Come Outside! Case study

Supporting volunteer leaders to sustain health improvements

Area
Caerphilly

The group
Penybryn

Supported by
Mid Valleys West Communities First Cluster

Start date
May 2014

Total participants
47

Number of sessions
51

Session types
Walking, Nordic Walking, Astronomy

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Penybryn group was started as a result of a healthy eating course run by Communities First in Caerphilly. Residents took part in a Foodwise course and decided that they wanted to go walking to get fitter and help them lose weight. Communities First put them in touch with the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator.

The group started taking part in taster sessions in summer 2014 and there have been a total of 47 participants who have taken part in at least one session. It is a mixed group, however slightly over half the members are female, aged from late 30s to 60s. A number of families have also taken part with parents bringing other adults and younger age children to the sessions. There is a mix of economic status, with 48% of the group employed, 17% unemployed, 13% retired and 9% long term sick or disabled.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

The group started going out for walks in summer 2014 and to date have taken part in 51 sessions. On average 6 people attended each session, some have been very well attended with more than 20 people attending, with others less well attended due to poor weather in the winter months. 15 members have taken part in at least 5 sessions and there is a core group of 8 people who have attended more than 10 sessions.

The group attended a Dark Skies event, where another participant talked to the group about Nordic Walking. This interested the group as they thought the walking poles would help some members with back, hip and mobility problems caused by their weight. They started doing Nordic walking and find they are more stable with the poles.

What the participants said

8 participants completed our survey, of these all 8 are more physically active as a result, with 4 of these moving from a sedentary lifestyle to taking part in regular physical activity, and 2 of these now meeting the recommended 5 x 30 minute sessions a week. 6 participants are more confident about taking part in outdoor activities outside the organised sessions and 6 are happier as a result of taking part in Come Outside!

"Walking has really helped keep the weight off"

"We feel fitter and it's helped us to do more"

"I thoroughly enjoyed it, wouldn't have missed it for the world"

"Well - I have got muscles I didn't know existed after my first experience of Nordic Walking earlier. Looking forward to Monday already. Thanks Donna [volunteer leader} for introducing me to my new keep fit regime and for your patience with me. Thoroughly enjoyed it. 'It's also good to meet people – before I was just at home or work all the time and it's been good to meet people and socialise. Walking is relaxing, stress free, you enjoy the fresh air. It gets people out of the house socialising which makes you feel better' "

"Initially I was 'volunteered' and just decided to 'go with the flow' but it's been really rewarding to see people getting more active – I feel a real sense of achievement and I really like helping people. It helps keep you going knowing you've helped people"

One regular member of the group was asked if they would be interested in taking more of a lead role on a voluntary basis; helping to coordinate and lead some of the sessions. They have taken part in walk leader training and Nordic Walking training to help them in this role.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

Group members report that they are losing weight as a result of taking part in the walks. Some people really struggled at first, finding even the short walks difficult. But those who have attended regularly are improving, with one member managing a 5 mile walk in December 2014 which was a great achievement.

There has also been a social benefit to taking part in the group; the group find walking outdoors a relaxing, stress-free and enjoyable form of exercise.

The training has also been beneficial for the volunteer leader, who has enjoyed the training she's been provided as a result of Come Outside!, as well as that provided by Communities First. The volunteering has also been personally rewarding.

SUSTAINABILITY

Communities First helps to promote the group and keeps them in touch with other opportunities, so they are now less reliant on the support of Come Outside!

The training for the volunteer means that the group can continue to meet and go for local walks once the programme ends and they are confident this will happen. The group has also been encouraged to be self-sufficient financially; all members pay a small amount into a 'kitty' that is then used to pay for any costs.

March 2016

"We are confident we will keep going once Come Outside! finishes"

Come Outside! Case study

Raising awareness and confidence to take part in outdoor activities, increasing levels of physical activity and building relationships between mothers and daughters

The group
Mill Park Community Project

Supported by
Cardiff West Communities First Cluster

Start date
July 2015

Total participants
13

Number of sessions
7

Session types
Cycling, camping

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Mill Park Community Project is a community led initiative to regenerate a small inner city park in Ely, Cardiff. This was previously a poor quality open space that attracted anti-social behaviour but through the efforts of volunteers the project has achieved impressive outcomes.

The project received support from Cardiff Council Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme, Communities First, Cylch Meithrin Trelai Nursery, Herbert Thompson Primary School and Welsh Government Tidy Towns.

Improvements made to the park include installation of a multi-use games area (used during school hours by the school and opened up to the public at all other times), removal of some fencing, providing play equipment, and installing an art hoarding via a series of community arts workshops. This work has resulted in an improved physical environment, increased accessibility and use of the open space by a variety of groups, and a reduction of anti-social behaviour.

The Mill Park Community Group is entirely made up of mothers from the local area. When the Come Outside! Coordinator consulted with them it became clear they wanted to take part in activities that would strengthen the relationships with their teenage daughters.

There were barriers to taking part in physical activity from geographical limitations due to location within an inner city ward, to socio-economic constraints as well as limitations of knowledge about opportunities in the outdoors.

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What the support organisations said

"There are positive memories that they are now talking about that will stick with them long term. They are doing things together as mothers and daughters and it's giving them that time together - many have younger children and it's giving them that time away just to spend time mother and daughter and not just dealing with the little ones"

"They've done a lot more than they thought they were capable of – they've taken on a lot in the last couple of days especially. One said: 'I want to keep this exercise up – I've been feeling really good the last couple of days'"

"All of her [beneficiary's] younger children have bikes, and she's now talking about getting a bike herself"

"At the start … I was hoping they would have more confidence in being able to access the outdoors as a resource for their families individually and the group as a whole, and I feel like they've achieved that. The cycling particularly has motivated them"

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

The group received support from Kate McCabe, Come Outside! Regional Coordinator, to take part in several outdoor activities over the summer of 2015.

The group began by learning to set up and pack away tents in preparation for an overnight camping trip. During their camping trip they took part in cycling sessions, including routes on roads, and kayaked at the Cardiff International White Water Centre. For many of the group, it was their first time doing a number of these activities.

The sessions were well attended and enjoyed by the group.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

Whilst a number of the group were already taking part in some form of physical activity, it was largely walking locally with children and dogs and there was relatively little strenuous exercise being done.

All of the mothers and daughters now report that Come Outside! has had an impact on them, specifically increasing their knowledge of and confidence to engage with new types of outdoor activities. Outdoor activities now feel more accessible and achievable for the group.

The daughters particularly commented that the activities with Come Outside! had changed their attitudes towards activity. They had thought about being fit and active to stay healthy but were previously limited by ideas of how to do so. The majority of the daughters have now got access to bikes of their own and are using cycling as a means of transport around the city and to college.

The mothers have also subsequently started cycling with their younger children on safe routes in Cardiff parks.

