

# WOMEN'S LIVES LEEDS

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

## Women's Lives Leeds Engagement and Engagement Expenses report

### Introduction

Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) is dependent on the engagement of women and girls; those internally from existing services provided by partners and WLL itself and those who are not service users but choose to attend activities co-ordinated and led by WLL, to achieve its aims and objectives. For example the Women and Girls Forum.

WLL recognises that there are many barriers that generally prevent women and girls from accessing provision, either mainstream or specific, accordingly to individual needs. WLL endeavours to provide its services in a fully accessible way that meets the needs of service users and removes the barriers of engagement faced by women and girls including:

- Geographical/location of activities
- Language/to be fully inclusive in activities
- Accessibility/to have accessible venues
- Children/ childcare responsibilities
- Time of day/ over lunch too early too late
- Transport/getting to activities

### Summary

It is clear that there are many barriers to engaging in WLL led activities faced by women and girls in Leeds. A balanced approach has been taken, which includes considering all the comments, feedback and contributions given by service users, evaluations, WLL partners and external partners like Leeds city council to inform the recommendations of this report.

What is apparent is that there are differences of opinion, of what is offered between partners, external partners and more importantly service users, which in some cases contradict each other, it is this differing of opinions that has and will challenge the views of the partners as the project progresses.

It is proposed that WLL implements the recommendations to all activities that they lead on and adopts a "Women's Lives Leeds – Expenses and how to claim them process" (appendix 1), to ensure that the maximum number of women and girls can access without barriers; activities co-ordinated by WLL.

WLL Led activities include:

- a. Service User participation, events, focus groups and the Advisory Board
- b. Women and Girls Forum, events, sub-groups and meetings
- c. Focus groups to support the development of initiatives

- d. Peer Support, workshops resources, focus groups and training
- e. Complex Needs and Community Development Service (where appropriate)

## Methodology

The following have helped to shape this policy:

1. The evaluation of the Participation Event in February 2017;
2. Two focus groups (YUMS – Young Mums and Footsteps) with service users during July 2017; and
3. The decision by partners for WLL core team to remove all barriers to engagement in July 2017
4. Feedback ref existing policies and procedures from Leeds City Council Equalities Assembly representatives.

## Barriers

The following captures the key points with reference to the conversations that have taken place on identified barriers and each section concludes with recommendations for WLL partners to agree and the core team to implement.

### Geographical/location

Service users were keen to access activities closer to home, especially if they were specific focus groups or consultations. They understood the need that some activities need to be centrally located due to the nature of the project being city wide and suggested this was considered in each activity planning stage.

#### Recommendation

- *When planning activities WLL will endeavour to hold activities in places which are easily accessible for the intended audience.  
For example if a drop in is required in north Leeds due to emerging needs a venue in north Leeds will be sourced for that purpose.*

Service users have indicated that one bus journey is appropriate to travel to an event, especially if you have two children.

#### Recommendation

- *Key events (like the participation and annual learning events) will take place in city centre locations.*

### Language

Feedback indicates that publicity should be less busy and focus on the key points for those who do not have English as their first language. One of the projects target groups is new and migrant women and girls, so WLL must offer support to enable these women to access WLL activities.

## Recommendations

- *When planning activities as part of the initial planning processes, language will be considered in all areas.*
- *If practicable Interpreters will be made available for all activities.*
- *Promotional materials will include other key languages to be agreed by partners*
- *Website information will include translation options*

## Children and Child care responsibilities

Service users indicated that they preferred a variety of options to support those who had very young children or needed childcare support to access activities arranged by WLL.

Service users felt that having most meetings/activities organised in a way that was child friendly would assist them in attending and that a crèche/childcare provision is not always the answer to this. The definition of “child friendly” was explored with the service users and they agreed that it is ***having space and activities for children in the same room as the event/activity/meeting, with a dedicated worker who if possible is qualified to oversee.*** They suggested that the agenda is planned to allow parents to interact in conversation, but also be there for their child if needed.

Service users indicated that they would feel much more relaxed if they were in the same room as their children, but they recognised that for bigger events where external professionals would be in attendance this would not be the case and on this basis child care should be provided in the same venue.

In addition they agreed that a smaller “quiet” room/space available for use would help, if their child needed time out to be with mum away from the planned activity.

