



THE  
OUTWARD  
BOUND TRUST

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S**

**MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING:**

***CONNECTING TO NATURE***



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## 1.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mental health and wellbeing issues amongst young people are on the rise. The most recent government Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey (CAMH), published in 2017, identified that 1 in 8 young people aged between 5 and 19 have a clinically diagnosed mental health problem. The report also recognised that the majority of mental health issues start in childhood or adolescence and continue into adulthood. This highlights the importance of the 10 to 20 age bracket – as a time fraught with risks to young people's mental health, and a time to focus on protective factors around their wellbeing.

Research suggests the cause for this rise is a combination of academic pressures and a change in lifestyles amongst youth today. **Young people are spending on average 13 hours a week watching television services and over 20 hours a week online** (predominately on social media). This has led to a recent government report stating that up to three-quarters of young people spend less time outdoors than prison inmates **and up to a fifth of children not playing outside at all on an average day.**

Moving forward, schools, work places, charities and other youth sector organisations are very much part of the solution to improving young people's wellbeing – by bridging the gap between parents, healthcare services and young people themselves. Health and wellbeing are multi-dimensional concepts, and the New Economics Foundation's (NEF) evidenced-based framework "**Five Ways to Wellbeing**" for promoting wellbeing is one approach that can be easily embedded into schools and work places. The framework is based on research commissioned by the UK Government, and details a set of actions that can be taken to improve individual mental health and wellbeing.

There is now a strong evidence base to show that engagement with natural environments is beneficial for mental health and wellbeing: through a restorative effect; opportunities for positive social contact; and opportunities for physical activity. At The Outward Bound Trust, for over 77 years we have been providing young people with the kinds of experiences now promoted through the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework. Taken in combination with nature, these Five Ways to Wellbeing can have maximum effect. We specialise in developing skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, self-management, resilience and determination by providing opportunities for young people to connect with others, to be active, to become more aware, to support others and to learn new skills. These skills are proven essentials in both preventing the onset of and combating diagnosed mental health problems, and promoting young people's mental wellbeing.



**At The Outward Bound Trust, for over 77 years we have been providing young people with the kinds of experiences now promoted through the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework.**



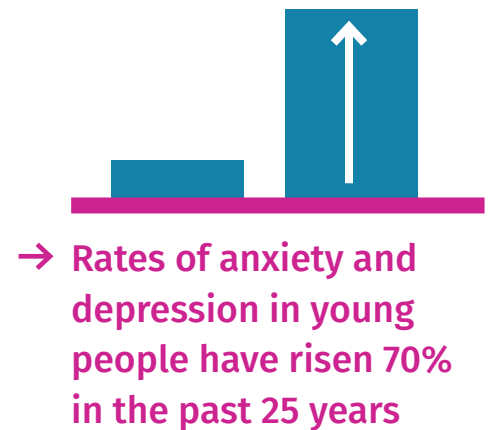
## 2.

## INTRODUCTION

Young people's mental health is a topic of constant debate, with concern for the issue growing amongst healthcare professionals, educationalists, the government and the general public. Rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen 70% in the past 25 years, and those aged 12-25 have the highest incidence of mental illness across the lifespan.

*However, is the full extent of the problem fully understood; what is contributing to the problem; how is this impacting young people, their development and their future; and what can be done to help the current state of affairs that simply does not involve medicating the problem, but aims to fix the causes?*

**These are some of the questions this report seeks to answer.**





## 3.

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Young people account for around a third of the world's population, 2.2 billion individuals, with mental health issues affecting up to 20% of them worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Evidence shows us that the majority of mental health issues start in childhood or adolescence.<sup>2</sup> Studies in the area have shown the average age of 11 for the onset of anxiety and impulse control disorders, where more substance use and mood-related disorders tend to take hold in later life (age 20-30).<sup>3,4</sup>

The 2017 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys (CAMH) carried out by The Office for National Statistics (ONS), found that 1 in 8 young people aged between 5 and 19 had a clinically diagnosed mental health problem.<sup>2</sup> The report shows an increase over time in the prevalence of mental disorders in young people, with emotional disorders being the most common. In 2013, UNICEF issued a report identifying the state of children's wellbeing in the 29 most developed countries, placing the UK only 16th overall. The UK consistently fell around the middle of the table for material, behavioural, and health and safety dimensions of wellbeing, and was ranked just 24th for educational wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Most concerning of all is that it is widely acknowledged that the full extent of the problem is not fully understood. For the first time, the CAMH report captures the prevalence of mental disorders in 2 to 4 year olds, and spans the transition into adulthood by covering 17 to 19 year olds, but is it clear that current UK data struggles to capture the scale of the problem.<sup>6</sup>

