



# **Impact Report Respond 24 Hour Overnight Programme**

**Active Connections CLG  
Oct 2023**



About Active Connections Our approach 3 Pillars	Pg. 3 Pg. 4 Pg. 5
About the Respond Programme	Pg. 6
Research statement	Pg. 7
Research Process Research Parameters Results - Young people Results - Adults	Pg. 8  Pg. 10-14 Pg. 15-20
Case Studies	Pg. 21-28
Appendices	Pg. 29-30



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## Executive Summary

The Respond Programme, run by Active Connections CLG, collected feedback from young participants and their carers. A total of 25 carers and 21 young people filled out questionnaires. This feedback helps understand how well the program is working and where it can get better.

### Participants and Questionnaires

Carers (16 men, 9 women) and young people (13 boys, 8 girls) shared their thoughts. Some people participated multiple times. Out of 135 invites, 67 carers and 64 young people completed the questionnaires. Most young people stayed for one night (72%), some for two nights (19%), and a few for three nights (9%).

### Discussion on Young People's Feedback

#### Young people

- Felt heard, understood, and respected (98.4%).
- They mostly thought the programme fit well (96.9%),
- A high proportion found it beneficial to support their situation (93.8%).

#### Parents/Carers' Feedback:

Out of 66 carer feedback forms, most reported one night stays (66%), followed by two nights (18%), and three nights (16%).

- Most carers felt heard, understood, and respected (96.9%).
- About 75% believed the programme helped their situation.

### Discussion on Carers' Feedback

Carers shared mainly positive feedback, especially about how the programme helped their situation.

Additional Comments: Both young people and carers mentioned the programme positives like fun activities, better mental health, and improved behavior.

Conclusion: Overall feedback shows that the programme has a good relationship with Active Connections, young people, and carers. About 92.2% of feedback was positive. The programme is committed to fixing the concerns and making the programme better for the young people.

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## About Active Connections CLG

Active Connections CLG was founded by James Bruton, John Paul O'Neill and Raymond Burke in 2012 with the mission to "Transform Lives Through Adventure". The trio who met whilst working in the residential care industry were shocked by the number of young people falling through the cracks. They quickly identified that it was not the young people at fault but the system.

Since inception one of Active Connections CLG goals was to actively connect with like-minded people and organisations to spread the founders' genuine belief that the outdoors is a dynamic and powerful environment to enable people to overcome adversity.

They established Active Connections CLG and focused on developing outdoor based therapeutic services that would reduce the size of the cracks in the social care system, by supplying more options the fewer the young people would be missed.

The New Trails service was rolled out in 2012 as an adventure based therapeutic service. Jim and John Paul moved to other opportunities in those early days. Ray became CEO and led the further development of the organisation. In 2015 Active Connections CLG added an overnight adventure respite service called Breakaway, this sits under the umbrella of the New Trails service but provides additional support to young people and their families/carers during times of particular pressures

Active Connections CLG became an award winning social enterprise first in 2014 Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, 2019 and again in 2023 with Rethink Ireland.

In 2018 the Ember Camp programme was added to the suite of services supplied by Active Connections CLG. This was the first step into the disability sector, the Ember Camp service now delivers one third of the direct work carried out by Active Connections CLG.

2022 saw the development of the 'Respond' out of hours service, a service which holds the principles of reducing the cracks in the system at its core. This service offers an emergency overnight and day service that runs from Friday to Monday, with focus being on the young people's experiences throughout.



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## Active Connections Our Approach

Active Connections CLG uses a specific combination of adventure-based processes in combination with brief solution focused coaching to assist the participant to map their own path out of their identified difficulties.

Participants are placed into a unique, unfamiliar physical environment and into a unique social environment that allows for individuality, growth and development. Participants will be faced with problem solving tasks and challenges that are achievable, concrete, incremental and draw on their mental and physical strength.

This guided process helps lead to manageable levels of stress and anxieties which the participant adapts to through conscious processing, competence and mastery. Resulting in an expanded capacity of, greater self-esteem, belief in self, tested/reinforced coping skills and resiliency.



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## Active Connections Philosophy

Active Connections CLG's primary goal is to supply people experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties with an alternative therapeutic option, which incorporates physically and psychologically demanding activities.

Programmes are built around three guiding principals: Active Connections CLG's 3 pillars.

### The Experience:

This pillar looks at the specific physically and mentally challenging activities the young person engages in and how the participant faces these challenges. When looking at this pillar, staff explore the activity, participant's roles, decision & actions taken, interactions with others, and staff & the environment.

*"that from successful experience in an elemental setting, one can learn better to respect self; that from respect of self can flow compassion and concern for others; that from compassion for others one draws commitment for service to man; that in a genuine service to the benefit of others one best expresses on a day-to-day basis his reverence for life itself" - Kurt Hahn*

### Personal Ownership:

Each participant is asked to take responsibility for their own actions & decisions whilst on the session. All participants will be asked to give back to self, staff, environments and their own communities. The focus of this pillar is to help build personal responsibility and empathy for others.

### Reflections:

This section focuses on the young person's life outside of the programme and to the decisions and actions taken by the young person which resulted with the young person being referred to Active Connections CLG. Focusing on reflection of the experience and how the participant interoperates all facets and impact on the effectiveness of the session/programme. This pillar will often be used during sessions to challenge thoughts and actions.

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## The Respond Programme - Tusla

Developed in combination with our partners in Tusla, Active Connections CLG established an out of hours emergency response programme. The aim of this programme is to reduce the risk of placement breakdown whilst also enhancing the support systems in place. This aim is achieved by Active Connections CLG teams supplying direct person to person support from Friday afternoon right through to Monday morning (Tuesday morning on a bank holiday weekend).

This service provides

- Overnight respite service to foster carers
- Time away to young people experiencing difficulties
- Enhanced safety planning to families
- Additional time to referrers to gain suitable supports/care position
- Young people with key workers to explore behaviours and coping methods
- Emergency support to young people in need

A further goal is to provide families in need with out of hours support to reduce the number of placement breakdowns and sections 12s.





