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PART OF THE SYNERGI
COLLABORATIVE NETWORK

annual report '26



Photos used throughout are from the RWF digital archive.

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Foreword

Synergi-Leeds was established in response to persistent ethnic inequalities in mental health outcomes across Leeds. Despite national and local efforts to address these disparities, people from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic communities continue to experience unequal access to support, poorer experiences of services and disproportionately high rates of detention under the Mental Health Act.

Over the past year, Synergi-Leeds has continued to strengthen its role as a citywide partnership and community of practice committed to addressing these inequalities through collaboration, co-production, anti-racist practice and system change. Bringing together people with lived experience, statutory organisations, voluntary and community sector partners, commissioners, academics and practitioners, the network provides a unique space for dialogue, challenge, learning and action.

Throughout 2026, the network has expanded both its membership and influence, reflecting growing recognition that addressing racial inequalities in mental health requires coordinated action across systems. This report highlights the progress made during the year, key achievements, learning from our work, and priorities for the future.

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Background and Approach

Synergi-Leeds was established following analysis undertaken by Touchstone and Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LYPFT) which identified the disproportionate detention of people from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic communities within mental health services. While the issue is not unique to Leeds, local data continues to demonstrate significant inequalities. Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic men remain substantially more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than their White counterparts.

Mental health is influenced by a complex interaction of social, economic, environmental and cultural factors, including poverty, housing, education, employment, discrimination and trauma. Within this context, racism is recognised as a fundamental driver of mental health inequalities, shaping experiences, opportunities and outcomes.

Synergi-Leeds is jointly led by Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and Leeds City Council Public Health and is funded by Leeds ICB (Integrated Care Board). This funding supports two posts which provide strategic oversight and operational delivery of the core programmes. In addition to these posts, a small core team support the activities of the partnership and include representatives from LYPFT, Forum Central, Touchstone and Leeds Involving People.

This core team is complemented by a wider network of partners from across health, local government, policing, education, housing, culture and the voluntary and community sector, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing mental health inequalities.

Central to the Synergi-Leeds approach is a commitment to:

- Anti-racist practice and system transformation.
- Meaningful co-production and shared decision-making.
- Valuing lived experience as expertise.
- Addressing structural inequalities and wider determinants of mental health.
- Creating psychologically informed spaces where difficult conversations can be held safely and constructively.
- Supporting collective action through collaboration and partnership.
- Diverse and inclusive leadership.

The network continues to provide a forum where partners can challenge assumptions, learn from one another and develop practical solutions that contribute to more equitable mental health outcomes.

Synergi-Leeds Network

A key achievement of 2026 has been the continued growth of the Synergi-Leeds network.

Over recent years, membership has expanded considerably and now includes representatives from health services, local government, education, housing, policing, universities, voluntary and community organisations and cultural institutions.

This broader membership has strengthened the network's ability to address complex challenges that sit across multiple systems.

The network continues to act as a convenor and connector, bringing together partners who may not otherwise have opportunities to collaborate.

