

How to... 'engage with young women in challenging circumstances'



Why it's important

Participation rates for young women in challenging circumstances, such as those not in education, employment or training (NEET), those involved in crime or at risk of offending and young women tackling issues such as substance misuse are likely to be much lower than for young women who are in more stable situations. These young women are more likely to live in underserved areas, have a low income, low levels of confidence and/or low levels of aspiration. They can often feel isolated and can therefore be hard to reach in order to promote activities to them. They may not have played sport or been active for a long time so feel out of touch with physical activity. This group of young women often face multiple barriers to playing sport and will need a 'whole person approach' so that sport can be accessible to them.

Factors to consider

Engagement

These young women may be easier to find as a group as they may already come together as a result of other partner agency work. They are likely, however, to be difficult to work with and encouraging them to attend sports sessions is likely to be resource intensive and time consuming as they face many barriers to participation. Partnership working with agencies already working with these young women can be more successful as they will already have built trust and rapport. This approach is also more likely to result in higher numbers of similar young women attending the sports sessions which is in turn more likely to result in a better session, more fun, new friendships and higher retention rates.

Confidence and self-esteem

Low confidence levels will be a significant factor in engaging these young women in sport and activity sessions. It is unlikely that these young women will go to an unfamiliar facility outside of their comfort zone to a session run by a coach that they don't know, playing sports that they might not have played before or for a long time. These young women are likely to have varying levels of skill, coordination and fitness and varying degrees of experience and knowledge about different sports. Sessions must be delivered in the right style with confidence building playing a key part.

Trust and the right coach/leader

Building up the trust of this cohort of young women is vital. This often means getting to know the women and understanding their circumstances before trying to introduce physical activity into their lives. Again, this can be time and resource intensive. Having the right coach/leader with the right attributes who can relate to the young women is essential.

Personal resilience

It is important to think about incorporating personal development activities linked to sports activities that enable young women to build greater personal awareness and resilience in order to sustain new positive behaviours. For example a personal awareness activity that enables individuals to explore internal and external factors of who they are – this helps people to think about things like their physical presence, how to embrace new experiences and learning how to adapt to new situations and people.

Cost

Cost can be a 'killer factor' for young women in challenging circumstances as they are likely to be on a low income, often receiving benefits and therefore need to justify every penny spent. These groups are often eligible for concessions and projects may consider offering discounts for these groups.

Timing of sessions

Daytime sessions are often more attractive and may be more likely to attract these young women especially if they have children at school or nursery /playgroup. Daytime activities are more likely to be perceived as safer (than at night) and address barriers such as curfews.



Case studies

Middlesbrough FC Us Girls project

The Middlesbrough FC Us Girls project set up a new multi-sport session aimed at NEET young women. The session was based in the heart of an underserved community close to the Tees Valley Women's Centre. The Us Girls project staff worked alongside the Women's Centre and a local employment agency to refer their NEET young women to the session emphasising the potential benefits to the agencies such as increased confidence, self-esteem and better interpersonal skills.

The session is free of charge and runs on Tuesday mornings. The timing of the session helps to ensure that the group is made up of young women in similar circumstances.

The coach for this session was selected on the basis of the right style and level of experience for working with this group of young women as well as a sports coaching qualification.

