

**LONG TERM IMPACTS OF THE YOUNG CHAMPION EXPERIENCE WITH EXMOOR  
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**Summary report**

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## **BACKGROUND**

### **The Mosaic project**

The original Mosaic project in 2001 worked with black and minority ethnic communities to increase their use of National Parks. Since the original pilot, focusing on black and minority ethnic communities, the project has been extended to other audiences, including 16 to 25 year olds, and six projects have been run nationally. Members of a particular demographic group act as advocates for the National Parks to their own community members, in effect 'championing' their value and the enjoyment that they can offer.

The key to the Mosaic model is that the training and support that each Champion receives is founded upon their own interests in relation to the National Parks, so that they come up with ideas for activities that they think may appeal to their peers. The Young Champions are volunteers who receive training relating to aspects of the National Park, developing their knowledge and skills, and then promoting activities demonstrating them to others in their community. The National Park Authorities, the YHA and other organisations collaborate to make this tailoring possible through the coordination of a Mosaic Project Officer.

In the pilot project in 2009/10, 18 Pilot Young Champions (PYCs) in the 16-25 year old age range were recruited from deprived urban wards to develop projects that would enable other young people to access Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks. These 18 volunteered over 200 days, championed 20 events and directly supported more than 100 other young people to spend over 1,000 hours in the National Parks. Evaluation of this pilot phase showed that the PYCs were positive about the experience when asked soon after completion, but no follow up had been made to check how attitudes may have changed over time.

### **Exploring long term impacts to inform current practice**

Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) is taking part in the main project led by the Campaign for National Parks with 4 other National Parks, which is being evaluated by the research team at Plymouth University. The ENPA Education Manager suggested a study that would

1. explore longer term effects from the intervention and
2. inform Mosaic project officer practice during the lifetime of the current Mosaic project.

The study was also intended to demonstrate whether the practices within the Mosaic project are effective methods to create long term attitude changes and inform Exmoor National Park Authority planning more generally.

### **The research study**

This study was conducted between November 2013 and September 2014, three years after the pilot project ended. We recruited an opportunity sample of four out of 18 from those young people that were traceable after this period and willing to take part (two declined). As the pilot took place across the two southwest National Parks, the pilot Young Champions sometimes refer to Dartmoor as well as Exmoor National Park. Their cooperation in the research has enabled us to explore richly detailed narratives about the influential factors that shape experiences for different individuals.

## Our research questions

1. Are there changes in their lives that can be attributed to the former Young Champions' participation in the Mosaic pilot project?
2. Specifically, do they consider their attitudes towards nature and Exmoor National Park have been affected?
3. What do they regard as most influential within the Mosaic experiences they had in effecting any changes?
4. In retrospect, are there additional features that might enhance a similar experience for young people in their view?

Ethical approval was obtained from Plymouth University Education Research Ethics committee and all participants. The findings set out below are based on three survey responses (2 electronic, 1 paper copy) and telephone interviews (4).

## CHANGES IN LIVES ATTRIBUTED TO MOSAIC

Amongst the most important gains from taking part in the pilot Mosaic reported by the survey respondents were:

- Knowing more about Exmoor
- Confidence
- Meeting new people
- Developing professional skills
- General positive experiences

Respondents also cited experience outdoors and becoming more active as positive changes to their lives as a result of their involvement in the pilot Mosaic project. These changes were echoed by the four Young Champions interviewed. There appeared to be interconnections between the development of *wellbeing* and *self confidence*, *teamwork* and *employability skills*. An underlying message was that *new worlds* were opened up by taking part in the Mosaic project both during it and, for some, in the longer term.

## ATTITUDES TO NATURE AND EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

### Nature

One Young Champion's experience illustrated how the restorative power of natural environments was not always visible or available to people in difficult circumstances. Nor was the importance of preserving access to such places for everybody evident to all.

'...I did not see the importance of nature, outdoor activities and national parks, how important it is to look after them. It is something beneficial all the time, for all people, everywhere, everybody. It gave me a good thought of nature. I didn't know, I liked it being out before then, I like nature and going out and everything. I liked it, but from that, I did learn about the importance of it'

He seems to say that previously to Mosaic he had experienced an innate relationship with nature, but had not been aware of our reciprocal relationship with it and how benefits and enjoyment of people within landscapes could make them care for them and appreciate symbiosis of the human and non-human world.

For others too, a passion for the outdoors predated the Mosaic project. This might be anticipated from the Mosaic model whereby young people offer things they enjoy to others to spread the benefits to their peers.

[Speaking about his connection to nature] 'It's always been with me.... I definitely remember just strong experiences [...] emotional, something very strong, a sense of power, being empowered'

## Differences in Approaches

There were also some interesting differences in perception between the approaches to the Mosaic pilot adopted by Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authority and the two groups of young people involved. Two of the four interviewees mentioned that Dartmoor seemed more accessible to young people.

