

# **Entertainment in the Dales**

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A report on behalf of the Dales PCT  
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# Introduction

## The Brief

The Durham Dales PCT asked a group of young people to find out:

**What entertainment means for young people living in the Dales and to contrast how types of entertainment -and access to them- vary for those living in a rural community to those living in an urban community.**

## How the research was carried out

Over the past 3 months Sarah Maughan, Shelley Routledge and Toby Thirling assisted by Pippa Bell have been finding out what entertainment means to young people.

Sarah, Shelley and Toby are all 15 years old and attend secondary schools in Bishop Auckland (a small town on the edge of the Durham Dales) and Wolsingham (a market town within the Durham Dales)

In order to conduct this research the group has employed various research methods which are indicated below. The group:

- Initially discussed the entertainment issues important to them.
- Asked their peers at school to complete a questionnaire – at Wolsingham School  
- at St. John's Bishop Auckland
- Visited a youth club in the market town of Barnard Castle to talk to the young people.
- Set up focus groups and interviewed pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 at Wolsingham School and Bishop Auckland School.
- Kept diaries for 3 weeks noting how they spent their leisure time each day.

The following information, the issues that have arisen and recommendations the group have made have all been drawn from this original source material.

Due to the limitations of time in compiling this report it has not been possible unfortunately in some areas to meet with community leaders to discuss the entertainment provision for young people.

## The Findings

Entertainment is **'fun'** according to all the young people we spoke to.

Entertainment is important because it is something that young people do **'for enjoyment'** in contrast to their schoolwork or **'something to keep me occupied so that I don't get bored'**.

Young people entertain themselves in many diverse ways-from activities with friends i.e. Club activities (drama or sporting, playing musical instruments or just **'hanging out together'**) to solitary activities i.e. reading, painting, listening to music and using the computer. In general young people are resourceful and make the most of the facilities in their area and activities on offer.

Entertainment means, **'Having fun anywhere, with your friends'**.

Socialising with his or her friends was the most important aspect of entertainment for everyone. Whether the young people lived in a rural area or a town this sentiment was the same. Whatever they were doing the young people wanted to be with their friends and able to share their enjoyment with them. They all felt entertainment can take any form as long as you **'can have a laugh with your mates'**.

Often the type of activity the young people did was determined by whether their friends were interested or involved in it.

## Entertainment in a Rural Community

### Young People's Attitude

The young people we spoke to living in rural communities measured their entertainment opportunities against the facilities that were available to them. Therefore a typical initial comment was **'It's boring here'**

Some young people felt deprived **'there is nothing to do here'**

However the majority made the most of where they lived and were very resourceful **'You make your own entertainment'**. One girl told us **'I took up horse-riding because there was nothing else to do here'**

### Entertainment Facilities

- The community provides much of the entertainment available to young people in rural areas. For example: In Wolsingham the people are able to use the Comprehensive school pool. Events such as an under 18's disco and a youth club are held in the school hall. There is a water sports club that not only teaches sport but also arranges outings to go to football matches or to go ice-skating.
- There are good after-school clubs such as drama and football available at the school but despite the teachers organising transport to get home afterwards many young people are not able to attend because of the difficulties in getting home.
- There are good youth clubs for the under 14's in many rural communities, but due to lack of funding and volunteers there are few youth clubs catering for over 14's and therefore this age group are often left to entertain themselves.
- One of the highlights of the year in the rural community are the annual shows when the fairground rides and amusements visit the area.

### Meeting Places

These are limited in the Dales, the young people mostly

- a) **'Hang around Wolsingham with my mates'** as there is nowhere to go inside and have a cheap drink with friends.
- b) Visit the library it is a good meeting place for young people but the facilities available are limited compared to a large town library, which has Internet access and Playstations.
- c) Go to a friend's houses as long as they are able to get home afterwards.

### Intimidation

The only form of intimidation the young people have experienced was catching the bus from the town late at night with a lot of drunken people on it. Although they weren't threatened they felt frightened.

### What's on- Local awareness

The young people find out what's on through:

- a) The parish magazine
- b) Notices around the village
- c) Word-of-mouth through friends or parents.

## **Access to Entertainment Facilities**

Getting to and from entertainment facilities is the greatest frustration faced by young people living in rural areas.

