

Here Girls Can

Report

March 2023

Delivered in partnership

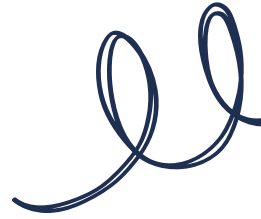


STRIDE
ACTIVE

Funded by



Progress to date



Here Girls Can has evolved in Herefordshire since 2018. In March 2023, Stride Active and Active Herefordshire & Worcestershire delivered the third Here Girls Can Festival at Foley Trading Estate. The festival is a catalyst for creating sustainable behaviour change in girls' physical activity levels. To date we have engaged almost 350 unique participants from 26 schools.

The same deliverers once again offered subsidised rates to be involved in the festival, helping to make the project financially viable. Consequently the direct delivery costs for the festival are just £16.80 per participant. Activities at the festival included: dance, rollerskating, yoga, NetFit, aerial hoop, kickboxing & karate and functional fitness. Girl Talk sessions also accompanied the physical activities.

The festival followed the same four design principles that were established by young people ahead of the pilot event in March 2022. A year on, we tested these principles with participants at this festival; the findings of which will be detailed in this report.

Design Principles

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.

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.

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.

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.



Testing our insight

We have continued to use Girl Talk sessions at the festival to break up physical activity and also provide a safe space for girls to talk, ask questions and dispel myths. This equally provides us with an opportunity to test our insight, check and challenge our design principles and find out changes in girls' motivations and barriers to being active.

Participants were given postcards to write their own personal responses, anonymously. These were then given to teachers to take back to school and consider if they could be actioned. The postcards asked:

What do you think would help more girls get active / enjoy PE at your school?

Write 3 words to describe how you want to feel when taking part in physical activity.

Happy	20
Comfortable	15
Energised / energetic	10
Proud	8
Confident	5
Having fun	5

What 3 words

In addition to the top words listed, girls also shared these desired feelings:

Calm Joyful Warm
Inspired Excited
Normal Safe Supported
Not being judged Sporty
Amazing Free Motivated



What girls would change

"I think maybe letting us pick the teams so you can be more comfortable with your team."

The feedback received from girls can be assigned to four themes; the environment, clothing, activities and feelings.

Comments around the environment include both the physical and social environment within PE. Having music during PE lessons, which is appropriately chosen by students was one of the most popular responses. This was closely followed by who features in the PE environment. Several comments identify the desire for girls-only groups, being with friends, choosing your own partner/team and "split groups for people who enjoy and don't". Feedback on the physical environment centred on wanting to be warm by having "more indoor sports" and "not going outside in the winter".



Clothing and changing were identified as barriers to being physically active in school. Some girls stated a preference to "wear our own clothes that makes us feel comfortable". We know that this is not feasible, but some concerns around PE kit have the potential to be addressed.

"No musty bibs."

Some girls find PE kit uncomfortable, particularly requesting "longer skorts" or "not having to wear a skort in PE over leggings." Changing in front of peers was frequently mentioned. "Going into school in your PE kit", or "cubicles in the changing rooms" were some of the recommendations made by participants.

"Taking input from students on what sport."

A broad range of activity suggestions were listed by girls, from specific sports through to how activities should be chosen or set up. Specific sports such as tag rugby, football, Bollywood dance, gymnastics and meditation were requested by participants.

"More single activities (no pairs)."



Opportunities to try something new, having more choice of activities, or a greater variety were popular comments. Several girls also requested "less rough games" or "less contact sport."

Whilst a lot of the comments on environment, clothing and activities evoke particular feelings, girls did also provide very specific feedback about how they did, or did not want to feel during PE. Feeling included and not being judged were cited on several instances.

