

**THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST REPORT**

# **HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND RECONNECT, REENGAGE AND REBUILD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**MARCH – JULY 2021**



**THE  
OUTWARD  
BOUND TRUST**

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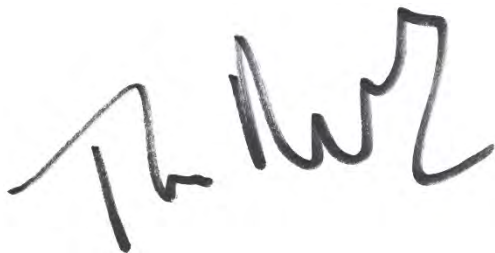
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## FOREWORD

The Outward Bound Trust has faced significant challenges over the last 15 months, as great as any experienced in the eighty years since its inception. In March 2020, Covid-19 brought our normal ways of working to a halt, played havoc with our finances and, above all, compromised our ability to positively impact the lives of thousands of young people.

Back then, as the pandemic first hit Europe and we were compelled to close our centres and furlough our staff, we set ourselves a number of objectives. We said we would get Outward Bound busy again just as soon as it was possible; we said we would find a way of using the talents and abilities of our staff to best effect to the benefit of young people; we said we would be prepared to let go of our usual financial disciplines and run (if necessary) a loss making and more versatile operation for the foreseeable future; and we said that we would learn from the experience and develop a capacity to reach and support young people in new and innovative ways.

This “mini Social Impact Report” is the second of its kind. The first basically covered the summer and autumn of 2020 and this latest edition focuses on what we have done in 2021. Both reports demonstrate that we have tried hard to live up to the objectives we set at the start of the pandemic. Indeed, I am immensely proud of the story that we have to tell. In very uncertain and unpredictable times and during a period when “normal” Outward Bound was an impossibility, we have got out there and delivered our mission.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Barrett', with a stylized, cursive script.

**NICK BARRETT**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**For many young people, life continues to feel very uncertain.** Despite messages of hope and optimism that come with the success of the vaccination programme and the easing of restrictions over the summer, young people are still reeling from the effects of the most recent lockdown. They face the daunting prospect of catching up on months of lost learning, entering a rapidly diminishing job market and rebuilding their hopes and dreams whilst **struggling to cope** with increasing levels of **anxiety** and **worry** about **what the future holds**.

After a winter lockdown, a second round of school closures and prolonged isolation from friends, young people are struggling more than ever before. They've found it **significantly harder** to **readjust to being back at school** and **emotional** and **behavioural issues** have risen. **Mental health complaints** have also **soared**, with **anxiety levels increasing** across all ages.

It has been widely reported that school closures have led to a **loss of academic learning** that could lead to **long-term wage scarring** and **significant economic losses**, but it's the devastating loss of skills that's affecting young people right now – a loss of skills and resilience that has left them feeling unable to reconnect with others, disengaged from learning and fearful that they won't be able to achieve their goals and succeed in life.

**Between August 2020 and July 2021 we will work with over 13,000 young people** across the UK – **nearly 4,000 of whom are from Scotland** – to help them recover from the effects of lockdown. Our Adventure Days and in-school adventure programmes are going a long way to providing young people with **positive and engaging experiences** that are helping them to **reconnect** with their peers, **reengage** with learning and **rebuild** their skills and aspiration. In many instances, these programmes have been targeted at young people who have been disproportionately affected by the most recent lockdown – such as **vulnerable pupils**, those from **disadvantaged backgrounds** or with **additional needs**. We are incredibly proud of the work we've been able to do and are **hugely grateful for the continued and generous support of our funders and donors**.

As we look to the future, concerns are rapidly growing around the **long-term effects of the pandemic** on young people's **mental health and well-being**. While there is absolutely no doubt that young people need support to catch up on lost learning, that alone will not give them the skills they need to successfully navigate an increasingly uncertain future. We have considerable expertise in helping young people to become more **resilient** and **resourceful** in the face of **obstacles** and **changing circumstances** and we are determined to do everything we can to ensure our programmes are available to as many young people as possible.

If the easing of restrictions goes ahead as planned, we fully hope to begin delivering residential courses over the summer months, and very much look forward to welcoming young people back to our centres again. However, we are acutely aware that the situation can change very rapidly. Should restrictions tighten again, we will resume our non-residential work to ensure young people continue to have access to opportunities that instil confidence, enable them to connect with others and restore well-being.

