

ME, NOT MY AGE OR IMPAIRMENT

Engaging women with a disability or life
limiting health condition in later life



Thanet
Kent



BACKGROUND

Get Out Get Active (GOGA), funded by Spirit of 2012, **supports disabled and non-disabled people to take part in fun and inclusive activities together.** www.getoutgetactive.co.uk

Women in Sport are a partner in GOGA and for this research we collaborated with GOGA Thanet. Thanet is the most deprived area of Kent and is also the least active district. 35% of the population are physically inactive. People living in the east of Kent (including Thanet) are more likely to consider themselves to have a limiting health condition or disability than the average for the County.

GOGA Partners are guided by the Activity Alliance's Talk to Me principles. These principles, help providers improve their offer to disabled people and make it more appealing.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Existing research on women over 55 years old, particularly in a lower socio-economic group and/or with a disability, is limited. Women in Sport wanted to know more.

We spoke to and observed women attending GOGA Thanet sessions. We wanted to understand:

1. Why the women attend and the barriers to being active
2. The role of influencers and enablers in encouraging women to attend

We also spoke to women over 55 years old in Thanet who are not currently active. We wanted to understand:

1. The barriers and potential enablers for older women who are not currently active.
2. Identify ways to encourage these women to get active.

We explored how the Talk to Me principles are being used and how these could be effectively utilised to engage inactive women.

We used observations, depth interviews and focus groups. Nearly all interviewees had a disability or life-limiting health condition. The research was carried out in November 2017.



THE ACTIVE WOMEN

We found the majority of women participating are fiercely independent and want to have control over their own lives.

Sociable
Strong social
networks

**Lynchpin of
family/community**
Many with caring
responsibilities for
family

**Volunteer,
participate in
other activities**
e.g. choir, church
groups, charity shops

**Have always
been 'busy'**
Worked or
volunteered pre-
retirement and don't
want to stop

For the female attendees, the enablers or influencers to participation are generally friends or neighbours.

VALUES SYSTEM- ACTIVE WOMEN

We found the active women's drivers or motivations fit within these 3 values from Women in Sport's Understanding Women's Lives research.

- Nurturing friends and family is the priority for many of the women
- Often women were carers which was stressful.

I retired and thought it would be time for myself and then my sister broke her hip and I've been looking after her ever since.



- A focus on feeling good mentally.
- There was an awareness of the importance of getting out, keeping busy and not 'being stuck' at home.

- Retirement is not 'the end' and the active women don't see themselves as 'old'.
- Their lives can be busy, challenging and hard so they value opportunities to have fun and do something for themselves.

Source: Women in Sport (2015) Understanding Women's Lives – Re-designing and Re-positioning Sport and Physical Activity to Engage Women

I want to grow old disgracefully!

WHY WOMEN ARE ATTENDING

The appeal of the inclusive sessions:



TRIGGERS TO BEING ACTIVE

Specific triggers

- A particular illness or impairment worsens and they wanted to do something about it.
- An illness or impairment means they need to find a different way to exercise.
- Some women came to sessions to support or accompany family members (often husband).
- Sessions that the couples can attend and be active together.

General trigger: 'getting older'

- It is important to 'look after yourself'. The women want to keep healthy and 'keep going'.
- Important to be active now in order to see grandchildren grow up and keep playing a role in the family.
- Being active helps to avoid being a burden and keep control over their own lives.
- To prevent possible treatment or an illness.

APPLYING THE 'TALK TO ME' PRINCIPLES TO OLDER WOMEN IN THANET

Talk to Me Principle	Talk to Me Principle
<p>1. Use the channels I already trust Word of mouth and other trusted sources of information are used. Leaders/staff are trusted sources of information.</p>	<p>6. Reassure me I'm going to fit in Instructors and other participants are very welcoming and accepting.</p>
<p>2. Stay local to me GOGA Thanet activities feel local, easy to access.</p>	<p>7. Make me feel I can do it Activities adapt to participants; instructors provide support and reassurance.</p>
<p>3. Don't lead with my impairment or health condition Sessions are open and accepting; all abilities welcomed.</p>	<p>8. Make it easy for me to tell you my needs Staff are sensitive to participants' needs, but not patronising.</p>
<p>4. Talk to as many of my values as possible GOGA Thanet sessions are a good fit with the women's values.</p>	<p>9. Ensure my first experience is good Participants report feeling immediately welcomed and put at ease.</p>
<p>5. Continue to fulfil my values in new ways Through meeting others, social networks are widening. Women also get involved in other activities.</p>	<p>10. Encourage me via existing advocates Outreach and word of mouth work well within current social networks.</p>

THE INACTIVE WOMEN

For the majority of the inactive women, being sociable is often not part of their norm. They have few influencers encouraging and supporting them to be active.

When I got my diagnosis, I was very angry, I didn't understand it.

Notably socially isolated
To be social can be daunting

I keep myself to myself, apart from my relatives and the people here (casino).

Disability/health conditions felt to be severely limiting
Physical horizons felt to be very limited.
Fearful of pushing themselves too much.

Financially challenging situations
Can be dependent on benefits.

May never have done physical activity
May not be part of how they have ever seen themselves.

