

Come Outside! Case study

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

Area

Wrexham

The group

ADHD Support Group

Supported by

Wrexham Communities
First Urban Villages
Cluster

Start date

January 2015

Total participants

29

Number of sessions

23

Session types

Bushcraft, walks,
woodland activities

ABOUT THE GROUP

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

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

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

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

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

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



What the participants (and their parents) said

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

“The pair of them work as a great team”

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

“The kids absolutely loved it”

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

“When you go with your own kids it’s just a walk, when you go with Doug it’s something else”

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

“They were having fun and learning something”

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

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

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

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

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

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

IMPACT ON THE FAMILIES

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

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

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

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

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

“When she met them she said ‘I like them, they are like me, they have fun”

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

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

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

What the support organisation said

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

“It’s really important to have someone with specific skills like [Regional Coordinator] to refer people to”

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

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

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

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

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

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

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