

A person is captured mid-air, jumping with their arms and legs spread wide. They are wearing a dark jacket with a red panel on the chest and dark trousers. The background is a vast, open landscape under a bright sky with scattered white clouds. The sun is high, creating a lens flare effect. In the distance, a group of people is visible on a ridge, looking out over the landscape.

Learning through outdoor experience

A guide for schools and youth groups

Learning through outdoor experience: a guide for schools and youth groups

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A **yarn** handbook

Learning through outdoor experience

Published by the YMCA George Williams College for the Rank Foundation.

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ISBN: 978-0-9509547-6-9

yarn

yarn exists to promote informal education. It is a network that enables people and agencies from Rank Foundation youth and community work initiatives to explore practice, develop new work, and communicate with the field. Website: www.rmoodle.org

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We need ‘elemental mystery’

The power of the outdoors

Learning through the outdoors is, for me, about *elemental mystery*. Part of the charm is that most of my direct contacts with the outdoors, whether sailing in the sun or being blasted by hail and snow, remain a wondrous puzzle. It’s not just about building expertise, though that’s part of it.

Similarly, it’s not just about broadening experience, though that’s also part of it. For me it’s about direct contact. It’s about shifts in thinking and philosophy. In my case it’s certainly close to being about survival itself. It’s about spirit, mystery, challenge and much, much more.

This might sound corny, but every year I hear direct from people who have been involved in the outdoors – on land or sea – about the life-enhancing and -changing power of the outdoors:

“I never knew I could do it”;

“It gave me my daughter back”;

“It put bereavement into perspective”.

It is a privilege to have some sort of relationship with the elements. Perhaps what gives learning through the outdoors that special power is that, in the outdoors, there will always remain a sense of striving, a sense of mystery and, perhaps most of all, a sense of challenge and adventure.

The outdoors is a powerful arena for learning. The outdoors – and our development in, and relationship with, it – is part of the spirit of our origins and history.

Being in contact with nature

There is growing discussion of ‘nature deficit disorder’, which, according to some, is damaging Britain’s children. An ‘outcomes-driven’ industry of tick boxes, ‘milestones’ and performance indicators is destroying our closeness to nature itself and, as such, *our own* nature.

Tangible contact with nature’s reality is too large a sacrifice for any part of society to make. There are real dangers involved. There are huge pitfalls if we drift apart from closeness and respect for the elements and our environment.

Providing inspiration

The Rank Foundation has long been active in promoting the value of the outdoors with young people. Since 1980 we have established active relationships and initiatives with organisations, including the Tall Ships Youth Trust, Outward Bound, Brathay Hall and the Jubilee Sailing Trust.

Our partnerships have brought young people and youth and community workers from all parts of the city and country to experience and be inspired by that challenge, that adventure.....that elemental mystery of the outdoors.

C W V Harris OBE

Director of Youth Projects

August 2012

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About the book



Our aims

Experiencing the outdoors can be a powerful stimulus for learning. Being deep in a forest, feeling alone on a hillside or just sharing a cup of tea around a fire can set us off on a path that changes the way we think about ourselves, our relationships and way we live our lives.

When we asked people about their experience of being outdoors it unlocked a rich collection of stories. Some of the stories were about how individuals were able to reflect and make changes – often over a long period of time. Some told of how they were helped by others to make sense of something and appreciate it.

There were also tales of how difficult it can be to take learning ‘back home’. What seems obvious while looking at the sun setting across a bay may not be as clear when faced with the reality of the daily routines of life.

These stories have shaped what follows. We want to explore:

- **Being outdoors as an educational experience** – and what we can do to deepen learning and support change.
- **How learning can be ‘brought back home’** – the ways in which experiencing the outdoors can become part of people’s everyday lives and relationships.
- **Developing community capacity** – how we encourage and help adults and young people in local communities to see the importance of outdoor experience and take opportunities to enjoy and learn from it.

The focus is on offering practical guidance to those working with young people in communities and schools – guidance on how to maximise the learning potential of that outdoor experience.

It is worth noting at the outset that, for schools and community organisations like youth groups, outdoor experience is often linked to *residential* experience. People are away from their day-to-day settings and relationships, and having to work and relax as a group. In the stories that people told us, this combination of being away with a group and experiencing the outdoors was powerful.

The contents

Our **Introduction** outlines our perspective on the nature of outdoor experience and the learning involved in it. From there we look at the process of facilitating outdoor experience and learning from it. We follow a simple structure:

- **Before**
- **During**
- **After**

Each stage is broken down into its key elements, with:

- an explanation of their importance;
- stories and experiences from the field
- sample activities designed to engage young people in the process; and
- things to remember and practical advice.

The book has been written by a team of people involved in outdoor learning and experience. They are also part of a network of workers and agencies linked to the Rank Foundation (**yarn**). As well as drawing on their own experience and expertise they were also helped by responses and contributions by more than 50 other people in the network (see **Notes on Contributors**). The themes we explore were generated from within the network. All the quotes in italics are from people involved in the **yarn** network.

Alan Rogers and Mark K. Smith

Picture: Westminster House Youth Club

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Learning through outdoor experience



For many of those who helped us with this publication, much of the power of this form of learning lies in bringing together three factors. Experiencing:

- The elements
- Relationships
- The physical

The evidence of people's stories tells us clearly that, if we are to bring that outdoor learning 'back home', it is essential that those facilitating the experience keep their eyes on all three elements of *the whole experience*, rather than focusing solely on the 'delivery' of an outdoor 'activity'.

Elemental

Outdoor learning brings people into a direct relationship with the 'elements' – earth, air, water and fire. It strips away many of the

means we have developed to 'protect' ourselves from their impact.

Making do with what's around - having an experience that's not catered, comfy, and plain sailing, things that are not planned but safe and help/force us to try something that's scary - night games in dark fields with no torches.

As such outdoor learning throws people back on their own resources, and allows them to connect with the world in a different way. It often entails challenging situations where the unexpected can happen and where different responses are demanded. At the same time it can be magical for those involved.

Relational

In what people told us, encountering the elements runs alongside a focus on the relationship people have with each other and the world. In order to deal with situations they have to work together. At the same time those

situations can heighten tensions and differences.

Very physical challenges, including mud assault course etc... All took part and helped any who struggled, including me! Accepting help and support from participants was a powerful experience! Realising that we all have weaknesses... The outdoors breaks down all those safety nets leaving people to be open and vulnerable to a certain extent - allowing freedom to enjoy, take part, learn and be with others.

In what follows there is a strong emphasis on encouraging people to take responsibility and play their part in planning and making activities work. There is a similar concern to encourage them to appreciate what might be going on for others as well themselves, and to work and learn together.

Physical

While there are times that 'being outdoors' involves little physical activity, much of what we are concerned with here entails expending energy.

One of our young Asian workers has found incredible strength, confidence and self-determination through operating in the outdoors, leading to her pushing the boundaries both physically and culturally. [She was] awarded the Mountain Leader's Award, and... she is able to take other young people climbing with confidence and transferring her positivity onto other young people.

It is often demanding in terms of our bodies. We have to learn new skills, carry on when we would rather stop.

Outdoor learning in my experience pushes people to the edge of their comfort zone, throwing them in the deep-end to deepen their learning.

The idea of being beyond normal 'comfort zones' is important. As well as making demands on our bodies, outdoor learning often faces us with overcoming things that we have fears about, for example, around being up high, or in the dark or in cramped spaces.

Bringing the three together

This combination of the elemental, relational and physical creates a unique environment for learning.

We sailed a 40ft yacht around the islands of Scotland. We all met as group a day a week for three weeks beforehand... and planned the route from where the yacht was moored, looked at different islands and where we could do night sail; where we could moor; where could get provisions and then the route back home. The young people benefited from this as they felt that by planning what was happening they knew what to expect. Getting young people away from their community and their comfort zone is a great way to form positive relationships learn new skills and be challenged mentally/physically.

Learning is going on all the time. Those involved may be barely, or not at all aware of it. Such learning is a 'natural process'. It happens when people become involved in, and have to make sense of, new situations and settings. In other words, they learn as part of doing or achieving something and may not be aware that it is going on [see [learning on infed.org](#)].

At other times people may set out to learn something for themselves – or are helped to see and understand something. In these situations they are often aware of thinking about their learning.

Both forms of learning are involved in outdoor learning. Sometimes one is emphasised over the other. For example, it may be that experience is at the forefront – getting to the top of a hill, riding a wave, finding a way through a bog. At other times instruction or reflection is the focus. To realize the power of combining the elemental, relational and physical, we need to allow time and space to both experiences, and to instruction and reflection.

The nature of outdoor learning

Three things stood out in the stories that people told us about their experience of being outdoors and reflecting upon it. The experience helped to:

- Change the way people saw themselves, their relationships and their future.
- Develop groups so that they are more satisfying to their members and able to get things done.
- Deepen people's appreciation of the environment and commitment to work for sustainability

Changing the way people see themselves, their relationships and their future

The experience of being outdoors in the kinds of settings we have been looking at here is often a sharp contrast with what people go through on a day-to-day basis. As we have seen, they have to make do without many of the things they take for granted. This can be life-changing.

Outdoor learning involves, as Kurt Hahn once put it, being 'impelled into experience'. That impetus can then shake up the way we feel and see things.

Developing groups so that they are more satisfying to their members and able to get things done.

A constant theme in the stories that people told us, is the impact on relationships that outdoor experience can have – and the way the experiences help people to work together and help each other.

Being with others in the same situation and having to make the best of things can create considerable tensions in groups, but it can also encourage cooperation and consideration for others. The sense of shared achievement and of spending time in each other's company allows people connect in different – and often more positive – ways.

Deepening people's appreciation of the environment and commitment to work for sustainability

An obvious outcome of elemental experiences is a better appreciation of the environment – its power and fragility.

Many of those involved in putting this guide together talked about how people came to understand nature in a different way – and began to reflect on the unnecessary damage being done to the environment by the technologies they enjoy.

Our hope

Our hope is that what follows will encourage more people to engage with 'being outdoors' – and to embrace experience and relationship, and the reflection and action involved. Above all we want to encourage people to see being 'back home' as integral to the experience.

Alan Rogers and Mark K. Smith
Picture: Essex Boys and Girls Clubs

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Before

Outdoors there is fun to be had! Alongside this, something special can also happen. People often feel restored or refreshed by being outdoors. After all, we often choose to take young people to places that we think could stimulate the senses and the imagination.

Being in a different place encourages reflection and a new perspective on:

- ourselves,
- the groups of which we are a part, and
- the world around us.

Preparation is essential to make this happen – both in terms of shaping the programme and making practical arrangements. In this first part of the guide we look at some of the key areas.

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Why

Three years after the event, she remembered every little detail of the residential – the activities she participated in, how she felt beforehand – sceptical and nervous – and her thoughts and emotions looking back.



Being in a different environment provides an opportunity for new insights and experiences. Being clear on **why** you are there will help you to make the most of this opportunity. Young people can be involved from the very start of the project.

Outdoor learning projects commonly arise out of a desire to learn something (e.g. leadership), to experience something (outdoor activities) or to address issues (e.g. team building). It is vital to remain clear on those goals and adapt the programme of activities to them, rather than the other way round.

Clarity on motivation and methods is more likely to result in young people's informed consent to participation. If a young person is told they are going away on a residential experience to have 'fun and do teambuilding',

their expectations may not include stepping off a rock face with only a harness for company!

