

# On Paper: A Story of Partnership

*Skin Deep and The Diversity Trust explore how their first year of partnership has become more than just an agreement.*

*On the 2nd of December 2020, the partnership between Skin Deep and The Diversity Trust began.*

Nearly two years in the making, Laura Broadbent, Berkeley Wilde, Susie Steyn, and Annie Moon talk about how the partnership has flourished and what it has come to mean to them.

**What did you imagine the partnership would look like when it was first established?**

**LB:** I had high hopes from the start. From the introductory meeting it was clear how the partnership made sense and what could be achieved together. The Collaborative Agreement was exactly that; 12 items of true collaboration and that's how I saw our first couple of years looking.

I did however think we would see much more of each other...until the pandemic changed everything! This definitely impacted several items that we'd hoped to plan, but it didn't hold us back from fostering a great partnership.

**BW:** I think my expectations were more corporate, that we wouldn't be equals going into the partnership together, but it feels that we are. One of the things that struck me is that it feels like we've had an impact on Skin Deep, and on TSL, in a way that I hadn't envisaged. I thought the impact would be less multidirectional.

If you're entering into an agreement – partnership or collaborative, even sponsorship – where there's a financial aspect to that, then it (the relationship) can translate itself differently. It was different to what I anticipated, though.

I didn't expect us, as organisations or as

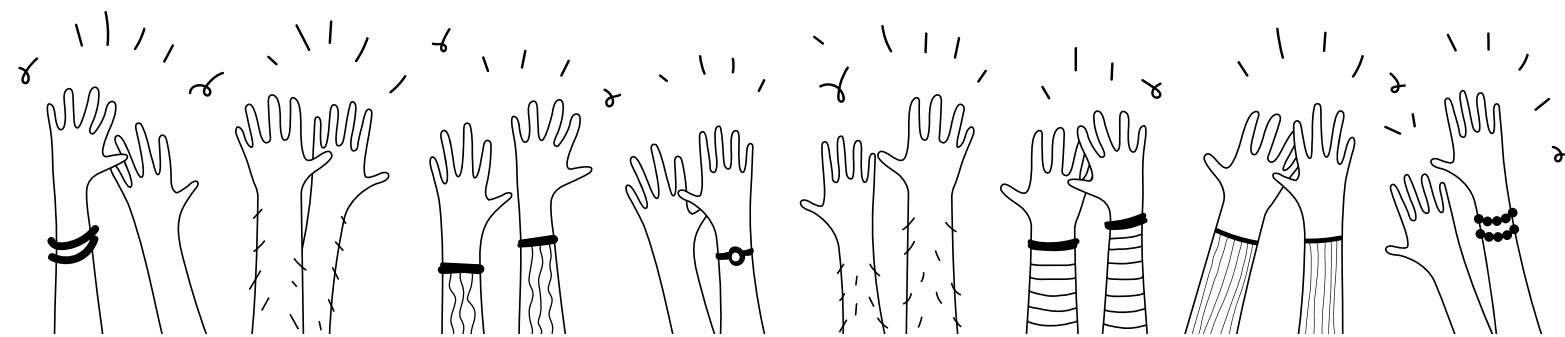
individuals, to develop the friendship we have. We entered this partnership when we couldn't meet up in person, so everything was being done online, and now we've all met in person during the Trust's 10th Anniversary event.

Everything is different to what I thought it would be, and that's a welcome surprise.

**“I thought things would be very surface level... like a box-ticking exercise.”**

**AM:** I didn't know what the partnership would look like when it was announced. I was a bit cynical at the start because I've seen partnerships before that have been very transactional rather than relational; I was quite nervous about it.

**SS:** I thought it would be designed mainly to strengthen the brand of the corporate partner, that it would focus on external marketing with the objective of developing public relations. In the back of my mind, I thought things would be very surface-level, almost like a box-ticking exercise, and that we wouldn't have a great deal of autonomy on how the work was done. I anticipated a level of rigidity and bureaucracy, too.



***What's been the biggest surprise for you whilst working alongside one another?***

**LB:** How much time and generosity has been afforded to me and Skin Deep. Knowing the great, vast and varied work of the Trust I believed we were 'small fish'. Brand partnerships can be very transactional and I really hoped for something meaningful and authentic. So it was a fantastic surprise that the Trust saw the value in us that we saw in them.