#### The most up-to-date statistics state that:

- 407 per 100,000 young people under 25 are like to be hospitalised for self-harm (2016/17 data).<sup>7</sup>
- Total admission episodes in England for eating disorders in the 0-25 age groups almost doubled from 3,584 in 2010/11 to 6,631 in 2016/17.<sup>8</sup>
- Over the past 10 years there has been a fivefold increase in the proportion of university students who disclose a mental health condition to their institution.<sup>9</sup>
- In adolescents (11-16), rates of mental health rise steeply with boys at 13% (increasing from 10% aged 5-10) and girls 10% (rising from 5% aged 5-10), this increases further to 23% age 18-20.<sup>10</sup>
- Boys are more likely to suffer from conduct disorders, hyperkinetic disorders and autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), while emotional problems are more prevalent in girls.<sup>2</sup>
- People with a mental health illness die on average 16-25 years sooner than the average population.<sup>11</sup>

→ This highlights the importance of the 10 to 20 age bracket, where so much is already happening in their lives,<sup>2</sup> such as:

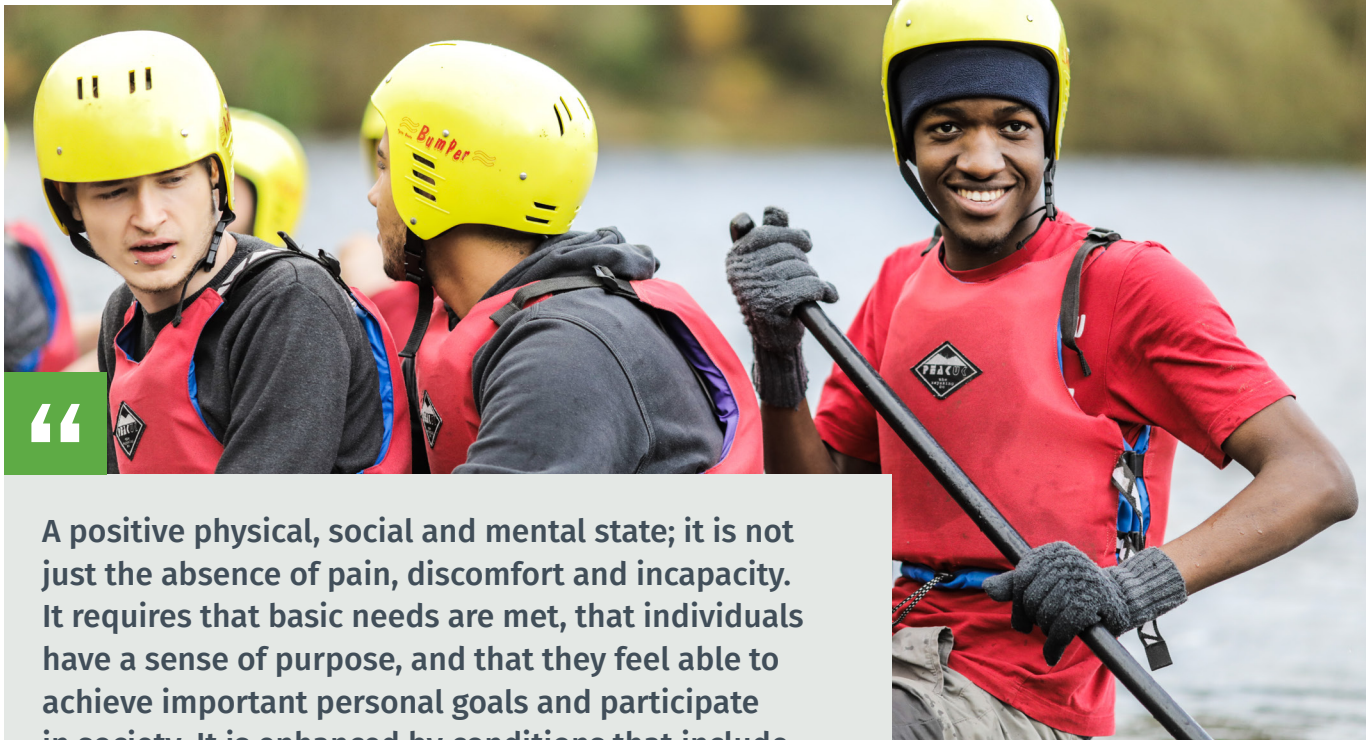
- Transitions between and within education, training and employment
- Exam pressures
- Puberty
- Sexual maturation and development, including sexual orientation
- Ever changing friendship groups
- Family changes (e.g. siblings, moving house, divorce, bereavement, etc.)

