

Evaluation of Live Life Go Further

Final Report

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1. Summary

This is the final evaluation report of the Live Life Go Further (LLGF) programme led by the Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC). Following the previous evaluation reports, which summarised and highlighted the early findings and emerging evidence about what's working and not working for the programme, the aim of this report is draw the learning from across the evaluation together in one place.

1.1 What is Live Life Go Further?

In 2018 the National Lottery Community Fund awarded funding to RSBC to extend and develop the existing 'Live Life Go Further' programme of work over a three-year period (December 2018 -January 2022). LLGF was made up of a range of social and educational activities for children and young people with a vision impairment (VI) aged 8-25 years. The programme was delivered by RSBC in London and three partner organisations:

Henshaws

The Albion
Foundation

Youth Focus
North East

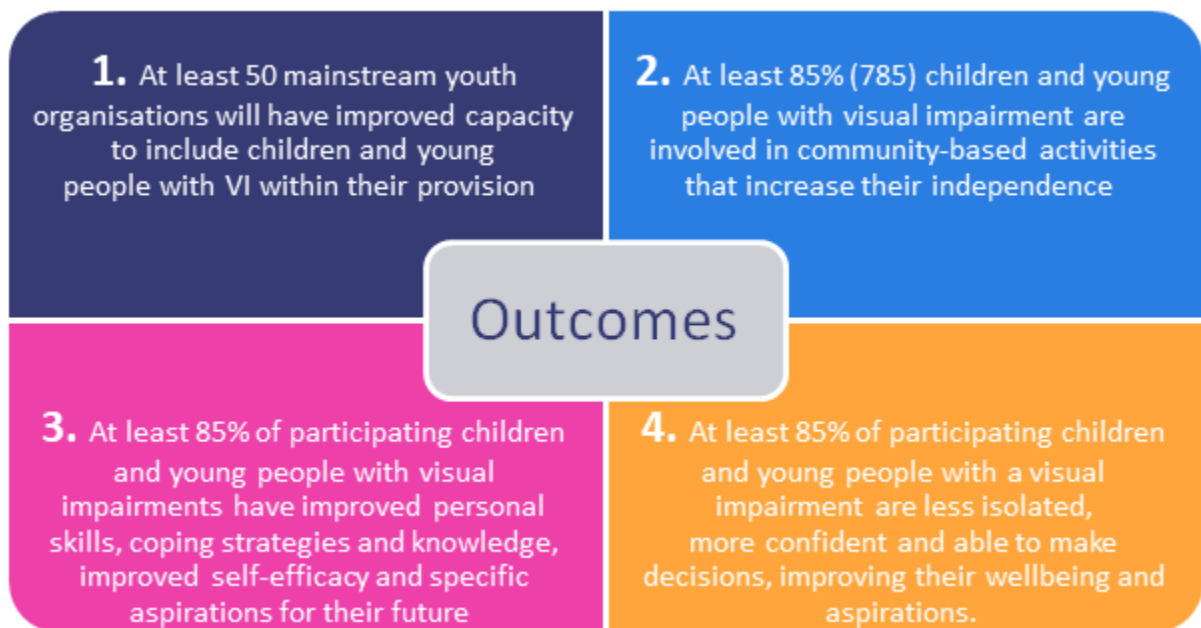
Until March 2020, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (BGCGM) were also LLGF partners, but they had to withdraw from the programme due to the impact of COVID-19. As a result, Youth Focus North East (YFNE) joined the programme at the beginning of year 3. Data from the BGCGM from Year 1 is included in this report where relevant, and data from YFNE is included where it has been captured.

1.2 Objectives and Outcomes

The delivery of LLGF was underpinned by three objectives:

- 1) Provision of Life Go Further Activities to children with a VI in three regions of England (Greater London, the North-East and the West Midlands) to be undertaken by RSBC in London and by partners outside of London.
- 2) Capacity building for other organisations so that they are better placed to include children and young people with a VI in the future.
- 3) Understanding 'what works' and how best to scale up provision to address unmet need nationally.

And four outcomes:



1.3 The evaluation of Live Life Go Further

The NDTi was commissioned by RSBC in May 2019 to carry out an independent evaluation of the LLGF programme. The aim of the evaluation was to understand what was working well, what wasn't working so well, and the changes that had come about as a result of the programme.

The evaluation was originally designed to answer four evaluation questions:

- 1) How have children and young people benefitted from their participation in Live Life Go Further, with specific reference to their emotional and social wellbeing?
- 2) How do the different delivery models compare with respect to: opportunities for learning and development available to participants with vision impairment; outcomes for children and young people; competence, commitment, and job satisfaction of delivery staff?

- 3) The implications and key learning from the programme – for best practice in effecting widescale inclusion of VI children and young people within mainstream youth provision?
- 4) To what extent has the programme helped to address social and economic inequalities for VI children, young people, and their families?

Given the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of LLGF, a fifth evaluation question was added in late 2020:

- 5) In what ways has delivery of the LLGF programme been adapted due to COVID-19 and are there any lessons which can be learned for future delivery?

The following data sources were used to inform this report, with all primary data collection carried out in the autumn/winter of each year. See Table 1 for a full breakdown of the people consulted. All names of participating individuals have been changed.

- **Thirty-four interviews** with managerial and delivery staff at RSBC, Henshaws, Albion, BGCGM, and YFNE.
- **Thirty-one interviews** with young people who have participated in LLGF programmes.
- **Eight interviews** with family members of young people who have participated in LLGF programmes.
- **Twenty Change Stories** submitted by partners
- **Observation of LLGF activities** run by RSBC and Albion
- **Attendance at and observation of Steering Group meetings**
- **Demographic data** of all young people engaged with LLGF.
- **Outcome data**¹ for young people engaged with LLGF across all sites, via Wellbeing Questionnaire (WBQ)/Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)², and Lifestyle Questionnaire (LSQ)³ responses.
- **Capacity building training data** captured by partners.
- **The impact of COVID-19 on RSBC Services. Internal RSBC Report**, October 2020.

¹ RSBC developed two measurement tools which were used for LLGF - the Wellbeing Questionnaire (WBQ) and the Lifestyle Questionnaire (LSQ). One or both were completed for every child or young person when they started attending LLGF activities and then revisited at six monthly intervals in order to measure change.

² WEMWBS replaced WBQ in December 2020

³ The LSQ was adapted from its original format in December 2020

1.4 Key Findings

- The work done in year 1 of LLGF laid the foundations for the programme as it was originally planned, and for the COVID-19 response that sites quickly delivered. The partnerships, training and set up of activities with groups of young people in local areas, allowed for a shift to online and then blended/hybrid delivery to happen quickly and smoothly. Of course, this was not true for all sites, with the BGCGM having to leave the programme due to the impact of COVID-19 on their organisation, but the work that was done allowed for the remaining sites and new partner, YFNE, to continue to grow and develop the programme in creative ways until the end.
- The partnership approach to LLGF provided partner sites with the support and networks needed to help deliver and grow their activities in their local areas. The sharing of ideas, particularly across specialisms, was seen to be particularly useful in a programme of this kind.
- Findings from the data collected across all 3 years suggests that the activities provided have led to positive outcomes for young people, including an increased sense of confidence, a supportive network of peers and opportunities to make friends.
- Findings also suggest that the capacity building training delivered helped mainstream youth organisations increase their knowledge and confidence in supporting children and young people with a VI, which will hopefully lead to more inclusive provision being available in the future.
- Being able to work in a blended/hybrid way to deliver support to children and young people with a VI was found to be a hugely beneficial outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. Offering people the opportunity to join support and activity sessions either online or face-to-face removed many barriers that had been faced previously. Including, not having to travel long distances, not having to miss out on sessions due to timings, and being able to join sessions due to health reasons. This approach is not without its challenges to staff and young people, but the benefits were felt by those involved in the evaluation to outweigh these.
- The outcome monitoring tools used in the programme have evolved and developed during the 3 years, however they were not without their problems until the end of the programme. It is hoped that the recommendations at the end of this report will help ensure these challenges are learnt from and changes implemented in future projects.



2. Introduction

2.1 About Live Life Go Further

Live Life Go Further (LLGF) was a three-year programme for young people (8 – 25) with a vision impairment (VI) in England, that aimed to contribute to the reduction of social isolation, the building of friendships, learning new skills and having fun through the provision of a variety of social and educational activities.

The programme was originally developed and delivered by RSBC, but in 2018 received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to extend and develop the approach with a diverse range of partners over a three-year period (December 2018 – January 2022). It is this three-year programme that is being evaluated here.

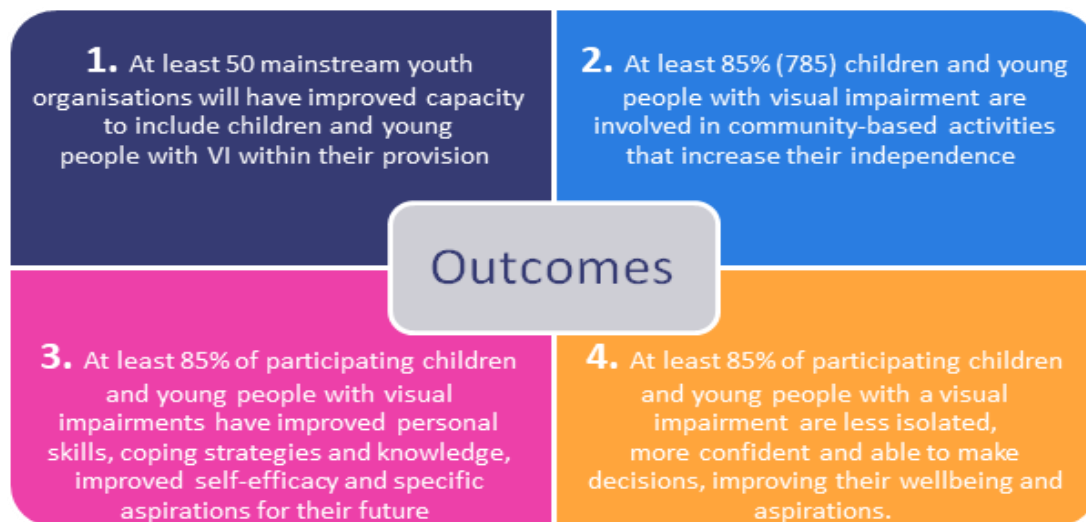
In addition to providing social and educational activities for young people with a VI, LLGF aimed to build capacity of mainstream organisations (non-VI specialist organisations) to be better placed to include children and young people with a VI in the future.

2.2 Objectives and Outcomes

The delivery of LLGF was underpinned by three objectives:

- 1) Provision of Life Go Further Activities to children with a VI in three regions of England (Greater London, the North-East and the West Midlands) to be undertaken by RSBC in London and by partners outside of London.
- 2) Capacity building for other organisations so that they are better placed to include children and young people with a VI in the future.
- 3) Understanding ‘what works’ and how best to scale up provision to address unmet need nationally.

And four outcomes:



2.3 The LLGF Partners

The variety of partners and their operating contexts was an important part of the LLGF programme. The three partners delivering LLGF alongside RSBC in London, were:



Until March 2020, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (BGCGM) were also LLGF partners. In March 2020, they had to withdraw from the programme due to the impact of COVID-19. As a result, Youth Focus North East (YFNE) joined the programme at the beginning of year 3. Data from the BGCGM from Year 1 is included in this report where relevant, and data from YFNE is included where it has been captured.

Henshaws is a well-established Manchester based charity which provides specialist support to people of all ages living with sight loss and a range of other disabilities to achieve their ambitions and go beyond expectations. Their support, advice and training enable people with a VI and their families to build skills, develop confidence, support each other, and look forward to a positive future. They offer a broad range of services delivered from specialist centres and within communities across the North of England, including a specialist college, arts and crafts centre, housing and support, and community services and they employ about 350 staff across all areas. As a well-recognized organization in the sight loss sector, Henshaws have strong strategic links and partnerships through which they receive referrals; they are partnered with local authority 'Sensory Teams', employ a patient support officer based at Manchester Royal Eye Hospital

and have an office within St Vincent's sensory impairment school in Merseyside. They also provide support to smaller organizations to share good practice and innovative ways to develop inclusive practice and attract funding for inclusion. Henshaws are also directly approached by families, some of whom travel long distances to access their provision. They have developed systems to enable them to capture data and information on outcomes for evaluation.

Within LLGF, Henshaws, alongside RSBC, were key to delivering VI capacity building training to local mainstream organisations, as well as delivering training to partner sites (Albion, BGCGM and YFNE) on how to offer capacity building training in their local areas. Henshaws also delivered face-to-face activities to young people with a VI around Manchester until the COVID-19 pandemic hit, when they swiftly moved to online delivery, and latterly a blended approach in 2021 as the pandemic and national restrictions allowed.

The Albion Foundation is the official charity partner of West Bromwich Albion Football Club. They have one of the only three blind football teams in the country and focus on using the power of football to support local communities in the West Midlands via a range of activities for disabled young people, including the country's biggest disabled football activity. The Albion Foundation run inclusive activities through their education team and their disability department including a football festival for all, blind football, inclusive holiday camps with multisport activities, autism camps and a new club for hearing impaired players. Prior to becoming a LLGF partner, Albion had struggled to recruit visually impaired young people to these opportunities.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Albion delivered sporting activities to young people with a VI face-to-face. When the pandemic took hold and national/local lockdowns began, they had to stop all activities until 2021 when they could deliver face-to-face again. In addition, Albion were also able to deliver a local VI capacity building session for mainstream organisations in late 2021.

Youth Focus North East is an independent charity who aim to improve the lives of young people through high quality youth work that invests in young people, those who support them and their communities. Youth Focus North East are not a specialist VI charity.

Youth Focus joined LLGF at the beginning of year 3. As a result, the support offered to young people with a VI was only just getting going as the programme came to an end, there was also no scope for them to deliver any local VI capacity building sessions to mainstream organisations.

BGCGM is a voluntary sector youth umbrella organisation based in Greater Manchester. They work with 42 local, grassroots, voluntary youth clubs and projects which are affiliated with the BGCGM and operate independently. These clubs offer programmes for around 8,000 young people aged 10-23 years, have

approximately 500 volunteers and provide a range of mainstream activities such as sports, music, dance, drama, and the arts. BGCGM offer training, support, advice, and networking opportunities for volunteers as well as activities for the clubs to take part in, such as sporting tournaments. People do not travel far to access clubs which are based in 7 out of the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester and are often in walking distance from their homes. A small number of clubs (2-3) offer 'inclusive' sessions which are run specifically for children and young people with physical disabilities and are not part of the mainstream provision. The BGCGM is not a specialist VI organisation and was keen to learn about and engage with more children and young people with a VI in the Greater Manchester area.

The BGCGM had to withdraw from LLGF in March 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their internal structure and capacity for delivery. They spent the first year of their involvement learning about capacity building and raising awareness of children and young people with a VI within their affiliated clubs and projects. They did not deliver any local VI capacity building training to mainstream organisations.

