

PERSPECTIVE: Access to Adventure

by Andy Robinson, IOL CEO

Many reasons are being proffered for the unrest that was experienced in a number of larger cities in the UK in August, including weak policing, social exclusion, spending cuts, poor parenting and many more. It seemed pretty clear that at least one of the reasons was a desire to experience something exciting and different. The content of some of the social media used during the riots pointed to the attractiveness of the 'adventure' to be had in looting & rioting. I can't help but feel a little disappointed that the choice of adventure for many involved in the unrest was so destructive and unlikely to be regarded by themselves and others as a positive personal development experience.

The cynical part of me thinks that a little unrest leads to an increase in available funding for initiatives and activities perceived to help create 'better citizens'. I'm sure we can all point to government funded initiatives aimed at utilising the transformational power of outdoor adventurous activity programmes, some of which have lasted for a few years before the political wind has changed and the funded has been withdrawn. Less cynically it is also possible to point to organisations, not necessarily dependent on the public purse who are drawing on adventurous activity based programmes to develop future community leaders, increase community cohesion and introduce less destructive forms of adventure to urban youth. I can't help thinking that the outdoors is falling well short of its potential in this role.

There is a good deal of research from the last 15-20 years that points to the positive developmental impact of outdoor adventurous activity for children and young people. So it seems a little ironic that the withdrawal or reduction of funding for school organised outdoor learning activities, especially residentials, can only result in fewer children and young people experiencing constructive, developmental adventure, to the ultimate detriment of the communities they are growing up in.

What are the options for outdoor learning practitioners to better fulfil the potential of the outdoors' role in building healthy communities? Do we need to work on more integrated solutions? Do we need to explore new dialogues and ways of working with youth work programmes, youth offender programmes, community organisations.....

It's not all bad news, whether we agree with the delivery model or not the National Citizenship Programme's large scale initiative is squarely aimed at engaging young people with their communities in a constructive way. The outdoor residential week in this programme plays a crucial role in helping to prepare the young participants for activities in their communities. What other replicable models exist and are we doing enough to promote and develop them? ■



Photograph from
the Low Bank
Ground Team