

OUTWARD BOUND REFLECTIONS: LASTING IMPACT ON OUR ALUMNI



**THE
OUTWARD
BOUND TRUST**

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OUTWARD BOUND: REFLECTIONS FROM ALUMNI

The Outward Bound Trust has been providing young people with experiences in the outdoors for 80 years. Recently we asked some of our alumni to look back at their Outward Bound course and describe the impact it has had on them at different stages of their lives.

We had an overwhelming response to our invitation for interview and carefully selected a small sample that best represents the diversity of our alumni. Telephone interviews were carried out with nine individuals, of different ages, backgrounds, who went on their Outward Bound course in different locations, in different years – some as long ago as 70 years.

ALUMNI PATHWAYS TO OUTWARD BOUND

The route by which our alumni found themselves at Outward Bound varied, some were selected and **'sent' as part of their school, youth group, apprenticeship or work, others applied to adverts** seen in their work bulletin or **responded to competitions** in the local newspaper.

For many, especially those who were selected and 'sent', the reason for them having been singled out for the opportunity did not become clear to them until reflecting on their experience many years later. Some realised that their workplace may have seen potential in them which they as young individuals, were not aware of at the time.

They each described their situation at the time at which they went on their Outward Bound course. The group represented a diverse demographic; a **variety of socio-economic backgrounds, experiences, ages, stages of education and work**. For many, their course happened at a time when they were **facing a transition** or **decisions about their next steps in education** or into the world of work. Most were at an **impressionable age** when they were discovering more about themselves and others. They spoke about **cultural and gender stereotypes and expectations** at the time, and how, especially for some of the females who came in the 60's and 70's, their involvement in the course was viewed as very much *out of the ordinary*, in what was a largely male-dominated sector.



For others, particularly females and those from more deprived backgrounds, the course represented a **once-in-a-lifetime opportunity** and a **chance for them to realise an innate drive and desire to travel, adventure and uncover a different side to their identity and sense of capability**. They alluded to reasons why the Outward Bound experience represented such a significant opportunity for them; including **feeling restricted** due to **family finances** or by **parental or teacher permissions and aspirations**.

“

I'd never been away from home. I barely had any holidays as a child. [...] But there was something inside me that wanted to do something adventurous; I felt that I needed to do something to bring the confidence out in me.

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

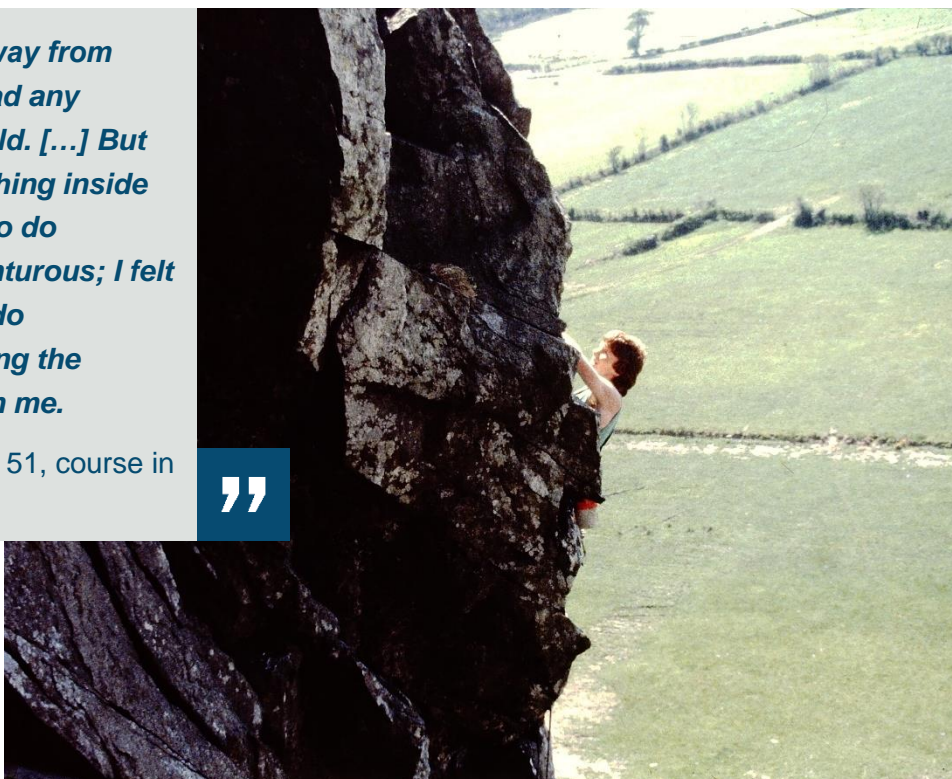
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“

At that time, my dad was a policeman and really strict. We lived in a small semi-detached house. I did feel quite suffocated [...] I didn't really know what to do or anything like that. At the same time, I always had quite a hunger for life, I wanted everything to happen, I was all excited about life, but I didn't feel fulfilled and there was nothing in the offering.

