



THE JO COX
FOUNDATION

MOMENT TO MOVEMENT REPORT



THE GREAT
GET TOGETHER
INSPIRED BY JO COX



MORE IN COMMON
NETWORK
INSPIRED BY JO COX



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SPIRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS



SPIRIT OF 2012

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Moment to movement: project summary

PROJECT SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

When The Jo Cox Foundation embarked on the Moment to Movement project in February 2020, we had two main aims. The first was to strengthen and grow the nationwide More in Common Network, and the second was to grow the Great Get Together as a major community-building initiative.

Our overall vision for the projects was for a society of stronger, happier communities where we all have a sense of identity and belonging, and in which we are proud of our diversity and the things we have in common. Since the project began, the UK has faced many unforeseen challenges which have undoubtedly had an impact on the project. The Covid pandemic kept us physically apart to some degree for the first 18 months of the work, and the cost of living crisis has added additional barriers to people getting involved in their communities.

Despite these challenges, we end this phase of the project, and this time partnered with Spirit of 2012, confident that we have met those two key aims, and that we have indeed contributed to stronger communities, where people know their neighbours, have deepened their own sense of belonging, built social connections and feel happier and less lonely.



Through the Moment to Movement project, we have:

- Run four **Great Get Together campaigns**, adapting to social distancing rules at the time when required.
- Run three **Great Winter Get Together campaigns**, focusing on addressing loneliness at what can be a difficult time of year, tackling stigma and encouraging connection.
- **Supported and learnt from our organiser community**, including offering opportunities to learn new skills, to learn from each other, and to connect.
- Seen a growth in the **More in Common Network**. Before the project started, there were five informal groups. We currently have ten fully incorporated groups and twelve potential groups on the development pathway.
- **Supported four More in Common groups as they have decided to wind up.** Though we're always sorry to see the end of a group, we understand that volunteer groups exist in a life-cycle, which sometimes does involve making the difficult decision to close. We have worked with the groups as they've closed, and have also stayed connected with them should they wish to restart the group, or form a new one, in future. We've also learnt more about the reasons for closure which has informed our work to develop a more sustainable model for current and future groups.
- Pioneered a new format of the More in Common work through **More in Common partnerships**, bringing organisations, not just individuals, together to work to make change. We have two active partnerships (in Cardiff and Nottingham), with two on the development pathway and interest expressed in another three areas.



We believe that what we've learnt during the process is even more important than explaining what we've done, which is why this report is presented as a **series of key learnings from the project**. These learnings will continue to influence the work of The Jo Cox Foundation as we continue to evolve this project, and we hope will also be helpful to the wider communities sector and all those who are striving to make their communities stronger and more cohesive.

PROJECT SUMMARY

B. BACKGROUND

The first Great Get Together campaign ran in June 2017, designed by Jo Cox's family and friends as a positive way to mark the anniversary of her murder. That first event, run in collaboration with Eden Community's Big Lunch, attracted millions of people with its call to action for communities to come together. The campaign was so successful that it was decided to make it an annual event. The date of the Great Get Together was moved in 2018 to the weekend closest to Jo's birthday, encouraging people to celebrate the way that she lived, and to come together, united by the words that she spoke in her first speech in Parliament:

"We are more united and have more in common than that which divides us."

People across the UK were deeply affected by the tragedy that was Jo's murder, and many people felt inspired to take action to make their communities better as a tribute to her. With support from Hope Not Hate, a recipient of funding from the Jo Cox Memorial Fund (funds raised from public donations following her death), More in Common groups began to form around the country. More in Common groups are locally based, volunteer led groups who work year round to deliver positive benefits in their communities. Often, but not always, this involves taking part in the Great Get Together.

One of the first of these groups was in Batley and Spen, Jo's constituency, and was led by Jo's family and friends. Other groups followed different models.

Following the Brexit vote, a group of volunteers in Lambeth (the highest remain vote in the country) made contact with volunteers in Boston (the highest leave vote) with the aim of building mutual understanding between these two places. Two new More in Common groups were formed, organising activities both separately and together, including trips to visit each other to understand what works in building community connections.

Following the 2019 Great Get Together, The Jo Cox Foundation team undertook research amongst our most dedicated organisers, including some members of the More in Common groups. What we learnt was that this was a group of extremely dedicated community 'doers', motivated by Jo's legacy and committed to making a difference in their local areas.

For most, but not all, the Great Get Together was the spark that ignited their interest and passion. Following this, we brought this group together in person for a day of learning and networking, helping us really understand what was needed to support these volunteers. It was through this work that we began to form our idea of moment to movement - that is, the spark of an event (the moment) being what we needed to inspire a movement of community change.

PROJECT SUMMARY

B. BACKGROUND

As part of this, we received an initial grant from Spirit of 2012 and worked with them to deepen understanding of the moment to movement concept with other partners. Based on this learning, we wanted to embark on a new phase of our work to deepen our understanding of the motivating factors that inspire event attendees to become organisers, and organisers to become active year-round in their community.

Supported by Spirit of 2012, we have been able to translate this thinking into action, running more campaigns, offering more support to volunteers, formalising the More in Common network, and making communities happier and more cohesive.

C. PROJECT OUTCOMES

As stated above, at the beginning of the project we had two main aims:

- To strengthen and grow the nationwide More in Common Network.
- To grow the Great Get Together as a major community-building initiative.

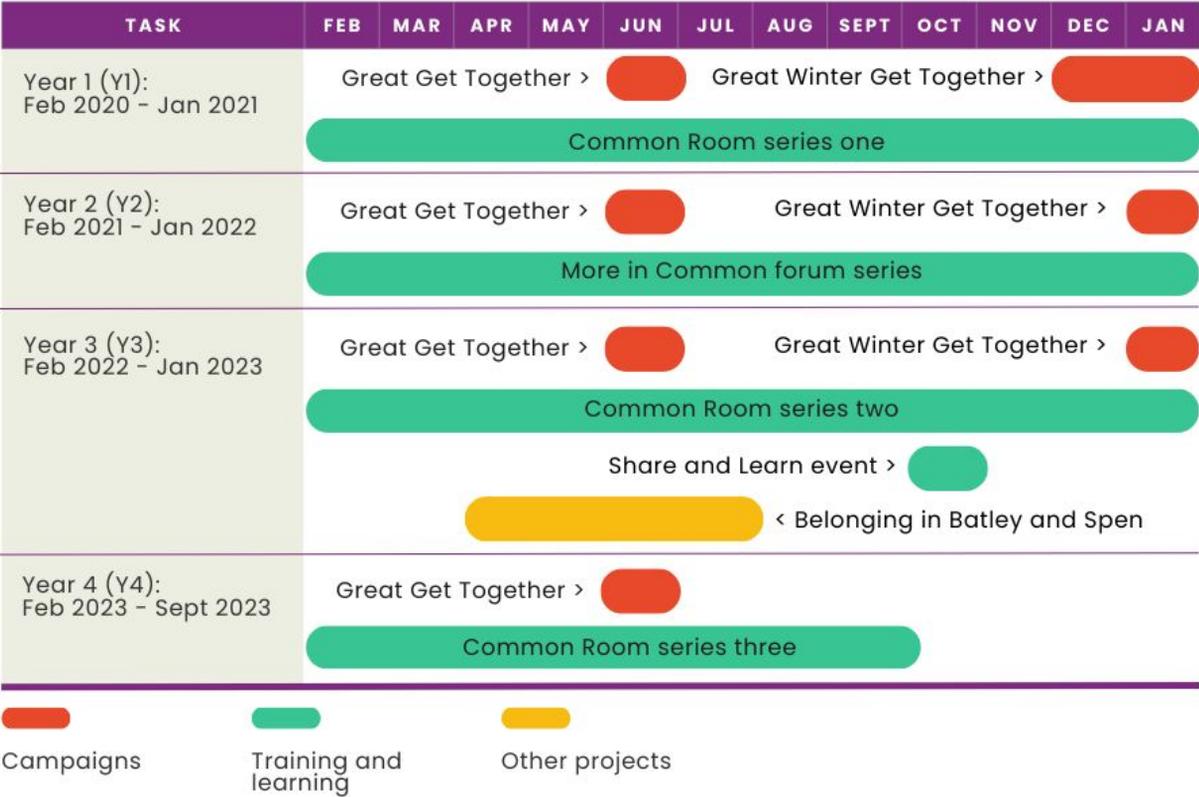
Linked to these overarching aims were five objectives, which are that:

- Participation in the Great Get Together and More in Common Network has a **positive impact on individual wellbeing**.
- The Great Get Together and More in Common Network activities have a **positive impact on community wellbeing**, specifically in terms of improving community cohesion and social connectedness.
- Participants in Great Get Together activities feel **less lonely and more socially connected**.
- The Great Get Together and More in Common Network attract **a diverse range of participants**.
- The Great Get Together and More in Common Network are **highly inclusive platforms for community organisers** from all backgrounds.

Rather than reflect on each of these individually in the report, we have shown progress and learning against them throughout our learnings.

PROJECT SUMMARY

D. TIMELINE



E. WHAT WE DID

We undertook four types of activity during this project. Alongside this, we also implemented an ongoing programme of learning and evaluation, enabling us to understand who was attending and organising Great Get Together events, and who was part of the More in Common Network. This enabled us to better understand who was not currently participating, directing us as we aimed to increase the diversity of project attendees.

WE RAN CAMPAIGNS

At the heart of this project is the Great Get Together, but the work wasn't just about running the campaign, it was also about understanding the impact of participating in

these events - both as an organiser and an attendee - and how we could harness the momentum from these events to inspire future volunteering and community engagement.

Over the course of the project we ran seven campaigns - four Great Get Together events in June, and three Great Winter Get Together campaigns in the winter.



PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

Year 1: In Y1 we ran the Great Get Together in June. The social distancing rules in place meant that only minimal in-person connections were possible, so we encouraged people to celebrate the power of community by doing small acts locally, or bringing people together online. We saw a wide variety of events, including plant swaps, socially distanced Zumba classes and online memory sharing events. The Great Winter Get Together took on even more importance as the country was under almost complete lockdown at the time. We ran a five week campaign, across December and January, focused on raising awareness of loneliness and reducing stigma.

Year 2: In Y2 the Great Get Together again had restrictions, with limits in place on mixing inside and a maximum group size for external events. Despite this, people still came together. We also introduced a major new activation, the Great Walk Together, which encouraged people to reach out to local refugee communities. In the winter, a shorter Great Winter Get Together placed a particular emphasis on the issue of youth loneliness, urging people that 'there's no shame in sharing' in an effort to reduce stigma.

Year 3: Y3 saw the first campaign of this project where we were able to bring people together with no restrictions. We were presented with a different challenge, with the Queen's Jubilee happening in early June. We made the decision not to move the date of the Great Get Together, which paid off, with over 500 Great Get Together events taking place across the country in June. The Great Winter Get Together was also able to encourage in-person connection, emphasising the impact of the cost of living crisis on people and encouraging communities to come together to make meaningful connections. This struck a real chord, with over 1100 Great Winter Get Together events being run during the campaign period.

