



myplace
support team

Gyms

Introduction

Gyms targeted at young people with specialist equipment designed to suit them are growing in popularity and helping to tackle inactivity and sedentary lifestyles. If you're planning such a facility in your **myplace** centre this briefing will provide some useful pointers and advice on how to go about it.

How to plan and use a youth gym

Youth gyms are a relatively new but increasingly popular idea. They offer specialist fitness and gym equipment for the youth market and seek to address health issues and educate young people into an active lifestyle, providing a valuable way for young people of all abilities and backgrounds to introduce some physical exercise into their daily lives. And they're a world away from the school-based PE lessons – offering a branded space where young people want to be and be seen.

As with other activities you'll offer in your **myplace** centre it's important to get your market research right from the start, and include young people as part of the expert team who will be advising on the building and fittings. What activities and exercises do they want to take part in, what equipment will it require, do they know what equipment is available, what gym facilities are there elsewhere in the community – all the way to what colour do they want the walls? Lots of big and small questions to be resolved, but it's their space and important that they feel fully involved in its development from the start.

One important consideration, from a health and safety perspective, is that young people only exercise in a gym where the equipment is right for them and that suits their physique. Adult fitness machines are not always suitable for young people, but resistance equipment can be tailored for them. Identify and speak to the professional equipment suppliers. The equipment, the supplier and manufacturer should be a well known and recognised name in the fitness industry, with a good reputation for reliability, life of equipment, maintenance and suitability for intended use.

A huge range of alternative and innovative equipment is now available alongside the more familiar mat-based activities, such as pilates, yoga or aerobics (and its many variations including dance aerobics and boxing aerobics, providing a more high-powered workout using gloves, pads and punchbags). For example, some fitness equipment companies have connected games consoles to exercise machines so that the physical input of the user 'powers' the videogame. The controls and screen are integral in the equipment and machines can be linked for interactive competition with others. Not surprisingly these are proving popular with the youth and young adult markets. Organised games of basketball and football on computerised pitches, with electronically sensitive panels and lights which create sounds, visual effects and scores; interactive dance mats; and even Wii style games consoles are also proving popular. Be aware that many of the games console-linked activities do not result in as much activity as the normal version of the sport – for example, Wii tennis is far less active than normal tennis although Wii boxing seems to consume a similar level of energy to real boxing.

Another activity you may want to offer is spinning (a cycling machine with a fixed wheel, so no coasting allowed), often linked to large plasma screens which show a moving landscape to add to the effect. Again, the overall experience can be enhanced by the imaginative inclusion of music and lights.

Fitness gym equipment though continues to evolve and improve, and new equipment and trends will become popular. It is becoming accepted that fitness should be viewed as a fun leisure activity, and this is beginning to be reflected in what's available. The best advice is to see what equipment suppliers are offering.

But a good and successful gym will be about much more than just the equipment that goes into it. It has to be a space that appeals to young people and that they choose to use – a youth zone. So, getting it right is also about the design. Fitness suites should have a bright open design. Right down to the colour scheme, which needs to appeal to the youth market. Allowing the users to decide this will not only create a more enjoyable experience for them but send out the message that they are valued and being treated seriously.

There will be aspects of the design that young people will probably be less concerned with – the technically important but dryer areas of, for example, circulation of people, heating, ventilation, humidity control, lighting – including artificial, natural and emergency – security and privacy. Make sure you use specialist professional services and don't rely on a generalist architect.

Two other aspects you'll need to consider from the outset too. Staff members and those running sessions will need to be specifically trained to work with young people, and will of course need CRB clearance. And it's important to ensure that **myplace** gyms are inclusive.

“We are getting better and better at listening to what people want and acting on their ideas. This gym will help keep young people fit and healthy, and give them a constructive hobby to take part in during the evenings and weekends.”

Councillor Grant Monahan,
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People,
Plymouth

Case Study

Two state-of-the-art youth gyms have opened at leisure centres in Rochdale in a partnership project between Link4Life, Rochdale Council and SHOKK (youth fitness specialists).

The Youth Gym, for 8 to 16-year-olds, features unique cardio vascular, resistance and interactive equipment and provides a dedicated place for young people to get fit and have fun in a safe, secure environment under the supervision of qualified staff. The gym includes multi-player dance mats giving young people the chance to get fit while sharpening up their dance moves, balance boards, which are similar to skateboards and give them the chance to improve their balance and unique youth gym equipment, such as fluid machines, resistance machines and functional weights designed for children and young people.

