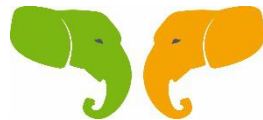


# **Social Effectiveness Research Centre**



## **South Riverside Community Development Centre: Believe / Credu Project**

**Final Evaluation**

**JUNE 2022**

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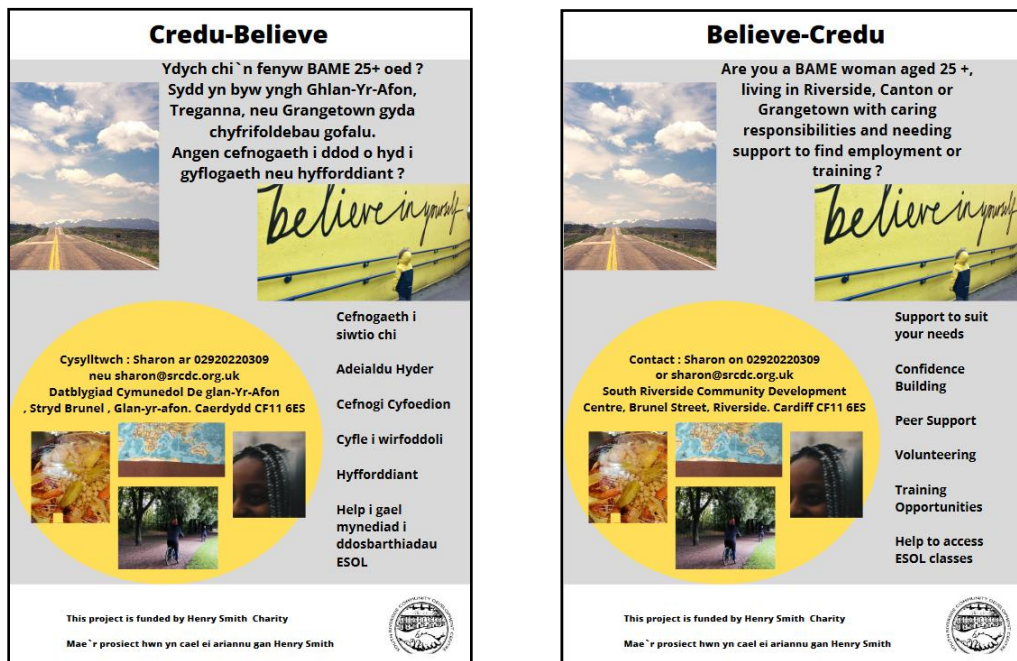
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## I. Introduction and Methodology



*“In the nearest future I am looking for a better job. I would like to apply all the skills and knowledge I have gained from the Believe project on my life and my new job.”*

Project participant, Believe / Credu project

Believe (or ‘Cred-u’ in Welsh) was a project delivered by South Riverside Community Development Centre (SRDC). The project ran from May 2019 to May 2022, and worked with Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women who were unemployed, had caring or childcaring responsibilities and/or who lacked formal qualifications or employability skills.<sup>1</sup> In doing this, Believe / Credu built upon a previous pilot project, Skills for Life, which had been delivered by SRDC in partnership with Oxfam Cymru between March 2017 and March 2018.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Believe / Credu as a project began before the acronym ‘BAME’ came in for prominent questioning as a term by individuals and communities in Wales. This process has more recently led Welsh Government, among others, to phase out the term from their official usage. The more spelled-out alternatives now used in place of ‘BAME’ have been used throughout this report.

<sup>2</sup> For further details see L. Quinn, ‘Oxfam Cymru and South Riverside Community Development Centre Skills for Life Project: Final Evaluation Report’ (Social Effectiveness Research Centre, June 2018), available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/oxfam-cymru-and-south-riverside-community-development-centre-skills-for-life-pr-620487/> <accessed June 2022>.

Believe / Credu was funded through a grant totalling £177,023 over the project's three-year lifetime from the Henry Smith Charity's 'Improving Lives' fund, which provides grants to charitable organisations *"that help people when other sources of support have failed, are inappropriate, or are simply not available"*.<sup>3</sup> The six priority areas for the charity's Improving Lives fund are as follows:

- Help at a critical moment
- Positive choices
- Accommodation/housing support
- Employment and training
- Financial inclusion, rights and entitlements
- Support networks and family.<sup>4</sup>

Figures from the Office for National Statistics have shown that unemployment for Black, Asian and other ethnic minority women in Wales is 5% higher than the UK average.<sup>5</sup> One in seven such women of working age are seeking jobs but are unable to find any, compared to just one in 23 White women.<sup>6</sup> Research has also found that job applications from people with 'white-sounding' names are 74% more likely to get called for an interview, or receive another positive response in relation to a given job, than people with 'ethnic minority sounding' names.<sup>7</sup>

Black, Asian and other minority ethnic individuals are also over-represented in low-paid, precarious jobs, as well as under-represented in senior positions, and more likely to be overqualified than their White British counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the Henry Smith Charity, 'Improving Lives - Overview', available at: <https://www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk/explore-our-grants-and-apply/improving-lives-grants-programme/improving-lives-grants-programme-overview/> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Smith Charity, 'Improving Lives - Priority Areas', available at: <https://www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk/explore-our-grants-and-apply/improving-lives-grants-programme/improving-lives-grants-programme-priority-areas/> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>5</sup> P. Joshi, 'Why skilled young BAME women see their future outside Wales' (Alt.Cardiff, 13 December 2018), available at: <https://www.jomec.co.uk/altcardiff/in-poverty/skilled-young-bame-women-see-their-future-outside-wales> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> A. Sippitt, 'Job applicants with ethnic minority sounding names are less likely to be called for interview' (Full Fact, 26 October 2015), available at: <https://fullfact.org/economy/job-applicants-ethnic-minority-sounding-names-are-less-likely-be-called-interview/> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>8</sup> H. Turkmen, 'Triple Glazed Ceiling: Barriers to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women Participating in the Economy' (Chwarae Teg, July 2019), p.5, available at: [https://chwaraeteg.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TGC-Barriers-to-BAME-Women\\_Summary-Report.pdf](https://chwaraeteg.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/TGC-Barriers-to-BAME-Women_Summary-Report.pdf) <accessed June 2022>.