What the participants said

"I didn't even know I could ride a bike"

"That centre today – it's really close to where we live. I never knew it was there – they do so many things. [child's name] would love that"

"I've never been that distance before – walking or riding"

"Now that I've done some exercise I feel like I want to do more. I must have lost a stone!"

"I'm proud of myself and I've got a lot more confidence"

"I'm glad to be out and about doing stuff, especially with all my close friends and my kids – we wouldn't normally have the chance to do this. It's been a nice break for me to not be a full time mother"

"Kate boosts your confidence in the community – knowing she's there to help. No other groups provide that kind of support"

The group had previously only got together via the Mill Park Community Project but Come Outside! has enabled them to access activities locally enabling them to keep fit and socialise. Being active in a group has been cited by individuals as improving the bonding between parent and child, generations and peer groups. There was a clear sense of pride and achievement amongst the group.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

Although the group had self-organised before with impressive outcomes, their awareness of and confidence to arrange outdoor activities has increased as a result of Come Outside! support.

The group now have access to camping equipment wholly due to Come Outside! and they are working together to purchase further items towards future camping trips.

Previously, the group would not have known about community resources such as Pedal Power, a charity that makes cycling accessible to all. Accessing bikes would have previously been a barrier to the uptake of this activity for the group. By using this service they have increased their knowledge of what is available and their confidence to use this resource.

Ely Communities First are now working with the group to develop cycling further by setting up a bike hire scheme for the local area.

November 2015

Come Outside! Case study

Geocaching as an engagement and learning tool to mobilise community groups

Area
Merthyr Tydfil

The group
3Gs Men's Project

Supported by
Merthyr Tydfil Communities First North Cluster

Start date
March 2015

Total participants
34

Number of sessions
74

Session types
Geocaching, walks, gardening, bushcraft, litter picks

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Learning Team at Merthyr Tydfil Communities First (CF) identified the need to work with unemployed men who weren't engaging in other activities. They started to advertise activities, but were finding it hard to engage people in the project – people came to do sporadic one-off activities but weren't really a group. They didn't have a purpose and it was difficult to find out what unemployed men in the area wanted to do and what would motivate them to engage.

A meeting with the Come Outside! Coordinator in early 2015 led to a series of taster sessions in geocaching, historical walks and bushcraft/survival days. Since these taster sessions started in March 2015 the group has started to meet weekly and 12 men regularly attend, with most coming every week.

The group consists of men of working age; from late teens to late 50's. Some are out of work, some are ex-offenders, and some have learning difficulties.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Since March 2015 the group has run 74 sessions, often carrying out a number of sessions a week. The Come Outside! taster sessions have led to greater involvement in outdoor activities by the group. 13 members of the group have taken part in at least 5 sessions, and a small core of 8 members have taken part in over 20 sessions.

As a result of Come Outside! they have now taken over the community garden at Cyfarthfa Park and are giving bushcraft lessons to schoolchildren and growing fruit and vegetables. The group have also offered their services on a voluntary basis to organisations such as Keep Wales Tidy, Gwyl Taf and Mountain & River Activities on activities such as litter picking, river restoration and supporting a led gorge walk activity in the Afon Mellte.

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What the support organisations said

"I wasn't really aware of geocaching before Come Outside! - it's a fantastic tool and a great platform to engage a lot of people"

"Their confidence has gone through the roof – they are engaging with activities and its getting them out the house"

"I've learnt as much as the men in the group"

"The support from Come Outside has been invaluable – I wouldn't want it to finish"

"It's given us new ideas of things we can do with other projects. We now consider outdoor activities more as an option"

"We have also learnt a lot about how to engage men in meaningful activities – as a result of Come Outside! they are meeting up, going fishing etc. This wouldn't have happened without Come Outside!"

Geocaching has been a particular success – the group has set up their own geocaching trail in the park which is now on the national geocaching website. They have had lots of positive feedback from people who have travelled to the park to use it.

The Communities First support worker has also been talking to the Youth Offending Team (YOT) about how they could use geocaching as a tool – they plan to link the 3Gs group to the young people being supported by the YOT by using the geocaching route as a learning and engagement tool. They are developing caches that include information about hygiene, crime, impact on victims etc making them relevant to the YOT's work.

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IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The outdoor activities have helped build the confidence of the group, many of whom led solitary, isolated lives. One member rarely left his house for 18 months, but as a result of taking part in the 3Gs group now has a job.

The main difference has been how the activities (in particular, geocaching) have helped mobilise the group. As a result of regular engagement, members are now working well as a team; with some taking on leadership roles and others supporting. They've developed organisational skills and are managing themselves at the Cyfarthfa Park allotment; working as a team to build raised beds and planting schemes etc.

Their levels of engagement have been very high and confidence, general levels of physical activity and social skills have all developed as a consequence. The transferrable skills that the group members are learning are also being used to grow their own produce at home or in the community garden. They are also socialising outside of the organised sessions; going to the allotment on other days and meeting up regularly.

The group were also involved in the pilot Outdoor Activity Skills Learning Programmes, developed by Come Outside! in summer/Autumn 2015. Three members of the group have successfully passed their leader assessment and will receive 3 credits at level three from Agored Cymru.

What the participants said

10 participants completed our survey, of these all 10 feel more confident about taking part in outdoor activity sessions, 9 are more physically active, 6 have improved wellbeing and 6 have improved self-esteem and feel able to make changes to their lives.

"I love this sort of stuff. I'm in heaven"

"I enjoyed every minute"

"Interesting all the way through. It kept you interested from start to finish"

"Now I'm over the moon"

"Prior to joining the Men's Project I was constantly at home playing on the PC, rarely going out, only to go shopping. I had approx. 18 months with nothing of interest to me. I had lost my job, but I managed to get by as my father had recently died and left me money"

"On a visit to the local Fish Shop I noticed a poster asking for Men to join the group, I immediately went in and spoke to someone about getting involved, which I did the very next week. At first we did Historical walks learning about the area in which we live, then moved on to Geocaching around the local valleys and then starting the Bear Grylls Course. I took part in all activities, pushing myself to the limit"

"In time I would like to learn more skills so that I can help and support groups such as these"

"The group have thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the training, and can't wait for the next session whatever the weather. Their skills have improved dramatically and they are already looking to further their learning by enrolling on additional courses. They are also now meeting as a group with minimal support from myself, and are also meeting socially outside of the group. I believe the group will achieve great things this summer with all the skills they have learnt, I really can't wait to see them put everything into practice and lead groups". (CF Learning Officer)

The group have been given free entry into this year's Cardiff Half Marathon under the Athletics for a Better World Scheme. This was reported on Wales Online … one participant, said:

"We've all grown up in the same area so it's been great training as a team - we're all like brothers. Most of us are completely new to running so there's been a few pulled hamstrings and accidents - one of the boys fell into a lake, but we're all really enjoying it. It's given us something to focus on and is keeping a few of the boys out of trouble."

