Naomi: 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/placepartnerships

Kath Lord-Green: Welcome to the Place Change Makers podcast.

I’m Kath Lord-Green, your host, and this is episode three, Being a Humble Leader, Influencing and Enabling Others. In this episode, we highlight the essential leadership skills and behaviours necessary for enabling systemic change. We hear insights and practical advice from people who are leading place based systemic change, the resilience building strategies they adopted and how they adapted to unforeseen challenges to maintain momentum.

Our guests today are Claire and Andy.

Claire Tomkinson: Hi everyone. I’m Claire Tomkinson. I’m Strategic Lead for People and Leadership at GM Moving in Greater Manchester. We’re the Active partnership for Greater Manchester, one of 43 working as a network throughout the country. And we’re also one of the original 12 Local Delivery Pilot areas, now known as Place Partnerships. So, testing and learning what it takes to build activity and movement into daily life. My role is Strategic Leadership. It’s generally based on the belief that it’s people that inspire, motivate and support people to move more and live more active lives. The building movement back in today’s life is really complex, it’s not just a personal choice, there’s lots of barriers and inequalities, and therefore we need to support people, workforce, volunteers, to work and lead in different ways that are more collaborative.

So a lot of my work is based around leadership development, with a real strong emphasis on community based leadership, capability, mindset, relationship and behaviours to unite people in a place around shared purpose rather than their organisational goal. And I fell into this work kind of by accident, my background in work with the voluntary sector and connecting the voluntary sector with health and social care.
And I think there was a bit of frustration within that work that there were lots of projects that were brilliant. We’re changing the leadership styles, behaviours and cultures which weren’t leading to long term sustainable change, which is why we wanted to really reframe what we meant by leadership and who are the leaders in our communities as well.

Andy Maddox: Hi, I’m Andy Maddox. I’m Strategic and Service Leader at the City of Doncaster Council, for Leisure Services. My role here is to oversee anything that’s physical activity or sport related. Be that contract management of our leisure trust, major sports events or sports development in its traditional sense, but more recently over the past six to eight years very much around systems thinking across the council using physical activity for working with our communities.

I sit within the Chief Exec’s office, the newly formed chief exec’s office within, their teams there, but actually within public health, although my background is not in public health. I’ve been working in that team for the past eight years. And that sort of brings a sort of new aspect of my work to that.

My background is very much sport and physical activity. I worked my way up from the shop floor. You could say that coaching was my passion at the age of 14, 15, I coached in the outdoors, particularly kayak and canoeing, sailing, et cetera. And for my first 15 years working, I worked in outdoor education, working my way up to running centres and managing programmes, both here and also coaching abroad as well.

From then, I’ve sort of stepped into the realms of sports development in 2000. And since then, I’ve sort of worked my way through the system in the authority working in numerous departments and areas around physical activity. And that’s as wide as sort of active travel capital expenditure and builds all the way through to the public health setting now.

So yeah, Doncaster has been my life as a workplace predominantly, although I’ve worked elsewhere in the UK and abroad. But also, working in a single organisation for a length of time gives you that that reach across an organisation and understanding of how it works.

Kath Lord-Green: What does leadership mean to you in the context of your role and work?

Andy Maddox: Good question. Leadership for me is about empowering people, empowering teams, empowering individuals, empowering organisations. I think
this is key to this work that I've found and hopefully a reflection of my career as I've been in leadership positions. Most of my life, either as a coach, when you're coaching people, you're actually taking people through a program of technical skills to use in actual expeditions and things like that.

You're in charge and that's a different type of leadership to where I am now. However, the key point about this is about getting the best out of people and making them believe in themselves. One of the things I always think of as a leader in a team, and I don't like calling myself a leader because as soon as you start doing you start thinking you're apart from the rest of the people.

So, I always see as my challenge is to get the best out of individuals. And let's say if it's the team I work with, it's actually to help them develop and blossom as they grow to the point where if, if they wish to move to another organisation, how do I help them get that role in another organisation?

It's not about keeping those people in situ. It's about bringing that leadership out. And I think it's also a term we'll probably come across a number of times in this conversation about distributed leadership. And what does that mean and how do you empower that and how do you take that forward? So it is an interesting place to be in.

