

Gabrielle Kay

Gabs has been with Serco Leisure for nearly 2 years, working originally as a Sport England-funded This Girl Can (TGC) Coordinator, before moving into Community Development Officer with the Swale Community Leisure and Maidstone Leisure Trusts.

She works across a number of sites, increasing participation in activities, breaking down barriers to participation and attracting hard to reach groups; both in centres and the community.

In 2018, she was awarded a Serco Leisure Shining Star award in the category Newcomer of the Year. Only 10 awards were given out across a company of over 3,000 people.

Over the past 12 months, Gabs' Sweat and Smile classes, which targeted the TGC audience has seen over 700 women attend. That's over 700 people for whom joining in physical activity sessions had seemed a bridge too far, until Gabs and her team stepped up.

Gabs developed her Sweat and Smile sessions from scratch, coming up with the catchy name, which complements the TGC ethos of getting women into sport and activity, while forgetting about the stuff that doesn't matter - sweat, and focusing on the positives of physical activity in a group - smiles.

Sport England were so impressed by Sweat and Smile, they're adding it to their list of activities on the This Girl Can website. A fitting culmination for over 12 months of hard work.

Across Serco Leisure, one region's absolutely nailed how to run TGC sessions: the south. Gabs and her team, including people like instructor Louise Howells, grabbed hold of the concept straight away, focusing on ways to reduce the barriers to inclusion, stressing the social nature of the sessions and really pushing the idea that attendees would be supported every step of the journey, with no-one being left to fend for themselves.

Gabs and her colleague Vicky Crosbie-Cowley have worked to help Maidstone Leisure Centre achieve Dementia Friendly status, via various dementia-friendly sessions. This great work was recognised at the Dementia Friendly Kent Award's night in October last year, where Maidstone LC took home the Sports and Leisure prize.

Some quotes from the attendees:

"Had a fantastic day and enjoyed every minute of it. The girls (team) are so fantastic in keeping us upbeat. Could not ask for a better team, long may it last!"

"I was please (sic) to talk to others and their problems and what others do."

And my favourite:

"He sings on the way to the group as he is so happy to be coming!"

I'm nominating Gabrielle Kay for Sweat and Smile. for leading on the promotion of TGC in the south, for helping her sites achieve Dementia Friendly status, for tirelessly promoting inclusion at every step, and always doing it with a smile.