



Elmhope CIC

# STRIDE IN ACTION

Active Movement Programme

---

**Community Engagement Report**

ESSEX • 2026



[www.elmhope.org](http://www.elmhope.org)



## About the Report

This report presents findings from



Surveys



Listening Groups



Extensive Community consultations

**Detailed feedback and analysis are presented in the next section.**



## About the Survey

This survey was designed to better understand how inactive young people engage with physical activity. It explores their needs, preferences, and barriers to participation to inform inclusive and supportive programme design.

### The survey explored:



Engagement of inactive young people



Preferences for different physical activities



Barriers to participation (confidence, cost, access)



Support needed to start and sustain activity

**Why this matters.** Insights from the survey directly informed the design of inclusive, confidence-building physical activity programmes for young people in Essex.



## Research Overview

This research was conducted to inform the design of the **Stride in Action – Active Movement Programme**, ensuring it reflects the real-world experiences, preferences, and needs of young people. **Quantitative data** were collected through an online survey over a **nine-week period**, engaging **247 young people**.

The survey explored how inactive young people engage with different types of physical activity.

Data captured participants' activity levels, preferences, barriers to participation, and the types of support needed to begin and sustain regular activity.

### **Why this matters:**

The findings directly informed programme design, shaping sessions that build confidence, improve wellbeing, strengthen social connection, and create pathways into coaching, volunteering, education, and employment.



# Demography

*Profile of survey participants*



Age

**16-25 years**

(100% of participants)



