

***UsGirls Research Report:
Participants' Experiences***

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Introduction

This report focuses on the views of participants involved in a range of UsGirls programmes. Information from coaches and programme coordinators is added in to elaborate or clarify the context of classes or sessions and some coaches participated in the focus groups.

Because the participants were chosen by programme coordinators the views tend to represent women who participated in the session regularly and viewed the programmes positively. The report, therefore, tends to focus on success detailing the characteristics of the UsGirls projects that appeal to participants. We feel this has allowed us to provide a detailed and somewhat unique portrayal of an array of community-based programmes that cater for and meet the physical activity needs of diverse young women from disadvantaged backgrounds..

Most of this data was collected during focus groups either before or after an activity session. The flavour of the session and interaction between participants helped further our understanding of key elements that shaped women's experience. Not all of the issues we anticipated proved important to the participants and some themes emerged as more important than we might have imagined. In order to provide the UsGirls staff with a flavour of these conversations we have included some longer passages that illustrate how women discussed key issues. Due to confidentiality we have removed any names and, in most cases, instead of using pseudonyms we have simply alternated plain/italics text to indicate a change in speaker when reporting conversations.

The report is split into five key sections that characterise different themes represented in the data that we collected: Initial attraction to programmes; Programme Design; Programme Delivery; Perceived Benefits; and, Sustainability.

Each section focuses on the data we collected but we have also included sections that illustrate links between this research and our previous report as well as links to other UsGirls research and how-to guides and previous academic research. As in the previous reports the links to previous research provide a summary of relevant work that helps to contextualise our findings and show where this report is consistent with, adds to, or challenges previous research. We are happy to elaborate on aspects of the literature if you would like more detailed information on any aspect of it. As stated in the previous report, most work on young women and sport focuses on PE or on organised sport settings and there is limited work that directly addresses community sport. We do feel that this research, therefore, can contribute to understandings of young women's sport experiences in a variety of formats ranging from programme planning and delivery to academic forums.

Again, the research team would like to thank you for allowing us to carry out this work which has been extremely productive and rewarding for us as researchers.

Laura, Alison, and Mandy

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Executive Summary

This report is primarily based on participant experiences gained through focus group interviews. Through the data collection we were able to gain understanding of shared as well as diverse experiences of the young women involved in UsGirls programmes. The report is divided into 5 key sections and focuses on an analysis of the key concerns and issues raised by the participants: Initial attraction to programmes; Programme Design; Programme Delivery; Perceived Benefits; and, Sustainability.

Initial Attraction to Programmes

Participants discussed both recruitment and crossing the threshold which referred to anxieties about attending exercise programmes for the first time. Participants learned about UsGirls through diverse recruiting and marketing strategies. Many women are recruited by friends and family. Interestingly, some women were recruited from other activity programmes showing that they engaged in different types of activities during the week.

Many participants told us about the anxiety they experienced prior to attending a first session. Going with friends and family, friendly recruiting strategies, experience of other activity settings, or prior knowledge of the leader or activity can help relieve worries. Key concerns for women were not being good enough, appearance, and fitting in socially.

Programme Design

Factors relating to programme design included cost, transport and location, type of activity, time and childcare. Many women had limited funds for leisure activities and it is clear the lost cost was part of what attracted participants to UsGirls programmes. Initial free sessions, incentive schemes, and opportunities to 'win' free sessions help to increase participation and build commitment. Paying for sessions can be part of a strategy to enhance commitment. And, commitment to sessions increases women's willingness to pay. Similarly, convenience in terms of location was important for many women. There were, however, women who were willing to travel to sessions outside their local area, typically if the event was unique or if they had already made a commitment to a particular group.

There was no type of activity preferred by all of the participants. Some preferred either team or individual activities; however, a number of women were involved in both. Many women expressed a desire for variety in the activities that were delivered. A number of women spoke negatively about traditional exercise environments such as gymwork or aerobics and favoured more informal and social spaces for activity. Similarly there was no one time that was deemed appropriate for all groups. This was true even in similar groupings such as working women. Children, transport, work, and domestic chores can all impact women's feelings about what time works best.

For some women childcare is crucial. Some groups resolve this by offering a crèche while others allow children to be in the room in which the activity takes place. In many of the programmes we observed women attended on their own having made arrangements elsewhere.

Programme Delivery

The coach plays a crucial role in how activities are viewed by participants. They often play a key role

in recruiting, in keeping in touch with participants to insure attendance, and in create an enjoyable and welcoming environment that will encourage and motivate women who may be worried or anxious about participating in physical activity. Coaches had to rely on personal qualities, over and above their technical expertise, to make the programmes successful. They were perceived as friendly, encouraging and non-judgemental. In addition, the coaches were noted for creating a positive atmosphere where participants could be social, and have fun. Competition was used selectively in order to increase fun and challenge without intimidating or embarrassing participants or disrupting the informal, enjoyable environment. The social element of the sessions was deemed a central component of enjoyment and of encouraging attendance.

Key Benefits

The women in this study identified a number of benefits relating to their participation. These benefits served as motivation for them to attend regularly. The key issues they raised included health and fitness, mental health including stress reduction and feeling good about themselves, and weight loss. In addition, a few women mentioned skill development and confidence. These findings are important as they suggest that women are seeing physical activity participation as part of being healthy and managing weight, but are also enjoying it as a way to lower stress and feel good about themselves more generally. Women involved in specific sports were more likely to identify developing skills or getting better at an activity as a benefit of attending sessions.

Sustainability

The women we interviewed stated that they enjoyed the UsGirls sessions and felt that they benefitted from being involved. Many of the sessions had relatively small numbers and inconsistent attendance. However, attracting this hard to reach group meant that these small numbers were still seen as successful by programme coordinators. The low numbers may, however, be seen by external funders as less than desirable providing a challenge to those who wish to work with 16-24 year old women from disadvantaged backgrounds. The age range proved difficult for coaches and programme coordinators who need to attract larger numbers of women to run more effective and efficient classes. Most programmes allowed women outside the target age range to participate in order to increase numbers and to avoid excluding women who wanted to be more active. Relatively few of the women we interviewed said that they would be interested in volunteering, with some stating that they did not have the necessary skills.

Initial Attraction to Programmes

In our focus groups, we asked participants how they first became involved in the activity session. We also asked them about what they were worried about prior to attending as we were interested in what factors persuaded women to get involved in an activity.

Recruitment

Participants became aware of programmes through a range of recruitment methods. Word of mouth emerged as particularly effective, and often the message came from a friend or relative.

She dragged me here... Alice's my, Alice's family. (Bootcamp)

Through a family member, told us oh there's an activity going on today, you should come down, so we were like, sure come down! (Festival, Multi-sport focus group)

Well I heard about it through work, somebody I knew, a friend from work came and then it just started from there, and then more people from work decided to come. (Multi-sport focus group)

Well it's really, our mum told their mum and then she would say would you like to come along and then they'd say yes and so ... (Cycling focus group)

There is no doubt that friends and relatives were perceived to play a key role in bringing people to the programmes we researched.

Some individuals said that they found out from posters or flyers in leisure or community centres where they were involved in other activities.

I found out through the Children's Centre, it was posted on the wall. (Festival focus group)

Yeah there was a poster in here [community centre]. (Zumba focus group)

I came for the boxing class on Wednesday, so I just popped by to see how it was and saw there was basketball. (Basketball focus group)

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The posters made it really clear that it was like fun, fitness and friends ... (Multisport focus group)

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Other young women became involved through their college. This could be through classes organised at the school or college, or through sports leaders or coaches coming into classes and doing demonstrations or tasters. For example, most of the recruitment for Dare to Dance occurs after girls participate in an organised introductory session within their school or college.

However, recruitment can be a much slower process. One adventure centre leader described how girls came to her programme incrementally. First, by hanging around the centre, chatting to the leaders. Eventually, the girls wanted to try out the canoeing; and, finally they became regular and positive members. The group is growing and expanding to include other activities. The leader felt

that these young women would not have joined a club initially but gradually grew to appreciate the leaders and the activities and attended the weekly sessions regularly.

One aspect that emerged here is that a number of women found out about programmes in other sport, exercise or physical activity sessions.

[A friend] came to one of the Us Girls Zumba classes where I'd been going and handed me a flyer, and it was free, so I figured why not? (Basketball)

While this is not attracting inactive women, it is giving interested young women more opportunities to be active. A number of women enjoyed attending activities more than once a week and either attended a number of sessions of the same activity type or combined activities such as basketball and Zumba which gave them more varied opportunities. It also suggests that some women do not necessarily want a single type of sport experience but are open to and interested in a range of ways to be active. In addition, gaining confidence in one physical activity can inspire young women to try new things.

Summary: Recruitment

- Participants learned about UsGirls programmes through diverse recruiting and marketing strategies.
- Many participants are recruited by friends and family.
- Some women were recruited through other activity sessions and enjoyed attending a number of different classes each week.

'Crossing the threshold'

One of the questions that we asked in the focus groups related to initial worries about attending the programme. We wanted to know in more detail what it takes to get young women into a first activity session. Most women acknowledged that going to the first session made them anxious.

The worries of the women in these programmes were primarily offset by having someone they trusted involved. This could be a friend or relative to go with, being familiar with the leader, or by having the activity with or in a familiar place like a school or young mums group.

I think I was quite happy because my friend recommended it, so that was ... I mean if it was somewhere new that we'd both never been before, I'd be like oh God I wouldn't want to go. But I think it was because it was recommended. (Multi-sport focus group)

I think for a lot of women though, if they saw that leaflet, it would be going that once wouldn't it, if you were on your own, sat at home, thinking I really want to go ... (Multi-sport focus group)

Many people expressed some fear about whether they would be embarrassed or feel out of place. One young woman explained that her biggest fear about going to a StreetDance session was that she would not be able to 'do it'.