Year 4: The last Great Get Together of this period saw an increase in events, with over 650 events taking place. We also developed new partnerships and initiatives, including the Great Watch Together and the Great Write Together. This year also saw an increase in the geographic range of events from the previous year. We saw events in all UK regions, with particular growth in the North East, South West and Yorkshire.

PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

WE UNDERSTOOD AND EVOLVED THE MORE IN COMMON NETWORK

As the five More in Common groups that existed before we officially began the Moment to Movement project had evolved in an arms length and organic fashion, our first step was to understand more about them, including the processes they had gone through, their successes and their challenges. After a period of information gathering, we worked with the existing groups to understand what it means to be a More in Common group, devising the More in Common agreement which all groups sign when they join the network.

After this foundational work had been done at the beginning of Y1, we were able to start building the network and recruiting new groups. While we had some success, welcoming enthusiastic groups including Halton and Llantwit, existing groups told us that having not been able to bring people together in person was having a significant and detrimental impact on the motivation for their members. Supporting existing groups through these challenges was key, and we trialled a number of avenues, including informal lunchtime get togethers and a Whatsapp group to connect and motivate the groups.



The 'More in Common approach':

1. We believe that showing we have more in common is more powerful than telling.
2. We try to take others with us, by avoiding language, behaviour or actions which might be polarising or exacerbate divisions.
3. We achieve our goals by forming mutually beneficial partnerships with other local organisations whose vision aligns with our own.
4. We work to build a national movement, by coming together and supporting others through The More in Common Network.
5. Inclusivity and respect for difference is at the heart of the 'more in common' message, and we try to make this felt in all we do.
6. Our groups share responsibility fairly among their core members, and make decisions collaboratively, so that everyone can contribute all that they have to offer.

By Y3, when the Great Get Together was able to bring people together without any restrictions for the first time since 2019, we saw an increase in interest in the network, welcoming new groups including Halifax and Gannow. We currently have ten active groups, with over ten more in contact with us and on the pathway to development. It was during Y3 as we prepared for the 2022 Great Get Together, that we were in touch with Nick Olsen, the Crime and Cohesion Officer at Cardiff City Council. Nick was interested in the power of the More in Common message to bring people together, and with the support of The Jo Cox Foundation team, convened a group of local stakeholders to discuss running events in June. This small working group of 12 organisations ran a very successful event at Grangetown Pavilion, and a seed was sown for what became the first More in Common partnership.

PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

The partnership model has continued to evolve. Partnerships are made up of organisations as opposed to individuals, bringing organisations from an area together (which could include local councils, police, charities, youth groups). Each partnership creates its own structure and membership so that the organisations can collaborate and take a coordinated approach to local social issues. We worked with two pilot partnerships – the Cardiff group and one in Nottingham – with considerable success. The Cardiff partnership now has over 40 organisations working together to bring people together, address local issues and make a difference in their communities. Between them, they organised 36 Great Get Together events in June 2023.

The Nottingham Partnership has 45 members, and earlier this year received the endorsement of the City Council who want to roll out the model across the county.



The Great Get Together
event in Grangetown
Pavilion, 2022



I've tried to find a way of bringing organisations together to address some of the issues we've had locally, but it's never worked before. It was a welcome surprise how easy it was to get people involved when they heard about the link with The Jo Cox Foundation! The more in common message is what brought all of these groups together – that's the goal that we're all working towards.

– **Cohesion Officer, Cardiff Council**



PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

WE SUPPORTED OUR ORGANISER BASE WITH TRAINING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, AND CONNECTED THEM WITH EACH OTHER

When we began this project, we knew that bringing people together and tackling local issues was challenging, and that we would need to offer support and guidance to our organisers as the project evolved. What we didn't know is exactly what help was needed, and what format it was needed in. We've experimented with a number of different forms of support, from an informal Whatsapp group for More in Common group members to a more formal, topic based approach with our Common Room series.

Our original intention at the beginning of the grant had been to run an annual in-person peer-to-peer learning event for all our organiser community in Y1. We were planning to use learnings from this to develop an on-going training plan for the rest of the project. With the onset of Covid, it was clear that an in-person event was not going to be possible, so we explored other options to meet the evolving needs of the organiser community against the backdrop of the pandemic. This presented challenges as we all collectively had to learn more about facilitating online spaces, but also some opportunities. The sudden shift to online living meant that we were able to hold more regular events, without the burden of travel.

For those not as able or willing to travel, online events proved to be more inclusive spaces which allowed a wider range of participants.

The Common Room – learning sessions for the wider network

Since Y1, we have delivered three series of Common Room events. The Common Room is a monthly programme of learning sessions designed to both provide capacity-building for existing organisers, but also as a recruitment tool, with the aim of reaching a new audience of community-minded people and establish a longer term connection to enable us to grow the More in Common network. We aimed at attracting a diverse audience to these spaces, particularly by working with partner organisation representing underrepresented groups to co-host sessions.

Across the three series, sessions have included: 'how can we build stronger intergenerational connections in our communities?', 'countering prejudice and building connection', and practical sessions such as the power of exercise in bringing people together.

PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

More in Common Forums and other opportunities to build links between groups

In Y2 we began to focus on how we could create spaces specifically for members (of both established and emerging groups). We worked on a series of quarterly More in Common Forums, dedicated spaces for members to address key issues. Topics covered included wellbeing and impact evaluation. The sessions also gave space for groups to meet each other and share ideas and challenges, as well as providing motivation for what keeps them going when times are hard!

Feedback from the forum sessions was positive, but increasingly it became apparent that finding time outside of working hours was difficult for many volunteers. We have since reverted to more informal ways of connecting the network. These include informal lunch sessions, which we ran through Y2 and into Y3. Initially very popular, with regular attendance from most groups, as normal patterns of life returned, attendance began to fall so we ended these in Y3. We have maintained a Whatsapp group for group members which has been very active and attracts very positive feedback.

Our Share and Learn event in Y3 was intended to be our first major in-person for our organiser community.

Moved online because of train strikes, it was attended by 45 people, both from our existing organiser communities and new participants. The day had a number of aims, including recruitment for the network, linking organisers to Jo's story, and working with them to envision the future for the network by understanding their needs.

Network members at the More in Common Forum in Manchester, 2021



Supporting Great Get Together organisers

In Y3, we started a series of webinars targeted specifically at Great Get Together and Great Winter Get Together organisers (or potential organisers). These short sessions covered topics including how to communicate about your event and how to run inclusive events, as well as creating spaces for people to come together to share ideas and tips. We also ran webinars with partners, including one with Warm Welcome and the Campaign to End Loneliness to support Warm Space organisers with making their warm space a connected space.

PROJECT SUMMARY

E. WHAT WE DID

WE RAN DEEP DIVE PROJECTS

One of the unique things about The Jo Cox Foundation is our ability to run national projects, but also to build depth of local understanding in communities near our Batley office in West Yorkshire. In Y1 and Y2 of the project, we began to understand more about the importance of belonging when it comes to individual and community wellbeing. In Y3, we ran a deep dive project in Batley, bringing together a small group of local people to explore feelings of belonging, and to work as a group to plan a Great Get Together. You can read more about what we found from this work in Learning 1.

F. EXTERNAL FACTORS

Much in the world is different from when we started the project in February 2020, and the project can only be fully understood when considered through the lens of these external factors.

THE IMPACT OF THE Covid PANDEMIC

The Moment to Movement project had only been live for a month before we had to start making contingency plans about the impact of the Covid pandemic. The project was operationally impacted by the pandemic, and the formal social distancing rules, for 18 months, but there has also been a longer-term impact on the project as a whole.

Short-term impacts

The Great Get Together campaigns in Y1 and Y2, and the Great Winter Get Together in Y1 were run under formal restrictions around social mixing. That came with the inevitable challenge of organising a 'get together' when it was actually illegal to be together. In Y1, both campaigns had to emphasise either small acts of connection or online interactions. Our data shows that participation had a positive impact on happiness and wellbeing, as well as alleviation of feelings of loneliness, so to that degree they were a success. However, it's become clear that these smaller interactions make it more difficult for participants to meet someone new, particularly someone from a different background.



▲ Participants at the first workshop of the Belonging in Batley and Spenningshall project

PROJECT SUMMARY

F. EXTERNAL FACTORS

Longer-term impacts

Some of the longer-term impacts of the pandemic have only become apparent in Y3 as we've been able to return to running events in person.

We've seen:

- An impact on the health of existing More in Common groups. Members told us that it was very hard to keep momentum going without bringing people together in person, and some groups nearly closed.
- A clear impact on recruitment of new groups. Without bringing people together in-person, we weren't able to see that spark which leads to longer-term involvement. This is shown by the surge in interest in forming a group after the 2022 Great Get Together, the first fully in-person campaign of this project.

THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

As the impact of the pandemic began to fade, the cost of living crisis became a more acute problem facing people across the country. We've seen this impact the Moment to Movement project in a number of ways.

- The need for the work that we do has increased. Our polling data in December 2022 shows that 27% of people said they were feeling more lonely because of the crisis, a fact that we focused on as part of our Great Winter Get Together campaign.
- People's ability to participate in community events has been impacted. Respondents to the post-event survey for the 2023 Great Winter Get Together told us why they couldn't take part and issues including the cost of transport were highlighted.



PROJECT SUMMARY

G. HOW WE MEASURED THE PROJECT

Our approach to monitoring and evaluating the project has evolved over time, including the introduction of an in-house Monitoring and Evaluation Manager. Drawing conclusions on the success of the project in achieving the stated objectives has been impacted by the disruption of the Covid pandemic, an event which not only meant activities involving groups of people meeting face-to-face were not possible, but also that people's wellbeing and feelings of isolation were radically changed.

In agreement with Spirit of 2012, we did not ask participants standard ONS wellbeing questions as we had planned, understanding that with the background of such anxiety and uncertainty, and with many of our interactions small-scale and online, it would be impossible to realistically measure their impact.

In line with better practice a baseline report was commissioned from Justice Studio at the start of the project. A monitoring and evaluation framework for both the Great Get Together and the Great Winter Get Together was developed, and data collection instruments put in place.

These were:

- Polling done before and after each campaign using a purposeful sample representative of the whole population to assess the level of awareness of the campaign, and participation in events.
- Optional surveys targeted at organisers of events and members of More in Common groups.

In the first two years of the project, social distancing rules meant we were not able to encourage organisers to conduct in-person surveying of attendees at events.

After moving to an in-house evaluation model in Y3, the pattern of polling before and after events was maintained, and surveys for participants, attendees, those who did not attend and More in Common groups were used. Case studies have also been collected.



