



Just a girl?

The Muirhouse Youth Development Group (MYDG) Stand Up project focused on how sectarianism can be subtle in the way attitudes to girls can make them feel separate from their peer groups, for example the behaviours and attitudes of boys in the local community.

The issue

Young women are often concerned about their image and how they are viewed by young men and boys. They find it difficult to engage with activities where boys are involved and when they do it is often to try to impress them. This often leads to boys being violent towards the young women who respond by joking that it is not serious. Young women do not have a voice and those that do, do not know how to express it in a way that reflects positively on them. These experiences of young women seem to mirror underlying sectarian messages.

The project

- 14 young women were involved in the 2-week programme.
- This was a new girls' group formed around the project.
- The programme included awareness raising workshops on the issues young women face and how these can be tackled.
- It culminated in a trip to Glasgow Women's Library for workshops on feminism.
- Media Education at North Edinburgh Arts was brought in to record the process and the group were involved in editing and producing a short video.
- **Just a girl?** – the film, is a resource to aid discussion and reflection around the experience of girls and young women in relation to sectarianism.

What the young women said ...

"It was fun, liked the filming, making new friends, travelling to Glasgow for the first time."

A high point of the project was the visit to Glasgow Women's Library:

"The girls had experiences that they hadn't had before ... travelling through to Glasgow on the train was a new experience ... they were quite excited but they were also a bit anxious ... it expelled a lot of myths for them about Glasgow."

"What has been really surprising was their enthusiasm for the project even though they were reluctant at first. They are still talking about it, and about what they can do next. They are keen to keep the group going."
Project worker



What difference has the project made?

For young people:

- Raised awareness about an issue in the community and what it is to be a young woman.
- Helped them realise connections between home and social life and the influence that parents and siblings have.
- Given the young women involved a drive to do more girls' work.

"I think everybody should be able to do what they like doing – boys doing hairdressing and girls being a professional footballer."

Young woman – from the film

For the leaders:

- The project challenged staff to think about what sectarianism is.
- Leaders are much more aware of the impact sectarianism and discrimination has on the girls and the boys.
- Leaders are more confident and able to challenge behaviour.

For the group:

- An opportunity to start a new girls' group and a safe place for girls to be themselves.
- Three of the young women involved went to the Peer Education Training residential. This has made them enthusiastic to be more involved with the groups at MYDG.
- One of the leaders was a young woman who could identify with the girls' experiences. Through the project this was an opportunity for her to have more responsibility and she is keen to take on a leadership role in a new girls' group.
- New partnerships have developed with the Women's Library and with Media Education.

Impact on sectarianism – How has the project contributed to tackling sectarianism?

"... not tackled it but raised it and got them (the young women) thinking about it."

"Everybody thinks about sectarianism as a football thing. We talked about how boys are when they go to the football and how they talk to each other. This was also about fathers and brothers and how they treat their mums when they come in. There is an acceptance that this is how it is, and putting up with it." Project worker

"One of the achievements is that the girls are more able to stand up for themselves and respect themselves more. It helped them to realise that you don't have to put up with 'stuff' and that you can challenge things."

Project worker

The project:

- Helped the group to express themselves and to feel safe and respected.
- Helped to raise awareness about what sectarianism is and how to challenge it.
- Helped the group to talk about a subject that many people don't understand.
- Provided more information on what sectarianism is and how it's personal to them.

Post script – What next for the MYDG Girls Project?

MYDG have plans to continue this work by:

- Getting younger girls involved and exploring sectarianism and discrimination with them.
- Using the film as a resource and involving the girls to pass on their experiences.
- Exploring further girls' work at MYDG and the involvement of the peer educators.