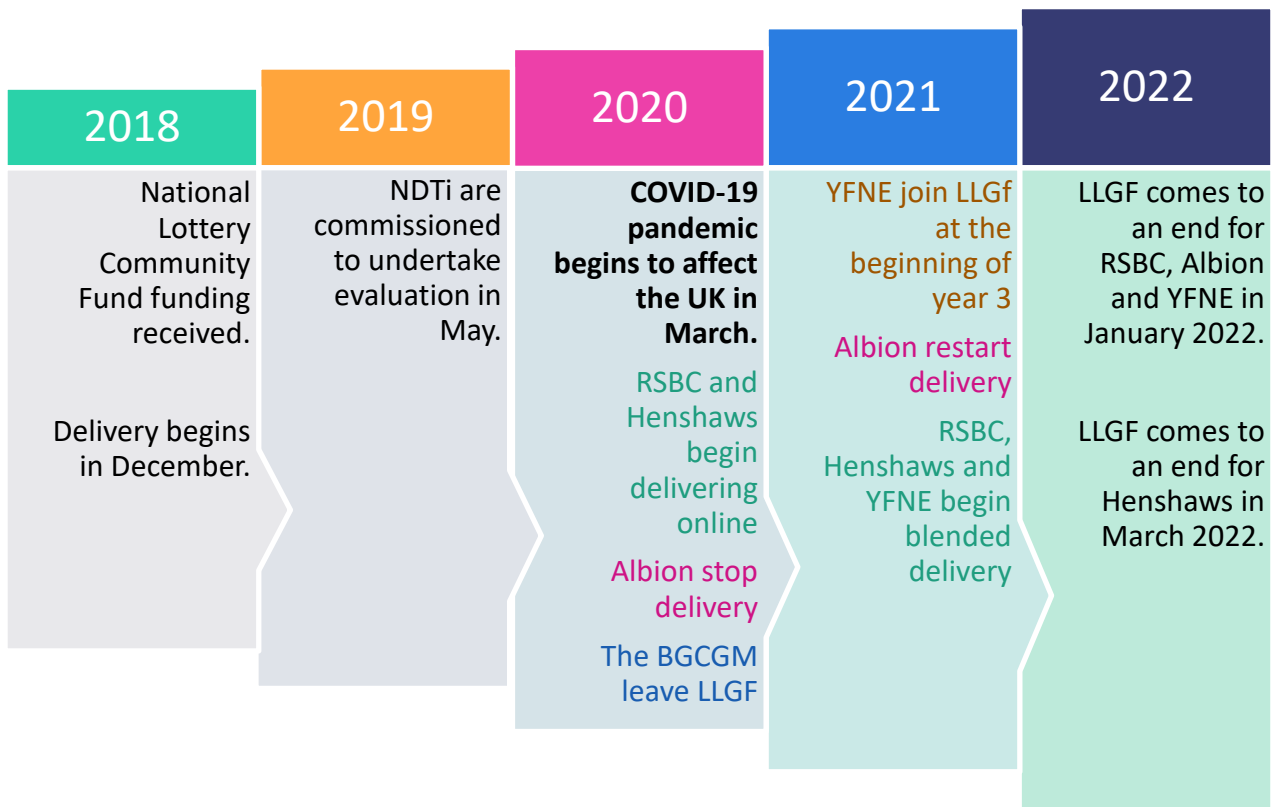
Since leaving the LLGF programme, the BGCGM have remained in contact with RSBC and are working closely together to share resources and develop bids for future work that benefit young people with a VI in England.

RSBC seeks to support children and young people with a VI to grow into adulthood with confidence, giving them opportunities to do activities that would normally not be available to them in mainstream contexts. Referrals are received through various channels, including schools, facilitation officers and social workers and in some cases, families go direct to RSBC via social media, their website or word of mouth

As part of their work, RSBC in London delivered the Lottery-funded LLGF programme (being evaluated here) under a wider umbrella of programming also called Live Life Go Further. To deliver the programme, RSBC developed a "menu" based approach with staff and volunteers directly delivering support to children and young people with a VI, including around health and wellbeing, social independence, employment, and assisted technology. Activities included health and wellbeing clubs (delivering sports and creative activities), supper clubs and social events, for example laser tag, car driving experiences and trips to outdoor adventure centres.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, RSBC swiftly moved their delivery online, shifting to a blended approach when the pandemic and national restrictions allowed. RSBC, alongside Henshaws, were key to delivering VI capacity building training to mainstream organisations and training up partner sites (Albion, BGCGM and YFNE) to deliver this training in their local area.

2.4 Programme Timeline





3. The Evaluation

3.1 About the Evaluation

The aim of this evaluation was to understand what was working well, what wasn't working so well, and the changes that came about as a result of the LLGF programme. To achieve this, a phased evaluation programme was designed to take a formative and summative approach that built evidence and learning over the three years of the programme.

The evaluation assessed the short-, medium- and longer-term impact of the work of all partners delivering LLGF activities in respect of the effects that improved social interaction and personal wellbeing, and reduced inequalities and social isolation.

The evaluation was originally designed to answer four evaluation questions:

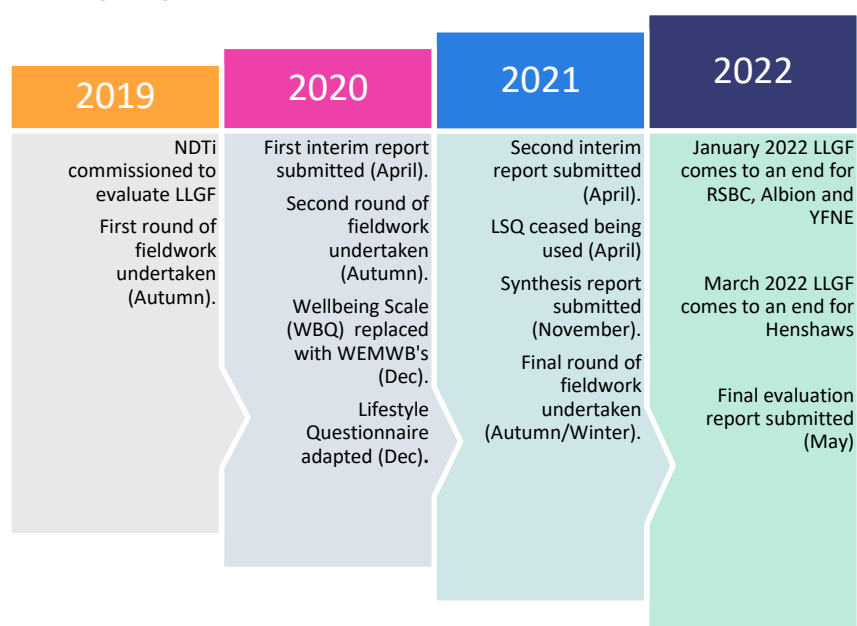
- 1) How have children and young people benefitted from their participation in Live Life Go Further, with specific reference to their emotional and social wellbeing?
- 2) How do the different delivery models compare with respect to: opportunities for learning and development available to participants with vision impairment; outcomes for children and young people; competence, commitment, and job satisfaction of delivery staff?
- 3) The implications and key learning from the programme – for best practice in effecting widescale inclusion of VI children and young people within mainstream youth provision?
- 4) To what extent has the programme helped to address social and economic inequalities for VI children, young people, and their families?

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of LLGF, a fifth evaluation question was added in late 2020:

- 5) In what ways has delivery of the LLGF programme been adapted due to COVID-19 and are there any lessons which can be learned for future delivery

An evidence grid showing a detailed extension of the LLGF outcome areas into interim outcomes and associated indicators, or signs of change, was developed by NDTi with partners in the inception phase of the evaluation and is provided in Annex 1.

3.2 Evaluation Timeline



3.3 Data Informing the Evaluation

The following data sources were used to inform this report, with all primary data collection carried out in the autumn/winter of each year. See Table 1 (below) for a full breakdown of the people consulted. All names of participating individuals have been changed.

- **Thirty-four interviews** with managerial and delivery staff at RSBC, Henshaws, Albion, BGCGM, and YFNE.
- **Thirty-one interviews** with young people who have participated in LLGF programmes.
- **Eight interviews** with family members of young people who have participated in LLGF programmes.
- **Twenty Change Stories** submitted by partners
- **Observation of LLGF activities** run by RSBC and Albion
- **Attendance at and observation of Steering Group meetings**
- **Demographic data** of all young people engaged with LLGF.
- **Outcome data**⁴ for young people engaged with LLGF across all sites, via Wellbeing Questionnaire (WBQ)/Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)⁵, and Lifestyle Questionnaire (LSQ)⁶ responses.
- **Capacity building training data** captured by partners.
- **The impact of COVID-19 on RSBC Services. Internal RSBC Report**, October 2020.

⁴ RSBC developed two measurement tools which were used for LLGF - the Wellbeing Questionnaire (WBQ) and the Lifestyle Questionnaire (LSQ). One or both were completed for every child or young person when they started attending LLGF activities and then revisited at six monthly intervals in order to measure change.

⁵ WEMWBS replaced WBQ in December 2020

⁶ The LSQ was adapted from its original format in December 2020

Table 1. Total Number of People Consulted

Partner	Interviews									Change Stories		
	Staff			LLGF Participants			Family			Yr1	Yr2	Yr3
	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3			
RSBC	1	9	6	0	4	9	0	0	1	5	7	0
Albion	1	2	4	0	0	6	0	0	3	0	0	0
Henshaws	1	3	3	0	2	8	0	0	4	2	6	0
BGCGM	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YFNE	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	34			31			8			20		

3.4 Limitations

A key change in the LLGF partnership was the withdrawal of the BGCGM and introduction of YFNE. As a result, the data available for these sites is limited to demographic data from the BGCGM collected in 2019 and YFNE collected in 2021/2. No outcome monitoring data was collected for either site.

The data available for analysis in this report is further limited by the changes made to the outcome monitoring tools by RSBC at the beginning of year 3.

In December 2020, the WBQ was replaced with the 14-point WEMWBS and the LSQ was initially altered and then discontinued in April 2021. As a result, there is no LSQ data available for analysis in year 3, and only a small sample of WEMWBS baseline (46) and follow-up (16) data available from RSBC. Partner sites did not collect WEMWBS data in year 3. Analysis of the WEMWBS data is further limited by the following conditions set out by the [authors](#) of the measure to ensure the validity of the data being reported:

- WEMWBS data can only be compared to itself at different time points (baseline and follow-up), it cannot be compared to other data captured via other measures.
- Data captured for children under the age of 13 cannot be included in analysis
- Due to the small sample size (<100) no statistical analysis of the population level data can be undertaken to report statistical significance or effect size of any change in scores as a result of LLGF.
- Change at a population and individual level has been reported. Individual level data should be viewed with caution as this reporting has not undergone the same rigorous validation process as the population level analysis.

A further limitation common to this type of evaluation is the sample of interviewees. As the NDTi were dependent on partners identifying children and young people as well as family members to be interviewed there is chance that the views of those who were more dissatisfied with the programme have not been captured. This is somewhat mitigated by the spread of interviews across the three years, with no one person interviewed more than once. As well as the outcome monitoring data capturing information from a broader mix of young people engaged in the programme. Additionally, although all interviews were confidential, staff anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the limited number of people in these roles.

3.5 How to Use This Report

This report tells the story of LLGF by drawing together the key learning from across the three years in one place. It is an overview of the programme which highlights key points and impacts, rather than a detailed exploration of all that has happened since December 2018.

The report is broken down into the following sections:

Take up and reach

This section presents the take up and reach of LLGF across all sites via an exploration of the demographic data collected. It will utilise data collected across all three years to highlight patterns and points of interest.

Early signs of change: before COVID-19

This section explores the evidence gathered towards outcomes before the COVID-19 pandemic (December 2018 and January 2020), drawing on outcome monitoring data returns (Wellbeing Scale (WBQ) and Lifestyle Questionnaire data (LSQ) from the young people engaged with LLGF) and interview data.

Responding to COVID-19

This section explores the evidence gathered towards outcomes between February 2020 to January 2021. This time period covers the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in England and as such, details how the LLGF programme responded to and continued to work towards outcomes during this unprecedented time. Data used to inform this section includes outcome monitoring data returns (Wellbeing Scale (WBQ) and Lifestyle Questionnaire data (LSQ) from the young people engaged with LLGF), and interview data.

Evidence towards outcomes during COVID-19

This section explores the evidence gathered towards outcomes from February 2021 to the end of the LLGF programme in January 2022, drawing on outcome monitoring data returns (Wellbeing Scale/Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WBQ/WEMWBS) and Lifestyle Questionnaire data (LSQ) from the young people engaged with LLGF), interview and observation data.

Conclusions and reflections

This section will draw the report to a close, highlighting key messages, conclusions, and recommendations.



4. Take Up and Reach

This section presents details of the take up and reach of LLGF activities across the partnership during the 3 years of the programme.

Table 2 (below) highlights which partners and data periods the analysis in this section is based on

Table 2. Partners and Data Sources

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Partners included	RSBC Albion BGCGM Henshaws	RSBC Albion Henshaws	RSBC Albion Henshaws YFNE
Data periods covered	Q1 - Q2	RSBC – Q1 - Q3 Partners: Q2 – Q3	Q1 – Q4
Data sources	Demographic data returns	Demographic data returns	Demographic data returns

Please note, due to partner data (Albion, BGCGM, Henshaws, YFNE) being merged (as received from RSBC for analysis), the numbers presented for year 2 reflect the loss of the BGCGM from the LLGF partnership, and year 3 reflects YFNE joining at the beginning of year 3. On this basis, no inference of change in take up and reach of partner sites can be made.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the number of responses in each figure does not always equal the total number of young people engaged in the programme by year (Figure 1). This is due to not all young people being asked the same questions, for example, only RSBC captured ethnicity data, they did not answer the questions asked or gave multiple responses. Where possible, this is highlighted in the text.

Figure 1. Total Number of Participants Engaged by Year

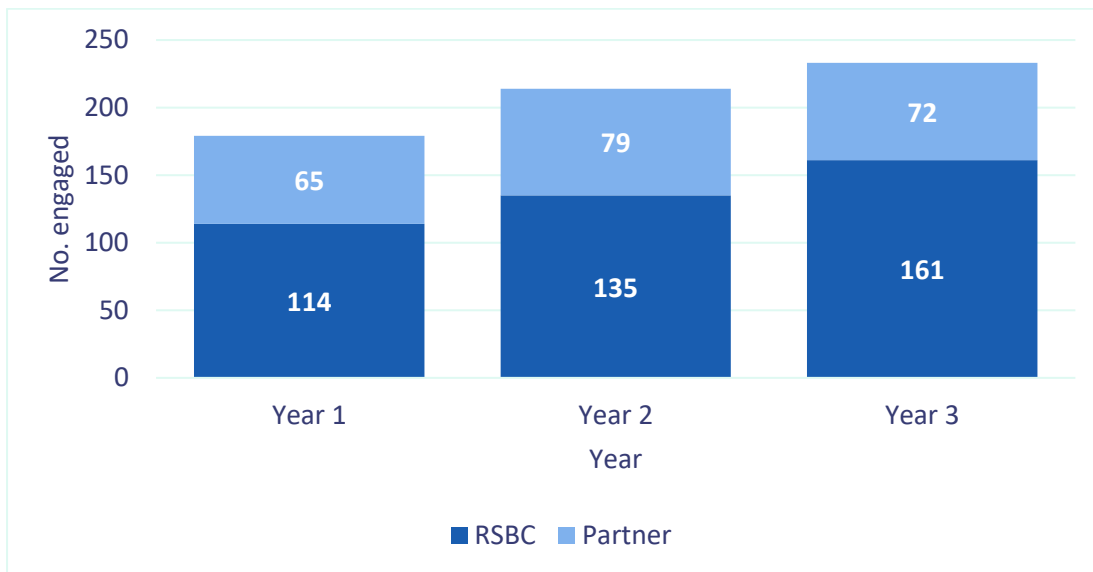


Figure 2. Total Gender by Year

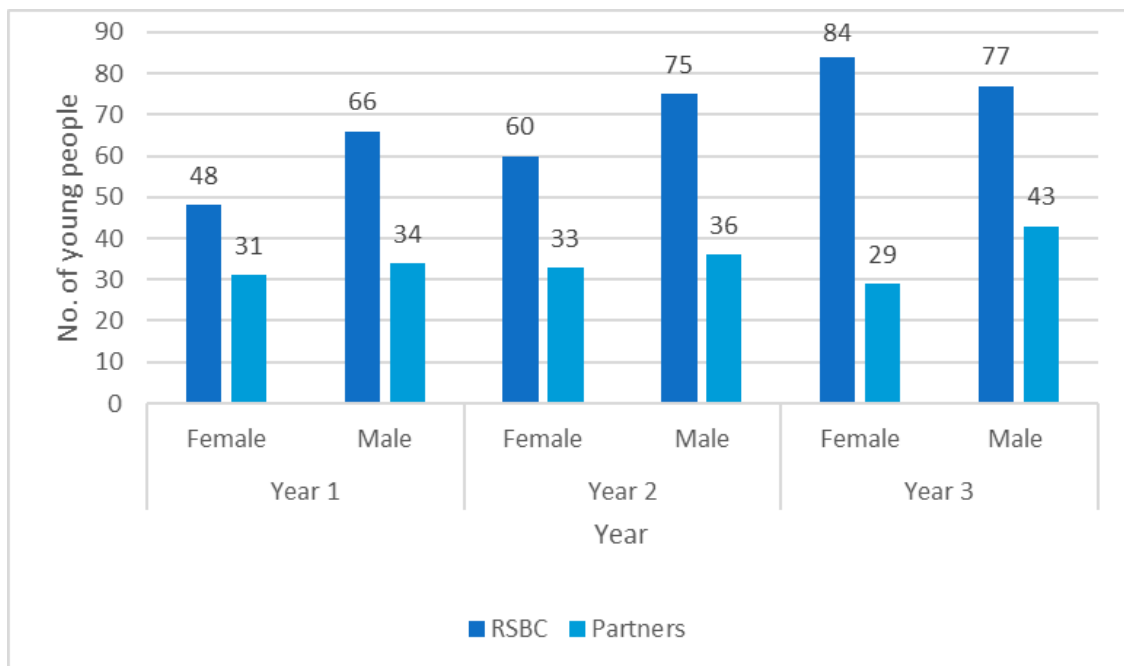


Figure 3. Ethnicity by Year

This data is only collected by RSBC, not partner sites.