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The support worker has worked closely with the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator to consult with the group and come up with new ideas. As a result of this involvement the support worker has learnt new skills and knowledge about outdoor activities.

As a result of the training, links with outdoor providers and geocaching equipment, the group will be able to continue without the support of the Regional Coordinator. However the support worker recognises that without the continuation of Come Outside! they will lose opportunities to learn about new activities.

The Communities First team is also keen to develop more geocaching opportunities; they have recently started using it with primary schools they work with which has been a great success and will continue to use it as a learning and engagement tool.

"This project has reintegrated me into the community and into a system of socialising, which has given me the impetus to seek employment"

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Come Outside! Case study

The value of community gardening to residents of a women's refuge

Area
Rhondda Cynon Taf

The group
Women's Refuge

Supported by
Women's Aid and Federation of City Farms and Gardens

Start date
May 2015

Total participants
67

Number of sessions
17

Session types
Gardening

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Women's Aid Refuge in Rhondda Cynon Taf supports women and children suffering from domestic abuse. The group got in touch with Come Outside! following one of their one-off events held in February 2015 and were keen to set up a community garden in one of their refuges. The Come Outside! Coordinator with support from the Federation of City Farms and Gardens has helped the group create the garden from scratch and they run weekly gardening sessions with residents.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Each week the residents get involved in different gardening activities – they started by building the raised beds and planting fruit and vegetables, then maintained the garden over the summer, finally harvesting the produce.

They keep a scrapbook of what they do each week which helps to build ownership of the garden – as many residents are only at the refuge for a short period of time the turnover of participants is quite high, so ensuring that people feel that the garden is 'theirs' was a challenge. But getting the children to help with the scrapbook and make posters about the garden has helped encourage more residents to take part.

The gardening is a social activity, as well as helping the children (and, often, the mothers too) learn about different types of fruit and vegetables. The kids learn the names and can get involved in watering, weeding and picking the produce. The women are then encouraged to take the produce inside to eat. Support workers are also using the garden produce in healthy eating and cooking sessions; helping the women learn about healthy eating.

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What the support organisations said

"It get them out and gives the kids something to do"

"I love being outside and enjoy the gardening. I'd like to get a lot more involved." (support worker)

"It helps them to socialise more – they are often very quiet and reserved when they arrive and this helps – something like this they don't have to talk but they can get involved"

"The kids absolutely love it – especially when the weather is lovely"

"Women don't stay for very long, but the ones that are here for a long time will come out, do a bit of weeding and then pick something for their tea"

"I think it helps with their confidence – they can talk to each other and it's good to get your hands dirty!"

"We will carry on 100% once Come Outside finishes – we are looking to find a volunteer to take over the running of it"

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

Living at a refuge is extremely disruptive for the women and children, and when they first move in they can be quiet and not want to socialise. The garden is helping residents to socialise in an informal way. It also provides residents who are reluctant to talk to others to get involved; when we visited, one lady had just moved in – she was older than the other women and wasn't really interested in talking or socialising. But she was a keen gardener and so was enjoying helping out in the garden. It provided her with a bit of normality in what was otherwise a pretty distressing experience.

The garden is helping the residents to socialise more, be more active and have opportunities to engage and play with their children. The support workers explained to us that many women who suffer from domestic abuse often don't play with their children, and the garden was giving them this opportunity.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The support workers at the refuge feel that the garden has been a real boost to them. The gardening project is also sustainable – with the refuge committed to continuing the project once the support from Come Outside! finishes.

The Manager told us:

"The garden has changed massively – when we first started we had nothing apart from soil and hope! Over the last few months it's been lovely to see the women and children involved in the gardening. They've burnt a lot of energy filling water buckets, carrying things around and pulling up things (even things they shouldn't!). They don't get a lot of opportunity to run around – the rooms are sufficient, but it's not like being at home. Life here is quite restrictive, so if we can get a family being more active and engage with the local community then that's great. It can be quite isolating for the mums and children and it's nice for them to get out and have an activity with the children. They have an activity they can do together and a bit of normality.

What the participants said

"Look, look! I found a giant courgette!! I really like the garden." (child)

"It's a nice way of settling in"

"I feel kind of a bit important now"

"I thought I killed the damn thing. But look, it's growing! Yayy!!"

"I'm leaving the refuge this week and going into my own home. Now that I know how to grow all these things, I'm going to get some raised beds in my new house, and I'm going to grow potatoes, onions, tomatoes, and I'd really like some mint. Oh and strawberries--the kids have loved the strawberries and I don't think anybody else got to eat any. I've learned loads about gardening and can't wait to have my own"

Any type of activity where women aren't forced to open up is good – they have a task to do and while they are doing that the conversation starts and it's a lot more natural. They learn things about each other that they wouldn't know and it's a nice way of reducing the isolation that the women do feel.

It's a different type of community garden as the women are only here for a short amount of time – but the garden is a constant – it's here when people want to use it.

We often arrive and people have weeded the beds, or watered the plants – this is happening in between the sessions.

One woman did her first session last week, and we learnt about the edible flowers and herbs in the garden. Today she's been sharing this knowledge with another woman who has just moved here."

March 2016

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Come Outside! Case study

Bringing communities together to get outdoors

Rhyl, Denbighshire

The group
Roundhouse Project

Supported by
North Denbighshire Communities First Cluster

Start date
April 2014

Total participants
145

Number of sessions
39

Session types
Site visits, multi-activity days, woodland management, self-build

ABOUT THE GROUP

Come Outside! has been working closely with North Denbighshire Communities First, Rhyl Adventure Playground Association (RAPA) and North Wales Wildlife Trust to support projects that get people, both young and old, outside.

The focus of the group was to build a Roundhouse on Denbighshire Countryside Service land. Glen Y Morfa is an old tip covering 86 acres adjacent to some of the most deprived communities in Wales. The Countryside Service has been working for a number of years to get more people using the site. When they first started working on the site it was used by a lot of illegal motorbikes and people wouldn't come and use it.

The Countryside Service have already done a substantial amount of work on the site, including creating a Mountain Bike and road track. This has led to more people using the site.

However, it is a big and complex site and the Roundhouse project is the next phase of bringing more of the site back into use and getting more of the community to use it.

The project is being led by the North Wales Wildlife Trust who have received funding through the Co-op and are the project managers for the delivery. As well as building the Roundhouse they are also developing the biodiversity of the site including tree planting. This is part of the commitment Denbighshire Countryside Service have for the site, in that all developments will lead to an increase in biodiversity, rather than reducing it.

The ambition is the Roundhouse will be the first of many. It will act as a pilot for other Roundhouses in the area that will be managed by the community.

