

How women's projects combat disadvantage and transform lives

November 2022



Learning from four National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative events in the North East and Cumbria, North West, the Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber.



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Front cover image credit:

1. Top - African Caribbean Community Association
2. Middle - Tumble Family Centre
3. Bottom - Arts Ekta

Back cover image credit:

1. Left - Llangors Community Shop
2. Right - Monkstown Boxing Club

Appendix:

Speakers, panellists and specialist services involved in the regional events

Introduction

This resource highlights some key messages which emerged from four events held in 2021 and 2022 in the North East and Cumbria, Yorkshire and Humberside, the Midlands and the North West of England. These events – co produced by staff from women and girls' services, the Community Fund and the WGI learning and evaluation partnership - brought together over 500 people from women and girls' services along with funders, commissioners, health, social care, criminal justice and other providers.

The aim was to:

- Highlight effective practice in supporting women and girls
- Explore solutions to pressing issues facing the sector
- Spark ideas for new collaborative working and systems change.

All four events were very well received, with nine out of ten participants reporting a greater understanding of the importance of specialist services for women and girls as a result of their attendance.



“I hadn't realised what fantastic and diverse services were available to women in this region... It was great to hear from so many Black and ethnic minority providers – and to find out about work with girls and young women.”

Event Participant



St Josephs Hospice

In 2016 The National Lottery Community Fund invested £44.7 million in a 5 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 evaluation partnership to work alongside projects to maximise collaboration, co-production, learning and influence through action learning groups, workshops and publications. These four events are one outcome of the Women and Girls Initiative and demonstrate its achievement in increasing the confidence, voice and influence of organisations in the sector.

Key Messages from the Women and Girls regional events

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.

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 homelessness.¹

Women facing such multiple disadvantage need services which understand the whole picture of these intersecting issues in their lives. However, 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 specialist services understand the impacts of such gender inequality and how they intersect with the impact of other inequalities arising from poverty, racism and disability.



“Intersectional feminism and a feminist trauma informed approach are the bedrock on which specialist women and girls services are built.”

Many of the problems facing women's organisations are the lack of resources and having the financial stability they need in order to address the inequalities that continue to face women. This is what most hampers their vital work to support some of the most vulnerable women in their communities.

¹ Scott, S. and McManus, S. (2016). Hidden Hurt: violence, abuse, and disadvantage in the lives of women. DMSS Research for Agenda.

[/weareagenda.org/Hidden-Hurt-executivesummary1.pdf](http://weareagenda.org/Hidden-Hurt-executivesummary1.pdf)

Too often organisations are pitted against each other as competitors for the same pots of money; competing to raise their profile and get their voices heard; often competing for staff, volunteers and trustees; and even at times competing for the same clients in order to meet arbitrary 'targets'.

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.

Local 'by and for' women's projects are often best able to reach some of the most 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 pandemic has just brought to the fore the massive inequalities (health and financial) that have existed in our communities for a long time. There are so many women who are left behind due to language challenges and so many other factors. This is where grassroots organisations are so crucial in ensuring these women and girls have tailored support and services.”

Event Participant

Trauma informed services are essential in being able to provide appropriate support for engaging women with multiple and complex needs and the well-being of workers is essential in enabling them to provide trauma-sensitive support.

Core aspects of women and girls services include the provision of safe women-only spaces, counselling, advocacy and support that can continue for as long as it is needed. These things may not be innovative but they are crucial.

Co-creation is at the core of feminist services: the origins of the women and girls' sector lies in women 'doing it for themselves' – self organising to address their own oppression.

Spaces where everyone can come together, including survivors, are needed so that all women and girls can contribute in ways that are meaningful. It is particularly important to have safe spaces that include 'by and for' services and minoritized communities



“Of course we have expertise: knowledge, skill and experience of what helps or of how the law works. But you can either use that to simply provide a service and do something for someone, or you can make the whole process empowering so she'll grow her own courage and confidence in challenging things. She'll go on to influence other women and her partners or children - she might never wave a placard or go on a demonstration, but she'll still be a force for change.”

