



UNIVERSAL  
ENLIGHTENMENT  
FORUM

# Final Report: UEF Love, Learn & Play Girls' Club Pilot 2021

In partnership with



THE  
PAUL  
HODGES  
TRUST



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## Setting the scene

### An Innovative Partnership for Change

The Universal Enlightenment Forum's mission is to enhance human flourishing by ushering humanity into an era of universal enlightenment, where all people are able to realise their innate potential to Love, Learn and Play. The Paul Hodges Trust's mission is to enable women and girls living in the world's poorest communities to access the resources they need to flourish against all the odds.

Powered by our shared values, since early 2021 we've been working together to design, deliver and test a ground-breaking pilot project: The UEF Love, Learn and Play Girls' Club, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This pilot, reaching 30 girls over a 12-week period, put UEF's unique Love, Learn and Play (LLP) framework into action, while providing a rich source of knowledge to enable a future scale up of this partnership.

### Why was this project needed?



Scholars from across disciplines and leaders of all faiths have battled with fundamental questions of the purpose of our existence and how to live a fulfilled life. UEF believe that the deepest and most fundamental longings within all of us are only three - to LOVE, to LEARN, and to PLAY - and that if we approach everything in life with an LLP mindset, we will truly flourish.

When we look closely at poor communities in Sierra Leone, we can clearly see that girls living in poverty are consistently denied the opportunity to fulfil these fundamental longings. They are routinely locked out of the opportunity to Love, Learn and Play.

**LOVE:** Negative expectations and stereotypes limit girls' ability to love themselves and recognise their innate value. They're looked down upon and seen as less important than others. Adolescent girls are highly vulnerable to violence and abuse and are too often unable to secure healthy, loving relationships as they move into adulthood.

**LEARN:** Adolescent girls are at the highest risk of dropping out from school. Even when girls are in school, they don't learn about a wide range of topics that will be essential for their future flourishing. However, a huge amount of evidence shows us that giving girls opportunities to learn is a proven way of improving the health and wealth of entire communities. As the African proverb says: "If you educate a woman, you educate a nation".

**PLAY:** As UNICEF has observed, "The evidence is clear: around the world, girls work while boys play". Girls in Sierra Leone face a heavy load of domestic labour, which eats up their time for play. Gender norms also limit girls' free movement, their ability to socialize outside their

family and the activities that are ‘appropriate’. There is a strong expectation that girls are ‘dutiful’ rather than ‘playful’. The adults around them are usually focused simply on survival, meaning girls have few role models to show them the value of play throughout life.

## Why Girls’ Clubs?



### **What is a Girls’ Club?**

*A safe, girls-only space, with a purposeful curriculum and empowering female leaders. Girls’ Clubs provide a place to play, learn and build positive relationships, outside the restrictions of a traditional classroom environment.*

Girls’ Clubs are the ideal forum to put UEF’s LLP framework into action. Increasing evidence has demonstrated that investing in Girls’ Clubs is a high-impact way to promote girls’ wellbeing and change the gender norms that constrain their lives.

## 3 Ways Girls’ Clubs Promote Flourishing

### 1. Girls’ Clubs challenge false narratives

- *They give girls space to develop their thoughts, and the opportunity to identify and challenge negative norms about what girls can and can’t do.*
- *They give girls access to new knowledge and broaden their horizons - exposing them to role models or possible life options they hadn’t previously considered.*
- *They develop girls’ leadership skills, so they can take a more active role in their families and communities.*

### 2. Girls’ Clubs provide an essential space for creativity and play

- *Clubs give girls a forum in which they can relax and socialise, enabling adolescent girls to build friendships and engage in playful activities.*
- *They provide a unique opportunity for girls to engage with art, music, singing, drama, games and poetry, nourishing their need for play and healing trauma, while providing vital opportunities to build knowledge and life skills.*

### 3. Girls’ Clubs build self-worth and self-confidence

- *Providing a safe space that seeks to nurture girls’ talents, awaken their creativity and celebrate their unique brilliance has a profound impact on their lives – enabling them to build ‘self-love’ and respect. As girls grow in confidence, they start to recognise their potential, dream and build towards brighter futures.*

## Project Design

The UEF Love, Learn, Play Girls' Club pilot was designed to:

1. Introduce the UEF Love, Learn and Play framework in a fun and accessible way
2. Provide girls with life skills and vital information to support their flourishing
3. Nurture greater self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth
4. Support girls to identify and challenge false narratives and discriminatory practice
5. Provide opportunities to play, have fun and be creative

The pilot ran over 12 weeks as an afterschool club. The curriculum was co-designed by UEF, The Paul Hodges Trust and our partner in Sierra Leone, We Yone Child Foundation. It was also informed by consultation with the anticipated beneficiaries. The Club was delivered by a female Social Worker and Young Mentor and hosted in the We Yone Primary School.

### Target Beneficiaries

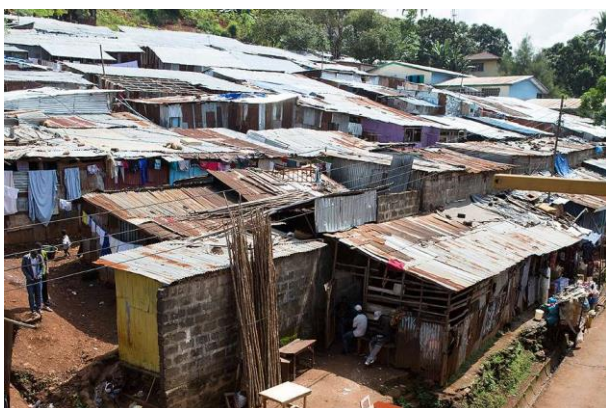


The Club was aimed at poor and vulnerable adolescent girls, aged 12 – 15. As there was a high level of interest from girls in attending the Club, social workers prioritised the 30 most vulnerable – those who face the greatest challenges in flourishing and those most locked out from LLP. These included orphans, girls with disabilities, HIV+ girls and survivors of violence and abuse. Where necessary, social workers mediated with caregivers to gain support for a girl's attendance.

