

Showcasing Impactful Practices for Joined-up Local Systems Addressing Gambling-Related Harms

Mobilising Local Systems (MLS) funding programme

December 2025

Mobilising Local Systems funding programme

The GambleAware MLS funding programme aimed to strengthen multi-agency working across nine regional boards in England, Scotland and Wales to build a more integrated support system for gambling-related harms (GRH). The programme was delivered in two phases: Phase 1 focused on enhancing regional collaboration through local events and conferences, while Phase 2 supported pilot projects and/or the expansion of integration activities begun in Phase 1.

Methodology

The case studies are intended to highlight creative and transformative practice within each local area. They illustrate how MLS programme funding has supported increases in awareness of gambling-related harm, strengthened partnership working across local authorities, treatment services and other stakeholders, and improved referral pathways. Together, these changes aim to create more responsive local systems and better outcomes for people affected by GRH.

The case studies are based on qualitative data from 26 semi-structured interviews conducted between July and October 2025. Interviewees included delivery leads, partner organisations, and professionals from participating services, including people with lived experience of gambling harm. Some case studies also draw on evaluation data provided by the local delivery areas, including event feedback surveys, participant reflections and other supporting evidence where available.

The case studies

- **East Midlands**: Addressing Gambling-Related Harm in a Prison Context
- **London**: Mobilising London's Response to Gambling-Related Harm
- **North East**: Embedding Gambling Harm in the Criminal Justice System
- **North West**: Neuro-Inclusive Transformation at Beacon Counselling Trust (BCT)
- **Scotland**: Changing The Conversation on Gambling-Harm in Scotland
- **South East & East**: Building Local Authority Partnerships in the South-East & East
- **South West**: Creative Connection in the South-West
- **Wales**: Building Awareness and New Referral Routes
- **West Midlands**: Breaking Barriers for Women Experiencing Gambling-Related Harm

We would like to thank all interviewees for their time and insights.



Addressing Gambling Related Harm in a Prison Context

From parachuting in, to embedding sustainable change

The East Midlands regional board, supported by Phase 2 MLS funding, has pioneered a comprehensive approach to addressing gambling-related harm within the criminal justice system through deep partnership working with HMP Ranby.

The embedded approach has fundamentally shifted how gambling-related harm is understood and addressed. As Sarah Franklin, East Midlands Service Manager, reflected: *"What we really, really want to leave behind is a legacy. So it's no good parachuting in for 12 months delivering something and then going right fundings run out."*

What Was Done?

Building on previous criminal justice work in the region, MLS Phase 2 funding enabled the East Midlands team to develop a holistic "start to finish" approach at HMP Ranby, inclusive of:

- **Systematic screening implementation:** Working with prison staff to integrate gambling harm screening into the induction process for all new prisoners, identifying those who would benefit from support at the earliest opportunity. This is supported by a robust assessment process to ensure referrals are legitimate.
- **Embedded practitioner support:** GamCare has established a regular weekly presence in the prison, delivering up to four tailored one-to-one CBT-based sessions per person, using worksheets and therapeutic approaches adapted for the prison environment.
- **Staff awareness training:** Integration into staff induction programmes and targeted training for key workers, safety officers, and Prison Offender Managers (POMs).
- **Comprehensive aftercare pathway:** Partnership with Epic Restart Foundation to provide peer mentor support and community-based services upon release, with consent obtained to track individuals' full journey through the system.

System Impact: Embedding Sustainable Change

The initiative has achieved tangible system-level transformation that extends far beyond temporary service delivery. Research conducted with Staffordshire University across multiple prisons revealed that 9% of the prison population would benefit from gambling harm support, validating the scope of need the project addresses¹.

The prison's Head of Health and Wellbeing, Tracy Sison, has become a strong advocate supporting successes such as the training programme reaching key staff groups. Magda Mazurkiewicz from GamCare has secured a permanent place in the staff induction programme, ensuring all new employees receive gambling harm awareness training. This creates a sustainable knowledge base that will persist beyond the funding period.

The human impact has been profound, with over 80 individuals supported in the first year. Magda noted the transformative effect of simply being asked about gambling:

“ They really appreciate that there is this space to actually talk about it ... they always said that this is the first time somebody asked them about gambling. ”

The assessment process reveals the complex relationship between gambling and criminal behaviour. Individuals present with offences that may not obviously relate to gambling - such as dangerous driving - but deeper exploration reveals the incident occurred after significant gambling losses, highlighting how gambling harm can be a hidden factor in various criminal behaviours.

The individual support sessions, delivered using CBT approaches and adapted worksheets, enable prisoners to engage with their gambling behaviour in ways previously unavailable to them. As Magda observed:

“ There's these vastly big, strong men who've committed these terrible crimes, and they're writing about their feelings. ”

The referral patterns show growing awareness and trust, with 70% of referrals now being self-referrals compared to 30% from prison staff, indicating that word is spreading and stigma is reducing within the prison community.



Building Towards Comprehensive Coverage

The initiative is expanding beyond individual support to create broader awareness. Plans include prisoner awareness sessions in the prison chapel, accommodating up to 50 individuals, and development of multimedia content through the prison's green room facilities for their internal digital platform.

Mark Pickering from Epic Restart Foundation, who has lived experience of both gambling harm and imprisonment, brings authentic peer perspective to the work. He hopes to facilitate the regular awareness-raising sessions and offer post prison support when individuals are rebuilding their lives in the community.

