

Belfast City Council Parks and Leisure Department

Environmental Based Youth Development Camps 2014

Evaluation Report

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1. Vision and context

1.1 The Vision for the camps

Belfast City Council Parks and Leisure Department decided to pilot a city wide programme of Environmental Based Youth Development Camps in 2014.

The initiative was a development of the trial Youth Development Projects held in 2012 and 2013 in West Belfast, which were based on an environmental theme for young people. The aim was to provide young people with opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge in an outdoor environment. The West Belfast camp's mission statement is 'to show young people how to explore, learn and appreciate the various and diverse geographical settings of Belfast while keeping safe at all times'. The rationale for the camp was that you don't have to go outside the city to experience the natural environment and to take part in adventure learning and environmental education and it aimed to:-

- Maximise the use of parks and open spaces as a public asset.
- Raise awareness about the connection of the parks with the urban environment
- Utilise natural capital and promote its connectivity by raising awareness of green corridors throughout the city eg the green corridor from Lagan Valley through Bog Meadows, the 2 cemeteries to the Black Mountain and how the park fits the rest of the natural environment.
- Promote non traditional activities and physical literacy, which are physically challenging and very different from organised sports.

The objectives for the young people at the camps were fun, explore, learn, team and safe.

The vision for the first camps was to address the increasing trend for children and young people to spend almost all of their time indoors, and the growing consensus that children would benefit from more freedom to explore nature and the outdoors. Since the 1970's, children have become increasingly shut in and their 'radius of activity' – the area around their home where they are allowed to roam unsupervised – has shrunk by almost 90%, according to the National Trust. Digital media and TV often get the blame but Tim Gill, author of 'No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Averse Society, argues that technology is a symptom rather than a cause of children's lack of access to nature. 'Because kids can't get outside in real life, a market has been created that keeps them engaged and connected', he said in a Sunday Times Article in 2013.

The amount of time which children spend strapped into cars, with a heavy reliance on TV and digital media led film maker, David Bond, to start a campaign called Project Wild Child. The National Trust then joined forces with Bond to create a Wild Network to entice children into the natural world. They produced a list of things to do before you are 11 ¾, which includes climbing a tree, catching a fish with a net, playing conkers, picking wild blackberries, star gazing.

This research, and the notion of 'battery reared', rather than 'free range children, caught the imagination of the Park Manager and members the Friends of the Falls Park and inspired the programming, choice of age range and objectives of the first camps.

1.2 Wider Policy Context

The initiative was driven by the Council's vision for parks and open spaces - Your City, Your Space 2005 – 2020. The vision followed two years of consultation and is the largest ongoing investment in parks and open spaces for many years, designed to improve the design, management, heritage value and levels of community involvement in Belfast's public spaces. It aims to:-

- a. help local people to take control of their open spaces,
- b. protect and improve open space that supports and promotes our natural, built and social heritage,
- c. provide a network of open space that we can enjoy and that will help to improve the quality of life and
- d. create and maintain an open space where we can all feel at ease.

This Council investment in its vision for parks and open spaces has led to the transformation of parks across the city. The Falls Park is one example of city leadership and community involvement working together to transform the park from an underused place where young people gathered, sometimes for anti social activities, and older people and women did not feel safe, to a positive environment for all parts of the local communities.

Additional Council policies and initiatives which the Camps contribute to are:-

- Local Biodiversity Plan for Belfast which aims to (a) raise awareness of biodiversity in Belfast, (b) get people involved with biodiversity and develop biodiversity partnerships and (c) conserve national and local priority species and habitats in Belfast.
- Reclaiming Belfast's Urban Parks and public open spaces Conference 2006. The conference was centred on the New York experience with key speakers from the city of New York's Parks and Recreation Department telling the story of how Central Park and other green spaces in the city had been turned into safe and welcoming places.
- The Belfast Strategic Partnership's citywide campaign to improve emotional well being which sets out the health benefits of physical activity and the natural environment. *(Take 5 Leaflet was distributed to every house in the city with City Matters in 2014).*

2. About the Programme

2.1 Design of the citywide camps

In April 2014, the Parks and Leisure Committee agreed in principle to grant approval to the citywide programme, subject to costs and clarity about selection procedure and age range. Final approval was granted in June based on a paper which set out the following:-

The camps were to last five days and to be aimed at various age groups with a maximum of 15 per camp.

Each camp had the following objectives:

- Develop skills and knowledge of the local environment
- Develop personal skills and complete different adventurous activities
- Build new relationships, both within a team environment and across the City.

Each camp had different aspects and projects, based on local opportunities as well as options to visit and experience other parts of the City and develop and learn new skills.

Typical days would include a cycle, team building physical activities, a walk through a forest or up a glen or mountain and an opportunity to learn new skills such as compass reading, basic navigation, and learning about local fauna and natural history.

