

Inclusion London

Supporting London's Deaf and
Disabled People's Organisations

Developing Deaf and Disabled Leaders for the Future

Learning report from Inclusion
London's pilot leadership programme



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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the leaders who completed this pilot programme. We have only been able to learn so much because of the trust, openness, and commitment this first group of leaders gave, in experimenting with a new approach to developing leadership practice.

We wanted to codesign future leadership programmes through learning with this first group. Each of the group therefore wrote their own individual report on their experience of the programme, its value and challenges, and its impact. All reports were inspiring in their honesty and deep self-reflection on journeys through the programme. As much as possible this report aims to bring together and represent the voice and views of all participants.

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About Inclusion London

Inclusion London is a disability equality Deaf/Disabled people's organisation (DDPO) run and controlled by Deaf/Disabled people. Inclusion London has built a strong track record in effective policy and campaigns work and in developing and delivering innovative and bespoke business and capacity building support to over 70 DDPOs across London (who in turn provide services to over 76,000 Deaf/Disabled Londoners).

About the author

Alex Hendra, Associate Business Consultant to Inclusion London, has been providing bespoke business and finance development support to DDPOs for the last 7 years. She has 20 years' experience in senior management or leadership roles in the voluntary sector. Her career has predominantly been in grassroots organisations promoting rights and equality of Deaf/Disabled people within the Social Model.

Alex was the facilitator and coach on this pilot programme, bringing to the role her passion for diversity in leadership and her own lived experience as a neurodivergent, lesbian leader. She has a particular interest in user-led and participatory models of service design, and previous experience co-designing successful leadership programmes with Disabled young people.

Background to the Leadership Programme

What we knew

Deaf/Disabled people's rights are being eroded and are under increasing threat¹. This is a time when the Disabled people's rights movement needs strong leaders who reflect the diversity of our communities and can get our voices heard. DDPOs are a crucial part of the movement yet, since 2015, about 25% of DDPOs have closed and remaining DDPOs face significant challenges to "bringing on" new Deaf/Disabled leaders.

In 2019, Inclusion London held two focus groups with DDPO leaders, and funders interested in "Lived Experience Leadership," to explore barriers that prevent development of Deaf/Disabled leaders. These barriers were identified as:

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/progress-disability-rights-united-kingdom>

Stereotypes about leadership:

- Expectations of a particular set of skills or characteristics in a leader. Lack of appreciation for diversity in leadership styles and approaches
- Confusion between leadership and management. Failure to recognise leadership in people not in management positions
- Less stereotypical leadership roles e.g. activists, are often unpaid or low paid, which undervalues them.

Societal prejudice about Deaf/Disabled people's ability to lead:

- Equating impairment with lack of ability
- Few role models of Deaf/Disabled people in leadership or positions of power leads to lack of pride in identity as Deaf/Disabled people and as potential leaders
- Internalised oppression and lack of confidence. Not putting ourselves forward for opportunities because of repeated rejections or internalised beliefs about inability
- It can take years of setbacks before young Deaf/Disabled people are exposed to the Social Model and the Disabled people's rights movement and can push back against inequality and stereotypes. This is a particular problem because so few organisations supporting Deaf/Disabled children are led by Deaf/Disabled people
- Lack of value afforded to DDPOs as user-led organisations. Big disability charities, led and managed by non-Disabled people, lead the narrative. This in turn perpetuates prejudice and stereotypes of what makes a leader. DDPOs and their leaders are not given enough attention or profile, so their success does not challenge the stereotypes
- It is hard to recruit new Deaf/Disabled talent into DDPOs and the wider movement because of that lack of exposure to the politics and low DDPO profile.

Tokenism and risk aversion:

- Even when Deaf/Disabled people are in recognised leadership positions, lack of appropriate access support or training limits their exercising of that role
- Funders, commissioners, senior managers may say they want Deaf/Disabled people to lead, make decisions, or coproduce solutions but they do not necessarily hand over the power, so no real change happens

- Lack of trust from funders, commissioners and decision makers for different approaches gives limited opportunity for non-traditional leaders to take chances, learn from mistakes, forge new paths
- Deaf/Disabled people are often consulted or asked for their “stories” but not allowed opportunities to lead real change.

Barriers to developing skills and experience:

- Employment disadvantage and discrimination limits Deaf/Disabled people’s opportunities to develop through work experience
- Lack of accessible training and development opportunities. Employers and training providers lack understanding of access barriers. Failure to make reasonable adjustments at work and in training prevents Deaf/Disabled people from developing, using strengths at work, and getting recognised for their skills
- Unpaid trustees, members, volunteers and activists are not able to use Access to Work funding for support and therefore have particular problems accessing training opportunities. Training providers are completely unaware of these issues and expect people to bring their own support
- Many Deaf/Disabled people feel the need to “mask” differences or access support needs in fear of jeopardising their jobs. Others lack understanding of their rights to reasonable adjustments, or have never had any experience of access needs being met, so do not know what to ask for
- Ongoing problems with Access to Work that prevent people from getting the funding they need for support and equipment²
- Lack of access to wider supportive networks and professional memberships that understand equalities issues
- Leadership programmes not coproduced by or informed by the experience of Deaf/Disabled people are often inaccessible
- Entrepreneurial support and social investment programmes can be a different route to success for non-traditional leaders, but do not have a good record of access for Deaf/Disabled people
- Progression routes from training, development and volunteering opportunities into paid roles are complicated for people receiving benefits.

² [Employment | Inclusion London](#)

Intersectional discrimination:

- These stereotypes and structural barriers to leadership are further complicated for people who experience multiple oppressions, eg in relation to race, sexuality, religion, gender as well as impairment
- Initiatives focused on the importance of “lived experience” often develop from a single equality focus and can fail to address the intersectionality of discrimination
- The Disabled people’s rights movement, along with other equalities movements, has yet to develop approaches to leadership that fully take this into account.

Even within DDPOs where employment rates of Deaf/Disabled people are high, and structural inequalities understood, there are barriers to leadership development. Chronic underfunding of these generally small organisations leads to:

- Under resourced job roles. Unrealistic levels of competing priorities lead to a sense of failure and limits capacity for development
- Very limited investment in training - a particular problem for Deaf/Disabled people who are more likely to have experienced lack of opportunity in the education system
- Limited coaching, mentoring, shadowing or secondment opportunities. Even when these are available, there are few Deaf/Disabled leaders or mentors to learn from
- Lack of supervision and support for CEOs which reduces opportunities to take risks and challenge yourself
- Lack of appropriate, accessible support and training for trustee development
- Flat management structures with few routes that support Deaf/Disabled people to progress towards more senior roles. These often end up being taken by non-Disabled people even within DDPOs
- Limited capacity to develop opportunities for unpaid members, activists and volunteers to take on rewarding and challenging roles where Deaf/Disabled people have power, purpose, and control
- Loss of talented Deaf/Disabled people to higher paid careers in other sectors.

What is good leadership practice?

From our focus groups with existing Deaf/Disabled leaders we developed our definition of a leader as someone who makes change happen and has influence or decision-making power in areas they are passionate about.

Leaders do not have to be in a traditional position of authority, or be a paid member of staff, or even be part of an organisation. We reject the notion that leaders are people with a particular set of skills or qualities which make them “natural” leaders. We believe anyone can be a leader and anyone can get better at leadership if they work on improving their practice.

To define what we meant by good leadership practice we again drew on ideas from our focus groups, combined with theories of “collaborative leadership”, “coproduction” and “human centred design”. We identified ten core areas of leadership practice to focus on in developing Deaf/Disabled Leaders for the future.

1. Having a vision for change

Having a change you are passionate to make happen, and a powerful vision of how things could be different

2. Confidence

Having confidence that you can achieve your planned change

3. Providing a sense of direction and purpose

Being clear and assertive about how you are going to make change happen.
Working out the right things to do to get there and communicating these well

4. Positive outlook, adaptability and resilience

Being positive about your plan and persistent in the face of challenges. Being flexible, but ensuring people are guided steadily when the plan is changed

5. Bringing diverse people together to work on an issue they care about

Getting people’s attention. Reaching out to build a network. Helping people feel excited and enthusiastic about using their different values, beliefs, experiences, strengths and passions to make a change

6. Empathising, and being aware of your own feelings and behaviours and their impact on others

Listening and communicating thoughtfully, with sensitivity to people's experiences, needs and views, and genuine interest in learning from them and developing shared understanding. Being aware that marginalised people may have limited experience of being listened to, or traumatic experiences of being ignored. Additionally, leadership can feel amazing, frustrating, inspiring, exhausting, thrilling, dangerous..... Being aware of your feelings, how you respond to them, and the impact of your behaviours and on others is important.

7. Building trust and ownership

Giving people a chance to participate, share control and power over decisions, and feel able to make a difference. Seeking out people's talents and ideas and making sure they have a chance to grow. Paying particular attention to enabling people to contribute in a way they feel comfortable. Taking extra time to understand how people can perform to their true potential. Using creative and flexible approaches to communication, engagement and participation.

8. Encouraging curiosity, questioning and creativity

Challenging your own view and thinking about other points of view. Being prepared to try out new ways of doing things. Asking awkward questions and leading others into fresh thinking. Challenging the way things have always been done. Being prepared to work with uncertainty. Creating environments and ways of working that encourage people to debate and challenge each other. Managing uncomfortable feelings in a positive way – seeing that conflicts show what matters to people, so they are a way to find people's passions and new ideas.

9. Taking real action

Dreams with deadlines! Going beyond ideas and into doing, testing and learning. Being bold and experimenting.

10. A rights and equalities based perspective

This was an essential area of leadership practice current DDPO leaders felt is often missing from traditional leadership programmes. This both excludes potential Deaf/Disabled leaders from those programmes, and prevents the development of leaders who can contribute to breaking down marginalising barriers in society.

We believe a rights and equalities based perspective for Deaf/Disabled leaders is demonstrated by:

- An understanding of the Social Model of disability, cultural model of deafness³ and principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)⁴
- Knowledge of barriers to equality experienced by Deaf/Disabled people
- A willingness to learn from, and share learning, with other Deaf/Disabled leaders, Deaf/Disabled led organisations and media
- Understanding of intersectionality, how different forms of discrimination and inequalities interact, and an understanding of how different social movements intersect with the Disabled people's rights movement
- Awareness of societal barriers impacting on you personally, self-knowledge of own access support needs, and assertiveness in ensuring these are met
- Awareness of how lived experience contributes to leadership.

³ <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/disability-in-london/social-model/the-social-model-of-disability-and-the-cultural-model-of-deafness/>

⁴ https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/uncrpd_guide_easyread.pdf

Theories we wanted to test in the pilot

- There are plenty of Deaf/Disabled people who have leadership potential, or who are already leading but are unacknowledged as leaders. They do not necessarily need to be taught leadership skills, but they do need support to recognise their leadership potential, develop awareness of societal barriers that stop them using their skills or having their leadership recognised, and find ways to challenge or get round these
- Flipping the power is key! We theorised that supporting Deaf/Disabled people to identify their own leadership development goals, and empowering potential leaders to work on a real change project they were passionate about - with coaching and support - would allow them to take control, gain confidence, and explore and break down the barriers that get in their way
- We believed it would be more realistic for DDPOs to nominate people to the programme if we provided funding to backfill posts or cover access support needs and enabled participants to work on a change that was relevant to the DDPO and would provide solutions to problems rather than create extra work
- We needed to learn more about what would and would not work and so we knew a successful leadership programme must be coproduced with Deaf/Disabled people. We believed that taking a “test and learn” approach would allow us to experiment, analyse and understand what is most effective in achieving leadership success
- “Human centred design⁵” is a creative approach to problem solving that starts with the people you are trying to reach and designs solutions from their perspective and with their involvement. It emphasises empathy, valuing diverse perspectives and unusual ideas, coproducing solutions, and learning through action and experimentation. It is commonly used within social enterprise development programmes. It seemed like a good match with the core leadership elements we wanted to promote. We wanted to test whether human centred design approaches, combined with a rights and equalities based approach to barriers, would effectively support leadership development.

