

London Together Learning Guide 2: Approaches to sport and social integration

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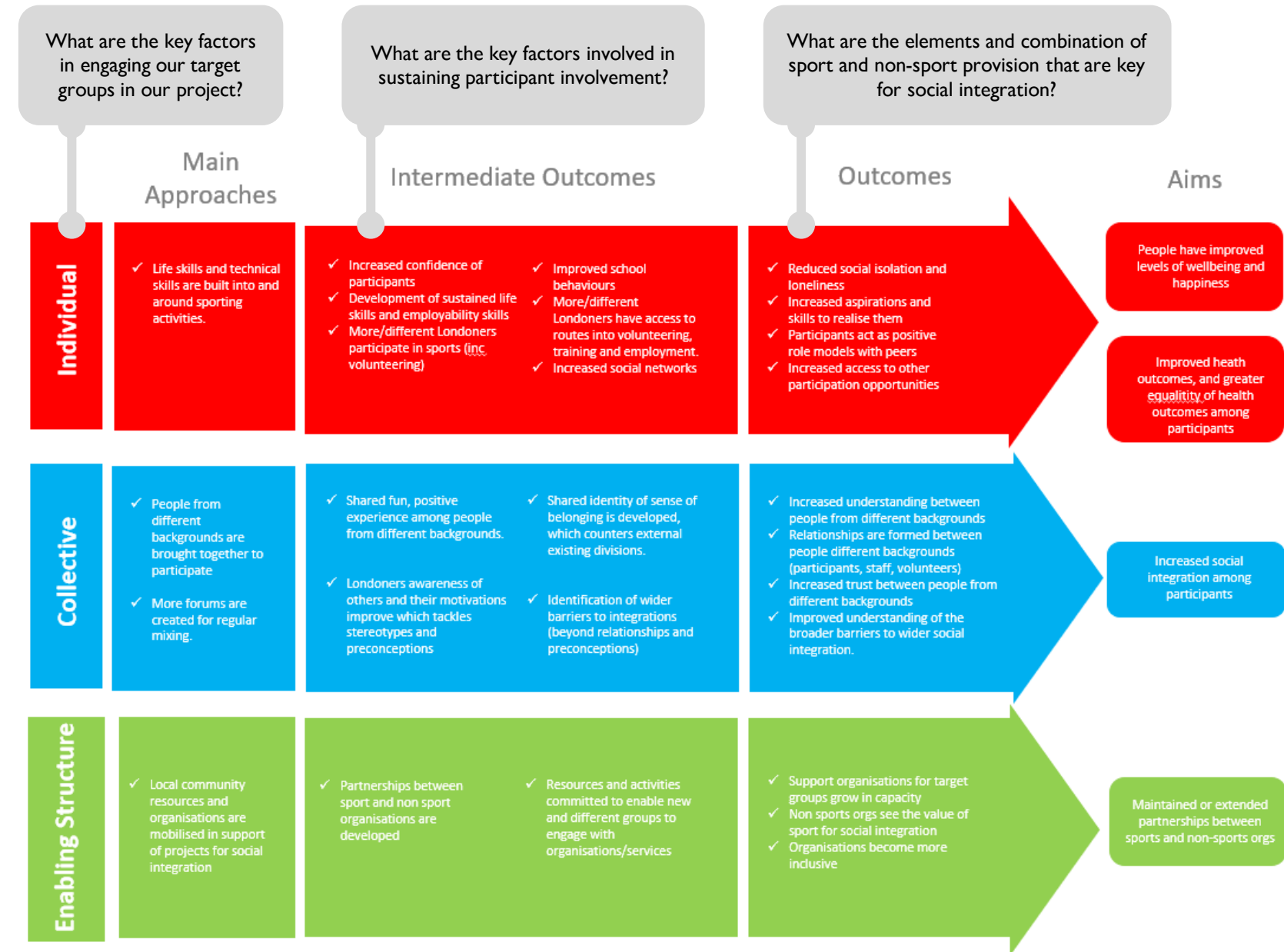


Introducing the Guide

London Together is a £3 million Sport Unites partnership financed equally by the Mayor of London and Comic Relief. London Together invests in sport for change approaches that aim to improve social integration in London. The 3-year fund launched in 2018 and a list of the projects funded through rounds 1 and 2 of London Together can be found here.

