

# BARNSELEY YOUTH ASSOCIATION YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS



The Youth Association (TYA) works across South and West Yorkshire, prioritising young people facing multiple needs, disadvantages and barriers, with the intention of increasing social and economic life chances. In 2021, The Youth Association benefitted from collaborative funding from StreetGames, Yorkshire Sport Foundation and Barnsley Council, to deliver female youth work sessions across Barnsley.

As part of the UsGirls project, young women were engaged at street-based level to access regular physical activity, with the aim of empowering young women in sport. TYA utilised their StreetSmart curriculum as part of the project, with the aim of equipping young women with essential life skills. StreetSmart is a scheme that improves skills, attitudes and prospects by taking training and certification to street level. The project involves delivering street-based workshops, supplemented by sports, social action, and other initiatives.

TYA have previously engaged with mixed gender groups, and have noticed that sports participation is often male dominated. Young women have attended these sessions; however, they report to youth workers a lack of confidence to participate in sports. Therefore, TYA identified a need for a female only project.

## CONSULTATION

In response, detached youth workers coproduced the project with young women, to ensure that it was relevant to their individual and group needs. To do this they conducted an initial consultation with young women aged 11-19 across Barnsley, to develop their aims and objectives.



## PARTICIPATION

In total, there were 44 responses to the consultation. In summary, they found that:



Only 41% of young women played a team sport.



The majority of young women would only partake in physical activity once or twice a week, including non-sporting activities such as walking the dog.



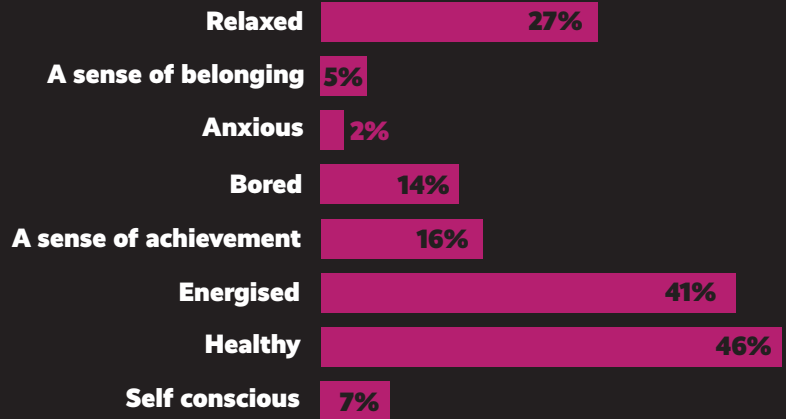
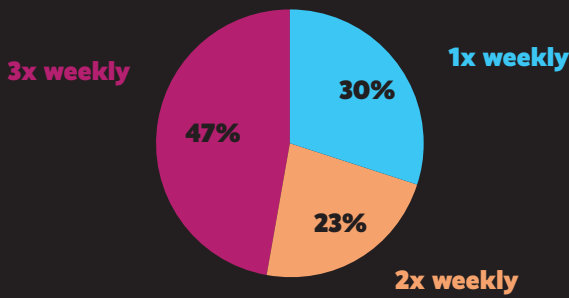
When asked 'how does something active makes them feel', the majority of young women answered positively with 'Energised', 'Relaxed' or 'Healthy'.



However, nearly a quarter of young women answered negatively with feelings of anxiousness, boredom, self-consciousness when participating in physical activity.

'I do some physical activity. e.g. walking a dog.' (n=44)

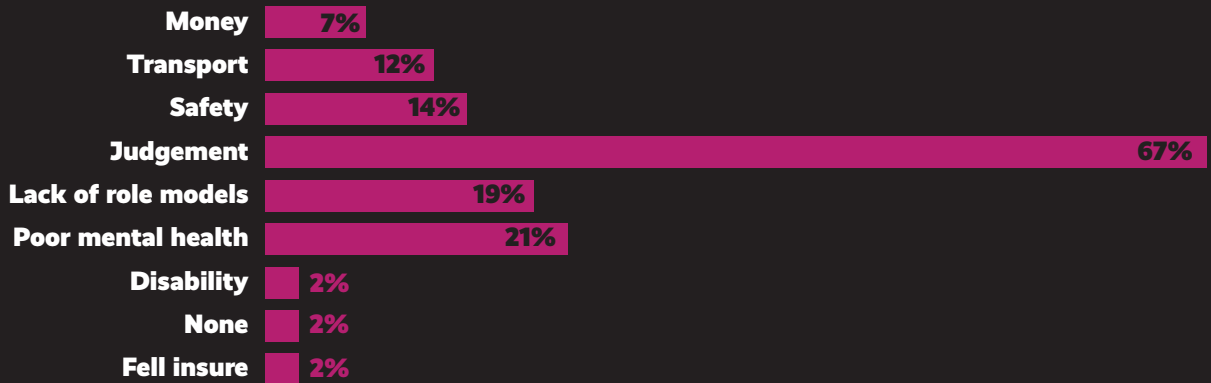
'Doing something active makes me feel...' (n=44)



