's helped me to get motivated. I can honestly say it's one of the best things I've done and I'm now out of bother"* Beneficiary

It is hard to say with certainty the extent to which the partnership element specifically contributed to or enhanced these outcomes for the women and girls without having similar non-partnership project comparisons. However, most organisations acknowledged that **without their partners, these projects would not have been possible** or at least would not have been delivered so successfully. It was also

*"You have expertise from different organisations coming together so can deliver a more enhanced and wholesome service that brings all the different elements to it".* Partner organisation, project lead

recognised that the **combined skills, networks, knowledge and expertise** of partners were essential for meeting their project outcomes, along with **gaining access to** and a relationship with women and girls, the ability to **deliver the activities** and much more as already highlighted earlier in the report.

*"It's amazing! Great, friendly and happy atmosphere enabling me to learn new skills and stay mobile, as I'm disabled and have learning difficulties... I feel totally included in the activities"* Beneficiary

*"when I was offered the opportunity to (1) hang out with a group of girls and (2) develop my skills and self-esteem in sport that was a big 'yes' and number 3...just being able to ..allow me to take part in a wide range of activities that I wouldn't usually get opportunity to do..."* Beneficiary

### 3.5 Sustainability and future plans

This final section focuses on the **longer-term sustainability** of the partnerships, any impact on other projects / areas of work and any future plans for partnership working and development.

#### 3.5.1 Sustainability of project activity

For projects whose funding had ended, there was a definite desire and intention amongst most organisations to continue delivery of the project or certain activities. Alternative funding was required by most projects for delivery to continue and some were in the process of seeking or applying for funding to **continue delivery of the project** and **maintain their existing partnership** (see case study 2).

*"This has been a really valuable project and our clients have benefited from being part of the project and if we could get the resources it is something we would like to continue."* Lead organisation, project worker

Those operating in **project management relationship-type partnerships** felt more confident in being **able to sustain current delivery** of project activities with no or very little funding required. This was

because they had upskilled staff or volunteers in their partner organisations working with women and girls to use sport / physical activity (see case study 1).

Some partnerships were looking to **continue a 'light' version of their project or had 'exit plans'** e.g. reduced provision each week. Many were clear they didn't want to suddenly stop providing something so valuable to the women and girls, which many had become reliant on. This desire to create an additional offer to the women and girls was echoed by several organisations.

*"Capacity building and sustainability is a key focus of all [our] work...[Our] groups will run regardless as is not funding dependent ...they will retain the knowledge and skills we have offered to them and be able to do more of this going forward. It's about building capacity within the member groups."* Lead organisation, project Lead

*"So, I think that [sustainability] for me is the most significant challenge, how we sort of try to sustain the work or if that isn't going to be doable that we have a really robust exit strategy in place so that the women feel supported into other activities".* Partner organisation, project lead

### 3.5.2 Impact on other projects and other areas of work

A number of organisations said their **involvement in this partnership had impacted positively on other projects and areas of work** in their organisation. For example, some said they were planning to transfer learning into new projects and partnerships using the tools, resources and knowledge gained; several partners had **started to use the partnership agreements developed for other projects**. One organisation in particular, explained how the partnership agreement was a more appropriate tool for their work as opposed to service level agreements which they had used previously.

*"I would be looking to use [a Partnership Agreement] in the future. We normally use an SLA but it feels very much like 'we want you to do this' whereas a partnership agreement is as a collective 'we are going to achieve this'... it puts it more in a positive light rather than a dictatorship model".* Lead organisation, project Lead

The majority of organisations were already **extending their current organisational offer within their day to day delivery and services**, using the skills and knowledge gained through the partnership to either embed sport and physical activity and / or involving more women and girls in their wider work (see case study 1 as an example). This extended to influencing organisational governance in one example, where as a result of their learning from the partnership, they were now looking to **recruit someone from the charity sector / sport for social change sector to their organisation's Board**. This was to help develop this area of work, which was a significant shift strategically for them.

*"This has been a massive shift and will be a big impact for us – bigger than we ever thought"* Partner organisation, project lead

One organisation also mentioned how they are continuing to learn from and use the knowledge and expertise of their partner organisation which was proving really helpful with **their longer-term strategy and development**.

