

MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS



IMOGEN CLARK, TRUSTEE AND CO-FOUNDER AT MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS, EXPLAINS WHY LOCAL COUNCILS HAVE A DUTY TO PROVIDE SAFE AND WELCOMING SPACES FOR TEENAGE GIRLS.

During lockdown, many of us learnt the value of outdoor space. It was a lifeline for our physical and mental health. In cities, towns, and villages, parks were central to our lockdown routines, as we realised their power to be a positive influence in our communities. This included those who didn't previously use the parks much - like teenage girls.

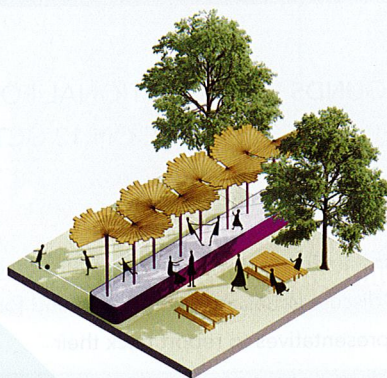
At Make Space for Girls, we are campaigning to make parks and similar public spaces more welcoming to teenage girls. Frequently, park provision for teenagers consists of Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs), BMX tracks, and skate/wheeled parks. These facilities are often dominated by boys and their presence in a park can actively deter girls. To quote Lily (age 14): 'Why would I go to the park? There's nothing there for me.'

There are lots of reasons teenage girls don't feel welcome in parks - the design of spaces, the behaviour of boys, and the expectations placed on girls. If readers would like to understand more detail on this, we have put together a summary of our research into this area, which can be found here - <https://bit.ly/3iSIKt>.

WHY MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS?

Activity levels for teenage girls are worryingly low. Parks can't solve all of this, but they can make a real contribution by encouraging girls out of their homes and showing them they have as much right to occupy the public realm as boys.

It matters that our teenage girls are not using our parks. It matters for reasons of fairness, it matters



because of the need to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, and it matters because of health.

A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY

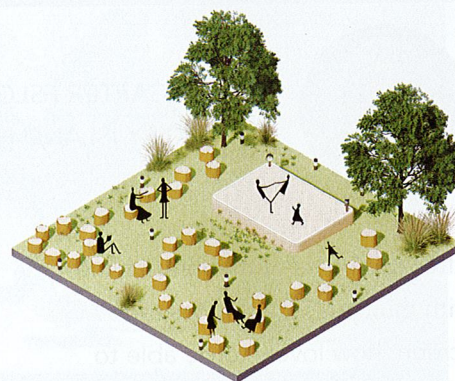
Coming out of lockdown gives us some amazing opportunities to tackle this issue. A recent survey by Women in Sport, asking teenage girls about the impact of the early stages of the pandemic, prompted the response that 82% of girls say they will put more effort into being fit and active after the pandemic.

We should grab this chance to engage with their enthusiasm and find ways to make our parks more welcoming to teenage girls.

HOW CAN PARKS BE MORE WELCOMING TO GIRLS?

Drawing on work done in places like Vienna and Malmo gives us some guidelines:

- Spaces broken up into smaller areas so no one group can dominate
- Wider entrances in and out of areas
- Good toilets and better lighting
- Perimeter paths, with clear lines of sight



Teenage girls also like swings, sociable seating, hammocks, stages, gym bars, and climbing walls. And there are plenty of girls who want to skate and play football too, so we can redesign these spaces to make them more welcoming.



TIPS

- If you're re-designing your skate park, don't just listen to the views of the current users. If you do, you'll end up with a very male-orientated place.
- Most importantly, involve teenage girls in the plans to make parks better. Because they aren't in the parks, they are often missed out when park consultation takes place with users.
- Engage with your local schools (we know one place where they used the consultation survey as part of an IT lesson), talk to the youth sections of local faith/community groups and see what your local girl guides say.

Because - it's time to make space for girls.