

THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND

2023/24



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YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND TODAY

For young people growing up in Scotland today, the forming of their self-identity is increasingly influenced, tested and judged within the networks in which they find themselves. From virtual to in-person, from public to private, from global to local, young people are facing influences and pressures that few generations previously have had to manage and navigate.



Young people today are faced with multiple expectations and pressures:

- Social expectations to look good, be engaging and have a voice.
- Academic and financial pressures to succeed and achieve.
- Reminders to prioritise self-care, health and invest in relationships.

The backdrop of global political, social and environmental uncertainty presents additional challenges. All factors combined are **making the forming of an identity for a young person an increasingly difficult and complex task.**

24% of young people in Scotland are living in relative poverty¹. Young people facing deprivation, from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who

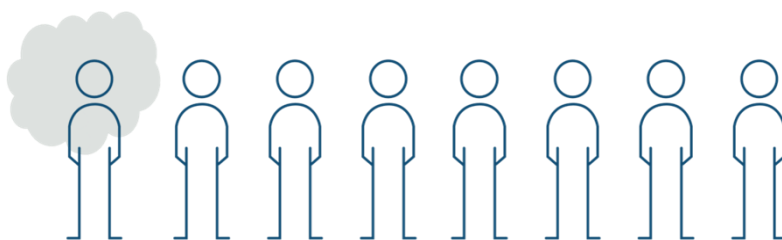
have caring responsibilities are some of the groups whose financial, social, and cultural situations mean they face additional barriers to achieving their potential.

- **On an individual level**, this is negatively impacting their sense of self, their self-confidence, and their ability to respond when things feel out of control.
- **Socially**, this impacts their relationships, their confidence and willingness to engage in situations that are new or unknown.
- In the long-term this can have a detrimental impact on their **educational attainment, employment prospects, aspirations** and overall **wellbeing**.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health and resilience are closely linked: having good mental health and wellbeing is a contributing factor in resilience, and resilient individuals are more able to successfully navigate mental health problems.

Young people's mental health, together with their confidence and happiness have seen the biggest declines in the last 15 years². Two years ago, the incidence of common mental disorders for young people were lowest across the age spectrum; today, the Resolution Foundation reports **"Young people have the undesirable attribute of having the poorest mental health of any age group"**³.



12% (one-in-eight) of 16 year olds missed more than 15 days off school in 2023 due to poor mental health. Compared to 2% (one-in-fifty) of their healthier peers (The Resolution Foundation 2024).

Findings from the HBS in Scotland found that around a **third (35%) of young people were classified as having low mood or risk of depression**⁴. Poor mental health in young people, impacts a young person's sense of self, their social life, their ability to engage in their education and their chances of finding a job³.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND LONELINESS

Headlines reporting epidemics of 'loneliness' and 'super shyness' amongst young people have emerged in the last few years⁵. Numbers of young people who report feeling lonely or isolated remain high⁵ and Government research identified that young people in the **16 – 24 age group in Scotland report some of the highest rates of loneliness**⁶. Whilst technology can bring us closer together and help maintain connections, 'digital loneliness' can occur when technology and spending hours in front of screens replaces in-person relationships⁷; this is a very real challenge for today's young people. Despite huge advances in young people being able to talk about mental health issues, loneliness remains a subject where stigma does still exist and where young people can feel judged or like a burden⁸.



Individuals aged 16-24 are more likely to feel lonely than any other age group. (Community life survey 2020/21)

YOUNG PEOPLE DISENGAGING

The coping mechanism of many young people living with a mental health illness or who feel isolated, anxious or overwhelmed, is often to withdraw socially, to distance themselves from the pressure and in doing so disengage from places, people and events². A report from Reform Scotland states that **40% of pupils miss a day of school per fortnight**⁹ and anxiety-based issues is thought to be one of the core reasons¹⁰. Alongside mental health issues, parental anxiety, turbulent home lives, fragmented relationships, feeling unsafe, overwhelmed, stressed and anxious are a few of a number of possible reasons why a young person might begin to distance themselves. Not only does this impact their educational outcomes³, in the long term, but can also result in poorer employment outcomes, physical and mental health and wellbeing.



THE NEED FOR OUR WORK

Research suggests that some of the most impactful protective factors against poor mental health are **self-regulation, emotional flexibility and secure social relations**. The social and emotional skills of an individual play a pivotal role in how they successfully navigate transitions through adolescence and into early adulthood. It is the development of these skills that an Outward Bound experience aims to support young people with.

At Outward Bound, we believe that providing young people with opportunities to develop fundamental social and emotional skills positively influences their outlook on life; they help act as protective factors in the face of adversity and mean young people with such skills will be more likely to be able to face and overcome uncertainty and fear.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

Last year The Outward Bound Trust partnered with 128 schools and youth groups in Scotland to provide 5,008 young people from across the country with an Outward Bound course that helped develop their resilience, confidence, relationships, and future aspirations. 84% of young people who attended required charitable funding to do so.

