

Come Outside! Case study

Geocaching as an engagement and learning tool to mobilise community groups

Area

Merthyr Tydfil

The group

3Gs Men's Project

Supported by

Merthyr Tydfil Communities
First North Cluster

Start date

March 2015

Total participants

34

Number of sessions

74

Session types

Geocaching, walks,
gardening, bushcraft, litter
picks

ABOUT THE GROUP

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

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

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

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

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

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



What the support organisations said

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

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

“I’ve learnt as much as the men in the group”

“The support from Come Outside has been invaluable – I wouldn’t want it to finish”

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

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

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

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

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

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

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

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

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

What the participants said

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

“I love this sort of stuff. I’m in heaven”

“I enjoyed every minute”

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

“Now I’m over the moon”

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

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

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

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

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

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

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

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

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

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

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