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Citation:

Coan, S and Cross, R and Knight, M and Freeman, C and Morris-Boam, J and Warwick-Booth, L (2021) WLL Project Evaluation and Learning. Project Report. UNSPECIFIED.

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/7910/>

Document Version:

Monograph (Published Version)

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# **WOMEN'S LIVES LEEDS**

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

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## **WLL Project Evaluation and Learning**

**In Partnership with Leeds Beckett University**

**Completed by:**

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**Date: May 2021**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction

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Welcome to the concluding final evaluation and learning report for the Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) Project.

The Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) Project was a Big Lottery, since renamed National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), Women and Girls Initiative Funded 4-year Project that delivered a range of opportunities including frontline services that enabled women and girls to lead safer and healthier lives and was created by a partnership of Women's led and centred organisations in Leeds, who joined together to form the "WLL Partnership" in May 2015.

The Partnership included Asha Neighbourhood Centre, Basis Yorkshire, Behind Closed Doors, Getaway Girls, Hooner Kelah, Leeds Women's Aid, HALT (who have since merged with LWA), Nari Ekta, Shantona Women's Centre, Together Women, Women's Counselling and Therapy Service, and Women's Health Matters.

Between them they have a collective of over 250 years' experience supporting the most vulnerable women and girls across the city of Leeds who experience multiple needs including; mental health, domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation, experience of the criminal justice system, sex work and substance misuse.

The focus of the work was on providing support to the most disadvantaged communities in Leeds, with the aim of reaching greater numbers of the most vulnerable women, ensuring they receive holistic, joined-up support no matter where in the city they live.

As one, they applied to the Big Lottery's, Women's and Girls Initiative fund, to fund the WLL Project and later that year were successful. The partnership was granted over £2.2mil over a 4-year timescale.

The WLL Project focussed on Women, Young Women and Girls and identified specific target groups: young women, women with complex needs and recently arrived new migrant communities and was based on initial research completed in December 2015 that identified current needs.

The Project aimed to achieve the following 3 outcomes:

1. Improved and extended access for vulnerable women and girls in Leeds to the services and support they want, when they choose
2. A holistic response to ensure that the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex issues are better supported

3. Women and Girls will be empowered to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city

The Executive Summary was completed in November 2020 and has already been shared with all stakeholders, partners and commissioners including Leeds City Council, Public Health and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

The purpose of this report is to detail the learning, challenges and successes taken from project delivery throughout its lifespan and its achievements with the aim for this to be shared to inform other providers in their service development.

This report has been informed by views from service users, external stakeholders, ongoing external evaluation, staff and the WLL Alliance gathered over the last four years.

## Women's Lives Leeds Partnership (Alliance)

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The Women's Lives Leeds Partnership, now known as the "Women's Lives Leeds Alliance" also throughout the project's duration, developed, based on its own challenges, successes and learning. The highlights and key points of this are as follows, with the detail in section two of this report.

- WLL have learnt through the development of the Alliance the value of its arrangements due to its unique and structured approach and that the delivery and focus on the "project" component was a mechanism that maintained the Alliance, the diversity of the organisations involved (specialisms) and facilitated opportunities for learning.
- Through a new independent Quality Assurance Award (Community Matters - Improving Quality) WLL were assessed in May 2018 and learnt that the Governance structures, policies, procedures and accountabilities within its arrangements were fit for purpose and WLL were the first in the UK to be awarded "Improving Quality - Foundation Status".
- Whilst being part of the Alliance members have experienced several benefits, including increased capacity, feelings of belonging, building relationships and opening opportunities.
- The development of the Alliance was a positive step forward for collectively raising awareness of the issues affecting women and girls. External partners see the Alliance as a means of representing women and pushing for a gendered approach across the city and they recognise the model of inclusive working involving the council, third sector and academics as key to one of its successes.
- There has been plenty of learning from the challenges within the Alliance that have since been overcome by the appointment of an Independent Chair in 2019. These challenges have comprised: problematic attendance at meetings, time pressures and conflicting priorities, the use of time within meetings; difficulties with the decision-making process, dynamics within the

group and not all voices being heard; which was made more difficult by not clearly separating “the project” from the Alliance early enough to allow for more of a focus on the Alliance itself.

- Stronger together; the Alliance is a powerful voice for women and girls and works together to provide holistic support and is now respected across the city.

*“... in terms of the partnership overall, it’s been a really positive involvement for us. I think the peer support aspect is entrenched at all levels. Because I think as senior officers within our organisation, often you feel that you’re working in isolation. It’s great to have the support of other CEOs and directors who’ve got experience in different areas. And you can benefit from that shared learning, sharing resources. And of course, that goes right through to the peer support model that’s been developed as well, which – it’s not necessarily one size fits all, but I think it recognises the key principles that apply to all kinds of groups”*

*“The peer support has been good. It’s good to be able to call someone else up to talk something over as this is an isolating field to work in. It’s good to get advice or copies of policies from others that we can use.”*

*“The point of the consortium is to be more powerful together, to have more connections and to share the specialisms. No one women and girls’ organisation have all of the*

### Since the Project has started the Alliance members have met:

- **Over 30 times as a Project Board**
- **Over 30 times in one or more of the following sub groups: Learning; Operations; Voice and Influence**
- **4 times in full day facilitated “Away Days”**

## Outcomes

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The project was split into three main outcomes, each with a specific focus and the following section breaks down these outcomes and summarises the main learning challenges and developments of each, with the detail listed in section two of this report

### Outcome one

***“Improved and extended access for vulnerable women and girls in Leeds to the services and support they want, when they choose”***

### Online Virtual Service Directory

The Virtual Service Directory and online communications were the conduits to support and information for women and girls providing detailed information. This included WLL, their services for women and girls and information about how to get involved. It hosted a service directory that women and girls could search to find suitable services or activities.

Early learning identified that the website was being accessed by a range of people both professional and individuals and it was evident from the responses that more clarity around who it is for was needed. That learning helped restructure the website to make it fit for purpose. The learning since has highlighted that the service directory has proved to be a valuable resource, due to its focus on women and girls only services and activities.

**Since the website restructure in Jan 2018 there have been 28,326 visits**

**With the top searches for specific services being:**

- 1. Mental Health – 1,626**
- 2. Domestic Violence – 1,185**
- 3. Volunteering – 1,047**
- 4. Sexual Health – 702**
- 5. Relationships – 416**

*“I think it’s quite good to have that online resource, isn’t it, with the directory of different organisations and different groups of women. And it’s definitely something that I signpost women to have a look at. It has everything there”*

### **Community Engagement Service**

The Community Engagement Service evidenced that it served in its function to increase the access of WLL members services across Leeds, achieving more than its intended target in terms of providing information to women, and professionals about what they provide and how to access them.

This specific aspect of the service was successful in engaging with traditionally harder to reach communities, so extending the reach of advice and increasing service user confidence.

However, WLL also found that it was not as affective in building the capacity of smaller women’s community organisations and that the drop-in service across Leeds was inconsistent. This informed restructuring from Community Development to Community Engagement. Following the restructure, it was the end of the third year of delivery that it became most effective. Despite helping many women and increasing the awareness of the work of WLL, unfortunately, a range of competing women focussed community engagement type services and activities were being offered across Leeds.

It was felt that WLL had improved the community engagement work in Leeds and due to increases in the offer across the city, a dedicated WLL Community Engagement Service would not be required after the project end.

- 5,213 – Women, young women and girls have received information and been signposted to**

*“I feel like especially women from ethnic minority communities, they don’t necessarily access mainstream services in the way that other people might. And it’s important to have community-based organisations such as*

*"I don't have to explain from beginning to the end. You don't want to go through again and over and over and explain...It makes me more anxious. So, I always prefer to speak with one person and that's it."*

### services through workshops and events

- **2,076 – Have received information through community groups**
- **1,391 – Have received support by attending community drop in sessions**

The Top five areas requested at drop in for support were:

1. Benefits and Finances; 2. Mental Health; 3. Utility Bills; 4. Education; 5. Housing

## Outcome two

***"A holistic response to ensure that the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex issues are better supported"***

### Complex Needs Service

**252 Service users benefited from accessing this service.**

The most important learning WLL has evidenced, has been the arrangements that underpin the frontline service delivery with the unique hosting of specialist Complex Needs workers within partner organisations, but managed centrally.

WLL found with the model, structures and approaches used that:

- By providing "glue" in the shape of the partnership; has kept the project and partnership together
- By having specialist staff hosted within partner organisations and having them meet regularly together, has enabled wider learning and development for each of the WLL Partners
- By having the staff team involved in the referral allocation process it has empowered them and also facilitated a culture of learning and development together
- By having a team of specialisms, WLL has been able to support a range of service users, who have had a range of multiple complex needs.

