

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Breaking Boundaries Executive Summary

February 2023

Executive Summary

About Breaking Boundaries

Breaking Boundaries aimed to socially connect young people, their families, and communities together through regular cricket and multi-sport themed engagement, fostering mutual respect and friendships by playing, spectating, and volunteering.

Funded by Spirit of 2012, it was delivered from 2018 to 2022 and in 5 cities: Bradford, Birmingham, London (Barking and Dagenham), Manchester and Slough. Led by the Youth Sport Trust in partnership with Sporting Equals and a consortium of organisations including Cricket Trusts and Foundations, Local Authorities, and Community Groups.

The purpose of the project was to provide social mixing between target communities using cricket and multi-sport as a tool to inspire, engage and reduce tensions/parallel lives. Working with community groups and city cohesion and integration teams, the project had delivered regular activity sessions, social action support and provided platforms for young people to have their voice heard, bringing different communities together.



What were the challenges facing these areas?

Themes across the five areas highlighted the following key challenges and needs around social cohesion that Breaking Boundaries sought to address such that:



Communities were living 'parallel lives' but not engaging with each other even though they might be living in very close proximity to each other;



In some areas, significant ongoing and recent changes in the ethnic make-up of targeted communities meant groups had not had many opportunities to engage with each other, or there were circumstances where communities had resisted moves toward integration;



Some areas were dominated by Ethnically Diverse Communities¹ made up of 2nd and 3rd generation migrants rather than those who had more recently arrived. However, these groups tended to remain focussed on engagement within their communities rather than outside of it and therefore these cities sought ways of bringing more 'settled' communities together.

Ongoing review work was needed by City teams to monitor change in these issues and emerging needs so the programme could maintain a local relevance to its delivery.

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Who took part in Breaking Boundaries?

Between 2018 and 2022, Breaking Boundaries achieved the following engagement and delivery:

3,864

**Volunteering hours
delivered by 379
Community Champions**

884

**Regular participants at
10,119 regular sessions**

4,398

**Individuals engaged
at 205 one off events**

222

**Community
partners engaged**



Primarily due to COVID-19, the programme missed its output targets, but as agreed by the programme board the final 12 months of the programme focused upon more targeted activities. This was to deliver a deeper qualitative experience for participants to identify learning on best practice in improving community cohesion by bringing communities together through physical activity with a cricket theme.

Across those Breaking Boundaries areas it has worked with it has had success recruiting Champions and participants from ethnically diverse communities. 83% of registered participants and 78% of Community Champions were from Ethnically Diverse Communities² far above the 15% in England. It also had success recruiting participants and Champions from Pakistani, Indian and Black groups.

83%

**of registered participants were from
Ethnically Diverse Communities²**

78%

**of Community Champions were from
Ethnically Diverse Communities²**

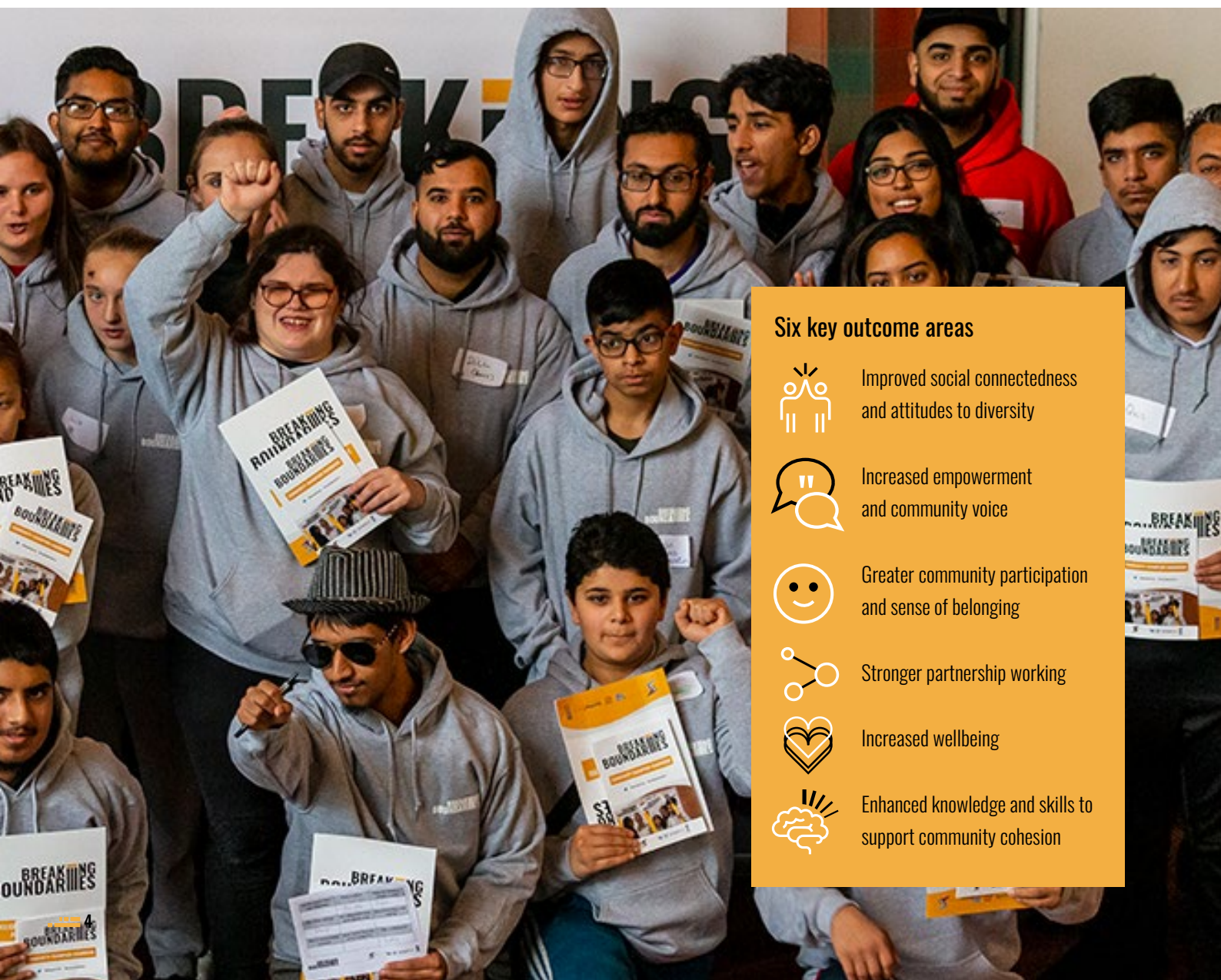
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What did Breaking Boundaries achieve?