The majority of the young people who come on an Outward Bound course live in underserved urban and rural communities from across Scotland. For young people such as young carers, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and low-income households, access to the outdoors and opportunities to develop social and emotional skills is significantly fewer than for their more affluent peers.

Those in receipt of free school meals or pupil equity funding also face additional barriers to realising and reaching their potential. At Outward Bound we recognise the urgent necessity for tailored experiences that can equip young people with the skills needed to encourage their engagement in learning, support their wellbeing, and improve their sense of belonging.



THE OUTWARD BOUND EXPERIENCE

The **wild, natural environments** at Outward Bound provide the backdrop to the authentic adventure and deliberate learning that happens on a course. Away from technology and



familiar environments, young people have **time and space** away from the constraints and pressures that often add to a young person's anxiety and low self-esteem.

For many, an Outward Bound course will bring a significant 'first' – the first night away from home, the first opportunity to go rock climbing and gorge scrambling, or the first chance to be a leader. It is an opportunity to **broaden their horizons** and give them a different perspective.

Before a course, time is taken to understand the young people's specific needs and the course is then tailored, ensuring the right level of challenge. The diversity of activities allows young people to build a range of skills, and the planning and reviewing of each challenge provides an opportunity to understand how the skills and behaviours they develop on their course can be applied to their lives and **set them up for achievement and success** in the future.

Often starting their course with a **jog & dip**^[1] or working together to get their team safely over a **high wall**, the young

people's confidence and resilience steadily begins to grow and so too does the level of adventure and challenge to include activities such as **canoeing, rock climbing** or a **gorge scramble**. Their course often culminates in an **overnight expedition** where they sleep out under the stars or stay in bothies.

New and inspiring surroundings encourage new behaviours and ways of thinking about themselves and others. Living alongside new people, **social barriers are broken down** as they learn to support each other; **building stronger connections** with their peers and teachers.

^[1] A short run, followed by a dip in the estuary, lake or loch.

CASE STUDIES

Together with schools, youth clubs and other institutions we design a course that is carefully tailored to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and achievement to enable personal growth and development.

The following case study highlights the experiences that can be had at Outward Bound and the range of outcomes and lasting impact that can be gained from our courses.

SCOTTISH SCHOOLS DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS AND SENSE OF BELONGING AT OUTWARD BOUND

For three Scottish schools (Hazlehead Academy, McLaren High School and Lanark Grammar School) who came to Outward Bound between September 2023 and February 2024, relationships, interpersonal skills and having fun together were all a focus for their Outward Bound Adventure & Challenge courses.

Although from very different locations in Scotland, all three schools recognise the challenges their young people face in terms of being able to connect, support and understand one another. This lack of cohesion is resulting in issues such as **bullying**, **poor attendance** and **young people struggling when it comes to them transitioning to higher education** or new situations.

Each school has a diverse student population which spans the range of deprivation deciles and so for most of the students, the opportunity to leave their local surroundings and have new experiences was important in them broadening their aspirations and sense of what is possible for them.

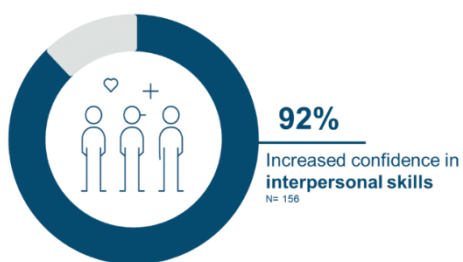


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I have learnt that everyone has a place and different needs/wants when they are in a team. [I've learnt] how to adapt to people's skillset.

Adam, 14, McLaren High School

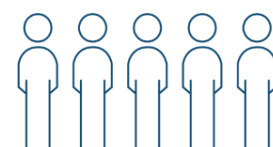
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During their courses, the young people lived alongside and worked with others, many who were new to them. Experiences ranged from gorge scrambling, climbing and canoe journeys together with many groups completing an expedition – all requiring the young people to work together, communicate and support one another. During the week, they learnt more about those around them – about their needs, their behaviours and began to understand them on a deeper level, adding to their sense of belonging.

This was also true for teachers who accompanied the young people, who recognise how the experience enables them to establish deeper relationships with their students, benefitting them back in the classroom.

Teachers hope that the relationships and shared memories from their course will be applied back at school and result in young people who previously struggled socially feeling more confident and willing to engage.



85% reported an
increased sense of
belonging at the end of their
course. (N=59)

At the end of their course, **92% of the young people reported increases in their confidence in interpersonal skills** and **85% reported an increased sense of belonging**; in terms of how they can rely on and trust their friends.