Jacci Jourdan 57, course in 1981 at Rhownair

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MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS

REMEMBERING OUTWARD BOUND

As they have progressed through different stages of their lives, their Outward Bound experience has changed in relevance and meaning. Different life experiences, getting older and having taken on different roles in their personal and professional lives has caused them to draw on different elements of their Outward Bound experience. For some, this was a conscious thought process, others described their Outward Bound experience as an event in their lives which they believe has subconsciously **changed their mindset, their values** and their **outlook on life**.

Many still hold vivid memories of their Outward Bound experience. These memories have been kept alive by re-reading **logbooks and journals**, looking at **photos, certificates** and their **badges**. **Delivering talks** to local groups about their experience, **conversations** with other Outward Bound alumni and attending **alumni events** have allowed them to **connect with others** with whom they hold a **shared experience**; all these things providing important vehicles for reminiscing.



“

When I look at the logbook again and I see all the things in my mind's eye, a lot of the things that we saw, that we did, they're as clear as yesterday.

Robert Cooke, 77, course in 1964 at Moray Sea School & Eskdale

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During the interviews, they recounted many memorable moments from their course. The following sections highlight some of the elements that contribute towards an Outward Bound experience being such a memorable and for many, an influential one.

RE-TRACING THE JOURNEY TO OUTWARD BOUND

Leaving home and travelling

independently far away

was for many the beginning of their Outward Bound adventure. Thinking back to this journey reminded our alumni of the **excitement, trepidation and nervousness** they felt. Those who came to Outward Bound in the 60's and 70's or for those from more deprived backgrounds, **travelling outside of their local area** through



changing landscapes to places where people spoke with a **different dialect and language** (in the case of Wales), all added to the **sense of being far away**, and was something that happened rarely, if at all for them and as such it felt like a very **significant occasion**.

“

I remember parts of the train journey, like looking at the scenery. I'd never seen anything like it before, [travelling through] the Pennines and Cumbria and stuff. And then I remember getting on the little train to Eskdale, I remember that vividly.

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

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Arriving at the Outward Bound centre after a long journey sticks in the minds of many alumni – they remember the **size and majesty of the centre buildings** against their **wild, natural backdrops**. These first impressions of the centre and the surrounding landscapes were instrumental in **setting the scene and their expectations** for their course, many commented that it made them feel very **privileged** being there.

“

I remember arriving at the centre and looking at the building thinking, “My God, this is incredible, this house is so big and beautiful.” I remember going in and all the wood panelling and big rooms and I just remember thinking, “Oh my, I've arrived somewhere that is going to be fantastic.”

Mary Levison, 74, course in 1965 at Rhownair

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“

[I remember arriving in] the big reception area [at Eskdale]. I suppose I felt a bit lost and nervous, because I was on my own and didn't know anybody. But a sense of, "I've made it, I've got here."

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

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OUTWARD BOUND CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVES

The contrast felt as they arrived at the Outward Bound centre continued throughout their time at Outward Bound. The course provided exposure to people, places, values and lifestyles very different to their own, often for the first time. This **exposure to difference** provided an **element of perspective** in a social, cultural and geographical sense.

“

A right group of people from all different backgrounds; from demographics, cultural, socioeconomic groups - all these different people effectively thrown together, and we all got on.

Nathan Panesar-Grix, 55, course in 1985 at Ullswater

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NEW PEOPLE

Living alongside other people from very different backgrounds to their own provided an **insight into how others live their lives** and gave them a **reference point** against which to compare their own situation. When reflecting on this aspect of their course, especially for those from more affluent backgrounds, it contributed to a **realisation and appreciation of their own privilege**, learning that has gone on to **influence the way in which they view and value others**.

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I think that's something which Outward Bound taught me, that we are all valuable people and we've all got something to offer.

