

Places Leisure introduces “Big Sister” mentors and free memberships to its centres within the Wokingham Borough to support girls into sport

Places Leisure is introducing its game-changing Big Sister project to 5 of its leisure centres within the Wokingham Borough to encourage and support girls aged 9-15 years old into sport and exercise during puberty.

The programme helps girls aged 9-15 years old feel ‘sport ready’ with the support of Big Sisters who will be based in all Places Leisure centres. The Big Sisters are peer leaders and supporters from sport, school and community organisations and are trained on the emotional and physical barriers girls face during puberty.

In addition to this, the Big Sister project offers free or half-price Places Leisure memberships, giving the girls access to junior gym sessions, swimming, weekly ‘We Move’ classes exclusively for girls, and the Places Leisure Virtual Studio.

[Women in Sport](#) research found that six in ten girls say judgement from others stops them from being active and 43% of those who once considered themselves sporty fell out of love with sport in their teens.

So, in 2022, Places Leisure partnered with Women in Sport to launch the Big Sister project in 11 of its leisure centres. Women in Sport research shows that since then 64% of girls that engaged in the project now enjoy taking part in sport and exercise more and 62% said their overall confidence has improved.

The project will be rolled out from 5 August 2024 to the following leisure centres within the Wokingham Borough:

- Wokingham Leisure Centre
- Loddon Valley Leisure Centre
- Bulmershe Leisure Centre
- Arborfield Green Leisure Centre
- Ryeish Green Sports Hub

As part of this programme, the above centres are working with The Cowshed, an organisation providing support to individuals and families in times of crisis. **Becky Russell, Operations Manager at The Cowshed said:** "We are delighted to be working with Places Leisure to support young girls by providing them with free period products. This partnership is a significant step towards ensuring that every girl can participate in sports without any barriers."

Sarah Roberts, Head of Fitness at Places Leisure said: “We have learnt so much about preconceptions and barriers in place when looking to engage girls going through puberty into activity.

“Inequality also remains huge for women in sport and we want to do all we can to break these barriers down at an early age and make sure girls feel comfortable and confident in places of exercise.

“The Big Sister project is game-changing as we will support any girl aged 9-15 years old with their own local ambassador who will champion the benefits and enjoyment of sport, exercise and physical activity to girls and support them into making it a part of their life. Crucially, the programme is shaped by girls, for girls and provides those we support with real role models who have faced the same challenges they do.

“As part of the project, the package we offer includes free or half-price memberships, which gives the girls access to gyms, swimming, classes and more at such an important time of their life.”

Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Women in Sport CEO said: “Thanks to the commitment and dedication of Places Leisure, thousands of girls across the UK will have the opportunity to access gyms, pools and sport while being properly supported to do so. Big Sister has debunked the myth that teenage girls are naturally averse to exercise. We are currently experiencing a mental health crisis among our teenage girls, and we know exercise can be a powerful remedy. There has never been a more crucial time to encourage girls to get active.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Places Leisure is a social enterprise which is passionate about ‘creating active places and healthy people’ and improving opportunities for communities to be physically active. It experiences over 30 million visits per annum across the 101 leisure facilities that it operates on behalf of local authorities across the country and supports over 69k children and adults learning to swim each year.

As part of its commitment to help girls into activity, Places Leisure centres within the Wokingham Borough are offering a free membership to girls eligible or a 50% discounted membership for all girls, which includes:

- Unlimited gym use during Junior Gym hours, which includes a 1:1 gym induction (11-15 year olds)
- Unlimited swimming
- Age-appropriate group workout classes including We Move classes
- Friendly on-site team, to support you through your activity
- Free access to Places Leisure App and Virtual Studio which includes a Big Sister channel

We Move classes take place at the following centres, at the below times:

- Wokingham Leisure Centre every Tuesday 4.00pm - 4.45pm, starting from Tuesday 20th August

- Loddon Valley Leisure Centre every Thursday 4.15pm - 5.00pm, starting from Thursday 22nd August
- Bulmershe Leisure Centre every Monday 3.45pm - 4.30pm, starting from Monday 9th September
- Arborfield Green Leisure Centre every Thursday 3.45pm - 4.30pm, starting from Thursday 12th September
- Ryeish Green Sports Hub every Friday 3.45pm - 4.30pm, starting from Friday 13th September

[Find your nearest centre](#)