



**STREETGAMES**

**DOORSTEP SPORT CLUBS**

**MIXED GENDER  
SESSIONS**



**LOTTERY  
FUNDED**



**SPORT  
ENGLAND**



## BACKGROUND

In 2012, Sport England ring-fenced £20m for investment into Doorstep Sport Clubs (DSCs) - this is the largest ever targeted investment into disadvantaged youth sport. The investment forms part of the Sport England and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2012-17.

StreetGames' role in the strategy is to lead the creation of 1000 new generation youth sports clubs - called Doorstep Sport Clubs, for young people (aged 14-25 years old) who live in deprived areas. DSCs are hosted by a range of neighbourhood community projects. The ambition for the programme is to reach and attract over 100,000 14-25 year olds into sport by 2017.

Doorstep Sport Clubs are fun, informal sports clubs that operate at the right time, for the right price, in the right place and in the right style. A Doorstep Sport Club provides a vibrant and varied sporting offer to young people in disadvantaged communities that is designed to grow their motivation and ability to adopt a sporting habit for life.

Through Sport England Lottery Funding, StreetGames together with our network of local partners has been developing Doorstep Sport Clubs since an initial pilot project in 2012 and there are now over 1,000 DSCs operating across the Country. The DSC programme also runs in Wales with support from Communities First and Sport Wales.

## WHY OFFER MIXED GENDER SESSIONS?

Well, why not? In the true meaning of a 'vibrant and varied offer' of activities in Doorstep Sport Clubs, it's important to consider if a mixed gender session can add value for young people in your communities. Of course, this is not a one-size-fits all approach, and we have a number of projects that work in engaging young people

in activities, simply because there is a single-sex approach to the sporting offer.

However, this doesn't mean mixed gender sport isn't something we should actively provide and support. Providing opportunities for males and females to participate together in community sessions, can help to create equal opportunities in sport and to foster tolerance of a variety of gender identities.

## WHAT TYPES OF MIXED GENDER SESSIONS DO DSCS OFFER?

Doorstep Sport Clubs (DSCs) currently provide a wide range of different activities at their sessions. Monitoring data shows that **over 40 different sports/activities are provided - with the most popular activities being: multi-sport, football, fitness, basketball, dance, table tennis, boxing, tennis, badminton and cricket.**

At StreetGames, we recently conducted a survey with existing DSCs to find out more about how sports sessions were provided and in particular how DSCs provide activities which appeal to both males and females. We found that 87% of the DSCs surveyed, have sessions that attract both male and female participants. With this in mind, we explored what these sessions look like in the community and found the following types of offers;

- 63% have sessions where males and females mix together during the whole activity.
- 22% have sessions for males and females that are delivered in the same venue/at the same time but using different spaces
- 22% have sessions that offer mixed gender activity, but the males and females tend to take part in their own sub-groups.
- 17% have sessions that offer separate activities for males and females, but that come together for events and trips.

Interestingly, many of the DSCs surveyed reported that



where the mixed gender sessions had been successful, they naturally occurred during the lifetime of the project, with single sex sessions, migrating into mixed gender activities, usually due to the type of activity on offer such as: Dodgeball or table tennis. Feedback from projects suggests that in order for mixed gender sessions to work well, the activity is quite often an individual based sport, as opposed to a team based sport.

## WHAT SPORTS?

In-keeping with the aim of providing a vibrant and varied sporting offer, DSCs reported back to us that there is a huge selection of sports on offer in a variety of settings.

**Multi-sport** sessions feature significantly in the feedback from DSCs - and is linked to the need for these mixed gender session to have more of an 'open' feel to them. Mixed gender sessions that have been successful tend to include more of a 'pic-n-mix' type approach, with young people finding an activity that works for them in a mixed gender environment.

The most popular sports used to offer and engage mixed gender sessions are: **gym/fitness activities, table tennis, dodgeball, basketball and football.**

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR TO ATTRACT MALES AND FEMALES TO SESSIONS?