Participant completing a Great Get Together survey ▶

PROJECT SUMMARY

G. HOW WE MEASURED THE PROJECT

The disruption caused by the pandemic means that the campaigns across the project have not always had the same specific aims, meaning that it has been challenging to collect large and consistent datasets over consecutive years to show meaningful trends.

At the beginning of the project, and in common with other similar national projects, the polling data was extrapolated over the entire adult population of the country to indicate participation. This gave high numbers which did not align with the number events registered via our online system, or with the survey data.

Because of this mismatch in information the Foundation has stopped using this potentially misleading way of calculating and reporting attendance at Great Get Together and Great Winter Get Together events, and instead report on the number of events we have registered with us. We believe this to be an under-representation, but are more comfortable using this data.

H. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT FOR THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT?

The period of the Moment to Movement project has been a time of real learning and development for The Jo Cox Foundation. The project will continue to evolve in a number of ways:

- With thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund Bringing People Together fund, we will continue to develop the More In Common Network, particularly the partnership model, given the successes of the Cardiff and Nottingham partnerships so far. We have an aim to expand from our current base of two established partnerships, and two on the pathway to forming, to 15 after three years.
- We remain committed to deepening the impact of the Great Get Together, planning ahead to the campaigns for 2024.
- As part of this, we want to deepen the support we give to organisers. We've understood through this project that bringing people of different life experiences together is challenging. We've also understood the value of peer-support, so intend to further develop our support offer for organisers.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT

LEARNING 1



Participating in
community
events and
volunteering
makes people
happier and
less lonely

HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

The vision for this project was for stronger, happier communities, so understanding more about whether taking part in community events increases individual wellbeing, and if so, why, was a key learning that we set out to explore. Throughout the project, data has shown consistently that both organising and taking part in a Great Get Together improves happiness, wellbeing and mental health. This was even the case during the pandemic, against a general backdrop of increased anxiety and uncertainty. In fact, participating in community activity took on a particular importance during the pandemic. In 2020's Great Get Together survey, 66% of people said 'it makes me feel good to do something positive' and 45% said that the pandemic made them want to do something positive in their local community.

The Great Winter Get Together has a specific focus on loneliness, and has consistently shown that participating helps increase participants' understanding of loneliness. Survey respondents tell us that they also see improvements in their mental health, and increased levels of social connection.

When we look deeper at why participation has an impact, we can see a number of potential reasons. This includes the importance of belonging in our local communities, which is something we specifically explored in our Belonging project in Batley and Spenningshall in Y3 of the project. We also see that participation increases confidence, increases connections with others and helps to build friendships.

As well as increasing levels of happiness, we also have examples of the genuinely life-changing impact that participation can have. We hear from Martyn on p23, but also know of people who have got a job because of their involvement in the Great Get Together, and who have been inspired to seek political office after being motivated by the More in Common Network.



It was clear that some people in my area are really beginning to feel cut off and needed to see others folks in a positive environment.

**- Great Get Together organiser
in 2020**



HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

SUCCESS: Participants are happier

Throughout the project, Great Get Together participants have consistently told us that taking part increases their feelings of happiness.

These findings are supported by qualitative data from both attendees and organisers about the positive impact of the Great Get Together.

We also heard about the impact that it made to members of the More in Common Network, with 83% of members of More in Common groups who responded to a survey in Y1 reported an improvement in their wellbeing and feelings of happiness.

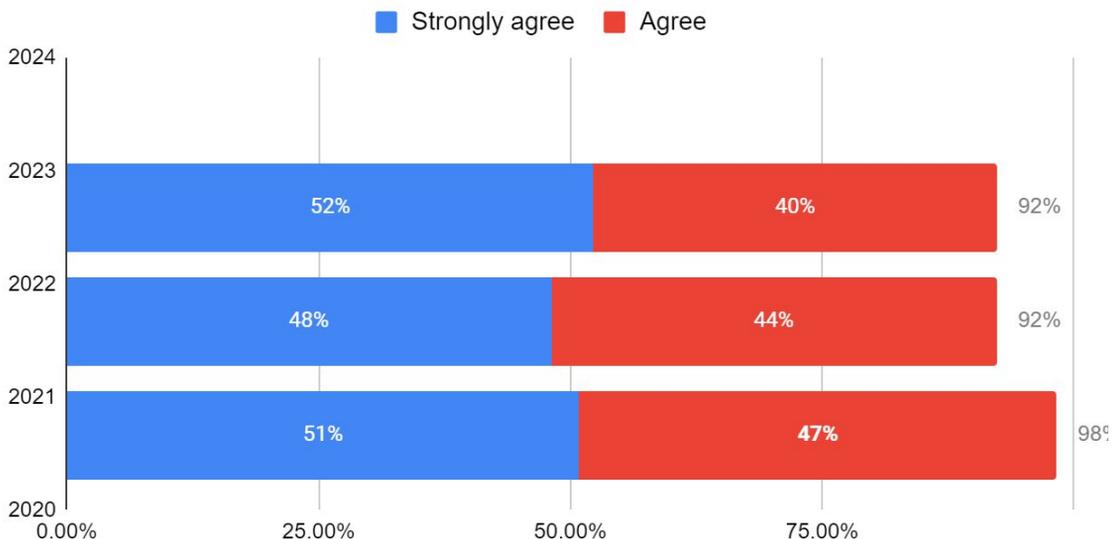
“I am always delighted when people who have not previously taken part come along and say how much they have enjoyed meeting others. It makes me feel positive and determined to continue building our community.”

- Great Get Together organiser in 2022

“I felt really happy after the walk, connecting with people different from me sparked great conversations and I really learnt a lot. It was also great to be out in the local area and explore.”

- Great Get Together attendee in 2022

Reported increase in happiness, Great Get Together participants 2021-3



HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

SUCCESS: Participants are happier

Positivity despite the pandemic

Even against the backdrop of the pandemic, organisers have told us that the Great Get Together brings much needed positivity. Each year, we have asked the question in the Great Get Together survey ‘what motivated you to organise a Great Get Together event?’.

In both Y1 and Y2, when pandemic restrictions were still in place, a high percentage of organisers responded that ‘it makes me feel good to do something positive’ (2020: 66%, 2021: 64%). In subsequent years, the desire to do something positive remained high (2022: 56%, 2023: 55%), but other factors, including ‘I wanted to help people in my community get to know each other better’ and ‘I wanted to meet people who are different from me’ have taken on a greater prominence.

Even though many planned events were cancelled in Y1 due to the Covid restrictions, those organisers who managed to go ahead with an event reported positive outcomes for themselves. As well as the satisfaction of doing something positive for their community, there were other strong reasons for this.

A third of people enjoyed getting to know more people in their community, or deepening relationships with neighbours. A few people relished the challenges of running an event online, others mentioned an increase in confidence or some form of personal growth from organising an event, or an improvement in mood or mental health. The organisers perceived that people attending (in person or virtually) also benefited from getting to know one another, and the sense of community the events engendered.

Outliers

There are some outliers in our data who have told us that they were not made happier because of their involvement. These comments are mostly related to organisers who held events that were badly attended, or where they felt unsupported. For example one organiser told us:

“I didn’t get much support even from our new village social action group despite sticking my head above the parapet I felt embarrassed by the lack of uptake.”

Despite organisers telling us about their challenges, including the stresses involved in event organising, the majority reported that overall, taking part had made them happier.

HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

SUCCESS: Participants are happier

Impact on loneliness

The Great Winter Get Together has a specific focus on loneliness. The aims of the campaign have had to adapt over the course of the project, given the circumstances of the pandemic. The campaigns in Y1 and Y2 couldn't include in-person events, so instead had a greater focus on raising awareness of loneliness and reducing the stigma of talking about it. This worked. In Y1, 90% of participants told us that the campaign helped them to talk more openly about loneliness, and in Y2, 78% said participating made them feel less embarrassed talking about the issue. However, though participants told us they felt happier, their own experiences of loneliness were less impacted. In Y1, only 54% of participants said their experience of loneliness had changed as a result of their participation.



▲ The social media sticker that we produced as part of the Great Winter Get Together in 2022, which aimed at reducing the stigma associated with loneliness.

The Great Winter Get Together in Y3 was the first where we were able to encourage in-person connection to address loneliness. We saw a clear impact on personal experiences of loneliness, with 78% of attendees telling us that taking part helped them to feel less lonely.

Great Winter Get Together event held by Healey School in Batley in January 2023



From the data, we can understand some of the reasons why this is the case.

- **Increased confidence.** We asked attendees to 'rate your levels of confidence in connecting with people from your community before and after the Great Winter Get Together event'. 37% reported that they were quite or extremely confident before, rising to 75% after.
- **Increased connection.** 94% of attendees told us they were inspired to attend more community events like this, with 92% motivated to make new connections with people from different backgrounds in their area.

HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

SUCCESS:

We understand more about why participants are happier

As well as understanding if participants were happier, we wanted to explore why they were happier. As you would expect, there are a variety of reasons for the impact, which include:

Building friendships

During Covid restrictions, members of existing More in Common groups reported improvements in their personal wellbeing from being involved in the More in Common network. These were longer lasting than the initial “lift” of getting involved in something worthwhile and included making deeper friendships and mutual support through difficult patches.

“In my most darkest moments, you know, [group members] and many others, they’ve been there to pick me up.”

- More in Common group member

“We just share a common thought, I couldn’t think of a nicer bunch of people I want to spend my time with.”

- More in Common group member

Boosting confidence

An increase in confidence was a common impact of organising an event that survey respondents told us about.

“Yes, it gave me confidence in organising a face to face event since lockdown. It made me feel happy to see all the ladies coming in and having fun, it made me think of my Mum when she was alive and how she loved to go to things like this.”

- Great Get Together organiser in 2021

Reduction in social isolation

By bringing people together and making connections, participation in the campaigns impacts feelings of social isolation, both for organiser and participants.

“I’m the chair of our Residents Association and live alone, and although not shielded, I was experiencing increasing depression as a result of social isolation in the earlier days of the pandemic. Organising our Great Get Together party has contributed to my feeling even more part of a very caring community in my street, and it was a joy to work together so happily with others, to feel very valued and indeed loved, and to see so many residents having such a happy time and such fun. It has been heartwarming for me to see how this has helped and is helping other residents.”

- Great Get Together organiser in 2020

HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

A wide range of other examples are given, including setting an example to children and having content for job interviews! We heard an example about how an event had a positive impact on people who were grieving:

“We used our Get Together to plant a cherry tree in our garden in memory of all of our friends who have passed away during the pandemic. Many families attended who had lost loved ones and we remembered together, we laughed together, we commemorated together.”

- Great Get Together organiser 2021

SUCCESS:

We understand much more about the importance of belonging

During the project, we have asked Great Get Together participants about whether their involvement has impacted their sense of belonging. We have seen a strong positive impact. After Y3's Great Get Together an additional 10% of people said they felt that their participation made them feel that they belong, an increase from 78% before the event to 88% after. Y2's results were more dramatic, with a 20% increase post-event.

