



NOVEMBER 2021

GOOD FOR GIRLS

**YEAR 1 EVALUATION
SUMMARY**

About Good for Girls

The Good for Girls programme aims to support young women and girls to access relevant, holistic early intervention mental health support in trusted community spaces. This includes support and guidance from trained youth professionals, and opportunities to develop relationships, skills, and tools to maintain positive mental health. The intention is that young women will get support earlier, meaning fewer require referral to specialist services.

The programme focuses on supporting young women of colour, aged 10-14. Over the course of the programme, the young women will take part in weekly activities of sports and/or arts in their youth organisation. This will promote positive mental health and challenge stigma; they will discuss emotional wellbeing and issues they care about. Finally, they will take leadership to promote wellbeing in their communities through a social action project.

Alongside this, each year a cohort of 30+ youth workers will receive a programme of high-quality training to become Wellbeing Leads and embed positive mental health practices into their delivery.

“Mental health, especially during the lockdown blew up. And especially for this age range; it’s such a confusing time, it’s a pivotal time that you need to hit where mental health is developing. Young people go through so much, but they don’t know how to navigate it.” (youth worker)

The Good for Girls programme includes the following key elements:

- * Weekly programme of **positive activities** (either sport or art) for the dedicated girls group
- * The inclusion of '**talking circles**' which are wrapped around these positive activities and encourage young people to talk about their feelings and receive support from their peers and the youth worker
- * Design and delivery of a **social action project**, which is led by the young people for the benefit the youth organisation or wider community
- * An intensive **training** programme for youth workers to build skills and capacity for the whole organisation
- * A **residential and celebration event** to bring young people together from different youth organisations to share what they have achieved

For London Youth, Good for Girls represents the first time a programme has been delivered across the Programmes Directorate, with a team created across the employability, sports and social action teams. This collaboration across the wider programme team is expected to result in wider benefits to London Youth as an organisation, as a result of sharing insights, good practice and approaches to delivering the different elements of the programme..

Who took part?

Youth organisations

The first cohort of the Good for Girls programme consisted of 30 member organisations from 19 different London boroughs.

Despite the challenges of starting the programme during the Covid-19 lockdown, there were high levels of demand, and a large number of applications. The timing of starting a programme dedicated to mental health during the pandemic was extremely relevant to many organisations.

Youth organisations chose to take part for three main reasons:

- * The opportunity to create a 'girls only' group
- * The opportunity to support the younger age category
- * The focus on mental health and wellbeing

There were a broad mix of organisations taking part; some had more experience of delivering this type of support to young people and others less so. The biggest gaps in terms of organisational capacity prior to delivering the programme were around improving networks, methods of co-production and youth worker skills, all of which were built into the programme model.

The skills and confidence of youth workers to deliver this type of programme also varied at the start; some were experienced, others less so. Even amongst those that were more experienced at delivering mental health support, for many this was the first time they had set up a girls only group, or a group that works with this particular age range.

"Our girls have collectively improved their strength to deal with self-worth, identity and motivation issues, and pressures caused by family, community and school through Art, Sports and Talking Circles sessions" (youth worker)

Young people

600 young people were engaged in the first year of the programme. Learning on how to engage young people included:

- * Work with parents
- * Positive activities (sport or art) as the 'hook'
- * Training for youth workers in how to promote the programme
- * The importance of strong female role models leading on delivery

Analysis of young people's demographic data shows that:

- * 90% of young people engaged were within the target age range of 10-14, with a third aged 13.
- * 83% were young people of colour
- * 7% had a disability or life-limiting health condition (including mental health)
- * 54% live in the top 30% most deprived communities in England

The data shows that the programme has successfully reached people from the target groups; namely young women and girls of colour and/or who live in lower socio-economic communities, who are aged 10-14.

The main issues identified that are affecting young girls' wellbeing included:

- * Body shaming
- * Bullying
- * Dealing with conflict
- * Issues at school
- * Friendship groups/peer pressure, boys
- * Covid-19; isolation and dealing with grief
- * Traumatic life experiences
- * Caring responsibilities
- * Parental pressures or issues at home

What was delivered?

Youth worker training

34 youth workers attended 11 core training sessions and 3 optional training sessions. Youth workers benefited from 541 hours of training, an average of 18 hours per youth worker; representing a significant investment in skills development.