It's an interesting way of working. It does mean you've got to let things go. You've got to let those responses go. And that is a challenge to most people who are seen as leaders to allow that to happen. And that's probably something we could probably across the whole system, both internally in like a local authority, politically, and also in other wider systems, is actually start releasing some of that authority to others who are in the system.

Containing it in one place is not the right style of leadership. It's about giving authority. And as one of my old chief execs used to say to me, permission to proceed, proceed with permission. And that sort of is the way of thinking about it.

Claire Tomkinson: Yeah, I'd agree with that as well, Andy, and we've been doing a lot of work to reframe what we mean by leadership within a collaborative environment.

So, we talk a lot about leadership. It's not about your position or how much positional power or authority you have or if you're in charge. Because when you're talking about working across sectors and boundaries, there generally isn't anyone in charge of all those different bits of the system and across different sectors.
So, we talk a lot about leadership as the people who are capable of working with others to create change, and that can be absolutely anybody, anybody, anywhere, but the real focus on relationships and behaviours and reputation and, and trust, and do you create more change in the middle of an informal network, or do you create more change at the top of an informal structure within an organisation?

So, leader to me means people. Having the skills and capabilities to unite a really broad group of people and diverse group of people with different contributions to make to work together around a shared purpose, rather than a leader being someone in charge with all the answers, because I don’t think that really exists within a complex system.

**Andy Maddox:** I think what you say there, Claire, about a shared purpose is crucial. It’s about principles and values that everybody hopefully buys into and wants to work to. And I think that is a critical part of leadership in the early stages— is with others— agreeing those shared principles.

And then once they are in place is being strong enough to be beholden to them and not be pressured to waver away from them. So, from day one in Doncaster, we set our principles out very strongly around how we would work with our communities, individuals, groups, etc., and how we would support those.

And that has enabled us to hopefully grow a distributed system where the leadership is not just owned by those in the local authority, but it’s owned by those that are working to those set of principles.

**Claire Tomkinson:** Yeah. And I think one thing I said before in my introduction was we know that one thing we’ve learned over the last few years is that being active and moving more isn’t a personal choice.

It’s not just down to your own willpower and motivations. You can’t talk about activity and movement without talking about inequalities and education and transport and health and green spaces and community clubs and community organisations. So, to get all of those people seeing that they’ve got a role to play and a contribution to make, particularly when they don’t think that activity and movement is part of their core area of work. To be able to get them all to point in the same direction and see it as part of their work and see they’ve got a role to play is a big part of the leadership culture that we’re trying to develop.
**Kath Lord-Green:** Claire, you mentioned earlier on skills and capabilities of leaders.

What would you consider to be the most important leadership characteristics for driving systemic change?

**Claire Tomkinson:** I think the clue’s in the word, what you’ve just said of systemic change of being a leader within a system is very different from being a leader within an organisation. And it requires a very different set of skills, behaviours, and mindsets.

I think the first thing is having the ability to recognise the situation that you’re in, recognising that when you’re working on things like inactivity and inequalities, it is really complex. There’s no project plan. You can’t project manage your way out of a complex situation. So, getting to lead us to recognise this is where we need to step in as a leader with a project plan, some targets, some KPIs, and when we need to step back and go, I don’t have the answers to all of this on my own, and that’s fine.

It’s not a weakness. It’s a strength to recognise that. And I need to bring in different people is, for me, a key skill within this kind of work. So, recognising the situation you’re in and understanding that it’s complex and it’s not complicated and that it needs a different set of leadership skills and behaviours.

We talk a lot about whether it’s a leader as a hero or a leader as a host. So, when to step in with a plan to save anyone and when to step back and bring other people into the conversation is vital to me as well. Understanding the local context, but being able to connect that to the bigger picture as well.

So, having an eye on everything that’s going on that influences activity and movement without just thinking specifically about the details. And we talk a lot about values as well. That’s something we’ve come across loads in our work of being led by your values and understanding how different values and worldviews and mindsets impact on the work and could create resistance to change.

So, really moving from I’d say a very transactional delivery mindset to a very transformative collaborative mindset. I think for a lot of people, it’s a completely different way of working that they’re just not used to.