Regardless of the formal aims of an outdoor programme, the experience is likely to have an impact on the nature and quality of relationships. Being together in a different environment for an extended period will almost certainly raise the possibility of a growth of understanding both within the group and between group members and staff. This represents, perhaps, the most important opportunity.

Experience

Outdoor learning in my experience pushes people to the edge of their comfort zone, throwing them in the deep end to deepen their learning.

A recent High Adventure experience brought together the most unlikely of groups. They all had the same aim – to reach the top of the high ropes course gaining a great overpowering sense of achievement. The only way this could be done was to work together, put their differences to one side and for everyone to be equal in the team.

Activity: Why go?

A starting task to establish the need and benefits of an outdoor experience is always useful – whether you are working with a staff team or group of young people or both.

Using a flipchart, write the words ‘Why Go?’ in the centre and ask the group to come up with as many words/reasons as possible. Discuss each of these in turn whilst keeping in mind the question ‘why and how will an outdoor experience support this aim?’

Once all the ideas have been written up and discussed use the list to identify the most common/agreed aims and make a new list of these. This should then become the starting point for your planning, preparation and discussions with the potential outdoor agency. It will also give clarity to the reasons for the experience, which should also help when trying to source funding and/or support.

Things to remember

Clarify what is driving the experience – the group, the funding or you?

Seek the views of colleagues with experience of organising outdoor activities.

Meet with the staff team and young people to establish a need.

Clarify and agree on the particular benefits of the outdoor experience.

Review the benefits against potential risks.

Identify and agree the broad aims of the experience.

Check that young people are aware of the types of activities being considered.

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders**
and **Kai Wooder**
Picture: **Prospex**

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Who

I've always felt that I couldn't do things, but here I'm a leader - I want to still be a leader when I get home.



Once you are clear on **why** the outdoor learning experience is happening, the question of **who** attends should become clearer. It is important to consider the make-up of the group, even if you decide that the experience should be open for all.

All groups will bring with them their own unique characteristics. Key issues to consider will include factors such as age, gender, culture, behaviour, disabilities and group dynamics. Some outdoor learning experiences aim to challenge a group dynamic whilst some serve to consolidate one.

Taking these factors into account will help you to ensure that the programme is relevant and needs-led – and that health and safety is at the front of your mind. This is the time to think through the worst-case scenario. With the potential make-up of the group, does the experience feel safe (emotionally and physically)? Is your professional judgement

clear and have you shared this judgement with others?

The opportunity to give young people a totally new experience is the overall intention and whilst thinking through the tough stuff must happen the aim is always to identify the barriers to participation and then to remove them.

The experience

Think carefully about group dynamics. Recently, I took a group away. Although I was aware that there were two particular girls who sometimes made things difficult for others, I 'hoped for the best' that they would be more considerate whilst we were away. Unfortunately, they weren't. This had a big impact on the enjoyment of the trip for the rest of the group. With hindsight, I would pay much more attention to how the group already interacts when deciding whether it is appropriate for young people to attend a residential. Obviously

this would need to be implemented very carefully and have alternatives in place for those who may not be suitable.

Activity: Opportunities and risks

This exercise should give the group a sense of the 'pros and cons'. From this they can make a more informed decision about whether or not they would like to attend.

With the group, work through the following two questions – you could use a flip chart:

What are the opportunities? What are the risks?

Ask the group to be honest and practical in their answers. You may want to point out, for example, that there may not be a TV, internet access etc. and would this be an opportunity or a risk for the group?

Follow up by asking the participants to work in small groups on the following:

- What do you want to gain from the experience?
- What would help to make it a success?
- What are you willing to give/do to make this happen?

Once each group has fed back their answers, you can use the final question as a basis to begin the process of setting group agreements.

Things to remember

Think through the implications of your aims for the make-up of the group. For example, will it be help to achieve your goals if the group is fairly homogeneous or is it important to have a 'mixed' group?

Discuss the needs of the group and determine the staff ratios at a staff meeting.

Check that the staff team is informed, trained and confident to deal with any potential problems you can identify at this stage.

Identify and plan for known specific needs of individual young people.

Be clear with the group on the type of activities that will happen.

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders** and **Kai Wooder**

Picture: **Westminster House Youth Club**

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What

It is important to be focused and to think through any outdoor education experience. If you are focused and have taken account of the users, the client group, colleagues or any environmental concerns it will be a relatively easy process. Try to be prepared



Designing the 'right' programme for your aims, the group and the time available will require consultation with participants, the staff team and the outdoor provider. You will need to consider whether the activity is something you are able – and legally covered – to lead yourself, whether you require professional input and/or equipment.

Adventure sports can be physically demanding and stretch people's boundaries; they can also release adrenalin and create feelings of exhilaration and achievement. More nature-focused activities, such as bush craft or environmental art may not be as physically demanding but can have an equally powerful effect.

The duration of your programme will influence the potential activities and the participants' experience. Your aims, the time and funding available and the participants' abilities are just

a few possible considerations that will influence whether you choose a half-day, full-day, overnight or an extended experience.

Your programme will require flexibility. One of the consequences of choosing an outdoor experience is the introduction of an element of chance – the weather may change the focus of your activities or the group may stay up late and feel too tired to take on the planned exercise, for example.

Experience

To promote ownership, enthusiasm and interest in the project, six young people... were tasked with deciding on a programme of challenging activities they felt would be beneficial to their specific needs. They had to choose between an outdoor activity residential, a camping trip or a sailing expedition. After a bit of research the young people felt that a sailing challenge would

be particularly valuable to their development, so we started the process.

Among many things it was decided that prior to the sailing expedition we would undertake a one-day taster. This would give the young people an insight into what the five-day expedition would be like. As well as this they would decide if they felt the full expedition was the right thing for them.

Living on a 41' sailing boat for five days had the potential to be very challenging for all. So the opportunity to try beforehand was extremely useful. This allowed the young people to identify if the sailing expedition would be right for them and reduce the potential for conflict during the five-day expedition. One of those who took part in the single day decided that the full expedition was not for him and pulled out from the programme. The rest of the participants went on to enjoy their expedition.

Activity: Planning and budgeting

It is important to engage the participants in the planning process. A powerful way of achieving this is to hand over some financial control. If you're feeling adventurous(!), you could give the control of the whole budget or just part of the budget – food, activities etc. This gets them to look at the different options there are for their experience. This activity also has the knock-on effect of helping young people to learn to budget in their everyday life

Some of the things they will need to consider are: what is the overall budget, what is allocated to what, if one thing is more expensive how that impacts on another? This will also mean that they will look at options and make decisions collectively. They will also be taking responsibility for the choices they have made. Some of the choices could be:

- **Transportation:** minibus hire, public transport, walking distances etc.
- **Accommodation:** residential centre, camping, self-built shelters, boats etc.
- **Food:** self-catering, all inclusive, ration packs etc.
- **Activities:** different activities have different pricing, full-day or half-day etc.

Things to remember

Communication with the activity provider to pick the 'right' activities for your programme aims.

Involve the participants in the planning stages.

There is no point in planning lots of water sports if the group dislikes getting wet or mountain biking if they dislike riding bikes!

Remember it may not be possible to change activity choice at late notice.

If you are running your own programme make sure you are insured and experienced to do so.

Communication with your intended group about their expectations of an activity is vital.

It is always worth talking through with a group exactly what the activity will entail, even if it seems very obvious.

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders**
and **Kai Wooder**

Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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Where

...climbing is great for building trust and support, whereas caving is great for teamwork and getting everyone involved...



The setting for your outdoor learning experience will influence its outcome. Whether it's just for a few hours or for an extended period of time it is important to make sure the setting is conducive to the aim you hope to achieve.

There are many different environments in which to hold your outdoor learning experience. You may choose neutral ground,

far away from your participants' homes or a local spot, such as a park, beach or small piece of green space in an inner city.

If you are considering an overnight or extended residential the type of venue and accommodation can enhance or detract from the experience. You will need to factor in your group's needs, your aim and the activities you want to do.

With the vast range of outdoor centre facilities on offer there is a myriad of choices to be made. From the luxurious to the basic, land- or water-based, you will always need to consider the experience you want your participants to have.

Sometimes though you just have to make do with what is at hand due to other variables, such as time and money.

Experience

We run a peer buddying initiative, providing social and recreational opportunities for young people with additional support needs and their buddies. In the summer of 2011 the young people participated in an outdoor adventure programme, which concluded with an overnight residential at a nearby location. With the project being relatively new, the main purpose of the adventure residential was to build group cohesion.

For many young people with learning disabilities continuity and familiarity are important aspect. We, therefore, asked the local outdoor adventure centre that provided our summer programme of activities to plan and deliver the residential. We chose a nearby location, as many of the young people had not experienced being away overnight without family or carers.

The overnight stay and support from familiar instructors provided the young people with three important elements to promote group cohesion: team activities, space and time. The event has had a long-term impact on the group. It contributed towards establishing the initial bonds between all of the young people, thus creating a strong basis for the on-going integration of young people with learning disabilities within our youth project.

Activity: Decisions, decisions

A way of engaging your participants on where to go could be by undertaking an exercise that looks at choices. As a group they can explore

such issues as 'time verses cost'. Different activities may cost more than others, and this may mean a half-day activity rather than a full day activity.

Another option could be 'activities versus accommodation'. Would they rather have more expensive accommodation and less activity or vice versa?

This could be done using a target with each section marked with, must have, would like, don't need. Using post-it notes get the group to put on what each individual deems a priority and discuss.

Another way to engage your participants is to get them to do the research using the internet, finding out what activities can possibly be done locally. Then create a database of local activities and providers.

Things to remember

Decide on the type of accommodation that would be suitable for your group experience?

Do you want cooking to be part of the experience or do you solely want to do activity and have food provided.

Speak to people who have used potential sites before and get their feedback.

Check the venue beforehand if possible – visit the site and talk to staff.

Check that the organization has the appropriate paper work (adventure activities license, insurance)

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders** and **Kai Wooder**

Picture: **The Hollowford Centre**

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Staff team

You need leaders capable of dealing with people rebelling and "hitting the wall".



Your organization's policies in regard to outings and residential trips will guide the mix of your staff team. They should state whether a female worker needs to go with a group if there are girls included etc. The same policies do not apply to all organizations.

A worker going on an outdoor learning experience ideally should be willing to get involved in the activity. Shared intense experiences can have lasting impact long after the activity. It may not always be possible for a worker to participate, so you will need to consider the impact this may have. If a worker is not involved in the activity are they then able to support the group in other ways?

If you are staying overnight you may need to consider accommodation lay-out. This can help you plan whose sleeping where and get the right mix.

Experience

Being an outdoor activity provider it is important for us to have the right instructors to deliver the activities our clients' request. Having a large client base ranging from nursery to the retired and from the highly motivated to the disengaging no one single instructor has all the skills. We like to communicate with our clients not just to sort out the formalities but to talk about the group and their aims and needs. This helps us choose the right instructors who we think have the right technical and soft skills to do the job. As you can imagine this does not always go to plan. Instructors have come back exhausted both physically and mentally from sessions where their perception of the group was not what they had imagined.