What the support organisations said

"Come Outside has been key to making this project happen. They have provided a range of activities on days like to day to help us engage the community"

"The value of getting people outside is massive. It is helping them engage with the environment in which they live. Kids have stopped playing outdoors and this helps address that"

"This project is all about community cohesion – it is getting people working with people they didn't know, different ages and breaking down pre-conceptions"

"By encouraging more positive use we can push some of the bad stuff away and provide people in West Rhyl with a clean safe place to visit"

What the participants (and their parents) said

"Rhyl's quite boring and being part of this gives you something to do"

"He'd just be running around on the streets if he wasn't here"

"We've learned a lot already like how to use the tools"

"I love being outdoors and it helps keep us out of trouble"

The Roundhouse projects aim to be intergenerational and as well as providing opportunities for young people to be outdoors, they will also provide a forum for older people and younger people to work together helping to break down barriers and remove preconceptions about each other.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Come Outside! has been an integral part of the project's development. In late 2014 they arranged for a group of young people to visit an existing Roundhouse development in North Wales organised by Felin Uchaf. This helped act as an inspiration for the project and helped get young people enthused about the opportunities of the Roundhouse project.

As well as this early visit to help inspire the group, Come Outside! arranged a series of fun days. These took place in February and April 2015. They were designed to engage the community in outdoor activities. This included geocaching, Bushcraft skills, hedge planting and crafts. The most popular activity was the Bushcraft skills, which included giving the young people an opportunity to eat chocolate biscuits and marshmallows warmed on an open fire!

Once funding for the Roundhouse project was in place, Come Outside! then supported the launch day. This saw around 80 people visit the site to take part in a wide range of activities, including the Opal scientific survey. It also provided an opportunity for people to find out about the history of the site and how the project has developed.

Come Outside! then supported the build phase of the Roundhouse. The project and site development is ongoing but Come Outside! played a key role in helping the site development happen and providing a range of outdoor activities to engage the wider community.

"We don't want anyone to wreck it – when we have built things before people have ruined it"

"If there is nothing to do we are out finding something to do and that ends up with us getting into trouble – doing this through the summer holidays will keep us busy"

"We will learn how to operate as a team and help each other"

"Doing things like this gets them off the streets and making new friends as well as using skills"

"It gets the kids involved in productive stuff"

"I love bushcraft it is my favourite thing"

"We saw the event advertised and came along – we have come to the others as it gives them activities and gets them to learn stuff as well as being outdoors"

"This kind of activity is a bit different. It is connecting people to their natural resources"

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The impact on the group has happened as part of the wider work taking place through the Communities First and RAPA teams.

As a team they have been engaging with the community and in particular some of the young people who have a local 'reputation'. This project is giving them something positive to engage with. As it ran over the summer it helped give them things to do and positive activities when they could have been getting into trouble.

For the families living in West Rhyl having this project to coalesce around has provided them with regular opportunities to get their younger children outdoors. The weather, on the days when the sessions have taken place has been poor, but the sessions are still busy with families attending to get the kids outdoors and to give them something positive to do.

The overall impact has been to provide families with more opportunities to get outdoors and to take part in activities they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to. The sessions provide a safe and structured environment helping to keep young people engaged in positive activities and 'off the street'.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

Working with the Come Outside! Regional Coordinators has been a substantial benefit to the Roundhouses project. It has provided a range of skills and expertise that otherwise would have been missing from the team.

In particular they have been able to provide the activities that have been so appealing to the local community to get involved and become engaged with the project. The bushcraft skills and woodland crafts have been appealing to the younger people who have attended the events.

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Come Outside! Case study

Improving parenting skills and wellbeing through outdoor activities

Area
Swansea

The group
Townhill and Blaenymaes Dads groups

Supported by
Swansea Family Partnership

Start date
March 2014

Total participants
76

Number of sessions
17

Session types
Cycling, fishing, geocaching, walking, visits

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Family Partnership Team at Swansea engage families who need skills, knowledge and support in parenting. Service users are referred by either social services, where they have concerns over ability to parent or via health visitors etc.

Most people are hard to reach, they have low motivation, are low in confidence and often isolated.

The team were approached by the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator. They were aware of the benefits of outdoor activities on mental health and so saw an opportunity to benefit from the programme.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

They started geocaching and it's been really successful. They initially ran geocaching events over the summer holidays in 2015; they had over 80 people at the first event. Although this reduced over the summer, 30 people attended the final event. These were followed by 17 sessions led by the Regional Coordinator and some by the Family Partnership Team staff.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The geocaching sessions have opened the group activities up to whole families, not just the dads. Getting outdoors has helped the dads improve their mental health and wellbeing; many are low in confidence, some have depression and poor mental health.

Most sessions are 1.5 to 2 miles long, so there is a clear focus on physical activity (even if the parents don't realise it!). The team have received very positive feedback and most families stay after the sessions finish, to play in the park with their kids, which is something they wouldn't have done before.

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What the support organisation said

"Geocaching is different to other outdoor activities – it's fun, structured and has a competitive element which dads love, and children love seeing their dads being competitive and enthusiastic"

"The Come Outside! approach is different to other projects focusing on health/fitness – it's an easy going approach, people don't feel pressurised, it's a fun activity that doesn't really focus on health like sport does – which puts people off. This is something they can do together and with their children"

"One dad had PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) from serving in Iraq – he was isolated, wouldn't leave the house and I really struggled to engage him and get him to come along to the sessions. He came to a geocaching session and enjoyed it and has really grown in confidence. We have now referred him on to a training course 'Down to Earth' (run by the council) which provides people with outdoor skills"

"Another man gained employment as a result – he lost his job and had a breakdown, then got involved in the group. As a result of taking part he then went on to volunteer on Down to Earth and is now working in a magistrates court as a clerk. It's really helped him to build his confidence and getting him back on track

It's helped remove barriers – the main ones being lack of confidence as they have never done geocaching before, lack of opportunities and options, and outdoor activities not being part of their day-to-day lifestyle. One group mostly came from the Townhill area, but had never been to the local places they have visited as a group; it's providing families with new experiences on their doorstep.

Come Outside! has also helped the group to develop positive habits – over half have done geocaching outside of the group and all have gone on to do something with their families outside the group (e.g. going to the park).

It has also helped build the confidence of group members which results in the support workers referring them to other training provided by Communities First; there is a clear pathway of progression once their confidence has improved.

"Most of our clients are very isolated and live sedentary lives; the sessions get them out of the house – most would be inactive, at home if the project didn't exist

"The changes we've seen in some people have been amazing."

What the participants said

"I enjoyed myself"

"It's built my confidence back up"

"I really enjoyed the day out with the family – we will do it again"

"I need to lose a few pounds and want to get fitter – this is great!"

"It's really good to have the space to myself and just enjoy being outdoors"

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The team have been provided with geocaching equipment and training and they have started using it in other teams/groups. The team have also attended a training course in outdoor activity which further demonstrated the benefits of the outdoors. This was not run by Come Outside! but they may not have considered it without being involved in the programme.

