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Us Girls: Peer Research a Year On

Introduction

A lack of engagement in sport amongst girls and young women aged 11-18 has been a growing concern. Insight from Women in Sport in 2022 suggested 43% of girls who thought of themselves as sporty at primary school, lost interest in physical activity as teenagers; deemed as a missed opportunity as they have positive opportunities to leverage. In comparison, 64% of boys aged 11 to 18 continue to perceive themselves as sporty and 24% of boys who thought of themselves as sporty in primary school have lost interest in physical activity as teenagers.

Project Overview

In 2021-22 StreetGames and SEWSCAP (South East and Mid Wales Collaborative Construction Framework) joined together to develop a collaborative Peer Research and Social Action Project in five low-income communities throughout South East Wales (Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Powys).

The overall aim of the project was to build upon and update learning previously gathered via StreetGames led Us Girls activities. To help tackle key barriers to participation that girls living in low-income communities typically face in taking part in sport/physical activity and as a result, provide them with a safe, friendly, engaging environment and more importantly with activities that they have an interest in taking part in.





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Project Overview Continued

The project set out to engage young Peer Researchers from 5 locally trusted organisations (LTOs) to upskill and support them to undertake consultation with their peers – i.e., other girls in their community around what an attractive sport and physical activity offer could look like in a post pandemic world.

From this consultation the Peer Researchers were tasked with planning and delivering a social action project, in addition to a business plan to pitch to SEWSCAP in a Dragons' Den style event. In total £78,157.23 was awarded to enable each group to take forward the Peer Researchers' proposed plans for a period of 12 months - demonstrating just how important and impactful peer consultation and youth voice can be in local communities. The project delivery ran between February 2022 and Dec 2022 .

12 months on from the Dragon's Den event, how have the social action projects impacted on the communities in which the young people live?





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POWYS YOUTH SERVICE

Context

The Powys Youth Service peer researcher insight revealed that there was a perceived lack of facility availability and accessibility for young people, especially girls. There was the feeling that in relation to the spaces that were accessible, girls did not feel comfortable to express themselves or explore activity. Football was the preferred sport with 26%, with netball, dance and other sports suggested. The insight further identified the gym as a facility the young people would most like to see improved and the local leisure centre was the most popular place where the young people would like to participate in activities. To support this demand, the initial project aim was to provide a minimum of one weekly girl focused activity session per week in the school term, complemented by additional opportunities and trips in the school holidays.

Impact

Since receiving the funds to deliver on the initial project aim in Newtown, the provision has gone from strength to strength, consistently providing safe spaces for girls to participate in sport and physical activity. This initial delivery scope expanded to offer support to girls at another youth service site in Welshpool.





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POWYS YOUTH SERVICE CONTINUED

Impact

The funding supported the purchase of new equipment and covered specialist coaching to create opportunities for girls to experience, and continue to explore, sports including skateboarding, boxing, table tennis, dance (youth led offer), pool, and football. The funding also covered prepaid access to the 3G pitch at the leisure centre, with the girls knowing they can book the space for no cost to them. Long term gym memberships were also secured for those who preferring to access this. Partnership working with local football and rugby clubs, provided further opportunities to access mainstream sport offers free of charge.

Some girls are now taking part in mixed football sessions with the Swansea Foundation, with the funding purchasing kit and equipment so they could participate. A few of those are now looking to get involved with playing for local woman's teams. As part of an local inspiration opportunity the young people attend matches at Newton AFC and experience a complete wraparound offer with complementary food and a pre match kickabout.

Within the Youth Club, there is now a 'Girls Only Party Room'. This provision has increased the number of girls coming to the facility, opening up community environments to girls and broadening the footprint of safe space access in the area, supporting girls focused youth club sessions in the holidays. There was free food and drink at every session, with hygiene boxes in the toilets.





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POWYS YOUTH SERVICE CONTINUED

Impact

The project has also supported four other youth centres in Powys, Welshpool, Llandrindod Wells, Brecon, Ystradgynlais, to increase girl's participation in activities and sports.

Other highlights over the year include inspirational trips to sporting events such as the British Athletics Championships, the Commonwealth Games and the Rugby League World Cup.



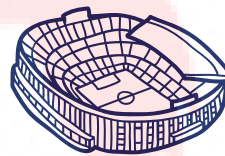
1500

Young Person Contacts



FIVE

Youth Centres
benefiting from the project



THREE

Major Events
attended



12

Different Activities





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One Year On ...

ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST

Context

Aneurin leisure
Improving community life

The Aneurin Leisure Trust peer researcher insight revealed that within the Blaenau Gwent area there was a populace of young females who have experienced adversity in their lives and are at risk of being removed from their families and/or being permanently excluded from school. These young women often find themselves in 'fight or flight' responses due to the adverse experiences that had shaped them. Therefore, it makes it difficult to emotionally navigate school environments and can manifest as a barrier to their learning and development.

Promoting
Resilience

The project encompassed 6-weeks of small group-based activity delivery, working with young women of secondary school age. The provision was delivered in collaboration with Supporting Change Team, ABUHB Child & Family Community Psychology, Parc Bryn Bach. The project was centred around bringing to life the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) recovery toolkit, incorporating additional therapeutic activities and outdoor exercises to support the young women to become more self-aware, develop their skills and knowledge and build on their strength and areas of development.





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One Year On ...

ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST CONTINUED

Aneurin leisure
improving community life

Impact

The six-week project had an incredible impact on the young females (aged 12-15). For the first time they saw themselves in a positive light and could identify and share their goals and aspirations for the future.

The outdoor activities; abseiling, paddleboarding, and rock climbing have empowered the young people with a positive experience around being more adventurous; open to trying new things and overcoming fears, whilst the project as a whole created an environment where they could develop their communication skills, in a safe space, when socialising with others, supporting them to make friends and develop trust in others.

One participant from the group has returned to school after a six-month absence, and another has started volunteering at a Friday evening StreetGames session with the support of two Us Girls team mentors.





One Year On ...

ANEURIN LEISURE TRUST CONTINUED

“I’ve started reaching out to people to get help. It makes me feel better about myself knowing that people are there.”

Participant

“I’ve started going back to school and because of this I’ve started having something to look forward to. I want to leave school having achieved my GCSEs, not be told to leave because of my behaviour.”

Participant



SIX

Young People’s Lives Changed



THREE

Outdoor Adventure Experiences



ONE

Young Person Volunteering as an Us Girls mentor



ONE

Young Person returning to education after time away





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One Year On ...

BETTWS BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB

Context

The Bettws Boys and Girls Club peer researcher's insight identified there was a lack of affordable sport and physical activity opportunities for girls in the area. The surveying process revealed a high percentage of members took part in no extracurricular activity, and for those young people not in education, employment or training, they were not active at all.

To be able to meet the demand for female, non-male focused, low-cost sports opportunity, for young people from Bettws and the surrounding area, the US Girls project group partnered with AZ Elite to offer a cheerleading, dance and gymnastics style provision for young females to access.

Impact

The impact of the project has been profound on a personal level for the young females. They have become more active, more social and more confident in themselves. Cheerleading can be an exclusionary sport due to the costs involved. This opportunity has supported the young people to develop the skills, and access kit and equipment to participate in an invaluable experience. The group have now progressed their training to the competitive arena and are competing in regional competitions in Wales. At a community level, the project has enhanced a wider community engagement piece, helping to positively connect the youth to the area.



One Year On ...

BETTWS BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB CONTINUED

Impact

Some of young people involved in this project have now participated on a national cheer team for a year, placing first in their category at the ICC Western and achieving zero deductions at the UK nationals and one participant was offered the opportunity to try out for the senior squad at AZ Elite, as well as accessed advanced coaching qualifications in both cheer and pom. She is on track to potentially receive sponsorship for her continued participation within AZ Elite as an athlete in her own right.

The young people involved in the project continue to advocate and champion female focused club activities and initiatives, such as the period dignity mission, and they continue to support each other to navigate challenges they face.

A core legacy of the project has been the embedding a youth led approach at the LTO where in future all decisions are made following consultation with young people.

Clyblau Bechgyn a Merched Cymru



One Year On ...

BETTWS BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB CONTINUED

“It’s been awesome taking part in the Us Girls project, I never knew how amazing this opportunity would be and how far I would have come because of it. It’s an experience of a lifetime and I will never forget it!”

Participant

“It’s an absolute joy to see the young people be welcomed into the team at AZ Elite. The confidence I those attending has grown so much in such a short period of time, it is almost hard to believe.”

Jonathan Price, Project Lead



35

Young People engaged



32

Sessions delivered



365

Approach to embedding youth voice at LTO



1st

Placing in competitive experience



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One Year On ...

TREHARRIS BOYS & GIRLS CLUB



Context

The Treharris Boys & Girls Club peer researcher insight identified that there was a need for a safe space for young females to express themselves and be physically active. Through further discussion and consultation, with young people and staff, the idea of converting a disused room at the club into a dance and fitness studio, came to light. This would enable female focused sessions to take place in a comfortable, safe space and became the project aim.