**Andy Maddox:** I agree with you there, Claire. I think one of the things that you said - hero leadership styles to other styles.
I think you have to be adaptive in this process. You have to be able to be a bit of a chameleon. But I would say for most of my role I’m there to sort of relationship manage and bring the connections together. And that’s the style that you have to take. Although there is a point sometimes where decisions have to be made and what we have to be very careful of when you bring a lot of people together is you can discuss the solution, but not come up with a solution.

And sometimes you just have to make a decision, whether it’s the right or wrong decision, you’ll find out when you use all the evidence, all the information on the table. And sometimes it is quite a difficult thing to do not try and step in immediately. But at some point you may have to do that.

Say, right, we’re going to follow this route and we’re going to see if it works, but if it doesn’t work, we can step aside and have a think about it and learn from it. So, it’s that old adage - if it doesn’t work well, it’s a learning experience. It’s not a failure.

And that is crucial in leadership. You never fail. What you always do is you learn from it and reset and try again. And that in some organisations – that’s very difficult. I would imagine. I know in my organisation many years ago, that had been a very difficult position to be in because failure was seen as you’ve not done your job.

Well, actually it’s not failure. You’ve learned something that the organisation needs to take on board. And, therefore, as a leader, then you can actually improve the system and improve yourself. So, I think there’s a key one there. The other thing that as leaders we’ve got to be careful of is getting stuck in KPIs.

You know, performance indicators, because when we do that, what we can do is deliver on the performance indicator, and not actually deliver to what the need is. So for me, I try and ask my team not to do that. Yeah, sometimes we have to do that, particularly when it’s led by, let’s say funding from the government, who are very KPI driven, but it should be about movement - is the dial moving in the right way to improve it and not just over six months or 12 months, but long term.

A key thing to consider as leaders in this, you’re in for the long haul. And actually that dial or that direction might not move significantly for quite a while, which puts you under significant pressure. So, I think one of the attributes of being a leader in this is resilience and actually building confidence in yourself, which is hard to do initially, that actually what you’re doing is the right thing.
And actually over time, you will still see the difference made. It’s not a quick win. So that at times can be quite difficult. Internally managed as an individual and externally expressed to your seniors or other organisations at the same time.

Claire Tomkinson: Yeah, that’s a really good point and I forgot about that.

It’s that sense of having a view of the bigger picture and that long term change. This is a generational level change. This isn’t something that’s going to happen overnight, you need to bring people with you and alleviate some of the fears of the more senior leaders and funders who want quick wins, who want 12 month KPIs and performative measures.

It just doesn’t work in that kind of space. So, how do you protect people and create space to work in that way, but also tell a really good story along the way of the difference that it’s making and why you’re taking that approach?

Andy Maddox: Definitely. I think the one thing about that, that approach and the distributed leader style is you look for other leaders in the system.

So, I know Claire and myself have spoke before, I’m a long timer in the local authority. So, I’ve got capital in the organisation, I’ve been around in the organisation for that long. You know, you build that sense of personal capital with either politicians, individuals, managers, etc..

Working in the local authority and in the voluntary sector and the sector outside. And I think, look, it’s, a lucky position to be in because you could actually pull on other leaders to do your bidding for you. So those that, if you’re, you’re fairly new into it, it’s looking for people who can be your advocates and your leaders on your behalf in other parts of the system and do your bidding or your work for you.

As long as those principles are upheld that we mentioned earlier. So, it’s an interesting one because it does take time, this work. It really does take time and that sometimes means you’re under pressure and sometimes you wonder if you’re doing the right things, but you just sit tight and believe in it, particularly if you’re working from a very strong evidence base.

Kath Lord-Green: Definitely. Do you think that’s what gave you the confidence? You mentioned confidence earlier on, by working from that evidence base, and has that made your own style of leadership change and adapt over time? You know,
giving you that confidence to lead in a different way. You’ve been saying, Andy, that you’ve been in this area of leadership in different forms for a very long time.

So how has your style evolved? How has it given you that confidence to actually know that it’s the right thing to do?

**Andy Maddox:** It’s an interesting one that because you say about confidence, confidence is one of the hardest things to have, I find and I’ve dealt with a number of people in senior positions and you always think they are very confident people and they know what’s happening as leaders and you get talking to and actually, as I get older, you get a little bit more reflective and you start to think that chief execs that I work with in my organization or others, once you get to know them all on a personal relationship, they’re just people that are in a job that’s a little bit different to yours.