Event Participant



Shantona

Funders can help by:

- ✓ Providing funding that is secure over 3 to 5 years
- ✓ Being flexible, so services can be responsive to emerging needs rather than chasing fixed targets
- ✓ Making monitoring and reporting requirements proportionate to the scale of funding and resources of services
- ✓ Becoming knowledgeable about gender discrimination and oppression, the ways in which different inequalities intersect in the lives of women and girls and the value of feminist approaches to empowerment and healing.
- ✓ Enabling projects to build their capacity as well as to deliver services.
- ✓ Providing or supporting opportunities for sharing learning and networking.
- ✓ Considering reflective practice and worker support and self-care as essential to good practice when assessing funding applications.
- ✓ Thinking about how you bring different voices into the room and using their power as a funder to both speak up for, and provide a platform for others to speak up.
- ✓ Funding influencing work to address the structural issues that are contributing to women's inequality : funders can do more than just pay for sticking plasters.
- ✓ Supporting the development of an infrastructure network that provides women and girls sector organisations with the resources, advice and evidence they need to provide sustainable holistic, streamlined services.



Feedback from the regional events

Across regional events nearly three quarters of participants who provided feedback reported:

- knowing more about how funders, commissioners and the women's sector can work better together.
- having gained useful information relevant to their work
- making new connections

85% of participants at the North-West event reported having gained greater understanding of issues affecting women and girls in the region and **94%** said they would be interested in opportunities for future collaboration.

Over **80%** of those providing feedback had found the WGI briefings provided before the event valuable and made a number of suggestions for further briefings including:

- Young women and county lines/supporting girls and young women
- Gender and Climate Change
- Monitoring and evaluation/impact measurement
- Collaborating on funding bids
- Lived experience
- Achieving policy change/influence
- Ending VAWG among impoverished and criminalised women
- How groups who work primarily but not exclusively with women can be included in the VAWG sector and collaborate with women-only services
- How police are changing the way they deal with VAWG
- Trans/non-binary inclusion
- Women, poverty and economic empowerment
- Child to adult violence and impact

Participants also made numerous suggestions for future events and next steps including:

- Sharing learning from successful bid holders/ partnerships
- Discussion of inflation/fuel crisis and the feminisation of poverty. How will the rising costs of living affect different groups of women and their strategies, including sex working, done to stave off poverty.
- Learning from Covid 19
- Transgender services
- Work with girls and women concerned with assertiveness, strengths and issues related to domestic abuse
- FGM and exploitation.
- Opportunities to meet with support organisations
- Collaborative funding opportunities
- Collation of organisations details to gather like work streams which would potentially allow us to propose funding bids/ funding streams.
- Forum set up to share ideas and understand developments
- A way research and good practice can be shared and spread across a wide geographical area.
- More collaboration with organisations working with Women & Girls perhaps through the creation of a platform to network in the region.

Intersectionality in the women and girls sector

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist and Professor of Law, coined the term intersectionality in 1989 and explained intersectional feminism as “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other.”²

Her concern was that race inequality was often discussed as if it was separate from inequalities of gender, class or sexuality when this was not how inequality operated. Many people are subject to more than one form of inequality and in their lived experience these inequalities interact and produce particular, specific forms of discrimination, disadvantage and stigma. Black women do not experience gender and racial discrimination separately: they are not one day treated as Black and another day as female. The forms of racism suffered by black women are themselves gendered.

The ideas behind intersectional feminism existed long before the term itself was coined. Sojourner Truth's speech in 1851 (since titled “Ain't I a Woman?”), in which she spoke from her position as a former slave to critique essentialist notions of femininity has been taken to exemplify intersectionality.³ And in the 1980s, US feminists of colour such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldua developed many of the ideas that are currently termed “intersectionality”.⁴ Feminist campaigns for the vote and later for equal pay and reproductive rights had largely been led by white middle-class women who sometimes assumed that their experience and priorities represented those of all women. This assumption was strongly challenged by black, working class and disabled women, and feminists sought to understand how gender, race, and class combine to produce specific patterns and experiences of disadvantage – and also of power and privilege. (A white, male, heterosexual professional clearly shares only a partial perspective with a colleague who is a black gay man.)

Intersectional feminism has illuminated the connections between apparently distinct struggles for justice and liberation. Across the world, those who are most impacted by gender-based violence, and by gender inequalities, are also the most impoverished and marginalized—black and brown women, indigenous women, women in rural areas, young girls, women living with disabilities.

