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STRIDE  
ACTIVE

# HERE GIRLS CAN FESTIVAL

September 2022

Funded by



# OVERVIEW

Here Girls Can was first introduced to Herefordshire secondary schools in 2018, using the platform of the national This Girl Can campaign. Since then, the format of delivery has been adapted in order to engage more schools and young women, and ensure we can make sustainable changes in their physical activity levels. On 30th September Stride Active and Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire delivered the second Here Girls Can Festival at Foley Trading Estate.

The festival followed the same principles that were established by young people ahead of the pilot event earlier in 2022.



## *No. 01* — **Not being judged**

Girls wanted to be active with those similar to them; for most this excluded boys and 'sporty' girls. They didn't want to be with anyone who would make them feel intimidated for not being very good. Girls wanted to take part in individual rather than team activities in order to help avoid this.



## *No. 02* — **Feeling comfortable**

It was really important for girls to be comfortable and confident to take part. Most wanted to be able to wear their own clothes, which are baggier and more covering than PE kit.



## *No. 03* — **Choice and mood**

Girls wanted to be able to have a choice of different activities that varied in intensity (some calm, some high intensity); some of the more traditional sports were still of interest to primary-aged girls. Girls wanted shorter bursts of activity.



## *No. 04* — **Fun**

One of the main motivators for girls to be active, was to have fun. They wanted time to be with their friends, to chat during activities and have music included too. Other reasons for being active were to get stronger, fitter, healthier and more confident.

# DELIVERY PARTNERS

Following the success of the pilot festival, all delivery partners engaged in the event again, alongside new deliverers who also have a facility on the trading estate. Deliverers offered a free or subsidised rate to be involved in the festival, helping to make the project financially viable. Consequently the direct delivery costs for the festival are just £14.39 per participant. This enables participants to be offered a breadth of activities, thus increasing the chances of young people finding an activity that's right for them.



***Yoga***  
**Hereford Yoga Centre**



***NetFit***  
**England Netball**



***Karate & Kickboxing***  
**The Combat Academy**



***Skating***  
**The Core**



***Aerial Hoop***  
**Pure-Studios**



***Fitness***  
**Bull Functional Fitness**



***Dance***  
**The Starlight Company**



Of the activities provided, five have their own facilities on the trading estate and the remaining activities are accessible within a close proximity. In addition to the physical activity sessions, participants also experienced 'Girl Talk' sessions, delivered by Girls Champions, with support from event staff. In small groups, girls discussed a number of myths, worries or questions about physical activity.

# GIRL TALK

In small groups, participants spent time discussing scenarios, questions, or myths which were chosen by a former Girls' Champion.

None of my friends want to do PE/sports anymore. What should I do?

Are some sports 'girls' sports and other sports 'boys sports'?

I don't like doing PE because I feel like everyone is judging me

What are your feelings towards body positivity, being active, being here today?

Can you still do PE on your period?



On the whole, girls felt strongly that they should carry on taking part in sport and PE regardless of what their friends' attitudes are: "Carry on, carry on, carry on" and "Do what you want to do for yourself, not for someone else" are some of the comments which reflect this. Those who felt this way also acknowledged that it was an opportunity to make new friends who also enjoyed sport. However, girls did also want to understand why their friends didn't want to take part: "Talk to your friend about why they don't like to do PE" in order to try and help them stay engaged: "Try out different sports with them". Girls therefore recognised that they could be influential in keeping their friends active, whilst also identifying the opportunity to make new friends by continuing themselves. Based on the sample of girls who responded to this question, in principle it appears that girls are less influenced by their friends when it comes to maintaining their participation in physical activity, however we do not know if this translates into action or simply reflects advice they would give others.

In contrast, girls were very aware of being judged when being active. Whilst some shared opinions such as "Oh well, it doesn't matter what they think" and "Don't pay attention to them", more girls talked about their own experiences of being judged: "Most of the time we do PE inside and I fall and everyone laughs"; "Sometimes I can't run quick and I get judging"; "Insecure about height and appearance when in sport". The importance of taking part alongside friends did show more prominently in response to this question, compared to the previous. Several girls commented on this: "I do get a little nervous around people but I try to ignore the other people who look at me. I do feel like I am not as comfortable without my friends"; "I feel judged by some people but when my friends compliment me I feel better".



Girls advised those who felt judged to "tell someone" - be it a teacher, friend or Mum and ask for help. Clothing was identified as an issue and cause for judgement; the wearing of skorts and feeling uncomfortable was mentioned by several. Most notably, girls specifically spoke about feeling judged by boys as opposed to other girls, particularly around areas of competency and boys thinking "they're better".

I think it's better if  
boys and girls do separate  
P.E because I feel like  
sometimes we do get judged  
if we make a mistake.

Boys could say  
'UR TERRIBLE' but  
it can still hurt  
even if it's a joke.