2.2 Anticipated benefits

The benefits of the young development camp were identified as:-

- Increased participation in leisure activities and assisting in reducing childhood obesity.
- Reduced potential of anti social /community behaviour by engaging and educating the young people of Belfast on the positives that our parks and open spaces have to offer.
- Increased awareness amongst young people on the importance of enhancing biodiversity in our city and surrounding area.
- Increased capacity for participants as 'young leaders' by developing leadership skills, decision making skills, team working skills and hazard awareness / avoidance skills.

The planning and design of the camps was subject to the preparation of an in depth event management plan including health and safety, child protection and relevant risk assessment.

2.3 Age range and selection process.

Parks Department Outreach Officers have developed relationships across the city with different age ranges of young people. On this basis, the proposed age range of 10- 17 years was agreed by Council as suitable, based on consultation with various existing youth groups.

Each camp was to include young people from either end of that range, as a group including the full range would not be consistent with effective child protection practice.

Belfast City Council identified involvement of the existing Youth Development Forums, which are linked to the Belfast Education and Library Board, as the most suitable process for recruitment, with appropriate checks in place. These Forums have the relevant experience and knowledge of the local needs of young people. Outreach managers worked with the Forums to ensure a broad representation of local young people in each environmental based youth camp and a balanced selection process.

The Outreach Managers sought nominations from the Youth Development Forums and their associated local youth groups to determine the final group of fifteen. By working with the Forums, Council was given assurance regarding the suitability of the young people to participate in this pilot programme, as well as ensuring appropriate support for the young people pre and post camp.

It was agreed that an evaluation report would be brought to Committee in the autumn.

2.4 Budget

Council decided the maximum cost per camp and the outreach managers identified the cost from their existing budgets. It was anticipated that each camp would have different requirements based on local circumstances, requirements and resources.

2.5 Evaluation Process

Independent evaluation support was secured in July 2014. The evaluation process consisted of:-

- Identification of a framework to measure benefits to young people.
- Interviews with each of the 3 Outreach Park Managers.
- Interviews with staff from Youth Development Forums and Youth Providers.
- Research on the context including Belfast City Council policies and relevant initiatives.
- Baseline interviews with young people from East, North and South Belfast.
- End of camp evaluation interviews with young people from East, North and South Belfast and telephone interviews with parents from West Belfast.
- Consultation meeting with the Assistant Director, Belfast City Council Parks and Leisure Dept.

3. Planning and Organisation

3.1 Aims

The youth development camps in each area were designed by Parks and Leisure Department Outreach Teams to ensure:-

- a. Achievement of the aims of the programme,
- b. Contributing to the Council's Vision for Parks and Open Spaces
- c. Responding local issues and using local assets

a. Programme aims.

- To develop skills and knowledge of the local environment
- To develop personal skills and complete different adventurous activities
- To build new relationships, both within a team environment and across the City

b. Aims of the Parks and Open Spaces vision

- help local people to take control of their open spaces,
- protect and improve open space that supports and promotes our natural, built and social heritage,
- provide a network of open space that we can enjoy and that will help to improve the quality of life and
- create and maintain an open space where we can all feel at ease.

c. Responding to local issues and assets.

Through the Council's vision and the efforts of its staff, parks across the city are being transformed from focal points for negative behaviour, with little ownership by local communities and citizens, where women and older people sometimes feel unsafe, to positive places for everyone. The development of the youth development camps arose from and contributed to this citywide change.

As well as contributing to this citywide vision, each camp had additional local objectives for the implementation of the vision in their area. These objectives were identified through interviews with the Outreach Managers.

North Belfast

In North Belfast the camp objectives were to:-

1. Use the newly refurbished Woodvale Park to demonstrate that the park is performing and can generate activities, bring in programmes and increase usage.
2. Test whether an initiative, started in another area of the city, is relevant to local needs, and address any concerns about value for money.

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3. Respond to Woodvale Park's reputation for anti social behaviour, by targeting the young people who are currently engaging in it and increase their respect for the park.
4. Explore with young people the concept of a Young Adult Association Area, which the Council is piloting by developing area where young people can be dry and unobserved in a place where noise would not disturb local residents.
5. Provide a range of activities which might lead to longer term outcomes for young people such as engagement in sports activities, involvement in the community garden etc.
6. Provide an opportunity for cross community interaction and relationship building.

South Belfast

In South Belfast the camp objectives were to use the skills and passion of local environmental groups to educate and enthuse children about the natural environment on their doorstep and:-

- Enhance appreciation of the parks
- Get to know park rangers and staff.
- Increase community ownership.
- Increase the number of young people using the park.
- Provide young people with opportunities for a better and more educated experience of the outdoors,
- Increase knowledge of local history and geology.
- Build on constructive relationships with community partners.
- Develop new interests and aspirations and channel young peoples' abilities eg cyclig and joining clubs.
- Increase confidence, mental and physical wellbeing of young people.
- Increase community cohesion – people from different communities having fun together.
- Build appreciation of biodiversity in their local area and how it links to the natural environment.
- Promote the parks and the outreach work by a programme which is highly visible with participants and leaders wearing branded T shirts and using branded tents – which is good PR for the Council, the image of the park and perception of young people.
- Increase local ownership and awareness of the range of facilities in Lady Dixon Park
- Create a highly visible positive presence of young people in the Falls Park.