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## **An evidence base our belief**

Active Connections CLG believes that evidence of impact is vital. To this mind Active Connections CLG carries out qualitative and quantitative research on all programmes we supply. This process helps us to ensure a quality and effective service is provided for:

### Stakeholder - Participants/Clients

- Our programmes are impactful/effective
- Our participants are achieving what they want to achieve
- Our clients understand the impact of their intervention

### Stakeholder - Referrers

- Our interventions can be shaped to address measured need
- Our referrers can track the interventions impact
- Our practice can help shape/inform service delivery to participants

### Stakeholders - Staff

- Our intervention relies on evidence of good practice
- Our service evolves with changing needs of our participant population
- Staff can adjust programmes inline with measured need

In 2022 Active Connections joined the ATOM study under researchers **Dr Will Dobud** (Charles Sturt University) & **Dr Daniel Cavanaugh** (University of Washington Bothell). This study is a feedback informed support process. As Active Connections gathered information from stakeholders, they adjusted the service to best meet their needs.





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## **Parameter of the study**

Feedback-Informed Treatment (FIT) is a “pantheoretical approach for evaluating and improving the quality and effectiveness of behavioural health services” (Bertolino, Bergmann, & Miller, 2012, p. 2). In turn this then informs best practice within the organisation.

The FIT Manuals utilised to inform this research project and methods are endorsed by the United States’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. FIT involves administering two self-report, ultra-brief measures to evaluate the quality of psychotherapy services.

The Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) (Miller et al., 2003), administered at the start of each session, is a measure of general wellbeing. When administered in the last five minutes of a session, the Session Rating Scale (SRS) (Duncan et al., 2003) is a measure of quality of the therapeutic relationship. This study aims to explore the potential and feasibility for routine outcome monitoring in outdoor/adventure therapy practice.

## **Literature review**

Data from meta-analyses and systemic reviews support the use of outdoor and adventure therapies, wilderness therapy, and forest therapy (Bowen & Neill, 2013; Bettman et al, 2016; Lee et al., 2017), as well as the many other forms of outdoor interventions.

While outdoor and adventure therapy practitioners are delivering outcomes on par with more ‘traditional’ modes of psychotherapy (Dobud & Harper, 2018), a major gap in the literature is practice-based research and the implementation of routine outcome monitoring, namely through FIT (Dobud, Cavanaugh, & Harper, 2020).

## **The process**

Every young person that attends a Respond weekend is invited to complete a Respond feedback questionnaire. This is also the same for their carers. All persons are informed that they are under no obligation to participate in this.

The feedback forms gather information, such as “name” and “number of nights attended”. If the young person or carer agrees to participate they are asked two to three questions regarding their experience of the Respond programme via a secure online platform. The questions are scaled from one to ten with “1” being the least positive and “10” being the most positive. The questions for both carers and young people can be seen next.

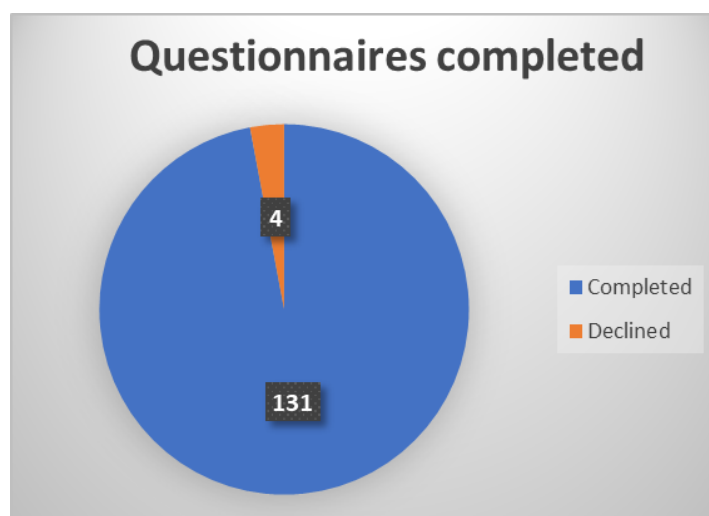
Young person's feedback questions		Carers feedback questions	
<b>Q1</b>	I felt heard, understood and respected	<b>Q1</b>	I felt heard, understood and respected
<b>Q2</b>	The approach was a good fit for me	<b>Q2</b>	I felt the intervention helped our situation
<b>Q3</b>	The Respond programme was of benefit to me		
Any other comments		Any other comments	

Scaling ranges for questions above									
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
Low-range on the scale			Mid-range on the scale				High-range on the scale		

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## The participants and questionnaires

The Respond review questionnaires were offered to the young person and their carers at the end of each weekend they attended. Twenty five carers completed the questionnaire for young people in their care, sixteen of which were male and nine female. As well as this, twenty-one young people completed them also, of which thirteen were male and eight female. In most cases, each young person and their carers would have the opportunity to complete multiple questionnaires if they attended multiple times.

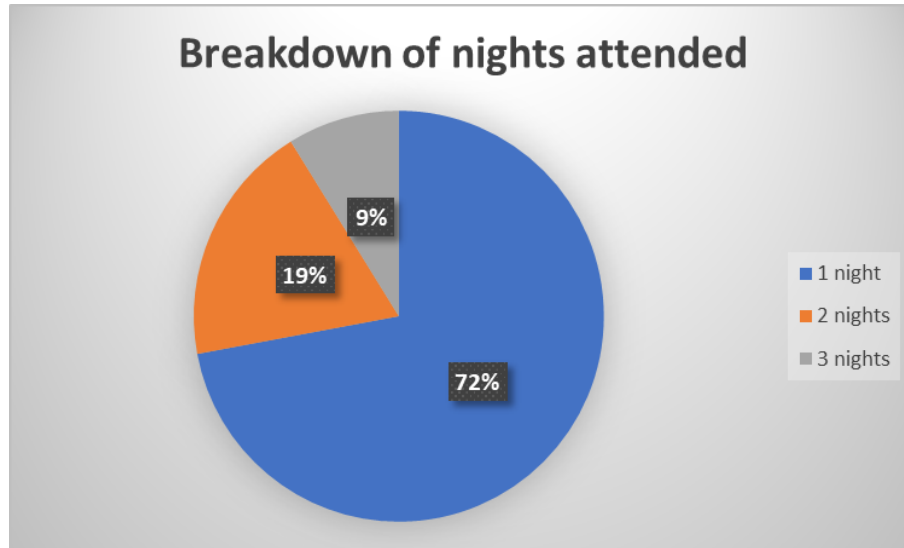


With regards to the questionnaires, Active Connections CLG have recorded a total of 135 invites to carers and young people to complete the Respond feedback form. On this, four people declined to complete the feedback form. With this in mind, a total of sixty-seven forms were completed by carers and sixty-four by young people who engaged in the service..

