

Freedom 2 Be Support Camp 2022: Key learnings



Freedom 2 Be (F2B) is a camp organised and delivered annually by Chiva to provide a supportive, educational, and relaxing environment for children and young people living with HIV in the UK and Ireland.

It has three main aims:

- **Enhancing HIV knowledge and understanding**
- **Reducing social isolation by building a peer support network**
- **Enhancing confidence and aspirations for the future.**

Run by a small staff team and a large group of volunteers, the camp leads young people through various learning, wellbeing and recreational activities.

Who attended in 2022?

Last year, we had a broad range of young people coming to camp:

- 73 attended, 42 young women and 31 young men
- 17 were aged 11-13, 25 were aged 14-15 and 31 were aged 16-17
- 32 had not attended a F2B camp before
- 19 had attended one camp before, five had attended two camps and 26 had attended three or more.

Based on discussion with healthcare professionals along with family members or carers, 25 young people were identified as having additional support needs related to mental health, illness or physical mobility/disability.





Participants took part in a range of activities including:

- Outdoor sporting activities
- HIV knowledge workshops
- Wellbeing activities
- Creative expression workshops
- Group gatherings and informal socialising

Methods

The following methods were used to evaluate camp and its impact:

- **Pre and post-camp questionnaires:** participants were asked to complete a questionnaire upon arrival on day one and immediately before leaving camp on day four. Some questions are repeated to see any shifts in reported knowledge. Participants receive support from volunteers and staff should they require help completing the answers. 73 day one questionnaires and 71 day four questionnaires were completed.
- **A brief questionnaire after each HIV knowledge workshop:** this asks about participant satisfaction with the workshop and the degree to which they felt they could speak in the session. 179 workshop questionnaires were completed.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** F2B camp leaders (young volunteers living with HIV, aged 18-24) interviewed approximately one third of participants at the end of camp. Interviewers followed a general question guide, asking about young people's experiences at camp, what activities or workshops were best, highlights of their time at F2B and what could be improved in future years.
- **Survey of parents:** two weeks after camp, an optional survey was distributed to parents asking for feedback about their experiences with Chiva and any feedback from their child. 22 parents responded.
- **Survey of volunteers:** two weeks after camp, an optional survey was also distributed to volunteers asking for feedback about their experiences with Chiva. 11 volunteers responded.

Key findings

Camp builds community and peer support

Many young people report that in wider life it can be challenging for them to talk openly about their HIV. Upon arrival, fewer than 1 in 5 said they talk about their HIV status with friends or other people outside their family. Of those, most said it was only every few months that they spoke about HIV (18%, n=13).



However, camp creates constructive spaces where participants can be increasingly confident talking about HIV. Feedback from workshops found that 60% of participants stated they felt extremely or very comfortable talking about HIV in their workshop.

All participants, Camp Leaders and many volunteers at F2B were living with HIV. This space for connection with others living with HIV was highly valued.

- 75% of participants found it extremely or very important to be around other young people living with HIV.
- 75% of participants found it extremely or very important to be around adults living with HIV.

This was reflected in the interviews with Camp Leaders, and the most common theme camp participants spoke about was the importance of the community cultivated at F2B. Interviewed participants mentioned how happy and excited they were to meet new and diverse people, and importantly, to make new friends. They spoke about how much they enjoyed socialising with others.

"My experience has actually been great because F2B camp is where I meet new people that have HIV my age and with the same experiences as me."

"I was shy at first, but when I got to know everyone, it was nice to see that other people were going through the same thing as me."

"I can be more open with them because we are all going through the same kind of thing. And it's better than the people I have in my area because I'm close with them, but it's not the same thing because they don't know..."

Inclusion and acceptance

Related to the theme of community, participants emphasised the sense of inclusion and acceptance they felt at F2B, which strongly contributed to their positive experiences of camp:

“It was fun and inclusive. Like you would play with everybody and you don’t get excluded.”

“It’s very good, we are united as one and you know, I feel blessed, you know.”

They also felt supported by their peers in a way they are unable to access at home.

“F2B camp was pretty good. Especially having young people living with HIV around me - it’s very supportive and it’s really helpful because I’m not always around people who are like me.”

Participants intend for these relationships to endure beyond camp, with 82% stating that they plan to keep in touch with other people they met at F2B this year.



Camp builds knowledge about HIV

In the questionnaires, distributed upon arrival and departure, we asked each participant to write the definition of a key term in their own words. These were then assessed by the Chiva team.

This showed a lower level of knowledge upon arrival but then a series of positive shifts in the proportion of participants correctly describing core knowledge about HIV by the end of camp.