## 4.

**UNDERSTANDING HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

As the above demonstrates, the emotional health and wellbeing of children is just as important as their physical health. But how do we understand 'health' and 'wellbeing'? They are interlinked and multifaceted concepts, with The World Health Organisation (WHO) defining health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".<sup>12</sup>

**Defra describe wellbeing as:**



**“ A positive physical, social and mental state; it is not just the absence of pain, discomfort and incapacity. It requires that basic needs are met, that individuals have a sense of purpose, and that they feel able to achieve important personal goals and participate in society. It is enhanced by conditions that include supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, financial and personal security, rewarding employment, and a healthy and attractive environment.”<sup>13</sup>**

”

→ **These definitions indicate that there is clearly a symbiotic relationship between our physical and mental health.**

Public Health England (PHE) suggest that mental health illnesses are a leading cause of health-related disabilities in children and young people, and can have adverse and long-lasting effects.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, seeking ways to encourage all aspects of young people's wellbeing is essential to prevent poor mental health becoming a catalyst for problems later in life. However, there are number of barriers which can make promoting mental health and wellbeing a challenge in youth today.



## 5.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIFE STYLES AND CHALLENGES TO WELLBEING

Young people's lifestyles have changed dramatically over the past 40 years, compared to those of their parents and grandparents at their age.<sup>14</sup> With the development and advancement of computer games, smartphones, television services, the internet and a host of other technologies, young people are increasingly spending more time indoors than ever before.<sup>15,16</sup>

A recent government report has shown that up to three-quarters of young people spend less time outdoors than prison inmates, and that on an average day up to a fifth do not play outside at all.<sup>15,16</sup> But it's not just technology at the cause, a reduction in urban green spaces and parents growing fears about unsupervised and unstructured play are also having a damming effect.<sup>17,18,19</sup> Additionally, if parents and other influencing adults adopt inactive lifestyles, it is highly likely their children will too.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, research has shown that young people who are active in adolescence are likely to maintain an active lifestyle in adulthood.<sup>18</sup>

These broad changes in the way that young people are spending their leisure time pose a number of threats to wellbeing, most directly through decreased levels of physical activity and an increased use of social media.



The most recent research reports that:

- Young people are averaging **13 hours** of television a week.<sup>20</sup>
- On average young people are spending over **20 hours** a week online, predominately on social media sites.<sup>19</sup>
- It is estimated that 11-15 year olds spend around seven and half hours in front of screens daily.<sup>19</sup>
- Less than a quarter of young people regularly use a local natural space.<sup>14,19</sup>
- Less than 1 in 10 young people regularly spend time in wild places.<sup>14,19</sup>

## 5.1

### PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Falling levels of physical activity have a significant impact on wellbeing, linked to a host of major chronic diseases and interrelated mental health issues. The UK government recommends that in order to stay healthy, children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day. However, a large proportion of our young people are failing to meet these recommendations.<sup>20</sup> Currently, 77% of boys and 80% of girls fail to meet daily recommendations and do not get enough physical activity, with the numbers meeting physical activity guidelines falling between those aged 5-7 and 13-15 year olds.<sup>22</sup> Research suggests that activity levels have also fallen as young people move into adolescence, with 16% of those in the 16-24 age bracket participating in less than 30 minutes of activity each week. Correspondingly, childhood obesity prevalence in 2016/17 was 10% in reception year and 20% in Year 6.<sup>21</sup> Statistics show that if trends continue, by 2050 over half of all adults and around a quarter of young people will be clinically defined as obese.<sup>19</sup>



Countless other studies have demonstrated clear links between regular physical activities and reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, as well as increased levels of feel-good endorphins. The relationship between physical health and mental wellbeing clearly indicates that reduced levels of physical activity in young people, due to spending less time outdoors and more time in front of screens, is a challenge to promoting good mental health and wellbeing.

→ A recent survey by Ipsos MORI for Sport England found that, on average, the more active a person is, the more satisfied they are with their life.<sup>22</sup>

## 5.2

### SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

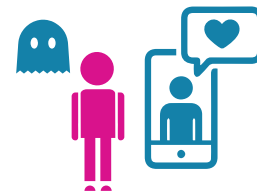
The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) 2017 report **#StatusOfMind** explored the effect of social media on young people's mental health and wellbeing. The report indicates that 91% of 16-24 year olds in the UK use the internet for social networking, and that social media use is linked with increased rates of anxiety, depression and poor sleep.<sup>23</sup> Social media addiction is thought to affect around 5% of young people,<sup>24</sup> and it is clear that the platforms that are supposed to help young people to connect with each other may actually be fuelling a mental health crisis.

Whilst the report acknowledges that using social media can have potential positive effects, the emerging evidence indicates that there are significant risks posed by social media use to young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Heavy users of social media – spending more than two hours per day on social networking sites such as a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram – are more likely to report poor mental health, including symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>22,24</sup> The constant pressures from unrealistic representations of reality can promote a 'compare and despair'<sup>26</sup> attitude in young people, increasing feelings of inadequacy, self-consciousness and low self-esteem.<sup>26,27</sup>

Additionally, increased social media use has a significant association with poor sleep quality in young people,<sup>28</sup> with 1 in 5 saying that they wake up during the night to check messages on social media, leading them to be 3x more likely to feel constantly tired than their friends.<sup>29</sup> Sleep and mental health are tightly linked, and sleep is particularly important for teens and young adults due to this being a key time for development.<sup>30</sup> Poor sleep is linked to a wide variety of physical and mental health conditions including obesity and depression.<sup>31,32</sup>

The use of social media is also directly linked to increases in cyberbullying, with 7 in 10 young people having experienced this, and 37% saying they are victims of cyberbullying on a regular basis.<sup>23</sup> Victims of bullying are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and changes in sleep and eating patterns – all of which can have significant long-term effects on their personal and social development.

