

A report on

**A community based physical activity program
to improve the emotional well-being of young
women**

by

**Prof Jan Wright
Dr Valerie Harwood
Dr Lisa Parker
Ms Jessica Arroyo**

A project conducted with the assistance of

**Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation
Youth Drug and Alcohol Team, Illawarra Area Health
Lake Illawarra PCYC
University of Wollongong**

July 2005

Introduction

In 2003 researchers from the University of Wollongong and drug and alcohol workers from the Illawarra Youth Drug and Alcohol (DACYT) team drew on their experiences of a pilot community-based program with young women and men in the Illawarra to develop a physical activity program specifically targeting young women. The pilot is reported in the 2004 Report to the then Department of Sport and Recreation and was funded jointly by the DSR and UOW. On the basis of this program and a survey of the literature of physical activity programs for young women (see Wright & Woodcock 2004), we designed and conducted a community based physical activity program over a period of ten weeks. The aim of the project was

to develop an intervention model designed to engage ‘at risk’ young women in a physical activity based program which will enhance their emotional well-being and physical competency, in ways which creates a desire to continue to be involved in physical activity in some form or other.

The young women were recruited for the program through the various health and community centres and services in the Illawarra, on the basis that it is the young people who use these services who will most benefit from the program and who will have had fewer opportunities to participate in the kinds of physical activities provided, as compared to young women we could recruit through schools.

The review of other programs conducted with young women and youth at risk (Wright & Woodcock 2004) suggested a number of important features of the program to best attract and retain young people in an extended program of physical activity. The literature around these programs and other literature on the effects of physical activity on self-esteem and changes in physicality (Gilroy 1997; Hadley et al. 2002; Markula 1995) suggest that some forms of physical activity are more likely to have an impact than others and/or are likely to have different effects (e.g. individual ‘bodywork’ activities such as yoga, martial arts, aerobics, weights as compared to outdoor/adventure activities as compared again to team games).

What did we learn from the literature review?

- For maximum attendance the perfect time was right after school (between 3.30-6.30).
- The ideal program was continuous and participation in the program improved the longer they ran.
- Novel and more risk-taking activities could create an environment where everyone started at the same place and where participants could support each other.
- Social aspects of the programs were a priority – the opportunities to make friendship. were important; the ways these were built into the program was important in terms of how a safe, welcoming, supportive environment develops.
- Peer marketing was key with youth programs. (The most likely way participants found out about programs in the survey of the literature was through 'word of mouth').
- Consistency of dates, locations and commitment equalled more attendance.
- A variety of locations covering a variety of activities, was more likely to be attractive and provided greater opportunities for access.

- Strong, positive relationships with an adult who was committed to the emotional well-being and interests of young people was important for a program's success for continuing attendance and for the achievement of goals associated with social and emotional well-being.
- Prior planning that involved all people with a stake in the program (council, providers, community workers, participants etc) was important.

The program

There were 19 girls who participated in the program in total, with a core of about five who attended most weeks. The average attendance per week over the eleven weeks of the program was eight and most of the young women came in and out of the program. Five young women who came to the first session did not continue to participate in the project. (Only one dropped out after engaging in several sessions, and that was because she had found work.) The young women were recruited through youth services in the Wollongong area and all except one came from the Southern suburbs. Seven of the participants identified as Aboriginal/Koori and were related to each other.

On most weeks the program ran between 2.30 and 6.00 pm on Thursday afternoons. A bus hired from the local PCYC, as well as occasionally being hired from Wollongong RSL Club, was driven by Lisa Parker, a youth drug and alcohol worker and clinical psychologist, who picked up the young women from their homes or a designated spot. Jessica, the project coordinator travelled with the young women on the bus and many of the interviews were recorded on the bus. Some of the young women already knew each other well from school or because they were related. In the first meeting, friendship groups and who came from the North and who from the South contributed to who stayed in the program and who did not.

