StreetGames #MindOverMountain Residential 2017

In November 2017, StreetGames held an innovative four-day residential at the beautiful Brathay Hall, near Ambleside in the Lake District. The event was part of the ‘Safe, Fit & Well’ programme – a new sport and mental wellbeing initiative designed for young people aged 14 to 25 – which is being delivered by StreetGames. The residential, dubbed ‘#MindOverMountain’ saw participants from four grassroots sports organisations belonging to the wider StreetGames network coming together to learn new skills in a relaxed and fun environment. Mental health and wellbeing were a major focus of the residential, with the StreetGames Training Academy delivering the Royal Society for Public Health’s Youth Health Champion training as part of the event. This qualification is a nationally recognised Level 2 award, with graduates joining a ‘Young Health Movement’ comprised of over 1,000 other Young Health Champions across the UK.

These attendees took part in a wide array of both indoor and outdoor activities, all of which were carefully designed to promote inclusion, understanding, confidence and teamwork. The ultimate goal of the event was to equip these young people with the core skills and confidence they’d need in order to improve their life chances, as well as those of their communities back home. In every respect the residential proved to be a major success, both for the attendees and for StreetGames itself, as it continues to expand its insight around mental health and wellbeing.

Facts & Figures

Safe, Fit & Well at Brathay involved 19 participants (7 male and 12 female), drawn from four Youth Development projects (Wirral Positive Futures; Leeds City College; Tyne Met College, North Tyneside and Fitness in Mind, Brentwood), along with three former attendees-turned ‘Young Advisors’. In addition, StreetGames’ staff were also joined by Dr. Louise Mansfield and Dr. Alistair John, two leading lecturers from Brunel University London – both of whom were on hand to document StreetGames’ methodologies, as part of an external research evaluation.

Engagement

Learners took part in a wide range of activities, including team-based raft building, tandem ropewalking, morning Tai Chi and orienteering. These events were interspersed with more conventional learning opportunities – many of which took place in smaller groups and involved discussions around health and wellbeing. These learning methods proved highly effective in connecting with the young attendees, building their confidence and generating greater empathy within the group – skills that the participants were encouraged to work on and share with other peers back home.
Impacts

For many attendees, #MindOverMountain proved to be a truly transformational event. One participant came to the residential as an intensely shy and timid individual, yet over the course of just four days, she tackled her fears, pushed herself to new heights and bonded with a whole host of new and diverse people. She even surprised her own project leader, who commented:

“We saw a huge change in a very short space of time, [...] before this residential I’d be panicking to see what she’d be like in a presentation - to speak in front of people, and she was just absolutely flawless, as if it was never an issue.”

From wanting to go home on day one to being desperate to stay by day four, this young person was far from the only participant to feel this way. Another participant was asked to attend the residential in order to improve her confidence, but also because StreetGames saw great leadership potential in her – something that was also true of all 19 of the attendees. As the young person herself put it: “They said I had potential, but I was just too shy to show it”. During an early activity, her shyness stopped her from taking part, but instead of feeling isolated and alone, StreetGames staff worked hard to reassure and refocus her energy. She told us:

 “[StreetGames’ staff] have been really supportive [...] It’s overwhelming, but in a good way. So much stuff has happened, but [they] turned it all into a positive. [...] Last night we were all on the stage dancing and singing. Before this, I wouldn’t have done that in front of anyone”.


For a glimpse into both girls’ futures, you needn’t look further than the three dedicated Young Advisors who helped to tie the whole Brathay experience together. Young Advisors are former attendees – both of projects and residential – who feel motivated to return to StreetGames’ events as organisers, educators and role models. One of our Young Advisors describes how her dreams of working in television and film had always taken a back seat due to her experiences of anxiety. During her first visit to a StreetGames event she had even asked to be placed away from her original group. Nowadays, the Young Adviser says she has the confidence to push herself when she feels that her voice should be heard.

“I was so scared to be in a social situation with no backup, then literally three hours in I just felt so at home that I wanted to go back to my original group and do what everyone else was doing. From that group I still have friends that I meet up with a good couple of times a week”.

Another of the #MindOverMountain Young Advisors – an avid football player and aspiring sports coach – described how his ambition had been curtailed by a lack of confidence, but thanks to StreetGames he “gain[ed] confidence, organisational abilities, [and] the ability to do everything that gets carried on through your life”. In other words “I just needed the love and support and guidance”.

While for some attendees, these lessons had a dramatic, visible impact, in other cases the changes were much more subtle, though just as important. The oldest attendee at 24 was already an articulate and confident speaker when he arrived at Brathay. Nevertheless, he wanted to challenge himself by attending – in order to better understand his weaknesses and to overcome them in a setting more conducive to personal reflection.

“At the start of this, there was an anxiety of not knowing what to expect. I didn’t know what my motivation would be like. Now leaving it’s quite sad. [...] It’s made me realise a lot of the weaknesses I had, as well as strengths. I’m more aware now of what different people have been through and having such a variety of people here in your peer group is really good. [...] “I’ve had 3 meals a day, and more of a routine. I’m feeling pretty healthy, the healthiest I’ve been in a while” [...] “I’d recommend it to anybody”.

Another attendee is already well on her way to becoming a Young Advisor. Having visited Brathay during a previous StreetGames’ summer residential, she returned in the hopes of continuing to build her leadership skills, in order to take on a possible Young Advisor role in the future.

“It’s beautiful here [...] there’s no one pushing you to do [activities]. It’s more a case of ‘it’d be good if you do it, but it doesn’t matter if you don’t’. Normally some people would peer pressure you into it” [...] “Here, it’s all about building trust”.

The young people who participated in the #MindOverMountain residential and Youth Health Champion training will now return to their Doorstep Sport programmes. They will become a valuable addition to the ongoing “Safe, Fit and Well” programme and continue to develop their roles as peer health mentors. Projects will continue receiving support from StreetGames during the remaining period of Sport England funding through to April 2018.

The StreetGames staff team would like to extend their thanks to the Brathay Trust for once again providing a wonderful environment and experience to all of the young attendees. Seeing the power of these residential to affect change only increases our enthusiasm to deliver further programmes in 2018.