## Young people's feedback

There were sixty-eight invites to complete a Respond feedback form amongst young people. Within the form was a breakdown of how many nights were attended by the young person within each Respond weekend. On this, the participants within this feedback section record a total of ninety-three nights attended. As can be seen below 72% of these were for one overnight stay, 19% for two consecutive overnights, and 9% of engagement consisted of three consecutive overnights.

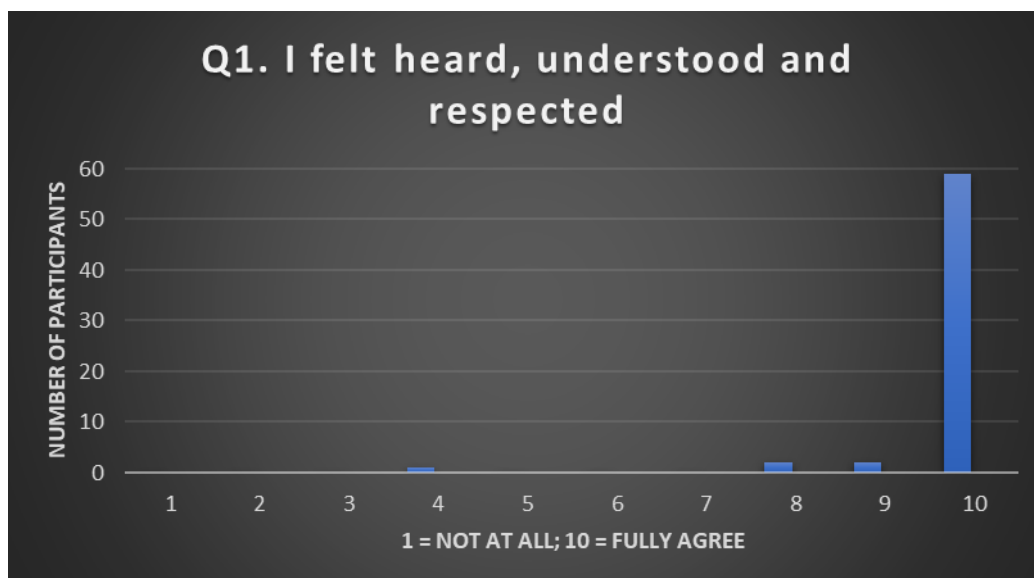




Most two and three consecutive overnights were filled with emergency cases with the other space on those given weekends being split between three other young people within the Respond referral list. This accounts for the high percentage of one night stays within the above pie chart.

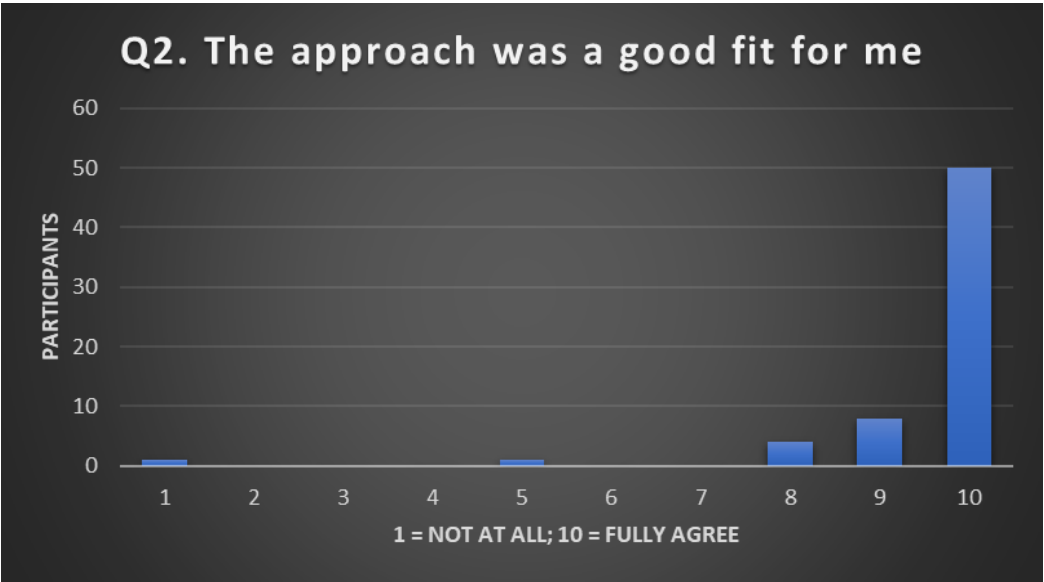
#### Young people's feedback questions

As mentioned in "the process" section, all young people were invited to answer three feedback questions. Of the sixty-eight young people invited, sixty-four completed these. Below is a breakdown of the responses along with some of the comments that were given by the young people themselves



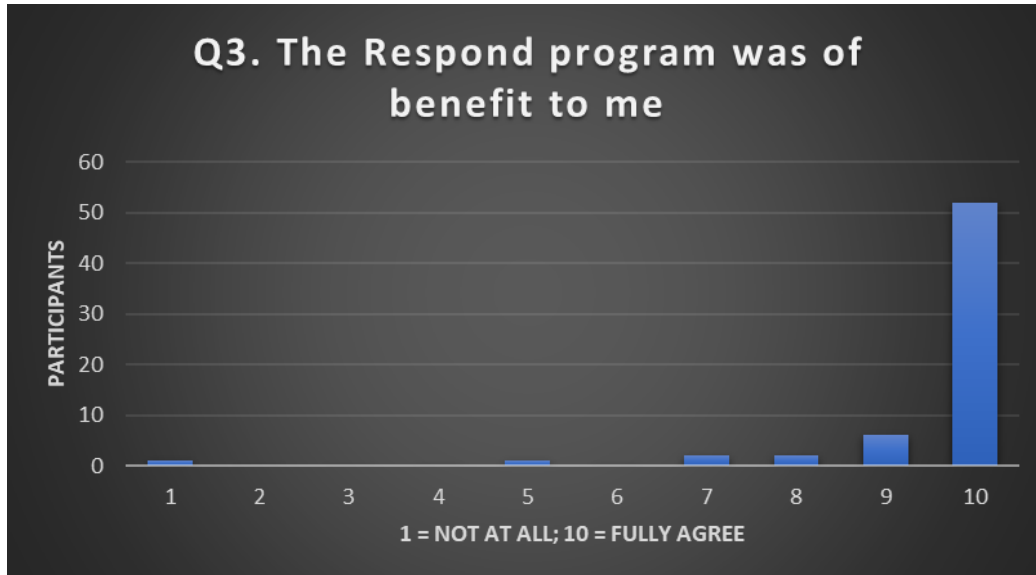
As can be seen for question one, most young people felt heard, understood and respected with sixty-three feedback forms showing an 8 or more in this regard. One feedback form showed a four in this section. Overall 98.4% of feedback fell within the high-range of feeling heard, understood and respected, with 1.6% falling mid-range on the scale.