Partly as a result of this, Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women are more likely to be self-employed than White British women.<sup>9</sup> In Wales, only 8% of economically active women are self-employed, but this number is higher among women from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups in particular.<sup>10</sup>

More generally, research has found too that most ethnic minority groups in Wales are less secure economically than the White population. This is partly due to their positions of disadvantage in relation to employment, which result in both ethnicity and gender pay gaps, as well as a higher rate of persistent poverty among Black, Asian and other minority ethnic households.<sup>11</sup> Ethnic minority women in Wales had been already hit disproportionately by austerity and welfare reform even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, with an estimated 80% of savings made under austerity coming from women's pockets, and with ethnic minority women particularly hard hit.<sup>12</sup>

These pre-existing issues were exacerbated significantly by the effects of COVID. Women in Wales were more likely to have lost their job due to a business closing down because of COVID than men, with 18% of women experiencing job loss for this reason compared to 11% of men.<sup>13</sup> The data also showed that Black, Asian and other minority ethnic people were twice as likely to have lost working hours compared to White people (48% versus 23%).<sup>14</sup>

Even more widely, other research found that experiences of violence and abuse for some minority ethnic groups could feed into the way they felt about their local area, leading to a sense of isolation. According to the research, “[b]arriers to accessing healthcare, sport and leisure exist, particularly for people from BAME [Black, Asian and other minority ethnic] groups or for whom English is an additional language”, something which “can further compound feelings of loneliness and not belonging”.<sup>15</sup> Members of Black, Asian and other ethnic minority communities also report higher rates of anxiety and feelings of isolation in comparison with their White counterparts, with one in four people from BAME groups reporting being lonely in Wales in 2017/18, compared to one in six of those who were White.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> M. Evans, ‘Half of mothers in Wales are struggling to make ends meet’ (WEN Wales, 25 March 2021), available at: <https://wenwales.org.uk/press-release-half-of-mothers-in-wales-are-struggling-to-make-ends-meet/> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> E. Ogbonna et al, ‘First Minister’s BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group: Report of the Socioeconomic Subgroup’ (Welsh Government, 22 June 2020), p.6, available at: <https://gov.wales/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-covid-19-socioeconomic-subgroup-report> <accessed June 2022>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In order to start to try to provide redress against these kinds of issues, Believe / Credu sought to achieve the following outcomes in its work with Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women:

- Participants in the project will feel more confident in looking for and applying for paid work
- Participants in the project will feel better able to manage a budget
- Participants in the project will identify an improvement in their financial assets
- Participants in the project will have a wider range of social contacts
- Participants in the project will know where to go for help and support.

The project sought to do so in part by achieving a series of annual output targets relating to these outcomes. The following table outlines its performance against those targets over the whole three-year lifetime of the project:

OUTPUT INDICATOR	TOTAL ACHIEVED (Y1/Y2/Y3 COMBINED)
● 150 women will have engaged with the project	229
● 132 will have attended relevant general training (accredited and non accredited)	235
● 120 will have received specific employment support (through employers or the project worker)	112
● 60 will have been on a work placement	60
● 48 will have been supported to (successfully) find employment.	72

As can be seen from the table, Believe / Credu performed strongly against its output indicators, achieving all but one of them, and in general exceeding them significantly. This was true both in terms of overall numbers engaged, and numbers attending training, but also in arguably the most important of these indicators, namely the number of participants helped to find employment.

The different types of employer taking on Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women because of Believe / Credu included a housing association, a think tank, various community organisations and statutory social and youth services, as well as private sector organisations such as a coffee bar, a renewable energy financial company or various types of caring,

cleaning or retail work. There were also successful examples of self-employment, particularly in relation to catering and interpreting.

Overall, given that a large portion of the project took part under the exceptionally difficult employment conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, this constitutes an especially noteworthy performance by the project, while also pointing to the large level of demand for such a service among Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women in Cardiff.

The only indicator where Believe / Credu slightly underperformed against initial expectations was the number of women receiving support specifically focused around employment. The reason for this shortfall, which occurred despite the project working with a higher than expected number of participants overall, was outlined in detail by a member of the project's staff:

*“Many women don't come in asking for support around employment. They come in asking for help to learn to sew or cycle or something like that, as many don't see themselves as being able to get a job, or be able to work and look after family, or culturally women do not work in that family. It is only months down the line that we get to the conversation about ‘Have you thought about getting a job?’ If I ask them about this at the initial interview I can tell that for some no one has ever asked them this before and they struggle to answer.”*

The same member of staff also added the following observation:

*“It is this relationship which develops between us that eventually gets them to have a light bulb moment whereby they could get a job. Although I have targets to fulfil, I feel I also need to give the women time, many of whom have experienced trauma to feel well enough to get to this point. It's what felt right and comfortable for them at that time in their lives, as some were going through some very challenging situations, especially because of the COVID pandemic. I go at their pace on their journey and not mine.”*

These observations encapsulate one of the key differences between the way Believe / Credu worked with Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women and more conventional employment programmes, and helps explain why even though the number women being offered specifically employment related support was below target, the number of women achieving the far more difficult goal of actually finding paid employment was significantly above target; going at the pace of the individual participant, rather than at the pace of the service provider, seems to lead to better results in the end.

The activities that the project undertook to achieve these outputs included things like group training sessions to help with areas like CV preparation, goal setting, dealing with different cultural expectations and so on.

It also offered individual case-by-case help for particular job applications, for interviews where the applications were successful and other one-to-one coaching, including the organising of, and ongoing support during, work experience placements.

Throughout the project, its individual support was based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, a holistic, asset-based methodology that can take intensive or non-intensive form depending on the extent of a participant's needs, including any wider non-employment related ones (such as their mental or physical well-being more generally, their levels of social connectedness/isolation, language issues, family or legal situations, qualifications and so on).<sup>17</sup>

The asset based approach Believe / Credu took was particularly important to the project. The initial questions the project would ask of participants when they first started with it were deliberately open ones, for example as follows:

- What would you like from the service?
- Where do you want to be in 6 months?
- Where do you want to be in 2 years?
- What are your existing skills and what experience do you have?
- Are there any gaps or particular support needed?

The result of this open, asset-based process was that participants themselves often chose to first look to better their position by building on strengths and skills they already possessed.

These strengths often included skills in community languages other than English, their childcare experience where they had some or other practical abilities such as cooking skills. Many participants who did not have English as a first language were above all keen to improve their English skills as the essential first step in moving closer to the labour market in Cardiff.

