

CASE STUDY

SPORTED

WOMEN
N
SPORT

Engage-HER

Challenging sports deliverers in Northern Ireland to think differently
2016-17



WHAT DID WE WANT TO KNOW?



During 2016 Women in Sport and Sported joined forces with a shared vision to encourage more girls and young women to be active.

It was recognised that Women in Sport's wealth of research and insight on understanding women's and girls' lives and their relationship with sport, combined with Sported's experience of community development and sport for social change, had the potential for real impact. As a result, both organisations started to explore how an effective partnership would look and who could help to make it happen.

In August 2016, Sport Northern Ireland presented an opportunity for both organisations to deliver a pilot project, called Engage-HER, focused on engaging more girls and young women in sport.

Sported has an established presence in Northern Ireland with a trusted membership network of over 240 community groups, and Women in Sport was very keen to share insights further afield, providing the ideal start point for the partnership. Through Sport Northern Ireland, the Department for Communities funded the Engage-HER project, which ran for five months.

The project aimed to build on the expert knowledge Sported members (community sport and youth groups) hold in engaging disadvantaged young people through sport and physical activity, by offering them the opportunity to improve their insight on how to specifically engage women and girls more effectively. The overarching objective was for members to feel confident challenging existing practices and embed plans to create positive and sustainable experiences in sport for girls and young women.

STATE OF PLAY

Current participation figures across the UK, specifically in Northern Ireland, highlighted the need for a project like Engage-HER:

- Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019 aims to improve the participation of women in sport by at least **6 percentage points** by 2019.
- Sported surveyed 160 of its members and found that **32%** of the groups' collective participants were female. Positively, almost half of those surveyed said they could and would want to do more to attract female participants if they were supported to do so.
- **7%** of girls meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day (Youth Sport Trust, 2015, Girls Active Pre-Intervention Survey Report).
- Women exercise significantly less than men in Northern Ireland; **45%** of women have participated in sport in the previous 12 months, as opposed to **59%** of men (British Heart Foundation Physical Activity Statistics 2015).
- There is a big discrepancy in the physical activity of 19-24-year-olds in Northern Ireland, with **71%** of males meeting recommendations and **58%** of females; females were also almost twice as likely to undertake 'very low' levels of activity compared to males (British Heart Foundation Physical Activity Statistics 2015).

WHAT DID WE DO?

Based on Sported's knowledge and understanding of the community sport sector in Northern Ireland, six member groups offering a variety of sports and working across different local communities were selected to be part of the Engage-HER pilot.

Sported recruited six suitable members and four Sported volunteer mentors to be part of the pilot project.

Women in Sport delivered a bespoke workshop to Sported members sharing insights and challenging members to 'think differently' about how they provide opportunities for girls and young women.

Women in Sport delivered a bespoke workshop for Sported volunteer mentors, sharing research and training on how to deliver key tasks with their members to initiate change.

The trained volunteer mentors were matched with a Sported member, and provided one-to-one support to help them develop a realistic 'engagement plan'.

Follow-up support was provided by Sported and Women in Sport to both members and mentors to assist with implementing actions and assessing impact.

The Sported members who participated in the project were:

- Ardmore Cricket Club
- Clonard Monastery Youth
- Coleraine FC Academy – Young Ladies
- Irish Athletic Boxing Association
- Knights Wheelchair Basketball
- O'Connell's GAC Camogie Club

THE IMPACT

Towards the end of the project three members and their mentors were interviewed to capture their experience of the project and crucially what effect this has had on girls and young women.

This is a short pilot project and often the impacts of interventions can take a longer period of time to show. As such the snapshots below highlight the first steps in this journey and we hope that through support from their mentors and effective planning the impact will be positive.

KNIGHTS WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL CLUB

The wheelchair basketball club wanted to be part of the project to engage more girls and young women in basketball and hopefully one day set up their own women's team to enter into a league.

Their mentor shared how passionate and enthusiastic the club were to make changes and provide positive experiences in their sport, which was a great starting point. The club took part in the Women in Sport workshop and their main learning centred around a consultancy approach; they needed to get more feedback from their female members. The mentor took this on board and used the consultation template provided as part of the workshop to formulate questions and assess what they already knew, wanted to find out and how they would go about it.

As part of the one-to-one sessions the mentor supported the group in designing a strategy to develop more of the right opportunities for women at the club, with the first action being to test some female-only taster sessions. The mentor had researched the club in advance so they were able to provide positive feedback on existing provision and advise on potential improvements. The next step in their journey will be to consult with female members and assess the success of the female-only sessions.

"We wanted to learn how to engage women into sport and hopefully one day set up our own women's team. Our mentor has been great in helping us think of a strategy about how to get more women and girls into our club and as a result of this we will be setting up women-only taster sessions".

Knights Wheelchair Basketball

"I think the project is already having a positive impact on female participation within the club. During discussions I can already tell that they have started to think on a deeper level about how to fully engage with women and girls, being open to making changes at the club. The club commented that they have felt empowered as a result of being involved in the pilot".

Sported volunteer mentor



ARDMORE CRICKET CLUB

The cricket club wanted to take part in the project to learn how to engage their female members more effectively and involve them more fully in the club environment, with the ultimate aim to have a women's team taking part in regular games of cricket.