*"We're talking about eleven partners. So, it's significantly different in terms of how you have to set yourself up, So, it's just quite different from when you're perhaps working with two, three organisations on a project."*



The learning that has been taken from the WLL Complex Needs Service delivery is described by service users themselves as the provision of “tailored holistic support in the form of an intensive, specialist service, that was suited to individual need and was on-going and flexible”.

Delivery involved working in a range of ways, offering: needs-based provision; practical and emotional support; listening, building trust; and proactively engaging with women, over longer periods. The average length of support was 9 months.

The aim was always to have a gender specific service, and as a learning project, it was quickly recognised and evidenced that this delivery model was crucial to its overall success.

Learning also informed WLL that being gender specific led to the service being a safe and confidential space, by women supporting women.

Service users, specifically said that the success from their point of view of the delivery of the Complex Needs service was based on the following points:

- That it was gender specific: women felt better understood and safer working with other women.
- It included practical and consistent support from the same worker covering a range of areas including medical, legal, housing, financial and social, meeting all their needs by one person.
- The service was client-led at their pace and they felt secure in the knowledge that the support would be there as long as necessary. After support they reported a range of positive outcomes including improved mental health, decreased isolation, increased confidence

*“I know it's our line of work and what u do but I really appreciate having you so much you're a really good person and if your goal was ever to help other people you've done that 100 times for me don't usually like workers don't always feel they play a purpose in my life but you actually are an angel from above”*

Project learning was adopted right at the beginning with staff being involved in the development of the front-line services, shaping and developing the essential policies, procedures and forms, and being part of ongoing change is learning WLL wishes to share.

Early in the project saw WLL adapt and change; due to the complexity of the cases that were being referred; the initial targets set:

- All service users with multiple complex needs engaged at varying levels and due to the nature of this complexity required more frequent, intensive, time, consuming support.
- Caseloads were revisited which better reflected the complexity of need and were lowered to a maximum of 12 for a full-time post and 10 and 8 for shorter 28 and 21hr posts respectively.
- However, it was found that there were still specific issues with the Sex Worker Complex

Needs role and the level of trauma and chaos these particular service users were experiencing so the caseload for this role was further reduced.

- It became clear that it was important for staff to have external clinical supervision to help them understand and cope with working and supporting women who had multiple complex needs.
- Through positive partnerships and the external evaluation WLL has learnt that the service is valued by external partners who described it as holistic, flexible, consistent and unique; In terms of the young women's specialist Complex Needs Worker, they recognised the importance of trust building and the on-going engagement needed to successfully work with young women.

Feedback indicates that the Complex Needs Service is unique, valuable and it is evidentially clear that the project has achieved in its ambition to have a specific service, that was service user led, and on evaluation and through individual outcomes monitoring has made a difference to the women and young women who accessed it.

WLL developed with service users their own outcomes monitoring tool that helped women measure their progress and saw increases from the initial assessment as follows:

- **"I feel confident going to an appointment with my GP or other service provider e.g. housing and I know where to go to get support" – 79%**
- **"I have been feeling good about myself and optimistic about the future" 76%**
- **"I have been able to make up my own mind about things" – 69%**
- **"I feel safe in my home and my community" 57%**
- **"I am able to make healthy decisions/have been dealing with problems well" 76%**

### Outcome three

***"Women and Girls will be empowered to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city."***

### Women's and Girls Hubs

Hub development and facilitation has raised awareness of gender-specific issues, empowered women & girls and influenced citywide services, conversations and strategic planning, particularly as a result of the State of Women's Health Report (White et al 2019), that was initiated by and for the Hubs members.

As the platform created to empower women and girls to have their voices heard WLL learnt that it was quickly recognised by strategic statutory partners as an influencing function and as a result is now embedded within the city's formal voice and influence arrangements.

*"WLL has raised awareness of gender-specific issues and influenced city wide services, conversations and strategic planning, particularly as a result of the State of Women's Health Report" (Public Health)*

The Hubs were being accessed for a range of reasons including: advice; awareness; networking; facilitating contributors; representing marginalised groups and as part of a professional role. A key learning point valued by the Hubs membership was that its activity also connected women and women's organisations with each other; facilitated networking and the sharing of information; provided opportunity to discuss and identify women's issues, which in turn empowered its members and gained influence in the city.

Further learning showed there was confusion internally and externally about the name "WLL" as this was the name of the Project, the Partnership and the Hub. Additionally, the hub structure was viewed as hierarchical, so after consultation with all stakeholders the name "Women's and Girls Hub" was agreed to minimise confusion and the women's hub was restructured into a flatter and more representative structure, which has led to growth in size, diversity and influence.

The successes of the Hubs and how they have grown and developed was included in a funding application to Comic Relief that focussed on a "women's movement" towards Leeds being a Women Friendly City, which was successful in August 2019, leaving a legacy once the project comes to an end in October 2020.

*"There's potential for it to build links between people, definitely. I just think it would need to be run in a slightly different way, perhaps with some more ground rules. Or perhaps with a different focus."*

Peer Support

- **The Women's Hub has met over 12 times**
- **Girls Hub is now meeting monthly**
- **Over 1,500 Women and Girls have taken part in activities facilitated by the Hubs.**

Peer Support featured highly in all activities of the WLL Project evidencing that the implementation of peer support across its structures has been successful and that:

- Peer Support has enabled the development of best practice across the WLL partner organisations and wider through the co-produced peer support network.
- Through the piloting of the peer support model partners have found it of benefit as they have used their learning to apply for additional funding to deliver more services, based on their peer support pilot experience, which has built the capacity of that organisation.
- As the Peer Support model continued to roll out in other WLL partner organisations, they too experienced the same positive effects as the initial pilot, with women being empowered and gaining confidence to lead their own peer support activities within their organisation, without the support of WLL staff.
- Smaller partners of WLL found using the Peer Support model as an effective way of engaging service users within a group setting, which had a particular focus.

- As the pilots developed women from within the groups gained confidence to initially help within the group, which then developed into a leadership role, with them leading the group on their own.
- There is still an appetite for peer support across the city and WLL has enabled through co-production the continuation of the Leeds Peer Support Network, which is still meeting and providing a valuable resource for the city.

*“It’s been a big major part of my recovery in all avenues from domestic violence and drink as well and boundaries and have better relationship with the key people in my life like my kids and my family.”*

*“We have lots of young women who’ve had support themselves and then they get involved in the project, and then they start to support others. So, it can be that kind of peer support and that lived experience being really important.”*

- **12 women have taken part and passed accredited Peer Support Training and of those, two have been offered external paid Peer Support opportunities**
- **114 Women have taken part in other Peer Support opportunities**
- **We have established 4 additional Peer Support groups within the WLL Partners**
- **We are Co-producers of the Leeds Peer Support Network**

## Service User Participation

Service users have and will continue to be integral to WLL service development, they have taken part in reviews, evaluations; have led on previous activities and through their involvement in a specifically designed service users’ function – The Advisory Board are now part of the formal WLL Alliance arrangements as a direct result of continuous learning.

The learning focusses on how powerful service users are; both in terms of shaping the development of existing service provision and providing their lived experience through voice and influence. It is their stories and voices that have been central to change being achieved successfully.

Through active engagement and feedback opportunities with service users WLL has been able to learn how the particular model of service delivery has been successful in supporting women who have had multiple complex needs and those who are often excluded due to being from specified marginalised communities.

*“I was looking at something that I could use my brain, not just look after children, not just do cleaning and ironing, not just being a mum, not just be a victim of domestic violence, and that’s what I was looking for. You know I*

*“It’s usually like these faceless bigwigs isn’t it... that are making these decisions in these services, you know, and the Advisory Board kind of breaks that*

*“It does sound amazing when you say to people ‘oh I’m on AB for WLL’ it does sound really you know ‘ooh’. Or having that on your CV. It is very impressive”*

- **2,229 service users have contributed to project learning through a range of activities**
- **58 Service Users have attended the meetings or have been members of the Service Users Advisory Board**
- **258 Women have provided individual responses and feedback about services they have accessed**
- **34 service users took part in the projects continuous External Evaluation completed by Leeds Becketts University**

## Conclusion

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WLL Partners and Project staff welcomed the opportunity presented to them by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), to deliver the project within a continuous learning context. WLL have strived to capture and embed learning gained and as one of the biggest Partnerships and Projects funded through the NLCF Women’s and Girls Initiative, wish to share learning, challenges and successes with others, with a view that they can take this and embed appropriately.

There is much to be shared in terms of tangible learning, which only highlights cab be captured within this document, as there are additional thoughts, feelings and experiences that are more difficult to capture, but equally important. It is outstanding that the project has achieved its three main objectives, against the backdrop of continuous learning, which supports the view that the learning from the structures, approaches and leadership are those to be showcased and tested in the future.