On a more everyday level, there are kids who are maybe on the edge of school, on the periphery of being involved in the classroom or involved in something outside school they shouldn't be. [After Outward Bound] they're much more engaged, much more likely to talk to you, much more likely to have a positive relationship with you in the corridors when you bump into them. If you say something to them, they take it from you because you've spoken to them at Outward Bound and you've maybe picked them up on something.

John Millar, Teacher, Lanark Grammar School



OUTWARD BOUND LEARNING OUTCOMES

We evaluate the impact of our courses by assessing the attitudes, skills and behaviours that young people develop while at Outward Bound. This allows us to gain an insight into the impact that a course can have on a young person and how the experiences allow them to build the skills required to be able to thrive and deal with the pressures and challenges they may face in their education, employment and in their social lives.

Surveys completed by young people and their teachers to assess the development of social and emotional skills are used before, after and up to several months after their course. Interviews help us to gain a deeper insight into the learning that an individual takes away from Outward Bound and the impact that learning then has on their lives at school, home or work. The following insights and data have been gathered from a range of courses for young people from across the UKⁱ.



ⁱ Young people's names have been changed to protect their anonymity, school staff names and job titles have been quoted where we have permission to do so.

THE ABILITY TO COPE WITH THE UNKNOWN, UNCERTAINTY AND CHANGE

The way in which an individual approaches and responds to challenge has huge influence on their general mental health and wellbeing. When a young person is able to recognise, manage and deal with uncomfortable emotions such as overwhelm, anxiety and stress they are better able to navigate unknown and challenging situations that they will inevitably face in their lives.

Opportunities which challenge and allow immersion in new, unknown situations may well prompt feelings of discomfort, worry and fear in an individual in the moment. However, by facing the situation, working through it with others in a supportive environment and by experiencing a sense of achievement, a young person, rather than fearing such situations, instead begins to develop strategies to be able to cope and work through them. They

develop a more positive association with challenge and change. **At the end of their course, 93% of young people reported an increased score for resilience** (Figure 1).

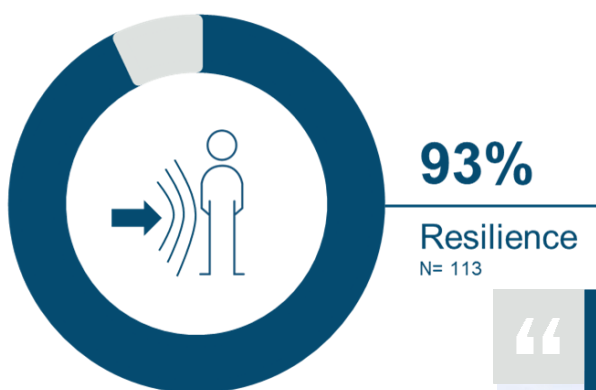


Figure 1: At the end of their course, young people reported an increased score for resilience, compared to their retrospective pre-course score.



[I learnt to] try everything because you won't know if you like it or not.

Glen, 13, Hazlehead Academy

Pupils will definitely have more confidence and willingness when facing challenges. They will have learned how to better control their emotions and deal with difficult situations.

Cristina D'Arrigo, Teacher, Holy Rood RC High School

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By immersing themselves in situations which are different, unknown or by completing tasks which they perceive to be difficult, a young person begins to develop a strong sense of their own capability. This is central to developing the resilience of a young person. At the end of their course, primary-school aged participants reported an increase in their ability to persevere through challenges and complete things they thought they would not be able to do (Figure 2).

