

Impactful Partnerships Programme

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership
Case study



Successful partnerships are built on genuine collaboration – but how do you ensure that happens? An innovative new programme is helping partners to understand each other and work more effectively. As participants from Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have discovered, it's about the creating space to think, talk and build those all-important relationships

"Partnership working is very focused and there's often not a lot of time to develop relationships and talk things over. This was a rare opportunity to step outside of our usual focus to think and collaborate more effectively." Inspector Jamie Hobday, Walsall partnerships team manager at West Midlands Police, was one of around 30 people who took part in a programme run by West Midlands Employers earlier this year.

Together with representatives from Walsall Council, the clinical commissioning group, NHS and voluntary sector – who are among members of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership – it was a chance to leave the day job behind and focus on creating a stronger partnership. The programme was spread over three days in total with a month between each session. While the first two days were face-to-face, the third was staged virtually due to Covid lockdown restrictions.

It uses a combination of individual profiling to help participants understand their unique contribution and a series of sessions tailored to a specific goal for the partnership. For Walsall this was tackling exploitation. In short, the programme is, according to Manny Sandhu, a director at West Midlands Employers, "designed to inspire, create and engage change makers wherever they are, to have impactful outcomes as individuals and as contributors to partnership working".

Jamie played a key role in getting partners across Walsall to take part in the programme and "break out of organisational silos".

He explains:

"It's about getting problems on the table and finding a path where you work through them and learn about the blockages as a partnership. Therefore it has a practical purpose while also learning as we go through the programme. I found it very engaging. It really was a collaborative process, it wasn't about 'what I want'."

Since taking part in the programme, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, which was formed last year following changes to government legislation, has launched an all-age exploitation pathway and family safeguarding model – a reflection of the borough's pioneering shift towards more joined up provision for vulnerable children and adults.

"When it comes to exploitation, we all come with organisational priorities and this helped us to understand we have different ways of looking at it," says Jamie. "It's by surfacing those problems and barriers that we will overcome them. I think this programme has edged the safeguarding partnership forward and helped with multi-agency working."



Katie Storer-Young, exploitation and missing team manager at Walsall Council, had only been with the local authority for two months when she took part in the programme. "The important thing was I got to meet partnership colleagues and understand the partnership a bit deeper. Getting everyone in the same room to look at the same priority, exploitation, was really useful to me. I think sometimes we're all on a different page when it comes to exploitation and this helped us move a piece of work forward and look at what we wanted to do as a partnership." The profiling element of the programme was particularly useful, she says. "On a personal level, understanding my proclivities and how I can interact with others was really important. Also, when you do meet it's normally at formal meetings with an agenda and actions and there isn't scope to just talk. Bringing us together in a different way really made a difference. We have a better understanding of each other's challenges."

Fellow participant Helen Matthews, chief executive of Street Teams, echoes those sentiments. The charity specialises in working with children and young people in Walsall who have been abused through exploitation. Helen admits she hadn't been looking forward to the programme – expecting it to be "a tick-box exercise" – but says it proved to be a breakthrough moment both personally and for her organisation. "The skills profile was really beneficial for me and helped others to recognise what I bring and also what Street Teams does. It was a bit of a light bulb moment in the room. The partnership has an amazing, dynamic skills set and so it's about understanding how to play to people's strengths."

"From a charity perspective, we can feel like a bit of an outsider on the partnership. This helped me to understand the dynamics of the partnership and for the first time I really felt part of it. I think we're now actually having more meetings – despite Covid – and have a clearer idea of what's happening around exploitation. In terms of what was achieved, it's a more collective approach." She adds: "People click when they understand how others learn and work and deliver. I'd advise other partnerships to look at this programme. It helps you to press pause, refresh your understanding of each other, take on board everyone's views and think about what's needed locally."

Evaluation of the Walsall sessions is now helping to improve the programme (see below) and West Midlands Employers has a further two funded pilots available to interested partnerships. Liz Murphy, chair of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, believes others will find the programme invaluable. "It allows an opportunity to stop and reflect. Effective partnership working doesn't just magically happen. It

requires relationships and is about the culture of the partnership. This programme created the space to think, to get to know each other and work out how to do things differently in order to make a difference to the most vulnerable."