The programme aimed to contribute to improvements across six key outcome areas. Against these outcomes, performance has been varied with the programme able to demonstrate strength in its delivery around improved social connectedness, empowerment, community voice and participation and belonging, and cohesion knowledge and skills of delivery staff.

It has made the greatest strides in improved partnership working bringing together partners through its work who had not previously worked together or were specifically addressing past tensions between themselves or communities. This overcame a lack of readiness and infrastructure in the cities to support cohesion work.

Greater progress was made in the final months of delivery as the programme flexed its delivery approach to undertake more targeted and deeper work with a narrower number of partners and community groups. In turn, this has fostered some of the positive progress seen in connectedness and community participation.



Six key outcome areas



Improved social connectedness and attitudes to diversity



Increased empowerment and community voice



Greater community participation and sense of belonging



Stronger partnership working



Increased wellbeing



Enhanced knowledge and skills to support community cohesion



Improved social connectedness and attitudes to diversity

Breaking Boundaries has sought to foster improved social connectedness and attitudes to diversity by deliberately facilitating social mixing between community groups through the activities it ran. This developed shared group ethos around exploring differences and commonalities between groups which meant the groups brought together developed a better understanding of each other. The targeted work since the programme's return from COVID-19 has seen progress in this area because it has, through co-produced approaches, deepened connections between a smaller number of groups such that they highlighted improved understanding of others.

Examples of improved social connectedness and attitudes to diversity

Faith Centre and Forums: Examples in Barking and Dagenham and Manchester show the value of using different faith centres as the host locations for programme activities to encourage participants to meet and understand different perspectives on the lives of others. Activities taking place as part of these events also encourage social mixing facilitated by discussions around different religion's perspectives on key local issues.

Quality connections over quantity: The targeted working in Slough with Roma and Pakistani young people demonstrates that well facilitated connection opportunities achieve a stronger quality of connection between participants. This also works most strongly when building social mixing into existing activities rather than creating new ones which is co-produced with the participants and facilitated by Community Champions. This was also seen in the joint work between Families Against Violence and Claremount Youth in Manchester that enabled them to see the real commonalities in their lived experience in the areas the programme was working in.



Increased empowerment and community voice

By focussing cohesion discussions on specific local issues the programme was able to empower participants and Champions to have a greater voice in their local communities and develop their own solutions to these issues. By encouraging 'safe' group environments Breaking Boundaries was able to facilitate the sharing of challenges between groups, and the City Leadership Forums (CLFs) also acted as safe forums in which groups could discuss and co-produce solutions to situations many felt they had not had agency over before.

Examples of increased empowerment and community voice

Empowering: In Birmingham a Female Empowerment event developed through Breaking Boundaries initiated consultation with underrepresented young women in physical activity in the city area. Bringing together female participants from different schools led to the development of new multi-sport activities with those they had not met before.