*"Now as we grow bigger – with our National communities strand that we are developing, we will be learning from [named partner] around strategic planning and sport delivery".* Lead organisation, project lead

In terms of **wider impact and influence**, one organisation had delivered training in gender conscious youth work to a range of external partners and workers in other organisations, based on the learning from their project. Other influencing opportunities arose for a couple of projects who had **presented their work at conferences** and developed associated learning materials, which they hoped would have wide reaching and longer-term benefits and impact. One project worker had been to address the Peacebuilding Commission in the UN on their youth work on the ground with young women.

*“staff delivered talks and workshops about the project in the UK, Ireland and at the PATH International conference in Florida, USA. We have developed a curriculum from this project that can be used by therapeutic horsemanship professionals across the world”. Annual report*

### 3.5.3 Plans for future partnership working

All the organisations, even those who had experienced challenges in their partnerships, clearly valued partnership working as they all intended to enter into partnerships again in the future.

One project stated how they now saw **partnership working and collaboration as essential to them** in terms of the continued enhancement of their offer and allowing them to ‘up their game’.

Due to the positive partnership experience several organisations also said they were **hoping to work together with their current partners on new projects and / or new ventures**. One organisation had already secured new funding with their existing partner as well as bringing on board new partners to bring in more specialist skills and expertise and avoid over-reliance on a single partner.

*“I think partnerships are definitely the way forward when applying for projects” Partner organisation, lead*

*“We’ve got a new project that has pretty much come out of [named LTF project], which is a mental health peer support group for women and it has grown quite nicely out of that project... [existing named partner] will be one of our partners on that project but we will also have a local mental health trust and statutory and voluntary organisations all working together.” Lead organisation, project lead*

*“We will continue to work together in future...we already have funding for a participation project through London Marathon charitable trust – based on a similar model” Lead organisation, project lead*

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section provides a summary of the key learning from the evaluation, in relation to the four evaluation questions, and some related key messages for other organisations and funders seeking to engage in more partnership working.

### 4.1 Concluding summary

#### a) What approaches have been taken by grantees to working in partnership across the projects?

Partnership models vary in the way they are set up and managed. There were 3 different partnership typologies adopted by the LTF projects. Each typology has its strengths and weaknesses, and it is clear from the experience of these projects that developing any typology requires time and careful thought

by all partners. It is also evident that adaptability within partnership models is critical for partnerships to be effective in a constantly changing context of social change.

Typology	Description	Pros	Cons
Typology 1: Integrated delivery	<i>Two (or three) organisation's working together to deliver the project (and sessions) in partnership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrated delivery (across partners) during sessions</li> <li>- Upskilling workers to work with W&amp;G and / or deliver sport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less sustainable model</li> <li>- Reliance on key workers to support W&amp;G and engage others</li> </ul>
Typology 2: Referral partnership	<i>One or two organisations being the referral path (and supporting organisations) into one organisation which delivers the majority of the sessions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunity for each partner to work to their strengths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reliance on one partner for majority of delivery</li> </ul>
Typology 3: Project Management relationship	<i>A project management organisation overseeing the project which is then being delivered by one (or more) partner organisations on the ground</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity building</li> <li>- More sustainable</li> <li>- Takes the project management away from the deliverers, allowing more time to focus on beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dilution of skills and knowledge</li> </ul>

#### **b) What have been the benefits of working in partnership for the grantees?**

Numerous benefits were identified for organisations and staff including the sharing of expertise and resources and having improved access to target groups. Benefits can also extend well beyond project-specific delivery however; some organisations adopted new organisational systems and processes whilst others were able to form new links and relationships across projects and through partners' networks. Staff also benefitted through gaining new referral routes and awareness of other networks as well as improving their own individual skills, health and wellbeing.

For this particular initiative, the learning across sectors has been significant. For many organisations working with specific groups of women and girls for the first time, their partners have been able to support them in gaining a much more nuanced understanding of their complex needs, how to adapt the use of sport appropriately, and the importance of safe spaces and relationships. Equally for those using Sport for Change for the first time, their sports partners have been able to demonstrate the skills and effectiveness of using such an approach in tackling issues of confidence, self-esteem, mental health, wellbeing, and social integration.

#### **c) How has working in partnership enhanced project outcomes?**

It was clear across the projects that without bringing together the different organisations to work in partnership, it would not have been possible for the projects to deliver so successfully and meet their intended outcomes. The range of skills, expertise, networks and knowledge that combinations of partners were able to bring enabled projects to access, engage and maintain relationships and trust with specific groups of women and girls, and provide a wider range of approaches, opportunities, pathways and solutions to tackling the complex issues that they face.

