



**UNDERSTANDING
VULNERABLE 14-19
YEAR OLDS**

MOTIVATIONS AND BARRIERS

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INTRODUCTION

Energise Me

Energise Me is a Hampshire-based charity, which exists to beat inactivity.

We work with partners from a variety of sectors to support people to get active. At the heart of our approach is a commitment to understanding inactive audiences.

By learning about inactive people and sharing that insight with our partners, we hope to influence positive behaviour change.

Background

Energise Me secured Lottery funding from Sport England for the delivery of local Satellite Clubs to get 14-19 year-olds active. To shape the programme, we wanted to find out more about young people - particularly those from socially deprived backgrounds and/or those facing disruption in their lives.

We commissioned The Behavioural Architects to delve into the lives of inactive teenagers living in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The Behavioural Architects' mission was to develop quality local insight that would help us understand young people's habits, motivations and barriers to being active.

The Behavioural Architects

The Behavioural Architects is an award-winning global insight, research and consultancy business. The company specialises in understanding and influencing behaviour.

Audience sample

The Behavioural Architects worked with thirteen 14-19 year-olds, including a mixture of individuals and friendship pairs.

The young people were clustered around Gosport, Havant and Eastleigh due to the high concentration of 14-19 year-olds in high deprivation within these areas.

They were a mixture of school and further education students, full or part-time workers and those not in education or employment (NEETS).

Most were inactive, taking part in less than 30 minutes of moderate activity per week. They had a range of health conditions and disabilities including anxiety, depression, diabetes, heart murmur and visual impairments.

The majority were facing or had faced life disruptions such as bullying, job loss, family turmoil, mental health conditions, caring duties or trouble with the police.

The methodology

The Behavioural Architects conducted research via an online platform and in person. They spent time with young people in their environments and attended activities with them.

They conducted group research to broaden the sample and challenged their learning with expert perspectives from local clubs and youth organisations.

NOT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE SAME



Differences

In this guide, we refer to vulnerable 14-19 year-olds as one audience. That's not to say they are all the same.

Just in this small research sample, we encountered young people who were juggling shift work and studies with other pressures. We met others who were not in education or employment. They all had different personalities, unique circumstances and varying challenges.

With such a diverse audience, it would be naive to say that we could influence them all to build an active habit through the same means and channels.

However, despite their differences, we saw similarities which give important clues for how to connect with this audience.

THE CLUES

How to connect with our audience

1. PRECIOUS FREEDOM

A lack of autonomy prompts rejection of anything that threatens their freedom

4. NARROW SPHERES

Small social circles reinforce current unhealthy lifestyles

2. LIMITED HEADSPACE

They have limited headspace for new behaviours that require energy and effort

5. NOT 'FOR ME'

Mainstream offers for young people do not say 'for me'

3. PEER FEARS

Their fear of other young people limits where they go



These clues help us understand what our audience values and avoids. They have implications for how we design and communicate activities to connect with young people.

1. PRECIOUS FREEDOM



“My mum has high functioning autism and a bad hip so I have to take care of her sometimes. It’s ok but just means I don’t get so much time on my own.”

Female, aged 15

Like most young people, they value and strive for greater independence. However, they experience less autonomy than average. Caring responsibilities and having little money curbs what they can do.

This makes them very protective of their free time and how they use their money.

They are most likely to buy things that either:

- support their independence and empowerment through exercising consumer choice
- provide escapism and relief from real life such as games and in-game purchases