These research statistics clearly implicate increased social media use in the rise of mental health issues in children and young people, by exposing them to situations which increase feelings of psychological distress. This presents a challenge for protecting the emotional wellbeing of young people.



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## 5.3

### INEQUALITIES IN WELLBEING

Research from the Wildlife Trust suggests that those that have the least access to nature also have the worst levels of physical health and mental wellbeing.<sup>43</sup> Natural England are striving for equality of access through their 'Outdoors for All' programme, observing that the opportunities to benefit from nature are not open to everyone.<sup>4</sup>

Coupled with this, there are challenges with the commissioning and provision of children's and adolescents mental health services, despite the knowledge that early intervention can avoid young people falling into crisis.<sup>11</sup> When you consider who is at risk of suffering from low mental health and wellbeing, it is pertinent that young people from the most deprived socio-economic groups are 1.2x more likely to report low life satisfaction than those from the least deprived group.<sup>11</sup> In the National Child Measurement Programme for England (NCMP) 2016/17, 26% of children aged 10-11 living in the most deprived areas were obese compared to 11% of those living in the least deprived areas.<sup>21</sup> This difference in obesity prevalence has increased by 7.5 percentage points over the last 10 years.



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**Young people from the most deprived socio-economic groups are 1.2x more likely to report low life satisfaction than those from the least deprived group.**



## 6.

## FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

Having identified some of the challenges to nurturing the positive mental health of the current population of young people, it is useful to focus on practical actions that can be taken to promote wellbeing. Evidence suggests that a small improvement in wellbeing can help to decrease mental health problems and allow people to flourish.

Commissioned by the UK Government, The New Economics Foundation (NEF) identified five evidence-based actions to improve wellbeing.<sup>32</sup> These are a set of public-health messages aimed at improving the population's mental health, and are widely drawn upon by local and national agencies, including the NHS.

The five actions that NeF recommend are:

1. CONNECT

2. BE ACTIVE

3. TAKE NOTICE

4. KEEP LEARNING

5. GIVE



PRACTICAL ACTIONS  
FOR NUTURING  
MENTAL HEALTH

## 6.1

## CONNECT

Social relationships, a sense of belonging, interaction and a support network are important for wellbeing, whilst social isolation and exclusion are associated with poorer health.<sup>33</sup> Evidence from the NEF research indicates that social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing,<sup>32</sup> and a primary social network (total number of close relatives and friends) of three or less predicts the probability of developing common mental health disorders.<sup>34</sup>





## 6.2

### BE ACTIVE

**Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.** Exercise slows age-related cognitive decline, and in the case of young people, it is often argued that 'action is central to cognition'.<sup>35</sup> Research examining the mediating factors in the effects of physical activity on wellbeing have focused on biophysical responses to exercise, such as an increase in perceived self-efficacy or sense of mastery. Others have focused on psychosocial mechanisms such as acting as a distraction from negative thoughts.<sup>32</sup>



## 6.3

### TAKE NOTICE

**Young people today have busy lives, and often fail to 'take notice' of their surroundings.** Having a heightened awareness, sometimes called 'mindfulness' – "Paying attention in the present moment to yourself, others and the world around you"<sup>36</sup> – can enhance self-understanding and allow young people to make positive choices based on their own values and motivations.<sup>37</sup> Self-determination theory suggests that an open awareness is particularly valuable for choosing behaviours that are consistent with one's needs and interests.<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, research into actions that aim to enhance wellbeing have similarly found that goals for behaviour change need to be aligned with personal values to be successful.<sup>32</sup>



→ **'Mindfulness'** - "Paying attention in the present moment to yourself, others and the world around you"<sup>37</sup>

## 6.4

### GIVE

**Evidence suggests that 'giving back' to others promotes wellbeing in all ages, and is particularly important to the development of social cognition in young people.** Additionally, feelings of happiness and life satisfaction have been strongly associated with active participation in social and community life.<sup>39</sup> The NEF research definition of mental wellbeing says that it is enhanced when an individual is able to achieve a sense of purpose in society. So, when young people engage in helping, sharing, giving and team-orientated behaviours, they are likely to experience an increase in sense of self-worth and positive feelings.<sup>40</sup> Further, giving and sharing has a longer-term association with wellbeing in that this type of behaviour has the potential to lead to stronger relationships in the future.