The final 6 months of the project coincided with the unexpected and devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation doesn’t include findings directly related to this, however as a project we have seen women and girls be affected, often disproportionately, by the effects of mental health, violence and abuse, caring responsibilities and employability.

It is important that the learning is shared with all stakeholders, to inform future service delivery and to be a catalyst for strategic systems change. This learning has contributed to the

development of a model that works, that can be considered by mainstream commissioners in future services development.

WLL are delighted to have had such positive engagement responses and contributions from those women who have experienced the project through participation in services and opportunities available. It is through this learning, that WLL have made improvements used it to shape future opportunities.

WLL want to thank every woman, young woman and girls who took the time to contribute their thoughts, opinions and experiences and which has given us extensive understanding and learning about the project and the services that they have accessed. We also want to thank the team from “The Centre for Health Promotion Research at Leeds Beckett University”, who have been with and evaluated us consistently on this learning journey.

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## Recommendations

**Strategic:** Share report with stakeholders, demonstrate theories of women centred working, continue to build links with statutory partners to ensure women and girls voices are heard, built on learning for expansion and development.

**Alliance:** Work to provide further clarity about expectations associated with membership, commitments, behaviours and competition; and conduct a SWOT analysis of all organisations involved and develop of plan to support the individual needs of each partner organisation based on size, staffing and capacity.

**Complex needs:** Work with stakeholders regarding re-funding, aiming to integrate complex needs working into wider partnerships, based on the evident needs.

**Advisory Board:** Integrate AB influence into all aspects of WLL work and encourage strategic voice and influence; increase the diversity of membership.

**Hub:** Develop structures and clarity to increase reach, improve diversity, develop action and develop strategies to retain members.

## 2.0 Section two – The Detail

### Evaluation Methodology

The overall aims and objectives of completing learning and evaluation were to:

- Assess the project’s effectiveness, measured against the outcomes of the project plan and Theory of Change.

- Design flexible, participatory and co-produced approaches in which Service users, stakeholders, staff, WLL Partners and Peer evaluators are involved and empowered.
- Deliver a test and learn approach in which the on-going evaluation and learning of the project feed into and shape delivery to make the project and all its activities more effective.

The evaluation element was conducted by researchers from the Centre for Health Promotion Research, Leeds Beckett University from April 2017 to April 2020.

The learning element was conducted by independent consultants, project staff and WLL Partners; was gathered through service delivery, bespoke reviews and reporting, quarterly monitoring and by a full-service review that was completed after one year's frontline service delivery.

To gather this information all processes used learning and evaluation approaches that placed the staff, partners, stakeholders and service users at the centre of qualitative data collection. To ensure that the evaluation was rigorous the Theory of Change underpinning WLL was tested frequently.

### **Data sources**

This report is based on data collected from; 34 service user interviews/focus groups, 25 service users exit/interviews and forms, 54 professional interviews/focus groups (19 repeats), and; Information and learning collated through quarterly monitoring and reporting, which included the analysis of all (252 to date) complex needs services users through their regular outcomes monitoring framework; and through the variety of bespoke service user consultations, reviews, reports and evaluations completed by the projects team throughout the projects 4-year lifespan. Data was gathered between 2017-2020.

### **Data collection and participants**

59 service users took part in data collection through interviews at specific points within their engagement as follows:

- Once they had exited the complex needs service.
- Had been involved in, or are current members of the Advisory Board.
- Were members of the Women and Girls Hub

The evaluation also included focus groups as follows:

- Service users, with 14 attending
- Staff with all attending annual reviews and 3 bespoke first year service review focus groups
- WLL Alliance members with all 12 partners taking part in 4 focus groups
- Women and Girls Hub focus group with 14 attending

External partners were also given the opportunity to take part in the evaluation which included:

- Submitting their own feedback via email, conversation or evaluation form with 54 responding.

Through established feedback mechanisms, including evaluation forms, text messages, emails, and conversations with staff; and additional 258 service users provided specific feedback, and through all activities including events and workshops 2,229 voices have contributed to the shaping and learning of the project.

Throughout the duration of the project WLL Partners and internal staff were involved in a range of activities as part of its continuous learning, of which the main activity was a full-service review during 2018.

In addition to the specific evaluation, service users were engaged and involved in a range of activities that informed and shaped the projects development. These included specific focus groups, feedback at the end of events, groups and sessions and as part of the process when exiting the frontline services.

The Project soon established a service users Advisory Board which has had 58 members. It is the mechanism that provides service user voice and is a formal part of the Alliance's arrangements, where its members attend Alliance meetings as an equal partner.

### **Ethical approval**

The evaluation was given ethical approval through Leeds Beckett University ethics procedures. The following practices were adhered to ensure ethical rigour:

- Informed consent – written or verbal consent was obtained from all participants in the interviews;
- Confidentiality and anonymity – no personal identifying information has been used in the reporting the data
- Secure information management – security was maintained through password protected university systems.

## **The Project and its Outcomes**

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### **Seven Elements of the Project**

The WLL Project consisted of seven elements as follows:

- **1. The Virtual Hub** – An online, web-based information and conduit to information about the project, the Alliance and their services and opportunities for women and girls. It hosts a service directory that women and girls can search to find suitable services or activities.
- **2. The Community Engagement Service** covered all of Leeds, had four workers who attended events to engage women; provided informative presentations focussing on



services for women and girls; held drop-in sessions that provided light touch support and signposting to other services and delivered awareness-raising workshops to organisations on a variety of topics for women and girls.

- **3. The Complex Needs Service** offered one to one intensive support by six Complex Needs Workers, who provide direct, holistic support to women and girls with multiple and complex needs. Each Worker has a unique specialism from the following: Domestic Violence, Sex Working, Post Pregnancy Removal, Mental Health, Culturally Diverse and Newly Arrived Women, and Young Women and Girls. Referrals into the service were made through the WLL partner services.
- **4. The Women and Girls Hubs** provided opportunities for any woman, girl, or professional from any women centred group, organisation or individual to contribute to strategic decision making and to influence and shape services for women and girls across the city. There is also a Girls Hub, for those aged 13-18 years, which too was established to facilitate voice and influence opportunities for young women and girls.
- **5. Peer Support** that enables opportunity through the development, embedding and sharing of best practice and support for each other and across the project's activities. It used that model to develop tool kits, guides and peer support activities with and for the WLL partners and to share with others through a Peer Support Network across Leeds.
- **6. Service User Participation** was encouraged throughout the project in a range of ways that suited service users. This included the development of The Advisory Board, that using a peer support model to facilitate ex or current services users to meet, discuss and contribute to the development and shaping of the project and its activities.
- **7. Continuous Learning** is applied to the project to enable it to grow and develop. Taken from ongoing lessons learnt, the capturing of challenges and issues, regular monitoring and evaluation and service user feedback and engagement. This has been ongoing throughout the lifetime of the project and within the Alliance and has informed the Alliance and all stakeholders of service delivery, achievement and successes.

The Project aimed to achieve the following 3 outcomes:

1. Improved and extended access for vulnerable women and girls in Leeds to the services and support they want, when they choose
2. A holistic response to ensure that the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex issues are better supported
3. Women and Girls will be empowered to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city

The following section goes into detail about the activities delivered to achieve the desired outcome

## Outcome one

***Improved and extended access for vulnerable women and girls in Leeds to the services and support they want, when they choose.***

### **The Community Engagement Service**

The Community Engagement Service covered all areas of Leeds, and aimed to raise the profile of the WLL Alliance members, provide light touch support and signposting and help build the capacity of women's smaller community groups and organisations. To do this the team attended events, gave presentations, facilitated a drop-in service, delivered awareness-raising topical workshops, signposted to other existing services based on identified need and supported community-based women and girls centred groups.

- **5,213 – Women, young women and girls have received information and been signposted to services through workshops and events**
- **2,076 – Have received information through community groups**
- **1,391 – Have received support by attending community drop in sessions**
- **84 – Group programmes delivered 1192 sessions with 565 individual women being supported of which 80 attended more than two sessions**

Initially workers were geographically based and worked within a specific “wedge” that reflected existing divisions of the city. Initially the team worked together well in raising the profile of the project, the Alliance and of services for women and girls but towards the end of the first year, inconsistencies in delivery were becoming apparent. Competition and differentiation in the understanding of “Community Development”, “Drop-in”, “Workshops” and “Raising Awareness” fuelled this. This was the first indication that a service review was needed, which was completed in 2018.

### **Service review**

The review confirmed that the service was no longer cohesive and inconsistent, with little or no direction. One recommendation was the need for it to have a clear plan and not just delivering activities- drop ins/ workshops etc in an uncoordinated way. It was recommended that the team should be working towards long term plan identifying gaps and needs in Leeds and establishing sustainable services in response to needs.