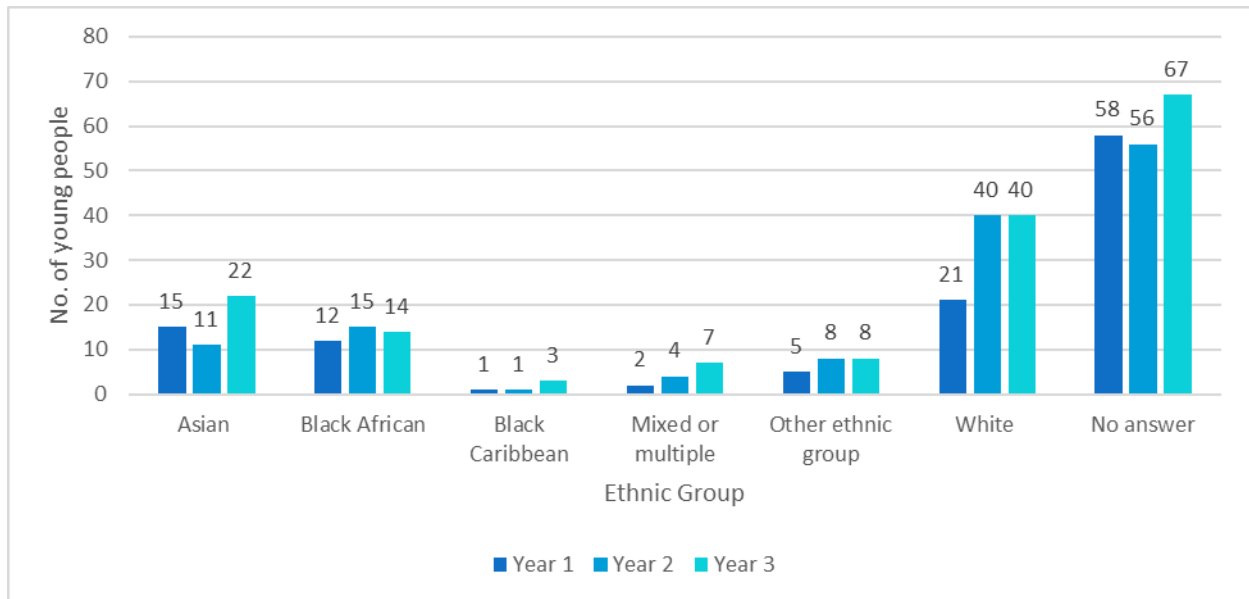


Figure 4. RSBC Ages by Year

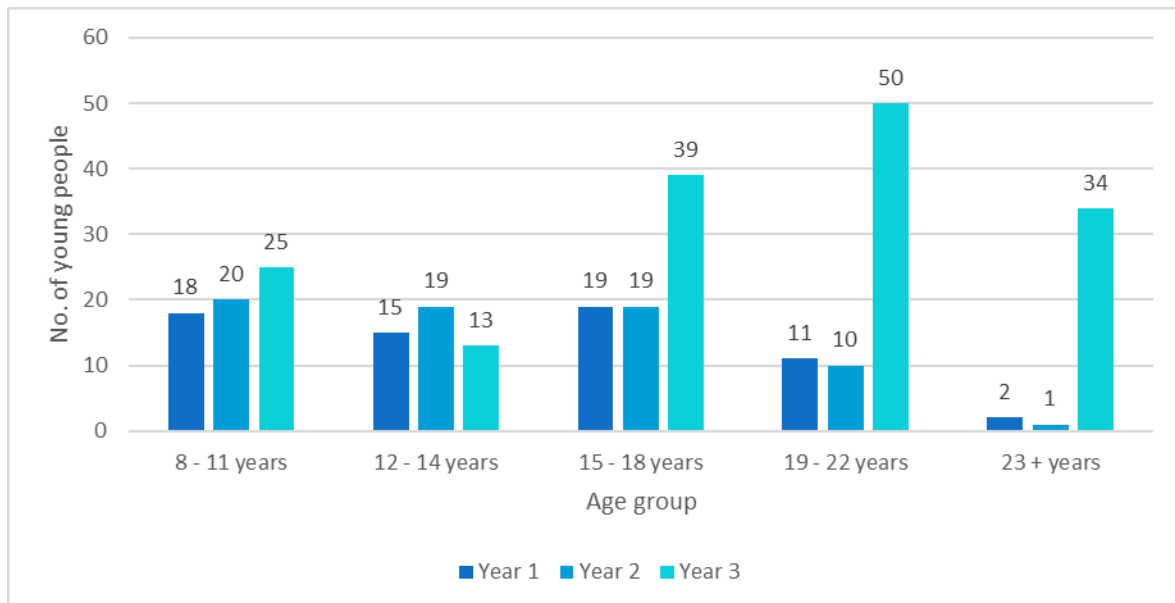


Figure 5 Partner Ages by Year

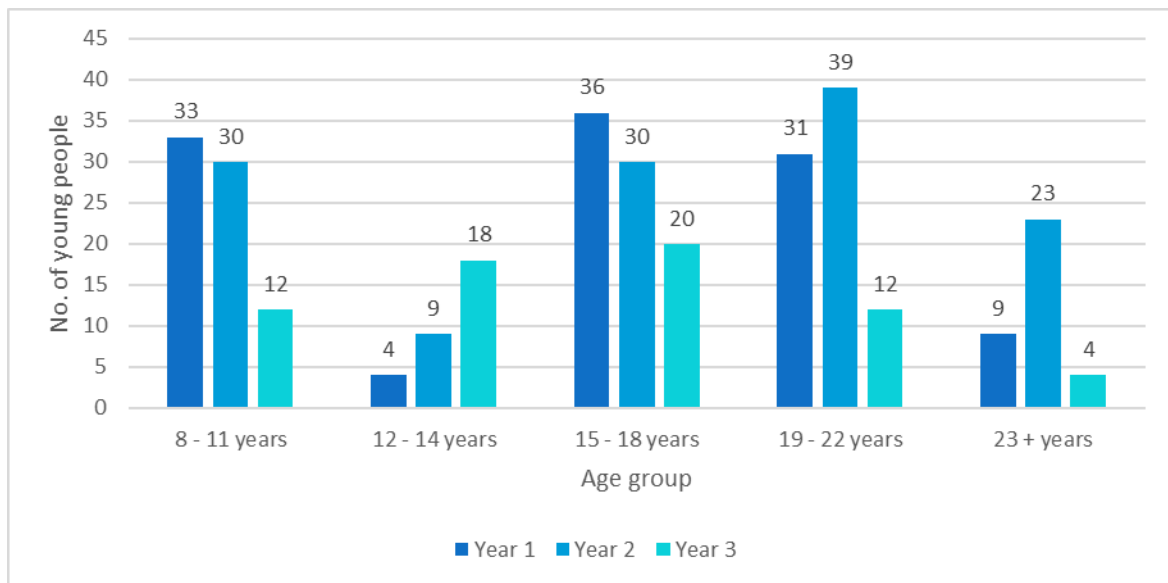


Figure 6. RSBC Locations by Year

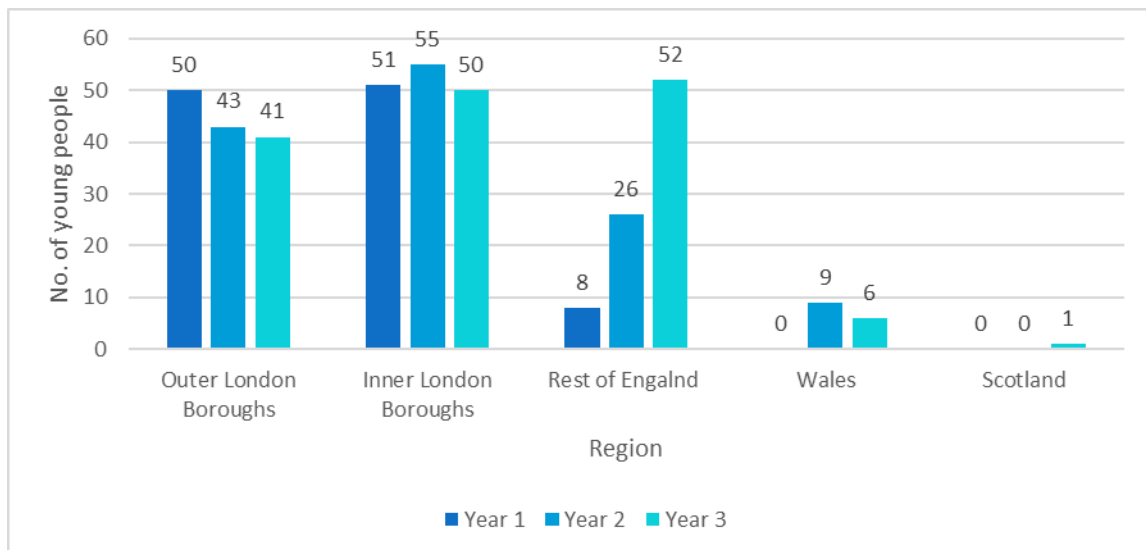


Table 3. RSBC Top 10 Locations by Year

Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
Area		Area		Area	
1. Tower Hamlets	13	1. Lewisham	10	1. Tower Hamlets	13
2. Hackney	10	2. Hackney	8	2. Medway	11
3. Newham	9	3. Newham	6	3. Lewisham	8
4. Lewisham	7	4. Lambeth	5	4. Brent	7

Year 1		Year 2		Year 3	
5. Croydon	6	5. Barking and Dagenham	4	5. Hackney	6
6. Redbridge	6	6. Barnet	4	6. Lambeth	6
7. Wandsworth	5	7. Croydon	4	7. Croydon	6
8. Barking and Dagenham	4	8. Redbridge	4	8. Coventry	5
9. Hammersmith and Fulham	4	9. Brent	4	9. Hillingdon	5
10. Lambeth	4	10. Enfield	3	10. Southwark	5

Figure 7. Partner Locations by Year

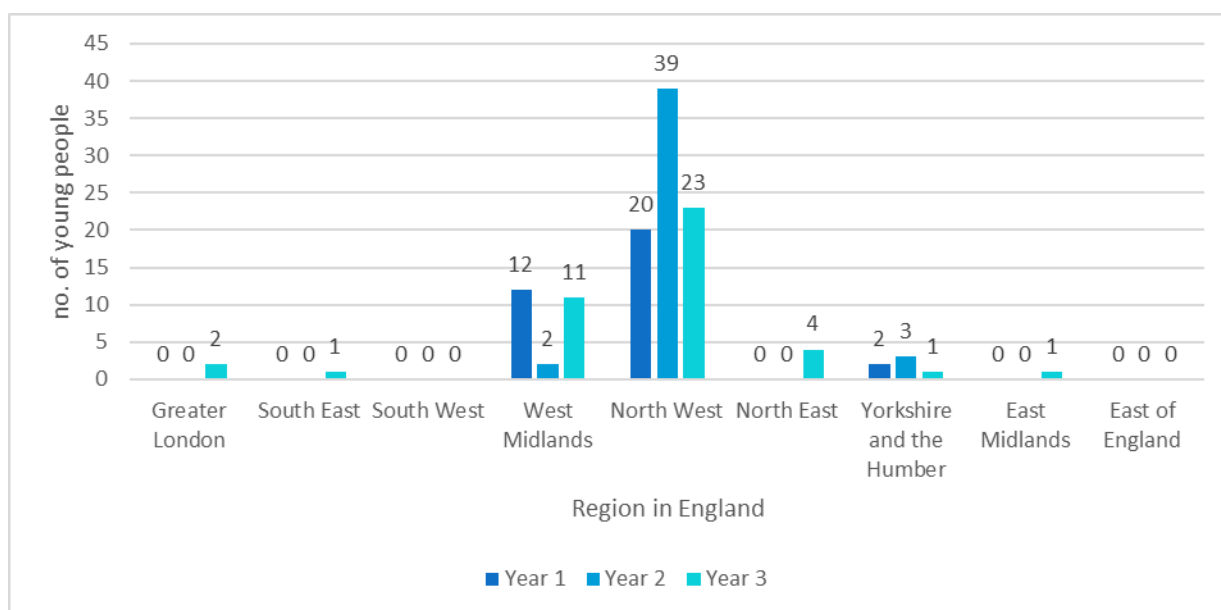


Figure 8. Average Number of Sessions Attended by Year

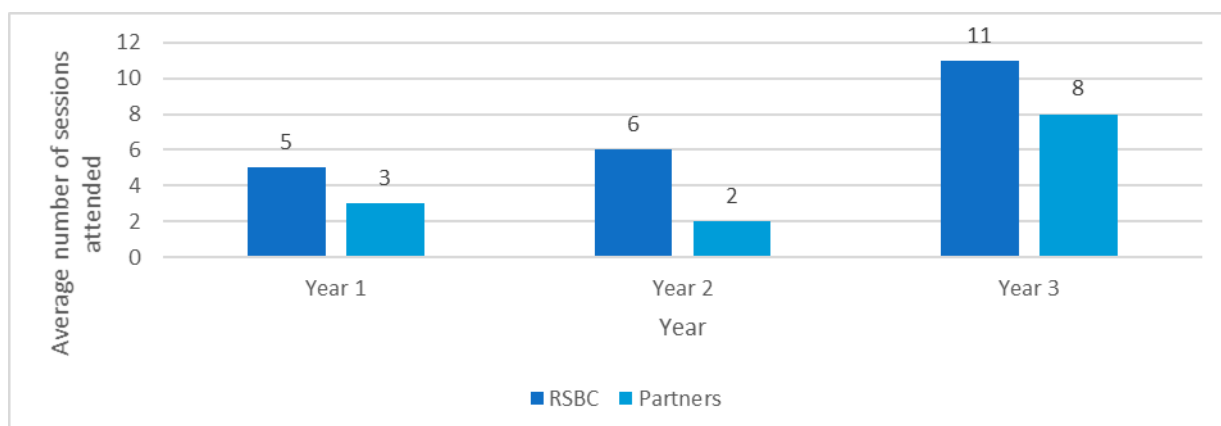
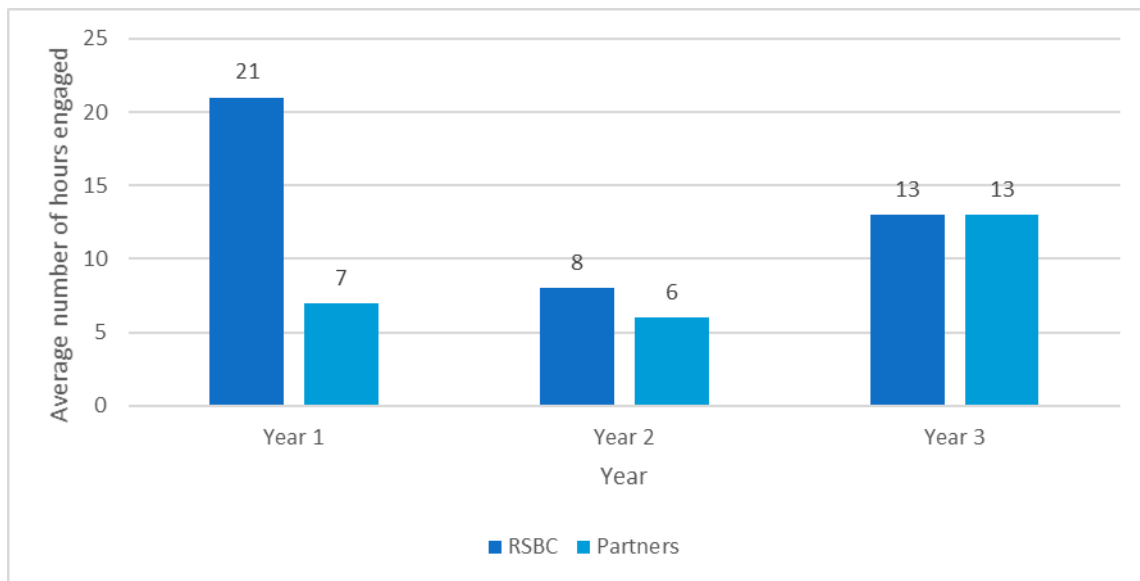


Figure 9. Average Number of Hours Engaged by Year



The data presented in this section highlights that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the partners and delivery of LLGF, the engagement and demographic makeup of children and young people with a VI involved with the programme did not significantly change across the 3 years.