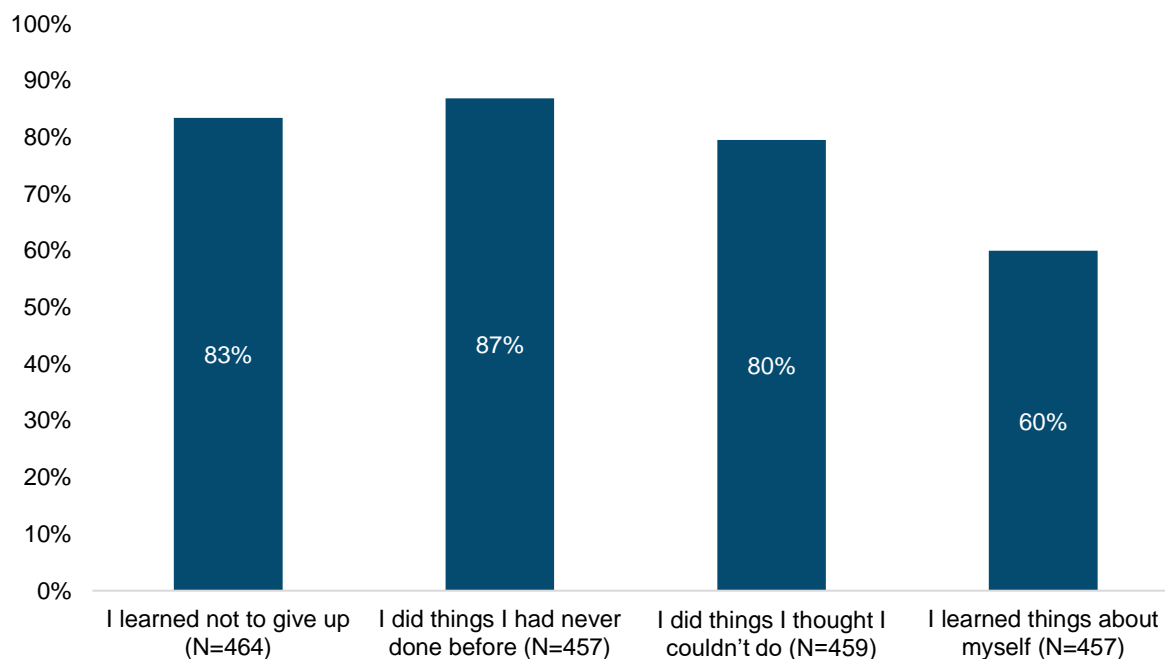


Figure 2: Primary-aged young people developed their resilience at Outward Bound. The percentage of participants in agreement with the statements at the end of their course. Responses were recorded on a 4-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'a lot'.

Accompanying primary school staff agreed that during the course, the young people's sense of capability, their ability to manage emotions and work through difficult situations had increased (Figure 3).

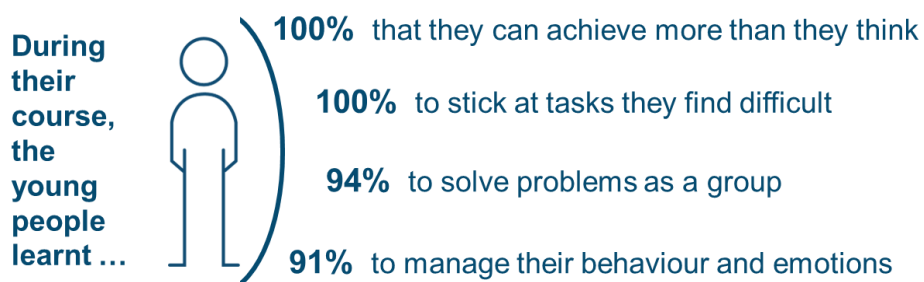


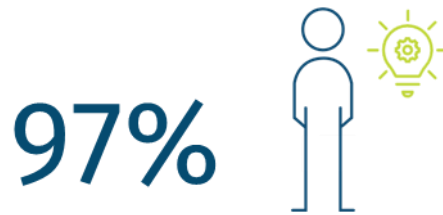
Figure 3: Accompanying primary school staff reported improvements in the young people's sense of capability and ability to work through difficult tasks. The percentages reflect the staff who reported the young people learnt the following 'a lot or quite a bit' during their course. N=34

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At the end of the course, accompanying secondary school staff observed improvements in young people's awareness of their own capabilities and ability to persevere through challenges.



of accompanying staff agreed that the young people will be more likely to persevere when they encounter difficulties in the future, as a result of the course (N=32).



of accompanying staff agreed that during their course, the young people realised they were capable of more than they had thought (N=32).

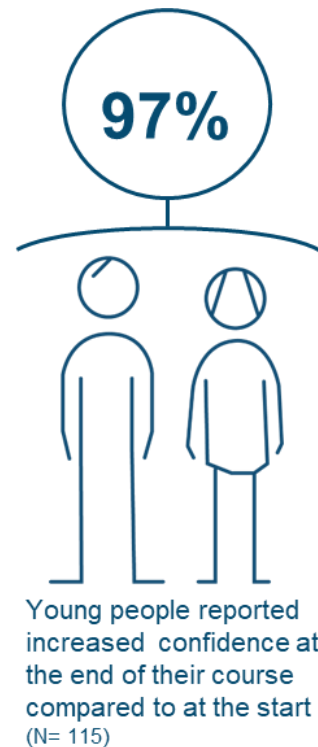
DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE AND SENSE OF CAPABILITY

When a young person feels confident in who they are and their capabilities, they are more likely to feel a sense of agency, value and motivation – this is key to their day to day engagement, socially and at school, contributing significantly to their overall wellbeing.

New surroundings prompt different interactions, new mindsets, and ways of thinking. The physical and emotional challenge at Outward Bound, combined with the residential element and being away from home, takes many young people out of their comfort zones. In a safe, supportive environment, they begin to see other sides to their capabilities, they hone new behaviours and discover new ways to approach to challenge and change. These experiences develop a heightened self-awareness, independence and strengthen a young person's self-identity and sense of who they are.