<i>Week</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
1	Funk/Hip Hop Dance Studio	First session was conducted at Studio 323 with S (Hip-hop teacher.) A fast paced session working though moves to a routine.
2	Funk/Hip Hop, Dance Studio	Session was conducted at the same venue. Pace was a little slower.
3	Kickboxing, Downtown Gym	Shannon Taylor as an instructor. The owner of the gym took 1 st half of class and Shannon 2 nd half.
4	Kickboxing, Downtown Gym	Had the owner again 1 st hour and Cameron 2 nd second.
5	Touch football and body contact at the Uni	School holidays, full day of activities. First hour kicking a football around on the hired Uni fields, then an hour in a body combat class.
6	Indoor rock climbing Hangdog	Hangdog is a climbing space where each wall has a different degree of difficulty. Instructors explained the rules but left the young women to climb at their own pace. Each girl worked with a partner.
7	Jazzercise, PCYC	Held at Warilla PCYC. Two women stood at the front, while the participants were expected to follow the moves. The

		routines were fast and upbeat.
8	Surfing Clinic North Beach	Three sessions with Taupu Surf School. After instructions on what to try and how to do it, in the shore breakers, the girls headed for the surf, with Tauri and Noodle working with individuals, offering support (physically most of the time) and advice wherever needed.
9	Surfing Clinic North Beach	Much the same routine as last week. Get to the beach, change into costumes and wetsuits, grab a board, a talk through what was being practised this week.
10	Surfing Clinic North Beach	Same procedure as last two weeks
11	Jamberoo Recreation Park	Final week get together. Picnic at Jamberoo Recreation Park. The girls were free to do what they wanted as long as they were on the bus at 4pm.

Collecting data

As a result of the first pilot we chose not to use pre and post measurements of psychological dispositions – these set up an environment of surveillance. We found that administering the tests was counter to building the relationship that we wanted with the group. What we did instead was collect process data through interviews with the young women and through a field note journal maintained by the Project Coordinator. In addition all of the session were videoed. Again on the basis of the experience of the pilot project, interviews were conducted wherever and whenever the participants were free to talk, this was primarily on the bus following sessions, on the beach when people were taking a break from surfing. The final ‘focus group interview’ was conducted under the trees at Jamberoo Recreation Park. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

Why did they come and why did they stay?

The young women who participated in the program were recruited initially through youth services in the Illawarra, and once the program had started through contacts with those already participating. When we asked the young women why they came, it was primarily because it was something different to do, not so much because it involved physical activity (indeed some of the participants were not even aware that this was the case) but because it was an opportunity to catch up with old friends, meet new friends, go to new places, and for some, to get out of school.

They stayed in the program, however, because it did involve physical activities, ones that they would not have otherwise had a chance to experience, and in contexts where they were treated with respect, and where although they had opportunities to learn they were not treated like children or students. Where this was not the case (see Appendix A) the young women withdrew their interest and participated on their own terms. Jessica’s relationship with the young people was crucial. At 25 she was not that much older and could share jokes, musical tastes and stories with the participants, but what is of particular interest was how the young people talked about the ‘older’ adults which included Lisa Parker and at various times Valerie Harwood and Jan Wright. Whenever we were at a session we always participated. For example, at the surfing clinic the young women saw us being pounded by the waves,

successfully and unsuccessfully standing on the boards, at the dance sessions we were with them trying to keep up with the routines and so on. This relationship and the young people's appreciation of it, is exemplified in the following quote:

- J: Ok, can you talk about your experiences with us, interacting with me and Lisa
A: Because you guys sort of lower yourself to our age
J: No I act like this all the time (laughs)
A: Yeah but like it's not like we have an older person always telling us what to do and stuff. You guys are like us
J: We get involved with you
A: Yeah, it's better than sitting on a chair and watching us do it, you actually do it. You're not watching over our shoulder
J: So you find that you're more at ease with us participating
A: Yeah it's great. It makes me feel more comfortable.

And from J on the last day

- J: Can you tell me what it's like to participate in these activities?
J: Yeah its fun and I know everyone and the workers are nice.
J: Oh thanks
J: Well you are your down to earth and that kind of thing. You're like us and you muck around like us.
J: Does that make you feel comfortable, as opposed to teachers at school and stuff like that?
J: Yeah they rule you and you guys don't. You're with us not against us.

We were also careful to be respectful of the young women's integrity and to only invoke rules and sanctions when these were relevant to safety or to the use of spaces provided by others. For example, the use of the bus was contingent on particular behaviours and this was understood as an area where the young women could be cautioned.

The following comment about school sport again points to the importance of relationships and how contexts in which these young people felt their interests were disregarded and they were treated as inferior were rejected.

- J: What kind of activities do you have to do for school sport?
T: We can do fishing, pool activities, beach activities but they were all filled up. I had to pick the gayest one.
J: So there are only limited amounts and if you don't hurry up you don't get in it (the activity)
T: But we all do it on the same day but when I went to go put my name down, they were all gone
J: What did you want to do?
T: Beach activities
J: Which is an activity like volleyball?
T: Anything, activities on the beach
J: How is the sport at school different to what we are doing for our physical activities?