→ **When young people engage in helping, sharing, giving and team-orientated behaviours, they are likely to experience an increase in sense of self-worth and positive feelings.<sup>4</sup>**



## 6.5

### KEEP LEARNING

For children and young people, learning contributes to social and cognitive development, increases self-esteem and social interaction, and encourages participation in physical activity.<sup>41,42</sup> Goal-directed behaviour (the practice of setting goals, strongly related to learning) has also been shown to have a positive impact on an individual's wellbeing, especially when the decision to engage in learning is concordant with intrinsic goals and values.<sup>42</sup> Given that extrinsic pressures can reduce motivation to perform, it is important that messages around this action appeal to both formal and informal learning, which do not necessarily have instrumental ends (e.g. exams results and educational attainment).



## 7.

**NATURE, WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH**

**There is an increasing (and convincing) evidence base to show that exposure to the natural environment positively affects mental wellbeing. Research shows us that time spent outdoors increases levels of self-esteem and mood, both of which are widely known to be short and long-term determinants of mental health.<sup>43</sup>**

Importantly, these positive effects are found to come in to play across a variety of 'natural' settings (open countryside, fields, urban green space, remote wilderness, allotments and gardens), and through varying levels of engagement (from viewing nature to active participation).<sup>44</sup>

Specifically, three main pathways have been identified in the way that contact with the natural environment contributes to mental health:<sup>45</sup>

- 1. Directly through the restorative effect of nature; and in two indirect ways,**
- 2. Through providing opportunities for positive social contact, and**
- 3. Providing opportunities for physical activity.**

→ **Low self-esteem is associated with feelings of loneliness, alienation and social anxiety, and can lead to depression. While high levels of self-esteem are known to promote positive healthy behaviours i.e. healthy eating, taking part in physical activity and a reduced risk of suicide.**

**Research indicates that the key benefits of contact with nature relating to the pathways above, are:<sup>42,46</sup>**

- Reduced anxiety and stress
- Improvement of mood
- Improvement of self-esteem
- Improvement of psychological wellbeing
- Improvement inattention and concentration
- Reduction in symptoms of ADHD in children
- Increase in cognitive restoration
- Improvements to physical health
- Promotion of physical activity
- Reduction of crime rates
- Increased immunity
- Improved perception of general health
- Increased social contact



## 8.

## THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST'S CONTRIBUTION TO FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

Published evidence shows convincing links between contact with natural environments and health and wellbeing. At Outward Bound, we understand the deep connection between engagement with the outdoors and personal wellbeing. Our pedagogy is based on the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn, who had a vision for developing young people through the belief that *“we are all better than we know”*.

Although these ideas were developed in the early 1900s, they continue to resonate in some form today, not least in the way that the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework can be mapped onto them. We can see the framework already well developed in Hahn's ideas – through the notions of maintaining physical fitness, learning through challenge, and giving back through the concept of service. We have been promoting the actions now publicised by NEF through the philosophy of Kurt Hahn, since the very first Outward Bound School opened in 1941.

**We now have almost 80 years' experience of helping to develop young people socially and emotionally through the outdoors.** Our expertise lies in developing self-control, problem-solving, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-belief, self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-management, resilience and determination. Through our courses, we actively use the outdoors to facilitate and augment this learning. These vital life skills are proven essentials in preventing the onset and in combating diagnosed mental health problems.

For over 10 years we have continually evaluated and measured the lasting effects our courses have on participants. Data is assessed, independently verified and compiled triennially to form our Social Impact Report (SIR).<sup>47</sup> The case studies and statistics presented below can be found in our latest 2017 SIR, following results from young people attending our courses.

→ Our pedagogy is based on the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn, who had a vision for developing young people through the belief that *“we are all better than we know”*.

Hahn's view of meaningful education was underpinned by four key building blocks: :

1. Physical fitness
2. Challenging adventures
3. Development of self-reliance through projects
4. Development of compassion through service





8.1

## CONNECT – SOCIAL INTERACTION AND CONNECTION TO NATURE

Evidence suggests that the more trees and vegetation in an area, the more people use and spend time in it. Green spaces therefore give individuals an opportunity to meet new people, and engaging in activities in natural environments promotes social interaction.<sup>48</sup> In addition, residential outdoor experiences provide a tailored opportunity for developing and enhancing relationships through taking part in physical outdoor activities as a team. Sufferers of mental health conditions can often feel isolated and lonely, and feel like they have no one to turn to. That's why developing positive relationships with the network of people around them is so important.

As highlighted by the recent Learning Away research,<sup>49</sup> residential experiences are a perfect environment for developing and enhancing relationships between students, and their teachers, and Outward Bound is no exception to this. In a study with XP school Doncaster both teachers and students reported that their relationships between one another had improved considerably since their Outward Bound course.<sup>48</sup> Teachers stated that they had a far better understanding of their students, identifying that this was made possible by seeing pupils in a variety of challenging situations that applied varying demands at different stages. When discussing relationships with their peers, students expressed that they had developed deeper relationships that also gave a sense of greater synergy between one another, where they all seemed to share a long-term vision.

