



How women's projects combat disadvantage and transform lives

Learning from The National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative roundtable event in the south west



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The National Lottery Community Fund's investment in women and girls

In 2016 The National Lottery Community Fund invested £44.7million in a five year strategic Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) supporting 62 women and girls' projects across England. The ambition for the Fund's investment was to support the development of a stronger sector with improved services to empower women and girls. To that end the Fund commissioned a learning and impact partnership to work alongside projects to maximise collaboration, co-production, learning and influence through action learning groups, workshops and publications.

This resource is the output from a south west Regional Learning Event held in October 2020 which brought women and girls' projects together with funders and commissioners to build relationships and share learning. The event was a co-production by leaders from six south west services for women and girls working with the Fund and the WGI learning and impact partnership.

Over 70 people participated in the event and discussions were rich and wide-ranging. As a result 88% of attendees reported a greater understanding of why specialist services are important for women and girls. This resource provides 10 bite-size, one page briefings summarising the learning. We hope it will help spread understanding of the sector even more widely.

This south west Regional Learning Event was the first of many and the Head of Region has pledged to continue to build relationships and share learning between the women and girls' sector, commissioners and funders; raise the profile of women and girls services and support the sector with funding and beyond funding.



“I think having service providers and funders/commissioners, and researchers/evaluators all in a virtual room together is really valuable. I would be interested in attending more events with this kind of mix of people.”

Event Participant



Speakers at the south west event



Elly De Decker was appointed as England Director for The National Lottery Community Fund in 2020, as Director Elly will seek to build upon the Fund's successful shift towards a more local model of grant-making and to deliver on the organisation's strategic framework that when people are in the lead, communities thrive.



Dr Sara Scott is co-director of DMSS Research and has been involved in research, evaluation and service development in the fields of gender, abuse and mental health for 25 years. She is currently part of the learning and impact partnership team for the Women and Girls' Initiative - working to improve specialist support and increase co-production of services by women and girls.



Layla Ismail co-founded and now manages the local women's charity; Refugee Women of Bristol, which is the only multi-ethnic, multi-faith organisation in Bristol which specifically targets the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking women and is directly owned by the refugee community. She has also been a prominent figure in work against FGM in the south west. In 2018 Layla was listed in the top 100 BAME people on the Bristol Powerlist.



Caroline Howe joined the Lloyds Bank Foundation in January 2015 to support development of the Foundation's policy work and national programmes. She has developed national programmes in the domestic abuse, sexual violence and criminal justice sectors.



Shane Ryan is the Deputy Director at The National Lottery Community Fund who has designed and led the Fund's approaches to Partnership and associated policy, Youth Voice and equitable approaches to funding. Shane Ryan is a tireless campaigner for justice, equality, wellbeing and opportunity for all. He has been Strategic Consultant to the Grenfell Response Unit and a Corporate Consultant on Ethical Leadership.



“The passion of all the speakers and panellists has been fantastic today! Feeling really hopeful about the next steps in the South West”
Event Participant

How do women's projects combat disadvantage and transform lives?

Despite some important increases in women's equality in the 20th Century it is still the case that women in Britain are likely to earn less money than men, enjoy less progression at work, have less freedom and leisure and spend more time caring for others. They are disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination, inter-personal violence and exploitation. Women's projects understand the impacts of such gender inequality and how they intersect with the impact of other inequalities: poverty, racism and disability. In Britain there are an estimated one million women who are both in poverty and have experience of extensive violence and abuse in their lives, and it is women who experience the most extensive abuse and violence who are most likely to face other adverse circumstances such as poor mental and physical health, disability, substance dependence, poverty and debt, poor housing and homelessness¹. Women facing such multiple disadvantage need services which understand the whole picture of these intersecting issues in their lives.

Mainstream service delivery models do not address the complexity of many women's lives. To get support, women may need to access multiple and often fragmented services across a range of organisations in different locations. Women's projects are often able to reach women who would not otherwise engage with services, and can provide holistic, women-centred and trauma informed support that empowers women to find their voice, recover from abuse and transform their lives.



“We come together here – listen to each other – learn from each other and get strong. You learn you deserve better and have things to offer. That living can be more than just surviving.”

Women's Centre user



“If I didn't get help from [the Women's Centre] I would've ended up back in a relationship with my ex-boyfriend and taking the abuse for the rest of my life.”

Women's Centre user

1. Scott, S. and McManus, S. (2016). Hidden Hurt: violence, abuse, and disadvantage in the lives of women. DMSS Research for Agenda. weareagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Hidden-Hurt-full-report1.pdf

What are the key principles of a trauma informed approach?