In the women and girls' sector intersectional feminism means working to end all forms of oppression not only gender injustice. It provides a framework through which to build inclusive, robust organisations that address overlapping forms of discrimination. It is fundamental to the provision of holistic support that sees ‘the whole woman’, appreciating both her strengths and vulnerabilities. At the same time, it encourages reflection on the different kinds of power we have as individuals, how we exercise that power, and on the privilege and advantages we may have by virtue of our class, race, ability and other factors.

2 Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality: [youtube.com/watch](https://www.youtube.com/watch)

3 thesojournertruthproject.com

4 Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. 2020. Intersectionality. 2nd ed. Key Concepts. Oxford, England: Polity Press.

The National Lottery Community Fund's future support of the Women and Girls Sector

What we have heard

These roundtable events provide opportunities for us as a funder to hear from the sector; their challenges and successes and help provide a platform to share learning and make new connections.

The Fund is currently renewing its strategy in consultation with external partners and internal staff.

Evidence from roundtable events, research reports and national infrastructure organisations conclude the women's sector is critically underfunded and experiencing unprecedented demands at a time where issues such as domestic and sexual violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), mental health issues and forced marriage are increasing in prominence.

Participants raised concerns that, commissioning contracts are being created which exclude smaller specialist agencies. Learning from the WGI grant holders and our roundtable meetings show the value to women and girls of specialist by and for led women and girls agencies who are able to reach further, build more trust, provide safe spaces and have the understanding, skills and expertise for better outcomes.

We are also aware of the latest research from the Women's Budget Group in 2022 showing that women are being hit harder by the Cost of Living Crisis.⁵

The National Lottery Community Fund is committed to funding services that benefit women and girls in local communities and nationally.

⁵ wbg.org.uk/The-gendered-impact-of-the-cost-of-living-crisis.pdf



What actions are we taking alongside the roundtable events

Learning

The responsive funding teams have received four weeks of planned learning focused on women and girls. This is to enable an intersectional and gendered lens to be applied when assessing applications; to know as a funder why it is so important to fund the women and girls sector and to understand the challenges for women and girls.

The training was designed to give practical and meaningful context, focusing on good practice and hearing from grant holders experiences so that we can improve our grant making practice.

Over 4 weeks we covered 7 themes in 23 learning sessions

182 Funding Officers and managers from England attended training and between them experienced 429 hours of learning

- The challenges for the women and girls sector – underfunded and over demanded
- Context, challenges and what works in the Women and Girls Sector
- The intersectional nature of women's identities in civil society
- Domestic Abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Mental health
- Employment

Monitoring how much funding is going to the Women and Girls Sector

The amount of funding; and which women and girls organisations are funded is now monitored and reviewed annually to ensure this over demanded and critically underfunded sector is responded to by Funding Teams.

We have invested in 2 collaborations with other funders:

- Mapping the funding in the Women and Girls Sector
- Understanding routes to power and influence in the women and girls sector focusing on deaf and disabled women and women from black and minoritized communities

Sharing learning and influence with other funders

- Evidence based, trauma informed and trauma wise approaches are important
- Wellbeing within the women and girls sector is critical
- Gendered services are needed and inequality still exists
- Specialist services have deeper understanding and more reach to marginalised women and girls
- Long term, flexible funding that includes capacity building is needed.

The Women and Girls Initiative: Learning and Evaluation Partnership



The National Lottery Community Fund engaged a learning and evaluation 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 Women and Girls Initiative learning page provides access to a series of briefings and blogs that have been produced as part of the programme. Links to some of these were sent out as part of the publicity for the Women and Girls regional events. 80% of attendees had looked at the WGI briefings and 100% who did so found them useful and interesting.

All WGI briefings and reports can be accessed through these links:

[Sanctuary and freedom: the transformational power of spaces for women and girls](#)

[Preventing another serial killer? Learning from projects supporting women and girls who are sexually exploited or selling sex](#)

[WGI Synthesis Report #2: Learning from a turbulent time](#)

[Increasing the voice and influence of girls and young women](#)

[Residential services for women survivors of abuse and multiple disadvantage](#)

[Implications of the Covid-19 pandemic: Where are we now?](#)

["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](#)

[WGI Synthesis Report #1 \(2016-19\)](#)

[Safer Pair of Hands: Black and Minority Ethnic \(BME\) specialist violence against women work](#)

[Why Work with Young Women and Girls Matters: An Insights Briefing](#)

[Influencing Commissioners](#)

[Why Women's Centres Work: Evidence Briefing](#)

[Descriptor Report](#)

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'?](#)

In addition to print outputs the WGI learning partnership commissioned Leeds Animation Workshop to produce the film 'Where she was to where she is now' celebrating the WGI. It was made with the active involvement of women and girls from 17 different projects who shared their thoughts and their artwork.