The topic of earlier planning and programming of activities was covered and all service users indicated that if more time was given they would also consider arranging their own child care provision out of the setting, but this would be weighted by how important *they* felt, their attending would be of benefit to *them* and the *relevance* of attending.

WLL partners indicated that the project should offer child care facilities for all activities and that this is communicated on all publicity when promoting WLL activities.

It’s interesting to note here that the local authority does not fund any child care activities to support any of the equalities hub and assembly meetings of which there is the LGBT\* Hub, the Older People’s Hub, the BME Hub, the Faith Hub and the Disability Hub all of which have women and girls as members.

## Recommendations

- *WLL will offer childcare facilities in all initiatives, but also offer and structure localised focus groups and activities to accommodate the needs of service users who wish to be in a child friendly environment and have their child with them in the same room.*
- *WLL will support and provide expenses for alternative arrangements, where the individual sources their own childcare/carers provision and claims this back.*

- *WLL central team will monitor requests and actual use of childcare provided and report on outcomes for information to the partnership.*

## **Time of day**

Feedback indicated here that time of day played a big part in all service user engagement and that when planning any activities, thought is to be given to this, to better the engagement of service users, women and girls. For example: allowing time for school drop off and collections, cheaper bus fares (off peak), travel time, meal times, school and after school activities.

Some service user feedback indicated that activities planned over the weekend and evening activities could be possibilities as it at these times – especially the evening when they feel most isolated and have nothing to do so this would give them something to focus on and look forward too.

With reference to mealtimes service users indicated that unless an activity fell over the lunchtime period (e.g. 10.00am -2.00pm), they did not expect to receive a meal either hot or cold during the activity and light refreshments tea, juice, fruit and biscuits were adequate.

This was explored in more detail with reference to having a “child friendly” environment and service users were keen for the activity to provide simple light refreshments for both parent and child for any session, but if a larger event with high attendance numbers there was an issue with reference to hot drinks and young child being in the same room.

On further exploration there is an expectation that a meal/food is provided if the activity runs over or encroaches over the lunchtime period (e.g.11.00am- 1.00pm) and as a minimum runs over 4 hrs.

Service users also suggested that a DIY way of providing food sometimes helps with interaction and breaking down communication barriers. (DIY means bringing all the food items un prepared and attendees making their own) Service users also suggested having pre-made packed lunches for attendees to collect when they sign in.

When asked service users expressed a preference to having activities in the afternoon as they felt less rushed to get to morning ones.

The Equalities Assembly arrange meetings to avoid lunchtimes and only offer liquid refreshments, for all meetings, except for annual conferences or events, where a light lunch is available to conclude the event.

## **Recommendations**

- *All activities are planned in accordance to the intended audience, which considers the following: allowing time for school drop off and collections, cheaper bus fares (off peak), travel time, meal times, school and after school activities.*
- *When planning to think about existing group make up and to consider the potential of hosting meetings over the weekend or during the evenings.*
- *Light snacks and refreshments are offered during each activity especially if a child friendly environment has been arranged.*

- *Activities that run over the lunch time period or are 4 hrs or longer will have a meal/food provided.*

## **Transport and getting to activities**

As mentioned earlier in this paper service users have indicated one bus journey would be viable to attend activities planned and they did not see the need to get taxis to and from everywhere and public transport would suffice, but they recognised those who have access, confidence, anxiety issues, have two or more children with them, or are new to the area would be better placed using taxis.

The discussion also focussed the sharing of taxis and in some cases this would not be viable due to home addresses not all being in the same area, but where possible taxi sharing could be a way to get to activities in the future.

The feedback they gave focussed on the initial outlay of the costs to attend activities. With many of them being on low income the cost of a day rider would make a big difference in their weekly budgets. However they were not adverse to planning ahead and saving money to attend activities if reimbursed on attendance and on the condition that they felt that the activity was worthwhile and they could contribute to the agenda in a positive way.

## **Recommendation**

- *WLL central team establish a Taxi and bus use arrangements/accounts and processes for service users to access and then to share and implement with partners.*

## **Additional outcomes**

In addition to the feedback given by service users on barriers to engagement there were additional outcomes that WLL could consider to better engage women and girls in planned activities.

## **Incentives**

Service users talked about how much they are asked to take part and contribute and although they did not mind, they felt that recognition of participation would help. One suggestion was to offer vouchers as a thank you, especially to those who have committed quite a lot of time to a particular activity.

