LivedExperience Leaders

LEARNING PARTNER

Final Report
Part C

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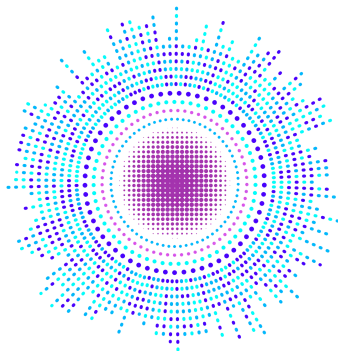- Some percentages may total over 100% due to rounding.

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What we learned about LEx Leadership

This Part is accompanied by Part A and Part B
which can be downloaded from lex-project.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we present some of the key themes that have emerged from our work as a learning partner within The National Lottery Community Fund's (TNLCF) Lived Experience (LEx) leadership fund.

This report is the third in a series of three reports made available at the end of this grant programme.
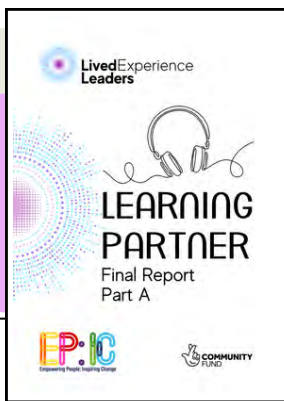
PART A

Part A outlines the purpose of the fund, and introduces the grantees at a global level, including their perceptions of the fund.
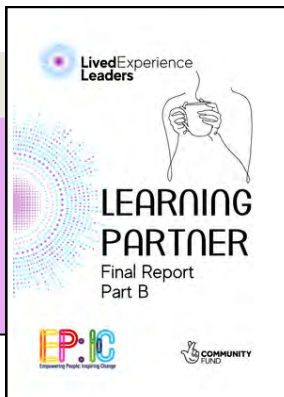
PART B

Part B considers each of the grantees in more detail, celebrating their successes and outlining where challenges were felt.
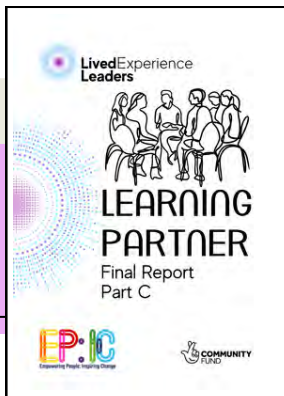
PART C

Part C explores some key themes that have emerged during the funding period relating to LEx more broadly.

In the event that Part A has not been previously read:

Following a successful pilot phase where 20 community partners were supported to promote LEx leadership via grant of up to £50,000, TNLCF launched a second phase. This second phase provided grants to 50 community partners from a range of sectors and across the whole of the UK.

EP:IC worked as the learning partner throughout, and made regular contact with all partners. Our aim was to walk alongside each partner, exploring their views of the fund, of LEx leadership, and to provide networking opportunities for those who wanted them. We encouraged reflection, connection and provided workshops when partners indicated certain learning would be useful.

We believe insights contained in this report to be valuable to anyone interested in LEx leadership, including LEx leaders themselves, funders interested in similar schemes and those employing anyone with LEx.

In this report, we have separated our learning into seven sections, as below:

> **Section 1** - Grantee Perspectives on LEx Leadership

> **Section 2** - What is it to be a LEx leader?

> **Section 3** - What makes a good LEx leader?

> **Section 4** - Challenges of LEx leadership
> Internal, societal, turbulence and crises, and funding

> **Section 5** - What conditions enable LEx leaders to thrive?

> **Section 6** - Beneficiaries

> **Section 7** - Considerations

Despite engagement of partners, it is worth noting that we did not experience continuous and active engagement from all 50 partners across the whole funding journey, although we did hear from everyone at various points. As such, we acknowledge that not every section will represent the views of every partner. Rather, we have reflected on our learning partner journey, keeping TNLCF's key questions in mind.

1

GRANTEE PERSPECTIVES OF LEX LEADERSHIP

"The path is getting better but still a long way to go for LEx to be valued."

It was interesting to learn that just 50% of partners had used the term Lived Experience before they became involved in the LEx leadership fund.

The term and concept was not always well understood by all, although within some sectors (i.e., the Disability sector) it was a well-established, recognised and respected movement.

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"It's not something I heard of before this role and still unclear. I would like to know more."

Clearly though, even those who were unaware of the term, had still been inadvertently promoting LEx within their organisations. Most of these had been so doing for years prior to the funding and learning of the terminology. No one was new to principles of LEx entirely.

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"We've not branded as LEx, but it's always been at the heart of what we do."

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"We have always been a LEx led org and rooted in LEx and therefore LEx leadership being really important to that. We have always been confident this is the right approach and we continue to know this."

"

"As soon as I came to the introductory meeting of this network, I realised that you had given me language to describe what we had been doing for years and now we had a way to talk about it to others and to ourselves."

"

"On a personal level I have been doing LEx for a long time, it has helped me step into the LEx Leader role and recognise the LEx Leadership work I'm already doing. I have now taken ownership of that name and own it through the work I'm doing."

We had several conversations in the early stages of the learning partnership where the definition was discussed and, at times, disputed. Questions were asked, such as:

What makes a LEx led organisation?

Is it ok to have professionals with learned experience in the leadership?

Can LEx expire or do we need new terms such as living and lived experience?

There were intensely mixed views. Some found blended teams of lived and learned experience diluted focus and led to division in the teams, others found blended teams enhanced perspective and opportunity. There was certainly no consensus met.

Further, interesting conversations materialised in regard to LEx alongside learned experience, and how some it difficult to promote the value of both.

> "I have both lived and learned experience, and I sometimes feel that the tendency to want to put people into neat boxes makes it harder for me to mobilise and utilise both of these elements of my identity to their fullest extent. People tend to assume that, if I have lived experience, I won't have any academic/formal credentials to back it up. On the flipside, my academic learning almost delegitimises - or places into question the authenticity of - my lived experience in some people's estimation. While 'LEx' is a useful designation, I think we need to guard against it becoming another label – people with LEx are more than their experiences of adversity/injustice, and it would be a shame if the other skills and knowledge they have at their disposal were overlooked."

In the second wave, there appeared less interest in defining LEx, with partners even questioning "does it really matter?" Partners instead, were enthusiastic about the movement, and about the potential to inspire and bring leaders together.

> "I think in terms of activating my kind of lived experience, I think it's always been activated, I just didn't know how to channel it in the right way. I didn't have the right vehicle to channel it."

> "We love the language of Lived experience leadership; it is a collective noun that inspires us."

In discussions around LEx, it was evident that there was an intuitive understanding around intersectionality, and that lived experience was not one dimensional, and instead often complex and multi-faceted. There was a keenness to draw on a range of life experiences, and a recognition that even those who identify as having a shared lived experience, may have had very different lives.

> "We also have people who have experienced something, that might not be the same thing. Like DV. Rather than being a Mum who has needed to get the children out specifically. Lived Experience is blurred."

> "I have found the older LGBTQ people I work with, have found hearing about younger LGBTQ experiences fascinating. Coming of age in a different era and identifying as LGBTQ. They feel completely safe, finally after many years have a safe space of only LGBTQ people."

> "Our participants will say but you've never been sectioned, you've never been diagnosed with a clinical mental health condition etc, yeah, you have lived experience in a secondary form. We are the people with living experience who have gone through that process, so it's quite rudimentary but that is a distinction that I get a lot from our participants."

The networking events brought some in-depth discussions around the reason why LEx leadership was needed, and indeed, more investment into leadership was welcome. Conversations frequently gravitated towards social inequality, power, and stigma and the exploitation of lived experience narratives.

> "What is this trend around inviting people to talk at conferences but only to talk about their experiences of pain or trauma from a position of their lived experience which is or can be perceived as damaged. It provides continuous opportunity to document pain, loss and damage in individuals and communities but it doesn't put resources or information in place to move away from these."

We heard how grantees had often been confronted with societal barriers preventing them from being able to make a difference to their communities. This can be as fundamental as being overlooked for employment opportunities due to their lived experience. Others spoke of being excluded from jobs based on their past. Potential employers viewing their experiences as a risk, rather than an asset.

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> "Some organisations have looked at my DBS and struggled. It's took me a lot longer to get here. It's mentally exhausting having to go through the DBS every time – it's like pulling off a scab."

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> "I was humiliated by the system. All I wanted to do was work, for a passion I had. I have all of this knowledge. I was better off not working, than doing something I felt was important. But then I found this."

Additionally, retaining 'regular' employment was sometimes described as challenging. 'Fitting in' to corporate operational models and upholding employment expectations were said to have been problematic for some.

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> "I was told by one of my managers, that I was too challenging, very passionate."

In contrast, in organisations where LEx leadership is encouraged and celebrated, attributes that were once the root of unemployment or incompatibility became the root of change and positivity.

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> "The thing I've learnt is that doing lived experience leadership can be a very powerful tool for healing and overcoming the mental traumas that often comes with quite painful lived experiences."

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> "Working class is an asset here. In some organisations it was a negative but here it is an asset."

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> "The fact I can make a difference, it's amazing. I couldn't do anything about my own situation but I can help others. I feel honoured. It feels wonderful."

Despite differences in the sectors each leader was representing, a common ground was distinctly found in terms of drive and empowerment. A genuine enthusiasm to come together in this collective understanding was evident.

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"Obviously some of the other groups within the within the cohort, their work is completely different, but it doesn't mean that some of the principles are ideas we can't learn from, and I think that's been a really, really interesting thing. Get away from the very specific issues that we face around our subject of addiction recovery and think about people facing similar stigma, exclusion and marginalisation, lack of funding, lack of support. I think some of those generic. Principles have been really important and I don't think they should be lost. You get caught up in the specifics."

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"I don't think that you can activate your lived experience without first having a sense of belonging, and whether that's to a cause, to a group of people, to a community, to an injustice, I think you need that to be able to activate your lived experience because it's what makes you care and it's what ends up making you informed so it can actually you know, one of those things is people becoming informed about their rights, about the fact that what they've been experiencing is an injustice."

In one survey, 81% of respondents felt empowered by the term LEx leader.

However, there is a sense that societal views are shifting, and the partners recognised being part of that change. In discussions, partners talked about the importance of being assertive and unapologetic about the importance of having LEx leaders "in the room" and "changing culture" by encouraging and empowering younger people with LEx to recognise their own LEx as 'gifts', enhancing their expertise and power to influence and inspire through their personal experiences.

81%

felt empowered by the term LEx leader

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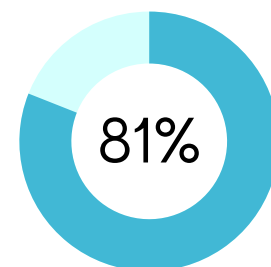
"There is a growing recognition of the strength that lived experience leadership brings."

Grantees were aware of how the fund had propelled their organisation forward in relation to visibility of their LEx leadership, and had given them the space to weave into all aspects of the organisations they worked within. One organisation disclosed they had not always utilised LEx in the most effective way prior to be being funded, though this fund enabled them to reflect on their experience and consider what could be different.

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"This [LEx] feels like a really valid qualification, I think."

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"What it has done for us as an organisation is to own it and name it. Our directors have spoken about LEx at a strategic level that we are LEx and LEx organisation. But the fund has allowed us to lean into and is a flag to be waved. It is now a huge strength of ours that we are recognising LEx and LEx leadership."

"

"The process has helped us to think how we integrate participation of LEx into all our work, so not just in a project. That is an interesting development for us. This project definitely contributed to that. We are just thinking about bringing together our learning on the project and relate the project on the wider social reliance work. It is definitely supporting us develop our thinking around that."

"

"So many people are now talking about LEx wider than the organisation. It is mega. We had never referred to ourselves as LEx organisation and support those with LEx Leadership. We had not used that language before even though we were doing it. Now we do, there is a shift in perceptions wider than us."

"

"Some of the stuff I do is setting up new organisations and stuff.If I'm ever gonna do that again I would be setting them up as the experience organisations, why would I ever do it any other different? I look back at some of the stuff I've done in the past and think like, 'What was I thinking?' Like, 'why on Earth did I do it that way?' So ,it has been quite a big deal for me personally to make it really real and not just a box ticking. I am guilty of having done in the past, you know... But yeah, so, I think it's been really quite important."

Interestingly, it was important for grant holders to not forget the experience of those who have pioneered LEx leadership.

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'It strikes me that People First were running a campaign called 'Label jars not people' in the 1980's and I think that's quite relevant. We've also done a project called 'Count us in' and I am wondering whether the system has kind of forgotten about the wealth of experience people actually have?"

It is unsurprising that LEx leaders in this programme were enthused by LEx leadership. For some, the fund has led to a wholly new exploration of the term, the movement and where this and they fit into society. For others, it has been an enabler for expansion of their LEx leadership, and has provided time to reinforce what is already known and what is to come.

Despite the positivity, it is clear that most grantees still considered there was work to do in relation to equality and prominence for LEx leaders. It is an important point to end this section on, that while LEx was prominent within the grantee organisations, this is not the case everywhere.

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"I think it is spread more across society and a little more understood. More work still needs to be done. We have the language but not the full capacity to use it."

2

WHAT IS IT TO BE A LEX LEADER?

> " A true understanding of what is needed, and a tenacity to not disappear when the funding disappears. We humanise and connect with people. "

We start this section outlining what grantees thought their roles were as leaders, then move onto considering their leadership styles and how this is developed.

LEx leaders' perceptions of their role as a leader

LEx leaders consistently told us that they were well placed to bridge the gap between communities, statutory organisations and funders through shared recognition of the need to enhance action, services or opportunities for others, whilst maintaining a close proximity to their community.

Grant holders saw themselves as leaders within communities who do not distance themselves emotionally or geographically from the issues and the people they seek to support once successful. They considered themselves recognisable as leaders through their emergence of rising through their community despite disadvantage or challenges - though still not so distant as to dilute trust and involvement from communities, where this can be fragile with others.