They tend to have the same worries, the same concerns. They start asking you for advice and you realise they are just normal people, to be honest. But, they’ve obviously got bigger pressure sometimes on them. So, I think what the way I’ve adapted over time is I’ve been more reflective and I would advise people if they’re getting into sort of leadership like this or any form of leadership is be really reflective on it, but not be hard on yourself. When you’re a young leader or a young person in responsibility, you’re quite hard on yourself because it hasn’t worked quite well.

I’ve reflected a lot on quite a few leaders, but there’s a few in my life that have influenced me, and one of them said to me when they tasked me to do something, he’d say (the same one that says permission to proceed and proceed with permission)t, I want you to do a piece of work, a big piece of work that needs doing, first of all, don’t do anything illegal.

Secondly don’t overspend, but if you’re going to overspend, let me know. And thirdly if you’re struggling at all, come to me and I’ll get you some help. That was it. And I think once you’ve been given that sort of very loose authority, that gives you that confidence. But I think through my career and the way my style has changed – I now also reflect. I go back to reflection, reflect on what support I’ve not had.

So, what support do I need to give to the people I’m trying to coach and mentor now? And that is a key to me because there are times in your career when you think, crikey, I could have done with some support there and it’s lacking or it was a very old-fashioned autocratic style of leadership you’ve dealt with.
And that’s not what we should be. But I think also I draw on my very early skills in the outdoors, knowing that, and again, we’ve discussed this previously, Claire, myself, and others, where I always work on the principle, make a decision. You never make a decision that is going to be negative. You make a decision on your best experience and evidence.

And as long as you’re faithful to that decision, and you’re doing it for the best will in the world, You’ve made the right thing. As I said earlier, you can always change it. So, I would say to leaders or people going through this process, once you’ve worked with people and you’ve got that responsibility and you’ve got people who give you that are confident in you, do make the decisions.

And, be honest and open that if it’s not the right decision, you can go back and put your hands up. Sorry, yeah, it wasn’t right. We’ve learned something from that. Let’s try again and actually a number of times it’s other people who have already confirmed what the decision is that you’re going to make, you know, you’re there, they’re actually talking to you and they’re saying we should do, You’ve already decided because if you’re connected to your communities, if you’re connected to your organizations, you should be all be thinking on a very similar level and a very similar way of solving problems going forward. So, I think that’s a confidence boost for you when you actually make the decision. Everybody goes, well, yeah, I was thinking about that as well. You know, you’re on the right track.

Claire Tomkinson: for me as well. I don’t know about you, I think my view of leadership and the way I’ve thought about leadership has changed completely over probably about the last 10 years.

I mean, I’m from a very working class background, I grew up in Salford, and I think I grew up with a real sense of leadership was the domain of a very small number of very clever, very senior people. And that absolutely was not me or people like me in my community at all. And I spent probably the first 20 years of my career completely avoiding any conversation about leadership.

Okay. You know, massively just thinking, that’s not me. That’s those clever people in charge, command and control. They tell people what to do. And that didn’t seem to align with me and my values and my ways of working, which is really interesting now that I’ve kind of gone completely full circle around that.

And I think it was from when I discovered systems, I was doing some work connecting the voluntary sector and communities with health and social care, and really seeing that command and control way of working just wasn’t working, it
wasn’t doing anything to fix some of the inequalities, particularly around health inequalities that we’re facing in communities.

I’m coming across the style of leadership that was all about that distributed network of people at different levels, different places, cooperating to create change, and a leader could be anywhere, anyone and anywhere. That really shifted our thinking, and made me rethink that leadership reframe it a little bit.

So, I can see that impact of that when working on some of the more deeply entrenched issues that we see in communities. So, now I’m very much about leadership as collaborative effort, as collective effort. Decisions need to be distributed between the people who are closer to those communities and closer to those issues and that it’s not just restricted to a small number of people.

**Andy Maddox:** I’d agree. I think what you’re saying there, Claire, is that thing about collaborative, when we’re talking about leadership, it’s not a case of I’m the leader. It’s not a case of my senior’s the leader, etc. The role, as I said, is more about relationship management. My role is to try and unlock the system so it can happen.