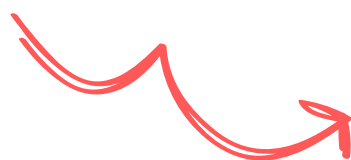
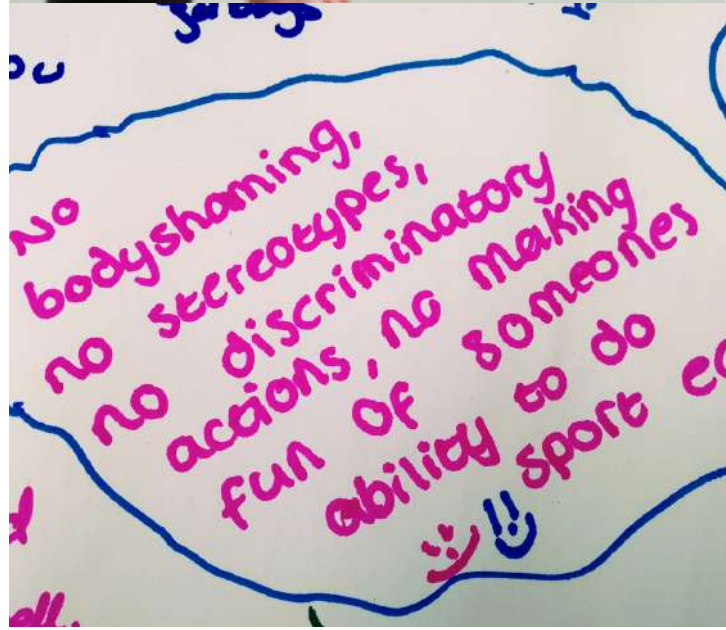
"Not being left out."

There were only two comments linked to periods, but both of which said that girls should not have to do PE when on their period. This indicates that we still need to educate girls about what exercise can feel attainable whilst menstruating.

Design principles

During the Girl Talk sessions, we asked girls to reconsider the four design principles formerly identified through consultation with their peers: not being judged, fun, feeling comfortable and mood/choice.

They were asked to order them according to importance, but also identify if anything is missing. Feeling comfortable and not judged scored highly. This is also reflected by many of the comments that girls shared on their postcards. However, feeling comfortable now stems beyond clothing choices and instead is more encompassing.



"No judgement – girls should support each other, we need to make sure everyone feels comfortable, we need to make people be happy and feel safe wherever they are."

This process has reinforced the design principles of the Here Girls Can festivals. It has also highlighted other factors that are important to girls which could be incorporated in the future:

- Set a task/achievement to aim for
- Complimenting and growing confidence
- Getting fit
- Feeling inspired and proud

Girls also identified "someone to help me through the way" as being important. One participant credited Ruby, a Girls' Champion as being important in helping to build her confidence. These comments support the integral role that Girls' Champions have in creating a safe and supportive environment.

Girls' Champions

Feedback from Girls' Champions aligns with this. When asked why they thought their role was important, responses centred on them being role models, helping to build

confidence, making participants feel comfortable and to provide support.

"To be a role model and show the girls they CAN do it."

"To guide the girls and make them feel comfortable."

Girls' Champions did this in a number of ways. "I stood with one of the girls until she wanted to do the activity". Others became a partner for participants, provided one-to-one support and encouragement.

Not only do Girls' Champions make an impact on the day, they also support culture change and sustainability back in their school. All identified an action they wanted to do back in school, such as supporting year 7 girls, leading younger girls, "share what we learnt" and even set up their own girls' talk.





Project impact

As the Here Girls Can festival is a catalyst for wider, sustainable change, it's important that it achieves impact on the day and beyond. The project impact therefore includes noticeable behaviour changes whilst participants engaged in the festival and reported changes after.

On the day

Teachers noticed a range of different behaviours in their students whilst they were at the festival. chattier than normal, coming out of their shell, growing in confidence, a willingness to take part, laughing, smiling and joking were all observations made by teachers. Peterchurch Primary School told us that their pupils were feeling more confident away from the confident girls at school;

"These girls were able to shine. Different girls today."

Whitecross School had two students who volunteered to do a demonstration in kickboxing and karate, whereas they would never have normally done this in school. Our Lady's School observed how girls were a lot more interested and outgoing compared to how they are in school PE lessons.

BHBS described how girls began the day with "their backs up against the wall" but by the time they had completed aerial hoop, they were "buzzing with a sense of achievement!" For many, it was the first time they had felt comfortable as the festival creates a level playing field.


Riverside Primary shared feedback from one of their students:

"'Best day ever!' from a very quiet, shy and anxious girl."

We asked schools what they'd learnt from attending the festival and what they would implement or change back in school.