⁵ <https://www.designkit.org/>

Summary of the pilot programme

September – November 2019

Three training workshops covering:

- Exploration of what leadership is and individual goals and motivations
- Brief introduction to human centred design theory and techniques
- Exploration of the change in their organisation or community participants want to lead, what leadership and other skills they would need to develop to be able to achieve this and how they would access these. Support to develop a “change canvas” (a summary of their vision for change and how they would make it happen)
- Development of three small peer mentoring groups
- Peer review of “change canvas”

Nov 2019 – May 2020 (then extended until December 2020 with additional funding)

- Participants work on their project using their "change canvas" to guide them
- Consultant available for flexible coaching support to progress change project and continually reflect on leadership practice (1.5 hours/month each average)
- Participants expected to connect with their peer mentoring groups monthly
- Participants access Inclusion London's wider training on business development, campaigning and use of the law
- Participants are signposted to other external support and training (with small individual training budget available towards this)

June-August 2020

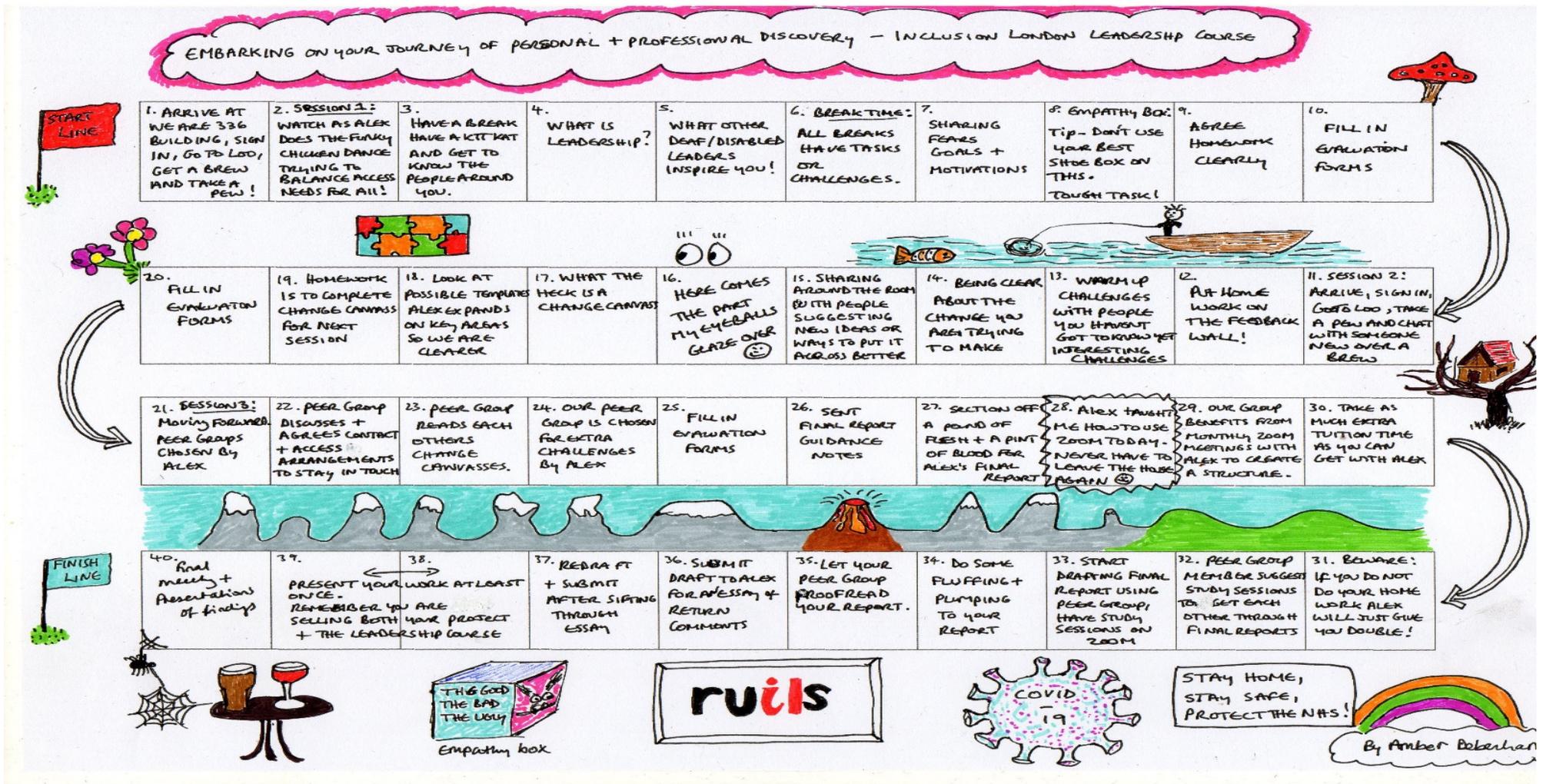
Each individual produces a report and presentation to reflect on their progress (with coaching support, peer review, and opportunity to practice presenting). Reports cover:

- change they focused on and progress they made with the change goals
- impact on their leadership skills and confidence
- reflection on where their lived experience as Deaf/Disabled people was beneficial
- other unexpected impacts
- use of training budget and other sources of support they were signposted to
- feedback from host DDPO on changes achieved
- feedback on programme approach- what worked, challenges, ideas for improvement.

Sept-Oct 2020

2 workshops to peer review reports and participate in designing next programme round.

A creative description of the programme, designed by one of the leaders:



Who took part?

10 leaders from DDPOs across London started the programme. 9 completed the full programme (1 withdrew after the initial workshops).

All were Deaf/Disabled people with a connection to a London DDPO, but with very varied roles and leadership experience. They included DDPO members, trustees and paid members of staff, some with additional experience as individual campaigners/activists and one who also runs a small social business.

All shared an evidenced interest in developing their leadership skills, and a passion for a particular change they wanted to make happen within their DDPO or local community.

Our learning about the programme design

For each element of the programme we have analysed what worked, or not, and how we can improve the next version of the programme.

1. Advertising and recruitment

Despite good initial interest in the programme from DDPOs there were only 10 nominations. DDPOs reported the need for a longer time between advertising the programme and nomination deadlines to allow for discussion with various potential nominees, discussion with trustees, and thinking with nominees about change plans that are mutually interesting to the DDPO and the nominee.

Four participants felt advertising to potential leaders could have been clearer. They felt stronger explanations were needed about the programme's aim to develop leadership through practically leading a change (rather than being taught leadership theory or a particular set of skills); the emphasis on understanding and breaking down barriers to leadership; and what "human centred design" is and its relevance to leadership development.

For example, one participant describes how she wasn't clear until the 2nd workshop that

"it perhaps wasn't going to tell me all the tools I need to be a leader, but would cover some of the basic knowledge regarding leadership, and more towards knocking down barriers that may actually be stopping us from our natural leadership."

Participants and DDPOs felt advertising should make it clearer that the primary focus is on leaders' personal leadership development, and that leading a real change project is a vehicle to this. If this was clearer, there would be no sense of disappointment in leaders who make progress in personal and professional development but do not manage to progress as much as they would have liked with their change project goals.

Two participants fed back that they were expecting a knowledge and skills-based management training course so they felt confused at the start (one continued to feel the course didn't meet expectations). However, this was not what was offered in the initial advertising and reflects a common confusion about the difference between leadership and management. Leaders who have been through the pilot are interested in being ambassadors for future programmes, and having people available to talk about their

experience of the programme may help avoid this confusion for future rounds.

Interestingly there was nothing stopping leaders from choosing change projects which included aspects of organisational or people management. In fact, two did. One led a change plan heavily focused on leading improvements in organisational management, and another chose to focus on leading volunteer members to develop their own services. Both used coaching and training to develop practical management skills along the way. It isn't completely clear why some participants felt they had flexibility to focus the change project on their personal goals, whilst others didn't. In future rounds we will need to emphasise this more. It is possible that giving examples of the range of change projects chosen by leaders in the pilot would demonstrate how much choice and flexibility people have over their change plan focus.

Several participants suggested improvements in the recruitment process:

Initial 1:1 phone or face to face meetings with Inclusion London's CEO were appreciated but could be improved with more detailed assessment of whether participants have time to give to the process, and what their expectations are.

Additionally, an individual meeting with the course facilitator would have been valuable between being offered a place and the first workshop to allow for:

- More detailed pre-course assessment of access needs (including some analysis or thought about whether applicants seemed aware of their own access needs or whether they might need support to develop this)
- Assessment of people's current leadership practice levels and deeper exploration of their goals and expectations, so workshops could be better tailored to the group's needs right from the start, and so they could raise questions and concerns.

One person dropped out of the programme shortly after the initial training workshops. We could not get any feedback about why, but it is possible that a more detailed recruitment process would have helped identify that the programme was not going to meet this person's needs or expectations.

Improvements Planned:

- We have codesigned (with the pilot group) a new programme description, and will include case studies from the first round so that there are clear examples demonstrating the choice and flexibility over change plan focus
- We will build more advertising and communications capacity into future rounds

- Extend the time between advertising the programme and nomination deadlines
- Introduce a 1:1 assessment stage between recruitment and the first workshop
- Engage leaders from the pilot programme as ambassadors to promote and explain the programme

2. Training workshops

Satisfaction and meeting learning objectives

Satisfaction with the 3 initial training and 2 programme review workshops was high and they met learning objectives well:

- 80% agreed or strongly agreed they knew more about leadership practice and what to do to improve (with 20% unsure)
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed they had a better idea of how to plan a change project
- 90% had a better idea of what to do practically to make their change happen (with 10% unsure)
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed they knew more about human centred design thinking and how to use it to lead change
- 70% felt more confident about improving leadership practice and using design thinking during the first 2 workshops, rising to 89% by the third workshop
- 100% felt they had a better idea of what they need to do to take their leadership practice further after the final workshop

The value of introducing human centred design techniques

On reflection in their reports, most participants saw the relevance of human centred design techniques and tools, and how the approach, or particular tools, helped develop their leadership practice ([see impact section](#)). However, several reported that they would have welcomed more pre-programme information to understand the approach and its relevance to leadership before they started, and longer training during the programme. From the facilitator's perspective, discussions with individual leaders within coaching sessions often returned to particular human-centred design tools that could be used to explore solutions, so it would definitely have been good to have more training sessions spread out through the programme. This would have allowed leaders to learn and experiment with a wider range of tools together.

One leader pointed out that some of the human centred design principles were the same

as coproduction principles she was already familiar with. For her, the concepts of codesigning with users and rebalancing power were not new, although some of the language or specific tools were. She found the idea of “change experiments” helpful and used this approach, but raised some concerns about the language in that

“my client group have been used as guinea pigs for years for a variety of uses and if they thought that was what we were doing they would not be a party to it”.

This participant and one other felt that overall the design techniques were not a particularly valuable part of the programme.

We asked leaders about their response to some of the specific tools and techniques used:

The design cycle:

A substantial part of one training workshop was focused on explaining a “design cycle”. This is a three stage process of defining the “problem” (through empathising and developing understanding from the perspective of the “user”); developing potential solutions (generating multiple ideas for solutions, codesigning prototypes with users, and testing and learning from these); then developing successful prototypes further before moving to delivery.

Rather than only teaching the theory, we practically used the approach. We ran a mini design cycle to explore the real “problem” of making a course environment that was accessible and comfortable for everyone, and actually designed solutions together.

In their reports, several participants say they struggled to see the immediate relevance of this at the time but later saw its value in improving their understanding of design from the perspective of the “user”. It contributed directly to their development of empathy by challenging them to think deeper about other people’s experiences and it helped encourage the sharing of diverse perspectives. Several have embedded this in their practice ([see impact section](#)).

