Statement on behalf of the Claimants
Name: Stephanie Barney
First witness statement
Exhibits: N/A
Date: 16 October 2026

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
ADMINISTRATIVE COURT

In the matter of an application for Judicial Review

B E T W E E N:

THE KING
On the application of

(1) SUPPORT AFTER RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE LEEDS (SARSVL)

(2) DCD

(3) GFG

Claimants

-and-

COMMISSION FOR EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Defendant

-and-

MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Interested Party

WITNESS STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE BARNEY

I, Stephanie Barney, CEO and co-founder of Girls On The Go Ltd ("GOTG"), of [redacted] will say as follows:

Introduction

1. I set up GOTG three years ago in Autumn 2023. We organise women-only events to help women of all ages to make new friends, feel less lonely, and try new activities.

2. I make this statement in support of the Claimants' application for judicial review of the lawfulness of the updated Code of Practice for Services, Public Functions and Associations, as handed down on 5 August 2026 ("the Code of Practice").

3. This statement was produced following email correspondence and telephone calls with solicitors at Leigh Day. In so far as the facts in this statement are within my knowledge, they are true. In so far as the facts in this statement are not within my direct knowledge, they are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

4. The purpose of this statement is to explain the effect that the decision has had and will continue to have on the work of GOTG.

Background

5. I helped co-found GOTG as a women's running club in Liverpool. I helped start the initiative because I had had experience with loneliness and wanted to create a social space for women to meet each other.

6. We started hosting events in Birmingham in Spring 2024, and then expanded to Manchester in Summer 2024. We now operate across five UK cities: Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Leeds. In the next 5 years we plan to be in all major cities in the UK and we have also acquired the European trademark for GOTG so we intend to expand internationally as well. GOTG has won awards for its work: we received two awards at the Merseyside Independent Business Awards for the impact of our work on women's lives in the region, and in June 2025 I was named as Merseyside Young Women of the Year for my work with Girls on the Go.

7. Although we started off as a running club, we now put on a range of events for women such as:

   a. colouring nights (group events where every attendee gets given a few colouring sheets; it is an incredibly relaxing and therapeutic activity)
   b. singalong cinema (where we have between 100-300 attendees watching films such as Mamma Mia and singing along to the songs together)

c. yoga and pilates workshops
d. book clubs
e. pottery painting
f. speed-friending (an evening where everyone has one-to-one conversations with others for 5 minutes, and each then chooses who they would like to be matched with)

We also participate in fundraising events for charity. We have so far raised over £75,000 for local women's and children's charities including Rape and Sexual Assault (RASA) Merseyside, Refugee Women Connect, BBC Children in Need and Endometriosis UK. We do this by organising fundraising activities including participating in women's 10k runs, organising walks and other social events.

8. GOTG's mission is to make the UK a less lonely place for women. We provide women with a safe and accessible space to make friends, stay active and try new activities.

9. Our events take place regularly. For example, in Bristol, we are hosting two events per week for the month of October 2026. In Liverpool, we are hosting 3-4 events every week in October 2026.

10. GOTG has a wide reach. Since GOTG started, we have sold over 40,000 tickets and organised roughly 1,200 events. Our Instagram accounts have thousands of followers. Our most high-profile Instagram account is our Liverpool account. At the time of giving this statement it has approximately 154,000 followers. Across all of our social media accounts, we have over 400,000 followers.

11. Many of our events are "solo events". For these, we ask people to come alone rather than in a group. We know that it can be incredibly intimidating to come to an event by yourself and not knowing if others have come with friends so with our solo events everyone is in the same situation and can feel more comfortable. This makes making friends much easier for the attendees and makes them feel safer at our events.

12. We sometimes host events for a specific age group for example speed friending for over 25s. We know it can be hard to make friends with women of different ages as you may

be in a different stage of life so by grouping attendees by age they feel more comfortable and at ease with other people in the same situation.

13. A lot of people who benefit from our events are women that have newly moved to one of the cities we operate in. Making friends in a city where you have no friends or family and don't know anyone is incredibly daunting and intimidating, and can often end up feeling very isolating. So, we try to take that barrier away and become a lifeline for people who are craving community and connection. We want people to feel that they have a space to turn to if they're feeling lonely and want to make new friends.