Creating safe spaces: In Slough and Birmingham, Breaking Boundaries activities enabled previously reticent participants to share views and experiences with others including other family members to enable their participation in programme and other community activities. This enabled different groups to come together and begin conversations about issues in their communities and saw them have a voice, often for the first time.



Greater community participation and sense of belonging

Breaking Boundaries created new opportunities for community participation through its delivery and participants and Champions alike highlighted how this had increased their participation with others from their community. From this a stronger sense of belonging has been fostered for some participants, but particularly Champions, with this being most strongly seen in activities involving visits to faith centres and other activities that sought to ensure participants had a stronger sense of the festivals, traditions, and issues faced by other communities. This had success where it deliberately sought to tackle the 'parallel lives' of the groups it was working with.



Stronger partnership working

Breaking Boundaries achieved strong outcomes against this measure particularly in the last months of the programme through the Community Leadership Forums work and the community development work undertaken by cities. Two-hundred and twenty-two partners were worked with including a range of organisations and community groups operating outside of the physical activity arena. Engaged local partners suggested that the programme's key strength was the links with other organisations and community projects that have been developed through the most recent work through the Community Leadership Forums that led to independent working between paired community organisations.

Examples of increased community participation and sense of belonging

- Weekly wellbeing walks, talks with occasional cricket teas between Asian and White British women and the Bhangra Blaze activities in Birmingham.
- Multi-faith cricket tournament and intergenerational dance sessions fostering engagement and facilitated conversations in Bradford.
- Weekly multi-sports and school session mixing young people from Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups to also discuss their lived experience in Manchester.
- A state v. public school cricket tournament and local community partnership family funday tackling parallel lived experience in Slough.

“ I think it's just feeling accepted and welcomed and being part of the community. A few years ago, I did Bollywood dancing, I loved the community aspect, it got rid of the isolation I was feeling. This is very similar; it brightens up my day.”

Female, Dance Participant, Barking

Examples of stronger partnership working

Working with partners outside physical activity: Slough's work with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) had taken several years to establish but had been brokered through Breaking Boundaries with a shared focus on developing a stronger sense of belonging for young people involved with the YOT. In Birmingham building on previous partner links developed a new project in limited time bringing together the White British community with refugees who were occupying multiple hotels in the targeted area through work with the Living Well Consortium and George Dixon School. This led to an initial programme of eight sessions of multi-sports activities and cohesion discussions that linked the White British pupils at the school with Arab and European young people in the temporary accommodation provided by the Cobden Hotel.

Building connection: In Manchester, the Breaking Boundaries team engaged all community organisation leads to come together monthly for social cricket themed get togethers. Each get together involved a cricket themed activity, lunch, and an opportunity for organisations to share their views on the programme. The get togethers provide an opportunity for organisations to connect better with each other and increase attitudes to diversity by learning about other cultures and religions.

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Increased wellbeing

Wellbeing outcomes were less strong although Breaking Boundaries did bring improved confidence, socialisation (tackling social isolation), and related mental health benefits arising from engagement with, and participation in the activities it provided. Champions saw positive changes for themselves with all Wellbeing areas improving and with increases in life satisfaction and happiness, whilst their anxiety levels also fell. This perhaps reflects the greater level of programme engagement Champions had through the training and the wider range of activities they were involved in.



Enhanced knowledge and skills to support community cohesion

Breaking Boundaries has improved the knowledge and skills of local people and organisations to enable them to effectively support community cohesion. In particular, Breaking Boundaries highlighted the importance for organisations to link effectively with local community organisations to reach community groups, individuals gained knowledge on how to effectively bring different groups of people together, and local groups learnt how to effectively use sport and physical activity as a vehicle to support cohesion outcomes.

Examples of increased wellbeing

Intergenerational activity: In Slough the Ujala Foundation has been helped by Breaking Boundaries to secure a wide range of materials, e.g. sewing machines and art supplies, and recruit a fitness instructor to offer the women heavily subsidised exercise classes (£1 per person per session). Women who attend the sessions identify they have helped them with social isolation and loneliness because it has brought them into contact with other women they wouldn't have otherwise engaged with.

Bolly Bhangra in Birmingham facilitated mixing between women from different South Asian ethnic groups, to tackle underlying tensions between different groups of South Asian women from Bangladeshi, Gujarati, and Pakistani backgrounds. There was evidence not only of improved confidence in the women, but the wellbeing benefits that come with it. The leader reported the activity also supported the mental health of participants that had worsened during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Examples of improved knowledge and skills to support community cohesion

Qualifications: All the five original Coordinators passed an apprenticeship qualification showing that they had demonstrated improved knowledge and skills around supporting community cohesion. Coordinators were also able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the pursuit of other similar employment³ illustrating how their training through Breaking Boundaries and experiences on the programme improved their employability.

