**Operating under Covid-19 conditions:**

**Top tips, challenges and adaptation/lesson learning**

**Top Tips**

**Innovative communications**

Use short videos, Facebook live, memorable hashtags and themed communications, such as shark month and mental health awareness week, to focus and increase online engagement.

**Data usage**

Applications such as Zoom use a large amount of data when used on a mobile phone (unless using WiFi). Consider paying for additional data to facilitate participation in online activity using Zoom.

**Get creative**

****Online engagement using mediums such as Minecraft can be a successful method for digital outreach as it is a less pressurised environment.

**Increasing outreach**

****Online engagement can make it easier for young people to participate as there is no travel involved. Projects have reported increased outreach as online engagement means they are not limited to their geographic area. It can also enable projects to broaden the breadth of subjects and activities covered.

**Group discussions**

Actively encourage small group discussions online. Projects have indicated that this can greatly increase the confidence and reflection/thinking skills of young people and make the sessions more ‘real’ for them.

**Digital poverty**

Digital poverty can be an issue for many young people. Consider initiating a laptop loan scheme to try and mitigate this.

**Getting the right balance**

Many young people already have access to excessive amounts of technology. Whilst online engagement can increase outreach, it can also cause technological fatigue so events should be planned and executed carefully to minimise this.

**Small group working**

Consider hosting invitation-only socially distanced small group outdoor activities.

**Data usage**

Ensure online engagement is fully optimised for, and accessible by mobile phones to streamline engagement where possible and make it fully accessibly, particularly for those without a computer.

**Challenges**

**Increased safeguarding**

Increased online engagement can bring additional challenges with safeguarding. Procedures should be reviewed to ensure they are still fit for purpose.

**Decreased engagement**

Lack of face to face engagement has led to a decrease in engagement with some young people who are less comfortable with online engagement.

**Transport barriers**

Transport (particularly in rural areas) was a real barrier because people were advised to avoid using public transport. This became easier once facemasks came into use.

**Online barriers**

For some young people (particularly those who already have barriers to online participation) there is no substitute for face-to-face engagement.

**Referral agencies and schools**

Many referral agencies, youth organisations and schools still do not recommend or advise face-to-face service provision which can be challenging for projects who work closely with these bodies

**Lack of facilities**



Due to lockdown many facilities including toilets and cooking facilities are unavailable meaning projects cannot always provide hot drinks or a hot meal where face-to-face engagement is taking place. This is a significant issue where young people may be reliant on the refreshments provided at face-to-face events.

**Adaptation/lesson learning**

**Mitigating anxiety**

Young people with extreme social anxiety can sometimes engage well in a digital environment although some young people can find breakout rooms with everyone on camera a daunting experience.

**Most vulnerable groups**

A reduction in face-to-face activity and increase in online engagement meant one project was able to increase 1:1 support for particularly vulnerable young people.

**Increased independence**

Reduced staff capacity and lockdown conditions have increased empowerment, responsibility and ownership in some projects. One project has reported increased independence from its youth forum members who have taken on responsibility for managing the forum, with reduced support from project staff.

**Increased adaptability and flexibility**

Digital delivery can move on quickly! Projects should adapt to the changing technologies, platforms and methods of communication with young people and adopt those that best fit their requirements whilst maintaining a fluid and flexible approach to reflect changing needs.

**Adopting a multi-facetted approach**

Many projects have indicated that they will continue to host online activity even when face-to-face activity resumes as it is a useful approach for engagement. Projects have stated that working online is a great way of bringing a wider range of people together but it does need to be coupled with some face-to-face engagement to maintain interpersonal approaches. By hosting both online and face-to-face activity, projects can undertake and complete more work, vary project activities and maintain young people’s engagement.

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