Towards Lasting Transformation

By working closely with prison management to understand practical constraints and opportunities, the team has created solutions that work within existing systems rather than imposing unrealistic additional burdens.

The focus on creating future-proofed resources - from training materials that can be used independently to peer support modules that integrate with existing prison peer support structures - ensures that the impact will continue beyond the funding period.





Mobilising London's Response to Gambling- Related Harm

From awareness to action: Building
a regional network

The London Regional Board, a collaborative approach primarily led by Betknowmore UK, GamCare and Primary Care Gambling Service, has led a collaborative approach to addressing gambling-related harm (GRH) across the capital using MLS funding. At the heart of their work was a strategic regional event that brought together diverse stakeholders and has sustained partnerships with local authorities.

What Was Done?

The MLS-funded London Regional Board organised an awareness event that deliberately was ambitious as it:

- **Hosted a diverse stakeholder event** featuring local authorities, addiction services, mental health providers, and primary care teams
- **Centered lived experience voices** through powerful testimonials and peer-led sessions
- **Created networking opportunities** for cross-sector collaboration and knowledge sharing
- **Developed multimedia resources** including a professional video documenting the event's impact

System Impact: Creating Lasting Connections?

The event successfully repositioned gambling harm as a public health issue requiring multi-agency responses. The initiative has resulted in measurable system-level changes, with Betknowmore UK now working with multiple London local authorities at various stages of engagement. For example, the event was able to shine a light on the positive work being completed in Islington. Here there is a weekly drop-in service on Upper Street that has delivered over 1,500 brief interventions, demonstrating the appetite for accessible gambling harm support when properly positioned within community services.



Cultural Change Through Connection

The London Regional Board event successfully challenged preconceptions across multiple sectors. Primary care representatives discovered new ways to integrate gambling harm awareness into routine healthcare interactions, mental health and addiction services recognised opportunities for cross-referral and shared learning, and Local authority representatives left with concrete ideas for policy and service development.

As one primary care professional reflected, the collaboration with lived experience colleagues proved particularly powerful: "*The powerful stories that lived experience is able to get across... is what's really helping me the most to get GPs and other primary care health workers engaged.*"

A Model With Expanding Reach

While the Regional Board event was a first step, its impact extends far beyond initial awareness-raising. The model demonstrates that effective regional coordination requires both stakeholder engagement and sustained follow-up to convert initial interest into practical action. As Frankie Graham noted

“*The Regional Board is a crucial step in helping support a public health approach, and we need to build on its success.*”



Embedding Gambling Harm in the Criminal Justice System

Bridging gaps & embedding support

The Durham Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has pioneered a transformative approach to addressing gambling-related harm (GRH) within the criminal justice system using Phase 2 financial support from the Mobilising Local Systems (MLS) funding programme. At the heart of this work lies a strategic partnership between the PCC and the NECA Gambling Service, as well as a growing network of peer mentors.

Led by Gambling Harms Coordinator Lucy Brown in partnership with NECA Gambling Manager Laura Oselton, the initiative has helped to embed GRH responses into police processes, reshaped organisational culture, and opened referral routes into support provided by NECA.



What Was Done?

MLS Phase 2 funding enabled Lucy to be seconded full time into the PCC team as a dedicated link officer, driving collaboration between the police and NECA. This role became a vital conduit between Durham Constabulary, NECA, and those at risk of, or affected by, GRH.

With Lucy in post, the team:

- Contracted NECA to deliver specialist awareness training across the criminal justice system
- Introduced 'gambling' as a safeguarding keyword in police systems
- Embedded gambling questions into custody risk assessments and victim service needs assessments
- Established a fast-track referral pathway from police custody to NECA and peer mentor support
- Delivered awareness sessions to peer mentors, neighbourhood officers, Victim Care staff, interns and community safety officers
- Developed a narrated PowerPoint module for e-learning targeted at over 1,000 police officers

System Impact: Changing Culture & Infrastructure

The initiative has resulted in tangible system-level shifts. Lucy and Laura have successfully repositioned gambling harm from a marginal concern to a recognised vulnerability alongside drugs, alcohol and mental health. Risk assessments now prompt officers to ask about gambling, safeguarding reports flag relevant cases, and every person released from custody receives a resource pack with GRH support information.

Lucy's daily monitoring of safeguarding reports allows for real-time triage and referral. NECA receives regular, structured referrals from the PCC, closing a previously unacknowledged service gap for individuals with GRH who have been in contact with the police – either as victims or perpetrators.

Anecdotally and operationally, the changes are sticking. Mark Warcup, manager of the Durham PCC Victim Care Service and its volunteer Community Peer Mentor team, reported that:

Gambling is now mentioned in the same breath as drugs and alcohol at senior partnership meetings and local authorities increasingly recognise it as a vulnerability. That tells me the message is getting across.

Cultural taboos are being dismantled, and officers themselves are beginning to disclose and seek help, supported by changes to the force's Performance and Development Review welfare checklist.

The learning cascade through training has helped recruit "Gambling Champions" across departments, whose role it is to sustain awareness of GRH across the force.

Impact On Individuals: A New Beginning

One powerful example illustrates the human value of these system changes. A man under police investigation for fraud due to gambling voluntarily turned himself in to the police. Referred by a police officer to the Community Peer Mentor (CPM) service, he began receiving weekly emotional and practical support. While on a long NHS waiting list, he was referred by Lucy to NECA, where he accessed support quickly. This bridged the gap until NHS treatment became available.