Community Leadership Forums (CLFs): In Birmingham, Breaking Boundaries worked with a local organisation, the Feast, who has developed expertise in promoting cohesion between young people of different faiths and cultures in their communities. The Feast provided training at the Breaking Boundaries City Leadership Forum to provide insight in the way delivery staff could facilitate conversations between young people from different backgrounds and reflect on conversations that could lead to future positive outcomes.

Changing roles and responsibilities: In Manchester, city team staff highlighted how their understanding of communities and community development focus had been enhanced by their programme experiences to extend sports development work to include greater community development elements. In Bradford, Community Champions undertook more volunteering and were able to become part time youth workers because of their Breaking Boundaries experiences. Teams acknowledged the need to get local cohesion teams (where available) on board early to help drive delivery forwards.

³This included three Coordinators moving on to manage another physical activity programme, work for the local authority, or in roles associated with community engagement for the NHS.

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What is the Breaking Boundaries legacy?

Key elements of legacy included changed working approaches around activity development which have a greater focus on community development approaches than traditional sports development work and greater input in decision making from young people. Other examples of legacy are:

Legacy examples

- In Birmingham community partners have been linked to volunteering opportunities at Edgbaston stadium as a way of ensuring continued engagement of Community Champions.
- In Manchester, access to holiday programme opportunities has been brokered for community partners leading to three new organisations being added to the holiday programme roster.
- In Slough, learning from Breaking Boundaries was used to support the drafting of the first specific sport and physical activity cohesion strategy.
- All the original Coordinators achieved their Apprenticeship qualification building skills and knowledge to improve community cohesion in their future work. Four have moved onto new jobs working with the NHS or other community partners.

There remain opportunities that could be fostered by local cohesion teams to continue to use programme Champions but also to develop further connections with the range of community expertise that Breaking Boundaries has been able to draw upon.



What are the main conclusions of the evaluation of Breaking Boundaries?

Breaking Boundaries has not only succeeded in breaking down the boundaries between communities but it has also broken new ground in many other ways. There is now clearly great potential to build upon, and replicate, this work and learning that has come from it to benefit cohesion and integration work and activities across the country. Breaking Boundaries has clearly changed the lives of the individuals it has involved as well as supporting the changing of attitudes and behaviours of the communities it has worked with.

Positive experiences for participants through the social mixing facilitated by programme activities have brought benefits in social connectedness, community participation and voice, and partnership development with organisations and individuals being brought together for the first time and in most cases then developing new activities through that link up.

Other outcomes have proved more challenging – attitudes to diversity, increased empowerment, and improved wellbeing around life satisfaction and whether life is worthwhile but there are some positive signs of progress being made.

Breaking Boundaries' focus on socialisation, play and coaching, participation, spectating, and volunteering based around a 'cricket-themed' approach has helped its work around cohesion, in particular the targeted approaches in the final period of programme delivery. This has aligned the programme more closely to the original intentions of the Connecting Communities through Cricket grant that funded the programme and has resulted in improved performance in its last months of operation.

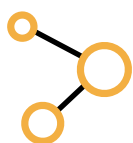
The programme did face significant barriers (including COVID-19) and for the success of the project to be more easily replicated, lessons must be learned, and new approaches adopted in the future.

What is the key learning to emerge from Breaking Boundaries?

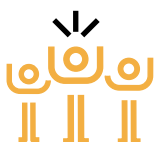
Programme delivery learning highlighted these lessons for future cohesion projects:



Time must be taken before starting a scheme to develop a fuller understanding of each community and the cohesion issues it faces. This is far more likely to be successfully achieved by a process of co-creation and wide engagement, especially with young people;



Infrastructure to facilitate regular contact and discussions between targeted community organisations to identify needs and approaches is especially valuable to support programme development and delivery. Community and area leadership forums can be especially useful in this context;



Workforce development on cohesion and integration is essential for all partners, before the scheme starts, but also as it develops;



Evaluation is essential and needs to be based on outcomes – to show how peoples' lived experiences are impacted by programme activities. This should be set up before programme delivery begins;



The quality of interaction between individuals and communities who are different, is far more important than quantity. The value of one-off events and other superficial engagement and inflexible delivery approaches must be challenged;



Local control of some funding decisions to support projects addressing local needs is a key way to build links and trust with targeted communities. Monitoring of such arrangements should be proportionate to the funds involved;



Sustainability and legacy should be built into every scheme from the start. Although, other models may be possible, Breaking Boundaries had success through the creation of community champions, skills development and building long term change in community partnerships. All schemes need to develop a similar approach.

The full report also outlines more specific lessons for local and national policy makers and physical activity and community partners.

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