

Pūtahi Rangahau Ngātahi
Centre for Community
Research and Evaluation



HER MOVE ACTIVITIES CLUB

SECONDARY DATA EVALUATION
[2022-2025]

Prepared By:
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FOREWORD

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“Her Move has made me more active, look forward to sports more, and more confident.”

HMAC participant

Her Move Activities Club (HMAC) begins with a simple invitation to girls: come as you are, choose what you try, find movement that feels like you. This report shows what happens when that invitation is honoured with care, evidence, and imagination. Youthtown’s HMAC creates spaces where judgement recedes and confidence can build. The programme’s practicalities matter, like water, kai, timing, and choice, but so do the intangibles, like belonging, joy, and the safety to fail and try again.

In this evaluation, I sought to bring numbers and narratives together. The survey feedback sheets mapped what girls enjoyed and what they would do again. Their open-text stories and quotes explained why. Combined, the evidence was consistent. Choice and variety increased motivation. A peer environment that felt safe reduced fear of judgement. Small achievements helped girls see themselves as more capable of being active. There were also clear pressures that sat outside the session space: timing, cost, fatigue, and family commitments. These require steady delivery, clear communication, and affordable access.

HMAC complements what the youth development, education, and physical activity literature tells us. Relationships matter. Fun matters. Co-design matters. When these pieces are present, participation grows. When they are missing, it stalls. The recommendation is simple. Keep the core offer strong, remove the small barriers that challenge good work, and build pathways so that gains carry on beyond a single term. To the girls who fed back on the programme over the years and those who supported design and delivery, thank you. Your voices guide the next steps.

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a secondary data analysis of Youthtown's Her Move Activities Club (HMAC), which is an initiative aimed at increasing physical activity among adolescent girls through fun, non-competitive activities of their choosing.

The analysis was completed by Dr Laura Ann Chubb, Co-Director of the Centre for Community Research and Evaluation (CCRE) at the University of Auckland | Waipapa Taumata Rau (UoA), with the involvement of Bachelor of Social Work student researchers who assisted with reviewing relevant literature. Youthtown commissioned this study as part of its partnership with Dr Chubb, CCRE, and the UoA, seeking an independent examination of existing programme feedback data.

The evaluation drew on post-programme survey feedback sheets, which included both structured responses and girls' stories and quotes. Data were collected between 2022 and 2025 from 11 school-based cohorts across secondary settings, and one community-based cohort. In total, 194 girls contributed feedback. Quantitative responses, such as closed responses (i.e. Yes or No), were summarised descriptively to highlight broad patterns, while qualitative comments were thematically analysed to capture girls' voices and experiences.

Findings Overview

Across all cohorts, HMAC was received very positively. Most girls described the programme as enjoyable, motivating, and socially safe, with 79 percent saying they would take part again and nearly all others indicating they would if barriers such as timing or cost were addressed. Girls valued the variety of activities and the chance to try things they had not experienced before, especially ice skating, rock climbing, horse riding, and archery. Distinctive, skill-building, and often individual activities held the strongest appeal, though interest in team sports such as netball, volleyball, and dodgeball was also present. For the most part, girls enjoyed the fun, low-pressure environment and often discovered new activities they liked.

The girls-only setting created a strong sense of belonging and reduced the fear of judgement that a few associated with sport or PE. For a number of girls, this contributed to more positive self-perceptions of being active. Some shifted from describing themselves as "not sporty" or

"lazy" to seeing themselves as capable and curious, with a few joining school teams as a result. Others continued to lack some confidence, showing that these changes are uneven. Short-term wellbeing benefits were also clear, with girls reporting greater happiness, calmness, and pride during the programme, although some who gave reflections after the programme noted these effects sometimes faded once sessions ended. HMAc also facilitated new friendships and indicated strong peer supports. Several girls noted that they met and bonded with girls they "didn't really talk to" before, helping them feel more connected at school. This social aspect further encouraged regular participation.

There were a few challenges. Not all activities were equally enjoyed, with yoga in particular receiving mixed feedback, and a small number of references to other activities "not being my thing." Practical issues such as session timing, short duration, travel time to off-site activities, thin numbers for some team-based sessions, and inconsistent water or snacks were noted. Broader barriers such as schoolwork, tiredness, family commitments, and financial pressure were described as posing some limits to participation.

Crucially, HMAc appears to inspire ongoing activity. A vast majority of girls indicated they would join HMAc again or continue being active on their own. In one school cohort, over 90 percent of the girls said they would sign up for the programme again, demonstrating strong satisfaction and sustained interest. Some even expressed willingness to contribute a small fee to keep the sessions going, highlighting the value they place on the experience.

Implications and Recommendations

The evaluation shows that HMAc is successfully delivering on its core aims: providing a safe and supportive environment, offering enjoyable variety, and encouraging girls to see themselves as capable of being active. To strengthen the programme further, a few actions are recommended. Consistency in delivery should be a priority, with regular session times, longer sessions of around 90 minutes, and keeping water and kai consistent each week. Programme design should continue to emphasise the most popular and distinctive activities (e.g., horse-riding, archery, boxing, and rock climbing) while providing alternative options when activities divide opinion. Attendance and communication could be improved through simple RSVP and buddy systems, along with clearer pre-session information.

The findings also point to the importance of reinforcing confidence and positive self-perceptions over time. Facilitators can play a role by using strengths-based language, highlighting small achievements, and encouraging brief reflection at the end of sessions. To sustain benefits beyond the programme term, Youthtown should continue to explore pathways into community clubs, school teams, or alumni groups. Finally, equitable access must remain central, with HMAc kept affordable, flexible, and delivered close to where girls already spend time.

The evaluation findings resonate with national and international literature that highlights the importance of safe, enjoyable, and youth-centred approaches for engaging adolescent girls in physical activity. HMAc demonstrates how co-designed, non-competitive programmes can address the barriers identified in previous research, such as fear of judgement, lack of variety, and negative experiences in traditional PE. In line with this evidence, the report concludes that sustained investment in initiatives like HMAc is essential to strengthen girls' participation and reduce inequities in physical activity across Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Why Girls' Participation in Physical Activity Matters

Adolescence is a key stage when participation in physical activity declines, and this drop is especially marked for girls. Globally, around 85% of adolescent females are not meeting the World Health Organization guideline of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity each day (World Health Organization, 2020). The same trend is evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. Data from Sport NZ's Active NZ Young People's Survey show that by the mid-teen years, girls are less likely than boys to be active, and participation continues to fall through secondary school. By age 17, young women are spending almost a third less time being active compared to young men (Wilson et al., 2023a). The 2022 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth gave overall activity a grade of C+, with just over half of young people meeting recommended weekly levels. Girls were consistently less likely than boys to meet these guidelines, and inequities were wider for those living in high-deprivation areas or with a disability (Wilson et al., 2023a).

