

# Building and Preserving Primary School Girls' Confidence through Physical Activity

**Evaluation of M2: Where Movement and Mindfulness  
Meet (Leeds, West Yorkshire: 2024)**



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This research was commissioned by M2, a Community Interest Group (Company no. 09846273) that strives to create a generation of young girls who enjoy being physically active, with a strong sense of self-worth and self-belief that flows through all aspects of their lives.

The research and programme activation were made possible through a generous grant from The Jane Tomlinson Appeal (JTA), a charitable organisation that helps children to be happier and healthier and improves the lives of people living with cancer. M2 are proud to represent the 'Children's Health and Well-being' pillar for JTA, which aims to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of children in disadvantaged areas. M2 are grateful to JTA for their ongoing support to ensure young girls are given the opportunity to be brave, strong and active.



## Executive Summary

M2 are committed to creating a generation of young girls that value themselves, using the power of physical activity to develop self-belief. Indeed, whilst sport and physical activity have the potential to transform lives, for many girls opportunities to engage are hampered by structural and societal barriers. The M2 programme supports girls in overcoming these barriers to enable a positive relationship with their bodies and physical activity.

Researchers from the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society in the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University were commissioned to undertake research for M2 between January and May 2024 to explore the impact of the M2 programme in five primary schools in Leeds, West Yorkshire. Two visits were undertaken at each school at the start and end of the programme to generate qualitative data to complement M2's ongoing quantitative evaluation activities. Visits involved observations of sessions, 'roving reporter' interviews with girls and semi-structured interviews with programme facilitators. The research team took part in one end celebration event with one school, involving participant observation methods.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the M2 programme provides a range of benefits for those taking part - improvements in physical developments and fitness; social outcomes including connecting with others and developing friendships; and positive mental wellbeing outcomes including resilience, pride, and confidence. Many of these outcomes were evidently being transferred into other school spaces leading to additional benefits. For example, girls raising their hands in class more, a positive outlook towards exam results, increased belief in their own abilities, public speaking, leadership roles, a more positive attitude towards physical activity, increased engagement in PE, participation in other after-school clubs, and girls becoming active in wider community settings.

The M2 resources that accompany the programme, the coach handbook and girls' journal, are well-received with suggestions offered for how these can be enhanced. To that end, the report offers a number of recommendations including: extending training to enable facilitators to discuss and share ideas in small groups regarding alternative activities and adaptations; encourage use of communities of practice as a means of support for all facilitators during the programme and in organising the end celebration event; review the coach's handbook and explore opportunities to make this less 'text heavy'; and review the girls' journals in relation to accessibility of language, and journals for different age groups. Finally, extending the programme to enable all workbook activities to remain alongside additional physical activity time to encourage positive behaviour change would be a worthwhile consideration.

For schools, targeting girls who lack confidence, do not enjoy PE, or who do not attend after-school clubs appears to be a successful strategy. Consistency of programme delivery is important for regular attendance and progress. Working with the girls to establish what they enjoy will encourage engagement and continuation. The end celebration event appears to have more value when externally recognised (e.g. parkrun), supported by others (e.g. parents, teachers), and celebrated publicly (e.g. assemblies). Where parkrun is not a possibility, working with other local schools to undertake a joint end celebration event offers an alternative.

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Who are M2: Where Movement and Mindfulness Meet?

M2: Where Movement and Mindfulness Meet, are a Community Interest Company whose ambition is to create strong, confident girls that connect physical activity with positive mental health and to have the programme in every primary school in the UK. The organisation is committed to creating a generation of young girls that enjoy being physically active and learn to value themselves. The programme focuses on movement and mindfulness using the power of physical activity to develop a strong sense of self-worth, self-belief, and confidence.

## 1.2 The power of sport and physical activity

Sport has long been heralded as a tool that can transform the lives of those who participate in it. Alongside the development of fundamental movement skills, it leads to other positive outcomes including physical health, mental wellbeing, social inclusion, and the development of essential life skills (Coalter, 2007; Holt, 2008). However, it has long been recognised that for girls their involvement in sport and physical activity can be hampered by a range of societal and structural barriers including gendered stereotypes, unsafe environments, sexist assumptions, lack of access and opportunity, and limited resources in comparison to boys (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Girlguiding, 2022; Mansfield et al., 2017; Oliver and Hamzah, 2010). Programmes, like those designed by M2, are necessary to support girls in overcoming these barriers so that they can enjoy a positive relationship with their bodies and physical activity.

## 1.3 Overview of the research

Researchers from the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society in the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University were commissioned to undertake research between January and May 2024 for M2. The research explored the impact of the M2 programme in a sample of primary schools in Leeds, West Yorkshire, generating qualitative data to complement M2's ongoing quantitative evaluation activities.

## 1.4 What will this report do?

Following this brief introduction, the report will provide an overview of the literature that considers girls' engagement in sport and physical activity. This section is followed by the research methodology including the choice of methods, and use of five case study primary schools. This will be followed by the findings, offered in three parts. First, the findings from each school will be reported separately, which details the ways in which each school's girls and staff experienced the programme. Second, common themes across the five schools will be presented. Third, data generated beyond the programme, through engagement in one end celebration event, will be offered. The report will conclude by providing some recommendations for the M2 programme that can be utilised by both M2 and the schools involved.

## 2.0 Overview of the literature: Gender, sport and physical activity

It has long been recognised that the teenage years are typically marked by a decline in engagement in sport and physical activity for many young women. For some time, research has consistently identified a number of societal and structural barriers young women face in being physically active. Examples include sexist beliefs and behaviour, gendered stereotypes, traditional assumptions regarding femininity, and lack of safe, supportive environments and opportunities (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Girlguiding, 2022; Mansfield et al., 2017; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010).

And yet, research also demonstrates a variety of benefits that being involved in sport and physical activity affords. Alongside the development of fundamental movement skills, sport and physical activity can provide opportunities for the development of personal, social and employability skills including teamwork, respect, resilience, trust, working with others, and leadership (Coalter 2007; Coalter et al., 2020; Holt, 2008). Engagement in sport and physical activity is also linked to enhancing feelings of belonging (Jones et al., 2020), combatting loneliness (Sport England, 2023), and improving attention, engagement and behaviour within other classes in school (Daly-Smith et al., 2018; Norris et al., 2020). It is well reported that physical health and mental wellbeing can also be improved through engagement in sport and physical activity (Girlguiding, 2022; Sport England, 2023; World Health Organisation, 2020).

This latter aspect is particularly important with concerns regarding young people's mental health on the increase, and referral rates to mental health services rising (NHS Digital, 2023 ; Sport England, 2023). Thus, tackling young women's disengagement with sport and physical activity and the barriers they face is a priority if the benefits that sport and physical activity offer are to be made available to them.