The most interesting point to note in the data is the locations in which children and young people with a VI engaged with RSBC activities. Figure 6 highlights that in year 3 the reach of RSBC outside of London grew significantly, as well as growing into Scotland and continuing to reach children and young people in Wales. Figure 7 also speaks to this growth, showing for the first time in 3 years an area outside of London (Coventry) in the top 10 areas for RSBC. This growth is thought, in part, to be due to the relationships and connections created between partner sites through their continued online working to oversee the programme, which has allowed them to refer young people in their areas to activities being run by RSBC. RSBC's shift to a hybrid model of delivery where activities are offered online and in-person, is also likely to have helped see their growth in other parts of the UK. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (p.55).



5. Early Signs of Change: Before COVID-19

5.1 LLGF Set Up

The LLGF programme began in December 2018 and the first five months were dedicated to establishing and building the partnerships between RSBC and Albion, the BGCGM, and Henshaws. In part, this took place through three steering group meetings (one in each region) and the delivery of two capacity building workshops by RSBC in Manchester. These workshops included sessions on health and wellbeing activities, adaptive VI sports and money management. This work enabled programme partners to begin offering some LLGF services in year one of the programme (mainly Henshaws).

For RSBC, this transition to a partnership model of working was a critical element of the LLGF programme. Working with partners in different geographical areas and within both specialist and mainstream contexts would expand the reach, delivery, and future sustainability of RSBC's work. As well as the access that children and young people with a VI have to inclusive opportunities to socialise and develop their confidence and skills. As such, LLGF partners had a key role in developing inclusive community-based mainstream activities and facilitating children and young peoples' access to these opportunities.

5.2 LLGF Partnership

Findings from partner interviews and attendance at steering group meetings showed a strong commitment to joint working across the LLGF partnership. Partners clearly brought strategic knowledge and expertise in different areas, and there was an open and collaborative approach to developing new connections. Through facilitation of the LLGF steering group, RSBC provided a forum for cross fertilization between partners and an opportunity to share information and ideas between VI specialist providers (Henshaws and RSBC) and mainstream providers (Albion and BGCGM). Examples included identifying local area contacts to help reach more children and young people with a VI, such as schools, local authority departments and the Local Offer, sensory impairments teams and hospital and health departments, sharing ideas on how and when to run and publicize events to reach families of children and young people with a VI, and creative ways to build on initial foundations of the programme.

A key part of the work in year one was the capacity building sessions run by RSBC and Henshaws. This enabled staff and volunteers at Albion and the

BGCGM to understand the programme aims and identify how they needed to develop their own work to enable children and young people with a VI to attend. Two partners also identified the NDTi workshop session as a useful opportunity to be involved in the development of the evaluation framework, meet staff working on different projects and jointly focus on the range of data and information to collect in order to evidence the impact of the programme for children and young people with a VI.

Henshaws appreciated working more closely with RSBC to maximize resources and avoid duplication of work. They were in a strong position to deliver the programme in the North West at the beginning of year one and felt that doing so allowed them to work with mainstream organizations in a more structured way, thus enabling more young people with a VI to attend accessible mainstream activities rather than just VI-specific activities.

In the spring of 2019, Henshaws successfully recruited two part time LLGF workers who each worked 14 hours per week. Their role was to build relationships with partners and mainstream organizations and to deliver weekend activities for children and young people with a VI. Activities included indoor climbing, music days, football taster sessions and indoor trampolining. Henshaws felt that funding from LLGF in year one enabled them to fill gaps in provision for children and young people with a VI, particularly in areas where other services had closed.

For the BGCGM, the first year of LLGF focused on building links within the LLGF partnership and undertaking capacity building training. They benefited from input by Henshaw's staff who attended an annual 5 a side football event and ran a warmup session for children and young people with a VI. This was followed by visits to other clubs training for children and young people without VI and volunteers. Towards the end of year one, the BGCGM identified that their next steps going into year two, would be to get volunteers within clubs to take on responsibility for the work with children and young people with a VI, and to understand more about the physical and structural changes required to include them, including purchasing any new equipment required.

Prior to partnering with the LLGF programme, the Albion Foundation had struggled to recruit visually impaired young people to their activities. However, within the first year of the programme Albion were able to increase initial engagement through a new weekly youth club located in a special school and attendance at capacity building training that increased staff and volunteer confidence in including children and young people with a VI in activities. At the end of year one, Albion were keen to continue to develop the work already started in year two, as well as develop their learning in relation to the evaluation of their work through LLGF.

As LLGF was nationally funded, rather than funded for specific boroughs, the LLGF programme gave RSBC greater flexibility in who they could reach and enabled them to expand some of their pre-existing activities. As well as establishing a popular Winter Festival and an end-of-year celebration event which allowed children and young people with a VI and their families to meet one another.

Working in partnership with partner sites also meant RSBC revisited and refined their delivery team processes in year one, which they reflected was a good exercise. Working with partners and NDTi also gave RSBC opportunity to revisit their monitoring systems and think about how they capture outcomes more robustly.

5.3 Signs of Change

As noted in Section 4 ('Take up and reach'.p.17), no follow up questionnaires (WBQ/LSQ) were conducted by LLGF partners in year one, so findings around outcomes are only based on RSBC data (44).

In total, lifestyle (LSQ) and wellbeing questionnaires (WBQ) were completed by 39% of young people attending RSBC LLGF activities (lower than would be expected). These questionnaires were designed to be completed before starting LLGF activities, and again, six months after. Findings and analysis of some of this data is integrated into the relevant outcome areas and learning sections below.

5.3.1 Change in Confidence, Self-Esteem, and Independence

There was some evidence to suggest that LLGF activities in year one did impact young people's sense of confidence and independence and change stories provided useful examples of this. One 17-year-old girl with severe sight impairment (SSI) identified that having the opportunity to meet new friends with similar impairments helped her build confidence which, in turn, led to her developing aspirations to meet up with them independently.

"I feel I can now chat with these friends and be open about my concerns. I hope to be able to meet up with them outside of Henshaw's activities"

Interviews with RSBC staff also emphasised the impact of social events had on young people's confidence levels. Change stories cited examples of staff and volunteers giving young people roles of responsibility which had successfully helped to develop their confidence. This included delivering activities, refereeing and a 17-year-old young woman with a VI supporting a blind young person with severe learning difficulties during an ice-skating session.

Given these positive examples, it is interesting to note that when asked about their confidence to try new things in the wellbeing questionnaires (WBQ), only a small number of participants (20%, 9/44) saw an improvement in their confidence between baseline and follow up in year one, with most reporting their confidence levels to have stayed the same (66%). It is impossible for the evaluators to know from the data captured in the WBQ, the range of factors influencing participant responses and in turn how their levels of confidence could be interpreted in relation to the LLGF programme.

Similar ambiguity was also found within the analysis of other year one questionnaire responses (WBQ and LSQ), with it proving difficult for the evaluators to discern whether changes in baseline and follow up scores could be attributed to the LLGF programme. For example, between baseline and follow-up only 27% (12/44) of participants saw an improvement in needing help when dealing with problems because of their sight, while 57% (25/44) stayed the same and 16% (7/44) saw a worsening. More specific information was needed about the kind of help required in order to link these outcomes directly to the LLGF programme. For example, a young person who previously did not need help preparing food but always ate microwave meals, may require more help to develop cooking skills. Data from this would suggest a decline in independence skills when in fact their independence skills are progressing as a result of additional help they receive.

As such, the qualitative data captured via interviews and change stories allowed for a more holistic understanding of the programme's impact and progress towards outcomes as interpreted and expressed by participants and members of staff themselves.

For example, a recurring theme in change stories captured in year one was the positive changes seen in children and young people's confidence as a result of new skills to travel independently. Throughout year one, RSBC staff often accompanied young people to LLGF activities on public transport and used this as an opportunity to build their confidence and skills. Whilst at Albion, a 14-year-old boy called Liam was involved in the Albion Foundation LLGF multi-sport club for nine weeks and the blind football programme. In this time, staff observed Liam increase his confidence and social skills through team building games and taking on leading roles at the club. Liam went on to be the youngest player in a tournament in the Czech Republic, which he travelled to, and was awarded player of the tournament for West Bromwich.

However, the questionnaire data returns saw only 25% (11/44) of participants reporting an improvement in their confidence to travel on their own between baseline and follow up, with 57% staying the same and 18% saw a worsening.

This is a clear illustration of how, due to limited data received, and ambiguity of the measures, the positive impact of the LLGF programme could be missed if questionnaires were relied upon in the evaluation of year one.

5.3.2 Developing Successful Relationships with Families and Children and Young People

“Building relationships with the whole family is the route to eventually getting our children and young people to have the confidence to make their own decision on what they attend and to attend independently of their parent.” (Staff member)

It was clear from evidence in the change stories collected in year one, that gaining parental confidence in the programme was an essential way to enable children and young people with a VI to access new opportunities. A key learning point for staff and volunteers in year one was the recognition of the time it takes to build relationships of trust with families and children and young people. As illustrated in the change story below, often it was the families who needed support and encouragement to allow their young person to exercise their independence and take sensible risks.

Tim is a 25-year-old young man who found independent travel very difficult due to his visual impairment and other disabilities. He had little contact with other young people and felt prevented from travelling independently due to his guardians concerns for his safety. This led to acrimonious relationships within the family. Staff at RSBC spent considerable time building up a good relationship with guardians and gaining their trust which enabled them to provide effective mediation between the young man and his guardian. A solution was found, and the young man can travel independently to agreed meetings points to meet the LLGF group either alone on public transport or in a taxi. As a result, Tim felt much happier, his guardians were reassured, and their relationship improved.

In another case, Matthew, a very shy 13-year-old, initially attended LLGF sessions with his parent and siblings. Staff observed Matthew develop from a nervous and reluctant child into a boy who was keen to have a go at everything and *“push himself beyond his own expectations... It has been encouraging to see the whole family have fun and benefit from new friendships.”*

In addition, at a steering group towards the end of year one, partners discussed how inclusion of parents at events had led to useful networking and connections between families, encouraged repeat attendance and led to the programme being advertised by word of mouth.

5.3.3 Children and Young People with a Visual Impairment are Less Isolated

Many change stories also highlighted how much children and young people in year one enjoyed socialising with peers as a result of LLGF activities, and the impact this had on their confidence levels. Feedback from the change stories and the interviews undertaken in year one suggested that the young people engaged with LLGF activities, often formed supportive and encouraging communities, with those who had attended more sessions frequently acting as role models for those who were perhaps new to VI activities. Findings from the wellbeing questionnaires supported this feedback; when asked whether they have enough friends 43% (19/44) of participants reported an improvement between baseline and follow up, while 27% (12/44) stayed the same and 30% (13/44) saw a worsening.

“Sport makes me feel comfortable and gives me a sense of purpose”

(Feedback from a 16-year-old girl who attended LLGF regional clubs and holiday programmes, building a large community of peers in the process who look to her for inspiration and encouragement).

Several young people and their families gave examples of when they had been excluded from activities at school due to their VI and a lack of understanding. Some change stories illustrated how the support parents received from staff, through engaging with LLGF activities, had a positive impact on inclusion in mainstream activities:

Stephen is 11 and had often been asked to sit out of PE lessons at primary school as they did not know how to support him. When given the opportunity to take part in a new Health and Wellbeing club close to his home he threw himself into the range of sports on offer with enthusiasm. Over time, he began to assist the coach to deliver skills-based drills and his mother could not believe how much his confidence had increased as a result of taking part in the club. In turn this increased her own confidence when liaising with Stephen's new secondary school about his inclusion within the mainstream sports offering. Staff at RSBC advised Stephen's mother of the equipment that the new school should consider ensuring Stephen could participate in PE, and she was able to pass this on to support a successful transition for him, thereby enabling him to continue playing sports. Stephen is now much more confident in talking to staff members, coaches and other children and young people. He approaches everything with a positive attitude which makes a difference to group morale overall.

Other data from the questionnaires (WBQ) did not support that LLGF had improved children and young people's confidence to socialise; 11% (5/44) of participants saw an improvement in their ability to get on with people between baseline and follow up, while 64% (28/44) stayed the same and 25% (11/44) saw a worsening. Furthermore, in the lifestyle questionnaire, most participants responded that their number of close friends, and whether they go out with friends in the evening, had 'stayed the same'.

5.3.4 The Role of Staff and Volunteers

Evidence collected in year one showed that the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers was an important factor in creating supportive environments which enabled young people to challenge themselves and try new things.

“We have worked hard to build an open, inviting and friendly group of participants, giving variety in our activities”

Staff and volunteers played an essential role in building relationships of trust with both children and young people and their families, and this had a direct bearing on repeat attendance at activities. Volunteers sometimes travelled long distances to accompany young people to activities in order to be included.

Change stories included several examples of signposting by the LLGF staff and volunteers which enabled children and young people with a VI to find out about other opportunities. One young person in London who had taken part in a range of sports at LLGF went on to participate in a VI tennis event at the National Tennis Centre. He commented: “I love tennis, I can't wait to play at home and beat Dad!”. As well as taking part in this opportunity the young person also won

a Club award from the Disability Sports Coach commending his participation enthusiasm and determination.

5.4 What This All Means

The first year of LLGF was an important period of development for the programme, laying the foundations for more intensive delivery over the remaining two years. The commitment between partners to the partnership model and what the programme hoped to achieve was clear, despite acknowledgements that it would take time to fully establish the programme, particularly for partners who were less experienced in offering inclusive services and activities. Training for staff and volunteers in the first year was therefore a key step in laying the foundations of the programme.

All partners highlighted the time required to build relationships within the partnership itself, with families and young people and with new organizations, and appreciated the ability to undertake this work in year one. An ongoing issue for all partners was reaching families and young people with a VI and ensuring that they had information about the programme.

The qualitative data collected in year one, highlighted evidence of positive outcomes emerging for young people with a VI and their families engaged with LLGF, though this was not reflected strongly in the outcome monitoring data captured (WBQ/LSQ). This was due to a combination of elements, including limited data returns received, the programme not being fully implemented by all partners, difficulties completing the questionnaires with children and young people who attended large groups, or only attend a few sessions, and the ambiguity in some of the statements in the questionnaires used.

As a result of this learning, the evaluators recommended the following actions at the end of year one:

- The WBQ and LSQ measures to be reviewed for appropriateness and the timing of completion revised to ensure a higher response rate. This should be done in conjunction with staff, families and children and young people across all partner sites.
- For consistency, all partner sites to collect the same demographic data including age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and nature of VI.
- Including children and young people and family members in the development of activities, specifically around the issue of embedding 'less focussed' time for people to socialise and develop new networks.
- VI awareness raising to be undertaken in mainstream schools that children and young people who attend LLGF activities are attending.