Despite this, girls were almost unanimous in their beliefs that there is no such thing as boys' and girls' sports. Responses included: "sports are just sports and everyone can do it"; "No matter the gender they can do whatever they want". A lot of comments transcended sport and instead referred to gender equality more generally: "Any girl can do anything that boys can do". There was equally a lot of support for boys to do any sport and not have to conform to traditionally male sports: "Girls and boys are to do whatever they feel like".

Girls and boys  
are equal

Not treated  
equally by the boys -  
"you can only play if you  
go on the other team"

Whilst girls believed sports should be gender neutral, they did comment on perceptions that others have: "I don't feel like there is sports for different genders but boys do think its for boys only for football or rugby". "What is seen as 'boys' sports should be available for girls to do as well" was a shared opinion, but some girls wanted the opportunity to do these away from boys: "Girls only sessions so they [boys] won't shout"; "Girls should do all sports but maybe split boys and girls".



Opinions were split when discussing if you can do PE when on your period. Some girls were definite in saying "Yes, it might be hard but yes, yes, YES". However, the majority said "It depends on things like cramps or heaviness of the period". Physical symptoms, such as cramps, appeared to be the most significant reason preventing girls taking part, with very little mention of fear of leaking, being judged, or energy levels which is reflected in other research. Another theme that affected participation was comfort; this related to comfort of menstrual products, the type of activity: "Only certain sports; ones that don't contain too much movement - pad/tampon could be uncomfortable" and clothing: "it might be more comfortable to wear trousers". Girls believe that they should have the choice to decide whether or not they participate depending on how their body feels.

On the whole, girls showed positivity towards physical activity; they recognised that "It makes you feel better and good. It makes people more happy"; "It's good to be active. It relieves your stress". Some girls remained negative about being physically active, either wanting to be lazy or just not liking it, thus the festival had no bearing on their feelings or attitude. For others, attending the festival made a difference to their attitudes: "I like doing what we are doing today"; "Positive after being here today!"; "I like it and I feel better today after being active". Attitudes to body image were very mixed, ranging from comments such as "All bodies are AMAZING and unique" to "Don't like my body". For some, attending the festival changed their own perceptions of their body: "I feel less FAT", "less chonky".

I feel better about  
my body after today!  
♡



Other comments also demonstrated a change in attitude, behaviour or confidence as a result of attending the festival. At the start one girl described herself as "nervous and shy" and by the middle of the day she felt "good and grateful". Others were more positive to try new things and felt "Good because we are all girls".

# GIRLS' CHAMPIONS

Girls' Champions are Year 10 young leaders; they play a vital role in supporting participation at the festival through using the Sport England 'like me' approach. The Girls' Champions receive training prior to the event which includes safeguarding, myth busting and planning for different scenarios which they might experience on the day.

The Girls' Champions believe they make a positive difference to other young people at the festival and think it's important for participants to have role models and people to talk to who are nearer their own age. When asked why they think their role is important, responses included:

“ I think having someone closer to their own age was nice  
Because they looked up to us  
Because I think the girls found us easier to talk to ”

Girls' Champions recognised how they were able to help participants:

*"Someone felt shy during the warm-up so I spoke about my own difficulties of being judged to bring them comfort"*

*"Helped her do an activity which she found scary."*

*"I helped the girls to feel more accepted and like there were people more like them doing it too."*

*"I connected with someone over music and talked more about shared insecurities"*

100%

said they 'definitely' enjoyed being a girls' champion, reasons for this included:

- Experiencing a 'leadership' role
- I loved seeing the change in confidence in the girls during the session
- Helping girls to feel more confident and comfortable in themselves
- Being a role model for a person for the younger ones to look up to
- Feeling like you're inspiring young girls to get more active
- I really liked being a champion because I got to help girls like me to enjoy exercise and improve their attitude towards it

# FEEDBACK

During the festival, teachers noted lots of positive differences within their pupils:

- As it was just girls in the group, pupils got more involved than usual.
- Lots of smiles and confidence to work together with girls from other schools.
- They've taken part in everything and not walked away as usual!
- Mixing with other schools made the girls nervous to begin with, which could potentially be detrimental.
- All pupils got involved which wasn't expected; one participant said "I actually liked making new friends".
- Some girls were a bit teary going straight into dance to begin with, but engaged really well with yoga after because it was calmer. Every activity they did, they got better and better. One girl struggled in the first 3 activities and was then really good at skating - she'd found something she was good at and found her confidence.
- For some girls it's a big thing just being here - sometimes they would rather watch than do.

Girls' Champions provided words of advice and feedback to participants:


**Love yourself and enjoy  
PE as much as you can!**

**You're amazing!**

Sports can be many things, not  
just the typical 'netball' or  
'rugby' from school.  
Find what works for you.