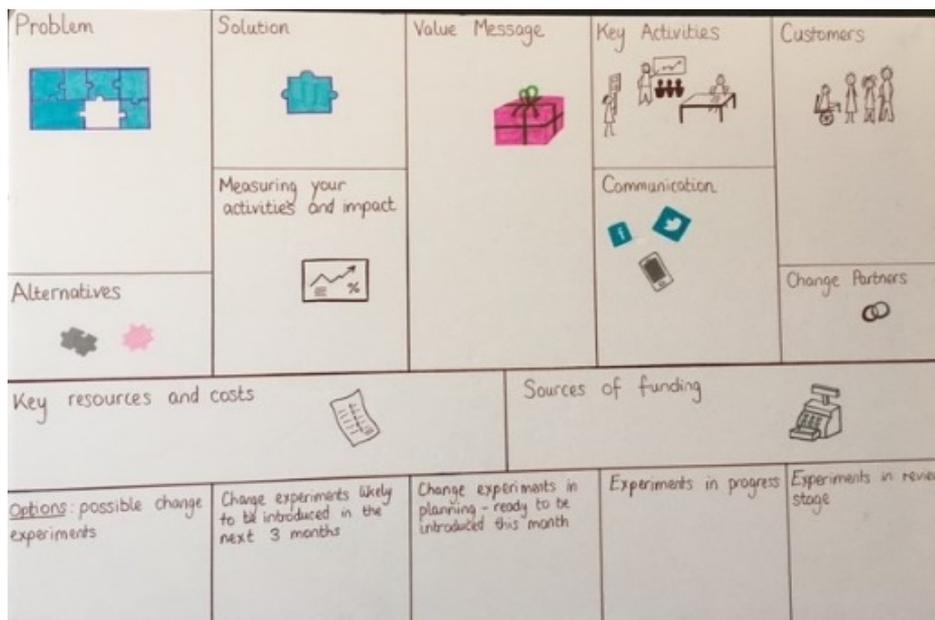
It also helped them work better together

“This also helped us to understand each other which was great for bonding and feeling really close with the rest of the team.”

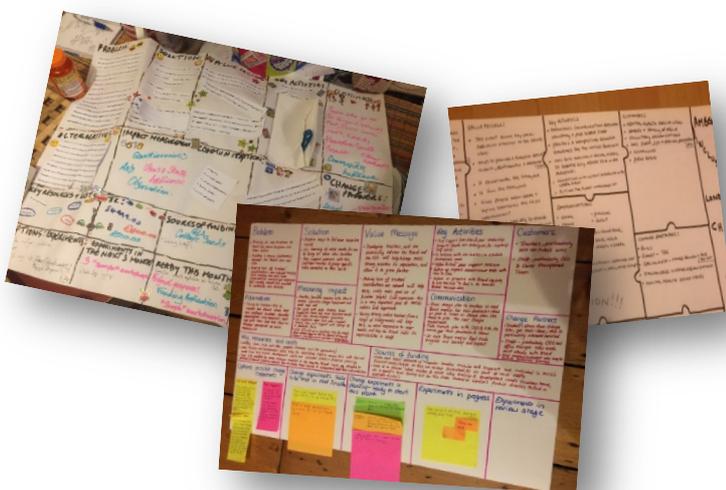
The Change Canvas:

We introduced leaders to a “change canvas”. This is a visual tool to quickly explain a vision for change and the building blocks to making that change happen. We designed a template for this, adapted from a business modelling tool often used in business start-

ups (business model canvas)⁶ and a tool sometimes used within businesses to manage rapid and “agile” change (lean change canvas)⁷.



Leaders were encouraged to use the template flexibly, and they all responded in different ways. Some stuck with the template, while others found completely different ways to show how they had worked through each section, using formats they felt more comfortable with on word, excel or powerpoint.



7 participants liked the change canvas model and found it helpful to be trained on its use:

⁶ [Strategyzer | Resources](#)

⁷ [Resources | Lean Change Management](#)

“It was beneficial that we worked on getting to know how to use and update this template to allow us to work on our own projects, allowing us to really think about all aspects of the project and each heading. It allowed us to see each step of the progress made, thus allowing exploration of each point, progress into each point to create further thinking”

“The Change Canvas was helpful – I will use it again when I do other things. It helped the way it made me break my ideas down into parts. And it made me think about things I wouldn’t have considered – like who does my change affect, or who my allies are”

A nominating CEO also commented on the tool: “creating the canvass really helps to think through a project or services.”

A wide variety of benefits were identified in using this method. It was found to directly contribute to leadership practice in supporting participants to more clearly articulate their vision; plan strategically and provide direct and purpose; stay motivated and adapt; build and use partnerships; and support the planning and taking of action. In addition, several participants attributed improvements in their business planning and impact measurement skills to the use of this model ([see impact section](#)).

One participant found the change canvas useful but was clear she wouldn’t have been able to use the tool without ongoing support.

Two participants did not find the model as useful. One already had a plan in place for the project she wanted to lead. However, she did see its value when dealing with rapid change

“It came in a bit handier as an emergency tool for change when the Coronavirus hit.”

And she did value the concept of “change experiments” which encouraged her to take risks and explore a completely different approach to testing a new fundraising product.

The other participant who did not find it helpful thought the tool was good in theory but did not work in practice for them. They reflected this may have been because they had recently started a new senior role and felt under too much pressure to focus on their change plan and project.

Tools for developing empathy and understanding user experiences

Design thinking has a strong emphasis on empathising with the person you are designing a change, product or service for. We introduced “customer journey maps” to analyse how people might experience your service or solution, and a tool for “empathy mapping”:

We knew we would not have access adjustments right straight away. Participants report how they appreciated the continued attention paid to accessibility beyond the original arrangements:

“I watched as (the facilitator) had a complex task ahead of her facilitating so many different needs. I found it encouraging as she asked many questions re accessibility to further develop and learn for next time. I valued the open conversations and tackling the elephant in the room that so often is ignored. It really got my attention”

“I felt exhausted emotionally after the first training session, the other emotion I felt was frustration. The following Monday morning I was happy to turn on my laptop to receive an email from (the facilitator) around my access needs and her observations. We exchanged a few emails regarding this and concerning how the next session could be more accessible. It was clear from the first session it wasn't just support around my deafness that I needed but also regarding my neurodiversity. I was very pleased to receive such a supportive email and it made me feel more understood which allowed me to feel hopeful again. I felt honesty and genuineness in the emails, just like in the session and this is extremely important to me as it allowed me to feel safe enough to be vulnerable on the course. I then was able to really benefit and get the most out of this programme. I continued to feel this support throughout which was a fundamental part of my development and experience.”

Supporting participants to articulate and understand each other's access needs

Introducing the design cycle through a practical exercise on making the training environment accessible and comfortable for all also had the immediate result of enabling participants to articulate their own access support needs and empathise with others'. The exercise revealed all sorts of access issues that would not always be addressed in training sessions and had not been requested by people before the workshop. This included not changing layout between each session (confusing for people with visual impairment); changing lighting, temperature, use of breakout rooms and creation of screened off areas (to lower sensory overload); design of furniture layout (to improve access for wheelchair and scooter users); more variety of creative supplies and exercises (so people with different skills and interests get a chance to play to strengths); clearly labelled areas for different kinds of activities (to lower anxiety by being clear what expectations/focus is planned); keeping meal breaks strictly separate from activities or networking time (to prevent exclusion of people with access needs around eating).

Using interactive, creative and flexible activities

Workshops were centred around interactive and creative games and activities. Human centred design techniques are heavily focused on creativity and innovation, but we were

aware that the off the shelf tools are not always accessible. So, we introduced some standard techniques from human centred design toolkits^{8 9}, and experimented with adapting others into arts and crafts and role play approaches to improve access.

These approaches were highly valued, even if participants found them challenging. Activities were rated separately. 75% of participants found the lowest scoring activity helpful. 100% found the highest scoring activity helpful

- “The games were a good idea. They helped me with thinking creatively”
- They made the sessions “fun, engaging, positive and creative”
- “I switch off if there is too much talking”
- “If I am asked what I dislike the most my quick response would be crafts! During the sessions I was asked to express myself via crafts a number of times. I felt huge disliking and frustration with this to be honest. I guess this was due to feeling extremely flabbergasted about how I could possibly express myself this way. It was also quite challenging questions that can be complex to verbally explain, never mind via crafts!....I believe my actual words were “Pete’s sake!” to myself when told this task, and I’m sure I gave out a vibe of “this sucks” but still, with encouragement and support, it didn’t kill me. In fact, if you ask me now what one of the most valuable experiences of the training days were for me I may have to answer crafts, though I don’t like to admit that.”

Confidence to use design activities again themselves within their projects was lower, ranging between 38-78% for the standard human centred design activities and steady at 67% for the activities adapted into arts and crafts or games-based activities. This suggests that adapting activities is important. It also suggests that providing more training so people can practice techniques for longer is probably needed before people feel confident in using them in their own practice.

Leaders appreciated the flexibility brought by the range of activities on offer and the freedom of choice:

“different tools were offered and we were free to use which one we felt more adaptable, accessible and easy to understand and follow”

“I liked the flexibility of how the group exercises were done – there was always another way of doing things if someone got stuck”

“(the facilitator) was helpful in helping me find a different way to do things”

⁸ <https://www.designkit.org/>

⁹ <https://designthinking.ideo.com/>

“the choice of tasks on the agenda which made it stand out that this programme was not the average leadership programme or what I was expecting.”

In the programme review workshops leaders suggested even more variety of activities in the future, particularly more role play and acting out of scenarios and challenges.

Pace of sessions

Leaders had different preferences for pace of delivery and different processing styles. This wasn't something we got right for everyone. One felt the training “was delivered at a pace which was user friendly”. Four felt the sessions were too rushed:

“by the time we have all settled in and actually started working, it sometimes felt a little rushed as we needed to get through an agenda. Sometimes there was not enough time to work on tasks, to fully grasp and understand in depth knowledge”

“a lot to take in because of concentration and processing issues”

“ a little extra time in the schedule planning, to run over, or longer activities, would be good as people work at different paces. Can be hard to process information when presented at pace, but this is a common factor in training in general.”

Some suggestions for improvements were:

- To break down the training into “shorter sections and using simpler language”
- Providing more written information (in large font with some Easy Read support) before the course
- Providing more detailed notes (perhaps distributing palantypist notes) or a video of the session for people who need more time to process information or go back over things they feel they have missed
- Having a second facilitator to provide more support in groupwork sessions

Two people felt the pace was too slow and one of these felt that the training group should have been split

“the group sessions were awkward – some people had no employment experience, other people had extensive employment experience, so there was a lot of boats sailing past each other in the night, different people talking past each other. It might have been good for me 20 years ago, but where I am now, the group work didn't benefit me....I'd suggest perhaps split the group into early-career and mid-career participants.”

This was discussed and very strongly rejected in the review workshop. We were able to think together about how the quality of people's leadership practice and their success in leading change during the programme had absolutely not been related to their seniority in organisations, the amount of paid work experience they had, or their learning and processing styles. We were able to explore how stereotypes about leadership but also about different impairment groups are at play even within a group of Deaf/Disabled leaders. We concluded that having people with such different levels of work experience, impairments and life experiences working together was hugely beneficial. As one leader pointed out

“I was interested to see everyone on the course were at different levels within their organisation (CEO, Trustee, Project Worker, Volunteer), but this didn't make any of us less of a leader because this programme showed us we all have the makings of a great leader in each of us. We are passionate about our cause, we have a vision, determination to make a positive change and the spark that inspires other to support our change.”

Travel

Travel to Brixton was difficult for 3 participants. Suggestions were for delivering the training in a more central London location in future or having a mixture of local meetings and online training. However later sessions were online because of covid 19 lockdown and this raised different access issues for some leaders. This probably needs to be thought about in relation to each round of the programme, depending on participants' travel access needs.

Improvements Planned:

- More training workshops extending further into the programme, with the opportunity to try out a wider range of human centred design tools, and opportunities to practice using them more
- More variety of creative activities
- More support to revisit key techniques and reflect on what is working in practice, via facilitated peer groups ([see peer support](#)).
- Further improvements to accessibility: more written information before and during the programme, with Easy Read translation; siting the training sessions in different areas of London and considering the mix of online and face to face training dependant on access needs of participants; and a second facilitator in training sessions to support group work

3. Leading a real change project

Did leading a real change project allow participants to take control, gain confidence, and explore and break down barriers to leadership?

