
Serco pools see huge growth in women's swimming after taking action to tackle confidence fears

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The number of women taking part in swimming sessions at Serco operated leisure centres has more than tripled over the past two years after it introduced new women only swimming classes, alongside a raft of measures designed to create a more supportive environment for women put off from swimming either by fears about their body image or a lack of confidence in their ability in the pool.

Serco introduced the classes at 20 of its leisure centres across England in support of the This Girl Can Swim campaign, part of the nationwide This Girl Can campaign led by Sport England aimed at encouraging women and girls to be more active and participate in sport.

The number of women swimming fell by over half a million between 2005-6 and 2015-6 according to Sport England's Active People survey – over twice the fall seen among men.

Since Serco first introduced the classes in January 2016, the number of women taking part has grown from around 150 per week to reach a level of nearly 500 a week. 25% of swimmers who have joined the classes have never swum at the centres before and 54% have not swum in the last six months.

The women only classes are designed to create a supportive community of female swimmers and were introduced alongside a range of changes in response to customer feedback to make the pool experience less intimidating to women concerned about their body image or lacking confidence in their swimming ability.

These included installing convenient poolside robe hooks for women who want to wear towels or robes when walking from the changing room to the pool, offering free flip flops for women who don't want to walk barefoot, and employing female poolside helpers supporting nervous swimmers to relax and giving tips on exercise and technique.

Kate McKnight, Head of Aquatics at Serco Leisure, said:

“We know that fears over body image or swimming ability can be major barriers stopping some women from taking up swimming, so we wanted to do everything we can to create an environment where women can feel comfortable.

continued

“Some of the changes are very small but they have had a really big impact. For example, many women have told us that the poolside robe and towel hooks have made a huge difference, as they used to dread the walk to the pool from the changing rooms. The feedback we’ve had from our customers has been fantastic and we’re really pleased that more women are taking up swimming as a result.”

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Notes to editors:

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