> "Lived Experience allows the development of relationships and genuine understanding between individuals and entities. The more Lived Experience is present and appreciated, the greater the level of trust, and the speed with which that trust can be developed.; non LEx leaders will have to negotiate significant barriers to trust including social and cultural misunderstanding and will have to rely on the other party making a distinct effort to meet them half way in order to achieve similar results."

> "Our community trust us and that would not happen without LEx."

> "LEx in the team has been invaluable ... because they can understand the inter-community conflicts that takes place. Quite a lot more conflict than you would expect."

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> "Empathy, understanding, understanding of the barriers and challenges. If I said I was in care, then those who had been in care will bring down those barriers straight away."

We heard that community confidence and engagement was heightened through such leadership and that communities valued authenticity in leadership, recognising LEx leaders' role in inspiring and motivating others to work towards better futures.

LEx leaders understood their responsibility to leave a demonstrable legacy for those who would come after them, especially those from the younger generations.

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> "In my experience the people we work with tend to have a view if you haven't got a lived experience then you can't really help me, it also further entrenches the idea that I'm alone with these problems and no one understands me. Having a lived experience means people believe we understand and empathise, instead of sympathising, we are better able to meet people where they are at. Understanding how the world looks like to them gives us more credibility to be able to introduce new ideas and ways of thinking."

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> "My aha moment was thinking about the next generation of lived experience leadership and how to make space for that new generation."

Grant holders also recognised their value in promoting equity when working with wider stakeholders. One example of this was the encouragement of moving beyond tokenistic 'service user voice' contributions to work, and instead remaining central in driving system change. Often leaders saw themselves as sitting simultaneously in both services and communities in order to enact transformation in both. They also felt able to dispel myths that communities were dependent on services and expert 'outsider help' through the assertion of their own sense of competency and agency.

More established leaders spoke of utilising their leadership position to influence others' (stakeholders and funders) by deepening their knowledge and understanding of the root causes and solutions to social injustice in their communities. They made a direct link to capacity building by effectively challenging the status quo, to shift thinking on social issues.

" "Absolutely huge for inspiration for those in the field and as a means of directing and guiding 'professional services' to be more effective in the community."

" "It's being able to play our game and play theirs with equal verve; that is why developing our leadership to span the divide is so needed!"

Leaders recognised the diversity of life skills and prior learning that they brought to their roles in comparison with leaders without direct lived experience. They suggested this diversity bought about new depths of viewpoints; and as such created space for innovation.

Interestingly, there was a wide range of leadership journeys travelled by grantees. They viewed this not as a weakness but as a strength within their organisations, creating space for fresh examination of internal principles and approaches.

" "I think as a lived experience leader we bring a different set of skills and tools and learning to the role. I feel most people within the sector I work in, do not have such skills sets it is something we can support them to learn develop."

" "The ability to think in new, diverse and inclusive ways to open up a greater range of possibilities, ideas and solutions. In my experience LEx leaders seem more reflective and less prone to the quick and easy answer, which can provide more depth to enacted solutions to working problems."

" "LEx Leaders have no choice but to see things through a different lens. Their ability to spot challenges, spark creative action, empathise across experiences informed by another's protected characteristics, resilience and protective factors elevate the level of interest, passion, and resilience invested in a LEx."

" "We can lead from experience, which is more likely to affect change that benefits other people with similar types of lived experience. We have heightened sense of empathy and often also of the intersections between different types of social inequality, meaning we can approach problems with more holistic understandings and therefore solutions."

We observed a genuine sense of camaraderie, collective spirit and openness to sharing both knowledge and resources across the network, as well as a desire to actively support each other throughout the duration of the programme. This was evidenced by the grantees dedicated to building collaborative networks, training offers for leaders beyond their own organisations, updates provided about collaborative working. Further this was evidenced in supportive conversations between leaders in network zooms and the mutual support shown for others' projects.

Feedback regarding the learning partnership's networking zooms was largely positive, and leaders commented on the benefits of having a network to draw upon.

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"LEx leaders are given a fantastic support network, fantastic platform to share experiences and to learn and develop from each and other current leaders and leaders from past programs. These are tools and development opportunities which are not available to none LEx leaders. The LEx leaders also shared similar experiences, difficulties, barriers and therefore solutions within the myriad of projects. This provides a vast wealth of knowledge, support and motivation within the programs. Often leaders when working alone and faced with new challenges can feel very isolated, this is not the case."

Leadership style

In early 2022, EP:IC sent a survey to the cohort to learn about thoughts and perceptions leadership styles in LEx Leadership. Forty people responded, most of whom (37.5%) were the project leads, followed by other team members and other senior leads (at 22.5% each). Participants described their styles in their own terms, and EP:IC grouped these in order to analyse responses.

Leadership style themes	Number
Collaborative	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Compassionate/Patient/Caring	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Encouraging/Supportive	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Progressive/innovative/visionary	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Empowering	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Approachable/Open	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Democratic	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Coaching	🧍🧍
Trusting	🧍🧍
Lead by example	🧍🧍
Person Centred	🧍🧍
Trauma informed	🧍🧍
Committed	🧍
Passionate	🧍
Gain Perspectives	🧍
Diplomatic	🧍

Collaborative was the most well used word throughout the responses. We heard from leaders who actively seek out opportunities for collaboration, forging partnerships and alliances that amplify their impact. By working together with others who share similar goals, they create a collective force that is greater than the sum of its parts. Their collaborative approach fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility, reinforcing the idea that positive change is achievable through collective effort.

> "Someone who is passionate about their project, but also understands the importance of other projects and is willing to work with them if their values align. Someone with strength and compassion."

Many of the other categories are spoken about more in the next section on good leadership, but we have included the quotes below, taken from survey responses to showcase partners' descriptions of their own leadership:

> "Democratic and pragmatic with a hint of idealism/optimism."

> "Transformational, example-led, values-driven, empathetic, visionary."

> "Inclusive and very democratic - always including everyone in the team and empowering them to be their best."

> "Words which help to describe my leadership style include relational, democratic, participatory, transformational, trauma-informed, visionary, flexible, person-centred, queer!"

> "Collaborative, encouraging peers to work together to share and gain an understanding of each other's unique experience. Empowering, giving our lived experience team the space to build confidence, share their experiences and gain perspectives."

> "Visionary, charismatic and strategic."

> "We are committed to equal and fair representation of people with lived experience, and also provide competitive pay, conditions and wellbeing support to our staff".

> "I'd describe my leadership style as cooperative. I like to support staff members to share their ideas for programme improvements and new programmes and to enable them to bring these changes to fruition."

> "Tries to bring the best out of the team but leads by example when necessary."

Within this survey we asked how LEx has affected their leadership style. Over three quarters, 77.5%, said it has 'totally' affected their leadership style. One and two people respectively said their LEx had not really affected their approach to leadership, or that they were unsure if they were affected by their LEx.

> "My lived experience has impacted on the way I see and understand the world around me and therefore how I relate to the people around me too. It informs my political perspectives and values. All of these aspects inevitably intersect with my leadership style."

Many recognised that their own experiences influenced how they relate to others and had enhanced their ability to empathise. It also gave them an ability to navigate their leadership with a heightened awareness to manage multi-faceted and complex challenges with tact and sensitivity.

> "I am a Black child of an Afro-Caribbean pastor, born, raised, and educated in a British Caribbean faith community, and identifies as gay. My background affords me the unique ability to empathise with leadership challenges that require tact in responding to difficulties faced within the team."

> "I don't think that anyone can underestimate the importance of empathy and personal experience on leadership. The reason I have shifted more towards a transformational / empathetic approach is because I have become increasingly aware of the value of enabling and empowering individuals through my leadership. This requires that I understand those I'm leading and that those I'm leading feel understood and appreciated. I believe that one of the most important tools in facilitating this is Lived Experience."

Leaders acknowledged that personal lived experience drove their ability to be both adaptable and flexible, as well as being stoic, resilient and responsive to last minute changes.

> "I think it has helped me be more resilient, less intimidated and more open minded to different leadership styles. I also think my lived experience allows me to cross boundaries (almost) effortlessly."

> "Living with my impairments forces me to be consistently open to change, and to modifying my ideas and ways of working. The best laid plans can fall apart at the last minute through no fault of my own and despite the most detailed planning and forethought. Just as my life requires the ability to be reflective and evaluative so does my working practice. Plus, my life opened up to meeting diverse new people who I would never have met had I not acquired my impairments, which opened my eyes to new ways of thinking about people, ideas and potential."

Many leaders acknowledged that their lived experience also influenced the origins of their leadership style; for some it was located in the strengths accrued by overcoming individual challenges, and for others this was motivated by a sureness that system change was needed to reduce social inequities.

> "I have used my past experience of the negative way I have led my life and first-hand knowledge of the system from a service user perspective, to address and challenge the systemic and structural inequalities present, as well as offering up some different approaches as a visible example to follow."

Development of leaders

The development of LEx across the fund in this programme was rich and diverse, spanning across all levels of organisations and their communities. Some development opportunities were offered through pre-designed training modules, some though purposeful mentoring, and some was more inadvertent through accessing network opportunities and knowledge sharing.

> "Yes, there has been much unintended learning, as such we have evolved with that experience and adjusted our approach. Some of the recent developments are steering us towards looking at supporting the emotional intelligence and wellbeing of our lived experience leaders."

Network meetings presented opportunities for cross pollination of experiences and approaches, for mutual benefit, and, in so doing, reinvigorated some leaders who had been used to working in silos.

> "By seeing other leaders and their experience, this has positively influenced me by offering different methods and perspectives. The breadth and depth of lived experience is far greater than any formal education could offer - sometimes the most dire of circumstances can make the strongest leaders."

Many acknowledged this fund exposed them to the reality that LEx leaders often worked within siloed crossed sectoral boundaries, but they had much in common. For some this was a real surprise. This eased senses of isolation and marginalisation that many leaders admitted to, as demanding work schedules and being embedded in communities often distracted leaders from seeking professional learning exchanges.

Leaders acknowledged the importance of development. For some, this was their initial encounter with thoughts of professional development and prompted a renewed focus on personal growth and progression. All agreed that this focus was an important learning point from the programme and should not be forgotten going forwards.

For some organisations the fund breathed new life into their thoughts around LEx leadership, reminding them of their roots, and journeys (both personal and organisational), re-energising them to examine where they were and their ways of working. Leaders reinforced how reframing lived experience can challenge both internal and external perceptions of vulnerability and risks.

"I've learnt how important LEx leadership is throughout our organisation, seeing the impact of having an inclusive board over the past year has been incredible."

"The organisation was started by community members and all of our project delivery staff are recruited locally from the community. It wouldn't be exaggerating to say that this funding and the way it has changed our thinking has driven a significant strategic shift in our organisation."

"We need to see lived experience as a strength that enhances our work, rather than a risk to professional ability or reputation."

"We've learned more about the importance of intersectionality within LEx leadership - often one identity (e.g., of being deaf or of being disabled) overshadows another identity (e.g., of being LGBTQI+ of being a person of colour). We're learning better how a person's different identities are equally important when it comes to LEx leadership styles and identities."

Importantly, LEx leaders discussed the challenge of LEx leadership to hierarchical structures in organisations. Leaders understood a fluid nature of their leadership, often speaking of flatter organisational structures, often being influenced by peers and wider community members, rather than being solely driven by those 'above'. Being connected to and walking with 'the beneficiary' was a powerful expression seen within community leadership. This chimed with many organisational aims to develop leadership at all levels of an organisation.

"A good leader is a continuous learner, and a person who leads from the frontline."

"We've learned so much! We've learned that so many people have the skills and knowledge to be LEx leaders - they just need to opportunity to step up."

Leaders asserted how lived experience knowledge and wisdom challenged historical or more traditional knowledge production about social issues or communities. Discussion also took place as to how LEx leadership might be understood as "a form of decolonial leadership - this is to say that it operates within and among and as the people it serves, rather than separately, from a sense of superiority and extraction."

LEx leaders were able to also discuss the limitations of solely relying on lived experience and this making them a proficient leader, recognising the importance of developing as professionals to enable a strong balance of lived and learnt skills.

> "I have learnt that LEx leadership is not a stand-alone style or skill set and that LEx leaders may also need good solid grounding in a variety of management and leadership approaches so that they can best lead individuals and teams in widest possible environments and contexts. Ongoing commitment to learning and development is essential."

3

WHAT MAKES A 'GOOD' LEX LEADER?

> "Anyone can have a title with leader on it but if no one is following them then they're just going for a walk."

The grant holders had much to say when asked to consider what defines a good LEx leader. Some argued it was an impossible question to answer.

"Ultimately it is not for TNLCF to define what good is; that should be defined by the relevant communities served by LEx leaders. Those may be complex and not consistent across sectors. It may be that leadership is its self-problematic and a more pluralistic style is identified."

"I think that the question of what is good is part of the problem. It is presupposed that good can be properly quantified and standardised in a way that will only replicate the barriers faced by LEx leaders in a new form. Good needs to be broad, inclusive and non-standardised. Some principles and values can help but should not serve to narrow the idea of leadership. Many notions of good leadership are rooted in ideas of white western masculinity, underpinned by neo-liberal principals."

LEx leadership was valued for its inherently positively disruptive and expressive nature and therefore, there was some nervousness in attempting to create (even a loosely based) competency framework around this type of leadership, especially if this was used to judge or justify. As such, many leaders did not tend to rank or position themselves with or against other LEx leaders. Instead, they spoke more of their work in their communities , and how impactful, or effective they were. And this is largely how 'good' was defined.

"Good leaders are identified, not in the number of people they are leading, but in the progress (both corporate AND individual) that they are generating. Lived Experience, empathy, strong personal values, selflessness and a strong belief in the value of their work are key elements of this. Their followers should be finding personal meaning, success, empowerment and value in their work and their relationship with their leader and this should be effectively contributing to the forward momentum of the combined work to achieve a specified vision."

"We value openness to new ideas and ways of working, we try to move away from thinking in terms of good and bad instead, we think more towards the vision and direction."

"They never expected me to say I was a former prisoner; imagine how shocked they were to see me there and how that shook perceptions to the core."

Some LEx leaders warned us of that trying to generalise or create rigid structures around the concept, instead seeing its power in the unbounded and contextual nature of its expression.