Research in New Zealand has identified several reasons for this decline. Girls frequently mention body image concerns, fear of judgement, competing school and family demands, and a lack of enjoyment in traditional physical education or competitive sport as reasons for opting out (Barbalich & Ball, 2023; Wilson et al., 2023b). Importantly, this is not due to a lack of interest. Many girls report wanting to be active but face social and structural barriers that prevent them from continuing (Barbalich & Ball, 2023). This disengagement has important consequences. Lower activity in adolescence is linked to poorer bone health, cardiovascular fitness, mental wellbeing, and self-confidence, and patterns of inactivity often continue into adulthood (Wilson et al., 2023a; Wilson et al., 2023b). Addressing these disparities has therefore become a public health and equity priority.

In response, Sport NZ developed the Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation Strategy and associated commitments, supported by investment and tracking through the Commitment Progress Report (Sport New Zealand, 2021). This has been complemented by campaigns such as It's My Move (Sport New Zealand, 2022), which directly address barriers faced by young women. One consistent lesson from recent research is that how programmes are delivered matters as much as what they offer. Approaches that centre youth voice and provide variety, fun, and safe spaces are more likely to engage girls and sustain their participation (O'Reilly et al., 2022; Bergen et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, Youthtown launched (and has continued to deliver) HMAC in 2018 to re-engage young women not drawn to competitive sport. The programme invites girls to co-design the activities, ranging from yoga and dance to archery and rock climbing, and provides a girls-only environment that reduces fear of embarrassment. This report is a qualitative evaluation of data collected across the programme from 2022 to 2024.

Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed-methods evaluation design based on secondary analysis of existing programme feedback data. The evaluation design was primarily qualitative and interpretive, focusing on girls' voices and experiences (Tejada Tayabas et al., 2014). Descriptive statistics were used in a limited way to summarise the sample and highlight broad patterns, while qualitative interpretation provided deeper insights into how young women engaged with the HMAc. The purpose of the methodology was not to generate generalisable findings, but to provide evidence from the different delivery sites of HMAc to inform future programme design and implementation. The table below summarises the number of young women (n= 194) who provided survey feedback, grouped by school level and organisation.

Participants and Sampling

This report draws on post-programme survey feedback from young women across intermediate and secondary schools where the organisation was delivering programmes, as well as through a community organisation. The datasets span Term 2, 2022 through Term 3, 2025, and include both structured survey responses and open-ended reflections ("Girls Stories + Quotes").

Most girls came from secondary schools (181 out of 194, around 93% of the total sample), with a smaller group from an intermediate school (10 participants, about 5%) and a community-based organisation (3 participants, just over 2%). This distribution shows that while the programme is primarily school-based and concentrated within secondary education settings, it also reaches younger girls at the intermediate level and extends into community-based youth provision.

School / Organisation	School Level (Years)	Term(s) Included	No. of Participants
Fairfield High School	Secondary (9–13)	Term 1 2024, Term 3 2024	12
Hillcrest High School	Secondary (9–13)	Term 3 2023	3
Morrinsville College	Secondary (9–13)	Term 2 2024	4
Otorohanga College	Secondary (9–13)	Term 2 2024 [only Stories + Quote data available]	5
Hamilton Girls' High School	Secondary (9–13)	Term 2 2022, Term 3 2022, Term 4 2022, Term 1 2023	40
Maeroa Intermediate	Intermediate (7–8)	Term 3 2024	10
South Auckland Middle School	Secondary (7–10)	Term 3 2023	16
YWCA	Community	2023	3
Matamata College	Secondary (9–13)	Term 1 2024	2
Upper Hutt/Wellington	Secondary (9–13)	Term 1 2025; Term 3 2025	35
Hokitika	Secondary (9–13)	Term 1 2024	5
Greymouth	Secondary (9–13)	Term 3 2024	2
Christchurch	Secondary (9–13)	Term 3 2024	57

Methods & Limitations

Feedback was collected from young women participating in the HMAc programme across multiple school and community sites. The data took two main forms:

1. Survey Sheets (labelled by Term and Year)

These included structured feedback questions, such as activity ratings, yes/no responses, and brief open comments.

2. Girls Stories + Quotes

The raw feedback data were collected in separate Excel files for each school or community site. Some files contained multiple sheets corresponding to specific programme delivery terms (e.g., Term 3 2023), as well as an additional sheet titled Girls Stories + Quotes in most sites. These narrative responses represent young women's own reflections and experiences in their words.

Because the data formats were structurally different, they required a mixed analytic approach. As such, the findings are reported in two parts.

Limitations of the Data

It is important to note that not all girls completed every survey question, and some responses were brief or general. This means that the denominators for different survey items vary, and percentages are calculated only from those who answered each question. In addition, the brevity of responses to some open-text items may reflect survey fatigue or differences in how questions were administered across sites. As such, the findings presented here should be read as strong indicators of programme impact, while also recognising that some variation may reflect survey processes rather than the programme itself.

PART ONE: SURVEY FEEDBACK SHEETS

Process for Data Analysis

The researcher looked at each site's post-programme survey that included structured questionnaire items designed to capture girls' experiences in a more quantifiable format. These items typically used closed-response options (e.g., Likert scales, yes/no choices, or categorical selections). To prepare these data for analysis, all relevant survey sheets that contained term- and year-specific responses were consolidated into a single dataset. Non-survey sheets (such as administrative information or girls' stories + quotes) were excluded at this stage. Data cleaning involved standardising response categories across sites (e.g., harmonising variations in spelling or formatting), addressing missing responses, and checking for consistency in scale use. This ensured comparability across schools and terms.

Analysis of the structured survey data was primarily descriptive. Frequencies and proportions were calculated to summarise patterns of response, enabling comparison across sites, terms, and survey items. Where possible, results were aggregated (i.e., combined) to highlight overall trends. Each site's post-programme survey included closed-response items (yes/no, categorical selections, and numeric).