Feedback also indicated that to help maintain engagement in frequent (Advisory Board) activities, one off special days every now and then would help to keep it fun and interesting. (e.g. the group go for a walk along the canal).

## **Communication**

Service users indicated that to help in their attendance that information packages should be supplied before activities take place. These would include the content of the session, how many and who is

expected, directions to the venue, including bus routes and numbers and how to access the building on arrival.

The final point that was made in reference to communication was the need to re-visit and go back to those who have been involved in activities and consultations and to feedback the outcome of those conversations to those involved.

All recognised the need to inform services users how their comments have helped to contribute to the development of WLL and how their feedback has influenced specific activities of WLL.

## Recommendations

- *WLL to provide incentives to those who commit on a regular basis and take part in service user activities. These can be in the form of vouchers, days out, meals or fun activities.*
- *WLL to feedback to all service users how their points have contributed to the shaping of activities on a regular basis and this being done in a variety of ways. E.g going back to the group, "You said - we did" on the website and through normal social media and publication routes.*

## Conclusion

It is clear that there are many barriers to engaging in WLL activities faced by women and girls in Leeds. A balanced approach has been taken, which includes considering all the comments, feedback and contributions given by service users, evaluations, WLL partners and external partners like Leeds city council to inform the recommendations of this report.

This has been an interesting process with the involvement of 2 services user groups, one of which is for young mothers, who on the day of the conversation had their children present with them.

Service users indicated that they had contributed to all types of consultation sessions and focus groups in the past, but never saw much as a result of their contributions. They indicated that they would like to be updated and shown the final report as part of a feedback loop. It is with this in mind that the core team must go back to each of the two groups and discuss with them the recommendations and how their feedback has contributed to the overall findings of the report.

What it apparent is that there are differences of opinion between partners, external partners and more importantly service users, as to what should be offered by WLL, which in some cases contradict each other, it is this differing of opinions that will challenge the views of the partners as the project progresses.

## Recommendations

The recommendations will inform WLL practice as the project moves into the second year of delivery and are inclusive of differing opinions, so reflect all, until a review that is being recommended takes place.

1. *When planning activities led by WLL, WLL will endeavour to hold activities in places which are easily accessible for the intended audience.  
For example if a drop in is required in north Leeds due to emerging needs a venue in north Leeds will be sourced for that purpose.*
2. *Key events (like the participation and annual learning events) will take place in city centre locations.*
3. *When planning activities as part of the initial planning processes, language will be considered in all areas.*
4. *If practicable Interpreters will be made available for all activities*
5. *Promotional materials will include other key languages to be agreed by partners*
6. *Website information will include translation options*
7. *WLL will offer childcare facilities in all WLL led initiatives, but also offer and structure localised focus groups and activities to accommodate the needs of service users who wish to be in a child friendly environment and have their child with them in the same room.*
8. *WLL will support and provide expenses for alternative arrangements, where the individual sources their own registered childcare/carers provision and claims this back.*
9. *WLL central team will monitor requests and actual use of childcare provided and report on outcomes for information to the partnership.*
10. *All activities are planned in accordance to the intended audience, which considers the following: allowing time for school drop off and collections, cheaper bus fares (off peak), travel time, meal times, school and after school activities.*
11. *When planning to think about existing group make up and to consider the potential of hosting meetings over the weekend or during the evenings.*
12. *Light snacks and refreshments are offered during each activity especially if a child friendly environment has been arranged.*
13. *Activities that run over the lunch time period or are 4 hrs or longer will have a meal/food provided.*
14. *WLL to provide incentives to those who commit on a regular basis and take part in service user activities. These can be in the form of vouchers, days out, meals or fun activities.*
15. *WLL to feedback to all service users how their points have contributed to the shaping of activities on a regular basis and this being done in a variety of ways. E.g going back to the group, "You said - we did" on the website and through normal social media and publication routes*
16. *To review the findings of this report and barriers to engagement annually.*

## Policy proposal

It is proposed that the following is the arrangements and processes for partners and service users to be reimbursed with their genuine out of pockets expenses to attend WLL led activities and events.

## Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) – Expenses and how to claim them

### ***What kind of expenses can be claimed?***

Claims can be made for interpreter, translation, travel expenses and replacement carers/childcare costs on the basis of the detail of this policy and the recommendations listed.