A trauma informed approach recognises that the trauma of abuse is a significant factor for many women, but that a variety of other experiences resulting from racism, poverty, being gang involved, losing a child to care or going to prison can also result in trauma. Taking account of trauma and addressing the psychological impact of this is therefore vital if services are to meet women's needs. Core to the approach are: understanding the dynamics of power and inequality, trauma awareness, safety, trustworthiness, choice and collaboration, and the building of strengths and skills. Understanding that the personal is also political and not just the result of individual inadequacy or misfortune enables women to shed guilt and self-blame. A trauma informed approach is a strengths-based approach that:

- Realises the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- Recognises the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices;
- And seeks to actively resist re-traumatisation.

The role of peer support (women supporting each other as peers, volunteers, workers) and enabling women to have a voice (i.e. develop the confidence to speak out and share their experiences and views) are core mechanisms for a strength based approach. Women are empowered to overcome trauma through discussion, shared analysis and access to new and enriching opportunities which promote both greater independence and a sense of solidarity.

Key learning in 2020 from the women and girls' sector

Trauma informed, women-centred and locally based specialist services are more important than ever.

Women with a history of trauma, often resulting from domestic violence or sexual abuse, are often re-triggered by the lockdown situation. Trauma informed services are essential in being able to provide appropriate support for engaging women with multiple and complex needs. And it is local women's projects which are best able to reach vulnerable and isolated women. They appreciate local geographical and cultural differences and are trusted because they are embedded in communities and often recommended by word-of-mouth.

The women and girls' sector is not just concerned with domestic and sexual violence. Many services take a holistic approach – or work in partnership to address women's experiences of disadvantage and inequality and their needs in relation to employment, education, parenting, debt or addiction. Partnerships between generalist services and specialist women and girls' services help reduce risks and increase knowledge and capacity within safeguarding systems.

Poverty and gender limits access to technology.

Services providing online support say checking in works well but online counselling or therapy is harder if women don't have private spaces, devices and broadband. There is a gendered dimension to digital exclusion with women and girls less comfortable in the virtual world and many women's sector staff and volunteers, as well as service users, lack training or confidence in technological skills.

Burnout and the wellbeing of workers needs to be a management priority.

Supporting traumatised women and girls from home whilst also dealing with lockdown/COVID issues in your own life is hard. The women's sector is good at looking after its own and often leads the way in reflective practice, support and self-care as fundamental to trauma-informed service provision. Ensuring this when practitioners are often working remotely and 'flying solo' is the challenge they are currently addressing.

Loss of income, scaling back and closure of services alongside increased need and demand for services.

Many organisations are fearful for their immediate survival. Few charities carry large reserves and maintaining cash flow is extremely challenging in the face of loss cancelled fundraising events or loss of regular revenue. At the same time demand is high and there is likely to be a further increase in women and girls needing specialist support. Many services already have long waiting lists.

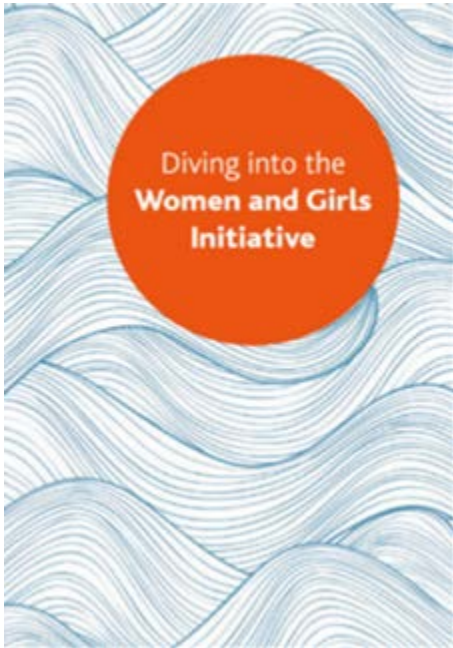
Responding to immediate need vs. planning ahead.

Concern for the immediate safety of women and girls; saving lives and maintaining vital services on a day-to-day basis frequently trumps longer-term thinking and planning. Services need funding that is secure, and funders that are flexible, so they can be responsive to emerging needs in such uncertain times.