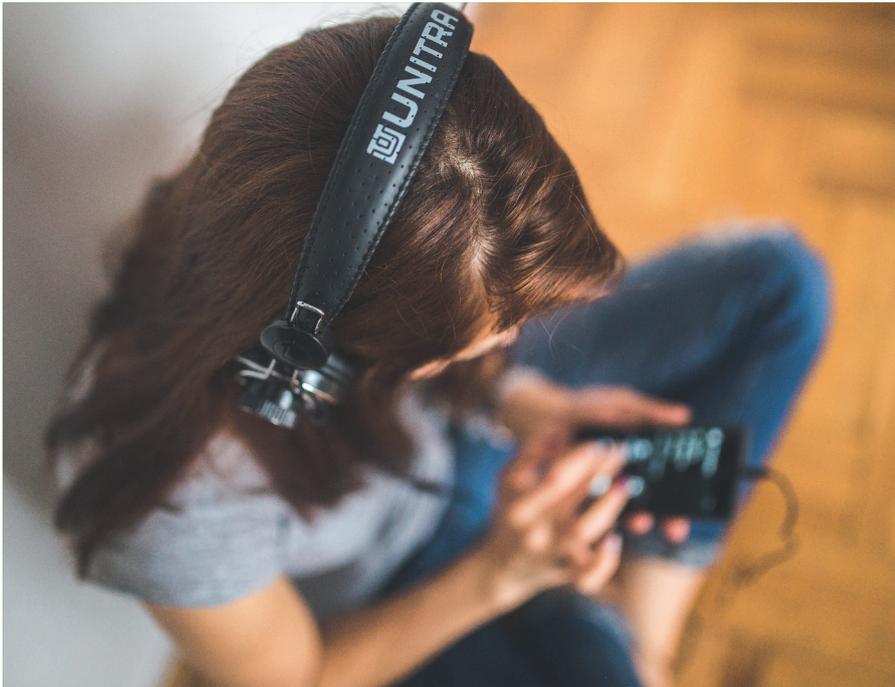
Key question: How can we play to (and not be seen to limit) their need for autonomy?

Less autonomy than average

Very protective of their free time and how they use their money

Prioritise spending on things that support independence, empowerment or escapism

2. LIMITED HEADSPACE



“I don’t really arrange to go out or do things, it’s mostly on the spur of the moment.”

Female, aged 18, Gosport

Difficult circumstances and life disruptions limit their ‘mental bandwidth’ to think beyond the here and now. Ongoing stresses can make them feel like their days are very full — just getting to school can be very effortful and exhausting.

This means they live day-to-day and take things as they come. Behaviours that don’t feel easy or that require a lot of forward planning can seem unachievable.

Things taking up headspace within our sample group included:

- different shift patterns released each week
- parent with medical condition, siblings and pets to care for
- own medical condition to monitor
- job-hunting
- worrying about money
- studying
- bullying
- eviction or deportation

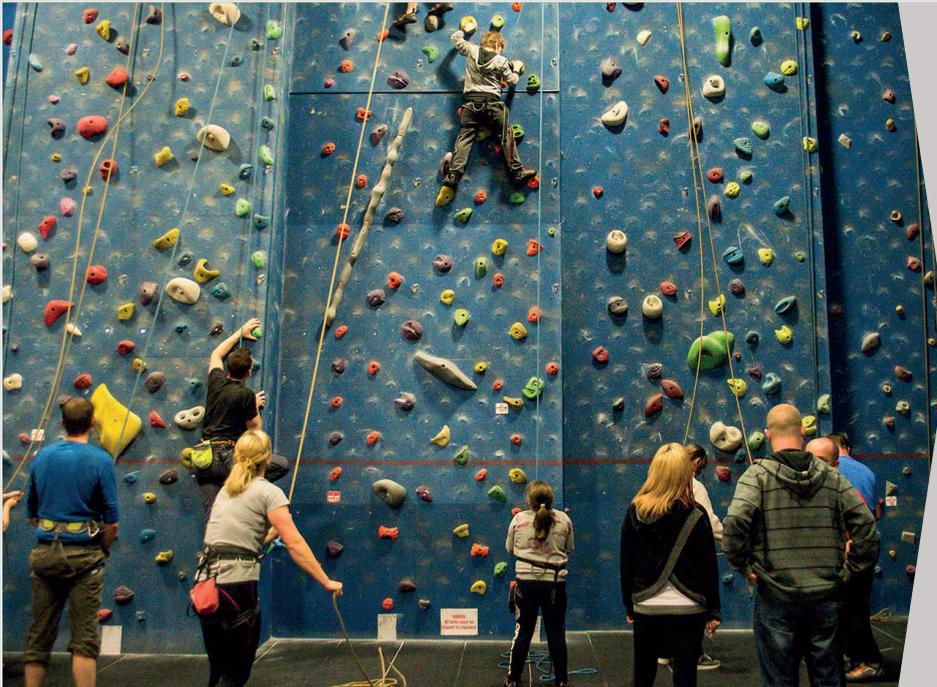
Key question: How can we make it easier for young people to participate without having to plan?