I was really worried because I didn't know whether I would be able to do it. (StreetDance)

It's tricky because I was more apprehensive about starting this because I was like, because I'm part of a team it will matter if I'm not very good, whereas in Zumba it doesn't matter. So I didn't, I wasn't shy about joining Zumba but here I was a bit like ooh. (Basketball focus group)

Just I'm worried about when I'm doing things when people look, I get nervous and I lose control a little bit. But then when people go, like clap or say well done things, or they cheer, then I start to get improved. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

Other women were concerned about fitting in with the group socially or that the environment would be too serious:

I wasn't really worried about doing the activities, because I do it regardless, if I'm rubbish or if I'm good! But it's just like being able to socialise with people because ... Obviously it's a group activity, you have to work as a group, so I thought maybe like try to talk to people, try not, because you never know who wants to talk or who doesn't. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

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It's like anything, anything for the first time, you have anxiety, apprehension about something, and then when you're actually there and you're doing it, you think "oh what was I worried about in the first place?" (Cycling focus group)

So I thought maybe people might be focused on the game, they would have had no time to like joke a bit, but it was alright, everybody was having fun and stuff, so I liked it. (Festival, multi-sport)

Another common concern related to clothing and body size. Women were worried that they would not look the part nor be as experienced as other members of the class.

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You dread ...
... you don't know what level everyone is at ...
... and you don't know whether you're going to get loads of like gym bunnies, they'll be in like Lycra and everything! You know and all that! (all laugh) And you're just thinking, I've just come in my leggings and an old shirt and you think ... (Bootcamp focus group)

Oh God, and I hope everyone's not bitchy because that's another thing ...
Yeah girls do worry about bitchiness ... (Multi-sport focus group)

A number of young women felt that participating in one activity made you more confident to do others.

I think, because I'd done netball before, but only about six months before, I remember that going to netball for the first time and I had to build up the confidence really to go for the first time! So I think it would be similar for someone coming here. (Multi-sport focus group)

Summary: Crossing the threshold

- For many women going to the first session is difficult.
- Going with friends and family, friendly recruiting strategies or prior knowledge of the leader or activity can help relieve worries.
- Women were concerned about not being good enough, appearance, and fitting in socially.

Overall

The recruitment strategies that participants identified were consistent with the previous report which focused on the views of programme coordinators. Overall, data from the participant focus groups reinforces the need to recruit in diverse ways as individuals do find out about what is going on from a number of different sources. It also supports the importance of friends and family in the recruitment process as they can help reassure women that they will enjoy the experience and adds a social element. These findings are consistent with Finch and White (1998) who found that young women were attracted to programmes that focused on immediate, appealing elements such as fun and friends. A crucial element of recruiting, however, is how friends, relatives, flyers, etc. present the programme. This includes a range of factors including time, cost, type of activity, as well as the expectation of what the environment will be like which are all factors influencing an individual's decision to attend initially as well as whether they will sustain involvement. All of these factors are discussed in the sections below which will give detail on what women enjoy about programmes.

Many of the participants in this study identified that getting to the first session was a big hurdle. Fears revolved around not being good enough and not being able to do the activities as well as worries about appearance, worries about how serious the sessions would be and concerns about the social dynamics of the sessions. One woman highlighted that billing the class as fun, friends, and fitness was reassuring as it intimated a more relaxed and social atmosphere. These findings reinforce the need for creative recruitment and marketing strategies. Many of the UsGirls projects have been successful in designing appealing flyers, with appealing nonthreatening photographs and language and have been using diverse strategies to reach women who might be reticent to sign up for activity classes.

Friends and relatives can help reassure women that they will enjoy activities. Research exploring the physical activity experiences of adolescent girls has consistently highlighted the importance of friends and the reassurance that peer approval has for women who want to become involved in sport or physical activity (Biddle et al, 2005). The current research expands on these findings to account for the experiences of slightly older women who may rely on friends and family for support and encouragement in the potentially daunting process of attending a physical activity session. Other strategies for helping women to cross the activity threshold include meeting the leader or participating in a taster session which can help provide a flavour of what the atmosphere of a class might be like. In addition, activities within particular community settings or with intact groups may allay women's fears about feeling embarrassed or about 'fitting in' socially. It is sometimes difficult for individuals who enjoy sport to understand the apprehension, fears and worries that many women experience when considering attendance at a sport or physical activity session. Some people simply do not view typical sporting environments as 'fun' and are concerned that they will have an unpleasant experience.

The types of concerns that women have about sport and exercise settings are discussed in more detail in the section on what women enjoyed about the UsGirls sessions.

Programme Design

We asked participants to discuss elements associated with the overall design of programmes including: cost, transport, time and type of activity. All of these elements impact women's participation and are important considerations in programme planning. The women we interviewed had diverse interests, needs, and commitments that impacted their views on the right cost, right place, right time and right activity. Ultimately there was no 'right way' for everyone, but we did gain understanding of what did work for different groups.

Cost

The programmes we observed ranged in cost from free to one multi-sport session that was £3.00. The participants in each case were partly drawn to the activities because of their low cost. They compared the low cost of Streetgames activities to other activity sessions in the community which were typically more expensive. This sense of getting a 'deal' was appealing, but a number of women did not have sufficient disposable income for more expensive options like gym membership or classes. One Zumba class had a particularly committed group of women who lived on a local estate. They had membership cards which were signed off weekly and UsGirls merchandise was used as an incentive for regular attendance. In the focus group they discussed the cost and the membership in detail.

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I started coming here like six weeks ago maybe. And it's been really good, I just, I would have come sooner if I'd worked out that I could play basketball for free!
(Basketball focus group)

The price is brilliant as well, it's just £1 a week!

... yeah, and we were quite reluctant to bring in a membership thing but then we realised actually, I mean it is good because it makes people quite committed (agreement). (Zumba coach)

Yeah, that's the thing, you're committed to it, exactly, that's the thing.
(Zumba focus group)

For these participants £1 was fine but £3 a bit high, particularly if they had to pay for children as well.

There's one at the [club] on a Friday night but she charges £3.

£1's OK, no problem, but £3 is a bit ... (interviewer)

Yeah, it's a push sometimes....

...when I'm paying for Amy as well, that's £5, if Maria puts her two girls in, there's an extra £2, there's £7 just for one night. (Zumba focus group)

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Another group nearby which was composed primarily of women who were working fulltime and who felt that their £3.00 multi-sport sessions were a bargain.

£3 is great compared to a gym membership.

Even the gym here, doing like a Zumba class here is £4.10 or something like that, for an hour, it's £3 here for an hour and a half, and it's better isn't it? (Multi-sport focus group)

For many of the women the initial free sessions motivated them to try it.

A group of girls who played basketball stated that if the programme had not been free they would probably not have attended.

Yeah I don't think I would have started.

Yeah I wouldn't have started.

But because I've been here so long I probably would now, if they introduced it, if it's not too,

like too high, I would still come, but maybe not as frequently either (agreement). (Basketball focus group)

Free or cheap [was an incentive], I just kind of assumed that I couldn't afford to play sport once I'd finished education. (Basketball focus group)

One of the UsGirls organisers captured the balancing act that they were faced with in terms of charging for sessions.

So it's not really about making money but it will help to sustain the session further. But we do want to keep it obviously affordable so that money's not a barrier for people. (UsGirls coordinator/coach)

Low cost continues to be a draw. In many cases women are willing to pay for classes and understand the need to help support the programmes. Initial free sessions and free sessions used as a reward for bringing someone were popular and help to continue the sense of having a bargain as well as representing commitment to the class.

Although participants understand the link between sustainability of the programme and the need to pay, there is a limit to what they feel that they can pay. In this case, the range was zero to £3. This does cause problems for coordinators as many of the successful groups have relatively small numbers of participants and some irregularity in attendance, so the amount that can be raised in sessions may not make a programme sustainable on its own. Within the UsGirls programmes the issue was exacerbated by the age range which limited numbers in some regions. (See sections below on age and attendance below)

Summary: Cost

- Many women were willing to pay for sessions.
- £3.00 per session seems to be a maximum price but some women drop out with any fee and for others £1.00 works.
- Cost can be part of a strategy to enhance commitment to sessions. And, commitment to sessions increases women's willingness to pay.
- Initial free sessions, incentive schemes, and opportunities to 'win' free sessions are appealing and help to increase participation and build commitment.

Transport and location

For many of the women the location of the activity formed a crucial determinant of participation. This is partly because activity sessions need to fit in with other demands. Sessions targeted at particular neighbourhoods, communities or schools work well for participants who live in those areas.

Yeah it's local, we only live literally around the corner. (Bootcamp focus group)

I think it's cool that, because the fact that it's free and the fact that I live literally down the road, so I can just pop along and then have fun and do different sports as well. (Multi-sport focus group)

The trade-off can be less ability to expand numbers to individuals who live outside of the area. For example, one Zumba session was held in a community centre located within an estate which was distant from other residential areas. This meant that it only attracted women from that particular estate.

Sometimes transport had an impact on attendance. This was particularly true for younger women who relied on getting a ride from someone.

Usually we come by car but today we came by bus, that's why we're a bit late! (Cycling focus group)

The only reason I don't come sometimes is because I don't drive yet, so I have to rely on like my brother to bring me sometimes, which is a bit annoying, because a lot of times I really wanted to come but just not been able to get here. (Multi-sport focus group)

Some women travelled relatively far to classes.

I just take the bus, just, there's four buses but I'm alright with the journey.... but I'm used to the journey because my grandma lives [near] so I'm always at my grandma's. (Basketball focus group)

Yeah we live quite far, because it's like about an hour's journey from here. But yeah, because we live in Islington, but it's not that bad. (Cycling focus group)

It takes about 40 minutes to walk ... (Cycling)

Summary: Transport and Location

- Having activities in a convenient location facilitated attendance for women who faced time and transport challenges.
- Some women, however, were willing to travel to sessions outside their local area, typically if the event was unique or if they had already made a commitment to a particular group.

Types of Activities

Within the research we interviewed participants involved in a wide range of programmes including: Zumba, bootcamp, basketball, cycling, multi-sport, badminton, canoeing, and StreetDance. It was clear that participants did not all share a desire for one particular activity. Some women preferred team sports and others wanted more individual, exercise-based activities. Younger women were more likely to participate in StreetDance but other activities were quite varied in terms of their appeal. A number of participants were involved in more than one type of activity desiring different sport and fitness experiences.

A number of women involved in multi-sport or team sport programmes identified that they enjoyed these activities in part because of the interaction with others.

I hate the gym! I'm not really unhappy with the gym but I don't like it, because I'm more of a, I like when I'm with a team and there's people here playing and you get to interact with other people, I like it when it's team sports. So I like the fact that when you come along you get to play with other people, because when I go upstairs [to the gym] you're just by yourself, so it's not as much fun and you don't have as much motivation, and you, it feels like a workout. Whereas when you're downstairs, you're having fun and it's a game, so it doesn't really feel like you're working out as well. You know you're leaving at the end and you're like huffing and puffing away ...! (Multi-sport participant)

I always enjoyed PE in high school and I kind of missed it, and then I got bored of going to the gym and then my friend told me about this, and I've just got into it, because I've always loved sport, and so I've carried on going. (Multi-sport focus group)

Women did not always agree on the link between activity and age. For example, one college offered a very successful Zumba programme for 16 year olds; however, some women felt that Zumba was perceived as something that would appeal to older women.