*‘I had a very good weekend’*      *‘It was really fun’*  
(Appendix 1)



Question two referred to the approach being a good fit for the young people who engaged in the Respond programme. Regarding this sixty-two participants gave a rating above 8. One feedback form showed a scale of 4 and one showed a scale of 1. With this in mind, 96.9% of feedback fell in the high-range that the approach was a good fit for them, with 1.6% falling mid-range of the scale and 1.6% in the lower-range.

*‘Really enjoyed getting to hang out with other young people and explore the forest’*  
(Appendix 1)



As we can see for the third feedback question, sixty feedback forms were scaled above 8. Two forms scaled at 7 and two forms scaled at 1 and 5 respectively. With this in mind 93.8% of the responses fall within the high-range with regard to the Respond programme being of benefit to them. The above bar chart also shows that 4.7% of the responses fell within the mid-range, and 1.6% fell within the low-range of the scale.

*'It was a great weekend. It helped my mental health and took a lot off my mind.  
It was so much fun'*

(Appendix 1)

### Discussion on young people's feedback

The data above was collected by young people that could have engaged in this service once or many times. Therefore a look into the scales at the lower end of the scale may be of benefit for the purpose of this paper.

The young person who scored a 4 for question one also gave a 5 for question 2. However they gave a 10 for the Respond programme being of benefit to him. It is also worthy to note that the same young person attended the Respond programme seven separate times and rated 10 for all questions within six of his feedback forms. With this in mind, it could be said that the lower end of the scale measured here may be reflective of difficulties the young person might have been experiencing at the time.

The person who gave a 1 for questions two and three also gave a 10 regarding being heard, understood and respected. On this, the young person attended once for one night. Therefore,



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it could be said that this young person was cared for appropriately by staff but that the program did not meet the young person's wants and needs when considering a service.

Considering all of this, 96.4% of overall feedback gave positive reviews in regard to the program across all measured scales. Furthermore, 7.8% of feedback forms fell into the mid-range of the measured scales, with 3.1% located within the low-range of the scale. Overall, the feedback from participants of the Respond programme was positive, with many wanting to engage on multiple occasions.

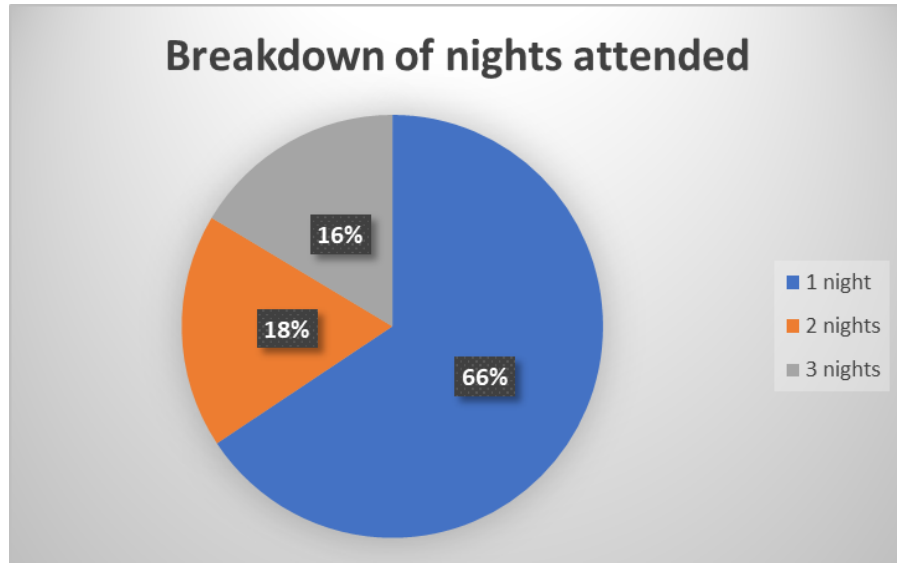
*'(I'd) Like to make scrapbooks documenting each weekend to keep when we're finished filled with pictures'*

(Appendix 1)



### **Parents/Carers' feedback**

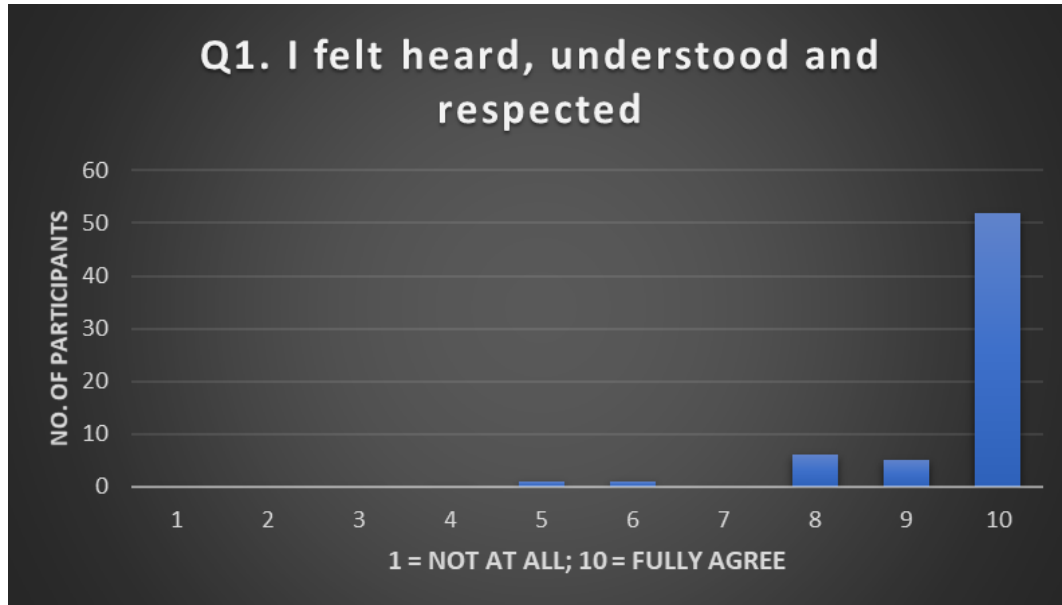
There were sixty-six completed Respond feedback forms from carers. Within the form was a breakdown of how many nights were attended by the carer's young person within each Respond weekend. On this, carers within this feedback section record a total of 101 nights attended. As can be seen below 66% of these were for one overnight stay, 18% for two consecutive overnights, and 16% of engagement consisted of three consecutive overnights.