Impact

The impact of refurbishment of the disused space at the club, resulted in opening of a dance and fitness studio space in late November 2022. The design and scheduling of dance specific offers continue to be youth led, and responsive to the needs of the young people attending the youth club.

A cohort of 5-7 young people regular use the dance studio, practicing between 1-3 sessions per week. What was originally designed as a provider led provision, quickly became youth led, driving future aspirations for further empowerment of the young people to lead on activities at the Youth Club.

The weekly practices have culminated in a dance performance during the Centenary BGC Celebrations, with a main stage being added to the hall. The girls performed 5 songs in front of an audience of over 100 visitors, demonstrating their growth in skills and confidence.



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One Year On ...

TREHARRIS BOYS & GIRLS CLUB CONTINUED



Impact

The lead youth volunteer, supporting the dance provision, has now completed the Street Dance Leadership Level 2 course, and leads on sessions for younger group of girls, and also won the Outstanding Volunteer in a Youth Setting Award through the Academy of Success.

Outside dance studio use, the space has been available for supervised multi-purpose access by the young people, with staff empowering them to use their initiative in terms of activating the space for positive club and community outcomes. Activities have included youth voice meetings, a space for interviews, boxing and a party space. The renovated space has also been made available to other groups and partners in the local area including well-being groups, Active Merthyr, Cwm Taf Health Board, and Empire Boxing.

Through the success of the project the Youth Club are now seeking partnerships to continue to enrich the activity offer, whilst accessing opportunities for staff and young people to be upskilled to diversify programme provision. Long term this will create a sustainable and fun environment for the future.



Volunteering

streetgames.org



One Year On ...

TREHARRIS BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB CONTINUED

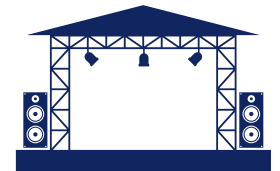


have really enjoyed teaching the younger girls dance routines during the UsGirls sessions. I am looking forward to completing my dance leadership qualification. It was scary doing the first session, but I am proud of myself for doing it.”

Young person leading sessions

“The change of use and refurbishment of the Dance Studio has surpassed all our expectations. The space provides a fantastic addition to the youth club and enables our young people to participate in dance sessions shaped to their needs.”

Youth Club staff



THREE

5+

ONE

100

Weekly dance opportunities

Organisations benefiting from using the new space

Award for Outstanding Volunteer in a Youth setting

Audience size @ Centenary Celebration



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One Year On ...

VALLEYS GYMNASTICS ACADEMY



Context

The Valleys Gymnastics Academy peer researcher's insight identified that there was a need for a safe space for young females to express themselves and be physically active. The project aims were to improve participation levels in sport in physical activity for girls and women aged between 12 and 25 and reduce the number of girls and women having a fear of failure in relation to sport and feeling out of place when confronted with being physically active. Only one other club in the area offered 'girls only' sessions.

Impact

The project supported a group of on average 20 young girls, on a weekly basis, to access sports, events and activities that they would have never been able to access due to cost, location or a perceived gender bias. Activities were delivered by a blend of internal staff and external organisations which the funding supported.

The project linked closely with Wales Golf and as part of an inspiration opportunity the group were invited to the Welsh Golf Open. Other sports the young people got to experience included netball, dodgeball, bench ball, tennis, rounders, volleyball and gymnastics. Aside to getting active, there were opportunities to have afternoon tea, pamper parties and team building sessions to develop communication and teamwork skills, encouraging the participants to socialise with a more diverse group of people and broaden their friendship circles.



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One Year On ...

VALLEYS GYMNASTICS ACADEMY CONTINUED

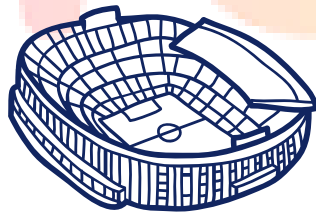
Impact

As an organisation the project has activated how youth voice informs the shape of the young person offer at VGA moving forward. It has created role models within the project and has shown younger participants that girls and young women can have a voice, and they can use it to shape the world around them. To support continued growth, success and sustainability of the offer as a legacy of the project, VGA plan to upskill the young coaches on multi-skills course in order to the youth workforce to build on their knowledge, skills and confidence to continue to create engaging environments for other young people to thrive and explore their potential.



30

Young People Engaged



ONE

Major Event



10

Different activities



ONE

Training and development opportunity for young people

“Molly loved yesterday’s session and cannot wait for next week. Thanks to the young leaders involved.”

Parent quote