**BW:** The impact. We've been working together nearly 18 months and the effect that we've had on one another as organisations has been much higher than I originally thought it would be. Things like being able to provide training to Skin Deep and TSL, which has had both a corporate and HR impact, has been amazing to be a part of. There's been a personal impact, too, where we've been able to mutually support one another through training and creating work.

There's been a lot of shared learning, which was a different outcome to what I was expecting, and which has been a nice surprise in addition to the impact of the collaboration.

**AM:** The biggest surprise for me is the way that Laura has really got behind the podcast. We've worked together as a team in a strategic way.

**SS:** I've been pleasantly surprised by the genuine passion of the Skin Deep team for what we are doing together. The care and attention devoted to the project, and to developing the partnership has been amazing to witness. The biggest surprise, though, is how much fun we've had together and how well we all get along, working on something that we all genuinely love doing.

***What's been the most significant learning experience for you in the past year?***

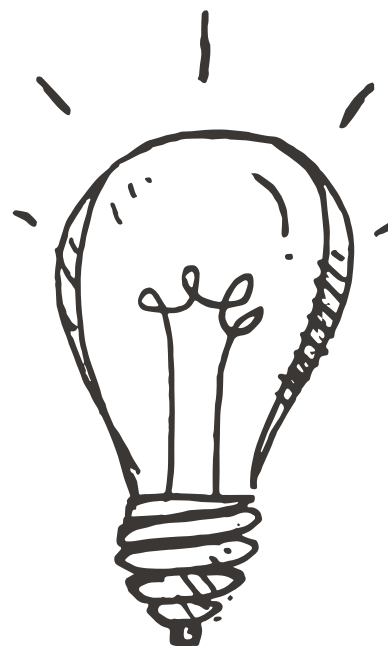
**LB:** You can't achieve everything in year one and progress may be slower than you intend. True collaborative growth is organic, and organic growth takes time.

**BW:** The value of communication was enhanced through this partnership. All the different elements that come together when we have our monthly meetings, all the things we're working to do together and that we achieve ... there's an underscore along all that around communication. If you think about it, a lot of the work we've been doing is encompassed by communication – the podcast, the social media, written content, having meetings and talking things through – all of that illustrates the value and importance of communication for me. It's been an enhancement, like a reminder, for me.

Learning about expectations has been significant, too, in that it's important to ground the expectations you have in the actual work you're doing. For example, we originally thought to do four podcasts,

but it worked that we did three, with the fourth being delivered in year two of the partnership. It's not just about what we've had capacity for either; there have been global events, such as the blockage in the Suez Canal, which had an unexpected impact on plans to distribute Skin Deep products to the global market.

It's been about managing expectations whilst also thinking about future risk and global influences. We, as an organisation, were massively impacted by very tragic global events and consequences. The pandemic moved our work from in-person to online, which made everything much more accessible from much wider audiences to hundreds of untapped opportunities across the world; the murder of George Floyd, which was a horrific event, and Black Lives Matter, resulted in the single biggest impact on our organisation outside of the pandemic. That



event resulted in Skin Deep approaching us and our partnership forming.

It's all about risk. What will future risk look like, how will it impact us as an organisation and as a community? The climate emergency, for example. What impact will that have on us as an organisation? There's been a lot of learning that has come through from the massive global and social shifts that have happened over the past few years.

**AM:** An authentic partnership really can deliver, and this has been such a positive example of best practice for me. Being up close to the work and seeing how the partnership has developed like this has been the biggest piece of learning for me. I've never experienced this before.

**SS:** Practically, I've learnt a lot from Laura in terms of the way she runs meetings. Her organisational skills means our time spent in meetings is used very well. We're all very productive and get through a lot.

Decisions and tasks are crystalised and followed through, and the minutes Laura keeps and circulates after each meeting are invaluable.

***Do you feel the partnership has had a personal impact for you? If so, can you describe how?***

**LB:** It's actually really difficult to describe as the personal impact it has had on me is very deep.

Although Skin Deep was developed and created before the murder of George Floyd, the lessons learned from that awful event, and the subsequent conversations that followed, affirmed that we must expand our networks if we're going to understand and empathise with each other.

Expanding my network and having meaningful conversations with people from all walks of life, each with so much lived experience of the issues they specialise in, really opened my mind to new places, issues and points of view.

From race and diversity to LGBTQIA+, I learnt that I can never truly understand how it feels to be marginalised, overlooked and persecuted for the things about me I can't change, for just being the person I am. But I can amplify the voices of those who have felt that way. On a personal level, I think I've taken a journey from what I thought was empathy (but which was probably sympathy) to somewhere in between. Depends which definition of empathy you adopt!