6. Responding to COVID-19

6.1 February 2020

At the beginning of year two (February 2020) all the partners were up and running with the delivery of LLGF. Henshaws were delivering a range of activities including sports, arts, crafts, and music as well as special trips to a dry ski slope and a trampoline park. They were also delivering activities in mainstream settings successfully through youth clubs in Manchester and the Wirral (Youth Zone) with morning sessions for young people with a VI and the afternoon for young people with other disabilities. This approach improved outcomes for young people with a VI as it allowed them to initially join activities with their VI peers in a 'protected' environment, which helped build their confidence and enabled transition into non-VI activities.

RSBC were delivering a full programme of activities for young people including health and wellbeing sessions, supper clubs and one-off trips to places like the theatre. Whilst Albion were running a weekly programme of sports activities at Priestly School for young people with a VI and additional needs, as well as being in talks about establishing a similar programme at New College Worcester and developing a blind football programme.

Within the interviews and change stories captured for the evaluation of year 2, the activities being run by LLGF partners at the start of the year helped improve young people's confidence both in terms of meeting new people and trying new activities, but also travelling independently, as well as the opportunity to build friendships and make connections with other young people with a VI. Henshaws also found positive outcomes for parents who were able to build important support networks with other families supporting children with VI. These findings reinforce and build on those captured in the evaluation of year 1 (Section 5).

Emily's change story: Emily, aged 16, first became involved with Henshaws at a time when her confidence was low due to a deterioration in her eyesight. Usually very sporty, Emily had recently had to stop many of her sports due to her sight loss. Through taking part in VI sports sessions during these youth clubs, Emily has realised there is still a way for her to be involved in sport. Emily's involvement with the project has enabled her to find out and explore new opportunities to her as an extension of the project. As part of the capacity building element of LLGF, Emily asked Henshaws to visit her mainstream Scout group to deliver Visual Impairment Awareness Training to help them understand her changing needs. Emily felt so empowered by this that she even got involved with delivering some of the training and talking about her own journey.

In addition to the outcomes seen for children and young people at the start of year 2, Henshaws were also able to deliver their Visual Impairment Awareness Training courses (VIAT) to some mainstream organisations. The delivery of this training was a key element of the LLGF programme, as its provision would hopefully enable inclusive community-based mainstream activities for children and young people with a VI to be developed. Evidence from change stories and interviews suggested positive outcomes for those who attended the training, stating that it increased their confidence, as well as increasing the confidence of parents who sent their children to activities where they knew the leaders had done training. Similarly, young people also felt more confident to attend mainstream activities when they knew the staff at the venue were aware of their specific abilities and needs.

The beginning of year two also saw continued positive relationships within the LLGF partnership, with partners reporting that meetings were useful places to share good practice. One important development was the extension of RSBC's AQA accreditation to the partners which meant they could also award the qualifications to their young people for attending specific activities. This enabled Albion to develop a sports curriculum which they found gave extra credence to their offer to schools.

6.2 March 2020: The COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began to have an impact in the UK with the first national lockdown and associated restrictions taking effect on the 23rd of March. As a result, LLGF activities, which had previously taken place exclusively face to face, were stopped with immediate effect. In addition to the impact this

had on the programme and the young people supported (which is discussed throughout the remainder of this section), the restrictions also led to the BGCGM having to leave the LLGF partnership as they were not able to engage with or deliver any related activities. As a result, there was no primary data collected with the BGCGM in year 2 and they were not engaged with the evaluation.

6.2.1 Moving Online

The remaining LLGF partners (RSBC, Albion, and Henshaws) were able to adapt and move to online working with differing degrees of success.

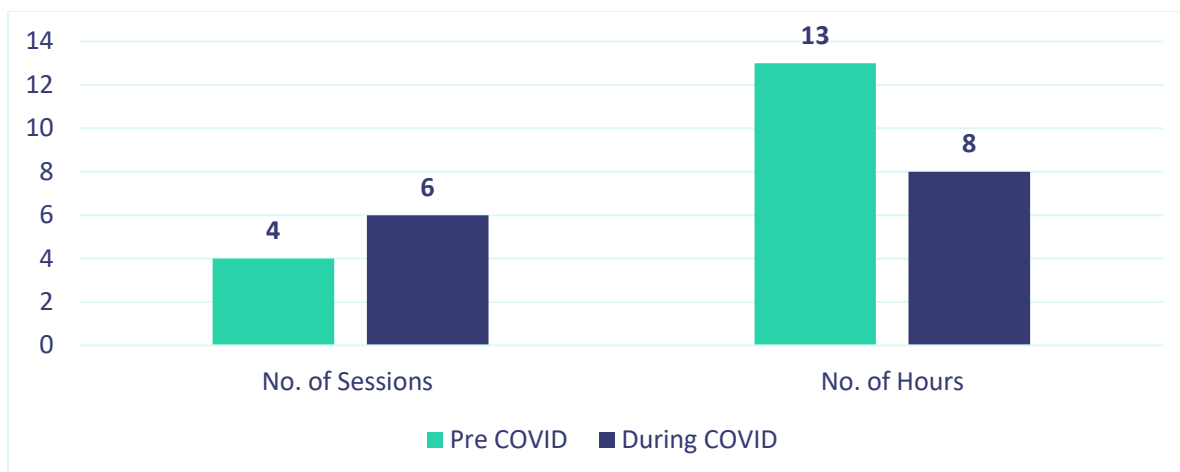
RSBC and Henshaws moved to virtual delivery more quickly, with RSBC having a full schedule of activities in place just two weeks after the restrictions were announced. There were challenges for both staff and young people around adapting to the new technology and at the beginning a lot of support was needed to set up young people with the right equipment and space, as well as staff delivering the sessions. Staff reported that some young people needed more support and encouragement to move online than others, and there were some concerns from families about the technology. Over time both groups reported that things became easier as people became more confident using the technology and the different norms of meeting remotely were understood.

“I think after a couple (of sessions) you get used to it being online, it feels normal”. (Girl aged 13)

“It has been a big learning curve for us, but we can take the learning into our face-to-face work...the kids are up for trying new things, they keep coming back, so we are building up trust.” (Staff member)

Working virtually, and with young people at home more than usual, meant that RSBC were able to offer more activities than usual, increasing from an average of 9.25 sessions per week between December 2019 to March 2020, to an average 39.5 sessions per week during the rest of 2020. However, while the number and variety of online sessions increased, partly due to the number of additional 1:1 assistive technology sessions delivered, the length of the sessions decreased, with online activities roughly a third of the time of face-to-face activities. Figure 10 shows that while the average number of sessions attended by young people increased in the COVID-19 period, the average hours attended decreased.

Figure 10. Average Engagement with RSBC LLGF Activities Before and During COVID-19



Staff and young people reported that online activities allowed for greater creativity in adapting old activities as well as testing new ideas. There were understandable challenges around adapting activities online, especially those which are especially physical, such as the health and wellbeing sessions. Staff consulted with young people and families and did a lot of research to adapt the sessions as they went. As a result, new activities evolved out of old ones, such as an audiobook club and the sisterhood sessions. Similarly, if sessions were not working well online, there was the freedom and confidence to drop it. Staff commented that this kind of experimentation was not as easy with face-to-face activities given the extra inputs required (travel, finding a venue, recruitment etc). For Henshaws, virtual working gave them the time and capacity to develop other projects, such as the online Knowledge Village resource. They also developed a blog on using Zoom with VI.

While moving online was positive in many instances for the LLGF programme, it did come with its challenges. For example, Albion were not able to move their activities online, and instead focused on wellbeing calls through the first period of restrictions as well as providing remote support and materials to the schools they work with. They were also able to refer their young people to the online RSBC and Henshaws activities.

In addition, the move to online activities did not work for everyone. This is evident in the drop off in engagement especially from young people living in inner London boroughs, particularly Tower Hamlets (please see Figure 7). Partners made efforts to understand why some people did not engage with virtual activities by phoning them and asking why they are not engaging anymore. Though it can be difficult to validate the real reasons, it would seem for some young people there were challenges around accessing reliable internet, equipment (smart phone, laptop etc.) or the right home environment to participate. One staff member spoke about hearing from other professionals that the majority of young people they support in Tower Hamlets did not have the internet or a computer. For others, who have additional needs or suffer from anxiety, joining virtual sessions

could be too much of a step. Henshaws spoke of being aware of the inequalities in terms of who accesses the service.

“The cohort we had for face to face is totally different to virtually.”
(Staff member)

Staff also spoke of others who engaged regularly before COVID-19 but who did not stay with the project during COVID-19 because they had existing support networks and were mainly accessing the project for the specialist activities/equipment.

For others, the technology needed to connect online was initially difficult to operate and confusing for those with a VI. Chaotic sessions with people talking over each other led to young people having to learn Zoom ‘etiquette’ to ensure everyone was included. Staff found it quite common for young people to leave their video off as they found it anxiety-inducing not being able to see themselves properly. Others had low confidence and found it difficult to engage online.

“I think it’s good online because it’s a different experience but not good when it cuts out and lots of people talking over each other. Noise in the background is a problem when people don’t turn their mics off – I can’t mute and unmute my mic. I can’t see enough. It was really hard the mute and unmute.” (Girl aged 14)

Perhaps more importantly a greater drawback of moving online was the loss of opportunity to make meaningful connections face to face, including side conversations with young people and parents and opportunities for young people to socialise either side of a structured activity. While there were attempts to recreate smaller, organic groups on Zoom, this could not replace nuanced in-person interactions and communication. There were also fewer opportunities for volunteers to be involved online.

“If you meet someone online it’s the equivalent of just sitting in a room doing nothing but when you meet someone you can walk around you could do other stuff to amplify the relationship you are actually building which is why I think it would be better.” (Boy aged 13)

Staff also highlighted the experiential learning that was lost when only meeting virtually. For many, the travel to the LLGF activities was an important learning opportunity, both in terms of building confidence and independence. Joining activities virtually meant that some young people never had to step outside their comfort zone.

The types of activities that could be offered virtually were also very different. For example, the experience of cultural activities such as theatre trips and physical

activities such as climbing could not be replicated online. One young person felt that the activities offered online could never be as good as face to face:

“Some of the activities they have done did feel a bit unimaginable in a negative way – e.g., beat box and drumming – it would be hard for me because I don’t know how that could work. It didn’t seem very seem realistic.” (Boy aged 19)

6.2.2 Co-Production

There was evidence that moving activities online allowed for a greater degree of coproduction of the programme with young people. At first, this focussed on decisions about the platform used to host virtual activities and later the type of activities offered. RSBC staff consulted with young people through the youth forum to test out the functionality of different online platforms (Teams, Zoom etc.), as well as with families. Staff reported that young people took an active role in developing and asking for different types of activities; for example, the lunch club and sisterhood sessions emerged out of the supper club session in order to meet the needs of different groups (younger children, and specific issues facing girls and young women), and it was from the lunch club that the idea for the audiobook club and open mic club were developed. Staff felt that increased attention to coproduction was an exciting development for the project and was an important feature to maintain as the project moved forward.

“The kids told us what they wanted; they’d say, ‘can we do an extra 15 minutes?’” (Staff member)

Henshaws staff took a similar approach, asking young people what kinds of activities they wanted as well as coproducing some ground rules for online sessions which have resulted in calmer/less noisy sessions.

“At first Henshaws picked activities and then they recently said we should have ideas which we did... we thought of different games. That’s a good idea as... it’s getting people to think for themselves what they want to do by trying other people’s ideas.” (Girl aged 14)

6.2.3 Wellbeing and Maintaining Contact

Partners reported there was more communication with young people and families during COVID-19, and more 1:1 support. At the start of the first lockdown, all three partners began welfare calls to their young people and staff reported some young people were struggling with their mental health due to the restrictions, social isolation and change in routine. Welfare calls became the main

activity for Albion and staff reported that they made a big difference to the young people. Henshaws found that their closed Facebook traffic doubled during COVID-19. As well as providing emotional support, RSBC and Henshaws staff reported an increase in more practical support, signposting young people to relevant people and services, especially at the start of the restrictions when there was more uncertainty. This contact was sustained throughout year 2, with some RSBC staff reporting that they spoke with their entire caseload almost on a weekly basis.

Henshaws also found that some parents missed the interaction with other families and the social aspect around the routine of attending activities. As a result, Henshaws staff helped to connect individual families and young people, who were feeling isolated and wanted contact with one other friend/family rather than joining a group.

Sarah is a girl aged 9 with a VI. Her mum received a welfare call from Henshaws at the start of the lockdown and they discovered that Sarah had left her braille at school and was not able to retrieve it. Both Sarah and her mum were worried about not being able to continue practising her braille. Henshaws helped Sarah access a volunteer within the adult services team who gave her techniques to replicate the braille alphabet using boxes and balls. The volunteer kept in touch with Sarah and her mum regularly during lockdown and Sarah now feels confident to return to school and show her improvement.

6.2.4 Increased Reach and Referrals

As can be seen in section 4 of this report, a key advantage of virtual delivery for RSBC was the ability for the LLGF programme and [Families First \(FF\) service](#) to work more closely together, with young people being referred between the two projects. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, location had been a barrier for some young people who lived too far away to access LLGF activities regularly, or not in an area served by a Family Practitioner working for the FF service. In total, since COVID-19, 68 young people were referred from the FF service and 19 young people from the FF telephone support service to LLGF in year 2. The average age of the referrals from FF was 10 years old and 16 years old from the telephone support service.

“We live in North Wales – if RSBC did something round here – not sure how many would come. This way Susie gets to go to something at

least twice a week and have contact with other children with VI”.

(Mum of girl aged 13)

RSBC LLGF staff reported how beneficial it was to be able to refer young people who were struggling with their mental health to the FF service, as well as to the telephone support advisor for more practical specialist support (for example support in accessing Universal Credit). Similarly, Family Practitioners were pleased to be able to offer additional activities to young people they support. Internally this led to more joined-up working, with LLGF and FF staff arranging handovers and catch-ups on young people they were both supporting so that any important issues could be flagged.

Likewise, the employment support service expanded to young people outside of London, mainly through referrals from the FF service. This expansion gave RSBC the chance to engage and motivate a new cohort of young people many of whom received no additional support outside their family and who may have never considered their future in terms of employment. To an extent, this highlights the difference in funding available to those outside of London as well as the location-tied nature of most funding streams available to RSBC.

Working online also meant that young people who used to be involved with RSBC were able to re-engage. An example of this is one young man who used to be part of RSBC when he was younger but lived too far away to join the supper club and was not able to travel independently. He was contacted when activities moved online and joined nearly every session since.

6.2.5 Partnership and Team Work

Ryan is in his 20s and had been attending activities with RSBC since summer 2019. He was interested in music and when he heard about the beatboxing sessions which Henshaws was running online he requested to join. Ryan had a real talent for beatboxing, which was noted by the instructor, and was interested in private tuition. Henshaws helped put him in touch with the instructor and arrange lessons. Ryan is loving his new hobby, which he normally would not have had the opportunity to access as he does not live near Henshaws.

In general, the LLGF partnership went from strength to strength in year 2, quickly adapting to the changing environment and providing a useful support network.

Partnership working between RSBC and Henshaws was especially productive, with staff communicating more regularly than usual and sharing learning around adapting to virtual delivery as well as practical resources and content such as activity plans and risk assessments. The move online also meant that geographical boundaries were less relevant, and young people were able to access activities delivered by different partners.

As well as the increased strength of the LLGF partnership, staff across the organisations spoke of the way in which their teams rallied together and supported each other, as well as their young people in different and creative ways. Interviews with staff found that there was a good level of trust and a sense that they were all ‘in it together’.