However, research has recently highlighted the need to consider how the challenges young women face in engaging in sport and physical activity begin earlier than the teenage years. Research undertaken by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) identifies a number of worrying trends within the primary school years. At key stage 2, 21% of girls are not confident to be more active at school versus 13% of boys (YST, 2023). Only 57% of girls aged 10-11 years are happy with their body, compared to 83% of boys; and 66% of girls perceive one or more barriers to being more active, double that of boys (YST, 2021a). Moreover, girls are less likely to rate their self-belief as good or very good in comparison to boys (69% v 79%); only 31% of parents think playing sport is important for their daughters in comparison to 41% for their sons; and only 49% of girls take part in a team sport in comparison to 70% of boys (YST, 2021b; 2021c).

**21% of girls are not confident to be more active at school versus 13% of boys (YST, 2023)**

**66% of girls perceive one or more barriers to being more active, double that of boys (YST, 2021a)**

**Moreover, girls are less likely to rate their self-belief as good or very good in comparison to boys (69% v 79%)**

Related to this, the insightful work by Women in Sport (2023) identifies the various ways that girls are labelled from a young age, and which contribute to beliefs that sport is not for them. For example, 'clumsy', 'princess', 'worrier', 'kind', 'fragile', and 'girly' are labels frequently used to describe girls, and yet are the antithesis of those qualities deemed necessary for sport. Women in Sport (2023) highlight two areas in providing a starting point for girls under the age of 11 to begin a positive relationship with sport and physical activity that will continue into their teenage years and beyond.

First, a change to the limiting narrative that suggests girls are not as competitive or as good at sport than boys, and/or that sport is not (important) for them. Rather, more positive messaging is needed that creates an alternative vision enabling girls' involvement, raising their (and significant others') expectations, and developing girls' confidence and self-belief.

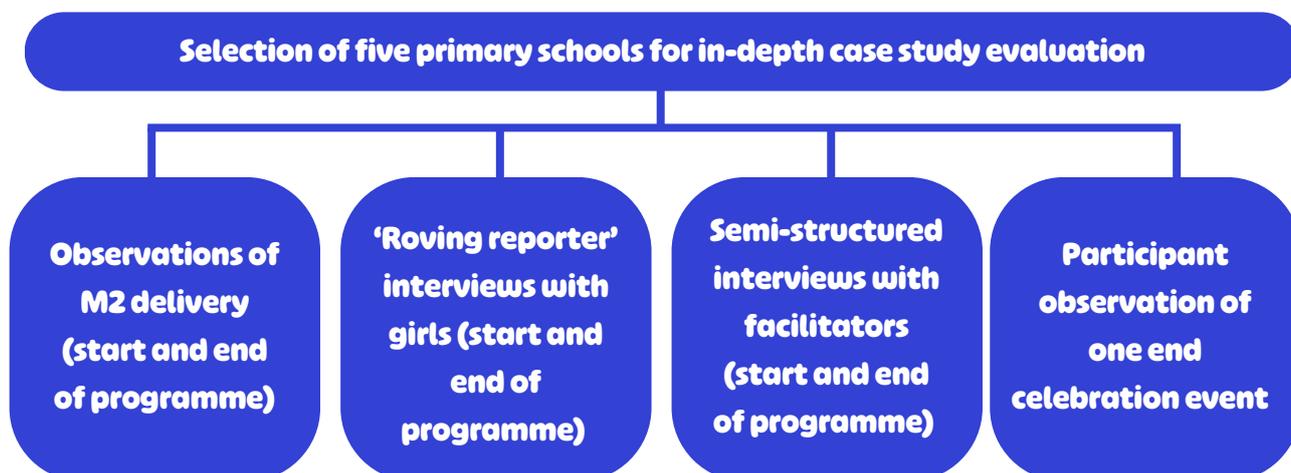
Second, the need to better equip young girls with the fundamental movement skills and opportunities to access and enjoy sport in and outside of school. To enable enjoyment and keep girls motivated, they signpost four key ingredients to provision: personal achievement; a sense of belonging; peer role models; and experiencing the feel-good factor of sport and physical activity. They also highlight the importance of a collaborative approach in developing young girls' confidence and competence in sport citing parents, teachers, peers, siblings, and community as integral to closing the skills gap, providing more opportunities for girls, and embedding the right attitudes amongst boys towards girls in sport.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Overview

This research extends ongoing evaluation activities conducted by M2 that offer a 'snapshot' of how girls and facilitators benefit from the M2 programme, to generate more in-depth insights. A case study approach was adopted with five primary schools in Leeds, West Yorkshire. Figure 1 provides an overview of data collection methods.

**Figure 1: Overview of data collection methods**



### 3.2 Sample schools

The five schools represented 25% of the total schools involved in the Spring term roll out of the M2 programme in Leeds. The schools selected were agreed between M2 and the research team and were based on school location, and the demographics of the school, to ensure a diversity of schools were considered. Table 1 provides details of the schools with the names changed for anonymity and confidentiality purposes. Similarly, any names of girls used within the report are pseudonyms.

**Table 1: School details**

School/ Details	Parkchester	Tremont	Kingbridge	Elder Avenue	Longwood
<b>Locations</b>	West Leeds	West Leeds	North Leeds	South Leeds	NE Leeds
<b>School Numbers</b>	~ 450	~ 400	~ 450	~ 300	~ 700
<b>Girls/Boys (%s split)</b>	47/53	48/52	53/47	49/51	43/57
<b>Pupils with SEN support (%)</b>	21 (↑) *	26 (↑)	16 (↑)	24 (↑)	51 (↑)
<b>Pupils for whom English is not first language (%)</b>	43 (↑)	9 (↓)	68 (↑)	6 (↓)	77 (↑)
<b>Pupils eligible for free school meals within last six years (%)</b>	22 (↓)	40 (↑)	31 (↑)	54 (↑)	35 (↑)

\*Arrows indicate higher or lower than the national average

### **3.3 Methods**

Two visits were undertaken at each case study school at the start and end of the programme to observe sessions and gather field notes. Observations considered participant engagement and interactions between the girls and the girls and the facilitator.

In addition to observations, the research team undertook informal 'roving reporter' interviews with the girls on both visits to the schools. These interviews captured the girls' immediate thoughts and feelings about the activities they were involved in.

Two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the facilitators of the programme in each school ('M2 School Facilitator'). The first interview explored roles, experiences with M2, and aspirations and concerns about delivering the M2 programme. The follow-up interview focused on what they felt was beneficial about the programme, and what they would do differently.