Sixteen to twenty-five year olds] do StreetDance mainly. Yeah, I think the StreetDance appeals to them more than the Zumba really. [Zumba focus group]

Well I do prefer basketball. I tried Zumba, I felt like it doesn't give you as much fitness as basketball on that at all. And it's, I don't know, I think Zumba's for people that are just starting to do their fitness. (Basketball focus group)

Because it's my favourite sport really, and also because I've grown up doing it, so I'm used to doing it. (Basketball focus group)

A range of activity programmes were successful for different reasons. Some women preferred more exercise-based activities such as bootcamp and Zumba while others enjoyed team sports. Some activities were perceived as more appealing to different age groups re-emphasising the diversity of the 16-25 year old age range. In addition, some women enjoyed a range of activities including exercise-based activities and team sports.

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*Well I've been a member of a gym before, and sometimes I like working out alone but then sometimes you need interaction...It's just different, lots of different activities, so you don't really get bored, it's fun.
(Festival, multi-sport)*

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Summary: Types of Activity

- There was no one type of activity preferred by all women.
- Variety was valued by many of the women in this research.
- While some women preferred either individual or team activities there were others who enjoyed both.
- StreetDance was viewed as appropriate for younger women
- A number of women spoke negatively about traditional exercise environments such as gymwork or aerobics classes.

Time

As in our previous research, the times of activities varied greatly. We attended morning, afternoon, evening and weekend sessions. The participants in the focus groups each had reasons why the times were conducive to their schedules. For college students having activities during a break between classes or after school was viewed positively. Sometimes, however, this meant that they could not attend as schedules change.

I think just the days I've got uni I can't come in because I always have lectures on a Wednesday, which is really annoying. (Multi sport)

For women who work, having evening sessions that are conveniently located increases opportunities. Residents were pleased when a local community centre started holding an evening, 6:00 p.m. Zumba class.

For a long time there's been nothing on here in keep fit wise or anything like that, so when [Zumba, StreetDance for Children] stuff did start doing then yeah you definitely want to come.

A lot of the stuff goes on for people during the day. So for people like me who work full time Yeah, same here, mm.

I don't get the benefit of it, so when something be on at night...

It's a bit push for me because I only get in at 5 o'clock but it's not too bad. (Zumba focus group)

Similarly, a group involved in a 6:00pm bootcamp stated.

And the time's good.

And the time, it's nice and early....

Because there's another local one that I go to sometimes as well, but it's on 8 till 9, so by the time you get back home and that it is late.

Yeah that is late. (Bootcamp)

Others, however, prefer later.

The time's ideal. [7:00-8:30]

The time's perfect.

I struggle with it some weeks, don't get me wrong, but the time's ideal, I couldn't come any earlier. (Multi-sport focus group)

If they're later on, I always put them off, I always go, oh ... By the time I've had my tea and this and ... I put it off and put it off...

Whereas because it is literally round the corner as well.

Because it is early you can wait to have your tea after. Like today I've ate my tea before and I found it dead hard ...

Like because it's a good time you can just wait and have your tea after, whereas if you finish at 9 o'clock, by the time you get home, half 9, 10 o'clock... you don't want to eat your tea that late do you? (Bootcamp focus group)

The quotes above are presented to illustrate the different ways that women discuss 'perfect' times. It is clear that there is no real agreement on a specific time and even the difference between 6:00 and 7:00 can be viewed differently by working women.

Summary: Time

- There is no one time that is appropriate for all groups.
- Children, transport, work, and domestic chores can all impact women's feelings about what time works best.
- Even women in comparable circumstances such as fulltime work or college may not agree on the best time for a session.

Childcare

Some women need to have help with childcare in order to participate in physical activity sessions. One Zumba class in a community centre involved women and their daughters. Most of the girls had attended an earlier children's dance class and then the mother's arrived for theirs. The girls varied between dancing and playing with each other. It was a friendly environment with a lot of interaction between adults and children.

If the kids weren't allowed to come it would make it difficult for us, yeah.

We've no ties have we, so it's not really a problem because we've no ties.

You see I have a younger child so sometimes I have to bring him with me and let him sit on the chair if my partner's not home, but ... (Zumba focus group)

The flexibility to bring children and the willingness of the participants and leader to have children in the room helped make this particular class successful and part of the fun for mothers and daughters.

For me it's just my children, transport is fine for me, I have a car, so ... For me, my little one's still very young and once my little one is full time, I can, I can come here more often, yeah.

So I'm balancing between my little one is just turning three.... That's the only thing that stops me. If there was a crèche then I would come more often. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

The challenges the women discussed are compatible with most other research in that for some women childcare is crucial. Some groups resolve this by offering a crèche while others allow children to be in the room in which the activity takes place. In most of the programmes we observed, however, women attended on their own having made arrangements elsewhere.

Overall

Key issues that were raised relating to programme planning were: cost, transport and location, type of activity, time and childcare. Our previous report identified organisers' views on charging for sessions. Programme planners at that point were still trying to decide how, if and when to initiate charges. For them, costs were perceived to help with sustainability and enhance commitment. Costs, however, had to be appropriate to the low income target group for the UsGirls project. One of the UsGirls organisers interviewed in the current research stated:

... we want to keep it low so that it's affordable because a lot of people in this area are on low incomes and we don't want to be charging you know, the whole thing is it's for the community. (UsGirls coordinator)

The participants' perspective reinforces the sense that free sessions may be important to get some people through the door; however, most women who had been involved regularly were willing to pay a small amount. The findings in the Diva Report and the Salford swim report echo the findings here related to cost in that £3.00 was seen as the maximum young women were willing to pay for a session. Having initial sessions at no cost also emerged as a desirable strategy within these reports.

Some participants stated that the cost did positively impact their commitment to the activity. The use of a membership card was also very effective in one location serving as a symbol of inclusion in the group as well as motivating them to attend. This was reinforced as the membership card showed how often they came. The cards were not used in a controlling way but as a way to keep a track of attendance in order to show when participants would receive their reward. The coach was flexible and while we were there one of the participants was paying for last week's session when she had forgotten her money. Incentives added to the motivation for attendance as well. It does seem that willingness to pay might be linked to commitment to the sessions in some cases. Therefore, the initial 'bargain' of free sessions or incentives or bring a friend deals could play a key role in recruiting and building up commitment in participants.

Having activities in a convenient place is helpful for young women who often have busy schedules. It can also mean that they are more likely to be able to come with friends and family. Some young women, however, were willing to spend time traveling to sessions. Sometimes it was for something special like the cycling sessions for Muslim women which took place in a quiet area away from traffic. Other women, who were committed to an activity that they enjoyed were willing to travel when needed. Overall, women are far more likely to attend sessions that are in or near places that are convenient and familiar.

Interestingly, there was no real discussion of the physical activity spaces that women participated in. The sessions we went to were typically in sports halls, community centres and schools or colleges. The majority were in familiar community-based settings; however, there were sessions in a large leisure centre, outdoors, and in the case of StreetDance, a community theatre. Women in a multi-sport session in a large leisure centre were pleased to have a space where they could do a wide

variety of activities. Overall, women seemed happy with the space and were primarily concerned with convenience and accessibility.

About half of the activities on offer in UsGirls are individual/ exercise-based and these continue to be perceived as attractive to women. However, there were many women who preferred team activities. Variety is a theme that we discuss below and a number of women identified that they enjoyed experiencing different activities rather than focusing on one type. Assumptions that women only wish to do exercise and fitness style activities were not demonstrated in this research. While these activities were popular a number of women wanted to participate in activities that are more associated with traditional sport. A number of women suggested that activities such as Zumba might be appealing to those who were less experienced or less confident in their ability. This perception of activity is helpful in understanding how to attract new and inexperienced women to projects. It may be that women who are a little more confident in their abilities would be more likely to engage in activities more closely associated with sport. The findings suggest that activity preference may relate to confidence and experience as well as perceptions of 'sports' and 'exercise' environments.

The findings relating to time are similar to the previous UsGirls report in that there is no one perfect time for sessions. Women in the focus groups seemed happy with the times of the sessions that they were attending and felt that they fit in well with their other commitments. It suggests that consultation is crucial in determining times as even people in similar circumstances such as working full time may differ in their preferred time to attend classes. Similarly, the findings on childcare were similar to our previous report. Many of the projects had no childcare available and women did not require provision or were able to make other arrangements. For some women, childcare was essential and for others it made participation easier. Recent research exploring active young mums from low SES backgrounds found that they were better able to reconcile time for active leisure with being a good mother rather than as time away from domestic duties. The idea that some women may feel that taking time out for themselves is neglecting the family could be considered when attempting to design programmes for mothers with young children (Currie, 2004; Miller and Brown, 2005).

While these elements of programme planning are important it was clear that programmes catered to a range of participant needs. Cost and location/transport will influence participants' decisions to attend a programme, particularly in its initial stages. Programme planners can consult with potential groups to gain more understanding of type of activity, time and childcare needs in order to develop successful programmes that fit the needs of target groups. There is little research that focuses specifically on these elements of programme planning discussed above in relation to the group of young women involved in this study who are participating outside the context of school, club or other organised sport or activity setting. Most of the research that does exist has focused on the ways that time, cost, location, childcare and domestic responsibilities serve as barriers to participation (Finch and White, 1998; Henderson and Bialeschki, 1993; Miller and Brown, 2005). The current research provides a useful contribution to research identifying the ways that some programmes have successfully addressed these barriers for some women.

Programme Delivery

This section focuses on aspects of the delivery of sessions that impacted women's enjoyment and desire to participate. These include the atmosphere of the sessions, the qualities of the coach and other themes such as new experiences. The themes overlap and work together. For example, the qualities admired in leaders and coaches included the type of atmosphere or climate that they created.

Coach

The coaches were valued for their knowledge and for creating a fun and challenging environment that was not stressful or threatening. The coaches were crucial to setting the tone for the sessions. We found that although the social element of these classes was important – they were not just social – the girls and women were highly active and valued being pushed a little, sweating, and working hard. They also needed to know that they could slow down, take a break, or modify a task that was too difficult. The leaders seemed to adjust to these demands well and for the most part were low key but enthusiastic, helpful without being overly directive, and responsive to the participants and their desired approach to the activities.

