

Benefit of Down to Earth and the outdoors to participants' well-being

This summary is based on research for a 3 year Big Lottery Fund project from the Young People's fund called "Developing self-reliance: wilderness therapy with disaffected young people" delivered by Down to Earth between 2008 and 2011.

Over the last 9 years, Down to Earth has worked with over 4000 people from 'hard to reach' groups. These groups have come primarily from South Wales, and especially from the Swansea/Neath Port Talbot/Valleys areas.

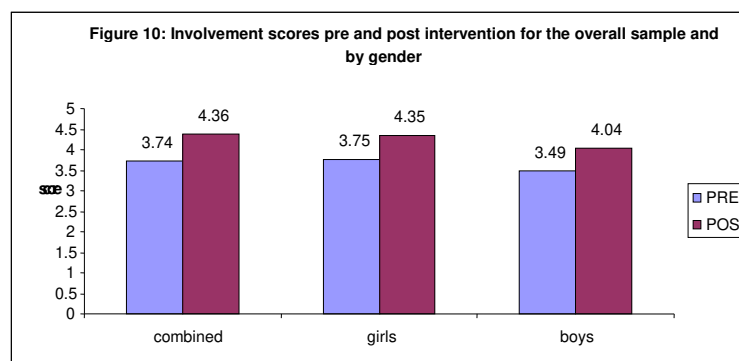
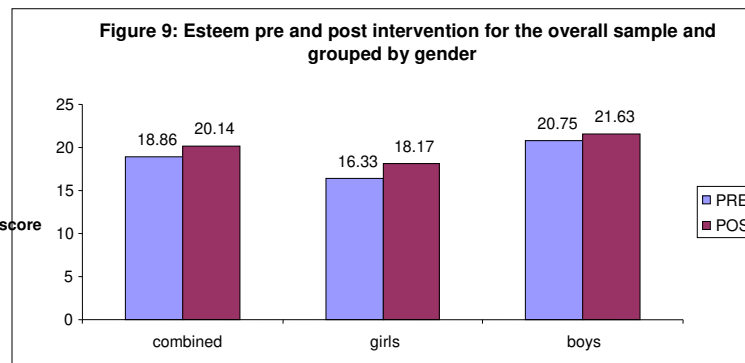
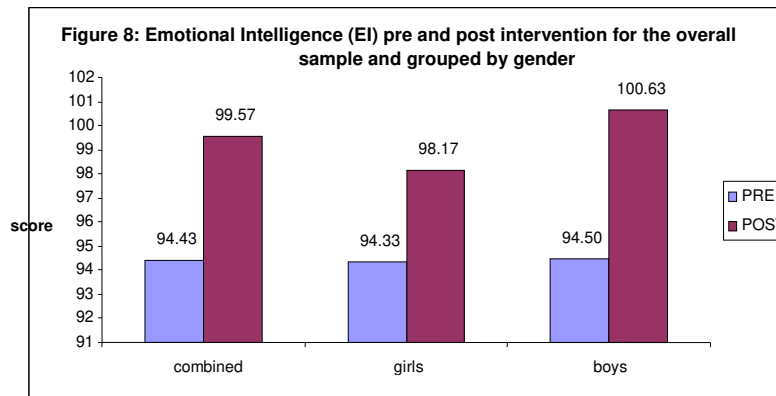
The benefits of outdoor settings for therapeutic development work and rehabilitation have long been recognized, but awareness that many mainstream curricular needs can be more effectively met in the outdoors is also growing. The English Outdoor Council (2010) suggests that outdoor learning can meet the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)'s second curricular aim better than the indoor classroom. As part of this second aim, QCDA aims to develop young people who:

- Have a sense of self worth and personal identity
- Relate well to others and form good relationships
- Are self aware and deal with their emotions
- Become increasingly independent
- Make healthy lifestyle choices
- Are physically competent and confident
- Take managed risks
- Are willing to make the most of opportunities
- Are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world

These elements are echoed in a meta-analysis of 96 studies into the effects of outdoor interventions (Hattie, J, Marsh, H.W., Neil, J.T and Richards, G.E (1997) "Adventure education and outward bound; Out-of-class experiences that make a difference," Review of Educational Research, 67 (1) 43-87)) which shows significant improvements to independence, confidence, self-understanding, self-efficacy, locus of control assertiveness and decision making in YP as a result of their engagement with outdoor education programmes.

Research carried out at Down to Earth shows significant emotional development in young people considered 'at risk' (e.g. of offending, drug use, becoming NEET etc) over a longer term intervention programme (see Figures 8,9,10). The study, carried out as part of the Big Lottery funded "Reaching Out" Project, tracks and analyses the emotional development of 14 young people over a 22 week programme. The study measured a number of tutor assessed and self-assessed aspects of emotional wellbeing, including emotional intelligence, self esteem and level of involvement, which together make up 'emotional resilience'.

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Research finding for changes in Emotional Intelligence, Self Esteem and Group Involve pre- and post engagement in a 20 week intervention programme at Down to Earth

internalised set of values. They have a positive self concept, sense of self efficacy and confidence, are optimistic, hopeful and socially perceptive. Resilient adolescents are autonomous with belief in their ability to control their futures. They have experience of overcoming adversity, the ability to change or restructure a situation to their benefit and an ability to use their environment constructively (Daniel et al, 1999). Children in Wales (2009) recommend that 'Young People need to be very resilient and proactive in this economic climate. They need Government's support and funding to help them have aspirations for the future.' Lois J Woodward "How can increased access to the outdoor environment via a 22 week intervention project have positive impacts on emotional intelligence and self esteem of young people at-risk of disaffection?" Swansea University MA Dissertation, 2010, p 19.)

In light of 2009 figures that one in ten of all 15 to 19 year olds are currently "NEET" (not in education, employment or training), Children in Wales recommend that the government should invest in these young people's futures through ensuring access to emotional intelligence and self-esteem building interventions.