

'parkrun' Focus Group: Sherwood Pines Forest

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme a focus group was set up with participants attending a 'parkrun' event at Sherwood Pines Forest. 'parkrun' organise weekly 5km timed runs around the world. This was a new activity for Sherwood Pines and started on site in October 2015. Ten women and three men participated in the focus group. Three participants were aged 16-34; nine were 35-54, with one person 55-64. Some of the group were already active however, three had never run before starting a 'parkrun' session, and two of them started their first run at Sherwood.



Motivations

Motivations to participate were to get fit, lose weight, be healthier and feel better. One participant also mentioned heart disease within the family as a motivation for getting fitter, while another felt that a mid life crisis led to her wanting to do things differently and challenge herself more.

Benefits - Social connections and a sense of community

Three of the thirteen participants were undertaking the run with their children; one family was running with all three of their children as well as the brother of one of the parents. Another woman had been running with her daughter (aged 6) at 'parkrun' events for over a year. Being and doing something together as a family was viewed as especially important. Participants talked about a sense of community engendered through getting involved in 'parkrun'. A number went to the café at Sherwood Pines after the run to chat and catch up.

Benefits of running

'It makes me feel better, both physically and mentally, especially in this environment because it's so nice and every time you do the run you see something different'.

*'I love the feeling of it [running]'.
'My daughter [aged 6] gets a real sense of accomplishment from it. We used to say she'd get a pound for every run. But she's never bothered as she gets personal bests and medals'.*

Engaging families

'It's amazing [parkrun] and it's fantastic to see these families getting their young ones into it. I admire them so much'

'That's what inspired me [seeing families run together] my 8 year old is up for it, my daughter's four - not sure she'd make it round.'

'We always go for a drink afterwards in the café, we try and make it a social and family activity as well'.

Changes in behaviour

'My first run was 12 weeks ago. It's made a massive, massive difference. I've lost one stone and nine pounds and I've come off anti-depressants. It just keeps me going. I come [to parkrun] with my niece, I never thought my niece would want to come out with me. So now we come every week and have aunty and niece time together.'

'I've always wanted to run, I just found with the asthma I couldn't run but then I thought I want to do it, I have to do it. I have had attacks but I've learnt from them, what to do and eat before a run.'

'I didn't start doing any fitness until I was thirty. I was three stone heavier than I am now, drank a lot and eat a lot. Since then I've been in and out of running'

Evidence of behaviour change

The quotes above provide evidence of considerable behaviour change; some of this was associated directly with 'parkrun' at Sherwood Pines while some was linked to other 'parkrun' events or the joining of a running club. One woman who had only started running recently joined a local running club and now ran four times a week. Another woman started because of a bad back:

'I had a really bad back, sometimes I couldn't even get out of bed. I went to the physio who said you need to help yourself and lose weight and start doing Pilates and other activity'

Encouraging children to have active lifestyles and acting as a role model for children was one of the reasons to sustain 'parkrun' activity. Seeing evidence of progress such as a new personal best, receiving a t-shirt for doing a certain number of runs also encouraged participants to keep on with their running.

Activity in the forest environment

One of the children enjoyed Sherwood Pines as *'it's got loads of turns and hills'*. Carrying out the run in a scenic setting was important as well as seeing how the site changed over the seasons. Participants also said running in the rain could be enjoyable.

'Here it's a nice atmosphere and the scenery is really great. It takes us 25 minutes to get here but it's a nice place to come'

Participants' felt 'parkrun' at Sherwood Pines Forest was open and accessible for all whatever age, size or ability. The participation of families with children was seen as very positive and a good means of promoting active healthy lifestyles.

Participants had sometimes carried out a 'parkrun' at other nearby sites or had also found another 'parkrun' to participate in when they were on holiday.

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Funding: Sport England and Forestry Commission England

Website: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/BEEH-A3HMKM> and to find out about parkrun go to <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/>