

Exploring representation of the global majority in leadership for movement, in Greater Manchester

Programme Report & Recommendations |
July 2026





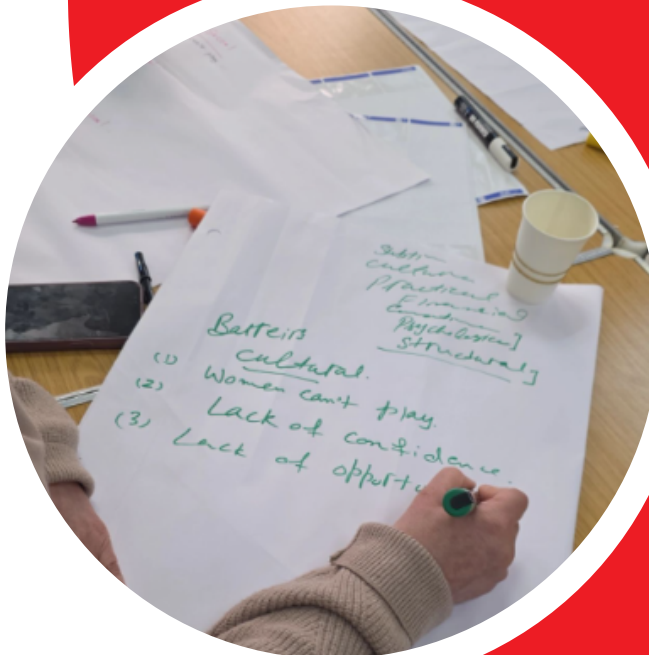
Diverse Leadership in Sport & Physical Activity in Greater Manchester

Contents

Executive Summary	01
Background & Context	02
Programme Overview	04
Co-design & Co-production	05
Session by Session: What We Did	06
Mentoring	07
Personal Development Budgets	08
Participant Voice	09
End of Programme Event	10
Key Reflections & Recommendations	11



The programme was deliberately not a formal leadership course.



Executive Summary

This report documents the Diverse Leadership in Sport and Physical Activity programme, a six-month personal development initiative hosted by Manchester Community Central on behalf of 10GM, in partnership with GM Moving.

Running from October 2025 to March 2026, the programme brought together nine participants from global majority backgrounds to explore representation in leadership within the sport and physical activity sector in Greater Manchester.

The programme was deliberately not a formal leadership course. Participants were already leaders within their communities. Instead, it created a protected peer support space - rare and deeply valued - where people could come together, share knowledge, explore power and influence, and begin to shape what systemic change in the sector could look like.

The programme concluded with an end of programme sharing event on 29 April 2026, which brought together participants, sector leaders, and partner organisations to reflect on learning and chart a path forward.

9	6	£400	6
Participants recruited	Sessions delivered	Personal development budget per person	Months of peer support



Background

A movement for Systems Leadership change in Manchester

Over several years, Manchester Community Central, in partnership with GM Moving and 10GM, have hosted a systems leadership project to support and enable a transformation in the knowledge, skills, and opportunities of people (paid and voluntary) in Greater Manchester to work and lead across sectors and within communities around the shared purpose of changing lives through movement, physical activity, and sport.

Systems Leadership was all about amplifying a model of leadership that's not about managing, but about how to make things happen, across sectors, in a collaborative way. It is designed to help people lead when they don't have positional power, levers to pull, or a large budget to wield.

We hosted a series of open workshops focused on storytelling, community leadership, collaboration and influence.

These workshops were open to anyone interested in sports and physical activity. Over 500 people from across sectors and organisations in Greater Manchester participated.

“to work and lead across sectors and within communities around the shared purpose”

August 2023 to December 2024:

Greater Manchester
Moving > ^ < v

30 sessions

556
participants

278
organisations

Introduction to Systems Leadership
Values based leadership
Public Narrative
Framing
Facilitation Skills
Community Leadership
Coaching Development Skills

Leading through Change
Inclusive Leadership
Different Conversations
Community Reporting
Over a Brew
Ted Talk Cinema Club
Learning Events

Image lists different workshops hosted over 30 sessions, with 556 participants and 278 organisations



Context

Diverse leadership in sports and physical activity

Although a wonderful cohort attended, we noticed that there was a visible lack of diversity amongst the participants, especially when it came to racial diversity, reflecting what is seen on a national level in the sport and physical activity workforce and leadership.