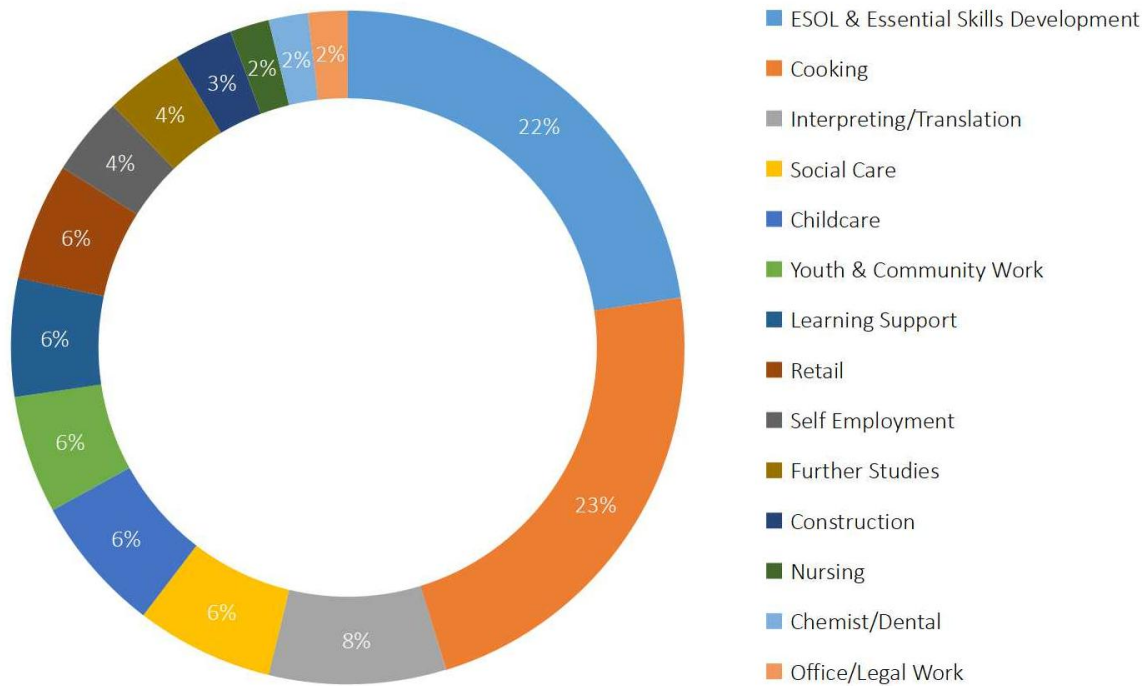
The resulting chart of initial employment, education and training aspiration among project participants records these and the other types of aspiration found in more detail:

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Oxfam Cymru, 'The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach: Toolkit for Wales' (Oxfam GB, 1 July 2013), available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233/> <accessed June 2022>.



BELIEVE / CREDU:  
Initial Employment/Education/Training Aspirations Among Project Participants  
(% identifying each EET area)



In terms of methodology, this final external evaluation made use of a mixed methods approach, utilising quantitative elements from the project’s records, including engagement and activity statistics, job outcome figures and other background documents for over 80 individual participants, as well as a sample of distance travelled surveys completed by 22 participants measuring progress in relation to the outcomes of the project. These quantitative data were then complemented by series of qualitative semi-structured interviews and case studies completed with project staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Focusing on beneficiaries’ lived experiences and own words, this evaluation report therefore first considers the progress of Believe / Credu against each of its intended outcomes. It then looks at the key learning points arising from the project’s whole three-year experience more widely, including providing a set of recommendations for any future version of the project or any other similar work to be undertaken based on the overall lessons of Believe / Credu as a whole.

## II. Outcome 1 - More Confident Seeking Work



*“Meeting women from different backgrounds has shown me that if I have the confidence I can train, find work and help my community.”*

Project participant, Believe / Credu

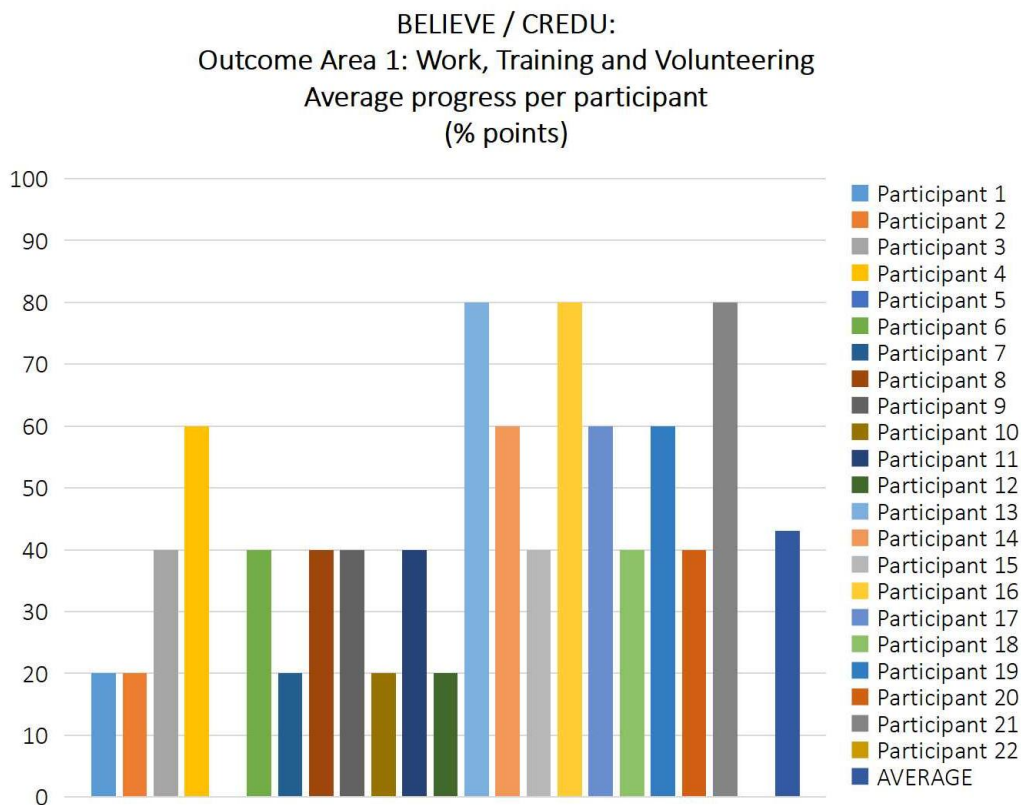
The first outcome Believe / Credu sought to achieve was that of helping its participants become more confident seeking work. This could be in relation to any stage of a participant’s career journey. They could be seeking paid work for the first time, they could be seeking a better job than the one they already had or they could simply be seeking any work experience, including voluntary work, for the first time in order to take themselves closer to the labour market.

