

COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEER MODEL

Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient

Sierra Leone



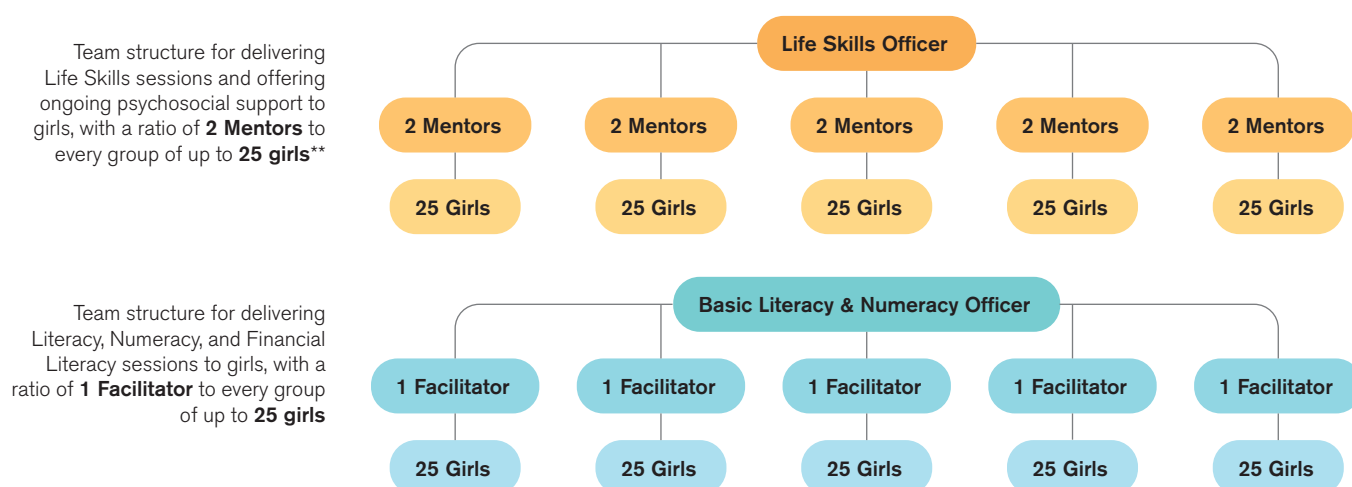
> What is EAGER?

EAGER (Every Adolescent Girl Empowered and Resilient) is a girls' education and empowerment project designed for out-of-school adolescent girls ages 13-17* with the aim of reaching the most marginalised girls. Through a consortium of four partners (International Rescue Committee, Concern Worldwide, Restless Development, and BBC Media Action), project teams delivered functional Literacy, Numeracy, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills sessions to 27,322 girls whilst engaging their households and communities, and aired 108 radio shows and 24 radio dramas aimed at fostering a more supportive and enabling environment for adolescent girls. Running from February 2019-January 2023, EAGER is a Leave No Girl Behind project funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through the Girls' Education Challenge.

> Why a community-based volunteer model?

The EAGER project aims to reach girls who missed out on formal education and provide new opportunities for learning functional skills whilst strengthening their social and emotional assets. To reach some of the most marginalised girls, the project works in many hard to reach areas. Project staff oversee implementation across several communities, so it is essential to work with volunteers recruited from and living in the girls' own communities to lead regular sessions and be a constant presence for the girls. Especially in more rural communities, volunteers are likely to know the girls and their families—including those girls who may experience greater barriers to participation, such as girls with disabilities. They are also more likely to be familiar with specific challenges girls face within their communities, and hold potential to be role models and agents of change over the long-term—leading to more sustainable outcomes for girls.

The following model shows the ideal ratio of volunteers to girls to successfully achieve these outcomes.



* EAGER worked with OOS adolescent girls ages 13-17 in the first cohort, and 13-19 in the second. The age expansion ensured that 17-year-old girls who were mapped for Cohort 1 but unable to participate could still join Cohort 2 and accounted for delays caused by the pandemic.

