

Us Girls 2023



What is Us Girls?

The award-winning Us Girls programme is designed to increase and sustain young women's participation in sport and physical activity in low-income communities across the UK. Underpinned by the principles of Doorstep Sport, it is an evidence-based methodology to help young women and girls to take part in sport and physical activity in a way that suits them. To find out more about Us Girls, click here: [Us Girls - StreetGames](#)

Launching in 2011, initially as a funded programme in England, Us Girls has developed and evolved as time has gone on.

Over the past ten years, the Us Girls brand and approach has been adopted by many organisations in the StreetGames network who have continued to undertake work aimed at increasing and sustaining young women's participation in sport and physical activity.

A key element of our Us Girls work involves gathering learning and sharing best practice – including the creation of an [Engaging Women & Girls Training workshop](#) to support community coaches, leaders and volunteers with practical ideas together with a series of ['How To...' Guides](#) and a range of case studies and inspirational stories.

The Context – What is the problem?

Rates of participation in sport and physical activity amongst those who identify as a girl or young woman have lagged behind men for many years. The most recent national survey data shows that women and girls continue to be less active than their male counterparts:



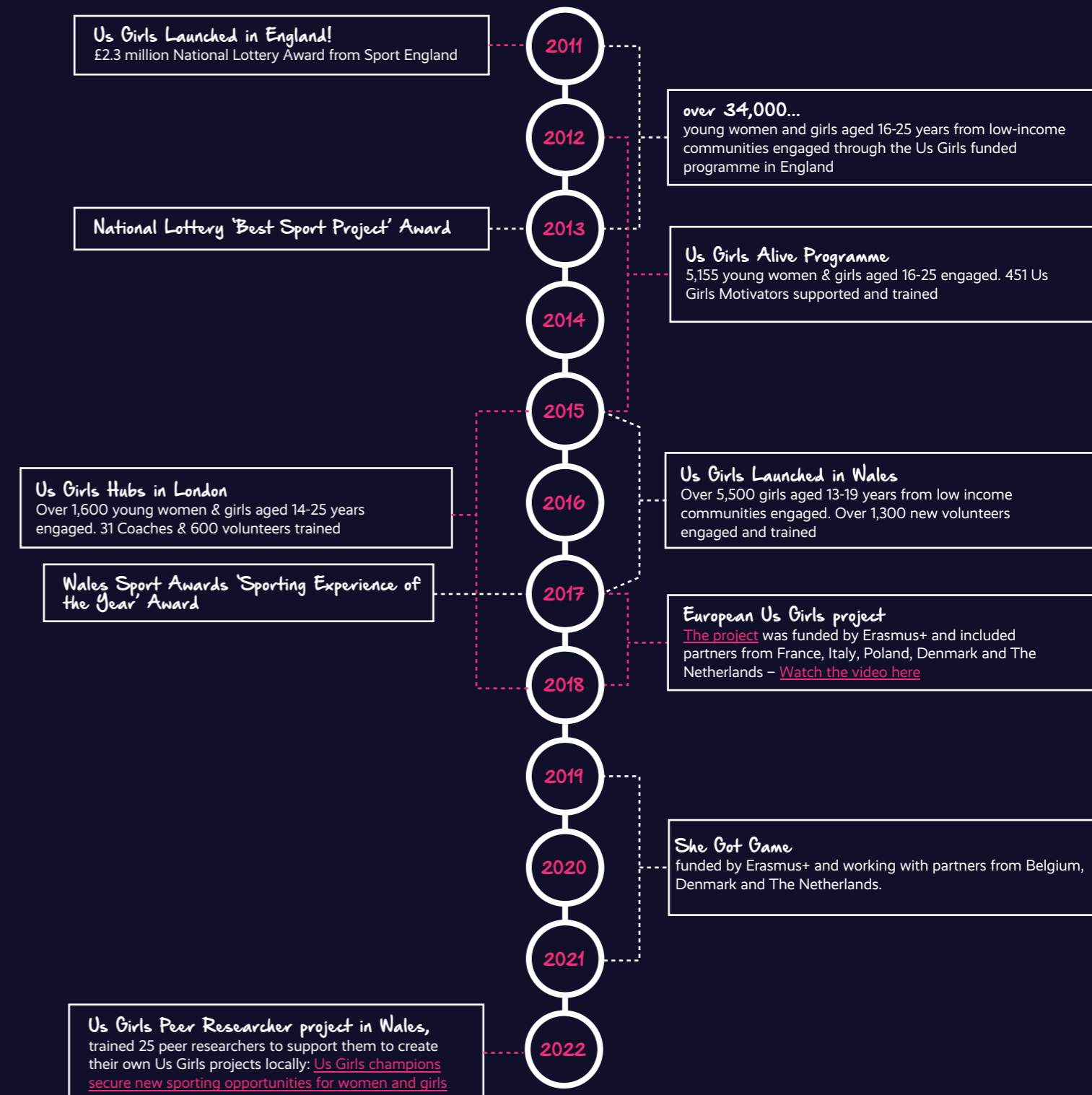
If we are to tackle these inequalities and encourage more young women and girls to be active, it is vital that there are more accessible and attractive opportunities.

