

Project Report: Girls Allowed

Creating “Brave
Spaces” – for young
Women



Project Feb–May 2025
Report – June 2025

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Project Development

Where did the idea come from?

The idea for this project had emerged and been discussed within the Esteem Youth Team for a while. Arising from an identified need for a small group for young women, we had observed a trend among some young adults who didn't feel comfortable in existing drop-in spaces due to the size of the group or they found the social dynamics tricky to manage.

Some young women had said they found these spaces overwhelming or off-putting, and were struggling to integrate into established peer groups and group sessions. This project emerged as a direct response to these observations. Initially it was thought the project would be taking shape through collaboration with the Juno Project and although this partnership was explored, we decided to move forward with the project in-house .

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- Increase confidence and develop social skills.
- Build self-esteem and self-worth.
- Use the group as a stepping stone toward joining Esteem's existing groups, activities or in accessing other support.
- Build confidence and aspirations to re-engage with education, training, or with entry to employment.

Project Aims



What were the project aims?

The group was designed as a gentle bridge to developing peer friendships and accessing Esteem's activities and groups, whilst allowing young adults to develop at their own pace in a supportive low-key and light touch environment. We encouraged the young adults to come as they are, be their authentic selves whilst challenging themselves to take healthy risks in both personal and social development.

We invited 7 young adults aged 14-18 to attend. We proposed the project would be weekly (1.5 hrs) for 8 weeks and the project's aims would be met through their participation with a range of different grounding, creative or nature-based activities. We wanted to create a space that felt warm, welcoming and relaxed.

I became a more confident in myself and also in my interactions with other people, and all aspects. EB

Targeted Groupwork



Who was involved?

The project focused on young women who had either dropped out of or were struggling with school or college attendance (EBSA).

We particularly wanted to support those young women having difficulty forming and maintaining friendships or lacking confidence in group settings.

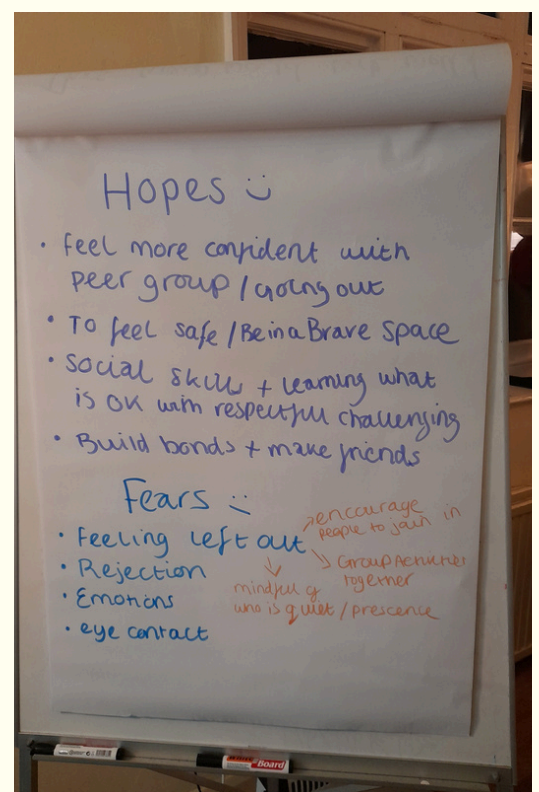
All of the young adults who participated described themselves to us as being “socially anxious” and had all had negative or very limited experience in developing positive peer relationships and friendship groups outside of Esteem.



Participants:

Our participants included:

- 4 young adults who identified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
- 1 young adult who was accessing school on a restricted timetable with day sessions at East Clayton Farm
- 1 young adult who was attending school but described themselves as being socially isolated with no friends or a peer group to hang out with.





What Did We Deliver?

We ran a series of structured but flexible sessions based in our participation approach, where we involved the young women in initial project planning and encouraged them to contribute their ideas and opinions both at the start and as the project progressed.

I looked forward to the session every week" - CJ

Each session was designed to gradually build trust and confidence while helping participants develop practical social, creative and leadership skills whilst in a supported environment.