Specific activities that the project ran in order to help its participants achieve this outcome included the following:

- One-to-one support with job applications and CVs
- Interview skills workshops to develop confidence in interview situations
- A ‘Life in the UK’ course to help orient newly-arrived participants to the cultural and practical aspects of living and working in Wales
- A ‘Read & Write’ group offering opportunities to practise spoken and written English and generally improve language skills in an informal group setting
- Other workshops and training specifically relating to employment and careers
- A ‘Let’s Interpret’ programme of courses delivered in partnership with Cardiff University to allow participants to take the first steps towards a potential career in interpreting

- Visits to potential public places of work to familiarise and demystify them, including a visit to the Senedd (Welsh Assembly) building in Cardiff Bay
- The organising of volunteering placements within a diverse range of organisations and sectors, plus the creation of volunteering roles within the project itself (such as a Walk Volunteer role) based upon requests made or needs identified by volunteers.

The results of all of these different activities in relation to seeking work were evident in the distance travelled surveys completed by participants. On average each participant in the sample reported an increase equivalent to 43 percentage points for the domain of Work, Training and Volunteering because of Believe/Credu.<sup>18</sup> This average increase per participant representing almost a doubling of their confidence levels in this domain, in comparison to when they had first come to the project, as the following graph records:



In qualitative terms, the ‘Let’s Interpret’ programme in particular provides a good example of how Believe / Credu managed to achieved these increases in its participants confidence seeking work. Rooted in the project’s asset-based approach, the set of courses made use of strong external partnerships and built on an existing skill that many of the Black, Asian and

<sup>18</sup> All but two participants sampled reported progress in this domain. One participant (participant 5), did not give a score for this domain while another (participant 22) made no progress, instead remaining where they had been when they had first got involved with the project.

other minority ethnic women participating in the project already had, namely native speaker level proficiency in a community language other than English. Feedback from participants underlined how important this approach of building on the advantages they already possessed was to their confidence seeking work. As one participant put it: *“Being involved in Let’s Interpret has really built my confidence and self-esteem. I had forgotten what I was capable of, but I am capable of doing a lot.”* Or, as another fed back having completed the course: *“I was previously on Jobseeker’s Allowance and I was often asked what skills I had. I feel like now I can become an interpreter because I know the steps to take.”*

Other participants who completed the programme through Believe / Credu also commented on the positive effect it had had on their confidence seeking work. In the words of one :

*“Let’s Interpret is something that is really needed. It helps give women the confidence to venture out and start climbing up the ladder towards their goals. Compared to traditional university courses, it feels like a safe haven that is relaxed and easy to be part of.”*

More generally, the activity was also emblematic of the greater sense of pride that flowed from achieving greater confidence in relation to seeking work. As another participant fed back, *“I am so proud of myself! I have learnt so many things and I feel a little bit like a professional interpreter now”*. Another outlined similarly how it had *“opened my eyes to a lot of things”* and how she now wanted to pursue interpretation as a professional career.

These outcomes were not just restricted to Believe / Credu’s ‘Let’s Interpret’ participants, however, but to be found in feedback from participants in other activities too. Another example was the following testimony from a Read & Write group participant:

*“I was married at 20 (but not civilly). I decided to come here [to Wales] - I wanted my son to study and have a better chance in life. I work in a restaurant, cleaning. I started coming [to Believe] to learn English. I have really appreciated coming.”*

This feedback from the Read & Write group captured something important about Believe / Credu more generally, namely that the women it worked with were, for the most part, only at the very initial stages of the journey towards sustainable work, rather than anywhere near something like a professional career already. As a result, they were usually in need of a great deal of intensive support from the Believe project worker if they were to move on in, or more usually simply towards, the labour market in Wales. In other words, these were generally not women who were close to the labour market when they first came to the project, and who just needed a small bit of extra help to find work.

One particular case study in relation to this outcome illustrates how long that journey could be for the kind of seldom-engaged participants Believe / Credu worked with. Although the project did very well quantitatively in terms of helping its participants increase their confidence in looking for, and in many cases, gaining employment, this was far from the only type of outcome it helped its participants achieve.

### CASE STUDY: BELIEVE / CREDU OUTCOME 1 - More confident seeking work

#### Anila\* (Believe / Credu participant, Pakistani background)

Anila has six children and an elderly husband with significant health issues. She did not attend school as a girl living in Pakistan and since moving to the UK she had concentrated on bringing her children up. She confided to the Believe project worker that she struggled to read and write, so the project worker agreed to support her as a participant and became her note-taker as needed.

As a result of this support, Anila was able to complete several courses with the project, including ones on How To Open Your Own Business, Self-Employment and Welfare Benefits, and Food Hygiene Skills. She also took part in other project activities, such as its sewing workshop, its Read & Write group, as well as completing training in Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults and in Equality and Diversity Awareness.

Following the project's asset-based approach, the project worker built on Anila's strong cooking skills, supporting her to deliver community pop-up food taster sessions at a local voluntary organisation. Anila now plans to open her own restaurant business in the future.

Anila also took part in the 'Let's Interpret' programme and now has the confidence to interpret for community members, including translating and filming COVID-19 guidelines for SRCDC.

\* Name changed for confidentiality reasons

### III. Outcomes 2 & 3 – Better Budgeting / Improved Financial Assets



*“I thought I was organised, but now I know I'm not organised enough.”*

Project participant, Believe / Credu

The second and third outcomes Believe / Credu sought to achieve were both centred around money, with one concentrating on trying to improve participants’ financial situations over the longer term and the other on helping them to manage better in the shorter term until an increase in income could be achieved.