Understanding what exactly belonging is, though, can be more complex to explore. For that reason, we ran a specific project in Batley and Spen in Y3 to find out more.

The project brought together a group of local people who worked together to plan a Great Get Together event. Their participation made a considerable difference to their sense of belonging and their individual wellbeing.

At the beginning of the project **75% of participants felt they belonged locally, rising to 95% after their event.**

We found that key factors involved in deepening belonging were:

- Making connections with other participants from different backgrounds.
- Learning new skills.
- Feeling that they could make a difference by being involved in their community.
- Challenging preconceptions about those who are different from them.



CASE STUDY:

Martyn, a participant in the project in 2022



Martyn at the first project workshop, sharing his perspective on belonging ▶

“The whole idea that I could be involved with this would have, at times, in the last decade been a fanciful notion to me. I have had a difficult decade. My own mental health seeing me often in despair and hospitalised, feeling helpless and optionless. I spent five whole years trapped in the house, agoraphobia biting deep. I guess though, despite still often being hugely anxious, I am emerging from the debacle that was the life lost to the cursed mental breakdown.

Personally, I still feel a little shocked at how I felt in those planning meetings, so engaged and driven. There was so much healing and recovery and reconnection with skills and experience I thought I no longer had, thanks to the encouragement, engagement and positive endorsement I got from those six or seven weeks being on that planning group. To all of the team involved, I feel I owe so much to them.”

Through the Belonging in Batley and Spenningsdale project, Martyn found friendship and healing. After their ‘Great Create Together’ event, his creative writing group (‘Serendipity’) went on to establish themselves as a CIC, received funding to be able to continue their work, and are now working on their 5-year business plan.



Martyn with the rest of the group at the final project workshop ▶

HAPPIER AND LESS LONELY

CHALLENGE:

It's hard to know how long-term the impact of event participation is

We have very strong evidence that shows that taking part (as an organiser and a participant) in a Great Get Together makes people happier. However, it's more difficult to know the longer-term impact of this, as our data is collected soon after the events have finished.

Particularly during the timeframe of this project, there have been a wide range of external factors that have had a significant impact on people's wellbeing, so pinpointing the Great Get Together as an exclusive factor as part of this becomes even more complex.

As we explore in the next learning, we can see that taking part inspires people to go on to take more action in their communities, ensuring ongoing benefit to their individual wellbeing.



▲
A Great Get Together event run by Living Bankside, in Central London

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT

LEARNING 2



Attending and organising community events inspires people to go on and engage more deeply in their local community

ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY

At the start of this project, we knew that a Great Get Together event could provide a 'spark' which leads to longer-term engagement in community volunteering. Our existing More in Common groups, most notably the group in Batley and Spen, had successfully used the Great Get Together since 2017 as a focal point for bringing people together, and inspiring ongoing social action. Through the project, we wanted to deepen our understanding of the motivating factors that inspire event attendees to become organisers, and organisers to become active year-round in their community.

When we collected data for our baseline report, we were surprised to find out that 48% of More in Common members had not joined their group because of a Great Get Together; instead there were a wide range of inspiring factors, including a desire to tackle problems that they saw locally, knowing other members, and being inspired by Jo Cox's legacy. As the project has developed, we have continued to grow our understanding of the role that events play in motivating people to volunteer. However, this has been impacted considerably by the pandemic, with in-person events either impossible or severely curtailed in Y1 and Y2 of the project.

As we have been able to return to in-person events in Y3 and Y4, we have understood more about the relationship between the Great Get Together and participant's motivation to go on to take further action in their communities. As well as proactively encouraging Great Get Together organisers to become involved in the More in Common Network, we've also understood more about the avenues to volunteering that people take. Put simply, the More in Common network isn't for everyone.

As the project has progressed, we've heard powerful stories about how being involved in the Great Get Together has inspired people to explore ways to be engaged in their communities, including volunteering with local projects. This has led to us adopting a more flexible approach, understanding that however participants continue to go on and engage, whether that's through the More in Common Network or other ways of being involved, the overall impact remains the same - participants are experiencing the positive impact of social connectedness and community cohesion.

ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY

SUCCESS:
Participating in the Great Get Together inspires ongoing community engagement

Throughout the project, Great Get Together and Great Winter Get Together participants have told us about how their involvement, whether as an event organiser or an event attendee, has inspired them to go on to take further action in their community. For organisers, often the most obvious thing they can do is organise another Great Get Together. Organising a Great Get Together or Great Winter Get Together does seem to be addictive! In Y1 75% of organisers had already organised at least two events previously in the period 2017–2019. By Y4 85% of organisers had already organised an event previously.

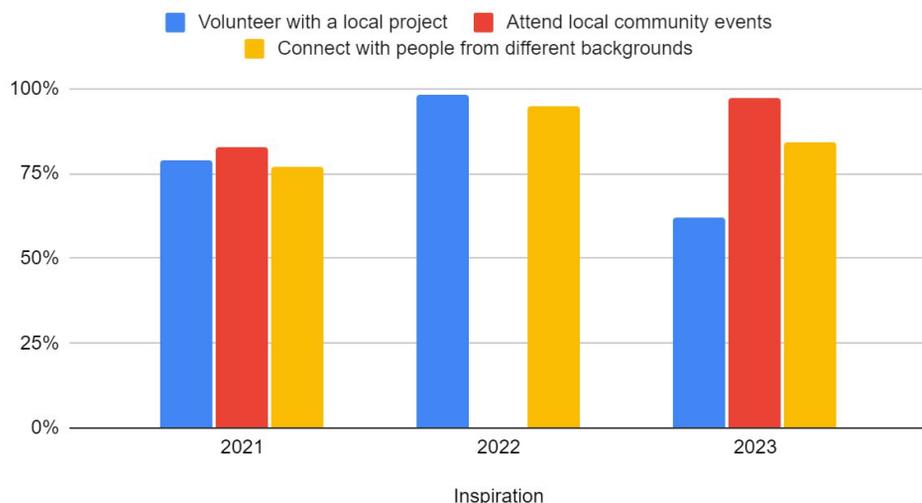
Organisers have also told us they were inspired to make their annual Great Get Together a more regular event. For example, following the Great Winter Get Together in Y3, we heard examples including a school who has now set up an intergenerational link with their local care home, church groups who are now holding a weekly get together (another holding a monthly Soup Day) and a variety of yoga and wellbeing, exercise and arts and crafts sessions that will now be regular features in the community's diary.

For those who feel inspired to do more as a consequence of their participation in the campaign, we can see some fluctuation in the data throughout the project, with a particular spike in 2022 in terms of desire to volunteer. As 2022 was the first Great Get Together of this project without any form of restrictions, it may be that this was due to the variety of opportunities that participants

realised were available to them locally.

There has been a high level of consistency in the desire to continue to connect with people of different backgrounds, demonstrating the impact of the Great Get Together on community cohesion.

Participants were inspired to do more in their communities



ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY

For those who wanted to go on to something else in their community, some were able to identify almost immediately what they wanted to do next- whether that was volunteering at existing local groups, carrying on new interests or maintaining connections with people and organisations.

After the Great Winter Get Together in Y3, 36% of attendees who told us they were inspired to get more involved with community activities were already able to provide examples of what they were doing, even though the survey was completed very close to the original event. We heard a rich and varied range of examples, ranging from volunteering with a local food bank, joining singing, dance, music, art and creative writing groups, enrolling on a local course, and starting to keep fit by swimming.

Organisers have also told us that there is an impact on their non-Great Get Together events, as people are inspired to take part. 29% of organisers in Y4 told us that they had seen an increase in volunteers for local projects by members of their community as a result of the Great Get Together.



Numbers at other activities always increase after a get together. There has been an increase in volunteers for all sorts of local projects.

- **Great Get Together organiser in 2022**



I have been made aware of so many projects and people to get involved with. I didn't really know much about events and get togethers which is very nice to have events like this to engage in the communities.

- **Great Winter Get Together attendee in 2022**



CASE STUDY:

From annual to monthly events in Scarborough, 2023

Janet, who organises the South Cliffe Gardens Great Get Together



Janet, the organiser of South Cliffe Gardens Great Get Together in Scarborough has been organising Great Get Togethers from her house since 2017. She believes that the Great Get Together is all about:

“The little drips. A drip of connection. The loneliness aspect is huge. [As a result of the Great Get Together] we now have people who had never met who have formed lifelong connections.”

This year she decided to extend her efforts and hired a local community centre, inviting passersby to join her for tea and cake. This was hugely successful at bringing a diverse range of people together; she could introduce the concept, invite people in and help them to connect.

As a result of her work the community centre will now hold ‘get togethers’ every month, inviting the community in to connect.

People enjoying a tea, cake, and a chat at the 2023 Great Get Together



CASE STUDY:

Abida's story of cooking lunch with neighbours, 2022



For Abida, this was her first time attending a Great Get Together event. The event was at Manor Croft Academy in Kirklees, where people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds came together to share food, chat and enjoy a game of Boccia.

Some of Abida's neighbours, Maureen and Pat, also happened to be at the event and they got talking about different cuisines - inspired by the multicultural food and activities at the event. It turned out that Maureen and Pat had always wanted to learn how to cook Asian food but no one had ever shown them how. They agreed to get together after the event and have a cooking lunch at Abida's house where she would show them how to cook various recipes. The lunch took place about a month after the Great Get Together and went really well, with everyone saying how lovely it had been.

Abida's good friend Parviz joined and showed the ladies how to make chapattis whilst Abida showed them how to make various curries. Afterwards Maureen and Pat said that they would like to use their new skills and cook the food for other local residents - inviting Parviz and Abida to join too. Abida said that: **"This only happened because we all attended this event."**

This story shows how one event can bring together people from varied backgrounds, ethnicities and religions to share their culture and experience in joyful ways. It has also acted as a catalyst to spark change, leading to longer lasting connection, friendship and community cohesion.

ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY

SUCCESS:

Organisers understand the issues in their local community

It is a logical assumption that local organisers understand best what the key issues in their local communities are. This was a topic that we were interested in exploring during this project, to understand the impact on community cohesion. We had interesting examples from 2019 of how Great Get Together organisers had addressed specific issues, including loneliness and knife crime.

With the onset of the pandemic, and the associated issues of isolation and disconnection, there was a very clear pressing problem that organisers were interested in, which, to an extent, overruled other local issues in at least Y1 and Y2 of the project.

However, in Y3 and Y4 we have been able to do more work to help us to understand what works. Part of this revolves around an understanding of what is reasonable to expect organisers, especially new organisers, to be able to do. A 'simple' event that brings neighbours together takes time and commitment, though as we say in Learning 4, the Great Get Together is designed to be flexible to allow for everyone to be able to organise an event.