The club expressed a desire to learn and were very open to new ways of working. Following the member workshop, the club assessed their promotional avenues and made small tweaks to ensure their advertising methods talk to women and girls in the right way and align to their values.

The one-to-one sessions with their mentor have been useful in providing a sounding board for new ideas and also to hear from different experiences in how to approach this area of work. These sessions also helped the club to organise paperwork and use the engagement plan to develop key actions.

On reflection the mentor shared how the workshop provided some key tools to help with this and the research on motivations and values was useful for discussions.

This project has re-energised the club and they have a number of areas of attention. They are actively seeking to involve more women on the club committee, engaging with local schools to encourage girls to join and also to create an inclusive environment for younger players to give the club a strong community feel. The research shared as part of the workshop on values and influencers will inevitably help here and encourage the club be more appealing to a female audience.

Importantly, the mentor highlighted that it will take time to achieve the club's longer-term goals, but the engagement plan developed through this programme will be a great grounding for work to come.

"Our mentor has been a sounding board for ideas. As well as listening to us she gives her own thoughts and experiences as to what we could do and try".

Ardmore Cricket Club

"I was truly impressed with the club, their commitment to engaging more females and their long term goal of developing an Ardmore girls and women's cricket team".

Sported volunteer mentor

THE IMPACT



O'CONNELL'S GAELIC ATHLETIC CAMOGIE CLUB

O'Connell's GAC wanted to take part in the project due to a need to attract more female volunteers and coaches, but also a desire to attract new and retain existing women and girls at the club.

The club has always valued the importance of engaging females, but after attending the workshop recognised the values that drive women's decisions making and as a result had a better understanding of how to make their club more appealing to this audience.

The club really valued support from the mentor, who spent time analysing strengths and weaknesses in order to develop a realistic engagement plan for the next 6-9 months. Through the planning process the mentor utilised learnings from the workshop, highlighting that Women in Sport's research was a complete 'eye opener' and how without these insights it would be difficult to support the club in the right way to benefit women and girls.

The mentor took the club through a number of tasks learnt in the workshop, specifically on consultation, marketing and the sphere of influence.

The club has now started to implement its plan, which has included training for parents and the introduction of family fitness sessions. Importantly, the club plans to consult with existing female players to determine what they enjoy, why their teammates may have left the club, what stops them coming to training and what the club could do better. Through this process they will also be identifying key influencers in the club that could help to create positive experiences.

"We have always valued the importance of engaging with females, however, after attending the workshop it helped us understand more why women participate in anything which in turn has helped us to have a better understanding of how to attract females to our club and sport".

O'Connell's Gaelic Athletic

"I found the volunteer training very useful – a complete eye opener. I was able to use the sphere of influence and programming tasks to help the group highlight their strengths and weaknesses".

Sported volunteer mentor

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The pilot project culminated in an evaluation event in March 2017, where members and mentors shared their experiences, learnings and hopes for the future.

All of the organisations have benefited from being involved in this pilot project and learnt a great deal to take forward:

- It is evident that Sported members in Northern Ireland are passionate about engaging more girls and young women in their organisations and have an appetite for additional support and guidance.
- The bespoke training provided was effective; members felt inspired and mentors were given research and tools to provide the right support.
- The mentors played a crucial role in this project, by providing one-to-one support on the ground and offering a sounding board for members' ideas and plans.
- Many of the members and all of the mentors were volunteers, which can often be a challenge, however realistic engagement plans and support at key times helped to keep the project moving forward.
- A partnership approach worked well; both Women in Sport and Sported were able to successfully share insights and experiences to support members and mentors.
- This was a very short pilot project, which means that true impacts won't yet be known. Future work in this area needs to take place over a longer period of time and incorporate methods to measure impact and behaviour change.

Together, we will now build on our learnings and explore the possibility of expanding this work further across Northern Ireland and into other areas of the UK.



Jennie Rivett, Senior Sport Partnerships Manager at Women in Sport reflected “For the first time, Women in Sport have been able to share our insights in Northern Ireland, challenging organisations to think differently and apply our research at a local level. Involvement in this pilot project signifies a really positive step forward for us in terms of developing partnerships and showcasing the positive impacts that come from a shared vision.”

Brenda Kelly, Northern Ireland Manager at Sported shared “This pilot has given community sport groups in Northern Ireland the opportunity to build their knowledge and understanding of how to better engage women and girls in sport and physical activity. Across Northern Ireland far fewer girls benefit from sport than their male counterparts; partnering with Women in Sport we are bringing together our respective strengths, experience and insight to help break down this gender gap.”

George Lucas, Chair of Sport Northern Ireland commented “Sport NI is committed to encouraging more women and girls to enjoy, engage and excel in sport, and Engage-HER is a perfect fit in developing a more informed and responsive approach to delivering quality sporting experiences for females. We are proud to have worked with Sported, Women in Sport and the six participating organisations on this project and are delighted to see its impact with clubs and their mentors across Northern Ireland.”

FIND OUT MORE

Women in Sport
womeninsport.org

Sported
sported.org.uk

Sport Northern Ireland
sportni.net



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