Finally, members of the research team took part in one end celebration event with one school, involving participant observation methods. This data is presented in the findings as a non-fictional short story using creative writing techniques as is popular within social science research (Sparkes, 2002).

## **4.0 Findings**

### **4.1 Overview**

This findings section begins by providing insights regarding how each school, its staff and girls, experienced the M2 programme (4.2). For consistency purposes this information covers the:

- School/programme context
- Benefits of engaging in the programme
- Programme content and delivery; and
- Highlight of the programme in each school.

The report then offers some overarching findings that emerged from across all five schools (4.3). The findings section culminates in the presentation of the participant observation data from one end celebration event, in the form of a non-fictional narrative using creative storytelling techniques (4.4).

## 4.2 Case Study Schools

### SCHOOL #1: PARKCHESTER

The M2 programme was facilitated by a teaching assistant, who had been involved in running the programme previously in the school. The programme ran one day a week after school, culminating in a parkrun as the end celebration event. The school purposefully targeted girls who typically do not access after-school clubs, resulting in 15 participants who remained throughout the programme.

#### PROGRAMME BENEFITS:

The facilitator saw the running of the programme as an opportunity to develop personally and professionally:

**“They asked if anyone would like to do an after-school club and would like to do training ... So I was like, putting myself forward.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

The benefits of the programme were multi-faceted and were seen in the observations of sessions, the facilitator’s understandings, but more often recognised by the girls themselves.

For example, in terms of physical development:

**“I’m so much faster, and when I just ran like two steps, I’d get so tired, and now I can run round that whole field twice and then I get tired.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“Before I’d go boxing and do laps as well and I’d get tired, now I can do them quite easily.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“It’s when I’ve like gone [walked] past when they’re doing lessons, or they’re outside. They’re more energetic, more focused and ... willing to get involved.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**Girls started off playing ‘scarecrow tig’ which they engaged in for quite a period of time with none of the comments about feeling tired that were in evidence during week one. They seemed to run for far longer than in week one.**  
**(Leeds Beckett University Researcher observation)**

These physical developments were complemented by other, more social, benefits. The most frequently mentioned was the ability to connect with others and make friends.

**“Interacting with others that they wouldn't normally do because, like, you see some in the playground and they've got their own little cliques ... but in the M2 group they were all as one.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“Before, I barely knew anyone, just her and her [points to other girls], and now I know everyone here.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I felt like I was so shy [at the start], and now I'm not anymore, and I've found my inner cheerleader.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

In addition to the physical and social developments that were occurring, psychological growth and mental wellbeing was also noted including feelings of positivity and pride:

**“Most of them have more pride in what they do, like the schoolwork, the presentation in it, the presentation of themselves. Like when they come into school, the way they present themselves.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Two girls noted increased confidence that had transferred into other learning environments:

**“So, when someone asked a question like, I always never knew the answer, like .... but now like, if they ask that question, like in English or something, I'll answer.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“Like SATs, when we got our tests back, my cheerleader basically said ‘well done, you tried your hardest. It doesn't matter about the score.’”**

**(M2 Participant)**

Another girl recognised how she had taken her learnings from the M2 programme and used these with her siblings to be more active away from school:

**“All these games that we play here, I play at home now ... with my brother and sisters.”  
(M2 Participant)**

Other developments that were signposted by school staff running the M2 programme included leadership and volunteering:

**“Since doing the M2 ... some of the girls are doing like active leaders. So, they'll go to a different year and do physical activities with the younger children.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

Moreover, the school's targeted approach of offering the programme to girls who had not attended an after-school club previously had clearly resonated with some girls who regarded this as an achievement:

**“Actually doing an after-school club, 'cause I never do them.”  
(M2 Participant)**

**“I never usually do after-school [clubs] ... but they persuaded me, they said it would be fun and that was right.”  
(M2 Participant)**

**“[I like] everything. I don't normally go to after-school clubs, I go mosque.”  
(M2 Participant)**

#### **PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY:**

In relation to the practicalities of running a programme like M2, there are several points to draw attention to. At this school there was an appreciation of the in-person training which provided opportunities to share ideas.

**“It was better being face to face 'cause ... you've seen Colleen, but then you saw others involved too ... you can ask questions ... like before, you could e-mail, but it's better to have a face-to-face conversation.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The focused and directive nature of the M2 coach's handbook, that was easy to adapt, was also appreciated.

**"I'm finding it really good ... it's straight down to the point of the activities you can do ... it's set out simple and it gives you guidelines of how to do it and you can adapt it to yourself as well ... So if like, if it's not working, you can have a different activity to do, as long as it's on similar lines."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

In terms of recommended areas to develop the ratio of physical activities to 'My Journal' workbook activities for the girls was raised.

**"They're engaged in it, but they would rather it be shorter ... more time on the physical activities ... on the second week there was like, 'can we have more games Miss and less writing?'"  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

This led this school to question whether the length of the programme and sessions was sufficient:

**"It's like soon as you start the hour of the session, it's quite quickly over ... I might extend it all ... 'cause these girls are proper enthusiastic, proper keen when they come to session."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

The facilitator felt a great sense of achievement through the completion of the end celebration event, a parkrun. Her initial concern, that this would not be well attended, was unfounded with all but one girl attending the event:

**"They were saying 'oh it's too far' or 'it's too early to get up', but they all turned up, which I was really, really surprised about."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The school had actively put in strategies to encourage participation, including asking parents to support, attendance by teachers, and the facilitator running with the girls.

Moreover, the event was then publicly celebrated at the school:

**"We hyped it up as well ... they got up in assembly ... I got them up to give them certificates and the medals as well, so they got an extra celebration."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

## SCHOOL #2: KINGSBRIDGE

The M2 programme was facilitated by a Physical Education specialist. The school had not previously run the programme and the headteacher saw this as an opportunity to develop the level of activity within the school. The school purposefully selected girls in years 5 and 6 who had 'not really engaged' previously in physical activities, either in PE lessons or extra-curricular clubs. Lack of engagement after school was often due to religious commitments. Thus, the M2 programme was scheduled for an hour a week during lunchtime or timetabled afternoon lessons. The programme culminated in a 5k run at the school.