We must acknowledge that to go deeper than this, to choose specific issues to address and to work with others to achieve this, is complex and demanding. This is where the evolving More in Common partnerships have proven to be very successful. By harnessing the power of organisations working together, there has been more capacity to address specific issues. That said, organisers do address a wide variety of issues, including:

“To enable children to be aware of the environment in our park and help them to gain a Blue Peter badge”

“Bring together refugees and local people. Show support for refugees and get together.”

“Wanted to do something for my organisation as a show of solidarity for Black Lives Matter.”



CASE STUDY:

How does a More in Common partnership bring the community together and address local issues?



Having different groups representing diverse communities on the partnership lets us keep our finger on the pulse, it lets us know what is going on 'on the ground' and helps us to nip issues in the bud before they become a major concern.

- Cohesion Officer, Cardiff Council



The More in Common Cardiff Partnership has over 40 member organisations. This includes large organisations, including the Council, sports organisations, and smaller groups who represent diverse community members. Because of this make-up, the partnership have been able to:

1. Understand the most pressing issues in the community because the membership of the partnership reflects the diversity of the community.
2. Work together to address these issues. In particular, this has included organisations who've never previously collaborated coming together to provide a specific response to problems.

Example: Tackling knife crime in Cardiff

A project is being planned between partnership members, including the Council and St Telio's School, to work in the local area where knife crime is a significant problem. The plan is for workshops on subjects such as racism, hate and democracy, with a Great Get Together planned at the end to celebrate the project.

Example: Countering gang violence

As part of the Great Winter Get Together in 2023, Cardiff City Football Club ran a 'mini twinning' project. They brought together two schools (who both have gang related issues) to come on a tour of the stadium. The tour provides a uniting 'wow' factor, and is followed by workshops to help the young people explore their commonalities. This project is very scalable, and can be built to include more partnership members tackling wider issues.

ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY

CHALLENGE:

Understanding the barriers to entry of starting a More in Common group

We've understood that, even though the Great Get Together inspires on-going community action, using it as a springboard to the More in Common Network isn't for everyone.

The formation of each group is different, so it's difficult to see very precise trends, but some examples of where groups have shown interest but not gone on to form include:

- **Time pressures** in Pimlico. We had strong interest from an individual in forming a group in Pimlico, London. He was really excited about bringing his community together, however a few months after our initial contact, he was elected as a local councillor, and realised that to do both was too much work, so he stepped away from the group. We tried to encourage him, but this shows an example also of why it's essential to have a core group of organisers at the outset of the formation of a group.

- **Taking the next step** in Middlesbrough. An organiser in Middlesbrough has been interested in the More in Common Network for some time. She is a member of the Whatsapp group, and often shares examples of the cohesion work she does locally, including projects that bring people from different religions together. However, they have not yet formed as an official More in Common group. We have asked ourselves the question, does it matter? Through her informal contact with the network, existing groups are able to take inspiration from her work, and the brilliant work is still happening, even if it is not happening under the More in Common umbrella.

As we've shown, there are hurdles towards the formation of a More in Common group.

However, we aim to offer a clear pathway for those who are interested in the network, guiding them from initial contact, through to meeting the rest of the network, to formally becoming a group.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT

LEARNING 3



There are barriers to engaging people with both attending events and long-term volunteering in their community

BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

Though we know that Jo Cox's 'more in common' message remains a powerful and persuasive call to action for community groups, we also know that there are significant barriers that stand in the way of people getting involved both in attending community events and becoming a volunteer.

Our understanding of what the barriers are, and how to overcome them, has increased as the project has progressed. We have always known that we wanted the Great Get Together to be an event that is inclusive and available for everyone. However, we better understand that saying everyone is welcome doesn't actually mean that everyone feels welcome. While we've seen a real change in the diversity of the participants at Great Get Together events, associated with a reduction in barriers to participation, it has been a slower process to increase the diversity of the More in Common groups and Great Get Together organisers.

The baseline for the project showed that the majority of our Great Get Together organisers and More in Common members were middle-aged women who were predominantly white. One of the outcomes for the project was to deepen the age profile of organisers, increase the number of people from minority ethnic backgrounds who take part,

and to ensure that participation is inclusive of disabled people.

The pandemic was a new and significant barrier to engagement during the course of the project. While we saw high engagement with the campaigns in Y1 and Y2, the small-scale nature of the activations, many of which were online, made it more difficult for participants to connect across lines of difference. More in Common participants in particular found it difficult to maintain the momentum behind their groups when they weren't able to bring people together in person. The pandemic remains a barrier, with potential participants still telling us that they have not been involved in the Great Get Together because of concerns about health and social mixing. The cost of living crisis has added additional barriers, with respondents telling us that increased costs for transport, for example, have impacted their ability to be involved.



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

SUCCESS:

Understanding more about how to make events inclusive

There are multiple things that we have done to make the Great Get Together and More in Common Network more deliberately inclusive. These include:

- **Re-emphasising the connection to Jo Cox**, and her words that “we have more in common than that which divides us”. Both organisers and participants consistently tell us that both Jo’s values are a key reason why they take part in the project, and that the words are a rallying point to bring people together.

- **Updating the brand and identity of the Great Get Together.** At the beginning of the project, the visual identity of the campaign was very heavily focused on a gingham motif, which we realised did not appeal to everyone. We ran a small focus group with young people in Y1, and they told us that the current look would actively put them off being involved. As such, we’ve evolved the brand, ensuring that it’s attractive and welcoming to a wider audience.
- **Continued to increase the support we’ve provided to organisers**, both to support those who have not previously organised, and to help organisers make their events more inclusive. This includes a dedicated inclusivity toolkit with help and guidance, as well as providing very targeted suggestions for what people can do. One young person in the focus group said this was essential. They were keen to be involved but lacked inspiration, telling us “I wouldn’t know what to do”.
- **We have worked with a wide range of partners** to increase the reach of the campaign to more diverse audiences. Examples include our partnerships with Refugee Week and Muslim Hikers for the Great Walk Together, explored in Learning 4, and work with the charities The Wolfpack Project and City Year to support young people experiencing loneliness.



For me it helped us to have an event that spoke openly about inclusivity and allowed us to celebrate what we had in common. We enjoyed the fact it wasn’t tied to faith, stance or belief, but at the same time welcomes everyone to take part. I got a lot out of seeing our young people (who have their own tough challenges to deal with) come together and enjoy each other’s company.

- Great Get Together organiser in 2022



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

SUCCESS:

Increasing the diversity of attendees

We want the Great Get Together to attract a diverse range of participants, and we specifically wanted to widen the reach of the campaign to a wider range of ages, people from different ethnic backgrounds, and disabled people. We can see that our efforts to increase the inclusivity of the project, and the actions of the organisers, have seen us be broadly successful in these areas.

One of the main reasons for increasing the diversity of participants is that Great Get Togethers give people the opportunity to interact with people who are different from them, and we have a large bank of evidence about the power of this.



It's not about politics, 'it's about everyone coming together to have a chat and find out more about each other. [I wanted] not just friends to attend, but also political opponents.

– Paul O’Kane MSP, who organised a Great Get Together



I live in a very diverse area. There are a lot of Muslim people here and I am not Muslim. The majority of people who attend the Grange Pavilion venue are Muslim. The event made me feel more included and engaged with my local community. The people are so friendly and it was nice to learn about their food. I feel more confident in my community and happy to live here.

– Great Get Together attendee in 2022



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

When aiming to increase the age profile of attendees, we had a specific focus in Y2 and Y3 on engaging with younger participants, particularly by working with schools, and with organisations who work with young people, including UK Youth and City Year. For example, the partnership with City Year was part of a focus for the Great Winter Get Together on youth loneliness, and led to 150 young volunteer mentors at City Year UK receiving training to support students with loneliness. This clearly worked, and between Y2 and Y3 we saw an increase in participants under 25 from 0% in Y2 to 11% in Y3.

In relation to widening the ethnic diversity of participants, we saw an increase in people from a minority background participating in Y3 and Y4. For Y4's Great Get Together, 31% of attendees identified as belonging to an ethnic minority, with the largest group being Asian and British Asian. However, this was lower than Y3's, where 38% of attendees identified as non-white.

From our baseline data collection, we saw that a high percentage of organisers self-identified as disabled. This is also echoed in participants. For Y3's Great Get Together, 28% of attendees identified as disabled, which had grown to 31% in Y4. This compares to 17.8% of people in England and Wales who identify as disabled in the 2021 census.

Disabilities include living with mobility or physical impairment, mental health support needs, neurodiverse conditions and difficulty concentrating or remembering. There is still more to do to support organisers to make their events truly inclusive for people with disabilities, with some Y4 respondents commenting that access for those in wheelchairs could be improved.

It is more challenging to show clearly with quantitative data that Great Get Together events were successful in bringing people together across lines of difference. While we have excellent qualitative data showing examples of when Great Get Together events bring together people with different lived experience, we didn't think it was appropriate to ask participants if they had interacted with someone 'not like them' at the event they attended, instead simply asking how many new people they had met. In the Y4 Great Get Together, answers to this question ranged from 0 up to 30.



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

Organisers making their events more inclusive

We know that organisers are also committed to making their events more inclusive, with 92% telling us they did this in Y3 and 85% in Y4. Organisers gave a range of examples about what they did to make their events inclusive, including using different languages, and using different media (including posters) to engage those who are less digitally active. It is worth noting that the steps that organisers took do differ, which naturally shows that there are different ideas about what 'inclusive' means. For instance they might be careful to ensure vegan, dairy free or gluten free options are available, but not halal or kosher.

As well as the impact on participants, this also had a longer-term impact on organisers themselves, as they reported that after their events they felt both more confident bringing together people from different backgrounds and holding inclusive events.



I am proud that we run all of our events as completely free. We are in an area of high deprivation and work with many members of our community through our other programmes of work. We work closely with a local service for refugees and asylum seekers, we supported them to bring a group of people by paying for their travel costs and providing a picnic.

– **Great Get Together organiser in 2023**



I aimed to bring people from Colchester and Chelmsford together to make new connections and friendships – GoodGym is active but I offered various ways for people to join in. I considered dietary requirements and we welcomed a Ukrainian lad who is staying with a local family. With the Afghan families there are different levels of English proficiency but sport is an international language and common denominator.

– **Great Get Together organiser in 2023**



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

CHALLENGE: Increasing the diversity of organisers

As well as diversifying the participant base, we also aimed to increase the diversity of our organisers. This has been more challenging, but, with initiatives we have put in place, we have seen an increase in the age range and ethnic diversity of our organiser base. Our baseline showed that we already had a high percentage of disabled organisers, and, with some slight variation, this has remained high throughout the course of the project.

We know that existing organisers think that the Great Get Together is inclusive. We asked organisers to what extent they agree with the statement 'The Great Get Together is accessible for organisers of different backgrounds'. In Y4, 84% of respondents told us that they agree, with only 2% disagreeing.