Now, if that means, unfortunately, I’m seen as the face of it, sometimes that’s just because I’ve got the ability to actually go in and knock on the door of the organisation or the individual and have that conversation. It’s not that I’m any better than the rest of the system by a long way. But it just, it’s just the ability to have those connections and have the time to do that.

So, I think that’s one of the big changes in leadership. It’s not you, you’re going in there and sort of sorting out your, all you’re doing is acting on other people’s asks to try and unlock things and make the connections. And nine times out of 10, what will happen is you just leave them to have that conversation and walk away because they will lead the decision making.

They will actually resolve it. Me and my team may get involved, or other partners if there is an ask for some specialist resourcing or some help or support as that goes along. And I think that that’s crucial for working in this systems way, is knowing that you do not have to be in the room all the time.

You do not have to be part of the conversation. You need to be able to trust people to resolve those issues themselves and lead their own decision making.
Kath Lord-Green: What practical approaches have you taken to build systems leadership capacity within your place? And what impact has it had to date?

Claire Tomkinson: Yeah, so at GM Moving, we’ve been looking at systems leadership approaches since about 2020. And we started that after working in our place and in our communities for a couple of years. Basically, what I was saying before, just seeing that the conditions and the culture and the distributed decision - the lack of that was really getting in the way.

So, we developed our systems leadership approach we’ve been running for a few years now and it’s really focusing on a number of learning development opportunities and we framed it very much in a way that it was open to everyone - if you felt like movement might assist you on your work – we provided a cross sector collaborative energised learning space that anybody could belong and participate in.

And we we listened really carefully to some of the things that people were getting stuck with and designed these opportunities around some of the less traditional training and development opportunities that you’d normally see. So we looked at things like introduction to systems leadership – what is it and what does it actually mean and why is it important?

We looked at things like values and leadership and what does a values led approach to leadership and decision making mean. We looked at systems leadership behaviours and how are the behaviours that we need from leaders changing in the future and changing as a response to working in this collaborative way and deeply rooted in communities.

We talked a lot about public narrative and storytelling and how we tell the story of the work in a way that brings people along and wants people to join you in action. And we talked about framing and how you work through uncertainty and change. And we found over the last, I mean, even the last year alone, hundreds of organisations and individuals coming along to participate in that across sport, local authority, health, transport, voluntary sector, community leisure etc..

So, a real cross sector movement of people who felt that physical activity really mattered to them and their work. And one thing we found from that over the last couple of years is a massive increase in people’s relationships, confidence, understanding, their knowledge, their skills, their motivation, their sense of purpose, and a real sense of we can do this, we can work in different ways in our
communities because we feel part of a supported network with new allies working alongside us.

I think one thing we’ve noticed when we’re getting stuck is I think we’ve done loads to increase the skills and capabilities of individuals, and I think we’ve done loads to look at what is a system wide movement of people and what do the behaviours and values and mindsets look like. The thing we’ve probably overlooked is people then go back to work in an organizational culture that feels quite different.

And if you’ve got a mindset of collaboration, shared decision making, holistic thinking, whole system approaches, yet you’re still working in an organization that’s very much got a traditional mindset of KPIs, project delivery, and all of that kind of stuff, it’d be really, really hard to create change. So, what we’re looking at now over the next couple of years, is the way we shift that focus to kind of bring in more of the strategic leaders and middle managers particularly, who I think get the blame for quite a lot, or are trying to hold all the pressures from above.

Look at what’s going on side to side and have the people at the line manager level wanting to work and lead in different ways. So, we’re really focusing on that strategic leadership, enabling that collective leadership. Who are the people in the system that can protect others to work? And give them that bit of freedom and the permission to say, go out there, make a decision, try something new, as long as it’s done with the best intentions, this is, if you’re innovating, you’ve got to go and try something different, even if it feels uncomfortable.

**Andy Maddox:** Yeah, I think uncomfortable is a good word to use because a lot of this in the early stages is very uncomfortable. I think one of the things that we do hear a lot and see a lot of is in organizations and when they’re working with the communities, they like to use the tag ‘You said, We did’. So, you know, the community’s asked for something and we go and do it.

And that is completely the wrong approach to take if you’re a leader. Yes, we need to listen, we need to engage, but actually it’s about empowering those organisations to do the work themselves. Because all you are doing with the ‘You said, We did’ analogy is a patriarchal approach that we are the family, we are the elders as an organisation, and you ask us to do something and we’ll do it for you.