#### **d) How has working in partnership influenced future design and delivery plans of grantees?**

In general, the LtF funded projects reported very positive experiences of partnership working with some strong, alliances forged. All of the organisations said they'd enter into a partnership again, and indeed a number already have follow-on partnership plans with one having already secured funding. Even where there had been challenges in the partnership delivery, much learning had been gained about how to do things differently in the future. Several were also keen to continue delivering their current project in partnership, highlighting the value of bringing together organisations working within the Sport for Change and women and girls' sectors, as well as drawing on each others' wider organisational, process and strategic knowledge and expertise.

In terms of the future, the partner organisations believed they would be in a good position to deliver other projects in partnership as a result of their learning and experiences. Most reported they'd learnt a great deal about a different sector and some had already found ways to continue to provide either sport and physical activity within their wider organisational delivery or activity which seeks to engage more effectively with women and girls.

## **4.2 Key messages for other organisations and funders seeking to do more partnership working.**

This evaluation has explored how one Comic Relief Grants Programme (Levelling the Field) has used partnership working to deliver 'Sports for Change' projects for women and girls. It describes how the partnerships were established and delivered and outlines the benefits, challenges and key lessons learnt. It is hoped that this evaluation will help other organisations and funders to better understand the barriers and enablers to good partnership working through providing some key factors to consider in the development of these.

### **Identify who to partner with**

- Consider the value and benefits of building on existing connections and relationships (where trust and mutual understanding is already established) vs the benefits of partnering with new organisations which may offer more opportunities for shared learning but where it may take longer to establish relationships.
- Partnering with organisations who share the same values and ethos can help with building trusting relationships and maintaining shared focus.
- Having more than one partner can be beneficial in terms of providing additional expertise, the potential to access more beneficiaries and learning opportunities. However multiple partners also increase the amount of management, administration and communication required.
- Working with partner organisations who are closely located physically can help in terms of communication and delivery.

### **Devise a partnership delivery model**

- **Explore the various partnership delivery models** and consider their pros and cons in the context of what your project is trying to achieve when deciding which approach to use.
- Remain **flexible and open-minded** about opportunities and the need to alter partnership delivery models in response to the needs of project, staff and the beneficiaries.



### Agree partnership purpose and focus and the role of partnership agreements

- Ensure clarity about the **focus and purpose** of the partnership and review this regularly. Having a **shared vision and goals and values** can help to prioritise the intended outcomes.
- Having a clear **partnership agreement** can help to articulate the purpose, role and structure of the partnership. It can help to prioritise purpose over structure.
- Ensure **roles and responsibilities are clearly defined**, agreed and documented. Avoid making assumptions and be sure to check expectations of partners and staff.

### Ensure shared systems, structures and processes are in place

- Having a clear system for shared decision-making, **shared responsibility** and accountability structures with agreed processes for things like monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- Take time to **identify potential risks** and how these would be managed, and review these regularly.

### Build relationships and systems for effective communication

- Invest time and effort in **building rapport and trust** between partners. Openness and honesty can help in both avoiding and dealing with challenges and issues. Don't underestimate the time needed to establish good working relationships.
- Ensure **effective communication mechanisms** are in place and accessible, both formal (e.g. steering groups, review meetings) and informal (e.g. email, text, WhatsApp). Different communication mechanisms may be needed for strategic and operational issues. Good communication can help build closer relationships with, and between, organisations and staff.

### Be prepared to be flexible and adaptable

- Acknowledge that not all partnerships work out as planned and that there may be a need to be **flexible and adaptable** in response to issues, circumstances and needs of beneficiaries as they arise. Having open communication systems and trust and openness can help to respond to these.
- Partnerships and joint methods of working **take time and investment** to be successful – do not underestimate this.

### Add value through playing to strengths and in sharing skills, expertise and resources

- Bringing together different organisations with different **skills and expertise** can result in more **successful project delivery** and create added value in meeting intended outcomes.
- Ensuring the partnership has access to **required skills and expertise and resources** – sharing human and physical resources is a key strength and benefit of partnership working. Complementary skills add value and increase opportunities to learn from one another, particularly across different sectors or focuses.
- **Avoid reliance on individual key staff** members as this can be problematic if /when they move on. Build capacity and awareness of the partnership within partner organisations rather than individuals to help manage this risk.
- There is value to be gained from partners' different styles of working but it is important to ensure shared understanding and a common language from the start to avoid confusion.