Seven of the nine leaders who completed the whole programme fed back that leading a real change project they were passionate about was a highly valued and effective part of the programme. The change projects leaders chose were very varied:

A participant who was already a DDPO trustee and also runs her own small social business aimed to address social isolation and give marginalized people a voice through participatory arts. She made huge progress in developing new partnerships and attracting funding to scale up her work. She is particularly proud of her success in adapting to the challenges of the Covid 19 lockdown by rapidly moving her drama workshops online. Working on her project contributed greatly to her leadership practice. Importantly, it gave her tangible evidence of her own abilities and the impact she could have, which boosted her confidence and motivated her to set her goals even higher.

Another leader who is a paid member of staff within a DDPO, and an individual campaigner, aimed to form local campaigning groups for blind and partially sighted people to advocate for access and equality in their local areas. She feels that practically putting learning into action was key:

“this programme helped me significantly in making progress, as there were elements which I would never have thought about....I prefer putting our learning into action, as opposed to just being talked at. We were able to put our individual projects as examples to work with and to put into action, and our learning was great for my development and for me to get a real sense of achievement. I usually need to practice something a few times before it really becomes second nature”.

The Director and an unpaid member from an organisation run by and for people with learning difficulties worked together on a project to set up more opportunities for their members to socialise. They approached it from two different angles based on their leadership goals. The member focused on leading development of new social activities. The Director focused on providing better support to enable members to design their own services. Working on a real change was a valued experience for them. The organisation has recently become independent from its local Mencap. Being able to challenge stereotypes and prove that people with learning difficulties can successfully control their own organisations and services is crucial to them. Working through a real change project was powerful proof of their ability:

Before lockdown “we managed to run one Sleaford club night which was brilliant – it went really well. It was the first time Safety Net has done this since becoming independent. So I was completely in charge – if anything went wrong it was my neck on the block! But it went fine. Holding Sleaford was a relief – everyone wanted it to happen. And it was important to show ourselves that we could do it on our own as an independent organisation” (Director)

“I worked as a volunteer organiser. It felt really good. Before I had just gone along and enjoyed the club night. I think I realised how important our ideas are. Other social clubs and organisations run brilliant events but they are run by people who aren’t Disabled. And people who go there are afraid to go clubbing anywhere else. That’s why we have to train people to do their own social lives as well as run club nights and events ourselves. It was good that I managed to get a plan of how we can make the change happen. That is progress” (Organisation member, and now trustee).

Another leader who is a paid staff member in a DDPO wanted to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of the organisation she worked for by developing a financial model to analyse and better plan use of staff and resources:

“with so many DDPO’s closing around us, I wanted to develop a financial model that would not only show (the DDPO) where their weaknesses were but address them before they became a problem. I also wanted to use the financial model to explore a way to address a common theme when working for DDPOs, it is common for staff to feel like we are constantly firefighting. My personal experience is that I do not produce my best work in this environment. Part of my change plan was to find out why this was happening and explore a shift in this way of working, as I believe it is costly in staff energy and the results aren’t what they could be....When I started my change plan, I lacked confidence and there were gaps in my knowledge that made me question if I could be a Leader within an organisation like mine. Learning about Financial Modelling was an amazing experience because it is a blueprint to how an organisation runs from the inside out.”

The process of working practically through a particular area of organisational development was really important to this leader in both developing her organisational management skills but also radically reframing how she saw her own abilities as a leader and her understanding of how organisational structures and under resourcing can constrain staff performance and development

“my whole life I have believed that I needed to work harder, go the extra mile, be multifaceted to overcompensate for my disability and the limitations that come with living with a lifelong fluctuating health condition. Working in a DDPO has

helped me learn that there are organisations that support Disabled people in a working environment through flexible working, which works best for me. Despite this I still found that my confidence was lacking, but this leadership programme and mentoring has completely shifted my thinking! I know in a working environment where I am firefighting, I am put in a position where I need to put my work above everything else to get the result that is needed, even if it means working outside my paid hours. This has a negative effect on my health, my relationships and my self-confidence as I don't feel the work produced is a true reflection of me at my best. This project has opened up my world and the way I see it. The importance of having a solid foundation for any organisation, with structures and processes that shape it's service provision, providing staff with the environment that is productive to producing high quality work without compromising their health or relationships or the need to work outside their paid hours to meet deadlines.”

Two leaders did not make as much progress as they had hoped on their specific change project because they dove deep into personal development, but it was still the initial vehicle that allowed them to identify barriers getting in the way of progress:

“Personally, this programme couldn't have come at a better time. I'm not sure if my journey was as it intended by the programme when designing it. I didn't get to fulfil my change plan as much as I had hoped however it did much more for me than allowing me to be successful in a change plan. It allowed me to be supported and guided by professionals who actually understood how to develop someone like me which feels like a unique opportunity and hope others who are in a similar situation can experience.....I now know I have the skills and ability but knew something was stopping me fulling my best but I just couldn't quite figure out what.”

The second of these two leaders wanted to support her organisations' trustees (including herself) to be more proactive and confident. She particularly wanted to find ways to ensure Disabled trustees with limited paid work or management experience understood their value on the Board and confidently used their lived experience. She didn't always feel able to progress all actions in her plan, particularly once lockdown hit. However, she maintained focus on the underlying goal of her project and it was a vehicle for getting out of her comfort zone, setting herself challenges to build her confidence, and make use of alternative opportunities to develop the voice and confidence of herself and other trustees and members. When she presented her progress to her peers at the end of the programme they reflected that she seemed to have moved from passion... to channelling that energy and anger into action....and through to confidence and self-belief.

The final two leaders fed back that they benefited more from other parts of the

programme, particularly peer support groups and coaching, rather than the focus on the change project. One of these had an existing project they had been working on for some time and had already achieved significant success in their vision of developing accessible information for users of mental health services, so working through a practical change project wasn't a fresh approach. The other struggled to focus down in on a particular change project because of work pressures in a new senior management role.

From the perspective of the facilitator, with leaders working on specific change projects it was easy to continually review how their actions could contribute to leadership practice development. Working on practical projects raised real problems to solve, tangible challenges to set, real evidence of their strengths or weaknesses, opportunities to notice and help them recognise actual progress on leadership elements, and actual examples of barriers to try to challenge (not necessarily ones that were initially expected).

This reflects the same learning from the last six years of running the Business Development Project at Inclusion London. At the end of training courses people may feel that they have benefited and understood, but it is when they put the tools and techniques into real practice, with coaching support where necessary, that they can start really progressing, thinking about what they still need to learn, what the barriers are, and embedding their learning into real life to have actual impact.

[Were the change projects beneficial to DDPOs? Did they provide solutions to problems rather than create extra work?](#)

Most nominating DDPOs report significant positive impacts for the organisation, from improved skills and confidence of participants but also because of the practical change projects. These brought improvements in governance, financial management, organisational development and service design, as well as benefits from new funding and partnerships. These are discussed [later in the report](#).

In focus groups before the programme, DDPO senior managers raised that sending people on training puts pressure on DDPOs, financially and because of having to cover work outputs. This is a barrier to staff development. Some were concerned this programme would do the same, particularly because the change projects would create expectations on the organisation for support.

Mostly DDPOs found that participants' work on their change projects didn't place major demands on them. Very much, nominating CEOs/managers have seen their role as encouragement and a sounding board, or for ideas generation, rather than having to provide extensive support:

“To be honest I haven’t felt that I had to provide a huge amount of support. She is very proactive and I know, having worked with her in the past, that she will come to me when she has a question. Often I merely provide a sounding board - she has great ideas and often just needs to be able to talk them through”

“Talking through and making suggestions around her ideas and change project; providing encouragement; talking through her insights and experiences on the programme.”

Participants appreciated guidance and support they received from nominating DDPOs:

“Catch-ups with the CEO and others encouraged me to keep going with my Change Plan. Support from my DDPO motivated me and made me realize the progress I needed to make”

“Time when needed with CEO, opportunity to prove myself and faith in my abilities.”

Some participants also received practical assistance from managers or other staff but without this causing particular pressure on the organisations:

- One leader received support with writing a funding application
- Three received support with data and information needed for their projects
- Several were supported to access further training
- Some were supported with introductions to change partners
- Some were supported with communications for their projects, eg advertising events on websites and social media.

For two organisations the programme has caused some pressures:

One participant left their employment part way through the programme which caused pressure to get her project finished before she left. This had some impact on other staff because of information they needed to supply more quickly than expected.

In the other, the nominating manager felt that although sufficient funding was provided to backfill the participant’s post, the logistics of arranging that backfill was a pressure. In addition, the participant’s manager changed during the programme. This meant the DDPO felt less involved and connected with what their participant was doing later in the programme. Her manager reflects

“I can see that I should have more thoroughly handed over to her Line Manager to ensure this involvement continued.”

This was particularly challenging because this participant worked deeply on her personal development during the programme which was not always an easy or comfortable process. Her nominating manager reflects that

“I think she made huge strides on the programme in terms of her personal and professional development. This development was not without its personal challenges. From my point of view, I felt that her exploration of the barriers she faces every day, some of which she hadn’t previously articulated or understood in the way that she came to through the programme, was at times an emotionally gruelling experience for her. I think this experience was ultimately very positive, as she outlines in her report. However, as her Manager I am aware that at times I did feel concerned about the impact on her wellbeing and unsure how to effectively walk beside and support her on her journey. Nevertheless, she and I have both worked hard to improve communication between us at challenging times and are committed to continuing to do so.”

It is clear that in future rounds we need to build in more guidance on expectations of managers so they are clear on their role. As one said

“I also feel that it wasn’t clear at the start what my role was and how I should support (my nominee). I think some guidance around this would be helpful. Just to help me make sure that the expectations were and how and when I should be offering support and advice.”

Similarly, more regular liaison with DDPOs would allow DDPOs to keep track of what was happening on the programme, but also enable them to raise any issues or unexpected impacts so that support and solutions could be explored. One suggestion was for

“regular emails from (the facilitator) letting me know where they were on the programme and what was being covered. I know we had the outline, but we all get busy and we lose track. An email after the workshops almost reminding us to check in and where they were in the journey would have been helpful”.

All DDPOs have reported that programme funding to DDPOs was appreciated to enable backfill of posts, or to cover access costs. Levels of funding were sufficient except that one DDPO had to top up the training budget ([see further training and support](#)).

Improvements planned

Focusing on a practical change plan is clearly an important and beneficial part of the programme and will be maintained in future rounds.

See [advertising and recruitment section](#) for improvements we will make to ensure recruits and nominating DDPOs fully understand the change project part of the programme and know what to expect.

We will provide more guidance to nominators on their role during the programme and regular 3 way communication between facilitator, participant and their nominator so that DDPOs are kept up to date on the programme and their nominees progress, and so that any support needs, or unexpected impacts and pressures can be discussed.

4. Regular coaching support to progress change project and continually reflect on leadership practice

Leaders were able to access coaching from the programme facilitator for initial support to draw up their initial change canvas, and then flexibly whilst they progressed their change project. They used an average of 1.5 hours coaching per month after they had finished drawing up their change canvas.

Flexible coaching support was valued by all the participants. Two found coaching, together with peer support, more valuable than other parts of the programme. Leaders used it for a very wide range of support, depending on their learning needs and change plans. In their reports they noted the value of coaching for:

- **Identifying learning goals**
- **Identifying other appropriate training, development and resources** and support to address any access barriers to using these
- **Coaching to implement learning** from other practical training courses or resources. Topics covered included impact measurement (3 people); costing services and financial modelling (2 people); fundraising and income generation (3 people); organisational and HR management policies and procedures (2 people); governance and risk management (1 person). Coaching allowed participants to reflect on learning, learn more at their own pace, “to really hone my skills” and build confidence gradually
- **Reviewing progress** with change projects and leadership development and staying motivated and on track “with (the facilitator) reaching out and helping me get back on track, I was able to further develop my change canvas and continue making

progress” . Three people mentioned that this flexibly available support, particularly at times of crisis and uncertainty, was valuable when the Covid crisis hit

- **Encouraging different perspectives and managing conflict**

“prompts to encourage further thinking outside my own. Why have I said or think this and are there other viewpoints. I find this a good technique as sometimes we are limited by our own perspective and having a broader picture really helps to develop an all-round productive plan that stands out”

and

“she also supported me to think differently when I came up against resistance from staff that weren’t as excited about the change as I was”

- Reminders of **human-centred design techniques** to use in generating ideas and problem solving and “tips to help you think through ideas”
- Three people particularly valued coaching input on exploring **access needs, barriers faced and reasonable adjustments** needed to perform most effectively
- Four leaders used it to discuss **new jobs and career opportunities** they were considering, or to think about their future options
“I got a lot out of the time spent on that – really focused on my own areas for development and my career”
- Support to think about **new partnerships**, and introductions to new contacts
- Practical tips, techniques and signposting to tools for **time management, project management, positive thinking, managing procrastination, managing anxiety**
- **Planning ongoing sources of peer support** beyond the programme.

