

# WOMEN & GIRLS ALLIANCE LEEDS

## EMPOWERING SYSTEMS CHANGE

BEST PRACTICE TOOLKIT



**The Women & Girls Alliance Leeds is a dynamic consortium of 12 women's centred organisations who are both strategically focussed and individually provide support and services for women and girls in Leeds.**


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**This interactive toolkit aims to share learning, through the sharing of reports, surveys and evaluations since it was established In 2015.**

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**It will give insight to some of the challenges they have encountered and overcome and a snapshot of some successes and achievements.**

**Each page consists of key learning, which can be followed up by clicking on links for more information concluding with a selection of learning reports and documents created since 2015.**



# EMPOWERING SYSTEMS CHANGE

BEST PRACTICE TOOLKIT

The W&GAL has a collective aim of improving the lives of women and girls in Leeds and was initially formed to promote their shared aims of enabling women and girls to lead healthy, safe, and full lives.

By working together, they provide more co-ordinated and rounded support and has a stronger influence in creating positive change in Leeds, however, they are individual organisations too.

To find out more about each of the Alliance members Click on the images below to go to each member's website



## WOMEN & GIRLS ALLIANCE LEEDS

# EMPOWERING SYSTEMS CHANGE

## BEST PRACTICE TOOLKIT

This Toolkit has been informed by the knowledge, learning and understanding gained from; the delivery of the front line Complex Needs Service, which was the first time they experienced complicated Matrix Management; how to engage service users is shaping its activities and their own strategic development and the appointment of an Independent Chair. All of which is hoped can be used to inform other organisations embarking on consortium development.

**There were five main elements that formed the structure of the ESC Project.**

**Click on the buttons below to learn about their best practice.**

[Strategic Alliance Development](#)

[Project Management](#)

[Complex Needs Service](#)

[Women Speak Group](#)

[Communications](#)

[Click here for resources and reports](#)

**WOMEN & GIRLS  
ALLIANCE LEEDS**

# STRATEGIC ALLIANCE DEVELOPMENT

The success of the Alliance is by having an agreed, strong Strategy. This underpins thinking in a collaborative way to develop new partnerships and the opportunities chosen to progress. An Alliance Development Manager supports them to work together to progress towards their goals.

## The Strategy has three Objectives:

- 1 Having a strong external influence**
- 2 Maintaining the strength of the Alliance**
- 3 Ensuring the sustainability of the Alliance**

### Having a strong external influence

By attending a range of partnership meetings across the city such as the City Wide VAWG Board; City Centre Partnership Boards, and statutory Boards like the Domestic Abuse Local Partnership, the Alliance can advocate for the priorities for women and girls and also their own service users, making sure their contributions influence decisions. They also actively participate and lead in community projects to maintain connections with the local women and girls they serve.

### Maintaining the strength of the Alliance

The Alliance experience a range of challenges to maintain the strength it has due to their independence and their commitment to deliver essential services for women and girls across Leeds. These include: communications; attending Alliance Project Operational and Strategic meetings; ensuring member voices are heard and being accountable. The Alliance have structures and processes in place making things as equitable as possible for each member. For example: meetings are planned in advance at times when smaller members can attend and Subgroup meetings allowing for more discussion. The flexibility for CEO's to delegate responsibility for others from their organisations to attend creating more inclusive and effective contributions and decision making.

### Ensuring the sustainability of the Alliance

By Horizon Scanning and planning ahead, and through managing projects that help to achieve long term goals, the Alliance work together to sustain their partnership arrangements. They agree on strategies and clear priorities together, enabling sustainability through awarded projects and initiatives, for the Alliance.

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# STRATEGIC ALLIANCE DEVELOPMENT

As an alliance of 12 charity organisations, each doing crucial work for their service in a sector that faces constant pressure, means strong communication is vital.

“ Being an Alliance means our services are complementary rather than overlapping. We can see a bigger picture of need, demand and gaps in the city and together we can bring a clear, strong voice to policy makers. ”



Women's Counselling and Therapy Service Leeds

**Keeping our alliance connected is key to maintaining our partnership and we implement 4 things that facilitate this:**



Katie Russell,  
CEO of SARSVL

“ Working together with trusted partners to combat violence against women and girls and inequity gives us greater reach, voice and impact. For me personally, it provides some invaluable daily solidarity and sisterhood. ”

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# PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project Management is a crucial part of working successfully as an Alliance, so a Project Manager is employed to manage all of the Alliances projects and initiatives.

The Project Manager then separates the Strategic activities from the Operational and with the Development Manager sets meetings that are timetabled to take place individually.

## Learning to share.

The Alliance has learnt that two separate meetings are required to clearly split the Strategic outwards facing discussion from the operational internal project delivery discussions as they are hard to chair and manage and often easily slip into operational conversations each time.

