

# Creating space for girls and women

**“Most parks have more facilities for dog waste than for teenage girls.”**

Females participate less in recreation and sport than males. Before females venture out, they're asking themselves: Is it safe? Is it well lit? Are there safe access routes? Who will be in the space? How can we create welcome access for girls and women?

## Seasonality

Changing daylight hours also have a significant impact on behaviour, with women having increased safety concerns during the winter which decreases their participation in outdoor activities.

## Barriers to participation

Young women are keen to be more active, often in less formally organised opportunities, and popular activities like walking and running happen in public spaces. Feeling confident and being in a positive environment are key contributors to increased levels of physical activity. Data from Active NZ on female participation.

There is a lack of access to public space. The Parkwatch report on use of spaces and places found that Multi-Use Games Areas (fenced pitches or cages), skate parks and BMX tracks are dominated by boys. Ninety percent of all users were male.

Barriers include the cost of transport, a sense of 'ownership' of some spaces, perceptions of safety and welcome, and the presence or absence of other girls and women.

As key decision makers, local authorities, recreation and sport providers need to consider a wider range of factors when investing in public provision of spaces and places.

Girls don't feel that parks are for them, but they want to be out there and active. They are not just interested in the 'sheltered spaces' and seating near the active recreation areas. “We don't want to ogle” one of them said.



Figure 1 East Christchurch Fantails Hub, supplied by Mainland Football

## Perceptions of safety and welcome

Women and girls are often alert to perceived danger when actual threats are minimal. Making spaces feel welcoming and safe are an important part of environmental design that encourages participation. For detailed information on gender inclusive design click here.

Perceptions of safety aren't just about 'women-only' environments, for example programming for Muslim women. Find ways of creating spaces which are respectful of difference and create a sense of belonging.

Evidence from Green Flag's Safer Parks Improving Access For Girls and Women recommends activation of spaces, and awareness of park features, that includes a range of users.

## Design

“...we need multi-modal spaces. Meaning, we need to offer spaces with variation and diversity that accommodate all types of community members, including girls, multicultural communities, kids with disabilities, and kids with no money, no bikes and no skateboards.” Kelsie Prabawa-Sear, Girls need play spaces too.

Creating spaces for girls and women incorporates both approaches to crime prevention (see information on the Urban Design Protocol) as well as Gender Inclusive Design. At a minimum we need spaces and places to apply the CPTED principles and incorporate good practice from Recreation Aotearoa's Outdoor Accessibility Design Guidelines.

## Case Study One Girls and Women's Month NZ Football

"Girls and Women's month is an awesome opportunity for our region to showcase its support for girls and women's football. Together with our local clubs, we want to grow participation, reduce barriers to access and make football a game for everyone to get involved in!"

Girls & Women's month at NZ Football was established to shine the spotlight on girls and women in football, spark discussions around gender equality and grow female participation at the grassroots level. NZ Football offers female specific programmes and events to remove the barriers to entry for women and girls as players, coaches and administrators. These include:

- Female only coaching clinic
- Football Fun for girls
- Have a go Futsal
- Learn to Referee

## Case Study Two Girl Skate NZ

Sport NZ's Skate Guidelines include a case study about Girls Skate NZ – a female-run skate school that aims to empower women and girls to learn how to skate in a friendly and inclusive environment. They deliver free, girls-only skate lessons across the Auckland region – including areas that otherwise had no access [to skate parks]. Skate Guidelines research found that 41% of female skaters identified as neurodiverse and 1/3 were under 18 years old.

Founder Amber Clyde said **"it's amazing what a few wooden ramps, a load of boards and helmets and a team of friendly coaches can do. We have had people come and give skateboarding a go from all different backgrounds and ethnicities who would never have the chance otherwise"**.



Figure 2 Image from <https://www.girlsskatenz.com/product-page/girls-skate-nz-tee>

## Insights into action

The following Insights into Action include the CPTED principles.

Principle	Action
Remove barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free to use</li> <li>• Sense of ownership</li> <li>• Close to public and active transport</li> <li>• Less daylight creates more barriers</li> <li>• Incorporate social opportunities (eg finish at a café)</li> <li>• Programme sessions focussed on fun and basic skills</li> </ul>
Perceptions of both safety and welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See other girls and women using a space</li> <li>• Eyes on the Park – busyness, activation, and staffing/authority figures</li> <li>• Inclusion - belonging and familiarity; image (of park, reputation)</li> </ul>
Urban design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good lighting</li> <li>• Toilets at skateparks</li> <li>• Planting that doesn't create areas for concealment or reduce visibility</li> <li>• Access and egress access routes</li> <li>• Use active security measures</li> </ul>
Flexible spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activate spaces and places with safe group activities (running and walking groups)</li> </ul>

## Further reading

[Skate Guidelines for Local Government, Sport NZ.](#)  
[Sport NZ Women and Girls Strategy](#)  
[Make Space for Girls](#)  
[Women in Sport Aotearoa Insight Hub](#)

## Relevant Insights

Check out the following relevant insights.

#12 [Equity and Leisure](#) Dec 2019  
 #29 [Rangatahi just want to have fun](#) Dec 2021  
 #40 [Spatial Justice – fair provision of places to play](#) Feb 2024