He later reflected:

The support I received during such a traumatic and challenging time was vital in helping me rebuild my life and make better decisions moving forward.

With a recovery plan in place, he now aspires to become a lived experience volunteer. His story exemplifies how frontline officer awareness, supported by systemic changes and integrated referral pathways, can shift outcomes for individuals. As Lucy put it, *“If that officer [that referred him] hadn’t thought outside the box, he’d probably still be doing what he was doing.”*

A Model With Ripple Effects

NECA staff delivering the training have reported hearing officers remark, *“Why didn’t I know about this before?”* and *“This is so useful for my role”* - a recurring lightbulb moment that speaks to the project’s success in raising awareness and embedding GRH knowledge across policing. Laura notes that having a PCC-embedded coordinator like Lucy has *“opened doors”* that would otherwise have remained closed.

Durham’s approach now serves as a model for other PCC areas. By demonstrating the feasibility and impact of integrating GRH support within criminal justice processes, it challenges neighbouring forces to step up and consider similar initiatives.

Towards Lasting Change

While still early in its development, Durham’s approach is an example of advanced collaboration. With the development of e-learning modules, sustained multi-agency training, and technical integration into police systems, there is strong potential for lasting transformation and replication elsewhere.





Neuro-Inclusive Transformation at Beacon Counselling Trust (BCT)

Turning the lens inward to change the system

A Different Kind of Project

For BCT, Phase 2 of the MLS funding programme has not just been about extending services to new communities, but involved asking a fundamental question:

**Are we truly
accessible to
neurodivergent
people?**

The result has been a bold internal shift. Rather than rushing to deliver new content, the team paused, turned the lens inward, and systematically rethought how they engaged such clients.

This reflection led to what engagement lead James Callaway described as “*a massive success for us*” – a transformation in how the organisation works with autistic people, those with ADHD, dyslexia, or other neurodivergent identities. .

Building Skills and Understanding Across The Whole Team

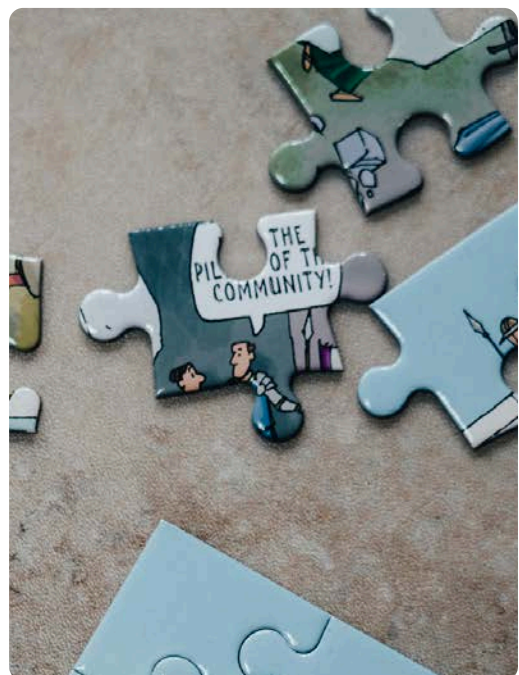
Using MLS Phase 2 funding, BCT commissioned a neurodiversity consultant to deliver two days of whole-team training covering emerging digital harms, parasocial marketing, autism, ADHD and addiction. Staff from across the organisation took part, including therapists, educators, and administrators.

Importantly, the sessions were not just theoretical. They were grounded in practice, with follow-up slide decks and materials that BCT continues to draw on.

Feedback from staff was clear: the training had given them not only insight, but skills and confidence. Treatment lead Lauren Campbell said that:

“*The training has opened people’s eyes to what it means to be neurodiverse. I think it made people more reflective in their practice and definitely more aware of adapting how they work.*”

This aligns with the MLS programme objectives to build workforce knowledge and capacity, especially in areas where gambling-related harm overlaps with other vulnerabilities.



Adapting The Service Environment

The consultancy led to an accessibility audit of both counselling services and digital content. This involved exploring every step of a service user's journey. In response, the team introduced a series of low-cost, high-impact changes. These included dimmed lighting, simplified signage, and neutral décor.

The website was overhauled with clearer layout, image-led navigation and simplified copy – replacing what was described as “massive walls of text.”

— USEFUL LINKS

- > [Click here for a simplified language page](#)
- > [About us](#)
- > [News](#)
- > [Contact us](#)

One of the clearest signs of this shift is visible on BCT's website, which now features a prominent link to a simplified language page to support users who may find standard layouts or terminology overwhelming.

One other major addition was a new first-visit infographic showing the building exterior, therapy rooms and a photo of the assigned therapist. This small innovation has made a big difference, especially for clients who find new environments unsettling.





New Tools, New Ways of Working

The cultural change has also extended into therapy rooms leading to improved service design, enhanced engagement, and tailored support for diverse needs. Therapeutic staff have begun to use creative tools such as modelling clay, art materials and figurines to support clients who find verbal processing difficult.

These tools provide non-verbal alternatives to explore feelings about self and other relationships and, in some cases, become reusable “*visual anchors*” that clients can return to in later sessions.

They have also introduced the option of “*walking sessions*” to support clients who find movement helps them focus and the use of fidget tools and gadgets to support clients’ self-regulation during sessions.