Across the course of the project, the Mayor of London and Comic Relief have worked with the consultancy inFocus to bring together the different projects into a 'learning community' to explore key topics in relation to Sport (including different forms of physical activity) and Social Integration. In the first year of the initiative, the guides are based on the theory of change and learning questions shown to the right, with the questions chosen by the projects themselves. This is the first of a series of guides that bring together the experiences and advice from the different projects.

It is important to note that not every guide will include information that is relevant in every context, and they are not a definitive 'check-list' of what every project should do. Rather, they are intended as 'food for thought' for anyone planning a sport for change project, particularly one focused on social integration.



Part 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of using sport for social integration



- ▶ Sport can foster different positive values that can help to bring a group closer together, such as teamwork and fair play. Being part of a team, playing together in this same kits, can forge a strong sense of shared identity in a group.
- ▶ Sport provides a range of options for modifying activities to meet a range of different needs, particularly though building key messaging into a particular supporting activity.
- ▶ Participation in sport builds confidence, not only in people's ability to play the sport, but also other aspects of life. This includes an increased confidence in social interaction and forming friendships/relationships.
- ▶ Engaging in regular physical activity can improve mental health and physical fitness, which can help in addressing isolation.
- ▶ Sport can help to breakdown stereotypes, helping to make a statement about who can do/is supposed to do what
- ▶ Projects using sport and physical activity for social integration can help people to access sports that would otherwise not be accessible (for example, because they are too expensive).
- ▶ Sport and physical activity has a strong cultural appeal across different ages, nationalities, ethnicities etc.

Advantages



- ▶ People can have a negative perception of sport, and what getting involved in sporting activity might involve. For example, homophobia in sports and exclusion based on gender can give sport a negative perception.
- ▶ Sporting activities can be expensive to deliver, for example hiring venues and providing equipment.
- ▶ There can also be costs for participants that act as a barrier to taking part, such as purchasing equipment (and feeling pressure to have the same equipment as their peers).
- ▶ The competitive nature of sport can lead to inequalities in a group if not managed effectively, for example, if participants are judged by other members of the group based on their ability. This can lead to cliques and divisiveness.
- ▶ Pan-disability sports are not always relevant to participants with different disabilities.
- ▶ The gendered nature of sport, which traditionally could include men's and women's teams, kits and changing facilities does not lend itself to accessibility and inclusion.
- ▶ Cultural stereotyping is an issue, people can feel uncomfortable in spaces they do not traditionally inhabit, particularly if they are visible minorities.

Disadvantages

In this guide, we look at different approaches from the London Together projects using sport as a tool for social integration. We start by thinking about both the advantages and disadvantages of using sport to address isolation and drive social integration. It is important to consider the pros and cons of using sport at the outset of designing a sport for social integration project.

Part 2: How are London Together grantees using sport for social integration?



Photograph: Jo Chukualim/Comic Relief.

In the Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) **We Stand Together**, the refugees taking part have different levels of written/spoken English. While participants have access to ESOL courses, in the project football is used as a non-verbal communication tool and the social interaction to help refugees improve their English indirectly. This has also increased the confidence of the participants, and helped to build relationships between the participants.

Non-verbal and English language development

Get Outside is the Saracens Sport Foundation's prison programme which uses the values of rugby to develop the education and employability skills of offenders through an intensive 8-week course in prison. The ultimate aim of the project is to reduce the reoffending rates of ex-offenders upon their release from prison and help them to reintegrate into society. This is achieved through both sporting and classroom sessions use and reflect upon values Saracens feel is encompassed through rugby, such as honesty, discipline, work rate and humility.

Incorporating the values of a particular sport

Reflecting on the advantages of using sport for social integration from the previous page, we have included some of the different approaches used by London Together projects to the right that highlight some of the different values sport can bring in supporting social integration.

