

Joe Gibson, Sense Scotland

Outdoor activities talk

First slide My name is Joseph Gibson and I am going to talk about the outdoor activities we do at Sense Scotland.

Next slide My background is in outdoor education. I have worked with Sense for nearly 8 years, I started doing nights within residential, then became a Team Leader within Housing Support. Recently I have just begun a post as “Outdoor Activity Co-ordinator. The whole time I have been working with Sense I have also been doing research. I have just finished my PhD and every conference presentation over the last few years seems to have been based one particular aspect or chapter... However, being as I’ve just finished I can now talk about the whole thing!

The aim of my research was “to investigate ways in which outdoor education can be used to enhance the life of people who are congenitally deafblind, and to try to understand the experiences of deafblind people when they participate in outdoor activities.”

(Link with Nordic talk (Friluftsliv) and Danish experience...)

In this presentation I will look at some of the outdoor activities we have undertaken with our service users using photos and a short piece of DVD. If there is time at the end, or you don’t ask enough questions, I have some more slides about my research methodology and findings. (Warning to interpreters this is where I get excited and talk quickly, use slang and maybe even swear...!)

Next slide So, what outdoor activities have we done? First there are activity holidays. During these there are a number of different activities on offer including water sports such as sailing and canoeing

Next slide This picture was taken after we had canoed across a lake and stopped to build a fire and have lunch... We also went hill walking... **Next slide** Here we are having a break during our walk... And climbing... **Next slide** This is a climbing at the man made wall at the outdoor centre, although we also climbed at natural crags outside as you will see in the DVD later. **Next slide** As well as climbing we went abseiling... **Next slide** Here we abseiled off an old railway bridge... Sometimes the most memorable days are not based on any particular outdoor activity but just involve experiencing the natural environment — even when it has gone a bit crazy... **Next slide** This day was supposed to be a walk exploring some caves but there had been so much rain that everywhere had flooded...

Next slide Another activity we do that came from the success of the activity holidays was to use the local climbing wall on a regular basis. **Next slide** This climbing wall is in Glasgow and is built in an old church so as well as the climbing there are lots of interesting stained glass windows to look at. **Next slide** Brian is my star climber and he not only climbs independently, choosing what routes to do but has also learnt to tie his own knot.

Next slide We also have regular hill walking days when back at home... **Next slide**

During these we can explore some of Scotland's amazing scenery. **Next slide**
And, unbelievably it doesn't always rain in Scotland!

Next slide Some other holidays have also involved an element of outdoor activities... **Next slide** During this holiday to the north of Scotland we stayed in a log cabin and every day we explored the surrounding hills and forest. **Next slide** This led to the development of environmental days for Peter as we found he was very interested in exploring then talking about the things we found **Next slide** We would investigate things, then sign their name, and then finger spell them. It was during this holiday we discovered Peter's liking of finger spelling. He would make a sign similar to "toast" and eventually we realised this meant he wanted us to spell the names of things. **Next slide** However, sometimes Peter wasn't always so keen on the amount of walking involved (although this did have a positive impact on his sleep pattern). **Next slide** He often tried to remind us that he was supposed to be on holiday.

Next slide I mentioned that the holiday I have just talked about led to the introduction of environmental days. During these we would search out and investigate all manner of things within the environment both big... **Next slide** And small... **Next slide** Although sometimes I wondered if this caused confusion (cow/chicken — beef/chicken curry)

Next slide Linking with other activities is where the real benefits can occur and we can go beyond letting the experiences speak for themselves. Most important of these were Conversation Sessions.

Conversation Sessions - I conducted these with Peter and we would sit and "talk" about the activities using his climbing equipment or things that we found during the hill walking or environmental days, trying to develop declarative communication

Art work - Brian was an artist and I used to ask him to draw picture at the

climbing wall, other people used the things they found when out to make collages with the art tutor.

Wood work - we now have a wood work tutor and it is hoped that when we find driftwood on the beach this can be made into sculptures and some of the people who go hill walking will be able to make and decorate their own walking sticks

Next slide Stop for DVD, but I can go on later...

Time filler talk — my research...

I will now talk a bit about my research. It took me nearly eight years to complete and during this time I had two fellow participants who you have already seen a lot of in the pictures and DVD, they are... **Next slide**

Peter although Fred is the pseudonym I used in the research and I often get mixed up when I am talking at conferences what name I am supposed to be calling him...

Peter enjoys communicating especially finger spelling and has a relatively sedentary lifestyle and a fondness of kitchen table... **Next slide**

Brian moved to a new house last year so I don't get to see him as much now. He has a perception of his own abilities compared to the other service users and is an artist ...

Next slide I only want to briefly consider some of the thinking behind my methodology. All of us researchers are very keen on methodology, allows other people to replicate what we have done and check we haven't just made it up...

