



An Evaluation of Sparkle's 2019 Residential Trips

18th November 2019

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the young people, parents and Sparkle staff that participated in the research for this evaluation, to Dr. Sarah Myers for her assistance with thematic coding, and O2E for financial support.

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Summary

Sparkle's residential trips are designed to offer young people, aged 12-17 years, with a range of complex additional needs, a unique opportunity to stay away from home with their peers, and participate in activities that may not otherwise have the opportunity to do. Of the 35 children who attended this year's trips, nine had never spent a night away from home before, and twelve required either 1:1 or 2:1 support to meet their needs.

To gain a deeper understanding of specific benefits of a residential trip for young people with additional needs, a formal evaluation was conducted of Sparkle's 2019 trips to Calvert Trust, an outward bound centre. Focus groups were conducted with young people to find out about their experiences and feelings, alongside feedback from parents and staff via questionnaires. We explored the hopes and fears of young people and their parents both prior to their trip, and on returning, while seeking to understand how the trips had benefited them overall.

A key finding was that the young people had positive experiences, such as trying new activities and doing activities as part of a group. Many of our young people are quite socially isolated, having few social activities with their peers. Reflecting on the trip, it was clear that our young people enjoyed the new experiences, describing how it made them feel happy, excited, proud, and confident. Unsurprisingly, some young people found certain aspects of the trip challenging, for example, finding some activities difficult, participating in a group and staying away from home. In terms of skill development, improvements were found in young people's independence, confidence, social skills, practical skills, emotional regulation and behaviour. These improvements were present not only during the trip, but after they returned home. This in depth evaluation shows that Sparkle's 2019 Residential Trips clearly provided young people with enjoyable and challenging experiences, helping to enhance young people's skills, behaviour and enjoyment of life.

1. Introduction

For the past five years, every summer Sparkle has provided young people aged 12-17 years with additional needs, the opportunity to attend a residential trip. Residential trips offer young people the opportunity to stay away from home, and participate in a variety of indoor and outdoor activities with their peers. Sparkle's residential trips are planned in close consultation with young people and their families. The 2019 residential trips were planned based on the feedback given in a consultation with young people and their families in May 2018. The 2019 Residential Trips to Calvert Trust in Exmoor consisted three residential options available for young people:

Trip 1 – Four-night stay, 22nd – 26th July

Trip 2 – One-night stay, 2nd – 3rd August.

Trip 3 – One-night stay, 3rd – 4th August.

Priority was given to young people aged 12 years and over who had not previously attended a residential trip. In total, 35 young people attended a residential trip, nine of whom had not previously stayed away from home without their family. In total, eight Sparkle staff accompanied the young people on the trips, in addition to the staff at the outward bound centre. The total cost of the trips to Sparkle this year was £14,931.09, generously supported by the charity O2E.

Sparkle runs residential trips each year because they offer valuable opportunities for young people with additional needs, such as the opportunity to stay away from home, to participate in activities that may not otherwise be accessible, to have enjoyable learning experiences, spending time with their peers and other adults. These opportunities have a range of potential benefits, such as increasing independence and confidence, and developing social and emotional skills.

2. Aim of the evaluation

The aim of this evaluation was to gain a richer understanding of the value of attending a residential trip provided by Sparkle. The objectives were to determine how the young people felt before, during and after going on a trip, and what the outcomes were for the young people.

3. Methodological Approach

The evaluation was conducted by Sparkle's Research and Development Officer using a mixed methods approach. Focus groups and informal interviews were conducted with young people following the trip, and parent and staff feedback questionnaires in paper and electronic formats were made available for completion.

All of the young people who attended a residential trip were invited to participate in a focus group, to have the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about the trip. During the focus groups, young people were asked about their experiences of the activities on the trip with the use of visual aids; pictures of the activities and a 5-point Likert scale with facial expressions for each response on the scale. To aid the young people with communicating how they felt before, during and after the trip, picture cards with examples of different feelings were

used. Activity sheets were also made available for young people who had difficulties with verbal communication, or preferred to draw or write about their experience and feelings of the trip. Each focus group lasted for approximately one hour, with a ten minute break in the middle of the session for refreshments. Two out of the three groups were audio-recorded and transcribed and an assistant facilitator recorded written observations of each session. Please see appendices A-D for the focus group schedule, Likert-scale visual aid, feelings picture cards and activity sheets.

All of the parents of the young people who attended a residential trip, and the Sparkle staff who accompanied the young people on the trips, were given the opportunity to complete a feedback questionnaire, which comprised of questions with tick-box and free text answers.

Analysis

Data from questionnaires completed on paper were manually entered into Survey Monkey and were analysed alongside questionnaires completed electronically. Focus group and interview transcripts were analysed thematically, which involved line-by-line coding in NVivo to find patterns in the data and subsequent identification of key themes and sub themes.

4. Findings

Focus groups

Focus groups were held with 13 young people in total, one for each residential trip (please refer to Table 1 for further details). The young people's disabilities and comorbidities included autism spectrum disorder (ASD), epilepsy, Asperger's, Down's syndrome, and global developmental delay. During the focus groups, the majority of children participated in the group activities, either verbally or non-verbally by holding up number/picture cards. In addition, one young person completed an activity sheet by drawing pictures of his favourite and least favourite activities on the trip; and another activity sheet was completed by a play worker on behalf of a young person who had difficulty joining in the group activities.

Table 1. Details of the residential trips, focus groups and the young people.

| Residential Trip | No. of YP on the trip | No. of YP who had 1:1 support | No. of YP who had 2:1 support | Date of focus group | No. of YP who attended a focus group | Ages of YP who attended a focus group |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| 22 nd - 26 th July 2019 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 30 th July | 6 | 15 (N=1) 16 (N=5) |
| 2 nd – 3 rd August 2019 | 12 | 3 | 1 | 8 th August | 3 | 12 (N=1) 13 (N=1) 14 (N=1) |
| 3 rd – 4 th August 2019 | 14 | 3 | 3 | 19 th August | 4 | 12 (N=2) 13 (N=1) 17 (N=1) |

Focus groups that were held in August were not as well attended because some of the young people and their families were on holiday. Two young people (age 15) were interviewed informally as one was not able to stay for the duration of the focus group, and the other young person was the only person who arrived for the final focus group session. In total, 13 young people attended focus group sessions, and 2 young people were informally interviewed.