Participants who can correctly state...	Day one	Day four
What HIV stands for	27%	54%
Three ways HIV can be passed from one person to another person	40%	65%
What white bloods cells (CD4 cells) do	36%	59%
What undetectable viral load means	37%	51%
What U=U means	40%	51%

Six participants spoke specifically about how much they learned at camp, some even despite having returned multiple times. They felt empowered by new or renewed information and reported that the knowledge and HIV workshops helped them better understand their diagnosis.

“I liked the workshops more because I knew I had HIV, but I never actually knew anything about it. Coming to the workshops, I learnt a lot more than I did know about having HIV. So I really enjoyed them.”

“It’s my sixth time and it was the best. And it’s been better because I’ve actually learned so much more new stuff than I knew – than I thought I knew.”

One participant specifically mentioned being interested in broader HIV knowledge beyond biological elements.

“I’ve been able to learn the history of HIV. I love that. Honestly, that interests me so much.”

Similar trends can be seen in parents’ feedback. Nine out of ten parents strongly agreed or agreed that their child learnt relevant information at camp.

Camp contributes to socio-emotional skill development

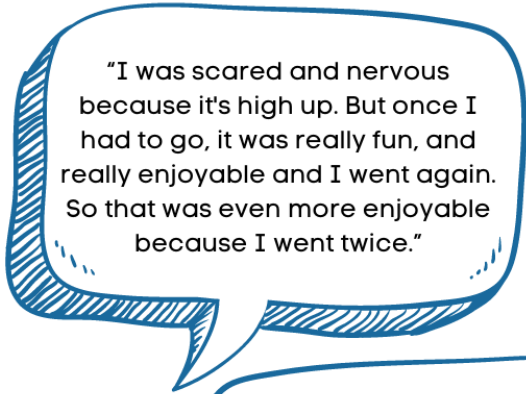
Well-developed key socio-emotional skills like responsibility, empathy, problem solving, initiative, teamwork, and emotion management increase the likelihood of young people achieving positive later life outcomes. Developing these skills at camp is very much a part of our aim to enhance the confidence of our attendees and their aspirations for the future.

Measuring how these skills develop and any changes a short intervention such as the Chiva camp could make can be challenging. We have trialed the use of the Centre for Youth Impacts’ Youth Engagement Survey, which captures young people’s feedback on their ‘mental engagement’ in activities, discussions and their environment. This enables an understanding of how their socio-emotional skills relate to their experience of camp and their relationships with the team.


We found very high engagement amongst the group, suggesting a high likelihood of socio-emotional skill growth through our intervention:

- 70% of participants score four out of five (five being very high engagement)
- 28% score three out of five
- No participants scored less than two.

Such findings echo the young people’s own description of camp. When asked about an experience that stood out for them, several camp participants described instances of pushing themselves outside their comfort zones and feeling proud of overcoming fears or trying new things.



“I was scared and nervous because it’s high up. But once I had to go, it was really fun, and really enjoyable and I went again. So that was even more enjoyable because I went twice.”



“It was really fun and stuff. I’m really scared of heights as well. So it just brought me out of my comfort zone, which is good. That’s cool.”

Participants also highlighted teamwork exercises which they enjoyed, specifically because they needed to work together, fostering stronger connections between friends as they see new sides of people.

“The activities, especially raft building, because everyone was just encouraging each other and working together as well.”

“My favourite was the canoeing because, you know, everyone was working as a team. And when you work as a team, you work very well, we play very well, you know, we do everything well.”

There was also a clear sense that participants believed camp was an enriching experience to try, encouraging those who might be nervous to trust the process.

“If you did want to come to camp, just come with an open mind and don’t fully close yourself off to make good friends because you never know.”

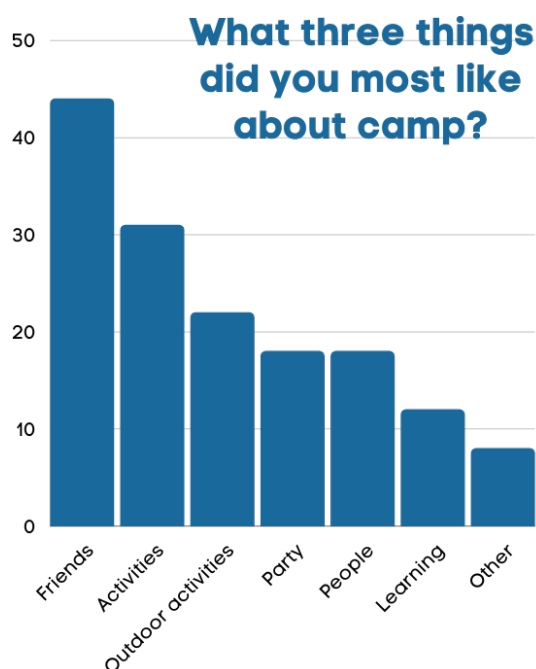
“Camp is the best! Come and have a go and enjoy yourself. The people are nice here. You know, you can always call your parents if you miss somebody.”



