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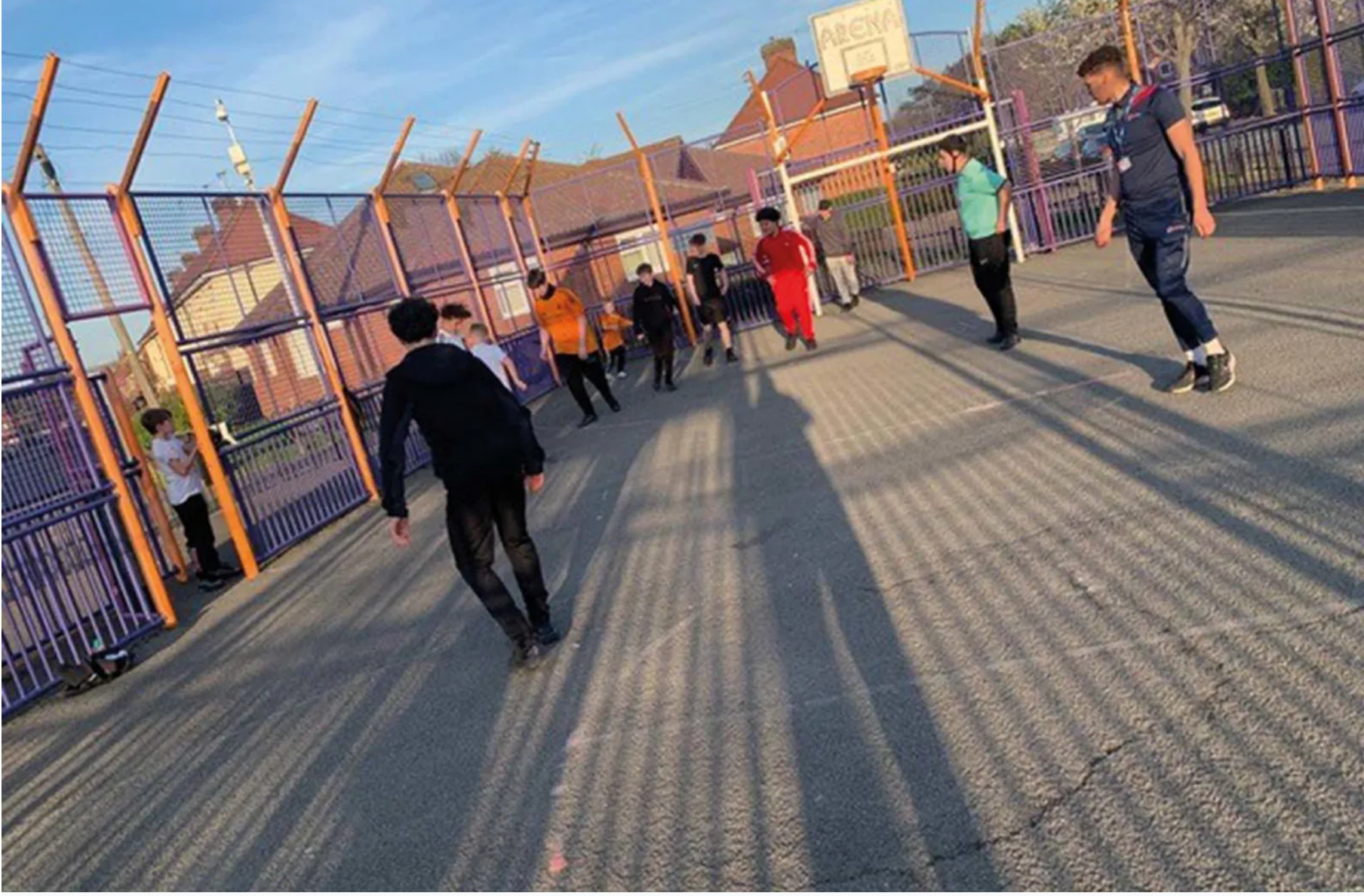
Best Practice

Beyond Rocket Park: a transformative journey

1 May 3 mins read Ross Podyma

Youth Work

Nestled in the heart of Sinfín, a district in Derby, lies Rocket Park, a worn multi-games unit surrounded by social housing.