Well, that world has changed very significantly. From where it was, you know, so let’s say like in the nineties when that was very much a top down approach. I think
some of the practical approaches - one is around narrative. The lived experience, understanding the lived experience of those individuals you’re working with.

I can never say, I can go there and put myself in their position. Although, doing the work has, again, made me think a little bit about it. I’ve done some work recently with carers and around what they do. And it’s made me reflect on my life because I didn’t realize I was actually a carer looking after my parents when one was disabled and one was ill.

I just thought that was the norm. And suddenly, you know, it’s a light bulb moment for me understanding that community a little bit deeper. Framing what you want to do and framing how you say that is crucial. you know, how you want to express yourself and how you wish to actually talk to people and engage them, needs a lot of thought.

Engagement processes, how we do that is, is key. And sometimes you have to learn on the hoof as we do that. You know, we’ve got examples here where we’ve tried to engage with communities. We’ve not been very successful. We’ve then been able to, to work with them and, and then we found leaders and advocates in there.

So, the key thing really is finding those diamonds in the communities who would become your advocates for you. And they are the leaders really, because they’re seen as the trusted individuals to go forward and do that. And I think, it’s something that does feel uncomfortable as I go back to that when you first started, but the more you do it, the more you see the benefits of it, the more it just becomes the norm.

And that really does help you with your confidence and how to lead. It is a really, really hard thing to do to adapt your style fairly quickly. So don’t be worried if you don’t feel like you’re doing it at pace. What you will do is adapt over time to become a completely different person. I’m completely different in a lot of my style now to what I was six, seven years ago.

Some of the things and tools I’ve got to use and be able to do that. And I think the thing around the distributed leadership is everybody asks; how do you measure that? Well, we’re in a fortunate position of the Place Partners, one of the LDPs, we could actually do that from an academic way to monitor and show the value.

And we know that we have now got a system of 3000 leaders in Doncaster who work to our principles. They’re all part of our systems network. They’re all part of
Get Doncaster Moving, which is our program. And they, they own it. I don’t own it. We just support them to be the owners of that.

And at some point they will take ownership completely as the funding or our resources or our staff move away. So, I think that’s one of the end goals is what is your sustainable outcome about leadership? And for me, the sustainable outcome is that you do yourself out of a job. And actually everybody takes that distributed leadership and actually has that onus to actually do the best they can in the system for the communities.

Kath Lord-Green: How have you worked collaboratively to increase the diversity of leaders? And have you got any examples of that? Making sure that the communities are more represented in your place of work.

Claire Tomkinson: Yeah, that’s been a real big focus in our work in Greater Manchester of how we make leadership and participation more representative of our local communities.

And there’s things we’ve noticed, some of the gaps and inequalities within our place. So, within our systems leadership work that I was talking about before, we work very closely with a number of voluntary sector partners on that. And so, we’ve got a new piece of work looking at how we broaden the diversity of people leading and advocating for sport and physical activity.

And that’s going to focus on racial inequalities. So that’s working with some very deeply rooted in communities, organisations who are really looking at a sense of justice and racial justice within leadership. So, we’re really looking at how we understand what the barriers are and how we elevate and amplify the voices of people who don’t often get heard.

So that’s a new piece of work that we’re just about to start. We’ve also done a big piece of work around volunteering and how to make volunteering in sport and physical activity more inclusive and representative of Greater Manchester’s communities. One thing we did quite differently with that is we obviously funded an academic research partner, but we also funded an advisory group to work alongside them, which was organisations from inequalities backgrounds and inequalities focused. And what we found now is even though the research has ended and we’re looking at how we put those recommendations into practice, we’ve distributed that leadership to a number of working groups who are looking at increasing the diversity of both volunteers as leaders, but also leaders within their system as well.
So, they’re looking at things like race, mental health, disability, children and young people, and getting more young people to think about careers and volunteering in sport, physical activity where they wouldn’t normally. We’re doing some work with the Chinese community, the Jewish community, asylum seekers and refugees, and we’re doing some work with Great Manchester Poverty Action around the impact of poverty and the cost of living crisis on volunteering and leadership opportunities as well.