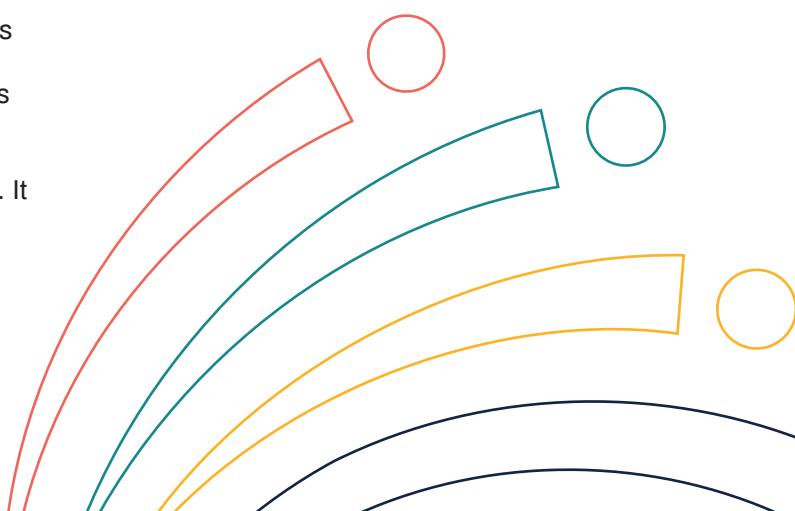
Manny Sandhu says the increasing complexity of partnership working means it's never been more important to understand the dynamics at play.

"We're living in a world of complex and interconnected problems that can only be solved by individuals who see the bigger picture and adapt to an ever-changing context," she explains. "These problems cross multiple boundaries, including that of organisations. Supporting and enabling individuals to operate outside of their organisation, within the wider system, through better collaborative partnership working, is crucial to deliver impactful lasting change."

Manny Sandhu

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Liz Murphy, chair of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership



Key learning points

Our fully funded pilots are to enable partnerships to make impactful change, whilst also contributing to a wider evaluation in which WME can refine the sessions for future programmes to maximise its value. An evaluation framework will be part of the next two pilot programmes. Key learning we have already taken from our first programme includes: Being clear that the benefits of the programme go far beyond that of the partnership and organisational outcomes, but also encompass personal impact, reflections and outcomes. It's a personal development opportunity as much as it is a chance to bring about better partnership working and help those partnerships to navigate their way through solving complex problems



Engagement with all stakeholders, particularly those commissioning the pilot, whom may not be participants themselves, to really understand the power of the GC Index, is key. . so that the way of working can continue beyond the three-day programme



Senior leadership to take part in future programmes wherever possible



The sharing of GC Index profiling to be more explicit in order to ensure the benefits of the exercise are maximised

What was the biggest benefit of the programme?



"Understanding my profile and raising my awareness into my strengths and maybe some areas to develop or at least be aware of. So useful to see other team members strengths too."

Alison Jones, designated nurse (looked after children), Walsall CCG



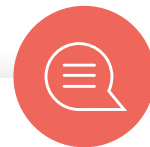
"Understanding my personal profile and remembering my style when working with others."

Sara Jones, deputy designated nurse (safeguarding children), Walsall CCG



"Getting to know some of my colleagues in other agencies better – I am fairly new to the area."

Nuala Waide, head of safeguarding for adults and children, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust



"The profile – it supports my current knowledge, but puts a slightly different slant to it. [It gave me] further insights into myself, but also that of partners that I work regularly with."

Chief Superintendent Kim Madill, West Midlands Police



"GC index – it helped me to understand how I work, and more importantly, how I can work with others in the leadership team... I feel more confident, being able to work with senior leaders and understanding my own work 'value'."

Katie Storer-Young, exploitation and missing team manager, Walsall Council

What the programme covers

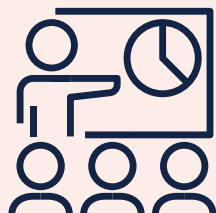
Spread over three days of face-to-face meetings (or virtually over either three or six sessions), the programme is broken down into themes based around a key priority of your partnership. It begins with individual profiling using The GC Index, a tool that helps people understand how they contribute to a partnership.

Sessions then cover six themes:



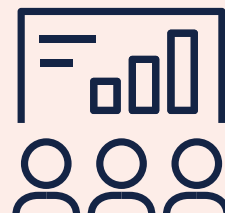
Day 1

**Building a cohesive
and credible team /
Understanding the “so
what?” implications for a
successful partnership**



Day 2

**Understanding collective
potential / Planning more
impactful action**



Day 3

**Increasing impact
and accelerating
action together /
Planning the future**

About WME

West Midlands Employers is a not for profit, public sector organisation collectively owned by 32 councils in the West Midlands. We're one of 9 Regional Employers' Organisations in England. Our vision is to advocate, build and champion a resilient and diverse public sector workforce for an ambitious West Midlands region. Our wide range of services supports this vision.

Visit www.wmemployers.org.uk

Find out more

If you'd like your partnership to take part in the programme, contact Manny Sandhu:

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