### PROGRAMME BENEFITS:

The pupils who participated benefited in a range of ways, reported by the girls themselves and the facilitator. In terms of physical outcomes, the girls and facilitator expressed:

**"It feels good to rip it up and just run."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"I don't feel tired when we do games."  
(M2 Participant)**

The facilitator of the programme reinforced some of the girls' positive attitudes. The facilitator also noted how these outcomes had translated into attendance at extra-curricular clubs and increased participation in PE lessons:

**"I am seeing them enjoy it a little bit more ... engaging and understanding how their bodies work when they exercise and that it's not embarrassing if they're sweating or red."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

**"The year 5 girls have joined football on a Monday because they weren't doing any clubs before, which is really good, I've never seen them at anything before ... they're always asking me like, if there are any sports trips coming up, like netball."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

**"I think like, within the PE lessons ... the class teachers have said they've been a little bit more engaged and involved."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

These outcomes were accompanied by psychological developments including an increase in self-confidence. Several girls acknowledged feelings of escape, comfort, and a growing desire to participate in physical activity

**"The activities made me feel fearless."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"I was able to forget about everything else."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"I felt like my whole self was telling me to live my life and do it."  
(M2 Participant)**

The facilitator also explained how one of the biggest improvements observed had been the girls' attitude:

**"They've been excited and asking me when we're going to do it each week which is nice and then they're really excited for the rewards trip\*, which is obviously like physical activity."**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

\*End of year celebration event at Yeadon Tarn

Both the facilitator and the participants themselves felt that some of the increased confidence linked to the girls-only environment. This environment fostered a sense of safety by alleviating concerns relating to religious requirements.

**"I felt comfortable because it was only girls, there was no boys to laugh at me"**

**(M2 Participant)**

**"Normally, I'm worried that my headscarf might come off, but now I don't care, everyone here has seen my hair now and we're all girls here so it's fine."**

**(M2 Participant)**

The facilitator also noted the challenges of mixed PE and how this can negatively impact engagement.

**"I think culturally, a lot of things are separate, like they go to mosque separately, the girls are covered up ... they are maybe just feeling a bit uncomfortable about the boys, maybe not necessarily religious reasons but they're [boys] always really competitive and sometimes get a bit too aggressive and put the girls off."**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Additional benefits concerning social outcomes were mentioned by the girls including new friendships.

Positive communication between the girls was also in evidence with them using their workbooks and activities to encourage each other

**"A few of them have started like hanging around with each other, like the two year 5 girls, I've seen them together at lunchtime a little bit more."**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**"They enjoyed filling that in ['My Journal'] and there were some weeks where they could write in each other's and write good things about each other..... They're going to take them away with them when we're finished."**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“There was a real buzz in the playground ... All the girls were smiling and laughing as we walked out to the session. They seem to all be friends even though they are from different year groups. They have been using some of the positive phrases they have thought of when we were in the classroom to cheer each other on.**

**(Leeds Beckett University Researcher Observation)**

### **PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY:**

The facilitator provided useful reflections regarding the practicalities of running the M2 programme focusing on the coach's handbook, the girls' workbook, and overall delivery. First, she noted the usefulness of the training:

**“It was nice and informative because we sort of went through the booklet as if we were the students ... it was good to put yourself in that position and then be able to help the girls with some examples.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

The clarity of instructions in the handbook was also appreciated. That said, the need for more variety and adaptations was highlighted:

**“I've adapted them a little bit because they enjoy the games ... obviously it's still running and similar to what's in the handbook, but a little bit adapted and just keeping them active.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

She recommended developing a more flexible design within the handbook to enable facilitators to adapt sessions to suit their group's needs and the environment:

**“Maybe just some extra games in there ... maybe a ball game ... not just running games ... they got a little bored some weeks..”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

The facilitator expressed how useful the booklets were for the girls, especially to keep as a memento of their work. The workbooks also provided a private space for the girls to be honest about their feelings in a supportive, safe environment, which they might otherwise have struggled to articulate:

**“I was quite shocked by some of the things they wrote about themselves ... it was quite sad really that they think that at that age ... They're very harsh on themselves.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Relatedly, the facilitator suggested that one of the key benefits of running the programme was the opportunity to better understand the barriers facing the girls, which she noted as useful to her role as the PE specialist moving forwards. For example:

**“Just seeing some of the reasons why they’ve maybe not wanted to be involved ... they were like really embarrassed because they were red and sweating and I didn’t think they would be that bothered ... but they didn’t really know what actually happens to your body and that that is normal.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

These insights had resulted in the school changing its timetable of lunchtime activities to include a wider range to suit different pupils.

**“So we do netball ... basketball ... we don’t just stick to football”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

One issue was a lack of consistency in timetabling the programme. This was due to staff commitments elsewhere in the school. She noted the need to ensure sessions ran consistently at the same time every week to maintain interest and momentum.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS:**

In this school the facilitator cited the psychological benefits of the programme as the key highlight. The girls started the programme unsure and unwilling to get involved in the physical activities.

As they developed through the programme and enhanced their social connections they began to exhibit more positive responses to physical activity, as reflected in the following comments.

**“I feel way more confident because we’ve been practicing!”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“I am positive now!”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

## **SCHOOL #3: LONGWOOD**

The M2 programme was facilitated by the lead for Physical Education, and a teaching assistant. The school saw the programme as an opportunity to develop confidence in those girls who lacked it in physical activity. The lead facilitator recognised the importance of having a female coach, noting that a man would have been more intimidating for the girls.

The M2 programme was new to the school and ran one day a week, after school. This was to alleviate the pressure of finding suitable times and spaces in the school day. However, this did result in some girls being unable to attend due to religious (i.e. going to mosque) and other commitments. The school did its own 5k run as its end celebration event.

### **PROGRAMME BENEFITS:**

Various benefits were in evidence, including physical, social, and psychological/mental wellbeing, as reported by the girls themselves, the facilitator, and the observation reports. In terms of physical outcomes, some girls noted:

**“Running is the best bit. We run a lot and that helps us be fit.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I liked it because it makes your body more physical, like moving.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

The facilitator of the programme supported these quotes. Moreover, the facilitator recognised that the girl's physical developments had resulted in an improved engagement within PE:

**“Fitness wise, week one, we did two laps of the sports hall, and the girls were saying that it is ‘too far, I can’t do it,’ or they were too tired...**

**By the end they were running five laps, having a break, five laps, having a break.**

**Even in PE lessons, more willing to take part ... they were actually up for getting involved.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Other outcomes were also reported, including building friendships. Moreover, as the girls participating in the programme were a mixture of two year groups (years 3 and 4), the positive social outcomes seen would have unlikely taken place, were it not for the programme.

**“Meeting other people and really building up my confidence.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“Mostly spending time with other people and not boys, that like mess up clubs and stuff.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“We had different year groups ... as we built up over the weeks, doing the different activities, they began to appreciate each other and cheer each other on.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

In addition to the physical and social developments, psychological health outcomes were reported. Several girls noted improvements in confidence.