** Whilst the project maintains that this is the ideal ratio, in cases where there is a high level of support and supervision, 1 Mentor to 25 girls may be possible, as was the case with EAGER's second cohort.

The project put strong Safeguarding measures in place from its inception to ensure that any risks to girls and other community members would be mitigated. A Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM) was established so that girls and communities could report any abuse or complaints about the project, and community outreach was conducted to ensure that the girls and community were aware of the CRM and how to use it. All EAGER volunteers (alongside all staff) were required to read, understand, and sign policies on Safeguarding and Child Protection, and a Code of Conduct outlining what was expected of them in terms of ethical behaviour and what was forbidden as EAGER volunteers. This was then reinforced through trainings.

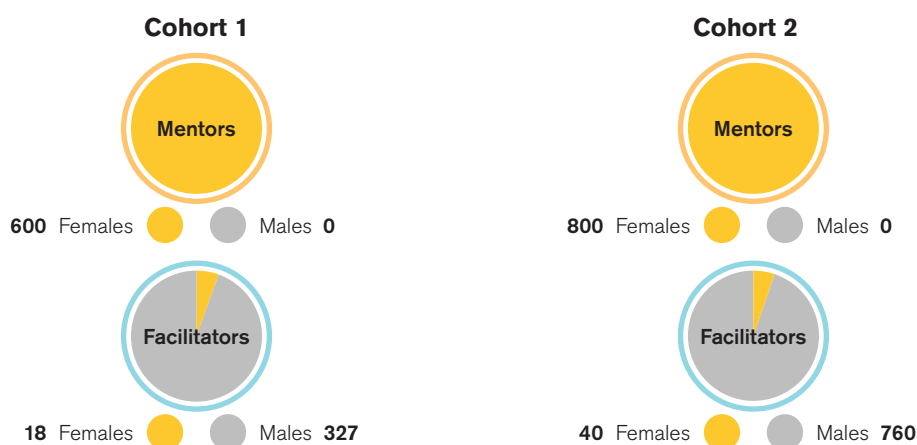
> How many volunteers participated?

EAGER volunteers include female Mentors to lead Life Skills sessions, provide Psychological First Aid, and lead follow-up with girls and their households throughout the programme. Female or male Facilitators lead Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions and support with household and community outreach.

The EAGER learning programme was implemented in two project cycles with two cohorts of girls. The initial recruitment of volunteers took place before starting sessions with Cohort 1, and these trained volunteers were retained wherever possible to continue leading sessions for Cohort 2. As the project was scaled up during the second cycle, new communities were engaged and a second round of recruitment was required.

Through these two cycles of programme implementation with two cohorts of girls, the project worked with 919 Mentors and 935 Facilitators. These were based in 456 communities across 10 districts in the most remote and underserved areas during the learning programme, and many continue to support the girls beyond the project timeline.

As required, all 800 Mentors working with girls in Cohort 2 were female. Of the 800 Facilitators in Cohort 2, 40 were female and 760 were male. Whilst project teams made significant efforts to recruit female Facilitators, it was difficult to find qualified females to fill this role in many of the more remote communities because a minimum level of education was required to become a Facilitator.

