

## Come Outside! Case study

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

Area

Torfaen

The group

Wednesday Warriors

Supported by

Torfaen County Borough  
Council

Start date

October 2014

Total participants

21

Number of sessions

20

Session types

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

#### ABOUT THE GROUP

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

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

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

#### COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

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

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



## What the support organisations said

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### IMPACT ON THE GROUP

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

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

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

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

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



## What the participants (and their parents) said

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

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

“I’ve tried new activities and really enjoyed them. It’s fun!”

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

**“Our son is clear about what he does and doesn’t want and this has improved since he has become happier and his confidence has increased”**

### IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

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

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

March 2016