So, we’ve really distributed that leadership to that collaborative network of people who are leading that change in their communities together. And we’re also doing some work with Great Manchester Youth Alliance, again, increasing the diversity of young people, considering sports and physical activity as a career and diversifying the workforce gradually over time as well.

And we’re also going to start some work around our trans and non-binary communities, particularly around gender diverse communities and people who you don’t see represented in those leadership positions and people who face some of the biggest barriers and inequalities to activity and movement as well.

So, we’ve done some work around that and we’re just looking for a new partner to work with us on that as well.

A bigger piece of work is looking at recruitment and how you recruit differently. And that’s going to be a longer-term piece of work for us, working with some partners around our NHS people and culture strategy is coming up within there a lot as well.

I think we seem to have innovated on everything apart from the way we recruit people into the workforce. So, we’re really, really keen to look at how we do that. Kind of redesign that to make it more inclusive for people who aren’t represented in the workforce at the moment.

**Andy Maddox:** I think that the voice of those that’s not heard is a crucial one.

And it can be drowned out by the champions of an area who are very positive about it, or actually by those that are actually just lobbying for something. So as leaders, you need to be aware of that, that sometimes the voices you hear are not necessarily the voices of the community.

So, I’m interested how you can try and get in that voice and be able to engage with it. And what we found quite a bit is sometimes you’ll come across a character
who is just sat in a meeting at the back of the room and they just make one comment and you think, well, I need to follow up on that, but actually that’s not the forum to do it.

And, and from that, it’s like pulling out a piece of thread. You suddenly unthread something and you start getting traction in the community or in the group. And we’ve got examples of that from one conversation we’ve had, because we’ve tried to be as wide in our discussions.

We’ve been able to actually engage with a group we’ve had, we’ve had very little or no dealings with previously. And that’s helped us sort of engage deeper with that community, those individuals. etc. Which then helps our partners. So, a lot of the time what we talk about here is that actually the use of physical activity is primarily around actually those stubborn inequalities and trying to get rid of those stubborn inequalities.

Our starting point is not to talk about being physical activity makes you healthy. Because most of the communities we’re going to be working in actually have lots more greater problems to worry about. It’s actually, how can we use our tools to enable our partners to act, to deal with those intrenched inequalities.

So, we work very heavily with our teams in public health. We fund posts in public health that work with people that coach and help people that have got long term illnesses etc.. We’ve also got groups that work with other agencies that are around employment and employability. We’re hoping to work with our mental health care trust around those people that are actually in mental health care hospital to enable them to have a social network through physical activity that stops them going back into care.

Now if we can do all those things and get those people engaged and have those conversations with our non-traditional communities, we can then sort of start having a greater conversation around increasing levels of physical activity. So, for me, the question around how do you work collaboratively and how do we increase in the diversity of those leaders, I would say is find out what their languages are, what they want to talk about and then talk about that. Do not talk about the benefits of physical activity because that’s not high on their agenda in most cases. Once you’ve got a strong relationship, then you can have that discussion and then intrinsically, they will become your leaders for you.

They will become your advocates for you. And then, as I said before, you let that roll and that network and that social network grows, as long as they understand
what the principles are. But it’s not easy, you know, to find it in some areas, like Claire’s mentioned, they’ve got greater connections with communities than we probably have here in Doncaster, just because of the nature of the build of the communities and the population densities we have and etc..

But at the same time, you do find some really interesting routes here. An example of one of those for us was we were doing a lot in parks and actually what we decided to do in one of the parks is we’ve got a wild area that’s grown. And as an exercise, this is not designed as an engagement tool.

We did scything. So, you know, with a scythe. A bit like Aidan Turner did in Poldark, that style of thing, if you remember that programme, we were scything. And the school next door to it, the primary school, is probably one of our most racially diverse schools. It was the time they were coming out. As they came out, we had a group of parents, from different demographics, stop and watch.

At that point some ladies came up to us who were Somalian and they actually explained they can remember their grandmother scything in the fields. And that took them back to that. That started a conversation. Now we’re connected with them and they’re part of the friends of group for that park.

We had a chap who was Eastern European and he came and told the instructor, he’s doing it completely wrong because they scythe in a completely different way. That led to another conversation. Now that gentleman is now part of the friends of group. So, what I’m trying to say there is leaders, you’ve got to look for those opportunities that are potentially not manufactured to engage, but do engage and grab them because that’s probably what we call the spark of the moment, the enlightenment moment where you can have that conversation rather than making it formal, which most people are a little bit wary of, to be honest.