Friendly

A number of participants discussed the friendliness of the coaches:

It makes a difference when they're friendly and welcoming, you know there are sessions I've been to where they're quite stern and they don't even give you a hello. So it's definitely down to how they run these things you know, and they're a chirpy pair, absolutely lovely! They always make you feel welcome and you can have a laugh and joke with them. (Multi-sport focus group)

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The friendly staff, they're really nice and they joke with us and stuff.

They make it feel like it's fun and games less than trying really hard. Because like if you're unable to do something, they say try again, unlucky, they motivate you.

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And then when you did it they clap you (all laugh) Wow, I did it good! Yeah. (Festival, multi-sport)

The e-mail I got from you (coach) was so sweet, so nice, so encouraging, you know ... (agreement from others in focus group) so that was really helpful. (Bootcamp focus group)

Well I felt stupid at first coming, but then once you've come you realise that it's like, it's quite like friendly.

Like yeah [we] help each other and encourage each other and ... (Bootcamp focus group)

It is clear that the participants appreciated the friendliness of the instructors and the encouragement that they provided. And, the atmosphere they created seemed to extend to participants and how they interacted with each other. One group compared their UsGirls experience to a previous club:

We got a coach who made it very competitive, and through that came a split and it's got a little bit bitchy, unfriendly, and not the style of club that you wanted.

Encouraging

The participants we talked to also highlighted that the coaches were encouraging. So, while there was some flexibility in terms of taking a break, the coaches were engaged and encouraged women to participate and to try hard. This encouragement though had to be done in a nonthreatening, friendly way.

She does tell you off if you stop as well!
I like that.
She's encouraging as well.
Yeah, like ...Motivation.
And she's quite fun as well, she's dead like ...
Yeah you can have a laugh ...
But then when you do stop she does tell, she does tell you ...
But if you are slacking, she will say come on, get back on it.
Yeah, she's very encouraging.
... which is good, yeah.(Bootcamp focus group)

One multi-sport group was also quite positive about the ways that the coach created an encouraging environment. In addition, a Zumba participant highlighted that this encouragement continued even when she felt she should have been doing better.

I think it's all about the coach, I'll be honest, and the person running it that makes you feel comfortable.
But obviously the coaches make it really a relaxed environment, so it definitely helps to have someone who's welcoming. (Multi-sport focus group)

You've been coming for 8 weeks so you should be able to do it, she'll still encourage you to do it. (Zumba focus group)

She's clear, makes sure that you 'get' it. (Zumba, focus group)

Another participant compared her UsGirls experience to a previous, less relaxed aerobics session. She was unfamiliar with the routine and the instructor did not offer any help or encouragement.

I only went once [to aerobics] ... there was all different moves and everything, she said if you can't do it march on the step, well I was just stood on that step marching all through the class! ALL LAUGH I never went again! (Zumba focus group)

Conversely, the UsGirls session she attended prioritised participation and everyone was involved no matter what level. Part of this was the view that these coaches gave clear instructions and responded to the participants. Those that were less experienced were not highlighted but were able to follow along and feel comfortable even when learning and making mistakes. This non-judgemental and encouraging environment was identified as very positive by many of the women, and is discussed below.

Non-judgemental/Relaxed

The instructors were also perceived as relaxed, non-judgemental and approachable. Many of the women were not confident in their ability and the feeling of not being embarrassed, no matter their skill level or body size, was important. One woman stated that she liked attending as:

[You] can participate at any level without being embarrassed

I was looking and I was so embarrassed to actually ask my friends to come and teach me. I bought a bike, I kept it for three years, I didn't touch it because I didn't want people to see me you know trying to learn. And I came here and I felt safe, I felt comfortable because there are people like me here that you know want to learn, and they feel ashamed of doing it because people making fun of you ... (Cycling focus group)

They also enjoyed the flexibility of sessions where you could stop if you wanted to or needed to without feeling bad.

Yeah, you can do as much or as little of it as you like and there's no, you know no one looks at you as if to say, no you're not doing it, you know. So it's easier that way ... (Zumba focus group)

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You know all shapes and sizes, you know, they come at first and they're like [worried], don't worry, look, we're all here to have fun. (Multi-sport focus group)

It's not something you can be self-conscious doing ... (Zumba focus group)

A group of Zumba participants compared the atmosphere of their UsGirls experience to more traditional gym/aerobics environments in one of the focus groups.

It's a very relaxed environment, it really is. When you go in the gym and you feel like all eyes are on you and you're like ...
And you see these women with like little cropped tops on and stuff, and you just think ... (all laugh) ... (Multi-sport focus group)

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Like what I saw when I've been to the gym, like they're all stick thin (agreement) and that makes me self-conscious.

And everyone's dead good.

ALL Yeah.

And then like everyone's dead good at doing it and you feel like the fat kid at school at the back, can't do it. (agreement) Whereas when you come to classes like this, everyone's different sizes, everyone's, some people are dead good at doing it, some people aren't ... (Multi-sport focus group)

I used to come [to] that...other one, and I used to think, I'm not doing this ...

Yeah, because they're all dead fit ... (agreement)

With a full face of make up!

I still can't, I still can't, even though I've been coming quite a bit now, I still struggle sometimes and I don't feel like she judges you for that. (Bootcamp focus group)

She's nice, not critical, teaches you how to do it, breaks it down and repeats, she also makes

mistakes. (Focus group, Zumba)

‘no rules’, if you do it wrong it’s ok, no shouting at you, no one is watching you. You get sweaty, you get your stress out, no one stares. Do it for self, doesn’t matter if you go wrong... (Student, Zumba)

The UsGirls sessions we observed corroborated the participants’ views that the atmosphere of sessions was geared towards fun, informality and flexibility. Women clearly participated because they wanted to and in a style that they were comfortable with. They wore casual clothes that may or may not have been designed for sport or fitness activities and varied in terms of body size and shape.

A key aspect of the environment that participants enjoy is the non-judgemental element which is supported in literature on women and physical activity (Allender et al., 2006; Bain et al., 1989; Biddle et al., 2005). While women enjoy working hard and being challenged and in some cases competition, they do not wish to worry about what they look like, how skilled or fit they are, or how they choose to participate. This need for a non-judgemental environment is linked to concerns about body image, confidence and concerns about being embarrassed. Interestingly, the leader making mistakes was seen as a positive as it demonstrated that it was ok to get it wrong and added to creating a more relaxed environment. The coaches as well as other participants were viewed as key to developing a positive atmosphere within the activity sessions.

Summary: Coach

- A friendly and encouraging coach was valued by the women
- Coaches were non-judgemental about appearance and ability
- Coaches had to rely on personal qualities, over and above their technical expertise, to make the programmes successful.

Overall

The UsGirls coaches were deemed to be friendly and welcoming by all of the participants we met. Their friendliness and encouragement were highlighted as particular strengths of their coaching styles. They were seen to give directions clearly, to be easy to talk to, and to make women feel welcome. Some women compared the UsGirls coaches with previous coaches who were ‘stern’ or less approachable. The coaches did sometimes participate in the focus groups which may have tempered any criticism; however, our observations reinforced the sense that there was a positive rapport between coaches and participants within sessions. The programme coordinators we interviewed for the March report indicated that they looked for coaches who were qualified but also friendly and approachable in order to help participants feel comfortable indicating their awareness of the needs of women who may not be confident or experienced.

A particular strength of the UsGirls sessions was the feeling that the coaches and participants were non-judgemental about appearance and ability. Interestingly, the rapport between the staff and the participants seemed almost effortless and ‘normal’; however, many of the participants discussed other classes where the instructors did seem judgemental and unwelcoming indicating that it may

be wrong to assume coaches know how to do this and will automatically be comfortable working in these settings. Women want coaches to provide good technical instruction and contingent positive feedback, and to allow them to develop warm interpersonal relationships with them (Tucker Center, 2007). While these leaders were knowledgeable, they had to rely on other personal qualities to make these programmes successful. There is little research on participants' views of physical activity settings in women's community-based literature but the desire for non-judgemental leadership was also found in research by Bain, Wilson, and Chaikind (1989) regarding the exercise experiences of overweight women. Research indicates that the need for an encouraging and non-judgemental environment is reinforced when working with women you may have low confidence in their abilities or appearance (Bain, Wilson, & Chaikind, 1989); Biddle et al., 2005).

Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the sessions was crucial to women's participation. They were not looking for traditional, highly organised sport-based sessions, nor did they want an aerobics-style setting. They wanted an environment which was fun, informal, nonthreatening, and supportive. The UsGirls coaches were effective at creating this atmosphere by being friendly, encouraging and 'normal'.

Fun

Many young women simply enjoyed coming to the activity because it was 'fun'. A number of women talked about having a laugh:

And you have a laugh don't you?

Yeah, I mean we try to make it fun, in some you can't talk ...

You know you're too busy watching steps and all that you know ... (Multi-sport focus group)

So how is this Zumba class different from aerobics?

It's more dancey and fun, more ...

Yeah the music's more fun and ...

Yeah and it's more upbeat. (Zumba focus group)

You've just got, it reminds me a lot of, like because I don't

really do sport at all, it just reminds me of like school and like the school team and you can all have a laugh and it's friends and it's fun, and it just reminds me of that kind of thing. It's not like forced sport, like we were saying before, it's not like you have to make yourself go to the gym. (Multi-sport focus group)

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It's got to be lighthearted and fun for me, you know, and I think that makes a difference for a lot of people really. (Multi-sport focus group)

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For the women in this study having fun was a key element of enjoyment. A range of elements emerged in this study that made the environment fun: being social, laughing, and having music as well as being in a non-judgemental, encouraging and friendly environment.

Managing Competitiveness

A few women mentioned that they enjoyed the inclusive nature of the activities in that everyone could be involved. This alleviates feelings of not being good enough which are often exacerbated in

competitive situations. While some women stated that they enjoyed competition, it was not the type of competitive environment that revolves around choosing the best for teams or hierarchies of ability. In team sports the focus was on making sure that everyone was involved. We observed a netball match where players rotated positions, rules were modified to keep activity high and everyone involved in a badminton session, and an Olympic style sports festival was designed to encourage women to try different 'events'.

I would say that, like today's session, it was, I felt like all of us were taking part, everyone was, there was no one like out of the group and ...