Mind pre-occupied

Small routine tasks can feel exhausting

Anything that requires planning can feel impossible

3. PEER FEARS



“Last year I was ganged up on in the middle of school and got pushed around by a big group of girls. I now have a big issue with trusting people my own age.”

Female, aged 14, Eastleigh

Our audience can feel uncomfortable and afraid in groups of people their own age. This may be as a result of being bullied for home-life difficulties or having different interests from the ‘populars’.

They will actively avoid places where they know other young people hang out and isolate themselves in their homes and bedrooms where they feel safer.

Digital habits and online interest groups can become their main source of escapism and substitute for face-to-face interactions.

Lack confidence around peers

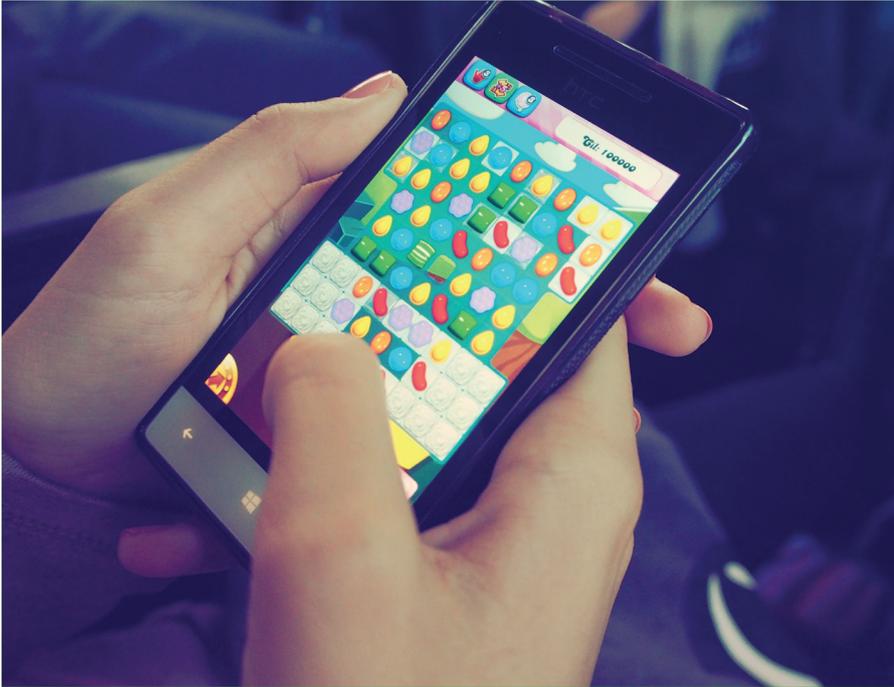
They may avoid activities with their own age group

Lean towards digital escapism

“I don’t actually know where most of my mates live... we all just talk on Xbox Live, I’ll just get a message on my phone saying one of them is online.” Male, aged 15

Key question: How could we engage young people in different groups through their families or digital networks?

4. NARROW SPHERES



“I just stayed home. I wasn't in the mood to go out so I stayed home playing video games, having snacks and sleeping.”

