

A KCLARITY REPORT FOR SNOW-CAMP:

Findings from the 2011 Youth Worker Learning Day

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Introduction

On 8th June 2011 the Snow-Camp team ran their first youth worker learning day. Snow-Camp is in regular communication with the youth groups they work with but this structured session had specific aims to:

- Gather insights on how Snow-Camp programmes combine with youth work in the community to impact on young people's lives.
- Understand how Snow-Camp achieves its vision to 'develop higher aspirations amongst young people to achieve more in snow sports, in education, training and employment and in their relationships.'
- Hear youth worker feedback to inform future development of the Snow-Camp programme.
- Support capacity building at Snow-Camp, through training staff to run 'journey mapping' workshops with youth workers in the future.

The methods used during learning day are discussed in more detail at the end of this report, and an example 'journey map' tool is provided.

Insights from the learning day

Snow-Camp programmes impact on young people well beyond the time they spend on the mountains, at the snow domes and in the life-skills courses.

This is the main point that can be taken from the Youth Worker Learning Day and was a consistent finding from the experience of all the youth workers.

Analysis of the workshop data identified four points where youth workers use the Snow-Camp process in their work:

1. Engaging young people with the idea of attending Snow-Camp programmes
2. Preparing for the Snow-Camp programme
3. Attending the Snow-Camp programme
4. Using the experiences back in the community

These four points are discussed in more detail below. The first section describes the 'general observations' of the youth workers, the usual experience and impacts they witness in young people as they experience the Snow-Camp programme. The second section of findings tells the youth workers' stories of 'exceptional' experiences some young people have had through the Snow-Camp programmes.

i. General observations

Engaging young people with Snow-Camp

For one youth centre that had been working with Snow-Camp for some time, raising the opportunity at the centre always generated significant interest as Snow-Camp had a very established, positive reputation. These young people were described as knowing '*they would never have the opportunity*' to engage in snow sports except through Snow-Camp. Other youth workers described how young people having friends who

had attended before and the fact that Snow-Camp was seen as a 'cool' programme contributed to often high demand for places.

However, introducing Snow-Camp, and in particular the possibility of the week-long residential programme to the mountains, also often raises anxieties for young people. These include being away from home, mixing with young people from other areas and doing something they had never considered possible. All youth workers noted how many of the young people they work with do not travel much beyond their local area, or even out of the estate where they live.

This process of pushing at young peoples' "comfort zones", just by discussing the Snow-Camp programme, led to conversations with the young people about needing to face fears to achieve goals, an issue which was recognised as relevant to many areas of young peoples' lives. Simply discussing the Snow-Camp programme as a possibility was described by one worker as "aspiration raising" in itself.

Effective methods for encouraging young people to take part in Snow-Camp include involving peers who have been through the programme and providing lots of opportunity to ask questions and have fears allayed.

Youth workers actively included young people they thought would benefit most from the experience of spending a week in the mountains, even where they were viewed as "more risky". This included some older individuals, for whom it was a "last chance" for this kind of experience, before they left the remit of youth work. Young people who rarely left their home environment or who very closely identified themselves with a particular area or estate had also been targeted as particularly likely to benefit from the horizon widening experience of Snow-Camp.

Preparing for Snow-Camp programmes

Preparing young people for attending a Snow-Camp programme was particularly significant for the residential programme to the mountains. All of the youth groups engage young people in structured work to prepare for the programme and describe how preparing is an opportunity for young people to develop independence and responsibility.

Across all the groups this preparation typically involved a series of weekly meetings, with a requirement that young people must demonstrate their commitment by attending the sessions, or risk losing their place on the trip. These preparatory meetings focused on practical planning and developing young peoples' responsibility, for example having their passport and belongings ready. The sessions also focus on getting young people to think about and plan for some of the situations and challenges they may face on the programme, many of which will be new, particularly for young people may not have been away from home before.