It's never competitive, so even though we're a bit competitive aren't we?! (ALL LAUGH) But it is just dead laid back, a good laugh, and that's what all the sessions are like. And if anyone wants anything more competitive, we can signpost them to teams, into clubs, and that's great if people go to clubs but a lot of the people who come to the sessions just want to stay at this level don't they? (Multi-sport focus group)

A number of women stated that they enjoyed a level of competition. A group of young women who attended a basketball class stated that they enjoyed competition and were hoping to join a competitive league.

Compete, you get to compete (all agree). In Zumba you just, you don't compete. (Basketball focus group)

Other groups stated that they enjoyed competitive elements to sessions but only up to a point.

I think Zumba you can do anywhere, like there's a lot of Zumba classes and things like that. I'd rather play a competitive game ...
I'll be honest, yeah, I'm a team player.
And it's not competitive in a sense that if you do something wrong you get shouted out ...
(Multi-sport focus group)

It's good, especially for beginners it's good because you just get the feel of how a real game is. So it's fun, even though we didn't win that much games. (Basketball focus group)

Many of the women stated that they enjoyed competition at some level; however, they did not want to feel judged and wanted to maintain high levels of fun, inclusion and enjoyment.

It is more fun without the stress of it being competitive.
Yeah competing for a position, yeah, definitely (all agree).
We're not going to be England now anyway are we?! (Multi-sport focus group)

Challenge

A key component for most of the women was challenge. It is crucial not to assume that a social, relaxed, flexible environment cannot also be a physically challenging environment. Sweating and hard work were perceived as desirable elements of physical activities. (This element is discussed in more detail in the section Perceived Benefits).

One of the aspects of the sessions that women enjoyed was the feeling of having worked hard physically. Some of the women enjoyed the intensity:

You feel like you've actually done a workout.

A workout, yeah, yeah.

You sweat and you feel as though you've done [something], yeah ... (Bootcamp focus group)

I just like exercising. (Cycling focus group)

It's quite challenging as well because like you push yourself more like if you go like on longer rides.

Yeah, and your legs ache! (Cycling focus group)

Other challenges could be getting better at activities, learning new skills, and trying new activities.

I like everything really, I like the challenges. (Basketball interview)

What I'm really impressed about this [coach] is that this is really good, like the thing I said about it being really inclusive (agreement) most of the time they are actually coaching you really well! (agreement) So other people I've had before haven't been as like, you know intensely kind of bringing you up, getting you to play well, play well as a team and work together and everything (agreement). So it's really nice to have that. (Basketball focus group)

Similarly, one of the young women involved in StreetDance said that she enjoyed the challenge of learning moves as well as the challenge of overcoming her anxiety about performing on stage.

One woman who participated in multi-sport sessions also attended an Olympic style festival where participants were encouraged to participate in different activities and their efforts were recorded. For example, they did a standing broad jump, a football agility task, and were timed to see how many baskets they could make in basketball in a set time.

This time was like challenging that you have to do and you can have a go, and there was a timing, like you have to push yourself to do things and to win something. (Festival, multi-sport participant).

The cycling was divided into two groups, beginner and more experienced riders who wanted more challenge on their ride and held their own session, while beginners met at a different time. This allowed both groups to experience an appropriate level of challenge.

Well cycling in a group is a bit hard because you've got to go slow. Also if there's beginners (agreement) that's so annoying (laughing) because you want to go fast and they're going slow, so that's why we have a beginners' session in the morning and then we have like us in the afternoon because otherwise they just slow us down. And then ... Yeah! (Cycling focus group)

The sessions that were observed were typically filled with activity. Women were working hard, sweating, and highly active for the duration of the session. This was an element that they enjoyed along with being social and having fun.

Social

Many women identified that the social aspect of sessions was a key factor in motivating them to attend and creating an enjoyable environment. As stated earlier some women had been anxious that the activity sessions would not be social enough.

I think the social side is really important, I know with the confident riders' group we kind of like add another half hour on to our ride just because we want to stop somewhere and have a coffee and a natter. Sometimes we you know, and the girls as well, you know, we have quite a few teenagers that come, just purely so that they can meet their friends, you know, and it's lovely, and everybody does that ... (Cycling focus group)

I would say that, like today's session, it was, I felt like all of us were taking part, everyone was, there was no one like out of the group and ... Even people I've never met before(!) like you spoke and it was quite nice. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

We get to see our friends ...

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It gives you that support doesn't it? You have that, you feel like you're not on your own, that everyone's in the same boat and everyone wants you to become better at it. (Cycling focus group)

Yeah and we see everyone, so it's fun, we talk while we cycle and ... It's not like we're alone. (Cycling focus group)

Others suggested that they felt that being part of a class and getting to know other people there made them feel more motivated to attend. One group of girls learned about a multi-sport class at work.

Yeah I think like at work we're all, are you going tonight, yeah alright, so then you go because you know ...
If you don't you're going to get hassled! (all laugh)

I keep going because I know Taz might notice when I'm not there (all laugh) whereas in Zumba no one will notice.
Oh yeah that's true, no one really notices in Zumba (agreement). (Basketball focus group)

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Another women in a multi-sport class stated:

Sometimes I think, especially when like numbers were quite low, I kept thinking, well I'd better go because I don't want Ali turning up and ... it gives me a bit more extra motivation to do it! (Multi-sport focus group)

Another aspect of the social nature of the class was the supportiveness of other members. A woman in a beginning cycling class stated:

That's what I used to feel like, then I never opened up to people that I don't know how to ride bike, then people were asking me, I didn't say. Now I can openly say, no I don't know how to ride a bike but I'm learning it. (Cycling focus group)

Some of the programmes capitalised on this by awarding participants with incentives or free sessions for bringing someone with them.

We also do bring a friend and then you can come for free. So if someone comes and brings a friend that hasn't been before, they get the session free, and that's just our way of trying to encourage people to bring more people and build up numbers. (UsGirls coordinator)

I like that you can bring someone. (Multi-sport participant)

I met quite a lot of the girls that come here, and then we normally, what we do is we go down to the bus stop and get on the buses and go down. And also I bring my friends along to the sessions and introduce them to ... (Basketball focus group)

The opportunity to bring friends was identified as a positive aspect of the programmes by many of the participants.

Variety and choice

One of the new themes that emerged was many women's preference for variety and trying new activities. This was particularly true for women engaged in multi-sport but even women in more fitness-based activities identified variety and choice as important to their enjoyment.

And also the choice, like there's not only one sport, we had like a variety of sports, we had badminton, basketball, like the relay thing ...
... so you don't get bored easily. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

when it comes to this multi sports it's good to get away from the netball and then do the tag rugby and something different, and the volleyball you know. That's what I enjoyed, the difference ... (Multi-sport focus group)

Because there was like a wide range of activities, so it's like more of a workout and it's more fun. Because some of these things I haven't played since I was really young, so it's quite fun playing badminton again, and hula hoops! (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

One multi-sport group met for 90 minutes each week and did two activities during that time. The coaches typically chose the first one and the participants the second.

Trying different sports and things that you'd never done before, seeing, like especially with the Olympics, you started to see things and you think oh I wouldn't mind that ...!
Sometimes we'll turn up and they'll say oh do you want to pick what you're doing in the second half and if we've something, like the other week we played a game of [seated] volleyball ...
Because we'd seen it at the Paralympics, we was rubbish at it but we had a go and it ...
(Multi-sport focus group).

One of the positive elements of new activities is that everyone is a beginner.

It's quite good as well, like the new sports, like netball most people played at school I think, but the new sports, everyone's starting off at the beginner's level, so like not many people have played volleyball before, so everyone was like a beginner ... (Multi-sport focus group)

The element of being a beginner was even shared by the coaches who often joined in with activities. In one multi-sport session the coaches participated in some of the novel activities:

Well in some sports like they're learning as well, so you don't feel ...
Yeah, they join in as well, so it's not, they're not staring at you, watching your every move!
(Multi-sport focus group)

These class members liked the coaches getting involved and they also liked that they were not 'perfect' but joining in with them not 'over' them. While the coaches were viewed as knowledgeable they were also viewed as part of the fun and 'normal' people who participants could relate to easily.

In addition, multi-sport sessions were viewed as a good way to try new things which would be more difficult without the support of the group and access to facilities and equipment.

Because as well, so if you're away from here, if you wanted to start a new sport you'd have to buy all the equipment and things, but here it was sort of kind of for free really! (Multi-sport focus group)

And since I've started I've learnt how to play volleyball, tag rugby, tag rugby we loved didn't we ...
Oh it was absolutely brilliant ... (Multi-sport focus group)

Even bootcamp was enjoyed because of the variety.

Yeah I like it because it's a bit like, I like circuit stuff and that ...
It's not just the same thing all the time.
She changes stations? (interviewer)
Yeah it's different every week, yeah.
You don't get bored. (Bootcamp focus group)

Whilst variety was appreciated by a number of women, some of the younger women we spoke to were committed to Streetdance or basketball and wanted to focus on improving their skill and working towards playing and performing to a high standard.

Summary: Atmosphere

- The ability to be social, have music and laugh contributed to the women enjoying the sessions
- Inclusive competition was used selectively
- Competition was managed through using a variety of sports, changing rules and Olympic style events
- Coaches balanced physical challenge with a social relaxed environment
- Women were encouraged to bring friends and family
- Some women preferred to concentrate on a single sport to allow them to improve their skill

Other themes

There were a few other issues raised about programme design that were discussed less frequently, but are worth including in the report as they reveal other aspects of women's experience.

New experiences

Young women involved in activities such as cycling and street dance enjoyed new experiences. For example, in StreetDance young women prepared for an onstage performance in a London theatre. Being able to perform was seen as a challenging yet desirable part of the project which gave them an unusual experience. A cycling group also involved some travel and a chance to go to new places:

Well you get to see new places, because we go to Lee Valley, then we explore new routes. So instead of just like doing the same one, we like turning off here to see where that goes, and sometimes we just have to go back ...

Challenging cultural stereotypes

Some of the Muslim women involved in cycling enjoyed the opportunity to engage in physical activity outdoors. Cycling was chosen as an activity in part because it was possible to do when wearing the required dress. One cyclist stated:

... and people are surprised when they see us! I find it quite funny! It's like, it's showing them that we can do stuff, that we're not ...