### Why adolescents?

Adolescent girls face significant challenges that prevent them from flourishing and many require urgent support to be able to fulfil their potential. At the same time, the shifts that happen during adolescence provide tremendous opportunities for positive change. The values and ideas developed at this time can shape an entire life, as well as having an impact on the next generation. This is why we felt this was such an important window to engage girls with LLP, enabling them to lay the foundation for a healthy transition into adulthood.

### Location



The pilot was run in George Brook, the biggest slum community in Freetown. As an 'unofficial' community, the government refuses to provide any healthcare, education or infrastructure, such as running water, to the roughly 10,000 people who live there. Life is very challenging, with most people living well below the poverty line and struggling to provide for their basic needs.

## Project Delivery

### Week 1: Love, Learn, Play: Introductions and Icebreakers



The first week of the Club was all about establishing a safe space and building trust between the girls and Club staff. Club staff clearly outlined the aims of the LLP Girls' Club and girls were provided with some of the resources they'd need over the next 12 weeks, including their UEF-designed workbook. As a feature of each week, the girls played a range of 'ice-breaker' games - these help with skills practice,

as well as supporting a fun environment. Considerable research has demonstrated that adolescents have short attention spans, so breaking up more formal learning with games is also beneficial for their ability to learn.

After this, the 'Club Principles' were agreed. Girls then completed the Self-Evaluation Questionnaire, so we could assess baseline attitudes and values. As would be repeated in each session, the girls had a 'Snack and Socialising Break' – this unstructured time provides a valuable space for girls to make friends, learn from each other and have fun. Research has also demonstrated that including snacks and drinks can incentivise regular attendance.

Next, a Life Skills session on 'Love' was delivered. Through group discussions, the girls debated: What does love mean? Why is love important? The girls then listened to the introductory video on 'Love' produced by UEF, before reflecting on what they had learnt from it. Girls were then invited to discuss 'How can we show love to ourselves?'. Finally, the facilitator invited the girls to decide a way they could open and close each Club meeting going forward. The girls decided to write a short song, which was subsequently sung at the start and end of each Club session:

***'Hello. This is our special club. This is a space for us girls only. We come here so that we can love, learn and play. Love, learn and play. Hooray! Even when the world is busy, even when our days are hard, we'll come together, so we can love, learn and play. Hooray!'***

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#### ***Girls Quotes – Week 1***

*"Love is like cooking a stew – the more good ingredients you put in, the better it tastes" – Fatamata, 12*

*"What does love mean to me? I love my mother and father, I love my family, I love my teacher, I love my friend, I love my school, I love my church. I am FULL of love" – Emmah, 13*

*"Love is a special bond – between two people or a whole group" – Alimatu, 12*

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## Week 2: Identity, Ideas and Learning



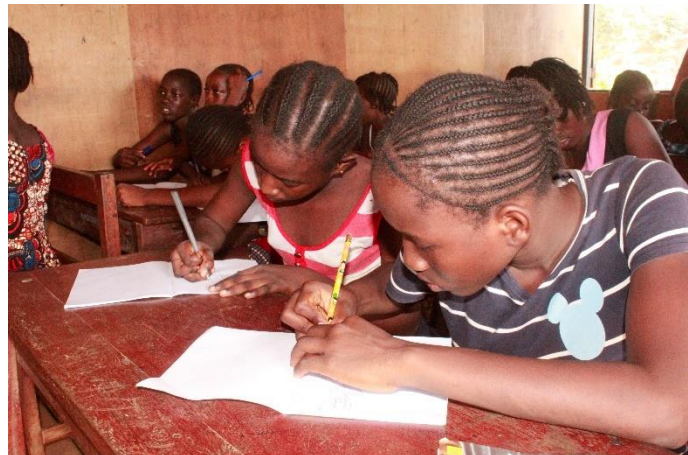
In Week 2, the Club started to think about identity – what makes each of us special and unique?

A range of activities designed to support girls to identify their strengths and develop a positive sense of self-worth were delivered.

After this, the girls listened to a podcast called 'What is Gender'. Designed by Sierra Leone Ministry of Education with support from UNFPA

and Irish Aid, this podcast explores the difference between 'sex' (biology) and 'gender' (social expectations based on biology) and asks participants to rethink beliefs and judgements about the differences between boys and girls, what they can do and achieve.

Finally, a life-skills session on 'Learn' was delivered. Girls were invited to discuss: What is learning? How can we learn about things? Why is learning important? Key tenets of the LLP framework were shared, including on the importance of learning for human flourishing, with an emphasis on learning being a lifelong pursuit that can happen in many ways (not just in formal educational environments). A quiz was run to help girls think about different learning styles.



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### Girls Quotes – Week 2

*“Learning is important because it makes us be a positive part of society – if I have knowledge, I can share it with others” – Debora, 13*

*“Some people think girls cannot learn somethings. But why not? My brain is good. If I want to learn, I can” – Sylvia, 13*

*“I thought you could only learn in school. But now I am seeing that that is just one part. Now I want to learn from my friends and family too” – Princess, 13*

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### Week 3: Play and Creativity

To consolidate efforts made in the first two weeks to build girls self-love and self-esteem, this session started with girls completing an activity called 'My good qualities', where the girls provided positive feedback to one another and then updated their identity diagrams made in previous weeks.