The project undertook a series of dedicated activities to help with these two outcomes, including the following:

- An Embroidery Repair Cafe based on the Benthyc Cymru ‘Reuse and Repair Model’ to allow participants to repair their clothes and those of their family, and potentially work towards starting up their own embroidery businesses
- The Riverside Robes Clothes Project, a scheme whereby participants could access free clothes for them and their families and think about retail as a prospective career
- A Taste of Riverside Cookery group, a regularly meeting group to exchange recipes, cook low cost meals together and consider hospitality and catering as a profession
- Pedal4It: BAME Breeze Cycle Leaders - a volunteering opportunity for participants to try cycling for themselves and help spread the word to their families and their wider communities about cycling as a low cost and healthy leisure activity and way of getting around (including commuting), as well as an opportunity to consider a future

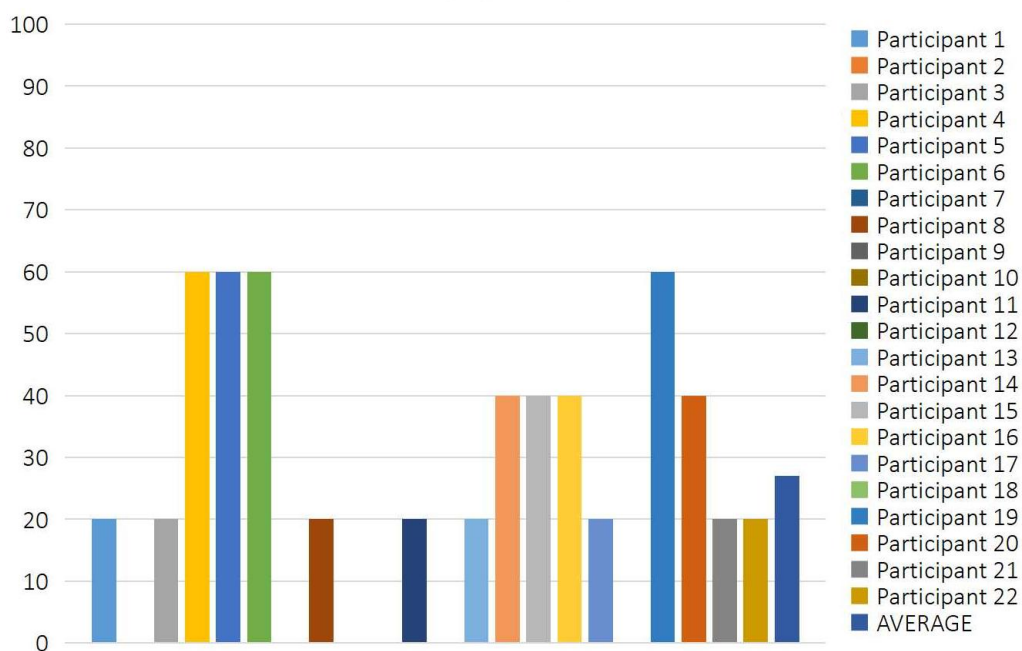
in a field of employment in which, as a member of the project staff pointed out in her interview, ethnic minority women have historically been under-represented

- Other free or low cost leisure activities, such as Believe /CredU’s Outrigger Project with Cardiff International White Water (which saw participants canoeing in Cardiff Bay and the surrounding coastline) or the project’s Walk & Talk walking group - again these activities were aimed at sowing the seed of the idea that the participants too could become rowing coaches or walk leader and make things like this a vocation.<sup>19</sup>

The generally positive outcomes of these activities were again captured in the project’s distance travelled sampling, with each participant increasing their scores in the Money domain on average by 27 percentage points, or an improvement of just over a quarter compared to their starting position when they initially came to the project.

The following graph illustrates the change in each participant in the sample in detail:

BELIEVE / CREDU:  
Outcome Areas 2 and 3: Money  
Average progress per participant  
(% points)



At the same time, however, it was noticeably harder for participants to make progress in the Money domain than it had been in the Work, Training and Volunteering domain. In the above graph, it is only participant 18 who did not give a score for this domain - participants 2, 7, 9, 10 and 12, by contrast, all made no progress, potentially indicating the greater level of challenge around the task of increasing financial resilience

<sup>19</sup> A film made of the participants’ experiences on one of the canoeing activities (‘CIWW - The Challenge’) is available at <https://vimeo.com/652865404/9b941acaf1> <accessed June 2022>.

compared to the task of increasing confidence in looking for work. In part, of course, this may have been a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its massive and disproportionate (as discussed in the introduction to this report) effects on Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women and their families. One project participant, for instance, related the effects of the pandemic just on her, starting with the fact that *“in March/April 2020 I was furloughed from my role as a childcare worker, which was devastating and [meant] less money coming in, which was worrying”*. In response to this, she sought support from Believe to help her update her CV and help her with job opportunities moving forward. For all that the project could not immediately solve all of her money problems, it was still nonetheless able to help her achieve other outcomes. As she put it herself, *“my confidence has increased [from] being part of Believe”*. She cited the visit to the Senedd as being particularly helpful in boosting her belief in herself again.<sup>20</sup>

Effects of the coronavirus pandemic aside, the cycling activities organised by the project seem to have been empowering for participants all round, but especially in financial terms. As one participant described in her feedback:

*“I have really benefited from the borrowing scheme at Believe as it has given me the opportunity to practice more and save on buying my own bike lock. Now I have also been lucky to have a bike donated. Having a bike has helped my well-being and increased my exercise and saves me time and money. Now instead of taking a bus, I go on my bike.”*

External partners too were impressed by the results of the project’s activities in relation to financial resilience. As one organisation fed back in relation to the clothes project:

*“I would like to take this opportunity to say a big THANK YOU/DIOLCH YN FAWR IAWN for all your support with families over the last few months. The families that have received the clothing for their children are so very grateful for the generosity, flexibility and kindness shown during this difficult time. The families’ feedback has been so positive that they cannot thank you enough. It is great to see professionals, communities and individuals working together to support one another during this difficult time and to show that we can work together in a positive way. Thank you*

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<sup>20</sup> The project worker also observed that the monetary value of costs avoided by participants - such as attending a free course, or getting a week’s food at low or no cost - were rarely taken into account in relation to this goal. Understandably in her view, if it was not money in a participant’s pocket or bank account, they did not feel better off financially, even if they may be argued to have become so in reality.