Female, aged 15, Gosport

Inactive habits are held in place by a small social circle — often spending a lot of time at home with family or 1 or 2 close friends. They have a latent awareness that shutting themselves off probably isn't good for them or likely to help them in the long-term but can feel stuck in a rut.

“I wouldn't say my Xbox was a hobby, it's more of an addiction. I enjoy playing it but know it's not good to be stuck indoors all day playing games.” Male, aged 15

Key question: How can we incorporate or tempt young people away from their video games and expand their social circles?

Small social circles

Often spend a lot of time at home with family or close friends

They feel stuck in a rut

5. NOT 'FOR ME'



“Every Sunday I go to this games shop and play card games like Magic The Gathering. It’s a nice community, I’ve been a few times and I now really feel part of it – I know all the regulars now.”

Male, aged 17, East Hants

Our audience has come to see themselves as ‘different’ from other young people. They spend more time with family and have different interests.

Niche hobbies and passions help them to be themselves and feel accepted.

This means they can dismiss or filter out mainstream activities aimed at their age group as not for them.

“It’s different and I like to be different, I don’t want to be like the popular kids.” Female, aged 15

Key question: How can we support young people to access or create niche active hobbies that feel like they are for them?

See themselves as different

Niche hobbies help them to be themselves

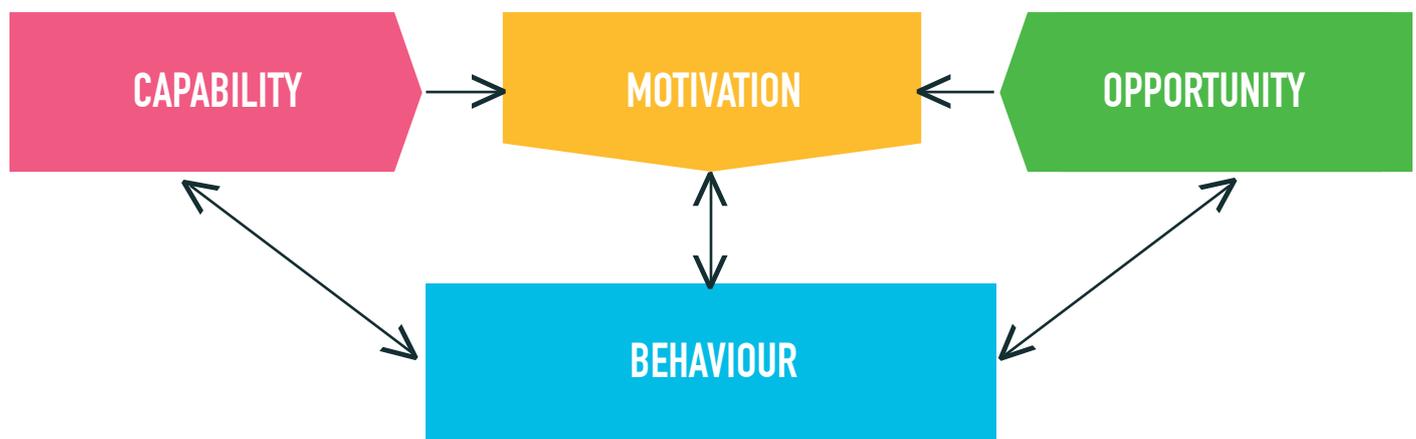
May avoid mainstream activities aimed at their age group