### Enable access to, and better engagement with, target groups

- Working in partnership can help increase **access to, and improve engagement with, target groups** through capitalising on established connections with target groups and communities and sharing expertise and experience of the barriers and enablers to engagement.
- Working in partnership can provide **new referral pathways** for providers and awareness and access of other pathways for beneficiaries through sharing knowledge of services and networks.
- Partnership working can increase the opportunities and pathways available to beneficiaries e.g. allowing women the opportunity to gain qualifications and/or secure volunteer or paid roles.

### 4.3 Recommendations for Comic Relief as a result of the learning from the evaluation

- Invite previous grantees to funding information events to share their stories and experiences of developing and working in partnership
- Provide template partnership agreements
- Share the report and case studies with prospective grantees
- Integrate messages about partnerships into Comic Relief start up meetings and processes – recognising they take time and energy to make them work, and may initially impact on project delivery whilst they are set up
- Provide more support to partnership projects in terms of sustainability, this could include providing grantees with references to aid similar future funding bids with other grant holders and utilising opportunities to talk about successful partnership projects (via website, specific events, summaries etc.)
- Consider developing guidance on partnership working for prospective grantees, e.g. a best practice tool kit or 'Top tips' (do's and don'ts) guide



## 5. Appendices

### 5.1 Evaluation Approach in detail

#### 5.1.1 Desk research – review of 6 monthly and annual reports

At the outset, the evaluation team reviewed various project documentation to provide a deeper understanding of the 12 projects – their aims and objectives and the partner organisations involved. The documents included initial project proposals, start-up forms and partnership agreements. Throughout the funding period projects also submitted reports to Comic Relief every six months and annually, which were also shared with the evaluation team to help supplement the findings.

#### 5.1.2 Initial site visits

During the early stages of the evaluation (May-June '18) site visits were conducted allowing the team to meet the leads from each partner organisation, key workers and women and girls engaged in the projects where feasible. During the visits, depth interviews were conducted with leads and key workers and observations of activities the women and girls were engaged in. **Table 5.1** below provides an overview of the site visits.

#### 5.1.3 Learning Event

In November 2018 a Learning Event was held at Manchester University, which was an opportunity for key personnel from the projects to meet one another and share experiences. The day-long event consisted of presentations delivered by Comic Relief and the evaluation team focussing on the emergent findings to date, with various interactive sessions and activities for the grantees to participate in allowing for their successes and challenges to be shared.

#### 5.1.4 Follow up telephone interviews

During January-March '19, telephone interviews were conducted with project leads (from all partner orgs where possible) and some key workers. These aimed to build on the previous interviews and learning from the event. They focussed on the different partnership models and approaches taken to working in partnership as well as key learning, benefits and challenges to partnership working.

#### 5.1.5 Case studies

Four projects, each adopting a different partnership model were chosen as case studies. Site visits were made to 3 of the projects and the fourth was conducted by phone, all during Summer '19.

The case studies consisted of informal discussions with project leads, individual or small group interviews with key staff from lead and partner organisations and focus group discussions with beneficiaries.

The case studies can be found below in a separate document – labelled **Appendix 5.2**

#### 5.1.6 Final Celebration Event

Towards the end of the funding, rather than undertake a final round of telephone interviews with grantees (as originally proposed), it was agreed a celebration event was most useful for both the projects and the evaluation to provide a further learning and another opportunity for the grantees to share learning and experiences.