Life for many of these women feels like hard work.

There are some days when I just want to stay in bed, lock the door, turn the lights out and not have to deal with it.

VALUES SYSTEM- INACTIVE WOMEN

We found the inactive women's drivers or motivations fit within these 3 values from Women in Sport's Understanding Women's Lives research.

I don't not get out, they [family] would take me where I wanted to go. It's just that I don't know where that would be.

- Spending time in a positive way with friends and family can appeal.



- There is high awareness of the value in positive mental wellbeing.
- Frequently the inactive women expressed a desire to do more, to get out but felt limited by their physical capabilities.

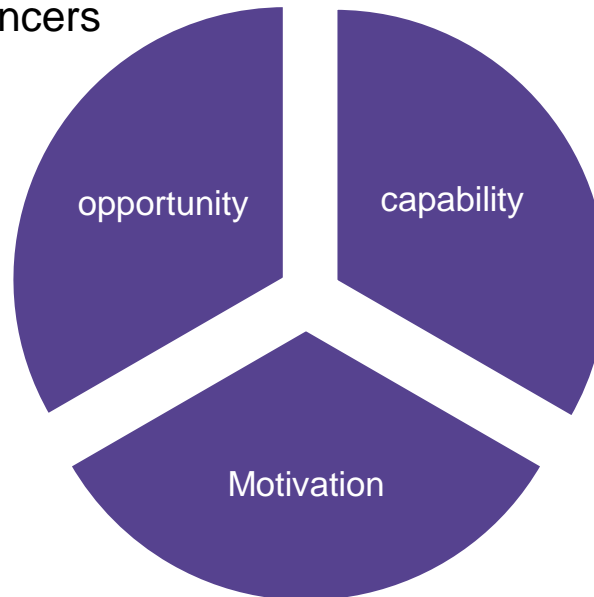
- Focused on managing or improving a health condition or impairment.

Source: Women in Sport (2015) Understanding Women's Lives – Re-designing and Re-positioning Sport and Physical Activity to Engage Women

BARRIERS TO BEING ACTIVE

Opportunity barriers

- Getting there: practical challenges
- Few enablers and influencers
- Cost



Capability barriers

- Low confidence in their own ability to be active.
- Wary of committing themselves

Motivational barriers

- Fear of being judged
- It's simply too overwhelming
- Motivation existed for many of the inactive women. However, barriers were felt as numerous and difficult to overcome.

For women to change their **behaviour** and become more active, they must have the **capability**, **opportunity** and **motivation** to do so.

ATTITUDES TO BEING ACTIVE

Not all the inactive women were interested in being active but...

- The majority identified, and even yearned for, the potential benefits of physical activity.
- Many women believed they might enjoy it.
- A few keenly missed their more active lives prior to their life limiting health condition or impairment.

I used to walk for miles, used to love walking on the beach.

I would like to do more, I don't like to be a lazy lout.

I've got to have a knee operation. Until I lose weight they don't do the operation.

VIEWS OF THE ACTIVITIES BY INACTIVE WOMEN:

- Some activities were seen as too easy or sedate for them; can sound boring.
- The name of some activities implies it's for 'really old people'.
- Some activities prompted interest and curiosity.
- Some activities were not widely known and require explanation.

That would be a load of old people, I don't want to join them yet

Will they accept that I can't do some things? I don't want to be asked lots of questions

Oh so I wouldn't feel out of place if I had to sit down then? Well, that's different

SUPPORTING WOMEN TO BE ACTIVE



Thanet
Kent



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. An opportunity to re-engage in exercise.** The experience of 'getting older' or a particular health condition can trigger participation. Limitations imposed by certain conditions might mean women need to find a different way to exercise. This opportunity can be maximised by sport providers.
- 2. Vary the group size.** Being sociable is not always the norm for inactive women. Activities in smaller groups may appeal.
- 3. Utilise buddy schemes.** Schemes which use a peer or family members to encourage and support participation can engage women who lack social support networks.
- 4. Take advantage of the interest for quality family time.** Physical activities where different generations of a family can be active together can provide an enjoyable way of spending quality time together.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5. Provide as much information as possible.** This helps women to see if the activity is suitable for them. The information will help overcome anxiety about attendance and whether the activity will be suited to their ability.
- 6. Me, not my age or impairment.** Many women do not identify with being an older woman or disabled. Avoid marketing and advertising that focusses on this.
- 7. Tap into the desire to do more.** Frequently inactive women expressed a desire to do more but felt limited by their physical capabilities. Inclusive and accessible activities are more likely to appeal.



RECOMMENDATIONS

8. **Goal setting.** Helping to set goals as part of the activity, with a pathway to achievement, could help offer a focus beyond the day to day challenges.
9. **Get closer to where women are.** Particularly with regards to the location of sessions and in order to spread the word about the activities. Consider locations that seem relevant, this may include health centres, garden centres or bingo halls.
10. **Engage women's values.** Align sport and physical activity offers to women's core values.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to:

- **The research participants**
- **GOGA Thanet and Your Leisure**
- **Percy Research, who supported us with the research**
- **Spirit of 2012, funders of the research and Get Out Get Active**

**Get Out
Get Active**

