



THE FRIENDS OF ROWNTREE PARK

‘Make Space for Girls’ in Rowntree Park (and York Parks)

Asking questions!

You can read more about the research and methods of our project [here](#), but below is some further information to help address any questions you may have. If you have other questions - do get in touch!

Please keep in mind, this project is part of the work of a small charity who want to do what they can. If you see ways the project can be improved, then get involved! Our view is, it's better to do something rather than nothing!

Are we excluding boys?

The project isn't about excluding boys or creating gender segregation: it is about taking positive steps to "design in girls". We need to do this because the data is clear: currently 90% of the users of facilities councils build for teenagers are boys and men. What our own research has found, is that when asked - teen boys want the same as the girls.

Is it discrimination create a space that is focussed on girls?

A lot of current teen provision is dominated by boys and young men and girls and young women are disadvantaged. This is the kind of structural inequality that the Public Sector Equality Duty (part of the Equality Act 2010) is designed to address, by encouraging public bodies including all local authorities to consider potential discrimination in their decision making.

It's not about separate facilities for girls in parks, more about adding facilities girls want. Our research shows many boys want similar facilities too - what's good for one, often benefits more groups! As stands the facilities currently provided are separate already as around half of the teen population aren't using them.

The aim is to get girls equally using parks – that may be looking at the hidden barriers that stop them using facilities such as skateparks and seeking to remedy this and improve things to increase participation. It may be that some additional equipment/areas are more suited to uses by some girls (and boys). It's not about segregation, it's about taking in the views of both boys and girls in the planning and design of parks. Any changes that take place will benefit a range of park users including boys, and those who do not identify with a specific gender.

Surely providing a skate park can't be seen as discrimination? (and shouldn't we just be encouraging girls to use the sports facilities provided in parks like the skateparks?)

Interesting one this. Most studies on gender issues in parks are focused on skate parks. Skateboarding seems to be an overwhelmingly male pursuit. There has been a good increase in girls getting into skating in recent years plus successful women's sports teams are leading to more women getting into previously male dominated sports, This is all great. However, as it stands only around 15% of skateboard park users in the UK are girls/women. So the question is – why is this such a small percentage? It's this that we need to seek to readdress. We should look at those that do but also those that don't – find out more about why and why not, and use this knowledge to help make changes.

There are things that can be done to existing facilities to improve them and make them more welcoming to girls and where we can, we should look to do this. However, at the same time it also needs to be recognised that the majority of teen girls don't currently use these facilities or do these sports and when asked there are other things we can do in parks to encourage them to use the space. It's not about taking money/funding away from existing facilities, but looking to enhance and improve parks with more.

A bit more info and background...

In the book 'Invisible Women' by Caroline Perez, a similar question was raised by a town official in a town in Sweden who after one official had stated that at least 'snow clearing was something the gender people' could not interfere in. However this led them to look into this and they found that there were issues! They found that when snow fell it was the roads that were cleared first. This mainly benefited male workers who travelled by car to the workplace. It was realised that the policy disadvantaged many women who actually were more likely to walk or use public transport. They found men's travel patterns were pretty simple – to and from work, whereas women's were more complex and included multiple journeys that covered unpaid work such as childcare drop offs, visiting elderly relatives, supermarket visits etc – all mainly via footpaths. The women were making multiple journeys yet their needs were not considered! The policy hadn't intended to discriminate, but by default by not considering the views and travel of women it had.

The same goes for skateparks. A British study based in Nottingham stated 90% of skatepark users are male, Australian studies point to around 95% of skatepark users being male. More recent 2019 study in the US shows that it was 76.1% . This may reflect positive change is happening but the inequality is still there. Studies point to the fact some female skaters have voiced that they pick times to visit the skatepark when they know large crowds of males won't be around. In fact, they have stated on their own that some individual males seem to be supportive, but when boys are in groups, the girls feel intimidated. It's actually argued that the fact skate parks can attract people from out of the local area makes this

even more intimidating to girls. So what can you do? Hold girl only skate sessions? Maybe, but is the message to girls that they can only use a park if they use it the way boys do?

Sport England states: *'don't expect women to change to fit sport and exercise'*. Don't try to fix the girls, fix the facilities.

What about non-binary/trans young people?

The project isn't excluding non-binary or trans young people. The project is led by evidence and to be supported by the legal framework of the Public Sector Equality Duty; and currently the fact is that the research overwhelmingly considers the gendered use of parks in binary terms; as do the obligations under the PSED. However, with regard to our project specifically, the term 'girls' means all those who are girls, and ALL girls are welcome to be involved in our project.

Should we be using the terms girls and boys?

Under the Gender Equality Act 2021, sex is a protected characteristic, not gender. Therefore this is what councils have to adhere to – making sure parks and open spaces provide equality for both sexes.

Then there is the issue of gender identity. Again this isn't being dismissed or sidelined BUT at this stage we are looking at the statistics that show boys dominate the facilities in parks provided for older children. There are obviously many other issues – race, culture, disability – all issues that should be explored to make parks and open spaces accessible to all. Indeed how such things affect girls' usage of parks should be explored too. At this stage, our focus is on what we can do to make our park more welcoming to older girls.

There could be so much 'whataboutery'- but there is a real inequality here in terms of provision for girls and this is what we are focusing on at present. We'd love others to get involved to represent other groups and make changes too. What we are trying to do, and how it's approached, may not be perfect, we may get things wrong. But don't criticise, help instead! Let's facilitate change. We could spend all day discussing the 'buts' and concerns around offending people and groups, but we are trying to make changes. If we aren't doing things right, help us, guide us, and get involved!