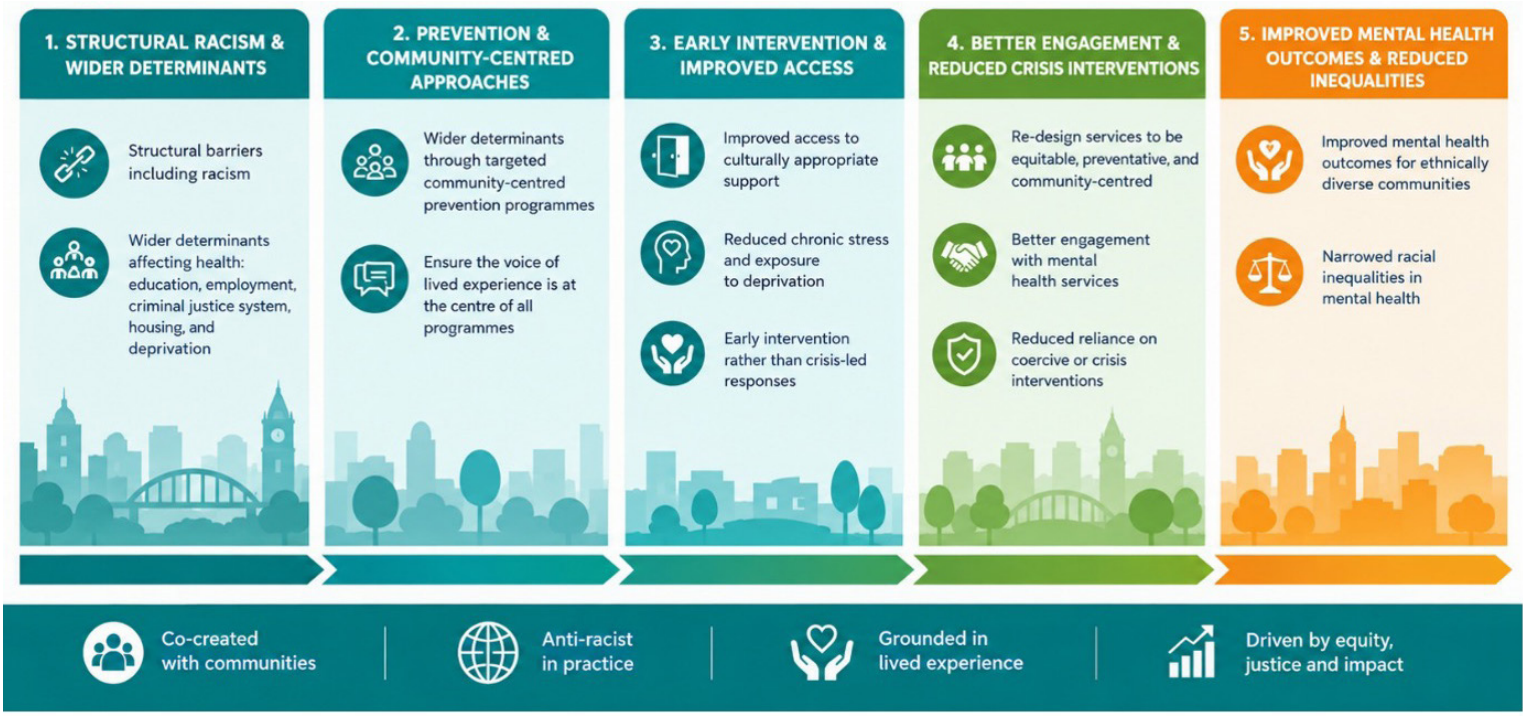
This has supported stronger relationships between statutory services and community organisations and created greater opportunities for shared learning and collective action.

Members consistently report that participation in the network increases their understanding of racial inequalities, strengthens professional relationships and enhances their ability to influence change within their own organisations.

As the network has grown, so too has its influence. Synergi-Leeds is increasingly recognised as an important voice within local and regional discussions relating to mental health inequalities, anti-racism and health equity.



Synergi-Leeds Theory of Change and Partnership Ecosystem





Why Synergi-Leeds Matters

National and local evidence shows that people from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic communities experience unequal access to services, poorer experiences of care, and disproportionately higher rates of detention under the Mental Health Act.

These inequalities are shaped by a range of social, economic and cultural factors, with racism recognised as a key driver of unequal experiences and outcomes.

Some groups – particularly Black African and Caribbean communities - experience higher rates of severe mental illness and crisis intervention, alongside lower access to early support. As a result, many people first engage with services at a point of crisis, leading to poorer outcomes.

National and local data highlights clear inequalities across the mental health pathway:

Talking therapies:
Lower access among ethnically diverse communities. [1]