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES

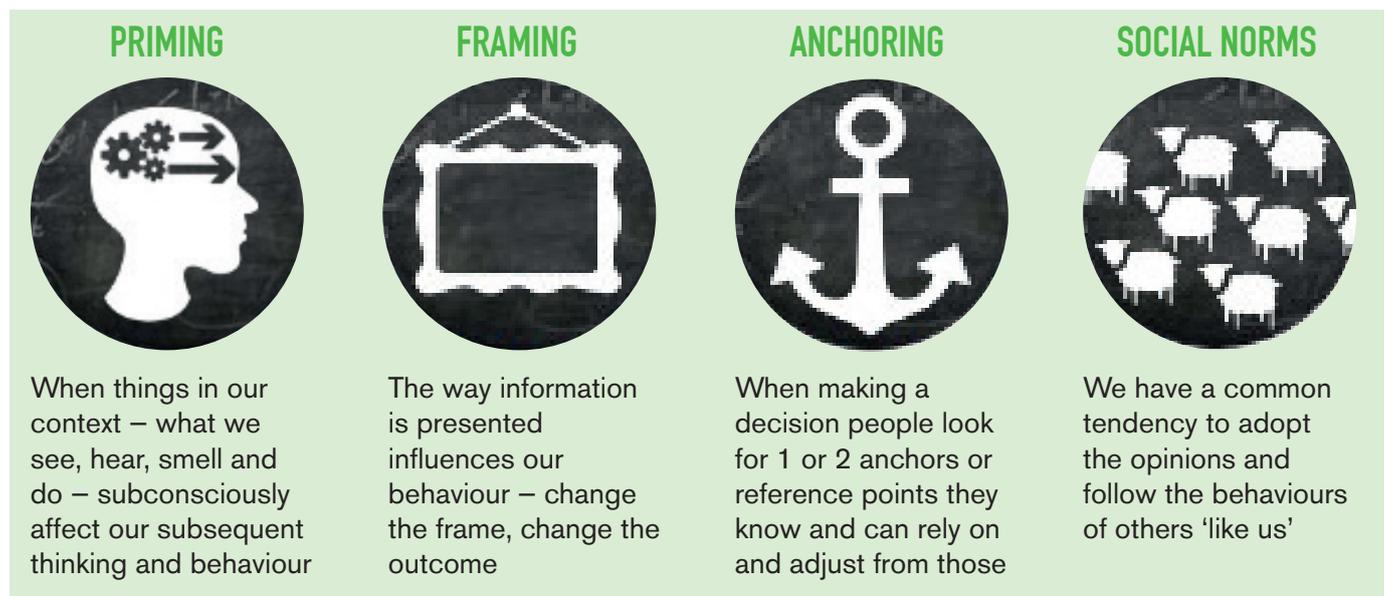
Introducing the COM-B model of behaviour change

The COM-B model shows how different factors combine to influence our behaviour. It can be used to identify challenges to physical activity. It can also help us tailor approaches and interventions more effectively to a particular audience.

The Behavioural Architects used the framework during their research to dig into triggers and barriers and unpack what the young people were actually saying.



They also applied Behavioural Economics concepts:



The challenges described on the following page are both:

- Actual - based on experiences in the past and/or when trying a new sport or activity as part of the research
- Perceived - how they might imagine a sport/activity experience to be

CAPABILITY

“I dislike most sporting activities because I’m bad at them. If I run for a long distance, I get out of breath.” Male, aged 17

Chaotic lives make this audience particularly vulnerable to criticism and setbacks. They are quick to reject what they aren't 'good' at.

Sport/physical activity in particular carries a lot of baggage — especially previous experiences of not 'making the grade'.

Getting breathless, hot or sweaty can be quickly interpreted negatively. It can be seen as not being able to keep up, rather than as something normal and to be expected.

MOTIVATION

“Playing Xbox in my room I just get sucked into it and you don’t stop to think about what’s going on around you, you just want to complete the level or beat your mate.” Male, aged 15

Inactive interests and ways of spending their time feel easier and less of a risk.

Spending time and money on ways to escape/switch off that provide autonomy and don't make them feel vulnerable takes precedence.

They may dismiss sport/fitness activities as 'boring' as a defence mechanism against their underlying fear of failure.

OPPORTUNITY

“I searched the internet for sports activities in Gosport... I don’t like the fact that it’s mostly for kids.” Female, aged 18

Local opportunities to be active do not cater 'for them'.