*so much once again for going above and beyond to support families within communities. I look forward to working with you again in the future."*

The cooking project likewise came in for similar levels of praise from a different external organisation:

*"During the pandemic we are all looking to connect with others, we all face challenges, but some groups maybe more disenfranchised than others. [Believe / Credu] works to support such individuals and has created a global cooking club; an inspired idea, not only bringing people of different nationalities and ethnicities together, but providing a learning forum about food and of course culture."*

Again though, it is perhaps the case study evidence that provides the most detailed evidence of how a participant could improve their financial position with the project, as well as the holistic and interlinked nature of Believe / Credu's outcomes - how initial social support could lead to gaining a job and an improved financial situation, which could then lead to further educational or qualification opportunities, leading in turn to a better job, and to an even more improved financial situation, and so on:

### CASE STUDY: BELIEVE / CREDU OUTCOMES 2 & 3 - Better budgeting / improved financial assets

Noura\* (Believe / Credu participant, Sudanese background)

*"I started coming to the Believe project in 2019. I love the environment of SRCDC and built good relations with the staff. After doing that I found a job with [a local voluntary organisation] with the help of the project, and from that time I start my journey to work with national organisation in Wales. I really appreciate the help and support from [the Believe project worker]."*

*"I found the job and now I work with different organisations, also I started to study Youth and Community Development with Cardiff Metropolitan University], and the [Believe project worker] helped me with that."*

*"I think [my story] it's not [at its] end yet, but I found [my] job and course through [the] Believe project."*

\* Name changed for confidentiality reasons

## IV. Outcomes 4 & 5 – More Social Contacts / Better Able to Access Support



**Cardiff Science Festival is coming to SRCDC**

join in for free on **Sat 19<sup>th</sup> Feb**  
There are two family friendly workshops

**@Warehouse Hall**

**EVERY OTTER TELLS A TAIL**

Work with scientists from the Cardiff University Otter Project to find out what happened to a dead otter and what more it has to tell us?

1 one-hour session  
10:30 – 11:30am

**@Wyndham Street**

**Sensors: From Animation to Rehabilitation**

An introduction to and interactive demo of sensor research and technology with scientists from the SPIN Research Group, Cardiff University.

8 half-hour sessions  
between 11am & 3pm

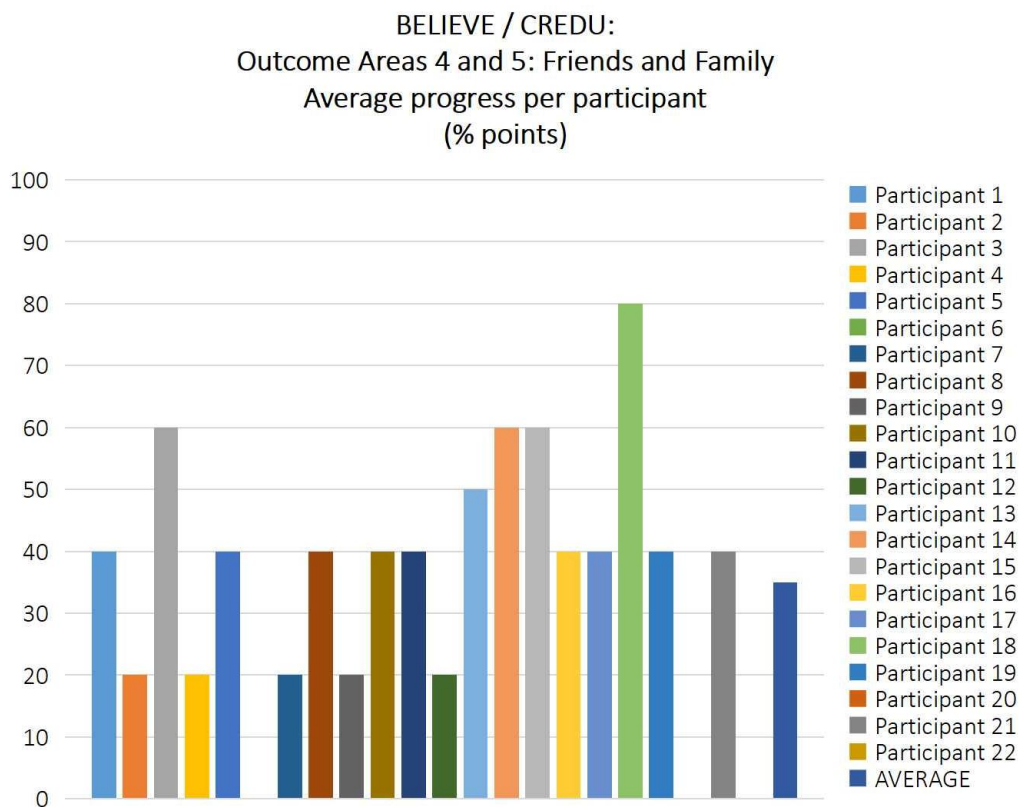
*“It was lovely to be part of a network and get to know each other – you don’t know when you might come across them again or need their help.”*

Project participant, Believe / CREDU

The final two outcomes Believe / CREDU sought to help its participants achieve were both related to participants’ social capital. Activities the project ran in order to help with this included the following:

- A FAN (Friends and Neighbours) group
- International Women’s Day events each year
- Iftar (Space to Break Our Fast) events for the end of Ramadan
- Eid celebrations
- Science Fest at SRCDC, which included animation, the story of the otter, fake snow making, drumming to make sound waves and other sensor research, plus food cooked by one of the Believe participants.

In terms of quantitative progress, while there was no exact equivalent domain to either of these outcomes in the distance travelled monitoring system used by the project, it is perhaps still worth noting that project participants increased their scores in the Friends and Family domain by an average of 37 percentage points per participant sampled, or just over a third. The increases achieved by individual participants within the sample for Friends and Family were as follows:<sup>21</sup>



One participant outlined what the statistical increase meant in qualitative terms to her:

*“I came to Cardiff and didn’t know anybody. I have been learning to cycle, rowing and volunteered at the Pantry. [I m]ade new friends/contacts [and gained c]onfidence in rowing and on the water and cycling - [I] now have my own bike and helmet and cycle everywhere!”*

Illustrative of the way that progress under one outcome could feed into progress against others, she also added that starting to volunteer at the the SRCDC project had

<sup>21</sup> All participants in the sample gave scores for this domain, therefore the participants without bars in the chart are those who made no progress (participants 6, 20 and 22 respectively), instead remaining at the same level they had been at the start of their involvement with Believe / Credu.