"Difficult to capture for LExL as it relies on growth and continual adaptation. it is also contingent on the circumstances and I think the goals should be more about networks and capacity building rather than trying to capture individual characteristics or traits."

"We think it's about nurturing. How invested they are in what they are doing, drive. Traditional idea of leadership – strong, masculine presence – that's not the leadership we need in 2021. We need to move away from this."

Having the skill to take others with you on the journey, and improve opportunities for the community was seen as crucial in any 'good' or 'effective' leader.

"The achievement of positive results - weighing up the evidence to put things in place to achieve positive outcomes for communities."

Respondents were keen to stress that academic qualifications were not a necessary component of LEx leadership.

> "Accessible, visible, empathetic, compassionate, working from a reputable evidence base, and academic qualifications are not a must."

Grant holders identified that leadership required an ability to successfully navigate power dynamics with other stakeholders, and a readiness to challenge misuse of power, while also holding safe trauma-informed and supportive spaces through which mistakes, misconception and momentary lapses in judgement could be understood and restored.

> "Good leadership looks like: listening, passing the mic when there's someone with more expertise or lived experience who should have the space to talk, being trauma-informed, being sensitive to power dynamics within teams, being aware of your own positionality and power in different settings, taking responsibility, being accountable."

LEx leaders were valued for their ability to position themselves centrally in organisations amongst their team, often in contrast to traditional organisational hierarchies, where there are clear lines between leaders and others.

> "A good leader inspires collective leadership and plays a significant role in changing organisational culture and any hierarchies of decision-making based on job titles that may be in place. Good leaders are role models and value and showcase their lived experiences as central to their leadership and do not undervalue this."

The primacy of service to others and to the cause was clear as an identifying feature of effective leadership, as was the commitment to both individual support and system change. Metaphorically, good leaders were identified as lighthouses beaming light for others as to the path towards change, innovation and a different way of being and doing. Most grantees recognised the importance of modelling to others that which they sought to achieve in the now and in so doing inspire others. Some recognised the burden of responsibility that this entails, the responsibility to maintain exemplary behaviours and to continually act as a source of inspiration to others.

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"Leaders need to identify the talents of the people they lead, and work tirelessly to make them realise those talents."

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"There are many qualities needed to bring the best out of a team, to bring the best out of yourself as an individual when in a leadership role. It is not about having a list of virtues which are exclusive to good leadership in my opinion, but I do believe you need to be passionate and believe in the project, see leadership as an opportunity to bring the best out of the team and not to promote yourself but to bring the best out of the group and the project. Teams need to believe in the leader, to trust in the leader & for that to happen the leader must be open and able to understand how to communicate effectively and accessibly with all involved in the process."

Central to the essence of a LEx leadership is authenticity, trustworthiness and sincerity, with a view of community or mission advancement, over personal advancement.

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"The following things are important - having sound values, facilitating the voices of others to be heard, sharing power, being inspirational, being honest and truthful, being kind and compassionate, supporting others to grow and learn, challenging injustice, being able to plan and organise and make ideas happen."

> " "Patience, committed to the long term view/goal (this might not be necessarily about having a long term strategic plan, but being anchored very firmly in values, clear ethics/and commitment to certain ways of working), good listener, values collaboration, willing to admit and be wrong in public (fallible), optimistic, organised."

> " "I couldn't be the CEO if didn't have this lived experience. I couldn't make these changes to people's lives if I wasn't the CEO."

Our programme leaders identified a high functioning ability to empathise with the struggles and challenges faced by others as a key skill. Such leaders demonstrated profound understanding of emotions and exhibit high levels of emotional intelligence, making it easier for them to connect with others on a deep emotional level. This empathy enables them to listen attentively, offer genuine support, and create a safe and inclusive space for sharing experiences. This was viewed as a foundation of relational leadership styles, and highly valued; and inadvertently led to trauma-informed and trauma responsive services.

> " "A good leader is above all facilitative rather than authoritative: the purpose is to enable their communities to thrive, which means drawing the best out of people. This looks like respecting and encouraging creativity, autonomy and criticism. It also involves humility and a continual desire to learn (including from those in nominally inferior positions)."

Resilience was highlighted as a must, as the struggle to navigate leadership in challenging systems was draining, whilst the ability to be decisive was valued as a template for moving out of stagnation.

Lived experience leaders were viewed favourably when they could communicate a clear and compelling vision of the change they want to bring about and then visibly work to make that happen in practice. This vision is informed by experiences and the insights gained from navigating life's complexities. Good LEx leaders inspire others to join them in a collective pursuit of a better future for everyone, and crucially, learn as they go.

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"Embeds lived experience leadership within all levels of an organisation and strives to ensure succession planning takes place to ensure sustainability for the organisation."

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"Anyone can have a title with leader on it but if no one is following them then they're just going for a walk. We need leaders who are kind and compassionate whilst also courageous as they can be crucial to ensuring the culture of the org is in line with the vision and values."

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"Reflective – able to learn from what works well and what doesn't work so well."

A lived experience leader embraces ongoing learning and growth. They remain open to new perspectives, experiences, and insights, recognising that personal growth is a lifelong endeavour. Their willingness to learn and evolve ensures that their leadership remains relevant and impactful over time.

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"I think a good leader has some experience of bad leadership which they can learn from, has life experience of the changes they want to make happen, and the qualities of a great leader are being understanding, caring, passionate and real."

The cohort identified that good leaders excel in communication skills, enabling them to convey messages in a way that resonates with diverse audiences, as well as being excellent listeners. Their communication style is relatable, accessible, and impactful.

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"A good communicator who listens to those working alongside them and is willing to take on different points of view, also someone who is understanding and can work with people to further develop their strengths and improve on their weaknesses, or is in other words dynamic."

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"Always listen to what people say and what I found is there is always an answer to anything. Don't be bossy, instead listen."

Some grant holders asserted that their leadership was founded on acknowledgement of human frailty, and often of adversity and living through personal change. They believed this equipped them with optimism about change and a readiness to adapt and learn.

> "Someone who has a clear vision that that others can buy into, but is also open to being challenged on their assumptions and views, and will make changes accordingly."

> "I think creative thinking, good problem-solving skills and flexibility are key to being a good leader, in any area."

Good LEx leaders were seen to champion inclusivity and celebrate diversity. They recognise the importance of creating an environment where all voices are heard, valued, and respected. Through their own experiences, they promote understanding and empathy across different backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and unity that transcends societal divisions.

> "Ability to hear disparate, even conflicting voices - Leadership very seldom results from clear cut, simple choices. A good leader will hear various voices and bring as many people as possible along with them (c/o examples of where a broad church of people have got on board with a decision where this did not look likely at the start)."

> "We think that what makes good leadership is diversity - so everything we do has more than one lead, to ensure that each project benefits from different perspectives and different styles."

Linked to this, a strength of LEx leaders was deemed to be an awareness and ability to straddle intersectional issues and be constantly educating stakeholders to this reality and the intention and ability to disrupt siloed conversations.

> "Sector silos confine disability rights orgs to disability issues and don't situate us in the debate about wider social justice."

> "A more intersectional understanding of leadership needs to shed these burdens and be open, inclusive and ready to listen and adapt. I am concerned that too much of that is constructed to be good replicated existing structures that devalue things like emotion, sharing, collaborating and focus on economic value cut off from the planet and communities."

4

CHALLENGES
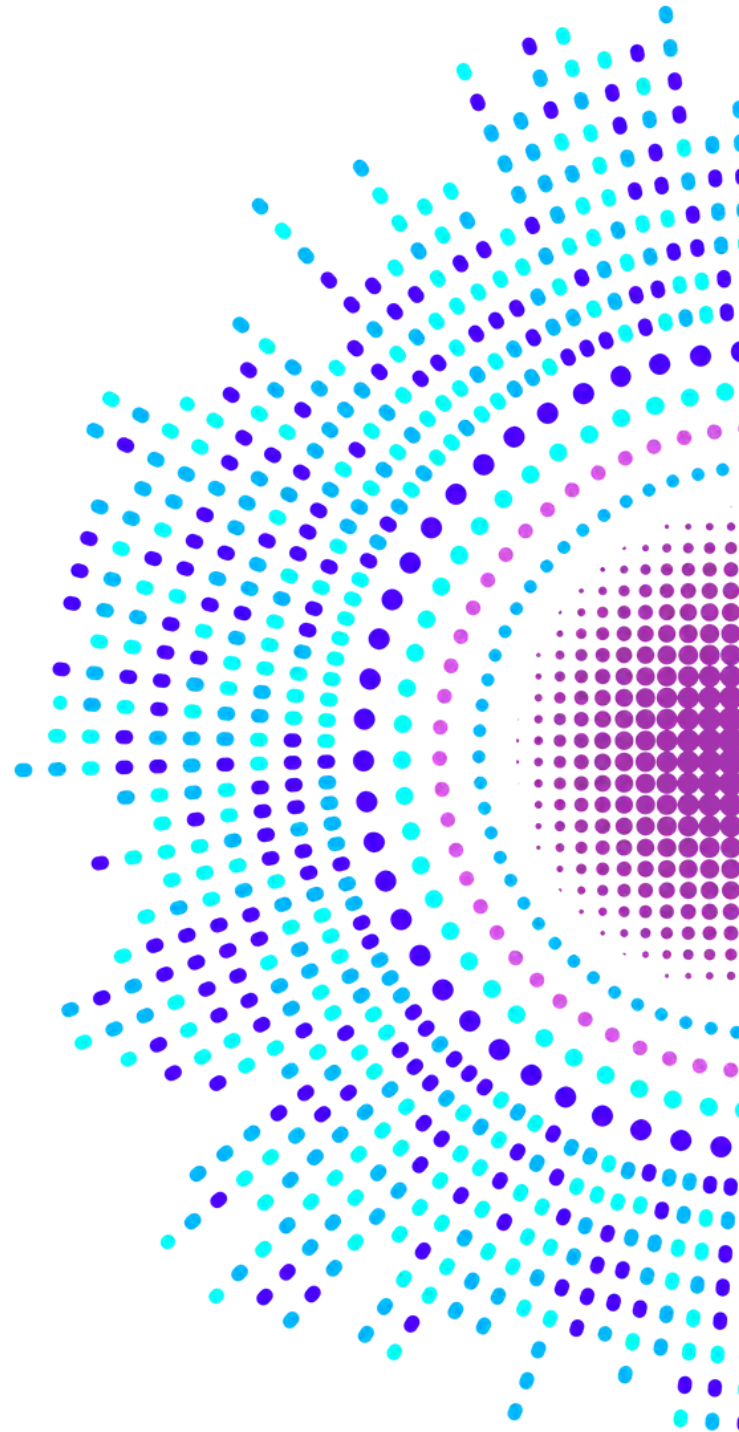
"That's why you're doing it and sometimes it is hard, and it does, it does wear you down and you continue to be battling against things to get things in place that should already be happening."

At one network event, we asked participants if they had faced barriers/challenges in their work as a LEx Leader.

The respondents told us:

78%	4%	18%
faced challenges	had not faced challenges	were unsure

For those who had, there were several challenges raised:

78% COVID-19 was a barrier to completing project

27% Finding the right people for the job

19% The use of technology
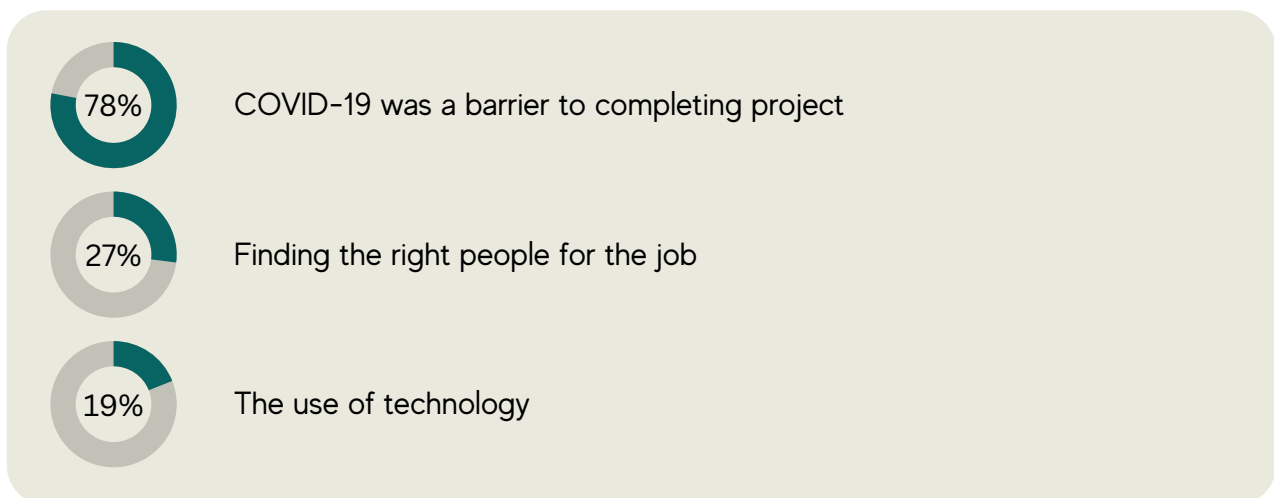
In discussions with grant holders three main themes emerged. Internal barriers, societal, and global challenges, and we explore these below.

Internal

Looking first at internal barriers, these differed considerably between grantees depending on their lived experience. But many spoke about a lack of confidence, and some talked of experiencing 'imposter syndrome'.

> "Some of the guys felt it difficult to talk about themselves in terms of promoting their organisation and the work that they're doing … [and] showcasing their good work."

> "One of the barriers that we actually have is building up our own confidence."

While internal barriers existed for many leaders, it appeared more pronounced in some sectors than others. For example, those who had experience of the criminal justice system disclosed that a sense of shame from their experiences can be exacerbated by societal stigma and this can hold a person back from achieving goals and aspirations for themselves and others.

> "Being a Lived experience leader in the criminal justice system, people automatically know that you been to prison and automatically are curious about why and there is pressure to share in order to validate the space which is a barrier and pressure, as sometimes you just want to be heard, you don't want to explain why you need to be heard and that can be a pressure and how you navigate that internally around shame and stigma and embarrassment, these are barriers that over the years I've had to learn to navigate."

Some within newly formed organisations struggled to consider themselves as leaders, so found the terminology to be at odds with how they often viewed themselves.

> "A lot of those women are coming from experiences where they don't value themselves, they don't value their experience, they don't value their voice, so our project is really about what you're talking about of helping those women come to a point where they understand the credibility of their experience and the credibility of their voice and therefore their position as a leader in speaking about that experience."

Some people struggled to recognise themselves as leaders, as they perceived that their projects were born from a need for social change, rather than a personal desire to be a leader and a desire for others not to go through the same experience as they (or someone they cared about) had been through.

> "Out of this really dark situation for my daughter to not only live, but to thrive ... I realised I was sick to death of seeing poverty. And I wanted young people in our city have the same umph in them not just to survive but to thrive."

> "Growing up in prison system, I know there is a massive gap in role models. Wanted to see YP in that career path, being role models to other young people caught up in the system."

The personal connection to the social cause indisputably led to a sense of responsibility, or need to support others, which grantees felt contributed to a more intense workload than experienced in previous employment. This emerged as a theme within the pilot cohort, where people felt the need to 'keep going', and never let their community down, even if it was at a personal cost of not taking annual leave or working regular hours.

> "When I reflect on what I've been through and continue to go through I have no other option but to go forward ...I can't go back and I can't stand still.... for me I have to keep going because the answers lie in the future and it needs work and progress and effort to get there."

Interestingly, some of the partners we spoke with had second jobs to sustain their homes and families, as their roles within LEx organisation did not provide a sufficient income. This added to the pressures felt by these grantees. LEx leaders we met were driven by passion, rather than profit.

> "I'm a little bit disappointed that I haven't been able to capitalise on it as much because I do work a full-time job, but that's my own fault (laughter) I try and spin too many plates at once, it's just one of the battles that you have when you try to run a grassroots organisation and maintain a full time job."

Within the second wave, for some, there was also a need to prove the worth of an organisation within the sector.

> "I think as well, here's the thing about having been given the opportunity by the funding process, you want to make it a success so as a leader you know, you take the whole weight of the world on your shoulders and you have your sleepless nights and you have your wins and your opportunities and you feel like you're going in the right direction and you've got the new resources to do it and it's you know, it's that struggle so you put more and more in to make sure at the end you come out with you know, a gold medal type of thing and being the best you can be with it."

Proving oneself and working towards community aims, often against a backdrop of inequity was described as draining, and while grantees clearly wanted to work and support their communities, it was evident that this could be challenging at a personal level. People told us of a blurring between professional and professional lives, meaning it was difficult to fully switch off, with time working blurring into personal time, and the weight of the work feeling heavy.

> "It feels like there's something around the emotional labour of lived experience work which is different to other jobs which perhaps you have less separation from your identity and things that affect your life as an emotional, I don't want to say toll, but an intensity and aspect of it that feels different to other things I'm involved in."

> "I think it's persistence and I think that persistence comes from you know our passion being based on that lived experience so it makes that, it gives you that drive to keep going cause there isn't, there is that blurring of line between professional and private, the two do become merged so I think its persistence rather than resilience, I don't think we're any more resilient than anybody else I just think we give more of a damn about the thing that we're talking about because it's ours."

> "Work is work and personal life is personal life and there is a crossover for us just purely because we meet some great guys that we are working with that we can't help but become friends with them so there's that aspect of it. So, there is a crossover."

In addition to leaders feeling under pressure with workloads and operational demand, some leaders highlighted it was also possible for people be to be triggered by the work, if not appropriately supported.

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"Having LEx can impact on mental health and bring up past trauma."

We heard from some organisations that their leaders could struggle with these pressures, and how it could lead to feeling unwell when there was nobody with whom to share the burden. This was more likely in small teams, or services who were stretched to capacity.

Interestingly, for the grantee below, there was a concern as to whether they would feel further judged if they presented to others as unwell, particularly because of their position as a LEx leader. Again, this centred back to the sense that LEx leaders feel they need to prove themselves to self, or others.

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"I ended up taking time off due to being unwell largely as a result of trying to do everything and not having capacity to do it because if I wasn't driving the work, nothing happened. And that sense of responsibility ultimately meant that by the end of the project I hadn't even taken any holiday time. I've been off sick but haven't taken any holiday, so there's things around how do you support people to be good enough but know that what good enough is and not feel that constant need to prove their validity. I think particularly when you have dips or peaks in health, when you're not at your best, you don't want to appear and show that you're incompetent. And what's that challenge between being honest about lived experience and it being useful versus what impacts on how people perceive you, and your competence in a role and that was a challenge."

It was clear that alongside passion, came the risk of emotional toil for LEx leaders, but was seen to be well managed in LEx led organisations, through a variety of means.

Societal

Several leaders felt that wider society can feel uncomfortable when faced with the potential dichotomy of having to accommodate, work alongside or make space for a leader with lived experience.

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"The minute that lived experience is mentioned there's a silent statement attached to it and I think we need to expose that silent statement attached to lived experience."

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"One of the barriers I've always found is that people don't take me seriously and I am wondering whether it's the tone people actually have when people who are in a position of power and maybe feel threatened where they are not used to meeting chief execs with a Lived experience."

"

"People only see as you one thing rather than seeing the whole person and understanding that you can be a survivor and be a social worker or a Police Officer or a teacher. You can be a professional as well as being a survivor of something and so on."

One networking session allowed for discussion and debate about how stigmas have evolved over the years but how difficult they were to escape from.

"

"If you saw someone walking down the street and they had 'thief' tattooed on their head, you would instantly know to avoid them so now we say 'ex offender' or we say 'smack head' or we use other really derogatory terms that we stick to people and these act as invisible markers of those who are different to us, of those that should be excluded from us and actually these labels really impact on service design and service delivery."

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"Sometimes to be a Lived Experience Leader means you don't get seen as being a leader so that in itself is a barrier because I myself am a survivor of child abuse and as soon as you say that you are almost labelled as a survivor and therefore you can't be a professional on top of that and a lot of people think of survivors stereotypically … you must be dysfunctional or you can't possibly cope with working every day."

In a snap poll with respondents to one of our surveys, 90% of grantees agreed that the term LEx leader had the potential to 'keep' them anchored in their past, and 63.6% felt it does not reflect all that they are.

A common theme that emerged was that lived experience was often viewed in the social justice sector as a vulnerability and not necessarily a strength. Therefore, to some extent, lived experience leaders were viewed as breaching societal norms and thus, were sometimes approached with caution, suspicion and often undervalued buy others, as leaders.

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"My experience is that whenever you say you are a survivor, other people put barriers between you and being a leader, because survivors are judged as dysfunctional or broken somehow. I often feel people cannot see me as a professional person, once they know I am a survivor!"

"Recognising the importance of lived experience in a range of roles and this is really, really important. I worry a bit that 'LEx Leader' sounds like a sub (i.e., lesser) category of leader. It also possibly makes it sound like LEx should only belong in LEx defined spaces (a bit like when things for men are not labelled as such but the women's version is labelled 'women's' (like women's football); whereas LEx should be integrated throughout society. i.e., I take it no one would one to be known 'as 'Disabled Manager' or 'Addict' CEO'!"

This led the grantees to question whether leaders should be required to disclose their lived experiences, and what this means to people. An anonymous snap poll showed more than a quarter of respondents were not comfortable sharing their own lived experience freely.
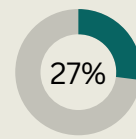
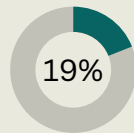**How do you feel about openly disclosing your personal lived experience?**
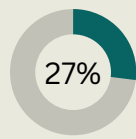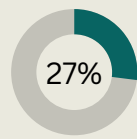
27%	27%	27%
Very comfortable	Comfortable	Uncomfortable

19%   Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable

Whether it is linked to stigma or not, there was concern voiced throughout the learning journey that lived experience was not always valued as a leadership skill by others. Many partners felt there was some 'way to go' in terms of recognition and equality with other leaders working in community services.

One theme that emerged related to investment in LEx led organisations, and how investment, or lack of it, can impact on how LEx leaders are perceived. Most felt there was a societal expectation that LEx leaders would work for less, or even for free, when compared to non-LEx leaders. Despite recognising it as a problem, most who were asked had taken this work on, seemingly due to a sense of duty or wanting to prove oneself and build a reputation. Yet, these same grantees also recognised that being paid less (or nothing) was a sign of tokenism or tick box practise, or a mark of being undervalued.

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"Having LEx encourages people to think you will always do this for free. This has gone on a long time now."

"

'How many times have you gone to a conference or a workshop and there's someone who's got lived experience there and they're named as a 'Lived experience' speaker but everybody else has got their job titles on the agenda or on the brochure and titles of their work? This has become permanent harmful practise that just continues."

"

"LEx people to be paid for their expertise of experience not to be used as a tick box. Experience to have value."

"

"We have to look at the pay scale to understand and see that silent stigma and how they undervalue the work we do so if you put the lived experience salaries against statuary and other organisational salaries its way under."

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"No, we don't just want the crumbs off the table. We want the same salary rates' so I think we're trying to do what women were trying to do years ago in terms of being valued and recognised and having a say in pay scales, being valued in the workplace."

The challenge of tokenism was spoken about, as was the 'trend' towards hearing the voice of lived experience. Many grantees felt this trend to involve can send a message that lived experience is about hearing stories of hardship to provide context to leaders' ideas and policies and not reflective of LEx leadership. It was evident that grantees were at different stages of unpicking their understanding between LEx leadership and user involvement, but conflating of the two was seen as a barrier by several.

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"I don't think people take Lived experience leaders seriously. We are just there to tell our story. They forget that we have insight and wisdom and expertise at policy research strategy which makes us immense."

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"Using lived experiences and people's trauma stories gets money, doesn't it, and it feeds into a culture of trauma tourism and trauma fetishization so we want, how many people used to sit at home and watch Jeremy Kyle and find it hilarious, MTV we have programmes 'Rich kids go skint' and we live in a society which is drawn to looking through every angle at how poor people live, 'Benefit Street' We have to recognise this culture and we have to really recognise it for what it is and our own parts in this."

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"What is this trend around inviting people to talk at conferences but only to talk about their experiences of pain or trauma from a position of their lived experience which is or can be perceived as damaged. It provides continuous opportunity to document pain, loss and damage in individuals and communities but it doesn't put resources or information in place to move away from these."

Some described feeling frustrated at how often commissioners and those in power still confuse lived experience leadership with user involvement, and how others' perceptions of LEx leaders has stagnated at the bottom of the widely recognised ladder of participation and involvement (based on Arnstein's work), despite progress seemingly being made. The ladder is a widely used tool in health settings, and illustrates different forms and degrees of patient and public involvement, with the lower 'rungs' showing non-involvement and tokenistic involvement which lean into the notion of 'trauma tourism'.

> "You get some commissioner going 'Yes, yes it's wonderful isn't it to hear these people's experiences, how marvellous!' and then nothing happens. You get things where you go to a service user meeting within a service, and you're asked because of financial cuts please bring your own sandwiches is that alright and then I go and meet the senior management and it's in a hotel with a three-course lunch and you're all paying for that, and I think 'wow and somebody else can't get the therapy then!'"

Further, in relation to funding, one grantee spoke about power imbalance. They hoped this could be addressed by being seen more equally as leaders in the long term, and by funders remaining open to new ideas.

> "That relationship is not equal so we become a bit like east End villains 'Oh yeah you do your campaigning against us and it would be a shame if your funding got cut wouldn't it or if we stopped delivering you any services?' Even if it's not spoken, somehow, they make you aware of it. It's that power. We have to become very adept to getting that and also there is strength and solidarity about us all coming together on this."

Overwhelmingly, TNLCF, as a funder was seen as different in this regard, and this dedicated fund for LEx leadership was highly valued, often shining through in conversations about the grant.

> "Having a large funder 'get it' and really appreciate what we're trying to do and trust us. We often hear the rhetoric but in reality we're not given the conditions or resources to truly lead."

Grantees spoke about the important of LEx leaders paving the way for others, and this was something the cohort are inspired to challenge.

> "We talked about the importance of being assertive and unapologetic about the importance of having LEx leaders in the room, also "changing the culture" by encouraging and empowering younger people with lived experience to recognise the gifts in their expertise and their power to influence and inspire through their personal expertise."

> "...for me what I am trying to do ... to try to change the narrative around Lived Experience because what we're saying is, we are professionals with lived experience."

Crises and turbulence

Aside from individual or societal barriers, it is important to recognise that both waves of LEx leadership funding straddled turbulent periods in modern history. From 2019 when the pilot phase started to today, the UK has felt the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and most recently, the repercussions of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in terms of adding to the cost-of-living crisis. In addition to this, there have been several changes in political leadership in the UK with different ideas and visions creating uncertainty for many organisations to consider future planning.

The third sector has been particularly hit by these events and the inevitable instability that has ensued within their communities.

> "The whole time this project has been in existence, it's been against a backdrop of gov cuts and less resources."

It is worth reflecting on these periods of crises, and how they affected LEx leaders, and their experience of their TNLCF grant. Of primary note is, unsurprisingly, COVID 19, as this affected both waves of funding. The pilot phase was significantly disrupted part way through by the first lockdown and the implications of this, while the second phase began at a time where the country was beginning to "live with" COVID, but restrictions were ongoing and the longer-term impacts were emerging.

Many of the communities in which pilot partners were living and working were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. We heard of personal bereavements and people required to shield for many months in virtual isolation. Yet, what we also noted in the pilot report was the tremendous mobility and flexibility of LEx leaders in the initial weeks and months of the pandemic. More than ever, LEx leaders attempted to build community cohesion and connection; against a tide of social and professional isolation. Much of this flexibility was again borne out of a desire to be present when others were not; when others closed their doors.

> "What we've always recognised and believed is that it's those challenges that make us stronger. So, when the challenge comes along, everyone rolls the sleeves up. And it's like "Right, you know, we're gonna jump in" Where's the need? Where's the gaps? Cause that's where we stand within those gaps."

