

## Supporting women and girls to be active

### Purpose of Report

For information

**Is this report confidential? No**

### Summary

Make Space for Girls and ukactive have been invited to talk to the Board about the work they are doing to support women and girls to be more active and to discuss some of the key themes that are likely to emerge from the CTS Board's call for evidence to support women and girls to be active.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Supporting local people and places

#### Recommendation(s):

That the Culture, Tourism & Sport Board:

1. Share local examples of work to support women and girls to be active; and
2. Identify key points from the presentations that should be followed up as part of the call for evidence and support to the sector.

#### Contact details

Contact officer: Samantha Ramanah

Position: Adviser – sport, leisure, physical activity, parks, green spaces, social prescribing

Phone no: 07887 503 136

Email: [Samantha.Ramanah@local.gov.uk](mailto:Samantha.Ramanah@local.gov.uk)

# Supporting women and girls to be active

## Background

1. At the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board on 13 September 2023 members agreed to focus the Board's efforts on supporting councils to improve participation and physical activity levels in the least active groups.
2. This Board will take a thematic approach over the next two years, taking an in-depth look at specific groups that are statistically identified as the least active. The purpose of this work is to create a resource for councils, share effective practice within the sector and to strengthen our lobbying lines.
3. The first group the Board will focus on is women and girls. A call for evidence was [published on 20 February 2024](#) asking councils and interested parties to submit best practice case study examples of projects that are supporting women and girls to be active and to submit evidence of the barriers, issues and potential solutions.
4. The Board identified the call for evidence will build on the Board's contribution to the [DCMS Committee inquiry into Women's Sport](#) and also support councils to achieve local objectives set out in the Government's recent "[Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#)" which has a specific target to increase activity levels in 1.25 million women and one million more children and young people by 2030.
5. [Make Space for Girls](#) and [ukactive](#) have been invited to talk to the Board about the work they are doing to support women and girls to be more active and to discuss some of the key themes that are likely to emerge from the call for evidence.

## About women and girls activity levels

6. Research shows that women are persistently less active than men and that the gender gap starts from a young age. Being physically active is important because it has been shown to improve health and wellbeing, manage and prevent many long-term health conditions, improve social connectedness and decrease feelings of loneliness and exclusion. Yet despite it being hailed as a miracle cure, 4 in 10 women are not active enough to ensure they get the full health benefits.
7. Over the past five years the Active Lives survey shows little progress has been made:
  - 7.1. In 2021/22, men were 4.8 per cent more active than women, similar to the gender gap recorded in 2015/14.
  - 7.2. In 2022/23, boys were 6.8 per cent more active than girls, the same as the gender gap recorded in 2017-18.
  - 7.3. Disparities exist within ethnic groups. Black men are 11 per cent more active than black women. Asian boys are 10 per cent more active than Asian girls.

8. Women and girls' attitudes towards prioritising and participating in physical activity significantly differs to men and boys.
9. Insights from the 'This girl can' campaign highlight that women feel that spending time with friends and family or studying/working should be more important than being active.
10. Thirty-one per cent of women say lack of time is a factor when trying to increase the amount of physical activity and exercise they do. Likewise, girls report prioritising schoolwork over being active.
11. Girls report more negative associations and lower levels of enjoyment compared to boys.
12. Forty-eight per cent of teenage girls say their mum is their biggest motivator when it comes to exercise.

### **Make Space for Girls**

13. Make Space for Girls campaigns for parks and public spaces to be designed for girls and young women, not just boys and young men. Teenage girls are at the centre of all their work because they are the experts on their local spaces and understand how to make things better. Make Space for Girls believes there is no 'one size fits everyone'; all their voices need to be heard for change to happen.
14. They work on a range of projects which improve parks and other outdoor spaces in order to support opportunities for teenage girls and improve their mental and physical well-being and their access to public space. This includes collaborating with a wide range of institutions, including universities, health trusts, councils and developers to create change.
15. Last year they worked with Homes England to produce a briefing for councils on [Inclusive spaces and places for girls and young people](#). The briefing highlights when facilities are provided for teenagers, these usually take the form of multi-use games areas (MUGAs), skate park and BMX tracks. None of these feel inclusive for teenage girls.
16. Councils responsibilities under the Public Sector Equalities Act (PSED) which requires councils, when exercising their public functions, to consider proactively the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; this involves removing/reducing disadvantage, meeting differing needs, and encouraging people to participate in activities where their participation is low; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
17. A survey of 400 girls in 2022 (Women in Sport) asking them what would help them to be more active in their own park highlighted that not feeling safe is a key barrier, an overfocus on being active can prevent girls from voicing their views on

their preferences around design such as social seating, walking loops, spaces that are broken down into smaller areas so that no one group can dominate, outdoor gyms that are arranged socially and not weighted towards men and public toilets.

