Improving Social-Emotional and Life Skills of Young People with Complex Additional Needs Through ‘Outward Bound’ Residential Trips

Sarah Myers, Fiona Elliot, Sabine Maguire & Michelle Barber

Among the estimated 800,000 children in the United Kingdom with disability, challenges include lack of access to leisure activities, opportunities for independent development and social contact. Short breaks and residential trips (RTs) provide positive experiences, and help improve mental and physical wellbeing. However, evaluations involving young people (YP) with disabilities are lacking. We aimed to understand the value and outcomes of a RT, from the perspective of YP, their parents, and staff. YP with disabilities (N = 35) aged 12–17 years, attended outdoor activity based RTs in 2019 provided by Sparkle (South Wales) Ltd. A mixed methods approach was used for data collection; YP attended focus groups (N = 13), and parents (N = 21) and staff (N = 5) completed feedback questionnaires. The data was double coded and analysed thematically. In addition to enjoyment, interview data suggests the participants felt that the YP’s emotional and social wellbeing improved. There were reported improvements in confidence, increased incidences of social communication behaviour, resilience and self-care. RTs have the potential to make a significant impact on YP and their families, and their role is an important consideration in the context of local authority funding cuts, and barriers to accessing short breaks.