

WELCOMING  
INTERNATIONAL

STORIES OF RESILIENCE:

# United Kingdom

Placing partnership building and  
language accessibility at the  
forefront of emergency response

## CREDITS

Published June 2022. Copyright Welcoming America. All rights reserved. This publication is part of the case study series Stories of Resilience published by Welcoming America as part of its Welcoming International initiative. The contents are based on conversations with Jannine Antigha and Philip Clarke from Liverpool City Council, and Theresa MacDermott from Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre. Liverpool City Council participates in the Inclusive Cities programme led by the University of Oxford Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity, which is a partner in the Welcoming International alliance.

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## Background

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Liverpool City Council and their local partners sprang into action to ensure an inclusive and equitable emergency response, relying on previously developed partnerships and communications efforts to meet community needs and leverage opportunities. The following case study highlights successful approaches and lessons learned from Liverpool that other localities can consider applying in their own work now and into the future.

Liverpool City Council participates in [Inclusive Cities](#), a knowledge exchange programme in the United Kingdom led by the University of Oxford Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity — a Welcoming International alliance partner. The Inclusive Cities programme supports 12 UK cities and their local partners to achieve a step change in their approach towards integration of newcomers at the local level. In Liverpool, Inclusive Cities has helped the City Council and their local partners to develop their inclusion strategies, bringing together migrant and non-migrant communities.

In 2018, Liverpool City Council launched [Our Liverpool](#), an effort to support local migrant-led initiatives and networks, while facilitating information sharing between the council and community groups that already promote welcoming practices across the city. The aim was to guide the council's work on inclusion from the grassroots up.

Today, Our Liverpool is led by a dedicated team of community officers with long standing experience in social justice. The team has developed collaborative tactics and strategies aimed at aligning the efforts of the local government with the needs of local residents. Their approach is rooted in genuine listening, rapid response and partnership building. The key success factor is the programme's ability to translate high-level ideas of "welcome" and "inclusion" — generated at the grass-roots level — into the administration of the city council. The result is a stronger social fabric for both newcomers and long-standing communities.

One of the community development teams that Our Liverpool frequently collaborates with is L8 A Better Place. Part of the NGO [Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre](#), L8 A Better Place is led by a team of four whose work focuses on L8 postcodes in Liverpool. This highly diverse area is home to one of the oldest Black communities in the UK, as well as many newcomer communities. It also hosts two initial accommodation centres for people seeking asylum.

L8 A Better Place builds connections between various stakeholders and strengthens the community by increasing opportunities for activism, training volunteers, and supporting locally emerging ideas and projects,

some of which are delivered in partnership with the city council. It also often acts as a messenger between the council and the local communities in L8, ensuring there is cultural translation of services, information and support offered locally.

Reflecting on their partnership, Jannine Antigha and Philip Clarke from Our Liverpool, as well as Theresa MacDermott from Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, underscored that consistent solidarity, language accessibility, and strategies focused on systemic change were not only key factors in Liverpool's pandemic recovery, but also in its long-term community resilience.



*Participants gather in-person at an event hosted by L8: A Better Place when safe to do so. Credit: Michael Kirkham Photography*

“We have our ideas about how to do things in Liverpool, and we know the city very well, including the communities that live here, but I think the opportunity to learn from other places is really important. Sometimes you can do things that you feel are quite innovative, but then you see that someone else has tried it elsewhere and it didn't quite work, or it worked by doing it in a different way. We are massively keen to look at best practice from around the country, and around the world, and learn how we can implement it”.

— Philip Clarke, Liverpool City Council

## Ingredients for Success

### #1 BUILDING TRUST THROUGH COLLECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our Liverpool has seen the value of regular engagement with the community and recognises that meaningful encounters, where people feel comfortable to speak up and lead, often take place outside the walls of city council and that building trust takes time. Antigha and Clarke explain that “as the local government, we are also ‘the state,’ and building up trust means that people are willing to engage with us”.

Advancing welcoming means that there are not only times to lead, but also moments to take a step back and create space for others to lead. In the early days of the pandemic, Our Liverpool took the initiative to run campaigns but also invited other local stakeholders to take the reins. This allowed everyone to see the pandemic as a collective experience that required shared problem-solving.

Our Liverpool has an ongoing presence at meetings held at various community centres and online. Its team is reachable via email, WhatsApp and phone, and is always keen to meet new emerging leaders and learn about barriers to participation in city life. For example, it only took one email for Philip to agree to meet Polish Migrants Organise for Change, a small migrant-led organisation working with the Polish community in Liverpool, and connect it with other like-minded organisations.

