Empowering young women to make healthier choices

This Girl Can ‘Be Healthy’ is a project combining exercise and nutrition, locally activating the national This Girl Can campaign and empowering young women in Milton Keynes to make healthier choices.

Consisting of eight afterschool sessions the content was designed for girls aged 16 to 17 years who are irregularly or consistently inactive.

The Sportivate project was developed in partnership with Obesity & Diabetes Specialist and Personal Trainer, Chris Collins who is based at Stantonbury Leisure Centre.

The sessions covered topics such as good and bad calories, mindful eating rather than dieting and a variety of gym challenges to keep interest and develop the girls’ confidence.

Understanding the audience

In Milton Keynes 66.7% of adults are classified as overweight or obese, so encouraging active lifestyles and improving dietary education at a young age is key to helping the population develop healthy habits for life.

A small group of inactive girls were identified through the Milton Keynes school. The Personal Trainer, Chris, met with this group at the school and consulted them on the project.

When asked, the majority of the girls said they felt pressure from social media about the way they look.

The group highlighted that the main barriers they faced to taking part in activity were cost and fear of judgement.

They also said that their main motivation for taking part would be to lose weight.

It was identified that these girls would be classed as ‘Cautious Introverts’ from the ‘Under the Skin’ Youth Insight.

This pre session consultation, coupled with the national insight then helped shape the project to suit the target audience.

“...I feel there’s a lot of pressure now days on girls to have a certain body image, to have a certain look, a certain shape. You know, be curvy but slim.

But after seeing the progress the girls have made on this programme, I realised that there isn’t really a type of body image you should have.

Girls should just be happy with the way they are and they way the look and not think too much about what social media says about it.

Sacha, 17 Participant

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Using insight to help shape to project

Session costs were subsidised in order to reduce the barrier of cost.

Cautious Introverts show great loyalty so participants were identified through personal recommendation, referred by the initial group of girls. This also helped keep the group small and supportive, building confidence and reducing the fear of judgement.

Insight shows that they also prefer to stick to what is familiar, so sessions were broken down into bite sized challenges with some consistent elements throughout. This enabled the gradual introduction of new skills, suitable for the group where many had never used a gym before.

Making healthier choices and feeling better

The project successfully achieved 100% attendance over the 8 weeks, with participants reporting marked changed in their confidence and attitudes towards food and exercise.

All participants reported improvements in their wellbeing when asked the same questions at week one and again at week eight.

Over half of the participants said that a free gym pass would encourage them to continue to attend following the eight weeks of activity and this was included in the project, providing an exit route for further participation.

“ I originally came to This Girl Can as I wanted to lose weight. I’m not overly confident in my body and obviously it helps with my self esteem so I thought I’d do this.

I come with all of my girlfriends and we have such fun every week. It helps us actually stick to the course and try and lose weight in the end.

Natalie, 17
Participant

“ We’ve really noticed a change in behaviour when it comes to the girls exercise habits and also their nutritional diaries over the last 8 weeks.

One of the girls has changed her behaviour towards food from having a meat pasty for breakfast & 4 takeaways a week to cooking salmon, making toast and having fruit…

Chris Collins
Obesity and Diabetes Specialist and Personal Trainer

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