¹ Sport England – Active Lives Children & Young People Survey 2021-22. 'Active' relates to the CMO guidelines for children and young people to undertake sport and physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes a day.

² Sport England – Sport for All

³ School Sport Survey 2022 | Sport Wales

⁴ Women in Sport - Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Tackling Teenage Disengagement 2022



In this summary document we look to share some of the recent learning together with a selection of Us Girls good practice examples from the StreetGames network.

What Factors Influence & Impact Engagement in Sport & Physical Activity?

The barriers and motivations of young women and girls have been well documented over the years - by StreetGames, other partners such as Sport England, Sport Wales and Women in Sport, and via academic research.

Barriers



Access

due to limited access to attractive, local and affordable activities and facilities within low-income communities.



Confidence

worries about being with new people/making friends or not feeling 'fit' enough.



Insecurities

fears of looking 'silly' in front of others (boys and strangers), not wanting to be 'watched', feeling uncomfortable in outfits or feeling judged and embarrassed.



Safety

feeling safe to take part whilst at a session, and/or feeling safe getting to and from a venue.



Time

a lack of time to take part due to other commitments and interests.



Awareness

not knowing what is actually available to take part in.



Friends

not having anyone to go with can be the deciding factor on whether to take part or not.



Clothing / Equipment

fears over not having the 'right' kit or equipment to take part.

"The girls haven't got confidence to be able to go out without the boys saying something to them and that's why I don't go out as much anymore."

"All the main sports centres are seven miles away"

"The gym can be intimidating around massive blokes when you don't really know what you're doing"

"At the gyms and leisure centres the prices are really expensive..."

"I hated swimming because of the attire, I feel exposed."

Motivations

Key motivations shared by women and girls for taking part in sport/physical activity include:



The opportunity it provides to socialise and **make new friends**



The opportunities it gives to **develop personally** or challenge themselves



To try new things - gain new experiences and try different sports and activities



To have fun



For personal health, fitness and well-being (for escapism, freedom and to relax)

".....Exercise makes you feel better"

"I go the girls group because it is a safe place to talk to my friends and have fun. The sessions involve a lot of things - Learning how to cope with things, cooking, art, first-aid training and plenty more."

"It's a nice break away from daily stresses. It's a chance to forget about everything and enjoy yourself while being active and healthy too"

"I've got some friends now who I never knew before, some of them are my best mates now."

However, the young women and girls we spoke to talked about many different motivations and influences - therefore, it is really important to take time to understand this and to not make assumptions.



What's New?

Through research undertaken in-house, with research partners and via young people acting as Peer Researchers over the past two years, we've heard from many young women and girls about the key factors that influence their behaviours, attitudes, motivations towards being physically active, and how things are different in 2023 and beyond.

Although a lot of what we've heard is consistent with previous research and insight studies, there have also been some aspects that seem to be more apparent than previously or more 'dialled up' - including:



Increased concerns related to **mental health and well-being, isolation and stress** – particularly post-Pandemic and during exam periods and a recognition of the role that sport and exercise can play in helping young people to cope.



Concerns around the **rising cost-of-living** and how this is currently affecting their lives and what they are able to do.



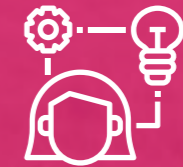
A strong **desire to be active** and valuing physical activity.



A clear **desire to 'have a say'** and get involved; through opportunities for youth voice, co-creation, peer research and social action - utilising young people's skills/placing them as the experts: e.g. via TikTok, gaming, videography.



The value of cultivating a culture and **sense of belonging** (e.g. through t-shirts, a clear ethos and mission) rather than just an activity or session.



The value of **'pre-education'** - around benefits, an emphasis on mental wellbeing - to make them feel like they have some knowledge and 'where to start' competence.