## A LOST GENERATION: THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE

For many young people, **life continues to feel very uncertain**. Despite messages of hope and optimism that come with the success of the vaccination programme and the easing of restrictions over the summer, young people are still reeling from the effects of the most recent lockdown. They face the daunting prospect of **catching up on months of lost learning**, entering a **rapidly diminishing job market** and **rebuilding their hopes and dreams** whilst struggling to cope with **increasing levels of anxiety** and **worry** about what the future holds.

### LOSS OF LEARNING AMONGST PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

School closures have affected primary-age pupils more severely than older pupils. Studies have shown that **primary school pupils are further behind in learning** than secondary school pupils, with this gap becoming ever larger for children from **deprived backgrounds**<sup>1</sup>. Whilst children from poorer households were less able to connect with others and participate in extra-curricular activities<sup>2</sup>, those who had strong parental support with home learning have become deeply dependent on adult support and have lost independent learning skills.

Pupils have struggled to **readjust to being back at school**, unsure of how to interact with their peers and increasingly anxious about the learning they've lost. **Listening and attention skills** have **deteriorated** and both **emotional and behavioural problems have increased**<sup>3</sup>. It's clear that **lockdown has resulted in a loss of skills** across all pupils that are essential to supporting learning.

“

*When we first came back, they were **more passive**, not wanting to get as involved with a lesson. They've got **anxieties** and their **concentration dips** because they're more concentrated on their **anxieties** and **worries** than they are on what they should be doing... If they are anxious or worried it makes them **more reserved** and **less able to interact with others**. Primary School teacher (Bradford)*

”

### LOSS OF ASPIRATION AMONGST SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Secondary-age school pupils have also fallen behind in learning as a result of school closures, and this has taken a toll on **aspirations** and **mental well-being** in particular. Almost half of 16-18 year olds in full-time education struggled to continue their education during the winter lockdown, and most are **concerned that their future life plans will be negatively affected by their education at home**<sup>4</sup>. Pupils with additional learning needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds have fallen behind the most, despite schools' efforts to ensure these young people had the support and technology they needed to engage effectively with remote learning.

“

*What we've noticed as a school [during the pandemic] is a definite increase in the attainment gap, as young people from deprived backgrounds find it very difficult and at times extremely challenging to engage with the online learning, through no fault of their own. Ross Hunter, Headteacher, Gracemount High School (Edinburgh)*



**47% OF 16-18 YEAR OLDS STRUGGLED TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION OVER THE WINTER LOCKDOWN**

The cancellation of SQA examinations for the second year running has also been a significant source of anxiety for young people<sup>5</sup>, with many feeling angry and let down, fearing they will not receive a fair grade and that their career prospects are at risk.

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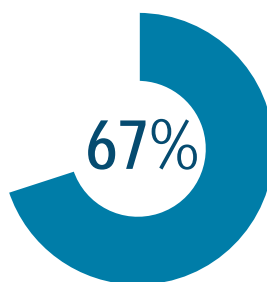
## MENTAL HEALTH AT CRISIS POINT

The growing mental health crisis for young people is ever apparent, and while we look with a sense of hope and optimism at restrictions easing over the summer, many young people are still **reeling from the negative impact of the most recent lockdown** on their mental health and well-being. Anxiety levels have increased for young people across all stages of education, as the isolation caused by the pandemic has removed them from their usual support networks both within and outside of school.

According to The Prince's Trust Youth Index (2021), **26% of 16 to 25-year olds feel “unable to cope with life”, increasing to 40% among those not in education or training**<sup>6</sup>. Young Minds reported that three quarters of young people surveyed stated that they were finding the most recent lockdown harder to cope with than the previous ones; half said this was due to **loneliness** and **isolation** and two thirds believed that the pandemic would have a **long-term negative effect on their mental health**<sup>7</sup>. **In Scotland**, children and young people identified to be at **higher risk of impacts to their mental health** include **females**, those in the **senior years of high school**, those **living near the epicentre of outbreaks** and those with **lower attainment**<sup>8</sup>.



**1 IN 4**  
16-25 YEAR OLDS  
FEEL “UNABLE TO  
COPE WITH LIFE”



**BELIEVE THAT THE  
PANDEMIC WILL HAVE A  
LONG-TERM NEGATIVE  
EFFECT ON THEIR  
MENTAL HEALTH**

“

*I struggle to manage my stress; I've always been called a “stress ball” because I always panic in stressful situations. So that was a really big struggle for me [during lockdown] with school and with everything that had to be done without my support network that I usually find in school, I struggled with that. Marysia, 17 years old*

”

## LOST JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The impact of the pandemic for young people currently in, or about to enter, the workforce has been staggering. Of the 700,000 job losses since the start of the pandemic, two thirds of these were for adults under the age of 25.<sup>9</sup>



