Herefordshire's Here Girls Can Festival

In 2021/22, Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire and Stride Active (SGOs) united the Here Girls Can and county-wide School Games programmes. Combining both programmes allowed the team to work in collaboration with local partners to host a festival designed to engage inactive girls. County data showed 21% of primary-aged girls were inactive due to barriers including fears of being judged, low self-confidence, and lack of comfort when wearing PE kit.

The Here Girls Can festival was designed using insight entirely from youth voice to create an event with a range of non-traditional activities, designed to remove these barriers. During the event, the participants rotated through the activities which varied in intensity. A 'girl talk' session was delivered which allowed participants to freely discuss 'taboo' topics, with young leaders offering advice and support.

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Objectives

- To develop and deliver an event that was informed entirely by youth voice.
- Create a positive environment for disengaged girls to experience physical activity and understand the wider impact it can have on their confidence and wellbeing.

Who was the target audience and how were they engaged?

The **Here Girls Can festival** was aimed at girls in years 5-8 to align with key transition points in school and because this age group will be experiencing/soon to be experiencing changes through puberty. The event capacity was limited to 96 participants to ensure it would not be too overwhelming and allowed for groups to be split into smaller numbers.

Schools were given clear directives as to who should be selected to attend (i.e. girls not already participating in school teams/extra-curricular clubs, and girls who may have low self-esteem/body image worries/who struggle to engage with PE).

Why was the activity unique?

The event involved 14 young leaders (Year 10), whose role as 'Girls' Champions' supported rather than coached participants. The Girls' Champions received training prior to the event, which included various scenarios and discussions around their barriers to participation. At the event, they led small groups in the girl talk sessions, took part in activities alongside participants, and helped to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Local, qualified professionals delivered the activities within their own venue. The deliverers attended meetings prior to the event to understand the target group and ensure the activities were suited to their needs.

What was the impact felt in schools and by CYP?

Teachers observed that girls who were historically reluctant to engage with PE were not afraid to get involved with the activities on the day. The participants were less concerned with being judged and instead felt comfortable and confident around girls that were like them.

Teachers were able to take away ideas of how they could take elements from the festival and use them in their school to build resilience in their female pupils, such as implementing 'girl talk' sessions, deliver PE with smaller groups and try different activities outside of the traditional sports.

Why is this an example of School Games best practice?

The festival was held at an industrial estate to allow participants to rotate through activities held at venues across the site. This helped to remove the association of 'sports' that traditional venues (e.g. leisure centres) hold and prevented participants from feeling uncomfortable on arrival.

The feedback from local insight allowed the team to think creatively and consider non-traditional venues which had no connotations of sport, and the variation of activities on offer catered to the needs of the girls attending.

For more information, please contact the entrants on beky@strideactive.org / b.clifford@worc.ac.uk