At the end of their course, **97% of young people reported an increased score for confidenceⁱⁱ**, compared to their start of course score – reflecting an increase in their belief that they can succeed and achieve things they set out to do.



ⁱⁱ N=115

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This increased awareness and understanding of self, combined with opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility builds independence and confidence. Primary school pupils reported that they had learned how to look after themselves, that they could do things on their own and that they could support and rely on others – all important factors in a young person becoming more independent and realising that they are capable of doing things that, at first, may seem intimidating or challenging (Figure 4).

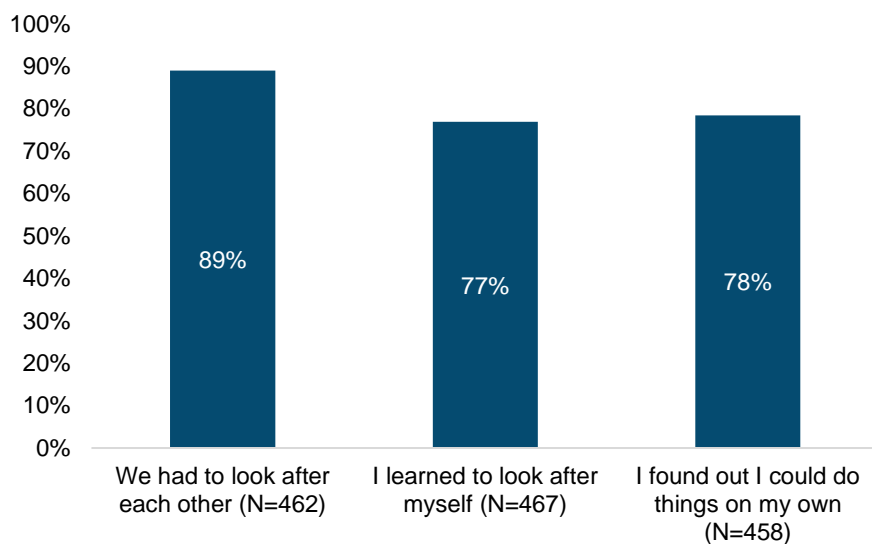


Figure 4: Primary-aged young people developed their independence at Outward Bound. The percentage of participants agreeing with the statements at the end of their course. Responses were recorded on a 4-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'a lot'.

DEVELOPING QUALITY CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS

The extent to which a young person feels connected to, accepted and understood by those around them has a large impact on their mental health and overall general wellbeing.

During an Outward Bound residential a young person has opportunities to get to know and rely on others in a way that isn't always possible in the fast pace of everyday life and in the advent of digital technology and online interactions.

Whilst at Outward Bound, every face-face interaction, be that out on the hillside, on the water or during social time in the evening, provides an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills. **88% reported an increased confidence in their interpersonal skills – meeting and working with new people.**

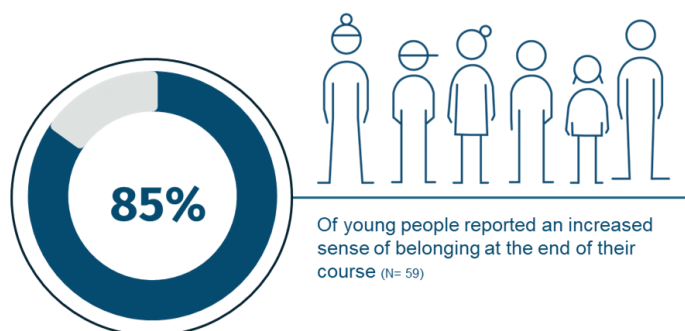


88%
of young people reported an increased confidence in their interpersonal skills (N=376)

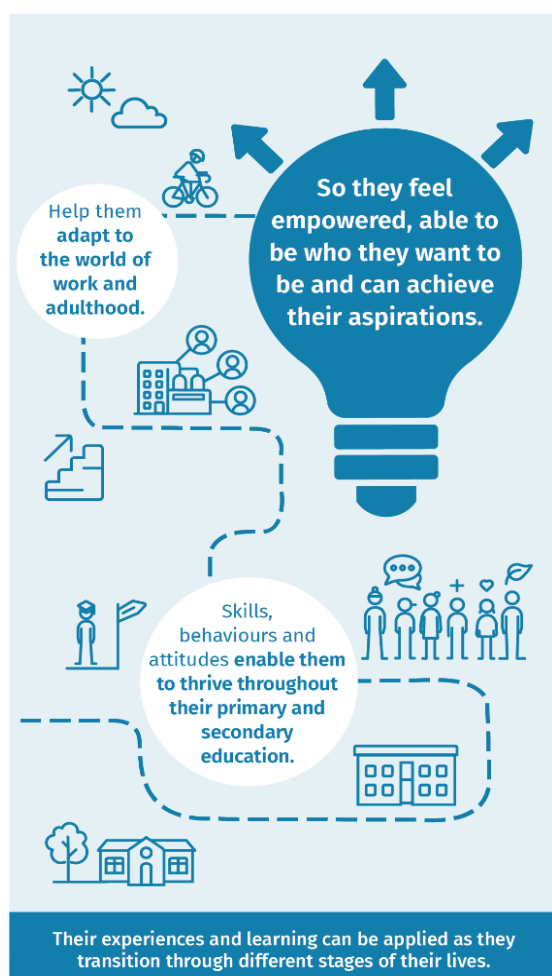
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Through teamwork and by supporting one another to reach a common goal, such as trusting one another to get themselves up a rock face safely or working together to paddle a canoe or simply by spending time reflecting on their experiences together in the evenings, they **develop understanding and respect** on a level that they may not have felt before.