Rocket Park's young people forged rewarding connections on their residential trip.
Picture: Sporting Communities

Despite its faded appearance, the park has served as a vital hub for Sinfín's youth for more than a decade, offering a place of connection and respite amid the challenges of daily life.

Several years ago, our detached youth work team, Gerome and David, began engaging with the community here, providing support and opportunities for young people facing poverty and limited prospects.

Resilience and solidarity

Sinfín is a vibrant multicultural area, bound together by shared hardship. Poverty and lack of opportunity are persistent struggles, but they have also fostered resilience and solidarity. At Rocket Park we offer regular sessions where young people can momentarily escape their realities through sports, activities, and connections with staff. These sessions use youth work techniques such as relationship-building, mentoring, and providing safe spaces for young people to explore their interests and develop positive self-perceptions. The relationships we build through consistent engagement offer trust, support, and a sense of belonging, helping to nurture their self-confidence and reinforce their ability to make positive decisions.

Out of this work, an exciting idea emerged: a weekend trip to Kibblestone Campsite and Activity Centre, a Scout site in the Midlands. This trip would provide the young people with an opportunity to experience something beyond their everyday lives.

Securing funding for transport and accommodation was challenging, but we were determined. The announcement created a buzz in the community, shifting the atmosphere from routine indifference to eager anticipation. The young people rallied around the trip, excited for what it could offer.

For many, the trip wasn't just about excitement, it was about overcoming the barriers poverty had created. We found ourselves assisting families with essentials such as clothing and toiletries. This experience revealed the hidden struggles of many families and provided a rare opportunity to connect with parents, breaking down barriers between families and support services.

These logistical hurdles demanded collaboration between the youth work team, families, and the community, illustrating how youth workers often bridge the gap between young people and the wider systems they interact with.

On the day of the trip, excitement buzzed through the air as the young people boarded the bus. However, the lively chatter quickly subsided, and a reflective silence fell over the group. This journey was more than just a getaway; it represented growth and reflection.

Once at Kibblestone, the young people quickly realised the scope of the weekend ahead. We split into teams, and the activities began: orienteering in the dark, treetop rope walks, rock climbing, canoeing, and team challenges. Each activity pushed the young people to their physical and emotional limits, creating moments of self-discovery and strengthened confidence. These challenges provided opportunities for youth workers to apply empowerment techniques, helping young people recognise their strengths, build resilience, and foster a sense of accomplishment. Youth-led activities, where young people set their own goals, played a crucial role in shaping the experience.

During downtime, the group gathered in the recreation room to share stories. The conversations were filled with laughter, acknowledgment of fears overcome, and recognition that failure and success are part of the same journey. This reflective process enhanced emotional intelligence and communication skills, which are key to their personal growth.

The following day, the group's energy had shifted from exhaustion to exhilaration, and they tackled physical challenges with renewed enthusiasm. By the time we headed home, the bus was alive with laughter and singing. The once-fragmented group had come together, united in solidarity, empathy, and shared spirit. These moments of connection demonstrated the importance of community-building and group cohesion in youth work, which helps young people feel part of something more than themselves.

Connection and empathy

Returning to Rocket Park, the change in the young people was striking. Their attitudes towards one another and the staff had shifted significantly. A newfound sense of connection and empathy had emerged. The trip had planted the seeds of change, and the spirit of community and togetherness continued to thrive. It changed their self-perception and confidence, allowing them to see themselves as capable, resilient individuals.

Taking young people, especially those facing adversity, on a weekend adventure is a transformative experience. It allows them to step outside their daily lives, reflect on their potential, and see the possibilities ahead. These trips provide not only a break from routine but also a space for personal growth, reflection, and empowerment. The youth work techniques, emotional support, goal setting, teamwork, and empowerment, were effective in building self-esteem and preparing young people to face future challenges.

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