Ethnicity

**BAME: Black and ethnic minority communities**



Gender

100% **Female**



Number of Participants

247



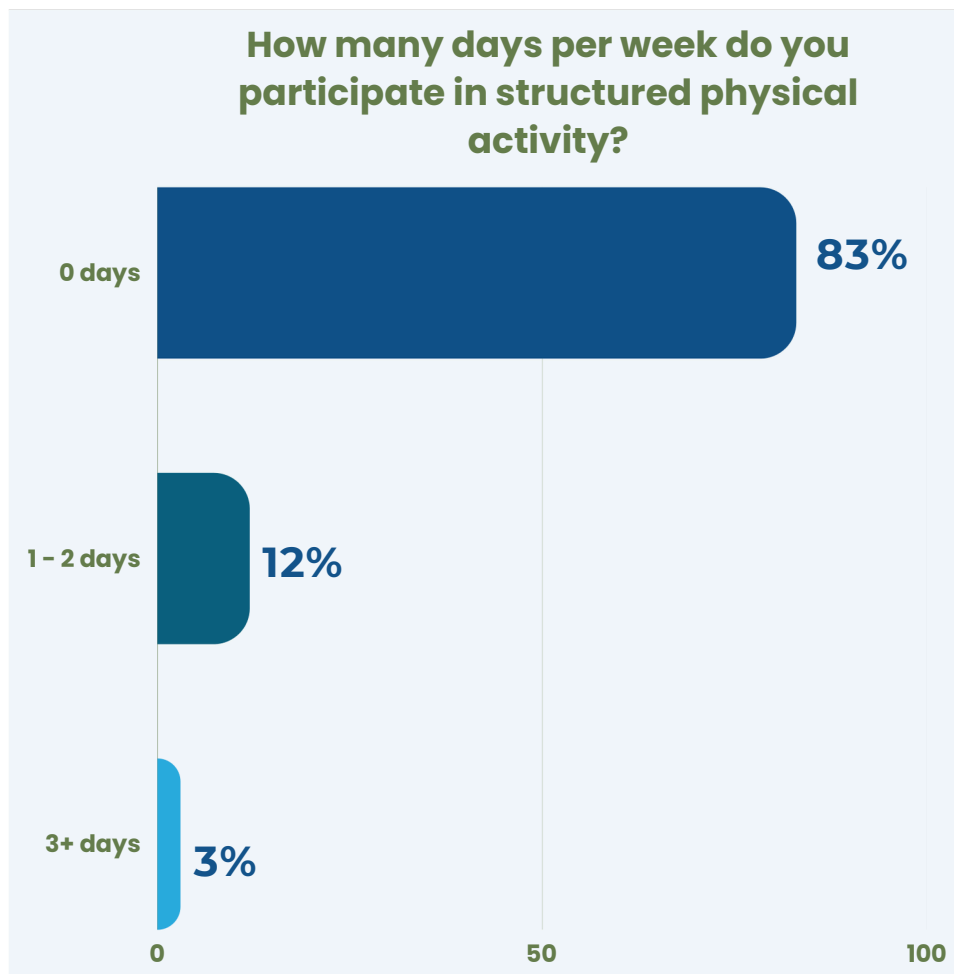
Location

Essex



# Current Activity Levels

*How often young people currently participate in structured physical activity*



Not sure: 2%

## Key Insight

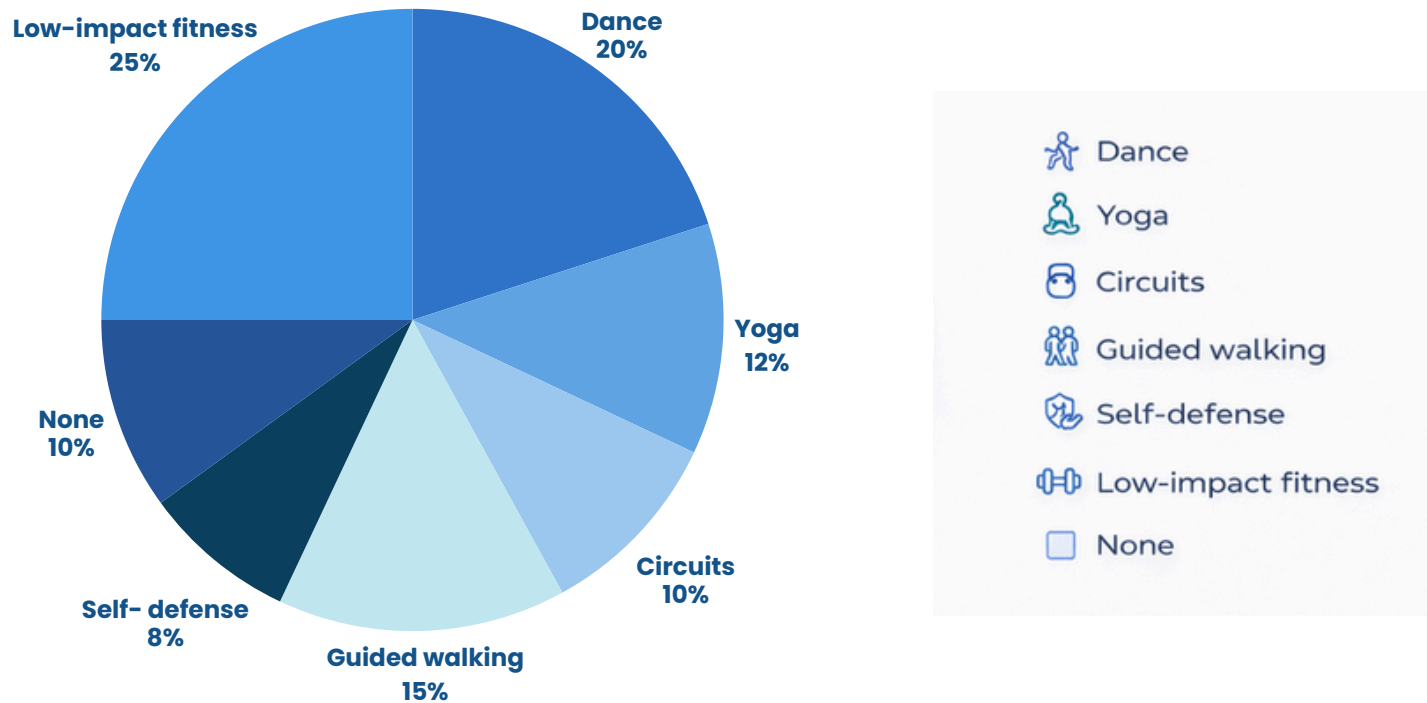
The majority of respondents are currently inactive, with **83%** reporting no structured physical activity in a typical week.

## Why this matters

This highlights a clear **participation gap** and reinforces the need for **low-pressure, beginner-friendly** programmes that focus on confidence-building and gradual engagement.



# Previous Experience with Activities



Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had any prior experience participating in the listed activities.