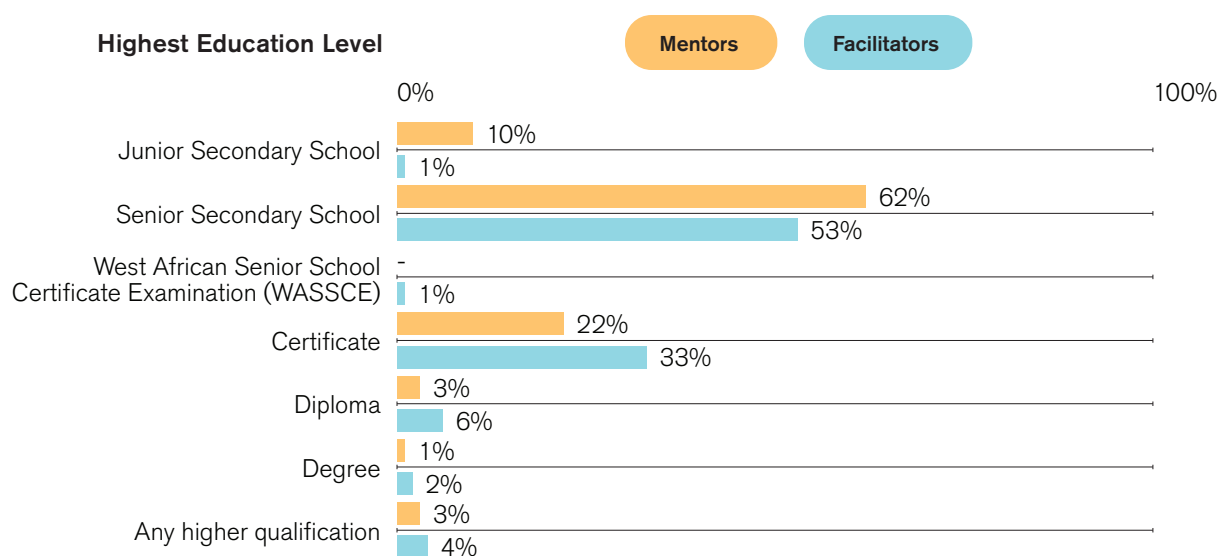


> How were volunteers selected?

Volunteer recruitment took place at the community level. Specific selection criteria were established by the consortium (see table below), Terms of Reference were developed, and communities were engaged in supporting the recruitment process through recommendations and validations. Applicants were interviewed and screened for key skills, and the girls enrolled in the programme gave the final validation before any volunteer was approved to join the project. This validation was key for ensuring that the girls felt comfortable and safe with the volunteers.

Mentor selection criteria	Facilitator selection criteria
Female, ideally 25-40 years old	Female or male, ideally 25-40 years old
Lives in the community	Lives in the community
Able to read English and translate to local language for the girls	Able to read English and translate to local language for the girls
Positive attitude toward girls and good communication skills	Positive attitude toward girls and good communication skills
Committed to supporting girls' learning - even sensitive and taboo topics	Committed to support girls' learning
Open to learning and new ideas	At least an SSS graduate with strong literacy & numeracy skills
Previous experience working with girls, facilitating groups, or teaching (preferred)	Previous experience teaching, facilitating groups, in social work or community development
	Passed the competencies test

The graphic below shows the highest level of education reached by the 800 Mentors and 800 Facilitators who were recruited to work with girls in Cohort 2.

