Intro/Outro: Welcome to the Place Change Makers podcast series, brought to you by Sport England and our Place Partners. In this series, we dive into the world of place based approaches to tackle physical inactivity. Join us as we explore the skills, mindsets, and behaviours all crucial for driving change across local systems.

Discover practical examples, challenges faced and the transformative experiences of those at the heart of this work. Tune in for insights and inspiration for your own journey towards positive change. You can also watch these episodes and access the transcripts by visiting www.sportengland.org/placepartners

Kath Lord-Green: Welcome to the Place Change Makers podcast. I’m Kath Lord-Green, your host. Episode one, ‘It ain’t what you do. It’s the way that you do it.’ This series is about people. People make change happen. People turn policy into practice and strategy into a movement. This episode explores the evolution of mindsets, values, and behaviours crucial for systemic change.

From places that are putting it into practice, providing insights from their transformative journeys and key takeaways on creating meaningful and sustainable change happen. Today, the guests are Tom and Lola.

Tom Hughes: Hi, thanks for having me on. So yeah, I’m Tom Hughes. I’m a development manager. In Sheffield the Yorkshire Sport Foundation Yorkshire Sport Foundation one of 42 Active Partnerships nationally.

We cover the West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire region and I’m often operating as the, the backbone support function, if you like, for Sheffield and supporting the city and its, its mission to move more. Don’t know if people will be able to tell from my accent. I’m an adopted Shefielder so I’m from the Northeast.

Originally my journey started, well, started with Sheffield. Coming down to university and I’ve pretty much remained here ever since. So about 18 years of my life, which is just over half my life. Now I’ve spent in the city in various different roles, but roles across the sport, leisure and physical activity sector, some of that time spent within the local authority and most recently within the active partnership. And I’ve just had a, a career and a lifelong passion for sport and physical activity and wanting to help people to, to move more really. And that’s started diversifying to just helping communities to help themselves.

Physical activity is that tool that I often used to do that. And along with that, I wouldn’t say that I have a particular skill set. I’m not a specialist in any particular
area, an absolute jack of all trades. Certainly what I pride myself on is the ability to build long-lasting relationships with people across the board.

The city that I operate in at the minute and a lot of that time is spent in areas that have significant barriers to being physically active. Well, yeah, I seem to be all right at my job, I think, and stuck around long enough that I’ve built some of those brilliant relationships that are really helping us as a city to, to move more.

So yeah, that’s a very whistle stop tour of sort of my 18 years or so in Sheffield. Happy to pass on to Lola and equally if you want to come back to me on any points, please do.

**Lola Akindoyin:** So I’m Lola Akindoyin and I’m the Head of Programme at Hackney Council. I’m the Head of Programme for the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot.

So for those who aren’t familiar with the terminology, because I’m conscious that it has changed, the Local Delivery Pilots were essentially the sort of first round of place partners. that Sport England invested in about five years ago. So there were, there were 12 of us. So I’ve been in this role for about five years now, and my background is not sport and physical activity.

I’m largely from a sort of community development type background, but I’ve always had. Jobs that have involved kind of working on programs or approaches that are designed to reduce inequalities or widen participation and have been very much focused around improving and gaining better outcomes for local people.

I’ve worked in both the voluntary sector and in local government, and I think it’s probably just edging into a few more years in local government now, but I’ve always enjoyed working in both and I’ve always worked in London, primarily in East London. So Hackney is a super important place to me because it’s also the place that my parents moved to when they first came here from Nigeria.

And I don’t live in the borough anymore, but I lived in Hackney for many years. So I’m really fortunate to be able to be working there. So for me in terms of kind of why I’m, I’m doing this work is that belief in, in people in local communities, in our role as enablers. And certainly when I worked in the voluntary and community sector, I would often come across different kind of programs or work that we were doing, myself, or working with other community partners that would sometimes hit kind of big issues.
And so being able to now also be working within the local authority again, it’s also just been ensuring that my work is focused on helping to remove those.

Kath Lord-Green: Why is it important to talk about people when working in a place-based systemic way? And what do we actually mean by that?

Lola Akindoyin: For me, I think one of the things that I really noticed early on in my career is that, and I think this was particularly when I maybe was working more in the voluntary sector, is that we would often find that there were things that we would come up against that we were unable to resolve.

So, you know, we all know that the Voluntary and Community Sector do fantastic work. But, you know, and often that, that work is very much working, you know, directly with local people to, you know, respond to a range of inequalities and a range of issues within communities. But sometimes they get stuck against things that they just were unable to resolve themselves.

So to me, it’s about working in a systemic way is about really having a look at all of the different factors that are within a local system that play into a local system. And they’re often very place specific. So our understanding of place is necessary in order for us to understand the structural inequalities and also the systemic work that is needed to respond to those things.

So I know that’s a bit full and a garble, but context is place. Okay. And then systemic work is about seeing everything that is a factor and where work is needed. Would you say that’s the case, Tom?