- While many respondents reported prior experience in at least one activity, 10% indicated no previous experience across any of the listed options.
- This suggests that, for many participants, barriers to engagement may relate more to confidence, consistency, or structure rather than a complete lack of exposure to physical activity.



# Informal Physical Activity

## Structured Physical Activity (per week)

**83%** 0 sessions per week

**12%** 1-2 sessions per week

**5%** 3+ sessions per week

Structured Physical Activity definition:  
Planned, organised, and usually guided  
by someone (instructor, coach, teacher,  
or program leader)

The majority of participants **are not**  
currently engaged in any structured  
physical activity.



## Informal Activity

- ✓ **Walking**
- ✓ **Household activities**
- ✓ **Home-based movement**

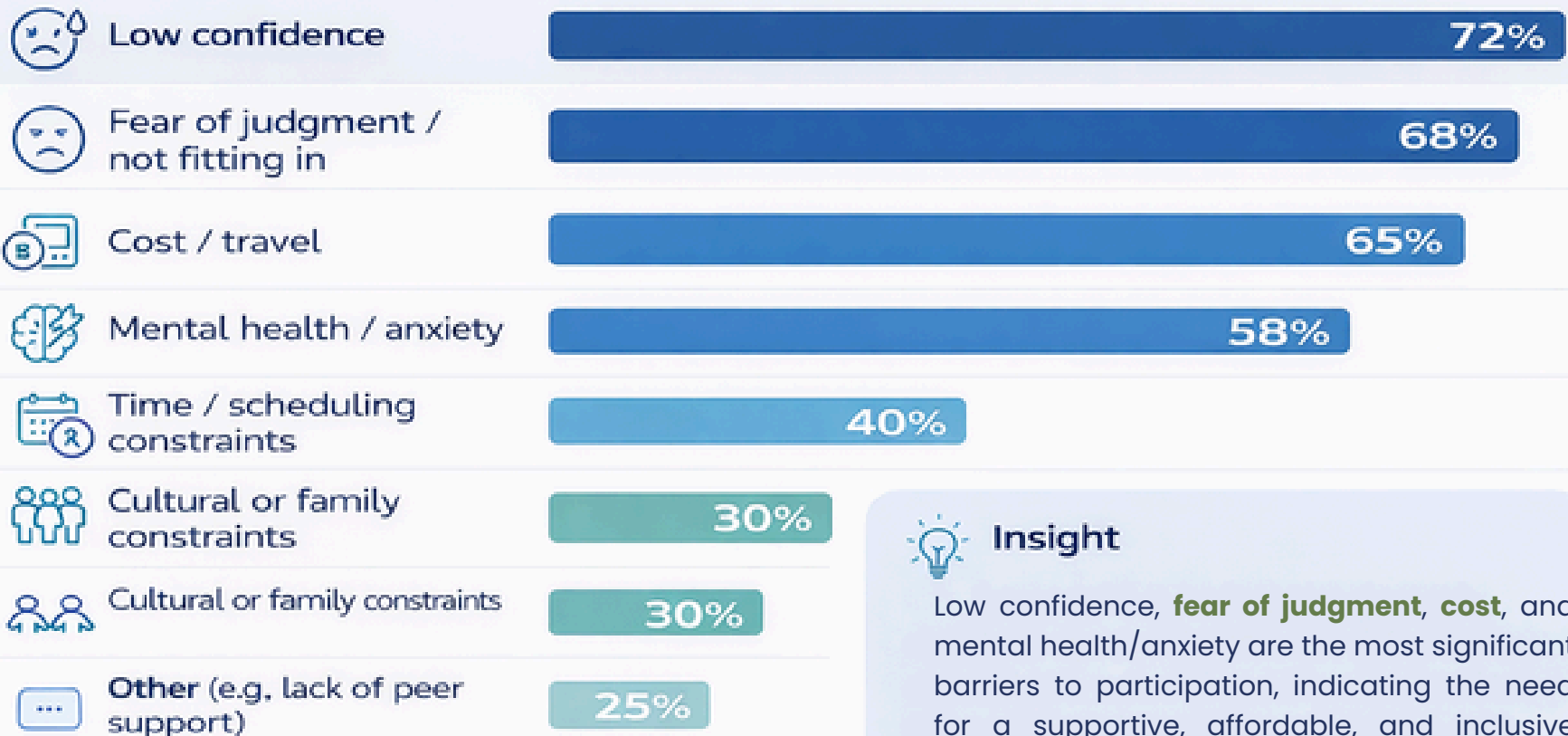
### Key Insight

Some respondents reported minimal  
informal activity such as occasional  
walking and household activities.