A similar openness and collaborative spirit came to the fore in August 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Liverpool came together with L8 A Better Place to deliver information to residents in Liverpool's [Princes Park ward](#) on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 and avoid lock down. At the time, Princes Park saw an above-average rise in COVID-19 cases. Our Liverpool organised an urgent virtual meeting with the city's director of public health to gather opinions from 20 local organisations concerned about how to connect with and support the Princes Park community.

Antigha and Clarke of the Liverpool City Council recall that collectively “they devised a plan to build trust by working with community leaders to make videos, while making it very clear that we weren't targeting the community unfairly or blaming them for the spike”. By collaborating with local community members as messengers informing people about unfolding events and changing laws — in languages that people understood — information became more salient rather than met with scepticism. Announcements about the outbreak were made the day before Eid, and yet the local community trusted the team enough to change their holiday plans, minimising in-person gatherings to follow the council's guidelines. MacDermott recalls that “residents helped us to spread the message further. It became a rolling process, and we were much more than the sum of our parts”.

In addition to collectively creating [informational videos in various languages](#), which were shared online and via WhatsApp, the council set up two walk-in testing sites in trusted, accessible locations, making it clear that tests were free of charge and did not require immigration checks. Together, Our Liverpool and L8 A Better Place launched a street engagement campaign to knock on doors and distribute materials informing newcomers and long-term residents about how to protect themselves.

“In July 2020 the director of public health invited community groups to a meeting because there was an increase in COVID-19 infections in the Princes Park ward. The suggestions that came out of this meeting included a combination of door knocking, leafleting, text and video messages in 12 different languages and WhatsApp messaging, and we had an open channel of communication throughout the process. The reaction was imaginative and instant, and Our Liverpool worked really hard to get important information out to the community very quickly”.

— Theresa MacDermott, L8 A Better Place

“Every time we want to get some new information out now, we ask ourselves how we can continue to build on this process — whether it's a public health message, or a mental health message. Because we already have a strong network of communication in place we don't have to spend a lot of time building trust or designing the message from scratch. It's going to be something that can be quickly led by the community themselves”.

— Jannine Antigha and Philip Clarke, Liverpool City Council

## #2 CREATING FEEDBACK LOOPS TO INFLUENCE POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS

Our Liverpool sees the local council's role as being responsive to community needs, and where relevant, remaining open to feedback and challenging its own culture and practices. Our Liverpool does not want to be a gatekeeper holding the relationships between the council and community members. They aim to ensure that grassroots organisations, local leaders, and community members can all have a good relationship with the council as a whole, and be able to influence local policy and decision-making. Our Liverpool sees these efforts as a form of solidarity rooted in listening and caring.

Although the team cannot make decisions about the council's housing or benefits strategy, or national immigration law, they can influence policies by pointing out problems and opportunities that have arisen through brainstorming with community members. For example, Our Liverpool now regularly contributes to the [Solidarity Knows No Borders network](#), a UK-based group that campaigns against national anti-migrant policies.

Our Liverpool sees numerous benefits to residents and community organisations being better connected to city institutions and political systems. During the pandemic, for example, community and migrant organisations identified people who had relied on libraries to use the internet and therefore had interrupted access because of pandemic-related closures. In response, city councillors raised funding from local authorities to support communities in accessing technology.

## #3 INCREASING LANGUAGE ACCESS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

At the start of the pandemic, in the L8 neighbourhood of Toxteth, one community development organisation created a WhatsApp group to connect nearly 100 community members, including those in need of assistance to those able to provide it. The group rapidly became one of the key information distribution platforms used by the council and the communities. The WhatsApp group continues as active as ever with new members continuing to join.

MacDermott, of the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, explains the power of this bottom-up approach to communications: "The community in which I live responds best to WhatsApp messages, which can circulate information much more quickly through friends and family groups than using formal mechanisms". While many people in the community do not use email, they have WhatsApp installed on their mobile phones. MacDermott used WhatsApp to send voice messages and texts, including translations of urgent information from the council into various languages spoken in the community.

Translation, in fact, was imperative to the uptake of this information. Our Liverpool coordinated and produced most of the video and written translations. Whenever they encountered difficulties with finding a particular translator, L8 A Better Place was able to identify a trusted person from the relevant community to support their efforts. MacDermott recalls, "the city council has working relationships with several translators, but two of them were not available in March 2020. I called my colleagues and neighbours and instantly found Somali and Urdu translators. The council provided a script, they translated it, and we posted the results within a day".

