

## Come Outside! Case study

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

Area

Torfaen

The group

Countryside Rangers

Supported by

Torfaen Social Services

Start date

October 2014

Total participants

25

Number of sessions

19

Session types

Woodwork, geocaching,  
bushcraft

#### ABOUT THE GROUP

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

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

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

#### COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

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

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

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

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



## What the support organisations said

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

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

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

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

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

## IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The group have learnt new skills, learnt how to use specialist machines, learnt about the natural environment and being more aware of the environment.

Geocaching has helped them to take more notice of their surroundings and they learn new things from the quizzes. For example they did a tree identification quiz recently which 15-20 people took part in.

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

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

## IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

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

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

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

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