The National Lottery Community Fund's future support of the women and girls' sector

- Within The National Lottery Community Fund each region has appointed Women and Girls Champions who will help ensure that the sector is kept well informed about funding opportunities – and that the Fund are well informed about issues, concerns and changes within the sector.
- The Fund recognises that the VAWG sector is underfunded and already has demands far outstripping its capacity. Following on from the Women and Girls' Initiative funding will continue to be available from the Reaching Communities funding programme to women and girls specialist services and responsive to their needs.
- The Fund will ensure that sexual violence services, BAME led women's services and women's centres as well as domestic violence services are fully aware of funding opportunities.
- A reflective practice culture for workers and trauma informed approaches will be considered as essential to good practice when assessing funding requests.
- The Fund is committed to deepening its understanding of gender inequality and the interaction of different forms of disadvantage and discrimination through briefings, training and discussions in regional funding teams.
- The Fund will work collaboratively with other funders to ensure funding works well for the women and girls' sector and reaches those organisations most in need.
- The Fund will host and co-produce further events with the women and girls' sector in the south west over the coming year.

The Women and Girls Initiative: Learning and Impact Partnership



The National Lottery Community Fund engaged a learning and impact team drawn from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, DMSS Research and the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit to support the Women and Girls Initiative. The partnership supports grant holders to capture and share learning, and works to develop a stronger and more influential women and girls' sector.

The interim evaluation found that:

“WGI funding has been instrumental in supporting women and girl’s organisations to come together in new and more powerful partnerships, strengthened their commitment to co-production and increased their confidence in who they are and what they have to offer.”

The [Women and Girls Initiative learning page](#) provides access to a series of briefings and blogs that have been produced as part of the programme. 82% of attendees at the South-West event had looked at the WGI briefings and 100% who did so found them useful and interesting

- [Why Women’s Centres Work: Evidence Briefing](#)
- [A Safer Pair of Hands: Black and Minority Ethnic specialist violence against women work](#)
- [Residential services for women survivors of abuse and multiple disadvantage. Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [“It’s been a game changer” The impact of National Lottery funding on women and girls’ projects](#)
- [Women’s Mental Health – The Essential Contribution of Feminist Services: Briefing paper](#)
- [Partnership Working for Women and Girls: Briefing Paper](#)
- [Increasing the voice and influence of girls and young women](#)

The following blogs are highly recommended:

- [Responding to and learning from changes during COVID-19](#)
- [A woman’s place is in the \(on-line\) world?](#)
- [Supporting staff in the women and girls’ sector](#)
- [Virtual support and vulnerability in the women and girls’ sector](#)
- [COVID-19 and the Women and Girls Initiative](#)
- [Have we lost the ‘we’?](#)

Learning from the Lloyds Bank Foundation Transform Programme



The Lloyds Bank Foundation £1.6million Transform Programme supported 16 small and medium sized organisations in the domestic and sexual abuse sectors to influence policy and strengthen infrastructure and innovation. Working with their learning and evaluation partner, DMSS Research, they supported these organisations to develop theories of change which enabled them to clearly define their goals, develop strategies for influencing change and monitor their progress. A number of projects enjoyed amazing success including Somerset & Avon Rape and Sexual Abuse Support, The Green House, Womankind and Barnardo's in Bristol. They worked as a consortium to develop easier access to the most appropriate support and secured £600k to deliver joined-up sexual violence services across the region.



Transform was not just about funding. It brought together a group of projects with a common interest in tackling violence and abuse and supported them to become agents of change. It encouraged the sharing of learning between projects and sought to build influencing capacity for the future. The evaluation found that the Transform programme's approach – combining the provision of funding with support for learning and networking and set within a theory of change planning framework – was a successful formula.

A summary of the work funded through Transform and its key impacts is [available here](#).

Insights from the National Lottery Community Fund

tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/insights/covid-19-resources/responding-to-covid-19/domestic-abuse

What do women (in the south west) want?



“The pandemic has exposed a lack of adequate funding for the women’s sector: essential lifesaving services cannot access the funds they need and are overwhelmed by demand. During lockdown women subject to domestic violence have been trapped with their abusers and have been cut off from their support systems.

We would like to see a more comprehensive multi-agency safeguarding system across the South West; one that has a more holistic approach to safeguarding and a particular focus on early intervention.

We want more acknowledgement of women and girl’s contribution in the South West, especially those going above and beyond to help the most vulnerable in our society. The rise in Mutual Aid groups shows how communities have been coming together to support one another in the absence of essential services.”

Layla Ismail, Development Manager, Refugee Women of Bristol



“We want young women to feel a sense of hope about their futures. To have alternatives to the normalised and damaging perceptions of how they should be; what they should think and how they should look. We asked some young women what they would like to see changed and their responses included the right to live their lives free from fear, violence and bullying, and to be able to express themselves with boldness and confidence without fear of reprisal and judgement. They told us : “We would love to see equality of genders, where boys don’t have the power over us. We want a world where boys don’t see us as objects that they can make sexual comments about.”

