

EMPOWER HER EVALUATION REPORT YEAR 1: 2024 - 2025

Introduction

Empower Her is a collaboration between Us Charitable Trust (USCT), Alperton School (ACS) and the Jason Roberts Foundation (JRF), with the support of Young Brent Foundation (YBF). This report is the result of an evaluation of the first year of the project's delivery.

The first year of this three-year project gives strong indications of the collaborative model being effective in delivering on its expected outcomes for the participants, their families and the participating organisations.

Funding



Funding for the project was provided by the John Lyon's Charity that gives grants to benefit children and young people aged under 25 in its 'beneficial area' of Greater London, which includes Brent. The charity has several areas of particular concern including the transition between primary and secondary education.

Background

Observations of experienced staff together with evidence indicating that girls and young women face structural and social barriers to participation in sport and confidence-building activities, gave rise to the project design. Brent girls and young women often have fewer opportunities to explore their strengths, participate in sports, or access confidence-building activities. Boys frequently dominate after-school activities and local facilities, leaving girls sidelined, sometimes facing isolation, heightened risks, and limited role models.



Evidence of Need

National evidence consistently shows a gender gap in sport and physical activity participation, with girls and young women less likely to be active than boys and young men. Sport England's *Active Lives* data demonstrates that boys are more likely than girls to meet recommended physical activity levels from childhood onwards, and this gap persists into adulthood, where women are more likely than men to be inactive (Sport England, *Active Lives Survey*).

The gender gap begins early in life. National *Active Lives Children and Young People* data shows that a significantly lower proportion of girls meet daily activity guidelines compared with boys, indicating that disparities in opportunity, confidence, and engagement emerge during childhood and adolescence (Sport England, *Active Lives CYP Survey*). Research also highlights that girls experience higher drop-out rates from sport as they get older, particularly during teenage years (Sport England).

Evidence suggests this participation gap is linked not only to access, but also to confidence, fear of judgement, lack of appropriate provision, and limited role models, all of which disproportionately affect girls and young women (Sport England; *Women in Sport*). These barriers reduce opportunities for girls to explore their strengths, build confidence, and benefit from positive social networks through sport and physical activity.

At a local and regional level, London-wide analysis of *Active Lives* data shows that overall physical activity levels vary significantly by borough, with Brent identified as having relatively low activity levels compared with other London boroughs (London Sport). London-wide children's data confirms that girls are consistently less active than boys, suggesting that national gender inequalities are likely reflected locally (London Sport).



Partnership

It was determined that a partnership between Alperton Community School, the Jason Roberts Foundation, and US Charitable Trust (USCT), working together alongside the Young Brent Foundation, would be most effective. Focusing on supporting girls in Years 7–9 (ages 11–14) as they transition from primary to secondary school, the collaboration was devised to benefit from varying perspectives, knowledge and experience. It was set up to result in significant impact for girls, their families and their communities, and to benefit the participating organisations; to provide varied models of working, specific skills, learning and support.

Programme

Over three years, girls will be offered sustained, high-quality support through a phased programme of sport, mentoring, and well-being activities. The project was designed to

allow girls to be themselves, take healthy risks, and redefine their identity without external pressures, in a space free from the male gaze and rooted in high expectations.

Trusted relationships with adults and peers, built through consistent, non-judgemental support, help girls develop resilience, emotional literacy, and self-worth.

Physical activity and shared challenges are used not just for fitness, but as tools to build discipline, body confidence, teamwork, and a growth mindset.



Each year will build on the last, guiding participants through key developmental stages:

1. Year 1: Welcoming & Belonging

Girls are welcomed into a girls-only environment where they feel emotionally safe and valued. They begin to trust, participate, and experience a sense of belonging. Isolation is reduced, and the foundations of confidence are laid.

2. Year 2: Deepening Confidence & Starting to Lead

With growing self-belief, girls are supported to step outside their comfort zones, taking on challenges in sport, group work, and creative expression. They begin to take initiative, develop their voice, and support others.

3. Year 3: Leadership, Independence & Giving Back

Girls take on more responsibility, strengthening their sense of agency and aspiration. They begin to imagine broader futures for themselves - personally, academically, and professionally - and understand their potential to influence others.