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- Increase local ownership and awareness of the range of facilities in Lady Dixon Park
- Create a highly visible positive presence of young people in the Falls Park.

East Belfast

In East Belfast the camp aimed to develop relationships with local youth practitioners into working partnerships with the aim of enabling young people to enhance their personal skills and their sense of ownership of local parks and open spaces.

The Belfast City Council Parks Team have been working with the East Belfast Youth Practitioners Forum over the last year to develop their outreach work, with the aim of maximising community involvement and participation in the Council's parks and open spaces.

In March 2014 the Parks team participated in a series of workshops, organised by the East Belfast Youth Practitioners Forum to develop a youth response plan for the area. The workshops were attended by community and youth leaders from across the area, voluntary agencies and statutory services including PSNI, Health Trust and BELB. The aim of this process was to maximise partnership working between community and youth workers and voluntary and statutory agencies across the area. A number of points were raised which highlighted opportunities for the Parks Team to develop its outreach work in partnership with groups in the area including:-

'Groups need to work collectively with statutory groups. Youth and community groups have limits to their resources and remit; more statutory intervention is needed.'

‘Just moving the young people about and not actually engaging them doesn’t work, and neither does not reaching the core group. There is an opportunity for more co-ordination, understanding the strengths and limitations of each agency and sharing resources between agencies.’

In this context the additional local objectives for the camp were to:-

- Work in partnership with East Belfast Youth providers to increase capacity for future projects.
- Establish the skills sets of local organisations.
- Build the capacity of peer leaders (aged 15 – 17)
- Provide a meaningful enjoyable experience for young people.

3.2 Recruitment of young people

As outlined in the Council paper, Parks and Leisure Outreach managers worked with their local Youth Development Forums, which are linked to the Belfast Education and Library Board, to ensure a broad representation of local young people in each youth camp and a balanced selection process.

Nominations were sought from the Youth Development Forums and their associated local youth groups to determine the final group of fifteen. In this way, Council was given assurance regarding the suitability of the young people to participate in this pilot programme, as well as ensuring appropriate support for the young people pre and post camp.

In North Belfast recruitment was carried out by BELB’s Area Youth Project which carries out detached work in parks and other places where young people gather. The age range of the young people was 13 – 14 years old. The rationale for the age range was to target park users to prevent and address involvement in anti social behaviour.

In West Belfast recruitment was carried out through the network of established youth providers – Upper Springfield Development Trust, St Galls, Ulster Wildlife Club, Friends of the Falls Park, USDT, Corpus Christi School and Upper Andersonstown Community Forum. The age range was 10 – 12. The rationale for this age range was the Wild Network idea, outlined in 1.1 including the list of things children should do before they are 11 ³/₄, as well as the openness of pre adolescent young people to education and learning and their less challenging behaviour.

In East Belfast recruitment was carried out through the East Belfast Youth Practitioners Forum which includes a range of statutory and community based groups across the area. The age range was 12 – 15 with a group of peer mentors aged 16-17. The rationale for the age range was to prevent and address involvement in anti social behaviour, to develop confidence and skills and to build the capacity of peer leaders.

In South Belfast recruitment was carried out through Malone Integrated College, South Belfast Area Project and through Friends of Lady Dixon Park. The age range was 10 – 12. The rationale for this age range was that pre adolescent young people are more open to education and learning and their behaviour is less problematic.

The choice of age group of the young people in each area was carefully considered in response to local needs and circumstances in the context of the programme aims.

3.3 Programme

South Belfast

In South Belfast the Camp was overseen and led by the Outreach Manager and day to day facilitation and group management was provided by a local leadership, management and team development company, with input from volunteers from previous years. The local Community Park Supervisor and the park wardens attended and participated throughout the week.

Activities included:-

Mountain biking skills, geo caching, bird box building, bike to meadows, shelter and day camp construction, willow dome construction, pond dipping, high wire and caving and canoeing at Belfast Activity Centre, tent erection and preparation of camp for overnight campout, campfire songs and marshmallows feast, cycling instruction and exploration of the Giants Ring.

The South Belfast camp was based in Lady Dixon Park and camp activities took place during the day. The overnight camp out took place in the Walled Garden of the Park. Other venues included the Lagan Tow Path, Barnet's Park, Mary Peters Track, Lagan Meadows, Divis Mountain and Belfast Activity Centre.

East Belfast

The camp in East Belfast was led by the Outreach Manager and day to day facilitation and management was provided by East Belfast Alternatives. There was a high level of active engagement from 3 local park wardens. There was also input from Belfast Activity Centre, Belfast Exposed on photography, Nozzle and Brush on graffiti art, Eclipse Pics on videography, Swann Training on woodwork skills and Connswater Greenway. Three volunteers from Orangegrove Athletics Club assisted at the orienteering activity.

