

Junior Development

Before You Start

Any club development takes time and effort. One off initiatives will be less successful than a long-term programme of events and activities. Before starting a programme of development, it is important to get 'buy in' and commitment from the club in terms of volunteer provision, financial support and equipment provision. As a minimum a key team of 3 individuals with different skill sets is recommended – a good communicator / organiser type person, an experienced planner and a technology person.

Junior development can be split into 2 key stages: attracting participants and then developing those participants into active club members.

Stage 1 – Attracting Participants

Put on a series of CATI type events

A series of events is far better than one offs. This can be done through a youth or schools' league (although it should be focused on the parents bringing the children rather than teachers) or a series of newcomer events. A series of approximately 9 is recommended spread over the academic year.

Stick to a regular format

Use an event format that works for inexperienced orienteers and stick to it. Newcomers like knowing what to expect and it makes it easier for volunteers. Choose a set time (e.g. 1-3pm) and day so people know when to turn up. You don't necessarily need to stick to a specific date each month because you may want to avoid major orienteering competitions and school holidays. Ensure that the dates are firmly fixed for the full series and once fixed don't change them, families like to plan ahead. Courses should be kept short. Re-use areas and run previous courses in reverse. Offer a light green for improvers and adults and something for the more experienced e.g. map memory, sprints. You must use electronic timing as you need to put on a high-quality event.

Keep it local

Newcomers do not want to travel far to begin with (a 20-minute drive is the suggested maximum travel time but this of course will depend on the geography of your area). Pick a target population and choose areas as close as possible to it. Even moving a couple of miles outside the target area will see a drop in number at those particular events. Over time people will be prepared to travel further and you can add in some further afield areas.

Use busy well known parks and gardens that are popular & familiar to families

People are happier to let their children run on their own / children are more confident where they are familiar. They know where the venues are so they can get to the event easily. There are lots of people already there who you can publicise future events to or persuade to have a go on the day.

Base start, finish & registration by cafes

Everything should be close by – lots of people hanging around creates a lovely social atmosphere and gives the event a real buzz. The cafes provide facilities such as toilets & refreshments. In the winter think about using indoor registration facilities such as a classrooms & discovery centres. Alternatively, put up a tent for shelter and ask parents to run a cake stall.

Celebrate children's success

End the league series with a separate prize giving event. Medals for the 1st 3 in each school year / age class, certificates for anybody who does 5 events or more, trophy for winning schools and a prize for anyone who does all events.

Friendly familiar faces at every event with a flexible attitude

Welcome everybody. Look out for lost souls. Explain what to do. Get to know your participants. Greet them by name. Ask how they've done. Talk through the course/map with them. Allow children to be shadowed and run in pairs and still be competitive. Be prepared for all sorts of weird and wonderful requests and try to accommodate them wherever possible. Offer free SI/EMIT card hire.

Publicise your events

Large banners at the venue for 2 weeks before hand. 5000 glossy flyers advertising the series printed & distributed to schools, at school's cross country events, at park runs, in sports shops, libraries, scout groups etc. Focus on schools where existing juniors attend and ask them to invite their friends or where there is a keen PE co-ordinator. Use Facebook. Advertise in the 'what's on' section of local magazines and newspaper. Run orienteering activities such as mazes or simple courses at community events – fairs, outdoors events etc. – and give out flyers. Establish links with partners (school sports partnerships, council etc.) who will be happy to help publicise the events.

Be patient

Although publicity is essential, lots of participants will come through word of mouth and this takes a long while to spread. Twenty or so participants can be normal for much of the first year but numbers will eventually grow.

Capture email addresses

Take the email address of everyone who registers, then you can regularly email them about the next event and invite them to club activities. Find out how they heard about the event.

Stage 2 – Increasing & Developing Membership

Sell the benefits of membership

People need to see the advantages of joining the club e.g. regular socials, competing on behalf of the club, reduced fees at events, British Orienteering negotiated discounts, free coaching, regular newsletters, wearing club kit etc. What can you do to improve your membership offer for juniors and their families?

Put on regular coaching sessions

Beginners need coaching to improve. Split children into different age groups – teenagers do not want to be with 7 and 8 year olds. Offer a range of TD levels so people can slot in at the level they are comfortable at.

Invite regular juniors to coaching sessions

Look at the results and invite regular attendees to club coaching sessions using personal invites. Maybe offer free coaching sessions to members (could be a key selling point for why people should join the club).

Capture the interest of parents

If parents get the orienteering bug then you will get a new family that actively participates in all aspects of orienteering – travelling to big competitions, volunteering etc. Invite parents to help at the league events, encourage them to run themselves, run a separate adults' coaching group.

Regular Communication

Orienteering is complicated. Regular emails and newsletters are essential to explain what all the different competitions are and to keep all club members informed of what club events and coaching sessions are happening.

Enter as many junior competitions as you can

Juniors love being asked to run for the club and events such as YBT, Peter Palmers, BSOC, JK Relays etc. give them a great opportunity to socialise and travel with other juniors.

Personal Invitations

Email new members personally and invite them to run at suitable competitions and come to club activities. Some competitions are more suitable than others e.g. YBT is suitable for any junior regardless of ability (they just need to be able to do a yellow in a pair) but the CSC requires seniors / juniors to run specific courses so they need to be of a certain standard. Blanket requests don't work because newcomers are shy to push themselves forward.

Regular Socials

Run a monthly evening event varying the format through the year. Nominate a pub to meet in for food afterwards and invite newcomers to attend. Include juniors in this. Nearly all pubs welcome children and they enjoy a chance to socialise too. During the winter it will tend to be mainly adults as night events don't attract many juniors but during spring and summer evening events are popular with families too. Try to hold other events such as BBQs and annual dinners or lunches where club success is celebrated. Give out lots of awards for various performances to lots of different people– best relay run, most improved etc.

And finally.....

Reward volunteers

Increasing membership and participation takes a lot of hard work. Volunteers need to be appreciated and thanked. Some ideas: thank you note, free run voucher and lottery scratched card to main event officials (planner, organiser, controller etc.) after the event. Half price runs for helpers at level C and above events, free runs for helpers at level D events. All main officials presented with a small prize at the AGM / presentation afternoon with a larger prize for Official of the Year and a trophy to someone who has made an outstanding volunteering contribution to the club. BUT accept that not everyone will volunteer don't pressure those that don't want to – you will lose them from orienteering.