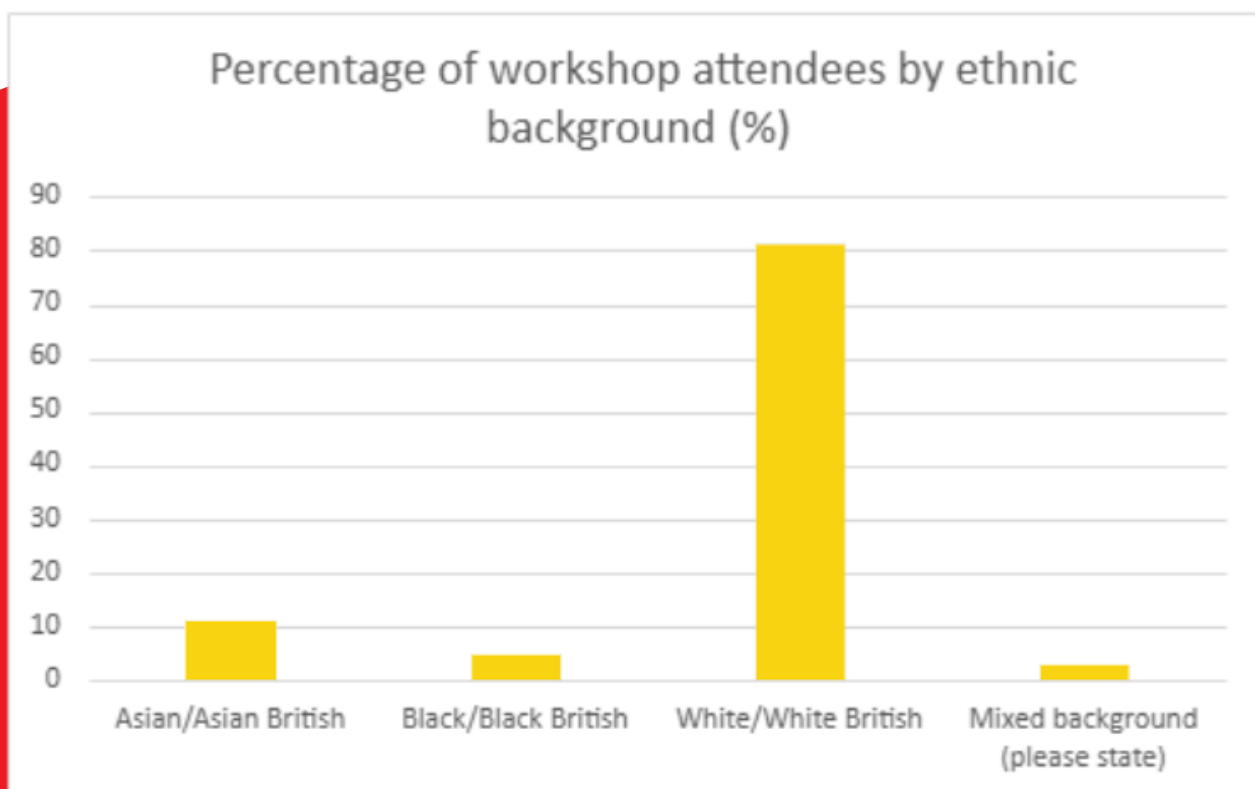
Taking this into consideration we decided to implement an anonymous and optional form to monitor the demographics of our participants to see if our perceptions were correct; we found that 19% of our participants were from racially minoritised backgrounds, compared to the percentage of the Greater Manchester population who are not white being 28.7%.

We concluded that people from racially minoritised backgrounds are not getting involved in leadership opportunities which leads to a lack of voice and representation for these groups.

We need more spaces for people to connect and explore how to challenge the barriers that exist in the system, to grow the voice and representation for people from global majority groups in decision-making spaces.

We recognised that although we cannot transform the equity and inclusion of people from racially minoritised communities in the physical activity workforce and leadership in a time-limited programme, we can contribute to this change.