They also feel they can continue without the support of the Regional Coordinator, as they have the equipment and skills to now offer more outdoor activities to other groups. They have more options and are able to offer more opportunities to the families they work with.

November 2015

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Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Natural Resources Wales

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Come Outside! Case study

Increasing awareness of and providing training in outdoor activities to expand opportunities offered under the National Exercise Referral Scheme

Area
Swansea

The group
National Exercise Referral Scheme

Supported by
Come Outside! Regional Coordinator

ABOUT THE GROUP

The group consists of Local Authority officers charged with delivering the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) in Swansea.

The group had attended physical activity workshops as part of Public Health Wales. The Chief Executive of NRW was there and was keen that Come Outside! linked with exercise referral activities delivered by the NERS group in Swansea.

The NERS client groups range in age from 16 to 90 years olds. Their client group are generally mobile but with various medical conditions.

Most NERS clients are referred by a health professional – referrals can be for a variety of reasons, many are referred due to obesity, but also for conditions such as heart disease and other cardiac issues, strokes, and diabetes, as well as for more general physiotherapy purposes. Most NERS clients are overweight.

The NERS team are qualified to health and fitness industry standards. Training is focused on specifics such as cardio and pulmonary rehabilitation. However, no matter what the condition is, the key is to educate and enthuse people to take part and sustain activity.

The NERS group wanted to increase physical activity delivery outdoors, having tended to do delivery indoors using predominantly gym based activities. One of their biggest challenges is to get people to an initial consultation and then on to sustained activity. A key issue raised at the outset was the need to provide appropriate exist routes to clients after 16 weeks on the NERS programme.

Previously, the NERS team had received training from Fitness Wales in TIDE (Training in Different Environments) but it was never really utilised in practice as much of it was too high intensity for their client groups.

What the NERS officers said

"It was very informative and as you could see from the discussion it really got the team thinking about the benefits of outdoor P.A and the opportunities available to our groups"

"Because [outdoor activities are] free and at sociable times it is very accessible – your family can go, your dog can go, your children can go. If they've got a baby and want to go to the gym, they have to find a babysitter. If they go for a walk it's inclusive to all"

"It's a more friendly service – more laid back, less hard learning. You can be open and honest in the sessions. Kate did her best to help us … Kate gave her contact details. Often training doesn't have that after care element to it"

Their NERS National Coordinator had also requested that schemes in Wales be more diverse in what they are offering. They had previously delivered some walking activities but outdoor delivery was limited.
As a result the NERS officers wanted to increase their understanding of what physical activity sessions they can deliver outdoors. They wanted to be able to show their clients that they could get exercise by going out and having fun – doing a walk or other easily accessible activity without the need for specialist equipment or significant cost.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

The Regional Coordinator from Come Outside! delivered an initial half-day training session for the Swansea NERS team. They were delivered with an indoor format for planning and risk assessment, engaging with communities and what sorts of things they needed to conduct the activities.

They then went out and did some geocaching and a woodland walk – from that they identified that walking-based activities was something that they wanted to develop. The Regional Coordinator then delivered a subsequent geocaching workshop for the team.

IMPACT ON THE TEAM

The NERS team were clear that the Come Outside! support had improved their skills set and knowledge.
Come Outside! support has given the staff motivation as a team to think and do things differently. As a result of the support they have discovered new areas of potential activity, and they are more aware of what can be done outside without much equipment and in ways that make activities fun and easy for their beneficiaries to engage with.

As a result of the support they reported that they felt better equipped to develop a greater variety of sessions in their programme.

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"The input we've had from Kate has been spot on - there's absolutely nothing we could have hoped for to be different"

"[This makes] it fun, so that beneficiaries don't know they're exercising"

"I didn't have a clue what this was all about but now I can see how this would really interest some of my groups"

"Very few of our client group had heard about geocaching"

"This is great, I really enjoy it and would love to be doing this every day"

Whilst the NERS service users do not directly benefit from Come Outside! support, the NERS officers group are confident that they will benefit indirectly as a result of a more skilled NERS team providing a wider range of accessible, fun outdoor activities that are easy for all beneficiaries to engage with.

In contrast to other training they have received, the Come Outside! approach was considered by the NERS team to be more suitable and accessible to their client groups' abilities and interests.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The support provided by Come Outside! to date is sufficient to change the NERS team's approach and will be embedded in their working from now on. There are other outdoor activities that it would be useful to have similar support for e.g. cycling, though the Come Outside! support has encouraged the group to look at and think about a range of different options for outdoor activities. Whilst the training to date has left a legacy, there is also scope for more to provide further knowledge and breadth to their options.

A direct result of the training has been the establishment of weekly geocaching walks in Swansea Bay delivered by the NERS team.

The group is keen to develop this further and would welcome further support were the programme to continue – it is clearly evident that the programme, via a talented and respected worker, has provided real added value to the team.

November 2015

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Come Outside! Case study

Improving wellbeing for veterans suffering from PTSD

Area
Swansea

The group
Change Steps

Supported by
Change Steps Charity

Start date
March 2015

Total participants
14

Number of sessions
10

Session types
Bushcraft

ABOUT THE GROUP

Change Steps supports veterans with drug and alcohol misuse issues, often arising from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They provide a mentoring service, signpost to other support, provide positive activities and support people into employment. Change Steps Swansea were contacted by their Merthyr Tydfil branch who had engaged with Come Outside! and they contacted the Regional Coordinator for the Swansea area.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

The group initially took part in a five week programme of foraging, bushcraft, canyoning and outdoor cooking.

The sessions took place in a secluded, quiet place, with no mobile phones etc. It provided a safe space to help the group interact and reminded them of their time in the forces. It provided some respite from their problems.

The sessions involved a wide range of age groups and physical capabilities – the younger people did the canyoning and the older people helped build fires and cook food. It was inclusive and there was something for everyone to take part in.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

All the group members were previously confident, skilled and physically active during their time in the forces. However, PTSD has led to many being isolated and inactive, with many not leaving the house. Being part of the group has helped them engage first in group activities, and then in the wider world. It has helped to build their confidence back up and remind them of the skills they once had.

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What the support organisations said

"The outdoor provider developed a real connection with the group; it could have been a risk, taking them out and encouraging them to take part in activities that reminded them of their time in the forces. But instead it reminded them of how they used to be and feel, and this had a massive impact on them. They are really keen to do more – wanting more challenges and even overnight camping trips. This is a big step forward for many of our group"

A volunteer (who previously suffered from PTSD) told us:

"I got involved in Change Steps about 15 months ago. I was suffering from PTSD and, like a lot of men, struggled in therapy. I was on my own, no family or no friends and sometimes I got aggressive and violent. Since I got involved in Change Steps I've never looked back – I now volunteer here and support the other lads. Come Outside! got us involved in survival shelters, cooking, canyoning etc. PTSD drags down your self-esteem and self-worth. Come Outside is reconnecting the guys with skills they had in the forces, which reinforces their self-esteem. It's reconnected them with that, giving them their self-worth back again. You can see the change in the guys – the team spirit. Jeff [bushcraft provider] was great – being ex-military – great banter, got on with the guys. I loved it - I learnt some new skills and it was good for me to bond with the boys that I'm helping. It has helped me show them the way. Come Outside! wasn't about PTSD; it encouraged great camaraderie and bonding – being outside and learning core skills.