**Keep active and  
be happy. Forget  
your worries**

Don't let anyone tell you  
what you can and can't do

**Keep moving! Don't let  
anything discourage you  
from doing what you love** 

I hope you can take away from this that it  
is okay to talk to others & to share your  
feelings about anything.

*Your own opinion is the only opinion that  
matters. Be brave and be bold!*

*I want them to know that they can't do PE  
wrong, and whatever they do, as long as they  
put in the effort, they will be amazing.*

You can do anything if you put your mind to it



# IMPACT

The festival is designed to encourage long-term behaviour change; by creating an ethos and culture that participants, young leaders and teachers take back into school with them. Teachers and Girls' Champions shared some of changes that they want to make when back in school to reinforce the message of Here Girls Can and benefit more pupils.

## *Girls' Champions*

- *I'll help people to get involved in PE and to feel accepted*
- *Helping friends in situations during PE*
- *Be a role model to younger years*
- *Keep being involved in sport and helping out with the younger girls in netball club*
- *Be more open to people about problems & periods*
- *Support all girls in PE and be kind*

## *Teachers*

- *Girls only clubs*
- *Yoga for interventions*
- *Incorporating activities from functional fitness*
- *Looking at alternative activities like aerial hoop as it had such a positive impact*
- *Team work and mixing difference groups*

*"On the day, it was wonderful to see the girls speak out, smiling and full of enthusiasm. Some of the girls we chose, are often influenced or dominated by other girls within the school. I've also noticed since we've back in school, 2 of the girls have been more chatty and confident to ask questions.*

*Thanks so much for the day, it really was VERY special."* **Teacher, Weobley Primary School**

*"Wow!!!! Where do I start?*

*When I got home Friday night my daughter was "buzzing" after her day to the "Here Girls Can Festival". At first, she was very reluctant to take part when she was first told. After talking with her she decided she would partake, however, feeling very nervous about it. As soon as I walked through the door on Friday night, she met me at the door and bombarded me with all the activities she had participated in. I have not seen her this happy for a long, long time! It has boosted her self-esteem immensely and so lovely to see. She told me what she did, showed me some moves she did in yoga and combat and got me to do it with her. She was also so pleased that some of the girls at pure studios remembered her. I just felt I needed to send this email to thank you for giving her the opportunity to attend this festival and boosting her confidence so much."* **Parent, BHBS**

Longer-term impact for participants who attended the previous festival included girls being more confident and willing to give things a go in PE (Ivington) and attending extra-curricular clubs and being more involved (St Thomas Cantilupe).

## CASE STUDY

Kingstone High School have fully embedded the ethos and learning from the previous two festivals, back into their school. Their case study demonstrates that whilst the festival is a one-off event for participants, sustained behaviour change has occurred as a result.

"Over the last two years, with support and guidance from the Here Girls Can Festival, we now have an invite only club for the previous attendees from the festival. The 12-16 girls come to a lunch time run by the Yr11s who were Girls Ambassadors on the day from our high school. The KS3 girls invited feel part of a little community and seeing them communicate with one another in a happy environment whilst being physically active is very special.

Some girls from my previous cohort who attended the festival now participate whilst on their periods, with rest breaks, water and at a low intensity. Sometimes they need a little encouragement and reminding about what the festival taught them about how exercise is beneficial when you are on your period. They are much more open to discussing their problems with me whereas before it was seen as a bit of a taboo. I too, have learnt about adaptive exercise whilst girls are on their periods and wish to continue this knowledge for the future cohorts.

Each year, the students ask if it is running again and if they can go back to it, showing how inspiring and successful it was. We now have a This Girl Can board in our PE Department with pictures from the past two events which is a great talking point for others, as well as increasing the girls football participation too with the recent successful Euros event. One of our students has written a statement which is laminated on our girls board, about the event which I would like to share with you below, directly quoted from our current Year 9 who attended as a Year 8:

"Where do I start? I am so grateful to be chosen to take part in This Girl Can. It was an amazing experience. I cannot describe how comforting it was to be with a group of girls that understand you and how you feel. It is an experience I will never forget! From the yoga, to the rollerblading, and even the girl chit chat. Ever since participating, I have felt more included and confident with different age groups and myself. It made me realise that I am not on my own! "I am hot and not bothered".

This student has chosen to take a sports leaders course in Year 9 and also assists with the Year 7s at football club on a weekly basis. This has broadened her previously limited social circle and has expanded her activity levels in sports and PE."

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following organisations for their support and involvement in our Here Girls Can Festival:

- The Core (Skate Hereford)
- Herefordshire Netball Development Officer (England Netball)
- Hereford Yoga Centre
- Bull Functional Fitness
- The Starlight Company
- Pure-Studios
- The Combat Academy
- St Mary's RC High School & Kingstone High School (Girls' Champions)



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Find out more @ThisGirlCanHW & @stride\_active