Session 1 & 2

Session 1:

Get to know each other with a welcome and intro activity.
Participate in a fun "fire"-building activity using craft materials.
Use sanitizer demo to talk about oversharing/safe spaces.
Start a group art project about "connection" (canvas painting).
Enjoy some toasties together for social time.
"Wheel of Life" check-in to see how everyone's feeling at the start of the project (baseline monitoring).

Session 2:

Quick check-in (rate how you're feeling 1-10).
Use "Vertellis" conversation cards in small groups to spark deeper conversation and build trusted relationships.
Continue the group art project with a snack break.

Session 3 & 4

Session 3:

Start with an "emotional weather" check-in (how you're feeling emotionally, like a weather report).
Get creative with henna or temporary tattoos.
Share some pizza together for snack break.
Reflect on the designs everyone made - building self-esteem.

Session 4:

Quick group check-in.
Learn how to make scrunchies in a fun sewing workshop, led by a peer in the group.

What did we deliver?

"The group helped me feel safe, listened to and feel wanted in a space that wasn't my home" - CJ

Session 5 & 6

Session 5:

Start with a one-word check-in (describe how you feel in one word).
Keep working on your sewing projects.
Learn how to make friendship bracelets.
Make and enjoy some smoothies together for snack break.

Session 6:

Start with an energy rating check-in (share how much energy you have today).
Take part in a cupcake baking workshop.
Everyone will have a team role.
Bake, decorate, and enjoy cupcakes together.

Session 7 & 8

Session 7:

Check in by sharing your favourite colour.
Learn different tie-dye techniques.
Design and make own personalized tie-dye t-shirt.

Session 8:

Quick thumbs up/down check-in.
Watch a chosen film together with snacks.
Have a relaxed discussion about the film's themes.

Session 9 & 10

Session 9:

Check in with a forward-looking prompt (thinking about the future).
Learn pottery painting techniques with external facilitator.
Spend time creating and decorating your own pottery piece.

Session 10:

Make "nature crowns" using materials from outdoors.
Enjoy a celebration picnic at Apron community garden.
Reflect on journey with a final group circle and "Wheel of Life" summative evaluation.
Take part in a symbolic flower crowning ceremony.

What Worked Well?

" Really enjoyable activities and nice company, and understanding space"
- YS

Consistent attendance:

The group was well-attended, especially considering attendees were experiencing anxiety and in particular- social anxiety. The group wanted to increase the number of sessions, which we need from 8-10.

"Braver space" environment:

We successfully created a supportive environment where young adults could, come as they are and be themselves. The participants went from feeling isolated to hanging out together outside of the group.

Age-appropriate role modelling:

Having participants of similar ages but with a range (14-18), created positive role models within the group and helped young people feel understood and seen.

Growing participation:

Over time, participants became more involved in planning and deciding the agenda for sessions. They were more able to fully express their voice and influence.

Shifting leadership:

As facilitators, we gradually took a step back from leading, allowing participants to take more ownership of leading discussions, activities and decisions.

Creative activities:

These provided natural, informal conversation opportunities and reduced social pressures, stress and anxiety.

"Sleepover vibes":

We created a relaxed, fun atmosphere that participants responded well to, particularly as some had reflected they didn't have their own social peer groups to "hang out" in.

Accepting environment, reflecting Esteem's values:

Young adults were notably accepting of each other's differences. They respected, valued and supported each other during sessions as well as outside of them.

What Were Our Challenges?



Check-in:

Some participants struggled with the check-ins and didn't engage fully. On reflection, we would think about an alternative activity in future projects, such as using emoji's or other examples of non-verbal check in's, to avoid the pressure and expectation of having to share info about themselves.

Time constraints:

Sessions often felt rushed with limited time to complete activities. This went against the relaxed vibe we were aiming for. In future projects, we would consider running a longer 2 hour session and a longer still planning/evaluation session.

One-to-one support:

When a worker needed to provide one-to-one support, it sometimes left the group short-staffed. We identified the need for backup staffing plans, particularly if the attendees had mental health, wellbeing or complex needs arising which needed additional support at sessions.

