

VALLEYS GYMNASTICS ACADEMY

Peer Researchers



Valleys Gymnastics Academy (VGA) is a community gymnastics club, regularly providing outreach projects into the local area. The peer researchers, Olivia, Mia, Carys, Charlie and Maddy are athletes, young leaders and coaches within the club who believed it was important to work on this project to work towards reducing the inequality, known as the gender gap in sport. "Meeting new people", "attending new events" and the "rewarding" nature of the project encouraged the girls to get involved with the project to help the club reach out into the wider community.

StreetGames posed the following research question:

'What does an attractive sport and physical activity offer look like for girls and young women, in a post pandemic world?'

The peer researchers opted to use a survey to gain initial insights and later, held a "pilot event using qualitative research with post it notes, writing down what they think to get a broader understanding of how they felt and their opinions". Carys said the biggest challenge the group faced was "thinking about how we were going to get people from outside of our gym to do the survey, through schools etc which was hard because maybe some schools didn't like to hand out surveys. We wanted to include everybody in the community because if we just had people from our gym, we weren't targeting the right people because they already participate in exercise". To overcome this, the girls utilised their connections in local schools to share the survey and Maddy worked with her headteacher to arrange for the survey to be shared online by the school.

As teamwork became a high priority for the VGA peer researchers, the group opted to work together on all aspects of the project rather than dividing responsibilities. This allowed the group to grow in confidence and become a "strong" team, keen to utilise their findings and progress with their plans.

The research suggested girls and young women wanted to participate in netball, gymnastics and rounders, as well as being eager to experience new activities. The funding allocated by SEWSCAP will be used to "run sessions every Saturday, 90 minutes long, for 40 weeks of the year". On top of this, the group are exploring options to offer reward days for regular participation to "do something completely different such as paddle boarding, rock climbing or trampolining". The aim of the sessions is to "get girls out of the house, socialising with others, meeting new friends and taking part in exercise". Carys said at the pilot event "we could see the start of it, so we know now that we can make an impact if we carry on with our sessions".

When asked if they enjoyed taking part in the project the group all replied "yes!". Mia said "I think it's good for the experience. We're quite young so it's good to get this experience now before we do something later in life". Also, Carys said, "it's also fun because we're meeting new people and becoming more confident, for example, it's easier to speak in front of people now". This was echoed by Olivia, saying "we needed this project to boost our confidence".

What would you say to another young person who's thinking of getting involved in StreetGames in the future?

"Definitely go for it, it's a good experience for not just yourself but it's good experience with other people, how to work with others and different learning styles. It's good to see the other people around you progress and the girls in the community feeling more comfortable".

"It shows you how much of a difference sport can make in someone's life".