Mary Levison, 74, course in 1965 at Rhownair

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“

We were a disparate bunch of kids thrown together. Some of them struggled at some things. We all came from different places, had different experiences, had different qualities of life, had different financial backgrounds. I was able to just use what I'd learned as a kid growing up, that sort of caring, compassionate, understanding and getting stuck in when people needed a hand, and being willing to do that.

Tim Partridge, 60, course in 1968, at Aberdovey

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An understanding of their peers and their vulnerabilities has resulted in a **heighted awareness of the need to support and encourage others**. This has been particularly valuable for those who have gone on to work with people or who have found themselves in a teaching, leadership or mentoring role.

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*[As a leader] you inspire [people], you motivate them, you understand when they fall over, and you enable them to pick themselves back up - allowing people to grow and develop and I think some of that was helped by *Outward Bound*.*

Professor Phil Harris 70, course in 1970 at Moray Sea School

”

Memories of individual peers and instructors they came into contact with on their course have stuck with many of our alumni for a variety of reasons; they were individuals from **backgrounds very different** to their own, they **demonstrated behaviours** that they hadn't come into contact with before, some of which made them feel **scared or worried**. Other characters were memorable because they **admired, felt inspired by** or looked up to them as **role models**.

NEW PLACES

The locations in which their Outward Bound course happened remain a significant feature of their memories. They remember feeling a **physical connection with nature** and being at *the mercy of the elements*. They talk about the **beauty of nature**, about the views and landscapes and how it gave them a feeling of **peace and calm**, **awe and wonder** and a sense that they are part of a **bigger system**. They describe feeling **rewarded by nature** for their physical efforts – seeing the views from the top of a mountain, stars from a campsite or their reflections in the water.



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I was in awe of just the beauty of the mountains and being out there walking the hills.

Karl Reed, 57, course in 1984 at Eskdale

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We eventually found the footpath leading around the edge of the quarry of Cadair Idris. There, we descended through the mist to be greeted by the [landscape]. The sun shone and we had fabulous views. I was overwhelmed by the immense size of it and the thought that once it was solid, packed with ice [as a glacier]. I stood in awe and revelled in the power of nature and the elements. It was just a gobsmacking scene.

Tim Partridge, 60, course in 1986 at Aberdovey

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For many, Outward Bound was their **first introduction to nature and wild environments**. Outward Bound provided them with *survival* skills which have equipped them to continue **enjoying the outdoors** in a professional and leisure capacity, which remains a big part of their lives. An **appreciation and respect** of the natural environment remains a **fundamental part of their values**.

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Being exposed to the landscape, the elements, all sorts of conditions that we were in for four weeks at Outward Bound does make you aware of the world we live in, the importance of it and the beauty of it and how we need to take care of it.

Mary Levison 74, course in 1965 at Rhownair

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For those who came from very urban environments, the wilds of the Lake District, Scotland and Wales were a significant **contrast to home**. Many of these places continue to hold special meaning for our alumni, with them describing **deep emotional and spiritual connections with the natural environment**.

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It ignited a love affair with Scotland – the hills the mountains, how rich the environment could be.

Professor Phil Harris 70, course in 1970 at Moray Sea School



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“

They're places of deep reflection and connection. It's ethereal stuff perhaps [...] It's hard to describe what it is but there's something, a power there that you can use as a resource, it's renewable clean energy for when the world gets tough.

Tim Partridge, 60, course in 1968 at Aberdovey

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AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Having reflected back on themselves and their situation at the time of their course, the reasons for them having been 'sent' on the course have become more obvious. Many identified themselves as having **lacked in confidence or self-esteem**. They attributed this to many different reasons; their **relationships with others**, the stage at which they were at in their **education or career**, their **socio-economic situation**, or as a result of **low expectations or stereotypes** placed upon them by others.

Fun, enjoyment and freedom, figure frequently in their descriptions of the course. Thinking back to participating in activities such as scree running, kayaking and rock climbing with their peers, in places where they felt a **strong sense of freedom** and **adventure**, evoked very **powerful, positive emotions** for our alumni both at the time of their course and 50 or 60 years on. They talk of the **surprise, pride and relief** in overcoming challenges, together with the **courage and resilience** required. These experiences, together with **practical skills** they learnt whilst on their course – survival skills, map reading, knot-tying and basic nursing skills have all added to their sense of **capability and independence** and are skills they find themselves using today.



“

I remember this amazing scree and running down this scree. There was a tarn at the bottom, and just getting into that, it was a very hot day and also the thrill of running, down this scree.