### ***Who is eligible to claim expenses?***

Anyone is eligible to claim expenses ***except*** people who are already claiming through their own workplace/organisation, or have pre-existing childcare arrangements already established for day to day activities.

It is the choice of each individual to accept or waive a payment, except for the costs of interpreters; this must come through a partner organisation or the central team.

### ***Will benefit claims/tax status be affected if claimants receive expenses?***

Reimbursement is made for genuine out-of-pocket expenses, i.e. the exact amount they have spent to enable them to attend WLL related meetings.

It is the responsibility of the individual receiving a payment to inform the relevant agency of any payment that may affect their benefits or income tax status. Failure to do this could result in benefits being stopped and individuals being investigated for fraud.

## **Interpreter expenses**

If it has been identified that an interpreter is required to support access to WLL services the process below is followed:

- Contact is made by the partner organisation or worker to a member of the central team advising that an interpreter is required, which is noted for reference.
- The partner/worker then arranges an interpreter through their usual organisational routes/contacts and confirms the cost back to the central team
- The partner will pay for the interpreter costs and then will invoice WLL back for costs incurred using a copy of the invoice they have paid.
- Interpreter costs will be paid out of the WLL central costs.

## **Travel expenses**

### **What types of transport can claimants use?**

Those who are able to access public transport will be expected to use buses or trains.

Those who cannot access public transport will be able to claim for car mileage and parking costs.

These are asked to notify the WLL central team beforehand so that details can be noted for internal accounts purposes.

**Mileage will be paid at 45p per mile.**

Appendix 1 is the claim form to be used by ALL claimants for ALL out of pocket expenses.

### Use of Taxis

For those who cannot access public transport or do not have a car, a taxi may be provided following the process below:

- This must be arranged through one of the twelve partner organisations of WLL.
- They will then notify the WLL central team of such arrangements.
- The taxi will be booked centrally by a member of the central team using an established WLL taxi account.
- For return journeys the central team will towards the end of the activity confirm and book taxi arrangements direct using the taxi account.

### Note

No taxi journeys outside Leeds are to be booked unless an agreement has been made between the individual/their representative concerned and the central team. WLL will ask all to car share or taxi share wherever possible, to minimise costs.

Those deciding to book their own taxi will not be reimbursed.

### Bus travel

For those who travel and use buses, pre-paid bus tickets will be provided as one option for reimbursement of funds.

- WLL central team will purchase bus scratch tickets which can be used for one day only and these will be stored centrally.
- Prior to the activity partners will inform the central team how many they require and these will be signed for by the requesting partner on receipt.
- Unused tickets are to be returned back to the central team.

If claimants purchase their own bus tickets then the following procedures apply in claiming them back:

### How to claim travel expenses

Claimants are asked to sign and complete a form, which must be countersigned by a member of the central team the day they attend and where ever possible submit the relevant receipts as proof, before payment is made.

The only exception to this is where it has been noted that evidence is required to return. (for example, individuals have to keep hold of parking ticket/bus tickets for return journey).

For pay and display tickets a photograph of the ticket (by phone) can be presented as evidence on the day.

Payment will ONLY be made on the day and not retrospectively.

Only journeys that have been evidenced will be paid

One way journeys away from meetings will NOT be paid if an inward journey has NOT been evidenced – (i.e. claimants requesting bus fare home but has no evidence to demonstrate inward journey)

## **Childcare expenses**

### **How to claim childcare/care costs**

WLL will pay for genuine out-of-pocket childcare expenses, if a service user has opted to arrange their own childcare provision to attend the activity. i.e. the exact amount they have spent for childcare to enable them to attend WLL related activities.

On those occasions where childcare is not provided, WLL will reimburse those who make alternative arrangements as above on the basis that individuals/or their representative must notify the WLL central team of such arrangements in advance and an agreement has been made between the individual/representative and the central team.

Those deciding to choose alternative arrangements without informing the central team will not be reimbursed.

Individuals are asked to sign and complete a form, which must be countersigned by a member of the central team the day they attend and where ever possible submit the relevant receipts as proof, before payment is made.

A receipt/invoice/agreement from the childcare/care provider must be provided to support the claim, which must include name, address and childcare provider registration number if possible.

WLL recognises that individuals may use immediate family members to cover childcare, whilst WLL supports this, they will not reimburse service users who use family members to do this.