T: Because it's for fun, we get treated like adults; we don't get treated like retards

Another important factor was the control they had and were given over their own behaviour by adults in contexts set up for them by adults; and this was something of a novelty for these young women. They could choose not to come one week, but turn up again at a later time; in any one session they could they choose not to continue with an activity which they do not want to do, without any fear of ridicule, hassling, or other sanctions. And they exercised this right. For example, in the jazzercise session, which took little account of the young women's interests or starting points, where the instructors had a set routine, distanced themselves from the group through their headsets and microphones, most of the young women gradually stopped following instructions. They gravitated to the back of the class where the food had been placed and ate, watched the others and made comments such as 'M doesn't need to do this because she is thin'. Some came back in when music or a routine seemed more appealing. The point here is that unlike most of their other institutionalised experiences of physical activity, they were able to exert control over their own behaviour without fear of punishment. They were not disrespectful, they just did not do what they did not want to do because someone else said that they had to. It was also clear that jazzercise, at least taught in this way, was unlikely to be an activity that most of them would repeat. Comments in the bus following the jazzercise session were revealing:

J: Ok, so what did you think of that Jazzercise Session?
G: That was stupid, that's why I didn't do it
J: You reckon it was stupid? How come?
G: I don't like dancing in front of people
C: I don't like when your dancing and people are looking at you. It puts you off a bit.
J: What about you M?
M: Oh I didn't do it. I enjoyed it because I ate.
K: I thought it was alright
J: How about you V did you like it?
M: *I didn't need to lose weight so I didn't do it*
V: It was fun

As a notable contrast, in the surfing clinic they pushed themselves, went back out into the waves after repeatedly falling off their boards, being thoroughly dumped and constantly frustrated in their attempts to go beyond the first breakers. They were encouraged by the instructors but there were never any expectations of particular 'outcomes' of achievement. These were set by the young women themselves. One young women, for example, said that she wasn't getting out of the surf on the final day until she had stood on her board. The following comments are typical of the participants' responses to the surf clinic.

J: Oh no, did you have fun but?
G: I loved it
K: It was mad
M: I love the water
K: You don't know how many times I got smashed
A: I know it was so fun. I was screaming to you 'swim, swim!'
All: Laughs
J: Do you love the water M?

- M: I love it so much. I just get embarrassed
 J: Why? What makes you feel embarrassed?
 M: Because I'm too skinny

The chance to participate in a range of different physical activities that they would otherwise not have experienced was also very much appreciated. A's final response in this exchange is very suggestive.

- A: Sometimes when you say we are doing something, I think 'what the hell is that'
 J: Yeah, you don't know what to expect
 A: But we give it a go anyway and it sort of gives us an idea of what we like and what we don't like. Most of the time I'll be at home and I'll be like 'I wonder what that would be like,' because we I have never done it before (referring to the different types of physical activity.)
 J: Yeah exactly
 A: *Once you do it you find out what it's like. Not just that, you find yourself. You find out who you really are*

The importance of the bus and the food

The program would not have survived without the bus. The young women were picked up from their homes or designated places of meeting and welcomed on to the bus by Jess. The girls greeted each other loudly, caught up on events and asked for loud music. The rules for the bus: 'we have to behave ourselves, or else we lose the bus and can't do anything'.

The bus was part of the getting away experience that was important to the participants. Their responses in the interviews suggest that the physical activity component of the program was not necessarily what initially attracted them to it; what was more important was the opportunity to go somewhere different. Their response to the news that they were going to their local PCYC for one of the activities exemplifies this. This was not 'new' and indeed had negative connotations because some of the girls had been recently asked to leave the Club.

The food welded everything together; the esky carrying the food was a meeting point for conversations, a non-threatening site for resistance when people did not want to do activities, a great thing to look forward to at the end of a hard day in the surf; an opportunity to make suggestions. Running the program without the food would have been unimaginable.

What form did the program take in practice?

The activities enjoyed by most of the young women were the surfing clinic which was a standout for participation and engagement, kickboxing particularly when taught by Shannon Taylor, the world champion boxer, indoor climbing at Hangdog and for some the hip hop class when it slowed down a bit (although the mirrors were off putting). The jazzercise was generally not liked except for the two participants who really got into the dancing and most stopped participating in the university based boxing class (they decided they had eaten too much and felt sick).