By the time the second wave of grantees started their projects, the country was more familiar with the pandemic. COVID was heavily referenced in applications and project plans, with online delivery being commonplace, and contingency plans in place. We noted that there was, again, no hiding from the pandemic, but a desire to empower communities in spite of it. There were some partners who reflected on the challenges of the pandemic on their organisations and communities.

> "We would have liked to have this programme in person but because of COVID it did not happen. It would have been nice for it to be in person because it would have made the learning and discussion much easier. Sometimes working on zoom, the conversations can be stilted sometimes. You don't get natural flow of discussion and ideas."

> "We also got the funding in the middle of COVID. We definitely tried our best in getting a community-based project off the ground. But it was really hard because the communities we tried to engage with and the LEx leader were being massively impacted by COVID personally. COVID did not just have a practical impact on the project but had a real impact on people's well-being and being able to engage with conversations around this."

Yet despite the challenges it presented, we noted how partners were able to enjoy positives from a difficult situation. Second wave partners spoke of how their business models were impacted by the pandemic, often for the better.

> "It was a brilliant challenge for us. We understand the negative impact on our community. But as an organisation we had to grow. Before covid everything was in person and a lot of our activity did not have such a big reach. But within 2 weeks of the first lockdown, we held our first online event and kept holding more and growing our expertise in that. This has now extended our reach so we are UK wide."

Further, we heard how the pandemic enabled some teams to spend more time together online than they would have done ordinarily, given that people would usually be spending time with service users on the front line. Others found they were able to utilise the non-contact time to connect and consider the direction of the organisation.

> "It was one of the bizarre mixed blessings of COVID. Was that it meant that in a way that's no longer the case. All of us were at home all the time, and we were able to put in the hours and we were really able to bond as a group. And I think one of the challenges in the last few months is we haven't had a group and we haven't spent so much time together."

Additionally, we also heard how 'moving online' due to COVID had actually encouraged those who were anxious, neurodiverse or socially isolated to start engaging with programmes, as the online experience was less intimidating than in-person events. This is particularly true for wave 2 organisations, for whom this was not a new experience and most people had become familiar with digital opportunities over the course of the pandemic. Beneficiaries told us how they valued being supported by the grantee organisations.

> "If they haven't done a zoom initially, I think it may have been overwhelming for me."

> "I was very nervous and very shy when I started. When we went into lockdown, we started doing zoom chats. I think in one session I must have said something. The following day I got an email asking me to join the autism group (Raw). From that I have come one leaps and bounds."

> "I got involved at the start on the pandemic in 2020, when their stuff moved online. I'm in the South West and they are in Manchester, in the North. Before that I had not really engaged. They realised how difficult it was for disabled people in pandemic and they just stepped up and did the most amazing things."

This was important, as it not only reached a wider pool of people, but also those for whom COVID was a lonely and difficult time.

> "Not sure what would have happened if I had not had the group to support me when we were stuck inside our homes during covid. I look forward to seeing the familiar faces every week. Totally love the group."

> "COVID has also been one of the opportunities so to reach more people and reach a wider demographic of people, sort of thing, and another opportunity."

While COVID has been the most dominant global crisis, there have been other wider matters impacting the grantee cohort. The cost-of-living crisis has affected many partners, and when combined with 'coming back from COVID' in terms of face-to-face meetings, this has been particularly challenging.

> "Obviously our costs are higher than they were when we first budgeted. You know, over the last two years."

> "The shock has come from now going back into the room and being face to face. You realise how expensive this is to do things in person. In terms of actual cost and time."

> "Know obviously cost of living affects our staff as. Well, there's a couple of staff that we've, had to, you know, support them through pretty like serious hardship, even though obviously they are employed."

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis has ongoing implications, and is a storm we are currently riding rather than one we are through. It is important for funders to acknowledge this as impacting on leaders and their communities. We touch on it further in the section on funding.

In addition, organisations faced their own unique crises and turbulation. Examples are given below:

54

> One organisation (ACAA) works with Afghan refugees and the funding period met with a time of turbulence in Afghanistan. ACAA Volunteers and workers responded to community need by offering practical and emotional support to those who have family either remaining or fleeing from Afghanistan.

> Positive Stepz faced a community situation where knife crime was accelerating, leading to the premature deaths of two people within six months. Their reaction was to step into the space and increase the support offer. They did this by actively (and successfully) requesting additional funding from TNLCF.

> We heard from one organisation that their LEx leader left their role within the LEx leadership project due to pressures relating to his probation requirements. In this instance the more the project gained momentum and success, the more they realised the project lead would struggle to keep pace, given the restrictions on his time and freedom.

The message was clear and consistent, that partners find ways to pivot their resources in times of crisis, so that the organisation remains active in the sector and responds to community need. The passion, persistence and resilience spoken about thus far are evident in periods of crisis, where community leaders step up, and do not retreat.
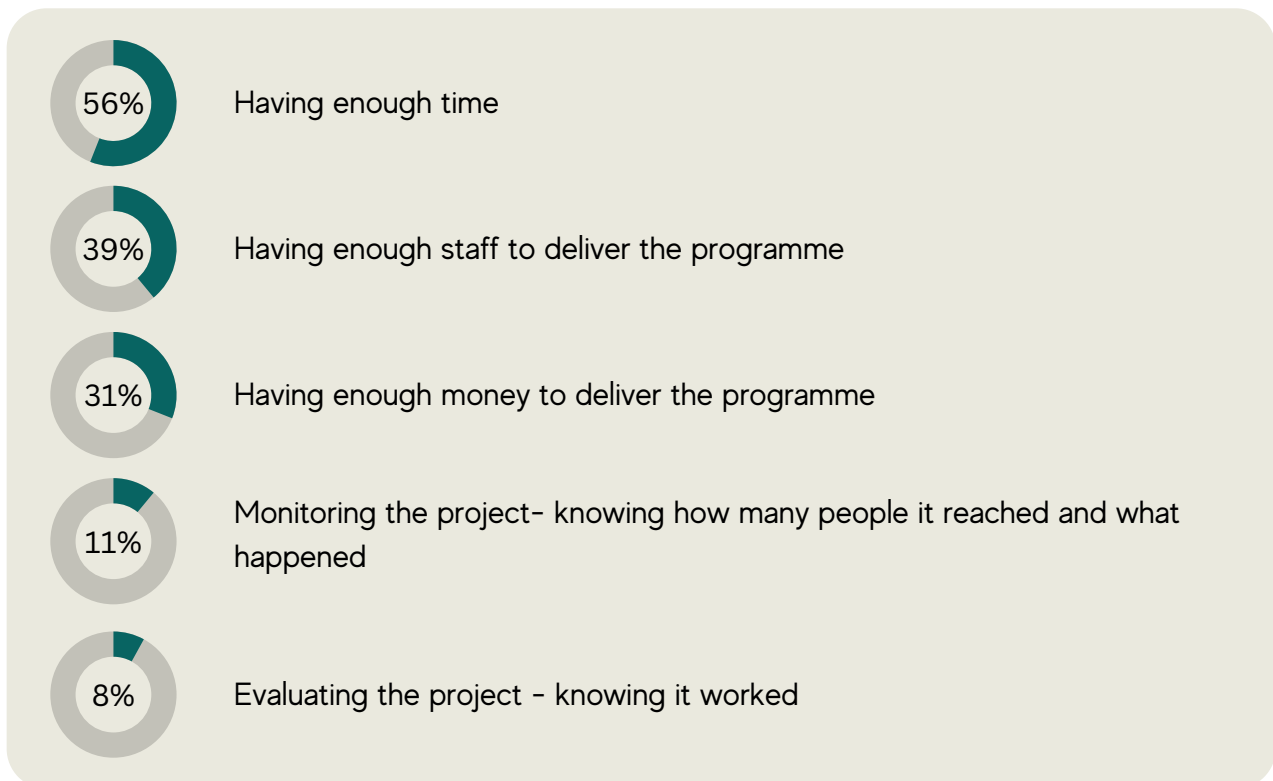
"

"But I don't think it's been a particularly big issue and it's just been another, you know. We're kind of getting used to it, aren't we? We're just rolling from one crisis to the next, I think. I think it just shows how resilient everybody is."

Funding

We include this section, as it featured within discussions relating to LEx leadership, and is impacted by all the challenges raised above.

In a survey undertaken as partners completed their projects, reflections were made as to the issues faced. Some of the issues that related to funding are listed below.

56% Having enough time

39% Having enough staff to deliver the programme

31% Having enough money to deliver the programme

11% Monitoring the project- knowing how many people it reached and what happened

8% Evaluating the project - knowing it worked

From this, it's clear that over half the completing partners felt they would have benefited from more time to complete their projects, which was an important reflection. Some referred to being initially "over ambitious" with their time estimates within funding applications. Reasons for delays with projects were diverse, including having challenges recruiting the right staff and project participants, as well as many having to replace key staff members due to unexpected exits. This was particularly problematic for one-year projects.

"————

"I think a lot of people in the third sector are often really harping on about this to the blue in the face and it just feels like people aren't listening. The time thing is just a constant pressure and barrier for these one-year projects that you know you've got to get everything done and wrapped up and outcomes and everything and it's just not."

66 ————————

"It's a one year (contract), but I think it's going to have to go on for two. It's not a case of you can't just send people on a few courses and then send them on their way, you literally have to hold their hand through the whole process, which I'm finding really, really interesting."

We spoke to a couple of newly formed organisations, who did not feel confident in applying for the grant over a longer period, but came to realise they needed a longer period to complete all the work proposed / required.

66 ————————

"This was our first large funding bid, and so we hedged our bets by applying for just 1 year of funding. On reflection, we should have been braver and gone for 2 years. We are very grateful to the lottery for believing in this project to fund, we believe another investment would help us to achieve more."

Another underestimation related to the amount of money requested. Again, there were some confidence issues in applying for the larger grants, although we found less examples of this than in the pilot cohort. However, we did note some organisations said they struggled to do everything on the money granted, and some partners (8%) successfully bid to TNLCF for additional funds to bridge gaps during their grant holding period.

66 ————————

"We ran out of money about 3 months before the end of the project. This was because we had underestimated how much some of our costs would be. We supplemented the lottery money with our own unrestricted funding to enable us to complete things."

We heard examples of LEx leaders not taking payments, to ensure their budgets stretched as wide as possible, illustrating the passion for social change spoken about earlier.

66 ───────────────

"I will put myself out, stretch money, not pay myself first and do you know what I mean just to keep the project going and to do, squeeze that you know, more outcomes out for beneficiaries, whereas somebody wouldn't be like you know, business, I like that business minded side of things a little bit sometimes when we should really be quite strict with it and not put ourselves at a deficit but that's because we're passionate about what we do and we want to get as many outcomes as possible from the funding that we've got."

Grantees spoke about how difficult it usually was to secure contributions to core funding or training resources, so the opportunity to do so via this grant was welcomed. Without long term funding, retaining staff became a challenge, and with this meant training needed to be repeated when new staff were recruited, and new relationships needed to be built. With long term and / or core funding, this worry can be overcome.

66 ───────────────

66 ───────────────

"The lack of funding or the difficulty of maintaining consistent funding means that often those people that you have worked on a project with and have developed relationships with through the project, you can't always find ways to retain the people in your team."

"Cash flow for every charity is difficult. Footfall into the centre is quite low. So many staff are now on sessional payments. It is a shame with LEx that we did not have another year's funding, I would have liked it to be. It feels like this has been one of the most significant pieces of work we have done in a long time. It feels sad in a way that there is not a follow-on option … We have a fantastic member of staff that is great with managing those with LEx. But we don't have the money to pay her. It is difficult to retain staff without core funding because people need stability and routine. People often leave because bigger organisations can offer more money."

Grantees told us they sometimes felt exhausted by the constant chase for funding, as organisations are often small, and not supported by bid writing teams and strategic leads. Much work can fall on one or two people, which can feel overwhelming.

"

"In general, it is challenging as an organisation limping to the next project funding. There is immense pressure and stress. it feels even more competitive because of the cost of living and COVID. It is hard for small organisations (like ours) that don't have professional bid writers. We are going for the same pots of money but its more challenging to apply. Funding system is a broken system."

All the funding issues fall into sharper focus with the current cost-of-living crisis that exists in the UK. Partners wrote funding applications prior to the economic downtown, therefore, were unaware of rising costs and would not have budgeted for these.

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5

WHAT CONDITIONS ENABLE LEX LEADERS TO THRIVE?

In January 2022, we hosted a network event that asked grantees to consider the conditions in which their leadership could thrive.

We had heard many of the challenges but wanted to understand what was needed for optimal leadership. Many themes have been highlighted already but, in this section, take the form of suggestions for improvements.

Self-care

We understand a significant enabler to LEx led organisations was ensuring they were empowered to take the time to care of themselves and each other. As highlighted, we had noted the emotional connection of the LEx leaders to their organisations and communities, which made the work powerful but also harboured a risk for burnout if not managed. LEx led organisations that prioritised well-being, encouraged self-care practices and provided resources for mental and emotional well-being prevent burnout and led to not only improved, but sustainable leadership.

> "Just talking about the importance of support and things like coaching and collaboration with others and actually taking the time to stop and think about your mental health. That was a big thing that came out in our group and when we actually see that we are struggling we make that time. It's so important. These are the main top tips but the other thing we talked about as well was how great this group is because we are all in a similar boat, we are all sharing our experiences and our stories. We can support one another."

Some stated they made a conscious effort to take time for themselves, which was found to be beneficial to themselves and others.

"

> "I do Mandela art, I do meditation and yoga and I find that those things, when I take them out of my life, my stress levels increase my ability to manage situations reduces so I try to keep a balance of those things and I think fundamentally and so very much been outdoors is important and being amongst nature for me and I'm lucky that where I am here in Scotland there's plenty of places I can step out the door and be on the beach or in the forest or whatever relatively quickly."

Importantly, a small number stated that this fund has inspired them to consider budgeting for therapy, opportunities to take time-out and self-care within future funding applications; and reduce the need for this to be carved out of already-stretched funds.