Clarke summarises the approach from the council perspective: "COVID-19 gave some communities the focus to make decisions quickly on the ground, and as officers for the council we were able to be there as an additional layer of support and signposting".

“We knew that we needed to get out onto the streets to reach people who weren’t able to access digital channels. There was a big mobilisation around mass COVID-19 testing led by Our Liverpool and our community partners. We went out and knocked on doors ourselves, and asked people to knock on their neighbours’ doors to let them know they could participate. We view it as a great success that the community was delivering important messages to themselves”.

— Jannine Antigha and Philip Clarke, Liverpool City Council

“In the case of the rise in COVID-19 infections in the L8 ward, the council was able to drill through a lot of data to narrow everyone’s activities to a few streets where most of the cases were originating. Their ability to manage so much data made our efforts more effective, it was really well coordinated, and it felt great to see ourselves and the city council working in tandem”.

— Theresa MacDermott, L8 A Better Place

## #4 IMPROVING WORKFORCE INCLUSION AND ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

Liverpool City Council has been committed to being a fair and inclusive employer as part of its [Equality Objectives for 2020–2024](#), which includes goals to connect all Liverpoolians with opportunities to participate in civic life and the local labour force. A core focus is ensuring that information reaches those who are underrepresented in government, including migrants. In addition, council employees undergo training on how to counter unconscious bias during recruitment processes. This remains part of a wider plan to increase equality and diversity awareness for all staff across the organisation.

Through the Our Liverpool initiative, the council supports numerous [migrant rights groups and organisations](#). This also includes projects that address racial inequality in access to the job market and within the workplace, such as the [Nia Black Business Hub Pilot](#) and the Positive Action & Employment Support Programme. The Nia Black Business Hub Pilot is led by the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre in partnership with [The Women’s Organisation](#) and education entrepreneur Gloria Hyatt MBE. It supports the development of existing Black businesses, as well as emerging business ideas. The Positive Action & Employment Support Programme connects migrants with employment opportunities in Liverpool.

To ensure these projects are responsive to local needs, the Council established a racial equality taskforce. It partnered with local stakeholders to investigate racial inequality in the areas of education, employment, equality and health. The taskforce integrated insights learned during COVID-19 to improve outcomes moving forward.



Participants gather in-person at an event hosted by L8: A Better Place when safe to do so. Credit: Michael Kirkham Photography

## #5 INVESTING IN COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Liverpool City Council's integration programme is specifically designed around the needs of people with disabilities, along with Black, Asian, refugee and other communities that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and need additional support to access social and economic recovery. Guided by Our Liverpool and its partners, the council appointed seven Community Champions, who are members of these specific communities, speak relevant languages and are known as persons of trust.

Since last year, Community Champions have been crucial in delivering culturally relevant services, such as information about vaccinations. Meanwhile, they have shared information with the council about the impact of economic hardship, loss of life, or hampered access to healthcare on their communities. Their feedback helped local authorities adapt existing services to the newly emerged needs of the community and budget for adequate resources.

Currently there are plans to equip certain communities with permanent Community Champions who will work alongside someone based in the Liverpool City Council. Antigha and Clarke believe that "this will have a massive impact on the recovery process within communities that have felt disenfranchised and left out in terms of communication and when it came to COVID-19".

## Further Reading

### **INCLUSIVE CITIES: INTEGRATION POLICY AND PRACTICE DURING COVID-19**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, local authorities and their partners have had to adapt their inclusion programmes, often quickly, to support newcomer and longer standing communities. These [briefings](#) capture the learnings from these adaptations, as well as ongoing work to promote inclusion, against the five thematic areas set out in the [Inclusive Cities Framework](#). See the [Liverpool City Council briefing](#).

### **INCLUSIVE CITIES: COVID-19 RESEARCH AND POLICY BRIEFINGS**

A series of policy and research briefings on COVID-19 and inclusion arising from the Inclusive Cities programme is available [here](#).

## About Welcoming International

[Welcoming International](#) is an initiative of [Welcoming America](#) consisting of several programmes: The Welcoming International Alliance of peer national networks supporting local actors to advance migrant inclusion at the community level across the world; local-to-local learning exchanges; and technical assistance to national institutions on welcoming standards and strategies.

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