

FREEDOM 2 BE: A summary of the 2015 Camp Evaluation for funders

WHAT IS FREEDOM 2 BE?

Freedom 2 Be (F2B) is a weeklong Camp run by the Children's HIV Association for those aged 11-16 living with HIV in the UK and Ireland. The Camp goals are to reduce isolation, develop peer friendships, increase knowledge and understanding of living with HIV, and improve confidence and self-esteem. Camp attendees participate in workshops about living well with HIV and active or creative activities that facilitate open communication and relationship building.

THE 2015 EVALUATION

In 2015 an evaluation of the Camp took place to:

- Measure psychological and behavioural outcomes from before F2B to after (immediately and 6 months later) – using self-report measures.
- Elicit the views of Camp attendees, Camp staff, Clinic staff and Parent/Carers about Camp – using surveys and semi-structured interviews.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

- HIV knowledge increased after Camp, with changes still seen 6 months later.
- There were more positive onward HIV disclosure attitudes and feelings from before Camp to after, with these changes still seen at 6 months.
- HIV medication pro-adherence beliefs increased from before Camp to after.
- Self-perception improved from before Camp to after.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The overwhelming feedback about Camp from surveys and interviews was positive with many describing the value of having an open environment fostering self-acceptance and teaching young people how to live well with HIV.

- Young people and Camp staff reported deep connections between young people and with each other at Camp, with reduced feelings of isolation:

“I could express myself and like get away from home and school and being with the people that you can share stuff with.” [Camp attendee]

“I’d known these people for five days but I felt really close to them. It was a really good feeling.” [Camp attendee]

- The residential and intensive nature of Camp was very important:

“Some people are like me, coming from isolated areas of the country where there aren’t many HIV people associations which can help.” [Camp attendee]

“It is the one thing that...gives him a feeling of peace whilst he’s there...that he’s normal and that there are many young people just like him.” [Clinic staff]

“When you’re in a Camp and you’re there for just that single purpose and you have a hundred people all with that one thing whereas peer support group may be just a handful of people.” [Clinic staff]

- Young people felt more confident and able to live well with HIV:

“I’m glad. I was expecting it to just be like a fun time and..I’d have some more friends but it has actually changed me cause I don’t know, I’m more confident and happier in myself.Yeah, so I’m really glad it happened.” [Camp attendee]

- There were many reports of improved HIV medication adherence:

“My sister came back enlightened about her diagnosis [...] Before it used to be a battle to get her to take her medication but [now] she’s more forthcoming to take her medication.We don’t have to remind her, she even reminds us and calls upon us to supervise her taking her medication.” [Carer]

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROVISION OF FUTURE CAMPS

F2B shows evidence of impact lasting long after Camp has ended. The unique and normative residential environment was experienced positively and now there is evidence of gains that may lead to important changes in medication adherence, acceptance and understanding of HIV and improved health and well-being. Ongoing funding of this transformative intervention will allow these benefits to be experienced by future cohorts of young people living with HIV.