**““At the start I was really, really shy. But, now I have built a lot of confidence and I’m actually proud of myself.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“I like how Miss has been helping us to be more confident.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“Running makes me feel more confident.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

Indeed, the facilitator reflected upon the contrast in the girls’ confidence from the beginning to the end of the programme:

**“Many of the girls we picked were quiet. Week one they didn’t want to talk to each other, the room was silent. But by the end of it, they were really confident, and loud. They made some really good friends. They are the sort of girls that don’t really have friends, they are quite shy and timid. So, socially they gained lots more confidence.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Moreover, some girls demonstrated resilience and wanting to 'prove others wrong'

**"I would say, never give up."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"You can get more confident at PE maybe and we can prove all the people that say 'oh no sport is only for boys, why are you doing sport?', we can prove all of those people wrong."  
(M2 Participant)**

In further support of the girls' viewpoints regarding improvements in self-confidence, and resilience, the facilitator provided a specific example:

**"One girl, when we started, didn't really want to come ... she hated PE, she hated physical activity, and when she heard it was running, she was like 'absolutely not'. But she persevered ... and she said, 'I used to purposely try and get out of PE and pretend that I was hurt to get out of doing it, but I've realised once I have become more confident, it's actually quite fun.'  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

Closely aligned to improvements in psychological growth were the girls' use of their 'inner cheerleader/critic'. The facilitator commentated on the usefulness of these concepts, and the observations of sessions highlighted how these were being transferred into physical activity settings and other environments.

**The ideas of inner cheerleader and 'things that says to you' seemed to really resonate. The running activity and encouraging them to use the positive phrases they had thought of earlier to cheer each other on helped build a sense of doing it together.**

**(Leeds Beckett University  
Researcher Observation)**

**The facilitator mentioned how the girls were using their inner cheerleader in other areas of the school and at home. For instance, the facilitator revealed that one of the girls had some problems at home and was writing a story about their inner cheerleader.**

**(Leeds Beckett University  
Researcher Observation)**

## **PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY:**

The facilitator at this school provided some useful reflections regarding the practicalities of running the M2 programme. These related to the programme content, the M2 coach's handbook, and the girls 'my journal' workbook. First, the facilitator appreciated the directive nature of the coach's handbook:

**"The book, I went off that every week ... Great in terms of time constraints and no need to plan ... it was easy to follow."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

That said, the facilitator also reported on the 'text heavy' nature of the handbook:

**"It's very wordy, there's so much to read, I wanted to get to the main point ... I had to highlight the book to make it clear what I needed to do."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

Here, the facilitator offered recommendations to develop the handbook including, using bullet points, diagrams, or videos to help break down the programme content.

The ratio of time given to physical activity and completion of the 'My Journal' workbook activities was also highlighted by the facilitator:

**"The activities, it was quite a lot to fit into one hour ... at times there was lots of sitting and talking, rather than running. There were some fun games, but we were rushing and not always getting the time."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

On that note, the facilitator noted how the girls liked the concept of the journals at the start of the programme, but as it progressed, they became less interested.

**"Week one they loved them. In weeks seven, eight, they didn't want to use them anymore ... I mean they wanted to take them home, so they valued them enough."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The facilitator also reported some language issues with certain words (i.e. motivation, proud) used in the workbooks. This resulted in some girls (e.g. new to English, Special Educational Needs) not understanding the content. The facilitator added that the use of 'age-related' or different stage journals could help to prevent these kinds of issues.

One further point to note with this school relates to the end celebration event, a 5k run in the school grounds. The facilitator highlighted the challenges of organising this, and the preference to have engaged with other schools:

**“The thing that was the hardest was arranging the 5k ... having like a 5k run together would have been great, where the girls would have met each other ... make it feel like a big occasion.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**HIGHLIGHT:**

The facilitator cited the contrast between the girls’ attitudes from the start to the end of the programme to be the highlight. This became particularly apparent around the halfway point:

**“Probably at around weeks four, five, ... there was a sort of turning point where they just started to get the energy, asking me in the playground when the after-school club was on ... Then, seeing them grow really into confident children who actually had fun and enjoyed it was a real highlight. It was nice to see the smiles.”**  
**(M2 School Facilitator)**

A number of the girls also noted this change and shared how this changed how they perceived themselves and their abilities:

**“[At the start] I was worried, like oh no, what if I fail, what if I fall on the floor ... all the bad thoughts, negative thoughts ... [now] I feel proud that I am doing this.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

**“At the start I was worried, you know like I’m gonna stop ... [now] I feel confident, and I can encourage other people ... it feels amazing.”**  
**(M2 Participant)**

## SCHOOL #4: ELDER AVENUE

The M2 programme was facilitated by a Physical Education (PE) specialist teacher. The school had not run the M2 programme before, which was delivered after school, one day a week. This time was chosen as the facilitator felt it would be easier to organise, with more space available.

The school purposely targeted girls in their lower key stage 2 cohort who lacked confidence and determination in PE. The programme culminated in a 5k run on school grounds as the end celebration event.

### PROGRAMME BENEFITS:

Both the participants and the facilitator reported numerous positive outcomes from the M2 programme. For instance, the girls noted physical developments and fitness:

**“Running gives you lots of energy. I’d say to my friends that it teaches you not to be a couch potato and that you can be active.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“It’s made me feel stronger”**

**(M2 Participant)**

These quotes were complemented by the facilitator who also reported that some of the girls had joined a local sports club as a result of engaging with the M2 programme.

**“Like one of the girls, she has actually signed up for a karate club, which never in a billion years would I have expected her to go to ... so maybe that has been an impact of getting more kids more active outside of school.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“Some of the girls that have done the programme started going swimming this half-term.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Social outcomes were also evident through the programme, such as being with friends. Friendship was recognised by the girls themselves and noticed in the observation of sessions.

**It was the final session today, the 5k event at the school. Some of the girls were running constantly, others walking and talking to one another. The facilitator brought out a music speaker, which the girls responded well to. For example, Happy by Pharell Williams played and some of the girls shouted, ‘because I’m happy!’. The girls were smiling and having lots of fun with one another, running laps of the playground.**

**(Leeds Beckett University Researcher Observations)**

Engaging with the M2 programme also provided opportunities for the girls to build their confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience, as highlighted by a number of the girls:

**“I felt a bit nervous and scared [at the start] ... I feel really excited and happy [now].”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I have enjoyed getting to know myself. I feel a bit more confident [now].”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I feel amazing about it because when I am running it doesn't matter if I fall over, I just get back up and play with my friends..”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I'm feeling brave, because I do 'believe' and 'achieve' [the school's core values].”**

**(M2 Participant)**

Closely aligned to improvements in mental wellbeing and psychological growth were the girls' use of their 'inner cheerleader/critic'. The facilitator reported how the girls had transferred these concepts into other school environments:

**“During the last week, the girls referred to their inner cheerleader/critic when I have been walking through the dinner hall.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“The girls have already mentioned how they are going to channel their inner cheerleader and get in the swimming pool, even if they are a bit scared. They have even started saying that sort of thing [inner cheerleader] to their class teacher who had no idea what they were talking about, and they were like, 'yeah, you can be a cheerleader and get in the pool'. It's clearly had a big impact, it's a big deal getting in the swimming pool for the first time.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

#### **PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY:**

The facilitator at this school made various comments in relation to the practicalities of running the M2 programme, including the programme content, the M2 coach's handbook, and the girls 'my journal' workbook. It is important to note that the facilitator at this school was a PE teacher/specialist. As such, the facilitator acknowledged how the M2 coach's handbook and programme content could be more useful for less experienced practitioners.

