



INSIGHT INTO ACTION

THE LESSONS FROM THE
DOORSTEP SPORT CLUB
PROGRAMME 2013 - 17



SECTION 6

OVERCOMING THE DOUBLE JEOPARDY

PROVIDING EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS
AND YOUNG WOMEN

The issue: : How can Doorstep Sport address gender disparities?

The answer: Doorstep Sport Club hosts provide both mixed gender and female-only activities that enable young females to have fun, be active and meet new people. The clubs provide opportunities for disadvantaged young females to develop their confidence and motivation in sport and also develop leadership skills.

The gender gap in sports participation between males and females has existed over many years. Data from the Active People Survey (APS10) currently shows that while 40% of males aged 16+ take part in regular sport only 32% of females do so. This disparity is even more significant when social class is taken into consideration. For example, 43% of young males from the highest socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 1-4) take part in regular sport, but only 22% of young females from the lowest socio-economic groups (NS-SEC 5-8) do so. Similarly, there is a significant difference in participation even with NS SEC 5-8, with 30% of males participating once a week compared to 22% of females.

Encouraging disadvantaged young females into DSCs did not happen as a matter of course. A few months into the DSC programme, attendance records showed that many DSC hosts were struggling to attract female participants. Hosts found that while some young females were happy to play ball games and team games with their male counterparts, many more were not; with mixed gender DSCs being far more likely to engage more males than females.

To increase the number of girls taking part, hosts asked us to ring-fence resources to pay for sessions under the banner of 'US Girls: Fun, Fitness and Friendship'.¹ As the lifestyle research showed, these three factors are strong motivators with girls.

The Us Girls brand had been developed a few years before the DSC programme began. It is known to work well with girls who can imagine themselves as active and will be so once reasonable adjustments to presentation and the style of sessions are made. Us Girls is designed to suit many girls' self-image. It has a magenta colour palette, stresses movement to music and introduces games like football and cricket in secure spaces free from the judgemental male gaze. The small investment, reinforced with offers of dedicated support and training, enabled hosts to create a new, girls-only session alongside their existing provision. These new sessions met the girls' expectations and were built upon learning gathered in the Us Girls programme which, in summary, emphasised that:

- For most girls (but not all) the right place is often an indoor facility that's screened off from potential 'on-lookers'
- Sessions often need to have a different feel – built around 'fun, fitness and friendship'
- The most popular activities tend to be: gym/fitness, dance, running, swimming and, where traditional sports are provided, it is often in an informal multi-sport environment



- Including opportunities for girls to maintain their desired level of appearance whilst at the same time encouraging them to understand the benefits of exercise and how these benefits outweigh any temporary loss of the 'perfect' appearance.

Us Girls stresses friendship because young women have told us and our network of partners time and time again how important friends are in taking part – views which were confirmed in an independent poll of 1,000 young women which found that:

- 63% would shun any sport or physical activity if their friends were not involved
- 77% said the opportunity to catch up with friends is one of the main reasons for taking part
- 67% say they feel more comfortable exercising with their friends than with people they don't know.

"I want to play sport but I'm shy. I'd only do it if my friends did it first."

Female 16, London

A series of How To Guides aimed at engaging women and girls in physical activity were developed as part of the Us Girls offer – one of which specifically looks at delivering activity to females 'in the right style'. By way of example – see a DSC case study example from **Child UK**.

¹StreetGames led the Us Girls programme which was a £3.5 million Sport England Lottery funded programme which engaged over 30,000 disadvantaged young females between 2011-2013 and was voted National Lottery Best Sports Project in 2013. www.streetgames.org/our-work/us-girls



UsGirls - Right Style



In year one of the programme, just over a quarter of DSC participants were female. By the end of year 4, when Us Girls and CLUB1 sessions were bedded in, that figure had increased to females making up just under half (43%) of all new members. Females now form over 40% of participants at 238 of the 1,000 DSCs. A further 41 DSCs are engaging 35-39% female participants. There are also 108 girls-only clubs. Overall, 34% of attendees are female but 54% of CLUB1 attendees are female.

DSC Gender Spilt amongst new members by year

	Male	Female
Year 1	72%	28%
Year 2	73%	27%
Year 3	66%	34%
Year 4	57%	43%



This change in the DSC offer was attributable to Us Girls sessions which were accelerated by the **CLUB1** initiative. CLUB1 helps hosts to introduce and encourage participants to try 'solo' sports such as going to the gym, running, boxfit and dance based exercise – which proved more popular with young females than with males.

The Most Inactive

Despite these improvements, hosts were very much aware that there was yet another set of girls who we were far away from reaching. This group was not tempted by Us Girls.