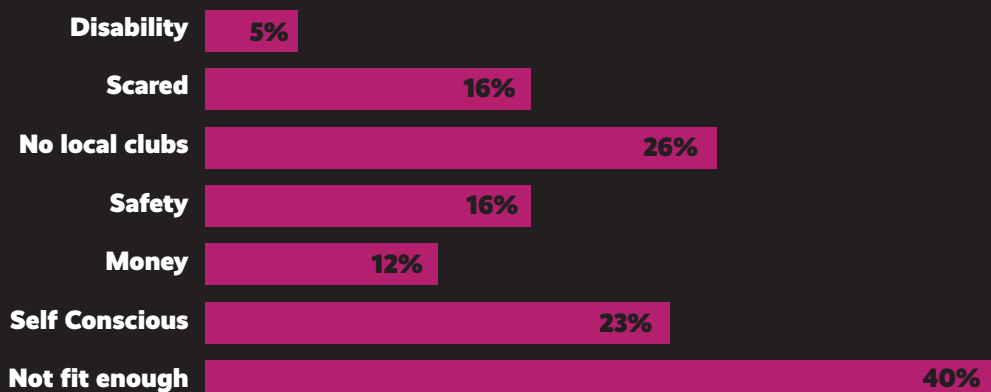
## Feelings/Attitudes towards Physical Activity

- When asked if they think if 'people are viewed equal in sports', **51%** of the young women replied No.
- When asked what they thought the main issues affecting women in sports were, an overwhelming **67%** chose 'Judgement'.
  - o Several other issues were highlighted by several of the young women, including Money, Transport, Safety, a Lack of Role Models and Poor Mental Health.
- When asked about which things THEY find most challenging about sport/physical activity, the majority of responses (Scared, Self-conscious, Not fit enough), indicated low self-esteem or lack of confidence.
  - o Several also highlighted some of the main barriers for young women in lower-socio economic groups, including the lack of local clubs, safety and money.

'Issues affecting women in sport are...' (n=42)



'The things I find most challenging about sport/physical activity are...' (n=43)



## IN RESPONSE

Based on this information, TYA were able to conclude that the programme needed to encourage physical activity, whilst having a positive impact on confidence and mental health. Social and community-based opportunities would also be offered, to help individuals to develop and overcome some of the barriers that young women face in low-income communities.

As well as addressing issues surrounding sport participation, TYA were able to reinforce their thinking around some of the issues outside sport that are more prevalent to young women. During discussions with youth workers, the young women expressed that they do not always feel safe in the areas in which they live. The apparent increase of violence against women and how these incidents have been portrayed in the media, had further added to their feelings of discomfort.



*There are lots of drug users around when it gets darker, it can be scary'.*



*(Worsborough) can be a nice area, but you can feel unsafe when you're walking on your own*



## SELF-DEFENCE

In an attempt to combat this, TYA put in place a six-week programme concentrating on self-defence and empowering young women, alongside their street-based work.

A large proportion of the programme included training from qualified and experienced self-defence instructors, with the intention of equipping the young women with skills that could hopefully enable them to live in less fear in their day to day lives.



As a result of these sessions, young women have reported back an increase in confidence and comfortability both alone and with friends, and have noted that they now feel they have the knowledge and techniques to safely get out of a dangerous situation should it arise.



*Since I joined the self-defence club and started learning lots of self-defence skills I have felt much more safe walking alone as I know that if anything ever happens I'd know exactly what to do. The club is so much fun and I love that we get another hour after to do fun activities and spend time together I love the fact that it is free so anyone can come even if you aren't financially stable and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to join!*





*I think it's really important for women and girls to have access to free self-defence classes especially as of today, I never really felt safe walking somewhere shady WITH friends never mind by myself but now that I know how to defend myself if someone were to do something I feel much more secure, it's also just really fun.*



Amongst a group of girls who had concerns over older males and walking home alone in their community, it was also hugely positive to see them come 'out of their shells' around older male instructors during the self-defence classes. TYA coaches - Rebecca, Faye and Rachel all act as great role models and it is clear to see that the girls trust new people and experiences, when their coaches are supporting and getting involved too.

In supplement to the self-defence sessions, TYA has provided other focused sessions surrounding women's issues and safety, whilst aiming to empower young women through exposing them to other positive role models and creating a safe space to try new things. These sessions came directly from the needs young women identified at the start of the project.

## Rock Climbing (The Foundry, Sheffield)

The young women were also provided with opportunities to take part in day trips and excursions, such as rock climbing. The rock-climbing event allowed some of the young women to experience entirely new things as well as climbing, for example, for some it was their first time travelling by train. This event in particular also allowed the young women to work collaboratively and provide encouragement and support for each other, particularly when there were signs of others being nervous or afraid. Again, around male instructors TYA were pleased to see the girls engage and trust their guidance with a little encouragement. After the session, the young women told us that the event helped to develop resilience and bravery, and also allowed them to use planning and thinking skills.