Camp structure and activities are positively valued by participants

At the end of camp, we asked participants what they liked most and least at camp. Participants could answer in any way that they liked, with their answers categorised by Chiva staff.

By far the most positive feedback was about seeing, being with and making friends. This was followed by positive feedback on activities, outdoor activities and the party. Nearly two in five comments related to positive relationships with people at camp – usually with the staff, volunteers and workshop leaders.



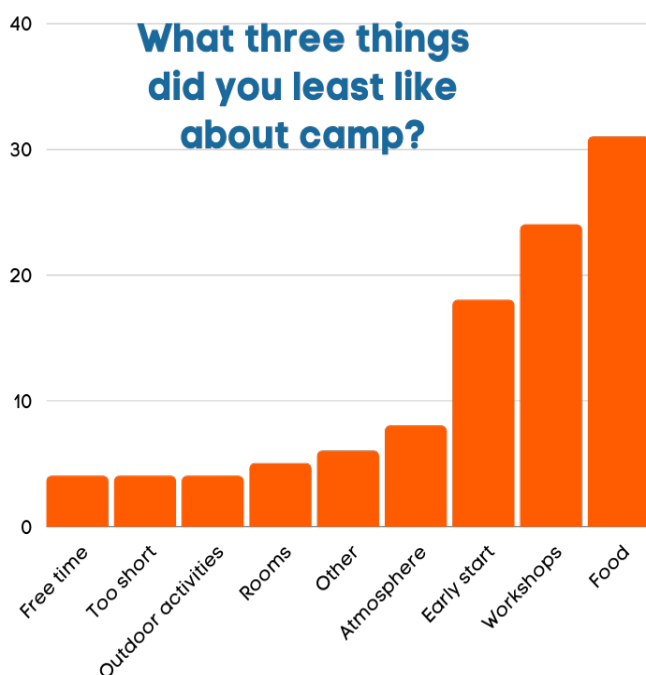
In feedback from individual workshops, 68% stated they found the workshops useful. Feedback from the one-to-one interviews was positive. Participants spoke highly of their time at camp, describing how much fun they had and that they would return if given the chance.

“I love the art that I got to do and HIV messages that I saw on walls and things. The workshops were really encouraging.”

“My overall experience of F2B camp was really good. I’m enjoying myself and I’m having fun here. And I’d definitely come again.”

Areas for improvement across surveys and interviews related to food; almost a third of interviewed participants mentioned they would like better food options, although this did not appear to take away from their overall camp experience.

Many responded that workshops could be improved by being more interactive or allowing participants to take them with their friends (workshop groups are age-banded, but some 14/15 year olds wished to be with the 16/17 year olds). Other dominant comments were for a later start to the day and more flexibility around bedtime.



Camp is valued by parents

We asked parents about their experiences:

- 90% of parents strongly agreed that their child enjoyed camp
- 86% of parents would recommend camp to other parents
- 86% of parents strongly agreed that overall they were happy with preparations for camp.

Similarly high approval rates were found for ease of registration, understanding information, knowing what their child should bring or how to contact staff for support and in being supported to travel to and from camp (organised by Chiva).

Feedback from parents included:

“[My child] really appreciates the opportunity to attend a camp with other young people with HIV and finds this a key priority each year.”

“[My child] said it was the best ever time away.”

“For my child it has empowered her, she’s confident, she doesn’t even think about it (referring to medicine). I’m so happy about her confidence.”

“My child has always loved coming to camp and learning from the group. She enjoys the activities and appreciates how she is able to disconnect from the world and just enjoy the experience. She is kind of sad this was her last camp experience as she is turning 18, but would love to continue coming as a volunteer so she can give back.”

Conclusions

These findings show F2B's aims were certainly met and the 2022 camp provided an engaging, safe, and educational space for young people living with HIV to learn more about how to live well with HIV, build meaningful relationships with new friends, and increase their confidence and self-worth.

Four in five wanted to keep in touch with those they'd met – and participants' knowledge of core HIV concepts jumped up by an average of 20%.

For future camps, the Chiva team will need to consider carefully how to meet the range of learning and information needs around HIV among the diverse group attending camp, both in terms of age and previous attendance. It will also be important to carefully monitor knowledge-related needs on an ongoing basis.

We also received some valuable feedback on the delivery approach from participants, particularly around the schedule at camp and the workshops. Future planning will need to explore how to incorporate this feedback.

It is heartening that both young people and parents recommend camp highly and are encouraging of others to come along and try it out. Chiva will need to continue to amplify these messages from camp participants in an effort to reach those yet to attend and who may face particular barriers in doing so.

The next Freedom 2 Be camp will take place over the first week of August 2023.

For more information visit:
www.chiva.org.uk/freedom2be



THEY CALL US H
THEY CALL US I
THEY CALL US V

CHIVA 2022

