

# VOICES FOR CHANGE:

## Addressing Gender Equity in Cardiff

2024 Consultation and Engagement Report



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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this report is to comprehensively document and highlight the findings from the innovative and creative consultation and engagement exercise conducted by Child Friendly Cardiff (CFC), focusing on the lived experiences of girls and young women (\* referred to as girls throughout this report) in Cardiff. This exercise, a key component of our focus on Equal & Included with a specific emphasis on gender equity, aims to gather in-depth insights into the challenges, barriers, and opportunities faced by this demographic in various aspects of city life.

The report seeks to translate these findings into actionable steps and broad recommendations, enabling CFC and its wider partners to develop targeted interventions and policies. The overarching goal is to enhance gender equity in Cardiff, ensuring that all children and young people, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to thrive and participate in the life of the city.

### Methods

In our pursuit to understand the lived experiences of girls in Cardiff, CFC employed a diverse range of methods to ensure broad and meaningful engagement. This included the innovative use of Legislative Theatre work, where participants could creatively explore and propose policy solutions through drama. In partnership with Plan UK, CFC initiated a social action grant programme, empowering girls to lead and implement projects addressing gender equity. Collaborating with DebateMate, CFC launched a debating initiative, providing a platform for girls to articulate their views and develop critical thinking skills. A highlight was the Gender Equity Day held at Cardiff City Stadium, which featured inspiring talks, interactive workshops, and an Empowerment Zone. Here, over 200 girls engaged with more than 20 partners, expressing themselves through art, poetry, and games, in a vibrant celebration of their voices and perspectives.

## Introduction

### Background

CFC, in its commitment to creating a city where every child thrives, places a strong emphasis on the principle of 'Equal & Included', with a particular focus on gender equity. Recognising that gender can significantly influence a child's experience and opportunities in life, this focus aims to address and dismantle the barriers faced by girls in Cardiff. Through a series of targeted initiatives, policies, and partnerships, CFC seeks to ensure that gender does not limit the potential or violate the rights of any child in the city.

### Objectives and rationale

The objectives of this consultation are twofold: firstly, to gain an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges and experiences faced by girls and young women in Cardiff through the lens of children's rights, and secondly, to identify effective strategies to promote gender equity within the city enabling them to claim their rights. The rationale behind this consultation stems from a recognition that while progress has been made, gender still significantly impacts a child's life experiences and opportunities. This initiative is a proactive step towards ensuring that Cardiff, as a Child Friendly City, not only acknowledges but actively addresses these gender-specific issues. By engaging directly with the girls and young women of Cardiff, we aim to empower them to voice their concerns and contribute to the creation of more equitable and inclusive policies and practices.

## Approach

### Stakeholder advisory group

A half day workshop with 14 different agencies was convened in June 2023 to discuss the wider objective of addressing gender equity in Cardiff. Throughout the workshop, we acknowledge the importance of intersectionality, recognising that the experiences of girls and young women are shaped not only by their gender but also by other aspects of their identity such as race, socioeconomic status, and ability, which collectively influence their opportunities and challenges.

### Gender Equity Steering Group

18 Cardiff Youth Council members formed a steering group for the consultation and engagement phase, advising the CFC Team and assisting with refining the findings for this report. They met on a regular basis to consider the CFC Survey data, to help plan activity, edited LT video used for teacher training and assess social action grant applications.

### Participants, tools and techniques

39,227 (24%) of Cardiff's population is female and between 0-18 years old (ONS 2021). Nearly 300 girls aged between 11 and 18 from Cardiff took part in the 6-month consultation and engagement programme.

A wide range of girls participated in the programme of work from across the city. They were supported by youth workers, mentors, support workers and teachers from schools and community partners.

Participants took part in a creative and innovative series of activities that enabled them to learn and express themselves. These included drama and theatre experiences, discussions and workshops, poetry and song writing, debating and art programmes. Tools and techniques used for engagement included surveys, focus groups, interviews & creative methods.

### Duration and phases of the consultation.

The consultation started in July 2023 with the majority of projects being concluded by January 2024. However, the social action grants continued until March 2024, allowing the young people ample time to plan and deliver their projects.

