



## Support for Young People.

### Adjusting support for different demographic groups in the outdoors: Younger People

This paper outlines emerging findings from the research on the types of support people in different sedentary groups need to get involved, change their behaviour and sustain that change.

- **Consider the impact of activity cost of perceptions of quality and affordability.**

Staff reported that many young people felt that they could not afford to pay anything for activities, yet also saw no value in 'free' activities, which they perceived to be equivalent to poor-quality activities. In addition, certain areas were thought to have been 'over-subsidised' previously, creating high expectations for outside provision and no appreciation of the actual value of what was being offered.

In practice, projects have found some success in charging small amounts (up to £5 for the most expensive activities, less for activities of smaller cost) to maintain participation in activities, with impacts on participation ranging from small decreases to increases in participants.

- **Travel difficulties are often presented as a barrier, but may not be significant.**

Project staff felt that inability to travel to activities was a common barrier presented to them by participants, but that this was often an excuse due to their reluctance to travel (or to participate at all), and that they would travel when they saw value in the activities being provided.



- **Young people need to feel 'comfortable'.**

Particularly amongst those projects which have focused on working with young women, projects have found that 'comfort' is the biggest influence over a participant's willingness to take part in activities. This means ensuring that the group feels non-threatening and safe, takes account of participants' lack of confidence (both in their abilities and their body image) and allows to feel that they won't be judged by others (both inside the group and outside). Activities were seen as a source of 'personal risk'.

Mixing groups – in particular mixing young men and young women – can bring risks to activities by providing sources of discomfort into groups, whether established or not. Project staff reported that female participants had a tendency to 'cover up', even when this made them physically uncomfortable, whereas male participants had a tendency to show off, in particularly by taking clothes off.



- **The varied impacts of peer pressure.**

Peer pressure is an important aspect of young people’s lives generally, and can have both positive and negative impacts. Having the ‘right people’ at an activity can act as a motivating factor for others to attend, but perception of the activity is also important – the ‘wrong activity’ or the ‘wrong people’ may put people off attending initially.

Staff also reported that personal identity and self-image – particularly the desire not to be seen to conform – had some effects on attendance and behaviour. Similar to the issues associated with mixing male and female participants in the same group, joining groups of different ages can also have an impact, particularly amongst older participants when asked to participate alongside younger people.

Projects have found that by taking these factors into account, and making judgements based on their knowledge of key individuals within groups (their attitudes and behaviour), can prevent mixing groups which might have a negative impact on participation overall

- **Select appropriate leaders.**

Projects have found that for younger people the most important thing to consider when selecting a leader is not who is most appropriate to lead a particular activity, but who is most appropriate for leading *that group*. Participants must be able to relate to their leader and understand the importance of particular group dynamics (as discussed above) and how to manage these effects.

- **Take account of how young people prioritise their lives.**

Project staff found that the young people they work with have a different ‘frame of thinking’ to them and their providers, living very much in the present and reacting to ‘dramatic changes’ on a daily basis. Young people were also seen to prioritise and make decisions based on how they wanted to be perceived (who they are and want to be). This has implications for how young people are engaged, and how their interest can be maintained (or managed) given this inherent instability.



**Conclusion:**

Supporting participants in their journey from physical inactivity to independent participation is time-intensive and requires sensitivity to the needs of target groups. This in turn supports a long-term approach to project development.

**Further information**

The MA website contains information about the National Partnership and all local projects as well as annual reports, research papers, practitioner guides, case studies and guidance notes issued to project staff. [www.mentroallan.co.uk](http://www.mentroallan.co.uk)

