

THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST REPORT

THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST: RECONNECTING
RELATIONSHIPS, REAWAKENING MINDS AND RESTORING
CONFIDENCE

APRIL 2022



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people in Scotland and across the UK have faced unprecedented disruption to their lives during the Covid-19 pandemic. The effect of this on their wellbeing is deeply concerning and, if left to continue, is likely to negatively impact their future life chances. Our research with headteachers, teachers and young people paints a bleak picture of what many young people have experienced over the past two years but also illustrates the positive and life-affirming experiences that Outward Bound offers.

The social and emotional impact of continued disruption to young people's education, social connections and opportunities is starkly evident. Many continue to be socially **disconnected**, **emotionally fragile** and **lacking the confidence, inspiration** and **resilience** they need to regain feelings of control and purpose in their lives. If left to continue, their social disengagement, low confidence and the decline in their mental health are likely to develop into longer-term disorders, trauma and/or other chronic health issues. This is likely to manifest at a societal level in perpetuating cycles of disadvantage, lower educational outcomes, higher unemployment rates, low aspirations and, ultimately, poorer wellbeing.

With a pressing need and stronger-than-ever desire to support young people, Outward Bound re-opened its centres and began delivering residential again in July 2021. This report explores the significance of some of the broader and often overlooked elements of an Outward Bound residential and highlights how the whole experience combined plays a vital role in helping young people develop their skills and behaviours.

During a residential, the **unfamiliarity** of the surroundings, **exposure to different people** and **immersion in nature** create a **unique experience of adventure** that captures young people's **attention** and **nurtures** their **curiosity** and **independence**. In a new environment, they are free to **step away from the social labels** that might define them at school and limit their belief in themselves. When combined with **freedom, fun** and **valuable social time** with others, the experience enables young people to feel a **sense of belonging and acceptance**. Working through physical, emotional and social challenges demonstrates to young people how **persevering through fears and discomfort** can be a **positive opportunity** from which to learn and on which to **reflect**. The **resilience, self-awareness and confidence** that results leads to **new perspectives, possibilities** and opportunities.

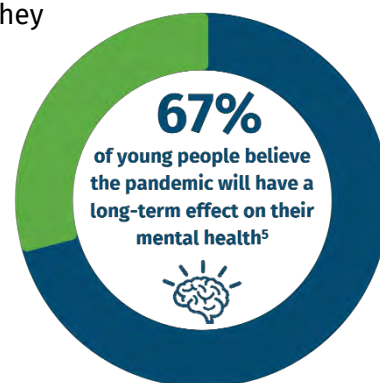
Young people leave Outward Bound feeling **accepted, more sure of themselves** and with a more **positive mindset**. Their horizons are broadened, they are more confident that their **future is something they can influence** and are less fearful of challenges: they are able to make changes to strengthen their wellbeing and increase the chance of them flourishing.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people have faced unprecedented disruption to their lives during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our research with headteachers, teachers and young people paints a bleak picture of what many young people have experienced over the past two years. The state of their wellbeing now and the resulting future trajectory on which this sets them is deeply concerning.

LONELINESS, FEAR AND LOSS: TWO YEARS OF LIFE ON HOLD

It is widely recognised that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic¹. Extended and repeated periods of lockdown have **disrupted their education, support systems and relationships, as well as access to basic needs and material items**, all of which have significantly impacted the sense of control they feel they have over their lives. School and college closures² have led to fragmented social networks and heightened anxiety over academic and employment prospects^{3,2}. But perhaps more worryingly, they have **missed out on opportunities to develop attitudes and skills** that are central to their social and emotional development. Combined, these experiences have led to a significant deterioration of their social, physical and mental^{2,4,5} wellbeing.



An increase in screen time, confinement at home and the closure of ‘safe places’ such as schools have led to a build-up of **negative emotions**⁴, such as **fear, loneliness, stress and anxiety**. This has been shown to be particularly true for females, individuals from BAME backgrounds, those from poorer households and for those living in inner-city areas. On the whole, young people now feel uncertain, fearful and isolated⁶.

For many young people, school provides a stable network of caring and supportive adults, and their closure for prolonged periods left many vulnerable young people alone in sometimes **toxic situations**. Teachers found the normal referral pathways and external support services to be overwhelmed, leaving them increasingly concerned for the young people in their charge.

TWO THIRDS of 16 to 29-year-olds who are worried about the impact of Covid-19 on their lives were concerned about the impact on their wellbeing and futures⁶



“

In the last 12 months my anxiety got worse. I felt more alone than I ever have. [With online learning] I didn't really see the point because it was never ending. I felt like I couldn't deal with it. I felt like everyone else seemed to be doing ok and it was only me that couldn't do it.

David, 16

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We had pupils for whom [during lockdown] it became clear that they needed their friends, and that their friends were their support mechanism; [support they] may not have [had] at home or in their local communities. [...] It really shows the importance of a school or any institution that works with young people and that they need the support, and they need it no matter how 'out there' and outgoing they are as a person. When the chips are down, they [should] always have someone there for them and who can talk to them.

