

Lead the Change Impact Report 2025



Introduction to Lead the Change

The data backs up what our eyes tell us – there's a lack of ethnic diversity in leadership roles in our sector.

Tackling inequalities is at the heart of everything we do here. Yet, for too long, leadership roles within our sector have not reflected the rich diversity of the communities we serve. The question isn't about if the talent is there amongst ethnically diverse leaders, rather how do we create a system which gives them equal opportunities to lead?

Which is why we wanted to create a programme that supported people to **'Lead the Change'**.

'Lead the Change' is an initiative to support more ethnically diverse people into leadership roles in the sport and physical activity sector. It was two years in the making, created as part of our Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan where we identified that there was a clear and urgent need to diversify our workforce.

We believe the biggest impact we can make is to give individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds greater confidence and resilience in applying for leadership positions

A Perrett Laver report (2020) found that the proportion of board members from ethnically diverse backgrounds in sports organisations was less than half the national average (7.9% vs 18%), and served as a stark call to action.

Working alongside local partners Yorkshire Cricket and West Riding County FA, we were determined to deliver something which has lasting impact. We commissioned AKD Solutions, Equity Coach and Sporting Equals – all with expertise in delivering leadership programmes for ethnically diverse talent.

“ In the short term, it's about being able to get people on boards, so people can start to see the change. It's only when people start to see things, that they start to believe it. And then it's about embedding that in communities, so its not a flash in the pan. This is about sowing a seed, setting a direction of travel that will take us on for years to come. So this is around people having the confidence, and believing in what we're saying. ”

Hannah Simpson – West Riding County FA

“ You know, we're talking about race and culture, and it's different for different communities, and different cultures. The people who make decisions need to represent that. If we can get that in five or ten years, the game will be safer, richer and more inclusive. ”

Mo Hussain – Yorkshire Cricket

Between us, we created a **five-day leadership programme** for individuals, and a **one-day anti-racism workshop for leaders** within organisations to understand the part they have to play in changing the narrative.

We are proud to present this impact report, which showcases the significant strides we have made in partnership with partners both locally and nationally, and a remarkable cohort of aspiring leaders.

While we talk about systems, organisations and the sector as a whole, what ultimately changes is people. I'm thrilled for a couple of people from this first cohort who have already taken on different or more senior leadership roles.

The change has to start somewhere, and they are among the very first to lead it.



The training days

The five-day leadership programme covered the themes of:

Day one

'Race', Culture and Sport (led by Equity Coach)

- The history of 'race' and sport – how our systems are setup and the legacies we are confronting
- Institutions and racism – Simpson's PCS model on institutional oppression, and the importance of intersectionality in understanding how organisations work.
- Cultural identity, cultural competency, it's link to bias and inclusion
- We were also joined by Charles Dacres (Director of Bradford Hate Crime Alliance) as a guest speaker to share his journey and experiences working in leadership positions.



**Days
two and
three**

**Positive Action in
Leadership (led by
AKD Solutions)**

**‘Listening Circles’ and ‘It’s Time to
Change The Narrative’**

- Provided an opportunity for everyone to speak about their lived experience and identify what type of development they will benefit from. The feedback from these listening circles helped shape the delivery of the next part of the programme, this included a workshop that supports people to be confident in reshaping the narrative about race in the workplace.

Sport, Leadership and Me

- We had guest speaker James Mason (CEO of West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce) speak about the importance of diversity in leadership roles and his own role as an ally.

**Days
four
and five**

**Getting Board
Ready (led by
Sporting Equals)**

**Effective Leadership in the
boardroom**

- This module emphasised the importance of inclusive decision making and cultural competence in leadership roles. Participants engaged with case studies, interactive discussions, and personal narratives that illustrated the unique challenges and strategies these leaders faced.