***“I'd initiate conversations with loved ones that we'd never had before.”***

**BW:** What I've gained from the partnership, personally, is affirmation, which has been lovely. Laura does a lot to champion us as an organisation, but she's also done a great deal to champion me, personally, which is very humbling. I value that a lot.

It makes me feel that if we had more of an opportunity to work together in-person, beyond the constraints of the pandemic and social upheaval, a lot more things, and different things, could happen in our work together. We'd do more work locally to one another, for example, and that drive to do more, be around one another more, has come from developing such a profound working relationship.

In our last meeting, there were six of us, all bringing our own knowledge and skills to the table, and I just thought how incredible this is, to have a huge, very rich resource which we all contribute to.

The partnership has become a tangible community for us, and this was evident when we all

met in Bristol for our 10th Anniversary event.

**AM:** Professionally, I've carried this experience into my consultancy, Be the Difference, and cited it as an example on a number of occasions, as a positive example of corporate partnership with social enterprises, and of best practice.

**SS:** It's been inspiring to be involved in the partnership because of the genuine care and attention demonstrated by everyone, particularly Laura. Her passion, and the pride she takes in this project, is infectious.

The relationship we all have is a very supportive one, which is rewarding to be a part of. Working together, we're able to step out of our comfort zones and push the boundaries of our confidence; this has led to personal in professional growth in an environment that's been made to feel safe and supportive.

***Has anything within the partnership made you feel vulnerable or profoundly (re)connected with the people around you?***

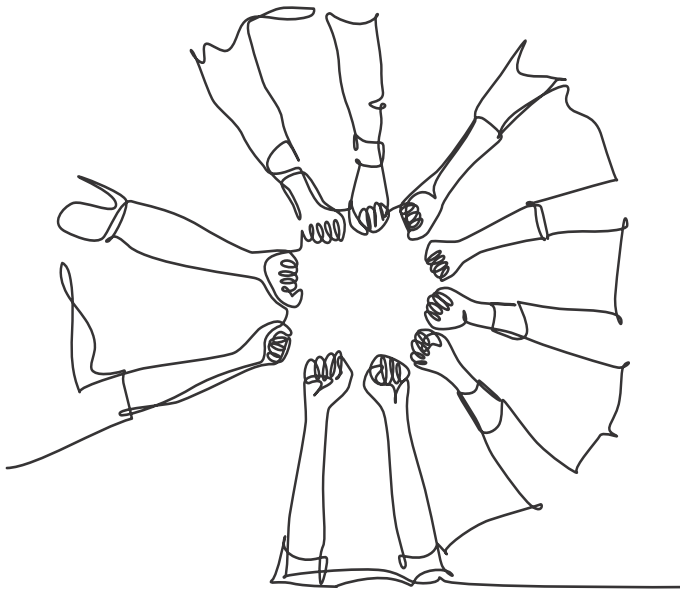
**LB:** Absolutely. Our journey started at a time where interaction was prohibited – by law – and yet I connected with a group of people who have taught me so much.

I can't speak on issues that Skin Deep exists to address because I don't have that lived experience. There is a natural and necessary vulnerability that comes with being the Marketing Manager for a brand like Skin Deep. That vulnerability opened me up to everything the Trust has to offer and gave me a much deeper level of understanding on issues around diversity, inclusion and representation. The conversations we had during our meetings bled into my personal life; I'd initiate important conversations with loved ones that we'd never had before.

**BW:** When I gave my talk at the anniversary event in Bristol, I had the opportunity to reflect on and speak about the huge personal changes that I'd experienced since the start of the partnership, from signing the collaboration agreement at the beginning of 2021, to moving to Scotland in April 2021.

There's a feeling of disconnect I have in my role at The Diversity Trust, purely because I work so broadly across a number of projects. In contrast, delivering my talk in July was incredibly emotional and it highlighted the importance and value of the people I work with. It was a lovely experience and I'm very grateful for everyone.

**AM:** What this partnership has flagged up for me is the fact that we all still need to have a voice, and to create platforms for those voices to be heard. Working on the podcast, I was able to reflect on the path we were taking with the interviews; I felt that more emphasis was being placed on corporate perspectives and that the space for community voices and activism wasn't as available.



Being able to revisit our podcast in an honest and curious way allowed us to reorient the work within the partnership, whilst also remaining strategic with the development. This was a moment of vulnerability but being able to express my thoughts and work together in this way, was a game-changer.