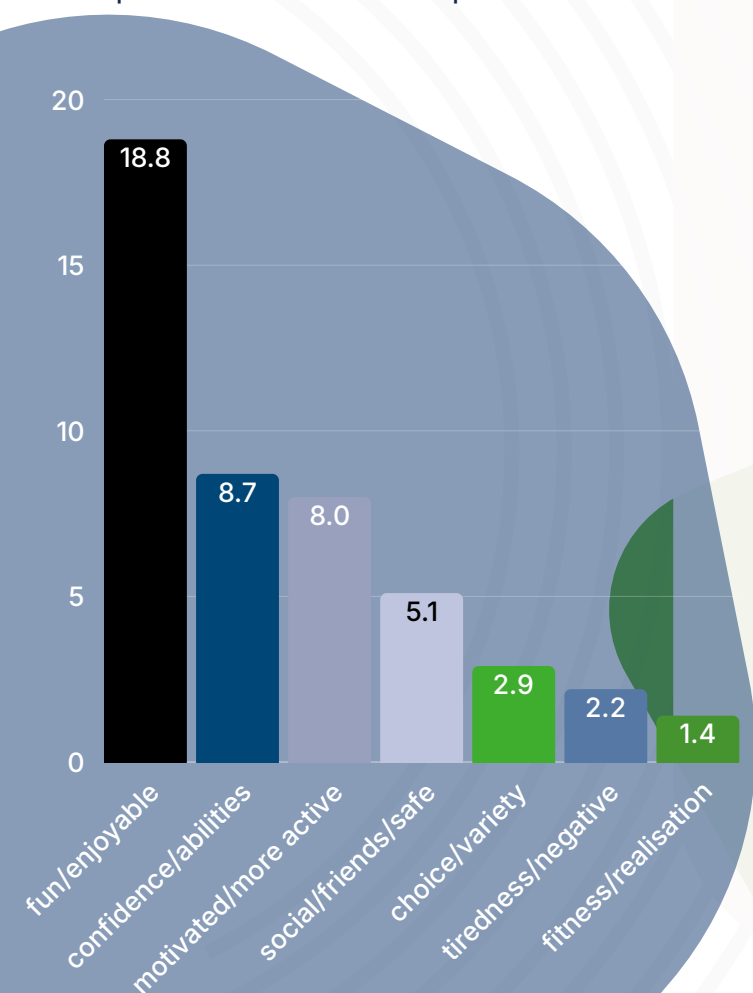
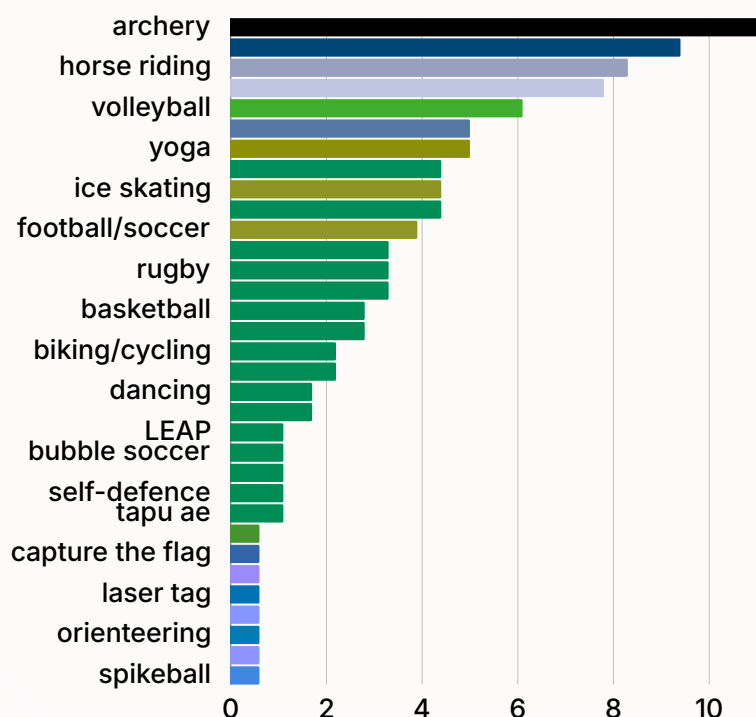


To enable valid cross-site comparison, all term-labelled survey sheets were consolidated, non-survey sheets were excluded, response options were standardised and missing or non-standard entries were handled conservatively. Analyses are descriptive: frequencies and proportions are reported overall. The structured feedback sheet responses indicated how widely particular outcomes and perceptions were shared across the sample, but because of inconsistent collection, are likely not generalisable to future groups of HMAc girls, with more data, over a longer period needing to be collected.

Findings

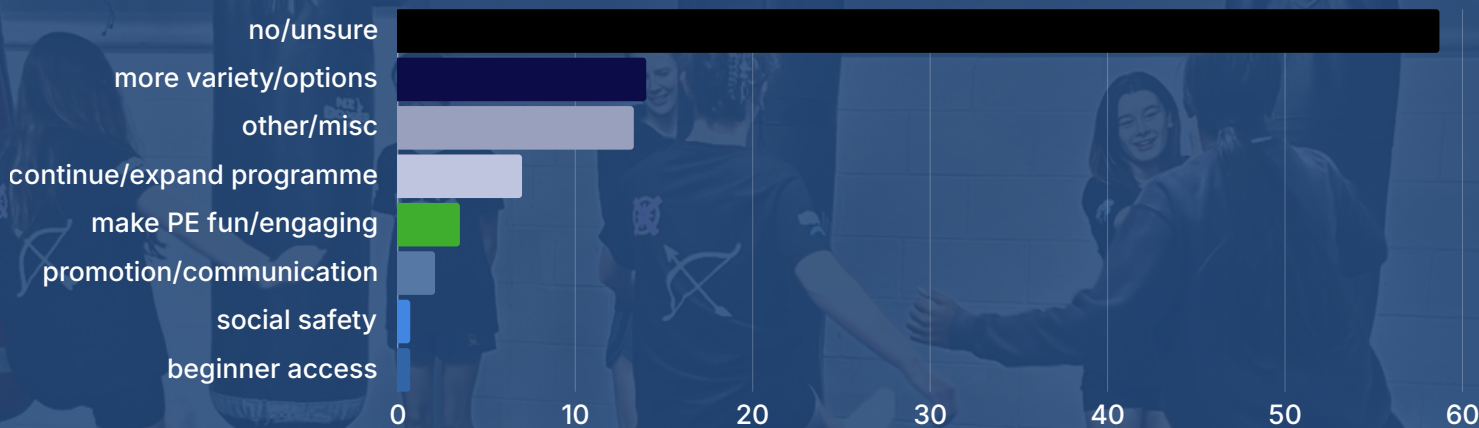
Based on the 180 responses to **"Have you tried any activities that you would like to do on a regular basis?"**, interest was led by archery (11.1%), boxing (9.4%), and horse riding (8.3%), with strong follow-on interest in netball (7.8%), volleyball (6.1%), rock climbing (5.0%), and yoga (5.0%). A solid second tier features dodgeball (4.4%), ice skating (4.4%), squash (4.4%), football/soccer (3.9%), golf (3.3%), rugby (3.3%), touch/rugby (3.3%), and basketball (2.8%). Smaller but still meaningful mentions included badminton, pickleball, dancing, swimming, kayaking, biking/cycling, self-defence, laser tag, spikeball, Tapu Ae, and others.

For HMAC, this suggests girls are most keen on distinctive, largely individual, skill-building activities, supported by a balanced set of team-based sports. Programme capacity should prioritise the most popular activities—especially archery, boxing, and horse riding—while keeping consistent opportunities for netball, volleyball, rock climbing, and yoga, and retaining a breadth of lighter-touch offerings to sustain inclusivity and variety. Percentages reflect the share of respondents who mentioned each activity and therefore sum to more than 100%, as many respondents named multiple activities.