Raising your Profile

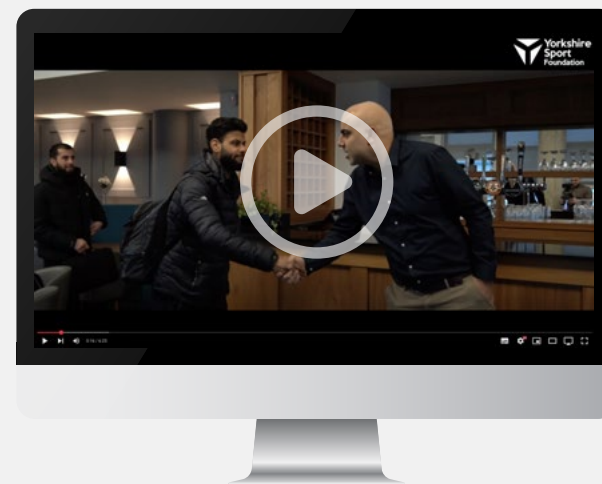
- Which included CV writing, interview skills, covering letters and LinkedIn profiles.
- Rashida Saloo a board member at YSF and Mid Yorkshire Teaching NHS Trust shared her own journey and the value of leadership programmes which equips aspiring leaders with the skillset to be confident enough to apply for leadership roles.



A peer-to-peer network has now been formed and the group regularly interact with each other through a private LinkedIn group. Relationships have been formed which will support the group as they progress on their journey.

Course Overview and Impact

This video gives an overview of the programme as well as showing what the people who attended got out of the training sessions.



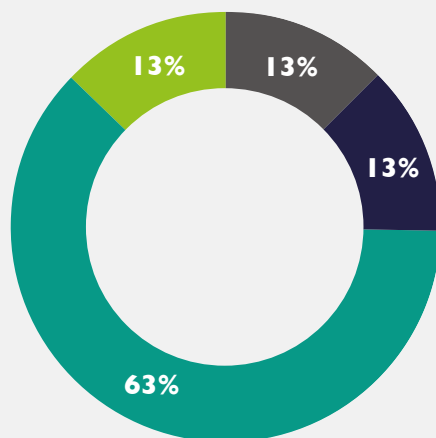
“ We took a long time to consider what we wanted to do around Lead the Change... We took a long time to listen, we spoke to people, asked questions about what’s most useful... We wanted to make sure we were being authentic in what ended up happening and wanted to be collaborative. ”

**James Brown, Director for West Yorkshire,
Yorkshire Sport Foundation**

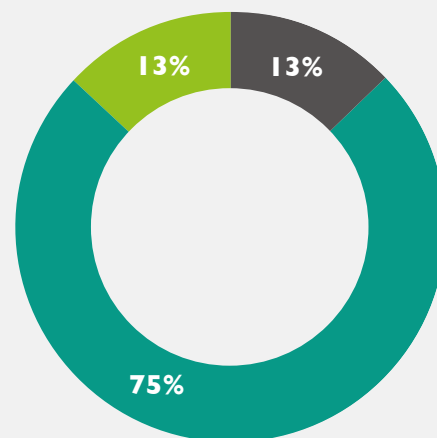


Attendee feedback

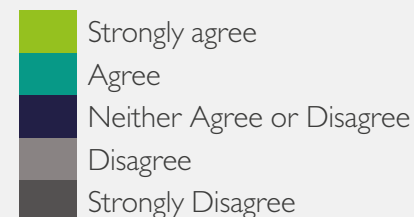
After completing the five day course:



76% of attendees **agreed** or **strongly agreed** they **felt confident in applying for a board or leadership position**.



88% of attendees **agreed** or **strongly agreed** they **had a good network of colleagues in the sport and physical activity sector that can support me in my board or leadership goals**.



Attendees were also asked how **ready they felt** for a board or leadership position at the start and end of the course, from **1 = not at all ready to 10 = completely ready**.

**Start of
the course
readiness
score:**

4.9



7.1

**End of
the course
readiness
score**

For the cohort the average readiness score increased from 4.9 to 7.1, a change of 2.2.