The review identified that the service could reach and benefit more women and girls if the workers were not restricted by geographical location too. The team all had their different strengths and qualities and the review highlighted that it would be better the service was built around those to reach communities across Leeds and to have a greater impact on women and

girls. e.g. workers with community languages being able to operate in any area in Leeds where there is high prevalence of that language being spoken.

The review also identified the need to define “Community Development” in terms of WLL and what the aims and objectives of the project were.

Following consultation with staff, Partners and external stakeholders the service changed to “Community Engagement” as this better reflected the intended project outcomes and type of activities that will be needed to be delivered.

The other recommendations are as follows:

Another but equally as important outcome for the service review was the recommendation that the team could directly refer into the projects Complex Needs Service if they identify women who have multiple complex needs through the drop-in service. This was implemented immediately.

Following the service review the Community Engagement service served in its function to increase the reach of WLL across Leeds, achieving more than its intended target in terms of the provision of information to women, and engagement via outreach.

The outreach aspect of the service was described as successful, with it engaging with traditionally harder to reach communities, extending the reach of advice and increasing service user confidence, along with the workers gaining knowledge about culturally diverse communities and partnership work enabling them to improve their own practice.

### **However**

The new model initially proved to be better with the removal of wedge and activity-based competition between staff and enabling a more cohesive city-wide service, but it was still not functioning well. Although staff were included in the shaping and developing of the new model and they agreed between them who would be best placed to deliver the activities based on their collective skills it continued to have a competitive edge.

A high turnover of staff (8 staff in less than 3 years) and long-term staff absences impacted on the new model leading to it not being fully implemented and it not being cohesive. So, although agreed the new model remained inconsistent and disjointed until the end of the third year of delivery. The service was then affected more by COVID-19 with the last nine months of delivery taking part under lockdown conditions.

### **Service User feedback**

In terms of service user feedback, it has proved very difficult to capture these due to the nature of the services being delivered, with them being mainly one-off contacts, presentations and signposting, making it difficult to gather service users views consistently. Staff had highlighted how it was virtually impossible whilst providing a one-off drop-in service, to ask the service user to feedback on the service there and then.

A variety of options were tested to try to gather evidence in support of the benefits of the service which included; feedback forms handed out at the end of the drop in with the request to stay to do this; feedback forms with stamped addressed envelopes given out; email addresses handed out; and even the trialling of the attendance of a member of the external evaluation team sitting in another “booth” to take views, all of which were unsuccessful. This lack of feedback and views in terms of service users’ voices was apparent in the first interim external evaluation report, completed in June 2019. However, notwithstanding the attempts to try to capture this feedback, the year two evaluation report in November 2019 confirmed this was still the case, with no feedback received.

The final external evaluation interim report May 2020 again reported the lack of qualitative feedback and evaluation from service users about the service, so it was difficult to highlight the uniqueness and benefits of this particular part of the WLL Project from a service users’ perspective.

### **Other Competitive Services**

Unfortunately, it was also at the end of the third year, just as staffing arrangements were more settled, it was reported by WLL Partners and was apparent, that a range of women’s focussed Community Development services and activities were being delivered by a range of organisations, thus duplicating the WLL Community Engagement Service offer.

### **Project Staff Learning**

As part of the projects ongoing learning, staff have feedback how they have developed new skills, personal learning, increased their knowledge and learnt about Partnership work saying

*“I’ve learnt about Partnership work. And I’ve learnt about how important it is, about how you need to persevere to reach some results really. It’s a learning curve.”*

They felt that they had gained confidence in some instances as well as increased knowledge about specific communities, including those from culturally diverse communities and it was noted by one in relation to how service users are likely to access the provision:

*“Whilst having this drop-in and whilst doing the ad-hoc drop-ins as well across the city, I really took my time to figure out what the need was and not to duplicate work, not to step on people’s toes, and to make sure that it was just spaces women actually attended as well. ... what I’ve found is women won’t step outside of their current routine unless they’re a) familiar with what they’re getting, and b) it’s really easy for them to do that, especially if they’re vulnerable women.”*

Staff also commented about how their roles benefited service users:

*“The drop-ins are beneficial, because it means that they can learn more about what support is out there for them.”*

One worker provided an example of the support that they had provided to one woman, which resulted in a positive outcome:

*“I’ve helped one woman move house away from her partner who has been released from prison. I’ve called different bailiffs and council tax bailiffs and asked for things not to be dealt with in such a harsh way because of their current capacity and conditions and so on.”*

Staff delivered activities in a fully inclusive way and by the facilitation of communication in a service users first language helped address mental health for some women with one saying:

*“Mental health is one of the biggest [impacts] really. Because it’s like almost a knock-on effect. ... for example, and if you can’t read [a letter] and you don’t know where to go with that letter, it causes you a lot of anxiety. You don’t know what the impact of that’s going to be, so you worry a hell of a lot about very small things. And it impacts on your general wellbeing and mental health, and then on your quality of life as well.”*

## **The Future of the Service**

So, along with limited service user feedback and evaluation, the identified competitive services across the city, a still inconsistent service delivery and the high staff turnover the view was taken by the WLL Partners that this service would not feature in future funding proposals.

### **Summary of community engagement service successes**

- The community engagement service increased the reach of WLL across Leeds, achieving more than its intended target in terms of the provision of information to women, and engagement via outreach.
- This aspect of the service was described as engaging with traditionally harder to reach communities, extending the reach of advice and increasing service user confidence.
- Workers gained knowledge about BAME communities and partnership work enabling them to improve their own practice.

## **Outcome two**

***A holistic response to ensure that the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex issues are better supported.***

## The Complex Needs Service

Before the project was commissioned a comprehensive needs analysis that focussed on current needs for women and girls across the city was completed. This analysis included service user voice, was completed in December 2015 by Voluntary Action Leeds and was used to shape the complex needs service.

Mental and Physical Health, Substance misuse including drugs and alcohol, being from a smaller marginalised community or being new to the country, fleeing from or being affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse and healthy relationships, both for women and young women were priority needs and informed the workers specialisms.

A bespoke case management system was developed, (OASIS) not only to provide a safe and secure space to store sensitive information, but to record and monitor progress and outcomes of each individual service user. OASIS enabled regular "Outcomes" monitoring, based on five simple but important subjects that women themselves had identified.

The five subjects and the statement to rate were:

- I feel confident about going to an appointment to my GP or other service provider and I know where to get support
- I have been feeling good about myself and optimistic about the future
- I have been able to make up my own mind about things
- I feel safe in my home and in my community
- I have been able to make healthy decisions and have been dealing with problems well

With the underlined words directly addressing the projects aims, objectives and outcomes.

## Service review

The Complex Needs service was included in the service review and the conclusions drawn indicated that staff were much more settled in their roles, were delivering in a fairly consistent way and recognised that they were supporting women and girls, who are individuals, have their own needs, so methods of working need to suit those needs.

The delivery model used, with staff being hosted by partner organisations, but meeting regularly as part of the referral process was critical to its success. The structure offered learning, peer support and development as a team, which was then cascaded back to host organisations too.

The service review made fewer recommendations for this service. One was based on need and that another Mental Health specialist worker post was required. This was actioned in February 2019 with a second post being created. Other recommendations that were implemented included; simplifying the paperwork and outcomes monitoring; having a “hardship fund” managed by the project manager but used to purchase specific but essential items for service user e.g. debt orders, and the provision of external clinical supervision for each worker.

The most important learning WLL has evidenced, both through the service review and the ongoing external evaluation and service user feedback has been the partnership arrangements that underpin its delivery with the unique hosting of specialist Complex Needs workers within partner organisations, but managed centrally.

WLL found with the model, structures and approaches used that:

- By providing “glue” in the shape of the partnership; has kept the project and partnership together.
- By having specialist staff hosted within partner organisations and having them meet regularly together, has enabled wider learning and development for each of the WLL Partners and their staff.
- By having the staff team involved in the referral allocation process it has empowered them and facilitated a culture of learning and development together.
- By having a team of specialisms, WLL has been able to support a range of service users, who have had a range of multiple complex needs.

Another important factor that helped in the success of the service, was it being gender specific – women supporting women and gender specific in the context of the service being delivered in safe spaces in a confidential, none judgmental and trusting manner.