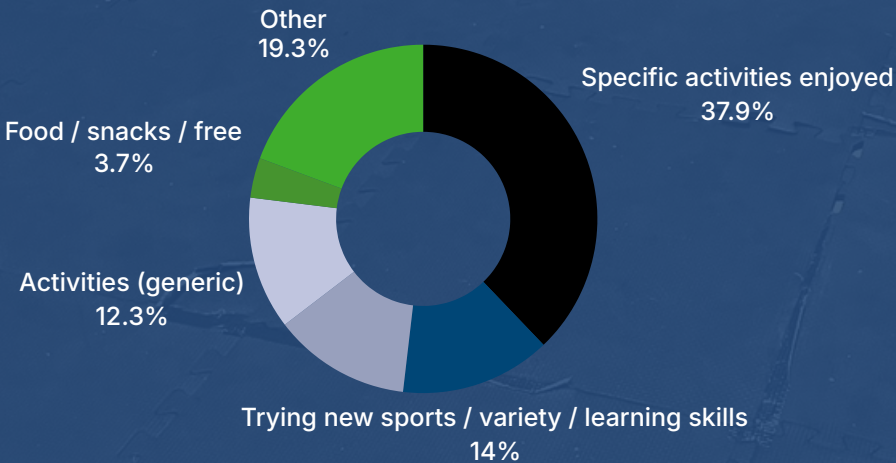


Based on the 138 responses to the question **"How has Her Move made you feel about being active?"**, feelings were mostly positive: 56% read as positive, 40% neutral/ambivalent, 4% negative, and less than 1% mixed. The most common theme was that being active felt fun and enjoyable (approx. 19%), with many girls simply describing sessions as "good," "fun," or "happy." Around 8% mentioned feeling more motivated to be active or to try more sports, and a further 9% noted improvements in confidence ("more confident in my abilities," "brave, strong & confident"). About 5% highlighted the social side (friends, "no boys," "comfortable, supported"), while 3% valued the choice and variety ("different options," "not just running/gym"). A smaller group of girls indicated 'needing' to get fitter (1%) or the occasional tiredness (2%). The findings indicate that HMAC is making activity feel fun, socially safe, and motivating, with only a very small minority reporting negative experiences.

From 143 responses to the question **“Is there anything that the school can do to help keep you active in a way that suits you?”**, over half (59%) offered no specific suggestion (“no/unsure”). Among those who did, the clearest request was for more variety and options (14%), including calls for different sports like dodgeball, volleyball, roller skating, yoga, boxing, archery, and alternatives beyond standard PE. Another 7% asked to continue or expand HMAC as a programme (e.g., running it every week or making it ongoing), and a smaller 2% pointed to the need for better promotion and communication (advertising, sign-ups, reminders). About 4% asked for PE to be more fun or engaging, and very small shares raised issues of beginner access (1%), social safety/anti-bullying (1%), or affordability (1%). The evidence suggests that most students have no particular ask, but those who do want greater variety of activities, a sustained HMAC offer, and better communication, with a few highlighting the need for more engaging PE, inclusive beginner options, and safe, affordable access.

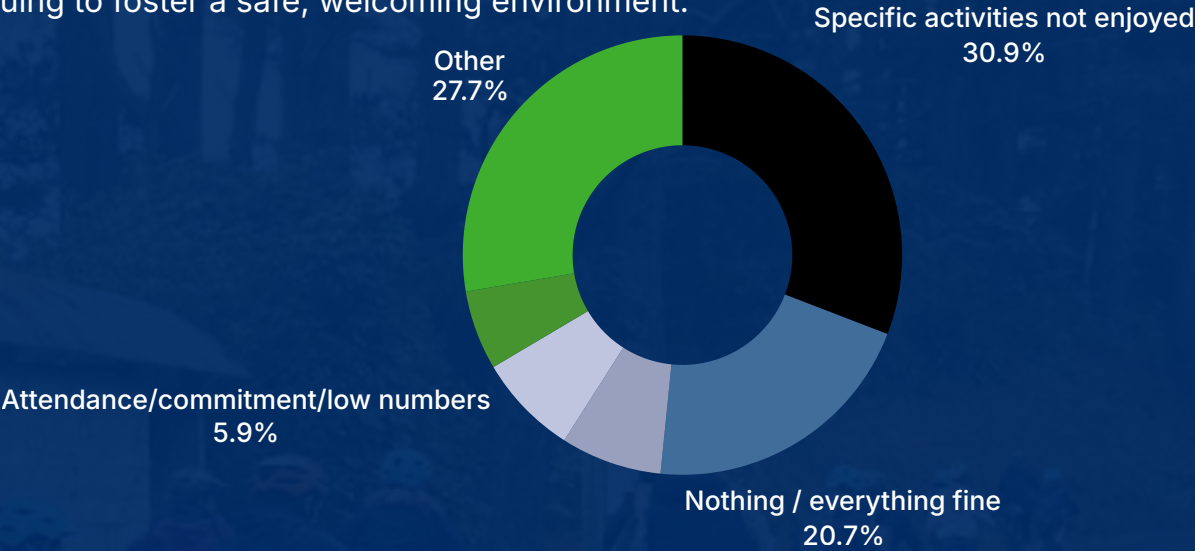


Based on the 186 responses to the question **“What do you enjoy most about Her Move?”**, the strongest theme is the enjoyment of specific activities (38%). Girls most often highlighted ice skating, rock climbing, horse riding, and archery, with other favourites including dodgeball, netball, basketball, volleyball, and mini golf. These were remembered as fun, exciting, and often unique opportunities they would not normally get at school. A second major theme was the value of trying new sports, experiencing variety, and learning new skills (14%). Many noted how much they enjoyed stepping outside their comfort zone, discovering new activities, and having the chance to do things they had not tried before. The social side was also central (13%), with girls emphasising the fun of being with friends, meeting new people, and sharing experiences together. Alongside this, 12% spoke about enjoying the activities in general, often describing them simply as fun, exciting, or something they looked forward to.