Reflections from Attendees

Attendees valued:

“The **opportunity to connect with a diverse group of individuals** who are passionate about driving positive change. The programme created **a supportive space for open dialogue, self-reflection, and learning**. The practical tools and real-life examples shared by the facilitators were especially impactful, helping me to **better understand inclusive leadership and how to apply it in my own context**.”



Feedback from attendees:

“Since completing the programme, I’ve become **more intentional about creating inclusive spaces** in my work and community roles. I now take **more time to listen to different perspectives** and ensure that everyone has a voice in decision-making processes. I also **plan to seek out leadership opportunities** where I can apply what I’ve learned and continue to grow in confidence and impact.”

“The programme supported me in developing several key skills, including: **Inclusive leadership** – I gained a deeper understanding of how to lead with equity and create environments where everyone feels valued. **Communication and active listening** – The sessions helped me become more intentional in how I engage with others, especially in diverse groups. **Confidence in leadership settings** – Through discussions and activities, I’ve become more confident in contributing to strategic conversations and considering leadership opportunities.”

Other areas of development included **networking** and **building self-belief** and **the tools to challenge**

Putting learning into practice

Attendees recognised many ways to put learning into practice. Including:



Challenging the belief system within their organisation



Challenging conversations in day-to-day work



Using stats and materials with colleagues



Creating an elevator pitch

As a result of the programme, they said

“ I would definitely consider how I can **influence the need for a prayer room/space** within my workplace. ”

“ In day-to-day work, I am going to use my new-found confidence to **ask someone to be my mentor.** ”

“ I will use the information to really reflect on my self development and where I want to be in terms of being in a position to make changes. ”

“ I have been invited to be a board trustee, I have an idea of what to expect. **I will use a lot of the techniques mentioned such as listening more,** especially when I first start to attend the meetings. ”

“ I will be strategic and confident in implementing change in sport and education. ”

Attendees' Stories

Ammarah

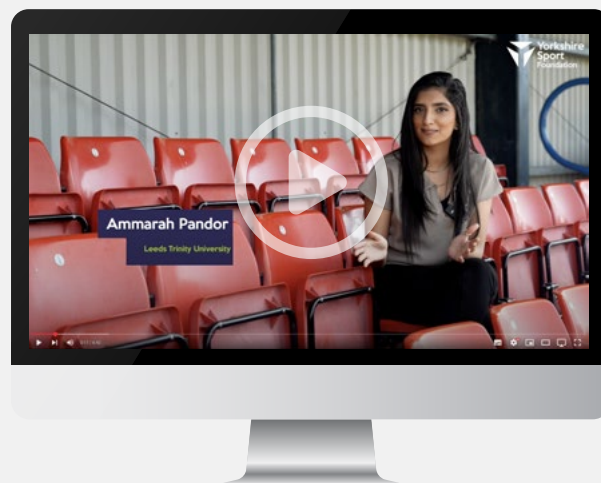
One thing I didn't initially think about, but I've really enjoyed is working with the people in that room, working with the future board leaders and just being able to build a rapport with those people.

What's been really valuable in this scheme is that we focused on the individual. How do we acknowledge the barriers, acknowledge the systems of oppression, but then use that to change our own narrative and centering yourself around that.

What is my influence? What can I do about it?

And using that to essentially lead the change.

