

Case study

**Bath Mind – women  
swimming sessions**



## Project at a glance

- Bath Mind found women from racialised communities faced barriers to being active.
- Their women-only swimming sessions attracted females from countries including Jordan, Albania, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria.
- The sessions provided a social space where women could make connections, grow in confidence and enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of swimming.

32 women  
regularly  
take part



Sessions  
are only a  
£1



## The challenge

Through its community connections Bath Mind saw that local women from racialised communities faced barriers to getting active. For example, many women from the local Mosque felt vulnerable when attempting everyday activities like jogging with friends because of potential discrimination and attacks.

The opportunity was there to create a successful service. But finding the right sessions for everyone was difficult, since different cultural sensitivities, and finding the right venue, ruled out many activities.

## Bath Mind's response

Some of the ladies Bath Mind approached said they'd like to try swimming. So now the challenge was for Special Projects Manager Ailsa Eaglestone and team to support them to make it happen.

“Working with a leisure centre was challenging,” she says.

“It was difficult to get what the ladies needed, and the first three months were a bit of a disaster! For example we'd insist on female lifeguards, then rotas would change and only male lifeguards would be available. It didn't help that the leisure centre's system was blocking our emails either.”

**“We needed to create an environment where the ladies could feel safe and comfortable. That meant the sessions had to be truly women-only, we couldn't have men in unisex changing rooms or looking down from the balconies.”**

However, Ailsa persisted and the situation gradually improved. A new manager was better able to listen to their concerns, and they managed to recruit swim coaches who could teach less confident women how to swim.

One big win was pushing back when the leisure centre asked the women to pay a £4 entrance fee. Ailsa successfully argued that for refugee women with children living on £20 a week, this was unsustainable. It felt like a huge victory when the centre agreed that they could use a pass to pay a pound.

## The results

After a year and a half the sessions regularly hosted up to 32 ladies from regions as diverse as Jordan, Turkey, Albania, Afghanistan, Libya, Egypt and Syria.

Twelve could not swim before the sessions, and were now becoming confident in the water. Nine ladies had never been in a pool in this country.

Once the sessions were more established (and following a change of venue), attendees were able to make connections and support each other too.

“I remember that some of the women were wearing black, water-proof leggings in the pool,” says Ailsa.

**“Some new joiners started to do the same thing. They said that the leggings made them feel more body confident in the water, so they’d swim more often.”**



## Learning

- **Use champions**

Having champions within their targeted community helped win buy-in, shape the project around the needs of the women involved, recruit participants and translate marketing and communications.

- **Be accessible**

Charging participants puts up a barrier. Bath Mind worked hard to keep the price low so more participants could afford to take part.

- **Train to gain**

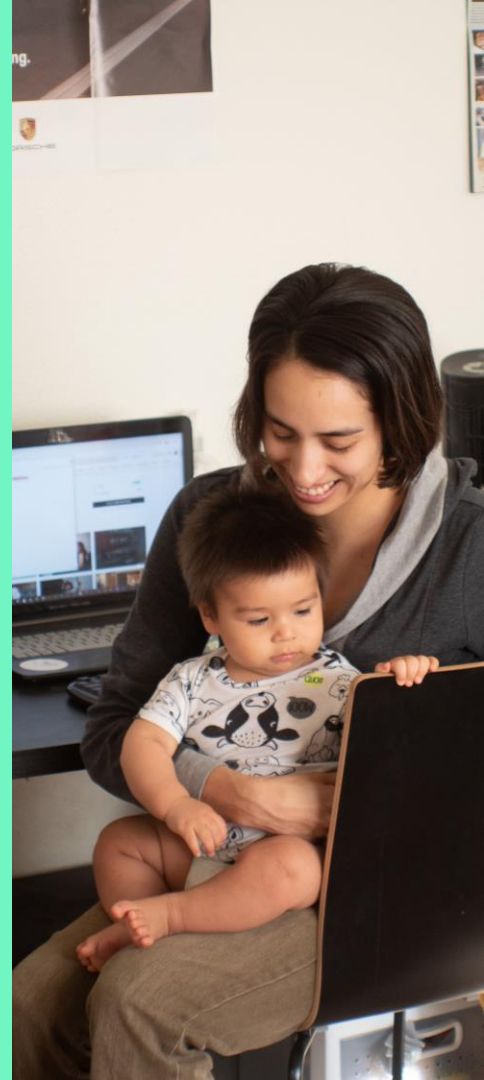
“It would be nice to have the women deliver their own training sessions to leisure centre staff,” says Ailsa. “That way the staff could better understand what they need and see that there’s an opportunity here.”

- **Consider the language barrier**

The team found it difficult to capture feedback through evaluation forms due to language barriers. Use champions and translators to get oral feedback.

- **Get children involved**

Enabling women to bring children made them more accessible. This wasn’t always possible (it required opening the children’s pool and more lifeguards) but was a popular move when it happened.



## Relevant support available

Mental health champions: a toolkit for the sport and physical activity sector

Mental Health Awareness for Sport & Physical Activity+ eLearning

Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit: Involving people with lived experience of mental health problems in the design and delivery of your work

Mind's Influence & Participation toolkit – involving people experiencing mental health problems in projects and services

