Principle 7: Change the programme, not the young person

leaders like us

CHANGE THE
PROGRAMME
NOT THE
YOUNG PERSON
REVIEW CHANGES REGULARLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE & ACT ON FEEDBACK
FLEXIBILITY IS KEY
INCLUSION
MAKE PARTICIPATION EASY
PLACE
FOCUS on PROGRAMME COMPONENTS
KIT
TIME
COSTS
ADMIN
SMALL STRUCTURAL CHANGES = REDUCED BARRIERS + IMPROVED PROGRESSION

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Why this matters

Sometimes young people are asked to fit into programmes that were not designed around their lives. Expectations, including fixed times, hidden costs, complicated forms, strict kit requirements, or “good participation” rules, can be hard to navigate.

If a young person is not attending, engaging, or progressing, the first question should not be “What could we change about the programme so it works better for them?”

Changing the programme means looking at the design, delivery, expectations, communication, environment, and decision-making. Small changes can make the programme more accessible, fair, and realistic for more young people.

“You can’t claim to be inclusive if you’re not willing to be flexible as well… Inclusion is nothing without flexibility and you cant expect people to just fit in”

What this can look like in practice

If you notice:	Try:
Lateness is common	Review transport, session times, education, work, caring responsibilities, and other pressures. Ask young people what would make attendance easier.
Kit as a barrier	Reduce reliance on young people owning kit. Create a kit bank, offer low-cost or no-cost options, and check whether expectations are realistic.
Young people are struggling with the programme demands	Change the delivery structure, not the young person. Give clear instructions, allow more time, offer quiet spaces, and provide different ways to take part.
Staff are making last-minute adaptations each week	Build planned options into the programme so flexibility is expected, recorded and shared.

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What you can do to change the programme

- Treat recurring barriers as signs that the programme design may need to change.
- Review barriers regularly using a simple tool or team check-in.
- Agree one small change at a time, record it, and give someone responsibility for following it up.
- Build flexibility into routine delivery, rather than relying on staff to improvise under pressure.
- Offer planned alternatives for timing, communication, kit, activity roles, forms, and participation.
- Resource the practical costs of participation, such as kit, travel, food, or access needs.
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- Record adaptations so the whole delivery team can respond consistently.
- Close the feedback loop by telling young people what changed because of what they said.
- Check whether changes are improving attendance, engagement, progression, and confidence.

Signs it’s working

- Fewer young people face recruitment or access barriers
- Issues are resolved more quickly once bariers are identified
- Staff adapt sessions confidently using planned options
- Fewer changes rely on last-minute improvisation
- Changes respond to young people’s real-life constraints
- Young people facing practical barriers are more likely to stay involved
- Attendance and progression become more stable