Throughout the week, they become aware of differences and also find things they have in common. Instead of judging each other by a first impression, they begin to deepen their understanding of one another and others' behaviour, they become better able to offer and receive support – all factors that contribute to an improved a sense of belonging for an individual. **At the end of their course, 85% of young people reported an increase in the sense of belonging.**



A LASTING IMPACT ON SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS



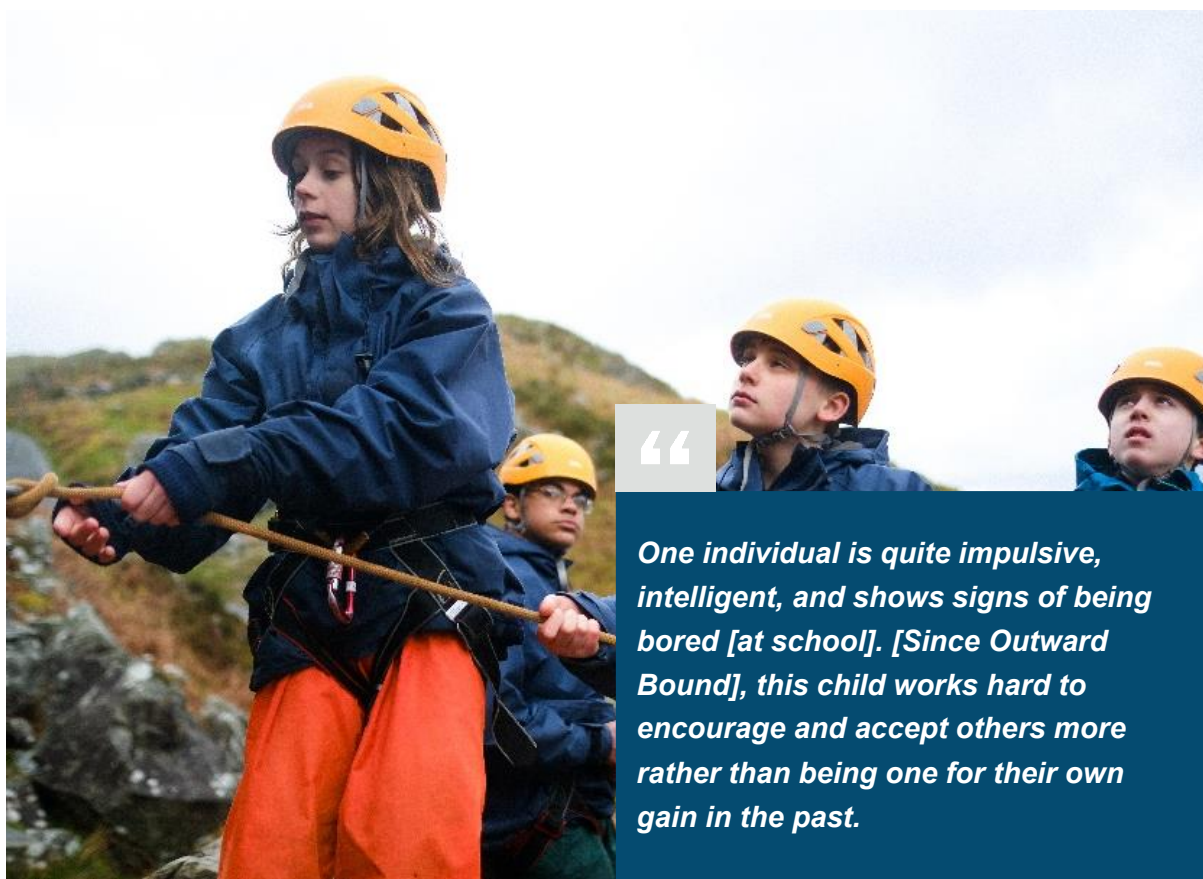
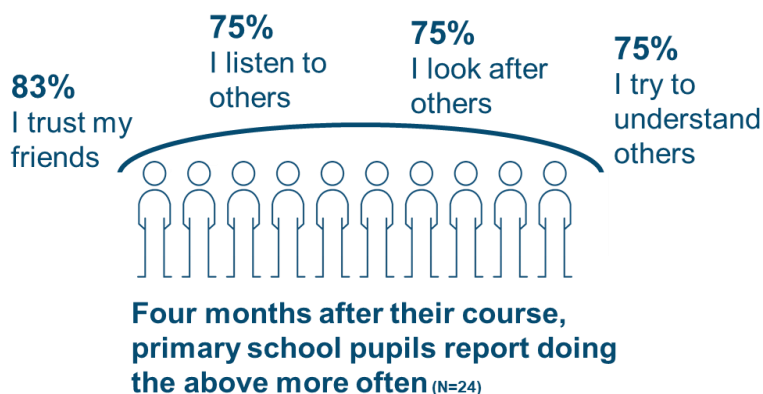
Thanks to opportunities enabled by your support, the skills, behaviours and attitudes developed on a course remain with an individual long after they leave Outward Bound.

