



Get Active-Stay Active

Women and Girls

 **isport**
Northern Ireland
LOTTERY FUNDED

The lead agency for developing sport in Northern Ireland

Sport Northern Ireland is keen to promote the message that sport and physical activity are for everyone and that the benefits of an active lifestyle should be fully embraced and enjoyed by all.

It is widely recognised that there are differences in participation rates in sport and physical activity among certain groups within the population. We know generally that:

- Men participate more than women;
- People without a disability participate more than people with a disability; and
- Younger people participate more than older people.

We all therefore need to do more to provide additional opportunities for women and girls that promote and maintain active lifestyles and encourage lifelong participation in sport and physical activity.

Did you know that in Northern Ireland...?^{1,2}

- 52% of the population are female.
- 70% of women and girls never participate in sport.
- 34% of women and girls achieve the recommended amount of weekly physical activity (30 minutes, 5 days a week) compared with 36% of males.
- The most popular activities for women and girls include aerobics, athletics, dance, cycling, running and jogging, swimming, going to the gym and walking.
- More women think it's important to be healthy, but there has been little change in the level of women's participation in 20 years.
- Women's motivations are often different from men's – important factors for women are to meet friends and have fun, keeping fit and toned, losing weight and relieving stress.
- Participation in sports is one of the best body-image enhancers.
- One of the best ways to prevent osteoporosis is to do regular weight-bearing exercise.
- Physically active girls are less likely to smoke.
- Men spend almost twice as much time on sport than women.
- More than twice as many men as women are members of a sports club.

¹ Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation – www.wsff.org.uk

² Northern Ireland Adult 'Sport and Physical Activity Survey' (SAPAS), 2010

Getting Active: About the Sport in Our Community Programme

Sport Northern Ireland invested £3.6 million to deliver the Sport in Our Community Investment Programme from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2010³.

Among the aims of the programme was a desire to support and deliver creative and innovative projects resulting in an increase in participation in sport and physical activity among underrepresented groups, including women and girls.

121,171 people took part in Sport in Our Community projects. 44% of the total participants were female participants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Total Number of Programme Participants

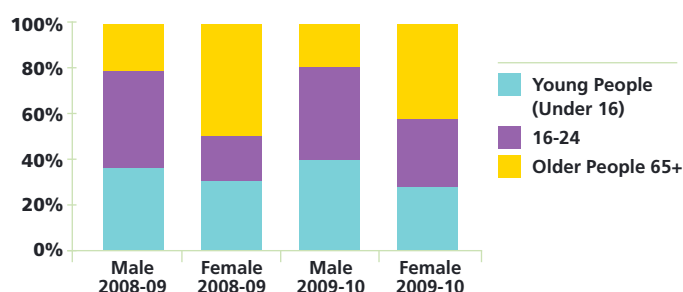
	SPORT IN OUR COMMUNITY PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS					TOTAL
	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	
Total number of participants ⁴	15,226	24,295	37,162	40,224	4,264	121,171
Total number of reported female participants	6,755	10,894	15,417	17,937	2,286	53,289
% of reported female participants	44%	45%	41%	45%	54%	44%

The number of women and girls participating in activities delivered by Sport in Our Community projects increased annually throughout the programme. In Year 4, 17,937 (45%) reported programme participants were female. Despite the small percentage point increase in reported female participants this equates to over 10,600 additional female participants.

The percentage breakdown of reported adult participants over 16 years of age remained fairly consistent (an average of 47% female, 53% male).

A comparison of reported female participation by age category in Year 3 and Year 4⁵ of the programme shows that 68% of reported participants in the over 65 category were female (Figure 1). This reflects the increase in the number of programmes delivered for older adults.

Figure 1: Percentage Reported Programme Participants (2008-10) by Age



Sports Coaches

Projects also reported the number of sports coaches delivering sport and physical activities as part of the programme. Of the 2,082 active coaches in Year 4 of the programme 73% were female – an increase of 8 percentage points from the first year of programme delivery, as shown in Table 2. This is inclusive of the project data reported by PlayBoard NI and the three Education and Library Boards which reflects the relatively high number of women engaged in play work and primary school teaching.

Table 2: Total Number of Programme Coaches by Gender

	SPORT IN OUR COMMUNITY PROGRAMME COACHES					TOTAL
	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	
Total number of Coaches	512	1,416	1,548	2,082	275	5,833
Total number of reported female Coaches	246	859	1,008	1,529	214	3,856
% of reported female Coaches	48%	61%	65%	73%	78%	66%

³ Investments made to the Education and Library Boards were extended through to the 30 June 2010, to coincide with the school year. These three month extensions are included as 2010-11.

⁴ Not all participants indicated their gender.

⁵ A breakdown of gender and age was only reported in Year 3, 4 and 5 of the programme

Staying Active:

At home and in your community

Sport Northern Ireland's investment in 34 Sport in Our Community projects enabled the development of specific programmes aimed at getting people active, and helping them to stay active.

