# **Culm Valley Children & Young People Focus Group**

# **Thoughts and Feelings on Being Active in the Culm Valley**

## **Introduction**

A focus group was held at the Hayridge Centre (local library) in Cullompton on Saturday 4th February 2023. The focus group was facilitated by Beth Bramble, Culm Valley CYP Social Prescriber, Sam Andrews, Young Devon Volunteer and Tamsin Phelvin, Partnerships Manager from Active Devon.

The focus group participants numbered 7 and they had all come through the Culm Valley Youth Social Prescribing Service having been referred by their GP.  The participants heard about the focus session through their Social Prescribing Link Worker. The participants were aged between 13 and 15 years with the majority attending Cullompton Community College but there were also participants from Uffculme School and Honiton Community College. One participant was not on any school roll, and one was a non-attender.

The aim of the focus group was to explore the participants thoughts and feeling on being physically active as well as thoughts and feelings on wider group activities. The focus group also aimed to understand the participants connection with local community spaces and understand what would encourage or discourage them from attending an activity session.

The session began with some ice breakers, games and setting of ground rules around how the participants would like to interact as a group during the session.

## **Exercise 1 – Thoughts and Feelings on Types of Activities**

This exercise involved the participants being presented with a number of images representing different physical activities and wider group activities. The participants were asked to express what that activity meant to them via emoji stickers. Some of the activities which seemed to draw a consensus response were then explored more widely in discussion to gain insight into what makes these activities appealing or not.

The participants had a negative response to images which were overtly ‘sporty’ or looked like ‘working out’.

The participants felt more comfortable in smaller group activities where ‘everyone got along’.

The participants felt unconfident performing activities where they ‘don’t know if they are doing something wrong’ and said they would be encouraged to take part if ‘they learnt how to do it properly’.

The group had negative associations with activities they felt ‘forced’ to do at primary school, ‘I was made to run every day’.

The participants associated some activities such as walking as an accessible way to spend time with friends ‘can’t go to each others houses and it doesn’t cost anything’.

The participants expressed a positive feeling from being in nature ‘walking along the back roads and listening to the birds chirping’.

The participants associated ‘adrenaline’ as a positive part of an activity they enjoyed such as competition (scoring in netball), performing (majorettes) or trying an activity with an element of risk (skateboarding) ‘performing makes me feel so happy, it is nerve wracking and I get adrenaline but I love it’.

The participants expressed that feeling judged is a major barrier to many activities.

Activities which had a particularly positive response were;

* Skateboarding
* Computer games
* Dodgeball
* Walking with friends/solo/dog walking
* Cooking/baking
* Drama/singing
* Bushcraft/outdoors
* Photography
* Dance
* Football (friendly kick about)
* Making music

Activities which had a particularly negative response were;

* Home workouts
* Running

Activities that the participants were already engaged in include; majorettes, netball, gym and walking. Activities that the participants had previously been engaged in but had now stopped were yoga (classes stopped), football (didn’t enjoy increased competitiveness when joining secondary school) and swimming (not feeling comfortable in large public group/body image).

## **Exercise 2 - Active Spaces**

For this exercise the participants were shown a variety of local ‘assets’ which could be used as active spaces such as village halls, school buildings, sports hall, John Tallack Centre, CCA fields etc. These were used to prompt discussion around connection to local spaces, where the participants currently spent their time, what spaces feel accessible and safe.

The participants generally had negative feelings towards attending activities at school. Some felt it was easier and familiar but the consensus was that school did not feel like a safe space or a place that the participants would want to be in their free time.

The participants became very animated when discussing outdoor spaces such as forests and woods sharing memories of rope swings and climbing trees. The participants identified these spaces (including CCA fields. ‘a bit of woodland near my house’ and Killerton) with play, nature, foraging and calmness ‘I can breath better in nature’.

The participants expressed a connection with village halls as safe and accessible spaces (Willand, Cullompton, Honiton) and associated them with activities such as guides, majorettes and parties ‘easy to get to’.

The participants felt that the local sports hall (Culm Valley Sports Centre or Uffculme School Sports Hall) was familiar and comfortable ‘not in our school (Cullompton) but right next to it and we do everything there’.