The following excerpts from Jess's field notes provide some sense of how the sessions were run, how they were received and also how the group of participants came together.

On the kick boxing class

Today we have 4 new participants. [Two identify as Aboriginal, one is Anglo and the fourth identifies as Italian.] M is sick with low iron count and the reason why she joined today was because the doctor has given her a lot of time off from school and she has nothing else to do. When the girls got on the bus, they were beaming with energy; screaming and yelling to people passing by. I asked them what all the noise was for and their replies were that they were excited. ... A came by herself. The vibe amongst the group this week was a lot more relaxed. The girls talked amongst themselves, usually there is silence. My theory on this is that the girls are slowly coming together as one group. In this group we have the girls from the south ... and the girls from the north ... and it seems that these two groups are forming together as one. Each girl is accepting the other. The food I had purchased this week was lollies, chips, popcorn, crackers, muesli and fruit bars. We arrived at the Youth Centre in Wollongong; after picking up all the young women ...

We arrived at the kickboxing gym, and the set up of the gym was divided into two main areas. The first room was a padded space which had mirrors at one end. There were no fans or air-conditioning, only open windows. The room was made up of punching mats which were used as body shields. The girls started using the equipment by each grabbing one of these mats and running towards each other from each ends of the room. The [owner of the gym] informed me that we were having a male instructor instead of a female instructor. This instructor was Shannon Taylor, the number one boxing champion for his weight division. For the first half an hour the class was instructed by [the owner]. [He] was very strict in his warm up regime and he constantly made comments about the 'ideal body' and how important it was to have the ideal body shape. This made the girls feel conscious about their exercise routines and their response later was that they felt guilty. The girls also believed that the words [he] had said were true. We were made to do push-ups and sit-ups while stressing the importance of being a good looking woman. I felt really sorry for some of the larger girls in our class and tried to get their opinion about [his] talk on the recorder. C's opinion was that she didn't really care about what [he] had said but her body language to me reflected that she did. I know myself during the time we had [the owner] as an instructor, I felt really conscious about the way my body looked. After his big 'ideal body' spiel, he asked the girls 'who wants to look good for summer?' All the girls had put their hand up. The warm up went for half an hour and then Shannon took us into the second room which has 15 punching bags hanging from the roof. The girls were given boxing gloves and were asked to partner up with someone. He was very patient with the girls and offered to help when they needed some assistance. The young women responded really well to him, probably because he was the number one champion and also because his tone was more comfortable and less disciplined. ... On the bus we had a bit of a chat about the boxing and the young women loved the session and that they had a mad time. They were looking forward to next week. They loved kickboxing because it was easy to master than dancing in the prior week.

The combat class at Uni

We arrived at the football oval no. 2 and settled down to have some rolls and fruit. Our group was fortunate enough to have an extra youth worker from the Port Kembla Youth Drug and Alcohol Adult team. His name was Brian Brown and he is Aboriginal. The

Aboriginal girls related really well with Brian and he started the girls in a game of pass the football around the circle. Brian has this amazing way of engaging with the young women. The girls started to get into the activity when it was time to begin our Body Combat class with [the teacher]. Our group was taken to a really nice, modern, state of the art, polished floorboard gym room, equipped with electronic walkers, walkmans to listen to music, whilst the latest music played. As soon as the girls saw this, they jumped on each machine so that they could assess how many kilojoules they were burning off. We were soon told that we were in the wrong room and that our room was downstairs. We all made our way into a dirty and dusty large room which had no furniture, the floor was black and the overall impression of this space was daggy. As the music played, the acoustics was terrible and you see by the look on the girls' faces, they were not impressed. The girls stated to muck up a bit then [the instructor] showed up. She was a blonde and petite with a softly spoken voice. Her class was a boxing class, not body combat (we had been booked into the wrong class). She had a lot of trouble engaging with the girls and most of them decided that they were not going to participate, giving the excuse that they had eaten too much and felt sick. Her choice of music was something from the 80s and none of the girls were familiar with the music and that didn't help in their participation. The girls participated for about 10 minutes and then they all decided to sit out and relax.