**“If I gave that book to somebody who never delivers PE, then there's lots of useful ideas in there ... Joe Bloggs who doesn't do PE might want that security blanket ... But for somebody like me, who teaches PE all day, for me a lot of the stuff in there was basic.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

In response to this, the facilitator explained that they used their knowledge and experience of delivering PE to slightly alter the programme content in their M2 sessions.

**“So, we changed it. I went off-piste a little bit. I made sure we did the booklet side of things, but in terms of them being active, I did just go with what they wanted to do, it was child-led ... we did all sorts. I’m not pretending that what I did was better than the book, but it was what the girls wanted to do, so they therefore engaged in it.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

This change in programme content was reflected positively in the girls’ responses.

**“I’ve liked the activities that we have been doing ... we’ve done a bit of exercise and [erm] tag rugby.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I really like the activities ... they are really fun, and you can practically do anything.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

In terms of recommendations, the facilitator suggested that the programme content could be visually represented through pictures and/or diagrams, bullet points and/or delivered through the use of videos.

There was an appreciation of the usefulness and structure of the ‘My Journal’ workbook.

**“It’s good to have that structure ... this is what is next ... and they can look back on that. It is important that they get to write their feelings down. The ones that could really access the written side of it and the drawing side of it got a little bit more out of it.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

**HIGHLIGHT:**

The facilitator initially anticipated that the programme would be beneficial for both the girls and for the school. When reflecting back, the facilitator suggested that the ‘highlight’ was the change in the girls’ attitudes towards physical activity, and school PE lessons. :

**“I think it would be really nice as a message for the rest of the school, because they will look at the girls that are part of this club and go wow, you did what? ... I think it can have a ripple effect.**

**I think the girls were always excited to do it, which was nice to see, because they are not always the most enthusiastic when it comes to PE.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

## SCHOOL #5: TREMONT

The M2 programme was facilitated by a PE and classroom teacher who was also involved in pastoral work. She had taken on the running of the M2 programme as she was interested in its pastoral benefits. The school had not run the M2 programme before. It was initially delivered during lunchtimes but, due to staffing issues, had to move to after school. The school targeted girls in the upper key stage 2 cohort who struggled socially, needed more pastoral support, or lacked confidence in PE. The end celebration event culminated in a parkrun.

### PROGRAMME BENEFITS:

Both the participants and the facilitator were highly enthusiastic about the benefits of engaging in the M2 programme. Some of these benefits were linked to physical development, and improved running ability.

**“Can we start running yet? ... That’s my favourite game.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I’m excited because it’s going to be the first time I’ve ever run that far”**

**(M2 Participant)**

For many of these girls the programme helped them realise that they were capable of doing physical activity and it was something they could enjoy.

**“I’m feeling good, I know I can do it.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“I was nervous, feeling that I’m not going to be able to do it ... Now I know I’m going to finish it, even if it’s painful.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

That said, the facilitator expressed some concerns regarding the girls’ ability to complete a 5k, relating this to the lack of consistency with scheduling the sessions.

**“Thinking about the 5k it does feel like quite a lot ... I’m just not sure they’re ready I don’t want them to fail after all this work.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Despite these concerns the facilitator was incredibly positive about the social outcomes, such as developing friendships, which were recognised by the girls also

**“I was scared, worried and excited ... Now I’m feeling welcomed because I’ve never done anything like this before. This is the only group I did.”**

**(M2 Participant)**

**“You didn’t even like me [referring to friend] before coming here and now we’re best friends”**

**(M2 Participant)**

What was particularly significant for two of the girls was the ways in which friendships helped to facilitate other positive benefits:



**“Sometimes I need her for moral support.”  
(M2 Participant)**

**“I know I’m not going to get bullied now.”  
(M2 Participant)**

The significance of social connections for these girls was reinforced by the facilitator.

**“They’ve got a good friendship group between them. Some of them have struggled historically with social connections. So, I think because they’ve got that one main thing in common, that really helps them in that respect.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The facilitator’s initial motivation for delivering the M2 programme, enhancing the girls’ self-confidence, was also realised. This was seen through the girls speaking more in M2 sessions and engagement in activities across the school.

**“There is one girl that ... at the beginning she’d be like, ‘Oh can I speak to you afterwards?’ ... whereas now ... she’s definitely comfortable, more comfortable in the group and a bit more confident.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“Like right at the beginning they were really shy and didn’t want to say anything, whereas now they’ve just grown in confidence and are showcasing themselves.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

**“She barely even used to put her hand up in class, so yeah it’s definitely had a positive impact on their confidence which is great.”  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

These increased levels of confidence had helped some girls take on new challenges, including public speaking, rock climbing, and attending a sports tournament. In addition, some articulated new levels of resilience in relation to running the 5k at the end of the programme

**“Excited, ready ... I was nervous, but I look at the positives.”  
(M2 Participant)**

**“I felt scared, worried and anxious ... now I’m feeling excited, confident and encouraged.”  
(M2 Participant)**

Closely linked to the girls' improved self-confidence were increased feelings of pride.

**"I'm proud of myself and I've got faster."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"I'm proud of everyone!"  
(M2 Participant)**

#### **PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY:**

The facilitator at this school spoke highly of the M2 programme content, the coach's handbook and the girls' workbook. She felt the training provided was excellent, and valued the opportunity to speak with other M2 leaders which made the subsequent delivery of the sessions much easier:

**"It went through everything really clearly ... It was nice to see other people that have run the programme before ... I had some questions about like the challenges that they faced, like in just engaging the girls to do it ... I came away from it thinking, actually, yeah, I am going to be able to deliver this successfully. It's going to make a difference."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The facilitator felt that the handbook was equally useful and relied on that to structure the sessions. She particularly valued the provision of resources meaning she didn't need to take time to find additional equipment during her busy teaching schedule:

**"Really good ... it gives you the learning outcomes, you know what's meant to happen, the main points are there to focus and like concentrate on ... It's been exceptionally useful ... I genuinely wouldn't have known where to start otherwise ... It's just well resourced ... it's so easy to use, it's step by step, anybody could do it really."  
(M2 School Facilitator)**

The girls responded positively to the tasks, acknowledging the journals as useful for recording their thoughts, especially around their inner critic voice

**"I feel happy to write it down instead of keeping it in my head."  
(M2 Participant)**

**"It's like taking all the pressure off your back "  
(M2 Participant)**

**"Because I worry about so many things, it was good because it meant I didn't need to worry about them anymore "  
(M2 Participant)**

The facilitator reiterated these ideas, also noting that writing down thoughts in the workbooks made the sessions more memorable, and gave the girls something to keep.