Identity Dance Team Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group (LORAG)

The dance team grew out of LORAG's summer scheme, when teenage girls who had not previously participated in activities at the Shaftesbury Recreation Centre identified dance as an activity that they would like to try.

A dance instructor was brought in to deliver a six-week 'hip-hop' dance programme which proved very popular with the girls. Dance has also proved popular with the boys and approximately equal numbers attend the two sessions held each week, one for children aged eight and under, and the other for young people aged nine to 18.

A fully constituted club has now been formed and the dance teams enter competitions under the name 'Identity'.

The confidence of the children and young people has grown – the project manager commented that they dance together in the park and in front of their families whereas before they would have been too self-conscious and embarrassed. Entering and doing well in competitions has also boosted their self-esteem and confidence. As the project manager said: *"Often they are very nervous but they do it anyway ...they are only here twice a week but they are dancing all the time."*



As a consequence of the team's success parents and local people are involved in fundraising for the teams and in providing transport to competitions. More people also know about the centre as a result of their children's involvement and more parents are using the gym while the young people are dancing.

Fit for Life Larne Borough Council

Larne Borough Council piloted this scheme in Larne Leisure Centre where the need and desire for a regular physical activity programme for women was identified. The programme has grown from a six-week programme to a permanent fixture and is a great example of how activity groups can become sustainable.

The programme aims to offer group members the opportunity of high quality, guided and affordable physical activity in an environment that is welcoming to all - regardless of age, fitness and ability. The programme now has 40 female members from young mothers to the 50+ age group.

Activities on offer include aerobics, badminton, swimming and weights, as well as use of the gym and the health suite. A major factor is not only the high quality physical activity opportunity, but the social aspect accomplished through guest speakers

and the provision of fresh fruit, tea and coffee at the end of participation.

Whilst the group is still dependant on funding it is hoped that the group will be formalised to become sustainable in its own right. Furthermore, Larne Borough Council aims to roll out similar projects in other target areas within the Borough.

Young Mothers and Toddlers Activity Group Lisburn City Council

Lisburn City Council runs a young mothers and toddlers activity group in the Colin Glen area.

This programme provides opportunities for 20 young mothers to take part in a physical activity programme. Activities delivered include aerobics, keep fit, tai chi and yoga. The programme is held at a time to suit the participants and crèche facilities are provided to allow those who are not able to access childcare to take part.

The programme also provides dietary and healthy living advice alongside the physical activity sessions.



Marian's Story

Marian always enjoyed cycling but never did more than a few miles or cycling the mile to and from work - always feeling good when she was out and even better when she came home. Over time work and other commitments took over and the bike was left rusting in the shed.

Her husband, being a keen cyclist, arranged a cycling holiday in France, giving Marian visions of hours left alone on a campsite worrying about him, with the boredom of no-one to talk to, she decided she had to do something and got back on her bike.

Out came the old Raleigh mountain bike and Marian began enjoying runs along the tow path from Belfast to Lisburn or the Comber Greenway. With her confidence returning it was time to take to the roads around her home. Big mistake! Hills loomed that found knees creaking and groaning, sounding as if they were going to snap at any minute - the pleasure was all gone.

However, not one to give up, Marian persevered - getting fitter and stronger as the days and weeks went on. Marian even invested in a new bike - in time for her trip to France.

On the first day of their holiday it was time to give the bike a go – Marian and her husband headed off to the nearby village which was uphill all the way. She did not realise they were climbing until she heard gasps behind her and shouts from her husband of “ease up.” Then finally, “go ahead and order the coffee.”

And so it was for the whole holiday - Marian was spinning her legs, having to put real effort in when the climbs were hard, was out in the fresh air and was enjoying life - everyday was a joy.

Marian says, “What does it matter if I am a wee woman of undisclosed years with arthritic knees and hands? I have found a new joy to life and am determined to continue to live life to the full.”

What we know now

Five key learning points:

1. Women participate less as they get older.
2. Women may prefer to exercise rather than play competitive sports, with women less likely to be members of sports clubs.
3. Programme planners need to develop a better understanding of how and why women participate in sport and physical activity.
4. Providing childcare along side sporting activity is key to encouraging mums to participate.
5. Some girls are self-conscious about their bodies and think that sport is unfeminine.

About Sport
Northern Ireland

Sport Northern Ireland is the leading public body for the development of sport in Northern Ireland. Its corporate vision is: *“a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport which contributes to a peaceful, fair and prosperous society”*.

Sport Northern Ireland promotes the benefits of lifelong participation in sport and physical activity and the value of an active lifestyle for all – and especially among women and girls.

The full report *Get Active-Stay Active: Impact of the Sport in Our Community Programme* is available to download at: www.sportni.net

This document is available in other accessible formats on request, and online at www.sportni.net

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