Hangdog and indoor climbing

We had a big turn out today surprisingly after last week's terrible session at the Wollongong Uni Gym. Our trip on the bus started with T bringing a tape of her favourite songs. R 'n' B rap music and everyone sang the same song over and over throughout journey. By the time we got to hangdog the young women were pumped and ready to go. After last week, the girls complained of feeling sick from eating just before the exercising, the trick today was to bring the food out after the session. Things didn't go according to plan. As soon as we got to Hangdog, the young women decided to get into their usual feast of lollies, salad rolls, chips, popcorn and drink. Hangdog is an indoor rock-climbing centre. The centre looks like a massive warehouse with heaps of space surrounded by rock-climbing walls and in the centre some tables to relax. Each wall is brightly painted with different colours and shaped ceramic rocks. Each wall has different degrees of complexity and the more the progress the harder each wall becomes. The rules were that the participants were to team up with a partner and they are in control of the rope that supports the rock climber. Then you are to swap. Our physical activity leaders were very patient in explaining the rules and how to use the harness. They took their time to fit each of us with a harness and as each girl finished their snacks, they got measured and fit with a harness. Their reactions were funny because not only did the harness stick right up your behind they had to be tight around your body. In my opinion, this made me feel self-conscious about my body because not only was everybody looking at you while your up climbing the wall, the position of the harness hugs your body in places that make your hip and thigh areas stand out. Surprisingly I didn't hear any comments made about the harnesses. As we began on the easier walls, the girls really looked like they were enjoying themselves, especially when the young women were egged on by their peers or partner to touch the roof. You could really tell whom the stronger, more confident girls were because they progressed onto the harder levels straight away. Some of them skipped the in-between walls and went straight for the very difficult stages.

... The good thing about Hangdog is that you go at your own pace. The facilitators do not rush participants and the girls can spend as long as they want on each wall or in the actual centre. I think the girls really enjoyed this because they didn't feel like they had to keep up and they could explore each wall, whichever order they pleased.

One particular obstacle was not a wall, but a thin like ladders. To look at this apparatus it looked really easy to master. There were two ladders, one as wide as a person's body, each step were about 2 feet apart and the other was a skinny thin wire metal ladder.

Both these ladders were not supported by anything, which meant that as soon as the young women used them, they become very flaccid and sloppy making it hard to balance. Most of the girls had a go and the competition was to see who could touch the roof. This kept them entertained for a while and they developed more confidence because this proved to be the most difficult task yet.

I felt that the girls really responded to this activity because it was a challenge, it tested their confidence, trust, ability and guts. Each week there is always at least one young woman that sits out the physical activity, but this week they all had a go, apart from A. She was involved in a car accident and was suffering whiplash on her neck. I can always tell when the young women enjoyed the session because on the bus they actually want to talk about their experiences.

Tauri, Noodle and the surfing clinic

Lisa and I picked up all the young women and made our way to North Wollongong Beach. By the time we got there, the young women complained of being tired and that they didn't want to participate. In my opinion, I think they become unsure about their ability to be able to do the activity, so they get scared and back out of participating. These feelings were soon overcome, especially when the teachers Tauri and Noodle introduced themselves and motivated the girls to join in. As the girls were fitted in the provided wetsuits, I assessed the body language of them having to put a wetsuit on. I was feeling self conscious about exposing my body in a wetsuit so I guess the young women did as well. Tauri was very responsive in engaging with the young girls and made a comment about body image like 'hey girls we are all in the same boat, when you're in a wetsuit you let it hang out.' I think this made the girls feel comfortable and they made their way to the beach.

T and C didn't want to participate. T was sick and C, after getting her wetsuit on, chose not to participate. I think she was feeling self conscious. What I was pleased to see was that every other girl who came along gave surfing a go. Usually M sits out of the physical activity, but today you could not get her out of the water, as with G and V. I wasn't in the water for long because I wanted to focus on doing one on one interviews. I did notice however that the girls in the water all seemed to join together into one group. Usually they segregate into two or three groups. V was chatting to A and K. Usually A is by herself because she is not part of the circle of friends. The girls really responded well to Tauri and treated her with respect.

Did the project make a difference?

It is difficult to document the many changes we noticed in the young women. In particular, Jess and Lisa because of their constant participation in the program and because of Jess close relationship with the young women were privy to conversations that cannot be reported here. These conversations, however, much more so than psychometric tests pointed to considerable changes in the ways in which the young women interacted with each other, with the workers

and engaged with the program. These conversations pointed also to the ways in which the young women perceived the program as making changes in themselves, their confidence, their practices around alcohol and drug use. The following is an assessment based on Jess Arroyo and Lisa Parker's observations and interactions with the young women.