# Barriers to Participation

What stops you from joining physical activity sessions?  
(Multiple choice, tick all that apply)



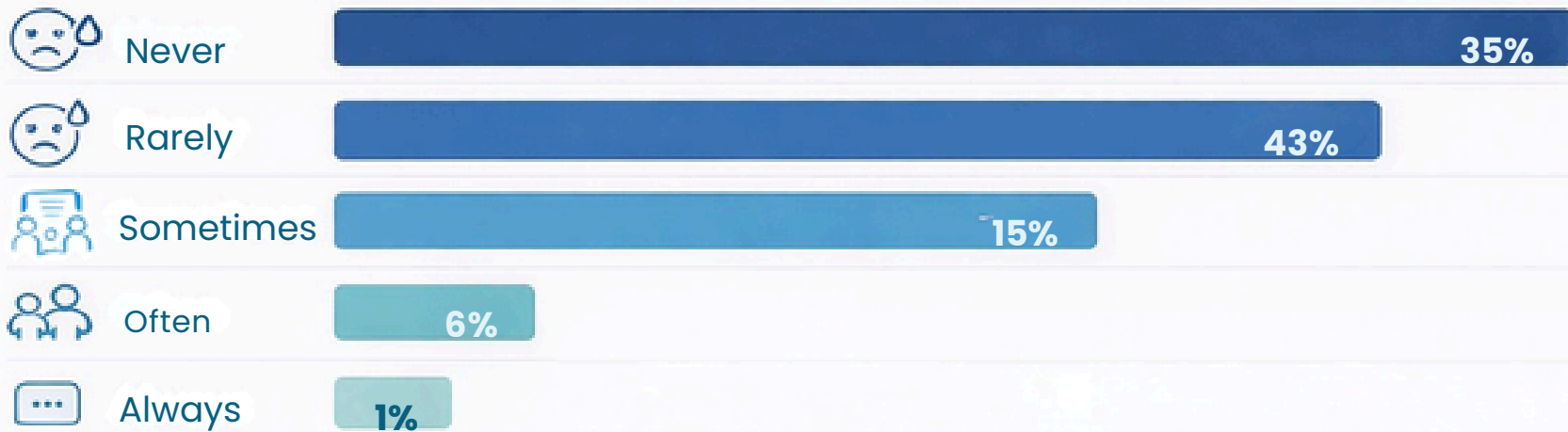
## Insight

Low confidence, **fear of judgment**, **cost**, and mental health/anxiety are the most significant barriers to participation, indicating the need for a supportive, affordable, and inclusive approach.



## Social Connection & Wellbeing

*How often do you feel socially connected to the community and local opportunities?*





## Social Connection Insight

**78%** of respondents reported feeling rarely or never socially connected to their community or local opportunities.

The vast majority of young people feel socially disconnected, highlighting a clear need for initiatives that go beyond physical activity to build social connections and improve awareness of, and access to, local opportunities.

### Why This Matters

There is an urgent need for structured, inclusive physical activity programmes like Stride in Motion, which not only encourage regular movement but also foster social connections and strengthen links to local opportunities. Such programmes can:

- Create safe spaces for social connection
- Build confidence gradually through supported activity
- Reduce isolation among inactive or disengaged young people
- Connect participants to their community and local opportunities



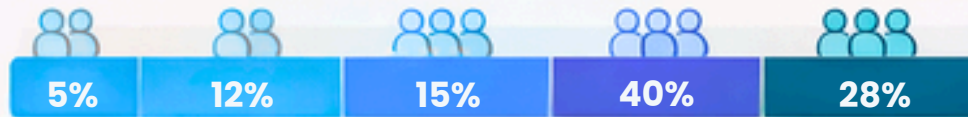
## Perceived Mental Health Benefit (68%)

Survey Question Example:

"Do you believe that joining gradual, low-pressure physical activity sessions could **reduce your stress or anxiety around Movement?**"

Likert scale:

Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree Strongly - Agree



### ✓ Insight

**68%** of respondents (Agree + **Strongly Agree**) perceived that structured, gradual physical activity could help reduce anxiety.