Tom Hughes: Yeah, absolutely. And I’m glad that you took that question, Lola, because I know when we’ve touched base very briefly before this podcast about that, you’re able to articulate that brilliantly, but yeah, for me, it’s just about, it’s almost doing exactly what it says on the tin.

It being about the place Lola’s chatting about Hackney in London, I’m chatting about Sheffield and Yorkshire that we will have very similar challenges but how we go about providing the solutions to that will be quite unique and different and some of that is down to a really hyper local level.

So that might be street by street, postcode to postcode, area to area. And that’s even just within our local place that, that we’ll both find that. So yeah, it’s, it’s all about sort of meeting local need. And I think for quite a period of time, and certainly in some of my time working in a local authority setting is we were guilty
of often coming with what we thought were the answers to some of these problems and not working in a way with the place, with the residents and the people who are representative of that community in helping them overcome the challenges. And in this instance, we’re predominantly chatting about physical activity, but yeah. And then the systemic working bit is as well embedded within that around working collaboratively for me, we’re not going to achieve this by ourselves. I’m certainly not in Sheffield going to achieve this by myself.

By myself, I’m certain Lola isn’t doing it in her place, and I know through the local delivery pilot work that is taking a place that that’s really coming through that sense of collaboration, and that, yeah, it’s not just down to a small team of people that are going to get our country moving more it’s going to be down to sort of everyone moving it up their agenda and it just becoming sort of daily life and part of everyone’s business and not just a sort of a set organisation or a set group of people that are on this campaign to, to get everyone moving.

**Lola Akindoyin:** If I can also just add, add something to that as well. It’s one of the things that I think it’s Mryon’s Maxims talks about around connecting the system more to itself.

And I think that that’s also a really key aspect of systemic place based working and tom’s already mentioned about, you know, his role in kind of knowing, you know, what’s going on in the local place, but it’s also, and being the backbone, it is about that connecting, because sometimes people are so busy heads down working that they’re not sort of heads aren’t coming up and looking across and thinking about actually, can we collaborate or work in a different way?

And so I think very much the work that we’ve been doing has been about taking that step back, almost about reflecting back to the system, other people’s experience or posing those questions to kind of prompt different ways of thinking or doing things. and then being able to connect. So new partnerships, new collaborations, and new approaches and ways of thinking and doing things.

**Tom Hughes:** And I think some of that challenge as well, Lola, I don’t know how necessarily you find it in, in Hackney, I often describe my work as sort of shadow working, that you very rarely sort of see me at the forefront of projects or involved in sort of what you perceive as being sort of physical activity.

It’s often sitting in a community centre, kitchen, or in someone’s living room or kitchen and having a cup of tea or a coffee and just trying to connect those dots locally just so that they can then start to help themselves. Lola’s absolutely right
There. Some people can’t see the wood for the trees at times, and I’m as guilty as that as anyone.

But just having that opportunity and the role I’m afforded in Sheffield is to be able to take a bit more of that objective view of just yeah, supporting people to help themselves and see sometimes what’s right in front of them. And then the stuff that isn’t right in front of them, of how do they access that, how do they reach that resource?

How do they speak to that individual? So yeah. It’s absolutely little glory almost in this role but incredibly satisfying in terms of being able to help people to help themselves is absolutely where the reward is in the role for me.

Kath Lord-Green: Looking back at your journey to date, what capabilities have been most important to your role?

Tom Hughes: Quite a big question. And it’s one that I’ve reflected on numerous times in various different settings. There’s some real sort of core values and principles, I guess, that exists within me and sometimes within the people that I work with that I look for. But what, what underpins everything is, is being a decent human being and basically wanting to do the right thing.

I don’t think any of us are necessarily in this industry are going to retire particularly young and with lots of money in our bank account. For me, it’s about doing what’s right by the communities that we live alongside, we live in and we work with. So it’s all encompassed within that. I think underneath that is sort of a few little, not necessarily tricks, but there might be personality traits.

There might just be ways of getting along. Some of that is sort of delivering on what you say you’re going to do. So under promise and over deliver is a big one. There was a phrase I’ve heard recently that trust comes on a tortoise and leaves on a horse. That it’s so true that it’s taken, and some of the reason I’m hopefully good in my role in Sheffield and why I’m on the podcast is I’ve spent 15 years sort of incrementally building up those relationships and those contacts across the city.

And I absolutely have areas of sort of weakness or a lack of understanding that we need to be better at that as a city and there needs to be more people in roles like me that, that were afforded that time to do that. But yeah, start in somewhere, find that sort of chink of light where you can support an organisation and that conversation most of the time isn’t around physical activity.
What tends to happen with those relationships is that something will come along at some point and call it serendipity, call it whatever you like, that there will be an opportunity to revisit that relationship. And just by laying those really early, good key foundations, you’re able to sort of calling favors, if you like, and start to shape and mold the agenda of the organization or the individual that you work in to then be able to shoehorn in a little bit about physical activity, or have you thought about this, or have you thought about that?