Muslim Girls Fence is a project collaboration between Maslaha and British Fencing which aims to facilitate spaces at a grassroots level for Muslim girls and women to challenge assumptions and narratives relating to their gender, racial, religious and other identities through both physical and creative methods. The girls and women are coached to learn the traditionally elite and white, male-dominated sport of fencing. Through this, they physically confront the stereotypes of fencers, but also the expectations our society has of them: that Muslim women and girls are weak, subordinated and lacking agency.

Using sport to confront stereotypes

The **All Together - Deaf Londoners Activation Programme**, run by UK Deaf Sport, has created a robust and evidence led Deaf peer to peer network through recruiting and training deaf activator champions across a number of London boroughs who engage, encourage and support deaf communities to integrate within their communities through activities. One of the aims of the project is to breakdown barriers and demonstrate the abilities of deaf people, for example, to help attendees at inclusive training to get a greater understanding of deafness and increased confidence in including deaf people in their activities

Demonstrating and showcasing ability

A shared love of sport, and it's rich history and heritage, can also be used as a tool for social integration. **Sporting Memories** clubs use trained volunteers to help older participants reminisce together in a group setting about their experiences of watching or playing sport, supported by memorabilia and resources defined by the participant's sporting interests and preferences. This is followed at least 45 minutes of physical activity with a range of activities and sports and balance and strength exercises. The aim of the project is to reduce isolation through increasing social connections and building a greater sense of community belonging among participants.

Finding a common interest in sporting culture

Part 3: How and where social integration happens: individuals, groups and community levels

As we explored on the previous page, there is no 'one-size fits all' approach to encouraging social integration through sport. The boxes to the right are a summary of the different approaches taken by London Together projects in relation to **how** and **where** social integration happens across three levels. This reflects that there is often a need to first working towards social integration at an individual level, then within groups taking part in the project, and finally in the wider community. Not all projects adopt all steps, and some may focus more on a particular level.

- ▶ Participants may lack confidence or have anxiety about engaging in social settings and developing relationships. For example, due to isolation, language barriers, adverse childhood relationships or trauma (such as bullying or harassment) or having limited interaction outside friends and family.
- ▶ Participants may have a lack of understanding/knowledge of other communities or have internalised stereotypes that may need to be addressed to foster social integration
- ▶ Many London Together projects start by working to build the confidence of participants, working individually to address specific needs and gradually easing them into group activities.
- ▶ Staff/volunteers that have progressed through the project can play a key role at this stage as mentors and role-models, particularly if they share a similar background to participants.



Individuals

- ▶ Many projects focus on forging a connection across a group within a project, building a sense of community, safety and trust between participants in a group, and between participants and staff/volunteers. This might start by working in pairs and small groups and using 'ice-breakers' to build confidence and could eventually involve mixing together groups from different locations within a project.
- ▶ Engagement in sport and physical activity within projects can encourage people of all backgrounds to feel safe/welcome and foster an environment of togetherness. (see part 2).
- ▶ Utilising diverse staff/volunteers within projects can also show how people from different backgrounds work together.
- ▶ Focusing on positive stories about the lives of participants can help to make people reconsider preconceptions about others and make them more empathetic.
- ▶ It can help to explore different identities within the group and what they mean to each individual, highlighting both similarities and differences.



Groups

- ▶ The London Together group of projects highlighted the importance of maintaining an open dialogue and working with participants to identify the systematic barriers that they face in engaging in their wider community (and not making assumptions about these barriers).
- ▶ Identifying these systematic problems can help participants to think about what needs to change in their community and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders (such as local authorities).
- ▶ Research and building up knowledge of the local area and services available is important for signposting people to wider opportunities.
- ▶ Several projects work with partners offering activities/facilities in the wider community to help to ensure that services were more accessible to participants.
- ▶ Other projects used mentors or ambassadors to attend wider activities in the community with participants to make sure they are supported as they take steps outside of the project .



Community