

# The London Together Response to Covid-19

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MAYOR OF LONDON

# Introduction

## What is London Together?

**London Together** is a £3 million Sport Unites partnership financed equally by the Mayor of London and Comic Relief. London Together invests in sport for change approaches that aim to improve social integration in London. The three year fund launched in 2018 and a list of the projects funded through the first two rounds of London Together can be found on the final page of this guide. Across the course of the project, the Mayor of London and Comic Relief have worked with inFocus Consultancy Ltd (inFocus) to bring together the different projects into a 'learning community' to explore key topics in relation to Sport (including different forms of physical activity) and Social Integration. In the first year of the initiative, the guides are based on a theory of change and learning questions chosen by the projects themselves. This is the third of a series of guides that bring together the experiences and advice from the different projects.

## Introducing this guide

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the *coronavirus* pandemic, has led to significant impacts for people across the UK, particularly for individuals or groups that were already isolated and vulnerable. This guide focuses on the response from London Together projects to the Covid-19 crisis, across the three phases below, although it is important to note that not all projects worked across these stages, or necessarily in the same order. The initial emergency response that focused on crisis management and addressing the urgent needs of participants, switching to the remote delivery of their sport for change social integration activities during lock-down, and planning for moving out of lock-down and gradually moving back to face to face delivery. The guide both highlights the work of the London Together projects, while also providing tips on how to move out of lock-down and take a 'hybrid' approach combining both online and face to face activities.



**Part I: Emergency response to COVID-19**

**Part II: Delivering Remote Activities**

**Part III: Moving out of lock-down**

# The London Together response to COVID-19

Across the next two parts of this guide we explore both the emergency response of London Together projects, and the move to delivering regular activities online. This includes a selection of different examples from London Together projects across the eight areas below:

Providing support packages including food, medicine, telephone top-up vouchers and travel costs

Setting up and running telephone helplines to support during lock-down

Keeping in touch through newsletters and checking in

Developing online programmes to deliver both new and existing activities. For example, online staff-led sessions on platforms such as Zoom, or resources such as videos or eLearning material

Running online social activities and events such as virtual pub quizzes

Setting tasks or challenges for participants to do in their own time, can then be brought together to share with other participants online

Supporting participants to get online (to access activities and support)

Providing remote 1 to 1 support and mentoring to participants

## Part I: Emergency response to COVID-19

Before Covid-19, the London Together projects were already working to support some of the most vulnerable and isolated groups in society. The effects of the pandemic, and particularly the lock-down, has led to London Together participants often facing even greater challenges including; increased family tensions, greater levels of anxiety and isolation, increasing levels of domestic violence and additional financial worries (for example, around applying for Universal credit), and accessing school meal vouchers and food banks. Those projects working with refugees and asylum seekers described how their participants were wary of providing their details to the government, often leaving funding and support from charities as their final means of sustenance.

### 1 Providing food and medicine

Those London Together projects in a position to do so found that they needed to move quickly to adapt their services to provide emergency support, with several putting emergency plans into place developed prior to lock-down. This support took a range of different forms. As described in the audio clip above, Islington Centre for Refugees provided support packages for refugees, including food, telephone top-up vouchers and travel for emergency health appointments. The effective roll-out of the support packages required staff to be in touch with participants on a weekly basis to understand their needs.



#### Andy Ruiz Palma, Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants

Learn more about how the Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants responded to Covid-19 in the audio clip above.



“At the beginning of lockdown our emphasis was on kind of crisis management and what we did was made weekly calls with all project participants, all of our clients and we found quite quickly that it was all about access to food, safe accommodation, lack of access to basic goods and also basic communication devices.”  
**Islington Mind**

Like Islington Centre for Refugees, CVA also supported members of the community with food and medicine, using their main community space as a food hub and working with 22 food bank partners to deliver food to vulnerable members of the community.

## 2 Telephone support

As you can hear in the audio clip below, Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) also provided telephone support through a helpline staffed by volunteers that anyone in the community could call for support during lock-down.



### Christine Double, Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA)

Learn more about CVA's emergency response to Covid-19 in the audio clip above.



“Since lockdown, CVA has taken the lead role in the voluntary sector response to Covid-19. We have set up a helpline for volunteers (with over 700 signed up) and used our Connect Well Croydon as the main site for residents to access ongoing or specially adapted services provided by local partners. This includes translations on Covid-19 guidance and on how to use Zoom and some keep fit at home videos from local partners. We have also set up a food donations and delivery service for the most vulnerable not on the shielded list and a similar service for medicine collection.”  
**Croydon Voluntary Action**

## 3 Keeping in touch

For other London Together projects there was also a focus on keeping in touch with participants through telephone calls and the doorstep delivery of paper flyers and newsletters to ensure that they were connected during lock-down. Core Arts, Sporting Memories, the Holloway Neighbourhood Group and Groundwork all delivered weekly newsletters. The Groundwork newsletter included relevant local updates, positive and cheerful messages, tips on how to stay active and healthy, sharing strategies of staying active/involved with others, inspirational stories of what others were doing, and ideas of things they could try at home.

