

PROJECT 51 CASE STUDY: COVENTRIANS FC



What were the biggest challenges facing the club?

Coventrians FC had low retention rates of girls, particularly between the ages of 11-16-years old. They also had a Youth Council which was open to both boys and girls to have a say in how the club is run and developed, however no girls had taken up the opportunity.

What approach did they take?

They signed up to be a part of Project 51, a joint programme between Sported and Women in Sport to tackle gender stereotyping within sport at the grassroots level. The programme helps community groups in socially deprived areas of the UK, to improve their knowledge and understanding of how to engage girls and young women, aged 11-18, in sport and physical activity.

Implementing what they learnt from the project, Coventrians made these three changes:

- Introduced a peer mentoring scheme whereby the older girls act as role models for the younger teams. The senior teams (18+) coached and offered inspiration for the 15-17-year olds and they in turn became role models and coached the young teams and Wildcats.
- Introduced 'comfort boxes' of sanitary products in the girls' toilets and changing rooms.
- Created a separate Facebook page and Twitter profile for the Ladies' section of the club.

What were the initial outcomes?

The initial outcomes were very positive. Within a few months the club already had six new 15-18 year olds join.

As their numbers continued to grow the club introduced an under 10's teams and had enough players for two senior teams, which was the first time in the club's history. Girls started to sit on the Youth Council and started contributing to discussions about the club and its direction. Girls started to attend training more consistently and no longer skipped weeks due to their periods.

Jane Connolly, founder of Coventrians FC, says on their efforts,



"We took a very direct approach in recruiting girls and used all opportunities available to us, such as Project 51 and FA initiatives, 'Mash Up' and 'Wildcats', which were advertised as fun football sessions.

We took to social media to get players in. We were unique as we had female coaches running female only sessions. We also used current players of varying ages, abilities and shape to encourage the girls to participate"



What was the impact on the girls?



"Introducing the female section at the club after taking part in Project 51 this has enabled the girls to see the value of their involvement at the club and this has encouraged more girls to sit on the Youth Council now and start to influence the club moving forward.

It was through the Youth Council suggestion that we introduced the "comfort boxes" of sanitary products made available to all women and girls at each venue.

Now girls, especially those that can't afford products, don't feel embarrassed and know they can continue to play even if they are on their periods."

What did success look like?

"The ladies first team squad is now reshaped! We have 16-18-year olds now getting regular first team football within the squad.

The trick is getting the right balance between youth and experience, but the girls are very supportive of each other. We are on the verge of a second female 16+ age group team too.

There is one player called Ellie whose twin brother has played for the club since he was seven. She used to play with the boys' team but didn't really want to play mixed football.

Being able to bring her friends to training now, following the transformation of our girls' section, and be a regular starter in the girls' first team is what she has waited almost 11 years for! She is now helping us recruit and retain younger girls by sharing her story with them."