The young people who live in and around Wolsingham are all able to access facilities in local towns fairly easily as their villages are on a good bus route. The last bus to leave Bishop Auckland for Stanhope is 11.15. However if you live in Mickleton or Howden or Hamsterely the last bus in to the village is before 6pm!

The bus fares are expensive and an outing costs a lot if you have to add this to the cost of the entertainment.

The young people are very reliant on parents for giving them lifts particular to weekend activities out of the area ‘ **My sister and I go to a drama club in Darlington for 3 hours on a Saturday. It is 45mins drive from here and so my parents take us and shop while they wait for us**’

Problems also arise if the young people miss the bus and are unable to get back into there without calling their parents for a lift.

Young people living in rural areas are very aware that the lack of entertainment facilities available to them is because there is not the volume of people living in the area to make them commercially viable.

## **Seasonal differences**

Living in a rural community the young people are more reliant on entertaining themselves outdoors. It is harder for them in the winter when they are unable to go riding, or cycling or swimming (the outdoor pool in Stanhope is closed in the winter) because of the dark nights and colder weather.

Their entertainment is more focused on indoor activities such as going to friend’s houses, watching TV, using the computer and listening to music.

## Entertainment in an Urban Community

### Young People's Attitude

Although the young people told us about many different things that they could do to entertain themselves in the town, they still complained that there **'is not enough to do'**!

They also mentioned that **'everything costs money and it is all quite expensive'**

As in the Dales, the main focus of entertainment for these young people was **'meeting up with your mates'**.

### Entertainment Facilities

- The young people living in the town have access to the following entertainment amenities e.g.: the cinema, takeaways, a variety of shops, pubs, swimming pool, skate park and expensive coffee shops.

Although the young people living in towns are not restricted by access, they are restricted by the amount of money it costs to use some of the entertainment facilities. Therefore they are more likely to meet friends in the park or walk around the shops after school or go to a friend's house. Often the young people will only use the expensive entertainment facilities on special occasions. They have to be price-selective.

- There are a variety of after-school clubs available for young people, sport, arts, drama- which some of the young people attend if they can walk home afterwards or their parents can pick them up.
- As young teenagers some of the people we spoke to had attended a youth club. However by the age of 15 they felt that they were too old for it. In town, as in the rural areas, there seems to be a gap in organised entertainment for teenagers between the ages of 14 -17.

Some of the young people we talked to had organised their own disco, and they would really like this to be a more regular occurrence than an exceptional one.

### Meeting Places

The young people meet in:

- a) Car-parks,
- b) McDonalds (or similar takeaway),
- c) Parks
- d) Semi-rural locations out of town (under the viaduct in Bishop Auckland)

There is no cafe in any of the towns where it is possible to buy cheap refreshments and sit down.

### Intimidation

Many of the young people we spoke to had experienced some form of intimidation from other teenager's e.g.: verbal abuse about what you are wearing to threatening behaviour.

This was more of a problem for the people who lived in the town and not for those who live in rural areas.

### What's on – Local awareness

The young people didn't know how to find out what was going on in their town and relied on word of mouth from friends.

Some mentioned that the local free newspaper had listings.

**Access to entertainment facilities**

The young people can walk to most places, although if they are going to other towns they catch the bus or train.

Living in the town means that the young people can also get to the bigger shopping areas e.g. Newcastle and the Metro Centre by train. Close proximity to good public transport systems means that their entertainment opportunities are much broader than the young people who live in rural locations.

However young people living in the town are still just as reliant on parents for lifts to out-of-school clubs and on being picked up late at night.

**Seasonal differences**

In the winter, due to the weather and the dark nights, the young people have to curtail their outdoor activities and can't meet outside as easily, therefore they meet more frequently at their friend's houses.