**SS:** It's been uplifting to work on this project, particularly in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. It's given a sense of hope. We're working together and taking action to encourage allyship, influencing people to challenge and change organisational and systemic racism. Together, we're tackling a broad range of equalities issues and that's a unifying experience.

**What are you most proud of having achieved during the first year of the partnership?**

**LB:** A collaborative approach where each party has equal value and contribution. That to me is more important than 'what we do' because it's the 'how we do it' that will ensure a long-lasting partnership that will naturally achieve more.

**BW:** I'm proud of having the ability to bring intersectionality into the partnership, by inviting people from different organisations, for example, to lead on the podcast interviewing. I feel that I've helped to make the right connections for the project, in that sense.

I'm also very proud of the Year One Impact Report and how that turned out. We were expecting a Word document a few pages long and we ended up with a designed booklet that was printed off. It had an immediate positive impact to people and to the partnership.

**AM:** The thing I most proud of is the way we've steered the equalities podcast back to what I feel is its 'true north'. Doing this, I think we've reset it to attract the high calibre interviewees that make it the

stand-out podcast that it is.

**SS:** The tone of the podcasts. The interviews remain intimate, and the content is fascinating and educational. The partnership is keen to do another series which is fantastic news. It feels like the value of that we create is really seen.

**Is there anything you would have done differently?**

**LB:** I can't think of a thing I would change. The entire experience to date has been wonderful.

**BW:** Thinking around expectations, risk, and priorities, it would have been useful to assess the points in the agreement we signed in 2021, and really thought about the reality of those items translating from the page and out into the real world. Some of the work can be much more complex than you realise, when put into practice. We would have taken more time to reflect around the priorities and capacities of the project and scaled the work accordingly.

**AM:** I would have established some criteria for the podcasts around capturing the ethos of the partnership and the work we were doing together. The learning around getting the tone right has been incredibly valuable, in hindsight, and I'll be using that experience to inform my work on the podcast going forward.

***“How incredible this is, to have a huge, very rich resource, which we all contribute to.”***

**SS:** I think it would have been good to involve more people from both organisations earlier in the partnership. I feel like this would have helped to cascade the impacts more broadly and increased the capacity within the team.

**What is your biggest hope/wish/dream for the partnership?**

**LB:** That Skin Deep becomes synonymous with The Diversity Trust. That's a sign of a true meaningful partnership.

**BW:** I really hope we can take the work to the next level, that we can think and act and carry out the project on a global level, as a partnership. The next podcast series is starting to develop around that aspiration as we look for international speakers, which I'm excited about.

It'd be tremendous for Skin Deep to move into the global market where we'd be able to do more and have a wider, more global influence. We'd be able to join up with communities across the world in a mutual effort to tackle racism and social inequalities, affect real social change, and work to challenge intersectional experiences of inequality and discrimination.

**AM:** I'd like to see the partnership continue to blossom. Continuing the work of the podcast is important, and I think we have so much potential to do more. I don't know exactly what that looks like but I'm sure that by staying authentic and unique, we can go into the future and achieve a great deal together.

**SS:** For the partnership and Skin Deep products to go global! It'd be amazing to link up with international groups and organisations to create a resilient and cohesive network of people, all working towards common goals.

*What do you aim to achieve in the next year of partnership?*

**LB:** From my side, I want to do all I can to realise both Skin Deep & The Diversity Trust's global ambitions, starting with the podcast.

**BW:** Developing our global connections through conversation and collaboration is my goal for this year. The podcast, which will be interviewing people from different places, with different perspectives, is the foundation of this goal.

If we can launch in the American market, and we do get to have that collaboration with international partners, that would be fantastic. The key is around collaboration and developing a global network.

**AM:** From the point of view of the podcast, which is the part of the project I work on, the goal is to continue developing and producing interviews, to keep it structured, and to keep the content fresh and meaningful. We're aiming to increase the reach of the podcast, too.

For International Podcast Day, we're creating two medleys of the snippets of all the interviews from series one, two, and three. It'll be a great way to showcase everything we've done to date, and to whet people's appetite for what is to come.

**SS:** To continue to contribute to the conversation around allyship, elevating the voices of activists in this space.

*How do you think the partnership will develop, going forward?*

**LB:** Increased engagement from others within TSL, which is not easy to do as the majority of the work we do is around Marketing, of which I'm the only person in the business. Plus the obvious 'going from one global crisis to the next' – that does seem to take up the majority of the business' time of late!

