



Sustaining participation in Fitness based activities

Engaging young women aged 16-25 in sport and physical activity can be a challenge. Research tells us that there is a significant drop off in sports participation from 16 years of age and that our particular target group 'Leanne' is the least active segment within her age group. This report highlights how six local areas have developed and implemented fitness programmes which have successfully engaged and sustained 'Leanne' in regular participation.

The report is separated into four key areas:

- Developing the right offer for Leanne
- Enhancing the experience
- When we get it right
- Top tips for sustaining participation.

Developing the right offer for Leanne

We know from using the Sport England segmentation data that fitness is an attractive physical activity offer for Leanne. However, there are a number of key components which need to be in place to ensure that Leanne's fitness experience is positive and leads to long term physical activity participation. The table below highlights how different projects have focused on one or more of these areas to engage and sustain Leanne's participation.

Session type

Projects have delivered a range of fitness based activities for the young women to participate including; Street dance, Zumba, Health & fitness gyms, Yoga, Bokwa and Pilates. Many projects consulted with groups of young women when planning their projects to ensure that they were responding to local demand. Tameside, Trafford and Solihull also offered all inclusive monthly membership options, providing access to a wide range of dance and workout sessions, swimming and Health and fitness gyms.



Active

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Environment

Creating an inviting and safe environment for young women to participate in was considered to be important for all the projects in this study. The projects in this report have delivered sessions in a range of settings including; leisure centres, education establishments and local businesses. Bromley My Time delivered a successful, female only urban street dance project at Higher Education (HE) sites. They have attracted a wide range of students including young women with a disability. Wigan also developed links with local community and children’s centres to target young mums. Brent council worked predominantly with young Muslim females. They ensured that activities were appropriate for the group by; utilising female fitness staff and by providing ladies only sessions/gym space.

Delivery

All projects identified the importance of identifying the right deliverers who can successfully engage with Leanne. Projects generally used young, female instructors, but felt that the delivery method, in particular the ‘fun factor’ was the most important factor when selected a deliverer. Some projects also felt that male instructors engaged their groups. Bromley My Time liaised with college youth workers to programme dance and fitness sessions to fit with college timetables. A large proportion of projects also provided Leanne with access to fitness and workout sessions at a variety of times and days, providing them with a flexibility to fit their participation around other priorities.



Cost

All ‘Us girls’ sessions are subsidised to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation. Many of the programmes are free of charge. This provides Leanne’s with an excellent opportunity to start their fitness experience. A number of projects including Brent council also supported participants to exercise independently by offering an additional one month health & fitness membership to girls who complete the 6 week programme. As a result a number of girls have become monthly members or pay as you go users and some also bring female relatives with them to female only sessions. Solihull, Tameside and Trafford also offer reduced price student/Us Girls memberships which has increased the affordability of taking part in regular; fitness, workout class and swimming sessions.

Marketing & recruitment

All projects have utilised the Us Girls branding and the vibrant pink colour used in the logo to design attractive and appealing artwork. Projects have displayed promotional material; outside facilities, in and around college and business sites, within children’s centre and on websites. Tameside Sports Trust also set up a Facebook group which has engaged over 400 users in the past few months. 68% of these users are females.



Enhancing the experience

Projects have shown excellent creativity, building on their knowledge of Leanne to sustain participation through introducing a range of opportunities and incentives. Collectively, these elements can enhance Leanne's fitness experience.

Mentoring & support

Bromley My Time provided additional support to the girls in their project through introducing specialist support workers into sessions. The support workers offered valuable support to all participants, guiding them to use the project as a stepping stone back into physical activity and motivating them to develop a 'can do' attitude. This additional role proved to be an excellent and valuable resource. Solihull, Trafford and Tameside also gained additional in kind support from membership advisors, who supported participants to identify the best pay as you go or monthly health & fitness offers for them. Tameside also offered crèche sessions alongside fitness classes to support mum's to become more active.



Events

Trafford enhanced their Us Girls programme by delivering a fun packed Pamper and Get Active launch event at one of their leisure sites. Women and girls attending the event enjoyed; taster classes, discounted memberships, free gym inductions and goody bags. They were also joined by an elite athlete, Jenna Downing. Jenna shared some of her experiences with the women to motivate them to become more active. Brent council and Tameside Sport Trust also delivered events to celebrate International women's day and many of the projects took part in the Us Girls Games 2012.

Attractive exit routes

All projects have successfully identified a range of pay as you go and monthly membership options for participants. Some projects including; Solihull, Trafford and Tameside have also gained approval from their organisations to maintain these offers indefinitely. Tameside Sports Trust have also set up a corporate scheme with Brother which provides their employees and immediate family members with 50% off a range of activities. Brother contributes the other 50% directly to Tameside Sport Trust.

Go on treat yourself, to a range of activities at 50% of the cost

Exclusive to Brother employee's. Staff will be able to access a range of pay as you go activities at 50% of the price and Brother will cover the cost of the other 50%.

Activity	Staff price at 50% discount
Adult Swims	£1.50
Adult Swims Hyde Leisure Pool	£2.15
Badminton court hire (1 hour)	£4.50
Squash court hire (1 hour)	£2.70
Shower	£2.50
Gym entry	£3.45
Workout class	£2.10



Offers, incentive and rewards

Most people, especially women enjoy a good offer free gift. A number of projects have capitalised on this by introducing attractive offers and rewards for participants. Tameside Sports Trust ran a successful Groupon deal. The deal sold over 310 vouchers. A large proportion of people redeeming vouchers are female and many of these bought vouchers with friends or family members. Wigan Sports Development also introduced a successful loyalty scheme. Participants can gain free gifts for attending between 1-50 sessions. Prizes include; Us Girls t-shirts, gift vouchers and MP3 players.

When we get it right

The primary outcome of all Us Girls projects is to provide a positive experience which is likely to sustain Leanne's involvement in physical activity. For many of the girls on the projects, this may be their first positive physical activity experience. If we are able to successfully bring together the elements described by the projects in this report, then we should hopefully hear participants saying some of the following statements:

'I like the idea that I'm keeping fit'

'I've never enjoyed taking part in sport, but the fitness sessions at college have been really good fun...I've even taken my Mum down to our local leisure centre to get her to try Zumba too!'

'I really do enjoy this project, it improves my dancing skills and fitness and after the sessions I feel more energetic and alert. My weight has redistributed and I feel stronger and I have no issues with my body now. I also get on well with everyone and the atmosphere is great.'

Projects have also demonstrated positive outcomes through participation figures and sign ups to membership packages. For example:

- Brent Council are consistently engaging 12-15 girls onto each of their 6 week health & fitness programmes.
- Tameside Sports Trust has signed up 562 new student health & fitness members between October 2011 and February 2012. 64% of these members are female.
- Solihull have signed up 48 new students within a month to student health & fitness memberships. 30 of these members fit the Us Girls criteria.

10 Top Tips for Sustaining Participation

1. Identify suitable exit routes before delivering your programme
2. Build partnership with local education establishments and employers
3. Take activities to participants e.g. workplace, college and community centre
4. Try to keep up with fitness trends
5. Create a safe environment for exercising
6. If activity costs will increase during or after your programme, notify the group of this from week one.
7. Recognise individual and group achievements e.g. weight loss, improved fitness, increased confidence
8. Use a range of marketing sources including; Facebook, Websites and Ambassadors
9. Provide training to participants so that they can lead future programmes
10. Provide rewards, discounts and offers e.g. 2 for 1