Based on the survey feedback from DSCs about their mixed gender sessions, some key themes have been identified that are useful to think about when offering a session to engage males and females. These include:

### REGULAR FEEDBACK

Listening to the young people (and engaging them in conversation) about what they want from a mixed gender session is really important. For mixed gender sessions to work well, there needs to be an element of control around what the session looks and feels like, so that one particular gender does not become isolated or disinterested as the session develops. A number of DSCs running mixed gender sessions reported that the girls, in particular, dropped out of sessions, if the boys 'took over'.

### FLEXIBILITY

Linked to the regular feedback, when running mixed gender sessions, young people want their sessions to have flexibility and to evolve with the needs of the group. This requirement for flexibility seems to be linked to the increased diversity of the group and finding and exploring activities that better suit both genders.



Alongside this is the need for flexibility of attendance - being able to 'drop-in and out' is still really important to some of our young people.

### TYPES OF MIXED GENDER SESSION

Finding a mixed gender approach that works can take time. DSCs reported that some sessions start as single sex, for the first part of the activity, and then come together for the second part of the session, in a staggered approach. Other DSCs say that having single sex groups that then engage in inter-group competitions or activities work well.

### COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

A large proportion of DSCs offering successful mixed gender sessions tell us that having at least one female coach or volunteer is really important to engaging girls in a mixed gender activity. Challenging any discriminatory behaviour immediately and feeling welcomed are key aspects for mixed gender approaches. Feedback from the DSCs say that young people need to feel comfortable in their sessions with an approachable Coach or Session Leader that they can chat to.

### 'LEVELLER' ACTIVITIES

Many of the DSCs that run mixed gender sessions tell us that the young people want to be able to take part in what they call 'leveller' activities and sports. These are sports that are not traditionally gender stereotyped, but quite often mean that the perceived gender gap in skill and ability may not be quite so prevalent. Activities such as Badminton, Dodgeball, Table Tennis, Volleyball, all feature in our mixed gender offers. This seems to avoid 'boys dominating' the activities, which is a significant barrier to female engagement in mixed sessions.



## SPOTLIGHT ON...

### URBAN EXPRESSIONS

Urban Expressions, with Eastlands Trust in Manchester, is a weekly, varied offer of sport and activities for young people aged 10-18 years. Activities such as BMX, skating, cheerleading, table tennis, Graffiti, see over 60 young people take part every week. The project has seen some successful mixed gender sessions, and they tell us that there is not any one specific aspect that has helped make their mixed gender session a success - instead a couple of top tips that may have contributed.

The project engaged with a handful of older girls who took part in sessions at the beginning and this seemed to encourage some of the younger girls to have a go in mixed activities. The Project Leader, Nicola Proudman suggests, "we chat to the girls and ask them 'what could we do' – within reason, we try and put on what they want". One of the dance teachers had a go in the BMX session, and that seemed to help encourage a mixed gender approach. The project have also used taster sessions, to try and break down perceived barriers and let the young people try different things, but also being realistic "it doesn't happen overnight" and knowing that "no one week is going to be the same" is really important.



Urban Expressions say that listening to the young people, being flexible, having open access offers are all key elements of a successful mixed gender session, and having approachable, friendly staff is paramount.

### SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

The council led project initially started a session, with Dance for females and Dodgeball for males, but found that over time, due to the nature of the Dodgeball session, being fun and informal, that girls started to migrate over to the Dodgeball, and so it developed into a mixed gender session. The session was originally a youth club based session (but the youth club then closed) and the project has worked hard to develop volunteers to run the session, currently being re-launched. Colin Hall, Project Leader suggests using young volunteers to run the sessions is important to keep the fun, informal, inclusive, feel of the session, which seems to be attractive for a mixed gender approach. However, consistency of offer and engagement is a key element, which, for young people can be a challenge with other time constraints impacting on their lives.