Familiar local places to do sport/activity, such as leisure centres, feel irrelevant to them.

Less traditional venues and more informal ways to be active are relatively more appealing but few and far between.

APPLYING INSIGHT

Having listened to what young people told them during their research, The Behavioural Architects identified '4 Guiding Principles' to help us create satellite club opportunities that would be more appealing and accessible to this target audience.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: Something new, something familiar

A lack of self-belief makes this audience reluctant to step outside of their comfort zone.

They wanted to see novel activities - distinct from the typical sports or fitness for people their age - connected in some way to their world.



“It would be like an indoor computer game, with ‘levels’ and obstacles and puzzles. Each week it would change around and you would have different missions to complete.”

Male, aged 19, Fareham

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: Included, not spotlighted

A fear of standing out and being compared to others means they shy away from group activities.

They wanted to be acknowledged and made to feel welcome but then allowed to blend into the background.



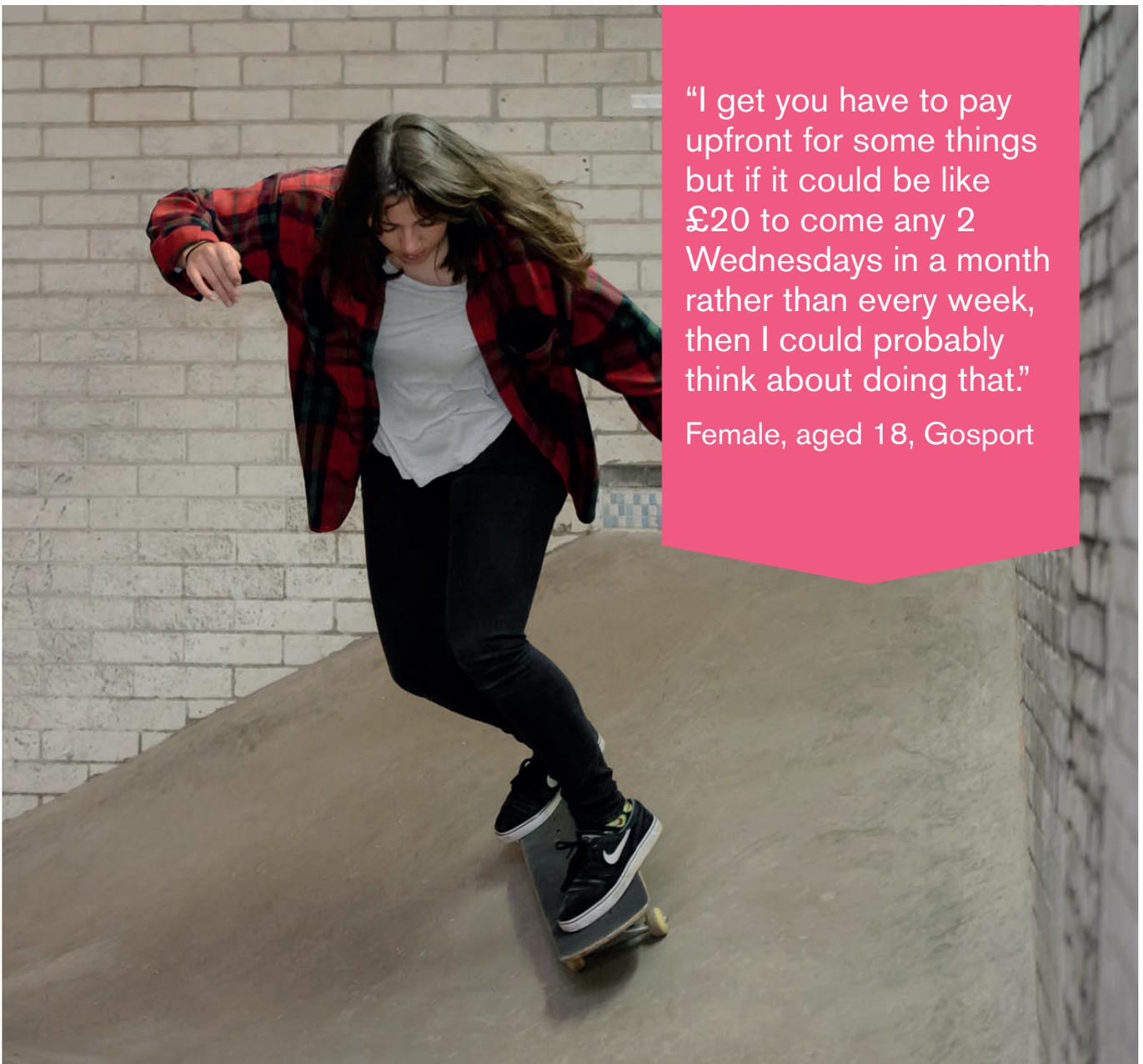
“When I couldn’t do the exercise I just stopped. The instructor didn’t say anything and just smiled at me and let me carry on in my own time. For the next exercise she showed everyone (but really me) how to make the move easier. It was like she cared, but also wasn’t going to make a fuss of me either... thankfully.”