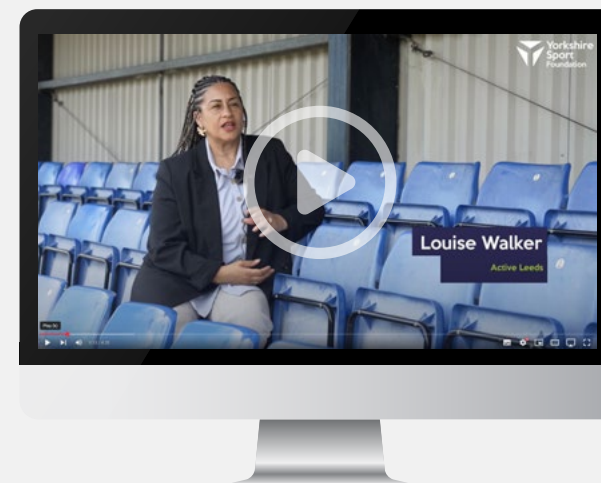
In my role as the Access and Participation Lead at Leeds Trinity University is all about; how we get students from underrepresented backgrounds into university, once they're through our doors, how do I make sure the University allows those students to succeed, and once they leave, how do I make sure the university ensures they progress into really good graduate outcomes?



Lou

The very first session on how sport developed over centuries made me realise that it is just culture. Sometimes it's how the culture is set and it's about how we change that culture, and it's a long journey.

I realise now I've got a lot to give back to a community as a volunteer. It doesn't have to be a paid role, it's about what my passion is for. I was invited to be a trustee on the Let's Do More, it's a basketball charity organisation. It just seemed to just fit.



Senior Leadership Day

Alongside the training for individuals, a one-day anti-racism workshop for leaders within organisations was held. The aim was to help them be better placed to attract applications from people with a diverse ethnic background to leadership roles.

As we look to support more ethnically diverse people into leadership positions, it was important to us that people already in those jobs understood the part they have to play. That's why we invited leaders from a range of organisations to a day that provided a history of 'race' and some practical tools they can use to address inequalities in our sports structures.

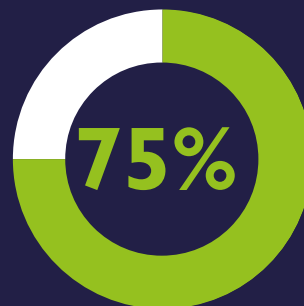
The morning session covered the important topic of What 'race' is, along with examples of the legacy of that in sport today – at a structural level, and how our identities shape those structures. In the afternoon session the participants explored some case studies, and practical tools were introduced at a leadership level for addressing racial inequalities in our sports structures and in their own organisations. Attendees were from a range of organisations including charities, NGBs and community foundations.

Dan Wilson, CEO of Rotherham United Community Trust described the training as *“incredibly thought provoking today, very different to anything I’ve been on previously. I really liked the challenge that was present throughout the course. Really got us to think about some challenging questions and assumptions we make.”*



Things leaders planned to do differently following the training included:

- **Look at dynamic values**
- **Review toolkits**
- **Look at current practices** through exclusionary, equality of opportunity, equality of conditions and equality of outcomes
- **Explore how racism affects their organisation**
- **Provide Board training**
- **Use the cultural competency framework** in their workplace



75% of attendees were extremely likely to recommend the session to a friend or colleague



Attendees noted many ways in which they planned to put learning into practice in their workplace. For example:

“The content was easy to follow, **provoked discussion** and debate and made me **think deeper and more critically about the way I think**, the way others may think and how we can better create a culturally proficient environment.”



What next?

Changing the system takes time, one programme of Lead the Change isn't going to change it. But it absolutely is the start of something meaningful, something which has action at the heart of it and is committed to creating leaders filled with confidence and resilience across our patch.

Our work is starting to be recognised, with **Connect Sport** recently reporting on cohort one's completion of the course.

We will continue to work with Sport England at a national level as part of the Leading the Movement co-design group, ensuring the voice and needs of a diverse range of sector leaders remain at the heart of the programme.

We are looking at the next cohorts of Lead the Change, we will take the lessons learned and look to improve and evolve. We're here for the long ride.



“We're committed to continuing this work, we feel on behalf of our partners and stakeholders it's the right thing to do. It's about time we took some action and really looking forward to cohort two.”

**James Brown, Director for West Yorkshire,
Yorkshire Sport Foundation**



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