Stuart Caddell, Deputy Head Teacher, Gairloch High School



Many young people with little or no support at home or who were already struggling with low self-esteem found managing the challenges of learning online too much. **Afraid to ask for help, they became increasingly anxious, isolated and alone in their struggles, and simply switched off and disengaged** – falling further behind academically and becoming increasingly distant from their social networks.



Ash's home life is not too good. He really suffered during lockdown; it's mum and him, and his mum got a new partner and had a baby and all sorts of [difficulties] were going on there. [If you think about it], for kids like Ash, who [had poor] social development and interpersonal skills, [he was then effectively] put in a room [learning from home]. And even though he was having contact from his personal tutor, Ash shrank into his 'cell'. Home was not a positive environment. For some of our children, it was horrendous, the environment they were in.

Jon Clarke, Shadow Headteacher/Senior Leadership Team, Walsall Academy, West Midlands



As young people have returned to classrooms, teachers have noticed a **sharp decline in young people's interpersonal skills**, their ability to self-regulate, their social confidence and their ability to communicate effectively and work through social challenges. As a result, they have described having to **reset their own expectations of their pupils**, both in terms of their academic ability and what they can expect of them socially. They report that primary-age children are **more anxious about leaving their parents** and secondary school pupils are showing **little belief in their capabilities**. For pupils in pivotal exam years, teachers have noticed a **decline in their belief in their capabilities**, their **confidence** and their **ability to work through challenging** times. This all **impacts on their resilience, their independence** and ultimately their future aspirations.

“

Our community was disproportionately affected by Covid and bereavements in their families – so [there's] fear, real fear. It's also [a case of] big families all living under one roof, very cramped, maybe with grandparents, maybe with relatives. It became, I guess, like a 'zero-risk. [There was] total fear of stepping outside. So, no going to the shops, let alone playing, let alone going into green spaces, which are few and far between here. [...] Loads of kids didn't step outside for an insanely long time.

Anna Bartlett, Head of House and Associate Senior Leader, Mulberry Academy, Central London

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Whatever their experience during lockdown, young people's communities and social circles have changed. Returning to school, to youth groups or stepping back into their wider communities continues to be a daunting prospect for many who feel they have lost connections with peers⁸, and as a result, a **loss of self-identity, belonging and security**. In a report commissioned by the Scottish Government, young people highlighted a need for increased opportunities to socialise with their peers, post-pandemic⁹.

60%

of 16 to 29-year-olds feel concerned about the impact of lockdown on friendships⁷



“

I'm a very social person, I couldn't meet up with friends, I couldn't meet new people, I think that was the biggest thing that affected me [during lockdown], just the inability to meet up with big groups of friends and [socialise].

Abdul, 21, speaking in summer 2021, four years after his Outward Bound course in 2017

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LONG-TERM RISKS TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S FUTURE LIFE CHANCES

We don't yet know what the true extent of the damage on young people's wellbeing will be. But we do know that if left to continue, feelings of overwhelm, anxiety and depression will perpetuate in affecting young people's well-being and **may develop into longer-term disorders, trauma and/or other chronic mental health issues**¹⁰. Individuals with poor mental health are at greater risk from **social exclusion**¹¹, and are less likely to achieve **higher educational**¹² and **employment outcomes**¹³.

In a 2020 report by the Prince's Trust, **44% of 16 to 25-year-olds said their aspirations for the future are now lower** and some 41% of young people (50% of those from poorer backgrounds) stated that their future goals now felt 'impossible to achieve'¹⁴, highlighting anxieties about the job market, unemployment and fewer opportunities.

60% of 13 to 25-year-olds believe their generation will be permanently disadvantaged by the pandemic, citing disruption to their education and reduced job opportunities as key factors¹³



Experiencing disruption and unemployment early on in a career is especially damaging to a young person's mental wellbeing¹⁵ and many young people at important transition points in their lives have described **distress and disappointment**¹⁵ resulting from reduced contact with supportive teachers and worries about completing coursework and grades. The Resolution Foundation reported that 18-24 was the age group most likely to have experienced extended worklessness (having been unemployed, fully furloughed or self-employed without work for three months or more) and highlight the long-term negative impact this is likely to have on their employment and pay prospects into the future¹⁶. The 'Lockdown Lowdown 3' report indicated that post-pandemic, **37% of young people in Scotland are still not feeling confident about finding a job or training opportunity when they leave education**⁹.

Identifying the potential long-term consequences on mental health and career prospects helps us to be more aware of young people's needs in the immediate term: coping skills and resilience to encourage them to recognise their own strengths and skills and support them in being able to adapt to ever-changing situations¹⁵.