Their experiences and learning stay with them as they progress through their education, into their careers. The insights presented in the following section have been drawn from reflections from young people up to five months after their course.

For the first time, we are able to share how their Outward Bound course is empowering and supporting young people once back at home and school.

A LASTING IMPACT ON CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Four months after their course, primary school pupils report positive changes in their relationships with others, saying they trust, listen, understand and look after others more often when compared to before their course.



Jorgia Harrison, Teacher, Gairloch Primary School, reflecting 2-3 months after their course.

”



Young people from secondary school continue to report increases in their confidence in their interpersonal skills up to five months after their course; 58% and 72% respectively reported an increase in their confidence in meeting and working with new people. Strengthened relationships with others help an individual to feel less anxious and intimidated by social situations, contributing to an increased overall sense of belonging.



[The young people are more] accepting of others and involving them or engaging with them when they wouldn't normally. My group was quite mixed, but they all ended up getting along and supporting and encouraging each other and this has rolled over to their life in school too.



Emily Hetherington, Teacher, Galashiels Academy, reflecting 2-3 months after their course.



A LASTING ABILITY TO FACE AND OVERCOME CHALLENGE

Social confidence and strong relationships with others contribute significantly to an individual’s sense of resilience - their ability to persevere through challenges and achieve their goals. Five months on from their course, 69% and 72% of young people respectively reported increases in their confidence in setting themselves challenges and achieving their goals.



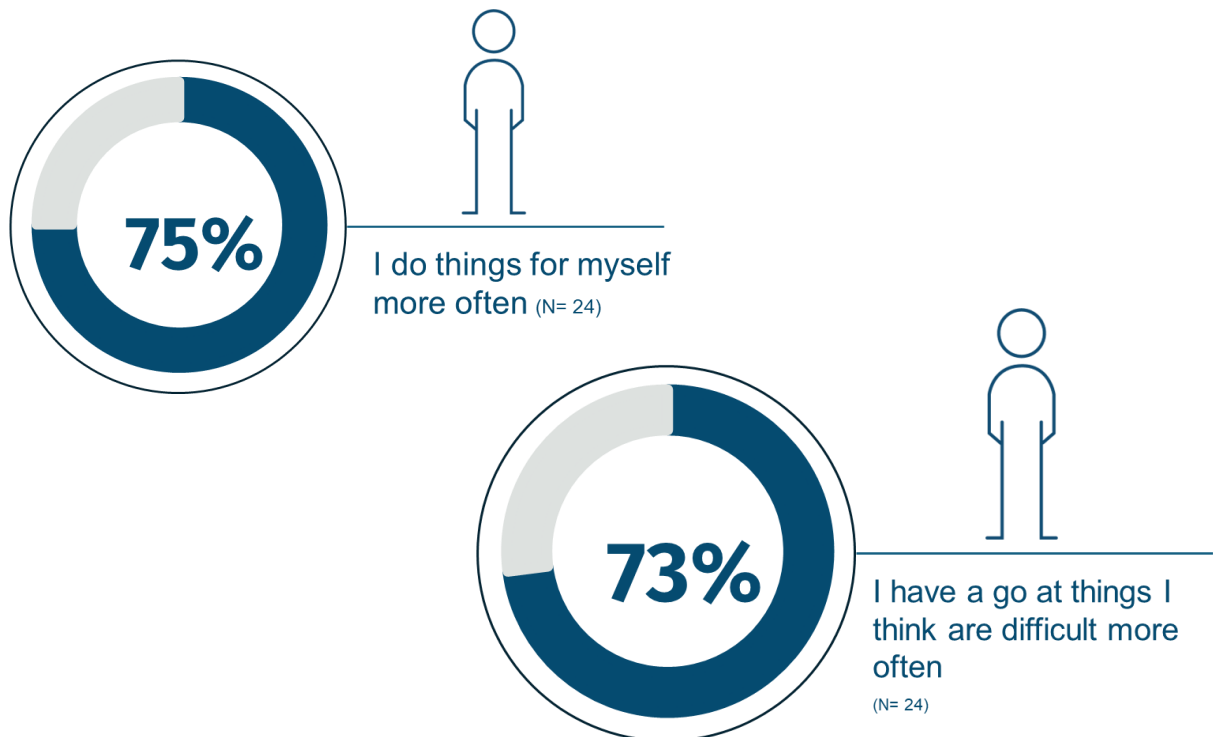
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She came home with so much more self-esteem and confidence and assurance that the [other] girls didn’t hate her. I hope this is her on the way to getting over the worst year of her life.