The participants did not identify the local swimming pool as a place where they would feel comfortable being active ‘it doesn’t feel comfortable if you are insecure about your body’. Most of this related to larger groups ‘I used to like it when it was just our school or a small group with private swimming’, parents watching and having to wear a swimming costume ‘when we were younger we had to wear a t-shirt over our swimming costume and I preferred this – now pools won’t let you do that’. The participants identified they would be more comfortable in an outside setting in a small group such as a lake or river.

The participants identified the library as a good place to meet friends and it being a quieter space appealed.

Safety was a strong theme that came through throughout discussions. The participants reported feeling unsafe when out in public spaces and reasons related to being watched, stories of suspicious/criminal behaviour reported in the area, signs of drug use and being bothered/approached by i.e. a large group of boys ‘it doesn’t feel like a safe space to walk around’.

## **Exercise 3 – Break Out Activity**

During the break the participants had an opportunity to anonymously post thoughts on what represented a motivation or a barrier to activity for them.

Motivations – What attracts me to an activity or makes an activity feel great for me?

* People
* Food (x 2)
* Quiet/cosy
* Family
* Adrenaline rushes
* Friends
* If people were nice
* Calm
* Body positivity
* If I knew people
* Safe place

Barriers – What makes me not want to or be unable to take part in an activity?

* LGBT+ oppression
* People
* Travelling
* People judging
* Too many people
* Sport
* Judgement
* Crossing boundaries
* Left out
* Energy
* Too loud
* Too crowded

## **Exercise 4 – Being Active in a Group**

This exercise was a discussion about what the participants would want from the other members of the group if attending a group activity.

The participants again expressed a desire for smaller groups.

The participants valued being with others who ‘are going through the same stuff as you and are not judgy’ and wanted to be with people that understand and are respectful.

From an activity leader the participants wanted reassurance and understanding that you may need some exceptions.

The participants wanted a level playing field so that ‘people who are struggling and people who are good are all in the same boat’ and didn’t want activities to be too hard.

The participants wanted an empathetic activity leader who was understanding, ‘doesn’t shout’, greets you at the start and asks if you are ok.

The participants wanted to go to an activity with someone or be sure that they would know someone there.

The participants preferred invite only, or registered attendees only, rather than open access.

Some of the participants found noise stressful and that ‘loud noise makes things hard’.

The participants felt that agreeing a contract of group ground rules (as we had done for the focus group) was a positive thing.

## **Exercise 5 – Design Your Perfect Session**

For the final exercise the participants were split into 3 small groups each which was each facilitated by one of the focus group leaders. The purpose of the exercise was to bring together all of the elements we had explored in the focus session and ask the participants to design their own perfect session giving consideration to a range of factors such as what the activity would be, what would make it a success, where would it be, how would you let people know about it etc. The 3 groups were broadly split into those with shared interests or similar personality types or who had sparked a friendship during the session.

Some of the key insights from this exercise were;

Smaller groups (max 10) were again highlighted as being preferred and a need to split ages quite narrowly i.e. 11-13, 14-16, 17+ and for some activities to be invitation only to ensure a ‘safe space’.

* Low cost / small donation
* Supported by volunteers
* Travel and transport is a major issue/barrier
* Fun and learning a skill is important
* Village hall, sports hall identified as locations
* Activities in nature desirable and with a game/purpose i.e. orienteering, treasure hunts, sound walks, photography walks.
* Preferred timings were after school, weekends, last Friday of the month so you have something to look forward to and during summer holidays when you can get lonely.
* Intergenerational activities desirable (nature walks with family).

The participants felt their parents/guardians would learn of what activities are on via Facebook but also suggested posters at the bus station and the importance of a text/phone call/personal invitation.

The participants were keen for activities to build life skills such as looking after themselves by being able to cook basic meals and to gain tools to support good mental health ‘people leave home and don’t know how to cook so learning how to make meals not fancy stuff’.

The participants were keen for activities which could be inclusive of need to accommodate neuro diversity.

**The ideas;**

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