UNDER-25s MAKE UP TWO THIRDS OF ADULTS WHO LOST THEIR JOBS SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC

In 2020, the **employment rate for 16-24 year olds in Scotland was 51.9% - six percentage points lower than a year ago**<sup>10</sup>, and depending on the pace of recovery it is predicted that **the unemployment rate of 16-24-year olds in Scotland could increase to more than 20% because of the impact of Covid-19 on the economy**<sup>11</sup>. For those returning to work or planning their future career, the pressure is mounting. The Prince's Trust Youth Index (2021)<sup>12</sup> reported:



60%

FEEL THAT GETTING A NEW JOB FEELS "IMPOSSIBLE NOW" BECAUSE THERE IS SO MUCH COMPETITION

1 in 5

FEEL SCARED THAT THEIR SKILLS AND TRAINING ARE NO LONGER USEFUL

21%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL THAT THE PANDEMIC HAS "DESTROYED" THEIR CAREER ASPIRATIONS

## INEQUALITIES CONTINUE TO REDUCE LIFE CHANCES

The negative impact of the pandemic on learning, well-being and work prospects is dramatically increased for young people from disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds. The **biggest decline in young children's well-being during lockdown was seen in children from low-income families, single parent families, and for children with a long-term health condition** or whose parents have a long-term health condition<sup>13</sup>.

HOUSEHOLDS WHERE BIGGEST DECLINE IN CHILDREN'S WELLBEING WAS OBSERVED



LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLD

SINGLE PARENT FAMILY

HOUSEHOLD COPING WITH LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITION

Families living in **rural marginalised communities in Scotland** have felt the **negative impact** of the pandemic on their **mental health and wellbeing more acutely**<sup>14</sup>, and young people from a **minority ethnic background** are more than **twice as likely to no longer be working** since lockdown than their peers, with 12.8% reporting they have lost their jobs<sup>15</sup>.

### RISKS OF SIGNIFICANT LONG-TERM WAGE SCARRING

Young people across the UK have lost over half a year of in-person schooling. For some, the impact is felt immediately as they struggle to move on to the next stage of their education or their early careers. For others, the impact will build over time with the knock-on effect of the loss of learning skills during lockdown, due to the difficulties of remote learning. It is estimated that one year of schooling increases an individual's future earnings by 8% each year. As a result, for 8.7 million UK school children this will equate to a loss of approximately £350 billion in lifetime earnings<sup>16</sup>.



### FEARS FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

While there is some hope and optimism as Covid restrictions ease, for young people the future is still filled with great uncertainty. Almost **a quarter of young people (23%) do not feel confident about their future work**<sup>17</sup>. Young Minds reported that the top concerns amongst young people, moving forward, centre around the uncertainty in their future and the immediate impacts of the pandemic on their wellbeing<sup>18</sup>.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT:

LONELINESS  
AND ISOLATION  
CAUSED BY THE  
PANDEMIC



UNCERTAINTIES IN  
EDUCATION,  
RELATIONSHIPS,  
AND MISSING TIME  
TO BE YOUNG



MENTAL  
HEALTH  
DETERIOATING



CURRENT AND  
FUTURE WORK  
AND CAREER  
PROSPECTS



FUTURE  
LOCKDOWNS,  
SICKNESS, AND  
INEQUALITIES



## HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE RECONNECT AND REENGAGE: THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST DURING COVID-19

The need has never been greater to invest in the recovery of a generation of young people. Whilst the government's focus is on a catch up curriculum, what they need first and foremost is the chance to **reconnect** with each other, to **recharge** after a year of disappointment, fear and anxiety, and to **rebuild** skills that will help them navigate an **increasingly uncertain future**.

We remain deeply committed to developing young people into strong, resilient and curious individuals, who are ready for the challenges of life. With a widespread and urgent need throughout the country to support young people's **well-being**, **re-engage** disaffected learners and rebuild **aspiration**, our non-residential programmes are continuing to help young people move on from the effects of the pandemic. When schools reopened in March, we resumed the delivery of our Adventure Days and in-school adventure programmes, which have enabled young people to reconnect socially and feel happy, confident and positive again.

### OUR WORK FROM AUGUST 2020 TO JULY 2021

Our priority since the start of the year has been the expansion of our in-school adventure programmes across the country. Through these, we will reach young people from rural, urban and inner-city schools across the UK, including **Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow** and the **Highlands**. By July 2021, we will have worked with **13,100 young people** through either an **adventure day** or **in-school adventure programme** - **nearly 4,000 of whom are from Scotland**.