When we interrogated the reasons, we heard a broad range of opinions, including:

"It offers the freedom to be able to just get on and do something in any form."

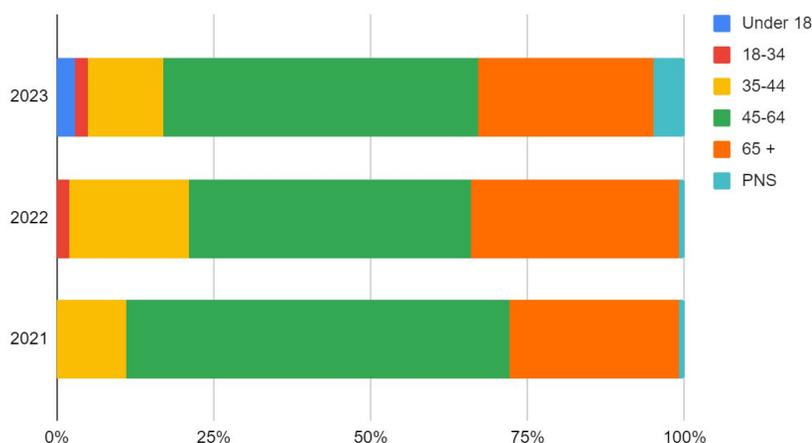
"Promotes a message of acceptance."

"It's accessible because you can make it as big or small bring it to your home or park or make it online and use whatever budget you can all afford."

As the chart below illustrates, there is a significant proportion of organisers who are over the age of 45. This is an unsurprising outcome as this tends to be the age group where people have the life skills and time to devote to volunteering in the community. However there has been a slight increase in the younger age groups, including in the most recent Great Get Together some organisers who are under 18 years old. In Y3 and Y4 we have worked with the Naz Legacy Foundation and Marmalade Trust to increase our engagement with young people

and schools, and this is clearly having an impact, though the majority of organisers remain in the 45 - 64 and 65+ age brackets.

Age of Great Get Together organisers



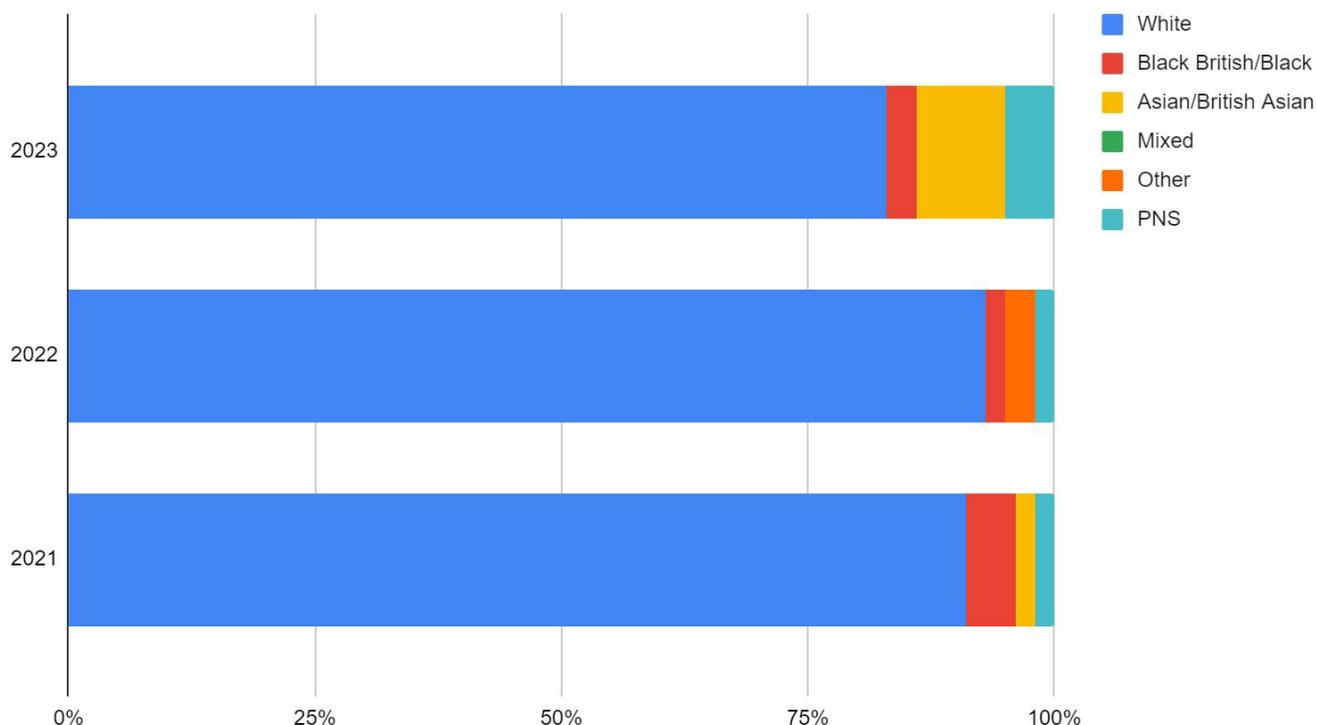
BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

Though the majority of organisers identify as white British, we can see a change in the ethnicity of organisers over the duration of the project, with a significant percentage of Asian and British Asian organisers in Y4 (Y2 2%, Y3 0%, Y4 9%).

There will be a number of reasons for this, but one may be the work we have done locally in West Yorkshire to inspire and support organisers. The most recent census shows that 23% of people in West Yorkshire identify as being from a minority ethnic group.

In May 2023, we held a Community Lunch, inviting potential organisers to meet the team from The Jo Cox Foundation, to find out more about the campaign, and to be inspired about how to take part.

Ethnicity of Great Get Together organisers



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

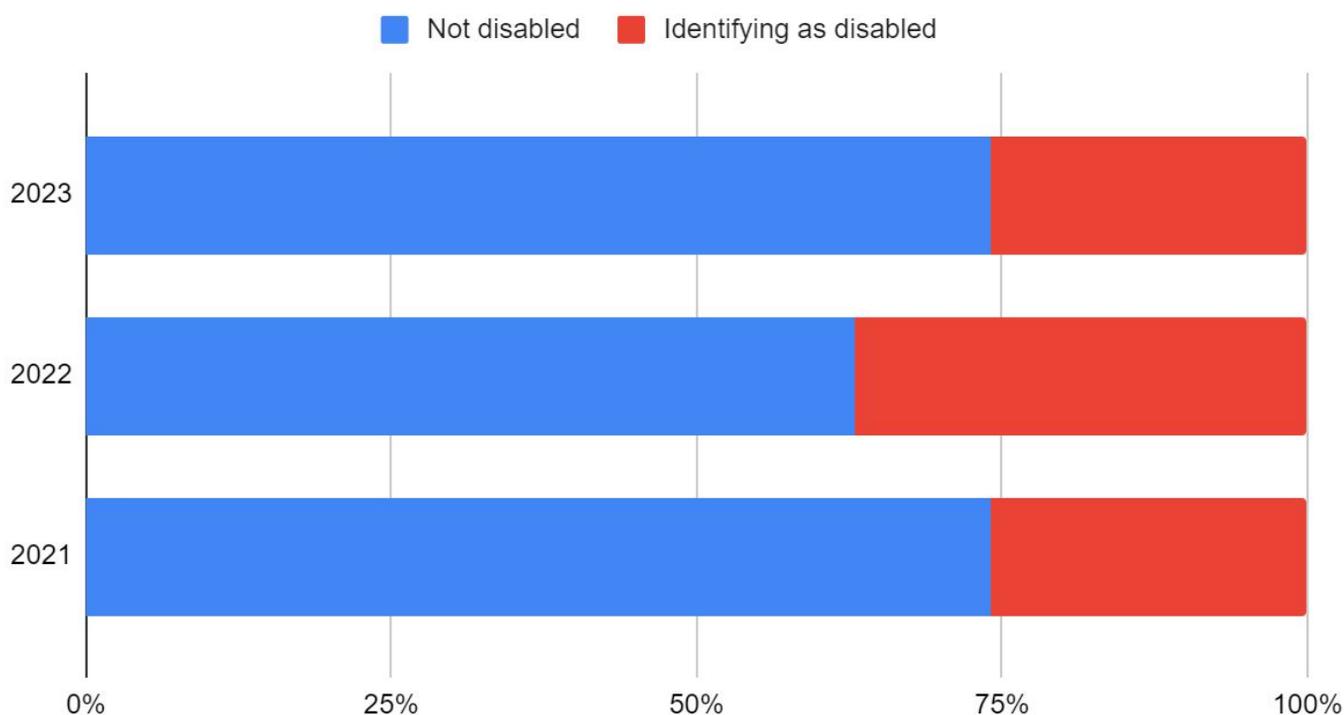
As with our participant base, a higher proportion than the national average of organisers self identify as disabled, with many having multiple disabilities. In the most recent Great Get Together organiser survey (Y4), the highest proportion of respondents had a mobility or physical impairment, followed by problems with concentration, and a hearing impairment.

We have heard a range of interesting stories from disabled organisers about the challenges they have faced when organising, which will help inform our future work.

This includes one organiser who did not feel able to attend the event they had arranged:

"I have ME and am still isolating - so while I organise I did not attend. For me, it was better during Covid when we did all our stuff on Zoom - but can appreciate that others prefer to socialise face to face."

Great Get Together organisers and disability



BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

In the project baseline for the More in Common Network, we saw that the majority of More in Common participants identified as white British (84%) and aged 46 - 64 (55%). Group members were open in acknowledging that their groups were not always diverse - **“I’d like our group to be much more diverse than it is... We’ve got a whole range of different sorts of people, but we’re all ... how can I put it? Not that young. We’re all vaguely middle class. We’re all vaguely left wing. And we’re all, apart from one or two people, white”** - and expressed a desire to reflect the diversity of their area. We also understand that this means different things depending on the local context.

For example, in Y1 the Birmingham group told us about about the broad diversity in their city, particularly in relation to faith, whereas in Llantwit and Darlington differences were described in terms of “pockets” of people, differing in terms of ethnicity or nationality (Darlington), or social class (Llantwit Major). For the baseline, groups showed a broad desire to diversify their groups, but also outlined challenges they had come across when trying to do so, in particular not knowing where or who to start with when engaging with particular groups.

We acknowledge, therefore, that there is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to the diversity of a More in Common group. As the project has evolved, we have seen new models for how groups encourage diversity. For example, the core organiser group in Bradford are all South Asian, representing the community that they wish to serve. In Halifax, where a new group is starting, they have, from the outset, set out to ensure that their core organiser group is representative of the diversity of the local area.

As we saw in the case study in Learning 2, the partnership model places diversity at its heart, ensuring that the voices of all in the community are represented. This enables the growth of new collaborations which bring groups together who have not previously engaged, as well as providing a powerful way of identifying and addressing local issues.