Therapist Ann-Marie Wilson explained that she had:

“Used these on a number of occasions where it was clear the individual was finding it hard to relax and I could see them in the process damaging items of clothing as they wrung laces or toggles through their hands. Offering a gadget [in these instances] appeared to validate and acknowledge the need for regulation in a non-judgemental way and helped individuals to feel more easily able to engage with the process.”

Evidence of Service Improvement

Since May 2025, BCT has added a neurodiversity question to all gambling-harm assessments and begun tracking disclosures in a separate data set. In the first two months, 40 clients identified as neurodivergent. This new insight is already informing more person-centred approaches to the delivery of support.

One client described the value of this shift:

“*It is really interesting to think about how ADHD may have been part of the reason for my hyper-fixation with gambling, which is something I have only been able to properly explore and understand since beginning my therapy sessions with Beacon.*”

Therapists report that because of the visibility now given to neurodiversity at the assessment stage, clients are opening up more about their diagnoses or suspected traits. The team feels better equipped to support them and to offer psychoeducation about how neurodivergence might shape patterns of risk or resilience in relation to gambling.

Remote delivery, now a norm post-Covid, has also proven valuable. Many neurodivergent clients find online sessions easier to engage with and less taxing. Therapists now adapt session length and structure, recognising that for some clients, 20 focused minutes may be more effective than the standard 50.

Changing Organisational Culture

One of the most significant outcomes of this project is cultural. From receptionists to senior clinicians, everyone at BCT now has a shared language for understanding and supporting neurodivergent clients. Importantly, team members with lived experience of autism, ADHD or dyslexia have begun sharing insights more openly, helping to embed practice from within.

As one staff member put it: *“Talking openly about our own neurodivergence within the team provides motivation and reassurance that differences can be assets, not obstacles.”*

The team described how lived experience had helped drive new thinking, creativity and innovation across their therapeutic models:

“
This approach is not just about reducing barriers; it's about harnessing neurodiversity as a strength. Within the team, lived experience has driven creativity, problem-solving, and innovative therapeutic models – one example of this was in our whole-team training on creative therapies looking at outlets which will support service users in expressing themselves.
”

Sharing Learning & Influencing Others

The ripple effects are growing. BCT plans to roll out neuro-inclusive education materials through upcoming outreach programmes and stakeholder events. They are also exploring a public-facing event to share their learning more widely across the gambling harm sector.

BCT's approach exemplifies how targeted MLS funding has been able to trigger deep, structural change. What began as a five-day consultancy has helped shape a system where neurodivergent people are not only welcomed, but actively supported through tailored environments, flexible engagement and creative therapeutic options.





Changing the Conversation on Gambling Harm in Scotland

Building partnerships, influencing policy,
and inspiring local action

The MLS Phase 2 funding enabled RCA Trust and the Scottish regional board to build on foundations laid in Phase 1 and take gambling harms awareness to a new level.

Under the leadership of Andy Todd, RCA Trust Chief Executive, the focus shifted from small, local engagement sessions to a high-profile national event – the **Gambling Harms Summit: Standing Strong for a Safer Scotland**, held in Glasgow in September 2025.

The summit was co-delivered in partnership with Fast Forward, GamCare Scotland, the Simon Community, Cyrenians and the John Hartson Recovery Workshop, alongside representatives from local authorities, the NHS and third-sector organisations.

By that point, RCA Trust had already strengthened links with Renfrewshire Council, Glasgow City Council, and Public Health Scotland, using a mix of bottom-up engagement and formal partnerships.

Local authorities had adapted materials from earlier MLS activity, creating an online training module that council staff could now access.

Others had signed the Workplace Charter and embedded gambling-harm awareness in mental health and welfare officer training.

“*The MLS programme has just bolstered that and actually elevated it [...] We’ve learned how to engage statutory organisations better – starting from the frontline up rather than top-down. That’s what’s really worked.*”

Andy Todd, RCA Trust Chief Executive



A Summit To Connect Systems & Challenge Stigma



The Glasgow summit was the culmination of that work – bringing together around 200 delegates from across the country, including local authority staff, NHS representatives, third-sector organisations, policymakers and people with lived experience.

The agenda reflected the board’s whole-systems approach: sessions ranged from the human-rights framing of gambling harm, to young people and influencers, veterans’ experiences, and financial and criminal-justice perspectives. Attendees also heard directly from people with lived experience – voices that, according to evaluation feedback, “*made the issue real*” and “*so much more powerful than facts alone.*”

“We had people there who’d never thought about gambling as a public-health issue before,” Andy recalled. “It was about bringing gambling to the forefront of their minds.”

Event evaluation data from 65 participants show just how well it achieved that goal.

94% rated the summit as excellent (49) or good (10)

94% said it met their expectations almost completely or completely

75% said they were very likely to apply what they learned in their work or community

Participants described the day as *“informative, enjoyable and emotional – in a good way,”* and particularly valued hearing from young people and those with lived experience. Several said the event had *“changed the way I look at gambling harm.”*

Local Change In Action

The national summit also strengthened local partnerships. In Renfrewshire, for example, the Workplace Gambling Charter – championed jointly by the council and Unite the Union – has been fully adopted.