So, so that’s a big one. Leaving your ego at the door. This job isn’t about my organization has done this. We have done that. It’s about what have we done? Achieved collaboratively. So yeah, basically take off the institutional heart, leave the organisation at the door. I was saying something the other day and apologies to my chief executive when he does listen to this is people in Sheffield don’t often care who I work for. They just care that I’m here to help. I could work for the local authority. I could work for Yorkshire Sport. I could work for a voluntary sector organisation that doesn’t really matter to them as long as I’m there to listen to them and support them in achieving what it is that they want to achieve. We’re on to a bit of a winner.

So yeah, taking off the institutional hat at times is really important. And again, from a community perspective, it can be really intimidating if someone’s turning up in a uniform or a tracksuit or with all the know how about their topic. And that’s not what they want to hear. Sometimes they just want a friendly face. They want someone to understand what is happening in their local community. So that’s all really important. And then, and I, it’s probably a million ways that people can do this. It’s try and empower the people that you’re having a conversation with and really hear what it is that they’re going through. Physical activity is often way down the list. When we’re chatting to individuals, when we’re chatting to organisations. So just listen. It’s some, it’s just some of those simple things. And then just an occasional touch point of check in with them out of the blue. It doesn’t have to be for any particular reason. It doesn’t have to be for a particular project that you’re working in. People really appreciate that touch point, or if you’re passing the building, just popping in, knocking on the door that carries so much weight. And as I say, just usually by chance, there’ll be an opportunity that will come up and it has happened on numerous occasions a really small scale and then really large scale stuff that we’ve done within Sheffield, but you’d sort of able to call in those, those favours that ask for help. And there’s that genuine willingness to collaborate and work together when you sort of laid those foundations and those stepping stones into that work. And yeah, Lola, I know you’re super
experienced in, in this world of community development. It’s sort of an add on for me coming from a physical activity background, but yeah, if there’s anything that I’m saying that you agree with, I completely disagree with, feel free to challenge me on it. But yeah, I know your background certainly around the community development and voluntary sector side.

**Lola Akindoyin:** No, I mean, I would completely agree with everything that you said, really. And the emphasis on, on people the emphasis on kind of, or having principles that are around human connection you know, principles that are around developing and building relationships and then all of the things that come alongside that.

So, you know, I think maybe a couple of things that I might add would be things like, you know, humility and, and, and an openness to go on a different journey because actually people come from very different experiences, walks of life, et cetera. And it’s important for us to go into spaces with an openness that allows for that to come forward. So, you know, I think too often we get caught up in potential. This is what I bring or, you know, my expertise and expertise is fine. But there’s value in other people’s expertise, perspective, et cetera, et cetera, and, and value in finding different approaches or ways of working.

And so again, coming back to the, to the people, for me, I’ve always seen, you know, really good work happen when it’s been collaboratively. In fact, I was like really struggling to think of if there’s an example of something where it has been solely delivered by one person in isolation. I just haven’t done, I just haven’t seen that work.

I’ve never been involved in that work. And I work in a borough where we really have a great focus on fostering collaboration, partnership work, finding sort of solutions together. And so for me, that’s kind of, I think I’m quite intentional about seeking out what sort of opportunities that allow that work to, to really happen because I think the conditions for that are really necessary, that we kind of do focus on relationships and, and opportunities to elaborate. Also, just in terms of maybe some specific things that I’d also perhaps draw out that quite have been helpful for the sort of local delivery pilot journey. There’s definitely been something about our being comfortable with uncertainty.

And, and actually the journey that you’re going to go on is like, that you think you’re going to go on is probably going to be quite different because actually it’s quite, it’s, it’s complex and it can be quite hard work to bring lots of different people
together to nurture relationships and to do that whilst also trying to deliver and drive work forward.

And so, you know, there is an element of ambiguity around where the work is going, you know, you might have the kind of broad headline, but actually in terms of how you’re going to get there, it is about co-designing and collaborating that with others. So there’s definitely something around, around that.

And also the point around the difference between working in a relational way and working in a way that feels quite transactional and relational working does take more time. So as Tom was saying, you know, sitting in a community centre, it’s very different from I’m just going to send an email, but actually, you know, whoever you’re sending the email to, there might be 101 reasons why they never get to that email, but actually, you know, they’re always there on a Wednesday afternoon.

So the timeout to go and see them on a Wednesday afternoon may give you your answer immediately. Maybe. So I think, you know, the, the, the recognition and always about bringing it back to the people. How, how does that work? You know, who are we working with and what’s the best way of being able to reach out, connect and develop a relationship.

**Kath Lord-Green:** In this context as well, have you or your teams had to adapt and evolve along the way? Five years for you, Lola 15 years for you, Tom. What have you seen as been the evolving moments along the way? What’s changed?