We have had highly challenging groups where we have been told they are mainstream young people. Not all instructors have the skills to work with this type of client and this can be a real challenge for them. We have also turned up to run a session for primary children and

*been faced with a group of nursery children.
Imagine the face of the burly outdoor instructor
faced with a group still in nappies!*

*To get the best out of an activity provider it is
important to give them as much information as
possible so you can get the experience you
desire.*

Activity: Team agenda

Have a team meeting before the residential or experience that focuses only on the residential/experience itself and with those who are going. You can use this to define roles and who is doing what.

- Highlight the skills and experience within the team to define who does what.
- Talk through any anxieties staff members may have in regards to the activities, the experience or possibly the participants going.
- What are the expectations of the team members in regards to their roles on the residential/experience?
- What happens in down time when the instructors aren't running an activity?

Things to remember

When getting involved in the action think beforehand about where and when it might be necessary to be the 'leader'.

Have an agreed team strategy about when to get involved in the activity and when to take on group leadership roles.

Be sure that your team has an appropriate gender mix to enable all participants to be supported.

Ensure an appropriate ratio of staff to participants.

Be sure to communicate with the centre or instructors about the make-up of your group, as well as your aims.

Be clear about your own role(s) and your expectations of any instructors at the various stages of the programme.

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders**
and **Kai Wooder**
Picture: **ykids**

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Managing expectations

...when 'selling' potentially challenging opportunities to young people, a relationship with trust is important.



Managing the expectations of a group prior to a trip away can be a challenging aspect of outdoor work, and something that must be given careful consideration.

A change in environment can be daunting to a young person; it is also likely to be exciting and valuable opportunity for development. Have the group visited this place, or anywhere like it, before? Will there need to be a change in their usual behaviour? Are there any facilities the group won't have access to? These are some of the questions a worker or facilitator may want to ask themselves in preparation for a trip away from their base.

Preparing a group for a visit to somewhere new treads a fine line between them knowing what to expect and offering the excitement of the unknown. There are times when maintaining the element of surprise can be an advantage

but in some cases, the unknown can create fear and anxiety, which can be counterproductive.

Being out of their comfort zone can affect a person's perception of the risk involved. In reality, the vast majority of activities run in the outdoors are extremely safe.

Experience

I took a group of young people to an outdoor centre in North Wales. Despite being advised several times before the trip that they might not be able to get mobile phone reception, some of the young people were very angry to find this was true once we arrived. They didn't stop going on about it for the first couple of days.

I couldn't understand why they hadn't taken on board what I'd said prior to us going. It wasn't

until we returned that I realised, being from a large city which they rarely left, having no signal on their phones was such a rare occurrence for them, I don't think they quite believed it was true. It just wasn't something they'd experienced before and perhaps being away made them feel more vulnerable to being cut off from the people at home.

Activity: What do we expect?

Meet with your group prior to a trip away and ask them to write a list of their expectations (this could be on post-it notes or on flip chart). Encourage them to think about: facilities, behaviour, activities, food, etc. and then facilitate a group discussion on each item.

This will help to reconcile their expectations and the reality of what may or may not be happening once you're away.

If the trip is going to be a new experience for staff too, it is worth communicating this to the young people and to talk about your own hopes and fears.

Things to remember

Ensure that the venue is seen as appropriate by the group.

Think about the differences between your usual environment and the place you are visiting. Is there anything your group need to be made aware of? Give pictures, brochures, flyers, to your group if you can.

Ensure that the venue you are visiting is made aware of any specific needs or concerns that members of your group may have.

Have you thought about an alternative if the place you have in mind is fully booked/cancel/too expensive?

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**
Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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Establishing a sense of the group

Ice breakers and team games were excellent for getting them into the mind set of working together



Encouraging the group's sense of ownership over a visit can help build trust and commitment to the project. It will also help them bond together as a group and offer a sense of security. This can be a little more challenging for a short, one off trip but there are ways you can assist your group in building confidence in each other.

The process will be influenced by the decisions already taken about 'who' comes on the trip. The age, gender, friendship groups of the young people will have a large bearing on group dynamics whilst you are away.

There are many ways of encouraging the group to bond before the event. Being together for other activities, whether this be aspects of the planning and organisation stage of the trip, such as agreeing goals, setting ground rules or devising the menus – or simply going out

together on a fun activity – will help you make the most of the trip away.

Remember, too, that the staff team need an opportunity to bond and establish themselves with the group as well, if possible, so that you can get an idea of how the group are going to work with each other.

Experience

We have done two sailing residentials and both have been very successful. The targeted groups were those in the 14-16 age bracket. All were selected from a list posted on the Notice Board of those wishing to take part.

We had 18 and only needed 12. This gave us the opportunity to look at the group and select those whom we feel would benefit most from the experience.

Those selected met several times to plan the event, from travel plans through to the planned programme. The pre-programme planning was thorough and final instructions given on the ship prior to sailing, ensuring all crew members had no illusions of grandeur!

Activity: Team crest

Ask the group to come up with a team name and design themselves a crest.

OR

Get your group together before a big trip: plan, make a group agreement, or just go bowling. Anything as long as it's done together, as a group.

OR, TO BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER:

Organise a young people vs. staff team quiz.....and don't cheat!

Things to remember

Encourage group input into as many aspects of the trip as possible.

Consider group dynamics. If there is a dominant character in the group, discuss with the staff team how their influence is diffused or used positively.

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**

Picture: **Essex Boys and Girls Clubs**

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Behaviour policy

Having participants involved at every stage is the most important piece of learning.



Residential or simply going away from home can be an opportunity for heightened emotions. Young people may be feeling a mixture of emotions, which may cause them to display more extreme behaviours.

It is good practice to develop a fair and positive discipline policy which aims to agree physical and social boundaries with all groups during the residential or experience. This beneficial agreement can be successfully achieved by creating an atmosphere of support and encouragement where all positive actions by young people are praised.

It is important that all staff working with your group be made aware of your behaviour policy and to agree with them who is going to enforce it. Participants should be given the opportunity to apologise for any negative behaviour if they are ready to. The behaviour of one young person may have caused a shift in group dynamics, for the better or worse. The group

may need the opportunity to talk about how a person's behaviour is impacting on them. Of course, during a trip away you are likely to see your young people at their best too, and this also needs to be acknowledged.

Experience

Don't lose sight of the aims and know what responsibilities to share (i.e. menus, activities etc.) and what not to (health and safety etc.) - don't control what you don't need to. Getting young people to explore the risks and getting them involved in the risk assessment helps to minimize risk and it shows the young people some of the things we have to consider.

Activity: Group agreement

A group agreement is an effective way of agreeing with young people what the expectations are in terms of their behaviour.

It may be worth making clear at the start what staff are not able to compromise on, e.g. safety, abusive language, then let the group negotiate the rest as appropriate.

Remember to get them to consider what the sanctions will be and how they will be enforced.

Things to remember

Agree on a behaviour policy with your group. It may be appropriate for parents/carers to be aware of your policy too.

Discuss with your staff team how sanctions will be enforced, if needed.

Have a team strategy to reinforce good behaviour with acknowledgment and/or praise. This can be one of the most effective tools in managing behaviour!

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**
Picture: **Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig**

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Funding

The group do all the planning and booking of activities. They have to do all the research into the activities and safety etc. It takes at least a couple of years to raise the funding [for some things]. All this is done by them



The amount of funding you have available will fundamentally influence the range and scope of activities available to your group – and the range of venues available. Involve the participants from the planning stage, it is valuable for them to be aware of much things cost. They may be willing to pay extra or fundraise for an activity or venue, if they really want it.

For residentials, you may want to offer the option of more basic accommodation in return for being able to spend more on the activities they have chosen. Ask the young people to decide what their priorities are and how much they are willing to contribute.

Funders generally want a very clear idea of the benefits of an excursion if you are applying for external funding. You may need to begin

fundraising several months before your trip to ensure you have ample time to raise the money needed.

Experience

We'd been taking members of our youth group on costly trips miles away from the city to go mountain biking for three years before we started working with a local cycle maintenance agency. They told us about the cycle paths, which ran right from the estate we work on into the city centre and beyond into the Peak District – all for free.

We've run several bike trips and picnics along the canals of South Yorkshire, which have cost us next to nothing. We now know that if we're limited in terms of funding we can facilitate cheap and safe trips into the countryside for the

young people we work with, and they are now aware of a whole network of cycle paths they can use to get to local attractions.

Activity: Keeping to budget

Ask some of your young people to research all the free attractions within 50 miles of your youth centre so you always have a cheaper alternative when funding is tight.

AND/OR

Fund-raiser. Ask your group to plan and organize a fundraiser, give them an achievable goal.

Things to remember

Plan your budget well in advance.

Seek quotes from several centres, weigh up what you are getting for your money, cheaper doesn't always mean better.

Think local and be creative, there are many free attractions all over the country.

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**

Picture: **Ellesmere Youth Project**

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Practical preparation

Rule 1, 'plan'; Rule 2, 'plan'; Rule 3....you've guessed it!



There is much to do, in terms of practical preparations, when you are taking a group of young people away for any length of time. They are

- **Financial matters:** Is your activity paid for? Do you need to raise funds? How much cash will your staff and young people need whilst you are away?
- **Safety matters:** Insurance; Risk Assessments; Consent; First Aid
- **Accommodation and travel matters:** Working out what you need, costing, booking and informing others.
- **Programme matters:** Weather plans; Food; Clothing; Equipment
- **Staff matters:** Who is to do what.

There are essential tasks under these five headings....and missing out on one of these key factors can create problems for everyone during – and after – the event.

Experience

Be prepared...for anything! no matter how well you prepare, people and things don't always do what you planned or hoped for.

Things get left behind, lost, best friends fall out, minibuses break down, equipment malfunctions, paths get washed away and trees fall down over your planned route, people will look like they are hanging onto your every word as you discuss arrangements for the next day but as you repeat yourself for the umpteenth time in the morning you realise perhaps not!

It's best to take spare 'everything's', a sense of humour and plenty of patience

Activity: Checklists

While workers and leaders may be familiar with keeping checklists, many young people are not – especially for something that is relatively complicated like going away on a residential. In the next section we list some of the things that are important to attend to – but as an opening activity try taking part of the programme and inviting the group to identify the jobs that need doing for it to happen.

Ask them to sequence the jobs in time and to work out who can or should do them.

You can repeat this for different areas and build a big checklist.

Things to remember

Keep checklists on all of the following! Keep them up-to-date. Encourage people to take responsibility for different things.

Financial matters: Is your activity paid for? Do you need to raise funds? How much cash will your staff and young people need whilst you are away?

Insurance – Is your organisation insured for the activities you have planned? Does the venue have the necessary insurance cover?

Risk Assessments – These need to be completed for all activities, your travel to and from the chosen centre and for the buildings you will be using.

Consent – Do you have the parental consent to be taking your group out? Does this include taking photos/video? Have you asked about any specific needs a young person may have? Are you authorised to agree to medical assistance in the event of an emergency?

First Aid – Is a member of your staff first aid qualified? Have you got a fully stocked first aid kit and accident book? Do you know where the nearest hospitals are in relation to your activity/accommodation?

Accommodation – Is your chosen accommodation young people friendly? Is it

easily accessible to any activities you have planned? Is it appropriate for the gender mix of your group and staff? Will you be able to supervise your group easily whilst you are there? Are there any other groups sharing your accommodation? Who are they?

Travel – What is the most appropriate way of getting your group to the destination? This will most probably be largely dependent on cost and time. Have you booked your travel in advance?

