

HORIZONS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OUTDOOR LEARNING

IN THIS ISSUE

CALLS FOR ACTION

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

FINDING JOY

THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT
CLIMBING, FEAR AND MARKETING
PLUS MORE

THE RIGHT TO EXPLORE

Young leaders show the way forward



AUTHOR

Kate O'Brien

BA (Hons) Outdoor Education, MSc Applied Positive Psychology

Kate has worked in Outdoor personal development for 20 years. Currently Kate works with Outward Bound UK managing the Generation Green project and broadening workforce diversity. She also loves riding bikes and works with The Adventure Syndicate on bikepacking expeditions for young people, especially teenage girls.

In 2019/20, 12 young leaders and two mentors from Lindley Educational Trust, Greater Manchester and Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre in London took part in the first Right to Explore programme: a series of progressive experiences designed to progress their personal skills and leadership. Kindly supported by The North Face we set out with the aim of

“Working in partnership to create Outdoor leadership opportunities for young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, in order to support development of role models in Outdoor leadership.”

Although interrupted by COVID-19, the group have been able to complete the programme and enjoy a summer celebration at Lindley’s Hollowford Centre.

We carried out a survey to hear about their experiences. Initial findings are really positive, suggesting that the programme impacted on the young people’s connectivity with the outdoors. 64% spent more time doing outdoor activities compared with before the programme. This also extended to having an influence locally, with 82% of the group introducing one or more family members to the outdoors through informal leadership.

When it came to employment, 82% of the group now have more interest in working or volunteering in the Outdoor sector, although interestingly fewer people indicated that they would like to pursue this as a full-time career, something we will explore further. 60% have completed Outdoor Leadership training/ qualifications, and 75% have gained paid employment leading groups in the Outdoors.

Mark Williams, Head of Lindley Educational Trust Centres shares,

“We saw these young leaders refine and develop their skills in terms of managing groups of young people. Initial volunteering has led to paid part-time youth work/ activity leader roles within Lindley. All six of our young leaders are now valued members of the Lindley team and they are inspirational role models for other children and young people from their community.”

Much of the feedback from the young leaders supports the impact of purposeful action towards improving diversity in the Outdoors, with this participant commenting,

“This programme can potentially show young people that outdoor activities can be multi-cultural and inclusive, potentially inspiring people from all backgrounds to participate in outdoor activities.”

Another group member goes on to demonstrate the positive ripples that can happen from this kind of programme, saying:

“... gives people from BAME backgrounds more experience with leading people in the Outdoors, so we can go on to take others to Outdoor activities and give them the same experiences.”



And finally, this participant reveals the wider impacts the programme has had on employability more generally.