The training was extremely well-received and a valuable element of the programme:

- * 100% of youth workers agreed that the training and support from London Youth met their needs
- * 93% agreed that the training and support from the external training providers met their needs
- * 89% agreed that the amount of training and support available was sufficient
- * 96% agreed that they were able to apply what they learnt in the training to the delivery of the Good for Girls programme
- * 93% agreed that the training and support has helped improve what they deliver

"I benefited from the training because I always wanted to have a better understanding on the topic of Mental Health and Young people. I feel that the training covered a wide range of different areas within the Mental Health topic. I specifically really enjoyed being able to also hear scenarios and situations other professionals have encountered with young people in regards to this broad topic. The training also enabled me to gain skills such as being able to facilitate and create a safe space for young people to feel they can open up about Mental Health. The training made me understand that as professionals we will not always have all the answers and that is okay however it is important to educate ourselves through training." (youth worker)

The main learning from the training programme in year 1 was related to both the

level of training required, and ensuring that it is scheduled appropriately to ensure it fits with the delivery of the programme. Although the feedback was extremely positive, many youth workers recognised that the training programme was intensive, and was a significant commitment for them.

Young people's sessions

A total of 662 sessions with young people were delivered over the year. On average each youth organisation delivered 24 sessions. Overall there were 7,893 attendances, with the young people benefiting from 9,006 hours of support.

Youth workers reported that delivering successful positive activity sessions required:

- * Exploring with the girls what they wanted to do
- * Combining traditional (competitive) sports with 'games' and 'play' to ensure sessions were fun
- * Explaining to the girls why being active is good for wellbeing/mental health, and how art can be used to express feelings
- * Some groups incorporated a wide range of different activities, whereas others just focused on a single activity
- * Having a fixed group meant that the girls supported each other and were more confident to try new things
- * Using the funding to pay for professional coaches or artists to support the groups

"The girls got to try different activities that they wouldn't normally try at the youth club which helped to engage those that don't normally want to take part in sports. The sports activities varied from dance and yoga to badminton, volleyball, basketball, dodgeball and more. The art sessions really allowed the girls to open up about their feelings and mental health whilst also trying new art disciplines and using this as a creative outlet for their emotions." (youth worker)

Talking circles

Including talking circles into the programme of positive activities has been hugely successful. Following the training, youth workers have been able to incorporate this element with relative ease, by either starting or ending sessions with a group discussion, or having standalone group discussions separately from the positive activities.

Some groups found the Talking Circles challenging, particularly at the start, when young people were reluctant to open up about their feelings. And groups where the youth worker was not already known to the young people needed to introduce these later in the programme. However, as the groups bonded and felt more comfortable, they became easier to deliver.

“The major highlight from the sport activities were around seeing the girls applying what they learned and discussed in the talking circle into football. Every now and again, some participants demonstrated leadership and proactivity in calming their teammates down after a mistake and reaching out to others when they seemed down. Another important gain from these activities was helping the participants see how similar football can be to life and that the lessons around mental health (i.e., coping strategies) can be applied in both settings.” (youth worker)

Many are keen to continue this approach with other groups and programmes; having a more structured approach to discussing what issues the young people are facing across the wider organisation.

“We are going to keep doing talking circles in lots of the other groups that we have, not just the female ones. I think we now know a lot more about how we need to be putting this into all of the work that we do.” (youth worker)

Social action

A key element of the programme was the delivery of a social action project. The girls chose a range of different projects, all having a focus on mental health or wellbeing. The social action projects gave the groups something

to focus on, responsibility to plan and deliver their own project idea, and also provided a mechanism to showcase what they have learnt about mental health and wellbeing with other young people, their families and/or the wider community.

“The final idea was to create a short film called 'The magic within' a short film covering the minds of young women, how young women deal with mental health, discussing and showing the problems that young women may face as a collective and individually, connecting to the audience on how to cope with certain social issues that young women face, mental health, family and community, expectations and world issue that have an impact on a young woman. The film is called 'The Magic within' as it a film revealing, showing and reminding young women the power that they hold when in this world and the unique magic that they have to deal with anything.” (youth worker)

Engaging and retention

On average, young people attended 13 sessions each and received 15 hours of support. Just over half of young people (51%) attended between 6 and 15 sessions.

Learning from youth workers suggests that setting up a dedicated girls group helped to keep young people engaged through the life of the programme, combined with the responsibility for delivering the social action project. There were challenges associated with retaining young people on the project; in particular related to delivering sessions online as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

“Sometimes it was hard to get them there at the same time, because of other things that are going on their lives. But I do feel that they did bond as a group; even when they are about in the youth club or doing other things, they have that connection to each other from being part of the group. Where we do talk about our emotions, about what's happening, and we check in each week, they know each other on a slightly deeper level than they might, in another activity” (youth worker)

What difference has the programme made?