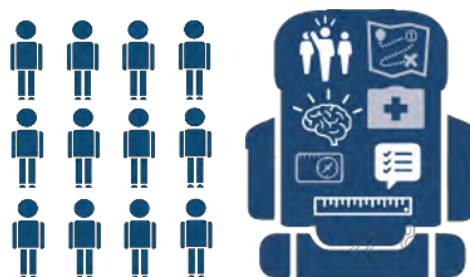
The Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis and climate change are just a few examples of the global crises that face our planet today. Such issues are adding to feelings of anxiety, concern and fear felt by young people. Now, more than ever, they require support to develop the skills, attitudes and behaviours to enable them to deal with uncertainty.

REBUILDING CURIOSITY, SOCIAL CONFIDENCE AND ASPIRATION THROUGH AN OUTWARD BOUND RESIDENTIAL

Between August 2020 and July 2021, during the enforced closure of our residential centres, we worked with **more than 13,000 young people in a non-residential capacity, including almost 4,000 from Scotland**, by providing 'In-school adventures' and 'Adventure days'. These programmes focused on **rebuilding social connections** and **other skills** lost over lockdown, and it's clear from the evaluations we carried out that these programmes made a significant positive impact on the wellbeing of young people in the short-term.

In July 2021, we were able to re-open our residential centres, and between 1st July 2021 and 31st July 2022, we expect to work with **12,748 young people** from **200 schools** across the UK **including almost 2,000 young people from 72 schools in Scotland**ⁱ – supporting them as they rebuild social and emotional skills. The purpose of this report is to highlight how an Outward Bound residential plays a vital role in helping young people develop their skills and behaviours as they recover from the pandemic.

12,478 young people



Evaluation of the importance of Outward Bound residential post-pandemic

Between November 2021 and March 2022, we carried out research with sixteen schools to deepen our understanding of how young people had been impacted by the pandemic and to identify the elements of an Outward Bound residential that are now key in supporting them into the future. Fifteen interviews were carried out with headteachers or lead coordinators for the school's Outward Bound trip, focusing on key aspects of an Outward Bound course that have recently been identified through research¹⁷ as making the experience as impactful as possible. These include the contrast in geography compared to a young people's norm, the immersive nature of the course and the social side of the residential.

534 young people from 10 primary and secondary schools also completed a surveyⁱⁱ at the end of their course, on topics ranging from relationships and personal skills to nature connection. The sample was representative of the variety of backgrounds of young people we work with, including those from inner-city/urban and rural schools across the UK including London, the East Midlands, the North of England and Scotland. Young people's names have been changed to protect their anonymity. School staff names, job titles and school names have been quoted where we have permission to do so.

ⁱ Due to Scottish Government and Local Authority restrictions, the number of young people we were able to work with in Scotland between Autumn /Winter 2021/22 was limited.

ⁱⁱ A retrospective pre/post questionnaire format was used. This asks participants at the end of their course to provide a score for their skills both at the start and end of the course. This may give a more accurate measure of personal growth experienced during the course.

KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation has clearly highlighted both the significance of a residential experience for young people before the pandemic, and the even greater significance that it carries now. Interviews with teachers and headteachers revealed a wide range of ways in which young people benefit from the residential experience, and how this varies depending on young people's individual circumstances – whether personal challenges they face, the type of area they live in or their family situation.

For young people living in deprived urban or inner-city areas, with few opportunities to connect with nature, an Outward Bound course represents an opportunity for **adventure** in new, **inspiring surroundings**. The **whole residential** experience is significant – from the distance young people travel to reach the Outward Bound centre, to the **wild and unfamiliar environments** in which our centres are located. The **contrast** of the surroundings, **exposure to different people** and **immersion in nature** captures young people's **attention** and nurtures their **curiosity** and **independence**.

It's clear that the residential experience plays a key role in **broadening their horizons** and widening their **understanding of the world**, while helping them to re-build vital skills and build **stronger connections** with others. In a new environment, they are free to **step away from the social labels** that might define them at school and limit their belief in themselves. When combined with **freedom, fun** and **valuable social time** with others, the experience enables young people to feel a **sense of belonging and acceptance**.

Working through physical, emotional and social challenges demonstrates to young people how **persevering through fears and discomfort** can be a **positive opportunity** from which to learn and on which to **reflect**. The **resilience, self-awareness and confidence** that results leads to **new perspectives, possibilities** and opportunities.

DISTANCE FROM HOME IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT: INSTILLING CURIOSITY, BROADENING HORIZONS & BUILDING INDEPENDENCE

It's clear that the unique blend of adventure with unfamiliar surroundings that are far away from home makes an Outward Bound programme a **significant** and **highly memorable experience**. **It's one that captures young people's attention, broadens their horizons** and encourages new mindsets and behaviours to develop.

Instilling curiosity through adventure

Interviews with teachers and headteachers highlighted how important it is that the environment at Outward Bound contrasts significantly with what young people experience in their daily lives. This immediately **captures their attention** and provokes feelings of **awe** and **wonder**. The surroundings alone **inspire** young people and **feed their innate curiosity**.

For young people in inner-city areas, being in such vast, wild surroundings instantly gives them a feeling of adventure. Unusual experiences include getting caught in a torrential

downpour or heavy snow on top of a mountain, or night-time activities that are navigated in complete darkness, engaging all the senses. Similarly, visiting unique places during their course that few people get to visit, or spaces only previously seen on TV or read about in books, adds to the sense of adventure.