Programme: Checking activities – are the timings right? Is the correct equipment booked? Have the instructors been booked and briefed? *Building in reflection* – what sort of spaces have you made for talking and thinking about the experience?

Weather – Is your trip/activity weather dependent? Do you have an alternative plan if the weather is too hot/cold/wet?

Food – When and where will you get food and drink away from your centre? Does your group have any dietary requirements?

Clothing – Do the young people know what clothes to bring and how much? Does the activity you have planned require specific clothing to be worn? Do you need to take spares or weatherproof clothing?

Equipment – What equipment, if any, do you need to take? What equipment are you expecting your instructor to bring?

Staff roles – Have you organised a staff meeting to discuss the needs of the group and to determine the staff ratio? Who will do what and when? Who is the leader worker or person with ultimate responsibility?

This section was prepared by [Danielle Sharp](#)
Picture: [Adventure Centre for Education](#)

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Establishing the relationship with the centre

It was definitely worth investing the time meeting with staff from the centre before we began this piece of work as when it came to delivering the activities, they knew exactly what we were aiming for. They were able to give us examples of other work they had done with similar groups so we were confident that not only were they good outdoor instructors, they were experienced youth workers as well.



Meeting with staff from the residential centre or place you are visiting prior to your trip (or at the very least having a telephone conversation) is essential in clarifying the roles and expectations of the staff and group during the visit.

Make clear the needs of your group and the outcomes you hope to achieve. The vast majority of venues will have experienced staff. They will usually be willing to work to your group's needs and are happy to make adjustments for particular issues. An established relationship with the staff you will be working with will be a valuable asset to your experience.

The centre may have desired outcomes of their own, a particular behaviour policy and/or

guidelines around health and safety which may differ from those your group are accustomed to, and these need to be discussed.

Some centres and instructors specialise in working with different types of groups, such as people with disabilities, highly challenging young people etc., so it is important to get to know what support is on offer. Communication can help centres choose the right instructor for your group. Ask for certain instructors if you have used a centre before and you like the way they work.

Experience

Last year we completed a large programme of outdoor work with a small but very challenging group of young people, which took place over

several months. We worked in partnership with an outdoor activity provider who understood that to get the best out of this group we needed consistency and they assigned us two workers for the duration of the project.

I have no doubt that this contributed to the success of the programme as the young people were able to build a rapport with them. For me as the lead youth worker, this aspect of partnership working was a huge source of support as it meant I was quickly familiar with their way of working, and vice versa.

Activity: Pre-visit

If possible, a visit to the venue you are planning to use prior to any trip is useful. Try and meet the staff you are going to be working with, especially if anyone in your group has particular needs or issues.

If you are using an outdoor centre for a residential, you may want to take your young people for a half-day activity before you commit to several days away.

Look at the checklist for **practical preparation** for some ideas about what to explore with the centre.

Things to remember

Do your research. Ask around your colleagues/networks for quality places to visit.

Visit the centre you are using prior to a trip away if you can. Request to meet the staff you'll be working with. Ask what experience they have of working with a group like yours.

Be clear about your aims for the visit and communicate these.

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**
Picture: **Westminster House Youth Club**

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Recording the journey

'Start with the end in mind....and don't forget the camera!'



A trip or residential can be a magical experience for both young people and the staff involved and it is important to consider right from the beginning how you are going to 'make it count' for all parties. Chances are the time away will go very quickly, and reflection and evaluation are often aspects of an excursion that get left until the end or missed completely.

The event is an opportunity for learning for everyone involved, not just the young people. The strengths and weaknesses of a staff team will be at their most transparent when away from your usual environment. Of course, this is also about documenting your trip so that it can be referred to in the future.

Photos, journals, videos or the collection of artefacts are some of the ways a trip can be recorded and can be made accessible to everyone. Thinking about how you are going to record the journey before you set off may well

influence how your group and staff take on board the events as they are happening.

The recording can start before you go away. This will help people reflect on the 'before' and 'after' – and help identify any significant changes.

Experience

I'd taken a group of young people away for a week's residential. The group initially agreeing to complete individual journals about their trip before we went away, but it was a different story once we got there! They were tired after their activities and reluctant to write anything substantial.

After a couple of days of getting nowhere we agreed that a couple of the group would answer three pre-constructed questions each day. Once we returned I took all the answers I'd

compiled and made them into one booklet to distribute to the group, adding photos and a blank section in which they could add their own comments and memories.

Although the journals seemed like a good idea to begin with, it wasn't appropriate for this particular group, as they weren't used to writing in this way.

Activity: Who does what?

Discuss with your group what way they want their trip recording, think of the practicalities and who will take responsibility for it. They could take it in turns to take photos, use the video camera, and find keep-sakes.

Ask them to think of priority moments they want to ensure are documented so that there is less chance of these being missed.

AND

Plan with your staff team when you will de-brief following a trip out and in what format this will take place.

Things to remember

Plan how you will document your trip in advance and what will be the most appropriate method you're your group.

Plan how you will evaluate the trip and what type of feedback you are looking for, there may be particular questions in relation to your aims that you want answering.

Diary in a time for you team to de-brief after you have been away.

DON'T FORGET THE CAMERA!

This section was prepared by **Danielle Sharp**
Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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During

Outdoor learning has experience at its core. It is driven by what people go through and feel. Our job as educators is to:

- Invite people on a journey. In other words we need to animate interest and encourage people to join in.
- Help people to reflect upon what has gone on in different situations, think about their feelings and emotions, and to develop new skills and understandings.
- Work with people so that they can 'bring experiences back home' i.e. make changes in their everyday lives.

All this needs careful organising and preparation, yet at the same time people require space to experience, make choices and face the consequences. We need to foster environments where people can experience, reflect and look forward.

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Group workers and outdoor specialists

I know from my own experience that failing to communicate staff roles and responsibilities to my team makes life a lot harder than it needs to be.



One of the key challenges facing specialist instructors and group workers is how they are to work together to provide the best experience for young people. One of the dangers is for experience to be broken down into a shift pattern constantly handing over the baton from group worker to outdoor instructor and vice versa. Whilst this may be appropriate for some groups there is a real opportunity being missed to create a programme that brings together the best elements of practice from both informal education and outdoor education.

As the worker with the group you will have an idea in your head of how you think the experience will go, with a set of hopes and things that you want to achieve throughout the week. These ideas are likely to be based on the fact that you have some understanding already of the young people that are taking part, their

backgrounds and where they are at in life. The outdoor instructor will have none of this knowledge unless it is communicated to them and will simply base the activities on an assumption of what they think will work. Spending some time planning together beforehand and then working collectively as the programme or residential progresses is essential to providing the best possible experience.

The group worker also faces choices around whether to stand off and observe (letting the instructor get on with it) or to take part (journeying alongside the young people). In the youth work or school environment back home, boundaries can be more defined in terms of worker/teacher and young person. When taking part in a shared outdoor experience these barriers can be taken away and young people and workers have the opportunity to

face the activity/challenges together. The nature of the outdoors is unpredictable, both in how people will react when faced with challenges and external factors like the impact of the weather. Shared experience is a powerful thing particularly in an environment where people are challenged or out of their comfort zones, it builds trust, deepens relationship and is an opportunity that shouldn't be missed.

Experience

Joining in with the young people and showing your weaknesses (in this instance for me it was heights and abseiling!) helped build on the relationships I was forming with the young people when they recognised that in some ways we shared the same feelings / fears. Being with the young people for over 48 hours (in one go) meant there was time to chat and get to know individuals in the group better. A couple of months after this residential, one young person came to me to confide in a personal issue that she wanted advice on. The young person commented at the time that she hadn't really known me before the residential, but now felt that she trusted me and knew I would help her if I could.

Activity: Communication is the key word.

Take some time beforehand to talk the programme through with whoever makes up your team either as individuals or as a group.

Your staff team need to understand what you expect of them and likewise they need to know what they can expect of you. If your team clearly understand their roles and responsibilities then you are much better placed to adopt a flexible approach, adapting/changing the plan where appropriate to maximise the opportunities for learning to take place.

Things to remember

Make sure that you have communicated what you hope to achieve with the outdoor provider.

Work with the outdoor specialist to come up with a programme that incorporates both your skill sets.

Take the opportunity wherever possible to journey alongside the young people – from taking part in an outdoor activity to sitting down with the group at meal times.

This section was prepared by **David Hassard**
Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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Being outdoors

I remember a very special time when we sat on the lake edge in the dark. Just the stars and moon lighting up our group. Some of the leaders started singing as we watched nature. Although we weren't moving about, the outdoor experience created this very magical time for our young women.



Depending on the activity that has been organised and prepared for, there will be a range of new experiences, the activity itself, equipment and specialist clothing to wear, the elements - feeling the rain on your face, the wind, the change in temperature, the cold, the heat.

To use nature for learning brings everything back to basics: talking, conversation, interaction face-to-face.

Outdoors the walls, doors, chairs and tables and technology of the usual setting have been removed. There are new openings and opportunities to create conversation, interact with each other and develop a new relationship with the group and individuals.

As well as these learning opportunities there is also room for exposure of feelings. These can range from excitement and a keenness to enjoy every minute to apprehension, being unsure and in some cases a real fear. There needs to be a balance between encouraging individuals to step up to the edge of a comfort zone without pushing people over the edge and withdrawing altogether for being too scared or pressured.

In the outdoors it may not be the worker that is leading, encouraging, supporting; the roles can easily be reversed and the worker could be the person that needs encouragement and support.

Experience

In a kayaking session with a group of young people who had not been before excitement turned to apprehension.

On the journey there was lots of banter about falling out of kayaks, splashing each other and looking forward to swimming in the lake.

Once everyone was changed into their wetsuits, buoyancy aids and helmets one young person was sat on the stairs, ready and prepared physically but not mentally. She had become apprehensive about the actual getting on to the water and the thought of falling out; worse than that, getting tipped out. She was crying.

It took a one-to-one chat to persuade her to take part but also some of the young people started to tell her how they didn't want her to miss out. Her friends didn't want to take part without her. They would all 'watch her back', look after her, so the others would not tip her or splash her. A word to the instructor about how she was feeling also made him aware of the situation.

Everybody took part and got the most out of their own experience by doing what they felt comfortable with but also trying something new.

This was one of my first outdoor experiences and I was quite naive about how well things were going. Having a young person to suddenly feel fearful and not want to take part was unnerving and made me feel totally unprepared

at that point. Be prepared for anything, not just at the start but during and after.

Activity: Encouraging people to encourage others

Encouragement can come not only from the worker or instructor but also from the young people. There is an opportunity to draw on positives of some who have overcome a fear to encourage others to try. Think about which group members are 'natural' encouragers – and support them in their efforts. Look out for those who are not 'encouragers'. Talk with them about their feelings and ways in which they could act.

Things to remember

Spend time thinking about the experiences you are choosing – and how they may meet the aims you and the group have.

Give space to be with nature – try to avoid constant activity and allow people to 'relax into the environment' and experience and engage with it.

This section was prepared by [Amanda Davies](#)

Picture: [Essex Boys and Girls Clubs](#)

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Being 24/7

There is nowhere like the outdoors to help a young person to open up and discuss problems and issues that they would otherwise keep locked up. One great memory I have of this was canoeing along Ullswater. The young person was able to open up to me and talk through all kinds of issues. I fully believe that the relaxing atmosphere of the surrounding and the activity aided this. It was a really special time!