**Tom Hughes:** Yeah, and again, I think this is where me and Lola are probably a good contrast within this work.

So in Sheffield and this isn’t me saying that I’ve been a lone wolf because I’ve worked with some fantastic colleagues. I’ve sort of remained within the system for 15 years and acted as that constant for people and communities that what I said earlier about it almost doesn’t matter what uniform or badge you wear and which organisation you represent.

It’s, it’s about the relationship. So in Sheffield, there’s an amazing network of partners, but we don’t sit under one roof or, or, or in one office at times. We’re all employed by different organisations, but with the same goal of, of helping people to be as physically active as possible. So. There isn’t necessarily a broad team in Sheffield.
There’s just lots of passionate individuals that are in this place of work. And yeah, some of, again, my role is to ensure that we connect that off and, and before I hand back to you, Laura, there was just a couple of points when you’re talking and conversation sparks, thoughts, and ideas and things is that.

You’re sort of briefly touching it going to the community is absolutely integral to this. It is so easy as we are today to sit behind a computer and particularly in a post COVID world, do things online. Yes, that’s quicker. It might be more time efficient, but it just doesn’t build the same rapport. It doesn’t, it just, you don’t get it.

You’ve got to go and visit your communities. You’ve got to walk around those neighborhoods. You’ve got to see some of them are physical barriers. Some of them are perceived barriers of what that community may feel like, what it sounds like, what is happening in that place, that, that, that’s absolutely integral.

And I loved what you said I can’t remember how you phrased it, particularly Lola, but I would refer to it as embracing the chaos. It’s a completely chaotic world that we operate in. Community is a completely chaotic yours is a far more professional way of phrasing it, Lola. But yeah, just chucking yourself in there.

And it’s like a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle at times. It’s about starting to pull those pieces into small clumps and then starting to form a bit of a picture. You will never have a complete understanding of. The place where you’re wanting to work these people that you’re working with will have lived and breathed that community for 20, 30, 40, 50 years, their entire lives.

You’re sort of stepping into their territory. And it’s really important that you can understand just a little piece of that. So yeah, stepping out from behind the desk and, and taking that time to walk a mile in their shoes is so valuable as part of that.

Lola Akindoyin: I mean, I think one of the things I’d, I would add is also around the importance of being adaptive.

So one of the analogies that I really, really like, and I, you know, I think about it all of the time is I think it’s Heifetz and Linsky developed this model around being on the balcony and dance floor. And for me that really works because I mean, I do like to dance, but you know, it, it, it works purely because it is about the kind of what’s going on, on the dance floor in the immediate moments, what are you seeing?

And then when you step back, you know, or what are you doing, you know, in those moments, but then also always taking the time to step back to look at the dance
floor, you know, to look at, you know, is there choreography here? Are people just
doing things in complete, you know, different directions? Can everyone sort of the
beat?

It’s always that kind of thing about the standing back to reflect and then going
back to the dance floor to participate, then standing back to reflect and then
going back to the dance floor to participate. And, you know, for me, I think our
program is different. It has different, kind of, different, I guess, key actors and
players that are involved from in the beginning, because that has developed over
time.

Because actually, by doing that kind of being in there and then standing back,
we’ve noticed many different things. And also, I think the importance of really
looking carefully, and trying to gather as much insight from a broad cross section
of partners will definitely tell, you know, tell us something different.

And then finally, I think just to pick up on a point that Tom also made about our
working communities. is we’re not, you know, I, I’m really clear that my team should
not be there to duplicate or disrespect anything that anybody else has done or
been doing for much longer than my team would ever be there for.

So I think a key thing for us has been defining our role and doing that with, with
others. So, in this work, what is our role? Where can we as a team add the most
value to this work? And also how or where can we enable others to add the most
value to this work? So again, that kind of mindset of collaboration, but also
regularly looking at self and the work that we’re doing.

Tom Hughes: The bit that we might not have touched on there, Lola, was are you
okay to touch on what your sort of team looks like as part of the LDP? And just
again, some of what that role is because I certainly at times question what my
role is. So my friends think I’m a PE teacher at times and other people think I’m a
community development worker and other people have absolutely no idea what I
do.

And I questioned my own sanity several times a week as to what the role is, but
yeah, just the makeup of the team that you’ve got down there in Hackney and
how that is working. What sort of positions and things are people taking within
that?

Lola Akindoyin: Sure. So, and actually, and it changed. So you know, really early on,
we had what I would say is quite a traditional local government structure team.
We had programme managers, we had like a community partnerships post. There’s my role as, as head of program. And actually a lot of work, you know, was focused around the program management role of kind of keeping us kind of very structured and having print I think they’re called sprints where, you know, you’d kind of like your work is done within two weeks and et cetera, et cetera.

And actually it was very difficult to work in that way because you can’t do that with relational working. Program management is necessary and it’s an important tool. But actually that’s not, you know, building a team structure almost kind of around that way of working was actually quite challenging. So I think the community development sort of post that wasn’t the role that was right for the team and the nature of the work that we were doing.