## Urban

The following are available in all towns we visited

including the market towns

Leisure centre  
(swimming pool, tennis court)

Running track

Football pitch

Skate park

Shops  
Library

Parks

Youth clubs and After- School Clubs

The following are only available in larger towns

Cinema

Bowling

Night clubs

Greater variety of shops

Takeaways

Pubs

## Rural

Areas of natural beauty – Woods, Forests and Fields

Bridleways

Community Hall – either Village, Church or School Hall

Football pitch

Shop - general stores

Pub

Based in Market towns 2 youth clubs that serve a wider rural area:

Teesdale Community Resources (Barnard Castle)

Wear Valley Water Sports (Wolsingham)

If we compare the availability of entertainment facilities (indicated above) for young people living in rural areas compared to urban areas it is immediately obvious that young people in rural areas have less facilities available to entertain themselves. This does not necessarily mean however that the young people living in the town use all the leisure facilities available to them. To investigate this further we have looked at, and compared the diaries the young people kept which confirmed how they spent their leisure time.

## Detailed comparison of Rural and Urban Entertainment

Drawing from the diaries the young people kept we can compare the after-school activities of a 15 year-old youth living in a town with a youth of the same age living in a village.

- Town: Walk through town after school with friends. Buy something to eat from a take-away. Look in shops, particularly game shops. Walk to friend's house to play on games console. Walk home by 5.45 for tea (parental rule).  
Occasionally during the week may walk to friends to play games on his computer, or will stay in and surf the net and watch TV.
- Rural: About twice a week go into local town from school, meet friend and either go skateboarding, look in shops or go for a drink and chat. Need to get bus back by 5.35pm (last bus to village) or rely on parents for a lift back.  
The rest of the week  
Catch bus home from school, watch TV, surf the net, play on guitar on his own.

From this comparison we can see that both youths have similar interests and an opportunity to meet with friends in town. However the youth that lives in the town has easier access to his friends and is able to walk to their houses. The youth who lives in a village is **'trapped in the village (due to lack of buses) after 5.30pm unless my parents can give me a lift or collect me from somewhere'**

At the weekend both teenagers have more opportunity to get out and use the leisure facilities in their locality. The youth living in the village was again restrained by the difficulties of getting to certain facilities. However both the teenagers decisions about which entertainment facilities to use were dependent on how much disposable income they had available.

A comparison of the girl's diaries shows a similar picture. The girl who lived in the town was able to regularly meet up with her friends after school and walk home or catch the bus home with them. Whereas the girl who lives in a village and goes to school in a rural location has no opportunity to meet with friends after school, because:

- a) She would not be able to catch a bus back to her village
- b) There is nothing to do after-school in the town where her school is.

She also owns a horse so all her leisure time is taken up with looking after him and riding him including most weekends.

During the week both girls spent their leisure time at home in similar ways to the youths

- Watch TV
  - Use the computer to play computer games, surf the net and chat to friends on line.
- This activity is one of the most popular ways young people have of entertaining themselves. Although, unlike the youths, the girls didn't play computer games or on a games console.
- Read
  - Listen to music

At the weekend the girl who lived in the town often met with her friends to go shopping, have something to eat and generally socialise together. The girl who lives in the village would occasionally (once every 3 weeks) catch the bus into town and meet a friend to go shopping.

From this comparison we can see that the girl who lives in the town has a greater opportunity to meet with her friends and use the entertainment facilities available to her. Whereas the girl

who lives in the village is kept occupied there during her leisure time by her horse riding hobby and also the fact that she can't easily get to the nearest town.

## **Conclusions**

### **Friends**

#### **'The most important thing about entertainment is being with your friends'**

Regardless of where the young people lived this was the most important aspect of entertainment for all of them. On the whole, wherever their friends are is where these young people wanted to be. In many cases the young people we spoke to felt this so strongly that some of them who had regularly attended sports clubs when they were younger (e.g. Swimming or martial arts clubs) no longer go because their friends were not involved in the same activities. They also added that sports training often took up too much of their leisure time!

There were a few exceptions to this, those young people who had horses were just as happy to be with their horses as well as their friends!

### **Access**

Without a good, cheap public transport system, the young people who live in rural communities **'feel trapped'** and cut-off from entertainment opportunities and their friends. Even young people in towns are dependent on a cheap, efficient transport system enabling them to visit bigger towns or visit their rural friends.

- The young people felt that the present public transport system was:
  1. Infrequent and unreliable
  2. Expensive
  3. Intimidating

The cost of a return bus fare if you are over 14 is expensive and although there are Investing in Children discount cards these often don't start until after 6pm when a lot of the buses have stopped going to the out-lying villages.

The young people were reluctant to use public transport late at night because they felt threatened by other drunken passengers.

- These are some of the frustrations the young people face with the public transport system:
  - a) They miss the last bus back to the village
  - b) The bus doesn't arrive
  - c) They want to go out when no bus is available
  - d) There is no public transport to where they want to go

Therefore young people are very reliant on their parents for lifts for the above reasons and also because parents like to know that the young people have reached their destination safely.

A lot of young people said that they planned their trips around their parent's work so that they are guaranteed a lift with them.

- Some young people in rural locations overcame the problems of meeting their friends after school or during the weekend by arranging to stay with them over night.

## Parents

The attitude of parents is a vital determining factor in how young people entertain themselves.

- Independence -In general the young people who lived in the town were given more independence by their parents from an earlier age – 11years old. Some children in rural areas were still not allowed into town without parents at the age of14, but this may also be because of difficulties getting into the town.

The young people also felt more independent as they grew older because their parents gave them more choices in how they spent their leisure time, and the young people didn't feel that they had to attend the clubs that their parents wanted them to in the past.

- Curfew- all the young people we talked to had family rules about when they should be home and where they were allowed to go with their friends.
- Freedom of choice- from early teens the young people are allowed to make up their minds about which activities they pursue without being told what to do by their parents.

One young girl's parents worked constantly so she told us that she was unable to go out anywhere.

## Income

Without some disposable income young people in rural and urban areas are unable to catch a bus or use entertainment facilities such as bowling, cinema or meeting friends for a coffee. So this factor is very important in determining how the young people spend their leisure time. The young people obtained their money through:

- a) Pocket money or allowance parents/Grandparents
- b) Birthday money
- c) Working ; Babysitting, waiter, shop assistant, paper round.

It is much easier for young people living in towns to get a job, although the young people in rural locations were very resourceful in finding an income, '**I clean my neighbours cars**'.

## Information

There is very little information for young people to access enabling them to find out what is going on in their area. If more information were available then young people would be more aware of the entertainment opportunities on offer in their locality.

For example: During this research we found out about Teesdale Community Resources (TCR) which offer young people some of the following opportunities:

1. Making music
2. Helping in voluntary projects
3. Making videos

TCR rely on word of mouth to tell people about their facilities. Unfortunately none of the young people we spoke to had heard of them.

The rural areas seem to have better information, parish magazines and posters around the villages. The young people in the town rely more on word of mouth from friends. Some commented '**We used to rely on our parents to tell us, but they are too busy at work and often don't know what is on**'

## **Secure environment**

All the young people we spoke to felt that they had no where to go when they met their friends either in an urban or rural location. They all said that there was no where to meet inside that had seats, cheap refreshments and pool or something to play.

## **Recommendations**

Based on their research the group has created 3 levels of entertainment facilities that they feel should be made available for young people:

1. Basic requirements (available to all young people where they live)
  - Somewhere to meet and sit
  - Cheap refreshments/Takeaways
  - Somewhere that is safe
2. Standard requirements (nice but not essential)
  - Somewhere that plays music
  - Somewhere that has games e.g. a games console or pool
  - Swimming pool with a café where you can meet your friends.
  - A variety of shops
3. Superior requirements (entertainment facilities in an Ideal world)
  - Cinema
  - Leisure Centre
  - Amusement arcade
  - Ice rink

## **Meeting place**

A drop-in café or Internet café would be ideal. This can be:

- Located in a building already in use like the library, or local swimming pool. Just put in a drink's machines
- Run by the community (part of the village hall)

## **Access**

- Cheaper fares for young people before 6pm
- Make sure that the buses that do run are more reliable
- Night buses to villages on 1 or 2 nights of the week (ideally at the weekend) so that at least there is an opportunity once a week to stay in town until late.

## **Events**

- Occasional events run by existing youth clubs for the older 14 –17 year age group, with transport laid on afterwards

## **Information**

Better advertising of 'what's on'

- On school notice boards
- On the web or MSN chatroom which many young people use to 'chat' on.
- Free magazine for young people in the locality (even a section of the parish magazine specifically advertising events for young people )