This aligns with pilot programme feedback, where **68% of participants** reported reduced anxiety after just one session.



**"Before the session, I didn't feel confident going to the gym or joining sports... but after just one session, I felt calmer and more positive."**



## Desire for Structured, Culturally Sensitive Support (90%)

### Survey Question Example:

"Would you be interested in structured physical activity sessions that are **culturally** sensitive and tailored for young women like you?"

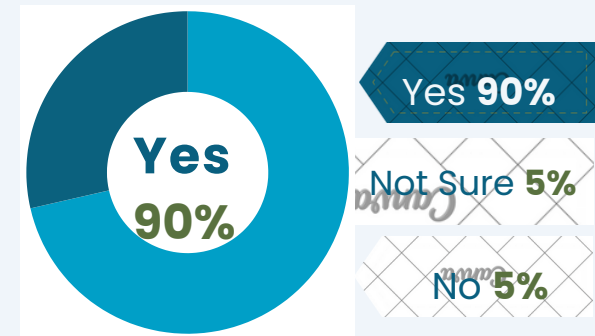
### Interpretation

A clear majority (90%) expressed a desire for structured, culturally sensitive sessions. This highlights the importance of designing programmes that are inclusive, safe, and reflective of participants' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

### “ Supporting Quote

"Having female only, culturally aware sessions will make me feel safe and motivated to try something new."