“The biggest thing I have noticed is the essential work to keep in touch with staff almost daily. Making sure we have open conversations as a team and sharing ideas. There are no experts as we are all learning as we go along.” (Staff member)

6.3 Outcomes for Young People

6.3.1 Social Connections and Friendships

A clear outcome for young people in year 2 was the reduced isolation as a result of accessing the LLGF activities. The varying restrictions placed on young people’s freedoms in the evaluation period, and the disruption to education and access to ‘usual’ activities and opportunities for socialising was especially challenging for young people with a VI. Young people and their families spoke about the benefits of being able to still meet other people and make friends during COVID-19. Findings from the WBQ support this to an extent – young people who had engaged with the project for a longer period (three monitoring follow-ups, n=28) found an improvement in the number of young people who felt they had enough friends (from an average baseline score of 6/10 to 7/10), while young people who had engaged with the project for less time did not see a change in the score. On the other hand, those young people who had started the project later (and so had experienced more online than face to face, n=17) saw an improvement in the extent to which they were happy with life in general (from an average baseline score of 7/10 to 8/10). Additionally, the outcome monitoring data captured saw an improvement across all young people with the statements; ‘Because of my sight, I often need help dealing with problems’ and ‘Although I have problems with my sight, I’m good at getting on with other people’. There was also an improvement in the WBQ in the number of young people who reported that they do not find it difficult to make new friends.

“It made me feel less lonely... they made me enjoy life a bit more and be happy because you can get in a big loop of loneliness, and you forget how nice it is to meet people and have fun.” (Boy aged 13)

“We’ve all noticed a really big difference it makes for her social and that brought out the best in her.” (Parent feedback)

For young people who would not normally have been able to access LLGF activities in person, the opportunity to meet others with a VI was important. For those young people who lived in more rural and isolated places, LLGF might be the only opportunity they had to meet other young people with a VI. Two young people spoke about how they attend mainstream school where there are no other pupils with a VI. Participating in LLGF activities enabled them to meet other similar young people. For others who struggled at school, for example with bullying, the LLGF activities were a safe space.

“That I get to meet other blind children and they can be really fun sometimes. Before that I did know some but only saw them once a term.” (Girl aged 10)

“Her having access to other blind students is super valuable as she is in a mainstream school and she is the only blind person there.”
(Mother of girl aged 10)

The virtual element also meant that young people were able to meet and socialise with people from different parts of the country who they normally would not have the chance to meet. RSBC and Henshaws staff spoke about how participants started their own WhatsApp groups to stay in contact outside of sessions. They noted how they were quick to add newcomers to the groups and welcome them in.

“Virtually it’s like they live down the road from each other.”
Staff member

6.3.2 Emotional and Behavioural Outcomes

Evidence collected suggests that participating in LLGF activities and making social connections with other young people had a positive impact on young people’s emotional resilience, especially for young people who were coming to terms with recent diagnoses.

“For me it means I feel like I am not the only one who is VI – when I was younger, I used to cry a lot. I mean really lots! I thought I was different and wished I could be like my younger brother with no issues.”
(Girl aged 19)

Parents also reported to staff specific outcomes such as their children being happier, less frustrated and feeling more positive due to the reduced isolation.

In addition, interviewees also spoke of the positive outcomes for parents, especially in the earlier days of COVID-19 when many people were juggling home schooling and working themselves. Parents benefited from the small sense of routine the online activities offered, feedback including that the activities were a 'lifeline'.

6.3.3 Increased Confidence

Interviews and change stories highlighted how being able to engage with LLGF activities and socialise with peers also impacted on young people's confidence levels. Some staff and young people spoke of feeling unsure to begin with about engaging over Zoom, but that soon their confidence grew to the point where they are showing real 'ownership' of the sessions. Others who were very quiet and shy at the start are now much more at ease and confident contributing to discussions and activities.

"I have got a lot more confident when I have been doing them. We all have a group chat that we talk on when not doing Zoom calls – just us no staff." (Girl aged 13)

Interviews and change stories also demonstrated how young people's confidence was boosted through seeing other young people with VI do things they might not have thought possible for them. These interactions were very powerful for young people and helped inspire them. One example was of a young person who attended an employment session led by one of the young leaders. She admitted to being completely surprised that it was possible for someone with VI to be in full time job and changed her mind set about her own future.

There was also evidence of increased mentorship among the young people. For example, the Sisterhood sessions were designed to bring together young women to discuss issues specifically concerning girls. By the end of 2020, they were being led by some of the older young women, who acted in a mentorship role for the younger girls. While staff said there was an element of mentoring before, since moving online young people have stepped up and taken on specific leadership roles which they never had time to properly develop before. Similarly, Albion staff spoke about the impact of younger players interacting with older players who have been through similar things, such as school transition, and can support them.

"People with VI can let go of those barriers they are holding onto for so long. I have seen people having their dream taken

away from them because of their VI. The activities give them the “I don’t care” and freedom to give it a go, for example if you want to play basketball do it in a VI setting with Henshaws.”

(Boy aged 19)

Change stories and interviews also demonstrated how some young people became more confident in terms of ‘owning’ their abilities and a realisation of self-worth through engaging with LLGF. Change stories showed that for some young people there was a shift in aspirations both in terms of seeing other people with a VI do things they never thought possible for themselves, but also accepting themselves as they are, as one young person said, “everyone expects me to be exceptional”. In particular, the main outcome of the 1:1 employment advice service was raising young people’s aspirations about their futures, especially for those outside London who had not had access to similar support before. In a couple of cases the support led to young people obtaining employment.

Interviews and change stories also emphasised that by the end of year 2, many young people felt more confident in using technology, in part due to the 1:1 assistive technology sessions offered by RSBC. In addition to this increase in confidence, the general move to online working had some benefits for young people with a VI looking to enter the workforce as employers were forced to see how they could operate more flexibly and undertake interviews remotely, thus removing some levels of previously accepted discrimination in the labour market. One example was a young man who was supported to get a job offer from Apple, his feedback was that the virtual interview process had made all the difference as the first thing that the employer saw wasn’t a white cane.

“Tech is the way forward...it feels like everyone else has caught up with us [people with VI] and it puts us on a more level playing field.”

(Staff member)

6.3.4 Peer Support

Online sessions quickly become supportive places for young people to share concerns and issues in year 2. The regular schedule and attendance of groups of young people meant that a strong community of peer support was formed, where information, advice and friendship was readily offered. Staff and young people emphasised that this was especially valuable for young people who lived in more isolated areas and would not have had access to LLGF activities prior to COVID-19. Staff gave examples of how sessions could sometimes be completely diverted by the group if someone raised an issue or problem they were struggling with. Such diversions were always welcomed and supported.

“They understand. If I say something about X – [they say] ‘oh yeah this has happened to me as well’.” (Girl aged 13)

“I did a Christmas party – it wasn’t only music and games, but a chance to speak to people who you barely know who may or not have similar experience... they make sure you can have a chat if you have something on our minds then we can do that.” (Boy aged 19)

“They have created their own community within RSBC.” (Staff member)

Peer support was happening to a lesser extent before COVID-19, though some staff reported that face to face groups, such as the supper club, had the tendency to be less open, with the same regular attendees making it more intimidating for new people to join. With virtual sessions, staff found it easier to bring new people into a group and create a friendly atmosphere.

6.3.5 Independence and Control

Online activities increased some young people’s sense of independence in comparison to face-to-face activities, where often young people had to be supported to attend sessions by a family member or volunteer. With virtual sessions, some young people could ‘log on’ and join the sessions independently which led to a greater sense of autonomy. Furthermore, it can be daunting joining an in-person session for the first time, and for some people being able to log on makes it feel much more easily accessible.

For many young people, travel to the in-person activities was stressful and joining virtually meant they no longer worried about travelling. Some parents also given similar feedback about the improved accessibility of online activities without the transport.

6.4 The Challenges

In addition to the challenges around delivering LLGF activities virtually and participation during COVID-19 previously mentioned, the partners also experienced challenges around the re-starting of face-to-face activities, building the programme, and the outcome monitoring tools.

6.4.1 Restarting Face-to-Face Activities

Both Albion and Henshaws resumed face-to-face activities with small numbers in the summer of 2020. This was challenging as the law, government guidance and regional lockdowns affected who could join activities in different areas. For Albion in particular, a key challenge was negotiating access into schools, which

all took different approaches. However, late in 2020 they were able to run some taster sessions of the curriculum they had developed to provide young people with opportunities to develop their social skills through team building exercises.

“Our activity programme is understandably not at the top of priority list for schools... Don’t know of any two schools that are running in the same way. They all have own version of policies and approaches.”

(Staff member)

6.4.2 Building the Programme

Henshaws found building referrals to the LLGF programme was particularly challenging in COVID-19. This was due to the lack of face-to-face contact, which made building relationships with local sensory teams who were not referring to the programme as much as hoped.

6.4.3 Outcome Monitoring Tools

As flagged in section 5 of this report, the outcome monitoring tools used by partners as part of the LLGF programme (WBQ/LSQ), continued in year 2 to not seem entirely fit for purpose. The lifestyle and wellbeing questionnaires are designed to be completed with each young person at the start of their engagement with the programme, and then at six-monthly intervals after that. However, the small proportion of baseline and follow-up surveys which were completed in year 2 (only 12% of total), as well as feedback from partners, suggests that staff and young people are struggling to do this. Some staff said they found the questionnaires too long and wordy and difficult to get young people to complete. Henshaws and Albion have also had to manage with both RSBC’s monitoring system Upshot, as well as their own databases.

More generally, and as mentioned in section 5, given the breadth of the questions and the impact of external factors beyond LLGF on young people’s answers, it is hard to attribute improvement or deterioration in scores solely to the programme. Furthermore, as all questions are asked to all young people engaged in the programme, regardless of age, several questions are often not age appropriate. For example, questions on work placements, going out with friends and using public transport would not be appropriate for the youngest participants and could skew the analysis. It is also not entirely clear how the programme is expected to lead to a change in some of the behaviours/habits monitored in the questionnaires, for example control over types of food eaten when many young people will have little control over these decisions beyond their attendance at activities such as RSBC’s lunch club.

6.5 What This all Means

Despite the unprecedented events in year 2, the LLGF partnership continued to deliver activities for young people with a VI, exceeding the number of participants in Year 1 of the programme. Staff worked hard to develop innovative and creative ways to engage and support young people, the activities providing something of a haven for many socially isolated young people during an uncertain time. Findings from interviews with young people, and staff and change stories all suggest that the activities led to positive outcomes for young people, including an increased sense of confidence, a supportive network of peers and opportunities to make friends.

As a result of this learning, the evaluators recommended the following actions at the end of year two:

- Activities delivered online work for some, but not all, young people. As a result, a blended programme of activities for young people to join either virtually or face-to-face should be developed and delivered in year 3 (should COVID-19 restrictions allow).
- This blended programme should be co-produced with children and young people with a VI, based on the good examples seen in year 2.
- Follow up with those who disengaged during exclusive online delivery in year 2 should be continued to help encourage re-engagement with the new blended programme in year 3.
- Within the new blended programme of activities, time should be protected for children and young people, as well as family members, to socialise.
- If COVID-19 restrictions allow, work should be done in year 3 to grow the capacity building training delivered to mainstream organisations
- LLGF partner organisations should endeavour to continue working in a joined-up way to help aid referrals and grow the programme.
- LLGF partners who have developed local networks within the VI community, should be utilised to help grow referrals and the programme as a whole
- The usefulness of the outcome monitoring questionnaires (WBQ/LSQ) should be revisited and what is most important to capture and understand, prioritised.



7. Evidence towards outcomes 2021 2022

7.1 Introduction

At the beginning of year 3 (February 2021) England was once again in a national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This lockdown, which began on the 6th of January 2021, came after a number of localised lockdowns in some LLGF partner areas at the end of 2020. This series of events had a significant effect on the delivery of LLGF in each of the partner sites (RSBC, Albion, and Henshaws) until May 2021.

Despite these challenges, RSBC were able to continue the work done in year 2 and deliver a full online programme of activities and support to young people with a VI across London and other parts of the UK (please see figure 6). The same was true for Henshaws who were also able to continue delivering support and activities to young people with a VI around Manchester and the rest of the UK (please see figure 6). Whilst for Albion their ability to provide support and activities continued to be hampered by the limited opportunities to meet with young people face-to-face. However, they did continue their weekly wellbeing calls that started in year 2, continued to refer young people to RSBC and Henshaws online activities, developed an online social discussion group, and a programme of weekly fitness challenges that was circulated via their VI networks. Both the social discussion group and weekly fitness challenge were not specifically developed for LLGF or children and young people with a VI, however both offered adaptations for those with a VI who wanted to take part.

7.2 A New Partnership

At the beginning of year 3, Youth Focus North East (YFNE) joined the LLGF partnership, taking the place of the BGCGM who left in March 2020 (year 2). Like the BGCGM, YFNE are a mainstream youth organisation, not a specialist VI organisation, with a focus on social action and youth voice. Before joining the LLGF partnership, YFNE had previously worked with RSBC on a youth voice focused Erasmus scheme and explored numerous collaborative funding applications. Their joining the LLGF programme offered both organisations the opportunity to come together again and strengthen their collaboration, as well as allow YFNE to begin engaging with a new group of young people not previously worked with.

“We have known RSBC for years, but before LLGF we did not have any VI young people involved in our projects.” (Manager YFNE)

Due to YFNE joining to programme at the beginning of year 3 in the midst of another national lockdown, they had to promote, engage, and deliver activities online.

“When we came into it, we were coming out of the 3rd lockdown. We had to run the project online. We were relying on email due to COVID rather than meeting people at different events like we did previously – we didn’t get as much response as we hoped for. It was a real challenge recruiting young people with VI. We connected with all partners we have already when we started to help locate young people. It was like starting from the ground up again.”

(Youth Worker, YFNE)

7.3 Outcomes for Young People

Despite the continued presence of COVID-19 restrictions in year 3, findings from the evaluation suggest that the programme has led to positive outcomes for children and young people with a VI engaged with the activities and support provided by partner sites. This section draws on data captured in interviews and observations with young people and their families, as well as on outcome monitoring data provided by partner sites. It is important to note that at the end of year 2 (December 2020), the outcome monitoring tools used throughout the LLGF programme (WBQ and LSQ) were either changed completely (WBQ replaced with WEMWBS) or adapted (LSQ) to reflect learning from the evaluation to date (please see previous reports) as well as organisational and software changes more widely. As a result, only WEMWBS scores are presented for year 3 with no comparison to WBQ scores from year’s 1 and 2. Where possible LSQ scores from year 3 are compared to year’s 1 and 2 (please see annex 2 - 5 for copies of the measures used across the 3 years of the programme)

7.3.1 Social Connections and Friendships

As in year 2, the children and young people who engaged in LLGF activities benefited greatly from the social interactions and friendships that were able to grow and flourish as a result of the programme.

“I make lots of friends. I used to sit in the corner by myself at school but now I have lots of friends and I can play with them” (Child, Albion)

In addition, with many of the partners able to deliver activities in a blended/hybrid way in year 3, many children and young people were able to re-join activities that they had left in year 1/early in year 2. For others, this blended approach either allowed them to continue meeting with people who were geographically a long way from them:

“That’s the trouble with Zoom but it’s good for me as I am in Newcastle and wouldn’t be able to come otherwise.”
(Young person, RSBC)

or were able to meet people face-to-face that they had only ever met virtually before:

“...we had one young woman come down with her dad for the session, they made a real trip of it. She joined Sisterhood during COVID and had made real friendships. Seeing her meet everyone, and her dad supporting her to do it, was wonderful. Those are friendships that wouldn’t have happened without COVID.” (Delivery worker, RSBC)

7.3.2 Increased Confidence

The confidence of the children and young people who took part in year 3 activities also continued to grow. Examples were given by young people themselves, their families, and partners of where this was evident:

“He’s confident, a lot more confident, A LOT!” (Family member, Albion)

“It’s good for helping you with stuff like confidence and mental health. It helps you know you’re not alone, you’re not the only visually impaired person.” (Young person, RSBC)

“I’m getting better and better at football, and I’ve got lots of confidence.” (Child, Albion)

“We had a girl from Pakistan join when we only delivering online. She is transgender and was quite shy to begin with. She gradually developed the confidence to contribute on Zoom and has now attended her first face-to-face session.” (Delivery staff, Henshaws)

“They have really taken on ownership of the group, and it is led by them”. They have appreciated the fact that we have gone to them for advice sometimes – we are not experts, and this is not our area of expertise.” (Youth worker, YFNE)

7.3.3 Peer Support

As has already been alluded to, attending the activities in year 3 has allowed children and young people with a VI to develop friendships and support each other. This peer support has been invaluable to many young people in making them feel less alone:

“It’s a place where you can talk about how you are feeling. I don’t have any other friends so I can talk to other people with VI, it gives me the confidence to speak with other people.” (Young person, RSBC)

It has also provided them with a place to go and discuss things that matter to them and their hopes, dreams and concerns about the future.