CASE STUDY:

How Kumon Y'all increased the diversity of the organiser base through thoughtful planning, June 2022



Farook Yunus founded Kumon Y'all in Dewsbury fifteen years ago with the aim of enabling young people to unite and tackle the problems of their communities, most notably racial segregation resulting in issues and tensions, together. There are some areas that he's found difficult to crack and where he's been faced with hostile, racist reactions when trying to establish Kumon Y'all projects. One of these areas was around Manor Croft Academy, a majority white area with a history of racial tension. Farook had tried for a decade to establish a project in the area but had been unable to do so.

With the Great Get Together Farook saw an opportunity; a chance to put something on that could bring people together in a traditionally polarised community. His method was a game called Boccia, a game similar to boules which can be played by anyone, no matter their age or ability. It provides a brilliant way to bring people from different backgrounds together. With this in mind he approached Manor Croft Academy, a school in the heart of the community, and once they agreed to host, he himself stepped back.

This is a key part of Farook's approach. He feels it's vital for young people to take responsibility and make change themselves. So having put the bones of the project in place he stepped back and devolved responsibility to a group of young people who took the lead. The young people handled everything from inviting in local faith groups (the local church and two local mosques) to advertising the event and arranging food. The aim was simple; to come together, to play Boccia, have some food and connect!

When the Great Get Together came around the event was very well attended with people from across the community and from a range of backgrounds. The game provided an opportunity for people to get chatting together, to make connections and to plan future connections. The event was such a success that it was run again in 2023.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGING

CHALLENGE: Other barriers to engagement

When conducting our post-event data collection, we share our survey with our mailing list and on our social media channels, giving an opportunity for those who didn't take part to tell us why. This enables us to build an understanding of other barriers that potential participants face. These include:

The impact of the cost of living crisis, particularly impacting people's ability to get to events. In Y3 18% of those who didn't attend a Great Get Together told us they didn't attend because of lack of finances, with 5% saying they lacked means to get to an event.

"I'm deaf and disabled and there is no bus service so I am unable to leave my home, unless I pay for a taxi, which I can't afford, as I'm on disability benefits and am struggling to make ends meet."

Ongoing health concerns. Some potential participants are still shielding, or are still lacking confidence to return to events. For Y4's Great Get Together, 5% of people said they didn't attend because of Covid.

The break in social connections during Covid has also caused a **loss of momentum** for some organisers, who are finding it difficult to start up again.

"Our Community Group has only just re-formed after the Covid years and it will take time to re-establish links with Councillors after a change of local government structure and other local groups to hopefully achieve something sustainable involving young people and disability groups." - previous Great Get Together organiser

Caring responsibilities or work responsibilities are also an issue. During Y1 and Y2 we had received feedback from participants that being able to join online made events more inclusive for them. Though there are fewer online events now, we have taken onboard feedback around this, and will ensure that some online participation is possible for future campaigns.

"I would have liked an online option as I am a full-time carer for four people and I'm unable to leave home."

A difficulty in securing funding to run events, coupled with the requirements of local rules and regulations.

"This year was slightly more stressful than previous years with council regulations getting in the way" - Great Get Together organiser in 2022

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT

LEARNING 4



Bigger isn't always better! Smaller events can have a deep impact, and the type of event makes a difference to the experience of participants

TYPES OF EVENT

During the course of the project we've understood more about the benefit of the flexibility of the Great Get Together model, in that it allows a really wide variety of events. As part of this, we have also learnt more about the impact of different kinds of events - whether that be the size or the type of event. Our developing understanding has enabled us to learn more about how to reduce barriers to participation and make events more inclusive.

We have always been clear that Great Get Togethers come in all shapes and sizes, and since the inception of the project we have celebrated the range of events that organisers plan. When we ran the 2020 Great Get Together under full Covid restrictions, we had to support organisers to get really creative about what type of event they were organising. At the time, up to six people could meet outside, with social distancing in place, but many still also felt anxious to be close to others. We saw a huge range of inventive events, including street Zumba sessions, plant swaps, community gardening and online quizzes. We have continued to encourage this inventiveness because we were seeing encouraging signs about the impact that a range of events were having.

In Y3's Great Winter Get Together we specifically encouraged online events, responding to feedback from those who were still shielding or unable to attend in person.



We also implemented some new campaign initiatives designed to encourage events that were not a typical street party or fete. In Y2 we started the Great Walk Together in collaboration with Refugee Week, which asked communities to welcome refugees, or reflect on the experiences of refugees, through the simple act of a walk. This has carried on since then, with 22 walks taking place in Y4. In Y4 we also put in place the Great Watch Together (with Cinema for All), the Great Train Together and the Great Read Together. A wide range of events means you are able to attract a more diverse audience who have different interests.

TYPES OF EVENT

SUCCESS:

Understanding the impact of different types of event

There is no fixed format for a Great Get Together, and the range of events has certainly expanded over the course of this project, with Covid requiring people to be increasingly inventive in the events they ran. This also helps with the diversity of events – not every event is for everyone, so by offering a range of activities, it is more likely that they will appeal to more people. Here you can see deep dives and case studies showing the impact of a range of events.

DEEP DIVE: The Great Walk Together

One of the challenges facing the Great Get Together in 2021 was how, during a pandemic where people weren't allowed to meet in large numbers, you could actually get people together. To address this challenge we linked up with Refugee Week to run the Great Walk Together, an initiative we've continued ever since.

Refugee Week is a week of events which aims to celebrate contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees. It shares a date with the Great Get Together, as well as many values, including a belief that it's important to bring people together to connect beyond labels.

The original aim of the initiative was to find a safe, simple, accessible way for people to take part in both campaigns. We placed inclusivity at the heart of the project design, paying specific attention to supporting organisers to removing barriers to participation. This included reassuring people that big doesn't have to be better, and that smaller walks could be equally impactful, as well as offering advice about how to reach new people who may not previously have participated in community events.

In 2021 this proved a huge success with the toolkit downloaded over 1000 times and dozens of walks run around the country. **"It's a fantastic way to meet new people,"** said Ann who ran a walk for Disley Quakers, **"and to introduce them to our local area. Once you start walking you just start talking."** Ann summarises one of the things that is so successful about this initiative – the power of walking as a low-pressure activity for people to participate in. We know from a range of research that walking is a good way to build social connectedness and wanted to take advantage of this power.

TYPES OF EVENT

DEEP DIVE: The Great Walk Together (continued)

As a result of this success we repeated the initiative in both 2022 and 2023, both encouraging organisers to organise walks and using it to pilot specific events or initiatives. In 2022 we worked with Muslim Hikers to develop a model of 'nature orientation' walks for refugees, using the event to help introduce newly arrived refugees to local green spaces. In 2023 this was repeated, alongside partnerships with the Yorkshire Dales National Park to bring together rural and urban communities.

The Great Walk Together has provided a sustainable, long lasting model of partnership for us and an excellent, simple way for people to take part in both the Great Get Together and Refugee Week.

Photos from the Great Walk Together in the
Yorkshire Dales in June 2023



CASE STUDY:

Craft and Chat, Online in 2021



Our Yorkshire Programme Manager, Hafeezah Soni, hosted a series of Craft and Chat online sessions in 2020 and 2021.

Participants were sent a craft pack in the post, and then the group came together online to talk and connect as they carried out their activity. Hafeezah reflects on how the events were particularly powerful at bringing together people from different generations.

"The Craft and Chat workshops created a safe space for people to craft, catch up and spend time together. Friendships formed, stories were shared, and skills were learned and exchanged during a time of physical distancing. This safe space helped create a sense of belonging and connection across multigenerational households, pushing boundaries by overcoming the stereotypes associated with crafting."

Participant Katie said:

"I still have all the things I made from my pom-pom hedgehog, my craft apron, my banner with the rainbow on it. It was great to see all of the folks every week, watching my online friends, hearing what they had all designed. Seeing the kids loving getting messy with the paint and adults helping their children or grandchildren. It really was a very clever programme. We all enjoyed our time together and it was so well timed bringing people together online, with no danger of Covid."

CASE STUDY:

Gardening in Wolverhampton, June 2021



Beverley and allotment holders
at their Great Get Together
event

In 2021, Beverley Momenabadi, who has hosted multiple Great Get Togethers over the years, decided to host the event at the local allotments as an opportunity for the allotment holders to share produce and have a meal together:

“The Great Get Together is about bringing communities together, and celebrating what we have in common. Every year we do something to honour Jo Cox and because of Covid restrictions, it had to be outside. There could only be 30 guests so it made sense for it to be held at Howell Road Allotments because that place celebrates what we have in common. The allotment holders are all from different backgrounds and walks of life and they come together because of their love for fruit and vegetables.”



Serving up the food brought along by
different allotment holders



CASE STUDY:

The power of sport in Cardiff, 2023

More in Common Cardiff Partnership member Glamorgan Cricket spoke of how they used the Great Get Together to bring together different communities and bridge divides; both between refugees and local people, but also between rural and urban schools in the area around Cardiff. They brought together refugees, children from Llantwit Major and from schools local to the cricket stadium together to learn and play.

Andrew Hignall, the Head of the Cricket Museum, said:

“It was so nice to bring together so many nice people who share a common interest. The Great Get Together showed the power of sport for good. Often you see the tribal rivalries and unglamorous things on the field, but what happened on the 25th of June showed its power for good. We look forward to tapping into this further.

The club plans to extend and repeat the project over the next year.



TYPES OF EVENT

SUCCESS:

Simple things can help facilitate connections between people

It is clear that many organisers put a lot of effort into making sure that people feel comfortable attending the events they have organised. Comments about making sure that they invited people personally, and made introductions if people did not know anyone were mentioned as making a big difference at events based on a street or residential housing block. Others focussed on making sure the tables were attractive and well presented to help people feel welcome.

“We are always most welcoming to those who attend - but especially so to those who come for the first time and who might feel a bit shy.”

- Great Get Together organiser in 2022

“We had games tables, chatting tables and volunteers available to talk to those who find these situations difficult due to social anxiety.”

- Great Get Together organiser in 2022

“At least 4 people came to the community centre for the first time, even though they live very close by. It was lovely to hear that they enjoyed themselves and felt welcomed and that they belonged. Two have returned to other activities run at the hub, and I have the phone numbers of some others who I will contact and give them an open invitation to join us.”

- Great Winter Get Together organiser in 2023

The personal impact of making someone feel welcome can have a huge impact on someone's experience, as evidenced by the case study on the next page.



CASE STUDY:

Healing after loss at a Great Winter Get Together event, 2023



Participants enjoying the Soup Lunch Great Winter Get Together event ▶

"On the first Soup Lunch we met Annie whose partner had died 10 weeks earlier. Recently bereaved and with no family or friends locally she was feeling very alone. She found out about the Bee Friends Coffee Morning and Great Winter Get Together Soup Lunch event at the local library through Healthwatch. Annie had led a career in catering and was immediately interested in the Soup Lunch, she said she'd never been so happy as when she was serving food.