Although designed to be fun, the £145,000 investment in new facilities comes with a serious health message about the importance for long-term good health of taking part in regular physical activity.

Craig McAteer, Link4life Managing Director, said: “The project was put in place based on consultation between Rochdale Youth Services and local young people. It will support the other sporting and activity programmes we are running and although we still encourage it, we understand that young people today aren’t doing enough traditional outdoor activity and have different tastes and requirements to previous generations.”

Kieran Murphy, Marketing Director from SHOKK, said: “Walking into the Youth Gyms will provide a unique experience, essentially, it’s a space designed with young people in mind – somewhere they can identify with and a place they’ll want to hang out.”

Action planning

Young People

What activities do young people want to do? They’ll have lots of their own ideas ranging from interactive dance mats to Wii Fit. If they like PlayStations and gaming and want exercise, why not combine the two. Some fitness equipment companies have connected games consoles to exercise machines so that the physical input of the user ‘powers’ the videogame. Set up a group to explore what the options are.

Making a Difference

Although you’ll need trained and qualified (and CRB cleared) instructors try also encouraging some senior members to volunteer to go on a gym instructors course – there are lots to choose from. This will not only be good for them and their CVs, but also allow for greater use of the gym facilities by other young people.

Vision and Values

A good youth gym can make a major contribution towards achieving your goals. It combines enjoyment with healthy activity and encourages young people to stay safe.

Practicality

There are lots of specialist professional services out there so consult them to ensure, for example, that the design of the space is developed alongside advice from suitable equipment suppliers. Do your homework too and only develop a space and provide activities that you know there is a demand for.

Links and Further Guidance

Take a look at the Design Guidance Note issued by Sport England on Fitness and Exercise Spaces, available on its website at www.sportengland.org. This will provide plenty of food for thought on how you want your space to function and what it should include. Sport England is the government agency responsible for creating a world class community sport environment.

The 'Inclusive Fitness Initiative' (IFI) is a valuable resource for information on accessibility, inclusive equipment (that can be used by both disabled and non-disabled young people), staff training and inclusive marketing strategies. The initiative can award the 'Inclusive Fitness Mark', which is a quality mark accreditation. Find out more at www.inclusivefitness.org. IFI Mark accreditation should be a goal for all new and refurbished centres

SHOKK® Ltd is a company that specialises in professional fitness for the youth sector. It supplies a full range of specialist equipment, training and services to suit the needs of young people aged between 5 and 18. Find out more at www.shokk.co.uk SHOKK is one of the partners supporting the nationwide Change4Life campaign, dedicated to getting the nation to eat well, move more and live longer.

The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) is the trade body that represents every reputable organisation in the health and fitness industry. One of its current campaigns is GO Curves, a girls only programme which links registered Curves gyms with their local secondary schools, targeting 15 to 16-year-old girls. The programme offers participants the chance to experience a range of activities with a view to increasing and sustaining activity levels. In addition to exercise, it covers nutrition, health and self confidence. It is designed to increase physical activity to the recommended levels through attitudinal shift and improved self esteem. The GO programme can be tailored to suit different operator members, regions or physical activity genres.

The TwentyTen Commission was an industry consultation, designed to help develop a five year strategy for the sector. Among the cornerstones it identified was local community hubs. Find out more at www.fia.org.uk

Other useful websites include that of Active IQ, one of the UK's market leading Ofqual approved awarding bodies, designing nationally recognised qualifications and training materials that support career pathways in the Active Leisure sector. See www.activeiq.co.uk

Fitness Professionals is the largest and most respected association for fitness industry professionals in the world supporting over 80 per cent of UK health and fitness industry professionals. See www.fitpro.com for details on Fitclub - the original health-related fitness programme for children and young people -four programmes based on fun, action and skill acquisition.

Leisure Industry Week (LIW) is the UK's largest leisure event, attracting thousands of leisure professionals and over 350 industry suppliers. Details at www.liw.co.uk

Premier Training International provides a large range of professional health and fitness training and education within the UK. It has a successful track record in training within single site, local authority and multi-site facilities throughout the UK and Europe. It also offers free exercise guides. See www.premierglobal.co.uk for more details.