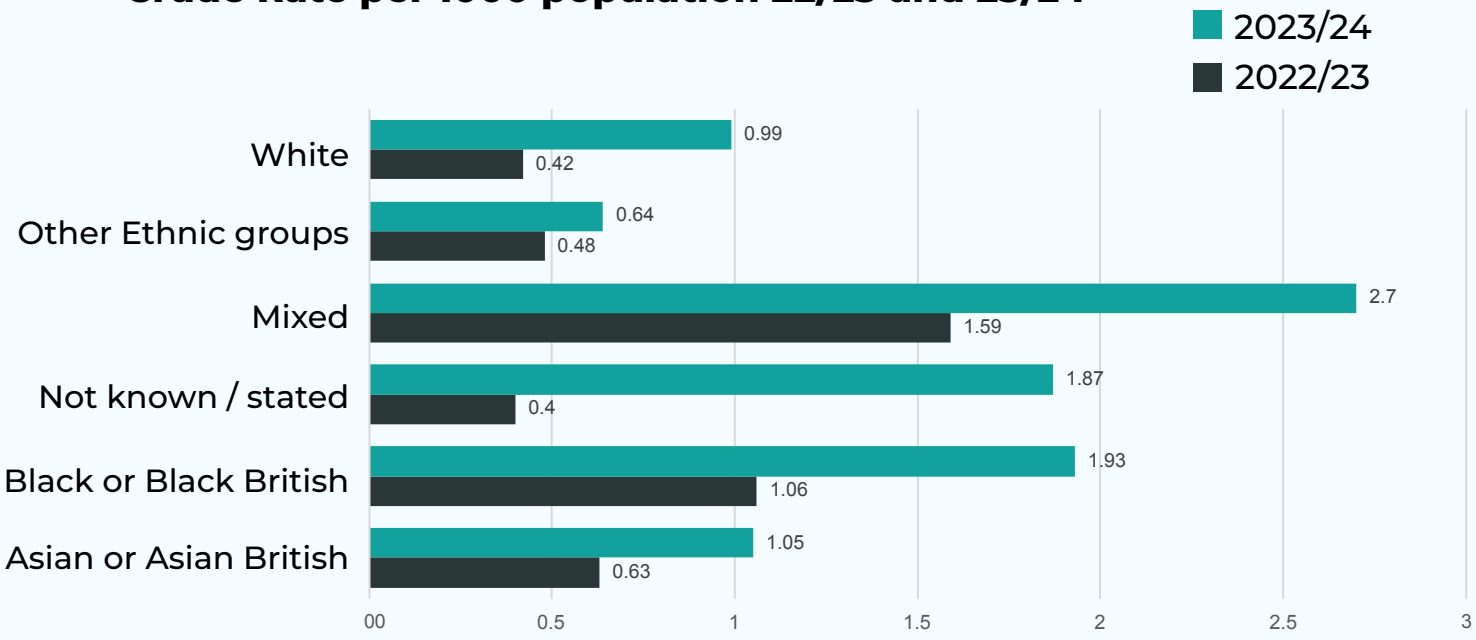
Access to mental health treatment:
Lower treatment rates for Black/Black British adults **(8.2%)** compared to White British adults **(18.4%)** despite similar or higher need. [2]

Crisis pathways:
Black and Mixed Ethnic groups are **twice** as likely to be admitted following crisis care. [3]

Mental Health Act detentions:
Nearly double the detention rates for Black and Mixed Ethnic groups compared to White British residents. [3]

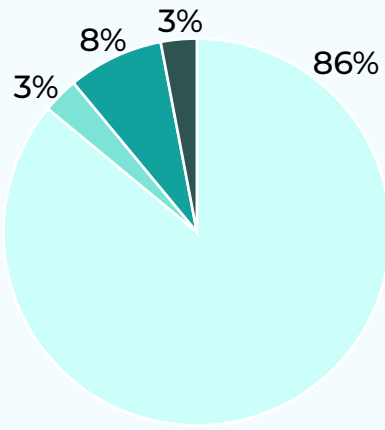
Inpatient care:
Overrepresentation of Black and Asian groups; 17% of records lack ethnicity data. [3]

Mental Health Act Detentions by Ethnicity
Crude Rate per 1000 population 22/23 and 23/24

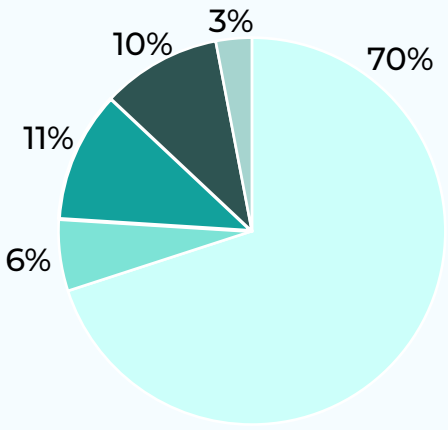


Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, 2025

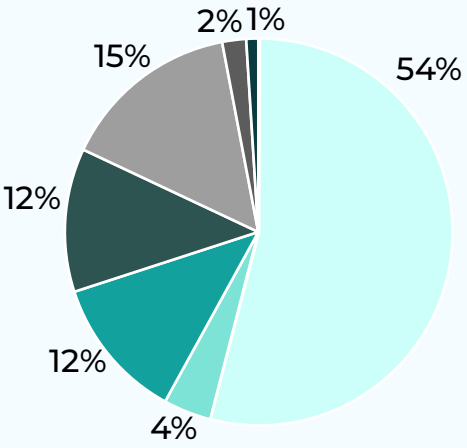
Population by Ethnic Group in Leeds (2011 Census)



Population by Ethnic Group in Leeds (2021 Census)



Mental Health Inpatient Population in Leeds 2025



White
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups
Other Ethnic Group
Black, African, Caribbean, Black British or Black Welsh
Not known
Not stated
Other
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh

Office for National Statistics. Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, 2025

Together, these patterns indicate that racially minoritised communities are more likely to experience late intervention, more restrictive care, and poorer outcomes.