Bee Friends have a policy of meeting and greeting so Annie was immediately given a warm welcome and taken to a table where there were friendly faces and a cup of coffee. It takes courage to walk into a large hall not knowing anyone, but Annie did it.

Annie watched as we served the soup – as this was our first time it wasn't elegant! But the atmosphere was wonderful, with everyone engaged and chatting as bowls were passed and seconds served.

After the last of the soup had been served and it was slightly calmer, we invited Annie into the kitchen and she said it was like coming home. As an experienced caterer, she was eager to help and use her skills to be of value and use. We all need to be needed. By Annie's own admission she does not have a lot of self confidence and as such no desire to be "front of house" but she is VERY at home in the kitchen and is now volunteering with us (as caterer in chief!). None of us have any catering experience and we will be looking to her for guidance.

Annie needed us but we needed her too. Because the Soup Lunch was so successful we are now holding one every month. Imagine our delight when last Thursday Annie came to a coffee morning, just for a chat. She was welcomed as a friend and joined a table of people she had sat with the previous week."

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE MOMENT TO MOVEMENT PROJECT

LEARNING 5



Training and peer networks are important when building long-term sustainability into volunteer projects

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

During the period of the grant, we've learnt a great deal about what works (and what does not) when it comes to supporting volunteers – both Great Get Together organisers and More in Common Network members.

After running a training event for existing organisers in 2019, before this project started, we had built an understanding of how much the volunteers valued the opportunities to be able to connect with each other to learn and share, as well as how motivating events like this could be. After that day, 100% of participants were motivated to join or start a More in Common group, and 90% felt they were better prepared to organise a Great Get Together.

Therefore, we began this project with a desire to bring organisers together regularly, building an empowering and supportive network. This became particularly acute during the pandemic, when maintaining momentum was a particular issue, especially for More in Common members.

We also wanted to support organisers to acquire new skills, increasing their capacity and confidence. This upskilling has a role in making sure that both the Great Get Together and the More in Common network are inclusive and attract a diverse range of participants. We understand that it can often be difficult to become involved in community organising, and wanted to offer opportunities, particularly to those who had not previously participated.

All of this supports the desire for the Great Get Together and the More in Common network to be more sustainable. By developing the skills of organisers, and by building networks for them to support themselves, we reduce their reliance on a centralised organising team, increasing the likelihood of the groups continuing in the long term.



Organiser training event in 2019 ►

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

SUCCESS:

Building a peer support network

We know that one of the motivating factors for organisers, both More in Common members and Great Get Together organisers, is the desire to 'be part of something bigger'. Building a peer support network plays an important role in this. A More in Common group member told us:

“We can see that it's a national movement that we're part of and that makes us feel good. And it helps keep us going.”

Building this peer support has been a particularly important element of the development of the More in Common Network. Though we have a staff team who are available to offer help and guidance, ensuring that mechanisms are in place for group members to support each other is a vital part of our planning for groups to be more self-sustainable. By being in touch, group members are able to share ideas (including for Great Get Together events), ask for help and advice, and motivate each other.

We've used a number of mechanisms to bring group members together, including the More in Common Forums and the Share and Learn event. However, it's the informal methods of connection that have proven to be most effective, particularly the Whatsapp group that exists. In our end of project conversations with the existing group, almost all mentioned how important they found the Whatsapp group, particularly in terms of motivation. One told us it is **“encouraging to see what other people are doing on Whatsapp”**. Members use the group to share tips and motivation, but also to share practical advice.

For example, Batley and Spen were able to offer practical accounting advice to the group Llantwit after being in touch in the Whatsapp group. We've also seen this group as a way of people staying in touch with the network, with a number of members of groups that have closed staying as part of the group in case it's helpful for motivation for future projects.



CASE STUDY:

South Wales groups working together, 2023

In March 2023, far right groups planned protests in Llantwit, South Wales, objecting to plans to develop a site to house refugees. The Llantwit More in Common group wanted to show their support for refugees. However, they were unsure about how to frame their activity – should it be a counter-protest, or something else?

They were able to seek advice from Nick Olsen, one of the lead organisers of the More in Common Cardiff Partnership who has specific expertise in this area, given his job as Crime and Cohesion Officer.

Nick advised the volunteers of the risks of counter-protest, so instead they decided to instead stage a 24 hour celebration of their community, emphasising Jo's more in common message.



Patriotic Alternative: The town fighting the far-right with Welsh cakes

© 25 March



TRAINING AND SUPPORT

SUCCESS: Increased motivation

One of the key aims for these activities was to introduce new people to our communities, and to encourage organisers to become involved in the More in Common Network. This worked! After the first season of the Common Room in Y2, sign-ups to the More in Common newsletter had tripled. After the Share and Learn event in Y3, 89% of attendees said they were motivated to join or start a More in Common group.

The recruitment aim undoubtedly worked, but a related success is the motivation that these sessions provided, both to those who were already working in their communities, and to those who had not yet taken that step.

100% of attendees reported that the Share and Learn event increased their level of motivation to take action in their community. This motivation can be linked with individual wellbeing, as evidence shows that the boost can help those feeling overwhelmed by their volunteer work.

Understanding that being a volunteer can be challenging has been at the heart of the development of this work. Not only did we want to provide emotional support and encouragement, it has also been our aim to support organisers with new skills and perspectives to enable them to deepen their work in their communities. Through the breadth of the support we've given, this has certainly been achieved. As an example, 64% of attendees at the Share and Learn event in Y3 reported an increase in their knowledge of how to make positive change in their community and 73% of attendees reported an increase in their skill to make positive change in their community. 82% of participants in Common Room series one in Y2 told us that participating had introduced them to new perspectives.



I felt motivated. It gets quite tiring and overwhelming doing community work. But coming to events like this helps inspire me by hearing and learning from others.

- Participant in the Share and Learn event



TRAINING AND SUPPORT

SUCCESS:
Increased capacity, skills and confidence

Understanding that being a volunteer can be challenging has been at the heart of the development of this work. Not only did we want to provide emotional support and encouragement, it has also been our aim to support organisers with new skills and perspectives to enable them to deepen their work in their communities. Through the breadth of the support we've given, this has certainly been achieved. As an example, 64% of attendees at the Share and Learn event in Y3 reported an increase in their knowledge of how to make positive change in their community and 73% of attendees reported an increase in their skill to make positive change in their community. 82% of participants in Common Room series one in Y2 told us that participating had introduced them to new perspectives.

"Love it Amir. Everyone loves Lego." - Share and Learn participant, responding to a suggestion about how to introduce simple evaluation tools to events!

"It was interesting to find out about the different types of loneliness and that many young people experience loneliness. I also enjoyed hearing about different initiatives in different places to reach out to lonely people." - Common Room attendee

Attendees were able to give practical examples of how they would implement learnings, particularly to make their events more inclusive. A participant from the Common Room series two told us they were going to work on **"removing barriers that prevent people from attending events/re-attending events"**, and another said **"often I try to engage with people from very different backgrounds to me - interested to hear how sharing stories could help."**

A member of the More in Common Basildon group told us about how attending a Common Room session entitled 'welcome more' had directly impacted them, as they used advice and ideas from the session to set up a Community Exchange with local refugees.



TRAINING AND SUPPORT

CHALLENGE: Embedding self-sustainability

Increasing self-sustainability in the More in Common Network was one of the original aims of the project. Upskilling organisers and connecting them with each other has undoubtedly made a difference to this objective, in terms of sustaining morale and keeping momentum. However, there are other issues which have come across very strongly as barriers to the sustainability of More in Common groups.

Broadly, there are two other issues. The first is financial, with funding to put on events and activities becoming increasingly difficult to secure, especially with the cost of living crisis. The partnership model, with the engagement of larger organisations and statutory bodies has offered an approach to this issue, with examples in Cardiff of the Council being able to fund Great Get Together activities.

Another key issue is the reliance on one or two central people at the core of a More in Common group. This impacts the resilience of groups, as they can easily break down if the central organiser has a change in life circumstances. This is common in many volunteer organisations, and we've understood more about this as the project has evolved. We now advise new groups to consider this issue as they are forming, and to build a central, strong core team. This is also an issue that the partnership model protects against. Partnerships deliberately have a shared power structure, meaning that they are not overly reliant on just one lead organisation, and therefore are more resilient in the long-term.





Ongoing impact

IMPACT FOR THE JO COX FOUNDATION

The learnings from this project have already impacted the ongoing work of The Jo Cox Foundation. Our refreshed three year strategy centres a desire to focus on building connections across lines of difference, using the understanding that we have more in common than that which divides us, to increase trust, empathy, and feelings of belonging, and decrease prejudice and hate in the communities and networks where we work.

As well as embedding our learnings, key takeaways that will inform our ongoing work are:

- Despite the challenges over recent years, **people still have a strong desire to engage in their community**, through events and volunteering. We will continue to provide opportunities for event organisers and participants, through delivery of the Great Get Together and Great Winter Get Together. The evolution of the More in Common Partnership model will also enable us to have a greater reach for community members who wish to engage year round.
- **The importance of a flexible monitoring and evaluation framework for future projects.** During the course of this project, which faced so many changes and challenges due to events outside our control, we learned a lot about good practice in monitoring and evaluation and the importance of having adaptable systems in place. We are better equipped to build frameworks that meet the needs and expectations of our participants, and have plans to involve participants in the development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the More in Common Network in the next 6 months.
- **We will be more confident in the knowledge that bigger events and more events isn't always better** - what is more important is that events have a focus on being spaces for meaningful connection, and understanding that meaningful connection often happens at more intimate events. We are reviewing what scale and growth mean to us, and are looking to increase depth and strengthen infrastructure rather than simply aim to register more events each year.
- **By understanding more about barriers to participation we are better equipped to support participants in our programmes to understand and overcome them.** We are developing our strategy on equality, diversity and inclusion in our Stronger Communities work over the next year and the learning from this project will influence that work. We are seeking funding that will allow us to offer additional support to Great Get Together organisers.

WIDER IMPACT

We intend to share this report with the wider communities sector, political stakeholders and funders as we believe that the learnings are applicable to many stakeholders. Some of the key areas include:

- **Emphasising the power of events to bring people together and how to make events spaces for connection.** For funders and policymakers, understanding the value of supporting projects that bring people together is important, as is further deepening the understanding of how we can support people, particularly those who do not currently take part in community activities, to engage.
- **Sharing challenges and good practice around effective monitoring, reporting and evaluation** of community events and projects. We have learnt a considerable amount from this project, and would welcome the opportunity to talk more with partners to share our learnings and ideas for how we do this work in the future.
- **Emphasising the power of collaboration.** The past four years have been challenging for all of those organisations working in the community sector, and we believe that by collaborating even more in the future, we can help each other to build resilience, and better support the communities we serve.





THE **JO COX**
FOUNDATION