I think it's encouraged more people to go back to an active life – a lot of us have injuries but this has shown us we can still do it! It provided us with a challenge and an incentive to do more. We want to go out again soon – really looking forward to it. If we could afford it we'd do it every week."

What the participants said

"Jumping off the waterfall was pretty terrifying! I've got a fear of water and heights, and it was a good challenge. It was a really good experience – I need to do more outdoors. It helps us to get out and be more confident in ourselves, helping us to mingle with and meet other people. A few years ago I locked myself in the house, I had no confidence. I met these people and started helping out and it's really helped me. I'm now trying to get a job"

"I got involved about 6 months ago. We meet up every week, we do things to get us out the house and stop us moping around. It's like a family really. The bushcraft was probably the best thing I've done since leaving the forces. Jeff was a soldier and from the minute we met him there was banter flying – the connection we had was really, really good. What he was doing was jogging my memory – for example helping me remember how to find north with my watch – I'd remember that I used to know this, all these skills I'd forgotten about. He knew that – he's a clever man – able to talk to us in a way that we understood. It's bonded us all, we all started working together as a team again. Some of us hadn't worked together before, but we were given tasks to do – it highlighted that we didn't need to be taught how to do this as we knew it all really"

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The Come Outside! sessions provided a different approach for the organisation – normally they provide drop-in support and peer mentoring advice. Come Outside! has provided different opportunities for the group which were suitable for veterans. The outdoor activity provider that delivered the 5 week course was also ex-forces, so was able to interact and communicate with the group in a way they understood.

"He brought the hawks down…it may sound daft, but a lot of us have seen some pretty nasty things in our lives and touching this hawk really gave us a lift. It landed on my arm and I was looking into its eyes and I thought I want to be a bird, I want to feel and see what it does – I got totally lost in the experience.

Before I joined Change Steps I spent a lot of time shut away in the house – the Change Step programme has bring me out of that, but the bushcraft took it a step forward – I can't thank them enough for the experience. I'd really like the stay the night next time and do some survival training. We are really close friends now – and I don't think we would be as close without Come Outside – it's gelled us together and we look after each other."

March 2016

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Come Outside! Case study

Influencing social services to use outdoor activities to support people with learning disabilities

Area
Torfaen

The group
Countryside Rangers

Supported by
Torfaen Social Services

Start date
October 2014

Total participants
25

Number of sessions
19

Session types
Woodwork, geocaching, bushcraft

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Countryside Rangers team are part of Torfaen Social Services. The group are predominantly young men who have learning disabilities – they do grass cutting and other contract work in the mornings and then work inside in the afternoons.

The Countryside Rangers team includes around 20 people – 12 can attend on any day. Some go once a week, others 3 to 5 times a week.

The Team Leader heard about Come Outside! from Communities First and attended the initial Come Outside! networking workshop. He found this was useful for meeting workers from other organisations in the borough and gave him ideas which prompted him to arrange for the Regional Coordinator to meet the group.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Initially they started doing woodworking skills one day a week and Come Outside! purchased them some equipment so they could do their own woodwork. They made wooden hedgehogs and bowls etc. and learnt how to use natural materials to make things.

Although the outdoor activity provider's funding came to an end in March 2015 and this support ended, they were still able to continue with the woodworking activity as they had developed the skills and had the necessary equipment.

They were then introduced to geocaching – they've been doing quizzes using the geocaches, often in the afternoons after finishing the contract work in the morning. Quizzes have been about a variety of topics – sport, health and safety etc.

They don't do geocaching regularly as it depends on the weather and other activities etc., but they have done it about 5 times since March and will do more in the winter once the contract work finishes.

What the support organisations said

"It's added a new dimension to what we do - this is something we'd never done before and has changed the way we work – we are always looking for new ways of working"

"Client groups are made up of adults with learning difficulties – exercise is a challenge, but with geocaching they don't notice they have gone for a long walk as they are focused on finding the cache and doing the quizzes inside. They are also learning how to use new technology"

"This will help them with their contract work. A classroom environment isn't appropriate for them, so practical learning is better and this really achieves that"

"Geocaching encourages [better communication] as it needs people to direct. It's really helped to build their confidence"

"Although the Countryside Team already do a lot of physical activity it's really helped increase their knowledge of the environment and has given them more physical activity activities in the afternoons rather than sitting indoors. It has helped maintain their levels of physical activity and fitness"

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The group have learnt new skills, learnt how to use specialist machines, learnt about the natural environment and being more aware of the environment.
Geocaching has helped them to take more notice of their surroundings and they learn new things from the quizzes. For example they did a tree identification quiz recently which 15-20 people took part in.

Geocaching has also given them a sense of adventure and has encouraged them to be creative and use their imagination. They have started to suggest topics for the quizzes and some have even started to get involved in designing the quizzes.

It is also helping to improve communication skills, people who would normally take a 'back seat' are starting to take the lead.

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The Countryside Rangers team leader is also responsible for other groups within Social Services and he and other members of the team have had training in geocaching from Come Outside! They have also purchased them some geocaching kits, so they can use them with a variety of teams. This has led to Social Services setting up a system of booking out the geocaching equipment and have rolled it out to over 100 service users.

Before Come Outside! some Social Services teams did outdoor activities (like the Countryside Team) but this wasn't standard practice. But now they all have the opportunity to do geocaching. It's particularly helped groups who have higher needs, such as wheelchair users.

The activities can also be sustained without Come Outside! as they have the resources in the staff team to support the sessions and have had the training and equipment they need to continue. The Regional Coordinator provided them with lots of support when they needed it most (at the start) but has now started to take a 'back seat' and just lets them get on with it.

March 2016

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ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI LOTTERY FUNDED

Come Outside! Case study

Building the skills and confidence of young adults with autism and other learning disabilities

Area
Torfaen

The group
Wednesday Warriors

Supported by
Torfaen County Borough Council

Start date
October 2014

Total participants
21

Number of sessions
20

Session types
Geocaching, walking, pond dipping, African drumming, bushcraft, raft building, fishing

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Wednesday Warriors group was set up as a collaboration project between Torfaen Youth Service, Social Services and Day Services. It was identified that existing services did not meet the needs of some individuals with learning disabilities who were at risk of social isolation.

The group was set up in 2013, and meets every Wednesday – they called themselves the Wednesday Warriors. The aim of the group was to offer a wider range of leisure, cultural, education and community opportunities to provide members with new experiences that aren't available through existing or traditional services.

