

# Adventures Away From Home Evaluation 2023



A review of our £600k grant fund  
that provided bursaries for young  
people facing disadvantage to  
access outdoor learning  
experiences

**UK YOUTH**



Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport for funding the UK Youth Fund Adventures Away from Home. The project made a real positive difference to the lives of disadvantaged young people.

We would also like to thank all 45 Outdoor Learning Providers who supported UK Youth in delivering this project successfully and who made it possible to engage with over 3,500 young people.

Special thank you to Adventure Expeditions, Avon Tyrrell, Magdalen Farm, The Anderton Centre, The Pioneer Centre, Tees Active and Woodcraft Folk, who provided the photos shown in this report and those who kindly hosted UK Youth and DCMS staff quality assurance visits.

And finally, to all the youth group leaders, family members and carers and above all the young people for participating and making this, a successful ‘Adventures Away from Home’ project.

# Executive Summary

## Project context

The Adventures Away from Home (AAfH) project was a £600k grant fund that provided bursaries for young people facing disadvantage to access outdoor learning experiences. The fund was provided by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) and was delivered by the UK Youth Outdoor Learning Team.

'Adventures Away from Home' forms part of the government's 'National Youth Guarantee'<sup>1</sup> which builds upon findings from the Youth Review first conducted by DCMS between December 2020 – January 2021<sup>2</sup>. A key finding from this review was that young people wanted more opportunities to have adventures away from their home environment and the government committed that by 2025 every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and volunteering opportunities.

This project provided a welcome opportunity to introduce adventures away from home through outdoor learning provision, building upon the inclusive and challenging practices that outdoor learning provides for young people, and which supports their development of life skills. From this we have seen that young people have taken on new challenges, exploring their capabilities, and continuing to take steps towards a bright future.

## Project delivery

The project was delivered between February and April 2023 with a total of £564k in grant funding delivered by 45 outdoor learning providers across England to 3,584 young people aged between 11-18. All the young people engaged could be described as having additional 'access needs' to outdoor learning. This included young people facing financial exclusion, having a personal disability, challenges with their mental well-being, are in care or have caring responsibilities, and have little to no access to green spaces.

Intended outcomes of the AAfH project were:

- Young people who face inclusion barriers get access to valued outdoor learning opportunities

- Young people will improve their skills for life and work
- Young people will improve their mental well-being.

An accompanying evaluation framework supported in measuring the success of the project, with evaluation being undertaken with outdoor learning providers, group leaders who attended the outdoor learning sites and participating young people.

## Key findings and recommendations

The evaluation evidenced that:

- Young people with a range of access needs who are facing inclusion barriers were able to participate in valuable outdoor learning experiences.
- Young people were showing improvements in their personal confidence, independence, and self-reliance, group-working and engagement in activities, indicating improvements in their skills for life and work.
- Young people were showing greater enjoyment and happiness through their outdoor experience, indicating initial improvements in their mental well-being.
- In addition to these outcomes, it was also found that the project rose to delivering and reaching young people facing inclusion barriers in an 8-week delivery window. Some, but minor, limitations were found between the relatively short delivery window and offering a fully inclusive approach for all young people, with need to consider additional delivery time in future iterations.
- By using our established network, to connect youth and outdoor sector organisations, relationships were built between outdoor learning providers and youth groups working with young people facing disadvantage that have an opportunity to grow and be sustainable.
- Funding did not always cover all needed attendees, for example, additional trusted adults to attend (although many outdoor learning providers also provided additional bursaries for these people).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-outlines-ambitious-plans-to-level-up-activities-for-young-people>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response/youth-review-summary-findings-and-government-response>

- The learning and evaluation framework did not fully cover the skills and attributes that young people wanted to develop through their AAfH experience. Recording and monitoring these prior to the outdoor learning experience can help to build the outdoor learning journey further.
- The AAfH approach allowed young people and youth group leaders to test and develop their outdoor learning journey without the need to commit to a long-term programme.

From this it is recommended that future iterations of the AAfH project should build upon the positive practices highlighted and

- **Build a network engagement plan, prior to delivery, to build relationships between outdoor learning providers and youth organisations, supported with timely communication of the project and offer.**
- **Extend the delivery window to provide opportunity for all groups of young people to participate.**
- **Develop a learning and evaluation framework that supports young people to identify their own development needs and measure their own outcomes.**
- **Build in funding to enable additional 'trusted adults' such as 1:1 carers, youth workers and community members to attend**

## Conclusions

The AAfH project successfully delivered valuable outdoor learning development experiences through outdoor and youth sector collaboration, to young people with additional access needs who are facing inclusion barriers. Through this opportunity they have been able to personally grow, develop new skills for life and create new social networks/friendships.

