**This Girl Can and parkrun team up to get more women than ever participating for International Women’s Day**

* Hundreds of This Girl Can parkrun events are happening across the UK to inspire and attract women.
* Of the 1.8 million women who have registered for parkrun 650,000 are yet to participate.
* The first ever parkrun celebration of International Women’s Day aims to break down the barriers preventing women from taking part.

This International Women’s Day, Sport England’s This Girl Can campaign and parkrun have joined forces to encourage thousands of women and girls around the country to take part in a parkrun event on Saturday 7th March.

The female celebration comes in response to research that found that women want to take part in physical activity, but large numbers never take the first step.

Women are less likely than men to actually participate in parkrun events, despite registering in greater numbers. For example, last year, females made up 52% of total registrations, but only accounted for 44% of completed parkruns.

Sport England launched the This Girl Can campaign in 2015 to help tackle the gender gap in sport and physical activity - currently nearly two fifths (39%) of women aren’t active, compared to 35% of men [1]. The International Women’s Day parkrun partnership follows a £3million investment Sport England made to parkrun to support the creation of 200 new parkrun events in England focusing on increasing the number of women and girls who take part and increasing participation from lower socio-economic groups.

This Girl Can research shows that women want to be active but face barriers such as a fear of judgement, or practical issues such as childcare obligations. The partnership aims to break down these barriers and inspire women to get active in a fun, supportive and non-judgemental environment.

parkruns are free, fun, sociable 5k community events taking place every weekend in public parks and open spaces across the globe. They are accessible to all, regardless of age, ability or background. There are more than 700 parkruns every week in the UK and on Saturday 7th March, parkrun and This Girl Can are encouraging as many women and girls as possible to come along to parkrun.

Every participant takes part however way they want to, whether that is to walk, jog or run some or all of the course, undertake one of the many volunteer roles, or join people in a local cafe for a coffee and a chat afterwards. Many parkruns allow buggies and dogs, so it really is something that the whole family can get involved with.

For anyone coming along for the first time, or those who might need a bit of reassurance, a friendly volunteer will be on hand to welcome newcomers, provide information about the event and answer any questions. Even if you come to parkrun alone, the chances are you will leave with a whole new group of friends, and a buzz that lasts for a long time after.

**Chrissie Wellington, parkrun Global Head of Health and Wellbeing, said:** “In the UK more than 1.2 million women and girls have completed a parkrun. But unfortunately, a huge proportion of women are registering for our events and not turning up. Our research and insights from Sport England show that many of the reasons why are gender-related, with a fear of not being fit enough, worries about attending alone, childcare obligations and not knowing what to expect being much more commonly cited by females.

“parkrun is a world where female participation is joyfully celebrated – young and old, friends and families, walkers, joggers, runners and volunteers, and those that come along to watch and support. Through this campaign we want to champion women and encourage those that haven’t taken part yet to get down to their local event and give it a go, whether they run, jog or walk.”

**Kate Dale, This Girl Can campaign lead, said:** “This Girl Can is all about breaking down barriers and helping women feel like they can be active, no matter their ability, size or lifestyle. The aim of our partnership with parkrun is to celebrate women in all their imperfect glory. This International Women’s Day we’re calling on the women who haven’t quite made it out there yet to join this huge female movement and take part in their local parkrun – whether they walk, run, skip or just do half of it.

“Our recent research found 42% of women feel positive when they see other women post about not being very good when it comes to getting active on their social media channels. We want women who take part in parkrun to be sharing their experiences online. Showing real experiences of normal women exercising can help break down many of the barriers they face, and International Women’s Day is the perfect opportunity for women across the country to empower and motivate each other.”

On Saturday 7th March, parkruns across the UK will be showing their support with female volunteer teams, a welcome brief for all newcomers, selfie frames and a suggested purple dress code. Those already parkrunning are encouraged to bring a female friend, colleague or family member along, and everyone is invited to join the celebration online at **#IWDparkrun and #ThisGirlCan**.

A dedicated page is live at [parkrun.org.uk/IWDparkrun](http://parkrun.org.uk/IWDparkrun), including information to help those taking part for the first time, and a postcode searchable map of all parkrun events.

The International Women’s Day parkrun will be supported by a social media campaign to address and break down barriers faced by women and girls when accessing physical activity. The campaign will feature real life case studies from across the country who are available for comment. Through these examples, the campaign will help show that parkrun is for everyone, no matter your age, background, fitness level or gender. And although the IWD parkrun is being held on one day, it is hoped that the impact will be far more long lasting as people continue to reap the rewards of being active in a nurturing, welcoming, outdoor environment.

**-Ends-**

[1] Sport England Active Lives survey May 18/May 19 shows that 61% of women (or 14.1m) are active, compared to 65% of men (or 14.4m). Being active is defined as doing 150 minutes or more of physical activity each week, according to the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines.

**About parkrun**

parkrun is a UK based charity supporting in excess of 350,000 people to take part in free, socially-focused, 5k events every weekend in public areas of open space.

The first parkrun took place on 2 October 2004 with 13 runners and 5 volunteers in London’s Bushy Park, there are now more than 2,000 parkrun events taking place in 21 countries.

More than 6,000,000 people have registered for parkrun and over half a million people have volunteered worldwide.

parkruns are free, weekly, timed, community 5k events in areas of public space. They are entirely volunteer led, and open to anyone of any age, ability, or background to participate.

parkrun is a place where you can walk, jog, run, volunteer or just come along and watch.

A dedicated volunteer Tail Walker comes last at every event and participants are under no pressure to complete the entire 5k.

**About This Girl Can**

Since 2015, Sport England has been working to address the significant gender gap found in sports and exercise, to build women’s confidence around being active, and help them meet the Chief Medical Officer’s guidance.

The campaign was based on the insight that 75% of women say they want to do more sporting activities or exercise, but one of the unifying barriers found to be holding them back is the fear of judgement.

This Girl Can’s objective is to encourage women to engage in physical activity regardless of shape, size, age or ability.

**Contact**

For more information, images or interviews with spokespeople and case studies please contact:

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