The group consists of around 20 people, mostly male but with some females, aged in their 20s and 30s. 6 members have severe autism and all members have learning disabilities and were identified as being 'hard to reach' as they were not taking part in other services. A number had dropped out of college and other mainstream activities.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

The support workers spent the first year trying out different types of activities to identify what the group enjoyed most. Two members don't speak and those with autism find it hard to think of things or come up with ideas of things they haven't done before, so they tried lots of different activities and then spoke to them about what they enjoyed most. It became clear that the group enjoyed outdoor activities, and the support workers were put in touch with the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator.

Since working with the Regional Coordinator the group have taken part in 20 outdoor activity sessions in the last 12 months; regularly running either 1 or 2 sessions every month. They have taken part in a range of different activities; bushcraft, African drumming, sailing, pond dipping, geocaching etc.

What the support organisations said

"It's lovely to see them have the confidence to work with new people. They're showing real maturity that wasn't there in the beginning"

"They are going home really tired when they finish on a Wednesday!"

"Rather than going for a walk we now can go geocaching which is much more fun"

"The Coordinator was able to broker links between us and the countryside ranger team – we'd tried previously but didn't have much luck. He's opened new doors for us"

"It's a sustainable model as we now have the contacts, knowledge and equipment we need to continue without Come Outside's help"

"The group has shown a real passion for the outdoors, nature, wildlife and conservation. They are now taking so much more interesting in nature and their surroundings. As a result of their increasing keenness in all things outdoors we have arranged more collaborative working with Project Nest box, and The Gwent Countryside team with the aim of all members of the group gaining a 'ASDAN Take up the Challenge award' and a 'John Muir Award environmental award'. By providing lots of different experiences and capturing people's reactions we hope it will assist us to developing a rich picture of what a good day activities would look like which can provide information that will inform the future commissioning of services"

On average the group participants have taken part in 8 sessions, with half the group (10 participants) taking part in 10 or more sessions. The other half of the group participants have only come to 1 or 2 sessions as a one-off. There is a core group of 10 participants who regularly engage, coming to nearly every session.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The activities the group takes part in are much more exciting as a result of Come Outside! The participants have responded really well – they particularly like the male influence that the Regional Coordinator and other providers have bought – they like 'macho' activities like bushcraft and sailing.

It has made a difference to the young people in terms of building their confidence. They now work as a group and get involved in meetings to discuss and plan the activities – they listen and take part in discussions as much as they can, and this is something they would never have done before.

Their social skills have improved and due to the relationship they have developed with the Regional Coordinator, they trust that the activities will be fun – previously if the weather was bad that would have caused real problems as they wouldn't have wanted to go out, but now they do it willingly.

The participants are also more physically active – if they just went for a walk they would get bored after an hour and stop. But geocaching gets them out and active all day.

Parents have also noticed the difference in their levels of motivation and confidence – some participants are now getting themselves out of bed and dressed ready to go on a Wednesday, something they wouldn't have done before. And another now has the confidence to get the bus to the sessions by himself and is now much more independent as a result of taking part in the group and outdoor activities.

What the participants (and their parents) said

9 participants completed our survey, of these all 9 feel more confident about taking part in outdoor activity sessions, 8 have a better understanding of how to lead a healthy life, 7 are more physically active and 7 are happier as a result of taking part in Come Outside!

"I didn't do anything in the daytime before and didn't have any friends. I really enjoy seeing them on a Wednesday and want to meet people and do other things now. I would like to go to the youth club"

"I've tried new activities and really enjoyed them. It's fun!"

"We know that our son is now enjoying his whole week, he is much happier now, he's more like his old self - we've got our boy back"

"Our son is clear about what he does and doesn't want and this has improved since he has become happier and his confidence has increased"

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

Working with the Regional Coordinator has given them new ideas of activities they could take part in, as well as links and contacts they didn't have before. They have also had a small amount of money to help pay for the more expensive activities like sailing, and for equipment like the geocaching kit and wet weather clothing.

They now have the contacts, knowledge and equipment to enable them to run the sessions themselves. Support workers have also learnt new skills as well as knowledge of what to do and places to go

March 2016

Come Outside! Case study

Alternative ways of working with wood that get a group outside, no matter what the weather

Area
Wrexham

The group
Green Woodworking Group

Supported by
Caia Park Partnership

Start date
February 2015

Total participants
34

Number of sessions
42

Session types
Green woodworking

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Green Woodworking Group was established as part of the wood workshop at Caia Park Partnership. The workshop had an existing group that met on a Wednesday morning and did carving activities, but not using green wood which is cheaper and more available.

There was a lead for the carving but he took a break after Christmas 2014 and there was a gap in the activities the group could get involved with.

Most of the group are older and require some kind of support in their lives. They enjoy being in the woodshop and working with wood and the session provides some regular structure in their lives.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Come Outside! supported the group in several ways. It was set up to be sustainable from day one. The first few weeks the group focused on making the green woodworking tools they would need. This included a lathe.

The first session also saw the Regional Coordinator showcase how quick it was to work with green wood and he started to make legs for milk stools as well as showing the group how to make spoons and spatulas.

The group now has an outdoor area dedicated to green wood working. It is covered by a Tarpaulin meaning they are able to use the tools outdoors, no matter what the weather.

The Regional Coordinator has been attending weekly to help build the skills and confidence of the group and to teach them new tools and techniques. Everyone involved in the group works at their own pace and is able to work on their own projects.

What the participants said

"The sessions are definitely different with Doug. To be honest I am not very good at carving. With this you just have to be sensible. I love the work"

"Doug is a very good teacher. I have no complaints at all"

"I've just started making a spoon. I'm making it for my grandson as he likes cooking"

"I don't like it when it is cold but I have my coat"

"It is very interesting as he is using methods that have been used for hundreds of years so it is really interesting"

"It is a different set of skills we are learning working with green wood. When your using wood for carving it has to be seasoned and at my age it means you have to buy it"

"It's been really good to develop our skills"

"We have been out in the fresh air more"

"It's the speed of it that is making the difference"

"Doug is a great guy. He is one in a million. Doesn't put any pressure on you at all"

The wood shop does produce things for sale into the wider community and given time the Green Woodworking group will contribute to this. They are already making legs that will be used on milk stools that will be sold.

The sessions will continue long after the Regional Coordinator input ends. They have the tools and equipment they need to work with green wood and the Regional Coordinator has equipped them with the skills they need. The group works together and they are happy to help each other with the different tools and tasks. If new people join the group they will be given the same support to help them make things from green wood.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The impact on the group has been quite subtle. They were already engaged in carving and moving to green wood working has provided them with a new set of skills and a new way of working.

The group are more enthusiastic about the work as green woodworking requires a different set of skills. At the early stages of making something it is easier to do and requires less precision, although the precision 'kicks in' the closer you get to the piece being completed.