3,811

YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND  
WILL TAKE PART IN A NON-  
RESIDENTIAL ADVENTURE  
PROGRAMME

182 SCHOOLS FROM  
ACROSS SCOTLAND

150 ATTENDED AN  
ADVENTURE DAY

3,661 WILL ATTEND AN IN-  
SCHOOL ADVENTURE



In this report, we present the findings from interviews<sup>19</sup> carried out with senior leaders and teaching staff from a range of schools who have participated in an in-school adventure programme this year, alongside feedback collected from parents and young people who attended an Adventure Day in 2021.

## ADVENTURE DAYS

Since August 2020, **150 young people from Scotland** have taken part in at least one Adventure Day at an Outward Bound centre. After the easing of restrictions, we ran these days during the 2021 Easter holidays and May half-term breaks, and feedback indicates that they benefited participants in very similar ways after the first lockdown; providing them with a much-needed opportunity to **interact with others**, be **physically active** and **spend time in nature** following prolonged isolation from friends and time spent indoors, especially over the winter.

“

*[Robbie] loved all the raft buildings and waterfall scrambling and the campfires, all that good character building... it gives them **an opportunity to go out and gain skills that they might not get in the classroom, or a playground scenario**. I think it's a great opportunity for everybody to do it as they're growing up... the **teamwork, getting past obstacles... those skills are all transferable**. Robbie's dad*

”

## IN-SCHOOL ADVENTURE PROGRAMMES

Outward Bound instructors have continued to work closely with teaching staff to deliver programmes that **respond to each school's individual needs**. Some programmes are focused on **rebuilding skills across the whole school** or in **targeted year groups**, whilst others are aimed at the **most vulnerable pupils** who urgently need additional support. **Before the end of June, 3,661 young people from Scotland will attend one of these programmes.**

Programmes have ranged in length from half or full-day sessions delivered over a series of weeks to a set programme delivered over 2-5 full days and most activities are **delivered outdoors** within or near school grounds, making use of interesting local nature areas where possible. Instructors have adapted Outward Bound learning and activities to deliver **similar challenges in new outdoor locations**. For instance, activities such as **competitive rope-based games** in the school grounds, **den-building** and **bushcraft** in nature areas surrounding the school, and hikes through local areas have provided pupils with opportunities to **connect socially, rebuild relationships** and **experience a sense of achievement**.

“

*I felt like I was falling behind in school because I felt overwhelmed with the work. I really enjoyed taking part [in Outward Bound sessions because] I made lots of new friends and developed skills...**the course has changed the way I think about things. I feel more positive about things now**. Alex, age 14, St. Paul's Academy (Dundee)*



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## THE IMPACT OF OUR NON-RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMMES: HELPING PUPILS TO RE-CONNECT, RE-ENGAGE AND RE-BUILD

### DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND SOCIAL SKILLS: HELPING PUPILS TO RECONNECT

Time away from peers, lack of in-person teaching and detachment from the normal routine of school has left young people **isolated** and **fearful** of **returning to the classroom**. Even with procedures in place to ensure a safe return to school, many teachers have noticed pupils feeling **increasingly worried** and **struggling with being around their peers again** due to the overwhelming focus of the pandemic in the news and on social media and the impact of serious illness for some families caused by Covid-19.

It is clear from interviews with school staff that the in-school adventure programmes are helping pupils to **readjust to being back in the school environment** by enabling them to **reconnect with their peers** and **rebuild relationships**. In doing so, the programmes are going a long way to supporting mental health and restoring pupil well-being. *“One of the pupils said they felt really alive...because they got wet!”*

The **problem-solving** and **team-building** challenges bring pupils together and enable them to re-learn listening and communication skills. Succeeding at the challenges has restored a sense of **self-belief**, and this has been particularly important for primary school pupils who have lost confidence in themselves as learners.



“

*When Outward Bound came in, they were able to focus **purely on the personal development side of things**. The experience was also great for the children's mental health and their post-Covid recovery. These were all areas we were particularly keen for them to address; and something which we can build upon and carry forward within the school.* David Rafe, Teacher, Pennine Way Primary School (Carlisle)

”

“

*We've **seen children communicating with children that they wouldn't normally work with...** I think it's **given the children a bit of increased confidence that they wouldn't have had without the in-school adventure**. It gave them 2½ days to step back from the academic side of school and **get back some of those social skills that they'd missed for months**.* Primary school teacher (Bradford)

”

Those making the transition from primary school into secondary school have been at particular risk of **heightened anxiety** and **emotional distress** because the usual transition programmes that schools offer have not been able to go ahead. The effect of this has been felt very strongly in the Highlands, where the majority of schools are remote and the pandemic has amplified the isolation felt within communities.