Ethnic inequalities in mental health reflect cumulative disadvantage across the life course, shaped by structural inequalities from early childhood through to adulthood.

Key factors include:

- **Early life:** Children from racially minoritised communities are significantly more likely to experience poverty, with around **47%** of Black and Asian children living in poverty compared to **22%** of White children. [4][5]
- **Education:** Persistent disparities in attainment and school exclusions between ethnic groups, with some communities experiencing lower attainment and significantly higher exclusion rates compared to White British pupils. [6][7]
- **Employment:** Ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience unemployment, lower employment rates and pay gaps compared to White British populations. [8][7]
- **Criminal justice:** Racially minoritised communities are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, increasing exposure to trauma and poorer health outcomes. [9]
- **Deprivation:** Racially minoritised communities are disproportionately concentrated in the most deprived areas in Leeds. [10]

These factors increase exposure to risk and reduce access to protective factors, reflecting an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunities.

Addressing these inequalities requires a whole-system approach. Synergi-Leeds brings partners together, amplifies lived experience, and supports system change to improve mental health outcomes across Leeds. By working with partners to improve ethnicity data recording and connect local data sources, Synergi-Leeds aims to deepen understanding of ethnic inequalities across the life course and mental health care pathways.



Synergi-Leeds Strategic Priorities

Synergi-Leeds identified four strategic priorities that have shaped the work of the partnership and provided a foundation for future system change:

- **Remembering What's Forgotten**
- **The Synergi-Leeds Grants Programme**
- **The Synergi-Leeds Communication Principles**
- **Commissioning for Racial Equity**

Remembering What's Forgotten

Remembering What's Forgotten (RWF) has been one of the most ambitious and impactful initiatives supported by Synergi-Leeds.

RWF was co-founded and project managed by Words of Colour Director Joy Francis, with input and collaboration from a range of community and cultural partners.

The project explored fifty years of inequality affecting Black and South Asian communities and created opportunities for reflection, storytelling and collective action.

The programme culminated in a major digital exhibition featuring contributions from over sixty artists, community members, practitioners and people with lived experience.

Findings presented within this report are drawn from the *What Needs to be Remembered* Executive Summary.

Photos used throughout this report are from the RWF Digital Exhibition and Archive.



REMEMBERING WHAT'S FORGOTTEN
PRESERVING HISTORY, EMBRACING LEGACY

WORDS OF COLOUR
The Immersive Change Agency

NHS
Leeds and York Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

Leeds City Council

Heritage Corner Leeds

TOUCHSTONE

Forum Central

Several important themes emerged:

Racism and Allyship

Participants consistently identified racism as a continuing influence on mental health experiences and outcomes. There was a strong call for leaders and organisations to move beyond acknowledgement towards action and accountability.

Creating Trusted and Culturally Safe Spaces

The project challenged persistent myths that Black and South Asian men are unwilling to engage with mental health support. Instead, participants highlighted the lack of trusted, culturally safe spaces and barriers to accessing appropriate support.

Recognising Hidden Contributions

The work highlighted the significant but often invisible role played by Black and South Asian women as carers, advocates and sources of emotional support within families and communities.







Addressing Gaps in Support

Participants identified particular concerns regarding the availability of support for LGBTQ+ young people and neurodivergent individuals from racially minoritised communities.

Leadership and Accountability

Many contributors expressed a desire for leadership that is culturally competent, representative, accountable and willing to challenge established approaches.

Preserving Community Knowledge

A recurring theme was the absence of accessible archives documenting Black and South Asian experiences of mental health in Leeds. Participants highlighted the risk of losing valuable knowledge and repeating historical mistakes when community histories are not preserved.

Nature, Connection and Belonging

The importance of nature, outdoor spaces, social connection and community belonging emerged as significant protective factors for wellbeing and recovery.



Building a Digital Archive

One of the most important legacies of Remembering What's Forgotten has been the creation of a digital archive and exhibition.

The platform provides a permanent repository of stories, artwork, spoken word performances, films, essays and reflections that document experiences often absent from traditional institutional records.

More than simply preserving history, the archive creates opportunities for learning, dialogue and action. It provides an accessible resource for communities, practitioners, researchers and policymakers seeking to better understand the relationship between race, mental health and social justice.

The Remembering What's Forgotten Digital Exhibition can be accessed online and continues to attract interest from audiences locally and nationally.

Visit the Remembering What's Forgotten website >





Synergi-Leeds Grants Programme

The Synergi-Leeds Grants Programme – ***Addressing Mental Health Inequalities within Ethnic Minority Communities*** continues to be a key mechanism for supporting community-led responses to mental health inequalities.

Funded by Public Health and delivered in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation, the programme has now supported three funding cohorts.

The first cohort focused on a life-course approach, supporting projects working with children, young people, families and adults.

The second cohort focused specifically on young people aged 16 to 25, recognising the importance of transition periods and the barriers many racially minoritised young people face when accessing support.

The third cohort, launched in 2026, focused on Black men's mental health and reflects increasing recognition of the significant inequalities experienced by this population. The grants programme prioritised Black-led initiatives working with Black men aged 18 and over who are disproportionately affected by mental health crisis and detention under the Mental Health Act.

Funded organisations were required to demonstrate meaningful involvement of Black men in the design and delivery of activities, adopt a holistic approach to wellbeing, and build stronger relationships between communities and statutory mental health services. The programme aimed to reduce mental health crises, improve access to culturally responsive support at an earlier stage, and ultimately reduce the overrepresentation of Black men in crisis services and compulsory detention.

Gipsil RISE Project



Learning from the programme highlights several consistent themes:

- **Community-led organisations are uniquely positioned to build trust and engage communities.**
- **Culturally responsive approaches improve participation and outcomes.**
- **Early intervention and prevention remain essential.**
- **Long-term relationships are critical for sustainable impact.**
- **Collaboration between sectors strengthens support pathways and reduces fragmentation.**

The programme has adopted a relational approach to funding, combining financial investment with practical support and ongoing engagement. This approach has helped organisations build capacity, strengthen partnerships and maximise impact.

Heritage Corner Project



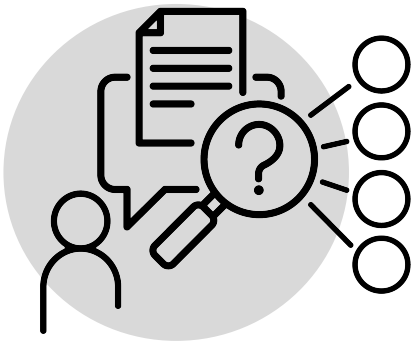
Synergi-Leeds Communication Principles

One of the most influential pieces of work undertaken by Synergi-Leeds has been the development of a set of communication principles to support conversations about ethnic inequalities in mental health.

Research led by Professor Stephen Coleman and Yusuf Rasul from the University of Leeds explored how conversations about race, inequality and mental health are experienced across systems. The team conducted interviews across a broad range of stakeholders and attended various system meetings where there was a focus on mental health and ethnic inequalities.

The study identified four key themes:

- Discomfort
- Recognition
- Language
- Agency



The resulting Communication Principles have become an important foundation for network activity. They encourage honesty, inclusive dialogue, respectful challenge and shared responsibility for change. We encourage our network members to utilise the communication principles within their organisation to encourage more honest conversations about race, inequality and mental health.

Discomfort

Conversations about ethnic inequalities often lead to discomfort amongst participants which can inhibit meaningful discussion.

Recognition

Certain voices were marginalised or dismissed within discussions, hindering open communication.

Language

The use of ‘institutional language’ was seen as a significant barrier to inclusion, with some participants feeling judged based on their use of language rather than the substance of their contributions.

Agency

Most participants believed that ‘their institutions’ perpetuated and reinforced ethnic inequalities in mental health, with a weariness about the capacity of these structures to prioritise systemic change.

The Communication Principles



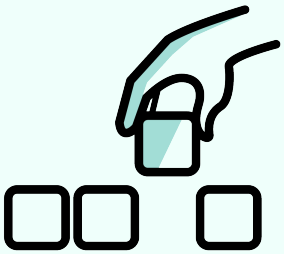
1. Acknowledge racism and discrimination openly.