“...it’s good there are other people with VI, we are all at different stages so can talk about that. It’s good to talk about school, the future, employment...” (Young person, RSBC)

7.3.4 Emotional and behavioural outcomes

Family members and partners spoke about children and young people experiencing improvements in their emotional wellbeing and behaviour as a result of LLGF in year 3:

“...trust, the games they play are based on trust, helps build trusting relationships and has carry over outside of this. Also, they develop understanding and following instructions.”

Family member, Albion:

“...when he finished college, he just went into a bit of a hole I suppose and just like lying in bed all morning and nobody could get hold of him and now he’s coming along, and he’s fully engaged, and he comes to fixtures at the weekend.” (Delivery staff, Albion)

7.3.5 Mental Wellbeing

As noted in section 3.4, WEMWBS was used by RSBC to capture the level of mental wellbeing in young people engaging with LLGF. Once cleansed (removal of data provided for children under the age of 13 = 10) a total of 46 young people provided baseline WEMWBS data (Feb 2021 – Mar 2022) leading to a population wellbeing score of 49.6. This is an average score, suggesting these young people’s mental wellbeing was neither high nor low when they completed the measure.

A total of 16 young people provided baseline and follow up WEMWBS data (Feb 2021 – Apr 2022) . At baseline, this population’s mental wellbeing score was 52 rising at follow-up to 54 (Apr 2022). This is a slight increase in mental wellbeing but remains within the average range for mental wellbeing.

Table 4 below, presents the individual WEMWBS scores at baseline and follow-up. Eight individuals saw their scores increase (green), whilst 7 (pink) saw them decrease and 1 stayed the same (yellow).

It is important to note that the time between baseline and follow-up scores both at the population and individual level ranged from one month to a year.

Table 4. Individual WEMWBS Scores Baseline and Follow-Up

Gender	Age	Baseline	Follow-up	Increase/Decrease
Female	25	61	70	Increase
Male	14	50	35	Decrease
Female	25	42	55	Increase
Male	22	61	59	Decrease
Female	18	55	56	Increase
Female	21	50	59	Increase
Male	23	62	49	Decrease
Female	21	62	60	Decrease
Male	15	58	54	Decrease
Male	20	65	58	Decrease
Female	22	34	30	Decrease
Female	20	39	56	Increase
Female	19	58	64	Increase
Male	22	51	51	Stable
Male	25	55	59	Increase
Female	21	36	55	Increase

Due to the small sample size, varied nature of time between baseline and follow-up data collection, and broad range of ages providing data, no statistical analysis for significance or effect can be undertaken.

7.4 Capacity Building Training

A key outcome of the LLGF programme was to increase the capacity of ‘at least 50 mainstream youth organisations to include children and young people with a VI within their provision.’

In order to achieve this outcome, RSBC worked with partner sites to deliver and evaluate the capacity building training offered in their area, from the outset of the programme. As such, each package of training delivered looked slightly different,

but all focused on ensuring attendees received a mix of information about VIs, ways to include children and young people with a VI in activities, practical resources to promote inclusion, hearing from a young person with a VI directly, and opportunity to explore fears and concerns, within a safe and interactive space that utilised traditional information sharing, videos, quizzes, and discussion.

In year 1, RSBC and Henshaws delivered capacity building training to both mainstream LLGF partners (Albion and BGCGM) and other mainstream organisations across England. In year 2, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and government guidelines affected the programme partners' ability to deliver any capacity building training, although Henshaws were able to offer briefing sessions to organisations in their local area.

However, in year 3, with local and national COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns easing, RSBC and Henshaws were able to restart their capacity building training delivery, including delivery and support for YFNE. Albion and YFNE were also able to deliver their first sessions in late 2021. The BGCGM did not deliver any capacity building training due to the limited time they were engaged with the programme. However, as noted, as a mainstream organisation they did receive capacity building training and support from RSBC and Henshaws in year 1, which helped inform and influence the way they include young people with a VI in their work.

“We are working with RSBC now [2021] to explore fundings avenues for some more collaborative work... We are also looking at how we can come together in the Lake District for an activity weekend.”
(BGCGM staff)

Table 5 (below) details the number of mainstream organisations that received full capacity building training from LLGF partners. These numbers do not include the training delivered by VI specialist LLGF partners (RSBC and Henshaws) to the non-VI specialist partners (Albion, BGCGM and YFNE).

Table 5 Number of Organisations Trained

Partner	Number of organisations
RSBC	37
Henshaws	12
Albion	3
YFNE	8
Total	60

As table 5 (above) highlights, the LLGF partnership has managed to achieve the outcome of increasing the capacity of ‘at least 50 mainstream youth organisations’ through the delivery of training across the 3 years of the

programme. This is a significant achievement, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic as a backdrop. The mainstream organisations who received capacity building training as part of the programme includes, but is not limited to; schools, colleges, local authorities, social services, charities, youth groups, and organisations that provide sessions for young people (drumming, farm experiences, scouts, yoga).

7.4.1 Impact of the Training

Each LLGF partner who delivered capacity building training also evaluated this training. RSBC supported partners to undertake the evaluation, providing a pre and post training survey template for attendees to complete.

As NDTi were not directly involved in the evaluation of the training we did not have sight of the questions asked or the format they were presented to attendees in. We were also reliant on partner sites sharing data with us from to inform this report. As such, the pre (N=75) and post (N=45) scores presented here are averages based on aggregate scores from RSBC and Albion, alongside quotes from attendees about the training. Henshaws and YFNE did not provide this data for the evaluation.

Reasons for doing the training

Attendees took part in the training delivered for a variety of reasons, including to increase their general understanding of VI issues, to hear from people with a VI themselves, to understand how they can support children and young people with a VI in their organisations, and to get practical hints, tips, and tools to support children and young people with a VI, particularly when using technology.

“I would like to have a greater understanding of the resources and strategies that are available and hear some real-world examples where they have been effective.”

“To improve our level of inclusion for our VI members in our creative/performing arts workshops.”

“Use of remote access devices and virtual activities for the CYPVI; how to prepare the VI student for ad hoc visual presentations done in class and how to prep teachers to be more VI friendly.”

Knowledge

Pre and post surveys asked training attendees:

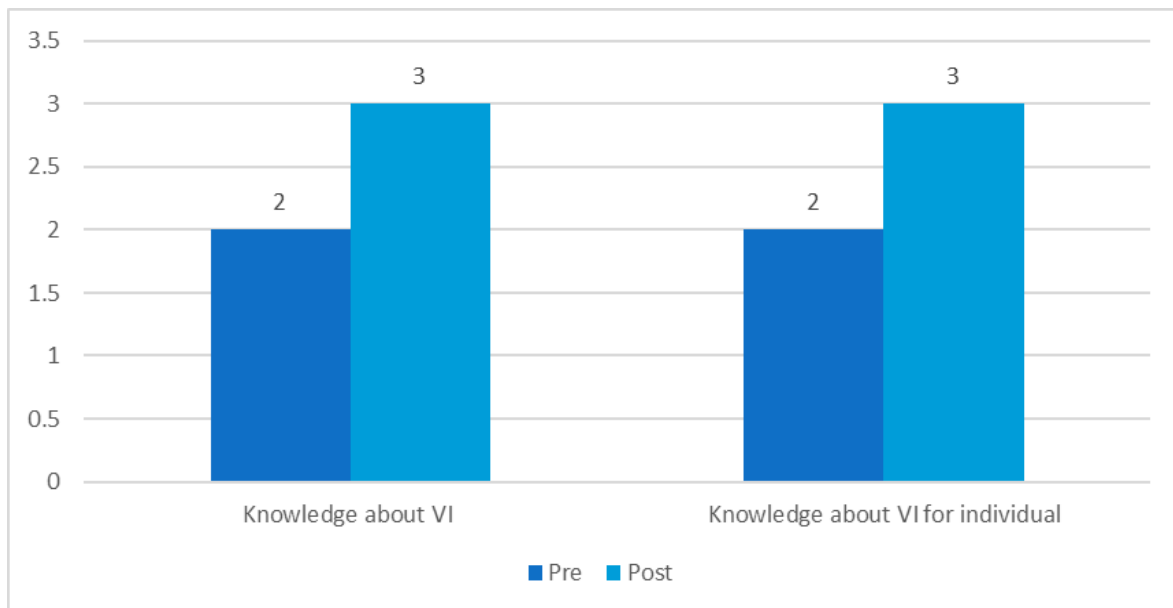
- How knowledgeable would you say you are about sight loss and vision impairments?

- How knowledgeable would you say you are about the impact of sight loss and vision impairment on an individual?

For each question 1 = not knowledgeable and 4 = very knowledgeable.

Figure 13 (following page) highlights that, on average, attendees at the training saw an increase in the knowledge in both these areas.

Figure 11. Average Level of VI Knowledge Pre and Post Training



Confidence

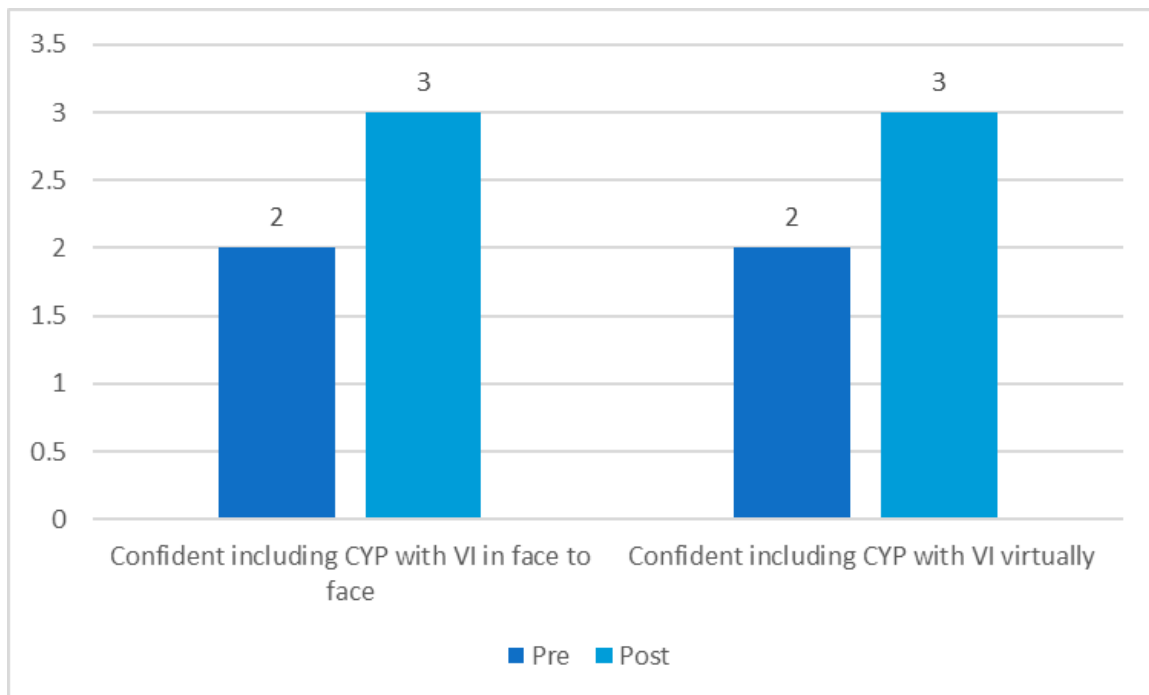
Pre and post surveys asked training attendees:

- How confident are you in your ability to include children and young people with a vision impairment in your face-to-face activities?
- How confident are you in your ability to include children and young people with a vision impairment in virtual activities?

For each question 1 = not knowledgeable and 4 = very knowledgeable

Figure 14 (below) highlights that, on average, attendees at the training saw an increase in confidence in both these areas.

Figure 12. Average Level of Confidence



What Worked Well, What Could have been Better and How Training will be Used

Overall training attendees felt that the training was about the right length for them and that they were going to share things they had learnt with others. The majority also suggested that they would do things differently as a result of what they had learnt, including, but not limited to; ensuring they include children and young people with a VI in their planning of activities/sessions, source adaptive equipment and tools to include children and young people with a VI, and being mindful of their communication with all young people who attend activities/sessions to ensure inclusive language is used.

“Think about how to integrate students with VI into lessons with others without VI.”

“Research and purchase adaptive equipment.”

“Be more mindful with working with younger people and how to explore supporting them better in different settings.”

Whilst these were suggestions of what attendees would do differently, some did suggest they'd do 'nothing' as a result of the training as it gave them 'an opportunity to confirm that what I am doing is the right thing'

Most attendees also enjoyed the training, with the opportunity to meet and hear from someone with a VI, the time allowed for discussion, networking and sharing ideas with others, and practical sessions, especially for Albion training attendees, being the most widely enjoyed elements.

“The interaction in smaller groups and gaining knowledge through those working directly with visually impaired youngsters.”

“The interaction with others and Q+A with a VI person!”

However, a number of attendees also offered constructive suggestions about how the training could be improved, including having the trainers joining breakout rooms to help stimulate conversations, the provision of more resources to take away and more practical sessions to try out things learnt.

“Breakout rooms felt a bit awkward - could a course instructor jump in occasionally and see how the conversations are going in the breakout rooms?”

“More resources to take away in relation to support for specific conditions.”

“I would love to see demonstrations of how you supported the young people in residential activities.”

7.5 What Worked Well

In addition to the positive outcomes seen for children and young people with a VI and those who received capacity building training, the LLGF programme has seen a number of other positive outcomes as a result of the work done in year 3.

7.5.1 Blended Delivery

Despite the challenges of yet another lockdown at the start of year 3, learning from year 2 meant that when they were able, RSBC, Henshaws and YFNE began offering a blended or hybrid programme of activities and support in the summer of 2021.

“In June we started to bring people back together face-to-face. This was so important for them and has been great for us. The energy is different and the way everyone talks is, just, its lively, people laugh.” (Delivery staff, RSBC)

Working in this way also allowed young people who either weren't able due to health concerns, timings of activities or geographical location to continue attending sessions virtually and benefit from the social connections and activities.

“Of course, it has been difficult for some, some people are still not wanting to come back together in a room. The travel can be a bigger barrier, especially in London. But people can still join us, I don't know why we didn't work like this before...it opens things up to so many more people, removes barriers.”

(Delivery staff, RSBC)

As well as bringing some of those children and young people who weren't able to engage with fully virtual activities in year 2, back to the programme.

“We have seen people we didn't see during lockdown. Now the schools are back open, they have come back. It has been so nice to see them and get them involved again.”

(Delivery staff, RSBC)

Despite these positive outcomes, as with the fully online programmes of activities and support delivered in year 2, staff in year 3 did find delivering sessions online where children and young people had their cameras off a challenge. Some managers reflected in interviews that this impacted staff's motivation to continue this form of delivery. In addition, delivery staff noted that delivering a blended/hybrid programme of activities takes more planning and requires the involvement of more staff or volunteers, especially if offering a session to people online at the same time as those in the room.

“It definitely takes more time, and you have to plan the activities well to make sure everyone feels included and can get involved. The way you do things online is different to in the room, so you almost have to have two of you, yeah at least two of you...and someone who is managing the tech. It is more complicated than I think any of us thought it would be!”

(Delivery staff, RSBC)

In addition, for some young people the move to blended delivery presented its challenges as well. These challenges were mainly faced by those who were joining sessions virtually when others were in the room face-to-face, and included not knowing when it was ok to speak/making sure they didn't interrupt or talk over someone, having to think whilst writing and having to have a supporter with them at home to read out information shared.