”

A parent commenting to a teacher at Cumbernauld Academy on the impact of her daughter’s Outward Bound course.

Primary school pupils continue to report positive changes in their ability to do things for themselves and in their approach to things they perceive to be difficult four months after they return back to school after Outward Bound. 75% and 73% respectively reported doing things for themselves and having a go at things they find difficult more often.





“

The experience has really helped me feel good about myself and made me realise how important it is to push myself to try things I maybe don't think I would enjoy.

Scotland's Next Generation Summer Adventure participant commenting in January 2024, five months after their course.

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LASTING IMPACT AT SCHOOL

The above-described lasting impact on a young person's resilience and on their connections to others is shown to have a positive impact on their confidence and willingness to engage and put themselves into unknown or new situations. Up to five months on, teachers describe **improved relationships back at school** between both the young people and between themselves and their pupils, resulting in teachers having more understanding of individuals, their needs and their behaviours and being better able to support them.



“

The relationships built with pupils means that they have a greater understanding that I am providing them with challenges that will help them improve/develop/gain knowledge or experiences.

Jo Kenwright, Teacher, The Edinburgh Academy, reflecting 2-3 months after their course.

”



I know the teachers who go on Outward Bound that teach those kids afterwards have a much better relationship with them. If you have a better relationship with them, the kids learn better, they're more engaged and everyone benefits.

John Millar, Teacher, Lanark Grammar School, commenting five months after their course.



One parent reported seeing changes in her son's motivation, re-engagement with school and overall quality of life when he returned back from Outward Bound, changes which she believes will significantly positively impact their relationship and his future.



I can't believe what this residential has done for [my son]. His routine has totally flipped. He said you really listened and understood him, that when things were too much, you didn't push him too far and you gave him that extra bit of time. I feel like I actually have my son back - thanks so much for taking the chance with him.

His sleep was so bad before he had no quality of life, I can't [remember] the last time he got up for school and ever since he has been back [after the residential], he has been up every morning. You've gave me a chance to make memories with my son and for him to build a future for himself and I couldn't be prouder of him! Thank you so much for everything [...].



Parent of a participant speaking two weeks after their course in June 2023

LOOKING FORWARD

With the world in which young people are growing up becoming increasingly uncertain and fragmented, the need for young people to feel a sense of self and agency is vital. It allows them to be able to navigate through the pressures and be able to function and thrive in their social lives and their education. Our impact evidence shows that residential experiences in wild, natural environments provide young people with opportunities to develop foundational social and emotional skills – strategies and approaches which they are able to apply back to their every day and draw on when faced with adversity. Confidence, resilience and relationships act as protective factors against poor mental health, loneliness and disengagement and are key to a young person’s self-identity, sense of value and their wellbeing.



“

Between the two staff, we have attended twelve Outward Bound courses. This speaks volumes for the importance and value it has on young people’s experiences. It is a joy and privilege to see and work with young people outside of a classroom.

Gemma Huntington, Teacher, Langholm Academy

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FURTHER INFORMATION

The Outward Bound Trust's Official Website

Our official website contains a wealth of information about The Trust, including information on our centres, the courses we offer, staff members and our upcoming events, as well as our latest news and additional case studies.

www.outwardbound.org.uk

The Outward Bound Trust Alumni

At the end of 2009, we launched a new initiative called 'Generations' to reach out to the million+ individuals who have participated in an Outward Bound course since the creation of the Aberdovey Outward Bound Sea School in 1941. The stories that over 400 alumni have shared with us suggest that an Outward Bound course can have a positive and enduring influence on their lives.

<https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/ob-alumni>

The Outward Bound Trust's Social Impact Report 2024

<https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/social-impact-reports>

The Outward Bound Trust's Latest Annual Report and Accounts

<https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/assets/pdf/uploads/Trust%20general/Outward-Bound-Trust-Annual-Report-FY23.pdf>



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Loch Eil, The Highlands, Scotland