So we moved actually that resource into the community so that it was much more community led. And my team then became kind of much more like what you’ve described, Tom, almost that kind of backbone. Convening sort of type of team that was supporting relationships to develop those facilitating connections both at a kind of community level, but also, you know, working across a number of the kind of statutory organizations in the area.

So that for me, when I say about, you know, being really clear about our role and defining our role, we are, you know, ours isn’t so much to do that kind of direct delivery with communities. We’re not the locally trusted organizations. There are many of those and many of them are really great. So it’s actually been about ensuring that they’re in a better position and in a stronger position to be able to do some of this, this work.

But there are also parameters around that, you know, we can’t, we aren’t able to do everything in response to every, everything that, that they need. Definitely in terms of being clear about what we can offer and how we can facilitate collaboration is the primary focus and, and working on top of those kind of knotty systems, structural barriers that I mentioned.

that can sometimes get in the way. So I think I mentioned that in my introduction, that even with great work in communities, if you’re not looking at some of those bigger systemic issues and how we can resolve and respond to some of those, then actually no matter how brilliant that work is at a community level, at some point it’s going to continue to butt against that.

Tom Hughes: I think sort of the simplest way of putting it is get around the table and it doesn’t matter whether you’re leading or just being sat there. Your role will
sort of become clear just by being present and you'll start to find the gaps and you'll start to pick up the bits that need doing and the dots that need joining.

And then, yeah, I think it takes a special kind of individual at times to work in that chaotic space. And that area of uncertainty because there are days that you completely doubt yourself and whether you are having an impact but then there’s some days of real clarity where yeah, you can sort of put your finger on a few things that you’ve done or a project that you’ve seen start or a conversation that’s, you know being born out of the back of something that you’ve done.

And that can just be as simple as connecting to people via email. But equally it can be convening a steering group and a working group to deliver a particular set of outcomes or outputs. So yeah, I love listening to you talk, Lola, because it’s a complete, it’s the same world, but it’s a completely different world with different resource and capacity.

So yeah, it’s always nice to be able to take this time to sit and listen to other people who are in this space.

**Lola Akindoyin:** Definitely. And I would agree. And it’s always great to have the opportunity to talk to people who are doing this work, but also people who have a passion for people, you know and, and that’s why I, you know, I’m, I’m really pleased that the, this kind of podcast is kicking off with, you know, talking about people because they are so important to doing work of this nature.

And, and also to provide an opportunity to, to support each other in this work, because some of the, you just said, Tom about, you know, sometimes you doubt yourself in this work. And I think that’s absolutely true. Sometimes you doubt yourself and actually sometimes other people will doubt you like as in, you know, that, that’s definitely been my experience.

And so it does require a kind of a real focus on all of the things we’ve been discussing, you know, people, collaboration, and an understanding of why we’re approaching things in a certain way. And, you know, it is a, it is different, it’s a different way of working when people are very used to, this is the program plan, this is what we’re going to do in, in this kind of two weeks.

And actually we’re the ones that are in control of delivering this. Well, what we’re saying is, no, that’s not quite what we believe is the thing that’s going to get that kind of long term sustained change. This is about, you know, going where things are a bit messy, delving into those things that are really quite difficult, you know,
like going at like, we’ve got a particular project and you know, I remember people like, well, we just, we just don’t work with this group of colleagues.

We just don’t work with this, you know, this, this group of organization. And for me, I heard that exactly the group of organizations we’re going to end up working with, because You know, there was clearly something there as to why, and then other people would say, we don’t talk to the council. And I’d be like, how do you not talk to your local council?

So again, we’re going to have that conversation. Let’s delve into that. Let’s get into that stuff to try and work out whether actually we could change that. And, you know, I’ve seen so far such words is that when we’ve delved into some of that messy stuff, it has been painful at times. It has required a number of repeat and repetitive conversation.

It has been challenging at times we had to take a break to find out and then go back at another time, but actually it’s starting to change things. You know, there is, there is absolutely a need to delve into that stuff in order to get to the outcomes that we need. And that’s what we’re now starting to see.

So I think there’s also something about the confidence in the approach, even in those moments of utter self doubt or in the face of when other people are doubting you.

**Kath Lord-Green:** It sounds like there’s been a lot of change. You’ve adapted and evolved a lot already. Looking ahead, how do you think you’re going to have to adapt and evolve in the next phase of the work?

**Lola Akindoyin:** So, I definitely feel that we’re at a point now, and like many of the colleagues who are involved in sort of place partnership work, working in support England and work of this nature. It is actually about really being able to tell the story of the work that we’ve been doing and, and being able to sort of draw out the impact.