## Part II: Delivering Remote Activities

The Covid-19 lock-down left many vulnerable people socially isolated and often less physically active. With a focus on addressing social isolation through sport, London Together projects were well placed to help to address these issues. For many projects this was a gradual move from the emergency support described in the last section to focusing back on core project outcomes. For example, as you can hear in the audio clip to the right from Sporting Memories, support calls moved from an exclusive focus on crisis management to 'nudge' and support participants to be more physically active. In this section we look at how London Together projects resumed their core activities remotely, most of which are continuing at the time of writing this guide, even as some socially distanced activities resume.

### 1 Developing online programmes

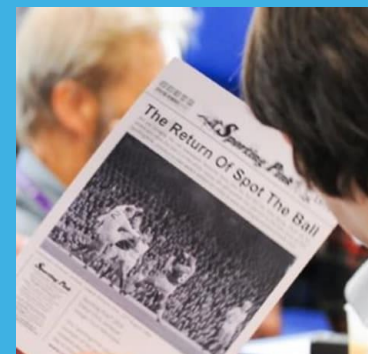
London Together projects moved quickly to switch to online delivery, combining online staff-led sessions on platforms such as Zoom, with other resources such as videos or eLearning material. Some online programming replicated face to face delivery, such as the Change Foundation continuing their employability work of interview preparation and CV development remotely, supporting their participants to set goals to achieve when face to face delivery returns. For other projects there was a focus on developing online programmes specifically to address issues caused by Covid-19, for example, UK Deaf Sport developed the online programme *#deafstayinworkout* focused on supporting deaf people to stay physically active and mentally well during lock-down.

“We developed a series of online physical activity and creative workshops in partnership with British Fencing. We are partnering up with local organisations and artists to deliver fitness and fencing online sessions, and creative workshops. This allows us to maintain connections with communities, and provide a space for togetherness, physical activity and creativity during this time. We are also commissioning artists to create online content, for example a short series of videos lasting about 20-30 minutes, which we can then share on our YouTube channel alongside live sessions over Zoom, which will be live-recorded, edited and shared online.” **Maslaha**



#### Kate Budd, Sporting Memories

Click on the audio symbol above to learn more about how Sporting Memories moved from emergency response to focus back on their core outcomes and getting participants physically active.



When moving activities online, several London Together projects found it important to consult participants on the design of activities and how to deliver activities online (e.g. identifying the most suitable remote platform to use). As described below, young people were involved in the design of Football Beyond Borders 'Virtual School', which provided young people with structure, support for school work and opportunities to connect with their peers and practitioners.

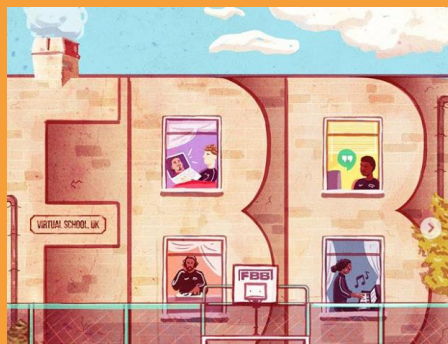
“Young people are the ones with the solutions during this period. What we've found have been the most successful part of our virtual school have been these creative projects and that's because we ran them based on topics that young people told us they wanted to learn about”

### Football Beyond Borders



James Reeves, Football Beyond Borders (FBB)

Find out more about the FFB Virtual School by clicking on the audio icon above.



## 2 Running Social Activities

As projects focusing on addressing social isolation, bringing people together online to meet other people and socialise was a key focus of London Together projects during lock-down. Core Arts are running live social events once a week where peers, tutors and staff can attend and catch-up, to help address the isolation that many of their members struggle with. Social events included a live virtual pub quiz and online sing-alongs.

“Social activities were a major part of our programme delivery. In absence of beneficiaries being able to physically come together we will be running activities whereby people are creating something individually and work towards an end product, for example: knit a square, square will be sewn together and donated to e.g. the local animal shelter, decorate a tile for a mosaic, grow seedlings to be planted in the garden, write a line for a collaborative poem, etc.”

### Groundwork

## 3 Self-directed activities

Several London Together projects also developed activities for participants to do in their own time. For example, the Change Foundation developed online 'sports at home' weekly engagement by creating a timetable of fitness circuits and sports challenges recorded on smart phones. Supporting people to get active in their own time also involved the provision of equipment and materials, such as Football Beyond Borders delivering laptops and footballs to participant's front doors.

