

Peer support programmes in outdoor adventurous activities – part of the key to improving well-being?



Pum ffordd at les
Five ways to well-being



The benefits of getting our 5 a-day (well-being 5 a-day that is, not veg) are hugely evident in maintaining a healthy mind and body, and being active outdoors, especially with others, can tick all 5 a-day in a single hit. An exciting new project is set to examine whether the benefits of peer support can be harnessed and used within an outdoor adventurous activity programme to improve participant well-being.

The area of outdoor adventurous activities has a rich tradition of seeking to contribute to well-being and health outcomes on a number of levels. At their core such activity programmes provide controlled exposure to challenging experiences and seek to create a warm and supportive group atmosphere. Such challenge and support enhances a person's capacity for resilience to deal with life's challenges.



Wales is at the forefront worldwide, of encouraging health and well-being through its Future Generations Act (2015). Projects such as this consider all 7 goals of the Act, namely: a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

Peer support is a flourishing area of interest in health and well-being. Dr Patricia Masterson Algar at the School of Healthcare Sciences, who is overseeing this PhD research said: *“Our research into peer support interventions in stroke rehabilitation, has proven the value of peer groups, and it's exciting to think that we may be able to extend the benefits into the community and encourage and enable a whole range of well-being benefits to be gained from peer support in outdoor activities.”*

Researchers at the School of Health Sciences at Bangor University have teamed up with Snowdonia Watersports, a local outdoor activity provider in Llanberis, to design and test a training package for those interested in using peer mentoring & support to get the most from their outdoor adventurous activities.

Chris Thorne of Snowdonia Watersports said: *“With more diverse groups from the local community using our facilities on a regular basis, I wanted to explore how best we could support their whole well-being not just provide them with an activity each week. Some groups, like our swimmers, just want us to provide safety cover, other groups we have like Menter Waunfawr want instruction and an outdoor experience. Groups may have complex disability needs to address, some may use adventurous activities to improve behaviour, others just want to paddle or swim with the*

reassurance of a safety boater and enjoy a coffee and a chat afterwards? But can my instructors do more for these community groups who use us for longer term programmes?



Trys Burke, who is undertaking the PhD research and is a former employee of Snowdonia Watersports said:

“Incorporating a successful peer support model within an outdoor programme, would help instructors and coaches provide more for long term participants. In a peer supported programme, participants would trust the peer supporter, feel inspired by them,

feel less uncomfortable, or worried, they would no doubt open up to them more as well, feeling more confident to discuss any issues they have. This would facilitate far greater well-being benefits than anything an instructor or coach operating alone could possibly provide. From a business point of view, such a model may also provide an additional income stream for outdoor activity practitioners like Snowdonia Watersports, to deliver more varied and tailored programmes, as well as longer term sustainable green, blue and social prescriptions or outdoor rehabilitation programmes for the community.”

During the first stage of the study, an extensive scoping study to explore the feasibility of such an initiative and to map exemplar peer support initiatives from health and education across onto outdoor adventurous activities. The second stage will involve working with relevant stakeholders in North West Wales (the following so far have been approached: Snowdonia Watersports, Menter Waenfawr, The Urdd, Menter Iaith, the Scouting Association and the Outdoor Partnership) . These stakeholders will be taking part in co-designing, developing, testing and reviewing an **outdoor activity peer support package** to fit their unique needs.

This peer support training package will clearly reflect the vision of the Future Generations Act (2015) not only within a Wales context, but also in signposting Wales as a centre of excellence in outdoor adventurous activities for community health and well-being. This research will not only develop theory, but will also reflect excellence in applied practice.

The research is funded under the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS) Programme. KESS II is part-funded by the Welsh Government’s European Social Fund (ESF) Convergence programme for West Wales and the Valleys and it supports collaborative research projects with external partners based in the Convergence area of Wales (West Wales and the Valleys). If you would like to know more about the project or wish for your company to participate in the design and delivery, please contact Trys Burke t.burke@bangor.ac.uk or Dr Patricia Masterson-Algar p.m.algar@bangor.ac.uk