'[...] there were actually more facilities in Dartmoor, I remember that now. There are more facilities'

'.... there's more stuff going on, maybe there's more young people, it's maybe the closest to the local city, or something like that' ...Yeah, I think, I definitely think that Dartmoor is more provided for er for young people than Exmoor'

'I was more involved in Exmoor (382)....Yeah, it's just that I know the Dartmoor young people really...er...impressed me with the changes that they've done; but they are very different from the groups I was in...so yeah I kind of wish we had these ideas as well [laughs]'

One explanation offered was

'Maybe Exmoor is a bit further out, and it seems to be a local kind of place'

Another perspective was that the emphasis on Exmoor was on practical experiences rather than the background of making the marketing and visual appeal for young people more evident.

'Yeah, they were very different. I mean the groups on Dartmoor that we met on the celebration residential - they'd done so much, that actually make an obvious difference, a very visual difference of the changing the leaflets, designing the hoodies; whereas our group was more interested in introducing young people to Exmoor practically, so taking them out on a day out. But unfortunately because of restraints and difficulties lack of workers or transport it didn't quite happen how we wanted it to happen. So yeah, it was still successful'

## Accessibility

It appears that a barrier during the project itself may have been rural inaccessibility so that taking young people out is much more difficult than designing a hoodie or leaflet. Although these artefacts are perceived as more 'solid' achievements, it is difficult to measure whether they will ultimately have more positive effects and for the sample of young people interviewed, the soft skills they had developed appeared a lasting legacy for them.

## Age sensitive cultures

One former Young Champion expressed his views regarding ENPA's perception of young people:

'I think it's got better. I think since the mosaic project I think the staff opinion [word is stressed, pronounced slowly and with emphasis] of young people is better. I still think there is an ingrained [pronounced slowly, with emphasis] almost Victorian kind of attitude to young people, where they think they're just gonna trash the place, you know they're gonna er leave litter...er...they're gonna take drugs. And there's always this sort of...er...look down...'

This sense of disapproval of young people was also projected upon the community; their perception of young people was described as

'... there's still an element of mistrust and suspicion...'

These underlying attitudes have a pervasive effect and potentially threaten the success of Mosaic in that young people may be encouraged to come to a place where they are not wanted.

## Staff

The impact of Mosaic on staff as well as on participants is an important factor to consider. If as is suggested here the project has resulted in shifts of attitudes towards young people then this is a very important outcome with impacts beyond Mosaic itself. Further consideration about how this shift occurs and how widespread its effects are would be worthwhile since this appears critically important to the legacy of the project.

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ASPECTS OF PARTICIPATION

### Responsibility and leadership

Several of the Young Champions mentioned the responsibility they were given as a stepping stone to feeling more confident and capable.

'And, so I was given the opportunity to practice responsibility and to help...to help set the thing. So yes, you know, [...]coming early to the thing and help set up, or going to meetings as well'

They also appreciated stretching themselves beyond their known preferences; although Mosaic is premised on starting from what the Young Champions themselves like, it also offers a range of options at the outset that can sometimes awaken new interests in them.

'What came out of it was just, yeah, I tried a lot of things out regarding my sense around team work and my ability to organise, to [...] organising things; er things that I like that I didn't know I liked'

Participants brought up the importance of exposure to activities even if it cannot be sustainable because of poor transportation after Mosaic has ended. Young Champions can take part in activities that they may not have access to (before and after the project).

### Acknowledging achievements

It was important for Young Champions to witness that goals have been accomplished, whether they were leading or participating in an activity and for the National Parks to continue to run similar projects.

'... then we went on another two-night residential to celebrate the end of the pilot project... And there they did lots of fun things, more than the volunteering...er...and they did lots of consultations on how it went and what...what young people got out of

it, what was achieved by young people. I know that there were so many amazing things achieved, some groups of young people had changed the information leaflets to be more friendly'

'...and seeing the impacts of the project and seeing young people who hadn't been out there before and the fact that they enjoyed so much [these words were pronounced with subtle emphasis]. I think it's definitely worth, you know government funding these projects 'cause it makes a big difference, and yeah it's obviously the next generation that you want to go out and experience and enjoy... the national parks...so...yeah I'd say kind of do more'

Careful management of expectations and the limits on aspirations, be they practical, financial or cultural, needs to be included as part of the enrolment process so that participants are clear about the extent to which they have control and ownership of the activities that might be set up with other young people within previously agreed parameters, including allowing sufficient time for reflection between and within activities.