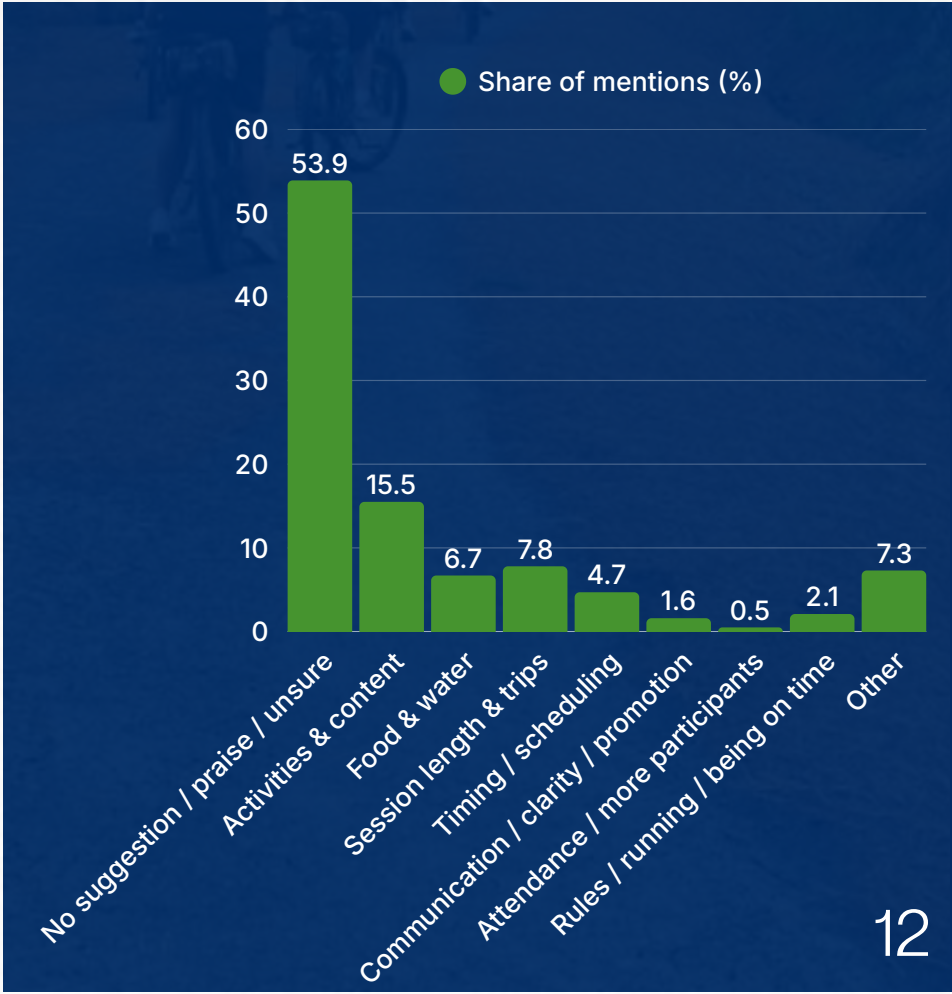


Smaller but meaningful elements also stood out. About 4% valued the girls-only environment and time away from boys, which made the space feel safer and more enjoyable. Around 4% mentioned the appeal of food, snacks, or free access, while others highlighted supportive staff and feeling comfortable (3%), trips or activities outside school (2.5%), and even a sense of relief from normal classroom bookwork (0.4%).

From 178 responses to the question **"What did you enjoy least about Her Move?"**, the number of times each issue was mentioned was counted. Because some girls named more than one thing, the percentages show the share of all mentions. The largest share was specific activities not enjoyed (30.9%)—most often yoga, with smaller mentions of archery, football/soccer, basketball, ice skating, spikeball, gym, golf, dodgeball, Tapu Ae, volleyball, capture the flag, badminton, gymnastics, self-defence, squash, multisport, rippa rugby, boxing, hockey, and futsal. The result, "Nothing / everything was fine (20.7%)" is encouraging. Next came physical discomfort/fitness limits (7.4%) and timing/schedule/travel (7.4%). Attendance/low numbers/participation (4.8%) also appeared, with smaller shares for social issues (3.2%), food/snacks (2.7%), icebreakers/start of session (1.6%), and programme continuity/commitment (1.1%). For HMAC, this points to keeping variety but offering adjustments and alternatives for sessions where girls opinion were divided, reviewing timing and travel logistics, strengthening attendance and participation expectations/communications, making the snack plan clear, and continuing to foster a safe, welcoming environment.



Across 177 responses to the question **"What can be improved about HMAC?"**, more than half of all mentions were "no suggestion / praise / unsure" (53.9%), indicating strong satisfaction with the programme. Among specific ideas for change, the largest share were activities and content (15.5%)—requests for a broader or more interesting mix (e.g., indoor netball, roller-skating/rollerblading, dodgeball, basketball, rugby league, rock climbing at Hang Dog, paddle boarding, swimming), less multisport, and occasional "don't do spikeball" feedback. Food and water (6.7%) was the next cluster with "more/better snacks, water available, sometimes gifts/treats".



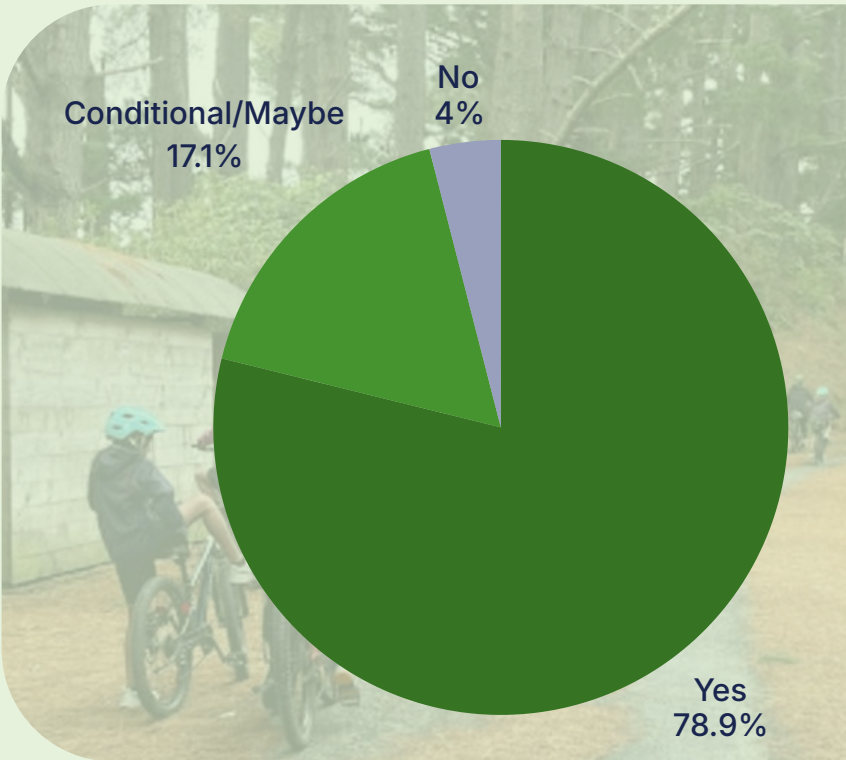
Session length and trips (7.8%) were mentioned, which covered running longer sessions, twice-a-week suggestions, and more out-of-school activities (e.g., leaving at the end of interval for longer trips, Mega Air, more day trips). Timing/scheduling (4.7%) included starting a bit later and trying a time-selection/vote when possible. Smaller shares mentioned communication/clarity/promotion (1.6%) (clearer texts about where to meet/what to bring), rules/running/on-time (2.1%), and attendance/more participants (0.5%).

Across 176 responses to the question **“Would you sign up for HMAC again?”**, most students said Yes (78.9%), with a further 17.1% giving a conditional/maybe yes (depending on timing, cost, or who attends). 4% said No. Reasons given for saying yes most often pointed to fun/enjoyment, being with friends/people, food or free access, and the chance to learn/try new sports.

Summary

Across the survey feedback sheets, HMAC is working as intended. The girls-only, well supported setting with kai and low or no cost makes being active feel safe and welcoming. Enjoyment was driven by distinctive, skill-building activities such as ice skating, rock climbing, horse riding and archery, with popular team options alongside these. Girls consistently valued variety and the chance to try new sports with friends. Most described HMAC as fun, confidence-building and motivating, and intent to return was very strong, with a smaller group being conditional on timing and cost. The main pain points are specific activities that not everyone enjoys, for example yoga for some, a few mentions of physical discomfort or tiredness, and practical frictions such as early starts, short sessions, travel time, thin numbers for some team games and inconsistent access to water or snacks. School-side suggestions focus on more variety and options, clearer communications and simple sign-ups, regular ongoing provision and beginner-friendly access.