Mary Levison 74, course in 1965 at Rhownair

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Hardship, challenge and a sense of risk were also central to many of the alumni's lasting memories. They described being **worried, nervous or scared** recounting situations where they had faced **adversity**, such as the weather conditions, challenging terrain, disagreements with peers, or in a few cases and in times with less stringent health and safety rules, by injuries sustained by themselves or teammates. These challenging situations required them to **pull together, find a solution** and **respond** to the situation and **get themselves to safety**, all adding to their sense of **independence, confidence** and **capability**.



“

I absolutely just fell in love with the outdoors and the Lake District - the wilderness and the sense of just being outdoors. I think it must have been how much it had an impact on my self-esteem and my confidence. Just that feeling of “I can’t do something”, for example kayaking, “I can’t do it, I’m too scared to do it,” but then actually going and doing it and overcoming it, it gives you the biggest sense of pride.

Lauren Kallides, 37, course in 2000 at Aberdovey

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These emotional experiences, all hold an important place in their memories, which many have reflected upon regularly as their lives have progressed and changed in direction. These experiences have influenced how they **react to situations** and have contributed to their **awareness** and **learning about themselves** and their skills and behaviours. Outward Bound for many was an opportunity to **develop a new identity** -not only to reframe how they think about themselves, but in terms of how others viewed them. It gave them a chance to **recognise mistakes** they had made in the past or **face insecurities** and address them.

“

I would say- this being in retrospect. I knew I was very capable of a lot of things, [though] I would say that I was somewhat lacking in confidence. I felt uncomfortable sometimes or intimidated by other people who were better at different things than I was, which was something that going on the course just really helped with.

Karl Reed, 57, course in 1984 at Eskdale

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THE LASTING IMPACT OF OUTWARD BOUND

It is clear that Outward Bound was a pivotal experience that has changed in relevance and meaning for our alumni as they have grown older.

For many, it was a first step beyond the familiar into a **world of difference** and **contrast**; **geographically** – the landscapes, the wilderness and nature, **physically** – exposure to sights, sounds, terrain and smells they had never come across before, **emotionally** – learning how they respond and react in different scenarios and perhaps the most significant difference; **socially**. Outward Bound provided and still does provide an opportunity for young people from all walks of life to come together, learn about each other, their values and how they live their lives, it's a valuable opportunity to **challenge stereotypes and biases** and develop an **understanding** and **acceptance** of others.

LASTING IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

At what was an impressionable age and a transition point for many, Outward Bound has **shaped and influenced the trajectory of many of our alumni's lives**. The confidence they developed at Outward Bound has enabled them to **take steps in their careers** that perhaps they would never have taken. They have had the **confidence to climb the career ladder**, reject an underpaid position, **step forward into leadership roles** or simply **stand up for what they believe in**. Confidence and resilience developed at Outward Bound has enabled our alumni to **overcome challenging relationships** and **situations in their home lives** and for some in doing so has enabled them to **step out of a cycle of deprivation** and **thrive in a fulfilling career**.

“

Had I not been on Outward Bound and it having shifted me, I could have potentially ended up in the care system myself, and I know that. I think [Outward Bound] is one of the reasons why I have always wanted to work with children from deprived areas and I have gone on to get my degree.

Lauren Kallides, 37, course in 2000 at Aberdovey

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“

I think initially one of the positives of Outward Bound, is the fact that I was prepared to push myself and say, “Right, I’m going to go for this,” but when I was teaching, I didn’t sit there and say, “I’m going to go for that next or that next or that next.” If the opportunity was there and I felt it was appropriate, I would go for it.

Robert Cooke, 77, course in 1964 at Moray Sea School & Eskdale

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LASTING IMPACT ON VALUES AND MINDSETS

Exposure to different ways in which people think about and **respond to people and their surroundings** is what many of our alumni attribute to having **shaped their own mindsets and values**.

Spending time with, relying on and supporting their teammates at Outward Bound has developed an **intrinsic awareness and respect** for other people – a common sentiment amongst the alumni was that *everyone needs to be and should be valued*. They feel their experience has increased their own **self-awareness** and has provided a foundation in **feeling empathy for and understanding** of others. This has **positively influenced their interactions and relationships** with different people throughout their professional and personal lives.