### The Alliance use the following principles when identifying and delivering projects:

- A focus on gender specific projects.
- Include co-production with service users.
- Have a core of Feminist working principles.
- Use Restorative problem solving techniques

### Gender-Specific Projects

All Projects including the Empowering Systems Change Project are driven by having a strong gender focus. By sticking to and maintaining this gendered focus the Alliance has a clear steer in terms of which projects and activities they will apply for. Such Projects include: The Women Friendly Leeds movement, Women's Night Safe Space, Ask for Angela and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which focussed on activities that supported the National initiative to end Violence Against Women and Girls.

These projects help to enhance the Alliance's reach, to strengthen their messaging; engage more women and girls allowing a greater voice to influence both the Alliance and also the cities decision making structures.

All initiatives are based on a strong ethos of:

**"ask us and include us before you decide" and "by and for Women and Girls".**

“ Each member of staff share the same values that encompass the project, such as dedication, passion, positivity, solution focused and working within feminist principles. However, they also represent a wide range of intersectional women; they sit within different specialist organisations and have different skills.

They represent some of the different cultures, sexualities, disabilities and experiences of the women and girls they work with and this representation is key to building trusting and non-judgemental relationships and the projects success.

**Women's Lives Leeds - Project Manager**

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# PROJECT MANAGEMENT

## Benefits of working with a team of specialist women and girls workers

1

We can share experiences and learning, relevant to the context we collectively work in.

3

We have a shared understanding of issues that disproportionately affect women and girls.

2

We collectively agree to work within a framework of feminist principles.

4

We bring together knowledge from a broad range of backgrounds and specialisms.

## Feminist Working Principles

As a women-focused Alliance the principles that empower women and feminist beliefs are important to steer our work as and the projects we initiate.

Considering and understanding intersectionality within our work.

Allowing the time and space to build trust, and therefore meaningful, professional relationships.

Non-hierarchical working relationships: everyone's voice in the team is valued and heard equally.

Taking a collaborative approach; sharing to gather advice, feedback and foster effective communication.

## Restorative Problem Solving Circles

A mechanism for collaboration from the Complex Needs Team:

Worker A then writes every one down, even if they've already tried them. Finally, Worker A chooses 2 or 3 of the suggestions to try, and will feedback at the next meeting.

A member of the team (Worker A) brings an issue to the group such as "Mary has stopped engaging but her risk factors have increased. What do I do?" They have 2 minutes to describe the problem.

Workers B, C and D then have 3 minutes to ask clarifying questions that will help them understand the case more. before responding.

Workers B, C and D then put forward as many suggestions as possible, however big or small, simple or complex, within another 3 minutes.

# COMPLEX NEEDS SERVICE

The Empowering Systems Change Complex Needs Service is a gender-specific support service designed to help women whose needs could not be met by existing models of support in other services.

**The service acknowledged the inter-related nature of issues faced by women with complex needs and took an holistic approach to supporting women in addressing these issues, in a way that single-issue focused services may be unable to do.**

**The support is offered by taking a long-term approach, that had no time limits or set “number of months in service” allowing time to build trust between women and support workers, with the aim to:**

**Helping women to gain confidence.**

**Helping women to lead more independent lives.**

**Helping women to understand and to learn how to be and stay safe.**

**Build their confidence and self-esteem.**

**Learn about healthy relationships and how to access services that they need.**

“ The benefits of offering a gender specific service go beyond simply focusing on girls, but is a concentrated effort to assist in female development in a positive and nurturing way.

– Complex Needs Worker ”

## How do we empower women to become independent and confident?

- Supporting to attend external group sessions and recreational activities to help build networks and prevent isolation.
- Helping to access work place support to continue in work or studies and aid financial stability.
- Providing a non-judgemental, listening ear, allowing the service user to explore their options and make their own decisions with autonomy.
- Supporting to attend meetings and appointments whilst building the confidence to attend alone.
- Giving positive affirmations, reflecting on how far service users have come.
- Assisting in building strong networks of support with other women.
- Offering specific activities that build learning around confidence building, agency, consent and self esteem.
- Building self esteem through activities that challenge women to leave their comfort zone.

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# COMPLEX NEEDS SERVICE SUPPORTING YOUNG WOMEN

## How did the project support young women aged 13 – 21 ?

“

Our support offered young women not only a safe space where they can explore their deeper feelings and experiences of multiple challenges, but also a strength-based, empowering approach that seeks to offer hope for the future in terms of aspirations and disrupting challenging cycles.

”

Complex Needs Worker

The work focussed around self esteem, using reflective exercises that looked at self image and confidence, while “vision board” making helps girls look towards their futures.

Work takes place at a critical stage of gender identity formation, viewing “femaleness” as inherently strength based.

Individually tailoring support specific to each Young woman’s needs, while working at a pace that she is comfortable with.

Meeting in spaces that feel safe and familiar to them that are easy to access. This dismantles hierarchy between workers and young women. For example in a school setting, in the park or a local cafe – somewhere where they feel safe.

Long-term support for an unspecified amount of time means that we can build a strong, trusting relationship with women.

## WOMEN SPEAK GROUP

### Women Speak is the advisory group for the Women and Girls Alliance Leeds

The group is made up of women who have used services from one or more of the twelve organisations within the alliance. They meet bi monthly to work on and co-produce internal alliance projects, such as informing strategy and policy and are involved with external voice and influence projects across the city.