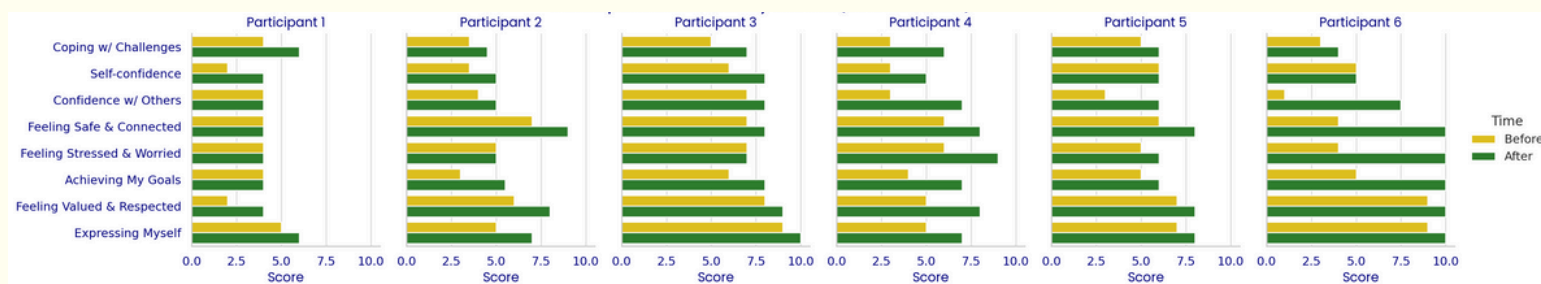
Relationship dynamics:

We had to carefully manage potential conflicts between participants prior to sessions. We found the young adults were particularly anxious about who else was in the group, so we tried to be transparent about this, but this could be problematic as we aim for the group to be accessible and open to all

*"Thank you for a wonderful day yesterday. It was a great last session and I had a great time."
- YS*

"The group helped me be able to be consistent in a group and get to know people over a bit of time. It helped me realise what people struggle with." - RH

What Were Our Outcome's?



We used an outcomes wheel for baseline monitoring before the start of the project. We asked the young adults to rate 8 different areas on the wheel, and we revisited the wheel during the last session, to enable conversations around the participants experiences, learning and growth. 100% of the group were able to identify 4 or more areas which increased during the time of the project.

Other outcomes:

- 3 young adults have places for colleges courses in September and are exploring avenues into employment or entrepreneurship.
- 1 young adult is attending drop in (social activities at Esteem).
- 1 young adult is attending Esteem Team and is also now being mentored at Esteem.
- 2 young adults have applied for paid peer research roles at Esteem.
- 1 young adult is taking on a peer lead/mentor role at the next young women's group.
- 1 young adult is involved in Esteem's Youth Worker recruitment process.

The average improvement across all outcomes was +40%, with the most notable gains in confidence with others (+88%), achieving goals (+57%), and coping with challenges (+44%).

Every participant improved in five or more wellbeing areas, and none experienced a decline in any category.

The strongest individual change was a 66% overall score increase, showing the deep impact of the support provided.

Project Development



What are our next steps?

After the successful engagement of the 6 participants of the “Girls Allowed” group work course, we intend to recruit and offer the project to another cohort of female identifying, under 18's. We have also acknowledged a need within our 18+ group, but at present due to staff capacity, we are only able to deliver one group at this time.

In addition, the youth team plan to also offer a similar course – open to male identifying young adults, as they have told us they would benefit from this kind of safe and supported space.

What do we need to consider?

At Esteem we recognise that single-gender group's may not fully reflect the diverse spectrum of gender identities of the young adults we work with. We are committed to our values of respect, support and trust and strive to approach this with sensitivity.

We have found through this project that, for the participants, having a single-gender space can offer a sense of safety, shared experience, and openness that supports personal growth and development.

We are mindful that should the need arise we can offer a space to young adults that are gender explorers and may not feel they conform to these binary gender identities. We remain open to supporting young adults in group work opportunities in a way that meets their needs and represents them.

“This was my first time being in a group with Esteem. I met nice people who I really connected with. I felt really comfortable. It wasn't like school, less structured and it felt more like hanging out and I enjoyed that.

I feel more comfortable in groups now and I'm less anxious in being involved in groups at Esteem”. (CB)