



Breaking Boundaries

Learning Paper

Galvanising Local Partners

Introduction

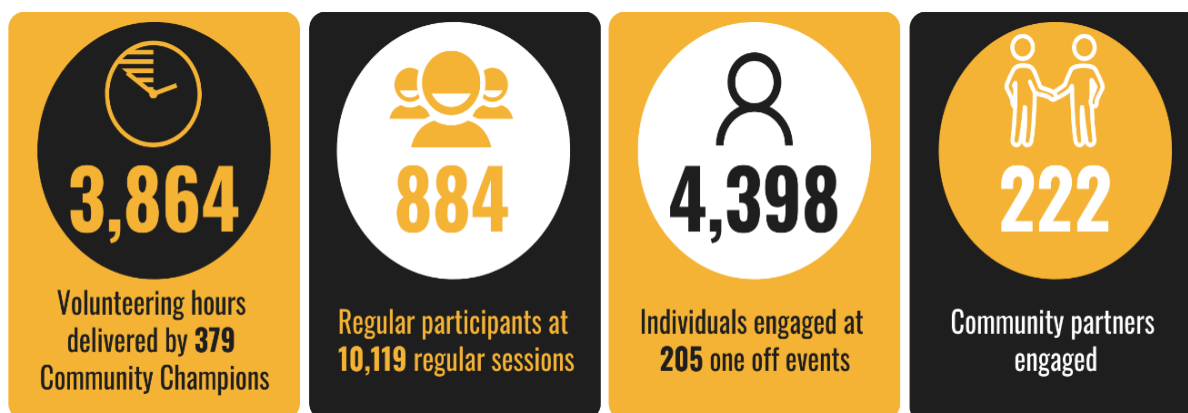
As a social cohesion programme, Breaking Boundaries' primary aim was to bring young people, their families, and communities together through regular activities/one-off events based around a 'cricket-themed' approach. This sought to improve community cohesion through projects in Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and Slough between 2018 and 2022.

Originally funded by £1.8 million from [Spirit of 2012](#) through its Connecting Communities through Cricket grant, the programme was led by a partnership between the [Youth Sport Trust](#) and [Sporting Equals](#). It generated key learning on how by working through strong and evolving partnerships, more cohesive communities can be created and sustained.

This paper provides organisations seeking to facilitate partnership working to improve community cohesion in their area with key insight drawn from the Breaking Boundaries programme to help galvanise other partners to be involved in that work.

Outcomes

Between 2018 and 2022, Breaking Boundaries delivered and engaged:

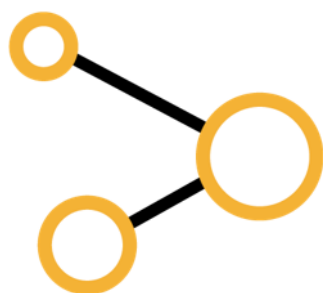


Breaking Boundaries demonstrated delivery strength around improved social connectedness, empowerment, community voice and participation and belonging for its participants and delivery staff, and new and additional cohesion knowledge and skills for its delivery staff and volunteers.

Its greatest strides came through the work it undertook to facilitate and stimulate improved partnership working between partners who had not previously worked together, often enabling them to address past tensions between themselves or communities. This overcame a lack of readiness and infrastructure in the cities to support ongoing cohesion work to build opportunities for future sustained work.

Examples of partnership development work supporting community cohesion through Breaking Boundaries are outlined below.

Extended and strengthened partnership working



Two-hundred and twenty-two partners were worked with through Breaking Boundaries including a range of organisations and community groups operating outside of the physical activity arena. This brought together a wide range of local knowledge and expertise in different areas like cohesion, sport, faith, and culture. This built on existing infrastructure to provide more opportunities for a 'community voice' to be heard and shape local delivery.

Engaged local partners suggested that the programme's key strength was the links with other organisations and community projects that were developed through local leadership forums. This led to independent working between paired community organisations and sustained partnership working beyond the programme.

"Internally and externally, we were able to connect with a wide range of diverse groups. We were able to provide a wide range of opportunities...We put people in a room who wouldn't have been there otherwise. Now it's a good partnership because we set up relationships with other people."

(Community Coordinator, Slough)

Increased empowerment and community voice



Breaking Boundaries focused cohesion discussions on specific local issues; this helped to engage community organisations as they could see how Breaking Boundaries could empower and give a voice to the communities that they represented. By encouraging 'safe' group environments, Breaking Boundaries was able to facilitate the sharing of challenges between groups. The City Leadership Forums (CLFs), which brought together a range of local community partners, acted as safe forums in which groups could discuss and co-produce solutions to situations that they had no control over before.

"The project has made the groups think about other organisations they may or not share and interest and encouraged them to reach out. This is something that probably wouldn't happen, due to the nature of people's work, now they have a reason to get to know another organisation they wouldn't normally do."

(Community Coordinator, Manchester)



Enhanced knowledge and skills to support community cohesion

Breaking Boundaries has improved the knowledge and skills of partners to enable them to support community cohesion more effectively. It highlighted the importance for organisations to link effectively with local community organisations in order to reach community groups and local groups. Individuals gained knowledge on how to effectively bring different groups together by using sport and physical activity as a vehicle to support cohesion outcomes.

"Breaking Boundaries has been really helpful in helping us think through our activities, it's really enabled us to build relationships with groups that we potentially wouldn't have had connections with or would have had to start from scratch. But because of the projects, we're already halfway there, we've already got some great relationships with some community groups and some youth groups."

(Community Partner, Birmingham)

Lessons and Recommendations

- **Take time to understand the local community:** Time must be taken before starting a scheme to develop a fuller understanding of each community and the cohesion issues it faces. This is far more likely to be successfully achieved by a process of co-creation and wide engagement, especially with young people. It can also help to galvanise community organisations to participate because a shared agenda has been developed.
- **Build in regular contact between partners:** Facilitate regular contact and discussions between targeted community organisations to identify needs and approaches is especially valuable to support programme development and delivery. Community and area leadership forums can be especially useful.
- **Reassure local partners of long-term delivery intentions:** Activities that wish to connect with potential participants may need to reassure local partners that they are going to be long term options. The benefits for the community organisation of participation also need to be clear up front. Many are suspicious of projects that 'drop in' and then 'drop out' of areas because community links haven't been properly established. By encouraging joint working, local partners can share skills and knowledge and gain trust in each other to secure more sustainable outcomes.
- **Strengthen cohesion skills and knowledge:** Workforce development on cohesion and integration is essential for all partners, before the scheme starts, but also as it develops. Cohesion work can be challenging for many, and short training and development inputs can be really valued. The offer of training on top of networking opportunities could also help persuade some more reticent organisations to attend.
- **Focus on regularly engaging with partners:** Proactive and ongoing engagement on a one-to-one basis keeps partners engaged. This helps to build programme understanding, maintains connection, and can be an important source of local intelligence on emerging cohesion issues that can facilitate new project/delivery development.
- **Build trust by allowing local decision making:** Local control of some funding decisions to support projects addressing local needs is a key way to build links and trust with targeted communities building on their local knowledge and expertise in the local area, whilst also helping to sustain joint working.