Increased connections through nature-based activities is not just limited to human-human relationships, but also concerns connections between humans and nature.<sup>42,46</sup> Increased connectedness to nature in itself is an important predictor of subjective wellbeing,<sup>51,52</sup> and in an age where we are increasingly disconnected from other people and from nature, contact with nature can therefore help to reconnect us both with others and with the outdoors. On their Outward Bound course participants are fully immersed into the environment, as everything we do is out in nature. This method, applied to every course, has left participants feeling more motivated to get outdoors, with **90%** of young people stating they feel motivated to act responsible towards the natural environment.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, **79%** felt motivated to discover natural spaces close to home; **84%** were motivated to encourage others to spend time in nature; and **64%** felt motivated to expand their knowledge and discover more about wildlife and the environment.



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**90%**

of young people stating they feel motivated to act responsible towards the natural environment.



## 8.2

**BE ACTIVE – NATURE AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

**Natural environments can play a key role in increasing physical activity levels in three contexts: physical activity as a result of nature nearby home; incidental activity as a result of nature-based activity; and active participation in activity within nature.<sup>42</sup>**

Individuals with easy access to nature are three times more likely to participate in physical activity and 40% less likely to become overweight or obese.<sup>53,54</sup> Open spaces such as parks can provide important places for people to be active, especially in urban areas,<sup>54</sup> and young people from rural areas with easy access to green space are more active than children from urban areas.<sup>55</sup>

Being active within nature is also often incidental to nature-based activities. For example, individuals may take part in gardening or conservation activities in order to engage with nature and socialise, but these activities will involve physical activity.<sup>44</sup> Individuals also use natural environments for the direct purpose of physical activity, often attracted to the psychological restoration they experience within them.<sup>54</sup> Through Outward Bound courses, participants will be physically active in nature via both of these mechanisms. This is embedded in our pedagogy, where immersion in the natural environment is a key tenant of our approach.<sup>47</sup> In all of our courses young people will undertake physically and mentally challenging tasks in the outdoors, and therefore an element of physical activity is integral to what we do. Natural environments can be used to encourage people to take part in physical activity and to gain the associated health and wellbeing benefits, and our courses seek to help our students discover the enjoyment of moving in the outdoors.

**Being active within nature is also often incidental to nature-based activities.**



→ **In all of our courses young people will undertake physically and mentally challenging tasks in the outdoors, and therefore an element of physical activity is integral to what we do. Our courses seek to help our students discover the enjoyment of moving in the outdoors.**

## 8.3

**TAKE NOTICE – NATURE AND MINDFULNESS**

**Mindfulness is said to aid wellbeing by enhancing self-understanding and reducing stress.<sup>32</sup> Research suggests that being in a natural environment and connecting with nature is associated with an increased awareness of experience, fostering mindfulness practices.<sup>56</sup>**

Outward Bound courses are specifically designed to develop young people's self-awareness and self-concept, by encouraging them to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings, their bodies, and their surroundings. Our own research suggests that there are significant improvements in self-management and self-control through participation in our courses. A person's ability to organise and manage their life is an essential life skill that can take years to master. This not only includes a person's ability to manage their time efficiently in order to tackle daily tasks but understanding the importance of planning and its application to

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all aspects of life, no matter how big or small. Goal setting is equally important as it enables people to maintain focus, while encouraging people to achieve. In terms of mental health, goal setting is especially important, as having something to strive towards can help to break a continuous and endless cycle, improve confidence, self-belief and self-worth. Post-course evaluations show that 69% of participants become more confident in achieving goals, 65% in setting targets and 57% in their ability to make decisions.<sup>47</sup>

The challenging nature of our courses and the beautiful but rugged mountain environments they operate in can often test young people's emotions. However, with the support of our skilled instructors, participants are taught how to manage these emotions, remain calm and find solutions to whatever challenge they are faced with. As a result, 71% of participants showed an increase in their ability to control their emotions and when re-surveyed 6 and 12 months later, these young people had retained these skills.<sup>47</sup>

The challenging nature of our courses and rugged mountain environments they operate in can often test young people's emotions.



**71%**

of participants showed an increase in their ability to control their emotions and when re-surveyed 6 and 12 months later.

### 8.4

## GIVE – NATURE, HELPING OTHERS AND TEAM WORK

'Giving back' and helping others can create social capital and reduce social isolation by connecting individuals. It can also help facilitate skill development and provide opportunities for self-discovery.<sup>57,58</sup> Further, research suggests that spending time in natural environments encourages generosity as individuals focus on others more,<sup>59</sup> and there is therefore a greater chance of developing satisfying relationships.