During the early phase of the program the young women typically presented "a tough attitude"; a pre-occupation with their body image; aggressive manners; moodiness; "a bad attitude"; talked about their mis-use of alcohol and other drugs; talked about conflict in their peer relationships; as well as giving us impressions of vulnerabilities, insecurities (e.g. this was noted by their hesitations to express themselves to us and references to their lack of confidence) and struggles with their cultural identity.

Toward the end of the program we started to experience their apparent ease of talking with us about themselves, their feelings and their enjoyment of the program; their "attitude" appeared increasingly respectful and considerate of differing opinions amongst their peers and us; they made more self-accepting statements relating to their body image; some started to seek information on health issues from the workers; greater eye contact during interactions was noticed in those who had previously been withdrawn; most spoke openly of changes in their experience of confidence. (Parker, commentary July 2005)

As a specific example, one young woman who reported using marijuana, described how the project helped her to control the amounts of drug she smoked, particularly on the day she participated in our program. She said that she got a different high from joining the group and being part of the activities. A further striking example of the growing cohesion of the group and of their appreciation of the opportunities provided by the program and their respectfulness was their appointment of M to 'officially' thank Taura and Yvonne for their experience of the Surfing Clinic.

What have we learned?

These girls miss out

The young women recruited for the program were deliberately targeted because they belonged to what might be described as a group of young people who are often ignored by programs, by planning and by schools. They could be described as 'disenfranchised' and 'hard to reach' young women; that is, they are difficult to access through community physical activity programs, clinics, or where recruitment for physical activity programs is through schools. If the young women in our program went to school, their attachment was minimal; and programs associated with schools, held at schools or in other institutional settings were not likely to be attractive. If these young women and other young people like them are to be attracted to programs, there has to be a deliberate targeting of such young people through youth services and youth outreach in communities, programs have to recognise their alienation from institutional practices and work with them to construct programs that are relevant and sufficiently appealing to recruit further through word of mouth.

Resources and programs which offer these young women opportunities to participate in physical activities which will continue to be accessible to them seems to be an enormous gap in current provisions but desperately needed.

From Jess's notes:

I said to the girls, what do you do, like where is a place where you guys can hang out? The boys have got the skate park and so on ... and their reply was nothing. The only thing they do is go for walks ... pay to use the space'

The people who 'front' the program are very important to its success. Such programs must include people who are experienced at working with young people outside institutionalised settings. If we had been judgemental about how the young people talked with each other, what they said to each other (and to Jess) about their lives, their weekends, their relationships, they would not have continued with the program and/or engaged in the kinds of conversations that allowed them to feel safe and respected. The participation in the physical activity could not be separated from lots and lots of chat. It is essential to include skilled workers who can negotiate boundaries, can build rapport while maintaining an appropriate distance. For future programs working with young people, who may be judged to be 'at risk', it would also be essential to recognize the importance of facilitators' ability to respond to health and service issues, for example, clarifying the young people's understanding of drug use and providing information on how to access a variety of services and advocacy where necessary. While this was not a significant feature of the project, if it had continued the opportunity to engage with the young women around these issues would have had more primacy.

In summary

- The importance of respectful relationships can not be underestimated – the young women repeatedly made comments about how this program was different from their school experiences of physical activity, how they were treated as equals and how the adults associated with the program joined in. The young women needed to feel comfortable in getting involved or choosing not to. Giving youth the choice to participate or not allows them to have freedom, the ability to make decisions and it gives them the opportunity to have a say, rather than their choice being made for them.
- Program organisers have to let go of judgements and provide spaces for the participants in programs to make choices at all levels of participation and engagement. The participants need to have a say about the kinds of activities, and they also have to have choices at a very micro level – that is, they need to have the freedom to participate or not during sessions – they should not feel any pressure to perform or participate. Marginalised young people often have few areas in their lives over which they have control. If they are to continue to voluntarily participate in a physical activity program then they need to have that control.
- The physical activity instructor/leader was important in whether the young women participated in the physical activity and importantly what they took from it in terms of their experience and their feelings about themselves. Physical activity instructors need to be chosen carefully and should have some training or induction in how to work with young people, particularly young people who are vulnerable.
- It is important for ALL adults involved to participate in the activities – there should be no voyeurs. This *does* mean that the adults responsible for the program are just as free to come in and out of activities as the young people, but they should not be separate from the activity component of the program. [This was particularly a problem with the pilot study when teachers accompanied the students from the alternative school

involved in the program and stood aside and looked on or made comments that maintained the teacher-student relationship, often in ways counter to the aims of the project in promoting young people's well-being and confidence]