An in-school adventure programme, delivered in partnership with Highland Council and 164 primary and secondary schools across the Highlands, aims to provide every pupil currently in their final year of primary school (over 2,500) with a ½ day in-school adventure to help them develop the skills needed to adjust well to life at secondary school. So far, the programme has enabled pupils to **develop relationships** with new people, learn about the values of their new school and familiarise themselves with a new school setting. There have been observed improvements in pupils' **social skills, empathy, problem-solving and flexible thinking skills** and the impact is particularly noticeable for the more vulnerable pupils.

“

*The children from the other schools really embraced [one of the pupils]... it was a very **supportive environment**... and when he was a bit confused about the instructions, another pupil enabled him to be successful. When you're doing Outward Bound, it's fine if you find things difficult because **there are solutions, and the process is as important as the outcome**... so to give him the confidence that it's fine and we'll work through it, and the staff are reassuring, not judgmental in any way, **the other children from the other school, instead of pushing him away, [they] included him.** [With the instructors] it was an open approach, it was friendly... built into the activities were **opportunities for everyone to take part.** It wasn't a win or lose situation [even] if it was competitive, it wasn't winners and losers, **it was everyone winning.** Robert Gill, Headteacher, Applecross and Lochcarron Primary School Cluster (Highlands)*

”



With the attainment gap having widened for pupils from deprived backgrounds over the course of the pandemic, it has been especially important to ensure these young people **readjust quickly to being back at school** and **rebuild their skills for learning**. Teachers at St. Maurice's High School in North Lanarkshire noticed a more **dramatic loss of problem-solving** and **interpersonal skills** in pupils from areas of higher deprivation, which was **causing conflict** even during basic teamwork tasks and **disrupting classroom teaching**. Over the course of a week, pupils took part in den-building, rope-based challenges and learnt to build a campfire, which they used to cook food over. Gradually, cooperation and collaboration within the group

improved and by the end of the week, behavioural incidents had reduced and they were working effectively as a team. Their engagement with the local environment also improved as they felt the benefits of spending time in nature.

“

*At first, they struggled to work together and do problem-solving tasks together... By the end of the week, they might revisit some of the tasks and **you would see a real difference in how quickly they were able to solve problems together as a team**, rather than all shouting and arguing with each other which is normally what they would do. **I've noticed a huge difference in their social interactions and the teamwork** in the groups and Outward Bound has certainly helped us in that, **it's brought us all back together**.*

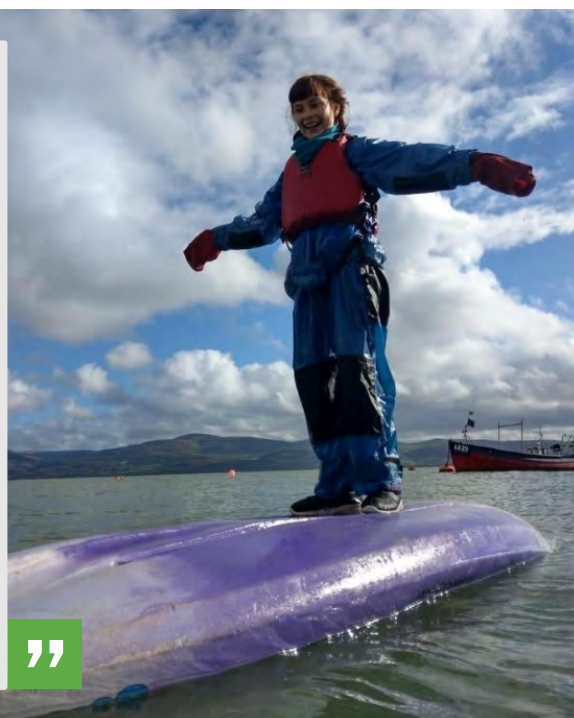
*I would also definitely say that pupils have got a **greater appreciation for the small wild spaces that we have around school**. At first a lot of the kids would roll their eyes when we said we were going to be working near the school, but they've definitely got a greater appreciation for it. Lauren Donald, Principal Teacher for Targeted Support, St. Maurice's High School (North Lanarkshire)*

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The **Adventure Days** have also been helping young people to reconnect with a **sense of confidence**, with **the outdoors**, and with **each other**. Courtney\*, age 10, is an only child and struggled with the isolation and boredom of lockdown. Taking part in an Adventure Day gave her the opportunity to **socialise** and **learn to make friends** again, as well as some **freedom from the confines of home** and **time to enjoy being physically active outdoors**.