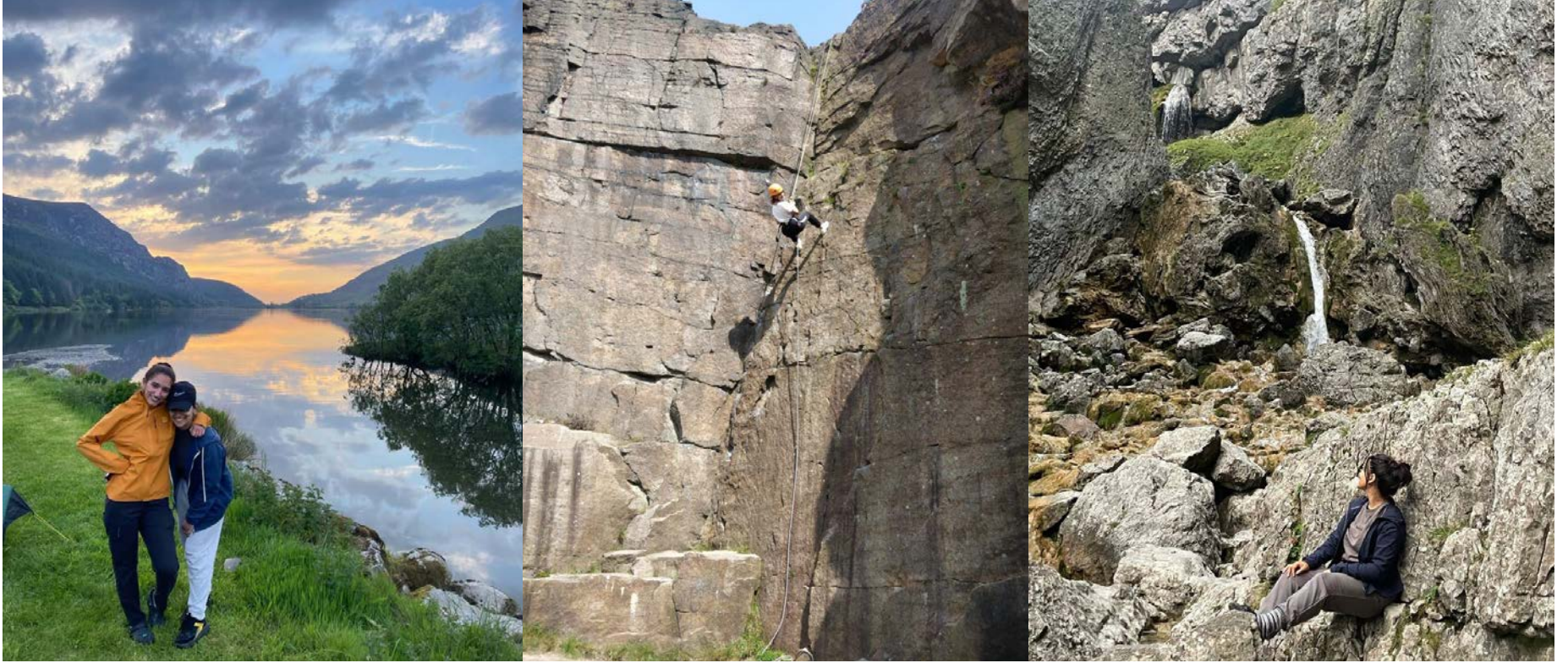
“I have enjoyed everything about it. It has also helped me develop into a more confident, outgoing and sociable young male which has really helped me when I have started working. I work for the NHS now and I still get involved (in the outdoors) as much as I can and look forward to it too. I believe that this has helped me when I had job interviews and also in my workplace where I work with people of different age ranges. Some people may not realise this but I believe that this is not just about doing outdoor activities, it is really good for our youths in many other ways”

To delve a bit deeper we caught up with Alishba Sheikh, one of the participants from Lindley Educational Trust, who has since appeared on BBC’s *Countryfile* and secured a scholarship with the Rank Foundation to work full time as an Outdoor youth worker for the next 12 months.

Tell us a bit about you and your journey to joining the Right to Explore Young Leaders’ programme.

“I was born in Belgium, my family are Pakistani and I’ve lived in the UK since I was four. I grew up in Ashton which is in the top 5% most deprived places in the UK, there’s a lot of drugs and crime, but it kind of just becomes normalised.





As a young person I was part of the Lindley youth club, starting from year 8. I had a lot going on at home and youth work was really an escape from that. I remember one of the first things we did was a winter trip to Snowdonia – well, after all the fundraising to make it happen. At the end of that week we went up Snowdon. I can feel it as if it was yesterday, just being sat at the top taking it all in. I can't even explain, it was like the best thing, something you can't forget. After that I started volunteering and just wanted to be involved in everything. It was like what started as a distraction became a passion. It had such an influence on my life as well... like I remember my mum saying to me, 'you're glowing'. I became more talkative and outgoing and also became Head Girl at school, which I think had a lot to do with those times outdoors.

In 2019 six of us were chosen for the 'Right to explore young leaders' programme where we went to the Lakes for the first week. I had a bit of experience outdoors but mostly on land, like in the mountains and a bit of climbing, but this was a lot of watersports. Like doing the jog and dip... I can't swim! So a lot of new things, but it was the best experience. I've no regrets and am someone who'll take every opportunity.

What were some of the highlights of the programme for you?

“ I think that first week made me feel a lot more confident. Like even with the kit that the North Face gave us, that was a big part of it. Getting free kit really helped. I didn't have the right clothes before, or the right kind of money to buy it. So I'm really grateful for that and that made me want to go out even more and get others into it too.