Most two and three consecutive overnights were filled with emergency cases with the other space on those given weekends being split between three other young people within the Respond referral list. This accounts for the high percentage of one night stays within the above pie chart.

#### Carer's feedback questions

"The process" section also shows the two feedback questions that were offered to Carers of the young people who engaged. There were sixty-six feedback forms completed. Below is a breakdown of the responses along with some of the comments that were given by the young people's carers.

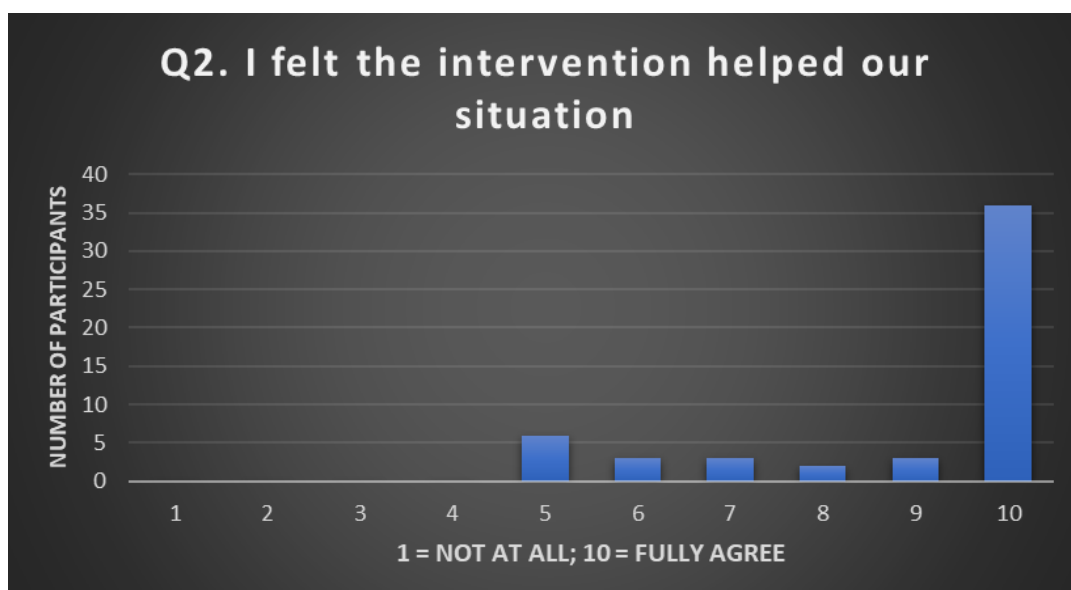


As can be seen in question one, most carers felt heard, understood and respected with sixty-three feedback forms showing an 8 or more in this regard. Two feedback forms showed a scale of 5 and 6 in this section. Overall 96.9% of carers scaled in the high-range of feeling heard, understood and respected, with 3.1% falling within the mid-range of the scale.

*'The boys attitudes have improved and more respectful since starting'*

*'Lovely to get a break and i'm sure they appreciate the break also'*

(Appendix 2)





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There is a positive viewpoint from carers with regard to the Respond programme helping their situation. On this, fifty-one feedback forms showed a scale of 8 and above. As well as this, the remaining 15 feedback forms fell between the scale of 4 and 7. Overall, 75.0% of carers scaled in the high-range with regard to the intervention helping their situation and the remaining 25.0% responded within the mid-range of the scale.

*'It's an amazing service that I didn't realize was available. Things are hectic here at the moment so it's been so helpful to get some breathing space. It's been invaluable'*

(Appendix 2)

### Discussion on carer's feedback

As with the young people's feedback, most carers' feedback was positive in relation to the service provided. With that being said, there was a significant difference in relation to the intervention helping their situation. To explain, 25% of feedback fell in the mid-range for this question. Upon looking into this, the majority of carers who scaled within this range had young people in crisis who attended multiple times, some of which had placements at risk of breakdown. The scaling varied each time the young person attended from being in the mid-range to the high-range.

With regard to feeling heard, understood and respected, sixty-three feedback forms fell in the high-range of the scale, with two falling in the mid-range. Of the two that fell in the mid range, one was in relation to a young person that had engaged several times with the Respond service. All other feedback forms from that carer scaled within the high-range.

Considering all of this, 86.0% of overall feedback gave positive reviews in regard to the program across all measured scales. Further to this, 14% of feedback forms fell into the mid-range of the measured scales, with none in the lower end of the scale. Overall, the feedback from carers regarding the Respond programme was positive, with many giving positive personal statements and requests for more overnights.

*'I always feel whatever ye do the boy comes back with a better attitude. He's started to love cooking and does some at home now. He always wants to show us the things he learns'*

*'Young Person enjoyed their trip and would like to go again'*

(Appendix 2)

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## Additional comments

There are a lot of positive comments about the Respond programme from both the carers and the young people, which can be seen in appendix 1 and 2. With that said, there is also some constructive feedback that would also be good to highlight.

It is important to state the benefits that the young people have said they get from the Respond programme. Most participants highlight the fun they have through the activities and the other young people they get to socialise with. As well as this, they highlight the good feeling they have after being on the program and how it benefits their mental health. These benefits are also mirrored from the carer's perspective, along with highlighting the young people's want to engage with the programme again.

*'It was really fun'; 'I feel good after it'*

(Appendix 1)

*'Whatever you're doing is working'; 'Young Person seems much better since starting with active connections'*

(Appendix 2)

Another area that carers and young people have commented on together was in relation to sleeping whilst on the Respond programme. A general struggle to fall asleep was highlighted as was a need for more comfortable sleeping arrangements. The latter has already been acted upon with new bedding acquired for the summer camping season.