Female, aged 19, Havant

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: On my terms

Regular structured sessions can feel difficult and constraining for their lifestyle.

They want activities to be easy for them and not require them to think too much. They like activities to be flexible and want autonomy within the activity.



“I get you have to pay upfront for some things but if it could be like £20 to come any 2 Wednesdays in a month rather than every week, then I could probably think about doing that.”

Female, aged 18, Gosport

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: Play with a purpose

The current local offer doesn't feel like it's 'for them'. Health and fitness is a lesser concern.

They want a way to switch off/escape from everyday life - which can be thrilling or calming. They are interested in benefits beyond just getting fit that connect with things they're interested in.



"I don't see the point in doing an activity unless it will help me in the future, something I could put on my CV."

Male, aged 17, Aldershot

These principles can guide the different building blocks of a Satellite Club

SESSION DESIGN & FORMAT

Physical activity connected to existing goals or interests that they can do their own way.

VENUE, ENVIRONMENT, ATMOSPHERE

Non-traditional and flexible environments with a relaxed atmosphere.

PEOPLE: INSTRUCTOR, PARTICIPANTS

With people who 'get them' and won't judge.

PROMOTION & DELIVERY CHANNELS

Framed around their broader motivations and interests and endorsed by people they trust.

Look out for our [Activity Design for Vulnerable Young People](#) guide for more detail on how to put the above into practice - coming soon.



TOP TIPS

Connecting research and practice

As we said from the start, not all vulnerable young people are the same. This guide is designed to get you thinking about the audience you're trying to reach. As a starting point we'd encourage you to:

CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS

Test the findings against activities you offer

Did anything surprise you or conflict with decisions you've made in shaping activities for this audience? Were those decisions informed by insight or assumptions?

EXPLORE THE CLUES

Brainstorm the key questions posed in this guide

Are there ways you could tweak your existing offer or do you have scope to create new activities? What would it take?

BUILD ON THE INSIGHT

Talk to and consult young people in your area

Try gathering a group of mystery shoppers to share their experiences of booking for your activities and attending for the first time. Is it easy? What would they change?

REVIEW COMMUNICATIONS

Look at your communications alongside the COM-B model

Is the way you talk about your activities likely to reduce potential fears and help boost young people's confidence in their capability to take part?

LOOK OUT FOR THE GUIDE

Look out for the activity design guide - coming soon

Keep an eye on our website and Twitter feed for the follow-up guide, Activity Design for Vulnerable Young People, which will give more detail on The Behavioural Architects' Guiding Principles.



Share your thoughts @EnergiseMe_



Our thanks go to
The Behavioural
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