“

*She only really had the dog to play with, and she's normally very active... so, during **the second lockdown, having to do all the home learning without actually having the ability to do much for enjoyment, was difficult for her**. Doing [outdoor activities] is one of her strengths, so [her Adventure Days] were a **confidence boost**. And she's going to secondary school in September, so she needs to make new friends again... Being [at Outward Bound] the whole day meant **she got to know people better**. After that week **she was much more upbeat having had that contact**, she was very excited to tell everyone what she'd been doing, it **improved her mood**. Courtney's mum*



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\* Names of Adventure Day and in-school adventure participants have been changed to protect the young person's identity. School names and staff names have been quoted where permission has been given to do so.

## HELPING VULNERABLE AND AT RISK PUPILS REENGAGE WITH LEARNING

Whilst the vast majority of young people have been affected in some way by the pandemic, those with pre-existing vulnerabilities have suffered even more. **Re-engaging with school** has been particularly difficult for these young people, such as **Looked After Children**, those **struggling with their mental health**, and those with **special educational needs**. Due to their circumstances and additional needs, they are likely to have fallen further behind in learning and are at greater risk of disengaging completely.

A number of in-school adventure programmes are focused on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable pupils. One example is a small group of boys in the first year of secondary school at Boroughmuir High School in Edinburgh. Having missed out on a transition programme to help them settle into secondary school and being forced to return to remote learning just a few months after the start of term, their confidence in learning had deteriorated almost completely. Through adventure sessions that encouraged them to **overcome obstacles** and build **resilience** and **self-confidence** in a supportive environment, they were able to challenge their **negative attitudes and beliefs** and **rebuild their enthusiasm for learning**.

One pupil who gives up on himself easily in classroom-based learning benefited in particular. He found that working outdoors with instructors gave him the **time and space** he needed to make mistakes and **challenge himself to try again until he succeeded**.



“

*We did this rope based [activity] called the ‘bomb disposal’... two of them gave up halfway through but **he stuck at it and they eventually succeeded**. It was just really the polar opposite to how he would approach it [in the classroom]. I think a lot of it has to do with written word confidence, so he was out of that setting, **he was just much more positive and had much more of a ‘can do’ attitude**. And he responded really well to positive praise. Part of that success was the space because we had all day and we’re at the park, and the instructors are relaxed with them if they’re struggling... whereas in the classroom, you don’t have that space to take half an hour and come back when you’re ready. I think **he appreciated that space and responded well to it**. Stephen Hamilton, Teacher, Boroughmuir High School (Edinburgh)*

”

A similar programme was delivered at City Academy in Hackney, a deprived area of London with a high number of pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds. The school is very aspirational and uses opportunities like Outward Bound on a regular basis to improve engagement and inspire pupils to achieve. They selected vulnerable students for whom lockdown had been especially difficult, in order to boost their well-being and provide them with a positive and fun experience at school. One student, Kieran, was unhappy and reluctant

to join in at the start of the three day programme, but after letting his guard down and experiencing success during the activities, his **engagement changed dramatically**.

“

*His transformation over the three days... that was very powerful because most have never seen him engaging [with others] like that, he's never been like that before. One of the teachers that was there is a drama teacher, and he said **his relationship with that student is completely different now because they have that external, really positive experience**. Anna Sarchet, Teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator, City Academy (Hackney, London)*

”



At Stratton Upper School in Bedfordshire, pupils come from a range of different socio-economic backgrounds and low aspiration amongst young people is quite common in the area. For those who are most vulnerable, such as Looked After Children, the pandemic has widened the disadvantage gap and led to further disengagement from learning, with the school seeing **increased behaviour issues** and **truancy** as a result. Their in-school adventure programme focused on reintegration and has helped to improve **tolerance** and **self-belief** in these pupils.

“

*I think **it's given them life skills**...in terms of belief. **Belief** is probably the best word I could use to describe it, because I remember sitting there last week and all of them were the same: “no, can't do this”, “not going to do this”, and all of a sudden [one of them got] the fire started, somebody sees that, and the next person thinks “well hang on a minute, **I know I can do that if they can do it**”. And **it was like dominoes, everybody was taking turns, everybody was able to do it**. Whereas at the very beginning, there was no hope. I think **that that belief in themselves that actually if you don't give up, you can do anything**. They don't have that within our area, low self-esteem is quite common. Richard Scoot, Learning Hub Leader/Designated Safeguarding Lead, Stratton Upper School (Bedfordshire)*

”



Finally, at Whitehaven Academy in Cumbria, outdoor learning is an important part of the school's creative curriculum, and their in-school adventure programme has enabled pupils to engage with the outdoors and develop skills in line with the school's core values of **respect**, **resilience**, and **responsibility**. It provided a particularly valuable opportunity for young people who struggle with a classroom setting to **re-engage with learning**.