We explored the views and attitudes of these young females and found girls who were rendered militantly inactive by the double burden of a low-income existence and deeply ingrained attitudes about gender-appropriate behaviour. Being active was not something these girls thought appropriate. The girls told us that their strong aspiration to get fitter and look fit is flattened and quashed by the fear of “not fitting in” and “looking silly”. Conforming to stereotypical images of attractiveness and femininity was thought to be very much at odds with getting hot and sweaty through taking part in sport and exercise. They feared humiliation if they transgressed their version of the cultural norm. Because of social media, that humiliation could be instantaneous and ubiquitous.

Others said their reasons for inactivity included a range of psychological and social barriers: a lack of confidence; not feeling fit enough; concerns over ability; friends not joining in and a general lack of confidence to try new things.

A small number of hosts worked together to find out if a carefully balanced intervention which relied on other teenage girls volunteering to take leadership roles could break this gender prison. The Department of Health funded this work which we called, ‘Us Girls Alive’. The volunteers took the title, ‘Peer Motivators’. Hosts worked with the Peer Motivators to create an attractive environment which appealed to these highly inactive girls. Because the girls needed a soft, subtle introduction to being active, hosts deployed fashion, music, health and beauty. The plan was then to blend physical activity into these sessions at a pace the girls would tolerate. The subterfuge worked. The Peer Motivators made it easy for the inactive girls to get active, and some of the formerly inactive girls went onto to become Peer Motivators themselves.

An independent evaluation of Us Girls Alive, undertaken by the BHFNC, found direct benefits from engaging Peer Motivators to encourage participation. They found that the Motivators themselves gained key skills and often went on to gain employment with the host organisations. Us Girls Alive sessions provided a safe space for young women to share concerns. As a result, many accessed other local health and support services which they had previously avoided.

By way of example – see a DSC case study example from [Hat-Trick](#).



Girls and Leadership

Hosts reported that many young females are enthusiastic to take on leadership roles in their DSC. We found many young females wanted to take on traditional volunteer roles (leadership roles) within their DSC, and aspired to become future leaders in the same way as their male counterparts. For those females, no gendered offer was required as a prompt to volunteer. 36% of the Doorstep Sport volunteers are females, which is similar to the national average that shows females volunteer in sport at around 67% of male rates.

However, there were other females who were keen to 'help out', but did not want a traditional volunteer or leader role. Often these females were not especially motivated by involvement in sport itself and felt stepping up to serve and being seen as part of the leadership at their club would distance them from their peer group. Being different to their friends was the last thing in the world they wanted to be.

So as the DSC programme progressed, we developed an approach to suit these girls. The successes came in Us Girls Alive, as discussed above, and in CLUB1, where young women were recruited as 'peer promoters'. These roles varied, but in the main it was not so much about having a high profile leadership role in sessions as promoting those sessions, making sure individuals were coming to events, using social media to bond the group and helping people try new activities.

Once girls became volunteers in these roles, we tried to combat the gender stereotyping which consigned them to such backseat and low profile roles. Instead, more visible, traditional leadership roles were promoted. By 2017, and after considerable efforts, 34% of successful candidates for the L2 Multi-Sport Coach qualification were female.

By way of example – see case study example from [Chorley](#).



'Light Bulb'

Practice

- The Us Girls slogan, 'fitness fun and friendship', is appealing to many women and girls.
- Girls need protecting from ideas that looking hot and sweaty is bad and renders them, 'unfeminine'.
- Very inactive girls need special help to become active and other girls are great role models.
- Those girls who are happy to exercise in mixed gender provision may need protection from sexist assumptions amongst their male peers.

Policy

- Investment is needed to run sessions that appeal to those girls who want single gender provision.
- Many want to join in with males and mixed sessions need to be welcoming to girls.
- Girls want to volunteer and can help less confident girls to become active.
- Girls are keen to talk about the issues that affect their everyday life.

Training Workshops

StreetGames also provides **training workshops** across a range of different topic areas. If you are interested in learning more about how to engage disadvantaged young females you may be interested in the following workshops:

- Engaging women and Girls in sport and physical activity
- Empowering Women.



Girls Empowerment

Having overcome the barriers around being active, some girls were keen to start meaningful discussions about the wider issues that have a limiting factor on how girls and young women live their lives.

All girls are different, but hosts have observed a readiness to engage in discussion on issues such as body image and body confidence, wider wellbeing such as sexual health, eating habits, sensible drinking and mental health and depression. There is also evidence to show that, when the time is right, girls are also keen to engage in discussions around issues of unequal pay, stereotyping and the issues around violence towards women and girls.

In response, we have developed training and resources that empower women and girls to use their voice, gain confidence and have better conversations so that they can take control of their own destiny by making positive lifestyle choices. A Girls Empowerment course is available for host organisations to use with groups of girls.





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