Being on a residential or spending time 'away from home' (and home comforts) can be an intense experience for both worker and young person. Unlike a project session, club night or anything else, a residential or overnight outdoor experience creates a new set of opportunities and at the same time brings new challenges that haven't been encountered before. Many young people can keep up a front or persona when you see them for a couple of hours a week, or even for an entire day. However, this is not so easy to do 24-7. It's worth remembering this works both ways. It's also just as difficult for the worker to keep up an image or persona they wish to portray!

Things that you think are mundane or take for granted often provide the greatest learning opportunities. Using cutlery at the dinner table or sitting down as a group to eat can be a

completely foreign concept to some and therefore provide great opportunities for learning to take place. If we recognise that all young people are different and learn in different ways then it means that our approach and programme needs to be varied in recognition of this. It is often at the most unexpected time that a young person will share something that they have previously felt unable to talk about or share and as workers we need to be ready to respond to this.

Experience

The power and impact of the outdoors shined recently with a group of young Asian women experiencing camping. Their world was transformed from straighteners to navigating themselves through the night to the communal toilet. This experience gave them the

confidence to accept themselves for who they are without the material world and pressure dictating to them how they should, look behave and feel. The outdoors was the freedom to have no makeup, have messy hair, laugh and scream at their antics whilst walking up and down hills, and finally appreciating themselves as individual young women who were deeper than just their exteriors.

Activity: At the beginning

Setting the scene at the start of the experience. At the start of a residential or overnight activity the young people you are working with may be experiencing a whole range of emotions. Whether they are anxious or excited setting the tone of the residential, establishing boundaries and trying to put young people at ease in their new surroundings is a key exercise.

One simple way you can do this is to involve the young people in setting the rules for the time they are away. In my experience by encouraging ownership in this way I find that the young people will then help to enforce the rules when someone steps out of line. The secret is to make sure you feed in one or two rules of your own as part of this process! I always make sure I get in respect the staff, respect each other and respect the building.

Using starters and energizers. Starters and energizers are also useful but at the same time are two words that literally strike fear into some people when you utter them – as does the older phrase ‘ice-breaker’! With this in mind you need to make a judgement call about the group and what sort of activity or exercise (if any) is most appropriate. As a general rule I steer clear of calling it a starter or ice breaker and pick something where everyone is involved together rather than as individuals. Below is an example of an exercise that I have found always works well.

The Magic Carpet. Group members stand on a sheet or tarpaulin, the size of which need to be appropriate for the groups size and ability. The aim is then to get everyone onto the other side

of the sheet without anyone stepping off the sheet.

If they complete this successfully a variation is to get your group to reduce the surface area available of the sheet/tarpaulin by folding it back under itself. The smaller the surface area the more creative the group has to become to make sure that everyone remains on the tarpaulin or not touching the floor. The facilitator needs to remain vigilant and make sure that they are in a good position to spot people throughout!

Things to remember:

A residential is an intense experience for both young people and staff. Try to find ‘moments’ where people can find space for themselves.

Where you are involving specialist outdoor educators give them time to set the scene with both you and the group

Expect the unexpected! (the unexpected will often provide the greatest learning opportunities/experiences)

Have a flexible approach to your programme and be prepared to adapt it/take opportunities when they arise.

If run and facilitated in the right way the residential setting and outdoor environment is a great facilitator of conversation as the constant interactions with technology and distractions of everyday life are or can be removed. Using the outdoors you naturally facilitate such opportunities it is then down to the young people as to whether they will take them.

This section was prepared by **David Hassard**
Picture: **The Hollowford Centre**

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Encouraging reflection

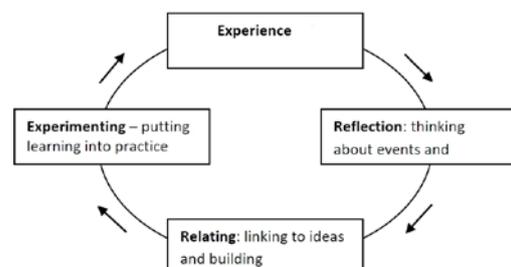
Don't be afraid to go with the flow when the moment arises. Some of our best group moments that live long in the memory are spur of the moment... a quick scramble up a hill to watch the sun setting over mountains and loch and a torchlight descent, a mad dash through fields, fences, flocks of sheep to catch the last of the setting sun on a beautiful remote beach on the Outer Hebrides.



It takes skill and judgement to get the most out of outdoor experience. The best facilitators combine the ability to work with others to develop programmes and go with the 'flow'. They need to respond to the moment and yet not just leave things to chance.

Their focus is upon helping people to engage with the things they have set out to do and to learn from the experience. Their tasks include encouraging people to attend to what has been going on; look to their feelings; build new understandings; and to act. It involves what has become known as experiential learning. Perhaps the best known presentation of this came from David Kolb [read about him on

infed.org]. A version of his model is shown below.



Alongside this facilitators have to work in a way that allows and encourages people to take responsibility to make things happen for

themselves. They encourage people to ask and answer questions like:

Why did it happen that way?

What was good and not so good?

What could we have done different?

What did we learn?

Many of us recognise that just being outdoors and undertaking adventurous activities has really positive outcomes. It also creates opportunities to do more in terms of facilitating learning and development opportunities.

Experience

A residential experience I was involved in with a group of young women survivors provided a break from their usual routines and negative coping strategies. Being supportively taken out their comfort zones gave them the opportunity to take risks, reflect on just how courageous they were, and how well they supported each other.

Activity – Chuff Charts

This is a fantastic way to start a review. Chuff charts are used to 'look back' at what happened. Typically you have a time line, which features significant events and a scale- illustrating individual moral in terms of high and low on the other axis.

Each individual then shares their chuff chart, talking through their high and lows and why they felt like that.

Another interesting way of using chuff charts is to have different coloured lines, which illustrate what teamwork was like, what was communication like etc.

See: <http://www.chuffchart.com/>

Some things to remember

Try to include regular moments of reviews where learning can begin to be identified.

Take photographs, use learning logs or diaries as these are essential tools to aid reflection.

Encourage everyone to be involved.

If you want to promote more teamwork, use situations that need people to work together, supporting and encouraging one another.

Don't give them all the answers. Give them tasks to solve and take ownership of as a group, this is a tried and tested way of working in the outdoors.

Remember you can only facilitate learning – you can't make people learn. That is something they have to own and do for themselves.

There are lots of useful resources. See, for example, Institute of Outdoor Learning – www.outdoorlearning.org; and Roger Greenaway's site - www.reviewing.co.uk

Section prepared by **Mark Williams**
Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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Group dynamics

We were with one group who were always at odds with each other, nothing major just niggly stuff. It was the second-to-last day of a week-long residential and fairly miserable for canoeing - windy, raining and grey. We paddled for most of the day, and the group discovered they had shared similar experiences. The next day, they got on with each other: sharing the workload, working together, laughing, smiling and doing what they came here to do, having fun. That's what the outdoors can do. Shared experiences are a powerful tool.



The intensity and excitement that outdoor experience often brings means that highs and lows are accentuated. Being away overnight or with longer residencials the experience can be even more powerful. People who have previously had to get on for a day or couple of hours suddenly find themselves having to co-exist, find common ground and establish a way of doing things that works for them as a group.

The elation of achievement can be a real moment of opening (what the ancient Greeks sometimes called *kairos*) in the group's life. On the flip side are the lows, often over incidents

that would at other times be laughed off as insignificant at other times. They can suddenly become pivotal as people learn to exist together in an intense and different environment. These moments of success and moments of despair as the experience progresses provide rich material to explore and reflect on.

Relationships between group members will often change visibly as people journey together, share experiences, learn to work together and rely on each other. This can be heightened further by being outdoors. When

pushed out of comfort zones, the team element and sense of all being in it together becomes more prominent. It can also sweep away the hierarchical structure in a group that exists back home. Being outdoors often requires new skills to be learned and developed: this can provide a platform for people that would usually stay at the back and out of the spotlight to step to the fore.

Experience

A young man who was normally very confident faced a challenging climb. It was particularly challenging for this individual because he was afraid of heights. He was adamant that he would not even try this climb and persisted in arguing with the instructor. Whilst this was taking place a shy lad who was considerably younger and not popular amongst the group volunteered to go first. He successfully completed the climb and on his return to the ground went over to the first individual and encouraged him just to give it a try. He basically said "if I can do it, so can you". Although the first individual didn't make it to the top of his climb, he had challenged himself and this had been inspired by someone in the group who he ordinarily wouldn't even speak to.

Activity: Cross the "Magma River".

Equipment needed: Plank of wood, scraps of carpet or similar items!

The entire group has to cross the river (an area of floor) without touching it. To do this they will have to work together and use only the equipment provided.

This challenge can be made easier or harder by changing the size of the river and introducing or taking away bits of equipment.

The group leader will need to remain vigilant throughout and select items to help cross that are appropriate in terms of safety and the group.

Things to remember

Encourage the team element where possible. You are all in it together when you are faced with things/situations that take young people out of their comfort zone.

Expect the highs and the lows – both are part of the experience and will provide good material to reflect on and work with (although they may be challenging at the time!)

Where appropriate encourage people that would normally stay at the back to take the initiative/lead. A different environment requires different skills; the outdoors will often offer the opportunity to explore new and unexpected abilities.

This section was prepared by [David Hassard](#)
Picture: [The Hollowford Centre](#)

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Teamwork

I really enjoyed cooking by the river. I learnt that sometimes I find tasks easy but others don't and I realised that everyone needs each other to make a good team.



It is 'team' effort that can ensure the positive effects of doing the activity. Being part of the 'team' can give a sense of belonging and of not going through a new experience alone. It is not surprising then, that many outdoor centres highlight 'teambuilding' as an activity – and that many organizations use outdoor experience as a way of trying to strengthen cooperation within particular work teams.

For group workers outdoor experiences offer opportunities for people learn about each other and to help each other. Crucially, for workers it also means that members of the group have to take responsibility and do things together.

Outdoor learning provides real situations – not the artificial ones of the classroom or project session – and so can be more powerful. Things are unpredictable and issues need solving if the group is to progress. There is, thus, a real need to communicate, support each other. People are in an environment where some may feel

vulnerable while others may feel more confident. It is a great opportunity to encourage to them to come together in order to support/be supported by each other.

The intensity of the activities can also provide a spur to members reflecting on how the group is changing. Here there is an opportunity for workers to introduce different ways of thinking about this.

Even at the end of the activity everyone may have completed the goal, e.g. got to the top of a mountain, climbed a gorge, but in reality it is the achievement of these goals that create the team and the learning that has happened while the team builds the relationships throughout the day.

Experience

Sometimes when you talk with young people about working as a team and problem solving the reality of the words mean nothing until you

put them in an outdoor setting, with a real problem to solve and tasks to work as part of team. One example of this is with a large group of young people who would not work together on a night navigation, picking up clues and rewards and then who met together one group having a Trangia cooker and the other having the water and brew equipment. On their own what each group had was of no value but putting them together on a cold dark night with a couple of shared snacks was transformational for group moral.

