Not everybody has to be a member of Team GB to lift the fear and give weightlifting a go however Anne Usher MBE, the current paralympic gold medallist for paracanoe is a relatively recent convert to lifting weights.

Anne’s journey into lifting weights is especially interesting, for a woman who predominantly enjoyed her exercise - outdoors!

"I've always known that lifting weights is good for you. As a Physiotherapist, I teach that loads and lifting prevent many age related processes including osteoporosis (fragile bones) and sarcopenia (muscle wasting) and it’s also crucial in injury prevention for sports people."

“But I've always hated gyms - I much prefer to be outside. I reluctantly got into lifting weights myself in 2013 when I transferred from endurance cycling to sprint kayaking because I needed to become stronger- like a lot stronger- in my non existent cyclists arms. “

Whilst Anne has won gold medals, like many women, there are parts of the gym experience she dislikes, having found them “smelly, crowded and noisy”.

Our research tells us Anne is not the only woman to experience this when it comes to lifting weights at the gym but what changed?

“I had a program and I started feeling confident in lifting weights I started to really enjoy it. It turned out that the men were just encouraging and spotting for each other (making sure the lifts were safe)” And once I started lifting weights they were very happy for me to join in."

Men have played a big part in a lot of women’s positive experiences around lifting as Anne continued to explain her own personal experience.

“They all spotted for me and it turns out that the smelly end of the gym wasn't intimidating at all, it was just me and my insecurities.”

With lifting weights a part of Anne’s physical activity, she “really loves feeling strong fit and capable”.

She also loves the fact that strong is not a size and says “I wish women could value their strength over their size because it is far more empowering and much more within our control.”