“

*There was a pupil out there today, and we saw a kestrel, and this boy, who very rarely speaks... he's very insular, I think **for the first time in three years, he instigated a conversation with me** about the bird that he'd seen. And it's always **the students who you might not expect**, or who are not used to doing very well in a normal classroom setting, who do much better and take on the leadership roles and really enjoy themselves when the learning is transferred outside. **Being outside just brings a completely different and hugely important dimension.** David McCabe, Director of Learning for Year 9 & Year 10, The Whitehaven Academy (Cumbria)*



”

## REBUILDING SKILLS FOR LEARNING AND ASPIRATION FOR THE FUTURE

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*In an era where you can find knowledge at the touch of a button, what **we're more interested in are skills that will benefit people in the long-term, real skills like problem solving and the team building that we've been doing today [with Outward Bound].** Head of Year, Secondary School (North-west)*

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Some schools have used their in-school adventure programme to help embed key skills that will support pupils' learning in the long-term and prepare older pupils for their transition into further / higher education or employment. At Staveley Primary School, teachers have used their in-school adventure programme to encourage pupils to make **positive choices** and take on **personal responsibility** as a regular part of lessons. They created a noticeboard in the classroom with photos and key learning points from their programme, and teachers refer to it daily to remind pupils how to approach things like problem-solving, overcoming obstacles or staying positive and engaged.



“ That language of self-governance, choice, and personal responsibility is, I think, what is really beneficial to children at the moment because they haven't had self-governance, they haven't been given personal responsibility. In a way that's **something that lockdown has stripped away from them. So, it's empowering.** Liz Moffat, Teacher, Staveley Primary School (Yorkshire)

For St. Paul's Academy in Dundee, their three-day course has helped pupils rebuild **initiative** and **adaptability** (in line with the skills framework for Skills Development Scotland), in addition to developing **leadership skills** as part of the school's post-Covid recovery programme. They have seen more active engagement from pupils, particularly amongst those who were shy and withdrawn.

“ It was all about building the team up and **getting them more confident and at ease with one another**, getting them to develop a plan and manage the resources, to **let them fail in a supportive environment, but then to review why it failed and what learning can we take forward.** Outward Bound instructors are so skilled at doing that. They have really managed to develop the leadership styles in each of them. And not only that but getting them to have **an appreciation of different leadership styles**, and that a good leader doesn't stick to the one leadership style.

There was one girl who was very shy, but **in class now you can see how her confidence has grown**, and she's taking part and volunteering ideas, where she would have been quite reticent about that in the past. And **one of the boys is now a lot more communicative, a lot more helpful, a lot more confident.** And it was lovely seeing new friendships being formed, which will hopefully continue. **It did absolute wonders for their confidence** as a group.

Anna McFarlane, Principal Teacher DYW, St. Paul's Academy (Dundee)

Teachers have made the most of the skills pupils gained during the programme by arranging for them to take part in mock interviews where they put the skills they developed into real-world practice. Pupils were asked what the main skill was that they developed over the course of the programme, and how it might help them in their future career.

“

*[I've picked up] **resilience**. I had this task where I had to build a three tiered tower out of cards, and every time I'd done it, it kept falling, but I kept going and I finally managed to do it. I really wanted to win the points for my team, and I wanted to feel proud of myself.* Kelly, age 14

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*Being able to adapt and showing [that] with our **plans not working and then being able to change it quite quickly** [was the main skill I learnt].* Helena, age 15

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*I enjoyed the in school adventure because I made new friends and I'm more confident when I'm talking a group of people.... It's changed the way I think about things such as including everybody and to let people talk when they have an idea.* Jo, age 12

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## INCREASING RECOGNITION OF THE IMPACT OF OUTDOOR LEARNING ON PUPIL DEVELOPMENT

With constant pressures to deliver against the curriculum, teachers have very little time to give sustained attention to some of the skills they would really like to see their pupils develop, such as **taking risks** and **learning to cope with failure**. This is compounded by the fact that teaching staff tend not to have the confidence or training to use make the best use of outdoor spaces to support pupils.

Many of the schools we have been able to work with through the in-school adventures are new to The Outward Bound Trust. Some already used outdoor learning prior to the pandemic to support student development, while others had very little or no experience of it. From the interviews carried out, it is clear that teaching staff have **greatly valued the unique skillset and expertise** that Outward Bound instructors have brought into their school, and the **empowering way** in which they have **worked with their pupils**. *“Instructors are very calm...it's that positive encouragement. That gentle encouragement that you can do it.”*

During an Outward Bound programme – whether a residential course or an in-school adventure – instructors purposely allow pupils to **make mistakes**, give them **responsibility for tasks** and provide the space and time needed for them to **find solutions for themselves**.