Caring for the team

We asked grantees how they managed support for their teams. Interestingly, at the start of the programme, the most common response was through training, and ensuring people felt equipped with the skills they needed to manage their work and the pressures that surround it. Therefore, upskilling and enabling staff through development opportunities contributed to improved leadership and better services.

How they managed support	Number
Relaxed/informal support – WhatsApp group, chat after meeting, coffee date, working lunch, walking meetings	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Set Clear Boundaries	🧍
Regular Meetings	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Therapy	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Coaching	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Holistic– Meditation, yoga	🧍🧍🧍
Exercise	🧍
Supervision	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Training	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Group Reflections	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Progression Planning	🧍🧍🧍
Person centred approach	🧍🧍🧍
Groups session talks/seminars/workshops	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Inductions	🧍
121	🧍🧍

Training and capacity building

Having access to comprehensive training and ongoing skill development opportunities was deemed crucial for LEx leaders to thrive, both on an individual 121 basis and in groups. Importantly, leaders also identified the need for flexibility to deliver these sessions outside of usual office hours. For instance, one of the projects reported that it adapted face to face training sessions for leaders locally, so that they were available online and at varied times to accommodate the needs of the group membership, especially childcare responsibilities. Some of the identified needs for LEx leaders were:

> Business support

> Legal advice

> Utilising technology

> Organisational structure

> Clinical supervision

66 ——————

"[This funding] will pay for some courses to build as leaders, gain some business acumen and support with strategy".

LEx leaders, especially those new to the funding arena, also identified how they needed training to understand how to manage the tension between wanting to do what was realistic with the funding and what they felt impassioned to achieve.

66 ——————

"We have not gone down the uplift route to funders, but we have gone down the route we need to do less for the money we have. As long as we are logical and can make a good case then this has been ok. Flexibility within the budgets has been helpful. For example, if we underspend then we can use elsewhere."

As the learning partner and in response to self-identified knowledge gaps, we delivered training on the following:

> Evaluation and impact
>
> Blogging
>
> Disclosure
>
> Managing social media

However, including capacity building opportunities into future grants for LEx leadership might be an important consideration.

As the programme developed, we heard much more about how individual partners supported capacity building in other ways. For example, we understood some engaged in reflective practice, others offered clinical and non-clinical supervision.

Some organisations have sought to fund external therapy and support for their teams, which featured less frequently, but was highly regarded by those who utilise it.

> "We have always self-funded therapy, which serves 2 purposes - one to think about our own trauma, and one to manage vicarious trauma."

> "There's a life coach - really spiritual and great - put it into our bid. She's offered it to us as well, pro-bono".

> "I have weekly sessions with a therapist".

> "Psychotherapy-and mindfulness being put in place."

One organisation explained the importance of external support, so that there was no expectation for other staff to 'hold' their trauma as well as their own. They identified this reduced any sense of embarrassment between colleagues, if deeply personal feelings were shared. Of course, this does not negate the need for inter-staff support, but for this organisation, external support was an 'add-on' benefit. Therefore, it was apparent that acknowledging and taking trauma-informed approached helped sustain LEx leadership.

A small number of grantees were able to access formal, external support through being part of a wider collection of organisations which was also a benefit.

"

"We also have clinical practitioners on site through the host organisation. Anyone involved in the organisation (inc. volunteers) is able to access this. Because the team is so young, we pay a lot of attention to their welfare and mental health. This was something we had written into the contract so that young people could feel supported."

Governance was also seen to be important, such as having appropriate policies and procedures in place. How organisations built capacity across their respective organisations differed across all grantees, with few organisations detailing all of the above.

Connection and culture setting

Building a sense of internal connection, and culture setting also presented as key factors in building an environment in which LEx leadership can flourish.

> "We've created a sort of home."

> "Support and coaching, shadowing different functions …very organic typical type of training."

> "After a zoom, we always have a bit of time just the two of us. On the one occasion we didn't do it, I felt really foggy."

> "Ensure regular 121s are had and policies are accessible. Training on LD awareness/safeguarding/MH capacity act. Regular supervision."

> "Structured support/informal support. Regular supervision, 1x every 3 months. Weekly team meeting."

> "Regular meetings. Then one day a week we have a welfare meeting - how are they developing. Coffee date in the mornings."

> "We are clear about rights and justice."

One LEx leader asserted the importance of regularly recognizing and appreciating the contributions of their staff, whether through formal acknowledgment, awards, or other forms of appreciation, seeing this as boosting confidence and motivation.

> "I make sure I acknowledge when someone has done something well and make sure others do this; it's a way of moving us all from invisibility."

Creating an open and collaborative and inclusive culture was deemed as essential for the success of LEx leaders. For those LEx leaders working in blended teams with non-LEx leaders, this had heightened importance, as did the need to ensure continued emphasis on recruitment and development of LEx staff within the organisation to ensure balance.

Connecting with others and building networks

External peer support networks were also considered to be an important component of growth. Being part of a network of peers permitted LEx leaders to share their experiences, exchange ideas, and receive encouragement and act as a check and balance against mission drift.

> "Anger sense of injustice as the fuel for change can destroy if alone with support and community can empower."

Feeling part of a wider community was also deemed as providing a sense of camaraderie, reduced feelings of isolation, fostered collective optimism, as well as offered opportunities for knowledge exchange.

> "It was interesting when we brought the group of LEx leaders together how each one was unique in their views and experiences, and the group thrived when given the time to share their own perspectives with each other. Learning how to listen and respond effectively when engaging with other people."

Networking opportunities offered permitted the grantees to recognise the intersectional benefits of contributing to a peer network. These networks inspired the cohort to seek outwider peer networks or to potentially start networks at local or regional level, having experienced the benefits of being part of a network first hand.

> "Although the young people will get individual support, they will also be part of something bigger – and belong to LEx movement. So, they stand for something rather than fall for everything. Creating opportunities."

> "I'm gonna try and work towards me having a local network and maybe seeing if there is one that I can join just because I think that there is strength in numbers and I feel empowered after this meeting today and everybody is in the same boat but we all have completely different experiences and we're different people and we're different lived experiences."

Time

Interestingly, time emerged as a significant factor for leaders when they were asked to consider what helps them flourish.

In some instances, the fund had enabled leaders newly found opportunities for reflection, upskilling and strategizing, previously unavailable due to restraints on their time. Having the time to strategise was important, for both the organisations who were new to funding, and those who were branching out and developing. Being afforded the time to strategically consider next steps or new opportunities helped leaders to think critically about important considerations and choices.

> "TNLCF funding is our first funding. We have never really thought about it but we need to strategise to make our project sustainable. If either party goes down, then we won't necessarily be able to survive and won't be able to support others in the community."

> "Becoming victim of own success. Fund has opened up opportunities, but it's being cautious of what to say yes to and not to everything to please. Growing too quickly."

Being given time also enabled organisations to reflect on their journey, avoiding mission drift. Importantly, staying true to the principles and values that drove the LEx leader to initiate this work was seen as critical in development and flourishing of both individuals and of LEx led organisations. Leaders recognised the risks of mission drift and loss of purpose as organisations grow, take on new staff and accept new funding arrangements. Having time to consider the direction of travel and resist where needed, helped leaders stay focused on their personal and organisation aims.

> "It's a real tension to keep true to the principles that drove you at the beginning when the system operates from a different paradigm. And even we default to those system inculcated ways of being and doing when faced with challenges that seem insurmountable."
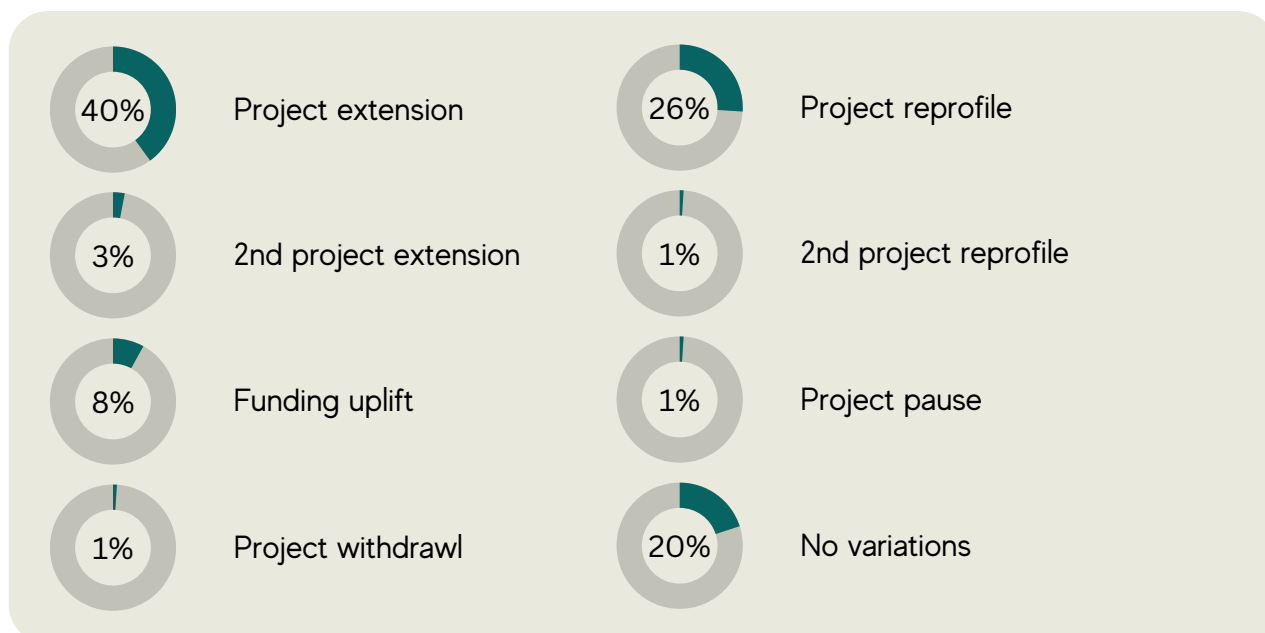
Funding opportunities

Providing opportunities for advancement and growth of LEx leadership is often contingent on securing funding, and as mentioned in the challenges section, funding can often be short term and limiting for not only leaders, but in the advancement of staff, and subsequently the organisations. Therefore, sustainable funding enables organisations to fully embed themselves in communities and ensures the impact of their work can be felt more deeply in communities over time.

> "[Certain funding and opportunity] has enabled us to grow quite rapidly over the past 2 or more years, we have had less time and ability to assess the effectiveness of some of our longer-term ambitions for the project."

Flexible funding allows programmes or project to develop as community needs change, and especially during a crisis. Enabling grant holders to shift the journey travelled, to better respond to their communities in real time, has made a significant difference to many organisations.

Interestingly, as mentioned in Part A of this report series, the most common project variation, at 40% approved by TNLCF, was project extensions, as illustrated in the following graph. Having access to this option was of huge value to partners.

40%	Project extension	26%	Project reprofile
3%	2nd project extension	1%	2nd project reprofile
8%	Funding uplift	1%	Project pause
1%	Project withdrawl	20%	No variations

Flexible funding is essential for effectiveness of all the organisations. It ensures their ability to fulfil their missions and provide valuable services to their communities allowing them to provide impactful, and innovative services.

6

BENEFICIARIES
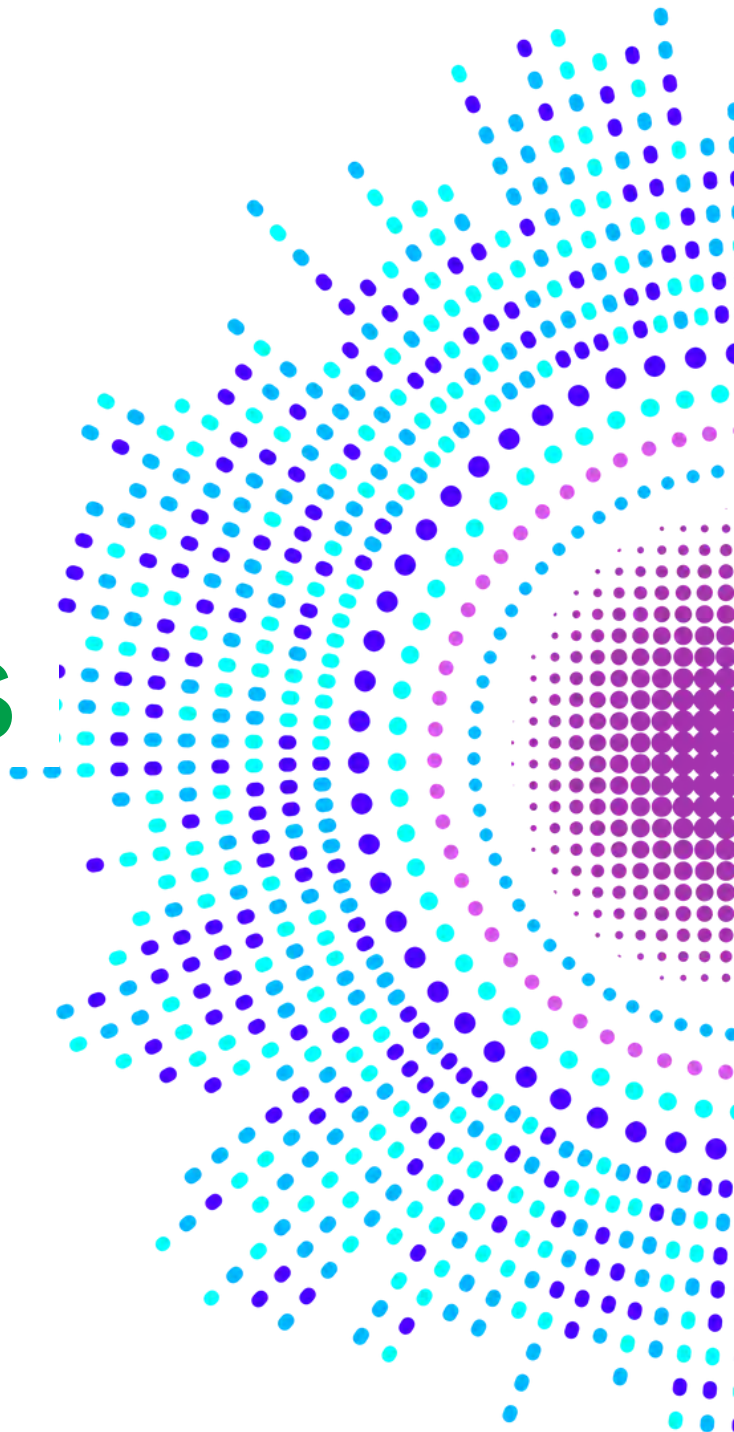
“Feels like this alternative path in life is not all doom and gloom and some lovely things are happening.”