In the initial stages an event management company was engaged to consult with Parks staff and the Youth Practitioners Forum to negotiate and develop a programme appropriate for the agreed target group. After two meetings, they produced a draft programme costed at significantly more than the available budget. The Outreach Manager then convened a further meeting with the Youth Practitioners Forum and local groups with the skills and facilities to contribute to the camp, including the boxing club, football club, Orangegrove Athletics Club and Connswater Greenway Project. This resulted in a revised programme which ran over 4 days.

Activities included: meeting the park warden and hearing about their work, woodwork, introduction to the community garden, outdoor play and sports, photography, orienteering, videography, graffiti, healthy eating, cycling and segway tours. Venues included Orangefield

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Park, Orangefield School, Victoria Park, Connswater Greenway, Titanic Quarter, Knocknagoney Community Garden, Comber Greenway and the Skainos Centre.

There was no overnight camp out, most activities took place in the evenings and there was a late night orienteering activity in Victoria Park.

North Belfast

The North Belfast camp was organised by the Outreach Manager and activities were provided by a range of groups including Belfast Activity Centre, North Belfast Area Project, Survival NI and Conservation Volunteers. Leadership on the ground was not clear or visible and, in the course of the week, the management of the group of young people was undertaken by two sessional workers. The Attendant in the Bowling Pavilion took an active interest in the camp and the young people.

Activities included: team games, multi sports and street dance, survival skills, Belfast Activity Centre, outdoor laser and a bouncy castle available for all park users on the final afternoon.

The camp was based in Woodvale Park, activities took place during the day and there was no overnight camp out.

West Belfast

In West Belfast the Camp was overseen and led by the Outreach Manager and day to day facilitation and group management was provided by an Adventure Camp Company, specialising in adventurous activities for teens. The local Community Park Supervisor and the park wardens attended and participated throughout the week.

Activities included:-

Mountain biking skills, geo caching, bird box building, bike to meadows, shelter and day camp construction, willow dome construction, pond dipping, high wire and caving and canoeing at Belfast Activity Centre, tent erection and preparation of camp for overnight campout, campfire songs and marshmallows feast, cycling instruction and exploration of the Giants Ring.

The West Belfast camp was based in the Falls Park and camp activities took place during the day. The camp out took place on Divis Mountain. Other venues included the Bog Meadows, Belfast Activity Centre and Colin Glen.

4. Evidence of benefits and impact

4.1 Achievement of programme aims

The first part of this section sets out the evidence of how the programme aims were achieved.

- To develop skills and knowledge of the local environment
- To develop personal skills and complete different adventurous activities
- To build new relationships, both within a team environment and across the City.

A. To develop skills and knowledge of the local environment

The success of the camps in achieving this aim is evident from participants' increased enjoyment of their local parks and open spaces and increased knowledge of the natural environment.

In West Belfast the enthusiasm of the camp leaders for the natural environment communicated itself to the young people. The Outreach Manager is a visible presence in open spaces in the area. One parent observed *'the kids look up to him – he's our own Bear Grylls'*.

The local young people learnt about the green corridor from the Falls Park, the graveyard and up to the Black Mountain. One parent said *'It was the young people's first hands-on experience of the environment – they came home and ate everything on their plate, slept well and lost interest in electronic gadgets for the week'*. Another parent noted *'there are thousands of children sitting in schools in West Belfast in the shadow of the Black Mountain but very few of them ever set foot on it, never mind camp out on it. This was a life-long experience for them'*.

In South Belfast, the young people explored the corridor between Minnowburn, Lagan Meadows, the Wetlands and Lady Dixon Park. One parent said *'This scheme is really different and with the staff's knowledge and enthusiasm my children have both learned a life lesson on getting up and getting out there'*.

In East Belfast the camp visited 4 local parks as well as the Connswater Greenway. Feedback from the young people included *'I've learnt about the wildlife of the park and to treat it with respect'* and *'I learnt how much effort the gardeners put in. I'd think a bit more before I'd vandalise them.'* T

The camp provided opportunities for the young people to enjoy public spaces alongside other citizens and users, for example they were able to meet and get to know bowlers and to interact with other people in the park, rather than being shepherded about in a group.

Local youth providers who have experienced a range of programmes for young people identified the outdoors nature of the camp as unique. *'It was simple, physical and in nature.'*

So many of the things our young people do are passive, commercialised and materialistic – this was participative and the young people felt free’.

At the end of each camp, young people demonstrated increased awareness of park facilities. When interviewed they reflected, *‘The park was a bit boring before; I’ll pay more attention now and enjoy it better’ and ‘ There’s a lot of stuff to do in the park and I respect it more.’* Another said *‘I learnt how much wildlife there actually is in our park’.*

Parents and young people from South and West Belfast said they would go to the park more often as a family, spend more time there and do a wider range of things. One parent said *‘The camp set an example for us. Although we are city folk, we’re all only 2 minutes from our local park’.*

Knowledge of the natural environment

Young people demonstrated more awareness of the natural environment and showed more curiosity and appreciation of flora and fauna at the end of the camp. They gained their new knowledge and appreciation in different ways, sometimes through input from local enthusiasts and parks staff and sometimes through the medium of photography.

In South Belfast young people learnt about pond dipping, bird box making, making shelters out of willows and bird ringing. Pond dipping was most frequently mentioned by the young people as an interesting and enjoyable activity, which they would do again. One parent from South Belfast said *‘My son and daughter children attended and I have to say it was one of the best learning experiences that my children have been involved in. My son loved the lessons on local wildlife and the local environment and last weekend we had to go as a family to Lady Dixons so he could show all of us where he had seen the kingfisher along the Lagan and where the bats lived.*

In East Belfast the young people learnt about the environment and about growing. Their comments included *‘I would like to try growing things now – like potatoes and flowers’ and ‘I’d be interested in helping out with a community garden’. ‘I learnt how beautiful the plants and flowers in the park are, through photography’.*

In North Belfast the knowledge of the natural environment was through learning survival skills such as lighting a fire and building a shelter on an expedition to the Cavehill.

Parents in West Belfast noted the education their children had gained and regarded it as a life lesson. One parent noted that his son is now much more aware of the natural environment and the importance of not leaving rubbish and use of bags for dog mess. Three parents noticed how their children had retained their knowledge and learning, pointing out the flora and fauna on family holidays or days out such as the difference between dragonflies and damson flies, or the presence of flint on a family walk. Another parent referred to the far greater impact the camp had on their child, compared to other programmes and schemes for children and young people.

Feedback from parents and young people evidenced a new love of the outdoors. One parent said *'my son has really bought into the outdoors'* and another *'my son had a good time but he also got an education and a new interest in the environment'* and one young person said *'I'm more outdoorsy than I thought!'*. Another family said that as a result of their son's newfound love of the outdoors, they would be holidaying at home next year instead of going abroad, so that they could camp and explore the local environment. The same child had also asked his parent for a dog so that he could take it for walks and he had ensured that his new schoolbag was a type that he could use on walks and camping trips with his family.

B Development of personal skills and completion of different adventurous activities

Adventure

Fun, adventure and excitement were words most often used to describe the camps. Other words and comments included:- *'it was the best week of my life'; 'the week was amazing; 'I would definitely come back'; 'best days of my summer; brilliant'*. Other words used to describe the camps were - surprising, competitive, very much about nature, very energetic, enjoyable.

One parent noted *'every day my children came home with stories of their adventures'*.

The focus on adventure worked equally well across the different age groups across the city. For example, in East Belfast, where the young people were older and some had been targeted because of their behaviour in the parks, local youth workers said *'the young people loved it; there was no negativity, we didn't have to coax them to take part, everybody participated and they all attended every day – in fact the number of participants increased.'*

Across the city, the young people completed a wide range activities including:-

<p>Cycling Archery Hill walking, Hiking. Overnight camping Caving Graffiti</p>	<p>Canoeing Building a shelter. Climbing trees. Wall climbing Orienteering. Photography Brake dancing</p>	<p>Woodwork Cookery Making a campfire Segways High rope activities. Bird box making Video</p>
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Personal skills and long term change

During the interviews, young people identified a range of personal skills they had developed during the camp, including:

- Resilience.
- Risk taking
- Leadership

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- Physical challenge.
- Overcoming the challenges of learning new things or things they found difficult.

One young man in North Belfast noted that he had fallen down a lot in the physical activities which was unusual for him. He reflected that this might have been because he felt safe to take risks. Another noticed that he had paid more attention and participated more than he usually did in organised activities because it was a fun learning experience— both the people and the activities. One young man enjoyed the opportunity to practice and develop his leadership skills, to think, plan, take the initiative, come up with ideas and lead the team.

Others reflected that the camp has been a challenge for them. They had pushed themselves to participate in activities. They also found the activities physically challenging, for example, completing a cycle or a hill walk, undertaking and completing the shelter and fire making, and getting especially cold and/or wet. Others surprised themselves *'I can go a lot further when I'm walking than I thought.'* Another said *'I changed from being nervous about everything to being confident and I'm proud about that.'*

Parents in West Belfast noted the personal skills including survival skills and self reliance which their children had developed, such as carrying their own pack, use of a stick on long walks, tidying up, putting up tents and washing up. One parent reflected on the difference between skills acquired through sports and the skills acquired through the camp which were more to do with adventure and relying on your own resources.

Leaders in West Belfast noticed that two young people – one girl and one boy displayed great athletic prowess in cycling. They highlighted this exceptional ability to their parents at the end of the week, encouraging them to support their children in pursuing their interest through a cycling club.

Parents of the younger participants in South and West Belfast commented on learning about leadership and organisation and the positive role model set by the camp leaders. *'We were a bit worried about leaving our son, especially overnight, but when we arrived at the camp and saw the level of organisation, the way equipment was laid out, the structure and the level of organisation - it set the scene for the week, and removed any fears we had'*. Another said *'the camp leaders were absolutely fantastic with the kids and, with their team, demonstrated great leadership skills. The professional organisation, direction and leadership gave me confidence.'*

Parents and young people evidenced long term change in attitudes, interests and behaviour. They referred to life lessons and experiences which will stay with them for the rest of their life. One example of long term change is this South Belfast parent's comment, *'It is hard to get my son to take part in activities outside the house so this camp has changed his attitude. Now he wants to join the Scouts so that he can do more adventure camps so he can learn more.'*

The skills which young people identified they had developed through the camps included cycling (which was very popular), orienteering, photography, woodworking, brake dancing, canoeing, graffiti and fishing. The interests which they expressed an interest in maintaining are listed in the section on 'increased participation in leisure activities'.

C New relationships built, both within a team environment and across the City.

All of the young people enjoyed meeting each other and making new friends. None of the young people on the four camps knew each other beforehand, with the exception of North Belfast. The young people enjoyed helping each other with activities and participating with the other gender. For example one of the girls commented, *'I would talk to the wee lads in the park now – I didn't before.'* Leaders in South Belfast noticed how the quietest, most withdrawn child at the beginning of the week was a confident member of the group, throwing himself into all the activities by the end of the week.

There were three other outcomes for relationships:-

New relationships between young people and parks staff

The young people identified the chance to get to know parks staff, wardens and managers as a valuable outcome of the camp for them. This was particularly noticeable amongst the older age group in East and North Belfast, who use the parks in the evening and are involved in, or witness negative behaviours, such as arranged fights, refusing to leave at closing time and rumour spreading and agitation against the police. This age group were also interested in the day to day work of parks staff; they provided positive, credible, role models for future employment. Both younger and older young people developed positive relationships with park managers, gardeners, wardens and attendants in the course of the camps and went home at the end of the week on first name terms with them.

I really enjoyed the parkies being with us; nicest men every; good banter off them; they have a hard job getting people out of the park at closing time.

The young people in East picked up on the enthusiasm of the Outreach Manager; she communicated her love of the job to them.

I met the park wardens; I thought they would have been boring but they're not.

It was good for the young people to see a woman in the role of Community Park Supervisor in South Belfast; she was a good role model'.

Relationships between young people and park users

The fact that the camps were based on adventure and open spaces, enabled young people to interact with other park users as fellow citizens; this had some unanticipated benefits. In East Belfast one of the bowlers in the park took an interest in the young people and showed them how to bowl. The next time the young people were in the park after the camp, they called in to have a chat with him.

New and stronger relationships between parks staff and local voluntary and community groups.

In East Belfast, the Outreach Manager achieved her aim of developing partnerships with youth providers. Throughout the planning and delivery of the camp, she maximised

opportunities for developing relationships and partnership working with local groups from sports clubs to youth providers. For example, she secured the support of a local youth provider with strong relationships with young people in the area; three of their staff worked alongside Park's staff, leading the camp, managing behaviour and supporting engagement and learning. The result is a range of new Parks' Outreach initiatives in the area for the future.

In North Belfast the camp provided an opportunity to initiate relationships with local youth providers. Prior to the project, the primary reason for Parks department staff to make contact with a local groups was to discuss and seek help with a problem in a Council facility. The primary reason for local groups to make contact with Parks department staff was to seek grant aid. This changed when this project started. Park Department staff now have a better appreciation of the knowledge that the local youth work team have about how the park is used by young people and what goes on in it.

In West Belfast, relationships with community networks, youth providers, schools and sporting organisations are well established through the Outreach Managers interaction with the Friends of the Falls Park group. The existing relationship with the Upper Springfield Development Trust was strengthened this year through their role in recruiting young people for the camp; previously the relationship with Parks Dept had been focused on addressing anti social behaviour. The relationship with schools in West Belfast has increased use of the Parks throughout the year by local schools, most recently for a B Tech learning programme.

Also in West Belfast, work with environmental groups has been developed to sustain the interest of the young people, with tangible outcomes. This summer Colin Glen Trust and the National Trust ran a week of events in Divis Mountain as a follow on to the camps, during which the park rangers put their new knowledge of pond dipping into practice by showing young people how to do it.

In South Belfast new relationships were established between parks staff and South Belfast Area Project and Malone Integrated College.

4.2 Achievement of programme benefits

The proposed benefits of the young development camp were identified by Council as:-

- i. Increased participation in leisure activities and assisting in reducing childhood obesity.
- ii. Reduced potential of anti social /community behaviour by engaging and educating the young people of Belfast on the positives that our parks and open spaces have to offer.
- iii. Increased awareness amongst young people on the importance of enhancing biodiversity in our city and surrounding area.
- iv. Increased capacity for participants as 'young leaders' by developing leadership skills, decision making skills, team working skills and hazard awareness / avoidance skills.

i. Increased participation in leisure activities.

The interests and skills which the young people said they would like to maintain after the camp are set out in the following table.

New Interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in a community garden • Pond dipping x 2 • Go for longer walks. • Spend more time outside. • Learning about birds and trees. • Mountain climbing. • Want to try caving. • BAC – new place to go. • Bird box building. • Walking

ii. Reduced potential of anti social /community behaviour by engaging and educating the young people of Belfast on the positives that our parks and open spaces have to offer.