Read against the Theory of Change, inputs and delivery are converting into immediate enjoyment and motivation, with a clear line to ongoing participation and wellbeing once the practical frictions are tidied. The pattern also aligns with Youthtown’s curriculum: girls are *Learning Life Skills* through new skills and rules, *Working Collaboratively* with friends and supportive staff, *Building Resilience* by trying unfamiliar or demanding activities, and *Unlocking Potential* as they identify sports to continue beyond the programme. To maintain momentum, Youthtown should keep the core offering and tighten delivery by locking a single regular start time and aiming for about 90 minutes. Staff should make water clearly available and keeping kai consistent each week. Additionally, offering a second option or simple adjustment when an activity is not for everyone so no one feels stuck would be helpful as well as refreshing the menu by keeping the distinctive experiences prominent while rotating high-interest team options such as indoor netball, dodgeball and volleyball. Lifting numbers (where needed) with a quick RSVP, buddy invites and clear where-to-meet texts would enhance attendance. Girls agree it is also important to protect access by keeping costs low or subsidised.



PART TWO: GIRLS STORIES + QUOTES

Approach to Analysis and Data Presentation

A hybrid inductive/deductive approach to thematic analysis was applied following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process (Terry et al., 2017). Themes were constructed by the researcher through reading, coding, and interpretation. The findings are portrayals that reflect the girls' voices while also shaped by the researcher's analytic decisions.

Both deductive and inductive orientations were combined.

- Deductively, the analysis was informed by the HMAC theory of change. Data were examined for evidence of the programme's expected outcomes: creating a safe and supportive environment, encouraging enjoyment and variety, building social connections, increasing confidence, and promoting ongoing participation.
- Inductively, the analysis remained open to meanings not captured in the theory of change, such as references to free food, ongoing dislike of school PE, or persistent self-labelling as "lazy" or "not sporty."

Both semantic coding (focusing on what was explicitly said) and latent coding (looking at underlying meanings such as assumptions, subtext, or metaphor) were also applied. For example, "I was nervous about being watched" was coded semantically as nervous and latently as fear of judgement in sport culture. Themes were then constructed by clustering codes into broader meaning patterns. Each theme was named to communicate an insight into how the girls experienced HMAC.

The final themes were:

- **Finding a Place Where I'm Not Judged**
- **From 'Lazy' to 'Capable' . . . but Not Always**
- **It's Not PE: Discovering Joy in Doing Things Differently**
- **I'd Do More . . . If Life Let Me**
- **Testing Myself in New and Surprising Ways**
- **Feeling Better in Myself**



To present the data, the research created composite vignettes. Composite vignettes are a form of creative non-fiction where researchers weave together multiple girls' accounts into a single storied narrative, often voiced as a character or persona, and illustrated with verbatim quotations.

In this project, each vignette took the form of a letter, voiced by a girls' persona with a name such as Maia, Hana, Sophie, Lani, Grace, or Ana. They were written as single flowing paragraphs that combined in most instances with verbatim, or partially modified (for grammar), quotes in quotation marks with short reflective stitching, all in the first-person voice. This ensured that the letters sounded authentic to the voices of 11–18-year-old girls, while also weaving together multiple perspectives. Each vignette held both dominant portrayals (stories that showed change in line with the programme outcomes) and counter-stories (accounts where change was partial, resisted, or shaped differently).

Composite vignettes were chosen for three reasons. First, they allow a whole journey to be presented, rather than presenting opinions from girls in isolation, giving the sense of how girls moved from initial anticipation to reflection. Second, they make the findings accessible and engaging for community audiences such as schools and youth organisations, who can more easily connect with a character voice than with abstract categories. Third, they help to capture the complexity of change, including tensions, contradictions, and silences, without erasing them into tidy themes (Knight et al., 2023).



Findings

The analysis constructed six themes that portray how girls experienced HMAC. Each theme is introduced below and illustrated with a composite vignette written as a letter in the first person. These vignettes bring together girls' words into the voice of a named female persona.

Finding a Place Where I'm Not Judged

This theme captures how HMAC created a safe space where girls could participate without fear of ridicule. Many described feeling nervous or shy at first yet also spoke about the relief of being in a welcoming group. Some accounts showed these worries never fully went away, but there was clear evidence of growing confidence.

Dear Future HMAC Girls,

I gave Her Move a go, and you should too!!

Before Her Move "I was most nervous about not knowing anyone." I was also "self-conscious about doing sports in front of others." Walking into the first session I wanted to keep quiet, but slowly I noticed "the welcoming environment."

I started to "feel great to be around the girls" participating "in activities together." There were times when I was "scared that someone would make fun of me" or "nervous about being in a crowd and being watched." Yet, being with others who felt the same helped. I started to look "forward to just having fun," and that sense of belonging grew. For me, it became a place where fitting in did not mean needing "to be perfect to play sports". I was surrounded by people who were "non-judgemental, allowing me to try my best."

— Maia

From 'Lazy' to 'Capable' . . . but Not Always

This theme shows how young girls negotiated their identities. Some reframed themselves as capable and confident, even joining new sports teams. Others continued to carry negative self-labels, revealing how change was uneven.

Dear Me,

I used to tell myself, "I'm lazy and have no skills." So I felt "pretty neutral about participating in physical activity." Sometimes I still slip into that way of thinking, but more often now "I feel more willing to be active" and "I am more confident in sports. I think I am going to join the cricket team next year."

Her Move helped me show up when "being unmotivated" would once have held me back. I came to all the sessions" and even found myself showing "up to things on time more." But I cannot pretend everything has changed, because part of me still feels that while "I loved participating . . . I don't think it would change my opinion on participating in sports with others" overall. I am not always lazy anymore, but I am not always confident either. At least I've become "more kind towards myself, understanding that is it okay if I am not good at something on the first try."

— Hana

It's Not PE: Discovering Joy in Doing Things Differently

HMAC was often contrasted with school PE. The variety of activities and freedom to try new things were celebrated as enjoyable. Yet some girls still felt that not all sport suited them, showing both enthusiasm and resistance.

Dear Me,

I can't believe how much I've changed! "I hated PE because we do boring games, and I am never any good at them." I also "wasn't very active in school because I didn't like doing the same thing in gym every day." That was who I was before.

Her Move gave me something else. "I loved this because we were doing different things . . . things that were actually fun." "I enjoyed the trips, the company and the time away from boys!" I even found myself saying I loved playing "football, so much that I joined my school team," and "I look forward to doing all the activities." It mattered that I could try "different sports that I wouldn't normally do in PE, like archery, shooting and rock climbing." I did not enjoy every single thing but "this programme is bloody amazing. I love coming to Her Move." "Trying new sports, making new friends, free food," what's not to love?

— Sophie

I'd Do More . . . If Life Let Me

Some of the girls highlighted the practical barriers to participation. Family schedules, exams, tiredness, and cost were common obstacles. The free and school-based nature of HMAC helped, but some barriers persisted beyond the programme.

Dear Programme Planners,

Sometimes it was just life getting in the way. "Feeling lazy and being busy has held me back from participating." For me it was often school. "As part of my schooling I have been going to Wintec and learning about a [skilled trade], which has made me feel more tired, and I haven't been coming to all Her Move sessions this term."

On top of this, "my family is always busy, and I had to try fit a time to play a sport in my own schedule." "I wasn't active beforehand mainly because my family had too busy of a schedule, due to both my parents being business owners." Cost matters too, which is why I kept saying, "I love the fact that we can have this programme for free" I mean, "we can exercise without a cost and we get to socialise with others." I did become more active, and now "often go for walks and . . . participate in the school cricket team," but I know the barriers are still there. I would do more if life let me. I hope a lot of other girls get to experience this programme and enjoy it as much as I did.