The group ensures that the alliance is making decisions that are relevant to, and informed by, the women and girls they represent. This gives women in the group the opportunity to build community, develop skills and work together to bring about change.



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## How do we ensure Women Speak is accessible and inclusive?

There are various challenges for the women in our group that could pose potential barriers to them attending sessions, such as economic, geographical and language, along with many others.

These are overcome by offering the following?

- 1 Women can bring a key worker with them to the group, to support with access needs or translation.
- 2 Meetings happen during the day so that women can be free for school pick up hours later on.
- 3 We hold each meeting in different alliance organisation venues so women can become familiar with different support services available and to allow women in different areas to attend.
- 4 Women can bring children with them so that childcare is not a barrier to participation.
- 5 We pay for bus fares or taxis to ensure there's not a financial or resource barrier to attending meetings.
- 6 Our Women Speak group co-ordinator has a call with women directly before they attend their first meeting so they can feel comfortable, get informed and to address any concerns.

**“It’s important to feel that you can be a part of the solution, rather than only seeing the problems.”**

– Women Speak Group Member

## How do we ensure the group is a safe space?

We reiterate that no one has to share their lived experiences or which organisation they have used the services of if they don't feel comfortable doing so.

We speak about a shared passion for making the city better for women and girls, which everybody, regardless of any personal differences, can respond to.

We explain any necessary context or happenings from previous meetings at the start of meetings, as well as reiterating the group purpose, to mitigate the issue of people not being able to attend every meeting. This allows us to all start every meeting with the information we need.



## How do we keep members engaged?

Including external speakers and interactive workshops as part of regular Women Speak meetings.

Inviting members to external sessions where they can be part of citywide projects and influence external change.

Involve members in consultations around internal W&GAL work and external projects, so that they can have input into tangible work.

Sending women who have missed meetings reminders to keep them in the loop and let them know they can return when it's right for them.

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# COMMUNICATIONS

Insights from the Women's Lives Leeds Communications and Project Support Worker on best practice in communications.

The Communications Worker managed a range of communications across projects from W&GAL, managing the W&GAL social media channels and website and Women Friendly Leeds social media channels and websites.

**When creating communication materials the following were considered a variety of factors to ensure that it:**

It reached a range of key audiences  
Provided messages that are visible, clear, and concise  
Made the projects and activities accessible to everyone

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To also ensure that the project considered ongoing improvements, opportunities for feedback were scheduled in and reviewed including those from the Partners and staff so that communications were informed by a range of perspectives.



The Projects Communications Worker hosting a workshop with the Women Speak group to consult on the new W&GAL website.

**Three principles for effective communication were used:**

**1**

## Clarity

Ensuring messaging is clear and concise, easy to understand and prioritises key points.

**2**

## Consistency

Co-ordinated and consistent communications to build a recognisable identity.

**3**

## Accessibility

Ensuring readability, accessibility and ease of access is considered in all communications.

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# COMMUNICATIONS

Insights from the WLL Communications and Project Support Worker on best practice in communications.

**Good communications are made easier with free tools, such as:**

**Canva:** Used for creating graphics, reports and visual elements.

**Later.com:** Used for scheduling posts for social platforms and marketing insights.

**Google analytics:** Used to assess reach and performance of our websites.

**It's important that the communications put out take into consideration each part of the project and reflect both the team and the women who are supported. To ensure this, communications workshops with each part of the team to provide an opportunity for direct input and feedback take place.**

- WLL Communications and Project Support Worker

## Communications Workshops

The Communications Worker hosted workshops with different parts of the Projects Teams to gather feedback and insights on the projects communications.

### These workshops enabled the team to:

- Ensure the project as a whole was reflected in all public facing materials
- Provide opportunities for feedback from staff and the women
- Guarantee communications are informed by a range of perspectives and experiences
- Give staff in different roles an insight into other parts of the work delivered

## Visual Principles

Visual principles were considered to create cohesion and consistency across all marketing, while expressing project messaging to the target audience.