Outcomes for young people

Satisfaction rates with Good for Girls were extremely high, with 97% of young people enjoying taking part. Young people felt involved in the design and delivery of the programme, with 85% feeling they had a choice over what they did or didn't do, and 87% felt their views and feelings were listened to.

83% of young people felt comfortable talking about their mental health in their organisation, which demonstrates how the programme has helped create safe spaces within youth organisations for young people to talk about how they feel.

"What I most enjoyed the most is that I could speak freely without getting embarrassed or feeling unsafe. I was in a community where I was around people I could easily relate with, and the teachers were amazing too." (young person)

"It was nice to be able to express myself without being judged. I am able to speak to my mum about my mental health as well as asking for help if I needed it." (young person)

The outcome survey completed by young people showed that:

- * 72% feel more confident about talking about their mental health
- * 51% have a greater understanding of where to go if they need help or support with their mental health
- * 53% feel better able to ask for help with their mental health if they need it
- * 42% have a better understanding of what mental health means
- * 51% feel better able to make changes or deal with any problems in their life

- * 51% feel more optimistic about the future
- * 47% feel more confident about supporting their friends/other young people

"It helped me realise I need to talk more about how I feel and share my opinions or ideas more."

"It has helped me to grow as a person and make more friends"

"It had allowed me to remain optimistic about school even if I am nervous or stressed about something for example a school test."

"It has helped me understand how other people think"

"It taught me about mental health and if you have bad day it not a bad thing its only for a short time"

"It has help me know if I have problems where to go to get help"

As a result in taking part in Good for Girls, the impact on young people's mental health or wellbeing was:

- * 55% reported it has improved a lot
- * 35% reported that it has improved a little
- * 10% reported that it hasn't improved, but it hasn't got worse

"From what I noticed in myself is that my self-esteem has improved much more than before I joined this club. It also helped me with my mental health, like now I felt comfortable talking about my mental health and it has improved a lot."

"It has helped me in many different ways both physically and mentally. I am much happier now and enjoy life. I am also comfortable taking about my mental health."

Impact on youth workers

The programme has built the skills and confidence of youth workers to deliver focused support around mental health and wellbeing. The biggest impact has been an increase in skills to support young people to talk about their mental health: The youth worker survey showed that:

- * Understanding of young women's needs in terms of their mental health has improved from 7.13 to 8.56 out of 10
- * The ability to reach and engage young women has increased from 7.87 to 8.89 out of 10
- * Youth worker's confidence to talk to young women about their mental health has increased from 8.8.67 out of 10
- * Skills to support young women with their mental health has increased from 7.13 to 8.63 out of 10

"I gained really practical skills to facilitate discussions around mental health for young girls including games and exercises. These in turn increased my confidence in how we as an organisation can support mental health of our young people." (youth worker)

"I gained knowledge in how to better engage young women in group sessions and I feel more confident running groups with a big number of participants whereas I didn't before." (youth worker)

Youth workers were able to detail the changes they have made to the way in which they deliver support to young people, including;

- * Including activities such as yoga and breathing to sessions
- * Introducing more opportunities for group discussions around mental health
- * Using different tools and techniques to talk about mental health
- * Supporting young people to take the lead

Impact on youth organisations

The youth organisation capacity tool showed how the programme helped improve the wider organisation's approach to supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing. Across all areas, average scores have increased, with a greater proportion of youth organisations rating themselves at 4 or 5 out of 5 than before the programme started. The biggest impact has been improving co-production and skills development.

Overall, as a result of Good for Girls:

- * 100% of youth organisations agree that they have improved their youth offer to young women/girls
- * 89% agree that they have improved their wellbeing offer to all young people
- * 89% agree that their staff are more skilled and confident about providing mental health support
- * 100% have a better understanding of what mental health support young people need and their role in providing this
- * 89% feel able to embed what they have learnt in Good for Girls across other areas of delivery

Youth organisations were able to point to specific changes they have made in order to embed mental health and wellbeing support into their core offer, including:

- * Incorporating wellbeing discussions within other programmes
- * Extending all programmes to a younger age group
- * Creating more girls-only groups

"Good for Girls allowed us to broach mental health head on, which I think has had an impact for all the girls involved, even outside of the sessions. Mental health is a more conscious thought in our programmes than previously, although we could go further with it." (youth worker)

Initially F was a very introverted and shy person who mostly kept to herself and did not speak up. Lockdown meant that F, among many other young people, missed out on school for months during Lockdown. This meant that F (who comes from an overcrowded family) was not able to see her friends - which made her feel even more isolated.