Union representative and RCA volunteer David Smith, who attended the summit, explained how persistence paid off:

“*It took me three years to get the council to sign the gambling charter, but now they’ve backed it completely. They’re putting posters in workplaces, supporting welfare officers, and making gambling awareness part of mental-wellbeing discussions.*”

He added that attendance at the Glasgow event helped cement the council’s commitment. *“They see what impact it’s had and want to keep moving forward. It’s not a label for publicity – they’re actually doing it.”*

For Margaret McLean, Suicide Prevention Lead for East Ayrshire, attending the summit reinforced the link between gambling harm and mental health. *“I’m a firm believer that suicide prevention and gambling harm are very much linked. The event showed how these conversations need to reach communities, not just stay in research papers.”* Margaret has since incorporated gambling harm into her suicide-prevention training for health and social-care professionals, using real examples and signposting to RCA Trust and other support services.

A Catalyst For Broader Engagement

The Glasgow summit has already resulted in tangible outcomes:

- Increased uptake of RCA Trust Level 2 training, rising from 10–15 people per month before the summit to over 60 trainees in the following two months.
- More councils expressing interest in adopting the Workplace Charter.
- Cross-sector collaborations, including links with prisons, veterans' organisations and public-health teams.

People have started saying, 'we need to do something about this,'" Andy reflected. "It's moved from talk to action."

Through MLS Phase 2 funding, RCA Trust has moved gambling harm firmly onto the Scottish public-health and workforce agenda. By combining high-level visibility with local action, the summit and preceding partnerships have created a momentum that continues to grow.

As one participant wrote, "When I signed up, I wasn't really aware of the impact gambling harms can have. Now I'll be looking at this issue in a completely different way."





Building Local Authority Partnerships in the South-East & East

Achieving system impact through local
partnerships and referral pathways



The South-East and East regional board has focused on building strategic partnerships with local authorities to embed responses to gambling harms within wider public health and wellbeing agendas. Breakeven has used conferences and targeted engagement to raise awareness, connect with decision-makers and offer tailored support that translates awareness into concrete action.

The programme of regional events has helped forge strong working relationships with local authorities. In Hertfordshire, for example, this led to the creation of a countywide Gambling Harms Alliance, which brings together statutory and voluntary partners around a holistic strategy. Andrew Watson, Engagement and Partnerships Manager at Breakeven, explained:

“*Hertfordshire have formed their whole Gambling Harms Alliance – they're really looking at a holistic approach to gambling harms across the whole county.*”

The alliance has achieved notable buy-in: the council has collated all available teaching and learning resources so partners can easily select appropriate courses, while local organisations, such as Carers in Hertfordshire, have directly commissioned training as a result of their involvement.

Demand from other charities and workplaces continues to rise, and plans are underway for a regional local authority working group to share learning and tackle barriers collectively – using Hertfordshire as a model.

The events programme has also proven transformative for opening doors to local systems. Following the Worthing conference in September, the High Sheriff for Sussex – a doctor with a public health background – invited Breakeven to deliver training at workshops for Mind in West Sussex and other regional charities.

Dr. Becky Cooper MP, who serves on a governmental gambling advisory board, attended and subsequently amplified the work's visibility across local systems.

Treatment service data demonstrates the impact of these system-level interventions on increased referrals for support. Breakeven saw nearly 900 Tier 2 and Tier 3 clients in the most recent quarter – a record number. As Andrew reflected:

What we're seeing is not just those engagement figures go up in terms of who I'm training and the organisations that I'm going out and delivering to, but actually people then being referred.

Targeted & Culturally Informed Outreach

Alongside mainstream partnership work, the Breaking the Sharam strand – adapted from a successful North-West model – focuses on addressing shame-related barriers in South Asian communities. In Southend, collaboration with Councillor Maxine Sadza has led to talks during South-East Asian Heritage Month and ongoing efforts to weave gambling harm awareness into community celebrations.

This twin-track approach ensures that while system-level structures strengthen, culturally specific outreach, continues to reach communities less likely to access mainstream services.

Embedding Organisational Change

Wealden District Council developed its own internal policy to help staff recognise and respond to gambling harms among colleagues, residents and service users. The initiative, supported by the South-East and East regional board, with Breakeven offering training across departments – including housing, revenues and benefits, and customer services – equipping staff to identify and refer people experiencing financial vulnerability. As Clare Buckle, Human Resources Lead, noted:

The staff who read that policy, if they have clients who might be affected by gambling, then they have a greater awareness of those mechanisms and other groups who can provide support to people being impacted by gambling or having gambling harm.



Towards Embedded Local Responses

The South-East and East region illustrates how sustained engagement and strong local leadership can transform awareness into coordinated local action. Through persistence, framing gambling harms within wider public health priorities, and identifying 'champions' within local systems, the Board has generated lasting momentum. The approach offers a clear pathway for others:

- Awareness-focused events can act as catalysts for ongoing training
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Ultimately system change
- Embedding gambling harm prevention firmly within local authority priorities