Kath Lord-Green: I think it’s been a lot of learning here and to round up, what has been your learning? Would you do anything differently? And what are you still learning?

Andy Maddox: Oh crikey what would I do differently? Lots of things differently. It’s like that letter to a younger self, isn’t it? What would you, what would you write as a letter to a younger self?

However, if you did it, if you did that and did it differently, you wouldn’t be the person you are now. So, I think that, you know, I think I reflect on it and say, I can sit
here and talk about it. It flashes through your mind, all those cringing moments in
life where you’ve done something wrong or made a mistake.

Well, that makes you who you are and that makes you the leader you are. So, there
are a number of things I would do differently. I think the one thing that always
plays on my mind is the imposter syndrome. You always think a bit like I, I left
school with not very many qualifications. I haven’t got O levels.

I never went to university, etc.. I’ve just worked my way up and you meet all these
clever people. And actually you start thinking, well, they’re a lot better than you. No,
they’re just equals. They’re just equals. They may have more knowledge in a
certain area than you, but you’ve got more knowledge in the other.

So, and I’ve got friends whose husbands and wives are very successful people.
When I speak to them, they always feel they shouldn’t be in that position because
how they got there. So, what I would say is for me, that never goes away. It just gets
a little bit easier as you reflect on things. So don’t be worried.

You think you shouldn’t be there. If you feel you’re doing the right thing and, and
you’re passionate about it and say you’re not doing anything wrong. You’re just
trying to do the best you can, then you’re in the right place. So that’s one of my
pleas to leaders is never think you’re not in the right place. If you are passionate
about what you do, but you could always change the way you do it.

You could always listen and learn and take advice. And I think that’s the one thing
become more receptive to as I’ve gone through. It is not that I thought I knew it all,
but I was just got my head down and doing things. And then what I do, what I’m
very conscious now is I’m more receptive to ideas.

I’m more receptive to people talking to me and actually I want criticism as well as
compliments. And at the same time, I realized that the team I’ve got and the
people I work with, not just in my organisation, elsewhere are extremely talented
and very good. the communities I work with have got a lot of talent.

They’ve just fallen on hard times. Some of these people are organisations and they
need help, but they’re the ones that actually make the change. And I’m in a very,
very lucky position that most of my life’s been in the public sector. So, I’ve been a
public servant. And actually it’s quite a privileged position to be in when you start
thinking about it.
You’re working for the people to help them. And that for me is the main thing is who is my boss. My boss is the people out there because I work within a political system and they vote in the people that make the decisions in my organisation. And ultimately that’s both a career, but it’s also a way of thinking as you go forward in life.

And I think if you just try and do your best as you lead it, not forgetting that, you know, you’ve got certain things you must deliver and deal on. Is that the best you can do. And if that develops you as an individual, do it, but always have an inquisitive mindset. That’s the key thing. Ask questions, challenge yourself and try and unpick that thread sometimes and go, well, why does that happen?

Let’s, let’s explore that. Let’s think about it, but you never fail. You just learn. That’s what, that’s the one thing.

**Claire Tomkinson:** Yeah, I think for me that combination of reframing, someone said to me once, you don’t fail, you just learn how to do things differently really quickly and I’ve always really liked that. And I think one thing for me that’s something we talk about a lot in our introduction systems leadership sessions is people don’t resist change. They resist the loss associated with that change. And if you think about the traditional ways of working that we’ve had for decades, really shifting from traditional management structures, to ways of working built on relationships and networks and trust and switching from top down delegation to shared decision making and moving from command and control to empowerment and co creation and co production.

These things are quite significant shifts in the way that we’ve been, we’ve funded and paid to do work over the last few decades. So, I think for me, our main learning is that’s really difficult. It takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of trust and to be really aware of what people think they might lose as a result of that change and being mindful of that and curious and have a lot of empathy about that from the start and meet them where they’re at and stop some of those kind of like blocks and challenges later on. So, I think my learning is not underestimating the scale of the change that we’re asking people to do.

**Naomi:** Thanks for joining us for this episode of the Place Changemakers 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.