Then, a Life Skills discussion on 'Play' was facilitated. Girls discussed what games they like to play, different ways you could play, how they felt when they played and the barriers to playing. The girls highlighted that there were many barriers for them to play, especially a social expectation that they should be studying or working and not 'wasting time'.

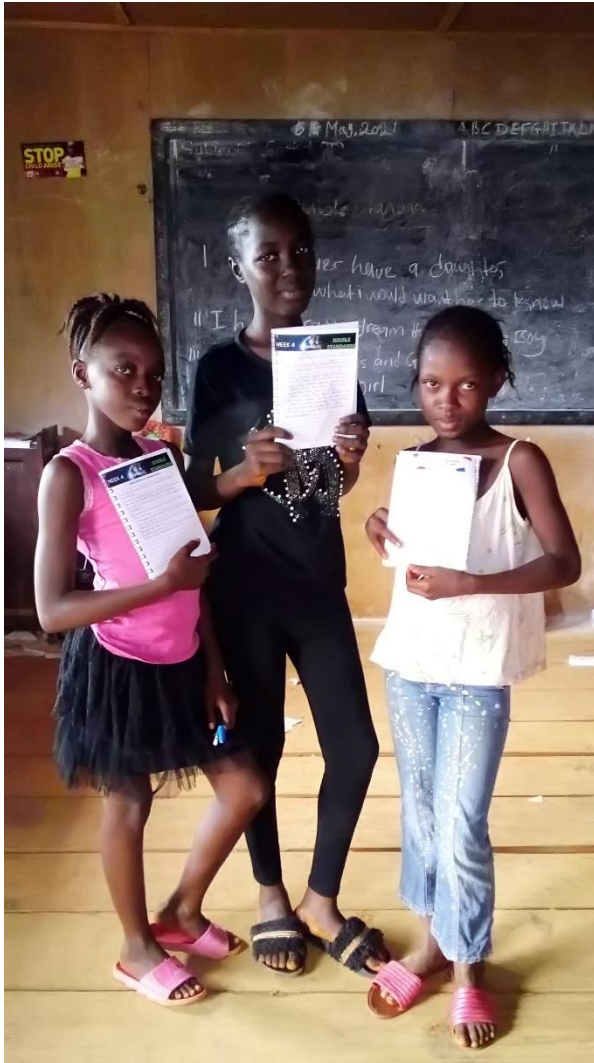
In the final 40 minutes, girls were given the time, space and resources to get creative and draw and colour in pictures. At first, they were given structured tasks and then free time to draw whatever they wanted. While this is a 'taken for granted' activity for children in many countries, art is not on the school curriculum in Sierra Leone and the girls we are working with don't have the resources to do this at home, so this was a

great opportunity for the girls to explore their creativity and experiment with a new activity.





## Week 4: Double Standards



This week was focused on the false narratives that negatively impact on girls' ability to flourish – how to identify them and how to challenge them! After some icebreaker games, girls listened to the 'Double Standards' podcast. This podcast builds from "What is Gender". It encourages girls to think for themselves and learn to apply critical thinking to test assumptions.

Girls were then invited to discuss times when they had seen or experienced double standards at school, at home, in their community that had stopped them from fulfilling their innate longings to Love, Learn and Play. They then discussed the impact this had on them and how double standards could be challenged and changed.

In the second half the session, girls read a poem by Kamla Bhasin that challenges traditional views about girls. Then, the girls had the opportunity to write their own poem or short story about double standards.

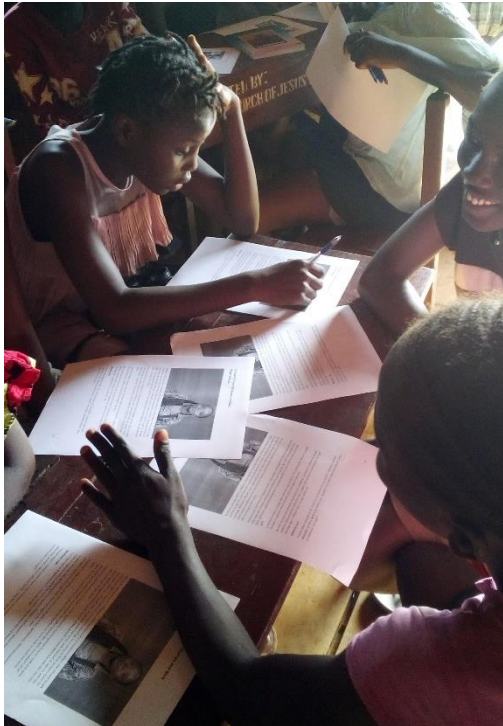
### ***The Truth About Boys and Girls – Poem by Isatu, 14***

*Here are some truths I would like to share  
Girls should not be the only ones who have to care  
For the babies and for the sick  
Why do the boys get to go and play so quick?  
Boys should help girls with their domestic chores  
Why should I be the only one to clean the floors?  
I would like to play with my friends too  
You can't deny it, you know it's true!*

### ***Because I'm a Girl – Poem By Finda, 12***

*Because I'm a Girl I must study hard  
Because I'm a Girl I must make my mark  
Because I'm a Girl I should play games when I want  
Because I'm a Girl I'll push to be at the front  
Because I'm a Girl people think my voice is not loud  
Because I'm a Girl I want to make my parents proud  
Because I'm a girl I must know right from wrong  
Because I'm a girl I'll surprise you by being strong*

## Week 5: Powerful Women and Girls



Building from the previous weeks, this session continued to challenge false narratives about girls and women, while deepening girls' understanding of the LLP framework.