- Legislative Theatre July – September 2023
- Nantes educational & cultural visit August 2023
- Social Action Grants Opened July 2023
- Social Action Grants allocated September 2023
- DebateMate Summer School August 2023
- DebateMate 2-day event October 2023
- Rights fest Gender Day October 2023
- Adult Stakeholder conference February 2024
- Social Action Grant Reports March 2024
- Cardiff University Making Space for Girls Research data collection March 24 – July 24
- Cardiff University Making Space for Girls Research Report October 24

## Demographics & Context

There are 39,227 girls aged 0-18 in Cardiff (census 2021) of which 6% are disabled, 69% are white and 31% are from Black, Asian, Caribbean or mixed ethnic groups. 44 % registered having no religion, 31% Christian, 17% Muslim, 5% other. While 27% (3-18) can speak Welsh.

In Cardiff, education attainment has improved every year since 2016 and schools now rank amongst the top performers in Wales. However, as is the case nationally, there is still a significant gap in educational outcomes between pupils from low-income families and those from more affluent backgrounds. Indeed, too many children are living in low-income families in the city, which can have a detrimental impact on a child's future prospects and well-being. Children from a lower socio-economic background are more likely to be at risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences and the rates of children considered to be at risk, placed on the child protection register, or taken into care, are significantly higher in the city's most deprived communities.

Evidence also suggests that children from a lower socio-economic background are more likely to have feelings of isolation, be drawn into anti-social behaviour, young offending or suffer the effects of crime. It is recognised that children and young people are more likely to be the target of grooming and exploitation, particularly if they are considered to be more at risk or vulnerable. Health and well-being in the early years of childhood particularly impacts on long-term outcomes. Whilst levels of general health for children in Cardiff are good, children living in the most deprived communities are more likely to suffer poorer health outcomes today and demonstrate symptoms which point towards poor health in the future.

Furthermore, whilst the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Cardiff's children and young people remains to be fully understood, there is a risk that it could have a negative impact on educational attainment, rights, mental and physical well-being, and future pathways into employment. As a result of lockdowns and restrictions, children and young people experienced substantial changes to education, with several extended periods of school closures and a switch to online learning, separation from friends and extended families, and a lack of access to recreation, sport, and leisure activities. Subsequently, there has been a significant rise in children and young people presenting with emotional and mental health issues. Whilst the pandemic impacted all of Cardiff's children and young people, for the city's most vulnerable children and young people, the impact of the pandemic has been greater, further widening inequities.

- Representation of diverse communities and groups within Cardiff including young people from ethnic minorities, residing in the southern arc of Cardiff and those attending Welsh medium schools.

# Summary of key Findings: Lived Experiences of Girls and Young Women in Cardiff

## Safety Concerns and Personal Well-being:

- Girls expressed significant concerns about safety, especially at night in specific areas of Cardiff, indicating a need for enhanced community safety measures, better street lighting, and a more visible police presence.
- Girls reported lower levels of life satisfaction (77.78%) compared to boys (86.13%) and experienced more school pressure than boys, highlighting a need for targeted interventions to improve their overall well-being. (CFC Survey 2021)

## Education and Awareness:

- A strong need was identified for education and awareness on topics like menstruation, general health, and inclusive sex education covering LGBTQIA+ topics and challenging traditional gender norms.
- Girls showed a keen interest in being educated about issues like misogyny, periods, and the female body.

## Empowerment and Support Systems:

- The importance of support systems such as family, friends, and community initiatives like "We Rise" and "Girls Promote" was emphasised for emotional support and empowerment.
- Participants reported not seeing themselves represented in community activity around them and felt that more opportunities for girls and young women to be part of work that was far more inclusive and met their needs. Activities led by girls and young women themselves was highlighted as important.

## Gender Equity and Opportunities:

- Responses highlighted the need for gender equality, particularly in access to opportunities like sports and extracurricular activities, with a call for more inclusive and equitable opportunities.
- Girls are less active in physical activities compared to boys, suggesting the need for initiatives promoting physical activity specifically among girls. Often there is an emphasis on competitive sports rather than being active which contributes to an increased lack of engagement by some girls.

## Experiences of Violence and Misogyny:

- There is a noticeable presence of female-on-female violence and concerns about how boys treat girls, indicating a need for programmes addressing respect and consent.
- Girls are more concerned about relationships, being bullied, and education, suggesting higher levels of anxiety and stress related to social relationships, bullying, and academic pressures.

### Cultural and Creative Expression:

- The lack of opportunity for participants to engage in activities that enable them to express themselves in safe and supportive environments was highlighted as a concern. Social action projects like "She Paints Our Streets" and "Girls on Air" were initiated to promote young girls' involvement in creative fields like graffiti and podcasting, indicating an interest in diverse forms of self-expression and media representation.