Service users themselves identified that the successes of the Complex Needs service were those based on its foundations and that:

- The service was gender specific: with women feeling better understood and safer working with other women
- They received practical and consistent support from the same worker in a range of areas including medical, legal, housing, and social, with workers advocating on their behalf.
- They felt listened to by their workers, who actively listened, did not judge, of whom they possessed personal qualities of warmth and kindness
- The service was service user-led at their pace
- They appreciated being given time – service users felt secure in the knowledge that the support would be there as long as necessary
- They reported a range of positive outcomes including improved mental health, decreased isolation, increased confidence and independence, meaningful occupation and healthier interpersonal relationships

Feedback now indicates the Complex Needs Service being unique and valuable and it is clear that the project has achieved in its ambition to have a specific service, that was gender based and service user led. Through both the external evaluation and individual outcomes monitoring, they clearly evidence that the service is making a difference to the women and young women who access it.

## Impact and Outcomes

Since the Complex service started in February 2017 it has supported **252** women and young women by providing tailored, holistic support in the form of an intensive, specialist service, suited to individual need and was provided as on-going, flexible provision. The workers worked in a range of ways, that offered needs-based, practical support (e.g. attending meetings, language support), emotional support, listening, building trust, proactively engaging with women, and working over the longer-term.

**230** service users regularly took part in outcomes monitoring with unfortunately 22 not having any assessment completed and of those recorded 74 only had one assessment completed.

**561** assessments completed with an average of 2.5 assessments per service user completed.

This table shows overall outcomes achieved by assessed service users.

Outcome	Increase	Decrease	No change	Not known
1. I feel confident going to an appointment with my GP or other service provider e.g. housing, and I know where to go to get support	97 (76%)	16	19	74
2. I have been feeling good about myself and optimistic about the future	96 (76%)	20	16	74
3. I have been able to make up my own mind about things	85 (69%)	22	25	74
4. I feel safe in my home and my community	76 (57%)	27	29	74
5. I am able to make healthy decisions and have been dealing with problems well	104 (79%)	9	19	74

### KEY:

#### Increase

Service users which have demonstrated a change in their score in the positive direction.

#### Decrease

Service users which have demonstrated a change in their score in the negative direction.

#### No Change

Service users which have demonstrated no change in their outcome result

#### Not Known

Service users which have had only one assessment completed

#### Missing data

No record of outcomes monitoring known

% = total percentage of service users

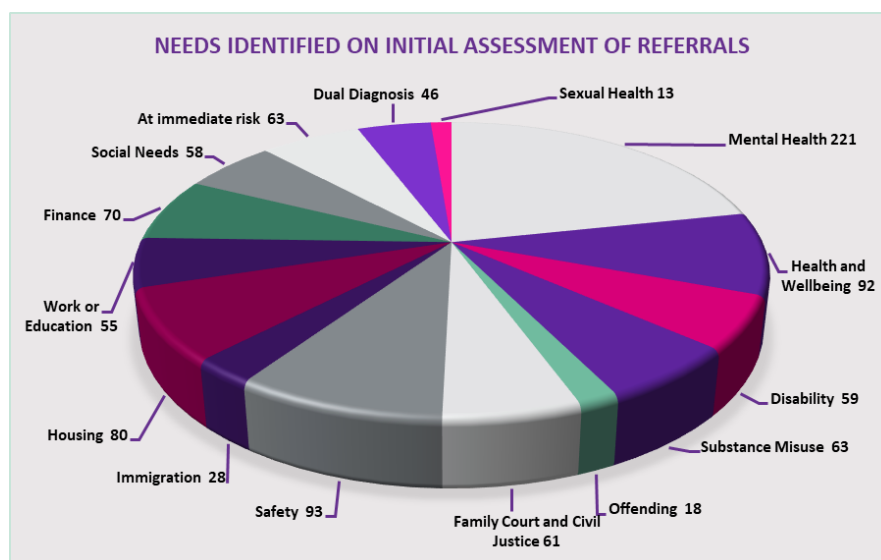
## Complexity of needs



As part of the needs analysis along with those identified that shaped the specialisms a range of other unmet needs were identified for women across the city, that included: support around Finance and Universal Credit; Homelessness; Hate crime and Isolation

The overall complexity of the needs and how they all intertwined provided the platform that the Complex Needs Service was built on and when service delivery started identification of need was included as part of the referral process.

A total of **957** needs between 252 service users were identified on initial contact, which on average each service user had 4. The pie chart below shows what these needs were.



## Reach of service

The complex Needs service has reached 252, women and young women from a range of communities and backgrounds across the city. The most popular specialism of the service was the Young Women and Girls specialist, who individually supported 72 service users, which is over 28% of the total number of referrals accepted.

Altogether the specialisms supported the following number of service users:

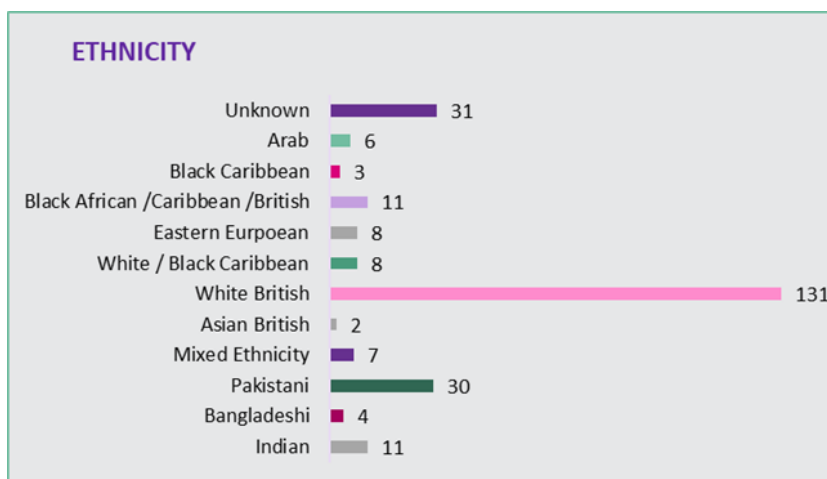
- Young Women and Girls (full time post) 72
- Domestic Violence and Abuse (full time post) 60
- Mental Health (MH) (part time 28hr post) 41\*
- New Migrants/Marginalised Communities (part time 28hr post) 37
- Pregnancy and Post removal(P&P) (part time 21hr post) 23\*
- Sex Worker (SW) (full time post) 19\*

Note: those market with \* have had staffing challenges either through leaving and recruitment (MH), long term illness (P&P), or an agreed redirection of purpose (SW).

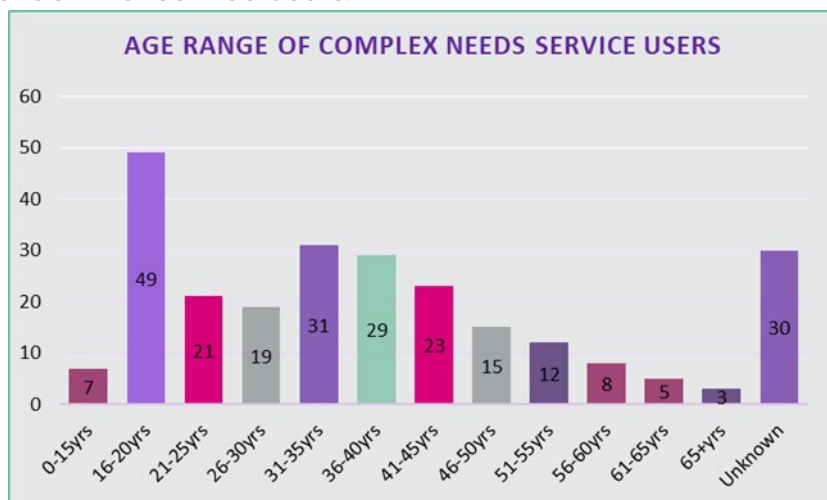
A total number of **11,630** hrs direct support has been offered to 252 service users.

The average numbers of hours support per service user is **46hrs**.  
 This works out that on average each case durations are **23 weeks**.

The ethnicity breakdown of service users.



The age range breakdown of service users.



Service User Representation by postcode

Postcode	Number	Postcode	Number	Postcode	Number
LS11	32	LS10	15	LS7	10
LS9	30	LS13	14	LS17	8
LS12	18	LS14	12	LS27	8
LS8	17	LS6	10	LS28	8

All other postcodes had fewer than 5 with 5 also coming from Wakefield.

### Service User Feedback

The Complex Needs service has change and developed due to ongoing review, engagement and feedback from service users. Each service user when exiting the service was given the opportunity to evaluate it from their perspective of which the feedback provided was positive.

Service users indicated that having someone who actively listened was important. All interviewed commented favourably on their worker's personal qualities of warmth, kindness and friendship and some stated that they felt it was important that the relationship while friendly and open, remained professional with clearly defined boundaries:

*"I think she's just really friendly and welcoming. But at the same time, she keeps authority structure as well, like her professionalism, which I think is important."*

Many talked about Trust being key to successfully achieving positive outcomes through consistent support and the building of strong rapport.