During the first year the programme offered activities on three days of the week, one in school hours, and involved:

- Summer activity programme
- Multi-sports activities
- Homework support club
- Personal development workshops
- Careers fair

- Life skills activities (e.g. shopping)
- Trips out (e.g. theatre)

Report

Project delivery

In May 2024 the project began by working with Lyons Park Primary school staff to identify 16 girls who would benefit most from the programme.

The July summer programme ran for 3 weeks and offered a variety of workshops and trips to that first cohort. USCT worked with the first 16 from September 2024 with bi-weekly sessions and the JRF coordinated after-school activities.

From October 2024 to February 2025 girls were supported as one group; from March 2025 smaller group sessions were introduced, and from May groups of 6 girls each were the norm. Topics in sessions: mental health, hygiene, bullying, friendships, resilience, self-care, revision, yoga, and therapeutic art.



The collaborating organisations very deliberately kept activities and responses under review, meeting that frequent adaptations were made to the programme. For example:

- Initially in the Summer programme, JRF and USCT ran sessions separately but relationships with the girls were improved when the organisations worked together, partly for safeguarding reasons (to improve staff ratios).
- There was concern that the initial 16 girls and the new 19 girls would not work together so but support to encourage mixing was provided, resulting in a well-integrated group.
- Drop-ins were badly attended so were replaced by staff presence in the playground.
- During school holidays girls reported an increase in difficulties and school staff observed an increase in challenging behaviours as the holidays approached. During breaks it appeared that momentum and some progress were lost as girls had no sessions to attend and sometimes experienced problems at home including:

- Parental absence (working parents) resulting in children under-stimulated and lacking support.
- Financial problems resulting in girls being home-bound, not mixing and, in a few cases, not eating properly.
- Unstable homelife such as parents with high-level needs, a lack of positive parenting skills and, in a few cases, the possibility of abuse or neglect.
- Isolation because of the above factors, increasing the chance of risky behaviour and emotional difficulties.

The project responded with voluntary provision during half-terms, Christmas, and Easter holidays, the latter being supported by Brent's Holiday Activities and Food funding.

Attendance across sessions was generally good. However, it was noted that children who missed sessions more frequently were often experiencing additional pressures, such as providing translation support for parents with limited English or caring for other family members. The girls whose attendance was affected by these responsibilities were often those most in need of support. The collaboration therefore quickly recognised that penalising them or removing them from the programme would be particularly harmful.

Monitoring information

34 girls benefited from the programme during this first year. All were from the Global Majority (Black or Asian heritage) or otherwise from minoritised racial, linguistic, cultural or religious backgrounds. Four had identified special educational needs. One girl withdrew from the programme.

Average attendance was higher when during the school day:

- Tuesdays – 18
- Wednesdays – 32
- Sundays - 12

156 sessions were held across three main venues (plus outings):

- Alperton Community School
- Jason Roberts Foundation (Stonebridge Arena)
- Grand Union Community Hub

Activities were broad and varied including:

- Sports and games: trampolining, tag rugby, football, tennis, boxing, crazy golf, table tennis, chess, dance
- Trips and visits: cinema; Kew gardens, shopping, Wembley stadium
- Practical activities: meal planning and preparation; public transport use
- Homework club
- Development workshops

All three participating organisations met together each month – 12 times during the year. Each organisation planned weekly internal meetings although Alperton school’s project coordinator wasn’t appointed until late so as a team they met 15 times during the year.



Outcomes for participants

Outcomes measurements during the year included:

- Professional observations
- Questionnaire
- Group exercises
- 1-1 interviews
- Case studies
- Home visits
- Vox pops (filmed comments)

The regular one-to-one meetings between individual girls and a member of the project team, together with the results of the student surveys, revealed common concerns and changes perceived by participants:

kindness
organised teams
confidence
support **future** self-care
new **career**
exams
responsibilities

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Towards the end of the year, all results were collated producing the following:

Outcomes	%	Comments
Increased confidence, self-esteem and self-belief	88	
Leadership and teamwork skills	85	From 43% baseline
Good coping strategies in the face of challenges; greater resilience; know how to seek help	98	From 40% baseline
Increased aspirations for themselves	98	30% specifically increased career aspirations
Feel included and less isolated	75	
Better connected to family, school and community	50	17 families engaged with the programme
Families better connected to children, school and community	35	12 families receiving additional input through home visits
Improved perceptions of women and girls	-	Sense of significant improvement – girls chatting; feedback from community members; siblings and cousins asking to join; parent feedback



“We should be kind to each other.”