**Table 5.1 Overview of initial visits conducted**

<b>Project title / partners</b>	<b>Visit details</b>	<b>Partner interviews</b>	<b>Staff / key worker interviews</b>
<b><i>Being Active; Changing Futures</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth Sport Foundation</li> <li>Together Women Project</li> <li>YWCA</li> </ul>	Visited two locations / delivery sites (Bradford and Doncaster) to meet partners and key staff. Observed the project in Bradford at 'Together Women Project'	Int 1. Two key leads from YSF and the lead from TWP Int 2. Same two leads from YSF and lead from Doncaster YWCA	Int 1. Two key workers from TWP (Bradford and Leeds sites) Int 2. Four key workers from Doncaster YWCA
<b><i>Brighton women's table tennis development project</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brighton Table Tennis Club</li> <li>Friends, Families and Travellers</li> <li>Brighton Women's Centre</li> </ul>	Visited Brighton Table Tennis Club which is the main site for project delivery, met with partners, key staff and observed one of the sessions. Also informally chatted with some of the women taking part in the session	Int. 1 Three key leads from 2/3 partner organisations (BTT & FFT)	Int. 2. Four key workers from across all 3 partner organisations (BTT, FFT & BWC)
<b><i>Netball for Change</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Change Foundation</li> <li>The Media Trust</li> </ul>	Visited Netball for change project with lead at The Change Foundation – met with two of the coaches and observed a session with girls in school. Follow up interview with both partners at Media Trust offices.	Int 1: Phone interview with Change Foundation.  Int 2: Face to face interview with leads at Media Trust and The Change Foundation.	TBA: Interview with one of the coaches.
<b><i>Young, Gifted &amp; Female</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>London Football Journeys (LFJ)</li> <li>LACES</li> </ul>	Visited Hackney school -one of the 3 sites where the project is delivered. Met with partners and delivery staff and observed session in action. Also met Sisterhood project staff who are capturing girls stories on film.	Int 1: Both partners from LFJ and LACES.	Int 2: Project manager with LFJ – works across all 3 sites.
<b><i>Steeper Steps</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth Action Northern Ireland</li> <li>Far and Wild</li> </ul>	Visited project in Derry/Londonderry to meet with partners, key staff and hear about project delivery (via PowerPoint and film).	Int 1: Project lead at YA and lead project worker at YA.  Int 2: Lead partner at F&W.	Worker interviewed

<b>Overcoming Obstacles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WITH</li> <li>• Gorwell (formerly Gwnedd Domestic Abuse Service)</li> </ul>	Visited WITH (North Wales) where the project is being delivered to meet with partners, key staff and observed one of the sessions	Int. 1 Two key leads from the partner organisation (WITH and Gorwell).	Int. 2 one key worker from WITH Int. 3 one key worker from Gorwell
<b>Project 51</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sported</li> <li>• Women in Sport</li> </ul>	Visited Sported offices and met with both partners. Follow up phone interview with one of the Sported Regional Managers in the SW who is supporting the projects in the field.	Int. 1 Two key leads from the partner organisation (WIS and Sported).	Int 2: With Sported Regional Manager in the SW who is supporting the projects in the field.
<b>Girls Skateboarding Initiative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projekts Mcr</li> <li>• GMYN (Greater Manchester Youth Network)</li> </ul>	Observed session being delivered in one of the schools and chatted to skate coach and the link teacher. Visited Skatepark to do interviews.	Int 1: Lead partner and project worker at Projekts.  Int 2: Phone interview with lead at GMYN.	
<b>Refugee Women and Girls Cycling Project</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bike Project</li> <li>• Young Roots</li> </ul>	Visited Young Roots office to meet both partners and key staff. Also visited Croydon Arena with the delivery team to observe a session and informally spoke to some of the young women taking part.	Int. 1 Two leads and two key staff from both partner organisations	Int 2. Followed up with two of the delivery team from both organisations
<b>Fighting Fit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pat Benson Boxing Academy</li> <li>• Women in today's Society</li> </ul>	Visited Pat Benson's Boxing Academy where the project is delivered to meet the partners and key staff. Observed the boxing session and joined in the social session afterwards	Int. 1 Two leads from both the partner organisations	Int. 2 Interview with key member overseeing and delivering the project from PBBA
<b>Get on Track - For women and girls facing disadvantage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dame Kelly Homes Trust</li> <li>• YouthFed (one of 3 partners)</li> </ul>	Visited project being delivered in Birkenhead with YouthFed. Observed and took part in session for girls.	Int 1: Phone interview with CEO at DKH.  Int 2: With DKH staff x 2 and YouthFed operational manager.	Int 3: Phone interview with one of the DKH coaches.
<b>Muslim Girls Fence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maslaha</li> <li>• British Fencing Association</li> </ul>	Visited Maslaha's office to meet the key partners, conducted a follow up telephone interview with a key worker from one of the delivery sites.	Int. 1 Two leads from the partner organisations (Maslaha and British Fencing)	Int. 2 Phone interview key worker from Maslaha

## **5.2 Case studies**

During Summer 2019, 4 case studies were conducted with the following projects;

- Being active, changing futures
- Brighton women's table tennis development project
- Steeper Steps
- Project 51

The summaries of the case studies are provided in a separate document.