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*If we had done something similar with them, we would never have got what we got out of it. It's definitely something about having somebody different coming in and bringing out something in them that we've not seen before. [Instructors] give everybody in the group a role, and I find they very quickly get to know the children, and they are very keen to work with us to get to know them quickly, so if we say to them 'this child struggles with this' they think of strategies that they can put in place, to try and work on that in an environment that's different to the classroom environment. Primary School teacher (Bradford)*

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The supportive environment that instructors create **engages all pupils** and helps them to **feel safe** and able to **learn from their mistakes**, without feeling the **pressure to get things right first time**. The in-school adventure programmes have raised awareness amongst teaching staff of the wide-ranging **benefits that outdoor learning can bring** both to individual pupils and the wider school. Pupils who struggle with academic learning or who have found it particularly hard to readjust to the social aspect of school **have thrived in an outdoor setting**, and there is an increasing recognition that the values that Outward Bound instils go to the very heart of what schools aspire to develop in every pupil.

“

*I think this is about **leaving a legacy**, when you've been through a hell of a year and a half, and you've got through it, **we're still standing, and we want to go forward**. We've got a set of values at the school based upon key words... **kind, confident, caring, supporting and positive**. **If you took those five words, that's everything that Outward Bound do**. And actually, when we dig down a bit, **those are the things that will get us through this Covid [pandemic] in society**. Robert Gill, Headteacher, Applecross and Lochcarron Primary School Cluster (Highlands)*

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Indeed, the success of these programmes has highlighted the critical importance of working in partnership to maximise the expertise available to support young people as they rebuild their lives. There is a strong hope amongst schools that they will be able to continue using the outdoors to ensure that all pupils are able to recover and flourish.

“

***All the things that Outward Bound provided are needed even more now; the things that you really focus on - mindset, resilience, time management, being able to develop a plan and implement it using the resources you are given and being prepared to use your initiative and take the lead. They are really important things anyway and the skills that we're going to need for the 21st century, but given the pandemic, it's forced us to be adaptable. The setting that Outward Bound provides is perfect for allowing young people to reflect on the skills and attributes they already have as well as building on and developing others. Having spent months in lockdown over this past year, to get them outdoors, away from their normal environment with that sense of adventure and making new friends - that's life-changing and the impact should never be underestimated.***

*Anna McFarlane, Principal Teacher DYW, St. Paul's Academy (Dundee)*

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## LOOKING FORWARD

Concerns are rapidly growing around the long-term effects of the pandemic on young people's life chances, and on their mental health and well-being in particular. Warnings at the end of last year of a **severe mental health crisis** have not gone away and as young people have returned to school, teaching staff have observed **mental health concerns affecting a far wider range of students than usual**. The drastic loss of confidence and skills, coupled with heightened anxiety, is interfering with pupils' ability to engage fully with learning and there are fears that the effects of this will be felt for many years to come.

There is absolutely no doubt that young people need support to catch up on lost learning, to prevent significant and long-term wage scarring, but that alone will not give them the skills they need to successfully navigate an increasingly uncertain future. The Outward Bound Trust has considerable expertise in helping young people to become more **resilient** and **resourceful** in the face of **obstacles** and **changing circumstances** and we are determined to do everything we can to ensure our programmes are available to as many young people as possible, no matter what their circumstances.

It's clear that our non-residential programmes have made a significant impact on the well-being of young people in the short-term, helping them to **readjust to being back at school**, to **reengage with classroom learning** and to **reconnect with their peers**. We are incredibly proud of the work we've been able to do and are hugely grateful for the continued and generous support of our funders and donors, which has made it possible for this work to go ahead.

We have also benefited from being forced to adapt our programmes, as our instructors have learnt a great deal from spending time in schools. They have a **significantly better understanding now of the day-to-day challenges pupils face at school** and will be better able to make learning at Outward Bound relevant and specific to their lives back home. We have also been able to show a large number of new schools the impact that outdoor learning can have on pupil development and hope we will be able to positively impact their students in the future through a residential programme.

If the easing of restrictions goes ahead as planned, we fully hope to begin delivering residential courses over the summer months, and **very much look forward to welcoming young people back to our centres again**. The deeper and long-lasting impact we can achieve through a residential course has the potential to **significantly accelerate young people's recovery from the effects of the pandemic**, but we are acutely aware that the situation can change very rapidly. Should restrictions tighten again, we will resume our non-residential work to ensure young people continue to have access to opportunities that instil confidence, enable them to connect with others and restore well-being.

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