So when I was just mentioning that things, you know, we’re starting to see that change, actually, I would argue that there’s no use in us just giving you the impact. You really need to understand the journey, you know, that’s been a really crucial part of how we’re kind of ending up with the outcomes that we’re beginning to see.
So that’s definitely an area of work that we really want to focus on and strengthen. It’s just how we do that, but also how we continue to influence different parts of the system and recognising that people do like different things in terms of understanding the impact. So some people, you know, they really want the sort of storytelling.

They, they want that, that, that detail. They want to know who’s involved, et cetera. And other people are actually very interested in quite hard metrics data. And that’s an area that we would like to do some more work on, but again, you know, the numbers without understanding the people, you know, that those, those things don’t necessarily neatly connect.

So there’s definitely something about thinking quite carefully around how we, we tell that story. And then I think my final point is also about how we build the capacity within our local system to do the more work of this that I HR, like, what does it take to be able to do more collaboration? What does it take to, you know, to connect and to be open and willing to think differently and to understand a different perspective and actually look for something that.

Might be a refreshed or a new approach or actually just bringing different partners to, to, to be involved and more collaboration across the system. You know, by no means have we done it, you know, we haven’t done it all. We’ve, we’ve done bits of it with, we’re working through it. So it continues to be a work in progress, but I think it’s absolutely about, you know, building on what we’ve learned and you know, a very strong role around that collaboration and making sure that people can come into any kind of collaborative working, feeling confident feeling able to develop those relationships in a place of kind of mutual respect and, and work

Tom Hughes: together. I think there’s a few things you said, Lola, that I’ll probably just quickly build on, because it was, I was sort of jotting down as you were talking, that’s my way of capturing this.

I think we’ve probably been really positive so far, chatting about our work and it’s, it’s because we care and we love it. It’s probably just a flag that it’s incredibly challenging as well, and incredibly frustrating at times. Certainly, and I’m certain I’m not the only place that, that feels this.

We need our partners to evolve with us. I think you’ll get a sense from me in all of it. We probably have a pretty good idea. We don’t know all the answers, but we have
a few. And we need some partners to come on that journey with us. That’s from a, a sort of a national organization level. That includes Sport England.

And then it comes down to a real local level as well. I've just come on this journey with us, come out and get to understand people. It’s incredibly challenging times, economically, socially, lots going on. So yeah, that’s. And how we do that’s challenging because then you're going into a whole other realm of building trust, building relationships, convincing people that this is the right way to go about things.

And I don’t know where sort of Hackney’s at in terms of its, its leadership and, and that setup, but there’s probably a real need for us in Sheffield to almost break through that glass ceiling. That’s certainly an operational level. We know this, we can make stuff happen. We can get into our communities.

We know where the people are. We really need our political leaders and senior leaders across the city to start bumping physical activity up the priority list a little bit, that is still an ongoing challenge. So. There’s probably bits that as individuals, we'll all need to adapt and evolve, but the city needs to start doing that as well.

We can champion and we can case study and we can evidence and we can provide all the research of the benefits of people being more physically active, but need a real change around sort of the political landscape of every couple of years shifting the goalposts a little bit that it feels like we’ve got a pretty, pretty good understanding of our places.

We just need some of that real buy in and Yeah. Sparkling of, I’m going to say gold dust. And some of it is cash and resource to be able to do this and, and have more people like Lola, I’m guessing in Hackney would be a massive starting point. So yeah, I just want it to flag that it’s not all easy.

It’s not all plain sailing. I sleep pretty well at weekends. And then you sort of back to it on a Monday first thing. But yeah, it’s. Yeah, it’s just about people, and if you can surround yourself with some of the right people doing the right stuff you’re at a pretty good starting point, so yeah.

Lola Akindoyin: I think that’s a, a great point to also flag Tom, because It has, you know, definitely has moments of significant challenge. It has moments of small challenge but the challenges are certainly there. And you know, I think in Hackney we definitely have political leadership that kind of understands the work that we’re doing.
And a lot of this work is actually about working in communities. And so again, just kind of, as Tom was saying earlier about how, you know, it’s not necessarily about physical activity, actually, often that’s not the kind of key connecting point. Yeah. So I’m also really struck by the fact you know, that we also need to just continue to think quite differently about how we can deliver physical activity outcomes.

So some of the most obvious, you know, people that you may think will be involved in this work are not necessarily the ones that are going to be able to actually reach into communities and work with communities. You know, I’m really struck by the significance of kind of active environments work. You know, which when I came into this role, I don’t think I realised how significant that was going to be. But actually, you know, work around active environments is connected to things like regeneration, planning, housing, park, sustainable transport teams you know, I think like road management or, you know, whatever, but that’s also called. So again, they’re not necessarily the teams that you would obviously think about in relation to delivering sport and physical activity programs or outcomes, but actually certainly in our case, and I think of course, many other places the active environments work has been really important and a key kind of area of the work.

So yeah, certainly not wanting to shy away from, from the challenges that come with this. But I also, you know, think that the work around place, the context of place is so important. And so with all the work that’s brought Sport England to doing around Uniting the Movement. I think it’s really key to kind of just continue building and the kind of capacity within a workforce to be able to work in this way.