At Outward Bound, young people work together in groups of 12 for the duration of their course. They complete all their activities as a team, supporting and motivating each other, using each other's strengths and working on each other's weaknesses to ensure that everybody succeeds in their own Outward Bound journey. There is no 'I' in team, and through helping each other to tackle the physically and mentally challenging tasks that their instructors set, participants are encouraged to become more empathetic and mindful of others, strengthen relationships and build trust, and feel part of a shared enterprise working towards a common goal. These actions of 'giving' and helping others can stimulate a sense of vitality, self-esteem, ameliorating feelings of psychological distress and promoting mental wellbeing.



→ Spending time in natural environments encourages generosity as individuals focus on others more = a greater chance of developing satisfying relationships



**8.5**

## KEEP LEARNING – LEARNING THROUGH NATURE

Natural environments can provide young people with lots of opportunities for learning – through developing ecological knowledge; physical literacy and social competencies; and cognitive skills, through for example engagement in an environmentally-focused curriculum, which is suggested to achieve 72% greater curriculum attainment than classroom-based learning.<sup>60</sup> The natural environment can add value to everyday experiences in the classroom, also benefitting self-esteem, and social, personal and emotional development.<sup>61</sup>

We tailor our courses to use nature as both a specific learning tool, and an opportunity for wider learning experiences. According to the needs of the young people, opportunities are taken to actively learn about the environment, for example understanding the water cycle; the uses of diverse flora; or simply raise environmental awareness. Outward Bound instructors are not only extremely skilled in personal development, but also have an excellent knowledge of the outdoors.

And of course, learning about 'self' is at the core of every Outward Bound experience. Our mission is to develop participants to reach their full potential, and our research has revealed that young people have consistently reported improvements in their self-concept.

→ **Engagement in an environmentally-focused curriculum is suggested to achieve 72% greater curriculum attainment than classroom-based learning.<sup>60</sup>**

→ **OUR MISSION:**  
To develop participants to reach their full potential

**In a study with St. Mark's Academy, London,** Outward Bound participants' have displayed strong results in improving both their overall self-esteem and self-efficacy. Six months after their course young people showed a 97% improvement in their levels of self-esteem and an 86% improvement in their self-efficacy.<sup>47</sup> Interviews revealed that young people believe this to be a result of the challenging nature of Outward Bound. Throughout their course, they undertook both physically and mentally challenging activities, which they felt they had to believe in themselves to succeed. These activities helped them to learn their physical and mental strengths, weaknesses, and limits. The majority of young people felt the course had a lasting impact on them, which has increased their self-belief enabling them to take on challenges and overcome difficult situations, and has increased their attainment in school.

**Our research has revealed that young people have consistently reported improvements in their self-concept post attending an Outward Bound course**





9.

## THE OUTWARD BOUND LEARNING MODEL

To achieve the findings stated in the Social Impact Report, we use a combination of methods to embed and cement learning gained from our courses. First and foremost, all of our centres are based in some of the last truly wild and natural environments in the UK; Snowdonia National Park, the Lake District National Park and the Scottish Highlands. These environments are some of the most difficult, rugged and challenging in the British Isles, while remaining some of the most beautiful – they are excellent spaces to apply real-world learning.

During Outward Bound courses, our instructors use various learning models to help young people develop positive effective behaviours and attitudes that can be applied to challenges faced during and beyond their course. Learning models such as Carol Dweck's Mindset theory, Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and comfort zones, as well as a host of other leadership and experiential learning models, help challenge the way young people think, feel and act towards opportunities and experiences, especially if they initially generate negative feelings. When these learning theories are applied to real-world situations that carry a level of consequence, the learning is extremely powerful.

→ During Outward Bound courses, our instructors use various learning models to help young people develop positive effective behaviours and attitudes that can be applied to challenges faced during and beyond their course.

Young people apply these models throughout their course, while participating in multiple outdoor sports and challenges. Due to our centre surroundings, we only deliver authentic adventurous experiences at real venues, practising activities and challenges in the environments they were intended for. Our unique residential locations allow us to really tailor courses and the level of challenge to young people, while being able to fully immerse them into a natural, wild environment that's completely different from their home surroundings. This provides an additional learning experience – through the contrast between large towns, cities or other industrialised/urban areas.

→ **We only deliver authentic adventurous experiences at real venues, practising activities and challenges in the environments they were intended for.**

**Our remote venues allow us to fully immerse young people in natural wild environments completely different to their home surroundings. This provides additional learning and experience.**



An essential part of all courses is allowing our participants to absorb their experience and reflect on all that has been learnt and achieved. This is done at several key stages throughout the course to aid with the continual learning and development process. This enables our instructors to facilitate, individualise and differentiate the learning for each student, every day, further enhancing the process.



The learning gained during each day is continually linked back to real-world situations or scenarios from their home, school and work environments. This is a key aspect of an Outward Bound course – being able to make those links and help young people understand how and where these skills can be applied in their normal lives.