**“I think it’ll be nice for them to have it and take it away and then be able to look back and say, this is where I started and then this is the things that I did to progress, and this is why I’m feeling so much better about it now.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

That being said, some of the girls struggled to articulate how they were feeling or to understand the vocabulary that was being used in the journals.

**“Some of them, I think, just struggled with the vocabulary initially ... some of them just didn’t really know how to verbalise what they were feeling.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

Overall, the facilitator felt that the girls-only nature of the sessions increased engagement and enjoyment whilst targeting those who needed support with resilience:

**“I just feel like girls in general, they’re just sometimes, especially when they get to like teenage years, just kind of struggle with resilience ... I was just like, this would be such a good opportunity.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

In terms of practical delivery the M2 sessions initially ran at lunchtime, split across two days. Some of the girls commented negatively on missing their lunch break, and the facilitator struggled to be consistently available to deliver the sessions. It was felt that moving to after school was more successful:

**“I think moving it to after school was the best thing and we’ve had no problems since.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

## **HIGHLIGHTS:**

The facilitator felt that the highlight of the programme was the significant increase in girls' confidence and self-esteem

**“Just how the girls have changed and just like tonight when Kellie said she was going to stand up in church... her saying she was going to do that, I could have literally cried when she said that ... that's why I was like oh my god I'm so proud of you.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

These increased confidence levels led to engagement in extra-curricular activities and other opportunities that previously the girls would not have participated in:

**“Chloe, when she turned around to me when I said I'm looking for someone to go to a sports competition ... and she put her hand up ... so that's been a real highlight.”**

**(M2 School Facilitator)**

## 4.3 Overall findings

### BENEFITS OF THE M2 PROGRAMME

Those responsible for facilitating the M2 programme in their schools had a variety of roles. For example, across the five schools the programme was led by the PE lead, a teaching assistant, a classroom teacher, and PE specialist. This demonstrates a strength of the M2 programme, in that it can be facilitated by a range of staff and does not require specialist expertise.

The M2 programme provided a range of benefits for those taking part. It is of no surprise that improvements in [physical developments and fitness](#) were consistently mentioned across all five schools. The opportunities that programmes like M2 provide girls to develop their fundamental movement skills are critical in encouraging a [positive lifelong relationship with sport](#) (Women in Sport, 2023). Indeed, these kinds of transferences were already being seen in some schools through a more positive attitude towards physical activity and increased engagement in PE, participation in other after-school clubs, and girls becoming active in wider community settings.

Alongside these physical outcomes, all schools highlighted the importance of the [social outcomes](#) emerging from the programme. The ability to connect with others, leading to new friendships was significant. These [friendships](#) were particularly valuable in alleviating shyness and providing moral support.

Psychological benefits including those linked to [positive mental wellbeing](#) were highlighted by all schools. Resilience, pride, and [confidence](#) consistently emerged as positive developments attributed to the M2 programme. Importantly, [confidence transferred into other school spaces](#). For example, through girls raising hands in class more, their outlook towards exam results, beliefs in their own abilities, public speaking, leadership roles, an appetite for doing more sport, and trying new activities.

Finally, the act of attending an after-school club was an achievement for several girls, which could have longer term consequences including a move into community sport. This had been the case with some girls trying new activities away from school. These kinds of opportunities are especially important for those girls whose families might not be involved in sport or know where or how to engage.

## PROGRAMME CONTENT AND DELIVERY

A number of the facilitators mentioned the **training** that took place before delivery of the programme. The opportunity to ask questions, be given guidance, and learn from others was appreciated.

The nature of the space - **'girl-only'** was positively highlighted on occasions and was pertinent for those girls who found mixed settings more challenging, for example, in relation to their religion and/or those for whom confidence was lacking.

The **coach's handbook** is a useful resource for any facilitator. Its strengths lie in its focused and directive nature. The ease with which it could be followed, its clarity, and the step-by-step guidance that required no pre-planning were frequently mentioned.

Whilst some facilitators felt this was a resource that could easily be adapted, this was not an opinion universally shared, with some citing the need for more variety and adaptations. One further area of development relates to the 'text heavy' nature of the resource with some suggestions provided on how this could be refined.

The **girls' journal** was a welcome addition to the programme, although some modifications would be beneficial for a broader audience. For example, a number of facilitators mentioned the inaccessibility of some of the language used, with some girls struggling to understand particular terms. Facilitators saw this as a useful memento for the girls to refer back to and suggested that that more pictures would add to its appeal.

On saying this, there was a feeling across the schools that the ratio of workbook activities to physical activity needs revisiting with the latter needing to take more of the session time. On that note, a number of facilitators mooted the idea of the programme being slightly longer. Of course, engaging the girls across an extended time period would increase the likelihood of positive behaviour change.

The notion of **'inner cheerleader'** and **'inner critic'** were well received with the journals offering a safe, supportive space for the girls to capture their thoughts on these concepts in ways they might struggle to articulate verbally. Moreover, the girls had started using these terms away from the M2 sessions, in other spaces in their lives.

The end celebration event for the M2 programme offers a focal point for the girls and seems to be particularly successful when this occurs externally to the school with the support of others.

#### **4.4 One End of Programme 5km Challenge**

The sun shines brightly as it rises in the powder blue sky on this early Spring morning. Fluffy white clouds slowly make their way overhead, as a cool breeze causes a shower of cherry blossom to fall from the trees, creating a snowy layer on the ground. The girls reluctantly start peeling off layers of clothing, revealing their green M2 t-shirts, some proudly displaying purple M2 stickers on their cheeks.

'Ooh, its cold Miss!' they begin to complain as they hand over an assortment of hoodies and coats to their three teachers, proudly looking on at their charges who have turned up, early on a Saturday, to do their first 5k run.

'Don't worry girls' one teacher reassures, 'Once we get moving, we'll warm up'. 'Do I carry my water bottle with me Miss?' another girl enquires. 'It's up to you, but I would though'.