*"I don't have to explain from beginning to the end. You don't want to go through again and over and over and explain...It makes me more anxious. So, I always prefer to speak with one person and that's it."*

*"Every time if I text her, she never ignores me. She's always there."*

Service users valued the support being tailored to their needs and current emotional state and found the client-led service meant that things could be paced to suit them. The flexibility of the workers and the services as a whole meant that activities and timeframes were adapted to fit the women's emotional and practical needs. Service users felt that the time allocated to them was appropriate and the punctuality and reliability of the workers helped to build trust and reduce client anxiety.

*"She never rushed, she's always on time. And she never missed. I never stressed, I never doubted these things."*

Service users considered the gender-specific aspect and the non-judgemental attitudes of the workers important, as they felt it was easier for a woman to relate to their situation and they felt less embarrassed or judged by a female worker. They also felt safer, particularly for those who had experienced domestic abuse, and for many, it would have been impossible to work with a man.

*"Because I've been raped by a man. I've been battered by a man! I don't want a man helping me – I want a woman. I feel safer with a woman, that's just how I feel."*

*"It's just silly little stuff with me like I used to hate talking to people on the phone, I wouldn't make a doctor's appointment or anything by myself. And now I'm in my own house, I've got a baby and it's just stuff like that that I could never imagine myself being like."*

Younger women themselves highlighted improved problem-solving skills and being able to look at things from different perspectives as important aspects of their learning during the time in the

service. Many women reported that working with their Complex Needs Worker helped them cope with difficult emotional situations, raised awareness of safety and changed their approach:

*"...there's a lot of groups on Facebook that advertise self-harming and depression and stuff. And I was in all of them groups...And I'm not in any of them now...which is thanks to [worker]."*

Some improvements noted were subtle, for example, a change in friendship groups and more positive emotional states however, these smaller changes are recognised as being very important by referrers. The ability to consider their own safety was also noted as an outcome.

## **External feedback**

Feedback requests were also sent to external stakeholders and those who had made referrals into the service and again the feedback was positive. When asking external stakeholders about the Complex Needs Service the following was reported:

*"The model of support provided by the complex needs worker is valued as it provides holistic, flexible, consistent and unique support and in terms of the young women's specialist she recognises the importance of trust building and the on-going engagement needed to successfully work with young women."*

Several referrers reported seeing improvements in the service users' lives following on from them receiving support from their Complex Needs Worker. one who referred to the young women's specialist saw an improvement by stating that the young woman:

*"Understood more about child sexual exploitation, understood the impact and how to improve their behaviour, demonstrating some mental health improvement, that improves situations, improves behaviour and overall improves self-confidence."*

### **Summary of Complex Needs service successes**

The complex needs service has the following elements that have contributed to its success:

- **Enabling and empowering** women via supportive ways of working
- **Holistic tailored support** for women on an individual needs' basis
- **Gender specific provision**, with women only workers creating a safe space
- **Support for staff** development and learning
- **Unique service model** offering specialist workers across the city

## Outcome three – Women’s and Girls Empowerment

***Women and Girls will be empowered to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city.***

### The Women’s and Girls Hubs (WGH)

The WGH was established to provide a function for women and girls to come together, to discuss and agree their citywide priorities and to empower them to have their voices heard, to influence decisions both locally in their communities and city-wide through formal decision-making structures.

It was quickly recognised by strategic statutory partners as an influencing function and a mechanism that facilitated conversations with women and girls, which is now embedded within the city’s formal voice and influence arrangements as part of the Leeds City Councils Equality Assembly.

### Service Review

The initial informal nature of the WGH was its strength allowing it to be more inclusive, welcoming and less intimidating, however the review identified that from a professional point of view the lack of structure made it difficult to know what was happening and when. This became more apparent when the structure became more formal by the introduction of a Chair, which created many challenges, in particular the priorities and the Chair’s position and their view on those priorities. The structure has now changed back to the more informal inclusive model.

Another important factor about the structure of the WGH was how it was positioned in terms of it being separate and not funded by statutory services. This allowed it to have more autonomy and greater power when challenging decision makers in the city.

One WGH member said: *“women are a force to be reckoned with when we get together”*

### Impact and Outcomes

The WGH has proved to be effective and has enabled women and girls to contribute to local and city-wide conversations and has made a difference and had impact across the city:

- In 2018 the WHG Lead on the cities Suffrage Community Outreach programme, celebrating 100 years since some women received the right to vote.

The WGH facilitated a year long programme of activity that included: consultation meetings, events, workshops, film festivals, activities and training opportunities that aimed to empower women; facilitate conversations with local Councillors about issues and concerns in local communities; and promote and engage more women and young women in registering them to vote.

The Community Outreach programme was a success with over 1000 women taking part in 31 activities across the city. The voices and feedback as a result of the conversations was highly regarded with Government ministers refunding the local authority to continue these conversations, through the City Listening Project.

- The production of the State of Women’s Health in Leeds Report, that was launched on International Women’s Day in 2019.

The co-produced report, that was born out of conversations from the WGH was the first of its kind to include local community case studies and the voices of the women and girls of Leeds.

This report has received National acclaim from the NHS, has been welcomed by the World Health Organisation and more importantly is now shaping services in Leeds for Women and Young Women.

- Women Friendly Leeds Initiative. Whilst identifying priorities for the WGH to focus on, the hub members were concerned about safety in their community and in Leeds City centre both during the day and at night, the Women Friendly Leeds initiative was developed.

WLL Alliance applied to the Comic Relief Power Up fund, as part of the gender justice programme to take the concept and make it a reality in Leeds.

A 4-year project application was successful with it being one of only seven granted in the United Kingdom with only 14 being granted worldwide.

Women Friendly Leeds is built on a United Nations concept – Women Friendly City’s which aims for women and girls to be equal and are safe in the city they live.

The Women’s Hub has met over 12 times, has a membership of over 700 and has had over 1500 women access its meetings, workshops and focus groups.

The Girls Hub meets monthly and has over 30 members who have agreed its priorities to campaign on for young women and girls.

### **Service user feedback**

The women who accessed the WGH stated in their feedback that they did so for a range of reasons, which in some instances were wider than its “Voice and Influence” purpose, but nevertheless were equally as important for the attendees.

Women saw the WGH providing additional functions:

- to get Advice e.g. about financial matters;
- to be made Aware about what is happening in Leeds to support women;
- to Network from both a social point to get out and meet people and for professional networking; to improve links between organisations and to represent marginalised groups e.g. disabled women, LGBTQI, carers in conversations to make Leeds a safer city for women.
- Some also attended due to it being relevant to their professional role, working with and supporting women.

## Summary of The Women's and Girls Hubs successes

- The WGH was accessed for the following reasons: advice; awareness; networking; contributors; representing marginalised groups; as part of a professional role.
- Outcomes associated with WGH involvement included connecting women and women's organisations, accessing information, having the opportunity to discuss and identify issues, and to gain influence in the city
- The WGH's are now part of the Projects legacy with it receiving resources to support its activity until 2023, which will amplify women's and girls voice and influence across the city.

## Peer Support

The Peer Support element of the WLL Project intended to review partner activity with the aim to develop an appropriate model that each of the WLL Alliance members could use to develop within their organisations.

This review did conclude with a Peer Support model, that was piloted and reviewed again with one of the smaller organisations, with the aim that the learning would be used to help shape further role out across other WLL Alliance members.

Along with learning from the model a Peer Support Tool Kit for others was created and then in March 2020 was re-designed due to COVID-19 to be an online resource which is now shared across the city.

*"It's all about not duplicating what's already out there, and trying to learn from other people, best practice, that sort of thing."*

The project learnt from the pilot that the smaller partners of WLL found using the Peer Support model as an effective way of engaging service users within a group setting. The women from these groups gained confidence to initially help within the group and have now moved on to leadership roles, with them leading the group on their own.

One particular partner found the peer support pilot of benefit as they were able to apply for additional funding to deliver more services, based on their peer support pilot experience, which has built the capacity of that organisation.

As the model is being rolled out in other partner organisations, they too are experiencing the same positive effects as the initial pilot, with women being empowered and gaining confidence to lead their own peer support activities within their organisation, without the support of WLL staff.

Peer Support has enabled the development of best practice and an important element of empowerment for service users:

*"We have lots of young women who've had support themselves and then they get involved in the project, and then they start to support others. So, it can be that kind of peer support and that lived experience being really important."*

WLL Alliance members have also noted the benefits for their own organisations as a direct result of peer support. This has been demonstrated by the sharing of policies, procedures or in responding to specific problems or queries raised by other WLL Alliance members.