Carers have also highlighted a want for more communication regarding start and finish times. Further to this, carer's also communicated a want for more notice about times and dates of their young person attending the Respond programme. This has been an ongoing issue that cannot always be achieved due to the nature of the Respond programme.

*'Earlier drop home time before school days to allow for homework to be completed'*

*'I would like more notice on days and times'*

(Appendix 2)

## Conclusion

The feedback from young people and carers above shows they have a positive working relationship with Active Connections CLG workers. Furthermore, the feedback could be taken to indicate that the Respond programme is successfully meeting the needs of participants and their carers. Regarding this, the overall scaling across all questions for both the young

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people and carers is as follows: 92.2% of all feedback was in the high-range of the scale, 7.2% fell mid-range, and 0.6% fell within the low-range of the scale.

Most of the written feedback from both carers and young people is very positive and regards the Respond programme helpful towards mental health, engaging in activities, meeting new people and having time to oneself. The most prominent points that came to the fore regarding constructive feedback were mostly logistical, such as more notice for the overnights and clearer communication regarding collections and drop-offs.

To conclude, no programme can encompass a “one programme fits all” scenario. With this in mind, Active Connections CLG consistently attempts to attain feedback to ensure that it can meet the complex needs of the young people who attend. This is where the incorporation feedback-informed treatment (FIT) is extremely beneficial. It can guarantee continued feedback and development to allow Active Connections CLG to provide the best service possible based on the experiences of the participants.



*'I love active connections'*

## Case Study 1

### Case study for Mark

(A pseudonym was used in this case study)

#### Background of the case

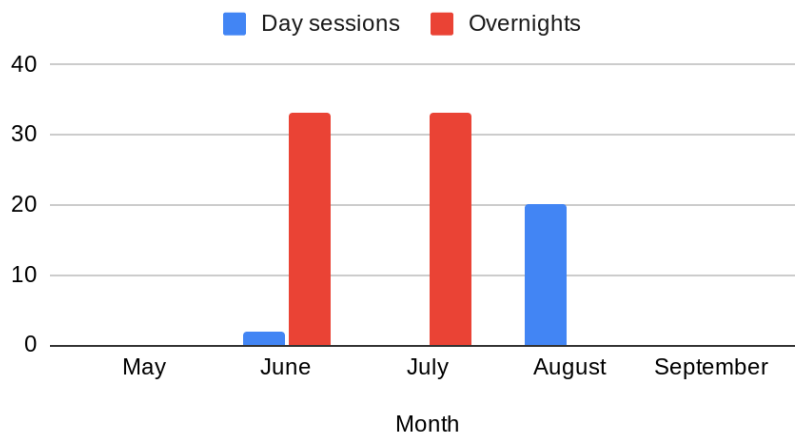
When Mark was first referred to Active Connections CLG he was residing at home with his parents and younger siblings. There were concerns about the home environment from the social work department around neglect, absences from school and lack of parental supervision. The referral was made as during the summer Mark would have little to do at home to occupy himself. Furthermore, there were concerns he would become involved with an unsuitable peer group and engage in petty crime. During August, Mark was removed from his home and placed into the care of his grandmother.

#### The work undertaken

Mark began engagement with Active Connections CLG on the 23rd of June 2023. He came out for a 2-hour day session and later in the weekend came to an overnight camp. Mark was frequently very tired or feeling unwell when he was collected by Active Connections CLG and stated regularly that he had slept very little the night before. Mark's mood usually improved whilst engaging in activities and he stated that he felt more relaxed after sessions.

Since June Mark has had 88 contact hours including both day sessions and overnights. 35 hours in June, 33 in July and 20 in August.

#### Day sessions and Overnights





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On several occasions, Mark has requested to leave early to spend time with friends. Mark has also declined to engage. When he did choose to come out he engaged fully and enjoyed activities, particularly bushcraft. During bushcraft activities, Mark often stated that he had done similar things with his grandfather.

During August, Mark was removed from his home and placed into the care of his grandmother. Mark was made aware that he could speak to staff about his circumstances if he wished. Mark was supported through this period through activities that he liked. This allowed for Mark to receive a break from his current situation and engage in mindfulness exercises through these activities.

Mark's sleep patterns improved after moving to his grandmothers and during August his doctor prescribed medication to help with his sleep. Mark stated his sleep had gotten much better.

#### Key finding and areas for development

Mark can state that he does not want to go on sessions at times. With that said, Mark has found that engaging with Active Connections CLG in the outdoors can improve his mood and has stated that he feels more relaxed after sessions. Mark has also shown a real interest in bushcraft and this is used as a medium for change and reflection. Mark has highlighted that he prefers to go on day sessions with Active Connections CLG rather than the overnights. Mark's sleep patterns have also started to improve after moving to his grandmothers.

## Case Study 2

### Case study for Peter

(A pseudonym was used in this case study)

#### Background of the case

Peter was in a short-term foster placement with his sister but this relationship was strained at the time. When Peter first engaged with Active Connections CLG, the intervention was to focus on social skills, boundaries, emotional dysregulation, oppositional behaviours, and a need for constant physical stimulation. Peter was also described as a young person who seeks high levels of attention and engagement, as well as being hyper at times. There was also a focus on giving Peter time out of his foster placement and giving all space for themselves.

Later, moved to another foster placement which he described by all as his "forever home". This appeared to be a very positive move for Peter, providing a strong and healthy relationship between him and his foster carers. With that said, Peter began to test the rules and boundaries within this placement. At times, Peter would get angry and could shout aggressively and throw things around his room. Peter also said that it makes him sad to talk

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about his parents. His parents would often miss scheduled access. They also missed his communion and Peter was very disappointed. There were concerns that these instances would impact Peter's emotions and behaviours

After an extended period, Peter began to experience issues within this foster placement and the relationships became strained. Unfortunately, these relationships deteriorated over time and his foster carers informed the social work department of their notice to end the placement. Peter's placement broke down and he is currently in a residential care home. However, Peter still has intermittent contact with his previous foster carers.

Peter has engaged with Active Connections CLG since June 2020 up to present. Peter attended the New Trails one to one therapeutic intervention as well as the overnight Respond programme in the latter stages of the engagement. On this, Peter's engagement with Active Connections has not been continuous, with the New Trails programme being brought in on several separate occasions during times of need.

