

Come Outside! Case study

Improving parenting skills and wellbeing through outdoor activities

Area

Swansea

The group

Townhill and Blaenymaes

Dads groups

Supported by

Swansea Family
Partnership

Start date

March 2014

Total participants

76

Number of sessions

17

Session types

Cycling, fishing,
geocaching, walking, visits

ABOUT THE GROUP

The Family Partnership Team at Swansea engage families who need skills, knowledge and support in parenting. Service users are referred by either social services, where they have concerns over ability to parent or via health visitors etc.

Most people are hard to reach, they have low motivation, are low in confidence and often isolated.

The team were approached by the Come Outside! Regional Coordinator. They were aware of the benefits of outdoor activities on mental health and so saw an opportunity to benefit from the programme.

COME OUTSIDE! ACTIVITIES

They started geocaching and it's been really successful. They initially ran geocaching events over the summer holidays in 2015; they had over 80 people at the first event. Although this reduced over the summer, 30 people attended the final event. These were followed by 17 sessions led by the Regional Coordinator and some by the Family Partnership Team staff.

IMPACT ON THE GROUP

The geocaching sessions have opened the group activities up to whole families, not just the dads. Getting outdoors has helped the dads improve their mental health and wellbeing; many are low in confidence, some have depression and poor mental health.

Most sessions are 1.5 to 2 miles long, so there is a clear focus on physical activity (even if the parents don't realise it!). The team have received very positive feedback and most families stay after the sessions finish, to play in the park with their kids, which is something they wouldn't have done before.



What the support organisation said

“Geocaching is different to other outdoor activities – it’s fun, structured and has a competitive element which dads love, and children love seeing their dads being competitive and enthusiastic”

“The Come Outside! approach is different to other projects focusing on health/fitness – it’s an easy going approach, people don’t feel pressurised, it’s a fun activity that doesn’t really focus on health like sport does – which puts people off. This is something they can do together and with their children”

“One dad had PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) from serving in Iraq – he was isolated, wouldn’t leave the house and I really struggled to engage him and get him to come along to the sessions. He came to a geocaching session and enjoyed it and has really grown in confidence. We have now referred him on to a training course ‘Down to Earth’ (run by the council) which provides people with outdoor skills”

“Another man gained employment as a result – he lost his job and had a breakdown, then got involved in the group. As a result of taking part he then went on to volunteer on Down to Earth and is now working in a magistrates court as a clerk. It’s really helped him to build his confidence and getting him back on track

It’s helped remove barriers – the main ones being lack of confidence as they have never done geocaching before, lack of opportunities and options, and outdoor activities not being part of their day-to-day lifestyle. One group mostly came from the Townhill area, but had never been to the local places they have visited as a group; it’s providing families with new experiences on their doorstep.

Come Outside! has also helped the group to develop positive habits – over half have done geocaching outside of the group and all have gone on to do something with their families outside the group (e.g. going to the park).

It has also helped build the confidence of group members which results in the support workers referring them to other training provided by Communities First; there is a clear pathway of progression once their confidence has improved.

“Most of our clients are very isolated and live sedentary lives; the sessions get them out of the house – most would be inactive, at home if the project didn’t exist

“The changes we’ve seen in some people have been amazing.”

What the participants said

“I enjoyed myself”

“It’s built my confidence back up”

“I really enjoyed the day out with the family – we will do it again”

“I need to lose a few pounds and want to get fitter – this is great!”

“It’s really good to have the space to myself and just enjoy being outdoors”

IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION

The team have been provided with geocaching equipment and training and they have started using it in other teams/groups. The team have also attended a training course in outdoor activity which further demonstrated the benefits of the outdoors. This was not run by Come Outside! but they may not have considered it without being involved in the programme.

They also feel they can continue without the support of the Regional Coordinator, as they have the equipment and skills to now offer more outdoor activities to other groups. They have more options and are able to offer more opportunities to the families they work with.

November 2015