A desire to **gain new experiences** and travel outside of their local area once a cohesive group is built - growth and opportunities.



Feeling worried about being able to create a habit and to stick to it.



Welcoming opportunities to have **open conversations around puberty and periods** - that can help address fears.

*"I'm currently very busy preparing for my mocks.....
I didn't have much time or confidence and I believe confidence is a big thing"*

"A lot of my friends don't take part in sports"

".....Exercise makes you feel better"

"the coach is fun and kind"

"My favourite bit is being with my friends"

Doorstep Sport, through an Us Girls lens...

Learning from organisations in the StreetGames network has identified a [number of ingredients](#) that underpin effective doorstep sport.

Learning and feedback from the young women and girls we've heard from suggests that when considering how to make offers more appealing to this audience, it is particularly important to pay specific attention to these ingredients:

Encouraging Lifelong Participation

It's important to consider ways of supporting young women and girls to grow their 'sporting capital' — through opportunities to go somewhere new, try something new and meet different people — so that they gain the knowledge, skills and confidence that can help them to make positive choices about their lifestyle, develop a sense of independence and an enthusiasm to be active/foster a 'sporting habit for life'.

Example – StreetGames recently led a yoga pilot together with a variety of community organisations in the North West & Yorkshire. The opportunity enabled young women and girls to try yoga and mindfulness in a safe, local space over eight week blocks as well as providing them with resources, information and knowledge to continue their yoga independently. [Read more here.](#)

Rewards and Rewarding

Young people develop new skills and behaviours through consistent involvement — this can be encouraged through rewards and recognition to incentivise participation. Rewards can come in the form of physical rewards, positive reinforcement and recognition, achievement of set goals and the opportunity to get involved in new things and experiences.

Example – StreetGames' #Inspiration2022 campaign provided many young people with the opportunity to attend inspirational live sporting events, including the Women's Euros, the Commonwealth Games, the Rugby League World Cup and Wimbledon. [Read more here.](#)

The 4 'Rights'

It is essential to find out what is 'Right' for women and girls and explore their preferences as this is likely to vary for example by locality and demographics. However, it is always important to create 'safe spaces' in the 'right' place — for some this will mean female only sessions, away from the male gaze to allow girls and young women to feel able to participate. This 'safe space' alongside a social, informal style of delivery allows bonds and friendships to be developed.

Example – At Treharris Boys and Girls Club, Merthyr, funding was secured to renovate an unused room into a gym deemed as a 'safe space' by the young girls in the community. [Read more here.](#)

Right People

We've heard from many young women and girls how vitally important it is to have a coach/leader who is caring and empathetic. Staff need to be 'young person-centred' in their approach — prioritising and responding to the needs of girls and young women. It is important to take time to build relationships and understand the motivations of those attending.

Example – In a joint project with Leeds Girls Can, the leaders from Leeds Girls Can took time to bring a group of South Asian girls together in a variety of settings to help build relationships and a sense of belonging — including visiting Sweaty Betty, a sports clothing shop, to design a sports kit they felt comfortable in, as well as group trips to try rock climbing and high ropes.

Personal Development Opportunities

Many young women and girls want to 'have a say' and 'help out' in their community — sports sessions can be an ideal place to create empowering and developmental opportunities to help build key social skills for life. Personal development can be woven into sports participation and wider opportunities such as youth leadership, peer research and spaces to listen to young people's voices.

Example – In Wales, six groups of girls and young women were trained as peer researchers and secured almost £80,000 to deliver social action based on their own research findings. [Read more here.](#)

Provision of an 'Attractive Offer'