There were different views on the amount of coaching available. The majority of leaders felt the amount of coaching was about right but three felt there should have been more coaching time. This is a fine balance. Coaching was purposefully planned at a low level so that the emphasis was on leaders finding their own solutions, working from their own strengths, and searching out their own opportunities - with signposting and support to overcome barriers to using these, rather than an idea that you need “experts” who can tell you how to do things. As one participant says:

“we had a coach who didn’t tell us what to do - they helped us work together as Disabled people on barriers that stop us being our best, how that made us unconfident and how to change that.”

Experimenting with different levels of coaching will be interesting in future rounds, but it isn’t clear at the moment whether offering higher levels of coaching would actually be beneficial or would take away some of the sense of control and increasing self-reliance. There was clear agreement from the group that having a second facilitator would be

helpful for group work in training sessions -having two cofacilitators in the programme would make it easier to experiment with levels of coaching time during the programme.

One participant felt it would be helpful to bring in a variety of Deaf/Disabled “senior executives” to give motivational speeches about their journeys into leadership. We explored this idea further in the review workshops. There were mixed views about the value of this. There was clear agreement from most of the group that any “role models” used in the programme needed to demonstrate the central message that leaders can be anyone, not just people who have gained a senior management or traditionally recognised leadership role. There was interest shown by nearly all participants in being mentors for future leaders going through a similar programme. This seems like a positive approach to trial in future rounds - graduates from this pilot would make excellent mentors, providing clear evidence of Deaf/Disabled people leading in all sorts of situations, and evidence of finding your own strengths and addressing external barriers to leadership, rather than needing to develop a specific set of skills.

Two participants felt they would have preferred more coaches coming in to train on a range of practical skills. This idea will not be introduced into future rounds since it moves too far away from what makes this programme different from other leadership approaches. Interestingly, in the next section of the report we look at how most participants successfully used signposting to find their own additional coaches, sources of inspiration and peer support, or training that suited their needs and individual development goals. It may be more important to explore how signposting, and support and encouragement to access other opportunities, can be improved so that all participants feel able to do this.

Improvements Planned

Introduce a second facilitator in the programme, to increase support available within training sessions but also allow for experimenting with coaching levels. Test what level provides most effective support without undermining people’s growth in self-confidence and self-reliance

Trial participants from this pilot becoming mentors on the next round of the programme

5. Signposting to further training and support

Each participant had access to a £200 training budget so that they could access other training related to their individual development needs and change projects. This did not cover the full costs of most people's additional training needs and later rounds of the programme need to include a higher training budget. One DDPO topped up training budgets and we were able to offer additional funding for training and support to some participants towards the end of the programme because of extended funding from NLCF. We were also able to signpost several participants on to other free training courses within Inclusion London and externally, as originally planned.

Training included:

- **arts based facilitator training:** “It made me more confident as a group leader and project leader”
- **project management**
- **trust fundraising** (2 people): “It was good as I’m interested to find out how to get money to do things. I didn’t know about this way of getting money before – I knew about doing sponsored walks and swims”
- **impact measurement** (2 people)
- **strategic planning** (1)
- One participant was signposted to a 5 day Sheila McKechnie Foundation **Campaigning and Influencing** course. This is a good example of how it is probably more effective to signpost people onto appropriate courses rather than bringing in coaches to teach on particular topics. This course was far more in depth than we could have offered within a leadership programme and the skills covered would not have been of interest to all the leaders, or relevant to all change projects. For this individual leader it was perfect. It was “useful in gaining additional knowledge, contributed towards enhancing the skills learned on this leadership programme and I learned different techniques of campaigning...Meeting others who were also working on campaigns...meant I was surrounded by people who understood the struggles, the benefits, the passion and drive, and the language around campaigning and influencing became common vocabulary. In addition, they understood the frustrations, the exhaustion and we learned strategies on how to manage and overcome these challenges and also identifying that taking time out is also important as this type of work can be full on and fast paced”.
- **neurodiversity training** for one participant and her team

Four participants found signposting to resources or support helpful, including:

- Research articles related to leadership or individual change projects
- Funding sources
- Templates and guidance related to organizational/business management
- Tailored DPO resources (e.g. Merton CIL's impact measurement toolkit, Inclusion London's business development tools and guidance)
- Signposting to other professionals with particular skills or interests

Several participants used their own initiative, or were encouraged, to set up regular arrangements for support which will continue beyond the programme:

- One has set up a monthly skill share arrangement with another professional-each bringing different experiences and skills “we both find the monthly sessions useful and have enjoyed sharing our growth over the last year. I find each session supports me to grow in confidence and encourages me to stretch myself but in a controlled way.”
- One was able to use programme funding to trial regular formal mentoring sessions with a local Disabled leader. Having experienced how useful this is, she has since secured grant funding to enable herself and other leaders within her organisation to continue receiving regular external support.
- A third participant has set up a peer support group within her organisation for staff who are neurodivergent, ensuring that she has continued support and can share her learning from the programme to benefit other members of her team.

Not all participants found signposting helpful. Barriers to using signposted training or resources were:

- One person couldn't find an accredited peer supporter training course within the programme timeframe. This seems to be a training gap
- Two people said resources are often not in an accessible format (not in plain English or with Easy Read support)
- One finds online resources overwhelming to use “they are often either too vague or very complicated”. “I am not the type to ask for help much. When I did, I was often signposted to resources which I didn't have time to absorb or study”. She preferred it when she arranged 1:1 coaching support to learn about particular topics or skills

- Two people said they didn't have capacity to follow up signposting because of job and other responsibilities or because of difficulties with self-organising and balancing priorities.

We need to explore ways to make signposting to further resources and support more accessible to everyone. One suggestion in the review workshop was to use the peer groups and whatsapp groups for regular discussion of training and resources used, so that people could share which ones were beneficial, accessible, and worth people's time. This was happening more by the end of the programme and will be extended further in future rounds.

Improvements planned

Increase training budget to £600 each

Explore different ways to signpost to other resources and training, including using peer discussion of which resources are beneficial, accessible and worth people's time

6. Peer support

All participants valued the peer support element of the programme:

“It was helpful meeting other leaders, working with new people, getting new ideas, peer support. It was interesting hearing different ideas from different people”

“It was also lovely to meet people from other Voluntary Sector groups and actually see the different way groups work within their organisation – Just wish that section lasted longer”

Benefits of working with peers included practice at articulating vision, improving empathy and listening skills, ideas generation for problem solving and service design, new partnerships, building trust and experience in managing diverse views and conflict. Particularly importantly, working with other Deaf/Disabled people has allowed the programme to take a strong rights and equalities based focus which is an element of the programme people felt was valuable and unique ([see impact section](#)).

[Response to particular elements of peer support:](#)

Peer review of change canvases:

89% found this helpful in the workshops, before starting working on their change project

“I found pairing up and learning from their suggestions beneficial, also learning about their change plan, seeing how some suggestions can link to one another”

Overall I think the workshop was very helpful, especially going through my peers' change plans. I was also very happy about who I was paired up with. I feel we have a lot to offer each other.”

Peer groups:

Three small peer mentoring groups were set up to provide opportunities for shared learning and support. Some felt that splitting into smaller groups meant they missed out

“It felt good to help others in my peer group with my skills and knowledge that will be useful to their change plan, but I felt that the others in my group aren't able to help me so much with my plan as their plan is different from mine. I'm happy to help but I would like more support on my change plan”

One described splitting into small groups as a “missed opportunity for all the leaders, I felt in my case I had a lot to offer more than just one peer group... I could have given more peer support across the different smaller groups, the same could be said for each of the leaders as we all had wide spectrum of knowledge and skills between us.”

Furthermore, after introductions two of the peer groups were left to self-organise. This did not work well. It wasn't until several months into the programme that participants started really supporting each other and then not necessarily within their allocated peer groups. One of the groups was facilitated (see below) and this group recognised the advantages of this

“our peer group definitely benefited by having (the facilitator) organise the agendas, tasks and accountability and I know this would have been a very different experience if it was not chaired or arranged by (them).”

Several other participants felt that regular facilitated peer support would have helped particularly because of the long gap between the first 3 workshops and the last 2

“For me personally, what I think didn't go so well was the long gap between group meetings, this and the additional challenges of COVID-19, managing home and work life balance as well as home schooling and a few changes at work, meant I didn't cope as well and put this project at the back of my mind.”

We were able to respond to this later in the programme, with additional funding offered by NLCF, by setting up monthly facilitated meetings for the whole group, focused on

themes chosen by the group (eg motivation and delegation). These have been well attended and appreciated

“thanks so much for all the information shared today. I found it so useful and appreciate the support more than you know.”

Additionally, later in the programme we followed up the suggestion from one leader of a whatsapp group to connect the group. This has been used to share resources and opportunities, share challenges and achievements, and provide emotional support, particularly at difficult times such as moving into the second lockdown.

Facilitated peer meetings for the whole group and a whatsapp group will be built into future programmes from the start. Participants also suggested some other methods to extend peer support which we can explore, such as extending networking time within training days, exchange visits to each other’s organisations, or shadowing peers who are working on similar change projects.

Focused peer group:

With one peer group we experimented with a different approach. In the first workshop when we explored access barriers and design of the programme, it was clear that some leaders were experiencing access barriers related to neurodiversity and/or mental health that are often less visible or hard to pinpoint or express.

We decided to test out working with this group in a different facilitated way to think about these invisible barriers to leadership in more depth and explore solutions together. The programme facilitator was able to offer this given her own lived experience as a neurodivergent person. All three leaders in this group valued this highly, with two describing it as perhaps the most useful or impactful part of the programme. As one says:

““I was surprised that it would be these discussions that would end up having the biggest impact in me in such a massive manner” and “this is the first time I haven’t had to tell people what I need”

We explore the particular benefits for this group further in the [impact section](#).

One of this focused group is also a Deaf BSL user. He felt isolated on the programme as the only BSL user and reflected that having a similar peer group of other BSL users led by a Deaf facilitator would have been similarly beneficial for analysing particular leadership barriers and working together to develop solutions.

“Having a shared background is so important, you can just jump over all the tedious basic stuff and go straight to the core of the issue.”

We discussed the idea of focused peer groups with the wider group and reflected on the dangers of going too far along this route and ending up with a medical model approach of working only with people in the same impairment group. It was appreciated that to address barriers to leadership that are less visible, or hard to articulate, or to build an initial shared strength and understanding between a group of people facing shared barriers, focused groups are probably a crucial part of the process for some people, at least initially, and that this is a helpful element to carry on in future rounds. However, there was strong agreement that overall, an essential part of the programme’s value is its inclusion of Deaf/Disabled people from widely different backgrounds and across impairment groups. We all learned enormously from this variety of lived experience. Focused groups will only work well as part of that wider shared learning. Learning is clear from round one that focused groups should be in addition to whole group facilitated peer groups, rather than instead of.

Improvements planned

Facilitated peer meetings with the whole group and whatsapp group from the start

More networking time built into workshops

Experiment with other forms of peer support such as exchange visits to each other’s DDPOs or shadowing people doing similar change projects

Consider other focused small peer groups to explore particular shared leadership challenges for example for Deaf leaders, leaders with learning difficulties who experience particular stereotypes about their ability to lead, or leaders experiencing intersectional barriers. It would be important for these groups to be facilitated by people with lived experience of the specific barriers being explored

The impact of the programme

Impact on leadership practice:

We measured the change in people's leadership practice using a self-assessment questionnaire at the start and end of the programme (8 out of 10 participants completed both questionnaires). Each leader also produced a self-reflective report towards the end to explore their experience of the programme and its impact.