It's outdoor experiences that youngsters tell me about when they come back [from Outward Bound]. Whether it's canoeing at night and being able to reach up and touch the stars, or the stillness -it's that. Where we are, 67% of our youngsters stay in the most deprived areas in Scotland and so getting them out and giving them those experiences away from their local environment for many youngsters is their first time they've experienced something like that – it's not something they would normally do with their families.

John Robertson, Headteacher, Calderhead High School, North Lanarkshire

97%

of young people found their Outward Bound course adventurous (N=174)



Exposing their pupils to new and unfamiliar surroundings while pushing them out of their comfort zones to try new activities encourages **different behaviours** and **mindsets**. Activities that encourage them to **face their fears**, or that are initially perceived as being extreme or as having an element of risk or danger, are seen as very adventurous. Experiences that contrast with their norm, that require them to **step outside their comfort zones** or reach distant **places that they have had to work hard to get to**, make the experience a very adventurous one.



One of our [pupils] is quite challenging, and he really shone the whole of the week in all activities, he obviously loved being there. There was no back-chat, there was no nonsense which you would often get because he was able to learn [in a] way that he preferred. [...] [Before the course] his attendance was 50% but he managed the whole week with us [at Outward Bound]. [In the week following the course], he has only had one day where he's not attended, that's a huge difference. The pattern of the regular bedtime, the regular getting up time has I think helped him and given him a boost back home.

Tracey Fraser-Lee, Headteacher, Beauly Primary School, Inverness



As they step out into unknown environments, complete activities they previously thought themselves incapable of, their mental toughness and ability to take on and overcome challenges improves. Young people often describe how being **self-sufficient** – for example through carrying equipment they need, navigating via maps, **working as a team** and **making use of the natural resources** around them – also brings alive the feeling of adventure.

Broadening horizons

It is not only the environment that provides contrast for young people. While on an Outward Bound residential, they come into **contact with people from a range of backgrounds**. The instructor who works with them for the duration of their course not only provides technical expertise but also brings a **fresh life experience, viewpoint and values**. Teachers describe the value of this to young people who, particularly following lockdown, have had very little exposure to people outside of their immediate social circle. Teachers tell us how having contact with people from diverse walks of life, combined with the activities and the environment, is key in exposing young people to **new possibilities**.



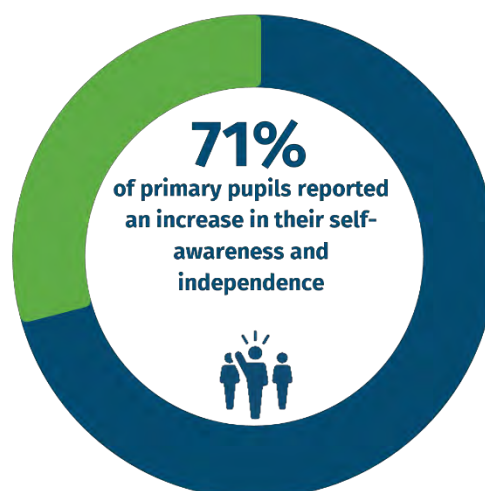
When they come back from Outward Bound, they see more possibilities about career choices they could make, or [question] why they could not go and do something. They've gone [to Outward Bound] and they've done [different activities], so, for example, why could [they] not go to university? Other people on the course [had been] to university so why could [they] not? I think it's that idea of opening up possibilities for youngsters within their own minds.

John Robertson, Headteacher, Calderhead High School, North Lanarkshire



Re-building independence

For many, travelling to an Outward Bound centre will be the first significant period of **time spent away from home**. Teachers describe how young people, particularly younger pupils or those in more affluent areas, returned from lockdowns with a heightened dependence on adults, to do things and to think for them. At Outward Bound, young people **think for themselves**, take on **responsibility** and make decisions. In doing so, they realise their own capabilities and build self-confidence and independence.



Being trusted to safely lead their team, look after kit or paddle their own canoe provides young people with a **feeling of control**, which is important for developing independence, responsibility and agency. Each of these things is fundamental in rebuilding the confidence of young people, particularly those who have had a lot done for them during lockdowns. **71% of primary pupilsⁱⁱⁱ reported an overall increase in their self-awareness and independence at the end of their Outward Bound course.** Over 70% of primary pupils agreed they had **done things they thought they couldn't do^{iv}**. They also found they were **able to do things on their own^v and look after themselves^{vi}**.

At the end of their course
78%
of primary pupils had
learned to look after
themselves

At the end of their course
76%
of primary pupils had
achieved things they
thought they couldn't do

At the end of their course
71%
of primary pupils had
found they could do
things on their own



“

[During] the first two days when they've got to dress themselves, get the kit organised and make sure things go back, get checked off, those things, I think, are quite a difficult thing for them to do. Because they're not independent, everything is done for them at home for the large majority. So that is a real thing [they learn] and they have no choice – if you have to do it yourself, you'll get on with it.