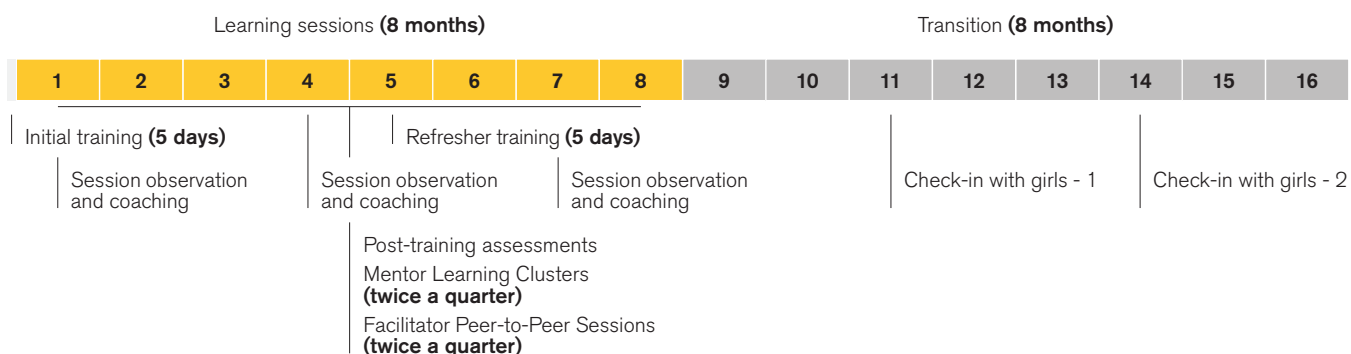




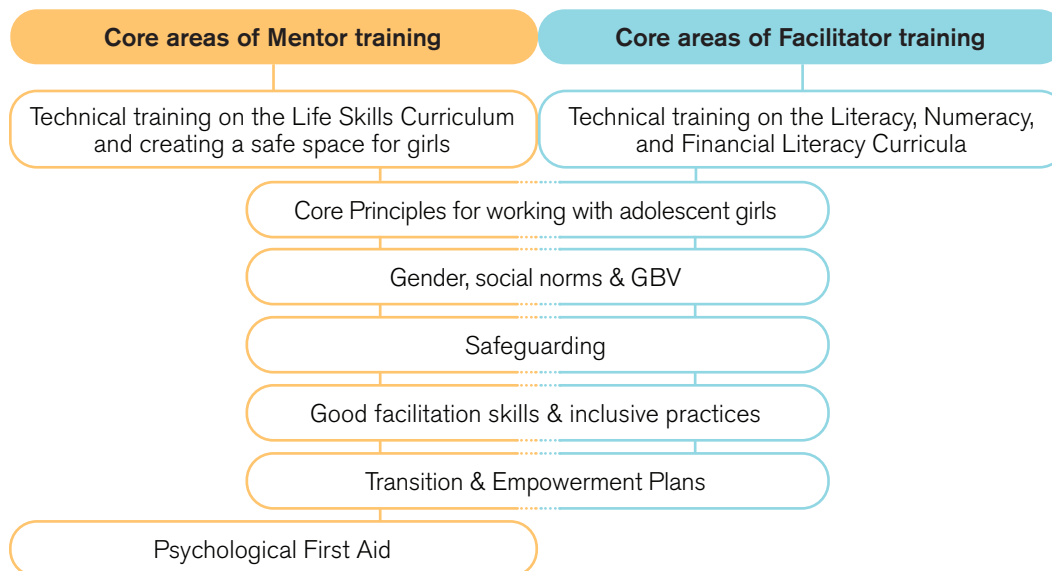
➤ How were volunteers trained, supervised, and coached?

The EAGER project's model for continuous professional development (CPD) includes technical trainings, one-on-one coaching and support, and structured support for peer learning and practice.

EAGER's CPD Model across the project timeline



Separate sets of Training of Trainers (ToT) trainings were conducted with Life Skills (LS) Officers and Basic Literacy & Numeracy (BLN) Officers. The first ToT was held before the learning sessions started, and the second at mid-point before the girls started working on their Empowerment Plans that guide their Transition period following the learning sessions. These trainings were cascaded by the Officers through separate Step-Down trainings for Mentors and Facilitators at the district level. Following are core areas that were covered:

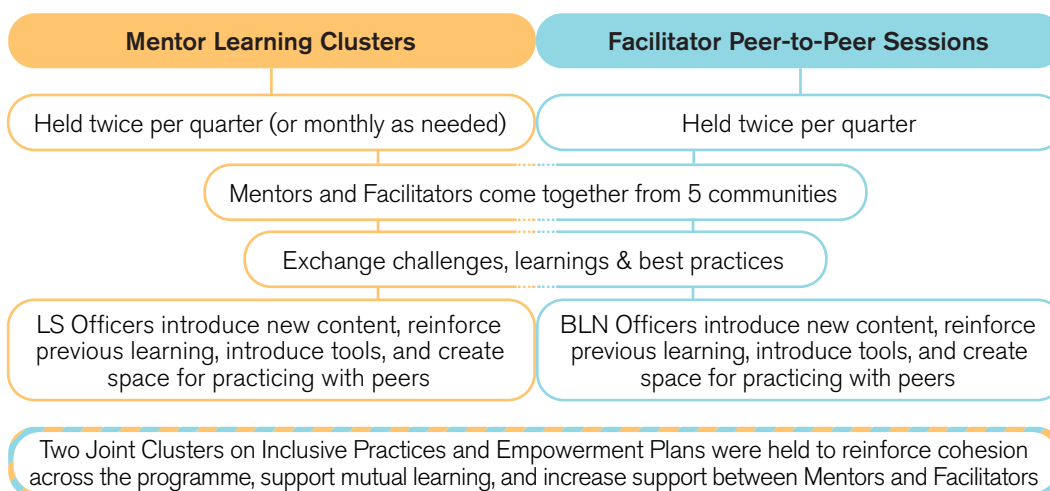


As noted above, the ideal ratio is for every LS Officer to work with 10 Mentors based in 5 neighbouring communities, so that they can move between these communities to provide ongoing guidance, support, and supervision. This model allowed the LS Officers to observe sessions at least once per quarter, using a form to document observations and provide one-on-one feedback and coaching following the session. EAGER BLN Officers followed the same model of observation and coaching to support the Facilitators' session delivery and ensure quality and inclusive teaching and learning practices.

In addition to these trainings and direct one-on-one support for skills-building, EAGER brought together groups of Mentors and groups of Facilitators working within geographical proximity on a regular basis. Mentor Learning Clusters enabled Mentors to learn from each other, share their challenges and solutions, and work together to find solutions. It also created a more intimate platform for learning, as LS Officers introduced new programme information, reinforced key messages, and created space for Mentors to practice their skills with each other.

Similarly, Peer-to-Peer Sessions created regular opportunities for Facilitators to gather together and exchange their learnings, challenges, and best practices for delivering effective Literacy, Numeracy, and Financial Literacy sessions. BLN Officers used these sessions to focus on building specific skills sets that were identified as areas requiring more knowledge and practice, and these peers groups created a safe space for practice and supportive peer critiques.

In addition, joint clusters brought Mentors and Facilitators together to reinforce learning across technical programme areas, strengthen mutual support and respect for each other's roles, and build synergy across the programme components. Two Joint Clusters on Inclusive Practices and Empowerment Plans were held to reinforce cohesion across the programme, support mutual learning, and increase support between Mentors and Facilitators.