We had a vision of a racially diverse cohort of people that are encouraging communities to lead active lives through their work. **The aim was to foster a network of developing leaders who are committed to inclusivity and who can influence decision-making at all levels of the sports and physical activity ecosystem.**



Graph: GM Systems Leadership programme demographics table demonstrating low ethnic diversity

Programme Overview

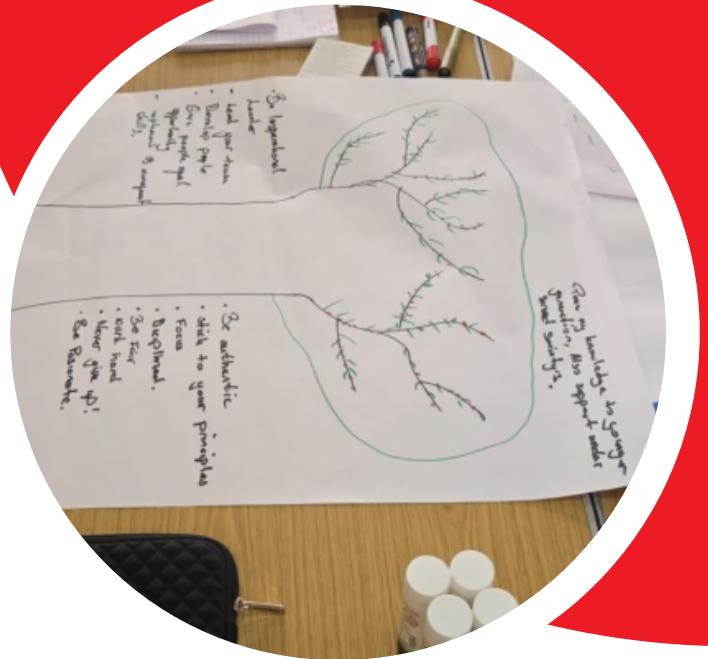
This gap between the diversity of the population and the diversity of those accessing leadership development was the starting point for this programme. As one framing statement from the project put it:

"We need more spaces for people to connect and explore how to challenge the barriers that exist in the system, to grow the voice and representation for people from global majority groups in decision-making spaces."

The programme was informed by learning from existing initiatives, including GMCA's We Lead for Legacy programme and Sporting Equals' Leaderboard programme, as well as 10GM's VCSE Workforce Development emerging leaders programme. It was explicitly designed to complement rather than duplicate these offers.

Rather than a formal leadership program we hosted themed peer support spaces for global majority participants to come and talk about the challenges and barriers to leadership in a protected environment.

The programme ran from October 2025 to March 2026, with a closing event in April 2026 and follow-up checks in July 2026. It was hosted at St Thomas Centre, Ardwick, Manchester (for in-person sessions) and online.



What participants were offered:

- A monthly facilitated peer support and discussion space
- Access to three one-to-one mentoring sessions with a leader from the global majority in the sport and physical activity sector
- A personal development budget of £400 per person to invest in their own leadership journey
- Signposting to pathways and influencing opportunities across Greater Manchester

Who the programme was for:

The programme was open to people from racially minoritised backgrounds who work or volunteer in Greater Manchester to help people live more active lives, who are not in senior leadership positions, and who have experienced barriers to leadership.



“We found that the cohort was smaller than originally expected (nine rather than fifteen), which in practice enabled deeper co-design, as the group was able to shape sessions in a more responsive and relational way.”

Co-design & Co-production

Our Sounding Board:

The programme was informed and shaped by a sounding board of leaders from the global majority, including:

- Umar Ahmed (he/him) — Active Adults Equalities Lead, GM Moving
- Ayisatu Emore — GM Equalities Alliance Partnership Coordinator, VSNW
- Isaac Samuels OBE (they/them) — People’s Voice Media
- Khadija Patel — Founder and Director, Krimmz Girls Youth Club
- Lesmond Taylor — Health and Wellbeing Manager, Caribbean & African Health Network
- Naz Khan (she/her) — Founder and Director, Bike It Walk it CIC
- Adil Mohammed Javed — Founder and CEO, Alchemy Arts
- Rehana Begum (She/Her) — CEO & Company Secretary, Diversity Matters NW

A core principle of the programme was that it should be shaped by participants, not just delivered to them. The sounding board recognised early on that another formal leadership course was not what was needed. Participants were already leaders within their communities. What they needed was space.