Joanne Ramsbottom, Headteacher, Daisyfield Primary School, Blackburn

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ⁱⁱⁱN = 49

^{iv}N=49

^vN=48

^{vi}N=50

SHARED EXPERIENCES: FEELING SAFE & ACCEPTED, REBUILDING SOCIAL CONFIDENCE & FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Both interviews with teachers and feedback from young people show that travelling to an Outward Bound centre gives young people an opportunity to **escape social labels** that they may be given at school according to their academic ability, appearance or popularity. They have a break from things that define them either at home or school and this enables them to **build a new identity**.

Living together and working through activities together such as rock climbing, gorge scrambling and canoeing in an environment that is new to all of them allows young people to **see their peers in a different light**. Social barriers are broken down, vulnerability and honesty are accepted and encouraged, and **people's differences take on a new value and importance**. Through these interactions, young people are challenged about how they view themselves, something that is key in developing their social awareness and acceptance of others.

Some **89% of young people^{vii} reported an improvement in their interpersonal** skills during the course, including their **confidence in meeting new people, working with others** and in **putting forward their ideas**.



Pupils are quite set in their opinions of each other. [At Outward Bound], spending time together allowed them to see different sides to each other. People who are often a bit silly and act out were working really well with people who they don't usually work with. [They were] giving each other time and thinking 'yeah they actually have got really great skills in this environment' -that's important - 'in this environment'. In the classroom you don't see everyone in the best light, and it gave people an opportunity to see a different side to each other.

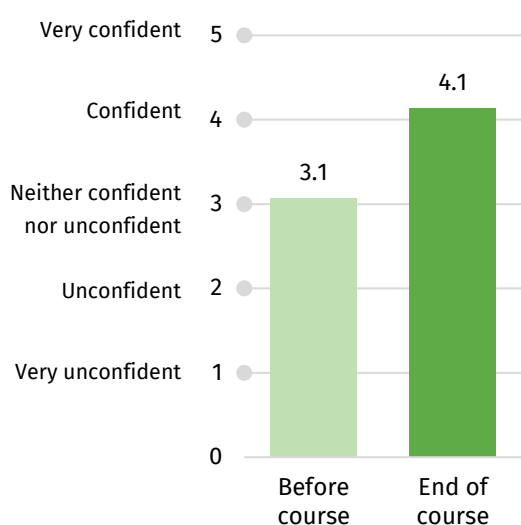
Jonathon Marks, Design and Technology Teacher, Tobermory High School, Isle of Mull



^{vii}N=254

The **less formal, more free learning environment** on an Outward Bound residential allows young people greater **freedom to interact** with one another and with their teachers. They act differently and become **more aware of each other's skills** and abilities. This **fosters respect, appreciation** and **trust**, all of which are crucial in nurturing a **sense of belonging** and security within their 'community'. Completing physical challenges with teammates gives them the opportunity to attempt new things, to make mistakes and to overcome conflict in a safe environment. They learn to **support and encourage** one another, which builds confidence and an awareness of their own skills and abilities, **strengthening their self-identity**.

At the end of their course, young people reported an improvement in their interpersonal skills – meeting and working with new people and putting forward ideas when working in a team (Figure 1).



83%

of young people reported an increase in the extent to which they felt supported by, and able to rely on, their friends at the end of their course (N=255)



Figure 1: Young people reported an improvement in their interpersonal skills. Confidence was indicated using a five-point rating scale where a higher score indicates a higher level of confidence (N=254).

“

[We have] quite a few students at the moment from Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania, and actually, a lot of students have come from rural settings there. So for them Outward Bound is an opportunity to really thrive because they're [thinking]: 'I used to [be outdoors] all the time and but actually, you've never really spoken to me in school because maybe my English isn't as good as it could be, but actually I can really help you on this because I know exactly how to hike up this mountain or I know exactly how to get across this rope'. And that's crucial – it's the getting rid of the preconceptions that we have of each other because we're in a different environment.

Jo Doyle, Deputy Headteacher, Rokeby School, East London



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'Downtime' on a residential provides unstructured time in which young people can process the day's activities. This may be on the minibus travelling back to the centre from activities, playing pool in the games room, or relaxing in their dorms in the evening. This social time, away from adults, is an opportunity to **explore new relationships** and **re-establish bonds** that have been weakened by long periods of separation through lockdown. While there is a need for young people to regain structure in their lives, it is also vital for their social wellbeing that they are given **unstructured time with friends to rebuild relationships**.



“

[My favourite shared moment] was being in the dorms and getting to know each other a lot more. Some of my friends are very funny so we ended up laughing and being happy a lot. [...] I started to know them more in four days than the rest of my life.

Monica, 13, St. Aidan's High School, Harrogate

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Back in the classroom, teachers notice improvements in young people's interpersonal skills and attitudes. They comment on **increased maturity, a sense of heightened respect for,** and **support** towards, others. Young people who were on the verge of disengagement due to turbulent home situations or who experience social isolation have regained a **feeling of belonging** and being cared for.