Other outcomes

- Students have become more actively involved in school life including extracurricular activities inside and outside the classroom, including other sports clubs and encouraging their friends to participate in the Tuesday session run by JRF.
- Many parents are paying more attention to their children's academic achievements; several have given feedback on how things have changed for their children.

CASE STUDY: AMANA (name and picture anonymised)

Amana, aged 11 presented as a shy young woman in need of a lot of emotional support. She experienced fluctuating mood, sometimes presenting as calm and settled but often tearfulness. She found it difficult to form and maintain relationships with a tendency to 'buy' friendship by following others. Amana was aware of her difficulties and was able to voice her sense of exclusion and sadness about it.



Amana was in the first intake on the Empower Her programme. She attended all scheduled sessions three times a week and went on all the trips arranged.

During the project Amana became distressed during one session and spoke about an urge to self-harm. In discussion she said this just reflected her mood at the time but she acknowledged that she did have periods of feeling very low. Safeguarding procedures were followed and Amana was referred to the Family Wellbeing Centre. A meeting with her family revealed parents to be worried and very open to further support.

Amana has slowly begun to mix more and is open in talking with staff, especially during her one-to-one sessions.

The small group sessions have allowed Amana to connect with a few other girls who are supportive and positive towards Amana.

Amana talks about feeling emotionally stronger and able to access support when she needs it. She is attending the Wellbeing Centre and says she is pleased her parents are involved.

Amana is so supported by the project; it's exactly what she needed (parent)

I feel happy to make friends and get involved in things (Amana)

- Improvement in Maths, English and Science for many children (largely through attendance at the schools Kumon sessions).
- School attendance has improved with over 72% of students on the programme having 97%-100% attendance rates.

Collaboration

The Jason Roberts Foundation reported that a learning point for some staff and volunteers was the importance of creating a positive, supportive environment even at the cost of delivering skills or formal learning.

“Real change happened when participants felt safe, connected, and valued.”

Working with families from diverse backgrounds made clear the need to invest in time to build relationships without expecting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to work.

The value of inviting parents in to participate in workshops was also reported as a key learning point.

The US Charitable Trust reported that they developed a deeper understanding of the environment and circumstances participants come from, which allowed for the creation of a bespoke and co-designed programme. Insight into girls’ experiences and realities helped project workers use language more consciously and challenge our own assumptions.

All partner organisations agreed that safeguarding - understanding and protocols - were strengthened through the collaboration; in particular, the tight policies and processes of an educational establishment, in the form of Alperton School, encouraged the configuration of robust and responsive support protocols.

For their part, Alperton grew in understanding of how involvement in a programme such as this can impact on school attendance and academic achievement. In particular, the importance of open communication between partner organisations and with participating students who must have a voice and remain engaged as a priority.

“Together, we created a welcoming, engaging, and supportive space for girls and their families.”

Each organisation had its own working style, expectations, and operational approaches, which brought value to the project delivery yet presented challenges in arriving at a consensus when decisions needed to be made. As a smaller organisation, Us Charitable Trust were used to a quick turnaround on decisions and needed to navigate the more labouring processes of their partners.

Another challenge related to staffing and coordination. The absence of the ACS Project Coordinator impacted the fluidity of the programme, particularly when it came to visiting homes and accessing important day-to-day data, which made it harder to fully understand the evolving challenges within families.

The late appointment of the project coordinator at Alperton school made coordinating meetings and planning difficult. More specifically, it was a challenge to gain access to primary schools early on. The problem was most noticeable when it was resolved and the gains were instant.

“Each challenge has provided valuable learning that will help us improve our collaborative work going forward.”