When it comes to the things I can control, I think we'll get slicker in our planning and execution.

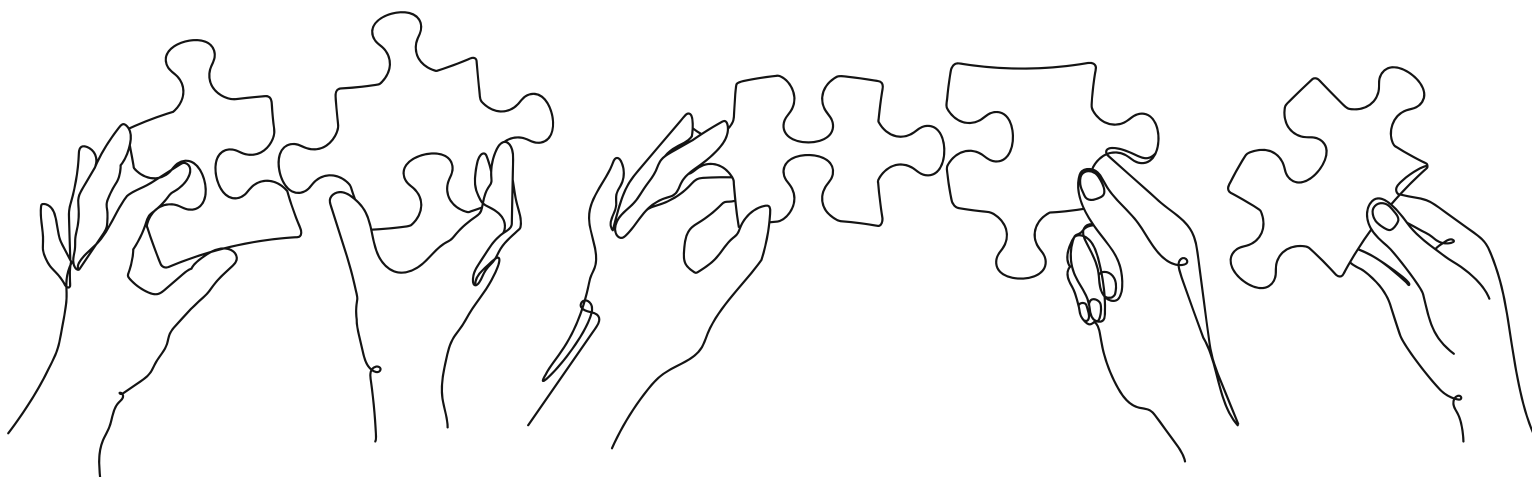
*“We all still need to have a voice, and to create platforms for those voices to be heard.”*

**BW:** I'm hoping for more opportunities to work together in-person. The Trust's AGM is in October, which Laura and her colleagues are coming to, and I'm looking forward to that.

I think our partnership will mature and consolidate; we now understand more about our agreement, our priorities, how each person works, what resources we have, and what we can achieve together. We're going to build on the work of Year One.

**AM:** In the same way that it has to date, I hope! For it to bloom and continue working in an authentic, meaningful, and impactful way.

**SS:** I hope to see increased buy-in from TSL and for Skin Deep as a brand, to continue to expand and grow from strength to strength, including growing into other geographic locations.





**Laura Broadbent**  
*Skin Deep - Marketing Manager*

Laura's career is built around consumer insight. Driven by the psychology of human motivation, she draws upon her experience in marketing and category management to anticipate and satisfy the everyday needs and desires of consumers. Her experience allows her to explore not only the future of retail and retail products, but also the here and now of product design and development.

**Berkeley Wilde**  
*The Diversity Trust - Executive Director*

Founder and CEO of the Diversity Trust. Berkeley has been working in the equalities space for 30-years. He is passionate about amplifying the voices of those without a voice.

**Annie Moon**  
*The Diversity Trust - The Equalities Podcast, Training Admin & Projects*

Proud member of the LGBT+ community, co-facilitates the Diversity Trust's Equalities podcast, works on ad hoc projects for the Diversity Trust. Annie's consultancy, Be The Difference, also has a joint service offering with the Diversity Trust in the equalities space.

**Susie Steyn**  
*The Diversity Trust - Communications Lead*

Proud wife, mum, lawyer and Cambridge certificated corporate sustainability consultant, specialising in communications and D&I.

**Skin  
Deep**  
SET THE TONE

The   
**Diversity Trust**  
Influencing Social Change