Also the outdoors isn't very diverse yet, we'll change that eventually but... like when we went to Scotland we got quite a few looks, not everyone is used to seeing South Asian people in the outdoors. On

the programme it was inspiring to be surrounded by so many others with a similar background and experiences. Getting to know people who'd been through similar stuff made me feel safe and not as lonely. Sometimes it can feel like it's you against the world! But knowing there are other people out there like you, knowing you're never alone, was amazing. I also think it's opened lots of doors and definitely builds character. It's matured me so much!

Rehna's made a big difference too, I can relate to her the most. She's come from a similar background to me and I can see myself in her in the future. She's the Head of Youth Work in Ashton. If it wasn't for her running that winter skills, I wouldn't be here now!

Tell us what you've been up to since the programme finished... you appeared on Countryfile, right?

“ Yeah, in Wales again. It was beautiful and peaceful at the campsite. I just love the sunrises and sunsets and watching the stars. Unfortunately I had to leave early as I had an injury from falling off the bouldering. I had two breaks to my fibula, needed surgery, a cast for six weeks, then a boot for five weeks and have just started walking again. It's not put me off though, I learned loads and it's just made me want to do more. When I got back, I watched it with my family, and some of the leaders locally had seen it. I was like 'wow', it's nice to be out there doing what I love.

We also did a Hill Skills weekend at Lindley last weekend where the majority were Asian women. It was amazing to see so many women in the outdoors as that's not been the norm. Knowing what an impact it's had on me I really want to be in a position where I can give back to my community.

So what's next? Tell us about your Rank Foundation Scholarship...

“ Well that came just after the Young Leaders' course. That

FINDING OUR WAY PODCAST

Rehna Yasheen, Ashton Community Project Lead being interviewed as part of *Finding Our Way* podcast which champions diverse Outdoor voices. Go to: www.thebmc.co.uk/finding-our-way-podcast-rehna-yaseen



helped massively and definitely made me more of a leader and want to progress in that direction. So I have a year's contract now, paid, working as a youth worker mainly in the Outdoors. Rehna recommended me and I did some interviews and passed. It's not that normal for Asian women to be active in the outdoors but for me, mentally it's literally changed me as a person. Getting into the outdoors has had such a big impact on my mental health so I want to do that for other people. The Rank Foundation offer a bursary afterwards too so you can go on to do qualifications like Mountain Leader or character development like counselling.

At college I studied psychology as one of my subjects. It's been so important to have that one person in your life, that's consistent and like carries you through. For me that was a teacher at school. He saw a light in me that I never knew I had! I liked studying but I think I'm more of a practical person, I like to be out there helping people and doing something to make a change so this scholarship is great for that.

Is there anything else you want to say that we've not covered?

WITH THANKS

Thanks to: The North Face for providing top quality kit to equip the groups for a lifetime of adventure; Sport England who are supporting 12 young people through their Workforce Diversity Fund; and DEFRA who are supporting a further 12 young people through the Generation Green project.

IMAGES

Images have been supplied by the author. Original photographers retain copyright.

“Just that the Young Leaders is a very good programme and I really hope it continues. It would be great if you can spread it out more. People might not know how to get into it so maybe going into schools would help. I would never have known about all this if it wasn't for the youth club. It's definitely needed to get more ethnic minority people involved and has made me want to pursue a career in this direction ■

This year we have extended the programme to work with new partners and new geographies. We have twenty four Young Leaders from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, supported by four mentors in Manchester, London, Coventry and Sheffield.

Mark Williams concludes,

“Diversity and inclusion is a long-term agenda and needs a strong commitment for a good number of years, if not decades... It is great to work in partnership on this project as organisations have things to learn from each other. In simple terms it is a worthy project as children and young people are more likely to take on challenges and be inspired by Outdoor instructors who look like them. On so many occasions we get told that a young person only engaged with us because our staff came from their community and understood their needs and values.

We get to know families and community elders, we get to know them and gain their trust. The outdoors is a great hook, but to get local people into the driving seat rather than just being passengers is more complex and needs investment and enthusiasm.

It is a long journey for someone who lives in a city, who has different values and cultures and who has barely been out to the countryside, to become a Mountain Leader holder. We have successfully taken dozens of people on this journey and it typically takes 10 years or more. But the effort has always been well worthwhile for Lindley, the community, young people and the individual.” ■

**WANT TO LISTEN
TO MORE VOICES?**

Go to page 35 to hear voices from around the world talking about the challenges and barriers of gender