- Part of the respect accorded to the young people is the kind of space to which their activities are allocated. If their activity is held in dingy, dirty spaces it sends messages to an already sensitised group about how they are regarded, where they are in terms of the hierarchies of facilities and resources.
- While not always essential, one of the key aspects of the participants enjoyment of a session was the capacity to work at their own pace, not necessarily to stay within comfort zones but to have challenges that were manageable and that they could work at in their own time – the indoor climbing experience and the surfing clinic were both activities offered in this way and both regarded with a high degree of enthusiasm.
- An 'all girls' group gave the participants the chance to be themselves, to feel safe and take risks without fear of ridicule or a need to compete with boys. The contrast between the ways in which the young women engaged as a group in this program and the experience from the pilot which included both male and female participants, suggests that a young women's group was far superior in achieving the outcomes that we were looking for.
- Word of mouth is the best way to recruit hard to access youth.
- Transport and food are essential.

References

- Gilroy, S. (1997). Working on the body: Links between physical activity and social power. In G. Clarke & B. Humberstone (eds) *Researching Women and Sport*. London, Macmillan.
- Hadley, S. Ginther-Wang, M. & Scharck, J. (2002) Adolescent girls, abuse and physical activity: Using physical activity to build self-esteem. *Melpomene Journal*, 2, 1: 36-50.
- Markula, P. (1995) Firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin: The postmodern aerobicizing female bodies. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 424-453
- Wright, J. & Woodcock, S. (2004) Designing and researching a youth development model for physical activity participation, in J. Wright, (Ed) *Researching in Physical and Health Education*. Proceedings of Researching in Sport, Physical and Health Education Conference, Wollongong: Faculty of Education.

Appendix A: Jess's field notes

		Descriptions	Comments
Week 1	Funk/Hip Hop Dance Studio	<p>First session was conducted at Studio 323 with S (Hip-hop teacher.) Session was very full on, fast paced making the session hard for the girls to grasp. Challenging and difficult at times.</p> <p>Although this session was difficult it worked well as a good ice breaker because it enabled to girls to open up and reflect on how 'silly' they felt doing each move.</p> <p>10 girls showed up to this first session</p>	<p>Possibly too intimidating as a first choice activity. The session was done in front of mirrors the girls were constantly looking at a full body view of themselves. I felt the teacher didn't engage with the girls very well, often racing through each routine, expecting the girls to catch up to her speed. She chose music not really suited to the young girls, it was purely her taste. The girls requested certain songs but the teacher declined.</p>
Week 2	Funk/Hip Hop, Dance Studio	<p>Session was conducted at the same venue. This time the pace was a little slower. Lost 5 girls but gained 2 new Koori girls. The activity slower in pace and the girls seemed to get a better grasp of the routine.</p> <p>The activity definitely brings out conversations and a chance to engage and develop friendships</p>	<p>There was definitely a different vibe this week having fewer girls attend. More focus was on the girls who did attend probably making them feel uncomfortable. They felt uncomfortable watching themselves in the video playback saying things like 'being fat' etc. These comments were often repeated on the bus</p>
Week 3	Kickboxing, Downtown Gym	<p>Had 4 new participants. Used Shannon Taylor as an instructor. The owner of the gym took 1st half of class and Shannon 2nd half. The owner focused on the importance of body image and losing weight.</p> <p>Shannon's focus was on getting fit and feeling good.</p> <p>The girls requested healthy food and drink for the project. They weighed themselves before and after each session having listen to the owner's views in body weight and how a woman should look.</p>	<p>The girls engaged with Shannon more than the owner because his focus was not on losing weight, rather to feel good. The girls enjoyed the class with Shannon because they felt that they had actually done physical activity. They were not keen on the owner's style of teaching because they said they felt guilty about eating after listening to him (having a good role model is a big deal in how young women respond and feel about themselves)</p>
Week 4	Kickboxing,	<p>Had an extra girl join today. Had the owner again 1st</p>	<p>The girls compared C to Shannon, and they felt that it</p>