Creative Connection In the South-West

Making gambling harm visible,
memorable & real

Turning Outreach Into Impact

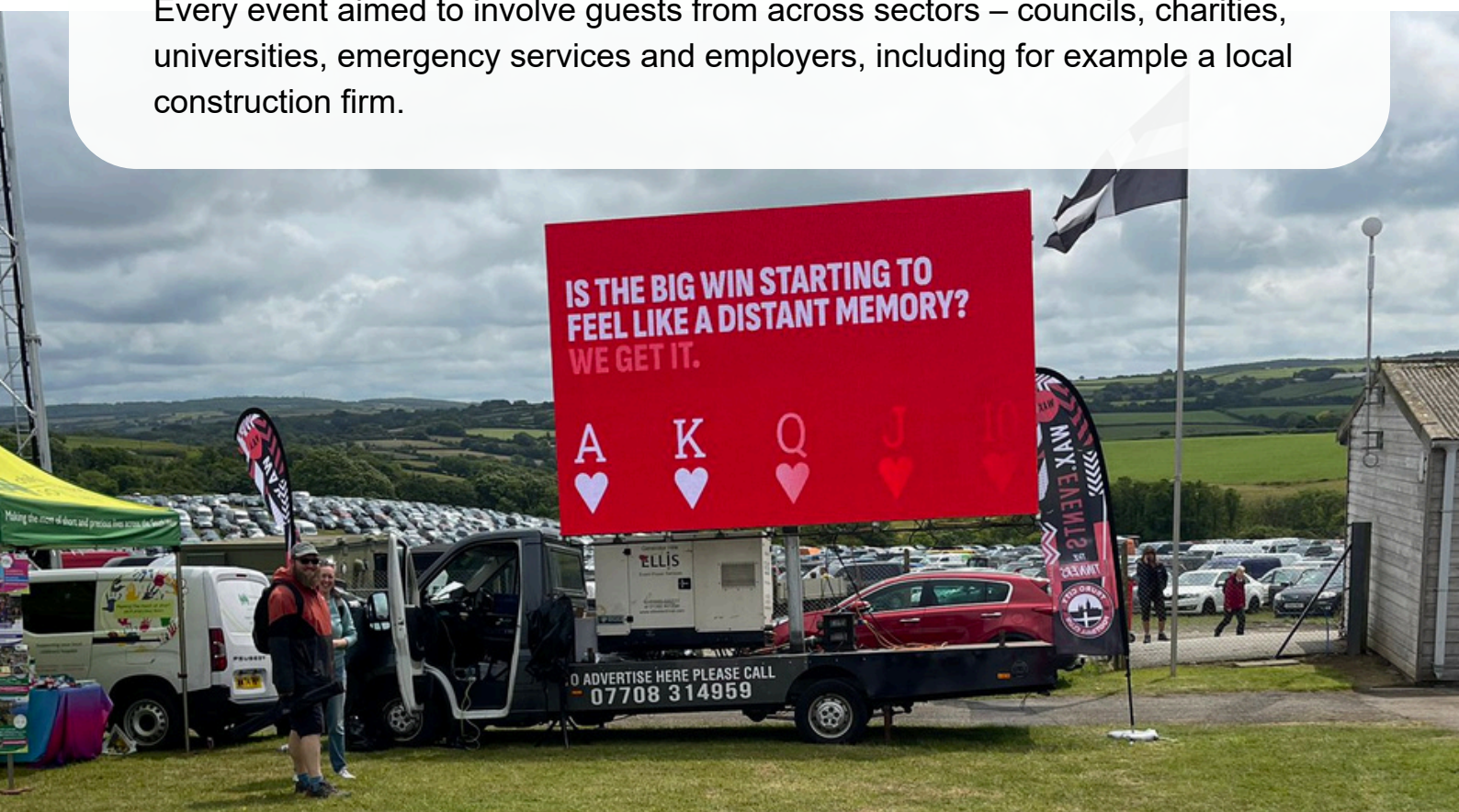
In the South-West region, Ara Recovery For All used the MLS Phase 2 funding to reshape how local services engage with gambling-related harm (GRH). Led by Community Engagement Leads Lindsey Taylor, Hayley Dinham, Chaz Singh and Kai McConkey, the team delivered twelve events across Bristol, Devon, Cornwall and Dorset. They were designed to spark conversations, build confidence, embed lasting learning among frontline professionals and increase referrals for treatment support.

This represented a clear shift from Phase 1, which had focused more on delivering conventional round-table events aimed at senior leaders. The goal now was to embed awareness and action directly within frontline practice, in line with MLS objectives around improved early identification, cross-sector coordination and system responsiveness. This was done via a series of immersive, emotionally engaging events that would stick in people's memories and stir them to act.

Creating Informal, Real-World Connections

Events were designed to reflect the local character of the 12 chosen delivery sites. In Cornwall, a 30-person wellbeing walk along Falmouth's Gyllyngvase Beach included informal "chat stops" led by speakers with lived experience. In Devon and Cornwall, pop-up digital billboards shared stark local statistics on gambling harms.

Every event aimed to involve guests from across sectors – councils, charities, universities, emergency services and employers, including for example a local construction firm.



A standout element of several of the events was a live drama performed by Movable Type Theatre. The play, based on three real stories of gambling harm, was delivered in two parts to encourage reflective conversations over lunch. Caroline Green, a community development officer at Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole (BCP) Council, recalled that the performance helped her see gambling as more than a financial issue and reframed her understanding of vulnerability:



“Literally sat there... shutting my eyes because I was crying. With gamblers, you’re going to get right to the end – to crisis point – before anybody scoops you up.”

Impact In Practice: New Referrals, New Routines

The impact was not just emotional, but practical. Within two weeks of the Bournemouth event, Kai received three referrals for gambling treatment services in a single day – a level of activity not previously seen. Since then, training requests have surged. One charity has booked gambling-harm awareness sessions for up to 120 frontline workers. Dorset Council has agreed to embed the topic into its suicide-prevention training.

“We make the referral process very, very simple – just verbal consent,” Kai explained. Services are now phoning through directly to make referrals for treatment support.