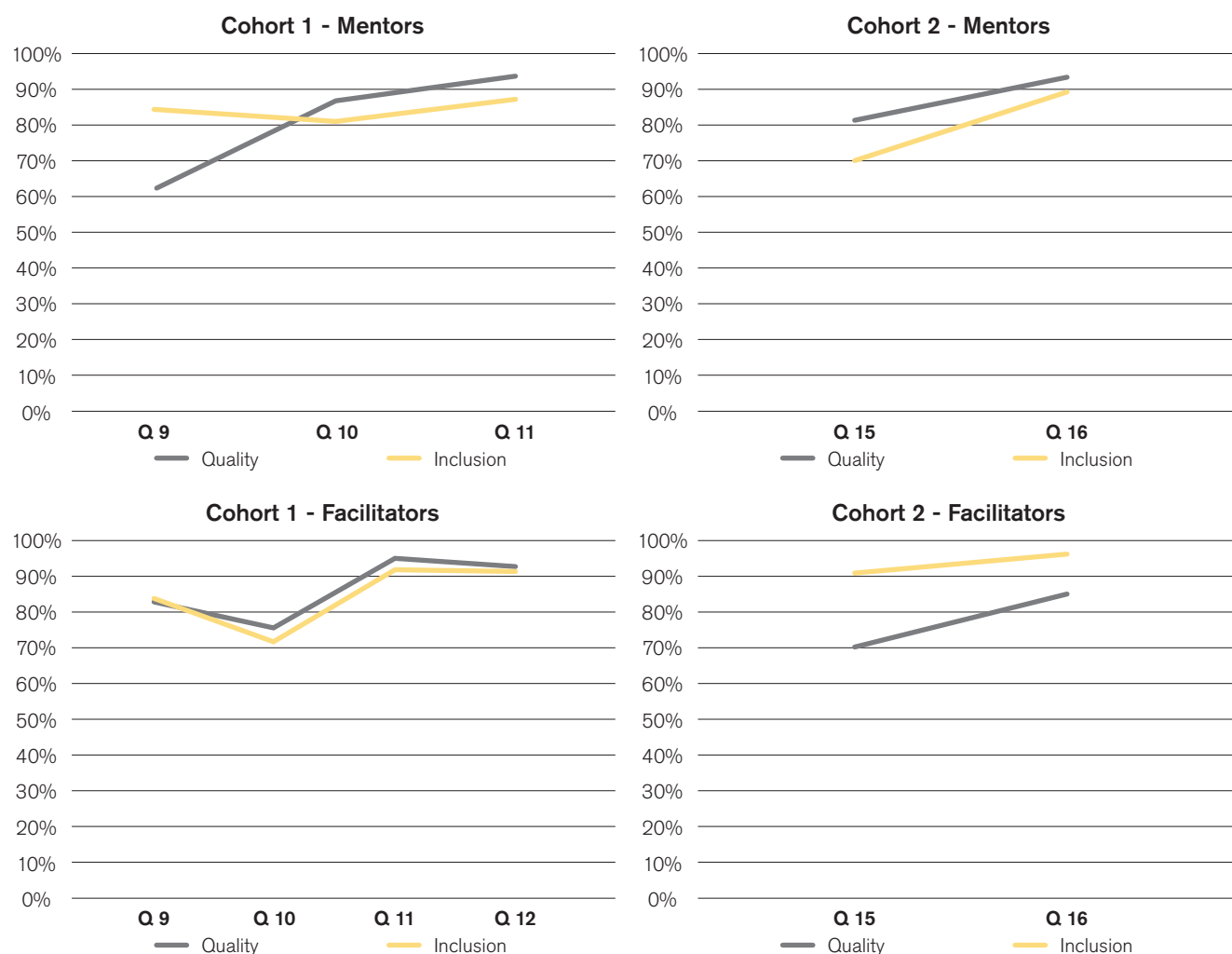


> What is the evidence of impact from this volunteer model?

Through a combination of external Baseline, Midline, and Endline Evaluations alongside extensive ongoing project monitoring, the EAGER project has collected many learnings that point towards the effectiveness of a community-based volunteer model when volunteers are robustly supported through quality technical trainings, supportive supervision, and peer learning.

Following are a few of the data points demonstrating improvements in quality and inclusive teaching practices by volunteers, and evidence of their accountability towards the girls.

Improvements in Quality and Inclusive Facilitation Practices (Project monitoring)





Girls' average literacy score increased from **19%** at Baseline to **45%** at Midline, or sixfold against target



Girls' average numeracy score increased from **47%** at Baseline to **74%** at Midline, or fivefold against target



Girls' financial literacy confidence increased from **68%** at Baseline to **87%** at Endline



Girls' average life skills score increased from **66%** at Baseline to **76%** at Midline, or fivefold against target



93% of Mentors & Facilitators demonstrated inclusive teaching practices
- Project Monitoring, 2021

90% of Mentors & Facilitators passed the post-test
- Project Monitoring, 2022

85% of Mentors & Facilitators rated with Good Effort or Exemplary across all aspects of facilitation, indicating quality and inclusive practices
- Midline Evaluation, 2021

94% of Mentors reported that a girl had come to speak to them about a private matter
- Project Monitoring, 2021



99% of girls reported that they felt comfortable speaking to Mentors
- Project Monitoring, 2021



94% of girls agreed "a lot" that their Facilitators made them feel welcome
- Midline Evaluation, 2021



95% of girls attended **65%** or more of their sessions
- Project Monitoring, 2021



99% of girls reported that Mentors & Facilitators encouraged all girls to actively participate in sessions
- Endline Evaluation, 2022





For more information, please contact:

Saffea Senessie

Country Director. Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tel: +232 76 622 998

saffea.senessie@rescue.org

To know more, visit the EAGER site:
www.rescue.org/eager-project



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