For Albion, the easing of local and national restrictions meant that they were able to begin delivering their programme of activities face-to-face once again. This proved highly beneficial to staff and young people with a VI alike:

“Face-to-face that’s been the most successful for us anything else has been in bits and pieces really.” (Delivery staff, Albion)

“During COVID and lockdown H missed it, he wasn’t doing much physical activity, it’s good for both physical and mental health.”
(Parent, Albion)

“I’m getting better and better at football and I’ve got lots of confidence.” (Young person, Albion)

7.5.2 Co-Production

Again, due to the learning from year 2, the partners developed and delivered their blended/hybrid programme of activities and support in a co-produced way in year 3. Staff felt that continuing to allow young people to choose and guide the types of sessions was now an important element of the LLGF programme, as this approach had led to more creative and relevant sessions being provided and a confidence to drop things that weren’t working more quickly in year 2.

“Sisterhood...they have so many ideas and so many of them we can do now we are together. The hair and makeup session has been one of the best. It is something they all wanted to do, they all wanted to know how to do their makeup and hair when they can’t see. We were able to use our connections and get Dua Lipa’s make up people in. It was great. We learnt lots and they looked great” (Delivery staff, RSBC)

In addition, YFNE took on board the learning from other partner sites around co-production and ensured that the sessions they began running were created in collaboration with young people. Working in this way also led to wider organisational changes for YFNE, which is an unexpected outcome to have come from their engagement with the LLGF programme.

“...it’s been led by the young people in terms of how sessions run – some icebreakers, updates on other opportunities etc... They have had input to our paperwork which has been hugely successful, and they have said they want to get more involved in our organisation now to inform strategic work. We don’t have many young people with different needs, and we have recently developed a new equality and diversity sub group which is looking at the gaps – staff training, what staff think and the like. We are looking at things like SEND, LGBTQ plus and children in care. We hope to have young people come to our sub-group.” (Youth Worker, YFNE)

7.5.3 Partnership and Teamwork

As in the first two years of the programme, the coming together of partner sites within the programme steering group continued to foster a sense of connectedness and teamwork in an unprecedented time. The site leads and delivery staff spoken to, all felt that coming together to share ideas and hear about what was working to keep young people engaged, helped them overcome challenges and increase their confidence within the programme:

“I think a lot of the meetings that I’ve been on we tend to share some ideas...It’s been right, let’s have a catch up with everyone else and see what they’ve been working on so we can pick any ideas or something like that. It’s a catchup so you can stay in touch and you’re still aware of what’s going on away from what we’re doing.”

(Delivery Staff, Albion)

“...they are a great opportunity to share experiences. It has given me confidence to try out new things...they are a sounding board for new ideas. I see how they meet my ideas before I try them.”

(Manager, Henshaws)

This was particularly apparent for YFNE who were new to the programme in year 3 and were struggling to engage with young people with a VI:

“it’s been so helpful to learn from others experience and hear suggestions, especially about recruitment of young people...it has improved staff confidence...getting practical suggestions and tips how to advertise.” (Manager, YFNE)

However, YFNE did face some difficulty engaging with RSBC more generally around their role in the LLGF programme. Their link to RSBC in the North East of England (a Family Practitioner) left their role and their replacement was difficult to contact and was unsure of data protection legislation. Whilst the Family Practitioner did not have a formal role in LLGF, YFNE felt they were their main contact for the programme and the difficulties experienced left them with a lack of clarity about what was expected of them within the programme and somewhat unsupported in trying to connect with and engage young people with a VI, a community they had not worked with before.. They felt that RSBC staff should be provided with appropriate GDPR training to enable them to provide the support needed to partner organisations, such as sending a series of emails to local schools, youth groups and sports groups introducing LLGF and connecting them to YFNE. YFNE felt this approach would have greatly benefited their ability to reach more young people with a VI than was actually possible.

7.5.4 Legacy

A key focus in the interviews with partner sites was upon the legacy of the LLGF programme as it drew to a close at the end of year 3. These conversations focused on the hopes for the support and activities available to children and young people with a VI offered by partners and the mainstream organisations and services who received the capacity building training, as well as the learning and changes generated by COVID-19 pandemic on funding avenues, partnership working and delivery methods.

“I really hope we can keep delivering. I want to see what the young people will do, I hope to see some of them grow more and move on. Apply to the youth board through the alliance.”

(Youth worker, YFNE)

“...that key of using partners and working with partners, whereas before it was very much geographical and you worked within your own areas, that learning was there, that there were supports, whether it’s from Manchester or London that can be accessed really quickly and really efficiently. We shouldn’t lose that.” (Delivery staff, Albion)

“We need to think more creatively about funding. We used to work in a siloed way, COVID has taught us that we don’t have to do that, and we can use our time to make sure we aren’t...Funding needs to reflect this new way of working, not just as a COVID response.” (Manager, BGCGM)

In addition, some sites are taking forward the capacity building training model and developing it into a children and young people friendly training. This not only highlights the flexibility of the LLGF programme model of delivery to meet local need, but also how the impact of the programme can be maintained past the end of this block of funding.

“I am developing a child friendly VIAT [Vision Impairment Access Training]course for non-VI children in mainstream schools that have VI pupils. I want to take the focus from the VI child to mainstream children who are very interested in and open to learning about VI. It is about shifting the support to the mainstream, rather than always focusing on the VI child. I have done a pilot and the children responded very well.” (Delivery staff, Henshaws)

“We have been training young people without VI to be VI champions. They have attended the capacity building training, the idea is they attend the sessions, learn about VI and then advocate for sessions at

school, sports sessions and youth groups are inclusive, to make it more accessible.” (Manager, YFNE)

For young people themselves, they hope that the activities started by partners continue and that more of them start up, either specifically for children and young people with a VI or as part of mainstream provision. They particularly hope that activities continue to be delivered in a blended/hybrid way to ensure they are accessible to all, and cover things such as music, drama, creative writing, mental health, and exams.

“...it would be good to do more creative things, and to focus on mental health. A session on school and stress would be good, and strategies for coping with exams.” (Young person, RSBC)

Similarly, family members hope that LLGF activities and programmes like it continue in the future. For many, the regular activities, support, friendship, and fun offered over the 3 years of the programme has been a lifeline, especially during COVID-19. Furthermore, family members recognise that for the success of the programme to be truly impactful the activities need to continue as it is a long-term need they and their families have, not a short term one.

“We hope it continues and they keep getting out of it what they are getting. It’s the long-term thing, for H to progress, to open up future opportunities for when he is older, to give other options.”
(Family member, Albion)

7.6 The Challenges

In addition to the challenges mentioned through this section of the report, there were some additional challenges mentioned by sites as part of the evaluation.

7.6.1 Time and Resources

For some partner sites the time and resources they had available in year 3 to undertake the delivery of the LLGF programme proved challenging.

For Albion, attendance at steering group meetings with the sharing of ideas and activities by partner sites was beneficial overall, but it did present the delivery staff with the realisation that they didn’t have the time to do everything the other sites were doing, which had an impact on morale.

“...there have been certain meetings where I’ve thought that’s quite cool, and we can try and incorporate that. I think there’s also an element where we put on our sessions to a certain, to our groups that

we're working with, and I think there were times where we were listening but there were some things that we really couldn't fit into our week. With one element because we've got so many different pockets of work that we work, it's not just this area, there's so much that we want to do and there's some elements that we are just not able to do ...that's difficult." (Delivery staff, Albion)

For YFNE, who joined the programme in year 3, the time it took to translate their organisational documents and communications to an accessible format for children and young people with a VI was a challenge for them. As one of the mainstream organisations involved in the delivery of LLGF with no experience of working with people with a VI, translating documents was a key activity they had to undertake before developing their programme of activities and delivering capacity building training. This was a time consuming and therefore costly activity that was not built into the wider programme and may have slowed down the recruitment of young people to the activities on offer.

"Just getting paperwork set up for this project has been a challenge as a lot of what we were using was not accessible to young people. Young people with VI have helped inform changes we have made e.g., we changed from using google docs to google forms so that it works better on the apps YP use. But this has taken a lot of time."
(Youth worker, YFNE)

7.6.2 Recruitment and Referrals

A key challenge for some partner sites in year 3 was recruiting and gaining referrals to the LLGF programme. For YFNE, as new providers in the VI sector and with limited support from their RSBC contact, they struggled to recruit young people to their programme of activities.

"I would say a challenge we have had is to do with engaging and recruiting visually impaired young people. We have struggled to find where they are and when trying to link with organisations who offer support to young people with a disability, it has been really hard to get these organisations to reply back to emails/phone calls. I'm not sure if it is a case of gate keeping, covid challenge or professional too busy to link with us." (Manager, YFNE)

Whilst for Henshaws, recruitment has continued to be a problem with more traditional approaches not working for attracting children and young people to the programme. However, the staff at Henshaws had a positive response to this choosing to look at the problem creatively and try new approaches rather than keep doing the same thing with the same people and organisations. Henshaws

experience and specialist VI knowledge allowed them to have the confidence to do this in comparison to YFNE who did not have experience or knowledge. However, some young people supported by YFNE as part of LLGF have taken ownership of the recruitment difficulties and are doing what they can to help.

“It would be better if there were more people involved. There’s only 4 other people and me. I am getting some posters to around my school and other schools. It might help.” (Young person, YFNE)

7.6.3 Outcome Monitoring Tools

Despite the changes made to the outcome monitoring tools at the end of year 2 (December 2020), partner sites and family members still reported challenges when it came to capturing and submitting the new outcome monitoring tools for the programme. The challenges faced ranged from young people and their families not completing the tools, young people and their families completing the tools but finding them difficult/inappropriate, finding the time to complete the tools in the sessions being delivered, and submitting the data captured into RSBC’s system time consuming and difficult to navigate.

“We know the monitoring is important but recording the data can be a chore. We have to record some of the data twice, which is time consuming. But it is being done and families are completing the questionnaires despite not enjoying them.” (Manager, Henshaws)

“...people just don’t fill them in, which means we have to chase them. We make them fill them in in the sessions, but the Wellbeing questionnaire is too long and takes a long time to convert so that young people stick with it and follow the questions.”
(Youth Worker, YFNE)

“The wellbeing survey is tedious, it’s too long and some of the questions are not written well in terms of friendliness. The concepts are not helpful, if I ask H how he’s feeling he says fine and then if I ask further, are you feeling sad or something he asks why, should I, so it’s really not helpful.” (Family member, Albion)

“...there will be a few people there tonight who will have done the surveys, a few haven’t and it’s just down to the nature of our session where if they miss a week where I’m doing all the surveys I have to come off of delivery to then do the surveys on that night which then leaves us a member of staff short which is ‘okay’ but if I’m doing it every week to catch every one suddenly we’re a staff member down

and with a visually impaired group a staff member is quite important.”
(Delivery staff, Albion)

Partner sites felt that the monitoring tools could be improved by being made shorter, incorporating more user-friendly language, and measuring the broader impacts of the programme.

“The impact/benefits of these activities in terms of improving confidence, independence etc is very evident and was clearly seen during the lockdowns and post Covid. Social activities are very important for children and young people, but the other benefits need to be recorded, for families and young people in terms of connections made, information shared etc. The project should not be overly focused on numbers.” (Delivery staff, Henshaws)

7.7 What This All Means

Despite the unprecedented events of 2021, the LLGF programme grew in size with the introduction of YFNE to the partnership, continued to provide activities to young people with a VI across England, and restarted the delivery of capacity building training to mainstream youth organisations. Staff across the partnership have continued to work hard to build on and develop innovative and creative ways to engage and support young people with a VI via an exciting programme of activities in the ever-changing COVID-19 dominated landscape. Findings from the data collected across year 3 suggests that the activities provided have led to positive outcomes for young people, including an increased sense of confidence, a supportive network of peers and opportunities to make friends. Findings also suggest that the capacity building training delivered has helped mainstream youth organisations increase their knowledge and confidence in supporting children and young people with a VI, which will hopefully lead to more inclusive provision being available in the future.



8. Conclusions, Reflections, and Recommendations

Despite the unprecedented events that unfolded during the lifespan of LLGF and the challenges this presented, the programme was able to grow across the 3 years, providing support and activities to children and young people with a VI across England (and the rest of the UK), and delivering capacity building training to mainstream organisations. Staff in partner sites worked hard to build and develop innovative and creative ways to engage and support young people with a VI via an exciting programme of activities in the ever-changing COVID-19 dominated landscape.

Below are some concluding reflections and recommendations for the partnership and other interested parties now the LLGF programme has come to an end.

8.1 Reflections

- Between 2019 and 2022 the world facing children and young people with a VI, their families, and partner sites was a challenging place, due to impact of COVID-19 and continued changes to local and national restrictions. Despite the challenges these changes presented, LLGF was able to remain supporting children and young people with a VI across the UK with a broad and varied programme of activities through the 3 years.
- The introduction of online and subsequent blended/hybrid approach to delivery in response to COVID-19, allowed children and young people to continue receiving support and attend activities at a time when they needed it most. The introduction of the blended/hybrid approach in the summer of 2021 (year 3) allowed children and young people to re-join activities they had stopped attending in year 2, to continue attending activities virtually due to medical, timing, or geographical reasons, and to meet in person people they had only previously met virtually. The blended approach was not without its challenges to sites (new skills and resources), and young people (knowing when to talk and needing support to take part), but the positives appear to far outweigh the negatives.
- Findings from the data collected suggests that across the 3 years of the programme the activities provided led to positive outcomes for young people, including an increased sense of confidence, a supportive network of peers and opportunities to make friends.

- Findings also suggest that the capacity building training delivered helped mainstream youth organisations increase their knowledge and confidence in supporting children and young people with a VI, which will hopefully lead to more inclusive provision being available in the future.
- The partnership model used to deliver LLGF was hugely beneficial to all sites involved. The ability to work with organisations with different specialisms and in different geographical areas allowed sites to learn from one another as well as feel supported.
- The outcome monitoring tools used in LLGF were a continued challenge for partners, children, young people and their families alike. Whilst recommendations from the evaluation were heeded and changes made at the end of year 2 (December 2020) the tools were still proving difficult to complete and capture for partners, children, young people and families until the end of year 3.

8.2 Recommendations

With the funding for the LLGF programme at an end, the recommendations below are focused on the wider learning that can be taken from the work done, to help inform the partners as well as those interested in undertaking a programme like this in the future

- Social activities and support for children and young people with a VI in England (and the rest of the UK) should continue past the end of the LLGF programme to help reduce social isolation, increase confidence, develop a supportive network of peers and opportunities to make friends.
- Programmes of activities for children and young people, as well as adults, would benefit from the continued use of a blended/hybrid approach to delivery, with a mix of online and face-to-face sessions offered in the future. This approach has proved highly beneficial to the partners, children, young people, and families involved in LLGF, but it is likely would benefit broader groups of people as well.
- Working in partnership with likeminded, but not necessarily same specialism, organisations or services benefits the programme, the organisations, and the sector itself. COVID-19 has highlighted how easy it can be to work outside of traditional silos or specialisms and the benefit this has. Future programmes should not be afraid to approach new partners in different areas to deliver work.
- Funders should support and allow the delivery of programmes with a broad mix of partners both in the continued response to COVID-19 and in the longer-term.
- Allowing partners within a programme to develop and deliver activities and training that is appropriate to their local area and need will allow a

programme to flourish. Support should be offered at all stages, including within a peer network, from lead partners/funders but without a top-down approach to management.

- If standardised outcome monitoring data collection tools are to be used to capture evidence within a programme, it is essential that the tools used are age appropriate and take a proportionate amount of time to complete. The move to the 14-point WEMWBS instead of the WBQ at RSBC and discontinuation of the LSQ across the programme in year 3 has proved promising. However, as WEMWBS is only validated for use with those aged over 13 it is recommended that a different measure is used for those under 13 that is both user friendly and not burdensome to staff or those attending activities. Furthermore, it is recommended that any platforms used to capture the evidence from tools is known to all those who have to use it.