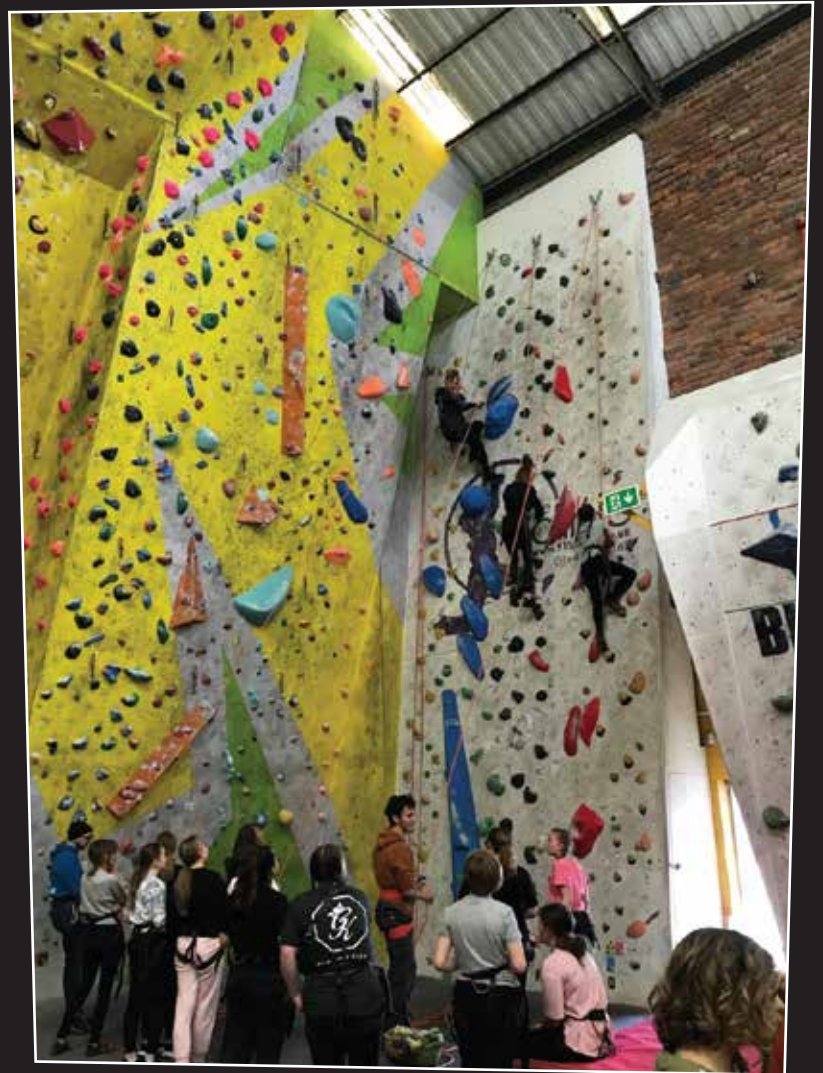
After the rock-climbing event, Rebecca, Faye and Rachel gathered the girls in a 'reflection circle' outside, to gather their thoughts and feelings about the day whilst it was still fresh in their minds.

*'One word to describe today ...'*

**AMAZING**  
**FUN**  
**MAGICAL**  
**EXCITING**  
**PROUD**  
**SUPPORTIVE**



Since the rock-climbing trip, young women have fed back that being involved with the project has increased their confidence - to the point that many auditioned for school plays, stating that beforehand they would not have had the confidence to do so. They have also showed signs of increased confidence and autonomy in regards to travel, since the initial rock-climbing event many of the older girls in the group have organised their own day trips to Sheffield.



## **FUTURE PLANS**

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Going forward, TYA plan to further reduce their fear of judgement and build self-esteem in the girls by continuing to expose them to more positive role models, females in particular. This summer (2022), the young women will be taking part in a 6-week roller-skating/skateboarding programme on the skate park where TYA have found female instructors to encourage young women to make better use of the skate park and reassure them that it is not a 'boys sport'. The girls will also be attending a women's Euro's match on 18th July. Finally, a female councillor for Barnsley, in her late twenties will be coming out to speak to the young women about how she got into politics and why. TYA believe that their young women will find her really relatable and that this meeting will reaffirm that they can go on to achieve goals, that they might currently see as 'unachievable'.

In terms of maintaining the girls increases in physical activity, TYA are looking to create a programme of dance classes. This is something that the young women are interested in, but many are unable to take part in without help from TYA, as it is not accessible due to finances or travel. In future, with potential support from StreetGames, TYA will aim to provide sustainable, lasting support to these young women and continue to work with this group to co-produce other projects with youth workers.