Becca Taylor, social-media and communications lead working for the Dorset-based charity Help & Kindness, described the Bournemouth event as *“the most powerful delivery of a service or an idea I’ve ever listened to.”* A creative learner, she valued the breakout spaces where people with lived experience hosted honest, informal conversations.

Lindsey’s events in Cornwall drew similar positive feedback. One attendee wrote: *“It was amazing to hear the stories from the experts by experience – it’s given me ideas of how to explore gambling more in depth as part of our support planning process.”*

Building A Wider Network Of Champions

A key legacy of the events is the Community Connector initiative. This growing network of frontline staff across the South West includes over 100 individuals who have volunteered to act as local champions. They commit to sharing resources, signposting colleagues and clients, and integrating learning into their everyday roles.

Immediately after the event, Becca signed up as a Community Connector. She has since arranged an internal training session for others in her team and plans to track gambling-related enquiries using keyword searches in their referral system.

At the Townsend Community Centre, Caroline now acts as a local champion, posting reminders about Kai's drop-ins on Facebook and inviting him to return regularly with his Ara information stand. She believes the gentle visibility of this approach – rather than a heavy-handed message – helps residents trust and engage.

Towards Lasting Change

By combining creative engagement, lived experience and targeted follow-up, Kai and Lindsey's work in the South West has transformed how gambling harm is understood and addressed locally. These events were not just well attended – they triggered new conversations, opened up referral pathways, and empowered professionals to take practical next steps. As one attendee put it, "It was money worth spent – if you're going to do something, do it properly."

For Lindsey, the chosen approach was about more than good event design:

"People gamble for 11 years before seeking help via the National Gambling Helpline, and the aim of mobilising local systems and creating referral processes at an early intervention stage aims to reduce this."





Key Findings

Crime & Problem Gambling: A research landscape



The more complex, prolonged and persistent the gambling problem, the more likely that a crime will be committed and, indeed, that many crimes may result (Turner et al, 2009; Perrone et al, 2013)

There has been a growing understanding that gambling addiction is a behavioural disorder, however, little of this has been translated to sentencing; problem gambling is not considered to be a mitigating factor in sentencing in the way mental health problems or drug and alcohol addiction are (Folino and Abait, 2009)

Whilst not always imprisoned as a direct result of problem gambling, there are extremely high rates of gambling addiction amongst prisoners.

Several of the studies reviewed agreed that custodial sentences, especially when no treatment is available for gambling addiction, was not a cost-effective way of avoiding further harm to the individual or society once the sentence is completed. (see for example Ledgerwood et al, 2007)

Staff across the CJS had little to no awareness of gambling and crime-related harms

No systematic support across the CJS, with little support for the individual and

Building Awareness & New Referral Routes

Through regional events in Wales

In Wales, the Ara team led by Community Engagement Manager Rob Parker have used MLS Phase 2 funding to take a fresh approach to raising awareness of gambling-related harms (GRH), building connections from the ground up.

Twelve regional mini conferences have been planned across the country, targeting areas with little prior engagement. By mid-2025, six had already been delivered – including in Cardiff, Swansea, Wrexham and Llandudno – drawing around 40 participants per event.



Each was designed to be locally relevant, emotionally resonant and practically useful and combined a consistent set of elements:

- Introduction to Ara and partner services
- Evidence on gambling prevalence and risks, with a Welsh lens
- Lived-experience stories highlighting crime, family fallout and recovery
- Spotlights on youth risks such as influencer marketing and loot boxes
- Awareness of self-exclusion tools such as GamStop

The content was adapted to reflect local contexts – for example, the Wrexham and Llandudno events included sessions focused on LGBTQ+ experiences and criminal justice. Round-table layouts and mixed seating helped prompt open discussion and break down professional silos.

“

From the second you got there, people were talking - that circular-table thing just kicked off real conversation

Hannah Tretheway, GamStop Senior Marketing Executive

”

Ripples of Real-World Impact

The mini conferences were not just well attended – they were well received. Across four of them, 91% of respondents said they were very satisfied, 88% said their awareness had increased a lot, and all but one said they now felt more confident supporting people affected by gambling harms.

Attendees included professionals from local authority safeguarding and housing teams, probation services, mental health and youth services, schools, and voluntary sector organisations such as LGBTQ+ support groups or other charities – reflecting a strong cross-section of frontline services across Wales.

The majority of participants planned to act. This included:

- Updating risk assessments
- Adding screening questions to service conversations
- Booking follow-on training with Ara
- Promoting dialogue internally

Rob reported that “*referrals came in immediately*” to Ara after some events, alongside multiple meeting and training requests. The Cardiff session alone led to at least one direct referral by the following morning.

Practice Changes

It helped us realise that gambling can happen to anybody in any guise.

Katherine Hussey ,
Third Sector Development Manager

For organisations like Flintshire Local Voluntary Council (FLVC), the Wrexham event sparked a change in practice.

Katherine is now exploring how to introduce prompts about gambling into her team’s conversations with clients, and intends to log referrals to Ara or other services made as a result.

Interest in GamStop training rose following the events, with Hannah contacted by several charities and local authorities. She emphasised their value in helping national organisations like GamStop “*know what services are out there and who we can refer people to – we always want to have up-to-date knowledge of what’s available in the regions so we can signpost properly.*”

It opened my eyes ...I didn’t realise the extent to which gambling was affecting people and families until I heard those stories

Julie Jones, Invisible Walls CIC



Local Champions and Ongoing Links

Julie Jones, who works with schools and prisons through Invisible Walls Community Interest Company, attended the Cardiff event and then co-delivered a school session with Ara's Helen Morgan just days later.