#### 4 Supporting offline participants

As you can hear in the audio clip to the right from Islington Mind, many participants in London Together projects were less comfortable accessing online activities and this was a key area of support:

“We were also working against quite a lot of pre-existing anxiety regarding technology, particularly platforms such as Zoom where people felt quite nervous about using them, and also making sure that people had data which is an ongoing problem because it seems very expensive. (other challenges included) People having working phones, people having wi-fi or internet connections, or even private places where they can join in with our sessions.” **Islington Mind**

#### 5 Providing 1 to 1 support and mentoring

Finally, several London Together projects provided one to one mentoring support to participants, for example, Saracens mentors would usually meet face to face with participants two to three times a week and this was replaced by remote calls:

“The individual mentoring is taking place virtually through Zoom or phone calls. For some of our beneficiaries, we might be their only support during this difficult and uncertain time. We are seeing more ‘Get Onside’ participants reaching out for mentoring, which may be because there are less distractions. We are currently offering weekly support through our volunteer mentors and staff. Each mentoring session gives the beneficiaries the opportunity to discuss challenges, frustrations, system issues and importantly how the current global situation is effecting them.” **Saracens**



Lizzie Hughes, Islington Mind

Learn more about how Islington Mind moved from crisis management into moving their programmes online.





## Part III: Moving out of lock-down

In this final section, we look at advice from London Together projects on what to consider when starting to move out gradually out of lock-down and start to deliver face to face activities (often as part of a 'hybrid' approach in combination with face to face activities).

### 1 Consult with your participants

It is important to take on board the viewpoints and concerns of participants when moving to face to face activities, for example, in a survey or as part of a one to one engagement. Some individuals and groups, particularly those that have been shielding during lock-down, may have anxieties about social interaction and may prefer to continue with online activities for the time being.

“Like everyone else we are also a client-led service and so need to remain flexible to what clients want and are hosting regular feedback sessions – clients may not want to go to online groups anymore so we need to strike a balance between offering real life activities safely at some point, without leaving those who don't want to attend in real life behind.” **Islington Mind**

### 2 Take a blended approach

If running online activities, consider keeping these running along-side your face to face activities to ease participants into meeting up again.

“Consider the benefits of hybrid approach – one of our fencing coaches found that the online sessions removed a lot of barriers for some of the women (cost/location) and so will continue to do online sessions even when they can begin to do delivery in person again.” **Maslaha**

Start slowly with face to face activities, for example, starting with social distanced face to face visits to the homes of participants (e.g. from volunteers that have engaged with them during lock-down), then moving to activities with small groups (e.g. walks), before progressing to distanced activities in bigger groups. It can also be helpful to conduct risk assessments for particularly vulnerable participants.

“To combine our online provisions for those who have anxieties about going out and those who are more high-risk and slowly work towards a slow start up of centre-based activities with emphasis of those without online access from September with social distance measures put in place.” **Core Arts**

### 3 The heightened needs of individuals

Covid-19 has led to a wide range of challenges for individuals and groups, such as the impact of increased isolation in lock-down on mental health. Activities that were running before Covid-19 may need to adapt to deal with the consequences of Covid-19, such as more targeted work to reach those even more isolated as a result of lock-down, or linking up beneficiaries with partners/resources to improve mental health.

“Covid-19 has highlighted the issues of food poverty, financial and health inequalities, so we will need to focus on how we tackle these issues as part of better social integration for our target group and move them towards independence – using sport as a useful hook – particularly on how being active can make people more resilient to COVID and other related health problems.” **Croydon Voluntary Action**

### 4 Consider accessibility

Maintaining both online activities developed during lock-down, and starting again with face to face activities may require an investment of resources to ensure that activities are accessible to a wide range of people. For example, the additional time needed to promote activities to ‘hard to engage’ groups or an additional investment needed in tech infrastructure and support to continue with online delivery.

### 5 Focus on the positives

Finally, while Covid-19 has caused significant challenges for many people, it is important to also recognise and build on the positives that have emerged from lock-down.

“For those working with young people, I think it’s really important to not focus too much on the negative aspects of a socially distanced world. All around we hear of the attainment gap widening and a mental health crisis in young people, which are of course huge challenges we must overcome, but we need to build young people up. Focus on their inner passions and creativity which have in many cases been boosted in this period.” **Football Beyond Borders**

### 6 Take into account government guidelines

Understanding Covid-19 guidelines and restrictions, and good practice for running socially distanced activities, will ensure you stay legal and can adapt your delivery accordingly. Additional risk mitigation is needed in everything from how toilet breaks are managed to numbers in a group. Mitigation of risk is key to giving participants a sense of safety and the confidence to attend activities. This will involve adopting new practices, changing others and stopping some existing ways of doing things. Consider appointing a Covid-19 Officer to coordinate their approach and to manage track and trace. You can see some guidance based upon the Mayor of London's social distance sport pilot project [here](#).

The organisations shown below, funded through rounds 1 and 2 of the **London Together** fund, have contributed to the development of this guide.

- ▶ Celtic FC Foundation
- ▶ Consonant
- ▶ Core Arts
- ▶ Croydon Voluntary Action
- ▶ Football Beyond Borders
- ▶ Football for Peace
- ▶ Groundwork London
- ▶ Holloway Neighbourhood Group
- ▶ Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants
- ▶ Islington Mind
- ▶ Maslaha
- ▶ Salaam Peace
- ▶ Saracens Sport Foundation
- ▶ Sporting Memories Network CIC
- ▶ The Change Foundation
- ▶ The Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC)
- ▶ Time and Talents
- ▶ UK Deaf Sport