That's the main thing, that you can wear your Muslim dress and it doesn't really matter, it doesn't make any difference. ...Because they'd be like oh you can't wear something that's quite long, or you can't wear a skirt and ride a bike, or you know those kind of comments. And I found that here it doesn't matter about what I wear and I can still ride. And I think that sort of boosted my confidence as well, that people weren't putting restrictions that didn't exist. (Cycling focus group)

Women only?

For some women, women sessions only are desirable. While this may be particularly true for some women due to their religious beliefs, a number of women are more comfortable with women only sessions. Almost all the sessions we visited were led by women and all of the participants were female as well. There is some support in the literature that women are more satisfied with training and instruction from a female compared with a male leader (Jowett & Nezelek, 2011). The exception was that girls sometimes played basketball with boys due to small numbers.

For some Muslim women having a female only space is 'very important':

You feel more comfortable to run around, and like sometimes when it's hot we can take our hijabs off. So like when there's men there you feel uncomfortable running and doing things, activities, you wouldn't be open as we are now because it's only women, so we feel more comfortable compared to be with boys. (Festival part of multi-sport)

The female basketball players, however, were relatively comfortable with the boys:

It's kind of funny with the boys because they challenge you more, because they're like, they're more challenging. But it's alright. (Basketball focus groups)

Summary: Other themes

- A few aspects of the programme delivery emerged that were not shared by all women but were interesting, such as gaining new experiences, challenging cultural stereotypes and an interest in female only spaces

Overall

Participants appreciated many aspects of the Programme Delivery of UsGirls activities. The coach is crucial to creating a space that feels emotionally safe for women who are anxious about sporting spaces and who may have had negative experiences of sport and low perceptions of body image, appearance and/or ability. Having a space that is fun, non-judgemental, and friendly is a crucial starting point. Women do want to learn and to be challenged as well but in a nondirective informal way. Variety emerged as important and women enjoyed trying new activities as well as enjoying occasions when everyone was a beginner. Competition could be enjoyable but it needed to be carefully managed to insure it was fun and low key. Coaches used a number of strategies to insure competitive situations remained nonthreatening. A few themes emerged that seemed important but were less shared across participants: the ability to go new places, to challenge cultural stereotypes, and the general preference for female only spaces.

Fun is a key reason that young people enjoy sports (Sport England, 2005) For the women in this study, there was no single factor that ensured that the environment enabled them to have fun. A range of elements emerged such as being social, laughing, and having music as well as being in a non-judgemental, encouraging and friendly environment. Similar to this research, Lloyd and Little (2010: 376) found that for adult women who described themselves as beginners 'confidence and the capacity to learn were enhanced in an environment that was described as "safe," "comfortable," and "fun."' This supports the sense that the 'fun' of UsGirls environments may facilitate the development of the requisite confidence and skills to sustain women's activity levels.

Competition is often viewed as an integral part of sport. Research, however, indicates that young women can view competition negatively as it can highlight low levels of ability, mistakes may be accentuated, and the pressure to be good is intensified. Young women who do not feel able to play well, who make mistakes, and who are not perceived as a desirable team member can feel left out and embarrassed (Hills, 2007). Competition can also be fun, exciting and challenging. UsGirls sport sessions often integrated some form of competition but it was carefully managed to avoid putting pressure on participants or being too serious (Constantinou, Manson & Silverman, 2009). Some girls also wanted to be engaged in more serious competition and while a small number of groups were more competitive, for the most part these girls were signposted to teams involved in leagues.

The social element of lessons was viewed as a crucial element of their success. Sandford, Armour and Warrington (2006) emphasise the significance of social relationships in engaging young people in physical activity. This could mean talking before and after, having a laugh together during the

lessons, bringing friends and family, feeling encouraged and supported by others, and sharing the experience in a friendly environment. Sometimes the women do not see each other outside of class but value the social nature while they are there. Other women who come with friends and family enjoy spending time with them as well as other women. The social element was not necessarily part of the planning of sessions, but seemed to emerge through the fun, informal, and positive atmosphere. In early stages it seems important that participants do have a chance to meet each other and feel included in the group and it may be worthwhile considering how best to inject the social element early on. Women often come with someone they know at first but it can be important for women who do not know each other to become integrated into the group quickly. Feeling part of the group also had a positive impact on attendance as women did not want to let other group members down by not showing up.

We find the idea of variety quite interesting. Many traditional sports opportunities are organised around the idea of commitment to a particular activity or club. Multi-sport appears to contradict this in favour of a more relaxed experience without the pressure of training or 'making the grade'. One of the most successful multi-sport programmes allowed participants to pick an activity on the night from a range of possibilities and also to suggest new ones such as the Paralympic inspired seated volleyball. In some ways trying new things alleviates some of the pressures associated with training and reduces the impact of differences in skill and experience. The perceived benefit of variety to the women may also result from the coaches' focus on the process rather than the product of doing the programme or sport (Glover, 2004). There is consistent evidence that adolescent girls as well as adult women are more motivated in their physical activity if given some choice in what and how they do it note (Lloyd & Little, 2010; Prusak, Treasure, Darst & Pangrazi, 2004). However it should be noted that not all women want variety, preferring instead to develop specific skills in one activity.

Perceived Benefits

The women in this study identified a number of benefits relating to their participation. These benefits served as motivation for them to attend regularly. The key issues they raised included health and fitness, mental health including stress reduction and feeling good about themselves, and weight loss. In addition, a few women mentioned skill development and confidence. These findings are important as they suggest that women are seeing physical activity participation as part of being healthy and managing weight, but are also enjoying it as a way to lower stress and feel good about themselves more generally. Women involved in specific sports were more likely to identify developing skills or getting better at an activity as a benefit of attending sessions.

Health and fitness

A number of women identified health and fitness as key motivators for attending sessions. They felt that the sessions did make them feel better.

Healthwise, obviously that's probably the main thing that you're active and then it probably brings your fitness up. We all came last week, we hadn't been in ages and it was like an hour of basketball and we were huffing and puffing during the drills! ...So I think probably just like you get fitness from running around for an hour, you're more active, and rather than going to the gym and you're working one particular muscle set, you're doing something you're literally moving every muscle in your body kind of thing. (Multi-sport, festival)

I think cycling is especially important as a sport, as a fitness I think it's very good, it's good for the muscles and all that, keeps you fit. (Cycling focus group)

Fitness, it makes me feel better after I've been here (agreement) I feel like a slob if I've not done anything (agreement). I got into that routine of after being, leaving school of just feeling horrible and just feeling lazy, and coming here, I feel better after it, I do it a couple of times a week and then I can maybe force myself to go to the gym once, then I've done my three days ... (Multi-sport focus group)

...it's a good way to keep fit and it's really healthy. (Basketball participant)

Especially as it gets to winter, you sort of sit down and you think I can't be bothered coming but I'm really glad that I do come because afterwards I feel better. And then I think what would I have been doing if I hadn't come here, I'd just been watching telly or something, so ... (Multi-sport focus group)

In addition, one woman stated that the Zumba lessons were helping her improve flexibility in her shoulder.

The stretching with Zumba's helped with my, I get tendonitis in my shoulder, and that's really helped to stretch it out and it's really done some good, so ...

Well more moveability definitely.

Yeah.

It just makes you feel better because you've done something. If you're sat there all day.

I could come home from work and my back's bad but I will come and I'll say, right I'll give it a go, but I always manage because when you're exercising it goes away anyhow really.

The focus on health and fitness as a perceived benefit is quite a positive finding. In this case it is not just an abstract concept or a statement that activity should help but a feeling gained from participating in physical activities and experiencing the effects. The women discussed how their body feels as a result of participation which includes general feelings of well-being, increased flexibility, and muscular development. While some comments are more general – 'it's really healthy' other women provide more specific detail of the ways they feel that their activities are affecting them.

Summary: Health and fitness

- Women felt that their UsGirls sessions were helping to improve their health and fitness.
- Some women were able to identify specific benefits including muscular development, increased flexibility and reduction of injury.

Mental Benefits

In addition to physical health, a number of women felt that the benefits of participation in activity yielded mental benefits. A number of women identified stress reduction as a benefit.

● ● ●
Mentally, it's brilliant isn't it?
It's the stress of all day and then you just have a bit of fun. It's just a laugh isn't it?
So like you say it's a de-stress (Zumba focus group)

Yeah it's a good laugh, it's a good workout.
Yeah it's a good workout, it's yeah.
De-stress! LAUGHS (Zumba focus group)

For some women part of the appeal was having a break and getting out of the house to do something different with other women.

● ● ●

Yeah, it gets you out, instead of being stuck in, it's something for you to get out and do.
A break from normality isn't it, yeah. It's definitely not normal!
(Zumba focus group)

These comments suggest that women are not only enjoying their activities, which are important, they are also finding that physical activity contexts can reduce stress rather than be stressful. This is a strong indicator of a key positive outcome of being involved in activity. The mental benefits also extended to feeling more positive about the self as well as more general feelings of well-being.

It clears your mind I think, exercise ...

It makes you feel better about yourself ...

Yeah, you always feel loads better don't you, after you've done it. (Bootcamp focus group)

It's exercising as well but it gives you freedom, you feel like you're a free soul when you're on bike. And it doesn't ...really make you feel tired like when you exercise in the gym, it's

not like that, so you are outdoor, you know fresh air, and I see lots of people doing other things, and it makes you happy, yeah. I think for mental health it's a must that people do ride a bike, it really does help. (Cycling focus group)

The experiences of the women are supported through research that connects their activity participation to psychological as well as physical benefits (O'Dougherty, Kurzer & Schmitz, 2010; Tucker Center, 2007). It is very positive that women who may have felt alienated or anxious about physical activity are finding it enjoyable and relaxing.

Summary: Mental Health

- Women identified feeling good and stress reduction as key benefits of participating in activity sessions.
- Physical activities were also enjoyed as a break from routine and a chance to get out of the house.

Weight

A number of women said that losing weight was the key motivation for coming to sessions as well as a benefit of attending.

My wedding next year! ALL LAUGH

Yeah trying to lose weight ...

Definitely losing weight, I mean I've lost loads from doing the Zumba and everything, from when I first started, I've lost about 2 ½ stone altogether. So it's definitely working for me, yeah. (Zumba focus group)

Well weight for me, it is weight. (Multi-sport focus group)

But typically, it was not just weight:

And the laugh as well. (Zumba focus group)

These comments demonstrate that the processes which enable women to enjoy their sessions are crucial to sustaining participation and that motivation to lose weight is, by itself, insufficient for some women.

