

DEVELOPING JUNIOR ORIENTEERING

Thank you to everyone who responded to my request for ideas and opinions on Junior Development. The youngest person to reply was under ten years old and the eldest were over eighty years old..... and perhaps that is the root of the problem and the challenge we as a club face. Orienteering is a sport for all ages, but perhaps our approach needs to be different for different age groups. If you take the club within a club that is the Fallibroome Students out of our membership numbers we have very few juniors and only a handful of families who compete.

It has been mentioned that we as a club are very welcoming to families and that is appreciated, but we do not really offer much in the way of targeted competitions for Juniors. Other clubs have offered local league competitions such as the highly successful DEE league for both Primary and Secondary schools. Those clubs who have increased Junior membership also offered a regular training programme and a social side to Junior coaching. A number of people mentioned this as one way forward and something that MDOC used to do in the past.

Instead of discussing what we can't do because of COVID19 restrictions I want to focus on what we can do now.

A JUNIOR LEAGUE

A number of people suggested offering a series of local events in an area targeted at Juniors and offering certificates on the day and medals. An experienced Orienteer commented :-

“A Primary School League is a good idea.

In my mind this looks like a normal Saturday Morning Event but the participating children get points for their school. Something simple: first home gets 1 point, second 2 points and so on. First three from each school to count. The real difficulty to overcome in order to have a league will be to reduce the logistical workload of planning and organising the events to the bare minimum, to the where it wouldn't be unreasonable to put one on every week. Not easy.

Bring a Parent.

In my mind the only way to get the children to an event is for parents to take them. A league will undoubtedly attract the parents who want to see their child represent the school, but they may want to run too, or they want to help with the coaching or putting out controls or bringing them in. It would be wise to involve them.”

Younger children often respond well to instant gratification and I intend to offer certificates for completing an event with a unique design with different backgrounds for children to collect.

When schools are back in September I will work with each one individually to perhaps do different events for single year groups.

As the Cheshire and Merseyside School League has been suspended until after Christmas this is an opportunity to do a school by school events and starting with Macclesfield a series of local events at perhaps Lyme Park, Riverside Park, Teggs Nose and Alderley Edge.

A parents point of view:-

“First thing I did was talk to my “ Junior”, to ask a bit more about what they enjoyed about the sport. In short this seemed to be the adventure and challenge, the fact they felt a sense of achievement having got around courses on their own and the puzzle element were all things they mentioned.

Their favourite events that they spoke about were the British School Champs and also the Dee Schools League event, they mentioned that they like the competition element of these and also that there were a lot of children involved.

One interesting point they mentioned was that they had only ever spoken to one other child of their age at an event which made me think about how different this activity is currently to other sports/clubs they attend that are more specifically targeted at children but therefore have a very high level of interaction between

the kids. The MDOC experience seemed more solitary. How can we change this? They did also say that they enjoyed running in a pair with a friend (and with me!) which they have done a couple of times with friends they have brought along, but did not enjoy that more than running "solo".

The competitive element seemed quite important to them, could MDOC do a simple version of the Merseyside schools league? Perhaps a smaller no of events to get started and likeley close to Macclesfield to follow up on the good work you have started there. Alternatively we could run "junior" targeted events rather than schools which might seem more open to all and broaden the number of juniors.

One further thought is that many of the simpler local events we do are in the autumn and winter when the weather and conditions are more challenging. Could a switch to doing some of these events in the late spring/early summer help with attracting juniors/newbies in general."

An experienced Orienteer mentioned the following ideas:-

"Making the autumn and spring series far more focused on juniors/families and promoting them accordingly. At the moment we probably promote as a Saturday Run for existing members with schools attendance from 'known' orienteering schools e.g. Fallibroome.

Limit the courses to white/yellow/orange?

Perhaps look to work with SELOC to introduce a Greater Manchester Schools League with one event in each of the Manchester Metropolitan Districts (Manchester/Stockport/TamesideRochdale/Bolton/Trafford/Wigan/Salford) – maybe with schools competing for their districts (plus an additional event for Macclesfield/Cheshire?)

Local event timings – interesting debate. We know most areas we use for local events have a ParkRun but we don't tap in to their membership perhaps as much as we could. Maybe afternoon events could pull in more families and juniors in the park for a day out. Do we try having an event at the same (popular) park two/three/four weeks in a row to see if that generates (repeat) interest from families/juniors?"