During this time, Peter was supported through adventure-based interventions. This allowed for Peter to be active as well as engage in conversation regarding the issues he was facing in a safe and known environment. Peter and his foster carers would comment on the positive outcomes that this was having for them. This was evident in that the carers were eventually the people helping Peter through issues instead of his worker. At this point, it was considered that the day sessions could finish with Peter still being offered overnights every several weeks.

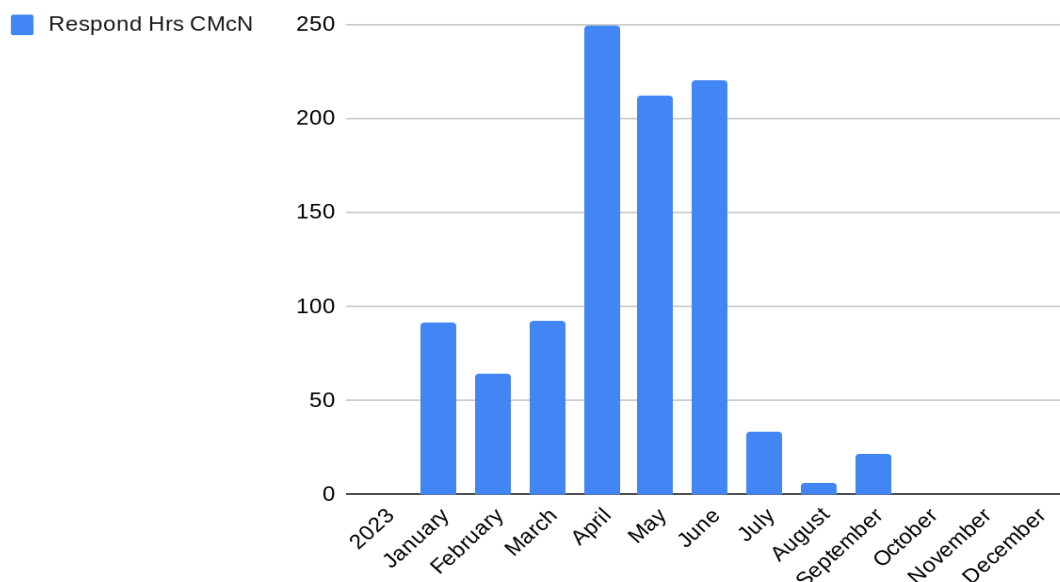
In the latter stages of his engagement, Peter was reengaged in weekly day sessions of 4 to 6 hours on the New Trails programme and sporadically went on overnights on the Respond programme. In the last couple of months in 2022, Active Connections CLG were aware that Peter's relationship with his foster carers was deteriorating. To help support the placement, along with his continued weekly sessions Peter was engaged more on the Respond programme overnights.

Peter interacted well on the Respond weekends, participating in many activities; swimming, soccer, walks, bushcraft, surfing, kayaking, SUPing, coasteering and rock climbing. Peter worked well with other young persons on the program and with the staff. Peter seldom refused to attend these overnights and appeared to benefit from the space and time they provided for himself

Many of the overnights on the Respond programme also involved Peter having overnights with his sister. Active Connections CLG engaged with Peter and his sister through outdoor activities to help strengthen the relationship through shared experiences.

Active Connections CLG were made aware that Peter's placement was in crisis during March 2023 and in an effort to help with the situation Peter was given priority to attend the Respond

programme. This gave Peter an outlet and provided a respite for Peter and his carers. In the following three months Peter engaged in 682.5 contact hours on the Respond programme as well as his continued weekly sessions of 4 to 6 hours on New Trails.



In this period, Peter was supported emotionally by staff as he regularly discussed his feelings about his circumstances. At handovers Peter spoke about the deteriorating communication in the household stating that they could no longer speak without it becoming an argument. Despite the relationships breaking down, on sessions Peter would sometimes speak about living with his foster carers forever and how he believed they would be adopting him. He also said he believed that the other young person staying with them might be moving. At no point did Peter mention that his placement was coming to an end.

During May 2023 Active Connections CLG were made aware that Peter's placement would be ending. Staff continued to facilitate Peter's time on Respond and New Trails until Peter moved to a residential care home. Peter was not made aware of this until the day he was leaving. There was a period of time after Peter moved that he was not engaging with active connections. The first time after the move that Peter came out on session he was very emotional and stated that he was angry with active connections for not telling him he was moving. Peter chose to leave early that day.

#### Key finding and areas for development

Peter appeared to value his sessions with Active Connections CLG. Peter had a strong working relationship with his workers and would often engage in conversation regarding issues that he was facing. Active Connections CLG helped to maintain the placement on

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regular occasions with Peter and his carers saying the same.

Peter often stated how much he enjoyed being out with Active Connections CLG. Towards the end of his placement with Peter spent a lot of time out of the home with service providers. This helped to maintain the placement and reduce further deterioration of the relationships until Peter finished out his school year.

Peter's relationship with his Active Connections CLG workers could be said to have been adversely affected by the perceived break in trust regarding Peter's movement to a residential care home.

### **Case Study 3**

#### **Case study for Tom**

(A pseudonym was used in this case study)

<b>Background of the case</b>
<p>Tom first came into care when he was two years old and was under a care order until he is eighteen. Tom came into care due to neglect following concerns of his mother having issues with alcohol abuse. Tom is now fifteen years old and has been in his current foster placement since he was three years old. Tom was linked with CAMHS, diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed medication for this. Tom was also diagnosed with borderline FAS in July 2019.</p> <p>Tom had been getting on well within his foster placement with little issues but this began to change for him when he entered into secondary school. Tom began posting inappropriate videos on social media sites through his phone. Tom also began to get into trouble within his school and this had an adverse effect on his placement. Tom had been suspended from school twice and was at risk of expulsion. Tom's carers said that his attitude towards them had become appalling and that he had started stealing money and phones from his carers. There were also incidents of Tom running away from home, once in which search and rescue was undertaken by his carers and family, and An Garda Síochána. Within the initial referral, Tom's social worker informed of a risk of placement breakdown if interventions and support were not put in place.</p>
<b>The work undertaken</b>
<p><u>New Trails day service</u></p> <p>Tom was referred to Active Connections CLG in early 2022. He attended a total of thirty-three New Trails session (4-hour day sessions) up until early 2023. Tom rarely missed a session and had stated on session that he really valued them. Tom would</p>

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regularly ask for more time on his sessions and appreciated when his Active Connections CLG worker (AC worker) organised this for him.