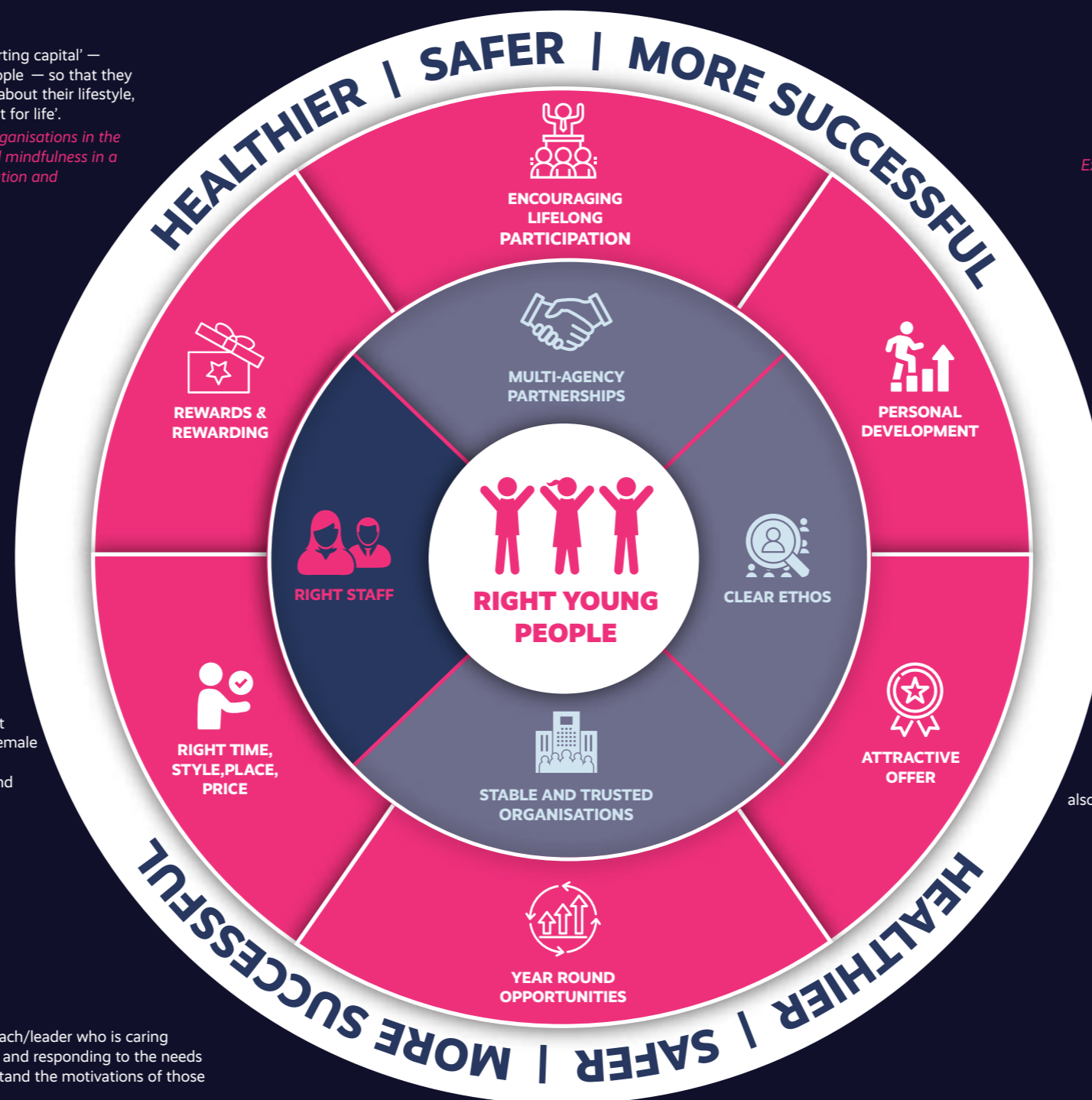
Our learning suggests that an attractive offer will often include opportunities to be physically active alongside other opportunities and 'bolt-ons' such as incorporating music and food to help keep girls and young women engaged in sessions. Through opportunities to try different sports a vibrant and varied offer can help young people to gain new experiences and build a sense of belonging. What constitutes 'attractive' may change over time, meaning the offer will need to be regularly reviewed and refreshed to adapt to the needs of the group.

Example - At Valleys Gymnastics Academy in Caerphilly, the activity offer was broadened to meet girls' requests to try a range of different sports such as gymnastics, netball, rounders and golf. They offered quarterly reward trips that included paddle boarding, rock climbing and food. [Read more here.](#)

Year Round Opportunities

Sporting offers need to be regular and consistent to enable young people to take part over prolonged periods — either within a local project or by linking to other opportunities with clear pathways from holiday activities and short-term/taster sessions into year-round doorstep sport offers. A year-round offer provides regularity, consistency and routine but also the reassurance that young people can always return to a familiar, friendly and safe setting.

Example – At Strength Academy Wales, the staff recognised the need to ensure their Us Girls offer was consistent following the Winter of Wellbeing programme. They now offer daily activities during the school holidays and weekly activities throughout the year.



Further Ingredients

The three remaining Doorstep Sport ingredients are:

A clear ethos

Stable and trusted organisation

Multi agency partnerships

These are organisational principles, i.e. things that the delivery organisation must think about/do to sustain their provision and develop an effective Doorstep Sport offer and also remain imperative — for more information, [click here](#)

