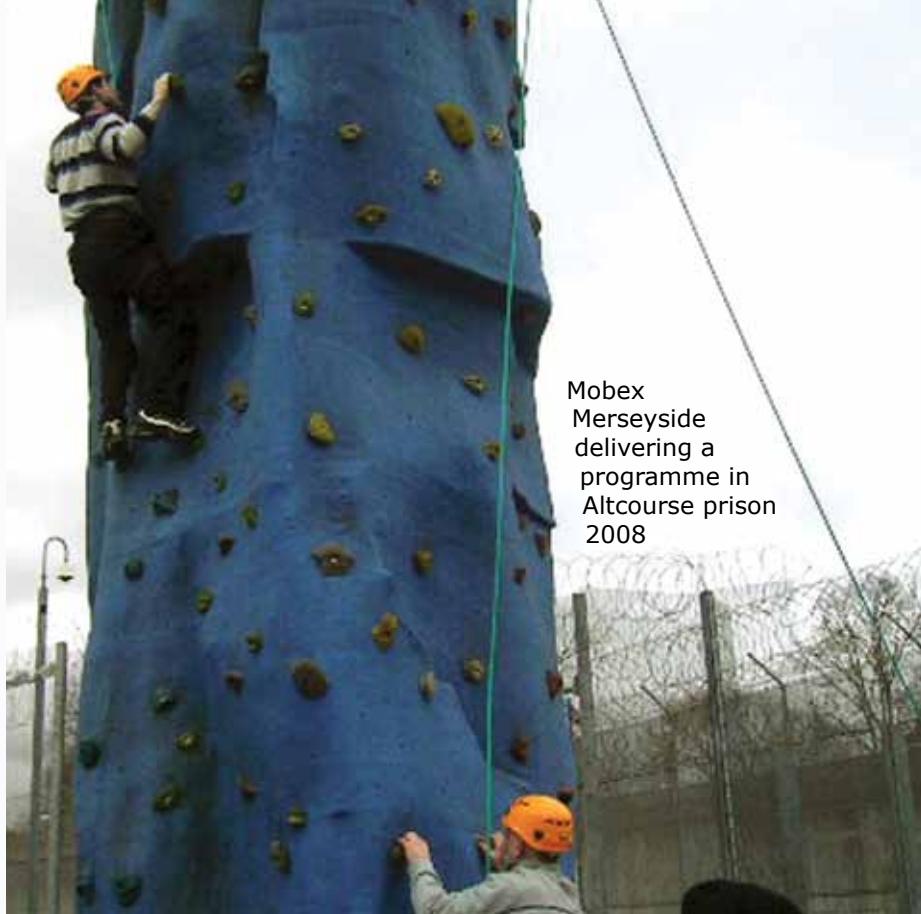


# Promoting a 'Can do' Attitude

Evaluating and celebrating 25 years of work with young people

by Tracey Hodgson



Mobex Merseyside delivering a programme in Altcourse prison 2008

The Mobex Network was created in 1986 to promote: "the mental, physical and spiritual development of young people through outdoor adventure, environmental awareness, creative arts and exploration, so that they might grow to maturity as individuals and as members of society".

In 2011 'Mobex Network' supports a federation of several 'Mobex Projects' based in Newcastle, East Lothian, Cumbria, Merseyside and the Isle of Man, each of which promote a 'can do' attitude with the people involved.

Recently ex-participants were interviewed in order to secure some evidence regarding the long-term impact of the work undertaken by Mobex. The results were heartening. One recalled how way back in 1995 he had discovered during the Mobex course that:

*"I had skills I didn't recognise but obviously they could help me fine tune them and develop new ones, so it made me aware of leadership stuff, I hadn't even heard of that word" (Davey Potts).*

Each Project aims to be a resource for personal and social development of young people and community members in their area. They seek to offer all organisations an opportunity to work collaboratively with them on projects to support the young people they are working with. The creative and collaborative nature of Mobex activities provides many benefits including offering young people the opportunity:

- to improve their general and psychological well-being
- acquire greater self-confidence and self-esteem
- increase their levels of trust
- learn social and communication skills
- reduce their social isolation and exclusion.