Julie noted how Helen's session with Year 9 pupils led to immediate disclosures about family gambling and helped young people understand that help is available. Julie now sees Ara as a trusted delivery partner and plans to continue collaborating on future youth engagement projects.

Rob deliberately designed the events to prompt system change from the ground up. "*Gambling harm is still not on the agenda,*" he noted, especially within some Welsh councils and health boards.

By focusing on operational staff, the Ara team hopes to build pressure and readiness from within local services, creating the conditions for eventual strategic buy-in. Their Community Connector model – over 100 signed up by late July – is part of that longer-term vision.

It is designed to create a wide-reaching network of local professionals who can act as gambling harm champions within their organisations and communities.

Conclusion

Ara's regional events in Wales have demonstrated that when awareness-raising events are designed to be interactive and build on lived experience, they can change hearts, minds and behaviour.

“
Thank you so much to all – it was the best training myself and my colleagues have attended – by far.

Llandudno, Participant feedback

In a country where GRH still struggles to be recognised as a public health issue, these mini-conferences are not only raising awareness, but enabling key stakeholders to take action in their own organisations.



Breaking Barriers for Women Experiencing Gambling- Related Harm

Creating safe spaces, building connections



The West Midlands regional board, supported by Phase 2 MLS funding, have taken a pioneering approach to creating event spaces for specific groups of people, for example, holding a LGBTQIA+ space and Affected Others space. This vignette focuses on the innovative approach taken to address the hidden needs of women experiencing gambling-related harm through a dedicated women's only event.

This initiative created a safe space where women could openly discuss their experiences without fear of judgment. The event demonstrated the transformative power of targeted, women-centred approaches in breaking down barriers to support and building lasting collaborative networks.

What Was Done?

MLS Phase 2 funding enabled the West Midlands regional board to design and deliver a tailored women's only event, addressing a gap identified through regional board discussions about women's underrepresentation in gambling support services. The collaborative approach brought together:

- A bespoke workshop developed by exploring the unique ways women experience gambling-related harm.
- Lived experience testimony from Stacey Goodwin at Epic Restart Foundation, sharing her journey and breaking down stigma.
- Specialist insight from Harp Edwards, Head of Therapy, at Gordon Moody, presenting evidence on women's treatment pathways and outcomes using tools like the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) and Core 10 assessments.
- Professional networking opportunities between gambling specialists, NHS mental health workers, social services, education professionals, and third sector organisations

System Impact: Opening Doors & Changing Conversations

The event generated tangible system-level changes that extended far beyond the single day. The women's only format proved transformative in ways that mixed-gender events had not achieved.

As Rebecca Neville from Aquarius reflected:

“*It was attended by only women, which again was absolutely brilliant... We actually got referrals directly into service as well, three times the number we normally have. So without that event, there were women that attended that would never have spoken up about the gambling harms that they've been through.*”

The networking impact was important with around 35 women attending representing a 40-60 split between professionals and those with lived experience. Harp Edwards observed the knowledge gaps that were revealed:

"People actually really don't know a lot about what support services are actually out there, not just women who need support, but people like other professionals."

The event sparked ongoing collaboration requests, with multiple organisations

subsequently asking for training and awareness sessions.

This multiplier effect created sustainable change beyond the initial funding period, with services now equipped to better identify and support women experiencing gambling-related harm.

Impact On Individuals: Finding Voice & Community

Women attended who had never previously spoken about their gambling experiences, finding safety in the shared space. As Rebecca noted:

“*We had one woman attend and she'd never spoke to anybody about it before because she felt like she couldn't. And she said, actually, I'm sitting here in a room full of women that all just understand. And that was that is so powerful.*”

The event directly generated referrals into specialist services, with women accessing support who might otherwise have remained isolated.

Additionally, several attendees volunteered to support future events.

One attendee emphasised the unique value of the women-only environment:



One attendee emphasised the unique value of the women-only environment:

“
Women only spaces are needed... A lot of things around domestic abuse, sexual abuse that you don't feel safe enough to say in front of men... having those spaces where you can say: 'I'm on my period and it's making me act like a crazy bitch' and not being judged for it.
”

A Model Sparking Change

The success of the women's event has created momentum with plans underway for a larger-scale event at Birmingham City University, potentially during fresher's week to reach younger women. The regional board's relationship with Birmingham City University's public health course has strengthened, creating academic partnerships that extend the reach and evidence base for women-centred approaches. The model has also influenced thinking about other marginalised groups, with the regional board successfully running LGBTQ+ specific events using similar safe space principles.

Towards Sustainable Transformation

The West Midlands women's event demonstrates how targeted, community-led approaches can achieve impact. By creating genuinely safe spaces and centring lived experience voices, the initiative broke through barriers that traditional mixed approaches had failed to address. The direct referrals into services, the professional development achieved, and the ongoing collaborative relationships established how single events can catalyse lasting system change.

The collaboration between Aquarius, Gordon Moody, and Epic Restart Foundation now forms a template for future women-centred work, with plans to co-facilitate larger events and develop joint training materials. This demonstrates how MLS funding has helped foster partnerships that will continue generating impact beyond the programme's lifetime, fundamentally changing how the West Midlands region approaches support for women experiencing gambling-related harm.