### Guidelines used for graphics:

- Inviting
- Approachable
- Clean
- Professional
- Relatable
- Consistent

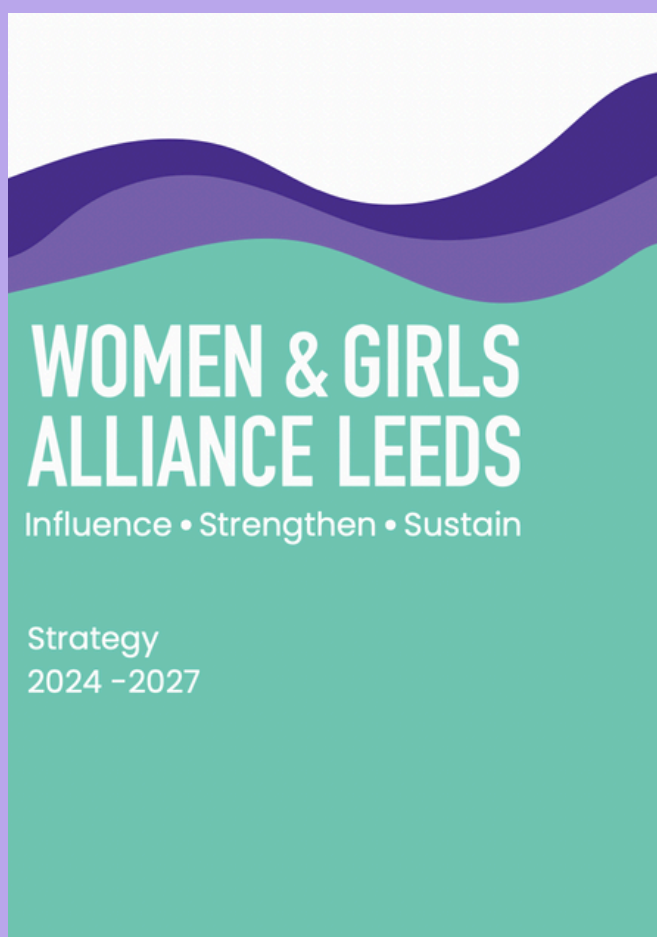
### Objectives used for comms:

- To create a familiar brand identity
- To be recognisable
- To establish ourselves as a key stakeholder for women and girls

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# RESOURCES AND REPORTS

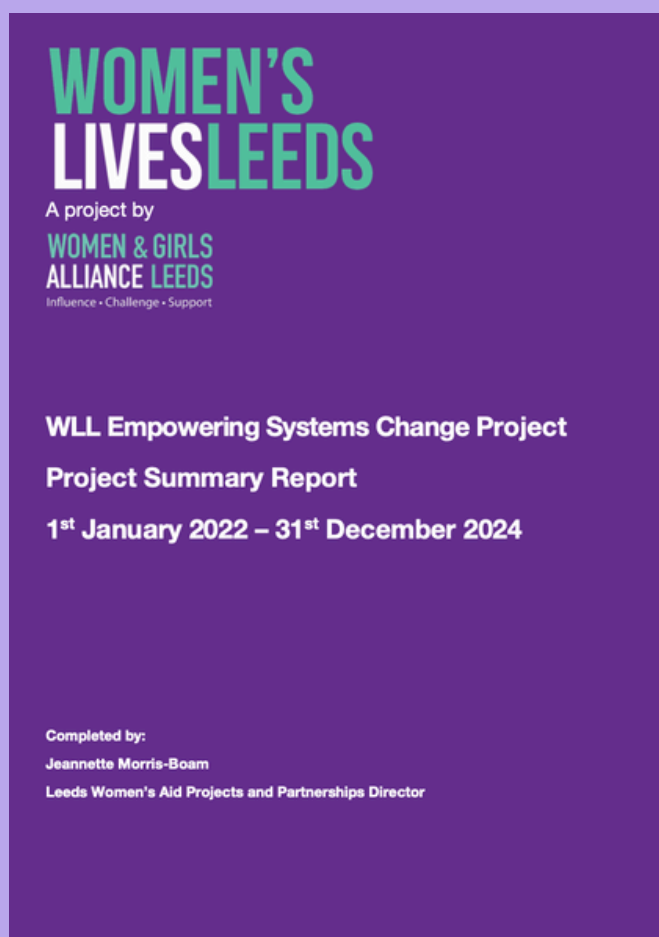
The following documents have informed thinking and development within the Alliance over the years. Click on any document to read it's content.



## Women and Girls Alliance Leeds Strategy

2024-2027

This is the current W&GAL Strategy with its strategic aims and objectives.



## WLL Empowering Systems Change Summary Report

2022-2024

This report summarises the achievements of the Empowering Systems Change Project

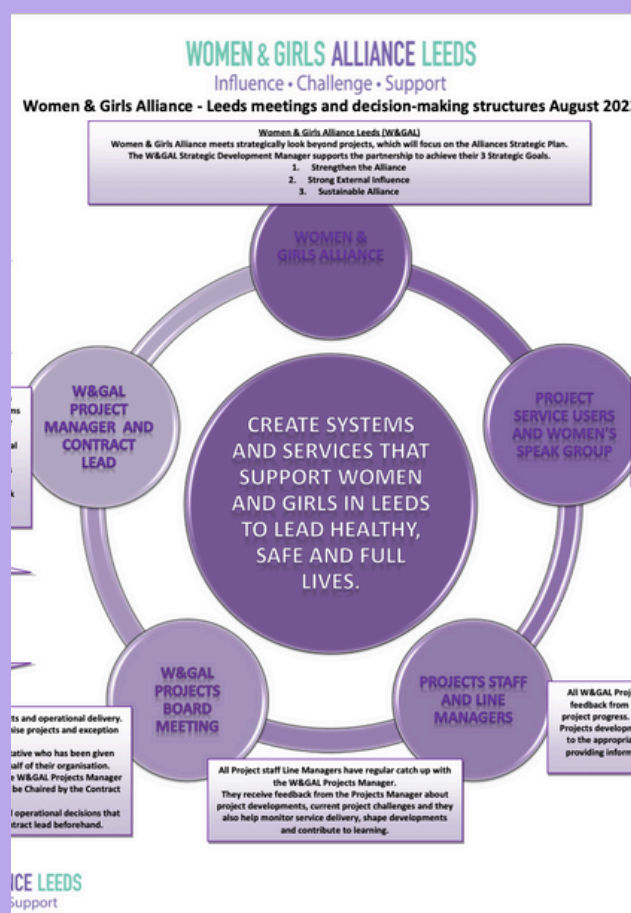


## Barriers to Support Consultation Report

April 2024

The Project and external evaluation of consultations with service users from the WLL Complex Needs Services, about the barriers they face when to engaging in external consultation.

This helped to inform the strategic aims and objectives of the Alliance.

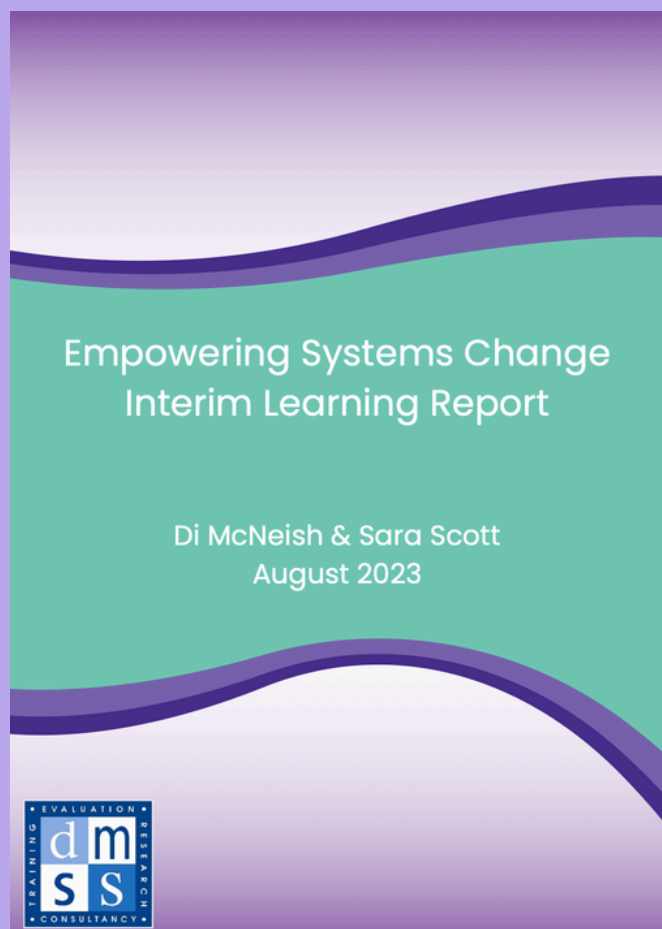


## Meeting and Decision-Making Structures

August 2023

This diagram shows the complexity and structure of how decisions were made by the Alliance and which members of the delivery team led and their specific activities/roles.