The philosophy of Mobex is based on the use of mobile, flexible and low cost training resource in order to provide opportunities for experiential learning. This method of working involves working through specific stages of development with young people to help them engage in participative planning as well as engaging in the doing and reviewing that is an intrinsic part of all their team building programmes. As one participant again mentioned:

*"All this stuff I had done with Mobex was making me self-evaluate and reflect and review and want to know more about myself" (Darren Berry)*

Many of those we spoke to about their 'Mobex' experience told us that they had few positive memories or achievements relating to their school career. For them, and others like them, outdoor adventure activities can provide a chance to develop resilience and improve their fitness and health.

All Mobex programmes are designed as learning frameworks for participants. As one woman who took part in a programme 14 years ago assured us

"It definitely moves people on in their life...you can overcome any barrier" (Julia Sharp) Some programmes are more formal leading to certification and accreditation, others are informal designed to stimulate learning via self-reflection. Both can equally motivate and help re-engage young people with school, training, college, volunteering or employment. As a recent graduate from a Mobex course explained:

*"I had just left school and I didn't know how to get into outdoors activities so I was just sticking with being a hairdresser, I didn't feel like I had any other options. I got into college and I was offered Mobex and I didn't know what to do. I decided to do the Mobex Challenge course, I knew that was what I wanted and if I had chosen hairdressing I'd be stuck with it. Although I had a lot of family problems I took part in the MAP (Mobex Activity Programme) and the peer education programme and I now volunteer with various groups at Mobex" (Tasha).*

Outdoor adventure can play a role in changing attitudes to a range of related issues including antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse whilst stimulating an interest in the environment. As someone who joined a course a decade ago explained:

*"I started taking heroin when I was 17 but I started taking drugs in general when I was about 11 or 12 so I was addicted to heroin by the time I was 18 with a daily habit. Basically 12 years had passed and I ended up in the gutter, I was begging on the streets of Newcastle...I got onto a Drug assessment and Treatment order and they referred me to Mobex. I used that as another structure to my week and gave it a try" (Darren Berry).*

After a long struggle Darren stopped using drugs, eventually qualifying as a community and youth worker.

Mobex's special approach enables it to deliver training programmes in any setting with a range of

focuses notably outdoor adventure and the creative arts. As with many young people involved with Mobex Nicky moved on to become a volunteer and is now employed as a Development Worker with Mobex North East. She first became involved in 1996, and believes:

*"it is important to give people a space away from their everyday lives where they have permission to be a little bit different and to explore themselves when they do not have to keep up the façade in front of their mates, the fact that there is somewhere completely different gives them a freedom to explore" (Nicky Sargeant).*



MOBEX--on the Johnson Fold Estate, Bolton

Community based outdoor adventure and creative arts can make a real contribution to the wellbeing of young people. Through involvement in positive activities Mobex can also have a beneficial impact on wider issues around social and community

cohesion. For as a young woman who first joined a Mobex programme in 2004 told us,

*"it equips them with life skills, team work so they can go on and become a positive member of the community, to be able to communicate properly with people, and show them a sense of achievement" (Julie Naylor).*

As a specialist provider of outdoor activities Mobex teaches young people to respect the landscape and environment and become aware how their actions impact on the environment and the community. For many who have been fortunate to become involved in a Mobex programme at a formative point in their lives it has inspired a lifelong interest in the world around them.

If you wish to learn more about the work of Mobex [www.mobexnetwork.org.uk](http://www.mobexnetwork.org.uk) ■



### Author's Biography

Tracey Hodgson is a researcher who has worked in the field of community and youth work for over 20 years in both the voluntary and statutory sector. Recent publications have included evaluations for the DCSF My Place programme (Durham University), Mobex North East Activities Programme, Mobex Network School Inclusion Programme, Sunderland Neighbourhood Youth Project. She is currently employed as a Domestic Violence Advocacy worker at West End Women and

Girls Centre in Newcastle and works as a volunteer host with Nightstop North East who work to support homeless young people and the Youth and Policy Journal.

**Photographs:** all from Mobex