— Lani

Testing Myself in New and Surprising Ways

Girls described valuing the chance to try activities they had not experienced before. Some gained new skills or joined teams, while others enjoyed the novelty without taking things further.

Dear Me,

I really pushed my boundaries and "I feel happy" that I got to "try new sports," and "feel more . . . more progressive for sport." "What interested me was the chance to learn new skills and participate more in physical activity, which I wouldn't normally feel confident in." At the start "My goal was to try everything," and "I aimed to achieve good teamwork and better communication." Some days I was nervous, "about my physical ability." I felt "ok, but I am a bit nervous if I don't know how to play the sport." Still, I found that "I like sports a lot more than I realised." Rock climbing stood out: "I had so much fun, and I loved" trying something new. I enjoyed horse riding the most, and I also enjoyed archery. I would love to do either on a regular basis." My friend really enjoyed yoga "because it was very relaxing and calming." Not every activity stuck, but I can say that I learned to surprise myself by giving things a go.

— Grace

Feeling Better in Myself

Many girls said that being active lifted their mood, made them calmer, or gave them pride. At the same time, some noted these benefits might fade once the programme ended and wished they could participate again.

Dear Me,

Her Move sounded "really fun and cool" before starting. I was "looking forward to playing games and making new friends," and it did help. It's been "another opportunity to be active, which helps my mental [*health*]." "I have become more happy [since] I participated in Her Move."

"Her Move has made me feel good about being active" and made me realise that "I should do more exercise during the week." I've even started to notice changes, like "I can show up to things on time more" . . . "I came to all the sessions!" I also feel that when trying a new activity, regardless of whether I am good at it or not I will have fun regardless now."

Yet when it ended, I felt a bit "upset because the Her Move group won't be here next term," and I wished, "it was running in term 4. Hopefully next year." For now, I know movement lifts me but keeping that feeling going is the hard part.

— Ana

Youthtown Curriculum: How the Findings Stack Up

The findings from HMAC can be read alongside Youthtown's outcome domains of Learning Life Skills, Working Collaboratively, Building Resilience, and Unlocking Potential.

Learning Life Skills

- The girls described gaining confidence, trying new activities, and recognising small achievements ("I can show up to things on time more because I came to all the sessions").
- These reflect transferable skills such as persistence, self-management, and willingness to try.
- However, explicit references to broader "life skills" (like leadership or planning) were not present in the data, so this is best framed as emerging rather than fully demonstrated.

Working Collaboratively

- Belonging and peer support were some of the strongest findings. Girls valued being "around the girls so we can participate in activities together" and talked about teamwork ("I aim to achieve good teamwork and better communication").
- This shows that HMAC enabled positive peer relationships, encouragement, and collective enjoyment.
- Collaboration was seen through shared fun and mutual support rather than structured teamwork development.

Building Resilience

- The stories contained signs of resilience, such as pushing through nerves, trying new things despite self-doubt, or returning after earlier disengagement ("I feel more willing to be active").
- At the same time, resilience was not a dominant theme. Some counter-stories showed persisting self-labels ("I am lazy"), reluctance to participate in sports with others, or sadness when the programme ended. So, while the programme created conditions that can support resilience (safety, confidence, persistence), resilience itself was not strongly articulated in girls' own words.

Unlocking Potential

- Many girls said they discovered new interests or surprised themselves ("I like sports a lot more than I realised"; "I even joined the school football team because of this group").
- This reflects the programme's role in broadening horizons and creating pathways into new sports and opportunities.
- But the data also showed that this unlocking is uneven: some girls did not carry their new confidence or enjoyment beyond the sessions.

The findings give clear evidence of outcomes in collaboration (belonging and peer support) and unlocking potential (discovering new sports, joining teams). They show emerging evidence of learning life skills (confidence, persistence) and conditional evidence for resilience (trying despite nerves, coping with judgement), though this was not a strong or consistent theme across stories.

Discussion

Together, these themes show how HMAc fostered safety, confidence, variety, and discovery, while also revealing barriers and limits to ongoing participation. The findings show that HMAc has been effective in providing safe and supportive spaces where girls felt less judged and more able to try new things. This aligns with evidence that strong, healthy relationships and a sense of belonging act as protective factors for young adolescents (Enriquez, 2011; Stirling et al., 2015). The theme Finding a Place Where I'm Not Judged reflects the need for emotionally safe environments identified in the youth confidence and engagement literature (Highfield & Webber, 2021).

Girls also described shifts in how they saw themselves, moving from "lazy" or "not sporty" identities to feeling more capable. This resonates with international work on youth programmes that strengthen self-confidence and engagement through role models and supportive relationships (Kuperminc et al., 2011; Vincent, 2019). However, counter-stories showed that some girls continued to hold on to negative labels or remained reluctant to join sport with others. This points to the need for longer-term or repeated interventions if identity change is to be sustained.

The value of variety was a repeated theme, with girls contrasting the repetitive nature of school PE with the novelty and enjoyment of HMAc. Literature suggests that variety, choice, and culturally responsive programming are key to sustaining adolescent girls' engagement (Cahill & O'Brien, 2020; Doyle et al., 2019; Light & Yasaki, 2017). Our findings confirm that enjoyment and novelty are strong motivators but also highlight that enjoyment alone may not fully overcome entrenched attitudes toward sport.

Access barriers were also visible in the vignettes. Time pressures, family schedules, and cost remain limiting factors. The free and school-based delivery of HMAc reduced some of these barriers, consistent with evidence on the "activity gap" in Aotearoa, where girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face limited opportunities for extracurricular activity despite benefitting the most from them (Barbalich & Ball, 2023). Addressing these barriers through flexible timing, ongoing provision, and continued free access will be crucial for impact.

Finally, the programme supported wellbeing in the short term, with girls reporting improved mood, calmness, and pride. This supports broader research linking physical activity to resilience and emotional wellbeing in early adolescence (Bosacki, 2003; Sook Yook et al., 2021). Yet, girls also expressed disappointment and sadness when the programme ended, indicating that benefits may fade without sustained engagement. This suggests that ongoing opportunities, alumni groups, or links into community clubs are needed to carry forward these positive effects.

Implications for Practice

The girls' stories make it clear that HMAC is working in important ways. Many felt it was a safe place where they did not have to worry about being judged, they enjoyed trying new activities, and they grew in confidence. These are the conditions that keep young people engaged and help them see themselves as active and capable. The stories also show where more can be done. Some girls still described themselves as "lazy" or "not sporty" even after finishing the programme. This suggests that change takes longer and that short-term opportunities may not be enough. Keeping the programme going over time, or linking girls into other activities afterwards, can give confidence a better chance to stick.

The variety of activities stood out as a strength. Girls said they liked that HMAC was "not like PE" and that they could try something different every week. This tells us that fun and choice matter. At the same time, variety alone will not always shift how girls feel about sport. Encouragement, support, and connections into ongoing opportunities are also needed.