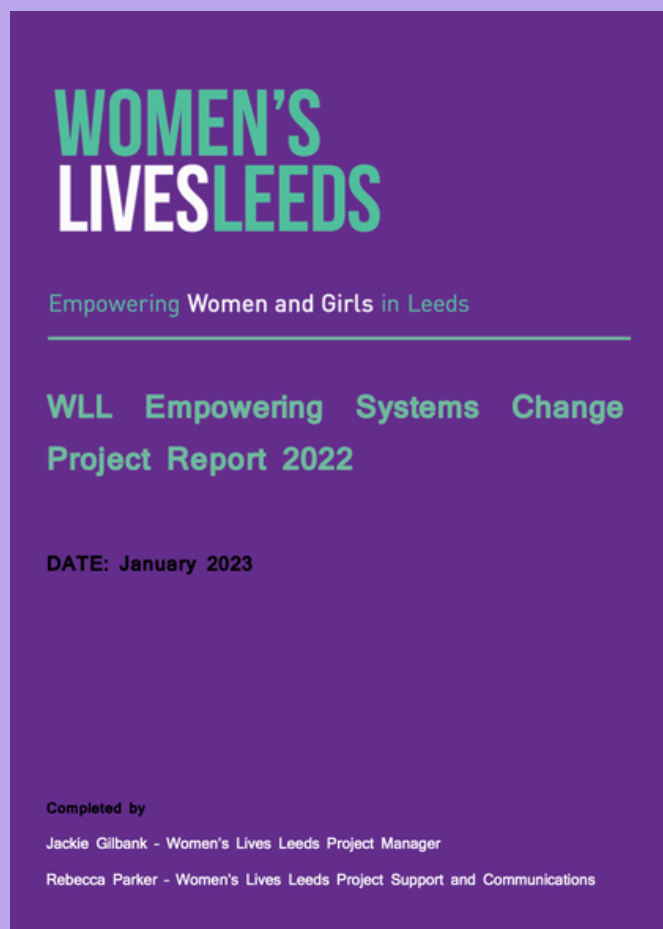
# RESOURCES AND REPORTS



## [Empowering Systems Change Learning Report](#)

August 2023

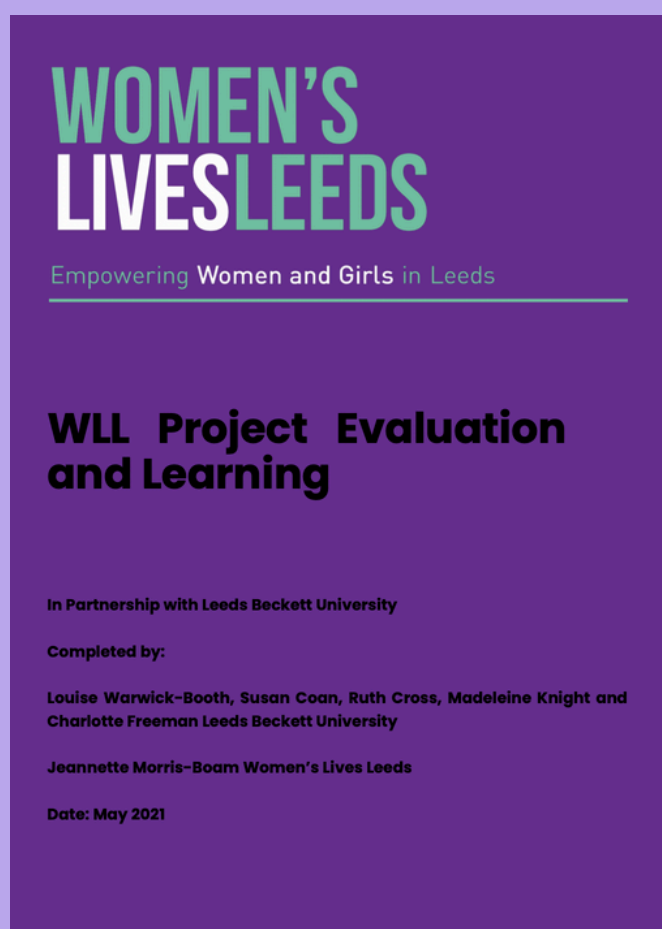
An external interim learning study was completed by DMSS Research about the ESC Project to continue to inform thinking and to make change as appropriate.



## [Empowering Systems Change Project Report](#)

August 2023

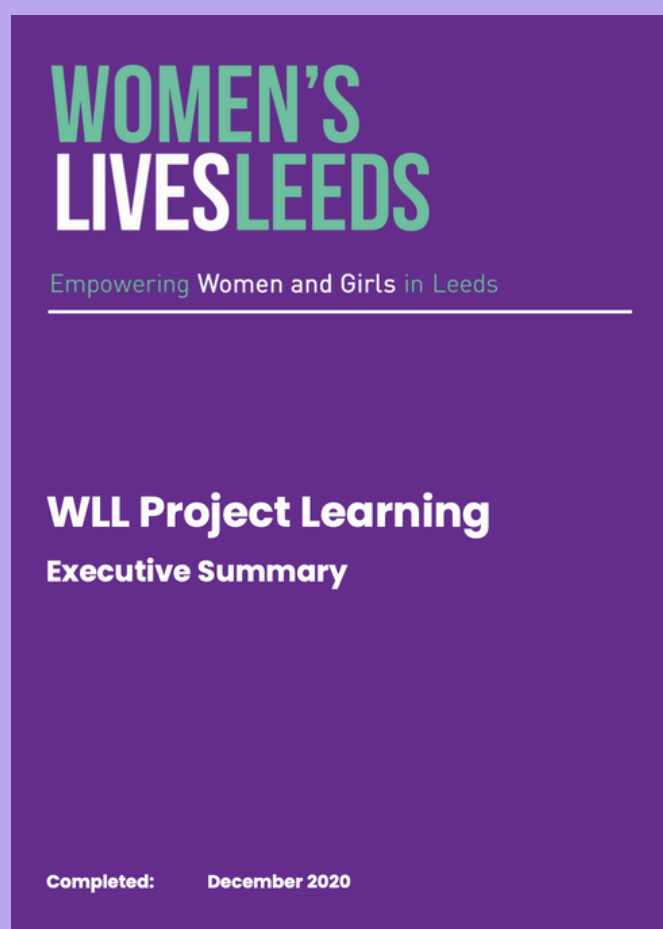
This Project report for the year 2022-2023 covers all delivery areas of the ESC Project.



## [WLL Project Evaluation and Learning](#)

May 2021

The second of two reports completed by an External Evaluation Team from Leeds Becketts University, to evaluate the first Women's Lives Leeds Project that started Autumn 2018.



## [WLL Project Learning Executive Summary](#)

December 2020

An Annual end of year Executive summary completed internally by Project staff as the first WLL Project was entering its final year.

# RESOURCES AND REPORTS

## WOMEN'S LIVESLEEDS

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

**Women's Lives Leeds Internal Review:**

**The Role of Independent Chair**

September 2020

**Introduction.**

## WOMEN'S LIVESLEEDS

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

**Women's Lives Leeds Alliance Agreement**

July 2020

### Review of the Independent Chair

September 2020

Following almost one year of having an Independent Chair, the Alliance members were invited to take part in an internal evaluation of this position to help inform thinking going forward.

### WLL Alliance Agreement

July 2020

As part of the work that an Independent Chair was employed to do, the WLL Alliance agreed how they would work together, their structure and to start to think about what their strategic objectives might be. This is the Alliance Agreement.

### Partnership working for Women and Girls

A briefing paper

Many projects funded by The National Lottery Community Fund's Women and Girls Initiative (WGI) work in partnership with others. Organisations may develop partnerships to shape and deliver services, collaborate on achieving greater voice and influence and/ or to optimise their capacity for attracting funding.

Today, in the context of Covid-19, partnership working is more important than ever. Across the women and girls sector, organisations are pulling together to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and finding that partnership approaches are often the only way of meeting needs in this challenging climate. Many such partnerships involve collaboration between two, three or four organisations. However, across the WGI, there are some partnerships that have taken collaboration even further, forging alliances between a larger number of organisations and working towards an even more joined up approach to improving the lives of women and girls. In this briefing we focus on three of these larger partnerships: the Women & Girls Partnership in Sheffield, Women's Lives Leeds and the Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance. There is extensive literature on partnership working but little that pertains specifically to the women's sector so the aim here is to share live lessons about the successes and challenges of these three larger scale partnerships and what they are finding works well in making them effective.

This briefing draws on material produced by the three partnerships and an on-line workshop hosted by the WGI Learning and Impact Team. The briefing will be of interest to commissioners and funders and anyone considering the development of a partnership approach, particularly across voluntary and community sector organisations.

#### About the three partnerships

• **Women's Lives Leeds** is a partnership of 11 organisations representative of the diversity of Leeds, including small BAME, medium and large organisations. The partnership was formed in 2015 around a common theme of empowering women and girls to lead healthier and safer lives.

• **Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance** has brought together eight organisations to take a whole systems approach to supporting women. The partnership initially had a focus on women in the criminal justice system but is now extended to all women with severe and multiple disadvantage.

• **Sheffield Women and Girls Partnership** involves five organisations in developing more creative service models for the recovery and empowerment of young women and girls. The partnership involves four women's organisations: Vida (the lead partner), Young Women's Housing, Haven and Ashiana along with a children and young people's organisation (Chilypep) which plays a particular role in supporting co-production across the partnership.



### National Partnership Evaluation

June 2020

As Part of the National Women and Girls Initiative funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, WLL were invited to take part as they were the newest and largest consortium to be funded. Their contributions were valued and helped to inform the overall evaluation.

### Women's Lives Leeds Operational Learning

December 2018

An internal evaluation of the services was completed to help reflect on changes implemented to the front-line service delivery, following an internal service review completed the year previous.