Examples of powerful women and girls from across Africa and beyond were shared with the girls, who worked in groups to digest and interpret each case study, before presenting it back to the other club members and reflecting on what they could learn from what other women and girls have achieved.

In the second half of the session, a local specialist martial arts coach ran a physical session introducing the girls to the basic principles of martial arts and various exercises and routines.

This session offered girls the opportunity to explore a new physical activity, learn new things, challenge gender stereotypes and gain confidence.



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### *Girls Quotes – Week 5*

*“My father was angry the day I was born – he didn’t want another girl child. He thinks girls are weak. But I am learning some girls are changing the world – in sport, in politics, in martial arts. That will be the future I want. When I have girl children, I will tell them: you can be as good as anyone else” –*

*Sally, 15*

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## Week 6: Changing Bodies



The LLP Girls' Club provides a safe and fun environment for girls to learn vital information about puberty and menstruation – life changes that all the girls will experience, but that too often remain taboo and unspoken about, leaving girls stressed, vulnerable and unable to flourish.

Understanding that puberty and periods are a natural and healthy part of development is also essential to ensure girls can have good self-esteem and self-worth, as they transition into adults.

During this session, the Club Facilitator used a range of activities to share information about puberty and menstruation and crucially, to challenge misconceptions and false narratives.

Because the Club brings together girls aged between 11 – 15, club participants were at different places in their puberty journey and could share their experience with others. Girls were also invited to anonymously share their outstanding questions on these issues.

Finally, the girls were given the opportunity to relax, play their favourite music via the Bluetooth speaker and dance. In small groups, they came up with 1 minute dance routines, which they displayed and taught the others in the group. This was a noisy week with lots of laughter!



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### Girls Quotes – Week 6

*“When my first period came, I didn’t know what was happening. I was worried I was injured inside, or maybe I had cancer. When my aunty coughed up blood, in the end she died. Now blood was coming out of me. But because it was my intimate area, I felt afraid to ask anyone. It was several months before I was able to ask my friend. I am glad that now we have this club, so the others girls don’t have to have this worry” – Isha, 14*

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## Week 7: Emotions



This week looked at emotions, including how we can recognise, express and manage emotions and how our emotions interact with our fundamental longings to Love, Learn and Play. Particular emphasis was given to how we can understand and manage uncomfortable emotions, including healthy coping techniques and the importance of sharing how we feel.

The Club facilitator ran through a series of breathing and mindfulness activities to help girls to manage their feelings and build greater resilience. After a snack and socialising break, the Club facilitator then returned to the theme of last week and took time to answer the anonymous questions on puberty and periods put forward by the girls the previous week.

In the final part of the club, the girls returned to the idea of the importance of play and the potential role of play and creativity in helping manage and express emotions. Girls studied some art examples to discuss how art can be used to convey emotions and then created their own works of art using watercolour paints.



## Week 8: My Body, My Choice



After some Icebreaker games, this week started with a learning session on reproductive health, including training on the principles of consent and how to report abuse. The girls listened to the Pregnancy Prevention Podcast.

While girls will receive some very basic sex education in school, the Government of Sierra Leone only allows abstinence-based sex education to be taught in classrooms. As such, girls lack vital information on how to prevent pregnancy and STIs. Sadly, due to the extreme poverty of communities where we work, many of the girls feel pressurised to exchange sex for basic commodities, like sanitary pads or food. As such, it is vitally important girls understand the risks of this and how to protect themselves.

Throughout the group discussion & listening to the podcast, girls had an opportunity to ask anonymous questions about sex and pregnancy prevention, with these being answered the following week.

Finally, girls were canvassed to understand what they would like to do in next week's 'Girls' Choice' session.



## Week 9: Girls' Choice Week

While the whole design of this curriculum was informed by consultations with the intended beneficiaries, we knew that inevitably new ideas & desired activities would come up during implementation. As such, this 'Girl's Choice' week was included to (a) make sure the curriculum met the girls' needs and (b) to help ensure the girls felt ownership of the club. As such, the girls got to choose the activities and life skills session to be covered in this week.

For the play and creativity session, the girls requested to do jewellery-making, play a local game (similar to skittles) and do boardgames. The girls also requested a Life Skills session on communicating with their parents. They raised the challenges they were having talking to their parents and getting their parents to recognise their right to LLP and support their flourishing. Common challenges were identified and girls shared ideas with each other on how to overcome them. The girls then designed some posters for their parents and the wider community expressing their feelings.



## Week 10: My Life Goals



As we moved towards the end of the Club, this week focussed on building from what had been learnt and looking to the future. Girls were taught about what a 'goal' was, the difference between a long-term and a short-term goal, and then set their own goals.

Throughout these discussions, the girls were encouraged to reflect on how their goals were impacted by LLP and many chose to set goals specific to these themes.

In the second half of this session, a local Sierra Leonean pop star, Ambassador Patricia, led a lively session on song-writing and singing. Ambassador Patricia is famous in Sierra Leone for her songs, which have a strong social message, including hits such as 'Girls should be girls and not mothers' and 'Respect me too'.

The girls worked with Patricia to write their own song, which they later performed in front of their friends and family at the Graduation Ceremony.



## Week 11: Reflection and Evaluation

This 12-week course was designed as a pilot project, with the experience and learning used to inform a future scale-up. As such, in the penultimate week, the focus was on reflecting on the Club experience, what had been learned, what had been challenging and what could be changed to make the Club even more impactful in the future.



In small groups, the girls reflected on the most important things they had learnt and gained from the club, before presenting this back to whole group, either through a poster, song or acting.

Girls were canvassed for their opinions on their favourite sessions, their least favourite sessions, what other topics they would have liked to be covered and how to improve the club for the future.

In a final recap activity, girls were asked to write a statement that starts: "Love is..." "Play is..." "Learning is..." "I would like everyone to know that..." The girls completed the sentence with their own reflections - either what they had learnt, what they already knew or what they

would like other people to know.

Finally, the girls completed the Self-Assessment Questionnaire for the second time (the first time was in Week 1), so we could track differences in attitudes, beliefs and values.

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### Girls Quotes – Week 11

*"Learning is... something that makes me excited for the future. I'm not the top of my class now because I have faced many hardships. But I can keep learning, keep working and get better." - Princess, 13*

*"Play is... good for how you feel about yourself. When you share a game and a smile with your friend, you can escape your suffering. That's important." - Lilian, 14*

*"Love is... caring for your friends and looking after yourself, so you can all have a good life" – Elizabeth, 12*

*"I would like everyone to know that girls deserve the chance to learn, to love ourselves and to play when we want" – Ratamu, 12*

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## Week 12: Graduation



The Graduation Ceremony in the final week provided an important opportunity to celebrate the girls' achievements and further build their self-esteem, while consolidating everything learnt over the duration of the Club.

Girls' families were invited to the ceremony and the girls prepared dances, small plays and presentations to share with the audience what they have learn about LLP. The work produced by the girls over the previous 11 weeks was put up on the walls of the venue.

- At the Ceremony each girl received:
- A UEF Love, Learn, Play T-Shirt
  - A Love, Learn, Play Girls' Club Certificate
    - A reusable sanitary pad set
    - A UEF personalised notebook
  - Motivational stickers and gel pen set



## Key Impact and Achievements

This project established a unique, safe space that enabled highly vulnerable girls to Love, Learn and Play. It gave them an exceptional opportunity to build self-esteem, learn skills and gain knowledge, while providing the tools to flourish in the long term.

### Girls' Attendance & Successful Completion



Throughout the pilot, the Club saw high levels of attendance. 100% of girls attended at least 10 out of the 12 sessions, the target required to Graduate.

A key aspect of achieving such high attendance figures was the important work undertaken by the Club social workers during the beneficiary selection and orientation process, explaining the

goals of the club to caregivers and securing their buy-in to enable their girls to attend.

Girls were hugely excited and enthusiastic to have the opportunity to attend the club and responded really well to the subject matter. At the end of 12 weeks, 100% of girls agreed they had learnt a lot from the club, 100% said they would like to continue attending the Girls' Club in future and 95% said they would like to become a mentor to help other girls.

In the final evaluation discussion, girls reported that the biggest benefit of the club was that it had given them much more confidence and belief in themselves, as well as giving them the opportunity to learn important things not covered in school. At the Graduation, parents reported that the girls now had a more positive mindset and were doing better in school, as they were more engaged and had more self-confidence to contribute in class.

### Challenges

At the end of Week 12, in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, 15% of girls reported it had been 'difficult' or 'very difficult' for them to attend the club. When discussed, the main challenges were the rainy season (which can leave routes around the slum impassable due to flooding), illness and family pressure.

- **Rainy Season:** The challenge of rainy season flooding was identified early on when we saw attendance suddenly drop after the first rains. Fortunately, we were able to use our contingency budget to provide the girls with wellington boots, so they could safely reach the club without having to walk through flooding and sewage overflows in their sandals.

- Illness: Illness is an on-going and expected challenge, as we are working in a community with minimal access to clean water and no government health care facilities. Sadly, during the project period, 2 girls fell seriously sick with malaria, leading to them having to miss a couple of sessions. 2 further girls were forced to miss an individual session due to a virulent stomach bug. Responding to this challenge, when we scale up this partnership and run a longer Girls' Club, it would be really useful to include skills training on health and hygiene, especially as Sierra Leone is now facing its first wave of COVID-19 infections.
- Family Pressure: Despite parents agreeing to their girls attending the Club, it was sometimes still seen as a 'nice-to-have', rather than a priority. As such, when issues came up, such a relative being sick, or additional chores needing to be done, girls were expected to stay home to fulfil their caring and cleaning responsibilities, rather than attend the club. As one father said: *"Yes, I can sometimes spare her to go to the club, but if I need her at home, then that is more important. Why should she go and play when there is work to be done? Am I supposed to go to bed hungry because no one is cooking for the family?"* This highlights the challenging attitudes faced by girls when trying to access their right to LLP, and also some parents lack of recognition of the importance of the Club for their girl's well-being and future flourishing. When scaling up this partnership in future, it would be great to include more community awareness and education activities, designed to build greater awareness of the value, purpose and impact of the intervention, whilst also challenging and changing false narratives more broadly.

#### Child Protection and Safeguarding

Whenever a girl failed to attend a weekly session of LLP Club, the social worker was responsible for getting in contact with her within 24 hours to understand what's wrong, either over the phone or via a home visit. This demonstrates one of the important 'knock-on' benefits of girls' involvement in the Club for their safety and well-being, as serious problems and risks to girls can be identified and acted on quickly. This was most powerfully evidenced when a 12-year-old participant missed a session in Week 4. After investigating, the Social Worker discovered this was because she had been sent back to her family village to undergo Female Genital Mutilation prior to a planned marriage. Thankfully, the social worker was able to intervene. She sought support from the local chief's wife, and together they were able to persuade the parents to cancel the FGM and marriage. The girl was recalled from the village and supported to return to school and the Club the following week. Social workers will continue to stay in close contact to provide emotional support and ensure she can stay safe, even after the duration of the project.

## Changes in Attitudes & Knowledge

A key objective of this pilot was to test to what extent a Girls' Club focussed on LLP could lead to meaningful changes in girls' attitudes and knowledge. To enable us to do this, throughout the project, we collected a range of quantitative and qualitative data to pick up changes in perspectives and behaviour, as well as tracking girls' understanding of the principles of Love, Learn and Play.

### LOVE

Interestingly, in Week 1, 100% of the girls already agreed with the statement "I think love is very important for a happy life". However, over the course of the 12 weeks, we saw big and important shifts, both in girls' understanding of the meaning of 'love' and their ability to love and value themselves.

For example, in their initial discussions on the topic, prior to watching the UEF 'Love' video, the girls' conceptualisation of love focussed narrowly on family-based love or romantic love/physical relationships. However, after watching the UEF video, when asked to draw their 'circle of love', the girls were inspired to include a greater variety of forms of love, including love of their friends, love of their community and love of their nation. We also saw an increase in girls' ability to identify and define 'loving' and 'unloving' behaviours, and the social workers reported seeing the girls displaying increasing compassion towards one another, as the Club progressed.

A key goal of the LLP Girls' Club was to build girls' 'philautia' (self-love). This is not about giving girls a narcissistic outlook, but instead about building their self-confidence, self-worth and self-belief – vital qualities for flourishing and happiness that are often sorely missing in the girls we work with. The low level of existing self-esteem was demonstrated in the Week 1 questionnaire where only 40% of participants agreed with the statement "I have many good qualities". Similarly, only 40% of girls agreed that "I can be successful". Sadly, reflecting prevalent gender norms, 60% of girls agreed with the statement that "Boys are more important than girls".

Happily, by the end of Week 12, we saw a big shift in these figures, with 90% of girls agreeing "I have many good qualities" and "I can be successful" and 97% of girls now disagreeing that "Boys are more important than girls". There were also big increases in girls agreeing to the statements "I can be a leader in my community", "I have a good plan for my future" and "I have the power to change things", demonstrating increased self-belief, empowerment and resilience.



Through undertaking the range of discussion and activities included in the curriculum, girls were supported to broaden their vision of themselves – this was practically displayed through

regularly updating their 'identity diagram' to include more positive things and recognise a broader range of positive credentials. In initial discussions, when girls did volunteer positive attributes about themselves or others, these were often exclusively focussed on physical appearance ('nice hair' or 'light skin'). With support and guidance from the Club staff, as the project progressed, it was noted that girls were both more likely to be willing to volunteer positive attributes about themselves (demonstrating greater self-esteem) and more likely for these attributes to relate to their personality rather than physical appearance. This is an important step forward, moving away from more stereotypical ideas of what makes a 'good girl', which are too often focussed on exterior appearances and perceived attractiveness.



Very positively, in the Week 12 survey, 100% of girls agreed with the statement 'I feel more confident after the club'. This was supported by staff observations, which reported significant increases in girls' willingness to speak up, talk in public and interact with others. Girls' socialisation in Sierra Leone is very much focussed on being 'seen but not heard', being polite, dutiful and demure. As such, many of the girls were initially very shy at the Club and felt uncomfortable speaking in front of the group. However, during their Graduation Ceremony, it was really clear how far the girls had come when they very spiritedly and confidently presented small plays, songs, dances and speeches in front of their friends and family members. It was truly inspiring seeing them step up into such a leadership role and it's a huge testament to the success of the club in building a safe environment, where girls were able to grow and develop.

If you'd like to see these wonderful girls in action for yourself, you can watch the Graduation here: [LLP Girls' Club Graduation LiveStream](#)

## LEARN



The LLP Girls' Club supported girls to learn in a range of crucial ways:

### **1. The Club provided vital practical knowledge to support girls to flourish**

This practical knowledge on topics, such as puberty, sex education, pregnancy prevention, handling emotions, healthy relationships and women's rights, filled in some of the key gaps in the school curriculum that are vital to support a successful transition into adulthood.

Prior to completing the Club, many girls had misconceptions on these topics, including ideas that put them at significant risk or that damaged their self-esteem (for example, the belief that you can't get pregnant the first time you have sex or the example that being on your period makes you dirty). All the girls

passed the end of Club exam on these topics. Through the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, we also saw the way that the Club helped to provide the girls with knowledge networks going forward, including through seeing significant increases in the percentage of girls who agreed that "If I have questions about sex and puberty, I know who I can talk to" and "If I am worried about something, I have someone I can talk to".

Based on the success of this pilot, when we scale up the Club to cover a longer time period, there are many additional topics that it would be immensely valuable to add to further expand girls' access to life-changing knowledge.

### **2. The Club purposefully grew girls' understanding of what learning is and the value of learning, making them more 'fully conscious of learning'**

From Week 1 of the Club, 90% of girls agreed that "Learning is important for a happy life". However, in initial discussions about learning, girls focussed narrowly on learning as something that happens in school (with 85% of girls agreeing that "You can only learn important things in school"). When thinking about why learning was important, they felt the main reason was instrumental - so they could gain qualifications to succeed in the future.

Through the activities and discussions throughout the course, including the UEF audio recordings, the girls were introduced to the idea that learning is actually a lifelong process, which helps us to understand the world, our lives and ourselves and is valuable in and of itself. This helped to change girls' perspectives and by the end of the course, only 15% of girls agreed that "You can only learn important things in school". In the Week 11 discussion on the value

of learning, the girls made many insightful points, which demonstrate their new, deeper understanding of the place of learning within a meaningful life:

*“Now I know that from the moment a baby is born, she starts to learn. That baby can continue learning until she dies. That makes me think my brain is even better than I thought. I can fill it up with so much knowledge. It makes me excited!” – Iye, 14*

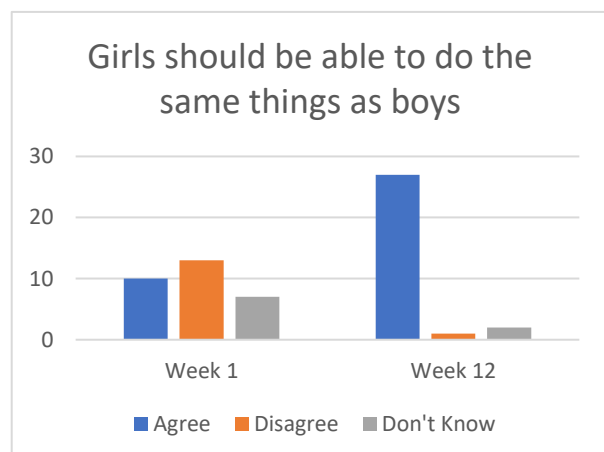
*“The Club actually made me think about what we can learn from each other. You don’t have to be a proper official ‘teacher’ to teach other people. My friends know a lot. Together we can solve problems.” – Hawa, 13*

*“I used to be embarrassed if I didn’t know something before, I would be very quiet. Now I know that not knowing is the start of a journey – if I raise up my voice and ask for help, not long until I will be crossing the river and knowing something new!” – Mabinty, 13*

### 3. The Club encouraged girls to think critically to identify and challenge false narratives

UEF have a particular interest in how false narratives work to constrain our ability to flourish. A recurring ambition throughout the Club was to encourage girls to think more critically and to interrogate widely accepted but damaging social ‘truths’, especially around gender.

By the end of the Club, we saw significant shifts in the girls’ attitudes and perspectives towards norms and stereotypes that restricted their potential. And as was displayed during their impassioned Graduation Speeches, the Club clearly stimulated a desire to ‘call out’ and challenge these false narratives. We strongly believe that these are skills that will help girls to realise their potential and change the future for the next generation.



*“Good afternoon, parents, guardians and fellow graduates. I am here to provide a short inspirational speech. The first think I want to say is this: Girls must be given equal opportunities as boys. Gender equality is the future. Parents – don’t say, “Because I gave birth to a girl child, I will not educate her, because I am just educating someone else’s wife”. Do not say, “Oh good, now I have someone to do the cleaning and cooking for her brothers”. This is not the right attitude at all. Investing in your girls is a good investment. It is not only your boys who can succeed, it is not only boys who should be allowed to play games and go to school. We are not living in the past. And to the girls here I say – you are the architect of your own future, do not let anyone take that future away with child marriage or early pregnancy, do not agree to sacrifice your dreams for someone else’s bad decision. You are strong, you are wise and you deserve the best” – Graduation Speech by Marilyn, 14*

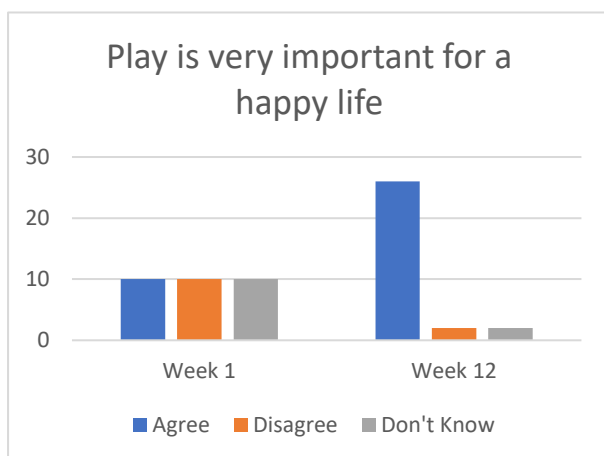
## PLAY



We know that play is so fundamental for children’s development, learning and well-being that it is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: *“Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”*

Increasingly, evidence also shows us that play, supports the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of humans at all stages of their lives.

However, as we have already highlighted, girls in Sierra Leone’s poorest communities are routinely locked out of the opportunities to play. Interestingly, during the 12-week duration of the Club, this was the area where we saw the most dramatic changes in attitudes and behaviours.

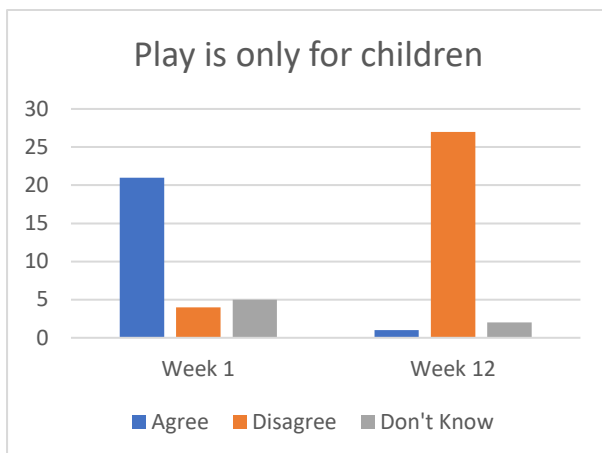


In Week 1, only 33% of girls agreed with the statement “I think play is very important for a happy life”. When this was discussed in greater detail in Week 3, it emerged that the girls associated play only with very young children and had been strongly socialised to believe they were ‘too old’ to be playing and that it was very important not to be ‘wasting time’ or ‘being silly’.

They shared that, in between attending school, doing domestic tasks (including cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, caring for family members etc) and often working part time to help support their families, they had very little time to themselves for any form of relaxation and play. If they did have any spare time, they were often not allowed out of the home to play with their friends and were strongly discouraged from playing sports, like football, because this was seen as inappropriate for girls and could potentially lead to them ‘mixing too much with boys’.



Within this context, the Club offered a vital opportunity to change girls' perspective on the role and value of play, as well as give them practical opportunities to play, be creative and have fun in a safe and non-judgemental environment.



Through introducing girls to a wide variety of fun and engaging play activities, the Club provided a unique platform for girls to nurture their playful side and better understand the value of play for mental health and happiness. Engaging in play has been shown to activate hormones associated with well-being, such as endorphins and dopamine. This is particularly valuable for many of the girls we are working with, who have experienced trauma and abuse in the

past. Play in the Club has provided them with a wealth of therapeutic opportunities to relieve stress, relax, bond with others, express themselves, overcome challenges and model positive behaviours.

As well as being valuable in and of itself, and a powerful tool for girls' well-being, it is also worth recognising that play within the Club environment provided a rich context for learning – bringing together two of the key LLP mindsets. During the play, girls got to try new things, solve problems, invent, create, test ideas, explore and discover.

Happily, despite some initial hesitance, by the time it was Week 11 and the girls were reflecting on their experience, many of them identified the play and creativity sessions as some of their real favourites.

There was particularly positive feedback for the dancing, singing and martial arts sessions - these were perceived as fun ways to be active and made the girls feel happy. Girls also enjoyed the drawing and painting sessions and they were very excited to receive their books and pen set at graduation, so they could continue to draw and write poems at home.

By week 12, there had been a huge shift, with 95% of girls agreeing that “Play is very important for a happy life”.

*‘I loved the dancing session – it made me feel so happy. Normally I can’t dance – sometimes I hear a good song and I want to dance. People would think I was crazy and being naughty, if I was just dancing alone and I’m not allowed to meet my friends after school. But to just be with other girls and listening to music and dancing was really fun! We were laughing the whole time.’ – Hawanatu, 14*

*“With the drawing, at first I didn’t know about it, I had never done it, so it was really difficult. Thinking how can I get this picture in my head onto the paper. But now I can do it myself and I love the feeling of creating something. I liked to show my mum my drawing, she was happy.” – Kadiatu, 13*

## Recommendations



As clearly demonstrated throughout this report, the LLP Girls' Club pilot has been a huge success. It has firmly demonstrated the value of this type of intervention for putting UEF's work into action and advancing human flourishing. The Paul Hodges Trust and We Yone Child Foundation are hugely excited about the prospect of continuing this powerful partnership with UEF, and scaling up to reach more girls.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: Scale Up the LLP Girls' Club – in Sierra Leone and Beyond!**

This powerful intervention has the potential to transform thousands of lives and take UEF's ambitious work to the next level. During the beneficiary selection process, it was clear that many more girls wanted to join the club than we had spaces for in the

30-girl pilot. Now that the impact of the Club for advancing UEF's mission has been demonstrated, **we strongly recommend that in 2022 the LLP girls' club in Sierra Leone is continued and scaled up.** The girls, who were engaged during the pilot stage are now passionate LLP advocates, who could act as mentors for future Clubs. As the partnerships and infrastructure are already in place in Sierra Leone, the Club could be scaled up there quickly and easily, maximising impact and value for money.

Alternatively, using the learning, knowledge, tools and resources from the Sierra Leone pilot, the LLP Girls' Club could also be replicated in other marginalised communities across Africa and beyond. Scaling up the LLP Girls' Club in this way would create a global network of empowered LLP champions and help to foster a new era of human flourishing.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: Run the scaled-up Club for at least 6 months to maximise impact**

To test the idea, the pilot was delivered over a very short time period. When scaling up the LLP Girls' Club programme, it would be advisable to run each club for at least 6 months. Research from the Overseas Development Institute and UNICEF has demonstrated that Clubs with longer interventions periods have a greater impact, especially in relation to changing attitudes and behaviours. While embracing the LLP mindset can clearly lead to transformational benefits, this is not something that can happen overnight, as in some cases truly prioritising LLP requires 'unlearning' many false societal narratives. As such, a 6-month programme would enable deeper learning and also give the opportunity to cover a wider range of topics and activities.

Feedback from the girls suggested they would have liked to have additional sessions included, particularly on tackling early marriage, managing stress and money matters e.g. budgeting, saving, jobs and employability. Based on our experience and understanding of the challenges being faced by the girls we are working with, we feel it would also be valuable to include sessions on health and hygiene, resolving disagreements, ending female genital mutilation and tackling violence against women and girls. A longer Club would also provide the opportunity for a wider range of play and physical activities, and give girls greater experience learning and practicing how to play.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Include community awareness and education activities**

The Overseas Development Institute Strategic review suggests that to be most effective, Girls' Clubs need to work with multiple stakeholders to drive changes in perceptions of what girls can and can't achieve. This work needs to involve parents, brothers, other male family members and the wider community.

When scaling up this partnership, UEF should consider engaging with parents to sensitise them about LLP, girls' rights, the long-term benefits of educating their daughters and the dangers of early marriage. Exposing parents to the LLP ideas their daughters are learning in clubs could encourage debate and discussion within families, potentially quickening the pace at which norms change and girls' potential can be realised.

### **Next Steps**

Building from this incredibly successful pilot partnership, The Paul Hodges Trust would be very excited to work with UEF to deliver the recommendations outlined above. In practical terms, we would be happy to work with the UEF to design and deliver the scale up of the Girls' Club in Sierra Leone or in the other countries in Africa where we work (Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania). As with the pilot project, we would be willing to offer project design, leadership, co-ordination, communication, monitoring and evaluation and reporting on a pro-bono basis, maximising the impact of the UEF investment.