And so, they hold onto their various bottles of differing colours and sizes as they make their way up the hill to the start point. Halfway up the incline, they spot the gathering crowd on the horizon. 'Who are all those people?' several of them ask, and we explain - this is a weekly run, and lots of people come to do it every weekend.

As we get closer to the start the girls get quieter, some talking in whispers to their friends, one or two nervously biting their bottom lip, eyes darting around, suddenly out of their comfort zone with so many people warming up - stretching and jogging on the spot - has this got a little too serious for them?

Then the race leader starts her obligatory talk, the crowd's excited chatter dropping in volume. When explaining the route she prompts another barrage of hushed questions from the girls 'Where did she say we go first?', 'What does she mean we go over there?', 'Where do we go after that?', 'How many times do we do the circuit?' 'Do we have to run up that hill?' 'Just follow me girls, we'll do this as a group' says their teacher who has led them through this eight week programme and is keen for the girls to all succeed, delighted that 14 have turned up, everyone who's done the M2 programme apart from one, who had a prior engagement that couldn't be changed.

Then the race leader suddenly announces any race newcomers and the school's name carries crisply on the spring air. The crowd cheer, whoop, and clap loudly, all to make the girls feel welcome and included, but after their initial surprise the girls giggle with embarrassment, putting their heads down, looking at the ground, anywhere to avoid eye contact with the crowd.

**But it is this encouragement that comes to mean something for the girls as they undertake the race.**

The group quickly splits as the race gets underway. Some sprint off and put distance between themselves and the others. Some are able to run for longer and they too break away creating a number of smaller groups. Annette decides to bring up the rear, finding herself with three girls a little slower than the rest.

For the next three laps of the track a series of small challenges emerge. 'I'm going to do a short cut Miss', one girl claims laughing, and her friend protests loudly, explaining she's cheating herself. Two of the group complain their throats hurt and Annette talks them through some breathing exercises.

'Breathe in for a count of two. Big, deep breaths, and then out for one, two, yeah?' 'We do that at my boxing club Miss, we're taught to make a noise when we punch' one girl shares. 'Ah, OK, well it's the same, so when we run, try and count your breaths, so they stay nice and regular. Shall we give it a go?' 'I can't run very far Miss.'

Annette explains the need to pace themselves. 'We don't need to sprint. We can try and do a slow shuffle. Like this, stay with me' and one girl follows Annette down the hill, matching her slow pace, as some of the adult runners begin to lap this small group of girls bringing up the rear.

All the time, the volunteers, wearing their bright pink vests, a stark contrast to the brown and green hues of this urban park, loudly cheer them on, clapping and high-fiving the girls as they pass certain points.

'Well done girls, you're doing fabulous' they exclaim, big smiles of encouragement to keep them going.

This urges the girls on, and they sprint off quickly for another 20 metres before abruptly resuming their walk. And so it continues, their teachers, strategically placed on the hill, offer them praise.

'You're doing so well girls'.

Parents sitting on the benches give them a hug, a clap and a cheer as they pass by. The runners, who lap them again and again, offer them words of advice as they sprint past

'Keep going girls, keep moving', 'You've got this girls! Not far to go'.

Other strategies seem to help the girls as they sprint, shuffle, walk, stop, sprint, shuffle, walk, stop their way round the three-lap course. We pass a game of girls playing football on one of the adjacent fields and this sparks a discussion about their own abilities.

We cover a range of other topics, jumping from one to another in rapid succession - maths lessons, Covid and social distancing, favourite chocolate and sweets, current popular programmes on

television, the M2 celebration event in July, and lying in at the weekend - all welcome distractions from the distance they still need to cover. They spot flashes of green t-shirts on the horizon, at the bottom of the hill, and through the trees as they make their way around the course, knowing their classmates are some way in front.

On their final lap, at the crest of the hill, the girls notice the throng of people gathering at the finish line down at the bottom. 'I thought I'd be first, or second' one girl states, 'but I'll be last'.

Does it matter?' Annette asks 'You're gonna finish right? That's what counts'. 'Yeah, don't be so lame' her friend advises.

And they set off again, buoyed by the prospect of nearly completing the 5k. As they approach the finish line some of the main crowd have begun to disperse, but a huge cheer still emerges for the girls, who despite sore feet and throats, the need to stop for a drink, and trying to spot short cuts have made it.

They have completed their first 5k.

Parents scurry over, pride in their eyes.

'You can come next time mum' one girl says.

'Maybe I can walk it?' her mother replies tentatively.

Yeah, and you can be her trainer' another girl tells her friend, as they hold proudly onto their certificates, knowing they will get medals next week in school.

## 5.0 Recommendations and insights

### 5.1 Recommendations for M2

- Continue with the M2 training that introduces the facilitators to the programme, and provides them with opportunities to ask questions, and meet and learn from others. On that note, extend the training where possible to enable facilitators to discuss and share ideas in small groups regarding alternative activities and adaptations.
- Place emphasis on the resource being used as a guide only so that facilitators feel comfortable in adapting the programme to meet their needs.
- Encourage use of communities of practice as a means of support for all facilitators during the programme and in organising the end celebration event (e.g. WhatsApp group).
- Encourage school clusters to facilitate joint end celebration events.
- Provide a range of alternatives to a parkrun as a celebration event (e.g. the M2 final year celebration, although timings will be a factor here).
- Review coach's handbook and explore opportunities to make this less 'text heavy'. For example, use of bullet points, and diagrams where possible.
- Review girls' workbook in relation to accessibility of language, and use of images, with handbooks for different age groups.
- Review balance of physical activity and other activities within workbooks to ensure main priority is on physical activity involvement.
- Consider extending the programme to enable workbook activities and physical activity to remain and to encourage positive behaviour change.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Schools**

- Rapport and trust between the facilitator and girls are critical ingredients in encouraging girls' initial engagement and continuation with the programme.
- Targeting girls including those who lack confidence, do not enjoy PE, and/or who do not attend after-school clubs appears to be a successful strategy.
- Whilst recognising that there is no perfect timeslot, consistency of programme delivery is important for regular attendance and progress.
- Be confident in adapting the programme to best suit your school's needs.
- Talk to the girls to establish what they would like to do and build this into the programme to encourage their engagement and continuation.
- Disseminate and celebrate the progress of the girls on the M2 programme and their achievements at the end celebration event throughout the school (e.g. assemblies).
- The end celebration event appears to have more value when externally recognised (e.g. parkrun) and supported by others (e.g. parents, teachers).
- Where parkrun is not a possibility, consider working with other local schools to undertake a joint end celebration event.
- Signpost the girls to local and relevant physical activity opportunities to ensure progress is not lost. This requires facilitators to have a good understanding of each girl to signpost appropriately.

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