Activity: Thinking about group development and change

Help the team or group to think about what is going on. Try introducing different models or ideas. Perhaps the most commonly used model in outdoor learning comes from Bruce Tuckman. He argued that groups will often go through certain stages – what he called forming, storming, norming and performing. They begin by testing each other and developing some sort of feeling for the group (forming) and then move on to a period of conflict (storming). Through the arguments, discussions and debates new roles and standards appear (norming) and then are able to function more effectively (performing). [See the discussion on infed.org]

Things to remember

New experiences can be quite levelling – different young people can come to the forefront at different times.

If developing teamwork is a desired outcome then it is important to experience teamwork to understand it. Select activities and setting that lend themselves to teamwork.

For workers this is an opportunity to become aware of strengths within a group and to use that in order to build relationships between group members.

Workers and instructors are also part of the team, as accompanying adults and the people with responsibilities to the group you have to be in the team to appreciate the learning and to be able to continue that learning after the event.

This section was prepared by [Amanda Davies](#)

Picture: [Ellesmere Youth Project](#)

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Personal growth and development

We took a group of eight 14 year olds all facing exclusion to a farm where we roughed it for a long weekend, using the camp fire to cook on, a chemical loo inside tarp and no showers. One lad really struggled... but after the first night's sleep got involved. After this only one was excluded. The lad told us three years later that it had changed his life and had motivated him to do well at school.



Having an opportunity to take part in an outdoor activity - something that the group do not usually do - can bring out abilities and capabilities that have not had a chance to show. However, not everything is to do with developing the group. This is also a time for individual change. A young person who has not previously needed to navigate their way up a gorge may for the first time be experiencing their own ability to support others who may not be confident in squeezing through the wet rocks.

When a young person is struggling with a new activity it is important to make them feel 'safe enough'. Here the team around them can be a great support in helping them to face what they may deem a risk in order to help with their personal growth. This can also create awareness for that young person of the feelings they are dealing with and how certain situations may make them feel. It can prepare them for other times when they are 'out of their comfort zone'. Some people thrive on fear and pushing themselves whereas others may

hold back from many situations because of the anxiety around the unknown.

Experience

Taking people away from their familiar routine and environment is a powerful way of creating space for them to behave and act differently. In the right supportive setting I have regularly witnessed young people giving themselves and other group members permission to take risks in acting and behaving in ways there is no way they'd dream of doing at home. This experience offers them options in how they view things, respond to them etc.

Activity: Small encouraging words

Small encouraging words from the worker or facilitator can create an awareness of how well someone is doing. Small conversations about feelings throughout, pointing out and noting what skills you as the worker have noticed; holding out a hand to the person behind to help them up to the next rock; calling out encouragements to another if they are climbing and have trouble finding the next foot hold – can so often go unnoticed but are vital.

Things to remember

Observing the behaviours of the individuals in situations that bring fears and skills to the fore can make great material for reflection.

While individuals need help and support in the end it is about their state of mind as an individual. We can help to create the right sort of environment for them but the rest is up to them.

This section was prepared by [Amanda Davies](#)

Picture: [Adventure Centre for Education](#)

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Challenge and achievement

Standing on the floor looking up at a young person who is determined that they cannot go up the wall any higher. This is where you challenge them to try harder, it may be a case of telling them you are sure they can do it, or depending on the young person they may do better by coming down and looking again at their route, taking a breather and then giving it another shot.



One of the key abilities that workers need concerns judging what might work best for the individual. They may be at breaking point and so fearful of going any higher. Trying to push at that point may make them recoil and this could have a negative impact on their esteem, abilities, and completely suck all the fun out of trying again.

The effects of achieving a new experience can build confidence in other situations, the challenge can be a personal one, a challenge from a friend or there could be a group challenge. When a very shy/fearful young person is taking part in something the group

can also feel that sense of achievement from being part of the experience that led to it.

Experience

On one particular residential, a young man who was normally very confident faced a challenging climb. It was particularly challenging for this individual because he was afraid of heights. He was adamant that he would not even try this climb and persisted in arguing with the instructor. Whilst this was taking place a young very shy lad who was considerably younger and not popular amongst the group volunteered to go first. He successfully completed the climb and on his

return to the ground went over to the first individual and encouraged him just to give it a try. He basically said "If I can do it, so can you". Although the first individual didn't make it to the top of his climb, he had challenged himself and this had been inspired by someone in the group who he ordinarily wouldn't even speak to.

Activity: Have a go

Some young people like the challenge that comes with sports so to pair them with another like-minded young person could encourage both of them to try new things: who can get up the wall the quickest, who can roll the kayak first. Keeping in mind other young people in the group that can be encouraged by more confident young people to 'have a go'.

The worker and instructor can use the more confident young people to facilitate this by getting one to do what they are comfortable with step by step so other young people can observe how to do it.

Things to remember

Achievement motivates further engagement. Being part of something may bring enjoyment and encourage people to stay involved, but concrete outcomes also matter.

While many of those involved may feel some sense of achievement, it is often necessary for workers to encourage people to dig a little deeper. We need to recognise there may be other important things that have been gained or realized.

This section was prepared by [Amanda Davies](#)

Picture: [Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig](#)

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Environmental awareness

The best residential have been when we are the furthest away from modern cons and although young people struggle with this concept at first, by the end they admit that fresh air, water and nature make them feel healthier and happier.



Being in nature can have a profound effect on people and everyone's reaction will be different. There is a strong body of research confirming that direct contact with nature increases mental health, psychological and spiritual development. These benefits include stress reduction, a sense of coherence and belonging, improved self-confidence, self-discipline, and a broader sense of community [see, for example: childrenandnature.org]

From the relaxing effects of a quiet walk in the park or an adrenalin-fuelled mountain bike journey to sailing the high seas there is an attraction to nature and being outdoors. However this attraction usually escapes most people's thought processes and they are not aware of the benefits. Although we are part of nature, we live excessively indoor lives and there is a school of thought that believes

people are suffering 'nature deprivation' and a disconnection with the world around them.

For many, respect and enjoyment of nature also leads to a sense of spirituality and an appreciation for powers larger than oneself. The opportunity to be in a wild place can teach that each individual is unique *and* part of the larger whole. In a world bogged down by social pressures, standards of conduct, and the demands of others, nature gives us a chance to appreciate a sense that the world is alive, fascinating and meaningful.

Whether you chose to lead an activity that can bring an understanding of these concepts or whether they happen informally and you choose to discuss them at that point, it is important to have an open mind and to

promote the fact that nature is more than a disposable resource.

Visit our site (learning through outdoor experience) for further material and resources

Experience

Seeing the face of young people who have grown up in an urban area, exposed to the amazing back drop of the country is just priceless! I remember one young man who had grown up and spent all his life in central London. Once he was opened up to the whole new world of the Lake District, I could not believe his response; Blown away by seeing livestock grazing, the majesty of the mountains and the clearness of the night sky. You could see that his young man's perspective of the world was radically changed!

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Activity: Mini Solo

The following instructions may be on a card given to each participant, with a pen:

Each participant is to select an area with no other person in sight. Find a soft rock to relax on and sit in silence. Choose an appropriate length of time you think your group can handle. Review the experience, focusing on questions such as:

- How do you feel being alone?
- What sounds did you hear? (Insects, animals, birds, etc.)
- What does silence do to you? (i.e. scared, reflect and think, silence, noisy)

Things to remember

Plan opportunities for your groups to 'be' in nature rather than just passing through it.

Expect the unexpected in young people's reactions to being in nature.

Encourage people to experience and see things – but don't be a tour guide pointing out everything for them.

This section was prepared by **Chris Saunders**
Picture: **Mobex North East**

Your responsibilities to the environment

Leave only footprints, take only photographs



Working in the outdoors brings with it the responsibility to ensure that you have limited or no lasting effects on the environment in which you work. A group of people covering the same ground can have a long-lasting impact.

Many young people who live in urban areas, have had little opportunities to explore and enjoy open country. You need to help them understand that their actions can have huge long-term effects on the areas that you take them to.

A good first step is to help group members realise how wonderful the outdoors is, how delicate the natural environment is and see the effects that humans have had in the great outdoors. If they start to value the natural environment and recognise how special it is,

they are then likely to take more care and make efforts to limit their impact.

There has been lots of research into how to manage our impact in the outdoors and there is plenty of guidance as regards good practice. Following the Country Code is a good start.

www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Aim to 'leave no trace'

[www.leavenotraceireland.org]

Experience

We as a group went to help protect the White tailed sea eagles on the island of Mull. We camped the first year but the following two years we staying at the youth hostel in Tobermory. We bonded as a group and shared experiences, conversation as we cooked our meals and terror as we took off down vertical

tracks in our mini bus, not for the faint hearted. We met wild goats, foxes, deer, a wildcat, golden eagles, buzzards, and the famous sea eagles that fill the sky with their presence and massive wings. Truly an experience never to be forgotten!

Activity: How long to biodegrade?

Collect some items of typical litter and get the group to guess how long each item would take to biodegrade.

Have some discussion about what litter they have seen and what they feel about it.

Here is a suggested list

- paper (2-4 weeks)
- banana peel (3-5 weeks)
- wool hat (1 year)
- cigarette butt (2-5 years)
- tin can (80 – 100 years)
- aluminium can (200 – 400 years)
- glass bottles (thousands of years)

You might even consider spreading the litter about in a small area, taking the group to it and taking things from there.

Things to remember

Plan ahead by doing your research; learn about the area you plan to visit. Are there any specific guidelines and points of interest? For example access law and your responsibilities are different in Scotland to the rest of the UK – see www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Consider others by acting responsibly, avoid noisy activity and ensure that your group and other people enjoy the outdoors.

Tread lightly – keep to existing paths when possible and avoid walking on the sides of paths, as this widens the eroded areas.

Leave No Litter and don't damage trees, plants.

This section was prepared by [Mark Williams](#)
Picture: [The Hollowford Centre](#)

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After

The classic experience many people face is that, although they may have a sense of something important happening while they were 'away', it can seem that nothing has changed 'back home'. As a result it is vital that we try to create spaces where participants can:

- *Deepen and extend* what they know, understand and feel.
- *Make decisions* about what they want and can do.
- *Try to make changes* and identifying the movement that happens.

Alongside this it is also important to look to developing local networks and strengthening the capacity of local groups and organizations so that young people can develop, flourish and play their part.

Here we look at ways of helping others to understand what may have happened and be going on; building links into local networks and groups; and developing further opportunities for outdoor learning.

Celebrating

One of my fondest memories as a young person was the annual 'Camp Films' – a photo story created from pictures of our 10-day residential – screening after our summer residential in Wales!



Celebrating your outdoor experience with the group once you get back home is an invaluable part of the process. Sharing the memories together, whether they are good, challenging, funny or poignant can be building a sense of community and belonging for everyone.

At the same time celebrating can be a way of evaluating the outdoor learning experience. We can use stories to remind young people of how they have grown, faced fears or learnt new skills. Story-telling can be anything from re-

living an experience over the coffee bar, to a formal, public event.

Creating that sense of belonging can also increase people's self-worth and confidence. Even the worst, most challenging moments during the outdoor experience can become a funny story to share with hindsight – enabling things to be put in a better perspective! Another chance for young people (and staff) to realise crises, hurts and even failings mellow with time.

During the story-telling, things may be revealed that bring new insights into what young people were experiencing during the activity... 'remember when I was screaming at the top of the mountain? - I was really scared; but I'm glad I did it now!'

Experience

We brought back stories and photos of our journey together and shared it all with our over-sixties lunch group. This was a massive hit as most of the attendees are almost house-bound and it really made them feel part of what we do.