*"The peer support has been good. It's good to be able to call someone else up to talk something over as this is an isolating field to work in. It's good to get advice or copies of policies from others that we can use."*

The WLL Alliance has also led to the development of leadership network allowing members to "bounce ideas" off "intelligent people working in the sector" Some CEOs felt that peer support was important in relation to their own learning:

*"... in terms of the partnership overall, it's been a really positive involvement for us. I think the peer support aspect is entrenched at all levels. Because I think as senior officers within our organisation, often you feel that you're working in isolation. It's great to have the support of other CEOs and directors who've got experience in different areas. And you can benefit from that shared learning, sharing resources. And of course, that goes right through to the peer support model that's been developed as well, which – it's not necessarily one size fits all, but I think it recognises the key principles that apply to all kinds of groups."*

- 12 women have taken part and passed accredited Peer Support Training and of those, two have been offered external paid Peer Support opportunities
- 114 Women have taken part in other Peer Support opportunities
- WLL have established 4 additional Peer Support groups within its Alliance
- WLL are Co-producers of the Leeds Peer Support Network

### Summary of peer support successes

- The AB was seen as an important mechanism in providing women involved with peer support.
- Staff involved in WLL outlined peer support as an added bonus associated with their involvement as it enabled them to gain new knowledge and to improve their own organisations.



- Leadership development was a clear outcome associated with peer support within the Alliance.
- A city-wide Peer Support Network is functioning and the On-line Peer Support Tool Kit has enabled others organisations outside of the WLL arrangements to develop their own peer support activities.

## Service User Involvement

Service users have and will continue to be integral to WLL service development, their contributions have featured highly throughout the project and as soon as was feasibly possible service users were actively involved in the project as it developed, with many saying how beneficial it was for them to be able to be supported, learn and contribute to shaping the project as it progressed.

There is a recognition of how powerful service users are; both in terms of shaping the development of existing service provision and providing their lived experience through voice and influence. It is their stories and voices that have been central to change being achieved successfully.

Through active engagement and feedback opportunities with service users WLL has been able to learn how the particular model of service delivery has been successful in supporting women who have had multiple complex needs and those who are often excluded due to being from specified marginalised communities.

A range of opportunities, activities and methods were created to keep service users involved and taking part. These include specific focus groups, feedback forms, evaluations and feedback after and during events, surveys and questionnaires when exiting the complex needs service and service users were involved from the very start of the project by having representation throughout the recruitment process of the Complex Needs and Community Engagement staff.

Service users have also taken part in reviews, evaluations; have led on previous activities and through their involvement in a specifically designed service users' group – The Advisory Board.

The Advisory Board (AB) enabled participation using the peer support model created. It supported a network of women, with staff on hand to advise, guide and encourage, where there was no pressure to participate, and where the meetings were consistent.

It was noted by the members that they felt safe in a non-judgemental environment, valued the women-only space, felt supported, encouraged and secure in the knowledge that the staff were there to help them.

One area of learning of the project in terms of service user's involvement, was their attendance at the Partnership Board. It was agreed that service users were fundamental in the project's development and success, but due to the way the Partnership Board functioned with a

“hierarchical structure” that included a confidential Peer Support space for the Chief Officers, it was not structured in an inclusive way.

A review of the partnership decision making structures took place, which informed the development of a more cylindrical one, that saw service users having the opportunity to access the appropriate meetings where they could take part and inform project development decisions.

The Project learnt very early on that it would be very difficult to recruit exiting service users as peer evaluators. (peer evaluators are those who take part in evaluating services i.e. the Complex Needs Service, but use their lived experience to lead the evaluation).

### **Service user feedback**

The AB has provided service users with opportunities to learn and develop by attending a range of courses, take leadership roles to plan and lead specific activities within the project and participate in decision making activities either internally or externally through the WGH.

Women joined the AB through accessing support or volunteering from one of the WLL Alliance members. However, it was identified that those who attend needed to be at a certain point in their journey to be able to join the AB. They needed to have a degree of stability but acknowledged that the AB was also part of their recovery process:

*“You’ve got to be somewhere where your life is stable enough that you can, it’s not a massive commitment, but you know just almost get your headspace to think about something different and be there.”*

*“It’s been a big major part of my recovery in all avenues from domestic violence and drink as well and boundaries and have better relationship with the key people in my life like my kids and my family.”*

AB members could choose to be involved in any aspects that interested them to the extent that they were able/wanted to be, this along with no pressure to participate was viewed very positively:

*“Everybody has completely different abilities and interests and they all work at different levels and that’s what I like about it. You basically do as much or as little as you want.”*

It was recognised that the women who were exiting the Complex Needs service on positive pathways were not yet in a position to become peer evaluators due to the complexity of their experiences.

*“It’s still part of my recovery, I was looking at something that I could use my brain, not just look after children, not just do cleaning and ironing, not just being a mum, not just be a victim of domestic violence, and that’s what I was looking for. You know I wanted to broaden out and just try different things.”*

As a result, the recruitment of peer evaluators stopped which was communicated and agreed by the WLL Partners.

- 2,229 service users have contributed to project learning through a range of activities
- 58 Service Users have attended the meetings or have been members of the Service Users Advisory Board
- 258 Women have provided individual responses and feedback about services they have accessed
- 34 service users took part in the projects continuous External Evaluation completed by Leeds Beckett University

### Summary of service user participation successes

- The AB created a supportive network of women, who reported that staff were always on hand to advise, guide and encourage. There was no pressure to participate, and the meetings were consistent. The women felt safe in a non-judgemental environment and valued the women-only space
- Women who participated in the AB reported several positive outcomes such as increased confidence, empowerment, recovery, skills improvement, securing paid employment, improved connections, and feeling heard
- Suggested areas for improvement included increasing diversity of membership, increasing the influence of the board (via attendance at the partnership meetings), and extending the reach of the project
- Service users have benefitted from attending the AB with 6 members going on to further employment, learning and development opportunities.
- The AB is now a formal part of the new WLL Alliance Agreement, which was launched to invite other women's centred organisations to join the partnership in September 2020

### WLL Alliance learning

Although there were approaches to continuous learning as part of the overall project delivery the WLL Alliance was continually learning about itself too. The partner organisations had worked as part of networks and partnerships before and recognised that working at such a scale offered a greater chance of success at changing the lives of women and girls across the whole city rather than just in their immediate communities.

A key message from several CEOs was that the development of the Alliance was a positive step forward for raising awareness of the issues affecting women and girls:

*“It’s been a huge force for positive change and to get gender back on the agenda, can’t say anything more importantly than that.”*

The pioneering approach adopted by the partnership was described as unique in scale in comparison to the other formal and informal partnerships that the CEOs had been members of:

*“We’re talking about eleven partners. So, it’s significantly different in terms of how you have to set yourself up, how you have to employ a project manager. We’ve got a voting system, things like that. So, it’s just quite different from when you’re perhaps working with two, three organisations on a project.”*

The model which turns out to be one of its success stories adopted by the partnership for joint delivery of the project is one where the frontline delivery staff are hosted across different organisations rather than having one organisation host the service with all partners being able to refer into it.

This brought additional value from the shared delivery and increased access to specialist knowledge:

*“The point of the consortium is to be more powerful together, to have more connections and to share the specialisms. No one women and girl’s organisation has all of the specialisms and knows everything. There is more skill together than separate.”*

The expertise available across the project and the Alliance has enabled them to learn more about what each other had to offer, which has in turn strengthened the work of the Alliance. The Alliance enabled each organisation to keep its individual identity, acknowledging that they were best placed to deliver specific work such as engaging with marginalised communities in which they are embedded.

Identifying and building on the strengths of each organisation was described as ‘additionality’, with it being especially important for the smaller organisations within the Alliance as were able to be supported by and learn from the larger organisations involved:

*“And it’s been learning for me in the act that usually when you’re a very small organisation, you’re just doing your day-to-day run of the mill kind of your job. You don’t really know what’s going on in the wider picture of things.”*

## **Learning through Partnership Work**

The service review, the ongoing external evaluation and other independently facilitated away days identified many areas for improvement in order to maximise the work and relationships of the Alliance.

Challenges reported in the Alliance included problematic attendance at meetings, time pressures and conflicting priorities, the use of time within meetings; difficulties with the decision-making process, unsettling dynamics within the Alliance and not all voices being heard; as well

as the issue of not separating the project and Alliance early enough to allow for more of a focus on the Alliance.

The main recommendation as a result of the service review was a reminder to maintain the reason why the organisations first came together – to improve the lives of women and girls in Leeds.