Because the work is easier to start and to develop it means they can produce more within the same time frame. Everyone looks forward to the sessions and all really rate Doug as a fantastic teacher.

Come Outside! is playing a valuable role in the group's sustainability. When the original carving sessions stopped after Christmas 2014 it was unclear what the group would focus on. The group really values the regular session they have together and it would be a loss to them as individuals and as a group if the sessions came to an end. It is a relaxed, informal group but provides structure to people who have difficulties in their lives.

What the organisation said

"Little Mo loves doing it – it's therapeutic"

"Everyone looks forward to the sessions"

"Having Doug here every week is a godsend"

"You get the reward from this – you see the results with a few hours"

"I certainly didn't expect it take off the way it has"

"you get enjoyment out of it. Everything is relaxed. Look at these people. That is the winner for me"

"They are getting confidence from doing the activities"

Come Outside! have provided the group with a new set of skills. This means regardless of what happens with the carving, they have a set of skills they can use to work with wood and to make things the wood shop can potentially sell. They are also making things for themselves and their wider families.

In addition to improved skills, Come Outside! have also been able to connect the group to the Natural Resources Wales' foresters who have been able to provide free timber for their activities. Reducing the cost of what they do was a big incentive for the group to engage in the programme, and the subsequent reduction in the cost of obtaining raw materials has had a big impact on the group's sustainability.

March 2016

Come Outside! Case study

Giving families with children who have complex needs the confidence and skills to get outdoors

Area
Wrexham

The group
ADHD Support Group

Supported by
Wrexham Communities First Urban Villages Cluster

Start date
January 2015

Total participants
29

Number of sessions
23

Session types
Bushcraft, walks, woodland activities

ABOUT THE GROUP

The ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) support group meets every Wednesday morning for 90 minutes. It is a self help and support group for families with children who have difficult or more complex needs.

The group meets at the Communities First centre but is self-organising and they use the meetings as an opportunity to have a coffee and a chat about their experiences during the week. They share experiences and problems and the sessions provide a forum where they can feel less isolated and realise other people are facing similar challenges.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

Come Outside! developed a programme of activities running over a number of weeks with the group. As several of the children and young people were autistic or had other learning problems, Come Outside! devised a clear plan to make sure the young people and adults approached the activities with as much knowledge as possible.

This led to Come Outside! developing a two stage process. First the adults would do the session on their own. They would be shown all the activities they were going to be doing and were physically at the place where the session was due to take place.

The parents could then explain clearly to their children what was going to happen in the session and what to expect. For example one of the parents took a picture of the fire and the entrance so their child would know what to expect. This preparation was seen as absolutely key to making sure the young people felt settled and able to take part in the sessions.

What the participants (and their parents) said

4 participants completed our survey, of these all reported that they were more physically active and were more confident about taking part in outdoor activities.

"The pair of them work as a great team"

"In these sessions it was the first time I had been able to get my kids to eat vegetable soup"

"The kids absolutely loved it"

"We didn't know we could do this stuff. Normally we would just go for a walk we didn't even know there was this area of the park"

"When you go with your own kids it's just a walk, when you go with Doug it is something else"

"Doug was great with the kids. If we said 'kids we are going to make whistles down the woods they would have gone – on no it's that bad' but because it was Doug it was different"

"They were having fun and learning something"

"It really helps having someone external because if it is coming from Dad or Mum they are just not interested"

"It was the fun factor the most for my kids, both the eldest and the youngest. They were sharing things and weren't made to feel different"

Once in the country park the group took part in lots of activities. This include making soup, going for a walk around the woods and looking at tracks. They made whistles out of grass and acorns, played sardines, made a walking staff and wool as well as making popcorn.

The activities were all designed to provide a positive experience for the group and to provide a fun experience for the whole family.

The activity leader was particularly good at setting boundaries and rules for the group and enforcing them in a clear and calm way. The group were using knives and had a fire but it was always made sure it was safe. The young people were shown how to use the knives correctly and were told how to behave around the fire.

The group was also given freedom but within rules – so they could go anywhere apart from through the gates and they could climb trees but only up to a certain height. This gave the group some freedom that they didn't get to experience often.

IMPACT ON THE FAMILIES

For the families involved in the activities more than anything it gave them something fun to be involved in. The adults felt safe and secure letting their kids wander off in the woods.

The young people learned new skills and learned to be with other people. They were willing to listen to the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator and to work within the rules of the group.

All of the parents identified how this activity gave their kids the opportunity to just be themselves. They were not being judged by other people and were with people who were similar to them. This helped to build confidence and to make new friends 'I like them, they are like me and have fun'.

They all identified how much they enjoyed being outdoors and doing the activities and while there are challenges with getting this to happen on a regular basis, set out below, they all enjoyed the activity and would jump at the chance to do it again.

"The girls enjoyed it they got to physically get down on the ground and light the fire"

"When she met them she said 'I like them, they are like me, they have fun"

"My son doesn't go out so to be able to take him somewhere like that and he could just be himself that was great"

"Our kids find it hard. They are already trying to compete with their peers and it was great to be with people who had the same outlook on life"

"Doug has a really calming influence. He is one of the few people that I do feel comfortable leaving my kids with and not have to worry about them"

What the support organisation said

"The group has really engaged well – it has increased their physical activity levels, reduced social isolation, helped them make new friends and develop better relationships with their children. One girl wouldn't go to school – she was disruptive. Now her behaviour has improved a lot"

"It's really important to have someone with specific skills like [Regional Coordinator] to refer people to"

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The sessions provided the group with the confidence to try new things and to let their kids get involved in a wider range of activities 'it gave me the confidence to let them play with fire as well as being outdoors'.

For this group it is particularly challenging to make the sessions sustainable. The group has become reliant on the Regional Coordinator to provide the necessary support to make the sessions work. We discussed with them whether someone would be willing to take over the sessions or activities. While there was some interest it was acknowledged there would be challenges getting the kids to share their time. In other words it could end up being more of a hindrance than a help.

They also identified the Regional Coordinators were much more effective at helping set the boundaries and keep young people safe. There was a perception from the families that if they were the ones giving the instructions it would immediately create conflict and make it more difficult for them to do the activity.

Doug (the Regional Coordinator) was identified as a calm person who was able to work really well with the young people and help and show them what to do. Part of this is he didn't tell the kids off, rather he showed them and explained why what they were doing was wrong. For example one group was trying to pick some saplings for the fire – Doug explained what green wood was and why it wouldn't burn. They accepted this and there was no conflict.

This is a big issue for this group as they are in regular conflict with their kids as they try and get them to behave within other people's expectations. What they valued so much about these sessions was the opportunity for the kids to just be themselves.

There is however, significant enthusiasm within the group to do more of this type of activity and they are likely to take any opportunity they can to get out more. Given time the group may feel more comfortable to take on these activities themselves.