Tom engaged fully with Active Connections CLG from the beginning. It quickly became apparent that water activities were Tom's favourite but that he enjoyed bushcraft also, especially prepping and lighting the fire to cook on. This became the norm for most of Tom's sessions.

Tom exhibited some behaviours whilst out on session, mainly in relation to taking jokes too far to the point they would become offensive. This was worked on throughout Tom's engagement. Tom has come a long way in relation to this and reading people's reactions to be able to stop when appropriate. At times, Tom would need to be asked to stop but he would recognise the reasons and apologise.

Tom opened up regarding how things were for him in the home and appeared to talk honestly. Some of the issues that Tom highlighted were not being listened to, being blamed for everything, and having no trust. Tom also told his AC worker of how his bedroom door would be locked at night and that there was a baby monitor in his room. Tom's AC worker consistently highlighted any issues with the social work department and worked with Tom and his carers on same

Throughout the intervention, Tom and his AC worker built a working trusting relationship where Tom could talk about anything and try to get his thoughts straight in his own head. Tom appeared to appreciate this and would often start conversations on things he was worried or annoyed about. Tom's AC worker would help Tom to make sense of these and find his own solutions to the issues he was facing. Tom's AC worker also worked on empathy throughout his intervention, of which Tom's ability to view things from different perspectives appeared to grow.

The AC worker also engaged Tom's carers regarding the perception that everything was bad all of the time. This was an ongoing piece that required Tom's AC worker to challenge Tom's carers on some of their views. Tom's carers began to see the good that was in their relationship and that issues only came up from time to time. The recurrence of issues lessened over time and the AC worker witnessed positive reinforcement coming from Tom's carers in relation to the effort that Tom was putting in to various aspects of his life.

Issues with school came about regularly for Tom in the early stages of the intervention from not doing homework, being "cheeky" in class, not doing well on tests, and running away from the group whilst on a school tours. Issues such as this appeared to be the main cause of distress within the home. Through working with Tom on these issues, Tom had made great progress in these areas. Tom was getting positive feedback from his carers and his school. Tom's principal praised him on the effort he had put in over the duration of the year and that there were no issues being reported home.



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Day session engagement ended just before the summer holidays. Tom's foster carers, his school, and even himself described the situation as being in a good place. Tom's placement was reported to have been this way all through the summer months also.

#### Respond overnight service

Tom also engaged in the overnight service when there was availability. Tom had been out on these numerous times from early to mid-2023, with over one-hundred hours attended. Tom would rarely decline attending these when offered and non-attendance would only be due to a clash with other events.

The Repond programme was not intended as a therapeutic intervention but more of a breakaway for Tom. This allowed him space to engage in activities with other young people and different AC workers. Tom would be given the invitation to discuss things that were bothering him if he wished but mostly the overnights were a time apart for both Tom and his carers, with activities and fun being the priority engagement with Tom.

Tom has stated how much he enjoys going away with Active Connections CLG on overnights and that he really appreciates the time away for himself. Tom's carers have also expressed that they appreciate the space that this gives them all to concentrate on themselves.

#### **Key finding and areas for development**

Tom engaged fully with the New Trails day programme. The AC worker worked with both Tom and his carers regarding the issues that were presenting. This appeared to have a positive effect on both home and school life, with all saying that things were good within the home and school, and within their relationship.

During Tom's time on the New Trails day programme, he also said he saw the improvements within his placement and his issues within the school. Issues within the home regarding locked doors, baby monitors and prolonged punishments were resolved. Tom was receiving positive feedback from teachers with regards to his work and behaviour. This improvement was also being highlighted by his carers within the home. By the end of the New Trails intervention, the relationship between Tom and his carers appeared to be positive and strong. This was also reported to be the case over the summer months following the intervention.

Unfortunately, issues began to present again once the new school year began. The New Trails AC worker engaged in a day session linked to the Respond programme about two-months following the start of the school year. Tom stated that things had gone bad when he started back in school. Tom's carers said Tom reverted back to stealing money from his carers and had recently been found sending inappropriate sexualised notes about girls in his class to one of his friends. Tom's carers said there were more issues than that over the last few months.

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Tom's carers have put in their notice to end the foster placement and Tom is currently awaiting a new placement. Tom said he wanted to have his AC worker back again as he helped a lot with the relationship with his carers and that he felt safe to discuss anything that he needed to.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Young people's Comments Verbatim
I had a very good weekend
I really enjoyed getting out on the walk and getting to meet nice people
Really enjoyed getting to hang out with other young people and explore the forest

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Very good
It was great
No
Learnt how to cook
Had a lot of fun
Struggled too fall asleep
Like to make scrap books documenting each weekends to keep when we're finished filled with pictures. Kids should get bed please.
Thanks
Thank you
I love active connections
It was really fun
It was a great weekend. It helped my mental health and took a lot off my mind. It was so much fun.
I feel good after it

## Appendix 2

<b>Carers Comments verbatim</b>
Lovely to get a break and i'm sure they appreciate the break also
Earlier drop home and contact for <i>Young Person</i> before school
Earlier drop home time before school days to allow for homework to be completed Other then this the <i>Young People</i> really enjoyed there time with AC and were very excited to go out with them again
It's amazing for <i>Young Person</i> to be able to get outdoors and spend time away as he enjoys the time.
The girls always have good things to say when they are out with active connections

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Told two days of intervention, collected at 7pm saturday and dropped home Monday at 1pm,
Whatever you're doing is working
<i>Young Person</i> is enjoying the response
I feel <i>Young Person</i> has really benefited from AC and it has helped him a lot.
Gives me a break.
Very helpful. <i>Young Person</i> really enjoy her time with active connections.
<i>Young Person</i> enjoyed her trip and would like to go again. Unfortunately <i>Young Person</i> found it difficult to sleep as she found the ground hard.
Day session. Great day would love to do it again looks happy and healthy
Ye are great
Happy with the service
The boy attitudes have improved and more respectful since starting
"Whatever your doing with <i>Young Person</i> is fantastic. He has really come out of his shell and has gotten more creative."
I would like more notice on days and times.
More notice for respond. Weighted blanket would be great
Thank you for bring the boy out
I always feel whatever ye do the boy come back with a better attitude, Hes started to love cooking and does some at home now, He always wants to show us the things he learns
It's an amazing service that I didn't realize was available, things are hectic here at the moment so its been so helpful to get some breathing space, it's been invaluable
Very happy with the service
<i>Young Person</i> seems much better since starting with active connections