Bec Bayliss, Community Development Co-Ordinator, Cornwall Women’s Centre



“Black and Brown women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID. In any space that requires heavy lifting, we are over-represented: building communities, health and social care, activism, and holding organisations together. Equally, we are so visibly absent in leadership, technology, and innovation. Let’s recognise how structural racism compounds the position of Black and Brown women globally, including here in the South West. And beyond just seeing it, we need to work hard at the threads of these oppressive systems to unleash our true potential.”

Sado Jirde, CEO, Black South West Network

What can funders do to best support women and girls' services?

Funders and commissioners need to:

- Understand gender inequality and its impacts and the value of feminist approaches to empowerment and healing.
- Invest at an adequate level and over longer time periods.
- Enable projects to build their capacity as well as to deliver services.
- Build trusting and flexible funding relationships.
- Provide or support opportunities for sharing learning and networking.



“They should allocate multi-year funding to give time for real impact and organisational sustainability, and better appreciate that the women and girls sector has to keep doing the core work and so fund our core costs, rather than always wanting to see new and innovative projects. They also need to recognise the impact of trauma and recovery on ‘outcomes’ – recovery is not a linear process. And streamline application processes (please!).”

Anna Smith, CEO, One25



“I think that we could make more opportunities to share: vision/ plans/ ideas/ good practice and then look at how value can be added by working together. The pot for commissioning specialist services for women and girls isn't large and so we need to be both strategic and creative in our approach to improving outcomes.”

Sue Moss, Senior Public Health Specialist, Bristol City Council



“I think there is much more room for collaboration between funders that support women and girls, this might be a joint learning exercise which can might pave the way for more aligned work that responds to the needs of women and girls more effectively. A funding membership body like ACF could be a good platform to explore this further (Rosa currently Chairs the ACF VAWG network) and we could bring together UK funders interested in supporting women and girls more broadly.”

Anna Jarvis, Head of Grants, Rosa Fund



“I really agree about funders building long term relationships - trust and honesty allows organisations to grow and overcome challenge and is much more rewarding for funders in seeing the change they make.”

Event Participant

How can funders make a difference for girls?

In 2018, the With and For Girls Collective, the world's only participatory fund by, and for, adolescent girls, brought together 12 girl activists from Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, U.S.A, Poland, Kenya, Nepal, Barbados, Guatemala, Israel, Romania and Nicaragua, to put on the closing plenary at the Human Rights Funders Conference, to an audience of over 700 of the world's largest and most prominent funders. These pledges serve as recommendations to funders globally on how they can ensure their funding makes a difference.

12 pledges for funders

- To fund capacity building, networking and mentoring opportunities for girl-led organisations.
- To fund informal, non-established groups.
- To make grant processes more accessible.
- To increase core and long-term funding to girl-led and girl-centred groups.
- To include girls in strategic decision making.
- To acknowledge the intersectionality of girls' issues.
- To enforce protocols so girls are given platforms to speak candidly about issues, beyond the confines of organisational alignment.
- To not see girls as trends or gimmicks, but as real change makers.
- To collaborate with girls at the board level.
- To actively seek out diverse, marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.

withandforgirls.org



“As funders, thinking more strategically and collaboratively together. and collaborating to make things easier for applicants/grantees”

Event Participant

How do we promote partnership, collaboration and system change?

There was considerable agreement at the South West event on the importance of working together to achieve change for women and girls. However, it was also acknowledged that although partnership working is great, not all partners are equal. Equal partnerships are built over time and require enormous honesty about power and difference. Building trusting partnerships is very time consuming and small organisations struggle to resource this. It was strongly felt that meaningful partnerships need to be driven by shared aims and values, not as a desperate bid for funds.

Funders can help in four ways. First, by providing up front partnership funding to help make it work. Offering development grants to help get partnerships going was suggested. Second, by appreciating the importance of small and specialist services, understanding they need an equal place at the table and not insisting on 'forced partnerships' as a funding requirement. Third, by supporting sector networking through opportunities for sharing learning and influencing:



“Getting us together and keeping the momentum going.”

Event Participant



“Something once a quarter would be great. Can The National Lottery Community Fund help connect charities that want to partner or share resources?”

Event Participant



“And finally, by joining in and themselves working collaboratively with each other, and with services, to develop ideas, skills and strategies to challenge inequality, achieve shared goals and influence system change. It would be great to do some joint systems change training with funders and services to see what we could do together.”

Event Participant



“I think we need to broaden out how we conceptualise systems change to include the right conditions for partnerships build on trust, respect, honesty etc. This as an outcome in and of itself, not just the brilliant things that organisations can achieve when working well in partnership. The healing, the wellbeing, the collective strength and care in strong partnerships are really important.”

Event Participant