Kath Lord-Green: It sounds like you’ve both learned a lot already. Is there anything you’d do differently?

Tom Hughes: Everything. No, loads. And I think some of it comes with just experience and maturity. I think a big thing for me is, you know, almost look, take a step back at times and check who’s got the nose pressed up against the glass a little bit, who’s on the outside that’s showing a real keen interest or it’s sort of mixing things up a little bit and it might be a little bit of an agitator or someone who’s just thinking a little bit differently.

Surround yourself with some more of those people. I certainly probably find myself way too often surrounding myself with people who, think like me, act like me, and that’s probably why we end up working in silos and exactly what you’ve just said, Lola, around sort of active environments and active travel.
That’s been the real slow burn for us in, in Sheffield, but that’s starting to come on leaps and bounds at the minute. And it’s a bit of that pincer movement that communities are starting to see the value in it, but we’re also starting to see a political shift. And we’re certainly seeing that from the mayoral combined authority in, in Sheffield, that they’re really starting to be hot on that. I think the biggest shift that will be needed in that sector is they are brilliant. Nationally putting investment into infrastructure. We can build stuff in the UK. We’re pretty good at building stuff, despite what some people might think, but it’s the hearts and minds and it’s the behaviours that come with that.

And it’s that deep connection into communities of, is this what they want? Will they actually use it? Do they have the means if you’re building cycle lanes and we’re in a city that’s incredibly hilly then cycle lanes. Is that the answer? It might be. I’m not saying that it isn’t, but let’s work with our communities to do that.

But yeah, in terms of doing things differently, just start having conversations and just do not go in with the answers. Do not go in with a conversation being about what you want to achieve. Just go in and just be genuinely curious. I think we’ve probably all. All be guilty. Well, I certainly have a sort of going in and, and being a bit of a, a saviour on the white horse and here to fix all of your area’s problems.

And, and that’s just not realistic. So yeah, avoid doing that, but just find some cool people, go and understand people, go and have conversations and invest time in doing that sometimes it doesn’t feel like work, but that’s the really important part of the job. You might think that. being sat behind your laptop and tied to emails and things is what you should be doing.

Just get out there, have conversations, said it a little bit earlier on, sort of walk around those communities and really understand what exists at times. It’s so valuable and it’ll just be those conversations you end up having on the corner of the street or in the local library or the community that, that really sparks a point of interest.

But yeah, other than that, there’s, there’s probably some points that, that Lola can come in on with her experience, but just go in with genuine curiosity, if you don’t have the genuine curiosity, you might not be in the right, field of work. So maybe then question that, but yeah, if, if you’re genuinely curious, go in and if your sort of vehicle to create changes, conversations around physical activity, brilliant.

If it isn’t, and it is about travel, there’s links into being physically active there. If it’s links into health and social care or education, there are links into conversations
about physical activity there. So. Yeah, go in, be curious surround yourself with
different people and look who’s got their nose pressed up against the glass and
showing an interest in maybe not the sort of more formal ways.

**Lola Akindoyin:** It’s really interesting just in terms of the things that you were
summing up, because I absolutely would agree about the point around curiosity
and that deep interest in, in people and why we’re doing that work, why we’re
doing this work is the, is the key driver. So to me, there’s probably a couple of things
I’d add.

One of those is I think I challenge a bit more from the outset, you know, and, and
when I say that, I actually think I mean much more within my own organisation. So,
you know, as much as we were open to working differently. I think a number of the
things that we then went on to learn early on, my gut was already telling me those
things.

So again, you know, when I, when I talk about the fact that I changed the structure
of the team, I think some of that work could have been done much earlier. And so
that’s from the very, very outset. There was an absolute kind of very clear, not just
a principle, but actually the action that followed around collaboration with a
community.

So really thinking quite carefully about how resources are used and actually, you
know, recognizing power and the imbalance that the resource can sometimes
give, you know, around that, that imbalance of power and how resources are
utilised. So, you know, I think that would definitely be something from, from the
outset is actually how can we, from the very beginning.

enter into this with the spirit of collaboration that ensures we’re all able to
participate in delivering this work. And, you know, that point about not just
expecting people to, to turn up and, and being too extractive, you know, cause our,
our community organisations and partners are a bit, you know, they, they just
don’t, it’s not an appropriate ask.

So actually just, you know, taking action a little bit sooner. And I think the other
thing is really trying to understand how or found a way to tell the story earlier and
sooner. So I think also we were almost waiting for that aha moment, like we have
reached this point and this is a key milestone, et cetera, that has been achieved
and therefore we will tell this story now.
But again, that, well, it doesn’t do is tell you the 101 conversations, tasks, actions that we need to take to get to that milestone. And actually it almost implies that it’s easy or it, you know, it doesn’t give a real picture of the work that’s needed. So I think for us, there’d definitely been something about, you know People weren’t seeing us, you know, so Tom, when you were saying that, in a sense, that is the work and I completely agree, you know, we’ve, you know, we’re busy behind the scenes, so it’s not necessarily that you needed to see us, but then sometimes I think people will kind of say, well, so what are they doing then?