Their shared experiences at Outward Bound provide them with a new connection, not only with the immediate peers with whom they have shared the experience, but with other year groups and alumni. Long-standing visitors to Outward Bound describe it as being akin to a 'rite of passage' or part of a **collective memory** for the school community.

“

When we went for the jog and dip on the first day it was absolutely freezing and when [we] got out it was bitterly cold – things like that you can have a laugh over and it means [the pupils] have a bit more in common because they've all done it. [Back at school] with other year groups it's something they have in common. In their [own] year group it's important, but when it's something you can share with other year groups they share that value – it's like being part of [the school] tradition.

Jonathon Marks, Design and Technology Teacher, Tobermory High School, Isle of Mull



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TACKLING & OVERCOMING CHALLENGE: DEVELOPING SKILLS & RAISING ASPIRATIONS

In a world that feels uncertain and changing, it is vital that young people are adaptable and ready to embrace change. Without these skills and attitudes, they are more likely to experience overwhelm, anxiety and stress when faced with new or changing situations. And they are at greater risk of being caught up in cycles of low aspiration, which can lead to poor employment prospects and can damage their wellbeing.

An Outward Bound residential provides young people with a **new awareness of themselves** and the possibilities open to them. They leave Outward Bound with **more resilience, increased confidence** and with a more **flexible outlook** on life. They are **less intimidated by the unknown** and are **more open to difference**. In the future they are less likely to shy away from risk and discomfort and are more likely to approach situations with an **open mind, and with willingness and positivity**.

Young people report leaving their course with a **new appreciation of their capabilities**, knowing they are able to cope in emotionally and physically challenging situations (Figure 2). Being more aware of, and more trusting in, their own capabilities is key to strengthening their self-confidence and overall mental wellbeing.

79%  **of young people reported an increase in their ability to cope in emotionally challenging situations at the end of their Outward Bound course (N=179)** 

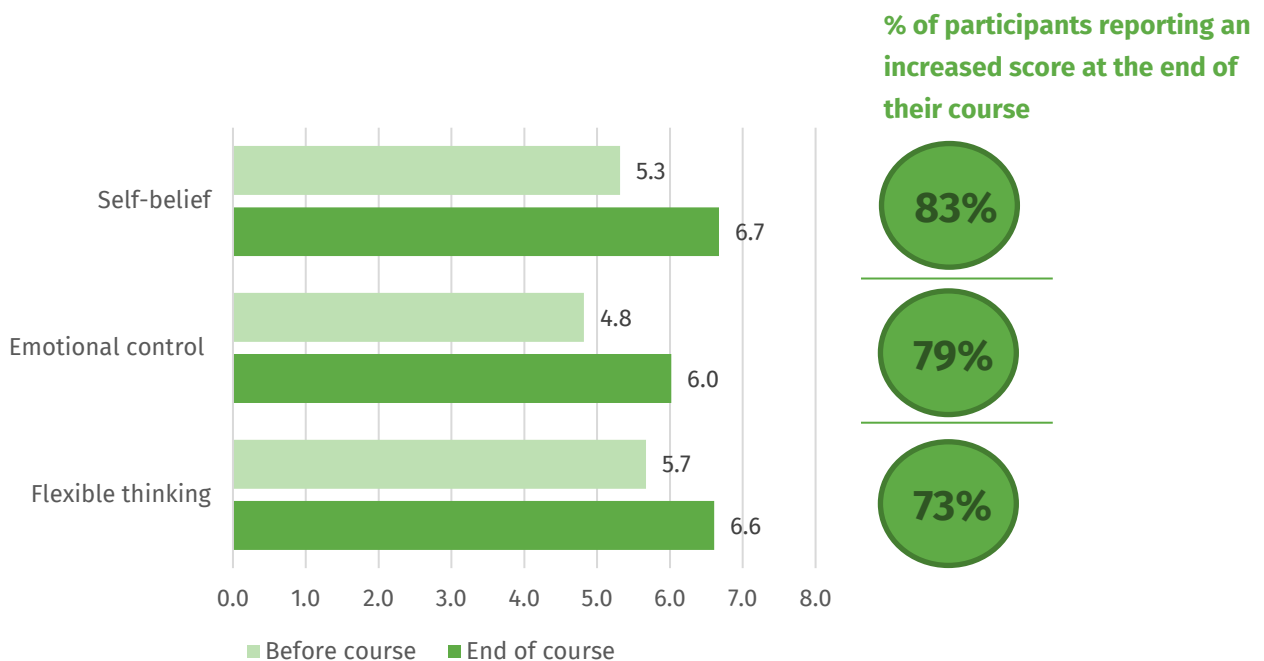


Figure 2: Young people leave their course knowing they are able to cope in emotionally and physically challenging situations. Participant average scores before and after the course. N = 179. Responses were indicated on an 8-point scale from 1 = False, not like me to 8 = True, like me. Participants were asked to give a retrospective pre-course rating.



