



**THEME:**  
**Communities**

**TITLE OF LEARNING:**  
Sandwell & Wolverhampton Inter Faith Networks

### KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can we support our partners to tackle inactivity?  
How do we develop opportunities to be active in the community?



### AN EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE:

Following the first Black Country Faith and Sport Forum in the summer of 2019, Active Black Country have looked to build on the positive momentum that was accrued and develop a series of inter-faith networks across the four Local Authority areas.

These forums are key networks as ABC look to understand the needs and capacity of an emerging physical activity workforce that is far wider and more nuanced than traditional sport-specific coaches. By developing a valued and ongoing dialogue with groups and individuals who are regarded as trusted sources of information within the local community we can start to equip them with the information, tools and resources that they need to cascade positive messages regarding physical activity and wellbeing to the underrepresented groups that they regularly come into contact with.

ABC are using these networks to carry out consultation and collate informative insight into the existing health-related services that faith centres provide and the barriers preventing them from developing these offers further.

### WHAT WERE THE LESSONS THAT WERE LEARNT?

Inter Faith Networks have been set up and delivered in Sandwell and Wolverhampton (with a view to holding these in Dudley and Walsall in 2020). Those present at the inaugural network meetings were asked about current delivery, barriers preventing them from engaging their congregation in wellbeing initiatives, capacity with regard to volunteers and whether or not the faith groups were able to cater for those with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Consultation found that, whilst there's a clear will and interest to develop health and wellbeing offers for their congregations, the faith-based groups engaging with the networks are limited in their ability to deliver for a variety of reasons. Limited space, a lack of suitable equipment and no access to appropriate funding were all cited, along with stereotypical attitudes by both congregations and committees regarding what the role of faith centres should be.

Those engaged have good access to volunteers but not to coaches or qualified leaders. Whilst this can potentially be addressed, a wellbeing offer does not necessarily need to be based around sport, and further work can be done to work with faith groups around encouraging their congregations to move more via walking and gentle exercise programmes.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

ABC will be using the consultation to inform a project in Wolverhampton that looks to explore the potential of faith groups to reach the most inactive disabled and non-disabled people.