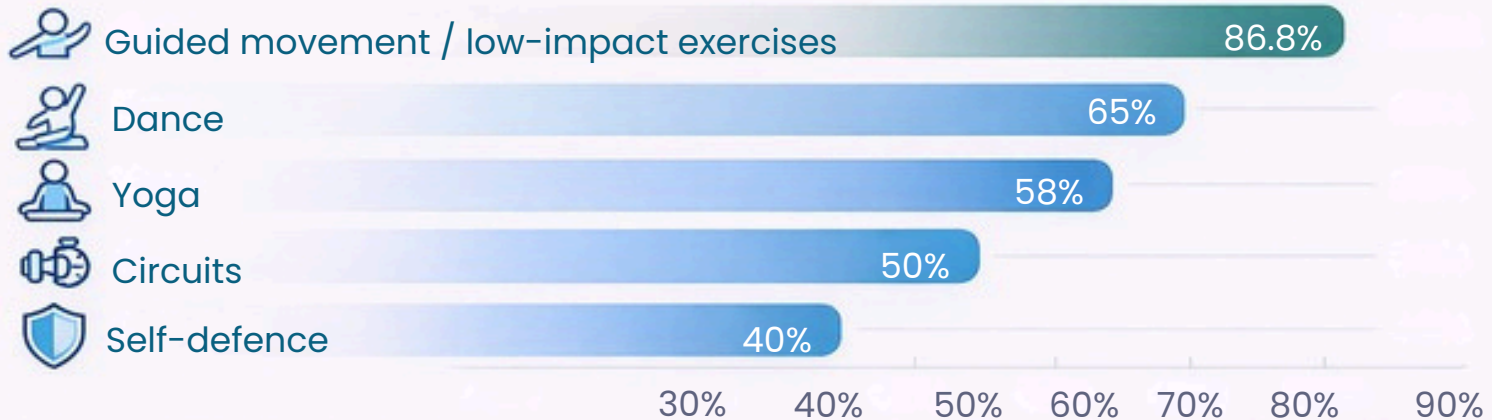
-Listening Group Participant





## Programme Preferences

### Preferred Session Types

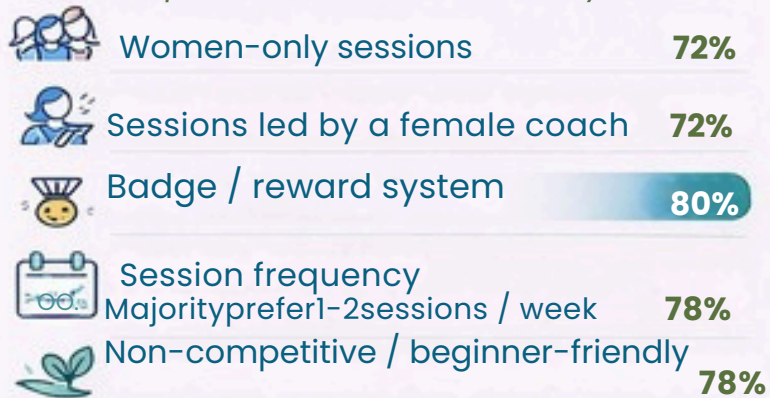


“We chose **low-impact exercises** and guided movement because there's less pressure to 'look fit;' **compete**, or **prove anything**, which makes me feel less anxious and makes starting feel possible.” - Listening Group Member



# Participation Preferences

## Participation Preferences (Survey Results)



## Key Insights

Respondents clearly value programmes **that are inclusive**, culturally sensitive, and beginner-friendly. Structured sessions that combine female mentorship, choice-based activities, and immediate rewards foster confidence, social connection, and sustained participation."

## Key Insights

- **Accessibility & comfort:** High preference for low-impact, guided movement sessions helps reduce pressure, anxiety, and fear of judgement.
- **Inclusivity:** Women-only sessions and female coach-led delivery creates safe, supportive environments where participants feel engaged confidently.
- **Motivation:** Reward systems such as badges provide positive reinforcement, supporting confidence-building and consistent attendance.
- **Sustainability:** Gradual, non-competitive sessions delivered 1-2 times per week are most appealing for long-term participation.



## Survey Responses

### Survey Responses

**Free or low-cost sessions 75%**  
Cost is a major barrier, accessible programmes are essential.

**Accessible location / transport support 65%**  
Travel logistics influence attendance.

**Women-only / culturally sensitive sessions 72%**  
Safe, inclusive spaces are highly valued.

**Supportive, experienced facilitator/female mentor 68%**  
Mentorship and guidance boost confidence and engagement.

**Pathways to volunteering, education, or coaching 60%**  
Clear progression opportunities motivate participation.

**Flexible, choice-based activities 70%**  
Autonomy and ability to choose activities improve comfort and participation.

**Clear short-term rewards (badge system) 80%**  
Immediate recognition increases motivation and attendance.

### Key Insights

- **Cost and accessibility:** Free sessions in convenient locations are crucial for engaging NEET young women.
- **Inclusive environment:** Women-only, culturally sensitive sessions led by a female mentors reduce barriers and anxiety.
- **Motivation & engagement:** Reward systems and choice-based activities encourage participation and build confidence.
- **Pathways to skills & progression:** Opportunities for volunteering, education, or coaching create tangible long-term benefits.

“These young women often fall through the cracks, structured, culturally sensitive, female-only sessions are an innovative way to engage them consistently.”

- Local youth service manager



# Listening Group Overview

## Purpose

The listening group was designed to gather qualitative insights from young women about their lived experiences, barriers to physical activity, and the types of support that would feel safe, motivating, and realistic.

### Who took part:

- ✓ Young women aged 16–25
- ✓ Many NEET (not in education, employment, or training)
- ✓ Predominantly from Black and ethnic minority (BAME) communities
- ✓ Based in Essex

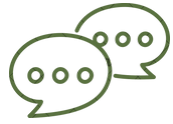
### Why a Listening Group

- ✓ To create a safe, non-judgemental space for open and honest discussion
- ✓ To capture voices and experiences that are not always visible in surveys
- ✓ To ensure the programme is co-designed with young women, not just informed by statistics

## How This Informed the Programme

Insights from the listening group directly shaped the design of Stride in Motion, ensuring it is:

- ✓ Confidence-building
- ✓ Inclusive and culturally sensitive
- ✓ Supportive and accessible



# Listening Group Insights

## Hope, not instruction, is the starting point

- Young people told us that many peers arrive feeling tired, hopeless, and disengaged. There was strong consensus that programmes must lead with hope, safety and belief in a better future, especially in the earliest sessions.

### Design:

- The programme should open with belonging, safety and low-pressure movement. It was suggested that facilitators lead from vulnerability and shared humanity rather than authority.
- Authority figures can unintentionally trigger resistance or withdrawal.

