

Working with young people in the outdoors

This short guide is aimed at outward facing delivery staff in National Park Authorities and other environmental organisations. It provides a few principles around working with people aged 16 to 25, but will be applicable to working with people of any age. We hope to make National Parks more engaging for young people and help change the demographic of people who use them and care about them. The guide has been produced by the [Campaign for National Parks](#)' Mosaic project and is based on our experience as a national team of youth workers working with young people who recently experienced National Parks for the first time.

More and more young people are getting involved in volunteering, partly in response to an increasingly challenging job market. National Parks and other green space provide inspirational environments for volunteering, having fun, spending time with friends or family, developing confidence and life skills and gaining technical skills.

Guiding principles in all work:

- Young people are people. They are all different with different interests.
- If you are nervous about working with this age group – remember that they may be just as nervous of working with you. Treat them as equals.
- Be yourself

How do I get young people to come to the National Park in the first place?

The most consistent piece of advice from young people with Mosaic is to start by meeting them or putting up information in places where they normally hang out. For example:

- Invest time in letting youth organisations know what activities can be done in National Parks, how to get there, if you can provide any support for transport, what opportunities there are for young people (e.g. volunteering, specific events) etc. This is usually slow to get started, but will snowball as people get to know and trust you.
- Cast your net wide at first focussing on easy wins. Once some people are engaged, others will follow.
- If possible offer a short session to youth organisations / colleges talking about the National Park and what you can do there. This works best if there is a specific event or activity in the National Park that young people can sign up to at the end of the session which is happening after a short period.
- Invest time in talking to young people who do get involved, or those who don't, about why they do or don't get involved – for example visit youth groups, college freshers' fairs etc.
- Work with people who work with young people – teachers, youth workers etc. They will be able to identify young people who already have a bent towards what you are offering.
- Think laterally about who to approach – people you know from outside work for example.
- Many young people want to volunteer. They want to put something back to their communities or make them better. High unemployment has made people very aware of the need to have a good CV.
- For good experiences in National Parks, it's important that it is the choice of each individual to take part in the activity.

Logistical considerations for events for young people in National Parks

Essentially the same rules apply as organising events/activities/volunteering sessions for people of any age, such as wet weather plans, risk assessments, ensuring the activity is suitable for those who are taking part. Particular things to think about:

- **Transport:** People in this age group are less likely to have access to transport. Public transport may be non-existent or too expensive (many young champions, for example may not have enough money for a bus fare).
- **Supply some food and drink** – lunch, potatoes made on the fire, cake, tea made with Kelly kettles, toast made on a fire, crisps, flapjacks, water etc
- **Strike a balance** between being too hard on people (spending the day in icy rain digging up roots in a bog) and being too soft (hustling them indoors at the slightest hint of rain).
- **Expenses:** Be prepared to pay expenses in cash on presentation of receipt at the event, rather than doing it by bank transfer later. People may not be able to afford to wait, or may rely on being reimbursed to get home again.
- **Repeat communication** before an event using texts, facebook, phone. Planning months in advance isn't realistic. Provide information about the activity for example, 2 weeks, 1 week, 1 day, 1 hour in advance.

Behavioural considerations

- Young people are people. Treat them as equals with respect.
- Sometimes everyone won't turn up. There may or may not be a good reason for this (as with any age of people). Be prepared for the list of participants to change drastically in the run up to the event. This can be nerve-racking.
- Be warm and friendly. Build a rapport, using your own natural style, rather than simulating someone else's. You will gain more respect for being yourself and making mistakes than trying to fit in and failing.
- Energy and enthusiasm are contagious and can turn a difficult day into a great one
- Try to strike a balance between being challenging and supportive.

Boring but important

Many people worry that working with under-18s adds a level of responsibility and regulation that makes it too complicated to consider. This doesn't have to be the case, and National Park Authorities are starting to work with volunteers aged under-18 with no difficulty.

- Familiarise yourself with your organisation's policy for working with young people and vulnerable adults and check insurance details for this work. You may be required to do one or two extra things, but nothing onerous. This is normally around 1. Parental consent, 2. Making sure everyone has the right information.
- One person in the group does need a DBS check to work with under-18s. These are now transferrable between organisations (at your organisation's discretion). If you need to do a new certificate it is normally a fairly quick and painless process. It's free for volunteers.

Considerations for what to include in any activity

Whether it's one person workshadowing you for the day or a residential for thirty 17 year-olds, consider the following:

Planning

- Try to arrange to meet, or at least speak to people before an activity to discuss what to expect and what it will include. This will help you to plan and help make the day go well.

You could also take this opportunity to run a plan past a couple of young people. They'll be able to give good feedback and guidance

- Consider that sets of sessions (e.g. a session on the first Saturday of every month for four months) that have a start and finish and a structure are often easier for people to engage with than random activities.
- Ensure activities fit with the group's interests and abilities
- Animals can be a great way of making people feel more comfortable – a dog joining the group, or a farm visit. Necessary risk assessments must be done.

At the start of and during the activity

- This may be the first time that person is doing something; they may be nervous – or they may not be.
- Create a safe space at the beginning of an activity, for example by making a group agreement for the day / weekend (e.g. <http://youthworkinit.com/how-to-create-a-group-agreement-youth-work-session-plan-idea/>).
- Give roles and responsibilities to different people – involve them different aspects of the activity – however small – and trust them to do it.
- Add an element of fun (anything from a little banter to a fun activity)
- Check what each person's interests and ideas are and see how they can be developed
- Make sure there are breaks in the activity. Or you could break up a day using quick games or icebreakers. There are plenty of books and websites providing information on this. For example, <http://www.youthworkresource.com/youth-work/games/> or <https://insight.typepad.co.uk/40-icebreakers-for-small-groups.pdf>.

At the end of the day

- Provide informal feedback. *'A really good system was that at the end of the day one of the people running it would come up to each person, individually and say – for example, 'Jon; I noticed you were really nervous using the loppers at the beginning of the day, but you've really mastered them now'. 'Almaz: I noticed you were shy about talking to other people at the beginning of the day, but you approached Robyn and that was great' etc'.*
- Evaluate the day. Use simple feedback forms or do a verbal evaluation and take notes. See the annex to this paper for further ideas and details.

Considerations for what to do between activities with young people

- Stay in contact- keep the updates going of what's happening, even if the young person hasn't attended a few sessions
- Share stuff about the activity and other things of interest on social media
- Reflect on how sessions went and what you might want to change or do more of

'Having young people in the Lake District volunteer groups created a great energy and stoked the fire of volunteers of all ages as well as the staff' Tim Duckmanton, Volunteer Coordinator, Lake District National Park Authority

Annex: Feedback and Evaluation Activities

Below are a few suggestions for collecting feedback and evaluating activities or programmes.

There are two sections;

- A. Feedback about the effectiveness of a specific event/series of events
- B. Feedback on the impact the event has had on the people attending
- C. Evaluation forms measuring impact over time

Things to note:

- Always be aware of the nature of the group when choosing feedback activities.
- Groups will usually contain mixed abilities in terms of reading and writing. Some people may not be comfortable providing written feedback
- Choose feedback activities appropriate to the weather (this may mean being armed with options) and the amount of time at the end of the day. If possible, it's a good idea to set aside a non-negotiable 30-45 minutes at the end of the day and do feedback while having tea (from a Kelly kettle, in a café, in a communal space).
- Pens and paper can be tricky if the group is outside all day in rain or strong wind.
- Feedback can be recorded using a voice recorder (e.g. on a smartphone) and/or camera
- Feedback forms, which ask for written comments, usually generate less quality feedback than the same form done verbally. If they must be used, it's a good idea to discuss answers with the group before filling them in.
- Make sure the member of staff running the activity understand why the feedback is needed and what it will be used for.
- It's a good idea to have a volunteer help out at the event who is specifically in charge of collecting feedback / evaluation. This could be a young person, who has had a briefing in advance of the event. This helps give due time to the process and ensure quality.

A. Feedback on an event or activity or set of activities

1. Rule of three

Each participant picks the best point about an activity, the worst point and what could be done better next time. This can be done quickly with each person saying all three in turn, or it can be the basis for a deeper discussion; taking all the best points, then all the worst, then ideas for next time – which is generally more engaging. Works best with groups of 6 or less when done verbally.

2. Thumbs

The organiser calls out the different activities / aspects of the day and participants put their thumbs up, sideways or down to give instant feedback. Can be followed by a few questions / discussion. Take photographs of thumbs to record. Can be very quick – and easier with larger groups, but doesn't give much detail.

3. Lines

The organiser starts by creating a line, indicating where 0 is and where 10 is (or where good and not good are – e.g. between two trees where one is 0 and the other is 10). S/he then calls out the different activities / aspects of the day. People stand on the line where they rate that activity. Record with photographs. Follow up with discussion where appropriate. This can be made more or less physical depending on conditions.

4. **Brick Wall**

Draw a brick wall on a piece of flipchart and give participants pens or post-its. Ask them to fill up the wall brick by brick with feedback about the day. Comments can be written or drawn, colourful or not. Once the brick is built, the whole group can look at it and make any overall reflections. This can be done for a single day – or a series of activities over time.

B. Open feedback focussing on participants:

1. **Personal observations**

Go round the group when everyone is together and listening and say ‘what I noticed about you..., What I’ve learned about you..., This is great because...’ If done authentically and honestly it can give participants a real sense of pride and something positive to take away.

2. **Hands**

Give each person a piece of paper and pen and ask them to draw round their hand. Write something they’ve learned or enjoyed on each finger. Once everyone has completed their fingers, discuss as a group – if appropriate. This feedback is useful for the participants and gives the organiser feedback on the types of activities that the participants have found useful / enjoyable.

3. **Head / Heart / Hand**

Something learned (head); enjoyed (heart); you did (hand). This can be done in various forms depending on the group/individual/ situation. E.g. verbally, or each person draws a picture on a small or large piece of paper and fills it out. Discussion afterwards – or while they are doing it. Take a photo of their image; then each participant can keep their own.

4. **Shields**

This is aimed at people who are involved in a programme of activities over a period of time and should be done only after a few sessions have been completed. This is done on paper as per the example below. Discuss the answers with the group once they have done them – or while they are doing it if appropriate. We have also used this as a way of preparing young people to make presentations about their experience in National Parks. The exercise deepened both the participants’ and staff’s understanding about what they were doing.

C. Closed Evaluation exercises

For project funded activities, many funders often require quantitative data that shows the impact the project is having on the young people taking part. Forms for collecting this data usually need to be done repeatedly to measure change over time. These might include, for example, NR6¹ forms (a six-question survey which explores connection with nature) or ‘Seed Star’ charts (participants rate themselves from 1-10 along each point of the star for a range of different competencies e.g. confidence, social relationships, etc). The following points may be considered:

1. Always allow enough time to fill in the forms properly in sheltered conditions or indoors.
2. Make sure you (or the person leading the session) really understand why the form is being used

¹ Short-form nature-relatedness scale, developed by Nisbet and Zelenski in 2013, which measures a person’s connection to nature using six dimensions.

3. Make sure that each participant understands what the form is for – why they are being asked to fill it in and what will be done with their responses. This leads to more accurate responses and fulfils basic ethical standards. (Ideally participants should sign to confirm they have understood why they are filling in the form). Give time to discuss this fully with the group.
4. Forms which seek to measure change over time should be used *at least* three times. Typically a person will over-rate themselves the first time they fill it in and then having grown in self-awareness will score themselves lower the second time they fill it in. The most accurate results are usually obtained by comparing the forms completed for the second and third time.
5. Evaluation forms should have less than 10 questions – ideally around six, so they do not become cumbersome.
6. Produce written forms so they suitable for people with dyslexia or colour blindness – e.g. it is advisable to use sans-serif fonts (e.g. Calibri, Geneva or Arial pt12) and images can help with make the form more approachable.

Figure: Sample of Shield exercise