In East Belfast some of the young people had been recruited for the camp because of a number of problems, including their refusal to leave the park at closing time and confrontations with the wardens. Despite these recent negative experiences, the park wardens threw themselves into the programme with professionalism, treating all of the young people the same, regardless of prior conflict. They took part in the icebreaker exercises from the very start. East Belfast Alternatives, who managed the camp alongside the Parks Manager, identified one of the main outcomes of the week as similar to a restorative justice process, in that it restored and strengthened relationships between wardens and young people. It is likely that this will contribute to preventing anti social behaviour in the future.

At the beginning of the camps, young people in North and East Belfast had described how parks can become a focus for negative experiences and activity such as arranged fights, spreading rumours about police activity and then attacking the police, refusing to leave at night when the wardens are locking up etc. The camps enabled them to enjoy both the freedom of the open spaces and to interact with other people who use them, such as the bowlers and the wardens who work in them. They were able to relax together in a number of parks and open spaces. The park also became a place of learning and trying out new skills. Youth leaders in East Belfast, who had prior knowledge the young people, were impressed by the respect they displayed throughout the week to all the leaders and to the park facilities. They noted the young people’s new awareness of how space could be used in a positive way, for example how they deliberated for a long time over where to situate their mural in the park so that it wouldn’t be damaged.

The camps provided the opportunity for Parks Dept staff to be seen as passionate and proud of their spaces and for young people to see the possibilities for enjoyment and learning. Continued engagement has been facilitated and can follow on with ease.

Branding worked well for the areas which used it. Branded coats, hoodies or tents created a visible presence in the park. This provided a sense of identity and also legitimacy for the young people in the parks, and highlighted young people's positive engagement in the park for other park users.

iii. Increased awareness amongst young people on the importance of enhancing biodiversity in our city and surrounding area.

Increased awareness of biodiversity was a central feature of the camps in South and West Belfast and love of the outdoors, gardening, flowers and plants in the parks was identified by East Belfast participants as a valued outcome.

Awareness of biodiversity was new for participants and has opened the door to a new interest, which was noted by a significant number as lifelong.

iv. Increased capacity for participants as 'young leaders' by developing leadership skills, decision making skills, team working skills and hazard awareness / avoidance skills.

The camps provided a range of opportunities for the development of leadership skills. In West and South Belfast, previous participants returned to the camps as leaders and camp and several camp participants expressed a wish to volunteer in the future. In East Belfast, young people who had expressed a wish to become volunteers with East Belfast Alternatives, were given the opportunity to attend the camp as mentors for the younger age group and to participate in an accredited course on peer mentoring, run by Alternatives. Group activities throughout the programme provided opportunities for participants to develop decision making, team working and hazard awareness skills.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Impact

The evidence from the evaluation process demonstrates that the citywide programme of Environment based Youth Development Camps achieved their aims and realised the anticipated benefits. This evaluation report evidences direct and sustainable benefits for young people, families, parks staff and statutory and voluntary youth providers.

Key impacts were:-

- Young people enjoyed and positive engaged with the outdoors *Aim 1 Awareness and knowledge of the local environment*
- Young people had new experiences of physical challenge and adventure and gained a range of new interests for the future – cycling, woodwork, pond dipping, walking, photography. *Aim 2 Personal skills and interests*
- New relationships were built between Parks staff and young people and relationships restored, where there had been conflict and anti social behaviour. Young park users are now on first name terms with park attendants, wardens, supervisors and managers. New and stronger relationships were created between Parks staff and local statutory and voluntary youth providers *Aim 3 Build new relationships, both within a team environment and across the City*
- Young people developed new interests, new knowledge of things to do in parks and open spaces. *Benefit 1 Increased participation in leisure activities*
- Young people changed their attitude to park staff and changed their awareness of and increased sense of belonging in parks alongside other park users. *Benefit 2 Reduced potential of anti social /community behaviour by engaging and educating the young people of Belfast on the positives that our parks and open spaces have to offer.*
- Young people gained an interest in the natural environment which is present on the doorstep – flowers, trees, birds, pond life. *Benefit 3 Increased awareness amongst young people on the importance of enhancing biodiversity in our city and surrounding area.*
- Young people learnt to work as a team and gained experience and training as youth mentors. *Benefit 4 Increased capacity for participants as 'young leaders' by developing leadership skills, decision making skills, team working skills and hazard awareness / avoidance skills.*

5.2 Uniqueness

There was a very clear understanding of the unique nature of the camp by all participants, leaders and contributors.

The key features of the camps were clearly identified by young people and youth leaders as being about:-

- Real learning and engagement,
- New experiences and adventure
- Appreciating your park.
- Simple, physical and outdoorsy experiences.

- Being in public spaces with other members of the public
- Enjoying and learning about local spaces, on your doorstep.
- Participative – not passive.

By contrast, other summer programmes were described as ‘impersonal’, ‘bus trips to the usual places where young people go all the time’, ‘shepherded about in small groups with no interaction with anybody else, including other members of the public’ and ‘more like child minding than engagement’.