*“encouraged me and pushed me to find [another volunteering position] for 3 days a week”.*

Improvements in social capital were particularly important for other Believe / Credu participants too, especially those newly arrived to Cardiff or to Wales, as so many of the Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women that the project worked with were. As another such participant put it:

*“When you arrive in a new place or new city it is very important to get help and support because of the language barrier and get to know new people. I really had an amazing experience [with the project] and I want to do more.”*

A third participant, who had taken part in the interpreting programme, expressed similar sentiments. She did so despite being an asylum seeker, and therefore not being eligible to seek paid work at this stage of her journey towards the Welsh employment market. In her words:

*“As an asylum seeker you can feel isolated and not have contact with many people. Being involved in ‘Let’s Interpret’ made me feel like I’m making progress instead of just wasting time.”*

The more long-standing Cardiff residents among the Believe / Credu participant group could also still benefit from opportunities to improve their social capital, however. As one such participant fed back, *“I hadn’t been in a group environment for so long, this gave me the confidence express my opinion in front of others, to speak up”.*

As with the other outcomes, though, it was the case study evidence provided by participants that gave the most detailed outline of all the different ways the project’s activities could impact positively on participant’s social capital.

The following study, for example, demonstrated in detail how improvements in the outcome areas relating to social capital could often be the crucial first step, with other outcomes then arising in turn from that initial increase in social capital.

These outcomes could be ones not specifically part of the project, such as greater physical health or increased mental well-being, or they could be one of the specific outcomes of the project, such as an enhanced ability to access services or other kinds of support:

## CASE STUDY: BELIEVE / CREDU OUTCOMES 4 & 5 - More social contacts / better able to access support

Ngozi\* (Believe / Credu participant, Black African background)

"I was very lonely due to the lockdown and still new to Cardiff and living in a flat [not far from SRCDC]. I didn't know anyone to make friends from Cardiff and to find out where I could get help and support."

"I met [the project co-ordinator] online (Zoom) and then became a regular weekly attender [of the project's Friends and Neighbours group] in order to improve my English and make new friends. FAN was [an] enjoyable experience and I enjoyed practising speaking and meeting new people."

"As a result I got to know what other things the Believe project could offer and joined the cycling classes [...] when lockdown restrictions lifted. I also joined the Renew/Reuse/Recycle workshops to look at recycling clothes. I also joined the Outrigger project and learnt how to row for the first time in my life, despite not being able to swim. We rowed as a team of women from Barry to Cardiff."

"I also attended sewing classes. This was the first time I have sewn and now I have bought my own sewing machine. I also joined the Street Walking Group and enjoyed exercising. I dip in and out of FAN [now] due to studying hours [with Cardiff and Vale college], which I need to attend to improve my English. I feel my life has improved as I have been exercising and getting to know new people and places like Cardiff Castle. I enjoy being out in the fresh air."

"The [Believe p]roject has made me feel better and my life is changing as I have tried new things. It was my dream to row or do anything in the sea, which I have never had the chance to do before. I have also found a beach in Cardiff Bay [and] the Grangetown Hub for information on one of the walks. It would be good [for the project] to continue to get support and [then] you [can] help us more."

\* Name changed for confidentiality reasons

## V. Conclusion and Recommendations



*“I am an asylum seeker, and I was alone in Cardiff and very depressed and [suffering from] low self esteem. Meeting new people has helped me make new friends who are like family, and this has really helped my mental health. I thought I would never be able to cycle but now I can do it. I have also volunteered to help at the Science Festival. If I hadn’t attended these activities, I would have been very low and miserable and sad. I used to cry a lot. These activities have given me hope and motivation to do other activities as well. We would like to have more activities and more funding to keep things going.”*

Project participant, Believe / Credu

Judging from both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered for this evaluation, Believe / Credu has had a great deal of success in helping its participants to move into, onwards within, or closer to, the labour market. This success seems to have been achieved in large part because of the project’s ability to be participant-led, to offer intensive support where required, and less intensive support where not. The project also appears to have benefited greatly from focusing on building upon participants’ (many) existing assets wherever possible, bending its programme towards the greatest areas of strength to be found among its beneficiaries. Because of this, Believe / Credu has been able to find ways to help its participants see a realistic path to sustainable work where before they had seen none.

From the evidence of this evaluation, the project appears to have benefited too from its understanding of the holistic nature of change in the lives of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women, especially those furthest from the labour markets. Time and

again in feedback from participants, change in one outcome area led to change in a different area, which then led to another change in another different area again, and so on. Believe / Credu's creation of this virtuous circle, achieved through coming to its participants not with a set programme, but with simple, open questions (which may be summed in one overall question simply as, 'What would you like from us?'). This was Believe / Credu's great strength, and a major reason it has had the success it has had.

All of this should perhaps be little surprise. In doing all of these things - in offering intensive support where needed, in building on assets wherever possible, in providing a flexible, open-ended, holistic model of support - Believe / Credu has employed established community development techniques which have been piloted by SRCDC and numerous other organisations in Wales over the years.

That continuation appears to have paid dividends in terms of supporting the goals of Henry Smith, the organisation that supported the project, too. Indeed, looking back to consider the six priority areas of the Improving Lives fund (as outlined in the introduction to this report), on the evidence of this evaluation, the project contributed to not just one or two of those areas, but to all of them.

At the same time, of course, this was by far the largest scale, and longest duration, project attempted yet in relation to Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women and the labour market in Cardiff (previous pilot work between SRCDC and Oxfam had been on a much smaller and shorter scale). There were therefore also learning points to emerge that could help shape further the model that has emerged from Believe / Credu's efforts to help its participants move closer to the labour market in the short term, and move onwards and upwards within that market to more sustainable work and careers in the long term.

Those learning points underpin the following set of recommendations for future development for the project, and are discussed below in relation to each one. While the recommendations and learning points focus primarily on the future potential role for Believe / Credu specifically, or a very similar project based upon its model, parts of these recommendations and learning points may also be of relevance to any similar work undertaken by other organisations in Cardiff with Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women in relation to employment, and possibly even in Wales more widely as a whole:

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** In the light of its successes in relation to helping Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women achieve outcomes and move closer to the labour market, Believe / Credu should seek continuation funding as a matter of urgency, in order to test its model in more emergency-free conditions than those experienced to date.