Summary: Weight

- Losing weight was perceived as both a motivation for exercise and a key benefit of participation.
- Losing weight by itself was not a sufficient reason for women to attend UsGirls sessions.

Learning new skills

A few women discussed that they enjoyed activities as they were learning new skills. These comments were more likely to emerge in single-sport focus groups such as basketball, streetdance, and cycling. Some women in a cycling group learned how to ride a bike for the first time in their lives. They discussed how this gave them confidence to try other activities.

I learnt so much!

Yeah it's good, especially for beginners it's good because you just get the feel of how a real game is. So it's fun, even though we didn't win that much games. (Basketball focus group)

I think it's not just being confident riding but it also gives you that confidence to do other things as well (agreement). You know when you feel like you can't do it but then once you know how to do something then you ...

Yeah, then you feel like you can do other things. (Cycling focus group)

In addition, two young women involved in Street Dance discussed that they enjoyed learning new dance moves and routines and felt good about their abilities. For a number of young women the UsGirls activities are allowing them to become more accomplished in their chosen sport. For other women, learning a new skill like riding a bike was seen to impact their self-confidence beyond sport. It appears that for some the UsGirls experience will lead sustained participation in sport or help provide the confidence to try other new activities.

Overall

Health, fitness and weight-loss were key benefits to activity participation. In addition, stress reduction and well-being were identified as positive aspects of participation. Within this research it was clear that women were not just making abstract links between these benefits and outcomes but were talking about their embodied experiences. This is an important finding as it provides examples of women who are from low participation groups and who appreciating participation in health-enhancing physical activity. There is a large amount of research which outlines the benefits of physical activity, but little on how women in community settings experience these benefits. A number of researchers have found that girls' and women's experience of physical activity contributes to a sense of physical and psychological well-being when delivered in a supportive environment that allows choice, promotes positive social support by peers and staff, and is perceived as enjoyable (Allender, 2006; Biddle et al, 2005; Lloyd & Little, 2010; O'Dougherty et al., 2010). Weight has been found to be a key motivator for exercise which can be both positive when perceived as an intrinsic, healthy goal and potentially problematic when reinforcing anxieties about appearance. These findings can be used to inform marketing strategies and to highlight the ways that the UsGirls projects have successfully engaged hard to reach women.

Sustainability

The participants we talked to enjoyed the programmes and hoped to continue being active. There were a few issues that emerged that related to sustainability of programmes. These included age, group size, and volunteering. These aspects of the programmes work alongside the issues such as cost, time, childcare, and transport/location discussed above, which can impact women's ability to attend sessions.

Group Size and Attendance

One of the challenges to sustainability is the nature of attendance and group size at the UsGirls projects. A successful UsGirls project may seem relatively small in size compared to club sports and youth leagues. In addition, attendance can be unpredictable meaning that coordinators cannot rely on a set amount of income each week. The key challenges for young women were time, child care, other commitments, and their own inability to get themselves moving. As one coach stated:

These ladies are very hard to get active, you know, they'll turn up one week, you know you'll have 20, and then the next week you'll have one. And so some organisations, they see that and go oh we're not succeeding. But sometimes the way of marketing and approaching ladies is, it's very time consuming. I think we spend a lot of time calling, we practically call everyone on a weekly basis, or e-mail them on a weekly basis so they don't disappear.
(Multi-sport coach)

Classes were relatively small in number and often had inconsistent attendance. For example, one bootcamp session that we attended attracted 8 participants; however, usually about 10-15 turned up. These numbers were viewed as a 'nice size' (Bootcamp focus group). One multi-sport group was viewed as successful in part because it ran no matter how many people turned up.

It's good here because you can adapt, like there was quite a few tonight, but if there's only two turn up you can still play badminton or something like that. You know that when you turn up you're going to, there's going to be something on, you're not going to be turned away because there's only 2 or 3. Whereas if it was like a netball session or something like that, they would say there's no point staying ... (Multi-sport focus group)

These experiences were replicated in other settings we visited and suggest that programmes need to be able to run with some flexibility in numbers per session, or find ways to recruit larger numbers.

Some of the women discussed factors that impacted their attendance:

Time, because I'm studying at the moment, sixth form, so I have to go to school obviously, then do some revision and then when I get here I'm tired, or the timing's a bit wrong or I'm just, yeah ... But the location's alright, I live quite close to here. (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

[We attend] off and on! Like we came twice, that's about it. But after the Ramadan period we'd like to come more regularly, yeah.
Yeah me too, I mean I was, I just enrolled as a leisure pass member and I've been going to

the women's gym and that's it really, just after Ramadan as well I'd like to come back.
(Festival, multi-sport focus group)

It's getting here, once you've done it ...

Once you've actually done it you feel great for it.

And you go home and you think oh I could do that again! And then you think [I don't know] tomorrow (Bootcamp focus group)

It's free, so that's not a thing either. So I walk, that's my warm up, when I walk over! So no, there's no real obstacles to coming here, not really, no. And the other times I think it's just me! Just wanting a lie in in the morning, probably one or two lie ins that sort of thing.
(Multi-sport focus group)

Even women who enjoy going to sessions may find it difficult to get themselves there. In addition, this cohort of women are also susceptible to life changes around leaving school or University, getting jobs, having children and other factors. These changes also lead to changes in participation levels.

I'm going to struggle to come when I start my new job in September.

Me too probably. And time I guess is the only other thing. I think there are weekend sessions but they're more competitive maybe! (Basketball focus group)

The challenges to consistent attendance have ramifications for coaches seeking funding to deliver programmes.

You have to, I mean it's quite labour intensive actually. And I think that's, I mean when we apply for funding, we always get stuck, because we always ask for more money than other organisations ask for, you know our numbers are smaller, but we have to, what we sort of try to get across is actually it's the quality of the people that we're getting rather than quantity. So we're literally getting inactive people active, literally. (Programme coordinator)

At the moment, many of the UsGirls projects which are successful are still attracting relatively small and inconsistent numbers. As programme coordinators have identified the numbers represent excellent progress when considering the population and the quality of the activities. For funding purposes these may seem insufficient and efforts to get more women involved or to change the requirements for funding is required. The recent formulas which focus on cost per participant may present difficulties for funders and there is a need to consider the challenges facing groups who have low participation rates and the effort required to create programmes that will help them to be more active.

Members of a bootcamp focus group identified a range of recruitment strategies that might help attract young women:

I think a lot of it is word of mouth (talk over each other – agreement)

Make some flyers around in the shops.

Schools as well, maybe ...

Let them know that it's not just for people who ...

You could put them in school, like primary schools, then mums could get to see them then.

That would be ideal that, yeah.

And if you do, say it's a woman instructor as well, I think that would like make a lot, a bit more ...

And it's not just for people who like, I don't know how to explain it but it's not just for people who can do it ...

Summary: Group Size and Attendance

- Successful UsGirls sessions often had relatively small numbers.
- Attendance fluctuated in many programmes.
- It may be that small numbers and inconsistent attendance may need to be considered when developing programmes for this target group.

It's all different ages as well. (Bootcamp focus group)

Age

Almost all of the programmes that we visited catered to women of a variety of ages that included but was not limited to the target group. The primary exceptions were programmes based in colleges and schools including StreetDance, Zumba, and multi-sport. The data from girls and women who are slightly older or younger is included as much of what they say is consistent with the target groups and helps to illustrate the broad range of issues involved in creating sporting opportunities that will attract the diverse group of women within this study.

The UsGirls project was designed with a specific target age group; however, it seems clear that this proved challenging for staff and participants. This suggests that individuals who wish to improve participation levels of women and to enhance the attractiveness of physical activity environments, may need to re-think whether it is necessary to restrict programmes by age.

It appears that age can place unwelcome restrictions on participation. This can be because of the practicality of childcare, the neighbourhood location, or family ties. For example, programmes situated in more isolated community centres tend to attract individuals from estates or neighbourhoods who know each other already. This is a chance to see each other after work regardless of age.

And you meet everyone, and everyone's from around your area as well, so it's like oh yeah I'm down there, and I'm like oh ... we never knew each other! (Multi-sport focus group)

I would like it if it wasn't like age targeted, like saying only from this age to that age. I would, if it was just only for females, no matter what age. (Multi-sport focus group)

For other individuals, doing activities with family members may be important. The intergenerational element is valued by some participants.

So in high school you're literally there with your year group and it's like your with people your own age and that's it. But here you get, you know, my mum comes along and [other] ladies come along and I'm 20 and they're like 40, and they're like, it's literally just like a mix of ages. (Multi-sport focus group)

I brought my mum the second time which was pretty cool....My mum loves it, she's very competitive!... I think the first time we did badminton, she completely beat me! She was like amazing. (Multi-sport focus group)

There were some girls who stated that they liked being with people their own age. For example, one

of the girls in a college Zumba class stated that she would not want to attend with her mother. Another young women in her early 20s stated that part of what she enjoyed about the lessons was being with people her own age. In one multi-sport group the majority of girls were in the early 20s; however, there was one women in her 50s.

You want to come here because it's like fun with like similar aged people, but some who are [older]

There's life in the old dog yet! (Multi-sport focus group)

Interestingly, one participant felt that having mixed ages enhanced the atmosphere of the lessons.

Like when you're with kids that are the same age as you, you find it more competitive because you're like well she can do it and I can't do it, we're the same age.

Coordinators have, in many cases, increased their economic and participant intake by allowing women from all ages to attend but actually only counting the target group within that. The participants themselves seem willing to work with the coaches and the ways that the funding is targeted.

There was a poster in here but it said from age 16, was it 16? (Zumba participant)

14. (Zumba participant)

14 but I phoned up and asked were we alright, because we're older than that obviously, and she said yeah just come. But obviously if people start coming at that age, they'll have to kick us out basically. (Zumba participant)

The coordinators have had to be very strategic in organising programmes and maintaining a level of flexibility and responsiveness to local communities and participant needs.

The UsGirls programmes do have a target age range but the organisers have been reticent to refuse access to women who are from socially deprived areas and who want to participate. The 16 and 25 year old cut off points were perceived by organisers and participants as unnecessarily limiting. For programmes trying to achieve sustainability the potential to attract larger numbers is a real asset and in order to attract sufficient numbers having a larger age range is essential to success. For the participants, having diverse age groups can be perceived as a strength of the programmes. Future initiatives may wish to consider age-based targets more carefully as they may actually serve to limit rather than facilitate participation in some communities.