## 10.

**CONCLUSION**

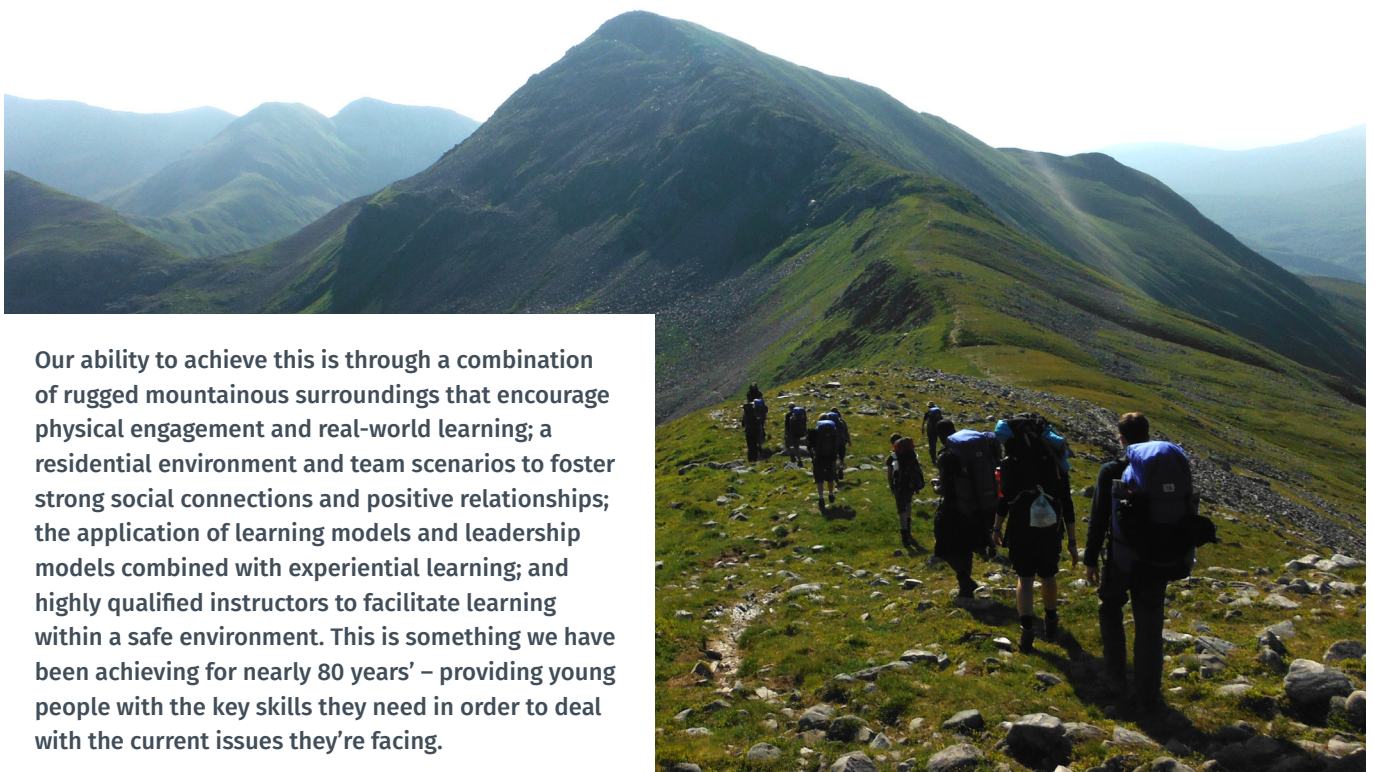
Young people's mental health is a significant issue worldwide and although concerns are growing there is still a lack of current, consistent and coherent data on the problem. The prevalence of mental health issues in young people is on the rise, attributed to their rapidly changing lives, which involves day-to-day practices evermore based in a virtual, technologically advanced indoor world. This new world is very much removed from the natural outdoor world – one that is vital to young people's development and wellbeing.

NEF have identified five evidence-based actions to improve wellbeing: connect; be active; take notice; give; and keep learning. These actions present a useful framework to help promote the positive mental health and wellbeing of our young people. In addition, spending time in the outdoors is known to have positive effects on people's physical and mental wellbeing, and at Outward Bound we have been spreading this message since our foundation in 1941. We believe that using nature to facilitate these five wellbeing actions maximises their impact.

Outward Bound courses are specifically designed to develop young people in a holistic way, enhancing their wellbeing by providing them with experiences now promoted through the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework.

→ The New Economics Foundation (NEF) have identified five evidence-based actions to improve wellbeing: **connect; be active; take notice; give; and keep learning.**

**We believe that using nature to facilitate these five wellbeing actions maximises their impact and have designed and delivered courses that achieve this since 1941.**



Our ability to achieve this is through a combination of rugged mountainous surroundings that encourage physical engagement and real-world learning; a residential environment and team scenarios to foster strong social connections and positive relationships; the application of learning models and leadership models combined with experiential learning; and highly qualified instructors to facilitate learning within a safe environment. This is something we have been achieving for nearly 80 years' – providing young people with the key skills they need in order to deal with the current issues they're facing.



## 11.

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