“

The Outward Bound Course was pivotal to me and helped change and shape much of my life. It developed in me leadership skills and helped me grow a grounded set of values that have allowed me to deal with complex situations and people in different environments and situations around the world. It enabled me to grow and make a difference. At 18 it was vital and helped me lead change.

Professor Phil Harris 70, course in 1970 at Moray Sea School

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Many feel that Outward Bound provided them with a foundation for their **resilient and positive approach to adversity**. Challenges and hardship they or those close to them have been faced with such as illness and challenging relationships have prompted many of them to draw on the same mindsets and strategies that got them through tough times they faced on their course.

“

[Outward Bound] gave me a different outlook on life, mainly that opportunities are there that I could literally grasp with both hands, like when you're jumping off a trapeze or something, you know? Having that self-belief, to achieve things if I put my mind to it, regardless of how challenging the situation is. It's got me through some difficult times in life. Where you just think back and think, "Oh, well, okay. If I did that, I can do anything." It has been a major part of my life.

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

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LASTING IMPACT ON PHYSICAL HEALTH, INTERESTS AND CONNECTION TO NATURE

They can still recount the mix of emotions they felt when trying activities such as kayaking, rock climbing and sailing for the first time at Outward Bound; the *buzz*, the *thrill*, simultaneously with fear and wanting to give up. Enjoyment of the outdoors, outdoor activities and **being physically active and healthy** remains important to many of our alumni who spend their holidays and weekends walking in the mountains, kayaking rivers and **appreciating being outdoors, close to nature**. For those who now aren't so physically mobile, they take time to travel to the locations where they did their Outward Bound course, where many feel a **strong emotional or spiritual connection** to the Lake District, Wales or the highlands of Scotland.

“

I think the Outward Bound turned me into a bit of an adrenaline junkie. Because I did that, then I went on to do my pilot license over two or three years. Got my own paraglider. And it was just fantastic, going off up the hills. It certainly gave me a love of the outdoors.

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

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The environment and nature is an aspect of their course that all of them remember and is something that has gone on to create a **positive association with the outdoors**. An **appreciation and respect for the environment** is something that has developed as the alumni have grown older – many recognise that their emotional, physical and spiritual connection with nature began during their Outward Bound course.

“

You know, this sense of place is something which is really important because it grounds us. I think going to Aberdovey, seeing some of those landscapes, helps you to understand the value of those. It helped me understand the value of those simple things.

Tim Partridge, 60, course in 1968 at Aberdovey

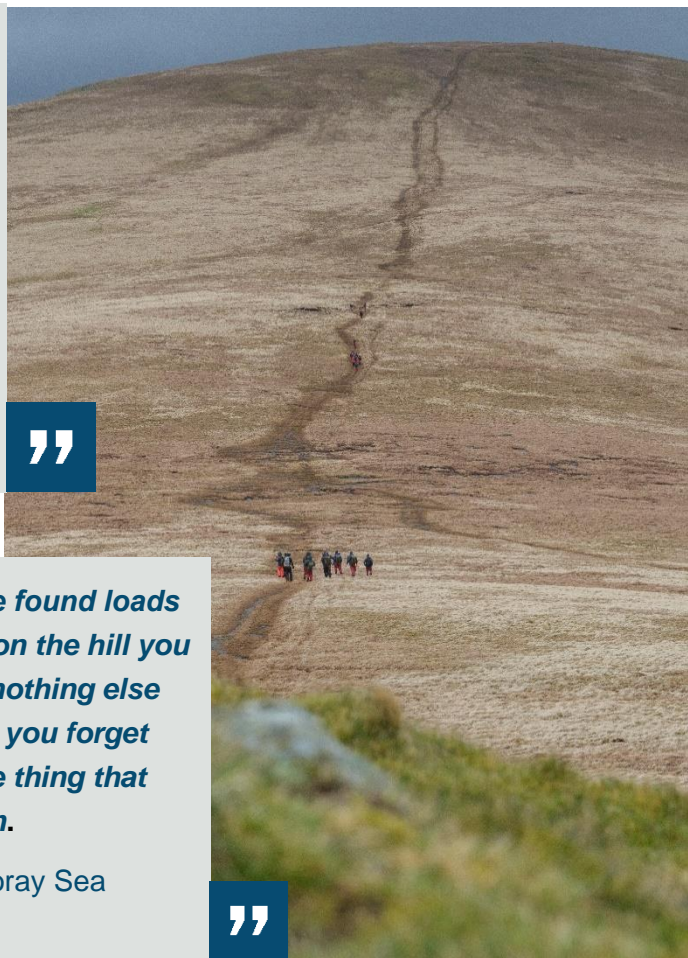
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“

I think overall the thing is that, as I've found loads of times since, whenever you're out on the hill you might be out three or four days and nothing else matters, it is just you and nature and you forget everything else. [...] I think that is the thing that any youngster really can benefit from.