Some focused on the activities which had engaged girls, such as dance, NetFit and yoga. They considered how these could be incorporated into PE lessons or the wider school day. Others wanted to recreate the feel of Here Girls Can by having their own festival, girls-only sessions, smaller groups, or having music in the playground. Several commented on the possibility of having their own Girls' Champions to support more girls back at school.

During the day, students from Our Lady's School suggested that they should have period products available in the school toilets.



After the festival

The impact that schools have reported post-event vary from changes in individual participants to whole-school developments. Participants now feel confident enough to access physical activity in their local community; young leaders are wanting to support more girls in their own school through their Girls' Champion role and fundamental changes are being made by PE departments, such as the introduction of a sports bra on PE kit lists.

"The event has seen a mind shift in the girls views towards physical activity and my mindset when planning activities and extra curricular clubs. At the start of the day, they were quiet , nervous and reluctant to partake in the warm up. As they day progressed, they became more comfortable, smiles started spreading across their faces and laughter was heard. In the journey back to school and on our arrival they were bursting to tell everyone what they had been up to. Since the event they have asked if they could do certain activities again and asked if we could run clubs. As a PE coordinator it has made me think about the activities we offer and believe a shift away from traditional sports may be the way forward. The girls blossomed during the day and it would be a shame to lose this momentum."

Withington Primary School

"M is diagnosed with ADHD and has controlled medication to alleviate her symptoms and behaviour. M is a bit of a misfit in her PE group and some of the other students do not always respond well to her. Although she is engaged and always brings her kit, getting her to socialise and partner up with other students is always a bit of a challenge. which can affect her confidence and therefore her activity levels. M was really excited that she had been chosen to attend the event, she doesn't attend extra-curricular activities in PE therefore never gets picked for anything. M has told me that she intends to start attending the aerial class that is based in Ross on Wye."

Anonymous to safeguard the participant



"The girls' talk was incredibly powerful, providing them with a safe environment to discuss issues/concerns they previously shied away from. As a result of this event and the feedback received from our girls, we have started to make a few changes in school as well as implement some of their ideas. Firstly, we have now added 'a sports bra' to the school PE kit list. Secondly, our Girls Champions are in the process of organising their own take on 'Girl Talk' providing all girls within the school the opportunity to talk to them about issues they are struggling with. Finally, we are looking to implement a Here Girls Can club specifically targeting those who struggle to engage with physical activity."

The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School

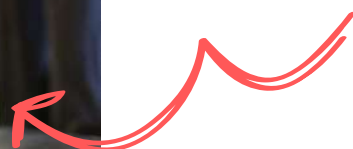


"My daughter took part in your Here Girls Can festival with her school [...] she's been having a lot of problems mostly down to early puberty at 8. She is in counselling and has really struggled taking part in things. When she got home she was so so happy, couldn't stop talking about her day."

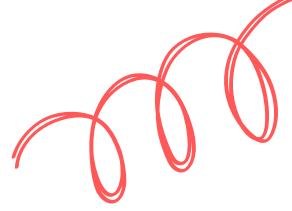
As a result of attending the festival, this parent has enquired about other activities which her daughter could take part in.

"The event inspired me and I would like to set up a Fairfield girls can in school and get staff and students involved with different activities that can take place after school."

Teacher, Fairfield School



Acknowledgements



We would like to thank all of the schools who attended, for prioritising girls' physical activity and wellbeing. In particular, we would like to thank the following schools for allowing us to train and work with Girls' Champions:

- The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School
- Kingstone High School



The festival would not achieve the impact it has without the deliverers, who play a crucial role in setting the right environment, providing support and encouragement. We're incredibly fortunate to have a group of local deliverers who are really invested in increasing parity in girls' physical activity. Our thanks go to:

- Jenny-May While (Hereford Yoga Centre)
- Becks White (The Starlight Company)
- Lindsay Davies (England Netball)
- Matt, Sam and Pip (The Core)
- Simon Small (The Combat Academy)
- Michelle (Bull Functional Fitness)
- Jess and Jade (Pure-Studios)

Finally, we would like to thank Public Health at Herefordshire Council for once again funding this initiative.

Find out more @ThisGirlCanHW & @stride_active