Key learning points

Activities mix

The combination of sports and games, off-site activities, and structured personal development sessions proved highly effective, with learning and impact from each element reinforcing the others. Small-group work provided a safe space for girls to explore personal concerns and develop more thoughtful responses and perspectives. The confidence gained through these sessions was then evident in larger group activities, where participants demonstrated increased leadership, cooperation, and peer support. As planned in the project design, it is clear that physical activity helps participants meet other goals such as increased confidence, teamwork skills and emotional maturity.

Enthusiasm and understanding

Despite participants being picked because of their struggles – for many, evidenced by challenging behaviour and low engagement with education – the programme’s purposes were well understood by most girls. They were enthusiastic about the programme not just because it was enjoyable but because of its potential to change individuals. It was clear the girls wanted to, for example, increase their engagement and improve their relationships.

Relationships

The project design prioritised change at the individual level and proved to be highly effective. Clear positive impacts were observed in participants’ behaviours and priorities. Girls reported strengthened relationships with parents, school staff, and peers, indicating improved communication and social awareness. There was also strong evidence of increased empathy, with many participants demonstrating a willingness to support others, particularly those perceived as struggling. Several girls explicitly reflected on making conscious efforts to act with kindness and friendliness. Despite some girls being quite pushy (and others liable to being pushed), there was next-to-no evidence of bullying during project delivery hours, suggesting a positive and inclusive group culture.

Project model

The collaboration

The project is strengthened by effective collaboration not only between delivery agencies but between participants and their families, creating a shared commitment to supporting girls through a critical period of their lives.

The programme's well-delivered activities

Activities are thoughtfully designed and well delivered, ensuring they are engaging, age-appropriate, and responsive to the needs of girls participating.

The focus on school transition

By focusing specifically on the transition from primary to secondary school, the project addresses a key risk period and helps build girls' confidence, readiness, and continuity in learning.

Home/family context

While many parents were keen to engage and learn, the home circumstances of some participants presented additional challenges and sources of stress. Nevertheless, the project demonstrated that positive experiences beyond the home environment can have a significant impact on girls' wellbeing and development. Although parental support is a clear advantage, all participants benefited from the programme, with particularly strong progress observed among those from more challenging backgrounds.

Notably, the sessions held in-school were better attended, with some children expressing a need to be at home outside of school hours. Several funders are resistant to funding activities that take place during the school day and John Lyon's Charity are commended for recognising need and effectiveness here.

Emerging themes

Girls were impressive in their understanding of their own needs – to increase confidence; to engage more with education; to improve relationships – but their specific concerns were interesting, particularly:

- school performance, exams and results
- career and personal aspirations
- improved organisational skills
- kindness to others



Recommendations and next steps

Programme continuation and replication

The evidenced success of the *Empower Her* project and collaboration during the first year indicates that the approach is effective in achieving positive outcomes for participants, with wider benefits extending to families, schools and communities. It is important that girls in future cohorts can benefit from the programme, and that the gains made by those already participating are sustained.

Implementation of the project has revealed several minor operational challenges, resulting in some adjustments to the original programme design; for example, the need to ensure continuity during school holidays. The needs presented by schools and groups in other locations will require appropriate flexibility in delivery; nevertheless, the core approach is likely to be effective with comparable groups, and it would be regrettable if such a successful model were not made available more widely.

Recommendation: Seek funding to extend the life-length of this project and introduce the model elsewhere.

Introduction of more formal outcomes measurement approaches

With two years remaining, there is an opportunity to gather robust evidence of both the overall approach and specific elements—what works, and how. A recommendation to introduce a range of monitoring, feedback, and outcomes measurement tools is already being implemented through the appointment of an external evaluation professional.

Recommendation: Use various methods to measure outcomes and collect information for collation and analysis.

Conclusions

The first year of this hugely effective project with well-evidenced positive outcomes has benefited from continued monitoring and flexibility in approach. It is both highly desirable and likely that the efficacy will continue to show as the project is further rolled out.

Collaboration partners might consider how the learning generated through the project can be systematically captured and actively disseminated, both internally and externally, to maximise its wider impact and value.