	Downtown Gym	and C 2 nd . Image was important; the girls didn't like C because he didn't look like the boxing type so they didn't engage with him. On the bus there was a lot more talking, not just within little groups that had formed, rather discussions as a whole group. The girls are slowly coming together as one group.	wasn't as good because they felt they didn't do enough physical work. They felt guilty they hadn't worked hard enough and continued to jump on scales and monitor their eating habits. S really enjoyed the session, it's her way of dealing with her anger issues. Al comments that this group and the activities we do help her 'inside her head.'
Week 5	Touch football and body contact at the Uni	School holidays, full day of activities. Had the help of a male Aboriginal youth worker to engage with the young Aboriginal girls. Spend an hour kicking a football around on the hired Uni fields, then an hour in a body combat class. Only 6 girls attended with M being the ringleader in getting the girls to join in. The body combat room was carried out in a large, grubby, dusty and smelly dark hall. There was no furniture & the acoustics in the room were terrible causing a lot of echoes. Our leader was softly spoken, had no imagination and was uninspiring. She did not have any idea in facilitating a youth body combat class and only 2 girls participated.	The quality of the space provided for this session and the lack of passion the leader displayed, really reflects whether the young women get into the activity or not. The girls became bored and used the excuse of eating too much to get out of the session. There was also not much conversation on the bus on the way home. Possibly because there was nothing to reflect or laugh about amongst each other.
Week 6	Indoor rock climbing	Held at Hangdog with a new participant. Hangdog is a well organised space, colourful and profession in its layout. Each wall has a different degree of difficulty. Our instructors explained the rules but left the young women to climb at their own pace. Each girl had to have a partner and that partner controlled your speed at which you fall from the wall.	This was a very successful activity because it challenged the girls in many ways. The ability to conquer their fear of heights, to trust your partner, confidence and the power to choose the pace at which they climb. All girls had a go this week, no one sat out. A very successful activity in many ways.
Week 7	Jazzercise, PCYC	Held at Warilla PCYC, many of girls had issues with accessing space in their local area. The space was	The space was not appealing to the girls, nor was the way the class was delivered by the activity leaders. Their

		<p>much like the space provided at Uni. Very dirty, neglected, cold and dark with cob webs and pigeon nests in the window sills. Two women stood at the front, while the young girls were made to follow every move. The routines were fast and upbeat with hardly any chance for a breath.</p>	<p>attitude was about losing weight, image and they didn't connect with the girls. They came across as being very serious which was reflected in their tech set up (microphone and headset)</p> <p>The young women were to stay away from leaders; this was evident when one of the girls invaded the space of one of the leaders. If the girls don't like an activity, they will use any excuse to get out of it.</p>
Week 8	Surfing Clinic North Beach	<p>Three sessions with Taupu Surf School. Girls met with instructor who had an amazing way of engaging with youth. The girls were made to put on skin tight wetsuits which was very intimidating but Tauri was a great role model and encouraged the girls illustrating that we all looked the same. The girls were shown what to do but were left to their own devices when conquering the surf, with Tauri and Yvonne working with individuals, offering support (physically most of the time) and advice wherever needed.</p>	<p>This was a very successful activity mainly because of the way the instructor, Tauri, motivated and engaged with the young women. She was an excellent role model and made the young women feel confident, comfortable and at ease with getting in the surf and having a go.</p> <p>Lots of squealing, laughter and people getting up and having another go after being dumped, wiped out and so on.</p>
Week 9	Surfing Clinic North Beach	<p>Much the same routine as last week. Get to the beach, change into costumes and wetsuits, grab a board, a talk through what was being practised this week, and surf at your own pace, with lots of support, encouragement and assistance from Tauri and Yvonne.</p>	<p>Still issues of exposing bodies in wetsuits but this was quickly overcome by filling wetsuits with water making the body seem bigger than they appear. Towards the end most of the girls wouldn't get out of the water because they were having too much fun. Different friendship groups were made today e.g. A Warilla girl partnering up with a Dapto girl.</p>
Week 10	Surfing Clinic North Beach	<p>Same procedure as last 2 weeks</p>	<p>A very successful activity, mostly because it gave the young women the opportunity to surf and feel comfortable participating in a male dominated sport, with confidence and a lot of support from an engaging activity leader</p>

Week 11	Jamberoo Recreation Park	Final week get together. Had a new girl join us on the last day. We had a picnic at Jamberoo. The girls were free to do what they wanted as long as they were on the bus at 4pm. The park was packed with lost of school kids because of school holidays. We found a space under the tree and the girls freely came and went when it suited them. Most of the girls hung around the area we had chosen to relax at, wanting to chat amongst themselves or with me.	By the end week the girls had really opened up between us as youth workers/researchers and amongst themselves. It really felt like a little posse had developed. The girls really formed a close group towards the end which was a bit disappointing when it ended. It would have been interesting to see how the group developed over a longer period of time.
---------	--------------------------	--	---