Questionnaire feedback

Questionnaires were open for completion over a 4 week period from 29th July to 27th August 2019. A total of 21 parent questionnaires and 5 staff questionnaires were completed.

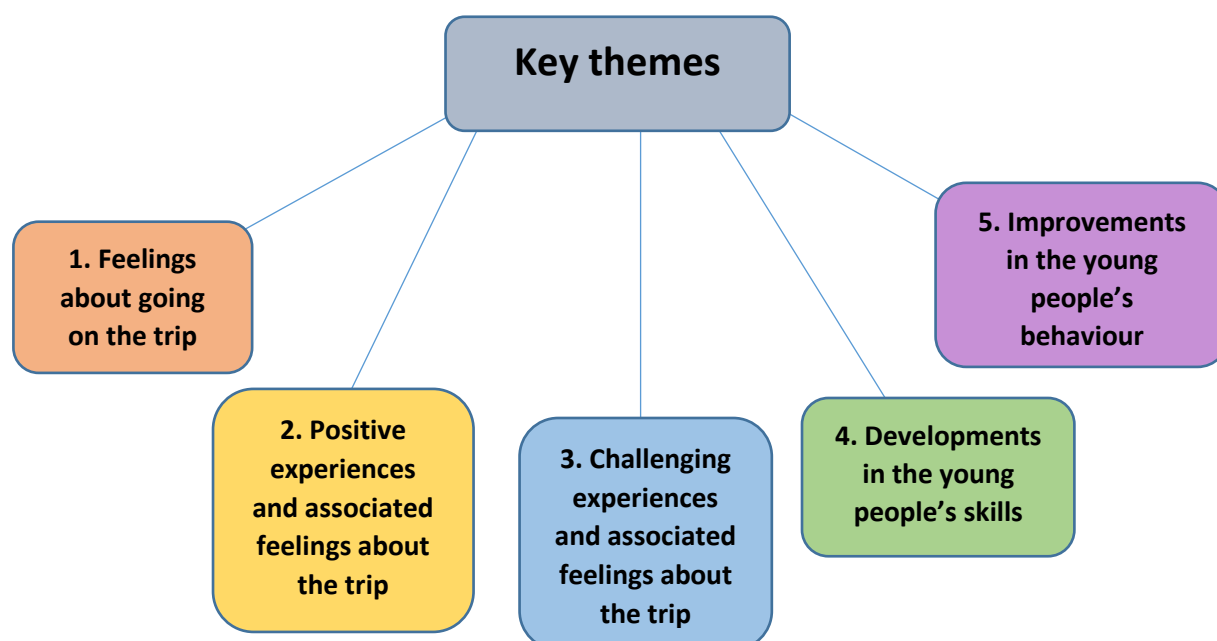
Table 2. Parent and staff feedback questionnaires

| Questionnaire | No. of parents/staff given/ emailed questionnaires | No. of questionnaires completed |
|---------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Parents | 35 | 21 |
| Staff | 8 | 5 |

Key themes

Thematic analysis of the data resulted in the identification of five key themes, as shown in Figure 1.

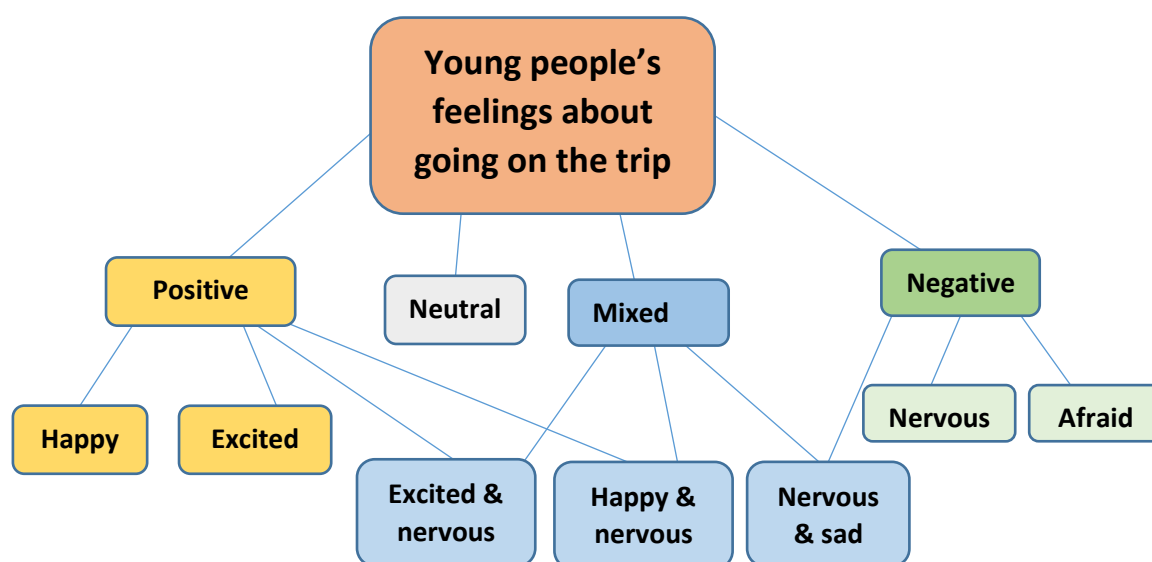
Figure 1. Key themes identified from thematic analysis of the data.



4.1 Feelings about going on the trip

In the focus groups, the young people were encouraged to share how they felt about going on a residential trip. Figure 2 shows examples of the feelings that were expressed by the young people about going on the trip.

Figure 2. Feelings that were expressed by the young people about going on the trip.



Young people

Some of the young people spoke about feeling happy or excited about going on the trip, giving reasons for these feelings such as “trying new activities” and “having a break from my parents”.

Young people also shared that they had mixed feelings, including a mixture of excited and nervous, happy and nervous, and nervous and sad. A young person explained that he felt excited and nervous because he “*didn’t know what to expect.*”

Thinking about being away from their family made some young people feel nervous and sad about going on the trip; a couple of young people shared that they felt nervous because they were concerned about their parents “*cop*ing” while being away, and that “*they would be over-worried.*”

One young person shared that getting injured the last time he went cycling was making him feel nervous about cycling on the trip.

“Getting injured...last time I went cycling I fell off and got a black eye, it was years ago but I’m still nervous about going on a bicycle.”

“A bit nervous and a bit excited at the same time.” (YP)

“I was nervous because it’s like the first time I ever left home for a whole week... I was also scared that my mum would be over-worried.” (YP)

“My happy and nervous is because I was nervous leaving home for a while, because... I was nervous for my family and how they cope with my mum and dad all alone and I didn’t want ...to be shot or burgled or kidnapped by aliens...” (YP)

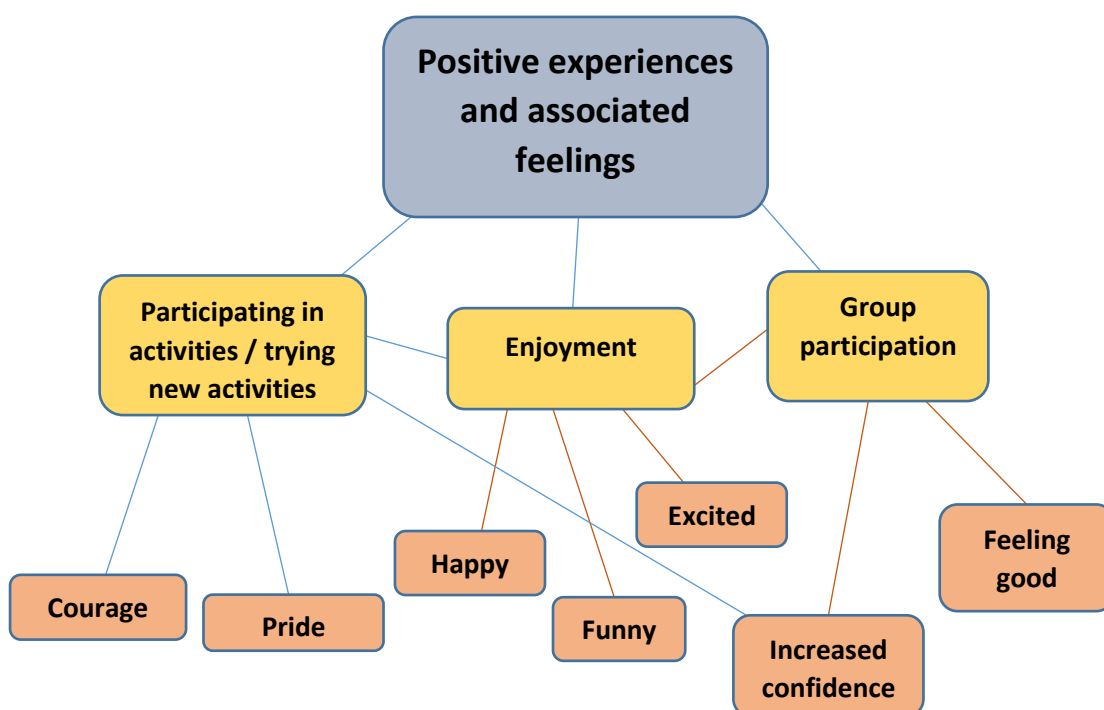
Parent feedback

Parent questionnaire responses indicated a variety of reasons for their child wanting to go on a residential trip, such as having the opportunity to experience new activities that may not otherwise be accessible, and to spend time mixing with other young people their age. Parents also felt that going on the trip would help to develop their child's independence and help their child feel less anxious about spending time away from their family. One parent's written response highlighted their child's sense of adventure and the positive association she had made between going on the trip and going on a holiday/adventure: *[Name] viewed the trip as another holiday and adventure.*

4.2 Positive experiences and associated feelings about the trip

From thematic analysis of the data, positive experiences during the trip, and associated positive feelings were identified as a key theme, with reference to Figure 3. The sub-themes identified include: participating in activities/ trying new activities, group participation, enjoyment and feelings of confidence, pride and courage.

Figure 3. Positive experiences and associated feelings expressed by the young people during the trip.



Enjoyment

The majority of the young people who participated in the focus groups indicated that they felt happy or excited during the trip, either by selecting an emotion card or verbally expressing themselves. For example:

"Happy. It was good. Nice break from home...happy about actually doing something."

"I felt happy...I went to trip residential, I was happy away..."

“I felt excited all the way through.”

The young people indicated that they enjoyed most of the activities they tried at Calvert Trust, in particular, cycling, abseiling, zip-wiring, horse riding and climbing. Some of the words the young people used to refer to these activities were “*spinningly fun*”, “*fun*”, “*good*” and “*awesome*”. Some of the young people’s responses indicating their enjoyment were:

“Awww abseiling...that was awesome!”

“Climbing things is really fun.”

When asked if she liked dancing, one young person smiled and looking at picture of the disco grinning for a couple of minutes.

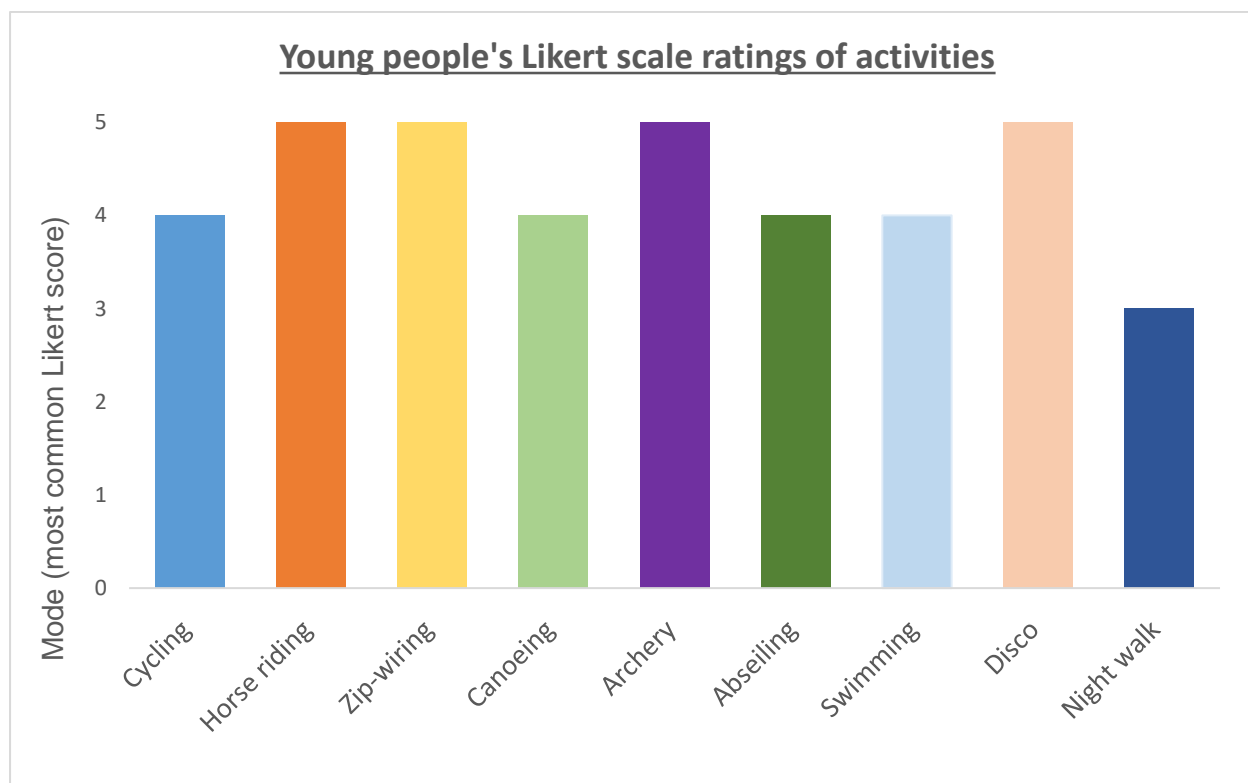
Some of the young people found enjoyment in doing activities that they were familiar with.

“It was quite fun because I used to go horse riding...so it was really fun riding a horse again.” (YP)

“We chose to do horse-riding twice because we liked it so much.” (Play worker)

The young people’s ratings for their enjoyment of activities on the trip are shown in Figure 4, which displays the mode (most common score) for each activity. Horse riding, zip-wiring, archery and the disco were most commonly rated by the young people as being activities that they enjoyed ‘A lot’. Cycling, canoeing, abseiling and swimming were most commonly rated as activities that the young people enjoyed ‘Quite a lot’, whereas the most common rating for the glow-in-the-dark walk was ‘Unsure’.

Figure 4. Young people’s Likert scale ratings of activities graph



Parent and staff feedback

From the questionnaire feedback, on a Likert Scale, the majority of parents indicated that they thought their child enjoyed the trip, either 'a lot' or 'quite a lot'; and staff indicated that the young people enjoyed the trip 'quite a lot'.

Participating in activities / trying new activities

The young people shared their experiences of participating in activities and trying new activities. From the focus groups it was evident that these experiences were associated with feelings of increased confidence, pride, and courage.

Feeling confident

Some of the young people shared that they felt confident while they were on the trip. Some of the comments made by young people in the focus groups indicated that being on the residential trip was a positive experience, which led to feelings of increased confidence. One young person indicated that she felt confident about dancing and canoeing.

"I was confident, at Calvert Trust." (YP)

*"His pride on returning has been wonderful to see...He has also spoken with family about his trip with clear pride."
(Parent)*

Feeling proud

It is evident from the comments made by some of the young people that they felt proud of their abilities. For example, one of the young people proudly expressed his cycling abilities, saying *"I could show off my moves on the bike."* When asked if there was something they felt proud of doing on the trip, a young person who had been nervous about cycling before the trip, responded with *"Yeah, a bit...going on the bike."* One young person wrote 'proud' when asked how she felt about doing activities such as canoeing.

"The abseiling was kinda scary...before I did it, I didn't want to do it but I did it and it felt good." (YP)

It was also evident that some of the young people felt a sense of achievement from participating in activities that were task-oriented and involved teamwork, such as the orienteering where the young people were tasked with working together to find hidden stars.

"...we found a few stars that weren't even on the map."

A parent also highlighted their child's pride following the trip in the feedback questionnaire.

"His pride on returning has been wonderful to see...He has also spoken with family about his trip with clear pride."

Feeling courageous

One of the young people explained that they felt good about trying abseiling, overcoming their initial fear of the activity.

"The abseiling was kinda scary...before I did it, I didn't want to do it but I did it and it felt good."

A parent also recognised that going on the residential trip and taking part in activities out of their comfort zone took a great deal of bravery for their child.

“He gets anxious in unfamiliar situations so being brave enough to participate in such an event...”

Participating in group activities

There was some indication from the young people that they enjoyed doing activities as part of a group, for example working as a team to find stars for the orienteering activity. One young person said he felt “good” about being around peers on the trip.

Staff feedback provides further examples of group participation on the trip.

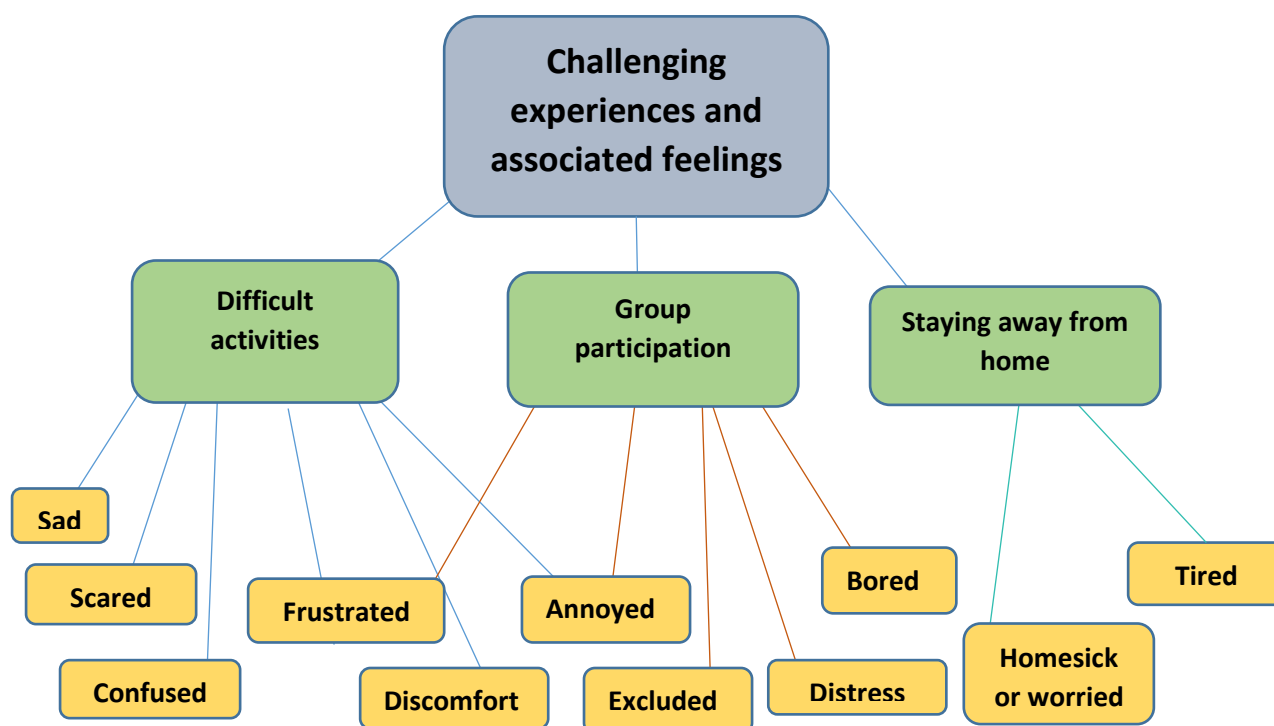
“As a group (young people and staff) we completed activities together, ate all meals together and took part in evening activities together.”

“The disco brought more of the group with the 1:1’s...the young people danced together at the disco.”

4.3 Challenging experiences and associated feelings about the trip

It was evident that some young people found certain aspects of the trip challenging, such as; finding activities difficult, participating in group activities, and staying away from home for the first time. This led to a range of difficult emotions that the young people shared during the focus groups, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Challenging experiences and associated feelings expressed by the young people about the trip.



Difficult activities

Some young people found canoeing particularly difficult and frustrating for reasons such as; not feeling as though other people were helping, finding it physically hard, having difficulty remembering the technique, and feeling as though they had no choice.

"It would have been more fun if the people we were with would have paddled...with me and someone else, no they literally just sat there while me and another staff paddled."

"It's the same for me, I just wish some people tried more and not just sit like the rest of people like and too hard and ...just focus on the task and enjoy it."

"Orienteering was another activity that proved to be challenging for some of the young people. One young person shared that he found it confusing and difficult.

"The map was really confusing...some of the stars that we saw on the map weren't even where they said they wereit was just really hard to find everything."

Feelings of discomfort were expressed by the young people when reflecting on their experience of zip-wiring.

"What I will say when I was on it, it kinda hurt...not hurt but felt very uncomfortable...when you didn't go down it. I would say that was the only downside to it."

A member of staff explained that a young person didn't want to abseil because he was scared of the height.

"He got to the edge and he got a bit sad. He didn't go down we just went to the edge but it was a really good try."

Group participation

For some young people, group participation was challenging for them and resulted in feelings of annoyance, frustration, distress and boredom. One young person in particular expressed that he felt "forced" into group activities, when he wanted to spend time by himself. This young person explained that he didn't want to go to the disco, choosing instead to spend time by himself.

"I didn't go to the disco I don't like discos...I went straight to my room and played with my phone."

When asked what he wanted to do by himself the young person responded:

"When I was on my own I felt like could do what I wanted, I didn't have to be dragged around by whatever the group was doing."

The language used here by the young person to describe his experience such as "forced" and being "dragged around", indicate feelings of frustration and annoyance.

One young person reflected on feeling bored whilst participating in the group walk.

"I spent time trying to be by myself...and when that didn't work I was either stuck with either [name] or [name]." (YP)

"Some got along better than others. Some improved friendships but some young people excluded others and would want to be in a team with just their 'friends' and not include others."

(Staff member)

"We just walked around a forest...it was a bit boring."

Staff feedback on group participation gave a mixed picture, indicating that there were positives such as strengthening friendships, but also negatives such as social exclusion.

"Some got along better than others. Some improved friendships but some young people excluded others and would want to be in a team with just their 'friends' and not include others."

One member of staff gave an example of how a young person's initial distress associated with going to the disco turned into enjoyment.

"[Name] was distressed and running out of the disco with his hands over his ears. After a schedule was put in place he agreed to go into the disco but was nervous. [Name] asked [Name] to dance with him and the two boys spent the whole night dancing and having a lovely time!!"

Staying away from home

For some young people staying away from home caused them to feel homesick, especially if it was the first time the young person had stayed away from their family.

"I miss my family."

"It was the first time I was away for a whole week so I felt a bit homesick."

In response to being asked how they felt returning home after the trip, a couple of young people expressed feelings of relief.

"A bit relieved when we got back home. I missed my bed."

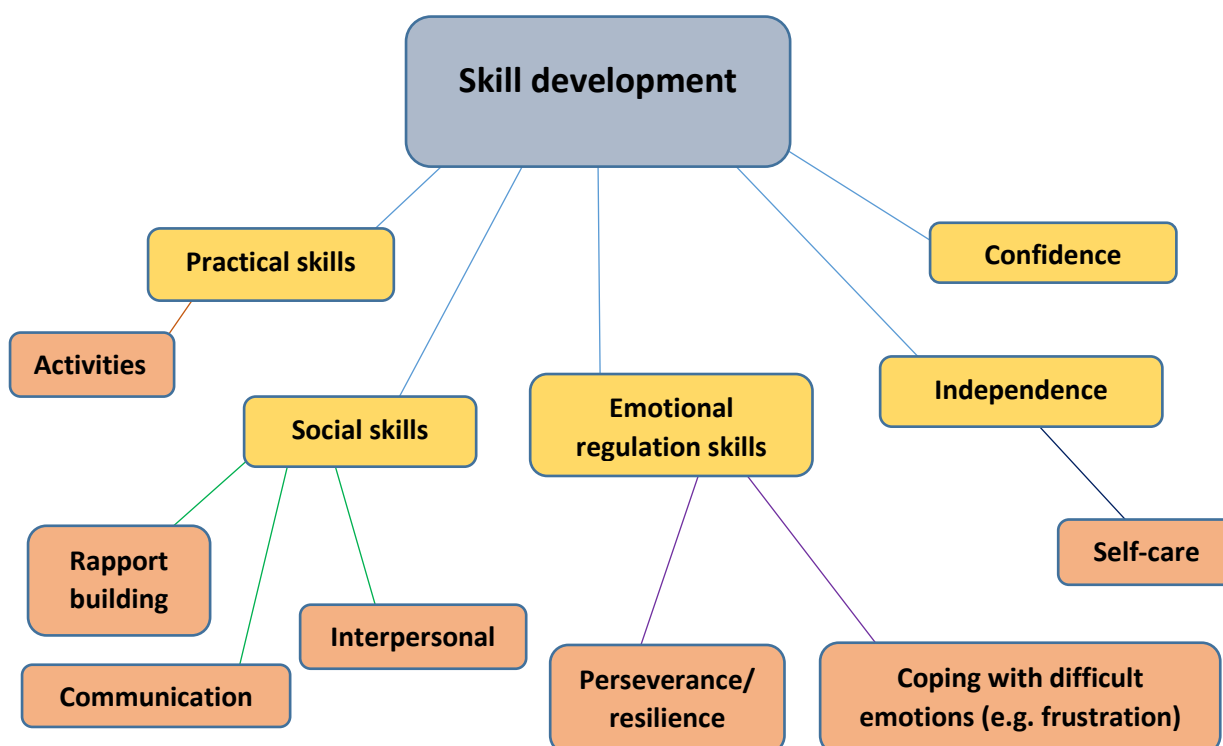
A couple of young people also spoke about feeling tired on the trip, however one young person explained that he felt tired all the time, not just during the trip.

A member of staff commented that *"Some were homesick towards the end."*

4.4 Developments in young people's skills

Developments in young people's skills was identified as a key theme, with evidence for skill development associated with going on the trip found across five main areas. These areas were: (1) social skills, (2) emotional regulation skills, (3) independence, (4) confidence, and (5) practical skills.

Figure 6. Areas of improvements in young people's skills



4.4.1 Development of independence

The young people's development of independence whilst being away on the residential trip was evident from the young peoples focus groups, the accompanying staff, and from some of the parents. Some of the young people indicated that they liked staying away from home for the first time, and responded positively when asked if they felt more independent since going on the trip.

The majority of staff questionnaire respondents indicated that they felt the trip led to improvements in the young people's independence. Staff gave examples of tasks in which the young people had developed independence on the trip, including *"packing, unpacking, ordering food, asking for items."*

A minority of parents indicated that they had noticed any improvements in their child's independence since going on the trip. Some parents' felt their child's independence had grown as a result of going on the trip, in relation to self-care, self-reliance and coping without their family/caregiver.

"She washed herself."

"He has proved that he can cope without me 😊"

"It was nice to be away for the first time. It was nice to be out of the house for a change."

(YP)

"[Name] still wears a nappy to bed, but will now do her bedtime routine unaided, she was progressing towards this beforehand, but since the trip, is quite happy to take herself to bed!"

(Parent)

"[Name] still wears a nappy to bed, but will now do her bedtime routine unaided, she was progressing towards this beforehand, but since the trip, is quite happy to take herself to bed!"

4.4.2 Development of confidence

Some of the young people shared that they felt confident during the trip, and for some, their growth in confidence was evident after the trip. For example, in response to being asked if there was anything they would do that they wouldn't have done before going on the trip, one young person said *"talk to people."*

Another young person also indicated that his confidence had increased in social situations since going on the trip, *"I feel more comfortable around new people."*

For another young person, his feelings of increased confidence were evident from his new-found enthusiasm for doing thrill-seeking activities abroad.

"I'm gonna do abseiling....I want to do jumping off a rock in Greece in to the lake. You know when you're jumping off a rock...taking a chance."

One young person shared that she was thinking of going back to horse riding, indicating that she felt more confident about this because of positive experience she had of horse riding on the trip.

"I may look back on going back on horse riding because of the trip."

Staff indicated that they felt the trip led to improvements in the young people's confidence, and shared their perspectives on areas in which they observed the young people developing their confidence on the trip.

"All children showed great confidence doing new skills."

"The young people had the confidence to go get there food, ask for different if they didn't like to choice."

Some parents felt that their child's confidence had improved since going on the trip. Parents gave their feedback on how they felt their child's confidence had improved, for example:

"She took part in so many activities that were outside her comfort zone."

"Confidence in explaining to others what he did on the trip."

"[Name] has gained confidence and joining in with group games."

4.4.3 Development of social skills

From the focus groups, there was some evidence for the young people building rapport with their peers during the trip using their interpersonal and communication skills. For example, one young person spoke about having a good time with another young person in the swimming pool and spending time together making funny movies.

"I liked video and making a movie with [name]"

Staff indicated that they felt the trip led to improvements in the young people's social skills. One staff member felt that the trip offered lots of opportunities for the young people to spend

time with their peers and other adults, opportunities that they wouldn't have on a typical day, which helped the young people to develop their social skills.

"Young people were also given down time with their peers so there were lots of opportunities for interactions which they may not have on a typical day."

Another member of staff also felt that going on a group trip improved the young people's social skills and highlighted the value of group tasks for developing the young people's communication skills.

"Spending time away from home and with one group improved their social skills, especially those that shared rooms. Group tasks improved their communicating skills and confidence with talking in groups."

Generally speaking, staff commented on the young people socialising well with each other and new people.

"All socialised with each other in activities and evening entertainment."

"Children interacted with new adults."

The majority of parents felt that their child had made new friends on the trip. Some of the young people's parents commented on the positive impact the trip had on their child's social skills.

"[Name] came home and chatted loads about his experience. He had enjoyed the activities but more than this he seemed to have really enjoyed the social interaction with peers/staff."

"Since the trip [Name] has met up with friends from the youth group during the summer holiday."

However, only a small number of parents felt that their child's social skills had improved since the trip.

4.4.4 Development of practical skills

All of the staff who completed the feedback questionnaire felt that the young people had learnt new skills during the trip. Some examples given were canoeing, climbing, swimming and horse riding.

The majority of parents felt that their child had learnt new skills or tried new activities on the trip. Parents gave examples of new skills learnt such as:

"Standing/jumping in water on his own"

"Horse riding, climbing, canoeing, biking forest activities & dancing at a disco which is unheard of!!"

4.4.5 Development of emotional regulation skills

With reference to the findings in section 4.3, 'Challenging experiences and associated feelings about the trip', there were occasions where young people felt difficult emotions, but were able to regulate these emotions and persevere with the activity. For example, a young person shared that he was scared of doing the abseiling, but was able to go to the edge despite being

afraid. Another young person spoke about his frustration with canoeing, however he didn't let his frustration stop him from continuing.

"Yeah...in the canoe it's really difficult to ride a canoe. I found it hard. I forgot how to ride a canoe and I get told off. Told every time and I found it difficult. (YP)"

Oh okay, did you find it a bit easier as you went along or did you find it hard the whole time? (Facilitator)

The whole time. (YP)"

A member of staff gave an example of a young person's resilience/perseverance with the climbing wall.

"Resilience/ perseverance with activities (e.g. [Name] persevering with the climbing wall - he didn't want to come down until he reached the top!)"

"[Name] persevering with the climbing wall - he didn't want to come down until he reached the top!")

(Staff member)

4.5 Improvements in young people's behaviour

The majority of staff indicated that they felt the trip led to improvements in the young people's behaviour. Staff gave examples of improvements in behaviour along with reasons why they thought these improvements occurred.

"One young person in particular did really well, when in school approx. 3-4 incidents of behaviours that challenge are recorded daily. However whilst away only 2 incidents occurred. I feel this was due to staff being able to address any increases in anxiety and put in place measure to de-escalate situations."

"The behaviour was very good on the week trip. I think this is because there were experienced staff members on the trip, all with firm boundaries in place and experienced in identifying triggers and escalation in behaviour and able to prevent situations from escalating further."

A minority of parents reported that their child's behaviour had improved since the trip. Parents gave examples of how their child's behaviour had improved.

"His behaviour always improves for a little while after these trips as I think he enjoys the break away from us."

"He's been better behaved around meals."

"He is more relaxed."

5. General feedback

General feedback about the trips from the young people, parents and staff was positive on the whole. Comments made by young people, parents and staff are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. General feedback comments about the residential trips.

| Young people | Parents | Staff |
|---|---|--|
| <p><i>"I enjoyed the trip really, really loads..."</i></p> <p><i>"I like it, the trip."</i></p> <p><i>"I wanted to go swimming but we didn't have time."</i></p> <p><i>"More activities in the day. It felt like we did one big thing and then a lot of waiting."</i></p> | <p><i>"Amazing support staff. I would not have considered it without their encouragement and reassurance. It was an amazing opportunity for [Name]."</i></p> <p><i>"These annual trips are the ONLY time [Name] is away over-night. Through this experience he is gaining confidence to independently form friendships. Such friendships have helped to change our son's perception of himself... The trip also challenges [Name] to try unfamiliar things and to overcome/manage his anxiety. This summer I took [Name] kayaking, he loved it. Without the trip early in the summer I am not sure this would have happened."</i></p> | <p><i>"All children had the opportunity to have an experience they may not get in school (like mainstream would) due to their disability. Giving them the chance to try new skills and experience new people and environments."</i></p> <p><i>"It gives children the opportunity to be pushed to reach their potential. Sometimes the young people are willing to take more risks away from their parents and this was evident by some of the activities the young people took part in. e.g. [name] rock climbing/riding a horse."</i></p> |

Staff feedback on pre-trip planning and preparation

Staff were asked in the feedback questionnaire if they thought any improvements should be made in the following areas: pre-trip planning, preparation of young people and parents, and mix of young people attending. The majority of staff felt that there could be improvements made in both pre-trip planning and preparation of young people and parents for the trip, and one staff member felt the mix of young people attending could be improved.

6. Conclusion

Sparkle's 2019 residential trips has given young people with additional needs the opportunity to share their experiences and feelings about the trips, as well as enabling their parents and Sparkle staff to share their views and reflections. It is evident that residential trips offering a wide-range of challenging and enjoyable outdoor activities, and have the potential to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of young people with moderate and severe disabilities.

A key learning point was that some young people were anxious about staying away from home because they were concerned that their parents would be worried about them and not be able to cope while they were away. This suggests that parents' anxieties are being transferred to their child/children, and highlights a need for greater psychological support for parents of children with additional needs, particularly prior to any new experiences for these children.

Evidently, both the positive and challenging experiences on the trips were valuable, as they led to developments in young people's skills and behaviour. Key areas of improvements found were in young people's independence, confidence, social skills, practical skills, emotional regulation skills and behaviour. For some young people, these areas of improvement were found to be evident not only during the trip, but after returning home. This is an indication that residential trips offer young people the opportunity to develop a range of skills that will aid their future self-development into adult

Appendix A: Focus group schedule

Offer children a sticker and a pen to write their name at the start of the session.

Welcome and instructions (5 mins)

- 1) Welcome everyone to the group (introduce myself as the facilitator and the assistant facilitator, explain our roles)
- 2) State the purpose of the session; explain the value of their participation and feedback: e.g.

“Today we’d like to give you all the opportunity to share your experiences of Sparkle’s residential trip to Calvert Trust in Exmoor to help us evaluate the trip and help plan how Sparkle delivers future residential trips.”

What will we be doing today?

First of all everyone will have chance to introduce themselves, then we’ll do a group activity to hear everyone’s feedback on the activities that you did on the trip. Then we’ll have a break for pizza. After the break we’ll do another group activity about how everyone felt before, during and after going on the trip.

- 3) So before we start...
 - There are no right or wrong answers. We’re interested everyone’s thoughts and opinions.
 - We don’t all have to agree with each other, as everyone’s experience of the trip will be different, but it’s important that everyone’s opinions are heard and respected so when someone is talking, we listen and do not talk over each other. If you have a different opinion to someone else, please speak up when they have finished talking.
 - I would like to tape record the group today so that I can listen back to it, it will help me remember what everyone said and write a report for Sparkle about the trip. Nobody will know what you said because your feedback will be anonymous (your name won’t be used in the report).

Is everyone happy for their voice to be recorded?

Does anyone have any questions before they start?

Toilet breaks - just let us know if you need the toilet or feel like you want to take a break.

Prompts:

- “What does everyone else think?”
- “Would you like to share more about that with the group?”
- Instead of asking why; “can anyone tell me more about that?”
- Re-state what participants are saying to clarify understanding. (This also gives the note-taker more time to record feedback).

Introductions / icebreaker (5-10mins)

We'll start by taking it turns to say your name and which Sparkle club(s) you attend, and if you want to share with the group...if you could be any animal what would you be and why?

Part 1 (20 mins)

"We'd like to hear all about the **Activity Centre and the activities** everyone tried on the trip. First, we'll be using number cards to say how much we liked or didn't like the activities on the trip."

[Give every participant a set of number cards from 1 to 5 and explain the Likert Scale using visual aid]

"For each picture of an activity or the centre that I hold up I'd like everyone to hold up a number that you think best describes how you would rate that activity on the scale, and then share your thoughts on the activity; so for example (demonstrate)

- a) Does everyone understand what to do? Any questions?
- b) Who tried...(Pics of activities)??
- c) What did you all think of this activity?
- d) "Tell me more about that?" "First time tried this activity?" "What was it like?"
- e) "How many people would like to do (abseiling) again?"
- f) "Are there any other activities that anyone tried that we haven't talked about?"

End part 1 - Time for pizza break for **10 minutes**, during the break I'd like you to start to think about how you felt before, during and after the trip. If you like, chat about this about it in pair's or 3's or write/draw your thoughts on paper.

Part 2 (15 mins) – Feelings: Before, During, After activity

- a) Would anyone like to start by sharing how they felt (before) going on the trip?
 - Prompt to explore feelings shared
- b) Would anyone like to share with the group how they felt during the trip?
 - Prompt to explore feelings shared
- c) Would anyone like to share how they feel after going on the trip?
 - Prompt to explore feelings shared
- d) Does anyone feel like they have more (confidence/ independent) in themselves after going on the trip?
 - Prompts: How do you feel more confident? With people, with doing activities? Etc.
- e) Would anyone like to share if there's anything you're going to do now after going on the trip that you wouldn't have done before?

Part 3 – Closing - Last couple of questions (if time)

Q) Can everyone tell me one thing they liked about the trip and one thing they didn't like?

Q) Can anyone think of any suggestions for the next Sparkle residential trip?

End with:

- Thanking everyone for their time and sharing their experiences and thoughts. Your feedback will help to evaluate the trip and plan for next year
- Invite everyone to write down any thoughts or ideas that they didn't want to share out loud and drop them in a box.

Appendix B: Focus group Likert-scale visual aid

Young people were given number cards from 1-5 corresponding to the Likert-scale to rate their responses to activities on the RTs.

| | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 1 | Not at all |  |
| 2 | A little bit |  |
| 3 | Not sure |  |
| 4 | Quite a lot |  |
| 5 | A lot |  |

Appendix C: Focus group feelings cards

Six 'feelings' cards were given out to focus group participants to give examples of feelings, these were (1) happy, (2) sad, (3) confident, (4) nervous, (5) proud and (6) frustrated.



HAPPY



SAD



CONFIDENT



NERVOUS



PROUD



FRUSTRATED

Appendix D: Focus group activity sheets

Residential Trip Feedback Sheet 1

1. *Write or draw* about the activities you did on the trip

2. *Write or draw* about your favourite activity

3. *Write or draw* about your least favourite activity

Thank you for sharing your experience 😊

Residential Trip Feedback Sheet 2

1. **Write or draw** about how you felt before going on the trip

2. **Write or draw** about how you felt on the trip

3. Write or draw about how you feel after going on the trip

Thank you for sharing your experience 😊