Summary: Age

- Most UsGirls programmes catered to a range of ages including and beyond the UsGirls target.
- Programmes based in schools and colleges were more focused on younger women.
- Limiting age may impair programme coordinators ability to attract sufficient numbers.
- Programme coordinators and coaches would prefer not to exclude women based on age.

Volunteering or coaching

We met few women that wanted to volunteer in our focus groups. Most were happy simply to attend but did not really anticipate further involvement. The exceptions were typically younger women who either wanted to gain qualifications or felt it would benefit their CV. When we talked to women though we also found out that many simply did not view themselves as having the requisite skill.

I always think that I can't do it, I don't know why, just because I'm, I don't know, just, because I don't know the rules of the game properly, or probably, because I'm not the best at them, ... I don't know how to play the game properly or something.... I've done a lot of volunteering this summer, so it's definitely something I like and I want to keep going, just kind of ... I would [not] volunteer for sports. (festival, multi-sport focus group)

During a bootcamp focus group a number of women thought that they would like to be able to be a coach.

Being a leader

I'd love to be able to do something ...

I'm just getting my weight off ...

That's me, my weight.

Once it's off, I think yeah, I'd like to do something like that. (bootcamp focus group)

One young woman felt that she would like to volunteer in basketball:

I like the basketball a lot, and if I had the chance to teach little kids basketball, I would like, I would ... (Festival, multi-sport focus group)

One of the programme coordinators explained that it was sometimes difficult for women to attain qualifications due to the structure of the programmes.

Well with the coaching qualifications, a lot of the time the qualification structure doesn't suit the women that we are trying to get active. So for example they'll do it over three evenings and you know that these ladies either have kids or they're not allowed out in the evenings and things like ... So what we try to do is arrange for those courses to either be run over a shorter period of time, over one day instead of three evenings, or we try and you know get it to a female only, so have a female instructor and a female session so that they can be comfortable again. You know there's a number of factors that women take into consideration. (Multi-sport organiser)

While StreetGames has been very successful in their volunteer programmes, many of the groups we visited through UsGirls had few if any volunteers. Although, we would note that there were a number of cases of success stories as well. One factor appeared to be women's confidence in their abilities and another seemed to be age. Younger women seemed more likely to volunteer while many of the women at the upper end of the target age group preferred to attend. There still may be room to consider alternate forms of volunteer opportunities for these groups that entail less significant levels of commitment of time.

Summary: Volunteering

- Relatively few women expressed an interest in volunteering.
- Those who were interested were typically younger women.
- Both age and confidence seemed to impact women's feelings about volunteering.

Overall

There were three key factors that could impact sustainability of programmes for 16-24 year old women. Participants, coaches and programme coordinators said that successful programmes for the target group typically attracted relatively small numbers. This means that coordinators are often trying to run a large number of small groups to reach their target numbers. In addition, attendance figures for this group are often inconsistent and coaches need to be prepared for weekly fluctuations. This inconsistency may in part be a function of the varying demands on time that young women face including domestic obligations, college responsibilities, work, and relationships. Organisers use a number of strategies to address these issues including incentives and membership cards which do have some success. The majority of women in our focus groups did not express an interest in volunteering but preferred to simply attend sessions. Those who were interested were typically, but not always, younger women. Some women expressed concern about their ability levels in relation to volunteering. Programmes that we observed varied in terms of the size and consistency of attendance; however, all of the women we spoke to enjoyed the activity sessions and planned on continuing to participate if possible. A number of groups expressed dismay about the potential end of the UsGirls sessions 'we don't want it to stop'. The UsGirls projects have engaged many relatively sedentary women who are enjoying their physical activity experiences. Hopefully, they will continue to grow in confidence and commitment to participation demonstrating that UsGirls has provided a blueprint for delivery to young women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

• • •
I've already decided to carry on when it starts again because I've already signed up to the e-mails, so they'll send you an e-mail reminder when it's starting up again. ... I think I'll just come along because I've had, I always have fun when I come and I like the fact I can bring people, so ... I think I'll always carry on coming anyway just because I like it! LAUGHS (Zumba focus group)

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Appendix A

Active Women Programme Coordinator interview guide

- A. Find out about the projects and what they are trying to achieve (increased participation but what, if anything, else?)
 - a. Target population
 - i. Special requirements or needs, predictions of interest, links to activities
 - ii. Known already
 - iii. Recruitment, marketing strategies
 - b. Activities
 - c. Number of projects
 - i. Characteristics of each – are the goals/outcomes/target population the same.
 - ii. Which one(s) best for the research.
 - d. Any activities associated with sport – education, health, childcare, education.
 - e. Goals for individual development – self-esteem, confidence, skill development, engagement/citizenship...
 - f. Goals for programme – interdepartmental links, NGB input, school links,
- B. Specific delivery plans – do they match what we have.
- C. Timeline
- D. Communication
 - a. What is the best way to maintain contact with staff and participants
 - b. Is network/social media an option
 - c. Language
- E. Consent for young people – are they happy with information packs for u16.
- F. Consent for staff – anonymity, confidentiality, no repercussions for things that do not work.
- G. What would they like to get out of the research? How much would they like to be involved?
 - a. How much do they think the participants would like to be involved?
- H. Our needs
 - a. Communication
 - b. Interviews
 - c. Helping to arrange focus groups/interviews

Streetgames interview guide – coach/leader

Introductions

Ask participants to introduce themselves (and age?)

Experience of coaching

How did you get involved with the StreetGames programme?

Was there something about working with this population in particular that attracted you to this activity/programme?

Do you coach other groups/activities? What is your preferred activity/group?

Experience of working with this programme

How does coaching this activity compare with your previous experiences of sport?

- How do you find the coaching/participants/facilities...?

What are your priorities for the sessions that you do with StreetGames?

- Fun, skill development, behaviour change, instruction,

How would you describe your leadership style?

- Have you modified it for working with this group of young women?

What do you enjoyed most from this coaching experience?

What are the biggest challenges?

What could be changed to make this programme better?

- Increased resources, better equipment, more effective marketing

Girls' participation

What are the girls' biggest challenges in terms of getting involved and staying involved?

- What are they e.g. time, money, childcare?
- How do you manage these?
- E.g. going into leisure centre, no friends
- How do you feel about these now?

What strategies work best for helping young women to stay involved in physical activity?

- Knowledge, Increasing skills, awareness of leisure environments?
- Addressing self-confidence, embarrassment issues
- Increasing social networks, Friendship groups, relationship with staff
- Changing the sporting environment – busting stereotypes of sports cultures
- Fun and enjoyment
- Linking to other activities such as youth work, health services...
- Timing of activities, Type of activity

Do you have any success stories?

Participation with StreetGames and UsGirls

How effective do you think the USGirls programme is?

Does the 'doorstep approach' or other StreetGames values make a difference?

Other info

How long will you carry on with the programme?

Anything else we should know?

Focus group interview guide

Participation

How many times have you been to the activity/programme?

When did you last do organised sport/physical activity before this?

- Are you doing other activities as well as this?

Experience of participation

How does this activity compare with your previous experiences of sport?

- How do you find the coaching/accessibility/cost compared with other experiences

How could this activity be done better in the future?

Who have you talked with about this programme?

- What do you tell them?

What have you enjoyed from doing this programme?

How do you feel that this activity benefits you personally?

Barriers/Facilitators to participation

Are there things that make it difficult to come?

- What are they e.g. time, money, childcare?
- How do you manage these?

What were the things you were worried about before coming here?

- E.g. going into leisure centre, no friends
- How do you feel about these now?

What are the key factors that motivate you to come?

Other info

How long will you carry on with the programme?

- How will you decide this

Are you thinking of trying other things?

Have you considered becoming a volunteer?

Anything else we should know?

Appendix B

Overview of methods

The methodology for this project originally was designed to focus on 5-6 case studies which would have provided in-depth knowledge of a few of the UsGirls locations. We agreed with the UsGirls staff that we would get a better sense of what was going on if we expanded the scope of the project to include more locations. This was primarily due to our feeling that the projects were so diverse that we would potentially miss out key information by focusing on case studies and some of the case studies took a bit longer to get started than we anticipated. We feel that this modification has greatly increased the usefulness and applicability of the findings providing a broad sense of factors that are influencing and contributing to the success of UsGirls projects. Within this we have maintained close contact with two of the original case studies and have, therefore, maintained a sense of how they progressed throughout the first year of the programme.

Our approach to the data collection has been participatory in that we have worked closely with the UsGirls team and the participants to insure that our research reflects their needs and contribute to the development of the UsGirls programmes. Our experience suggests that conducting research that feeds into programme development rather than post-delivery evaluation is little used and effective way to work and we thank the UsGirls team for working with us on this. We were involved in a recent symposium on relationships between University researchers and funders and reading in academic literature indicates that this method of working has been discussed more in theory than practice and is worth noting here.

The data was collected in two parts:

Part 1 focused on interviews with Programme Coordinators and some participants.

Part 2 focused on interviews with participants and some coaches and programme coordinators.

The methods we used were interviews, observations, and focus groups. During the research process we made 20 visits to different programmes for data collection including interviews with 14 programme coordinators and visits to 13 activity sessions for focus groups.

Programme Coordinators

We collected individual interview data from programme coordinators. These interviews were typically long (30 minutes to 2 hours) and detailed and focused on an array of themes regarding participant characteristics, programme design and delivery, and sustainability (see Appendix A for the interview schedule). These were primarily conducted in person but there were two occasions where we held telephone interviews.

Participants and Coaches

Data from participants and coaches was typically collected in focus groups either before or after an activity session. Some was collected during sessions when women were sitting out. Observations were also used to contextualise the data from the focus groups. The focus groups were typically shorter in length 10-30 minutes and typically included between 4 and 8 women depending on how many were willing to participate. These were often conducted in sports halls, sitting on the floor or benches and sometimes in noisy rooms. (See Appendix A for the interview schedule).

We are aware that programme coordinators felt some anxiety about the focus group interviews and this led to some challenges in access as they very much wanted to insure we saw things 'working'. As stated in the introduction, this meant that our data is very focused on the views of participants involved in successful programmes. However, we are not too concerned as the focus on this data collection is on what factors contribute to successful programmes and hopefully the information from these contexts will provide useful insights that can be used to inform other projects and training. Ideally we would have attended a few more activity sessions but we faced some challenges in terms of summer break and slow starting in autumn and concerned programme coordinator. We still have people getting back to us now and will feed in any additional data by either updating this report or submitting separate case studies.