The first recommendation arising from the evidence gathered for this evaluation is that the project has achieved sufficient outcomes to warrant being extended further, not least for the sake of those beneficiaries still being supported by it, who will otherwise not be able to access this kind of community development based, specifically employment focused support anywhere else in Cardiff.

This recommendation is especially important given the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting furloughs and lockdowns had upon the ability of Believe / Credu participants to access training and find work. As one of the project's staff noted in their feedback, even for those participants who were already in some kind of paid work, and seeking rather to find a better job than a first job, furlough blurred the lines of who was employed and who was not, and left participants with the question of whether any return to work after lockdown would actually be permanent.

On a practical, day-to-day level as well, the pandemic hampered the project in what it was trying to do, both in terms of participants being ill for training or other online events that the project moved to running after the pandemic initially hit, as well as events themselves not being able to run because of project staff or partner staff illness (with the project coordinator herself hospitalised by the coronavirus in March 2020).

**RECOMMENDATION #2** A future version of Believe / Credu, or any similar work seeking to support Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women to move closer to the labour market, should run over a longer time-span than just three years, and seek to secure funding to sustain that greater lifespan accordingly.

As previously discussed, Believe / Credu bore - in its approach at least - some similarities to SRCDC's previous Skills for Life project run in partnership with Oxfam.



Because there was over a year's gap between the two projects, however, they had an entirely different set of beneficiaries and staff. There was also no specific knowledge transfer between the two projects (as had been planned at the time the application for Believe / Credu was made), owing to staff and budget cuts within Oxfam Cymru.

So in a less theoretical sense, Believe / Credu was not a continuation of SRCDC and Oxfam's previous partnership work, and in practical terms, at the level of its individual participants, the new project essentially had to start from scratch all over again.

Partly as a result of this, even three years was not always enough to move those furthest away from the labour market into sustainable, secure, well-paid work. For many participants, in the words of one of the project's staff:

*"You can only touch the surface in three years. Watching people who could barely speak a word to me go to being able to give a presentation to [a large professional audience] made me realise just how long the journey can be".*

The second key recommendation of this evaluation is therefore that any future version of the project, or indeed any similar work along its lines, whoever might deliver it or wherever it might take place, should do so on a longer-term basis.

This should be done not least in order that that potentially vulnerable participants of any such future project are not left without appropriate support at the end of it, nor the risk of their outcomes going into reverse when, as a member of the project's staff observed in their feedback to this evaluation, such participants often still needed support to remain in employment, even where they have been able to find a job through the project in the first place.

More broadly, a longer timespan would allow a more longitudinal monitoring and evaluation approach to be taken that would be able to quantify more precisely the range, depth and duration of the project's long-term impact upon its participants' abilities to find and retain sustainable work. Believe / Credu's three years, especially those ones spent for the most part in lockdown or otherwise affected significantly by the COVID pandemic, allowed only for the beginnings of this fuller impact assessment approach to be begun, and further work certainly still needs to be done in this regard if the project's full impact is to be understood.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** A future iteration of Believe / Credu, or any similar work by any other organisation, should be accompanied by a greater focus on the wider structural factors that disadvantage Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women in the labour market, and advocate for meaningful action at the very highest levels on the range of intersectional barriers faced by ethnic minority women in Wales.

Finally in terms of recommendations, for all Believe / Credu's success stories, the project still had some struggles in helping every potential participant to overcome the range of additional barriers that Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women have to face when it comes to the labour market - barriers that many other groups simply do not encounter.

Some of this may be the result of simple prejudice on the part of some employers: as a member of the project's staff observed in their feedback, "*establishing relationships with employers is hard - some doors are firmly closed*". Indeed, the member of staff in question found themselves going to partnership work elements of the project and having to be the one to point out the lack of diversity of the people involved, such was the lack of acknowledgement of the issue on occasion.

The wider effects of the multiple types of disadvantage faced by so many of the project's participants was also a factor, however. The groups Believe / Credu sought to work with were disadvantaged not just by ethnicity, or just by gender, or by the combination of the two, but also by socio-economic position, cultural expectations, citizenship status, caring responsibilities, past experiences with the education system and many other factors, all mixing together depending on the individual in question and their exact life circumstances and experience.

It is encouraging that, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter and #Me Too and other recent social movements, the right words at least now seem to be being spoken in Wales, for example by the Welsh Government in the form of 'An Anti-Racist Wales', its draft Race Equality Action Plan to achieve an anti-racist country by 2030.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, though, there is clearly more to be done to translate fine words into meaningful change (as the plan seeks to do). This will need clear communication of the lived experiences of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women trying to move

<sup>22</sup> For further details see, Welsh Government 'Race Equality Action Plan: An Anti-racist Wales' (21 July 2021), available at: <https://gov.wales/race-equality-action-plan-anti-racist-wales> <accessed June 2022>.

closer to the labour market in Wales to be heard at the highest levels within government, public services and other key decision making fora. A clear focus on advocacy work as part of, or alongside, any similar future project to Believe / Credu would therefore seem essential if the women it would work with were to truly get the chance to find sustainable work on a level playing field with their less disadvantaged peers.

Overall, though, it is important not to let these learning points, and the recommendations that arise from them, overshadow too much the level of success Believe / Credu achieved in even its COVID-affected three-year lifetime. On the evidence of this evaluation, the project seems to have achieved a great deal, coping with all the challenges, expected and unexpected, of the last three years, and still managing to create high levels of change for the better among so many of its participants.

While looming recession, the cost of living crisis and other dark clouds that are either already here or on the horizon in Wales make the need for project like Believe / Credu greater than ever, the principles it has shown and the changes it has helped its participants make to their lives at least point the way to a brighter future for Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women seeking to paid work and greater social and financial resilience.

In conclusion, therefore, Believe / Credu has much to be proud of from its work with its beneficiaries over its three-year lifetime. Given the nature of the task it set itself at the start of those three years, it may also be said that its work is still only just beginning, and that there is still much to do. For the sake of the chances of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic women in Cardiff who want to move closer to the labour market, to financial independence and to sustainable work, it is very much to be hoped that this will turn out to be the case.

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