As we near the end of the learning report, we decided to include a section exploring learning from the viewpoint from a sample of those who benefited or who were impacted by the fund.

Due to the broad remit of the fund, this could be a:

> Service user or community member

> Internal team member

> LEx Leader or trustee

For ease of understanding, we refer to those reached by the fund as a beneficiary. We do this while also respecting one grantee's view that the term 'beneficiary' could be seen as downplaying the important role that programme participants have in shaping organisations and programmes.

"

"Not imposing your will on the beneficiaries. Working with them to guide and shape the project. More than mere consultation, but real co-production and involvement at every step. Being able to demonstrate that the voices of the members are shaping the work. Also, not calling people 'beneficiaries' as this implies, they are passive/dependant recipients of help, rather than key members making valuable contributions."

It is important to acknowledge that despite offering the opportunity for all organisations to be involved in the section, only 25 beneficiaries undertook an online survey. Of these, 24 interviews took place. Therefore, this section does not claim this to be representative of all beneficiaries, although it does provide a snapshot of views.

We asked emerging leaders to rate their experience of the LEx leadership opportunities they had been a part of with a partner organisation. Overall, the findings were very positive.

How would you rate your experience being involved with this organisation/group/project?

| 0%	0%	4%	24%	72%
1	2	3	4	5

25 responses
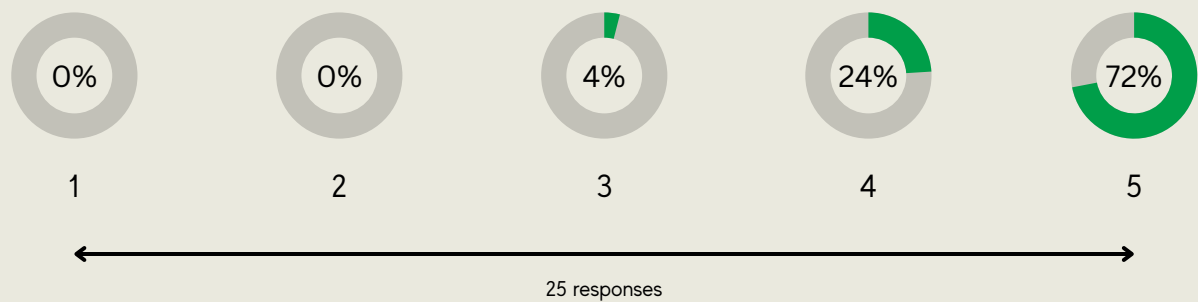
> "My experience rating it a 5 is not just because of the opportunities and the speakers they get at their events. But it is how they handle everything and the whole ethos."

Importantly, one of the reasons the emerging leaders felt so positive was due to the impact they felt they could have on the sector they associated with. Over half (54.2%) felt their organisation had a significant impact on their community / sector, and a further 29.2% felt it had some impact. Only 4 people (16.7%) felt unsure as to the impact.

Has this organisation/group/project had an impact on the community/sector they work in?

0%	0%	17%	29%	54%
1	2	3	4	5

24 responses
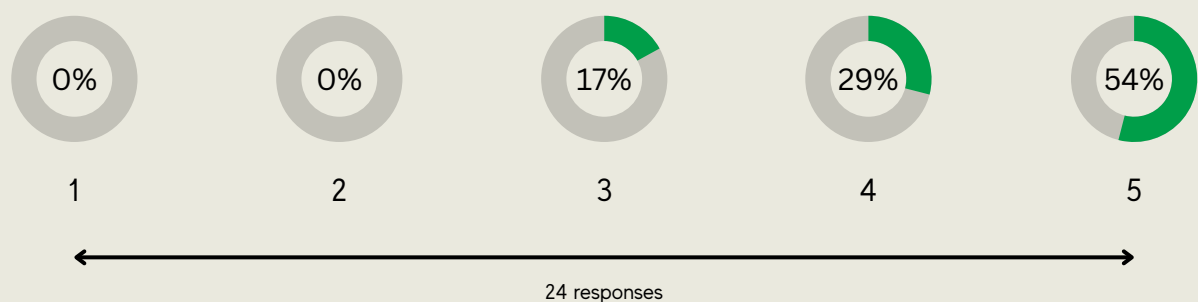
"We had a massive protest when George Osbourne was in charge. He did a disability U-turn. We went out and protested in London in Parliament Square. He was forced to go back on his words."

"Disabled people are often overlooked and sometimes those with other protected characteristics can get more attention, but we're working to make things better for everyone, those with impairments and those without."

"The feeling of excitement of hope that we are making a change with the project."

Belonging

Without exception, all spoke of the importance of the connection they felt when spending time at a LEx organisation. People felt they were fully able to be themselves, sometimes for the first time within a public setting.

"

"Hearing other people's experiences and knowing you are not alone with bad past experiences as a disabled person... Great sense of community and support together."

"

"Recognises all the different culture and religion, gender, sexual orientation, all the different facets of identity. They address this. In the summer they did an event on Cultivating Confidence within your culture. We speak out about our identity as South Asian women and how we can navigate this. I have not come across this before. It's amazing to have the tiny elements of your identity recognised."

"

"What was amazing being with other autistic women so the I didn't need to mask being me. It's the little things like in the training session with Emily and she would ask "Is it OK if I touch you to adjust your posture?" Part of my autism I hate unexpected touch, so to be asked should her understanding on Autism."

Instead of feeling socially excluded, people felt welcomed, and as though they belonged. The relationships formed within the organisations were warm, genuine and supportive. People felt this had a profound effect on their lives.

"

"This group is supportive for each other and a lifeline for me."

"

"Not sure what would have happened if I had not had the group to support me ... I look forward to seeing the familiar faces every week. Totally love the group."

"

"The zooms have a warm atmosphere. Very funny, lots talking, laughing and sharing. It was a great group of women. From the zoom, I knew this was for me."

The word 'safe' was used often to describe the environment they found themselves in, safety to be themselves and nurture leadership skills.

> "I genuinely think a big part of my experience is that everyone there identifies in the LGBTQ community, so feels a really safe space to work in."

> "Feeling of being listened to and not judged. Work in a way that is trauma informed. Safe self-disclosure. Ability to connect. Feel genuine connection."

In line with this, a sense of kindness was experienced, with some beneficiaries explaining how this impacted them at difficult periods of their lives.

> "They're like my family. If I need a hug, they're the first person that come to my mind. Very, very kind. When I had a knee injury … they came and brought me food. They come and talk to me, take me for a walk. I didn't have any family in the UK.

People were keen to explain the wider culture of the LEx led organisations, and without exception these were complementary. They described the culture as being open to learn, which was inspirational.

> "There is a lot of accountability across the organisation, which you don't get across of work places. There is room to be heard and listened to. Growing upon the listening. Real life changes, not just promises. You can see things in action. The pace in which they put actions into motions stands out. Things move along quicker. There is lots of flexibility, opportunities and uplifting at BBH. We have a voice and are supported to say, No."

Progression

More than half of the beneficiaries we spoke positively about their professional progression regardless of whether they were an emerging leader or had held a leadership post for some time.

> "I was originally on the advisory board in voluntary position then became Secretary, then took on a paid role to deliver the Heat programme training. I was then asked to stay onto develop the training and revamp. Then with a blend of my experiences I'm now the Development and Communications Manager. It has been a steady progression. The work is really valuable and something I've always wanted to support."

> "I have been involved for 17 years before I got involved in this group and campaigns."

> "It has been a really positive experience. I feel because I have used their service and now on the other side supporting them as an ambassador. I feel really inspired with the work we are doing part of the LEx project."

> "I was referred in about 2018 and they provided me with a case worker for a few years. I have now had the opportunity to be part of LEx project. I thought it was really good, empowering and I have always wanted to use my experience for social change."

Importantly, beneficiaries appreciated being involved, and working towards social change. This often generated a sense of passion within the cohort.

> "It is such an important project to be working together on. We are asking people what they actually need and making services fit for purpose. – I think this project is an opportunity to level the playing field. We are group making changes. On a current domestic abuse system that is not working."

Skill development

We asked beneficiaries whether they had developed any new skills as a result of the fund. Three quarters said they strongly agreed they had, while 13.6% agreed they had. 13.6% were unsure.

Have you developed any new skills because of this organisation's project?

0%	0%	14%	14%	72%
1	2	3	4	5
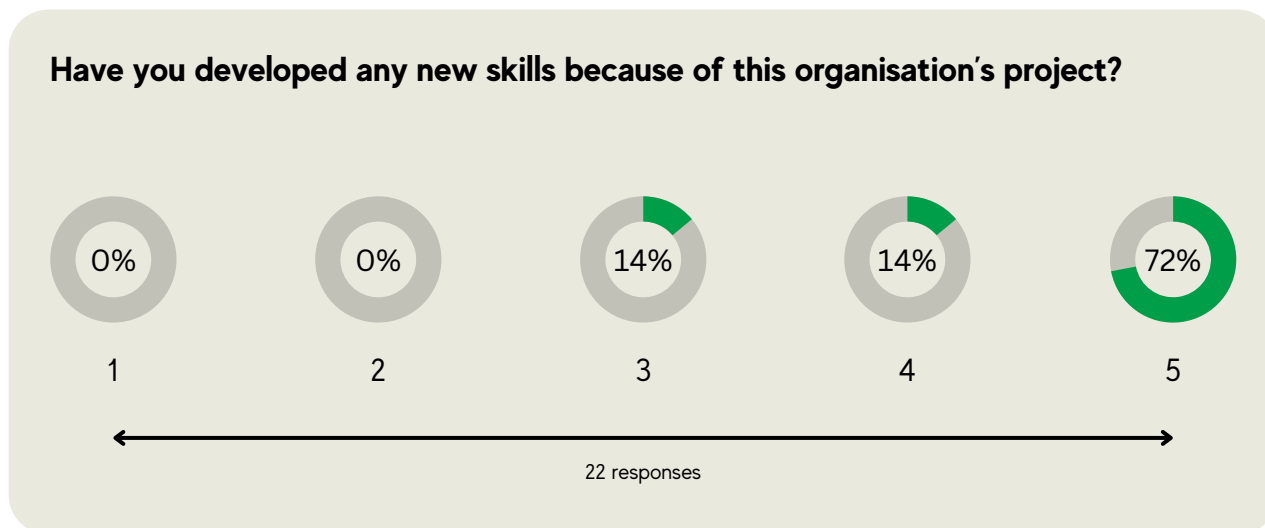
22 responses

We categorised the type of skill the beneficiaries had gained. The most common response was that 72% reported they had gained confidence since starting the programme. Following this, 44% said they had gained communication skills. All skills are shown in absolute numbers below.

Type of skill gained	Number
Belief and self worth	🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶
Confidence	🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶
Office skills/practical	🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶
Communication skills	🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶
Coaching skills	🚶
Commitment	🚶
Empowered	🚶🚶

Type of skill gained	Number
Deeper understanding of sector	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Build on existing skills already have/recognise own ability	🧍🧍🧍
Wellbeing skills	🧍🧍
Being assertive	🧍🧍
Technical skills	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Professional	🧍🧍
Managerial/leadership skills	🧍🧍🧍🧍
New language	🧍
Using LEx appropriately	🧍🧍🧍
Running a business/developing business	🧍🧍
Patience	🧍
Working as a team	🧍
Facilitation skills	🧍🧍
Being productive	🧍🧍
Resilience	🧍

"I think they have given me the confidence to just go out and do it. This is something I would not have had."

"I had the skills already but because where I was at that point in time I did not know I had them. I just needed someone to help uncover."

Part of the confidence appears to have come from becoming more comfortable with, and embracing their own lived experience. Often LEx led organisations have supported and nurtured this in recipients.

> "I've learnt not to be quite so worried about owning being disabled. I have hidden disabilities but feel more confident about owning that. And because of that I'm now writing about different things about my LEx."

> "Learn value and power of experiences. Reclaimed our power."

> "Not feeling embarrassed about what has happened to you. Gaining understanding about what has happened to you."

> "I accept myself. I am who I am."

> "I think I have gained a lot of skills being involved in with My Life My Choice. I learnt how to help people speak up. It has taught me how to speak up for myself."

We had some examples of how some people started with trepidation and needed (and received) individualised support from the LEx leaders. This is an important consideration.

> "I was so scared and shared with John. He supported me the whole way. he was so calm. it pushed me out my comfort zone. I felt validated by John because of his praise. I really felt fulfilled."

> "I have learnt I'm not afraid. I matter and I am important. What I have to share on my experience is valuable."

> "How to introduce myself and not under value myself. She helped me understand my value and I am someone of value."

Opportunities appear, for some, to be plentiful, aided by enthusiastic LEx leaders who see potential in emerging leaders.

66

"I have been really busy and taking on lots of tasks. I like to keep busy. I'm being mentored by Jukebox. I've been having training and shadow and helping to deliver the sessions to the children. I've been working on events- I've done Sundaze and Vann' events. I'm trying to try lots of new things to help figure out what I'm going to do at the end of this project."

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"I am constantly going on training. That help my personal development that will help me beyond Switchboard. I can go to my manager with training opportunities and would be confident that would try and financially support it, if it is relevant to switchboard in some way."

A space for healing

From the emerging leaders we spoke to, we saw that organisations had enabled spaces which were trauma informed, whether this was intended or not. Some beneficiaries told us they approached the projects with sometimes, unmet personal needs, which were diverse, which were considered, as they continued on their journey.