5.3 Criteria for success

The aims and benefits were achieved through a combination of vision, passion, professionalism, planning and management. A number of key components ensured results:-

- Passion for educating people about their local natural environment.
- Operational experience in the Council – to co-ordinate and maximise use of resources and input, manage risks and ensure safety.
- Local knowledge and relationships.
- Visible leadership, including branding.
- Day to day communication with, and management of, the young people.
- Use of contractors with local knowledge.
- Micro management of the young people, activities and equipment to minimise risks.

5.4 Flexible Model

The implementation of the camp across the city has demonstrated that the model for the camps is flexible. The same aims and benefits can be achieved in different local contexts and with young people from a range of backgrounds, interests, ages and confidence. The model was effective in addressing issues with young people’s behaviour in parks and changed young people’s attitudes to parks and parks staff in every case.

5.5 Value for money

Each of the four camps cost significantly less than the maximum cost approved by Council. Outreach managers identified the costs from their existing budgets.

Total costs, including support staff.

East Belfast	£5,279
North Belfast	£3,342
South Belfast	£6,123
West Belfast	£5,845

In the main, the camps provided a springboard for a range of new activities throughout the year and therefore some of the costs related to activities initiated through the camp and taking place later in the year. Other costs were for equipment which is being re-used for other groups and activities and will reduce the costs in subsequent years. There was not the same level of programme leadership or outcome in North Belfast.

Each camp had different requirements based on local circumstances, requirements and resources. All of them made maximum use of local assets and supported local businesses and voluntary and community groups, for example use of community venues and using skills of local youth providers, environmentalists and local sporting organisations.

Breakdown of total costs for the four camps.

Activities	Equipment	Programme leadership	Travel and subsistence	Support Staff
£8,171	£2,724	£5,600	£1,793	£2,301

Outreach managers used a range of local resources to ensure appropriately skilled, safe and qualified leadership for the camps.

There was considerable voluntary input to the camp in East Belfast from local groups and individuals – ranging from East Belfast Alternatives to the local athletics association and a member of the bowling club. This added to the local ownership of the camp and to the development of long term relationships.

The long term benefits of the camps for young people, families, Park Staff and youth providers was evidenced in the previous sections. The value for money of the camps is evident from the long term results.

5.6 Recommendations

1. **Train and up-skill Parks Staff.** The enthusiasm and professionalism of Parks Department staff, including attendants and wardens, as demonstrated by their success in engaging with young people and their passion for the natural environment, should be harnessed and developed through a citywide programme of training and up-skilling. The menu of training should range from practical skills like archery, pond dipping, cycling and canoeing to accredited programmes in ‘How to Engage with Young People’, Conflict Management and Mediation.
2. **Sustain the learning.** The learning impacts of the youth development camps should be sustained. Outreach Managers have a range of ideas and plans for activities at school holidays and weekends to sustain and build on the impact of the learning achieved through the camps. These include (a) Saturday clubs enabling pathways and progression such as Wilderness Clubs, Green Teenz, Junior Ranger Corps and

Conservation Corps, (b) activities in local parks including cross cycling, woodworking, photography training, gardening skills and linking in with current developments such as Connswater Greenway. (c) facilities in local parks such as pond dipping platforms and nature study points linking with the Council's Biodiversity work.

3. **Sustain the engagement.** The engagement impacts of the camps should be sustained through ongoing activities for young people organised with youth providers in each area in order to reduce the potential of anti social /community behaviour by engaging and educating the young people on the positives that our parks and open spaces have to offer.
4. **Widen access to the camp experience.** Ways of resourcing more young people to benefit from the camp experience should be identified such as School holiday camps throughout the year and increasing the number of summer camps in each area.
5. **Link with mainstream education.** Educational outcomes could be developed by building on existing work with schools in South and West Belfast to provide learning opportunities in biodiversity and the environment through the curriculum, and with environmental organisations to provide qualifications such as Entry Level Habitat Restoration work.
6. **Ensure Council gets recognition.** The concept of the city summer camp should be promoted, ensuring that Belfast City Council, and their partners, are recognised for this initiative. The Council should publicise the uniqueness of their camps,' run by your Council, in your local area in the green spaces on your doorstep, by your local Council workers'. Branding of clothing and equipment and Council leadership should be visible throughout the camp.
7. **Recruitment.** Recruitment of young people should be started in May/ June and Outreach Managers should share their experience and ideas about effective recruitment methods. The camp programme, including the strengths of each activity should be explained and discussed with young people / parents in advance.
8. **Learn from experience.** There was huge learning for outreach managers from the experience of running the camps. The criteria for success should be used to plan future camps, and opportunities provided for Outreach managers to share experience and learning to ensure that results are consistent across the city.
9. **Leadership.** Leadership of the camps should be clear and consistent throughout their duration. The roles of all leaders, facilitators and support staff should be clearly set out and agreed during the planning process. The role and supervision of sessional staff should be revisited.

Appendix A

Camp programmes to be appended.