The feedback [one pupil] got from Outward Bound and the challenges that he overcame made a real difference for him [back] in school. He is now set on becoming an English teacher. That was not something he talked about before Outward Bound, [...] Nobody in his family will have gone to university ever – even in his extended family – and so for him to have a clear path of how he was going to go to university, how he would then become an English teacher I think was a direct result of going [to Outward Bound], and [his] confidence.





John Robertson, Headteacher, Calderhead High School, North Lanarkshire



Reflection forms an integral part of an Outward Bound course and is instrumental in developing young people’s resilience. Regularly looking back, **reflecting on achievements** and **remembering the feelings of accomplishment** and success **reinforces the progress** they have made. Their image of what they can and can’t do then shifts over time and as their comfort zone stretches to encompass a wider range of experiences, their resilience develops. **83% of young people** reported an **improvement in their self-belief** and **77%^{viii} reported an increase in their overall resilience**. This was also reflected in staff feedback (Table 1).

The emotional element of the residential is key in ensuring it **holds their focus** and **remains memorable** for them¹⁸¹⁹²⁰. Their experiences provide important **reference points** that can be revisited in the future. Back at school, **teachers revisit experiences** from Outward Bound with pupils to **transfer the learning** and to **remind young people of their capabilities** or of times when they felt a sense of control or confidence. They also talk about the value of young people being able to use their Outward Bound experience as a reference point during interviews and in demonstrating skills and experience on their CVs. As a result of missed experiences during the pandemic, young people lack these important reference points – reminders of what they can achieve, or of positive experiences that evoked particular feelings.

Table 1: Feedback from accompanying staff members at the end of the course. Percentages represent the staff in agreement with the statement.

100% 	100% 	93% 	89% 
Young people realised they are capable of more than they thought (N=15)	Young people’s confidence has increased (N=23)	Young people will be more likely to persevere when they encounter difficulties in the future (N=13)	Young people are more willing to take on challenges (N=9)

^{viii}N = 179



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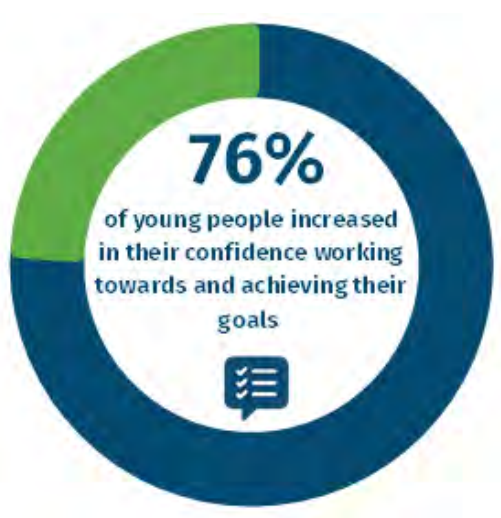
Outward Bound taught me that just sitting and thinking on things is a great way to deal with your emotions. Before that I didn't really know how to deal with my emotions, I'd just let them build up. That was one of the ways I developed my resilience: when life throws you hard things, you just take a step back and just sit and think about it.

Charlene, 20, speaking in 2021, four years after her Outward Bound course in 2017

”

Outward Bound gives young people **physical and emotional space**. It nurtures a connection to their surrounding environment and **allows them to re-frame how they think about themselves**. They leave feeling more capable, more motivated and more in control of their futures.

They are also encouraged to set and work towards goals on their course, which affirms their progress and capability. At the end of their course, **76% young people^{ix} reported increased confidence in working towards and achieving their goals.**



“

I had to be confident doing the abseil to help my classmate overcome their fear, even though I was nervous.

Jessica, 14, Tobermory High School, Isle of Mull

“

I think I am more confident now because I know that I've swam in a loch and climbed a mountain twice in December. So, for example, a maths test then isn't that bad.

Alice, 12, St. Aidan's High School, Harrogate

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^{ix}N = 253

IMMERSION IN NATURE: IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONNECTION WITH NATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

An Outward Bound residential **exposes young people to nature** around them, often in new ways that **alters their interest and engagement** with it. By tasting wild food they find, viewing dramatic scenery and experiencing all weathers, things they may have previously only seen on a video or in a textbook truly comes to life.

An Outward Bound residential is an opportunity for young people to **connect emotionally with nature**. The **immersive experience** gives them a **sense that they are part of it**, and for those from urban or inner-city surroundings it prompts a completely **new level of awareness**. For those already familiar with more natural environments, it's an opportunity to experience them in a different way, prompting **renewed appreciation**.

Spectacular views from the summits of mountains, early morning sunrises from their campsites, or views from the loch while canoeing are all **unique experiences** that trigger emotions and regularly feature strongly in young people's memories from their course. At Outward Bound, **nature provides freedom** and **space to play**; its beauty provides a **reward for physical efforts**; and emotionally, it **provides positivity** and **space away from daily pressures**.