1. Vision for change (18% improvement in total scores):

This showed the greatest change. This leadership area scored the lowest total across participants at the start. All but 1 participant improved their score and there was an 18% increase in the total score across participants.

Participants all started the programme with an idea for a change they wanted to make, but having to draw up a "change canvas" helped them systematically think through their vision for change and how to communicate it clearly and confidently:

"The change plan helps us explain our change in a clearer way, which helps us engage with others who will support the implementation and support to make the change happen"

"Writing about my project as a solution (participatory arts) to a problem (social isolation and a lack of engagement in the community) helped me to communicate this effectively to funders. Pinpointing my "Change Partners" helped me to connect with people and organisations and I was able to clearly communicate my project idea/ proposal."

They also had to present their canvas to peers on the programme, which gave them practice and confidence in telling people about their vision in a compelling way:

"Being passionate and having self-belief and having the confidence to articulate your point across is a skill I have grown stronger in."

A nominating manager agrees

"I think she has demonstrated her ability to shape a vision and to communicate this effectively to colleagues and other stakeholders."

2. Confidence (15% improvement in total scores):

This was the second lowest scoring indicator at the start. The majority of leaders reported increased confidence, with a 15% increase in the total scores on this by the end of the programme. Higher confidence showed itself in a number of ways.

Leaders feel more able to speak up:

“I am more vocal, not sure if everyone is happy with that, as when I’m on a tangent on my soap box, you then can’t shut me up, especially if I think I’m right”. This leader feels more able to put across her views locally and fight for local Disabled people’s rights “I don’t think twice”

“This programme has helped me develop my assertiveness and approaching difficult conversations in a professional manner”

“I wanted to be more assertive when leading workshops, whilst still maintaining the user-led approach. I have been assertive, and I feel like I have made my voice heard in workshops and meetings. I wanted to make my voice heard at Board meetings. I now feel more comfortable and confident to do this.”

Nominators agree

“Her confidence has increased and she is making her views heard at Board meetings”

“I think she is more confident and more ready to put forward her ideas and thoughts. She is much more ready to speak up.”

Some of the leaders feel more confident in managing their work:

“My self-confidence has improved and feel confident delivering projects”

“I wanted to improve my self-confidence, part of this process has made me realise it wasn’t my confidence that was lacking but rather my management of my own time and workload. By getting this right I have improved my ability to produce a better standard of work and my confidence has grown so much as a result”

“I’m more confident now. I’m more social too. I’m getting involved much more”. This leader’s nominator agrees: “She is much more confident. She knows she can do things on her own now. She has also learnt that it’s OK to have support and how helpful it can be.”

Some feel more confident in asserting their role as leaders:

“The programme did help me to be more assertive and confident in putting myself forward as a leader, knowing I had the faith of my CEO and fellow staff to come on this IL course”

One described how she has gained confidence from realising she has skills and knowledge to share with her peers

“It improved my self-esteem and allowed me to realise I do have a team behind me even though I am a volunteer. I think I am a lot happier to take a little of other staff members time when I need to. I feel more comfortable that I have earned & deserve that time now!”

Nominators agree

“I have seen a substantial change in her over the past few months. She appears more confident in taking charge and making decisions related to the organisation.”

Several have felt confident to take on new leadership roles as a direct result of the programme, which we detail later.

3. Providing a sense of direction and purpose: (no significant change in scores):

Participants scored themselves highly in this at the start and there wasn't much change in total scores.

However, in their reports, and in the review workshop, the group did comment that this too was an area the “change canvas” was useful for. It helped clearly set out the steps needed to make a planned change happen and why a particular approach had been chosen. This made it easier to provide direction to other people involved:

“the change plan supported me in creating a plan which you can go back to update, amend and keep track of your process. I am usually one for writing in brief, or lists which only I would really understand, but now truly understand the benefit of having a solid Change Plan”

“I have a lot of things in my head and struggle to communicate this to others without losing a large part of what I am really trying to verbalise. The change plan allowed me to express this in an organised way. It was helpful for others to see my ideas and plan clearer which then allowed for better feedback and team work.”

One leader reflected in how providing direction and purpose has been particularly important during the Covid 19 crisis.

4. Positive outlook, adaptability and resilience (11% improvement in total score):

This was the third lowest scoring indicator at the start of the programme and we saw an 11% increase in the total score across participants. This was particularly impressive given leaders were trying to continue their change projects during Covid 19 lockdown.

Some felt more positive, motivated, and determined:

“The leadership programme motivated and inspired me which helped me make progress”

“I learnt that I am capable of leading change and making positive things happen. I learnt the importance of maintaining continuity and not giving up”

“I think that although she will not be able to run the event this year, this programme has helped her to think through it all again and if anything has made her more determined to deliver it” (nominator).

The change canvas was helpful for some to maintain motivation and resilience and adapt when stuck:

“For me, it was good to keep updating it to track progress or make amendments and additions once each theme required further exploration. I feel with putting everything in order and working through my Change Plan, updating it and using it as a base model helped me keep on track”

“it helped me stay on track and if I felt stuck it reminded me of the different ways at looking at the change process.”

There were some particularly impressive examples of adaptability and resilience:

“When the Covid-19 pandemic started, I quickly adapted my Change Plan. I turned things around in these unprecedented times by taking my workshops online”

This leader worked creatively with Deaf/Disabled people in her leadership group and other people from within their DDPOs on the design and online delivery of workshops, to ensure they were accessible to people who are usually digitally excluded. She knew Deaf/Disabled people were being particularly badly affected by Covid and lockdown and she immediately adapted her participatory theatre approaches to respond to that:

“I led and organised a live YouTube performance which explored Disabled people’s experiences of the pandemic.... The performance will give Disabled people a voice at a time when Disabled rights are being denied. The play and the audience participation will involve the community and change perspectives. This is my vision for change and this is how I am taking action”.

Another leader’s nominator noted

“She started this programme at a time when a major organisational restructure was taking place and she remained committed to bringing about the change at a time when she, along with other staff, were concerned about their employment, thereby demonstrating personal resilience”. Nominating manager

Some leaders reflected that maintaining a positive outlook becomes easier as you achieve initial success and gain evidence of your own skills. For example, at the start of the programme one of the leaders needed guidance and support on how to gain funding for her change project. She quickly showed such progress in writing strong bids that when Inclusion London were commissioned to support DDPOs with emergency funding bids, we were able to offer her paid consultancy work supporting other DDPOs:

“The applications were successful which made me feel useful and like I am doing the right thing. My confidence in my abilities increased. Successful funding applications have given me a positive outlook”.

5. Bringing diverse people and views together (8% increase in total score)

Supporting leaders to think systematically in their “change canvases” about who their potential “change partners” could be and how they would engage and communicate with them has opened up all sorts of new successful partnerships.

Leaders feel more confident to collaborate and work with partners to achieve change

“I have improved my leadership practice by inspiring others and building links.”

Nominating DDPOs agree:

“She has further built her confidence in engaging with people to bring about change”

“She has built really good relationships with a number of organisations across London”

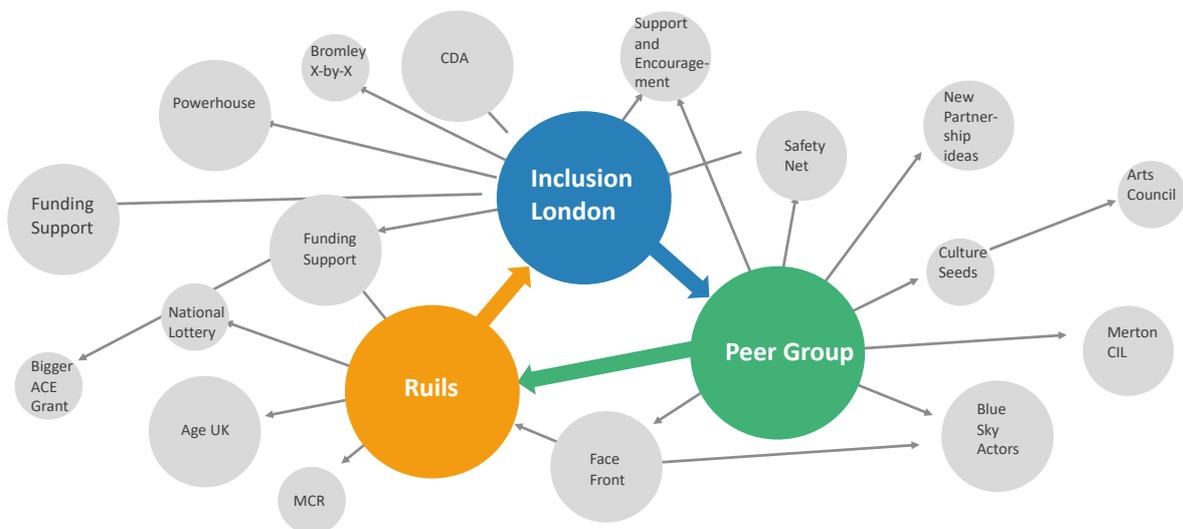
“We see (her) linking more with Disabled people in senior roles around London, people she really respects. We think this is really good. It will help (her) to talk to more experienced Disabled people and learn from them.

In her self-reflective report, one leader drew maps of all the new partnerships she planned and nurtured, both in working on her change project, and through new leadership challenges she has taken on during the programme:

Planning Partnerships



New partnerships and relationships with DDPOs



She identified how she used new partnerships for a range of purposes:

- New partnerships particularly in the homelessness and youth sectors, which she had not worked with before, have allowed her to diversify who she is reaching with her collaborative theatre work
“(My programme) has brought together diverse people including refugees, BAME people, elderly and disadvantaged people to share their views”
She reports feeling energized and excited by the new ideas this has brought to performances.
- She has been able to scale up her work. She has expanded her reach into other geographical areas by developing new links with DDPOs in Camden, Merton and Hammersmith and Fulham and getting them excited and enthusiastic about her participatory theatre approach. She recognizes this is mutually beneficial:
“Partner DDPOs benefit from my approach and we learn from one another. I share my skills and experience, they share their local knowledge and expertise.”
Meanwhile her audiences have increased
“Due to a new partnership...I am likely to surpass my target audience by 350 people.”
- She has been able to engage new skilled Disabled facilitators to work on her programmes via DDPO relationships, which has been mutually beneficial. One of the new facilitators is also a leader on this programme, who says
“it’s done me the world of good, being prepared to be foolish. I communicate better now. It’s helped me to listen and then shout”
- She has used her peers on the leadership programme group for mutual support and encouragement
- New work and ideas generated from partnerships have allowed her to attract more funding from existing and new funders.

6. Empathising, and being aware of your own feelings and behaviours and their impact on others (10% increase in total score)

Within the initial training workshops we paid a lot of attention to empathy. Practically learning about a “design cycle” by exploring the training environment together was effective in getting the leaders to think about other people’s perspectives:

“At the time, it wasn’t quite understood why we spent significant time on this, but now reflecting back and remembering thinking about it afterwards, it was great to understand everyone’s way of working.”

Working with peer support groups has helped with some people’s listening and empathy skills:

“I think the peer meetings have been good for (her) – I haven’t seen it but I get the sense that she has been supportive to others and I think working together and providing and receiving support is a very useful skill. I think (she) has become a better listener”.

Another leader talked about how she used her peer support group to think through resistance to her change project by another member of staff, and techniques she could use to understand their perspective.

The leader who rapidly redesigned her approaches in response to Covid 19 is able to see how redesigning with empathy results in service quality and satisfaction:

“We are empathising and connecting with people at a difficult time when contact is vital as isolated people have become more isolated. I have conducted a survey with a high positive response to our online work”.

7. Building trust and ownership (no significant change in score)

This was high scoring at the start and scores didn’t change significantly. Nevertheless, there were clearly improvements in specific leaders’ practice here. Some participants talked about how the emphasis on empathy and the practice of using creative approaches has helped them to think about how they build engagement, participation and trust within their change projects

“I... learned how to be more assertive and at the same time look at certain things in a different way. For instance, not everyone finds the same approach user friendly, the environment, the technology and different learning styles was something we all should bear in mind. This particularly helped me think about my own project and the different people with different abilities, the way of working, communication skills and so forth and how I would need to be approachable, adaptable and explore individual needs and requirements for the Engagement Champions to fully flourish and succeed in their volunteering experiences. I also started thinking more about impact, measurement, alternatives and evaluation processes.”

“I encouraged my teammates from (other DDPOs) to take ownership of the project.

We have built a huge amount of trust and this trust extends to the beneficiaries who are the participants”.

Some leaders have made positive progress in learning how to delegate and share control

“I have achieved two of the original goals... working with others – delegating and building trust with colleagues. I am still struggling to pick the right people for the right tasks, feeling overwhelming anxiety when delegating jobs which are time sensitive, but beginning to wonder if it’s the questions I am asking not them or their capabilities and that I think will be my next challenge!”

Her nominating CEO agrees

“She has been trying hard to delegate which is something she finds very difficult to do. Although she may not have achieved as much as she wanted to, I think she is very aware of the need to do this and with some support will be able to do it more in the future....I think she has made some really positive steps forward which will really benefit her”

One leader really wanted to improve her communication with and management of staff. She joined the programme with an unpaid member from her organisation and it has been valuable for her to see this member make her own leadership development journey. Watching her develop confidence and achieve successes in her change plan has been a perfect way of seeing the real benefits of building trust and allowing people to take ownership and control

“I wanted to improve being able to ask other people to do things, rather than just doing them myself. I think I’ve got better at letting people do things....What’s been difficult is that I haven’t had people around me to ask that I had confidence in. I now feel confident that (the member) could make social groups happen and will support her to do this on her own”.

8. Encouraging curiosity, questioning and debate (11% increase in total score)

One leader reflects on how she has been able to encourage curiosity, debate and uncomfortable topics within her change project

“I wanted to use theatre to explore with participants the issues that are affecting their lives. I did this and we explored a plethora of issues including family problems, racism and institutional bullying... In planning the workshops, we debate scenarios and the workshops are a space for people to question and discuss the issues that are currently affecting them.

Leaders and their nominators have commented on how the programme has encouraged openness to debate and helped leaders to be more comfortable with managing uncomfortable feelings that come up with conflicting views:

“I had conversations which were both difficult to initiate and fear of the outcome would previously deter me from challenging such discussions, but I found myself having these conversations with the guidance of this programme and skills I learned, allowing my fear of confrontation not consume me but actually having a conversation highlighting my concerns and sharing my thoughts”

“In the past, (she) has had some difficulty taking on board ideas and critiques and I think working with (the facilitator) has helped (her) to listen to what is being said, reflect on it and even if she doesn't make the change – she has assessed the advice. This is a great skill for a trustee as often there are conflicting views that need to be debated.”

One of the leaders has reflected on how the programme has helped her raise really difficult conversations at work about meeting her access needs. She has had both the opportunity to explore access barriers in a supportive environment (see point 10) and reassurance within the programme that debate and conflicting views are manageable. This has allowed her to bring these difficult issues up at work with her manager

“together we opened up and were able to start looking for solutions together, facing the things both myself and my ex employers had struggled to address or identify. This was a difficult meeting for us both as there are no easy answers as I am still on a journey figuring things out. It was a fundamental conversation that I was ready to have due to this programme.”

9. Taking Action (2% improvement in total score)

This was the third lowest score at the start. There wasn't a big change in the scores by the end of the programme. Despite the small change in self assessed scores, there is clear evidence of more confident action taking already detailed throughout this report. Some leaders also noted interesting changes in taking action within their report:

Two found that using a “change canvas” helped with more strategic approach to action

One found the change canvas particularly helpful for “evaluating your progress, monitoring your processes, outputs and outcomes, and learning about tools which you can use to measure each progress and monitor along the way”

Another's nominating manager says "when (she) has run these workshops before it has been under the umbrella of (her DDPO). I think (she) has been more proactive...she seems to have adopted a very methodical and organised approach to delivering the workshop and play and I think that is a great skill to have".

The programme supported people to experiment and take considered risks more often

"Taking risks has made me feel in control of my Change Plan. Getting outside of my comfort zone gave me a huge sense of achievement.

One leader took the risk to try to resolve access challenges at work. Meeting with managers about this "was a start of really facing things and developing my learning into action outside my head and into my workplace."

Another enjoyed using a "change experiment" to trial new approaches to fundraising: "It was done with an unusual approach which led to the group questioning with intrigue, creating an engagement I didn't expect".

Several leaders have taken action to start new leadership roles:

- "I have become more confident with the knowledge and tools I have gained, that I felt compelled to apply for a position of a Co-Chair for the BAME committee for the sight loss sector through Vision UK, which I was successful. I don't think I would have applied due to lack of confidence and lack of belief in myself".
- One has applied to be CoChair of a DDPO trustee Board which she says she wouldn't have been confident to do before
- An unpaid member on the programme has progressed into a trustee role
- One has taken on a paid mentoring role with a Disabled participant on another leadership programme.

Two have gained enough confidence that they have taken action towards career progression:

- "I decided to accept a more management position with another DPO, this is a position I wouldn't have had the confidence to have gone for before this leadership course". As her nominator says " she has been successful in obtaining career advancement with another DDPO – we feel that this is a direct result of her involvement in the project"

- Another participant “applied for a job that was very ambitious for my current experience. This was a big deal for me putting myself out there as I wouldn’t have done that due to fear before. However I learned a lot from the experience and am very proud I allowed myself to practice an interview. I feel like the goals I have achieved during this programmes have been really fundamental in my career path”.

It is possible that the relatively low change in scores for this leadership practice area, compared to the big gains in many of the other leadership practice areas, may reflect that some people didn’t make as much progress with their practical change project as they had hoped. Covid 19 lockdown obviously slowed some people down on their change plans, but also some leaders ended up focusing more on personal development than on their change project. Taking action on personal development goals seems to be less valued or harder to acknowledge. And converting personal change and development into action on practical change goals takes time, so it will be interesting to note whether these leaders feel stronger in “taking action” after another 6 months. As one leader says

“though my plan has been there in the background it has been way slower than intentional. I had some meetings with organisations to start some of the practical working together more productively, however I left the meetings feeling more confused than before. This highlighted to me that I needed to build my confidence around how to lead as an authentic self; as a neurodiversity person rather than perhaps a more conventional manner, as I was only left more confused that way and was unable to develop anything. This was when my learning and communication around neurodiversity made more sense to my current role and I started to be really explore and develop though this is still a work in progress!”

We have planned improvements in advertising and recruitment to make it clearer that the change projects are a vehicle to leadership development rather than the end goal, so there is not a sense of disappointment or an idea that they have failed to take action if people don’t complete their project goals.

10.Rights and equalities-based perspective

This was the aspect of the programme that several of leaders felt made it unique

“This programme really was focused on the root of the issue and disability and leadership: what has really prevented us up to this point and a safe place to really

challenge this and maybe find some breakthroughs.”

Better grasp of the Social Model, better knowledge of societal barriers experienced by Deaf/Disabled people, and the impacts personally, and assertiveness in ensuring access support needs are met:

Some of the leaders used coaching and peer support as a safe environment to really explore access barriers and discrimination they experience. The three leaders in the neurodiversity peer group found it a particularly helpful part of the programme:

One said the most helpful part of the programme was

“the sessions focussed on identifying internal barriers linked to disability or mental health or neurodiversity - and reclaiming these barriers and reclassifying them as failures by society to make suitable adjustments. I’m not saying reasonable adjustments! Suitable adjustments to meet what we need as individual Disabled people to be able to work at our best. That’s not just for example ramps and BSL interpreters, it also means adjusting expectations, accepting that we are who we are, that we have different ways of thinking and processing – and then how can we make that clear to our colleagues instead of trying to meet their expectations, or trying to meet what we think is expected from us.”

Another agreed that

“I was surprised that it would be these discussions that would end up having the biggest impact in me in such a massive manner. I recall one of the first being around apologising for ourselves re our communication style. I always apologise for not hearing first time or for explaining myself in metaphors or stories or my directness or even having a completely different outlook to something and answering a question in an unexpected manner or the million questions I like to ask. I didn’t realise the impact apologising for this can have.....I found myself reflecting a lot on discussions around neurodiversity and communication throughout the programme. My journey was very much in drive and I was really digging deep from the word go. Understanding my identity as a neuro-diverse worker/ potential leader and just what this really means to me and the impact around me, good and bad. Once I was able to start understanding some of my strategies in a more explainable manner I could then start to try figure out how to be more approachable and understood while still grabbing on to what really stands out by a neuro-diverse leader and exposing authentic self at work rather than seeing it as a barrier to be ignored. This programme gave me the tools and open conversations to be able to be on a journey, that I could really grow as a person in

this area, which could never have started without a safe place to explore and to feel understood at the same time!”

She reflects that

“I’m not hiding anymore” and “I am also learning to express myself in a way that’s true to myself but is effective to others without sensory overload though that is still a work in progress and on the right direction”.

This leaders’ nominator agrees that she gained

- “-New insights into the barriers she faces as a Disabled person.
- Growing confidence in overcoming these barriers, including how to communicate to others their role in removing barriers where possible.
- Greater self-acceptance and understanding of the impact that some of her negative experiences in the workplace have had on her confidence.”

The third member of the group reflected

“I have ADHD..... It affects my work much more than my deafness – it’s easy to see I’m deaf.... but ‘neurodiversity’, that’s far harder for people to deal with. It’s more invisible.I found it difficult to explain to my colleagues how to adjust to or work around my ADHD, because I hadn’t developed a good understanding of my own requirements, developed wording how to communicate that...I was only diagnosed a few years ago... (but I realised I’ve had it all my life but unlabelled, unidentified), so I have little experience of meeting or working with or learning from other people with ADHD. I’ve made progress in developing an understanding of my communication preferences, specifically around ADHD, not just deafness, and my support requirements for, for example, effective planning, scheduling, communication support, support with staying on track....I developed a better understanding (of how I needed to use my PA) and importantly, how to explain it to the people around me. That’s something that’s going to really benefit me in future leadership roles”.

Other leaders too now feel more comfortable and assertive about asking for support or adjustments and have better knowledge of what to ask for. One participant with learning difficulties was able to access PA support through the programme for the first time. This was a revelation to her

“I found working with my support worker was really good. I was a bit nervous at first as I didn’t really know them. But they were really good – they really understood me. They supported me when I needed it and not when I didn’t need it...I really learnt what good support is. I’d never had someone support work with me like that,

as a PA. I now know the value of someone working with me who understands what I need and what I don't. I am going to find ways to get a PA to help me with things I do in future.”

This organisation has gone on to secure grant funding for independent PA support for trustees and members involved in service development, who cannot get Access to Work funding for support because they are not paid staff.

Another leader says she

“learnt that by avoiding making my neurodiversity a thing it had actually been what may have caused a lot of confusion around me, including to myself. Once I started the conversations around this topic things started to improve.”

This leader has gone on to apply successfully to Access to Work for equipment, PA support and neurodiversity training for her team, which will enable her to do her job and develop to her potential much more effectively. Another has

“learnt more about what I need to get in place before I start a job – and how to best organise it so I can use my time to deliver”.

Better awareness of how lived experience as Deaf/Disabled people contributes to leadership:

Leaders were asked to reflect on this in their reports. Several felt the programme had helped them understand this better

“I made an interesting personal discovery, whereby I realised that my lived experience of disability gave me an advantage. There are acquired skills I overlook as I see them as a way of life but didn't really acknowledged these skills as leadership skills until taking part in this programme. I came to recognise the skills I shared with the other Disabled leaders.”

Particular skills they identified as brought by their lived experience, but not always acknowledged by other people are:

Passion for change:

“I am passionate about supporting Disabled people to have a voice because I understand how important it is to be an influencer over the services Disabled people rely on. This was a shared skill with everyone on the programme and it inspired me to see so many other people who were making a difference to their community.”

Adaptability:

“I feel some people with lived experience are used to adapting to change quicker.....as the systems that are supposed to support us often fail or are subject to regular change”

One could see how they used this skill within the programme itself “The terminology took a while to get used to, by then we all started winging it in our own ways as lived by experience people do. I always like to take different approaches to others anyway.”

Communication and skills for managing relationships with diverse people:

Several of the leaders are managing personal assistants and access support workers on a daily basis, some with support workers changing often over time, giving them extensive experience of clear communication and managing relationships. For those who employ their own assistants eg with direct payments or Access to Work funding, they also have extensive experience of employee management (usually without any initial training), which is often not acknowledged since it isn't happening within a traditional workplace.

One pointed out how “lived experience also allows me to bridge the gap between clients and professionals to get things across. Service users find me a “breath of fresh air” because I get mental health and how they feel, and I take that to the professionals and talk at their level in their language.”

Empathy:

“My lived experience has helped me to empathize with my participants and their situation in order to quickly adapt my project to go online in a way that best suits their needs”

“I am empathetic as a leader because I understand the barriers we face and recognise the opportunity we have on a daily basis, to support and empower all those around us to live their best life too. I felt this too was a shared vision for the other Disabled leaders”

More shared learning with other Deaf/Disabled people and DDPOs:

Leaders found working closely on leadership with a group of Deaf/Disabled peers hugely beneficial. One described it as “personal growth through shared experience”, with another saying “it was so great to meet everyone and work with you all - like a new era.”

This was particularly important for building trust and supporting participants to be more

open to debate and sharing diverse views. Several of the leaders on the programme have relayed multiple, sometimes traumatic, experiences of being undermined, disregarded, and stigmatised because of people's stereotypes. It can be incredibly difficult to come from these experiences and stay open to debate and questioning. But working in a trusting environment with other Deaf/Disabled people allowed the group to analyse and explore the specific differences in discrimination they face. They thought deeply together and honestly challenged and supported each other on solutions, skills they needed to develop, and even their own attitudes that needed to change.

One of the leaders reflects on the benefits of experiencing that trust

“I've got better at finding other people to help me – people I trust and respect. Working with (the facilitator) has been great – she knows how to work with DPOs and just makes things easy! I have worked with another person on the Leadership programme recommended to support me with Access to Work issues. I feel safe to ask her things and talk openly. I have also spoken to (another Disabled professional) locally who has been very helpful with other things, not on this programme. I think people like this will be important to me.”

The programme has also had the wider impact that several of the DDPOs are now working more closely together. Connections made through individual leaders or their change projects have opened up opportunities for sharing information, resources and learning. One of the leaders' participatory theatre work is now happening across a number of DDPOs across London.

Improved understanding of intersectionality:

Thinking about the value of diversity in leadership has been a key part of this programme. For some leaders that has opened up new thinking about intersectionality of discrimination and the value of their wider lived experience. For example, one reflects

“prior to this programme, I never took advantage of being someone who is BAME and has lived experience”.

This leader has taken the step of becoming Co Chair of a BAME Committee for the sight loss sector, with newfound confidence in her value “as someone who really gets and understands the issues facing blind and partially sighted people across London from all walks of life”.

Impact on wider skills development:

By focusing on real change projects of their choice, leaders all went in very different directions and most developed other skills in addition to leadership skills.

- 4 report improvements in **business planning**. One has already embedded the “change canvas” as a template to support business modelling at work and another says she will use it again for future planning. Two felt that they were thinking more strategically about planning and one progressed this further by taking up Inclusion London training on strategic planning. One of the nominators agree that “the process of planning her project, both in terms of the practicalities and strategic thinking, was good experience which she can carry forwards into other projects.”
- **Impact measurement** was one of the elements looked at within change canvases and three leaders mentioned this as an area they had improved in. They all used coaching support within the programme for this. One used Inclusion London training to learn more and implemented a new service evaluation system in her DDPO- the data from which has been used in their annual report later in the year. Another made use of a toolkit developed by a London DDPO to take her understanding further

“I learnt that although I had collected information in my head from meetings, person to person chats and forums, that I had kept no physical notes and therefore had no Baseline for the start of my project to assist in providing an Endpoint evaluation. This would have been invaluable to future funding bids. As a Trustee I have also challenged the amount of impact measurement my DDPO is doing, I understand that it is a tough job trying to equate social impact into a figure! I hope by challenging this it will improve future funding bids, a good reputation is not enough on its own”

- Three have developed new skills in **fundraising and income generation**. Two have improved their **bid writing skills**, one so successfully that she is now supporting other organisations to write bids. One found the change canvas useful in helping them think through resources they needed and potential funding sources. One has gained experience of being on a grants panel
- Two feel that their general **organisation skills** have improved, whilst another has developed skills in using a PA to support them with organizing work and time management
- Two report improvements in **verbal and written communication skills**

- Two report an improvement in their **IT skills** and the range of software they are comfortable using
- 1 learned skills in **financial modelling** to analyse and better plan the use of an organisation's staff and resources.
- One used her training budget and signposting to other support to enhance her **campaigning skills** "I gained additional knowledge on skills, tactics and when to use certain tactics during different stages of a campaigning journey". She has gained confidence and has expanded her podcasting and TV interviews around her campaign goals.

Positive Impact for DDPOs:

Training and development of staff, volunteers, members and trustees

DDPOs who nominated leaders to the programme were clear that the programme had allowed them to invest in training and development of their nominees and this had numerous benefits for leadership practice and wider development (as detailed above).

In addition, some DDPOs noted that finding out about training opportunities via the programme had resulted in other staff accessing training too.

One leader pointed out how important it is for DDPOs to be able to invest in other non-paid members and volunteers

"There is so much potential floating in the voluntary cloud around the outer edge of your DDPO. It is important that you start tapping into this potential!"

She points out that

"Good ideas and projects get buried if Disabled people are only acknowledged as service users....thanks to my successful first projectprofessionals do now take me more seriously, but this does show that lone service users without organisational backing can find it hard to be accepted by professionals as anything more than a service user".

Contributions to governance, particularly from the perspective of lived experience:

The programme has supported one member to progress to being a trustee, and several

trustees are taking on more responsibilities or being more assertive in their role. Examples are:

One leader has supported another Board member to start representing her organisation at local decision-making meetings. She also improved supportive relationships between the Board and senior management team. A manager in this leader's organisation says "she is one of the most accessible board members for our staff team and always keeps an ear on the ground. She has been very involved in supporting the organisation through a difficult period and through it all she has remained positive, helpful and passionate."

A nominator says of another leader "as a trustee (she) is involved in reviewing policies and she can provide insight and ensure that they are friendly and understandable to mental health service users. She makes a valuable contribution at the board meetings and the sub-committees she has joined. She is making a really positive contribution at the board and the sub-committees where she is getting stuck in and helping to make changes at (our DDPO)... (she) has also been a fantastic Ambassador for (our DDPO) – talking about mental health and challenging local providers"

Another states "I think the skills that (she) has learnt will help in her role as a trustee especially when we are looking at our own services and the changes we need to make."

Supporting organisational development:

One organisation recounts that their nominee's focus on financial modelling has resulted in "significant progress on financial modelling, collation of information and highlighting improvements we need to make in various areas. We have a huge range of financial information that we didn't have before – this has helped simplify the funding bid process."

In another organisation the nominee is now contributing to strategic development and business planning which she would not previously have been involved in.

Supporting better service design and improved engagement with Deaf/Disabled people:

DDPOs are very proud of leaders' achievements in this:

"She has learnt to use Zoom and has helped others to get on board. This is great as it means that people are coming along to Your Say (our user involvement & campaigning group) who may not have come as they wouldn't have felt confident to use it."

“She has clearly identified a need for campaigning to be capacity-built in London. Using her experience and discussions with other blind and partially sighted people she has developed a blueprint for change and accountability”.

“She has done brilliantly to restart our club night “Sleeq”. These nights are inclusive events where people with learning difficulties can come to dance, enjoy music and socialise. We think it is the only club night organised by Disabled people for Disabled people. We’re proud of that!”

“She will be delivering the workshops and ultimately the play with (our) clients. It will give people the opportunity to get their voices heard and to gain confidence. We are very proud of our collaborations with (her social business).”

Bringing new funding into DDPOs:

The programme itself brought funding into DDPOs which allowed them to pay for training and access support. In addition:

- Two of the leaders have managed to attract additional funding for their DDPOs related to their change projects. A nominator comments that “this is a huge help to the organisation”
- Improvements in financial modelling at one DDPO has made writing funding bids much easier and contributed to the success of two significant funding bids this year, one of which will help sustain the organisation through the Covid crisis and one which enables the organisation to expand its service delivery
- One leader has written her own successful funding bids for her social business
- Two have participated in bringing funding into wider DDPOs, one through supporting DDPOs with funding bids, and one by participating on a grants assessment panel for Covid emergency funding

Raising understanding of the value of DDPOs:

For a DDPO run by people with learning difficulties, the programme has helped them understand their value

“We realise now that we are quite different to other local organisations working with our members, people with learning difficulties. We are clearer about what is important about being a DDPO for us and the difference it makes. I think we are more confident talking about ourselves as an organisation controlled by Disabled

people. This is big for us because we have only been an independent DDPO for 1 year” (this organisation used to be managed by a larger organisation).

They have made a video about their experience and plan

“to show it to council leaders to show them how important (our DDPO) is and how important it is to give Disabled people a chance to make their ideas happen. It’s crucial to support us to do that.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The programme has clearly been valuable for all nine participants who completed the whole programme. For seven the method of delivery was largely successful, with some interesting learning about how to improve the programme in the future. The other two did not find the overall programme approach as beneficial but still found particular parts of the programme such as coaching and peer support valuable.

We have learned a lot about what works in supporting Deaf/Disabled leaders to develop their leadership practice and confidence. Overall it is clear that:

- Supporting Deaf/Disabled leaders to develop through practically leading a change they are passionate about and have power and control over is effective
- Human-centred design techniques and tools are useful in developing leadership practice, particularly when adapted creatively to improve access
- Crucially, this approach needs to be combined with a strong rights and equalities emphasis which allows leaders to explore the societal barriers that have prevented them fulfilling their leadership potential before (or having their leadership acknowledged)
- It is hugely beneficial for Deaf/Disabled leaders to have time and support to explore their own access needs and solutions in a deep way. This needs to be supported by facilitators knowledgeable about the Disabled people’s rights movement and with lived experience of barriers to leadership
- Working within a peer group of other Deaf/Disabled leaders is an important part of building trust, taking risks to develop, and exploring shared solutions and learning

- Developing Deaf/Disabled leaders in this way has positive impacts for the wider DDPO sector, as well as for the individual leaders.

The most compelling evidence of the success of this programme is that the participants have left with drive and ambition to continue developing as leaders and make change happen. We conclude with a few of their powerful voices:

“I will continue pursuing working on my leadership skills and particularly putting it into practice with the Local Engagement Champions project. The skills gained, I will use this to manage and guide to succeed and grow as a group and also within my Chair role for the BAME Committee”

“I will use my new learning and skills to run more workshops with groups of people that I have not worked with before and to hold more and better People’s Theatre events to give the participants a voice and make an impact with local politicians and decision-makers. I will expand to reach people in neighbouring boroughs I will create new partnerships with confidence in order to achieve my goals. I will be able to communicate my proposals with clarity to potential partners and funders”

“I will take this knowledge to my new job role and implement it there too. I will continue to climb the ladder and grow into my role with the aim of being a good leader in every role I do”

“I am now a lot more confident that as a neuro-diverse person I can use my skills that would make my leadership exciting once it is ready to be advanced further. I also no longer feel as stuck in my career development. The journey will continue and one day I will be able to fulfil my change plan and hopefully many more change plans.

Key recommendations for next steps are:

1. Secure funding to run a second iteration of the programme as soon as possible, to test the programme improvements planned above (See [Our learning about the programme design](#)).
2. Develop a business model for rolling out the programme to run in each of the UK regions, led by other regional infrastructure support organisations working in the DDPO sector.
3. Explore setting up a community of leadership practice for mentoring and ongoing peer support for Deaf/Disabled leaders, and working closely with the wider emerging Lived Experience Leadership movement.