14. Since GOTG was set up, we have been committed to operating as a women-only organisation. There are many other organisations which organise similar events which are open to people of all genders. However, we identified from the outset that there was a particular need for women-only events. There are particular issues facing women that can make it harder for them to participate in mixed-gender social events, or that can make those spaces intimidating and less welcoming. Women attend our events because they often feel intimidated, frightened, or diminished in male-dominated spaces. Many will have had experiences of sexual harassment or have been on the receiving end of unwanted attention from men, and these can put women off seeking out new experiences. One of the most meaningful pieces of feedback we have ever received, particularly at our larger events where alcohol is involved, is that women feel safe leaving their drinks uncovered for the first time in their lives because they are not afraid of being spiked. The popularity of our events amongst women is testament to the need for an organisation like ours.

Trans-inclusive approach

15. Since GOTG was established, trans women have always been welcome at our events and make up part of the GOTG community. Our policy is that anyone who identifies as a woman can come to our events. This has never caused any issues within our community and we have had no complaints about this policy or about the behaviour of any of our trans women members (except for that set out in paragraph 18 below). In fact, we have often been praised by our community for being so inclusive and have received positive feedback about our policy from our members who are not trans.

16. We are proud of this policy and it is important to us that we continue to provide a service that serves all women including trans women. On our website, in response to the FAQ question "Are you open to trans women?" we have written:

> *Yes absolutely. Girls On the Go has always, and will always, be open to anyone who identifies as a woman & of course that includes trans women. We are proudly trans friendly and make sure our events are safe spaces for trans women.*

17. We have not made any changes to our policy since the Interim Guidance released by the Equality and Human Rights Commission ("EHRC") on 25 April 2025.

18. In September 2026, we received an email from someone who said they were going to take us to court for providing trans-inclusive services. As far as we are aware, that person had never attended our events and this is the first communication we have received of this type. Since the Code of Practice was issued, we do have fears of receiving more correspondence of this kind trying to pressure us to change our policies.

19. It is important to us that all women have the opportunity to benefit from the community and activities that GOTG provides. The issues that we were set up to address (female loneliness, sexual harassment and all the other problems that can make women uncomfortable in spaces dominated by men) can apply even more so to trans women. We have received messages before from trans women that attend our events saying how much of a lifeline it has been for them to be able to attend events like ours.

20. I do not consider that there would be any justification for us to exclude trans women from our events. We have not faced any practical issues to date from including trans women and it is difficult to see what those could be. By contrast, if we were to exclude trans women, this would have a devastating impact on our trans women members who enjoy attending our events and gain a lot from them. It would also be a loss for other GOTG members, who would lose out on the friendship and community that our trans members offer.

21. If we were compelled to restrict our services to cisgender women only, enforcement would be practically impossible without causing serious harm to attendees. There is no way to verify whether a person is a "biological" woman without subjecting them to checks that would be demeaning, degrading, and constitute a form of sexual harassment. The suggestion that this could be implemented in practice is, in our view, inappropriate. I do not understand the point of having a policy that we could never realistically enforce.

22. However, even having such a policy would make our events less inclusive and less positive. In particular, I am concerned about whether having such a policy would lead to people questioning whether other attendees are trans or not, bearing in mind that we have no way of enforcing or verifying this, because it would encourage people to believe that trans women were not supposed to be present and that this should be enforced. I think this would particularly affect women who do not present in a stereotypically feminine way. This would obviously be an upsetting and distressing experience in what is meant to be a welcoming space. It would also place our organisers in a very difficult position if such concerns were raised: we would never want to ask anyone intrusive questions, but at the same time, if the Code of Practice is correct, we may be required to take action if someone raises a complaint about whether another member is trans or makes an issue. Having such a policy would undermine the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere which makes our events work.

23. I also believe the reputational and commercial consequences would be severe for our organisation if we excluded trans women from our events. Our members strongly support our current policy, and many would feel that trans women were being treated unfairly if we tried to exclude them. It would undermine the safe and inclusive environment that first attracted many members to take part. Many of our members are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, or are people who know trans people personally and care deeply about trans rights: I expect many of them would leave our community if we adopted a trans-exclusionary policy, and their friends may follow. Adopting a policy that undermines the principles we have based our community on would undermine us entirely.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: 

Date: 16/10/2026