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Positive Pathways: evaluating the impact of a residential wilderness and adventure learning programme with mentoring on young people who have offended (or are at risk of doing so)

Submission date
11/07/2024

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
18/07/2024

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
18/07/2024

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[X] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol
Background and study aims
Many studies have provided evidence that outdoor education can assist with the development of responsibility, leadership, self-reliance, resilience and self-awareness, as well as supporting learners in their educational journeys. Evidence also suggests a positive impact on young people' s attitudes, beliefs, self-perceptions and interpersonal skills along with fitness, motor skills, self-confidence, self-esteem, and their relationship with adults. However, how and why outdoor education works in improving these non-cognitive skills is not completely clear.
The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) identifies adventure and wilderness activities as likely having a low impact on violent crime but a moderate impact on reoffending. However, there are challenges presented by the issue of rural racism and possible perceptions of 'not belonging' or discomfort for some young people. In addition, there is developing evidence that community-based mentoring can positively influence 'at risk' young people, reducing the likelihood of youth offending and involvement in violent behaviour.
This study aims to evaluate the Positive Pathways programme, which combines adventure /outdoor learning with mentoring, initially via an internal pilot and, if promise is evident, through an efficacy trial.

Who can participate?
The Positive Pathways programme is targeted at young people aged 15-17 in the East and West Midlands who are either at risk of involvement in violent crime or are already in the Youth Justice system. The young people will be referred to the programme via schools and other educational settings, community organisations such as youth groups, the police and Youth Offending Teams.

What does the study involve?
Participants are randomly allocated to either an intervention group which will receive the Positive Pathways programme or a control group which will not receive the Positive Pathways programme but will receive an enhanced 'business as usual' approach with £50 per young

reserved for enrichment activities. Data for the study will be collected at the start of the programme, at onboarding and at the end. This data will be analysed to see whether the intervention has led to statistically significant changes in the responses of participants versus the control group.
An Implementation Process Evaluation (IPE) will run alongside the Impact Evaluation. This will use a combination of surveys, interviews/focus groups and observations to gather rich data to help understand how the intervention has been realised in practice, and how this has affected the participants (both in the intervention and control groups) and other stakeholders, including the mentors, those referring young people to the programme, and programme deliverers. This aims to help uncover perceptions and feelings about the programme, the extent to which it has fulfilled its stated objectives and how this may have come about. Should the programme or its outcomes not have been fully realised as intended, the IPE will try to understand why.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
In terms of benefits, those young people who are randomised into the intervention group will have received both mentoring and an outdoor residential experience which aims to lower the risk of reoffending or offending behaviour, as well as equipping the young people with greater levels of life skills. The control group, while not receiving the Positive Pathways programme, will still benefit from additional enrichment activity via the enhanced business as usual (£50 per Young Person).
As a result of the extensive safeguarding process that is a core part of the Positive Pathways programme, the researchers believe that the level of risk to participants and staff has been mitigated and therefore is low. However, there is a risk that those young people who are allocated to the control group may feel resentful and demoralised. It is hoped that the activities that will be offered via the enhanced business as usual will offset this.

Where is the study run from?
The Positive Pathways programme is delivered by Ingeus. The outdoor residential will be delivered by Inspiring Learning at their Kingswood residential site in Devon (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
November 2023 to June 2026

Who is funding the study?
Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) (UK)

Who is the main contact?
1. Josephine Booth, josephine.booth@shu.ac.uk
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Contact information

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Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
GR5-EVAL-032401

Study information

Scientific Title
Randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Positive Pathways programme

Acronym
PP

Study objectives
Participation in the Positive Pathways programme, a residential wilderness and adventure learning programme with mentoring, has a positive impact on the volume of offending behaviour (as measured by the self-reported SRDS volume score) amongst 15–17-year-olds that have offended (or are at risk of doing so).

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 30/05/2024, Sheffield Hallam University (Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB, United Kingdom; +44 (0)114 2255555; m.ranchordas@shu.ac.uk), ref: ER67367138

Primary study design

Interventional

Study design
Two-armed randomized controlled efficacy trial with internal pilot

Study type(s)
Prevention, Efficacy

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Self-reported offending behaviours

Interventions
The Positive Pathways programme is organised and run by Ingeus, a global provider that began offering services in the UK in 2002. The Positive Pathways programme itself draws heavily upon their well-established National Citizenship Scheme (NCS) residential wilderness project and continued partnership with Inspiring Learning. It is a referral group-based adventure programme to be delivered across the East and West Midlands, aimed at 15–17-year-olds who are at risk of violent offending or are already involved in the Youth Justice System.