Activity: A celebration event

Involve young people in picking some of the best photos of the outdoor experience; make a wall display/PowerPoint presentation. If there is any video footage this could be incorporated. Invite family members, friends and other group members. Over food and refreshments watch the presentation.

Celebration events could include an 'awards' ceremony ('the group's best climber', 'most helpful member', 'bravest' etc.). This type of session could easily be incorporated into a larger event, such as an AGM or community event.

Things to remember

Collect your own stories and be willing to share them.

Observe young people's contributions and development and remember to share this with them.

Try to make space during the experience or residential for reflection and celebration.

Check you have consent to use any photo's/ video clips taken of the young people.

Plan a celebration event (however big or small) with young people as part of the planning for the outdoor learning experience.

This section was prepared by [Jenny Tibbles](#)
Picture: [Logic Café](#)

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Reflecting

It is essential to evaluate as an experience draws to a close but the learning may take some time to infiltrate and it is key that people are given time to process this.



The young people's (and indeed staff's) learning from their outdoor experience does not stop as soon as they return. We can encourage people to reflect on the learning that has taken place and keep building on it when they are 'back home'.

Much of the learning that happens during an outdoor experience is 'transferrable'. Young people can be enabled to realise the problems or situations they face in day-to-day life contain the same elements that they overcame during outdoor experiences. They can be encouraged to look at situations from different angles before making a judgement. Staff can point out when young people faced a similar problem in the outdoors, giving them more confidence and a wider frame of reference. Reflection involves the same process: remembering what happened; attending to feelings that may have been experienced at the time – and currently; and building new understandings.

Reflection can be encouraged by holding a specific evaluation activity with the group. A reflective activity that encourages them to point out the learning that has taken place in other people can be particularly powerful. It is a real confidence booster (both for young people and workers!) when peers are able to point out where others have changed, overcome challenges or stepped out of their comfort zones. As a worker or volunteer, allow yourself to be part of this process as a participant.

Other times of reflection may be more *ad hoc* and based in on-going relationships. It may happen in general conversation or when individuals or groups of young people are facing particular challenges. By referring to times when people were challenged but overcame barriers during outdoor activities, you can encourage them to face the challenges they encounter in everyday life.

Experience

I worked with a young woman who had fairly severe dyspraxia. She was part of a group we took to an outdoor residential centre. On our walk up to a rock climbing site, she was having difficulty navigating the uneven rocky path, and was falling behind from the rest of the group. I encouraged her to take 'small, steady steps' (out of exasperation, rather than any particular wisdom I have to confess!) and she made it up to the site. A couple of weeks after we returned from the residential she came to me in a youth work session and explained that she had faced a particularly challenging situation at school. She said she had remembered how she had achieved getting to the climbing site by taking 'small, steady steps' and knew she was able to work through her challenges at school.

Activity: The person who.....

Prepare cards with various statements on them, like 'the person who surprised me the most'; 'the person who overcame a challenge'; 'the person who helped me the most' etc.

Young people pick a card at random out of a bag and then have to give it to someone in the group who most fits the description on the card. As they give the card to the other person, they should be encouraged to say why they are giving it to them.

Ensure that at the beginning of the session, young people agree that only positive comments should be given.

Things to remember

Plan a session to talk about the activity afterwards – to reflect in a thoughtful and planned, yet enjoyable way.

Be mindful of the learning you have noticed in young people and be prepared to share this with them.

When talking with young people who are facing difficulties, remind them of the achievements they experienced in the outdoors. Encourage them to identify more learning for themselves.

This section was prepared by [Jenny Tibbles](#)

Picture: [Ellesmere Youth Project](#)

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Organizing

I have found that after an outdoor experience some young people are more willing to get in to other pieces of work. And this relationship has to be nurtured. Setting up groups of young people to work around community issues can be difficult but those who have shared an experience with the worker are more willing, they trust that the worker will not get them in to something they cannot deal with.



The outdoor experience doesn't have to stop when you get home. With a bit of creativity there are ways of incorporating the outdoors into your work with young people in their neighbourhood.

Think about which elements of the outdoor experience you would like to replicate or develop – physical exercise or challenge; team work; facing fears; expanding horizons etc.

Building good working relationships with local venues or organisations that can support you in developing outdoor activities closer to home can help you achieve your goals. They will be

able to offer some expertise, may have access to any kit that you need or have some funding!

In addition there is always a job to be done in terms of deepening local people's appreciation of outdoor experience – and the changes that may be going on in those who have been involved in it.

Experience

They discussed how to organise a sponsored walk over all the central London bridges and who should start where. The boys did the West End bridges and the girls went from the East

then they all met at the South Bank Centre. They went at midnight and called it a "Moonwalk". The group met three times to plan this trip and did argue quite a lot about the route and how to manage the food, getting to the starting point and how to run the trip safely!

Instead of our usual cycle trips out in the Peak District with hired bikes, we decided to go on a bike ride from our usual base in inner city Sheffield. In partnership with Pedal Ready (cycle organisation), we took a group of young men on their own bikes – checked for roadworthiness – on the local cycle paths along the river and canal and got as far as Rotherham (a round trip of about 12 miles). Most of the young people had never been past Meadowhall shopping centre before.

Activities

The following list is an example of activities that can be tried out in most locations:

Climbing walls. There is a network of indoor climbing walls across the UK; some councils also have access to outdoor climbing walls which can be hired.

Local walks. There are often routes to explore locally; these can be spiced up by incorporating treasure hunts, or making it a night walk.

Canoeing. Most places have an accessible waterway or water sports facility - with an experienced instructor - nearby.

Bike rides. Your area may have a cycle network that can be used.

Park Rangers/local wildlife trust. They usually run activities in local parks or environmental areas. They may be able to arrange an activity just for your group.

Local parks. Use local open spaces to organise your own wide games or team challenges.

Environmental art. An art project could help to deepen people's relationship with nature. There may be a space that people can 'green' or where they can create objects that makes others think about nature.

Things to remember

Research local opportunities for outdoor activities nearer to home

See if there are local organisations that could help you organise outdoor opportunities i.e. wardens, wildlife trust, cycling or canoeing clubs

Carry out risk assessments – including staff visiting the site/ doing the activity themselves beforehand if possible.

If using young people's own bikes, see if there is a local organisation that could make sure they are roadworthy.

Use news items in local papers, newsletters and social media like Facebook to tell the story of outdoor experience.

This section was prepared by **Jenny Tibbles**
Picture: **Adventure Centre for Education**

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Judging

I had a profound experience on a residential when it transpired that a 13 year old boy had never seen a campfire before. We had difficulty getting him to agree to come away because he is addicted to computer games but while at a campsite for two days I had never seen him so happy! He was smiling, active and glowing.



How are we to make judgements about, and communicate to others, what has been achieved by experiencing, and reflecting on, the outdoors? We need to think about what we see as instructors, workers and facilitators, and what young people think and feel.

Evaluation involves research – finding out about things – and coming to some conclusions about what is significant about our findings. It involves making judgements. It is either about *proving* something is working or needed, or *improving* practice or a project. The first often arises out of our accountability to funders, managers and, crucially, the people are working with. The second is born of a wish to do what we do better.

To evaluate we need to be clear about:

- What are we aiming to do and why – what difference do we want to make?
- How would we know if we were succeeding – choosing indicators and making judgments?

Evaluation - if it is to have any real value - must look at the people involved, the processes and any outcomes we can identify. Appreciating and getting of flavour of these involves observation and conversation. Through enquiry we can begin to gain a better understanding of what is going on and is being achieved – and this does involve 'measurement' and reflection.

Unfortunately, it's too late to start thinking about evaluation when you get back home! Meaningful evaluation relies on our

preparation and planning. See the [Before section](#) to see how your planning can contribute to your evaluation. One of the key things to look at is indicators – events and behaviours that might show the work is happening and changes are occurring [see the activity below].

Experience

'Don't judge a book by its cover' as the saying goes, in particular for young people's learning... Look beyond the obvious and your preconceptions.

Activity: Work on your indicators

The problem we often have with any relational work with people is that the impact may not be seen or appreciated for some time. It is also difficult to isolate what things may have brought about change. That said there are some areas that can provide some fairly concrete indicators:

- *The number of people involved* (the numbers we are in contact with; who participate in groups and activities; and who involved in intensive work and support).
- *The nature of the opportunities we offer.* What activities have been taking place, what sort of spaces for learning created and so on?
- *The quality of the relationships available.* We often talk about 'building relationships' - but what have we been doing to facilitate relationships between

participants and with ourselves as workers?

- *How well do participants work and relate together and for others.* One of the key areas of development in this area is the ability to work together to solve problems or to organize things. Another important area is a growing readiness and capacity to support and help others. It is worth thinking about what we can be looking for and recording in this area.

Consider other helpful indicators.

Things to remember

Group evaluation and sharing of experience must happen within a few days of the experience otherwise the learning gets lost. Ensure everyone feels they can speak.

Evaluation nights are often a good way of working. Instead of handing participants a sheet some projects hold move interactive events – often with young people leading them.

Think about how you are going to communicate with others – participants, parents, funders etc.

This section was prepared by [Mark K Smith](#) and draws upon the Rank Foundation publication *Evaluation: Learning what matters*
Picture: [The Hollowford Centre](#)

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Making it count

Often we are asked to supply evidence of impact, I have found that sometimes it takes years before our impact is recognised.



A key element of learning through outdoor experience concerns what can be achieved ‘back home’ – not just in terms of individual change and development, but also around strengthening local communities and making them better places. Outdoor experience can be used as a tool to contribute to a larger project – for example, where teamwork and co-operation are required – such as a major community project. However, organizing new opportunities, encouraging local people to become involved are aspects of this (see ‘organizing’ in this section) takes time and a lot of work. It is worth it though to avoid learning from outdoor experience being lost or failing to impact on everyday life.

Engaging with outdoor experience can have a significant impact on individuals (and their friends and families), agencies, local communities and funder – but it is often not easy to quantify this locally. Larger-scale

research may set out what can be achieved by different activities etc. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to assess change, and identify what made it happen, in local projects. However, this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t gather material and think about its meaning. For example, we will be able to chart changes in staff relationships with young people and the sorts of activities young people engage in.

Experience

Working and living in Highland Perthshire means for me and those I work with the opportunity to have the outdoor industry on our doorstep being part of our everyday lives. Much of my work is with young people who are struggling with full time education and trying to find opportunities for them out in the workplace. I am lucky that friends of mine own outdoor companies and have been forthcoming

in allowing young people into their organisations to sample their world.

To date the industry employs river guides from other countries to work in our local area, employability for young people who live in the area is something that our project feels strongly about and we hope to bridge a gap by training local young people in local industries. We at present are setting up an employability scheme where young people volunteer within outdoor companies at weekends gaining experience and training where they have a future of employment within their local community.

Activity: Spot the differences

Look at the indicators (see the activity in the last section) you are using and talk with people around:

- The relationships they are making and experiencing. Look to their peers, their 'home' life and authority figures like teachers.
- Taking initiative and responsibility and their capacity to work in groups.
- Thinking about the needs of others, and what they can do for others.

Make notes on what you find. Look back at what you knew of them before their 'outdoor experience'. Reflect on what development has taken place and what work should now be done.