[Women and Girls Initiative Film](#)



The principles of a feminist 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.

Appendix

Speakers, panellists and specialist services involved in the North West event, March 2022

Emily Spurrell, Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside

Sophy Proctor, Senior Head of Strategic Programmes, The National Lottery Community Fund

Di McNeish, Director at DMSS, Learning Partner in The National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative

Aliyah Dunbar Hussain, Solace Women's Aid, Labyrinth Project

Dr Safina Islam, Chair of Ananna and Head of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Education Trust at Manchester University

Priya Chopra, Chief executive, Saheli

Nicola Guy, Centre Manager Stockport Women's Centre

Firoza Mohmed, Currently CEO at Humraaz Support Services

Afrah Qassim CEO & Founder Savera UK

Kathy Siddle, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Co-ordinator for the Smallwood Trust

This event was co-created and co-delivered by the following organisations:

DMSS Research, Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance, Idle Women, Pankhurst Trust Incorporating Manchester Women's Aid, Saheli, Savera UK, Stockport Women's Centre and The National Lottery Community Fund.

Speakers, panellists and specialist services involved in the Midlands Event, March 2022

Raj Holness, Survivor, Campaigner, Ambassador

Abdou Sidibe, Abdou Sidibe: Deputy Director of Partnerships -TNLCF

Nicky Brennan, West Midlands Victims Commissioner

Dr Sara Scott, Director at DMSS, Learning Partner in The National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative

Emma Crump, Head of Grants, Smallwood Trust

Caroline Howe, Policy and National Programmes Manager, Lloyds Bank Foundation

Khudeja Amer-Sharif, CEO, Shama Women's Centre Leicester

Lisa Thompson, CEO, RSVP Birmingham

This event was co-created and co-delivered by the following organisations:

DMSS Research, Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, Zinithya Trust, New Dawn New Day, Nottingham Women's Centre and The National Lottery Community Fund.

Speakers, panellists and specialist services involved in the Yorkshire and Humber Event, April 2022

Tracy Brabin: Mayor of West Yorkshire

Abdou Sidibe: Deputy Director of Partnerships -TNLCF

Yasmin Khan: CEO - The Halo Project/IDAS

Sue Botcherby: - DMSS Research

Jeannette Morris-Boam; Projects and Partnerships Director at Leeds Women's Aid - Women's Lives Leeds

Lara Bundock; CEO - The Snowdrop Project

Angela Everson: CEO - WomenCentre Calderdale and Kirklees

Lauren O Donoghue: Vibe Champion Together Women

Naz Kazmi: CEO - Keighley Association for Women and Children's Centre

Maureen Storey: Director - Director Vida Sheffield on behalf of women and girls recovery empowerment partnership

Louise Telford: Head of Grants - Rosa the UK Fund for Women and Girls

Lucy Graham: Operational Lead - Rape Crisis England & Wales

Caroline Howe: Policy and National Programmes Manager - Lloyds Bank Foundation

This event was co-created and co-delivered by the following organisations:

DMSS Research, Women's Lives Leeds, The Snowdrop Project, WomenCentre Calderdale and Kirklees, Together Women, Keighley Association for Women and Children's Centre, Rape Crisis England and Wales, Women and Girls recovery empowerment partnership Sheffield and The National Lottery Community Fund.

Speakers, panellists and specialist services involved in the North East and Cumbria Event March 2021

Claire Dove CBE DL: Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Crown Representative

Elly De Decker: Director for England TNLCF

Yasmin Khan: CEO - The Halo Project

Dr Sara Scott: Director at DMSS, Learning Partner in The National Lottery Community Fund Women and Girls Initiative

Caroline Howe: Policy and National Programmes Manager, Lloyds Bank Foundation

Cullagh Warnock: Cullagh Warnock – Co-Chair, Wearside Women in Need

Caroline Macdonald: Chair, Difference

Jessica Donnellan: Partnerships Manager, Comic Relief

This event was co-created and co-delivered by the following organisations:

DMSS Research, Aspire, Young Women's Outreach Project, A Way Out, Angelou Centre, Barrow Women's Community Matters and The National Lottery Community Fund.