The programme consists of
1. An initial onboarding session
2. An outdoor taster session to be held locally
3. An initial mentoring session
4. A residential adventure week, with outdoor activities and input from speakers with lived experience
5. A graduation/celebration event
6. Two follow-up mentoring sessions to take place a month apart
7. Opportunity for young people to contact their mentor via telephone or email informally outside of scheduled inputs to discuss concerns or to check in on anything related to the programme

Each wave of the programme will consist of four groups of 15 young people (i.e. 60 young people per wave). From start to finish, the programme will last a total of between 5-7 months – with the slight variation factored in to accommodate the rolling nature of recruitment. Young people will wait no more than 4 weeks between one input/activity to the next. Furthermore, young people are encouraged to contact mentors outside of formal sessions as required through email or telephone. Ingeus will also schedule additional sessions if they identify specific needs required for the young people to be able to access the programme.

Randomisation will be at the level of the individual and stratified into eight groups; by the referral route/organisation and identified Youth Endowment Foundation (funder) area of need i.e. whether a young person i) has been arrested or convicted of a criminal offence (described as 'Lower Tertiary Level' - LTL) or ii) is consider at high/medium risk of offending (described as 'Upper Secondary Level' - USL). This best ensures that, for each of the four referral routes, a similar number of young people with USL and LTL needs will be allocated to the Positive Pathways and enhanced BAU groups

If a young person is in the intervention group, they may also be asked to take part in a focus group or interview with a researcher to talk about how they found (or are finding) the Positive Pathways programme and what they liked and disliked. This is completely voluntary. A researcher from SHU may also observe either their Taster Day or some of their Residential Week.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Offending behaviour is measured using the volume of self-reported offending behaviours (Self-Report Delinquency Scale [SRDS]), Volume Score [0 to 198], at baseline and within 4 weeks after endpoint

Key secondary outcome(s)
1. Offending behaviour is measured using the variety of self-reported offending behaviours (Self-Report Delinquency Scale [SRDS]), variety scale [0 to 19], at baseline and within 4 weeks after endpoint
2. Total difficulties and pro-social behaviour, hyperactivity, conduct problems, emotional problems and peer problems measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) subscales including total difficulties scale [0 to 40], pro-social scale [0 to 10], hyperactivity subscale [0 to 10], conduct problems subscale [0 to 10], emotional problems subscale [0 to 10] ad peer problems subscale [0 to 10]; at baseline and within 4 weeks after endpoint
3. Wellbeing is measured using the ONS Wellbeing Scale, volume sore [0-10], at baseline and within 4 weeks after endpoint

Completion date
01/06/2026

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
The target group for the Positive Pathways programme therefore the RCT is young people aged 15-17 years who meet all three of the following inclusion criteria:

Criteria 1: have either been:
1. Convicted of a criminal offence (LTL)
2. Arrested, but have not received a criminal conviction (LTL)
3. Considered at high/medium risk of offending due to demonstrating one or more of the following factors:
3.1. Carrying weapons such as knives (USL/LTL)
3.2. Known association with peers known to be involved in criminal activity (USL/LTL)
3.3. Known to have siblings already involved in criminal activity (USL/LTL)
3.4. Displaying overt coercive or violent behaviour (LTL)
3.5. Excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream education i.e. persistent absences and suspension due to displaying behaviours including offending, bullying, aggression, violence (USL)
3.6. Professional concern around or signs of possible criminal exploitation e.g., burner phones, unexplained change in finances, missing episodes (USL/LTL)
3.7. Drug use or possession (USL/LTL)
3.8. Have had current or previous involvement with youth offending service, police or probation service either on a voluntary basis (non-statutory), preventative intervention (out-of-court disposal or diversionary outcome or court-mandated disposal (USL/LTL)

Criteria 2: Are living in the East or West Midlands

Criteria 3: Are willing to voluntarily engage with and complete Positive Pathways as demonstrated through:

1. Consenting to referral
2. Confirming consent to engage following the initial meeting and a detailed explanation of the project and the evaluation

Participant type(s)
Learner/student, Service user

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Lower age limit
15 Years

Upper age limit
17 Years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Young people will not be eligible if they are currently serving a custodial sentence or have previously served a custodial sentence for murder or a sexual offence. These are the only exclusion criteria that would be applied if the young person had satisfied the inclusion criteria.

Date of first enrolment
18/07/2024

Date of final enrolment
30/09/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Ingeus UK
18 Mansell Street
London
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Sponsor information

Organisation
Sheffield Hallam University

ROR
https://ror.org/019wt1929

Funder(s)

Funder type
Charity

Funder Name
Youth Endowment Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during the current study will be stored in a non-publicly available repository, the ONS Secure Research Archive (https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/statistics/requestingstatistics/secureresearchservice)

IPD sharing plan summary
Stored in non-publicly available repository