As I mentioned before the second part of my aim stated I wanted to *“try to understand the experiences of deafblind people when they participate in outdoor activities.”* I was interested in their experience and what was important to them, this led to a desire to investigate “emic” issues, that is issues that are important to the participants rather than “etic” issues which are those that are important to the researcher. (A brief example of this is at first I thought I might consider how the activities could help improve Peter & Brian’s self-perceptions, but this is a preoccupation with outdoor education, and while this might be relevant other issues seemed far more important to Brian and Peter)

So what did we do? We took part in a variety of outdoor activities which I have already talked about. To collect the data I made participant observations and collected video footage. All this data was stored and analysed using a computer package called NVivo which I won't go into now... We then followed up activities with Peter in conversation sessions and with Brian using art. In presenting my data I was keen to avoid lists of numbers and even in qualitative research there is a tendency to record the numbers of times incidence happened so I tried to use a narrative structure to tell the story of what happened. These are the how and why of the research process, but the interesting things are the what...

Next slide In my thesis I talk about six themes, four of which I think are truly emic, they are: Communication/Relationships/Stimulating experiences/Learning opportunities...

The other two are maybe more my issues (etic): Implications for practice/Use of video, although there is no denying their importance.

Next slide Five types of relationship were recorded...

- With other service users - Brian and Richard two anecdotes (steep

- hill/river crossing)
- With other professionals - Brian and the climbing wall staff
 - With the public – Brian and young boy

Obviously communication was the major theme... **Next slide**

I used Halliday's scheme to classify all the communicative exchanges I observed, on reflection I may have been better just sticking with the distinction between Imperative (instrumental and regulatory) and declarative (the rest). So what did I come up with...

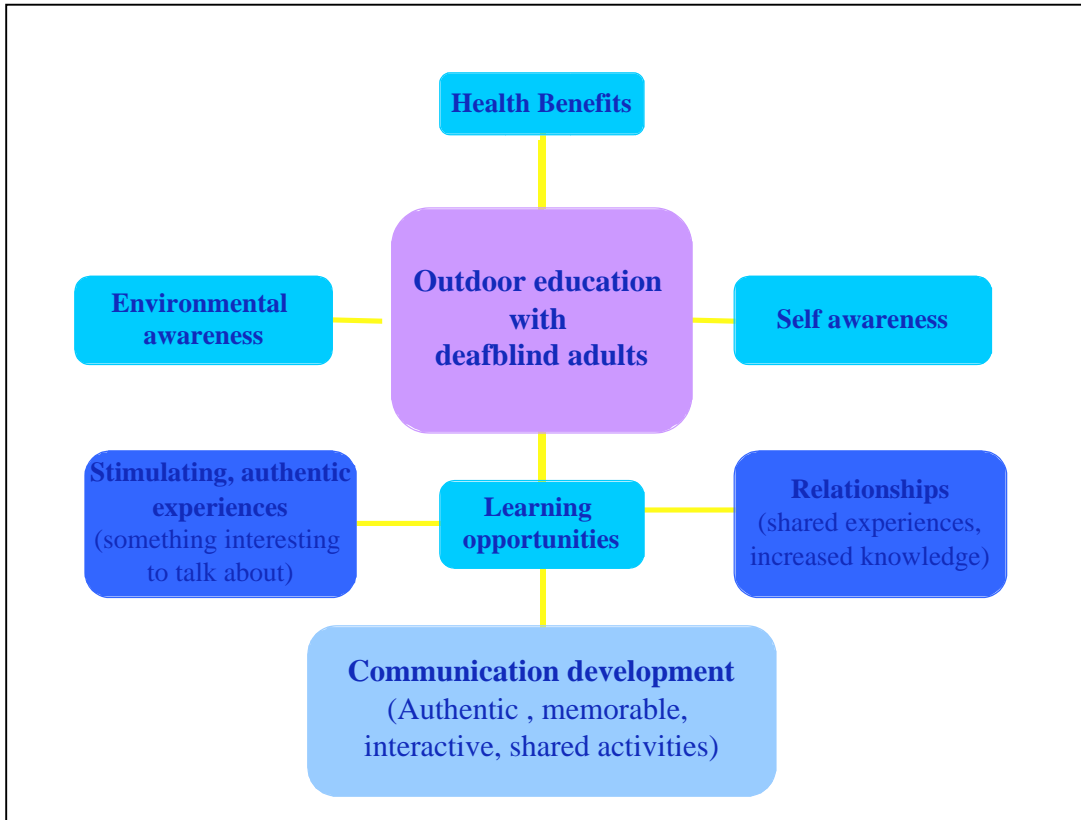
Next slide Four of the areas identified are shown here (although I did not do much on the health benefits there were some obvious examples such as improved sleep patterns when people had been busy all day).

Next slide The activities being in the environment led to stimulating and authentic experiences, this was important for me as I'm not very dramatic and find it difficult to get excited about contrived things so as well as the learning opportunities we have something interesting to talk about. The activities were also shared, what happened to the service user also happened to the staff, so as well as an awareness of the self and the previous discussion of relationships there was someone to talk to about the activities

Next slide This all gives the opportunity for the development of declarative communication through authentic, memorable, interactive shared activities...

(Note the model in the script differs slightly from that used in the PowerPoint presentation)

Model showing how outdoor education activities can be used to aid communication development



Any questions? Has anyone here any experience of outdoor activities?