### **Modelling effective youth work**

One participant was clearly inspired by Mosaic work and mentors. Mosaic had played a defining factor in continuing working with young people for at least one participant:

'I just think that it's such an important age where, at the age of 13 and up things are changing so much, not only in body but their minds, starting to make decisions, and actually I think it's quite important for them to have somebody that is not necessarily in authority, but someone who is a little bit knowledgeable, but also can say things in such a way that would influence them without forcing them to do something'

Mosaic provided a space for young champions to experience youth work providing the right combination of supervision and freedom to make decisions and get on the ground youth work experience:

'And actually getting the praise in the right places and also getting constructive criticism where they are going wrong'

Although it was found that young champions found several difficulties in engaging young people in terms of general commitment and enthusiasm.

'One thing I've learnt is that it's very difficult to draw the enthusiasm within this sort of age group of young people. We'd call it school-leaving age, sort of 16,18' '....so it's difficult for them to commit to anything'

However, despite this challenging aspect of youth work, some participants had decided to become youth workers and valued the importance of engaging young people. The responsibility that they had been given appeared to be key to the development of confidence to do this.

## **IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED BY YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Accessibility**

Finding ways to overcome the difficulties associated with lack of public transport and access to sites and activities by young people was important for the young people. Exmoor was seen as a 'local kind of place' with fewer facilities than Dartmoor.

## Age and interest sensitivity

Exposure to a range of activities and cultures awakened some unexpected possibilities but this could be at the expense of young people's own interest areas being side-lined. The skills and interest of the involvement with the Mosaic project included teamwork, social networks, communication skills, interest in other cultures and in nature. Specific *activities* were less frequently cited as long lasting memories.

## Keeping in touch

Relationships with key individuals were highly influential and developing ways to maintain contact would likely benefit the longevity of impact. This would have the additional benefit of generating a longitudinal data set to examine the sustainability of impacts. Significant relationships were built by the enablers in the Mosaic project and a sense of wellbeing and self-confidence was engendered in the young people. The Mosaic project clearly made short term impacts but these and the learning gained from the engagement by each cohort can sometimes be lost if contact is not maintained.

## Learning from young people

The Mosaic project offers opportunities to learn from young people themselves about the current barriers to access and those factors that make a sense of ownership and belonging in the park a problem for many young people. This aspect of learning from the young people themselves should be emphasised more. Careful management of expectations and consistent opportunities are also important in the spirit of the Mosaic approach.

## Exmoor National Park Authority role as a key enabler

In summary, the Exmoor National Park Authority aims to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities by the public and the Mosaic projects are intended to reach out to people who do not usually make much use of the Park. Some participants felt that the Mosaic project was shaped by a particular cultural view of suitable activities; however, others felt that exposure to new possibilities and groups were highly successful aspects of the project. The diversity of young champions' interests mean broad opportunities are likely to be necessary in order to find 'hooks' which they feel comfortable to develop with other young people. Transport accessibility was a major limitation and funding could also be a limiting factor at times.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

### Action 1

Take account of the lessons that can be learnt from the young people in Mosaic about

- accessibility and ownership of the National Park for all young people
- age-sensitive policies across the National Park and
- balance between organising activities for them and responding to their ideas.

### Action 2

Capitalise on the skills of leadership that young people acquire through informal learning in the Mosaic project and ensure these are recognised in ways that matter to young people.

### Action 3

Facilitate and fund an initiative by the young champions themselves to help them to take their learning into the community in a sustainable way and establish ways of recognising skills they have developed.

### Action 4

Develop with the young people a system of regular updates and communication such as a Facebook page, which will maintain interest and enable ENPA to keep in touch with Young Champions (and vice versa) in the longer term.

### Action 5

Review and report on actions taken in response to this research in one year to monitor longer term impact.

## CONCLUSION

We have gathered the opinions of seven former young champions three years after their involvement, enabling some insight into durable effects of Mosaic involvement. It may be that those who felt more strongly agreed to participate, but nevertheless a range of views were obtained to shape National Park policy and practice, echoing earlier studies and related to

- practical problems of accessibility,
- the modelling potential of inspirational leadership and
- the powerful and mixed influence of cultural norms.

Some issues apply across the National Park group, while others, such as transport, are particularly challenging for the Exmoor National Park Authority.

A core message for Mosaic and ENPA is that influencing change in young people requires *reciprocity* to increase intergenerational and corporate/public understanding. This implies that National Park Authorities respond to young people's expectations and learning and push the boundaries of what outcomes may become possible over time. To achieve a shift in relationships requires ongoing dialogue; projects such as Mosaic are clearly well placed to stimulate and support this but it also needs systemic mechanisms of youth engagement on the part of National Park Authorities in order to sustain.

PLEASE NOTE: A fuller report detailing context, literature review, methods, thematic analyses and findings is available on request from [sjwaite@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:sjwaite@plymouth.ac.uk) or on the Plymouth University outdoor and experiential learning research network website ([oelres.net](http://oelres.net)).