### Facilitator

- It was suggested that young people will engage more deeply with facilitators who look like them, understand their context, and share lived experience.
- Group identity strongly influences engagement: if young people don't see themselves reflected, they disengage.

## Exercises

- They told us that many experience anxiety around traditional fitness spaces due to body image, competitiveness, or fear of judgement.
- They suggested a progression of accessible activities; guided walking, yoga, dance, low-impact fitness that prioritise participation over performance.



## Listening Group Insights (Cont.d)

### Recognition & Peer Learning

They highlighted that they would much prefer participation-based recognition over competitive assessment.

They told us that peer learning accelerates engagement. Peer mentoring builds confidence for mentors and safety for participants.

#### Design response:

A 12-month badge and progression system, rewarding:

- Attendance and consistency
- Peer support
- Skill development
- Leadership and mentoring
- Badges evolve into peer mentoring roles and facilitation opportunities over time.

#### Design Response:

- A clear pathway from participant → peer mentor → community leader → Co-facilitator for next cohort, over 12 months.
- A final showcase, inviting family and friends, featuring young people's work, skills and stories, supported by ethical social media amplification.

### Why This Programme Is Different

- **Designed by young people, not for them**
- **Trauma-informed, culturally sensitive and inclusive**
- **Low-pressure entry with long-term progression**
- **Blends physical wellbeing, confidence, skills and leadership**
- **Creates tangible outcomes: badges, mentoring roles, showcases, case studies**



# Listening Group - Insights

## What young women told us



### Confidence before fitness

Participants shared that fear of judgment and **low confidence** often stop them from joining physical activity.

- ✓ Feeling **emotionally** safe mattered more than being "fit" or skilled.



### Safe, supportive spaces are essential

Women-only, non-judgemental environments helped participants feel comfortable trying something new.

- ✓ Many said mixed or competitive settings increased anxiety.



### Cost and accessibility shape participation

Free or low-cost sessions, nearby locations, and flexible timings were seen as essential.

- ✓ Travel costs and unfamiliar spaces were key barriers



### Social connection motivates engagement

- ✓ Young women valued opportunities to connect with others in similar situations.
- ✓ Feeling "not alone" increased confidence and willingness to attend regularly.

## How this shaped Stride in Motion

- ✓ Female-only, beginner-friendly sessions
- ✓ Low-pressure, guided movement rather than competitive sport
- ✓ Supportive facilitators focused on confidence-building



## Feedback: Pilot session

**"Before this, I didn't think sports were for people like me. Now I feel I can join and improve at my own pace."**

- Claire, 18

**"Having female-only sessions made me feel safe and confident to try new things."**

- Lola, 20

**"The badge system will make it fun and give me something to look forward to."**

- Tara, 19

**"I like that I can be active without pressure, and that it might lead to coaching or volunteering later."**

- Emily, 22

### *Pilot Programme Impact*

**68%** reported **reduced anxiety** after one session

**100%** requested continuation

### Key Insights

1. **Young women NEET** in Essex face multiple barriers: **social isolation**, low confidence, fear of judgement, cost, and travel.
2. **Women-only sessions** led by a female Coaches are highly desirable.
3. **Guided movement** and **low-impact Exercises** are seen as an **accessible** entry points for previously inactive young women.
4. **Structured**, culturally sensitive Programming is directly informed by the young people and has the potential to maximise engagement and well-being.
5. **Immediate rewards** (badge system) and clear pathways to coaching, volunteering, education or employment, are motivating and support long-term engagement.
6. **These programmes are increasingly vital** in the context of reduced youth service funding, high NEET rates, and the exclusion of young people from traditional provision.



# Implications for Course Design

*The findings highlight the importance of designing a programme that prioritises accessibility, confidence, and sustained engagement.*



Supportive, non-judgemental learning environment is essential, particularly for participants experiencing mental health challenges or financial stress.



Practical, cost-aware content is important for participants from low-income households, alongside free participation and support with access costs where possible.



Flexible delivery options including online courses as a follow up from in-person sessions, can help sustain engagement beyond the programme and help cost.



Inclusive language and examples should reflect diverse lived experiences, ensuring participants feel represented, safe, and supported.

# THANK YOU

Stride in Motion

Active Movement Programme



Elmhope CIC

[www.elmhope.org](http://www.elmhope.org)