## WOMEN'S LIVESLEEDS

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

### Women's Lives Leeds Operational Learning

December 2018

Completed by : Jeannette Morris-Boam

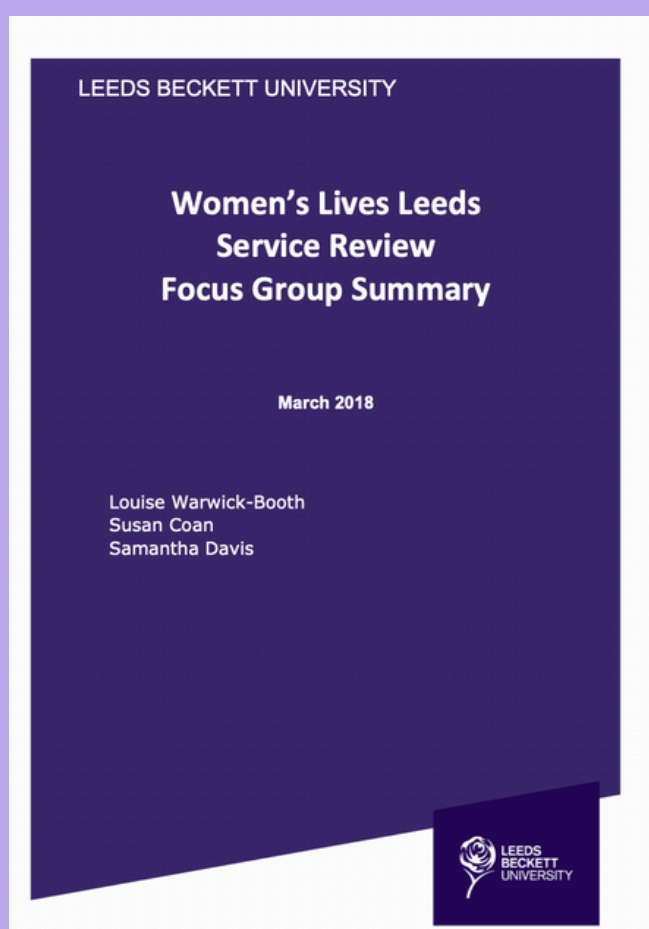
Women's Lives Leeds Project Manager

Women's Lives Leeds Operational Learning

December 2018

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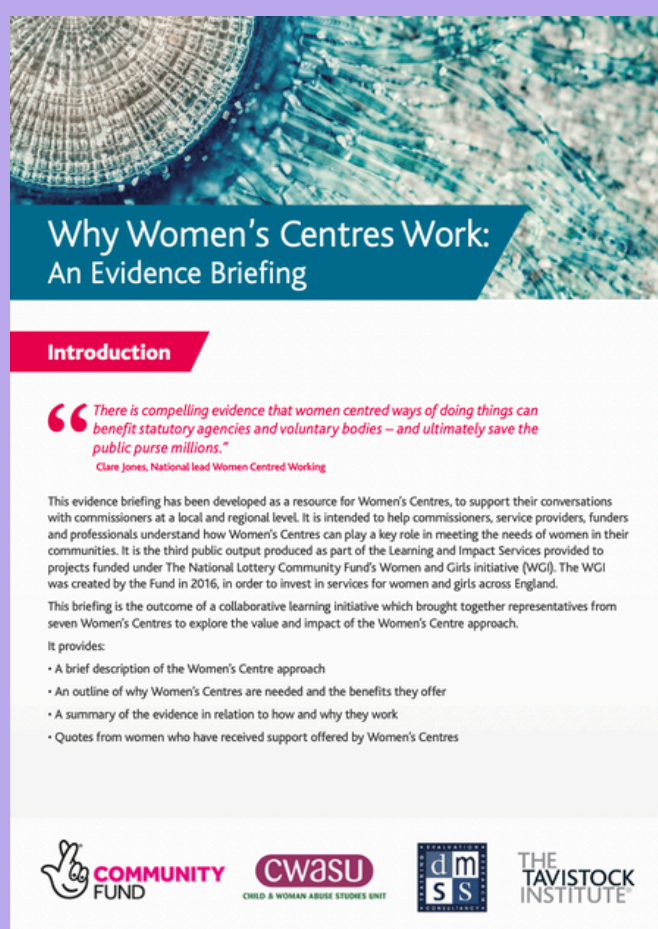
# RESOURCES AND REPORTS



## WLL Service Review Focus Group Summary

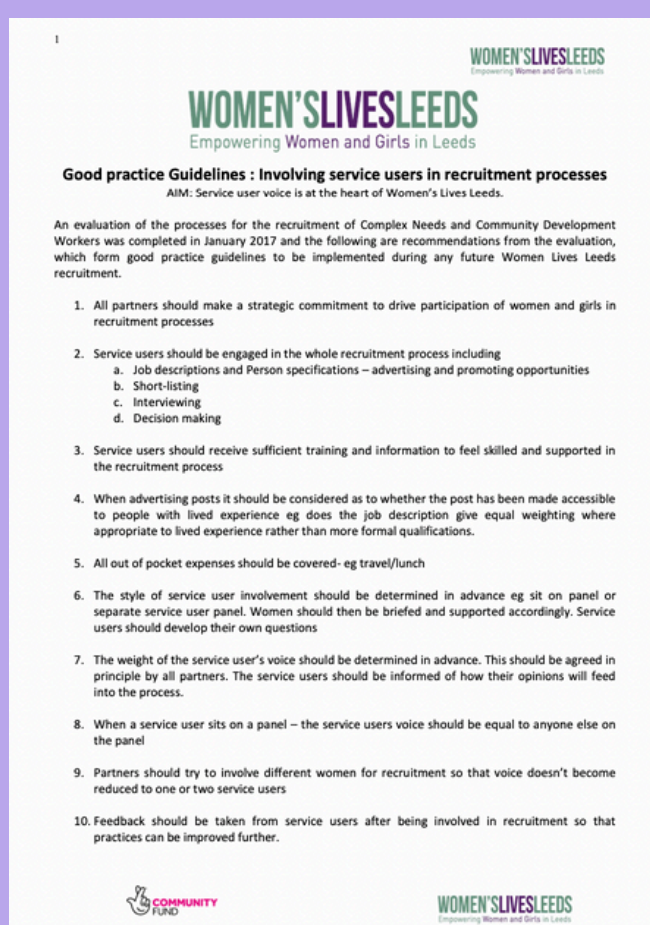
March 2018

An internal Service Review was completed as it was apparent that staff and WLL Members were experiencing operational challenges that made Community Development and Complex Needs Service staff to work in different and not in a consistent way.



## Why Women's Centres Work

National Learning gathered to help inform learning about Women's Centres and a future idea of testing and piloting a women's centre in Leeds which actually started in 2023.



## WLL Good Practise Recruitment Guidelines

As part of engaging service users in the development of activities with every project this was the first document that was co-produced with women from the Women's Lives Leeds Partnership. Ever since, every project has involved service users throughout.



# WOMEN & GIRLS ALLIANCE LEEDS

Please click [here](#) to view our  
website.



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April 2025