"Once we had the group together we would hold a meeting as a club, which they must attend or risk losing their place. And with so many young people wanting to go and ready to replace people it was good to getting them to come to meeting and take part in preparing for the trip"

Work is done to prepare for the long bus journeys, the frustrations of learning to ski, responding to different environments and relationship building. Although the work is in preparation for them being outside of their 'comfort zone' parallels are drawn to their day to day lives, and the need to have organisational skills and positive strategies for managing frustration.

Three of the youth groups involve young people in fundraising in part for their trip. One youth worker explained how even if the amount raised was only tokenistic, having young people do this is an important part of instilling responsibility and the experience of working for something you really want. Another commented that the Snow-Camp programme was the only time they had seen commitment from young people to engage in their own fundraising.

“Weekly sessions to prepare for the challenge / experience was essential for us for building friendships, understanding roles and responsibilities and for young people to raise their own funds (for ownership)”

One young people’s team works through a structured programme for 12 weeks before the residential. Issues covered include anger management, empathy, team work, drugs & weapons. This is important so they are equipped to manage a very new environment and parents are also involved in this work. The Snow-Camp programme was described as *“the carrot to engage them in the 12 week programme”*.

Working with the Snow-Camp team ensured that the 12 week programme was focusing on the right things and mutually supporting of the work that would take place during the programmes daily life skills sessions.

Attending Snow-Camp programmes

Youth workers witnessed different impacts on young people while they were taking part on a Snow-Camp programme. The impacts discussed often related to the residential programme to the mountains, although impact was also witnessed during shorter UK snow dome based programmes.

Horizon widening: The week long experience on the mountain was described as more intensive and extreme than other activities young people have access too, *“it literally raises horizons”* and shows them a world they might never have known. This eye opening experience provides a new perspective on what is available to them in their lives, depending on the choices they make. One youth worker described how the image of being on the mountain can stick with some young people and cause them to question whether the usual reactions they often see around them, for example violence, are *“worth it”*.

The youth workers also described how moving beyond their comfort zone enables young people to think about new ways of being and be open to other opportunities when they are back at home.

New relationships: All youth workers described how Snow-Camp exposed young people to others, from different areas of London, often for the first time, with some relationships persisting beyond the programmes. They also noted how some young people became better integrated with others, after sharing experiences on a Snow-Camp programme. This was linked with young people breaking their ideas of *“who they need to be”* during the programme.

Moving from ‘me’ to ‘we’: One youth worker described young people as experiencing *“a new and more inclusive kind of togetherness”* during the Snow-Camp programme. Sharing their experiences on the slopes, and then reflecting on them during the life skills sessions supported this. One youth worker described how *“they became less focused on ‘me’ and projecting a certain image”*. A bonding process was also supported through the experience of helping each other on the slopes, learning from each other, to encourage and motivate each other and demonstrating support for the less able members of their group. In particular, younger members of the group were encouraged by older members, which in some cases persisted into a new and more positive integration between age groups once they were back at home.

Developing perseverance, managing frustration: Managing the boredom of very long coach journeys was thought to encourage development of more positive responses to frustrating experiences, showing young people that they are able to manage frustration when working towards something they want. These experiences were used by youth workers as examples of how they were able to react positively when faced with boring or frustrating events in everyday life.

Similarly the experience of falling down and not immediately 'getting it' while learning to ski or snow board helped develop patience, determination and perseverance alongside techniques for breaking tasks down into manageable sections, to achieve one at a time.

"The programme had all the right ingredients for positive change, for 'planting a seed' as such, and the right water and sunshine can let that seed grow healthily (but it cannot be left alone)"

The Snow-Camp life skills sessions and the youth workers support this process of 'watering the seed'; by relating the things they have learnt from Snow-Camp back to their lives at home. This work helps to support the longer term changes seen back in the community.

Back in the community

Youth Workers describe using young peoples' experiences encourage them to take next steps in their day to day lives, to recognise their potential and break the boundaries they may have set for themselves. This might be in relation to education, offending or relationships with others. Useful lessons include skills for mentoring; understanding that it is ok to make mistakes and fall over, it's ok to 'fail', that it is how you pick yourself up that is more important.

Youth workers describe a range of positive changes once young people are back in the community, including improved time management, role modelling positive behaviours to others / peer mentoring, volunteering, changes in attitudes to be more positive and caring and willingness to make new friends. In some cases young people have become more proactive in telling youth workers what they want to do with their time in youth groups.

They also described the positive impact of sharing the experience and being at the same level of skiing as the young people, and having to persevere in the same way, as helping to strengthen bonds between workers and young people.

Some specific examples of change included a group of girls who had been on the Snow-Camp London programme and subsequently took up the opportunity to set up a 'big sisters' mentoring project. Their youth worker acknowledged that while it is difficult to attribute this directly to Snow-Camp he believes the confidence gained from having learnt to ski left them feeling that it was possible to achieve when other opportunities, such as being mentors, are presented. He described how even a "little journey", through a day at a snow dome, can make taking action seem more possible and increase young peoples' belief in themselves.

An increase in confidence, self-esteem and seeing more positive roles for themselves, is clearly implied within many of the changes and effects in young people described by the youth workers. These changes are more starkly described in the following section on exceptional stories.

ii. Exceptional stories

As part of the learning day Youth Workers were also asked to describe when they had seen Snow-Camp have a really exceptional impact on young people. Some felt it was difficult to quantify as the experience was exceptional for most young people, although not always in life changing ways. One youth worker estimated that this exceptional kind of impact happened for about 1 of 9 /10 young people going through the Snow-Camp programme.

Here are some of their 'exceptional' stories (to preserve anonymity no names have been used).

Becoming an instructor

One young man first tried skiing on a Snow-Camp programme in 2010. His youth worker described how "*as soon as he was on skis he became a different person*", interacting widely with others, being proactive about making the most of the opportunity and demonstrating huge dedication to the experience. Only one year later, having progressed through each of the Snow-Camp programmes, he has obtained his Level 1 certificate to be a ski instructor. He is now teaching his peers to ski as an employed instructor as part of Snow-Camp's summer programme.

Another youth worker described how two young people from the estate where he works had always had a very positive attitude but that Snow-Camp provided an opportunity for them to fulfil their potential. Again, both have gone on to qualify as Level 1 ski instructors and be actively engaged in recruiting other young people to the programme. They now have a strong local profile as positive role models in the area and are also teaching as part of the Snow-Camp summer programme.

Breaking out of the area

One young man first went skiing in 2007, on the Snow-Camp France trip. He was an older member of the group, 19, and had criminal convictions and no particular focus in life. His youth worker describes how the experience made him ask himself "*is this what you want to do for the rest of your life?*"

During the Snow-Camp programme he acted as a leader and bridge between the other young people and the instructors, youth workers and Snow-Camp staff. He was old enough to be respected and listened to by the younger members of the group and he took this opportunity to be a leader, including actively facilitating Life Skills discussions and helping make sure people were up on time and prepared for the day. The week provided him with a sense of purpose and opportunity to take on a new and more positive role.

Meeting people different to him and his circle of peers was an exciting experience that actively made him seek new opportunities to widen his horizons further, particularly through education. He is now on a University course, outside of London

Getting a job

One young man had been on several trips during the 4-5 years he had been working with a youth service, on one occasion he left to go home early. His youth worker described him as "*totally NEET*" at the time he attended the Snow-Camp programme.

The intense period of working with him on the mountain gave the youth worker the opportunity to see a pattern in his behaviour – of him saying "*yes*" to an opportunity or challenge but then 'freezing' in the moment or giving up. The Snow-Camp week provided this young man with lots of opportunities to be a

leader, to help others and be a role model – and for his worker to spot this ‘quick to quit’ pattern, who was able to “*work real time*” with him through these experiences and break this cycle.

One week after coming back from the trip he was employed as a chef, part of a huge team, and importantly remains in the job today.

Making a difference for others

Three older boys from one youth group were given the opportunity to attend the Snow-Camp France programme, it was one of the last chances they would have due to their age.

Their youth worker noticed a shift in their attitudes during the trip from “*self, self, self*” to thinking of others.

“Since SC 2010 the group I was working with have been fundraising towards those who are less fortunate than themselves. Things like car boot sales, fun walks, in club money raising, sponsorship events; all towards helping others. Before Snow-Camp they were not that interested in other peoples’ lives but now they are.”

He also describes how their interaction with the youth group has changed, with greater overall interaction and support for the younger members. He believes the experience of meeting new people on the Snow-Camp trip has broken down their barriers to integrating fully with the group.

Going forward

The day provided validation for Snow-Camp’s new programme design in two main ways. First, the youth workers noted that long gaps between courses had previously meant that it was difficult to keep some young people engaged with Snow-Camp and make full use of the opportunity of linking from one course to the next. These long gaps no longer exist in the new programme. They also emphasised the importance of the snow dome experience, through Snow-Camp London; how this provided a “*taste*” of what Snow-Camp is about and helps build the confidence to engage with the longer programmes. Snow-Camp London was clearly validated as the right starting point for young people.

Most importantly, the learning day helps explain how Snow-Camp can have an impact on young peoples’ lives: from developing skills in perseverance, communication and teamwork that they apply in their daily lives; to specific impacts on relationships with peers and in education & employment. The detailed evaluation of young people, starting in August 2011, will build on the solid findings presented here and provide an even more robust evidence base for Snow-Camp’s impact.

Approach to the learning day

At the start of the workshop each youth worker was given a 'journey map', a visual tool to help them think about how they use the Snow-Camp experience in their work and the impact they witness in young people (an example journey map template is included below).

A structured discussion was then facilitated to explore the youth workers' experiences in more detail. This helped to build an understanding of how the Snow-Camp programme has an impact. It also provided an opportunity for them to share their ideas and experiences with each other. The discussion was recorded and, along with the completed journey maps, was analysed for common themes.

Although the insights presented here are based on a small, purposive sample of youth workers working with Snow-Camp between them the workers have a wide range of combined experience:

- They were based in 3 different London boroughs & worked for 4 different types of youth project (including one linked to a Housing Association; one focused on a specific estate in London; one which encourages membership from across London and one Local Authority Targeted Youth Service).
- One youth worker had been involved with Snow-Camp since 2007, one since 2008 and 2 since 2009.
- Together the four had worked with approximately 95 young people who had been on a Snow-Camp programme.
- Two youth workers worked with young people who had completed the whole Snow-Camp journey, including the final Snow-Camp Excel course to achieve their Level 1 instructors' certificate.

This learning day is part of Snow-Camp's on going investment in evaluating the impact of their programme. From August 2011, as part of the new Snow-Camp programme, young people will be surveyed before and after they take part. This data will more fully explore the areas where Snow-Camp expects to see an impact.

About the author

I have been working with Snow-Camp since August 2010 to develop their approach to learning and evaluation. With over ten years of experience supporting organisations with evaluation and learning I focus on approaches that are useful, credible, and accessible and make best use of resources. I use a range of methods to combine creativity with rigour, including traditional evaluation methodologies, service design and social innovation methods. If you would like to know more about my work and publications please visit:

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/kerrymcc>

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Or follow me on twitter: <http://twitter.com/kclarity>

Example journey map

Please tell us a bit about you

- **Your name:**
- **Which London Borough do you work in:**
- **When did you first work with Snow-Camp (e.g. year & programme):**
- **How long have you been working with Snow-Camp:**
- **Approximately how many young people have you worked with that have been on a Snow-Camp programme:**

Above this line please record what you did at each stage and what impact it had on young people. Please add any other stages to the line that you think are important.



Snow-Camp meet your youth group

Getting YP signed

Preparing YP for the programme

Work on the SC programme

Work back in the community

Below this line please record any ideas you have for how you can integrate Snow-Camp in your work in the future. Please add any other stages to the line that you think are important.