



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

PURPOSE

ScoutsWales has been invited to submit a paper to the inquiry into the provision of 'Safe places to play, hang out' as a result of the concerns highlighted by young people during the 'It's all about you' project carried out in 2009.

Our views on some of the issues raised concerning provision of and barriers to accessing safe places to play and hang out are set out below. We hope this will help you in your deliberations.

BACKGROUND

Scouting has developed on the premise that children and young people have enquiring minds and need to informally play and socialise in safe environments, whatever their colour, creed or nationality. Our progressive programme for 6 to 25 year olds is based on physical, social, values and educational principles, which aim to develop young people through fun, play, interaction and skills learning, under the guidance of adult volunteers.

Currently 12,471 youth members meet in halls and community centres in rural, suburban and city centres throughout Wales, supported by 2,146 volunteer leaders and 875 other adults supporting those leaders through governance, management and fundraising.

All adult volunteers undergo enhanced CRB checks and undertake training, including safeguarding, first aid, and risk assessment to deliver activities suitable to the needs of their charges. We also have 225

Young Leaders aged 14 to 18 years who assist those adult leaders and also undergo training to develop their own confidence, skills and perhaps a career pathway.

BARRIERS AFFECTING PLAY IN SCOUT GROUPS:

- Risk aversion;
- Litigious society leads adults to decline voluntary roles, especially with children and young people;
- Availability of spare time by adults – both men and women – to volunteer;
- Transport availability in rural areas;
- Public transport costs for young people;
- Availability of suitable venues for meetings, particularly with space to be outdoors;
- Availability of suitable volunteers and support workers to empower disabled children and young people;
- Access to funding for specialist facilities e.g. wheelchair access, toilets, specialist equipment etc;
- Financial help for Scouting to exist in disadvantaged areas. Scouting is reliant on a membership subscription to cover the costs of venue hire, insurance, facilities etc;
- An understanding in marginalised groups that Scouting is open to all.

REVIEWING ISSUES RELEVANT TO EXISTING PROVISION IN SCOUTSWALES:

- Consistency and quality of provision is always dependant on local facilities and the skills of leadership teams plus time availability of volunteers;
- Existing facilities need to be made safer and feel safer by better access lighting, modernisation of heating and buildings in general;

- Support for venue hire, bus stops placed outside leisure/community facilities and support for young peoples transport to specific projects and training;
- Safer cycling provision to leisure/ community facilities;
- Initiatives to encourage both public and private sector employers to support employee volunteering.

HOW SCOUTING CONTRIBUTES TO “SAFE PLACES TO PLAY AND HANG OUT”

Scouting may be seen to be a very structured organisation. We have badges, awards and programme schemes to help the volunteers to provide girls and boys with an attractive and challenging meeting. However within that structure the “play” element is paramount and probably more so now than ever. Structured play i.e. games, are a large part of understanding about each other, incorporating respect, sharing, caring, confidence and learning. Whether it be football, den building, hangman, dominos, racing in the park, it doesn’t matter, but they all need an element of supervision and guidance. Scouting, as with other organisations, endeavours to provide a safe environment for these things to happen, however, we have to be mindful that accidents might happen and incidents can occur, despite all rigorous training and risk assessments. As a general rule, young people prefer to have the knowledge that there is someone to turn too, should there be a need, whether that person is a parent, older sibling, carer or voluntary leader. Scouting provides that person, even if it is only for one evening a week and the occasional trip away or camp.

Unstructured play probably plays a lesser part in Scouting because of time constraints and access to appropriate facilities but does happen on camp, where “free time” is an important element, but once again someone is always on hand.

Is Scouting a place to “hang out”? It is probably not viewed as such. However, for the older Scouts 14+ years, the meetings are, largely, far less structured. Time is given to chatting and coffee, to discuss all sorts of things or just socialise.

The common element is a team of adult volunteer leaders who understand the age group in their care, who can back off or direct as appropriate.

JILL GLOSTER
CHIEF COMMISSIONER OF WALES