Things to remember

To make experiences count it is important to:

Maintain a long-term perspective. Changes often take time to surface or to become embedded. People need space to talk and think

about their experiences, opportunities to try things out and consistent support over time. We need to record what is happening.

Look to further development. Where people show an aptitude and interest in the outdoors it is important to open up opportunities for development – perhaps deepening and extending their skills or in offering help and support to others via things like young mentorships. Is there potential for greater use of outdoor experience in the range of strategies used by the agency? e.g. within a larger project?...improving accessibility?...developing specific skills?

Educate funders. If we receive their money and support, it is our responsibility to help funders to appreciate the impact of what they do. Lively reports are a good starting point – but getting funders directly involved is often a great step forward. There is often something particularly powerful about meeting participants and hearing their stories or seeing the work in action. We also need to help funders see that this is work for the long-term.

Think about the impact on the agency. Hold a staff review of the event. Look at changes in staff relationships with young people

Consider the impact on community. Are there potential community partners to work on expanding opportunities – or using the benefits of outdoor learning.

This section was prepared by **Alan Rogers, Danielle Sharp, Chris Saunders and Mark K Smith.**

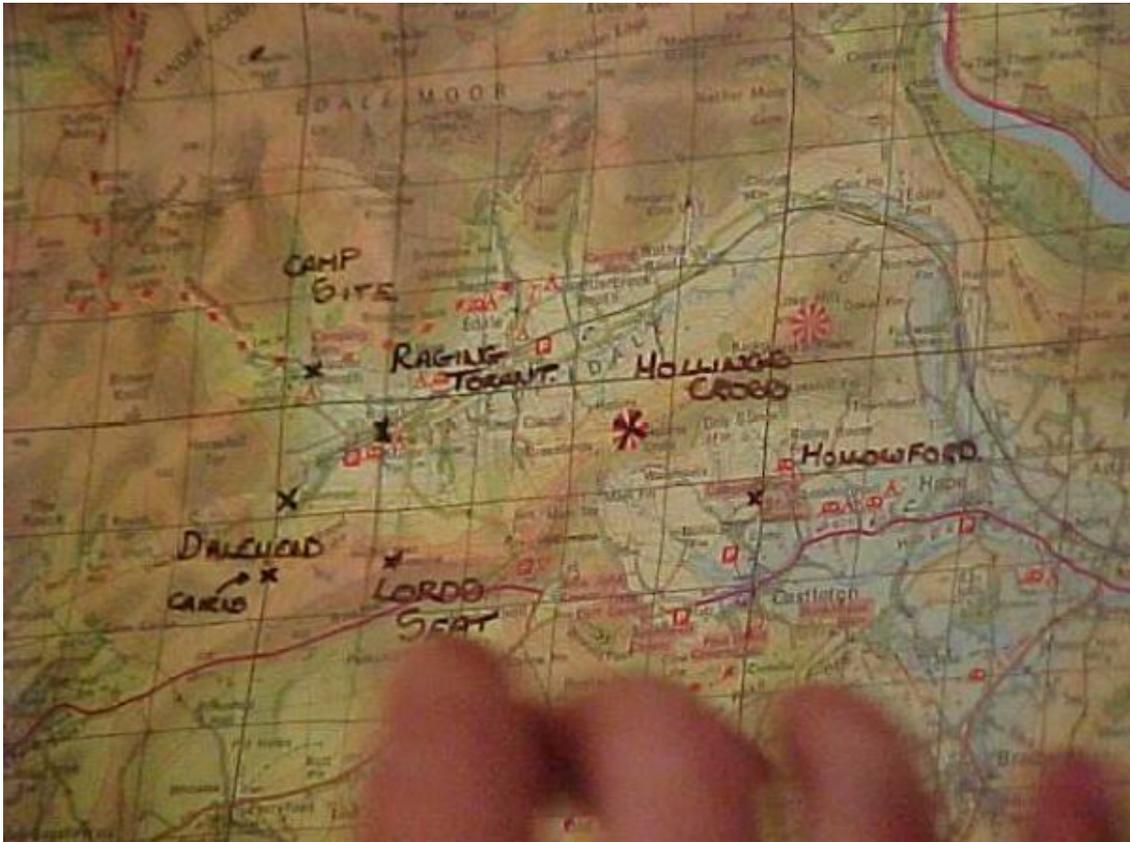
Picture: **Essex Boys and Girls Clubs**

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Keeping relevant and fresh

How can we help the excitement live on through our work? This may mean proving to other community members that young people can take responsibility not only for themselves but for others and their surroundings.



Organizations. Programmes should be reviewed at a number of levels. It is important that the end users – adults and young people – get a chance to provide feedback:

- Did the timetable of activities work? What ran well and not so well? What would you do differently next time?
- Did the programme meet its desired aims and objectives? Commonly there are unforeseen additional benefits and should these be identified?

Alongside this workers should spend time reflecting on the processes and what was achieved.

It is vital that agencies do not carry on repeating programmes and activities without considering their worth and relevance.

Workers. Keeping up with current practice is challenging. One way of doing this is to take part in something that you have never done. Another is occasionally co-tutoring with other providers. It is also good practice to have session observations, undertaken by other practitioners or senior staff. This should not just be regarded as a safety measure; it is also a fantastic opportunity to provide feedback and exchanges of ideas, which help improve working practice.

Experience

I recently experienced sailing on the tall ships with JST on the Lord Nelson. This was the

experience of a lifetime as not only did I have the opportunity to find out things about myself, I was able to observe how well individuals can quickly adapt and work well together within their designated watch but also with the rest of the crew. I could see how willing other crew members, regardless of their disabilities, were to assist in the various tasks that had to be undertaken each day. Everyone was treated with respect and understanding, being encouraged to take part and not pressurised into doing something they were not comfortable with. I came away from this experience with a new found view of life. It does not matter what disabilities people may have, the only thing preventing people achieving their goal is their own outlook in life. I would certainly recommend to anyone who has the chance to experience the tall ships to go for it as they will return from a voyage a better person with a new enriched attitude on life.

Activity: Keeping current

Join the IOL (Institute of Outdoor Learning)
<http://www.outdoor-learning.org/>

The IOL's journal Horizons is a source of current news and articles written by leading practitioners.

Things to remember

It is worth having procedures in place to ensure that evaluation takes place, such as filling in a standard course report. Results can then be measured against similar events. You can also look back at the report next time you facilitate something for that group.

Networking with other organisations can ensure alternatives are considered and new forms assessed.

Listening to what local people are saying about young people and the sorts of work you are involved in, can bring fresh insights and spark new pieces of work.

This section was prepared by **Mark Williams**

Picture: **The Hollowford Centre**

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Notes on contributors

Amanda Davies lives and works in North Wales. She became familiar with the outdoors through coordinating an outdoor project to support first language Welsh women to train as outdoor instructors while providing outdoor opportunities to local young people. This five year *Youth or Adult?* project with Sylfaen Cymunedol was supported by the Rank Foundation. She is a qualified informal and community educator. She also passed her Welsh language exam in 2011

Chris Dunning is Director of Youth Projects in Scotland for the Rank Foundation. He previously held posts in the fields of outdoor development training, youth work and teaching.

Charlie Harris went up his first mountain (Great Gable) when he was seven. He has 'completed' the Munros, toured mountains throughout the UK, and undertaken expeditions to the Pyrenees, Alps and other mountain environments. Charlie also regularly undertakes tall ships' and Challenger yachts' voyages – often working as a youth mentor and watch leader. He is a qualified teacher, youth play and community worker as well as Mountain Leader, and a member of the Rucksack Club.

David Hassard had his first experience of the great outdoors as a young person through the Out There Club in Colchester (where he still volunteers today). He has qualifications in mountaineering, paddling and mountain biking and is also a professionally qualified youth worker and community educator. Since 2006 he has been working with young people throughout Essex for Essex Boys and Girls Clubs and at their two residential centres High Row in the Lake District (www.essexboysandgirlsclubs.org) and Stubbers Adventure Centre in Essex (www.stubbers.co.uk).

Alan Rogers is a freelance writer and editor on youth and community work.

Chris Saunders has been an outdoor educator/instructor for twenty years. Having worked in many countries he settled in Girvan and joined the Rank network in 1999 as a worker within the *Youth or Adult?* programme. The combination of the outdoors, youth work and community development inspired him and the creation of the Adventure Centre for Education (ACE). ACE engages with well over a thousand people a year, and operates programmes utilising adventure and environmental education. The Centre works with all age groups and abilities, and have developed many initiatives such as the ACE apprentice scheme, Girls 'R' ACE programme, outdoor instructor trainee programme and volunteering opportunities. (www.adventurecentreforeducation.com)

Danielle Sharp is a Youth Development Worker for Ellesmere Youth Project in Burngreave, Sheffield. Danielle has a special interest in Sexual Health and Relationship Education for young people in community settings. Although a youth worker since she was 18, she graduated with an honours degree in 'Informal Education (Youth and Community Work)' with the YMCA George Williams College in 2012, via The Rank Foundation's 'Youth or Adult?' programme.

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Jenny Tibbles is Project Co-ordinator at Ellesmere Youth Project. She has been a qualified Youth and Community Worker since 1997 and has over 20 years' experience of youth work, both paid and voluntary. Jenny has worked in various settings, including church-based, with young people leaving care, youth participation work, and community-based youth work. She also had a very enjoyable 18 months in Australia working for their council-

run Youth Services. Jenny has encouraged young people to take part in outdoor activities in all the settings that she has worked in, and loves to see young people rising to the challenges it presents!

Mark Williams. From an early age Mark has enjoyed the great outdoors and has great passion and enthusiasm for helping young people have their own adventures. He has instructed outdoor activities for over 25 years and has a wide range of qualifications and experience. Having reached the lofty height of being Head of Centres for Lindley Educational Trust, he is now able to influence the shape and style of young people's outdoor provision and the learning and development outcomes.
(www.hollowford.org)

Kai Wooder has been an informal educator for many years and spent the first 5 years of her working life on and off residential based courses with young people from Liverpool and Merseyside. Adding all of the residential weeks up, Kai has spent a good 18 months of her life in residential centres, sleeping in bunk beds and eating curious foods. She has a keen interest in personal development work and in the benefits and challenges of working with young people outside of their usual environments. Kai is currently an Education Manager for a sexual health charity and a regional tutor for the YMCA George Williams College.

Thanks also to the following who contributed to our research: Sue Allen, Sam Anderson, Willy Barr, Natalie Bell, Heather Bellshaw, Billy Boyd,

Shane Budby, Bronagh Cappa, Sarahjane Chattenton, Patrick Estall, Beef (Richard) Frankland, Diane Garbett, Danny Gilchrist, David Ginesi, James Hall, Viccie Hamlet, Lori Hannah, Liz Hanrahan, Sara Holroyd, Jon Jolly, Harun Kaji, Carl Kelsall, Samuel Kirkby, Caroline McCahill, David McCue, Gemma McDonald, Kirsty McLuckie, Fokrul Meah, Kevin Mongan, Nicky Nicoll, Paul Oginsky, Dave Packwood, John Peaper, Vicky Perry, Gareth Prytherch, Aaron Stapleton, Johnny Smith, Paul Smith, Jo Taylor, Chris Turner, Wayne Virgo, Rod Webb-Taylor, Katie Worthington, Kate Yates

Thanks also to the agencies in the network that provided us with photographs and gave their permission for our use:

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