### Menstrual Health and Stigma Reduction:

- Issues around menstrual health and stigma were consistently highlighted by participants. Social action initiatives like "Soft Secrets" aim to provide period products for young girls, addressing the need for menstrual health awareness and stigma reduction.

## Proposed Actions and Outcomes

- This report will be shared with a range of high-level strategic groups for consideration including the C&YP Scrutiny Committee, Community Safety Partnership, Education Management Team, Children's Services Management Team, Cabinet Member briefings, Police and Crime Commissioner and Senior Management Team within the council.
- This report will be shared across Cardiff Third Sector Council (C3SC) to ensure third sector organisation can consider the findings to inform work across communities.
- Key stakeholders are encouraged to consider the key findings of this report and to work directly with girls and young women to co-design solutions and policies to address concerns highlighted.
- Adult stakeholders are asked to consider children's intrinsic human rights throughout the process of responding to this report and to embed a child rights response. Child Friendly City Team within the council will host a webinar to:
  - Highlight key findings contained within the report
  - Encourage the development of a joined-up approach through collaboration and partnership to maximise impact
  - Highlight the support on offer from the Child Friendly City Team within the council
  - Reinforce the importance of engaging young people in the co-design of solutions

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This report is not intended to provide detailed solutions to complex problems, more to highlight the experiences of girls and young women in Cardiff and to reinforce the importance of meaningfully engaging children & young people in the development of actions to address issues highlighted.

*Below are considerations when seeking to address issues highlighted:*

### Safety Concerns and Personal Well-being

- Involve girls in lighting improvement plans, promote gender-sensitive education practices and consider best way to conduct forums for girls to voice safety concerns. Set clear metrics for evaluating safety and well-being initiatives with a gender focus.

### Education and Awareness:

- Introduce inclusive health and sex education programmes that cover menstruation, general health, LGBTQ+ topics, and challenge traditional gender norms. Involve girls in the development of educational content to ensure it meets their needs and interests. Facilitate open discussions by creating safe spaces for girls to discuss and learn about these topics without stigma or embarrassment.

### Empowerment and Support Systems:

- Ensure girls see themselves represented in community activities and initiatives. Support activities and projects led by girls and young women to foster empowerment and leadership skills. Collaborate with local organisations to develop programmes that address the unique needs and interests of girls.

### Gender Equality and Opportunities:

- Create environments in sports and extracurricular programmes that are welcoming and supportive of all genders. Ensure equal access to sports and extracurricular activities for all genders, actively removing barriers to participation. Regularly assess gender disparities in activity participation and adjust programmes to ensure equity.

### Experiences of Violence and Misogyny:

- Include comprehensive actions against misogyny in schools and workplaces, integrating gender equality education including educating boys and girls on gender equity, emphasising the importance of respectful treatment of all individuals regardless of gender. Policy suggestions also focus on addressing gender normativity in schools, particularly in physical education, and promoting gender-neutral facilities and uniforms. Suggestions also included establishing robust anti-bullying policies and monitoring systems, with specific attention to gender-related bullying and harassment.

### Cultural and Creative Expression:

- Increase access to and support for a wide range of creative and cultural expression activities for girls and young women. Foster an environment that encourages and values the participation of girls in traditionally underrepresented fields. Engage schools and community organisations in promoting and supporting cultural and creative expression activities specifically designed for girls.

### Menstrual Health and Stigma Reduction:

- Increase menstrual health awareness by implementing comprehensive education programmes on menstrual health in schools and communities to increase awareness and understanding. Include all genders in menstrual health education to foster a supportive and inclusive environment. Create campaigns and discussions aimed at normalising menstruation and dismantling societal stigma.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this report underscore the urgent need for a collaborative approach in addressing the issues of gender equity and the safety and well-being of girls in Cardiff. We advocate for adult stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, community leaders, and parents, to actively engage with girls in co-designing solutions that are both meaningful and impactful. The voices of girls not only offer unique insights into the challenges they face but also bring innovative ideas for sustainable change. It is imperative that we seize this opportunity to work together to create an inclusive, safe, and equitable environment for all young people. Furthermore, we seek the support of political, strategic, and operational partners to develop and implement actions and policies that address gender equity comprehensively. By doing so, we can ensure that our collective efforts lead to significant and lasting improvements in the lives of girls and young women, fostering a community where everyone, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive.