

A journey of ongoing engagement: aiding discovery, inspiring exploration, building confidence

In 2025, Ruth and her daughter Jessica (age) attended Festival of the Girl for the third time. Their involvement began after hearing about the festival from a friend who ran an activity stall at an earlier festival, and through Arsenal in the Community, who invited Jessica's sister to take part in 2023.

Loyalty rooted in discovery, continuity, and community

The family's return in 2025 was largely driven by Jessica, who especially enjoys the hands-on activities and the chance to learn about women's achievements: *"I like the different stalls and going around and seeing everything girls can do, what people have done in the past ... It's a way to see how change happens."* She also highlighted the strong sense of "community" the festival creates and the balance of novelty and familiarity: *"It was nice going year after year seeing what there was, seeing all the new stands and pop-ups, but also seeing the ones that you've seen before."*

Ruth praised the festival's positivity, noting: *"It's so nice to have that space where they feel inspired to do things they wouldn't traditionally feel like they could access ... It's just a nice encouraging space."* She also valued the festival's emphasis on STEM careers, especially those usually dominated by men.

Exploring creativity, sport, and science in new and deeper ways

Jessica described the 2025 festival as "bright", "colourful" and "fun", with "intriguing" activities. Already passionate about creativity and sport – regularly reading, dancing, playing piano, playing football and building Lego – she found the festival a place to deepen these interests while trying new things, including kickboxing, rugby and a range of arts and crafts.

She used Virtual Reality to explore a digital lab and learned about the separation of blood cells in vaccinology at University College London's stall, recalling: *"It's fun seeing what scientists and doctors do – trying to find a cure for something. I really enjoyed that."* She also visited a stall focused on "girls and what they had achieved," where she learned about Greta Thunberg and her influence on climate activism.

Finding inspiration through crafts, sport, and female role models

Given her interests, Jessica's standout activities were the arts and crafts stalls. She especially enjoyed K Sprinkles stall, where she decorated "personalised pouches and bags," one of which she now uses to "put lots of arts and crafts and stuff in." Aside from K Sprinkles and the London Football School, all the activities she tried were new. She found kickboxing "really fun," and the experience shifted her

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perception of the sport: *“Before I thought maybe kickboxing was quite violent, but I quite liked it personally.”*

The festival also reinforced the importance of strong female role models. As Jessica reflected: *“It was so amazing seeing what people were doing and how they did it ... It makes me feel like women can do anything.”* Ruth echoed this sentiment, describing the impact of meeting women leading in their fields: *“The lady who ran the London Football School stand used to be a Lioness, she's played for Arsenal. She was really encouraging and positive. The more people you meet like that, it's that compound effect.”*

Lasting impact and digging deeper

Jessica shared that Festival of the Girl has deepened her interest in arts and crafts and Lego, and she credits it with introducing her to football: *“It really made me think I actually do like football, and I started attending afterschool clubs, and I'm now part of the team.”* Recently made vicecaptain, she felt the festival had helped her build the independence and confidence needed to take on this role.

Learning about Greta Thunberg also made a strong impression. Jessica drew on what she learned at the festival when *“speaking about activists in the classroom at school,”* and continued reading about Greta in the weeks that followed: *“Learning about how she grew up and how she was so curious about climate change, what she wanted to do, and the impact she wanted to have on the world.”*

Ruth also recalled that the previous year, Jessica had been inspired by a stall featuring books on Black history, which encouraged her to start *“looking at different books and learning more.”* She learned about Black pioneers, contributions across professions, and Black involvement in both World Wars, and in 2025 attended the Black British Book Festival at the Barbican Centre. Together, these experiences helped Jessica and her mum talk more about her *“identity”* and *“how she sees herself.”*

Self-belief and a world of possibility

Overall, Jessica felt empowered by her Festival of the Girl experiences: *“They make me feel more special knowing I can do even more, that I can do anything.”* They also broadened her horizons: *“Maybe before, I might have thought I wouldn't want a job like a scientist or a rugby player or a football player. But now that I've seen it, I might want to.”* Ruth's reflections on Jessica's growing confidence reinforced this: *“She is recognising the things about her that are unique, that she is able to put her mind to anything ... It's that reinforcement that there's no limit to what they can do.”*

Jessica and Ruth's experiences of Festival of the Girl show how its mix of hands-on activities, inspiring female role models, and a nurturing atmosphere creates space

Festival of the Girl: Evaluation of Festival of the Girl 2025

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for girls to try, reflect, and grow. For Jessica, her ongoing engagement with the festival has opened up new interests, boosted her creativity and confidence, supported her exploration of identity, and widened her sense of what her future could hold.