When first joining the G4G programme on Zoom, she would not show her face and she would barely engage with the conversations taking place. After introducing myself,

I encouraged her to take part in the quizzes online and allowed her to take time to adjust slowly, which motivated her to participate and communicate with her peers. First it started with small conversations which then developed into open discussions about personal and universal experiences. This helped with building positive relationships.

Now, it is evident that she is a lot more confident, as she is willing to socialise with other members and she is constantly voicing her opinion, suggesting ideas for the club and making the most out of the opportunities given to her.

"I look forward to coming to the youth sessions. I had anger issues because and I don't trust people and liked being on my own. I have new friends now who are in different School, but I see them as my friends. We support each other!"

The major personal development we noticed was in relation to the girls' confidence - especially when sharing their experiences and opinions around mental health issues. Some participants went from being shy and quiet during the talking circles to leading activities and discussions. It was extremely satisfying to see the girls improve their communication ability and other leadership skills, such as proactivity, problem-solving, mentoring, organisation, and others. We believe that by participating in this project, the girls are able to carry the lessons they learned onto other settings of their life. A couple of parents told us about the girls starting conversations around mental health at home and at school.

The Good For Girls programme came at a time that one young person needed it most. Her friend had just been stabbed, she has a lot of issues at home with a broken relationship with her mother as well as looking after all her younger siblings and she had issues at school with behaviour. The group was a space where she could be herself outside of all the trouble and judgement she was getting and she didn't feel judged but understood. She learnt and is still learning that her reactions and behaviours are a result of what she was going through and so when something happens she is open to speak about it.

Since coming her attitude has changed where she makes effort to come regularly and helps look after young girls. She no longer wants to get in trouble at school and has been connected to a football opportunity after we heard her speak about it during the sessions.

As the weeks have gone by, the girls have blossomed and have really come out of their shells. They have increased confidence and communication skills. Young people are opening up to discussion. Culturally aware of the stigma attached to mental health. The new friendships that have formed are amazing to see, and has helped individuals to interact not only in the group but also outside. This has been a great help with the well being of the girls. Strength and skills exercise enabled the young people to identify what their strengths are and to identify and support skills development. The listening exercises during circle time improved their communication skills and working as part of a team.

Conclusions: Summarising the learning

Overall the first year of the Good for Girls programme has been a huge success. The programme has achieved its targets for engaging youth organisations, and exceeded the target for numbers of young people involved, and the evidence clearly demonstrates how the programme is helping young women and girls to feel more confident about talking about their mental health and wellbeing in a youth work environment. It has also demonstrated how the programme has helped build skills of youth workers, and the capacity of youth organisations; with many looking to incorporate elements of the programme across their wider service delivery.

The Good for Girls programme has been a new area of focus for London Youth, and the first year has generated significant learning around what works.

The strengths of the Good for Girls programme are:

- * The focus on **mental health and wellbeing** is extremely timely and relevant to many youth organisations, who have seen first-hand the impact of Covid-19 on their young people's wellbeing, and are keen to support them with this
- * The fact it is a dedicated **girls-only** programme; for many youth organisations this has been the first time they have created girls only groups, and most are keen for these to continue. The creation of the group has also helped keep young people engaged as they have a sense of belonging and ownership
- * The importance of having **positive role models** for young women and girls; the majority of youth organisations had women youth workers leading delivery, however the most important element is making sure there is a good relationship and rapport developed as this is key to helping the young people feel safe and able to share their feelings.

- * The programme **structure**; setting out expectations from the start around running weekly sessions and providing a structure for these sessions around combining sport or art activities with talking circles
- * The **cross programme** approach; incorporating both sport, art and social action has helped to build capacity of youth organisations around delivering different activities, and has resulted in members who are new to art, sport or social action taking part in the programme
- * The emphasis on **training** and building the skills of individual youth workers has been extremely valuable, and has led to youth organisations feeling like part of a programme, supporting their networking as well as building capacity
- * The value of **talking circles**, and learning around how simple 'check-in' conversations at the start or end of sessions can help create a space for young people to share their feelings and support each other with their mental health and wellbeing
- * The level of **funding** was sufficient to set expectations around the programme structure, outcomes and MEL expectations, as well as enabling the team to effectively manage the programme

Perhaps one of the biggest successes is the fact that many elements of the Good for Girls programme can be easily embedded or mainstreamed within youth organisations' current provision, and this combined with the significant investment in youth worker skills development means the approach can be sustainable.