With this in mind the Alliance then started to make changes that included:

- Agreeing a set of expectations about membership of the consortium that all members would adhere to, including standards of behaviour at meetings considering individual partner needs
- Refreshing membership by inviting other women and girls' organisations to join and considering the exit strategy for existing members who no longer continue membership
- Addressing fair competition within the Alliance:

*“There has been some conflict around other bids involving a number of partners in relation to the ‘no competition’ arrangements, and this might continue to be a challenge moving forward.”*

### **Improving Quality – Quality Assurance scheme**

Following the review an opportunity presented itself that offered an external independent assessor to assess their arrangements against a Quality Assurance scheme.

Improving Quality (IQ) Standard is a quality assurance scheme for the not for profit/Charitable sector that assesses good practice in 4 areas covering all aspects of management and service delivery:

1. Being Accountable (governance, leadership and management)
2. Being Welcoming (involving service users, managing staff, equality and diversity)
3. Being Effective (planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation)
4. Being Sustainable (managing project risk, money and resources)

The assessment process concluded with a final report which detailed activity under the four areas and concluded with:

“Women’s Lives Leeds was found to be operating a quality system fully in compliance with all the requirements of the IQ Foundation Standard and the following areas were identified as particular strengths:

- There is a strong ethos of, and commitment to, enabling and supporting service users
- Everyone involved felt very positive about the Alliance and the effects that it was having
- There is a culture of openness, honesty and self-learning that was very evident and has been effective in improving the Alliance

- User feedback was very positive, and is consistently so
- The Alliance is well managed and supported by Leeds Women's Aid – the contract lead.

The Alliance have now agreed a WLL Alliance Agreement (August 2020) which clearly sets these out, demonstrating how the partners have developed together. The Alliance is now opening up to invite other women's centred organisations to express an interest to join them and the appointment of an independent Chair, was a constructive step forward to overcome many challenges to ensuring that there was effective management/chairing within partnership meetings.

## Conclusions

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### Academic research and WLL 's delivery

Academic literature suggests that organisations offering women-centred approaches to service provision are effective at meeting client needs (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2020).

Service user outcomes from the WLL project support the evidence in this area, with the complex needs service in particular using trauma-informed principles to support complex need. Trauma-informed services operate by taking account of trauma and avoiding triggering reactions.

In order to be trauma-informed, services have to adopt six core principles (Bloom & Covington 2008).

1. **Gender** makes a difference, so services and approaches need to be responsive to this: **evident in the project working with and supporting women and girls only.**
2. **Safety**, which in this context means ensuring that women seeking services feel physically and emotionally safe and that they remain so; **evident in the Community Engagement and Complex Needs Services.**
3. **Trustworthiness** is essential; women need to know that providers and practitioners will ensure that expectations are clear and consistent and that appropriate boundaries are maintained; **evident through user-led services, tailored to meet individuals needs at a pace set by them**
4. **Choice**, which means that the preferences of the women seeking services in routine practices and crisis situations should be prioritised. Holistically addressing need at the pace defined by the service user is part of such choice, and **evident in the complex needs provision.**
5. **Collaboration** in the form of input from women using the service; **evident in the delivery model** implemented by WLL and involvement for service users.
6. **Empowerment** with services developed and delivered to maximise the empowerment of women, recognising their strengths and building skills. **Service users and professionals noted feeling empowered as a result of their involvement with WLL.**

Globally, there is rarely effective provision for supporting individuals with complex needs and in most contexts including the UK there is no single strategic system with responsibility for women (Duffy and Hyde, 2011). Interventions tend to be placed within specific sectors for example, health care (Rees et al., 2014), or the criminal justice setting (Women in Prison, 2017) and as such are not scaled up, integrated responses to women's needs, despite evidence showing the necessity for multi-faceted, contextual responses (Rees et al., 2014).

**The creation of a gender-specific consortium in the form of WLL ensured that the combined expertise of twelve women's organisations was drawn upon to avoid service duplication, to extend reach to the most disadvantaged women, to enhance learning and to develop strategic plans to address women's need in the city.**

Evidence from the USA demonstrates that community-based coalitions can be useful mechanisms for the creation of policy change, starting with awareness raising (Kowalczyk et al 2017). **WLL linked with partner agencies to raise awareness of gender-specific needs** via the production of the State of Women's Health Report in particular, its accompanying dissemination and its use in practice to influence city wide services, conversations and strategic planning.

Knare et al (2015) discuss the importance of consistent membership and participation, the ability of partners to identify issues, to leverage resources, to draw upon evidence (local data), and to access internal and external resources.

**The WLL Alliance meets many of these markers of success: retaining the same membership, securing funding and creating locally based evidence.**

Other important lessons about the process of building coalitions relate to building consensus, hearing the voice of all partners, considering all partner interests and having effective communication and rules (again see Knare et al 2015).

**The WLL Partnership has established mechanisms to manage interests, hear voice and effectively communicate**, which still operates in a competitive funding environment, which continues to create healthy dialogue and challenge.

Wilton & Williams (2019) report that in providing trauma informed care, workers need to listen, understand, respond and check that they are responding in a meaningful way – **all aspects evident in the ways in which WLL workers operate.**

Voluntary sector service location and flexible service delivery are mechanisms of successful gender-specific interventions (Warwick-Booth & Cross 2017), especially when combined with advocacy and multi-agency working (Cleaver et al 2019), **all evident within WLL service delivery.**

### **WLL Project Learning and Evaluation Report Conclusions**

WLL Partners and Project staff welcomed the opportunity presented to them by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), to deliver the project within a continuous learning context. WLL have strived to capture and embed learning gained and as one of the biggest Partnerships and

Projects funded through the NLCF Women's and Girls Initiative, wish to share learning, challenges and successes with others, with a view that they can take this and embed appropriately.

There is much to be shared in terms of tangible learning, which only highlights can be captured within this document, as there are additional thoughts, feelings and experiences that are more difficult to capture, but equally important. It is outstanding that the project has achieved its three main objectives, against the backdrop of continuous learning, which supports the view that the learning from the structures, approaches and leadership are those to be showcased and tested in the future.

The final 6 months of the project coincided with the unexpected and devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation doesn't include findings directly related to this, however as a project we have seen women and girls be affected, often disproportionately, by the effects of mental health, violence and abuse, caring responsibilities and employability.

It is important that the learning is shared with all stakeholders, to inform future service delivery and to be a catalyst for strategic systems change. This learning has contributed to the development of a model that works, that can be considered by mainstream commissioners in future services development.

WLL are delighted to have had such positive engagement responses and contributions from those women who have experienced the project through participation in services and opportunities available. It is through this learning, that WLL have made improvements used it to shape future opportunities.

WLL want to thank every woman, young woman and girls who took the time to contribute their thoughts, opinions and experiences and which has given us extensive understanding and learning about the project and the services that they have accessed. We also want to thank the team from "The Centre for Health Promotion Research at Leeds Beckett University", who have been with and evaluated us consistently on this learning journey.

## Recommendations

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**Strategic:** Share report with stakeholders, demonstrate theories of women centred working, continue to build links with statutory partners to ensure women and girls voices are heard, built on learning for expansion and development.

**Alliance:** Work to provide further clarity about expectations associated with membership, commitments, behaviours and competition; and conduct a SWOT analysis of all organisations involved and develop of plan to support the individual needs of each partner organisation based on size, staffing and capacity.

**Complex needs:** Work with stakeholders regarding re-funding, aiming to integrate complex needs working into wider partnerships, based on the evident needs.



**Advisory Board:** Integrate AB influence into all aspects of WLL work and encourage strategic voice and influence; increase the diversity of membership.

**Hub:** Develop structures and clarity to increase reach, improve diversity, develop action and develop strategies to retain members.

## Our Vision

That all women and girls in Leeds thrive and flourish;  
Women and girls in Leeds are empowered through the support they give to each other; the support they receive through our work and the support they are offered by their families and the wider community;  
Every person and organisation in Leeds champions our aim of creating a safe, empowering and sustainable city (from UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Global Spaces).

## Our Mission

To ensure that the most vulnerable women and girls have improved and extended access to the services and support they want, when they choose, with the support of a dynamic, responsive and strategic Leeds Women's Sector;  
To prioritise and support the needs of women and girls with multiple and complex needs through the work of the WLL Alliance, leading to a holistic response from services that enables women and girls to live fulfilling and independent lives;  
To empower women, girls and Women's Sector Organisations to support their peers and influence service delivery, development and design across the city.

## Find out more

 [www.womenslivesleeds.org.uk](http://www.womenslivesleeds.org.uk)

 [twitter.com/leeds\\_women](https://twitter.com/leeds_women)

 [facebook.com/womenslivesleeds/](https://facebook.com/womenslivesleeds/)

Women's Lives Leeds is a unique partnership of the following eleven organisations, funded by the big lottery fund:



Women's Counselling and Therapy Service



Shantona Women's Centre  
Building confidence & independence in the community