Robert Cooke, 77, course in 1964 at Moray Sea School & Eskdale

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THE BROADER IMPACT OF OUTWARD BOUND

The **confidence, resilience, values and interests** that has shaped their personalities and characters has influenced their interactions with others. This indirectly has an **impact on the people they come into contact with**; their own children, family, friends or people they have worked alongside in their teaching, social worker, nursing and leadership roles. For some, being in a position teaching, mentoring or guiding others has **allowed them to reflect** on their Outward Bound experience through a **different lens** which has benefitted them in their professional and personal lives. For others, their **empathy, understanding and interpersonal** skills and confidence has influenced their ability to provide support to other people through difficulties they are facing.

“

[Outward Bound] suddenly made me realise that I could manage on my own. It is possible to survive and that gave me confidence as well which then when it came on to being an outdoor educator, I was able to actually crystalise, verbalise and put over to my students, that it is possible.

Nathan Panesar-Grix, 55, course in 1985 at Ullswater

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“

I think I've been able to make people stop a bit, like when they're all spiralling into something all upset, [...] So it's impacted people that I've met, I tend to try to be a peacemaker for people and say, "don't look at it like that, look at it in another way." I feel like I've walked in other people's shoes. I try to say to other people, "just think about how that person is feeling, don't make a judgement."

Jacci Jourdan 57, course in 1981 at Rhownair

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It is clear that our alumni's Outward Bound experiences have undoubtedly impacted and continue to impact their own and others' lives in a variety of ways. We would like to thank the individuals who took time to talk to us and reflect on their Outward Bound experiences in the first phase of this research, without whom it would not have been possible.

“

If I could relive any part of my life, it would be those three weeks [at Outward Bound] [...] it changed me as a person. Changed my life. You know, I went from not having any confidence to do anything, to, by the end of it I felt like I could conquer the world. It was that extreme.

Johanne Parsons, 51, course in 1990 at Eskdale

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OUTWARD BOUND AND YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

Young people across the UK continue to face a series of challenges to their education, finances and their social and emotional skills. The relevance and need for the Outward Bound Trust to support their wellbeing and resilience is greater than ever. Outward Bound has over 80 years of experience in developing vital life skills that young people need to thrive in an uncertain world. Our mission and core values combined with the skills of our instructors against the backdrop of the inspiring, wild locations in which we operate mean we are able to deliver quality adventurous, residential experiences that will create a positive, long-lasting impact on young people's aspirations and life chances regardless of their background.

As our conversations with our alumni and our ongoing evaluations have shown. An Outward Bound experience not only develops fundamental social and emotional skills in young people, but provides an opportunity from which life-long connections, values and appreciation of people and places grow. The young people about to embark on their Pinnacle or Summit courses this summer will no doubt be feeling the same mixture of trepidation and excitement that was felt by our alumni 50 or 60 years ago. While Outward Bound may look and feel slightly different today, each individual will undergo a very personal journey and leave with their own memories, experiences and learning that have the potential to shape and influence their futures in a positive way.



FURTHER INFORMATION

There are many ways alumni can stay in contact with Outward Bound and former participants:

The Outward Bound Trust Alumni Community Hub

Our alumni community hub hosts positive and enduring individual stories and reflections from Outward Bound participants, who have attended since the creation of the Aberdyfi Sea School in 1941, for you to read or contribute to. Here you can also find information on news and events and different ways to support, including leaving a Gift in your Will to future generations:

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

The Pay it Forward Campaign

Our campaign page has information about the summer adventure courses mentioned in this report, where you can also pay-it-forward and donate to the Summer Adventure Programme:

<https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/pay-it-forward>

The Outward Bound Trust Alumni Facebook

We also have an active and diverse Outward Bound alumni Facebook page, which you can join here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OutwardBoundAlumni>



THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST

For more information about this report or any alumni matters, please contact:

Dylan Carroll
Head of Partnerships
The Outward Bound Trust
4th Floor, 207 Waterloo Road,
London SE1 8XD

Tel: 02033016489 or 07841462146
Email: alumni@outwardbound.org.uk