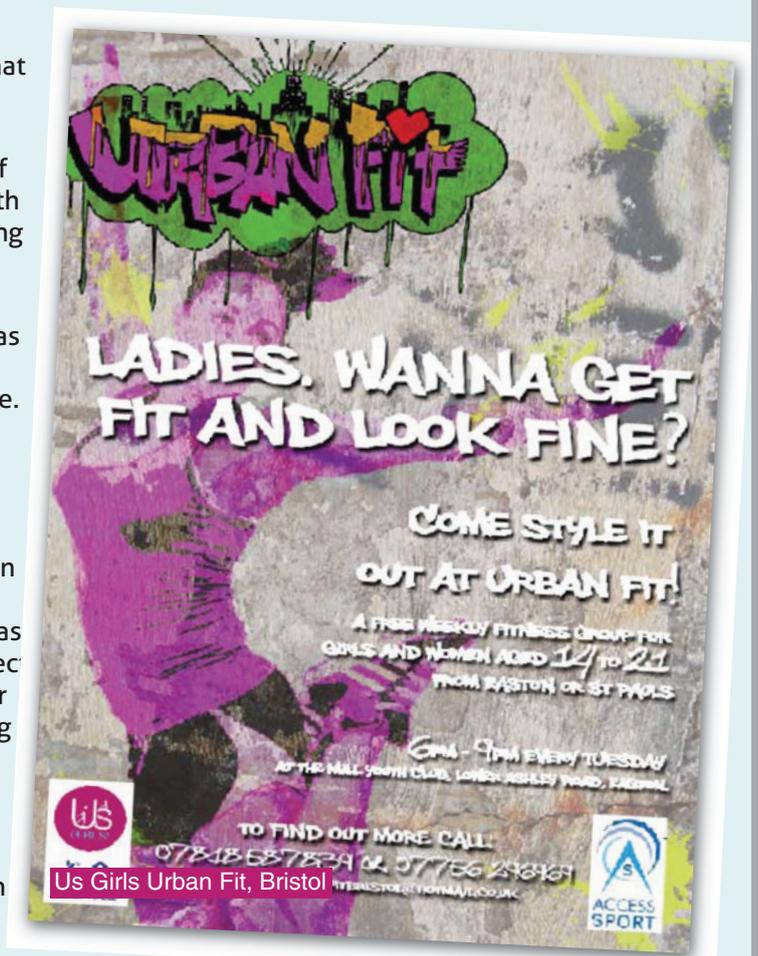
The women at the session had low levels of coordination, skill and fitness so 'hidden' coaching was used to develop their skills as well as adapting the activities so that they could do them at their own pace. The young women had a choice of activities to do.

Access Sport – Us Girls Urban Fit, Bristol

In 2011, Access Sport worked in partnership with Avon and Somerset Police on a project that focused on prevention of male gang membership. This project was so successful that they are now running another project aiming to attract females at risk of criminal activity or antisocial behaviour – Urban Fit. This club is attracting participants through referrals from Youth Offending Teams, Youth Services, Housing Associations, Police Youth Team and other agencies. Through the engaging activity and incentives that are being offered it is expected that participants will then spread the word and gain new recruits outside of the referrals.

Urban Fit is a general fitness project based within a youth club which is given free of charge for a whole evening. This means the club can run multiple activities and cater for a wider audience. Routines are fresh, modern and the leaders are starting to give the girls some responsibility for running parts of the sessions. The use of social media is working well in gaining awareness in the local area.

One of the club leaders works for the Police in their PR and Marketing department and the other used to be a Special Constable and is now a fitness instructor, however both are doing this voluntarily within their free time.





Chesterfield College Us Girls
Activity Programme

Top tips

- Partnership working with organisations that are already supporting young women in challenging circumstances is key to success. Think about training up their staff to deliver the sessions as part of their own activity programme at their own facility or involve their staff in the sessions.
- The right coach/leader – There needs to be a balance between coaching qualifications and 'style'. Although the coach/leader needs to have the right level of qualifications, s/he needs to have empathy and needs to be sensitive, good at building rapport with the young women as well as being enthusiastic about sport. It is important to have an understanding of the women's background and issues they face. Consider pairing up the leader with a social worker to run sessions initially.
- The right group 'dynamics' – It is better to run a session specifically aimed at young women in similar circumstances, therefore work with an existing group. The session needs to be aimed at young women with a similar skill level/playing ability otherwise participating alongside women that are better than them may make them feel self-conscious and they are less likely to join in.
- The use of non-sporting activities – Sessions may have a better chance of being successful if sport is linked to other activities so that it isn't seen as the focus of the session for the young women. Subtly incorporating links to other services such as social housing options or money management workshops will encourage participants to return each week.
- The right kind of session and environment – There needs to be an emphasis on fun. The session needs to be informal and based on a choice of activities by both the coach/leader and the young women. Participants must feel safe and be able to trust session leaders.
- Training – Don't expect every sports coach/leader to be skilled in this area of work. An element of training/upskilling/mentoring may be required.

Further information

www.usgirls.org.uk



/UsGirlsGetActive



@UsGirlsTweet

