



The Investing in Children Leisure Research Report

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Through Investing in Children we (Rachel Lee, Stacey Lee and Samantha Jackson) had worked on a project called Operation Discrimination which looked at the treatment young people received when they tried to use different services in County Durham. A major issue for young people we talked to was access to leisure centres and the way we are excluded at certain times of the day. We knew that other young people had experienced this so we joined forces with a group of young people from Ferryhill to find out what we could do about it.

We decided to establish what was already happening in Durham by visiting the local leisure centres and talking to the managers about issues important to us. We split into two groups. We decided that 2 – 3 people from the same area would contact their local leisure centres to arrange interviews with the managers.

We visited and spoke to managers and staff at the following centres

Leisure Centre in Ushaw Moor

The Spectrum in Willington

Glenholme in Crook

Meadowfield Sports Centre

Spennymoor Leisure Centre

Woodhouse Close Leisure Centre in Bishop Auckland

The Dolphin Centre in Darlington

Ferryhill Leisure Centre

Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre.

We also dropped in unannounced at Peterlee, Sherburn and The Abbey Sports Centres to test out how accessible they are.

Our intention was to visit several centres and ask a series of questions based around what we knew already as young people and what others had told us.

The issues we wished to discuss with the managers were:

- **Cost** – the entrance fee and activity costs in many leisure centres because they are placed beyond the pocket of many young people – social justice.
- **Access - times when young people are allowed in** – examples were given when young people were “kicked out” after 5.30 p.m. It was noticed that, in the evenings, adults could spectate but young people couldn’t.
- **Swimming pools** – rules are often unreasonably strict. Many pools for schools are under used.
- **Attitude of leisure centre staff** – can be miserable - treat young people badly – differently from adults.
- **Bus fares** – together with entrance fees, they can make leisure centres beyond the pocket of some young people – services only for the better off – it’s not fair.
- **Adults** – seem to need access in child/young person free zones – is this intolerance? Rules should be made clear.
- **Pass system** – this would be fairer than banning all young people because of the behaviour of a few.
- These issues were very important to us and we felt there needed to be some changes in leisure for young people.

What we found out

How we were received

We have to say that, except for Newton Aycliffe, we were well received and our questions and concerns seemed to be taken seriously. Kim's experience at Ferryhill could be proof that some managers were just saying the right things because we were seen as important people from Investing In Children. This didn't impress the manager of Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre who couldn't even be bothered to treat us with courtesy.

General Rules and Regulations

Everyone we talked to said the local council set most rules. This is strange, as leisure centres from the same council area seem to have different rules. It could be an easy way to avoid the question.

Attitude of staff toward young people – general treatment

While all the staff we talked to said they believed in treating young people the same as adults, some admitted that young people do not get the same treatment and didn't seem too interested in doing anything about it. Young people 'get branded with the same iron, but it's the way things are' – *Spectrum*.

Bans

Most centres thought it was right to be able to ban young people for up to 6 months. One centre gave out indefinite bans.

Activities

There was a good range of activities in most centres we visited, but most were aimed at adults.

Access

Only Brandon (*no restrictions or bans*) allowed open and free access to young people until 10.00pm. Most had a time in the early evening when young people had to leave or were made to pay just to spectate. The experience of Ferryhill shows that in reality access to leisure centres for young people is not as open as some of these managers claim.

Passes

This research didn't answer all the questions we set out to ask. For example, we didn't find out what each leisure centre thought about a pass system. We think it is time this was discussed.

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