18. Some of the areas where councils can drive progress in this areas is to work internally with teams who are responsible for making changes and giving them the information they need. Identifying barriers in existing policies, use new policies to create more inclusive spaces, use the Public Service Equality Duty to tackle the issues, collect data, review tender processes, consider gender sensitive budgeting and engage with teenage girls.
19. Biography: Susannah Walker is the Co-Founder of Make Space for Girls. Susannah varied career has included working in museums, as a tv producer for the BBC and Channel 4 and writing several books. She became outraged when she realised that not only had her local council only provided outdoor facilities for teenage boys, they didn't propose to do anything about it either. She particularly enjoys gathering data and finding great examples of spaces for teenage girls from other countries.

## ukactive

20. ukactive exists to improve the health of the nation by getting more people, more active, more often. It provides services and facilitates partnerships for a broad range of organisation. It serves over 4,000 members and partners from across the public, private and third sectors, from multinational giants to local voluntary community groups. We does this by facilitating partnerships, campaigning and providing membership services.
21. ukactive have been working with Sport England's 'This girl Can' campaign on a project called 'Safer Spaces to Move' which is designed to help women and girls to feel safer and more confident while being active in gyms, fitness spaces and leisure facilities.
22. The project provides resources, training and guidance for the sector to reduce some of the barriers women and girls face in taking part in physical activity and creating spaces that are inclusive and enjoyable for all.
23. Facilities play a huge part in supporting women and girls to be active. The recent active lives survey for children and young people showed 908,000 more children and young people taking part in gym and fitness compared to five years ago, which is a potential growth area. Additionally online communities offering digital workouts has proven popular with women and girls as well as hybrid options which has built confidence, knowledge, ability and motivation at home that then can enable them to take that next step in their fitness and physical activity journey by trying something new within a facility.

24. A guide has been produced with practical recommendations for gyms and leisure facilities that are easily applied to enable the sector to help get women and girls to the point of stepping into the door of their local facility and ensuring they have a positive and welcoming experience right from reception through to the gym floor, swimming pool or a group exercise class.
25. Ukactive are established partners of the LGA and recently co-hosted a sector development roundtable bringing together local government representatives with the private sector to explore the current challenges and opportunities facing delivery for residents. This was the start of a series of engagements to identify areas where closer collaboration between public and private sectors can deliver more effectively for local residents.
26. Biography: Harriet Jones is currently interim Director of Sector Development, acting up from her role as Head of Consumer Engagement for ukactive. She is currently leading on ukactive's consumer engagement work, helping to develop the sector's understanding of consumer expectations, barriers, behaviours and trends so that we can increase participation in physical activity. She played a key role in the development of ukactive and This Girl Can's new guide for gyms to help them improve their services for women and girls, including practical tips for making them safer and more comfortable spaces.

### **Implications for Wales**

27. Learning from these projects will be relevant to Welsh provision, and we are engaging Welsh authorities in the call for evidence.

### **Financial Implications**

28. This work is being delivered using existing staff resources.

### **Equalities implications**

29. This work forms a core strand of the CTS Board's commitment to tackle inequalities. Improving the reach and impact of sport and physical activity services will boost the health of local populations, relieving some of the pressure on social care and the NHS, and boosting economic productivity through helping people back into work.

### **Next steps**

30. Officers will hold at least two more roundtables with ukactive to fully explore the opportunities for collaboration.
31. The recommendations from both Make Space for Girls and ukactive will be considered as part of our analysis of the Call for evidence and the subsequent support offer developed for the sector. We invite members to highlight key points of interest from the conversation for inclusion in this work.