TRAINING

The one off training sessions that we have offered have been well received, but a number of people have said that they are too sporadic. Club members have requested a series of training sessions before an event with a debriefing and fun activities after an event aimed at younger juniors. Quizzes or puzzles to complete based on Orienteering knowledge would be welcomed. So that it is not just run and then go home. This may not be possible under the present restrictions, but should be built into events when it can happen.

A parents ideas:-

"Some Key elements of attracting and retaining juniors in the first place.

I think an important element is that beyond the course and competition side it should be as much fun as possible and more interaction with other kids would help. This could be as part of a coaching session at the event or some fun activity that is not necessarily badged as coaching but is 'O' related before they run. Even if a session was not practical, perhaps a quiz or challenge for them to do alongside the event would be an additional point of interest. (I also think with my two a "tuck shop" would also go down well and it was definitely popular at a SELOC event we attended last year when there were sweets given out at the end!)

I think the other key access point is parents/families attending as it is mostly the case that juniors can't come along with out a parent. I remember seeing a photo of a central Scotland club earlier in the year where there were around 15 families pictures and it made me think how few there seems to be in MDOC. Perhaps we need to do more local publicity in and around the parks and communities where we run events in the preceding weeks/months with a focus on families. It would also be good to follow up on how the proportion of family/junior members differs in other clubs (in particular urban ones?) and look at what more successful ones have done (and steal their ideas with pride?) I think we need to reach a "critical mass" in the family attendance department and it will become easier once we do this as there could be a domino effect.

The badge scheme is definitely something they are keen on but it is quite slow to move through. Your "honeycomb" cards seem quite a good idea and felt like more of a short term progress reward. Could we adapt these to use at club events? (SELOC do certificates which my kids proudly put on the fridge when they get home.)

Most of the above is about attracting along and retaining juniors rather than developing them. My thoughts in terms of this area are the coaching sessions like the ones John Kewley has previously done are key, even for younger juniors. My children really enjoyed the two they attended at Sale WP and Reddish Vale. We should definitely try to run a few more. It's also a great opportunity for kids to just play and interact with each other so ticks the box too (probably we should also try to get rid of hovering parents like myself too!)"

An experienced Orienteer ideas:-

"Activities/coaching/debriefing.

Let me explain. I see that the activities you do at school could/should be reinforced during sessions at the event before the run. Then the children run. Then they have a debriefing session with their coach. Then they go home. In my mind the "coaches" are MDOC members (maybe parents) who take care of between 2 to 6 children. It is something that MDOC have done in the past for DoE participants and for the Pay Back types. It works well."

MENTORING

I know that coach John Kewley has been offering some mentoring online for those juniors who have competed in virtual 'O' Competitions. Mentoring has been mentioned by a number of people as important for juniors to be able to get guidance and share debriefing feedback as soon as possible after an event. This could be done online in the same way we analyse our own runs via route gadget.

JUNIORS HELPING TO DEVELOP EVENTS.

People have said that one way for Juniors to become more involved in the club is for them to learn how to plan and organise an event and help run it. I know from experience of taking groups of Fallibroome students to help set up and run training for junior school events, that they are very willing and capable of organising and helping out as well as running an event on the day.

COME & TRY EVENTS

Other clubs have targeted marketing in the days and weeks before events in local parks and park run events. It is thought that we could have specific posters, flyers and signs at places before events that are more attractive to juniors, colourful and with more family friendly imagery. POTO saw a 16% increase in Junior participation from October to March by changing its marketing.

MDOC WEBSITE

It was thought that the images on the website could show more families and have pictures of younger people and family groups having fun not necessarily competition photos. It was also thought that we could signpost our events for families with a page for "New to the Sport" and more junior friendly advice. I have some ideas from other clubs and child friendly guides to getting started and improving at Orienteering.

AND FINALLY.....

I have been asked to provide more information about the age profile of our membership. I include two sets of data one a table of age ranges from Kath Speak who has looked at membership this way for the first time going back to 2012. Thank you Kath it was a very revealing set of figures.

The second set of graphs from BOF is equally revealing. A note of caution about interpreting those figures. In some years Fallibroome Juniors were not all members of MDOC and at its highest number Fallibroome had over fifty Junior

members. 2014 was the first year that all Fallibroome students were made members of MDOC it did not happen every year after that.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, please let me know your thoughts.

PETE HAYES AUGUST 2020