Be honest that racism and discrimination exist and contribute to mental health inequalities.



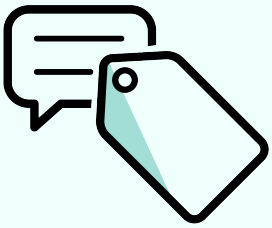
2. Include affected communities in decision-making.

Ensure people from affected communities are involved in all decisions in a meaningful way. Understand who is present, their lived experience, values, and influence.



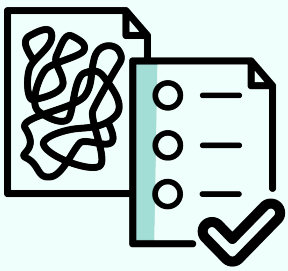
3. Seek external help when needed.

If it's hard to reach agreement, bring in facilitators to guide sensitive discussions and ensure everyone is heard and respected.



4. Be direct in naming issues.

Don't be afraid to name racism and unfair treatment. Clearly identify racism and social injustice.



5. Make institutional language clear and welcoming.

Use simple and inclusive language to ensure everyone feels welcome and can understand.

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The Communication Principles



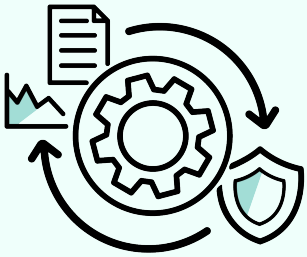
6. Share the responsibility of addressing injustice.

Don't expect only those most affected by racism to speak up. It's everyone's responsibility to address these issues.



7. Gather data to inform discussions.

Develop better mechanisms of gathering data that can inform discussions about racism and social injustice.



8. Establish accountability processes.

Ensure effective systems are in place to monitor and evaluate decisions and strategies on racism and social justice, and to assess their impact over time.



9. Value storytelling.

Listen not only to what people are saying but also to why they are saying it and what they might find difficult to express.



10. Recognise that understanding takes time.

Acknowledge that everyone is on a journey; that understanding and empathising takes time, and we need to be sensitive to where they are in that process.

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Commissioning for Racial Equity

Commissioning is a powerful mechanism for addressing inequalities within mental health services.

Throughout 2026, Synergi-Leeds has continued to work alongside commissioners to strengthen the integration of racial equity considerations into service specifications, performance frameworks and commissioning processes.

This work has included contributing a racial equity lens to the redevelopment of NHS Talking Therapies specifications and supporting commissioners to consider both qualitative and quantitative measures of success.

The partnership has drawn upon national guidance and evidence, including recommendations from the NHS Race and Health Observatory and the BABCP (British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies) Black, African and Asian Therapy Toolkit, to inform local commissioning approaches.

Alongside this work, Synergi-Leeds has contributed to the development of the West Yorkshire Racial Equity Steering Group. The group provides strategic leadership and aims to ensure that racial equity becomes embedded within all aspects of mental health service delivery, workforce development and organisational culture across the region.

Our ambition remains clear: mental health services should not only be accessible to racially minoritised communities but should also be experienced as culturally responsive, equitable and anti-racist.

West Yorkshire Racial Equity Steering Group

West Yorkshire Racial Equity Steering Group Core activities have been identified as:

- **The establishment of a West Yorkshire Community of Practice.**
- **Commissioning of an independent evaluation of the Provider PCREF plans and actions.**
- **Developing a governance framework for commissioning anti-racism training.**
- **Developing a local racial equity framework to support commissioning of mental health services.**

Looking Forward

The challenges associated with racial inequalities in mental health remain significant. However, the progress made during 2026 demonstrates the value of partnership, collaboration and sustained commitment.

Looking ahead, Synergi-Leeds will continue to focus on:

- **Supporting implementation of PCREF across provider organisations.**
- **Embedding racial equity within commissioning and service design.**
- **Strengthening the West Yorkshire Community of Practice.**
- **Expanding opportunities for lived experience leadership.**
- **Supporting workforce development and anti-racism learning.**
- **Sustaining community-led approaches that improve mental health outcomes.**

The partnership will continue to advocate for equitable services and systems that recognise, value and respond to the experiences of racially minoritised communities.

Conclusion

Throughout 2026, Synergi-Leeds has continued to grow as a collaborative network committed to addressing ethnic inequalities in mental health.