We were very clear about what it was that we were doing, but actually they weren’t necessarily telling the story in a way that was easy to, for people to understand what, you know, why that behind the scenes work is important. So. I think those kind of more regular opportunities to tell the story of the work, how the work is emerging.

But also when I say tell the story, not just from our perspective, but actually all those different people that are in, involved in the work, you know, making sure that there is space for them to actually really talk about it from their perspective as well.

And that requires a real skillset as well to be able to do that.

That I mentioned at the start that I’m a bit of a jack of all trades, but I’m not a marketing or media specialist. So being able to articulate that for people is sometimes really challenging. So yeah, finding the resource to be able to do that. And if that’s somebody locally or within academic institutions or public sector bodies, whoever that is, to be able to help you on that journey do that.

And then I think the last point for me is. And I find this really hard is not always being the lead person or the lead organization that it’s sometimes all right to take a step back. I’m very imminently going on some annual leave and I’m that person who thinks everything will fall around or fall apart while I’m not around.

And I absolutely know that it won’t. And sort of all the time you become comfortable that somebody else will pick that up. If you sort of leave a bit of a space, if you continue to fill that space, nobody else will step forward. And that’s not necessarily within my nature and it is something that I’ve had to work on.

But yeah, letting, letting somebody else do that bit of work is incredibly empowering as well. So I think when we touched base just before this Lola referred
to it Lola referred to it as being not always being the lead goose and sometimes taking the backseat is is important. So yeah, that, that’s something again that I, I do struggle with, but incredibly important to step away from the work at time and, and be part of the wider team.

**Kath Lord-Green:** Is there anything else you’d like to add? Are you still learning? Do you want to learn more?

**Lola Akindoyin:** Always still learning. I’m always still learning and, you know, really open to, to learning more and because things always change. So, You know, we’re now entering a period of kind of, you know, significant financial pressures.

And so, you know, there, there will be a need to think differently about the way that we will work from the way that we do things. But I, again, I would say that that’s where collaboration and working together kind of really does come into its own because as when resources, you know are more limited, then actually we do need to think very carefully about.

How we can get the best out of what we eat can bring to the table. That’s not, I’m not talking about money here. I’m talking about, you know, just quite money sometimes, but sometimes, you know, it’s about other, other ways of, of working and, you know, in, in terms of Tom’s kind of last point around, you know, not always being the ones that lead, that’s absolutely the approach is, you know, for us now is how are we starting to sort of move back and we haven’t always been the ones that are leading anyway.

But also where we have, how can you start to do that transference to other, other colleagues or other partners who are now in a better place to, to lead some of this work? And the point that, that Tom made around kind of, you know, being in the work and almost being so in the work that you kind of start to think, well, actually, you know, can anyone else do it?

Or, you know, I’m, I’m, I’m in it so much, but I think that’s also for me when you’re perhaps working with a little bit more of a, of a team and, and more people. It’s just being very intentional about the skills and experience that you’re trying to bring into this work. And I don’t think we’ve necessarily touched on that so much so, so far, but, you know, just being really clear.

So I used the example around kind of programme management and then actually wanting to have something that was much more around partnership development. You know, and therefore what kind of skills would be needed around
partnership development was actually something quite different from a more programmatic type role.

So, you know, there are several other examples, but I think when, when we were able to do that, both in terms of immediate teams, but also just thinking about our system, there’s a vast pool of skills, experience and resource to draw from. And so actually as you connect that system, that’s when you start to see the great work that, that can be achieved.

**Tom Hughes:** And I’d agree with you Lola, always learning probably every hour. But it’s the best part of the job of just finding out different things about different people, different communities, different projects, different things that are happening and connecting that all together and just finding those opportunities.

And that missing piece of the jigsaw at times is incredibly satisfying. I think the hardest part that comes with that is then sharing that it’s sort of, where is the release files to, this is all sort of coming into. It’s probably quite a small number of individuals in both areas of then how. Can you pass that on to different departments, different people, different organizations and that’s then a sort of a resource and capacity issue, or is it a skillset issue?

It’s probably a bit of both. But yeah, always learning. Love it. It’s completely bonkers all the time. So anyone who’s listening to this, do it, take the plunge, get into this kind of world. But yeah, I think the big ask of me is get out there, explore your communities and just find out. how you can help.

**Intro/Outro:** Thanks for joining us for this episode of the Place Change Makers podcast series. Remember though, conversation doesn’t have to end here. Check out our other episodes and take a look at our online resources by visiting www.sportengland.org/placepartnerships. Why don’t you come and join our community of learning, where we’ll keep you connected to the latest thinking and learning being surfaced by places.

So until next time, stay curious. And keep exploring!