

## Reaching out to young women

Sportivate aims to engage young adults up to the age of twenty five in sport. This brings its own challenges and CSPs and their partners are working hard to address the current disparity between men's and women's participation in this age group.



### Introduction

Active People survey data shows that far fewer 16-19 year old women participate in sport or physical activity at least once a week than their male counterparts. Over the past five years the proportion of 16-19 year old women participating in sport and physical activity at least once a week has fallen more than the proportion of men of the same age. Fewer 20-24 year old women participate in sport or physical activity at least once a week than men and the proportion of 20-24 year old women participating has declined steadily over the last four years, whereas the proportion of 20-24 year old men has actually increased.

However, a higher proportion of 16-19 and

**"Women's motivations and expectations are often different from men's. It's often about health and social motivations – fun, family, flexibility – and about fitting sport and fitness into busy lives. They want too the sort of high quality experience and customer service they enjoy in other environments."**

Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation.

20-24 women would like to do more sport and physical activity than men of the same age, and the proportion of women who want to do more has increased over the last four years. There is demand for sport among young women and girls and Sportivate providers face a challenge to meet it.

Sport England market segmentation research has helped to identify the characteristics of some young women and their attitudes to sport. Young women tend to get involved in sport for enjoyment, keeping fit, to take children, for socialising and losing weight. They are less likely to be a member of a sports club than the adult population as a whole but are more likely to take part in 'keep fit', gym and swimming. They are also likely to want to try athletics, cycling, tennis and badminton.

## Local innovation

Bath and North East Somerset Sport and Active Lifestyles Team designed a project in the Twerton area of Bath - a ward that has a high number of young mothers - to engage them in physical activity at a venue (a local community centre) and time where childcare issues could be overcome (crèche facilities were provided in conjunction with Time Bank). The project ran for 12 weeks in total (six of which were funded by Sportivate) and saw 25 women access the class, paying an affordable £2 per week for a 45 minute Zumba session, which they could fit around their often changeable work and childcare commitments. The sessions have since been continued by local leisure operator Aquaterra Leisure to meet the new demand.

**"This project is a great example of how Sportivate funding can help break down barriers to allow people to access sport and physical activity who may not have been able to access it otherwise."** Sarah Mcleod, Wesport.

Lancashire Sport brought together four children's centres across Fylde, the Borough Council and the Primary Care Trust, to plan appropriate activity for young mums. Children's centre staff



consulted women on the main barriers preventing them from participating in sport and found that classes were too expensive, not easily accessible, often held at unsuitable times and the cost and access to child care facilities was unsatisfactory. The group organised Zumba sessions over two sites, provided crèche facilities and

charged a modest amount which will ultimately provide a subsidy for follow up sessions at the children's centres after the Sportivate project has finished. The project received really positive feedback and engaged 14 young mums. The centres have since had a huge amount of interest from other women and are looking at ways they can work together to develop future Sportivate projects.

In [Kirklees](#) in West Yorkshire, women only cycling sessions, supported by Kirklees Council, have attracted 35 women to ride for the first time. Kirklees Bike Users Group (KBUG) which exists to promote cycling, to provide information on local events and support growth in cycling in the area was behind a series of Sportivate projects. The group, which provides adult cycle training, equipment loans and 'K Buddy Rides' to provide an experienced cyclist to accompany a new starter, has surveyed the needs of local people in recent years. As a result projects have been developed to target, for example, teenage girls and Asian women. The latter retained 12 new riders over a six week Sportivate project. As a result of continuing success, the Streetbikes Community Interest Company has been formed to coordinate local cycling projects and to attract more funding to support new initiatives. Streetbikes now recycles and reconditions discarded old bikes to give away to local people to help them continue cycling after their initial sessions have ended.

**"The scheme has offered the women the chance to learn cycling skills in a fun and safe environment... Sportivate has been the kick start we needed to get more funding from other sources."** Gill Greaves, Co-Chair KBUG

The [Kick Yourself Fit](#) project organised by Suffolk FA was a response to a group of non-playing Bangladeshi females wanting to try football, as identified by the Bangladeshi Support Centre. Organisers feel the project was successful because they identified 'leaders' within the group - two of the older females - who are listened to and respected by the others and who were able to promote the project by word of mouth. The deployment of a female coach was crucial who was able to build rapport with the women and earn their trust. In total, 20 women took part over the six week project in Ipswich of which 8 attended 5 out of 6 sessions. There are plans to maintain the interest of all 20 women by creating a self financing regular session at the centre.

Similarly, in the London Borough of [Tower Hamlets](#), a 'back to cricket' targeted Bangladeshi Muslim Women with sessions within the local Muslim Community Centre. Consultation had shown a demand for cricket but in a non traditional format outside of the traditional club cricket structure. The project has tackled the cultural challenges for women to take part in sport and physical activity. The women have also been offered the chance to become ECB Game Activators by attending a workshop free of charge. The course will equip them with the basic skills needed to run simple cricket activities to their friends, families and colleagues. In this way Middlesex Cricket Board and

Pro-Active East London hope to increase their confidence, retain them in the sport for years to come and introduce more people to the game.

Long Eaton Amateur Boxing Club in Derbyshire attracted 14 women up to the age of 23 (of which 10 were retained) to try boxing. Although the Club would have welcomed more 14 and 15 year olds from local schools, local advertising in colleges and community centres brought success with a slightly older age group. The project was advertised as fun fitness sessions with the chance to gain friends and confidence. The club coached the basic skills of amateur boxing in a non contact format. The sessions have subsequently been continued by the club (at the request of participants) after this and the self funded activity has helped to expand the club.

### The critical success factors

- Spending the time to gain real consumer insight is key. The preferences and motivations of women and girls are varied – they are not one homogenous group
- Market segmentation research is useful but there is no substitute for genuine and meaningful local consultation
- Marketing messages are crucial and should be tailored to the target audience - for example stressing weight loss or the social aspect of the activity
- It is a myth that young women are not interested in competition but they can be turned off by aggressive competitiveness
- Fitness activities like Zumba can attract participants to become active who can then be encouraged to take part in other sports
- Mixed age groups are often appealing and Sportivate projects should consider welcoming women over the age of 25 but targeting the funding at 14 – 25 participants
- It is not essential to have a female coach or instructor but it is important for he or she to have the right skills and personality.

**Consulting women and girls, recognising the particular local barriers facing them, and taking the right steps to overcome these can lead to success.**