The expansion of membership, influence and partnerships reflects both increasing recognition of the importance of the network and a shared commitment across sectors to work collectively towards more equitable mental health outcomes.

While challenges remain, the achievements highlighted within this report demonstrate that meaningful progress is possible when organisations, communities and people with lived experience come together around a common purpose.

Synergi-Leeds remains committed to fostering collaboration, challenging inequality, amplifying lived experience and supporting lasting system change across Leeds and West Yorkshire.

Case Study: Embedding Anti-Racist Practice Through Synergi-Leeds

Andrea Cavill, an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) and social worker, has been involved with Synergi-Leeds since its earliest Creative Spaces events. Through her engagement with the network, she has developed greater confidence in challenging racial inequalities and advocating for anti-racist practice across local, regional and national professional forums.

"Synergi-Leeds is a catalyst for shifting thinking from deficit-based approaches towards strengths-based, community-led models that value lived experience and challenge traditional power dynamics. The network has strengthened my understanding of trauma-informed practice, increased awareness of organisational harm, and encouraged more critical reflection on how risk is assessed and experienced, particularly by Black men and other racially minoritised groups.

Beyond individual practice, I have observed wider organisational change, including greater recognition of community assets, stronger partnerships between commissioning and public health teams, and an increased commitment to anti-racist approaches across services. I particularly value Synergi-Leeds' focus on translating conversations into action through community-led commissioning, grant programmes and system influence.

Looking ahead, I believe that while Synergi-Leeds has played a significant role in advancing racial equity, responsibility for change must remain collective. I have to emphasise the importance of ensuring anti-racist practice is embedded across organisations rather than being seen as the responsibility of a single network.

Synergi-Leeds is a safe space to have uncomfortable conversations, learn from others, and build confidence to challenge inequality. The real challenge now is ensuring that responsibility for change doesn't sit with one network alone, but is owned collectively by organisations, leaders and systems."

Case Study: Strengthening Anti-Racist Practice Through Reflective Leadership

Sinead Cregan, Director of Development and Innovation, Inspire North in Leeds, has been involved with Synergi-Leeds since joining the Creative Spaces programme in 2019. Through her participation in the network, she has developed a deeper understanding of how racism, discrimination, trauma and wider structural inequalities influence mental health outcomes and people's experiences of services.

"Synergi-Leeds has provided a unique space for reflection, challenge and learning, encouraging conversations about race, power and professional responsibility that are often difficult to have within traditional organisational settings. This experience has strengthened my confidence to champion anti-racist practice within my organisation and to challenge assumptions, bias and inequitable approaches to assessment and decision-making.

As a well-respected voice across the sector, I have encouraged practitioners to take a more reflective, trauma-informed and person-centred approach, including questioning how risk is understood and represented, particularly in relation to Black men and other racially minoritised groups. I have also advocated for greater attention to the experiences of staff from racialised communities and the need to embed racial equity across workforce development and organisational culture.

Beyond Leeds, I have contributed to local, regional and national discussions about anti-racist practice, helping to translate learning into wider system conversations. I believe Synergi-Leeds has played an important role in creating momentum for change which I'm proud of being a part of.

One of the things I really love about Synergi is the energy. You come out of those meetings feeling alive. It's a safe space to have conversations that aren't comfortable, to challenge thinking, and to learn. My confidence has grown in being the awkward voice in the room - asking where anti-racist practice sits, where responsibility sits, and how we create real change. But that responsibility can't sit with Synergi alone. It's collectively for everybody to be responsible for the change."

Reflection on Accomplishments

At the heart of everything Synergi-Leeds does are the people and communities we work alongside.

In recent years we were proud to see that collective effort recognised through two national awards: the Legacy Awards 2022, where Synergi-Leeds received the award for Health and Wellbeing, and the HSJ Awards, where we were honoured with Mental Health Innovation of the Year 2023. Synergi-Leeds was also shortlisted and commended for the Racial Equity HSJ Award.

These awards belong to everyone who has contributed to the Synergi-Leeds journey – our community members, people with lived experience, partners, staff and volunteers. They recognise the power of working together, listening to communities and creating approaches that are shaped by the experiences, strengths and aspirations of the diverse people of Leeds.





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Remembering What's Forgotten Digital Exhibition.

Coleman, S. & Rasul, Y. Communication Principles Research, University of Leeds.

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