“

[Their experiences at Outward Bound] bring real meaning and put things in context; what they see on TV, on the news is actually happening even in Scotland. I think sometimes with pollution and litter [we're] maybe a wee bit disconnected, I think you can see what's on your own doorstep [...] but actually [experiencing it] puts it into context [and makes you think] 'ok the TV programme may not be in our country but [the issue] is very relevant on the west coast of Scotland'.

Tracey Fraser-Lee, Headteacher, Beauly Primary School, Inverness

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“

I observed the pupils really appreciating what was around them. One time it was really windy, and we were facing into the wind, letting it hold us up. [Another time] we were at the beach just lying down and watching the clouds shoot by and pupils were off exploring the rivers and stuff. There wasn't a big walk or a big expedition, it was just a really nice experience to take in and appreciate the nature around them.

Jonathon Marks, Design and Technology Teacher, Tobermory High School, Isle of Mull



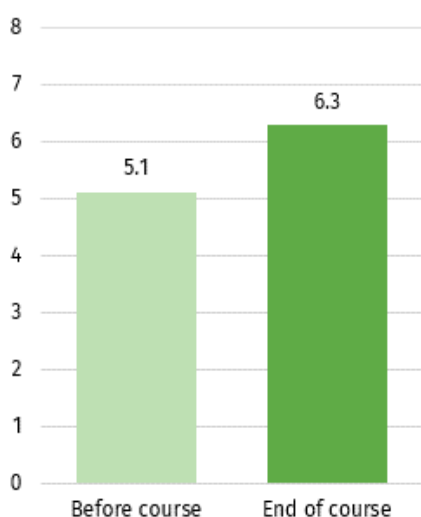
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With reports that eco-anxiety or climate-anxiety are increasingly affecting the mental health of young people, it is vital that they feel a connection to the natural world; that they not only **understand the threats** to it but **feel empowered to make a difference in terms of protecting it**. This is particularly true for young people living in urban areas, from disadvantaged and/or BAME backgrounds, who are reported to have suffered most due to a lack of access and opportunity to be in nature during lockdown. Young people now need opportunities to experience how spending time in nature benefits their physical and emotional wellbeing, benefits them socially and develops their awareness and compassion towards a planet that is increasingly under threat.

Young people leave their course with a **fresh awareness and appreciation** for the natural environment, with **90% of participants recording an increase in their sense of connection with nature at the end of their course** (Figure 3).

“ [Since I’ve come back from my course, we’ve been] conscious of our surroundings because we spent a week where the air was fresher, everything was more clean, you could literally just get water from the mountain. Coming back, you see the differences between where you just came from. You see litter everywhere, the water isn’t as fresh, we buy it from the shops – we could just go to a mountain and get it ourselves. It’s different.

Anna, 14, Sarah Bonnell School, East London, speaking about her course in 2020



90% of young people leave Outward Bound with a new appreciation and awareness of, and an overall closer connection with nature (N=264)

Figure 3: Young people reported an increase in the connection they felt with nature at the end of their course. Participants indicated their responses on an eight-point scale where 1 = Not like me and 8 = Like me. N=264

SUMMARY & LOOKING FORWARD

Two years in the lifetime of an adolescent is particularly significant. It's one of the most impressionable, emotional and changeable times in their lives, and it is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on young people's social, emotional development and already fragile wellbeing. With mental health issues and social disengagement on the rise, combined with low motivation and aspirations, the poor wellbeing of many of our young people today is a worrying indication of their lives' trajectory if little urgent action is taken to support them. At risk of poor educational and employment outcomes, and serious mental and physical health issues in the long-term, there are fears about how our young people will suffer, but also how society will lose out as a result.

At The Outward Bound Trust, we have taken time to listen to schools' experiences and through this developed a deep understanding of young people's experiences over the past two years.

Despite being acutely aware of the work that remains to be done, we are ambitious in our goal of working with 12,748 young people by the end of July 2022.

The locations of our centres, the experience of our instructors and the ethos behind every Outward Bound residential means we are perfectly poised to create a deep, long-lasting impact in young people. The experiences we offer are capable of restoring confidence, reawakening aspirations and refreshing mindsets, ultimately equipping young people with the skills, behaviours and coping strategies to once again feel in control and ensure their futures are as fulfilling and as productive as possible.

The Outward Bound Trust would like to thank the school staff and young people that made this report possible by being involved in our research.

“

There was a young man who had lost both his parents to drug deaths and he was at a low point. As a school, we were quite concerned about him. We went [to Outward Bound] with him in sixth year. One of the activities was canoeing across Loch Eil, and the instructor said to him: 'This is about life. You've picked a nice beach on the far side where you want to have your picnic this afternoon, but the current and the wind are taking us downstream. But if you want to do something and you think it's important, you have to work at it. You have to put effort in and you have to steer the course.' The young man came back, and that's something that stuck with him – that physical metaphor of steering the course, that you have to work hard, and that there'll be strong winds that'll take you away from what you want to do. But [that] if you really want to do it, you make the effort. That stayed with him a long time.

John Robertson, Headteacher, Calderhead High School, North Lanarkshire



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