> "I have found that most survivors help experience post relationship abuse... you come out the relationship and there is lots of support initially and people are sympathetic, but your left with all this trauma and nowhere to put it. But Speak Up is helping with this gap. I needed an outlet for all the feeling, thoughts, anger."

Due to the aforementioned sense of belonging, emerging leaders felt emotion and trauma was well understood and that they could express themselves more honestly. This enabled progression and more resilient organisational relationships.

> "Because of their LEx they understand some of the anger and exhaustion we might have. They were very good if anyone in the group came to the zoom feeling like this, they were good at bringing them into a creative space."

> "At the beginning of each group, they do a brilliant job at making sure everyone's needs are met and there is more care about how that happens. They take that extra time to make it inclusive."

> "Got a lot of support from revoke - therapy sessions, was suffering depression and PTSD due to my experiences. Sessions really helped me. EMDR as well. They took us on a trip a few times to Kent - to a farm - and there is a small river - we do a lot of activities there and we got the fresh air and time to thing."

This level of support had made a real difference to the lives of many beneficiaries.

"

"Giving a scaled answer on my experience does not do it justice. From doing the workshops and the exhibition transformed my life and that place I was in my life. [I was provided with] a space to make a piece of art that let me communicate what it feels like to go through the process of being abused, what it is like to carry that on into adulthood and go through the process of living through trauma of police reporting to then come out the other side. It gave me away to voice what I wanted those people (decision makers) to hear. Things I want to say that I hadn't realised I wanted to."

MEET THE FORW▶RD CULTURE MENTORS

Hope and the future

We asked beneficiaries if they had seen any additional opportunities as a consequence of the LEx leadership programme. 70% strongly agreed they had. Only one person (5%) said they did not feel this at all.

Types of opportunities	Number
Shadowing opportunities	🧍
Networking and relationship opportunities	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Trips/events/conferences	🧍🧍
New Job/roles/interviews	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍
Opportunity to use own skills – academic skills, organised event	🧍🧍🧍
Sit on panel/parent governor/running group	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Training/Development	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Find my new opportunities and interests	🧍🧍🧍🧍
Opportunities to influence – Spoke in parliament/assembly near parliament/community event/spoke to MP/consultation involvement	🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍🧍

Positively, seven of the 25 had gone onto new job roles following their time with the LEx leadership programme. Experiences are varied, but demonstrate how new found confidence and capacity building has impacted on beneficiaries of the fund.

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"The mentoring has had a direct impact on my career."

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"Being able to get back into work as quickly as I did. It did something for my confidence that meant I could have a job interview without having a panic attack."

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"This mentorship has cultivated a confidence to go for opportunities. For example, I wanted to enter journalism, I've done this mentorship and a 3 month internship, but I have struggled with imposter syndrome. My mentor gave me a tool kit to carve out opportunities for myself. Then I was able to help land a fellowship in journalism."

"

"They have approached me to coach. This is something that I never dreamt of doing. I'm not sure at the moment if this is right for me. I feel that right now I'm in a good mental space and enjoying the moment."

"

"For me personally along with this mentorship and this job they have helped me so much personally and professionally and in general life. I think together the job and the mentorship have helped create opportunities for myself. And me going out of my way to create this because previously I would have felt not confident and anxious. I have created a path for these opportunities."

Frequently people were looking forward and considering how these skills could benefit their future. And, in almost every case, their ambition was to support others in their sector, although there was also evidence of looking beyond the sector too.

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"Being more proactive and use initiative on the opportunities presented."

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"As a group we want to work on employment, neglect for those with disabilities."

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"In the future I would like to work with survivors in a more creative way. I would like to make time for a writing course or screen writing. I want to make a commitment to making time to do something I want to do."

"

"I'm really into research and this is also something I enjoy doing away from My Life My Choice. My Life My Choice is helping to grow and develop my research in the sector. Lots more campaigning and protesting."

"

"Being with BBH has helped me utilise my skills. For example, I have a Degree in Radio and Broadcasting and now I have been able to work on the podcast. I don't think if I was working anywhere else, I would have had the same support back into the work place as I have had let alone being still able to use my skills."

Emerging leaders told us they had seen changes in themselves since the programmes started, all of which were positive. No negative impacts were reported. For several, the project was described as being life changing.

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"Standout moment was the way it has changed me and had the biggest impact. I believe everyone has something they are good at, but just taken me 41 years to find it. I can't put into words how much this has helped. It has made me realise when you think you are not normal you actually are. No one is the same, but that is ok."

"

"I have turned 360. Before my breakdown I would say to people 'man up' but now I empathise with anyone and everyone. I'm growing and struggling every day. I have my own tools to keep me sane."

"

"Without a doubt it has changed my life. It took me from a bad space. I needed something extra to give me a push. I don't think I could have got that from anywhere else. It gave me a voice when I did not have one. It let me communicate things that I could not have done in any other way. it has been instrumental in my recovery and given me back my life."

CONSIDERATIONS

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"It has changed my life. From housewife to director. It has given me direction. I could not have done this without the fund."

"

This report outlines the major learning points acquired from the grantees over the course of TNLCF's LEx Leadership fund.

Whilst most of the learning for this report is formed from the second wave, we did draw upon our experiences with the pilot fund also. The following provides some of the headlines:

Perceptions of LEx leadership

It was clear that while only half of programme participants were familiar with the LEx terminology or movement before embarking on the programme, all had been practising it for years. There was a collective energy and buzz around the programme, and about connecting with other grantees.

The projects born out of this programme were rooted in a deep frustration with issues such as social inequality, power dynamics, and stigma. Most partners spoke passionately about the intricate web of intersectionality that their communities faced, highlighting the complexity of their challenges. Many partners shared personal experiences of encountering barriers, shame, and disappointment on their journey to their current positions.

Several partners expressed frustration over the exploitation of lived experience narratives, which served as a strong motivator for LEx leaders to drive change. Remarkably, a significant 81% of participants were inspired by the title of LEx leader, marking the beginning of our journey with a great deal of optimism and enthusiasm.

What is it to be a LEx leader?

LEx leaders recognised they bridged a gap between communities, statutory organisations and funders. They saw themselves as leaders within communities who do not distance themselves emotionally or geographically from the issues, and as such, trust could be built up with communities with relative ease, ensuring they remained central and responsive to the needs of their communities.

Over three quarters felt their leadership style had been impacted by their LEx, and that their personal experiences enabled them to be effective leaders to others with shared experiences – uniquely equipped to engage with others, in both a trauma-informed and authentic way.

There were a number of factors considered when reflecting on what it takes to be a good lived experience leader and often connection and collaboration was at the heart of this, for many, when focused on organisational goals and aims. Listening, responding and continual learning were all highlighted as important factors. Most leaders recognised that their own experiences influenced how they relate to others and had enhanced their ability to empathise. Determination, stoicism, flexibility, resilience and determination were all features that presented when considering traits of LEx leadership.

Lived experience leaders demonstrated a deep sense of empathy and compassion with others, whilst understanding their own experiences, turning these potentially damaging experiences into positive and powerful actions. Resilience to cope with any challenges, changes and crises was evident in all the leaders across the fund, though did not emerge without certain risks. Namely, this was the blurring of boundaries between work and home, resulting in potential burn out and illness, if self-care is not effectively considered and practised.

What makes a good LEx leader?

LEx leaders are seen to positively disrupt rather than conform to societal norms and models. Yet, a number of important features around what makes a good LEx leader were identified and discussed. Effective leaders were highly skilled in taking others on a journey with them, to inspire and instil confidence. Importantly, respected LEx leaders had an authenticity, a trustworthiness and a sincerity, which community members will recognise, serving as positive role models for others facing shared experiences. They are essentially able to demonstrate that it is possible to overcome adversity and achieve personal growth and success, whilst more widely challenging social injustice in their communities.

In all cases, LEx leaders hold mission advancement more prominently over personal advancement.

It was noted that due to LEx leaders possessed an inbuilt strength and determination to understand the barriers that exist for communities, and not look to be overwhelmed or beaten by these, but look to solutions to reduce them for those following.

Continuous learning and adaptability stand out as primary markers of esteemed LEx leadership. When leaders remain committed to growth and are quick to adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring their leadership remains valuable and relevant to those they serve.

Challenges of LEx leadership

Nearly all, 78% of LEx leaders reported encountering various challenges in their roles, which could be categorized into four main groups: internal, societal, crises, and funding.

Grantees questioned whether the term LEx leader had the potential to anchor them in the past due to the barriers presented by society in terms of acceptance. It was interesting that a quarter felt uncomfortable disclosing their lived experience.

When discussing crises and turbulence, it was revealed that 50% of the three-quarters who faced barriers mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as a significant challenge. However, these difficulties also showcased the remarkable flexibility and determination of LEx leaders, leading to positive changes in their organisations. Their willingness to boldly support their communities during crises, including the current cost-of-living crisis, underscored a defining trait of LEx leadership.

Lastly, the challenges of funding were explored. While this fund presented a unique opportunity to enhance services, it wasn't always viewed as sustainable as the funding came to an end. Limited access to core funding emerged as a primary issue in maintaining services and retaining staff. This sometimes led to a transient workforce and the need to "start over" with new team members, impacting on organisational stability and resources.

What conditions enable LEx leaders to thrive?

There were some crucial enablers to LEx leadership spoken about. Firstly, opportunities to self-care were seen a priority, to appreciate that real life experiences can act as both a motivator in LEx leadership but also enhance emotional connection to the issues, which is tiring. Self-care was seen to foster emotional resilience, and help them balance the challenges faced by those immersed in LEx-based organisations.

Care and kindness extended to the wider teams, and ensuring everyone had a safe space to reflect and grow. Leaders recognised that prioritising the well-being and development of team members fosters loyalty, motivation, and productivity, essentially creating improved services to communities.

Training and capacity building through continual learning and skill development enabled leaders to stay effective in an ever-changing landscape – which was apparent in of the many marginalised communities served.

Connection and culture setting was viewed as enabling leaders, as was connecting to the organisation. Networking and building relationships with peers, mentors, and industry professionals helped leaders feel less alone and offered opportunities for new learning.

Time was a prominent factor. Many of the leaders had little of it, and without this were unable to carry out many of the important aspects of leadership. And lastly, and as previously mentioned, access to flexible and sustainable funding opportunities were seen to significantly impact a leader's ability to innovate and achieve organisational goals, meaning they can move away from constantly seeking funding and concentrate on their mission for change.

08/03/2023

Breast screening, cancer, and Black women

Black women from Caribbean and African backgrounds are up to two times more likely to receive a late-stage diagnosis for some cancers than white British women in England. Helena writes about her journey.

Read More

Beneficiaries

We spoke of benefits in both part A and C of these reports, and in Wave 1 reporting. Everyone we spoke with benefited from involvement in the projects funded by this grant; and spoke highly about them in conversations. Most referred to increased confidence, self-belief, and enhanced skillsets.

One major benefit to those engaged, was experiencing a sense of belonging since being involved with their respective organisation. Everyone referred to being encouraged to be themselves, and to connect to others. An enthusiastic and supportive LEx leader was behind each positive, enabling story.

Nearly three quarters, 70%, said they had been afforded new opportunities as a consequence of the fund, and many referred to it profound terms. For emerging leaders, there was enormous positivity and hope for the future as a result of their experience.

Grant holders were initially disappointed that a commitment to LEx leadership was seen to dissipate though the termination of the fund, and the important aspects of the fund that recognise and celebrate LEx leadership may be lost, despite being grateful for the opportunity to be involved.

> "Keep it going. It could be very useful to the sector. I loved the 'light tough Lottery evaluation. Tailoring funding in this way is very beneficial and unusual. We need funding that does what we want it to do rather than following someone else's agenda all the time. We need to thrive rather than survive. We're full of skills and expertise - let us show it to you and the world!".

> "This was such a lovely fund to be involved with - please just keep doing what you're doing as it really does make a difference!"

> "Carry doing as you are but be as accessible, flexible and inclusive where you can. We recognise that we have quite a unique organisational model so understand that we are not always going to fit into a standard way of doing things."

In general, this TNLCF fund was viewed with optimism, gratitude and praise. As such, very few recommendations have been provided. As the fund comes to a permanent close several organisations chose to relay a message to funders.

> "It has been invaluable. You can't evidence everyone's personal achievements that may not seem much to people. You can't put a number or put them in a box. This is not necessarily tangible. You need to have these conversations to really take in the impact and where the money is going. They need to continue to invest money into these things. They need to see and to hear the impact."

> "It would be valuable to continue cultivating the relationships that have been formed through this. These relationships have been so valuable and this is shaping the next generation of women. This is helping!!"

> "It was definitely the right decision to fund us, please fund us more. It is a great way to spend their money. This project is going to have ripple effect."

Undoubtedly, throughout its existence, the fund has had a profound impact on both individuals and the empowerment of the communities who have received grants. It's challenging to measure the extent of the fund's success in advancing some of our most disadvantaged communities and the leaders within them due to the diverse nature of organisations and various funding aims. Though it is clear the fund has provided opportunities for various Lived Experience (LEx) leaders from diverse sectors to grow while simultaneously addressing social inequities and challenging traditional leadership norms.

The legacy of this fund is unquestionably built upon hope, optimism, inclusion and equity. LEx leadership brings invaluable perspectives into sharp focus. Just as every leader's lived experience is unique to them, the benefits of the fund are individual to each leader, and each community who have benefited from funding.

Moving forward, we recognise that LEx leaders can apply for broader grants from TNLCF to continue their vital work. Therefore, it is crucial to leverage the lessons learned throughout the lifetime of the fund, to assist them in navigating funding frameworks effectively, ensuring equitable access to these broader resources. There remains a clear imperative to persistently reduce the social inequalities experienced by those engaged and continually empower LEx leaders – enabling them to drive positive change within their communities.

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"What it has done for us as an organisation is to own it and name it. Our directors have spoken about LEx at a strategic level that we are LEx and LEx organisation. But the fund has allowed us to lean into that and it is our flag to be waved. It is now a huge strength of ours that we are recognising LEx and LEx leadership."

LEARNING PARTNER

Final Report
Part C