Access remains a challenge. Some girls missed sessions because of family, school, or work commitments, while others worried about cost. Free and school-based delivery made a big difference, but those who most need opportunities are often the hardest to reach. Keeping the programme low-cost, local, and flexible will help.

Finally, the programme made girls feel happier, calmer, and proud of themselves. But some said these feelings faded when the programme ended. Linking girls to community clubs, alumni groups, or other ways of staying active could help keep those benefits going. Overall, HMAC is creating safe spaces, building confidence, offering variety, and boosting wellbeing. The next step is to make sure these changes last by continuing opportunities, tackling barriers to access, and strengthening cultural connections. The following recommendations build on these findings:

- **Celebrate and keep building safe spaces:** Girls valued the feeling of not being judged and being able to try new things in a supportive group. Continue to nurture this positive culture as the heart of HMAC. Facilitators can model and reinforce strengths-based language in sessions (e.g., noticing effort, persistence, or teamwork rather than ability). This helps girls hear and repeat more positive ways of describing themselves. Make space to celebrate progress, no matter how small (e.g., showing up, trying something new, or improving on a past attempt). This reinforces that success is not only about being "good at sport." Give girls opportunities to take on different roles within an activity (e.g., leading warm-ups, setting up equipment, keeping score). This allows them to see themselves as leaders, helpers, or organisers, not just "participants."

- **Strengthen confidence over time:** Many girls described feeling growing confidence and a sense of pride in themselves. Creating chances to return or continue will help reinforce this growth. This could also look like including a short reflection at the end of each session where girls share something they achieved that day or encouraging the girls to set and track small goals during the programme (e.g., “I will try one new activity each week”).
- **Keep variety as a strength:** The mix of activities was one of the most talked-about highlights. Holding on to this sense of choice and fun will keep girls engaged.
- **Encourage new identities:** Some girls began to shift from “not sporty” to capable and active. Keep supporting these new identities with positive reinforcement and peer encouragement.
- **Build on commitment that’s already there:** Girls often showed up even when busy or tired, and many wanted more. Recognise this motivation by offering flexible ways to stay involved. Share simple activity cards or develop short challenges they can use outside of sessions.
- **Continue to carry the good feelings forward:** Girls said they felt happier, calmer, and proud during the programme. Continuing to find ways to link girls into other activities or networks will help those positive feelings continue. This could look like building partnerships with local clubs, recreation centres, or informal groups and share these opportunities with girls and families. Youthtown could also consider ways to keep past girls connected (e.g., establishing reunion sessions).

These qualitative findings show that HMAc is meeting its aims around safety, variety, confidence, and wellbeing, but also reveal tensions and limits. Confidence gains are not universal, enjoyment does not always transfer to long-term participation, and structural barriers remain. These results are consistent with wider literature emphasising the importance of safe, culturally responsive, co-designed, and sustained programming for adolescent girls (Prapaveissis et al., 2022; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016).



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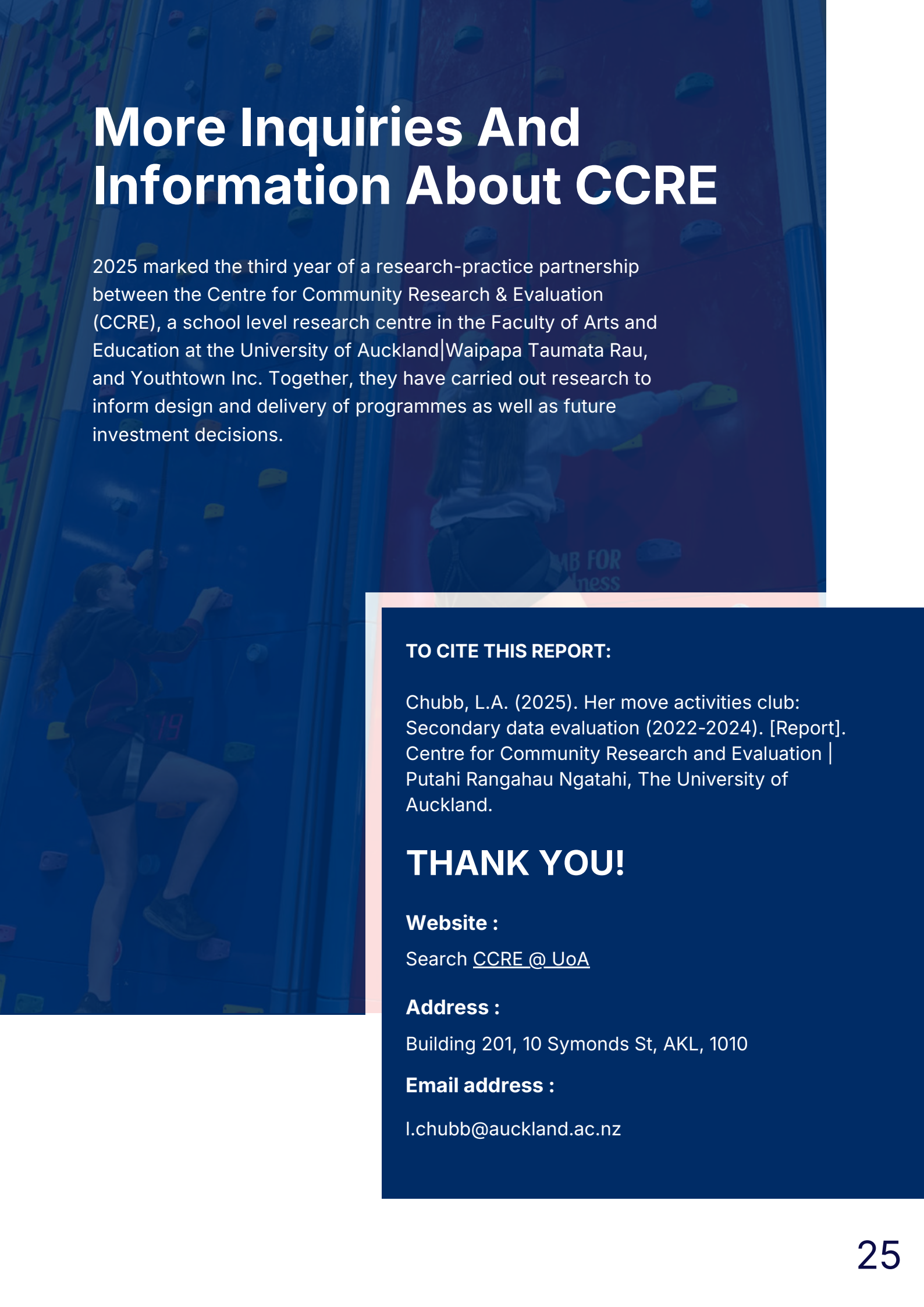
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A background image showing a person climbing a rock wall. The person is wearing a dark jacket and shorts, and is positioned on the left side of the frame. The rock wall is blue with various colored holds. The image is overlaid with a dark blue gradient.

More Inquiries And Information About CCRE

2025 marked the third year of a research-practice partnership between the Centre for Community Research & Evaluation (CCRE), a school level research centre in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Auckland|Waipapa Taumata Rau, and Youthtown Inc. Together, they have carried out research to inform design and delivery of programmes as well as future investment decisions.

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