The approach involved:

- Being informed by the sounding board from the outset
- Gathering constant feedback between sessions and adjusting content accordingly
- Co-creating group agreements with participants in the first session
- Inviting participants to suggest discussion topics throughout
- Building in reflective activities and honest check-ins to track what was working



Session by Session: what we did

Breakdown of each session from October to March

Session:	What we did:
Oct 29, 2025 — Welcome	Welcome and introductions. Co-creating group agreements. Exploring expectations. Reflection activity and discussion.
Nov 26, 2025 — Sport, Race & Leadership	Paul Reddish from Sporting Equals spoke on where race originated in sports and physical activity. Discussion followed.
Dec 17, 2025 — Challenges & SWOT	Group discussion identifying challenges. Fishbowl exercise. SWOT analysis.
Jan 28, 2026 — Women, Girls & Culture	Khadija Patel: women and girls barrier mapping. Cultural Tree exercise — roots, trunk, branches, leaves exploring identity and leadership.
Feb 25, 2026 — Power & Influence	Exploring what power means. What influence do I hold, what am I given, what do I not have? Internalised narratives, cultural expectations, leadership conditioning.
Mar 25, 2026 — Sector Change & Panel Prep	What needs to change in the sector? Planning for panel speaking role. If you could change ONE thing in sport/physical activity sector leadership tomorrow, what would it be?



Mentoring

As part of the program we offered one-to-one or group mentoring sessions with a leader from the global majority in the sport and physical activity sector. Meetings took place at a mutually agreed time, for example:

1

First meeting in November 2025 including discussion on ideas for the £400 personal development budget

2

Second meeting in January 2026

3

Final meeting in March 2026 including discussion on pathways and influencing opportunities

Estee Lynch - Afrocats -
Project Manager

Khadija Patel - Krimz Girls
Youth Club - Founder/ Director

Razia Shaikh Patel -
WATA CIC - Founder

Ayisatu Emore - GM Equals -
GM=EqAI Partnership
Coordinator



To support the participants we brought on board mentors from racialised backgrounds, who are leaders within the sports and physical activity sector for movement.

Mentors were encouraged to provide advice, guidance and feedback whilst also sharing their experiences and act as a sounding board for their mentee's ideas and plans.

We provided one-off mentoring training and resources to those who wished to be mentors. Training was provided by Chris from Baseline Mentoring who has created a mentoring and networking platform for young people from the global majority to access support with their leadership, careers and life goals.

Personal Development Budgets

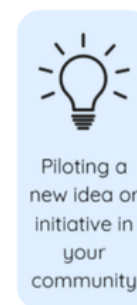
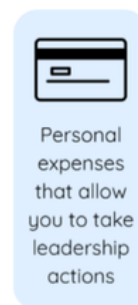
Each participant received a £400 personal development budget to invest in their own leadership journey. Activities were agreed with their mentor and were unique to each person. Examples of how the budget was used include:

Wellbeing & leadership courses	Books & conferences	Community football project
Art classes	Walk leadership & first aid qualification	Childcare fees to enable participation
Swimming lessons	Laptop for learning	Gym membership for wellbeing

Personal development budgets were advocated for by our sounding board members who argued that global majority individuals working in community organisations are less likely to take breaks, rest and prioritise their own needs. We wanted to use this to encourage this group to pause and reflect by checking in on their own wellbeing.

The personal development budgets could be spent on a range of activities. We acknowledged that all activities will be unique to everyone and are to be agreed with their mentor.

This flexibility was a deliberate as it recognised that barriers to leadership are not only about skills gaps; they are practical, financial, and personal. By allowing participants to define what 'personal development' meant to them, the budget became a genuine tool for inclusion.



We recognise that doing community work can be exhausting. Often the work of building inclusivity and being the voice that represents their culture/ race falls on the shoulders of global majority individuals. This leads to burnout and a neglect of self-care in favour of being an advocate for their community. This is why wellbeing and selfcare should be at the centre of leadership development for grassroots community leaders.

We are exploring an ongoing network with this group of participants and continue to assess the impact of personal development budgets on their leadership journey.



Participant Voice

Feedback was gathered throughout the programme via in-session feedback forms and informal check-ins. The following voices capture what participants valued:



“Overall, the programme was very well designed and highly valuable. I appreciated the safe and open environment created in each session, which encouraged honest reflection and meaningful discussions. The peer support element was particularly strong and added real depth to the learning experience.”



“Really enjoyed Omairia’s sessions. Always taking extra care to let everyone share and contribute.”
— March session participant

“A lot of thought went into the content and delivery — not something that can be led by an AI session plan.”

“Really enjoyed the training and I hope this is the beginning and that the group will be able to come back together in a few months time to see what actions have been put into place”

“It really helps to understand the different ways I can contribute to leading in the sports and physical activity sector.”





End of Programme Event

The programme concluded with an in-person sharing event on 29 April 2026 at St Thomas Centre, Manchester. Participants joined sector leaders and partner organisations to share the programme's learning and discuss what comes next.

The event included a presentation on the programme journey, a panel discussion led by participants, and a mapping activity structured around four questions:

- What do you want to tell the sector?
- What does inclusive leadership look like in practice?
- What next steps can we take collectively?
- How can organisations support emerging leaders better?

What participants told the sector

- Grassroots sport has racism, but people and policy are not talking about it or doing anything about it
- Allies need to stop making decisions without people in the room
- Be bold - don't be afraid to say what you don't know, and ask the community
- Upskill people to be in the room with decision-makers
- Help people understand political and NHS systems in GM. i.e. how funding is distributed, how resources are allocated
- We have champions, advocates, and role models. Leaders from the community. Collectively we are stronger - they need to be talking directly to commissioners
- Community leaders are getting burnt out trying to establish themselves
- Intermediaries see funding pots as their own - those managing funding need to be doing it differently



Reflections

Key themes from the program and final event

1. Sustaining the Network

Keeping people connected, maintaining collective voice, regular in-person meetings, and shared learning. There was strong appetite for a network, a Grassroots Voices in Physical Activity network, that is collaborative rather than competitive.

2. Systemic Influence

Feeding issues upward to NGBs and funders. Influencing decision-making at city and borough level. Supporting participatory grant-making and creating strong local ecosystems.

3. Developing Leaders

Building confidence and emotional intelligence. Representation at all levels. A pipeline through youth leadership in schools. Succession planning. A leadership qualifications offer.

4. Organisational Accountability

Using quotas in recruitment. Actioning feedback. Creating environments that enable growth. No gatekeeping of opportunities. Getting funders physically into grassroots spaces.

5. Programme Future

Running the programme again with the current cohort becoming teachers and mentors of the next. Making it cyclical, revisiting aims, and building toward a lasting legacy.



Representation matters

Peer support spaces for racialised communities in sport are rare and deeply valued — participants described them as safe, affirming, and galvanising.



Leadership is rooted in culture

Our Cultural Tree exercise revealed that collective values — community, kindness, support — are the foundation of how participants want to lead.



Power can be reimagined

When participants defined power through their own values, it looked fundamentally different to traditional models — collaborative, not hierarchical.



Barriers are systemic, not personal

From cost to cultural stereotypes, the barriers explored were structural — and participants left with language and tools to name and challenge them.



Recommendations

Based on the learning from this programme, the following recommendations are offered to Macc, GM Moving, 10GM, and the wider sport and physical activity sector in Greater Manchester:

For Macc and 10GM

- Run the programme again, ideally with the current cohort taking on mentoring and teaching roles for a new cohort - building a cycle of peer progression
- Establish a formal network for diverse leaders at grassroots level in the sport and physical activity sector, with a dedicated space for sharing opportunities, funding intelligence, and collective advocacy
- Explore participatory grant-making approaches that remove bureaucratic barriers for smaller community organisations and individuals
- Ensure that the learning from this programme is published and shared widely across the sector

For GM Moving

- Create meaningful roles for programme participants at the next GM Moving Conference, including co-design and influencing roles
- Actively open up existing boards and networks — including the GM Moving Partnership Board, Tackling Inequalities Network, and Place Accountability Group - to participants and the wider network
- Review recruitment and selection practices for leadership opportunities to actively address underrepresentation

For Sport and Physical Activity Organisations across GM

- Introduce quotas in recruitment and selection for leadership roles and influencing boards
- Invest in developing the conditions for emerging global majority leaders to thrive - this means creating time, space, and funding for community leaders who are currently burning out
- Get funders physically into grassroots spaces to see where the need and the expertise actually lives
- Address gatekeeping - share opportunities widely and actively support people from global majority communities to access boardrooms and decision-making roles
- Build succession planning into programme design from the outset

For the Sector as a Whole

- Recognise that the problem is systemic, not individual - and that sustained, funded, structural change is required
- Invest in intersectional approaches that connect global majority experience with disability, long-term health conditions, and other marginalised identities
- Use the learning from programmes like this one to influence NGBs and national funding bodies





Manchester Community Central

St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

0161 834 9823 • manchestercommunitycentral.org • info@mcrcommunitycentral.org

Manchester Community Central Ltd. is a charity registered in England and Wales no. 1145921 and a company limited by guarantee no. 7788593.
Registered office St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Ardwick, Manchester M12 6FZ.