This project evidenced the value added to young people's personal development and could be clearly scaled to support the government commitment **that by 2025 every young person will have access to activities, adventures away from home.**

Learning from the project can be taken forward in a series of ways, building on the work and role of both DCMS and UK Youth to co-ordinate the AAfH offer, as well as others undertaking similar work, to ensure that it reaches out to all groups of young people.



**I really enjoyed getting involved in things that I don't often get to do outdoors."**

Girl, 14, New Forest



“ I think you must try something before telling yourself you can't do it..”

Male, 14, Cumbria

## Adventures Away from Home Overview

The UK Youth Fund - Adventures Away from Home (AAfH) project was a £600k grant fund to provide bursary funding for young people facing disadvantage to access outdoor learning experiences. Funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and project managed through UK Youth by our experienced outdoor learning team, the AAfH project worked with 45 Outdoor Learning Providers across England. The scheme was designed to reach out to young people aged 11-18 who may be experiencing financial hardship, have a personal disability, mental well-being challenges, in care or are a young carer, have little or no access to green space, or were considered 'vulnerable', so they could access 'Adventures Away from Home'.

The Adventures Away from Home project was delivered between February – April 2023 with 3,584 young people supported through 267 'youth groups'<sup>3</sup> to attend unique outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor learning providers were able to apply for a grant that could be used to provide free bursary places and transport costs to support youth groups to attend an AAfH experience with a group of young people at an outdoor learning provider either for a one day or two nights residential.

This report covers the evaluation of the project, conducted by UK Youth, and completed in May 2023. It provides detailed findings on the reach of the project, the outcomes achieved and key lessons and recommendations.

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<sup>3</sup> We refer to youth groups here to describe all groups of young people who attended AAfH. These could include youth organisations or individual young person

## Aims of the project

The aim of the project was to ensure that young people aged 11-18 facing inclusion barriers, including financial hardship, physical access, or lack of access to green space, could get access to valuable outdoor learning experiences in support of their personal development. This was to be achieved by distributing a total budget of £564k in grants across 45 outdoor learning providers, who in turn would use the money to provide bursary places to ensure access for youth groups who would support young people to attend. From this, the AAFH project aimed to improve young people's skills for life and work, as well as their mental well-being.

The project was designed to ensure that young people from across regions in England could get access to outdoor learning provision. Through this, learning would be generated to understand how to improve access for young people to outdoor learning experiences, using the important role that youth work plays in achieving this.

## Why Outdoor Learning is important to young people's futures

We already know from previous systematic reviews that Outdoor Learning provides young people with increased confidence and self-esteem, interpersonal and social skills, academic learning, mental well-being, and environmental awareness (Fiennes et al, 2015).

It achieves this by providing young people with unique personal and social learning opportunities that create direct active experiences in the outdoor environment, encouraging them to test their boundaries and challenge their personal and team working skills (Institute for Outdoor Learning, <https://www.outdoor-learning-research.org/Research/What-is-Outdoor-Learning>).

In addition to this, outdoor learning also encourages young people to engage in competencies that help them to face the realities of the modern world. Environmental crisis, the social, physical, and mental health of future generations, and increasingly diversified communities, all require young people to think critically in unpredictable situations, developing their communication skills, self-reflection, problem-solving and solution-orientation (Jucker et al, 2022).

Despite these benefits, all too often many young people are not able to access quality outdoor learning experiences. Young people from families on low income, from minoritized ethnic backgrounds, those who have refugee or asylum seeker status, or those with additional support needs, can all face inclusion barriers to accessing valued outdoor learning (NatCen, 2021). These can include associated costs of delivering quality outdoor learning, confidence within communities to participate in outdoor learning, perceptions of what outdoor learning offers young people, unconscious bias within outdoor learning offers, as well as appropriate training and support within the sector, can all serve to restrict access for many young people to outdoor learning opportunities.

## Project Delivery

The project was delivered between February – April 2023, and was required to meet minimum delivery to c.2,804 young people. Project delivery management, support and quality assurance was provided by UK Youth's dedicated Outdoor Learning Team.

Outdoor Learning providers were asked to apply for a grant on the UK Youth online platform, only if they met a set criteria, detailed a strong case for funding and demonstrate that they held an external quality assurance certification for example Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC), Adventures Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) or Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) Gold standard. These demonstrated that young people would access quality safe provision.

In alignment with our network delivery approach, using our database of network organisations across England, we brokered relationships between a number of youth organisations and their local outdoor learning provider to work together to engage disadvantaged young people to participate in the project. This was successful and had a secondary outcome of building new community networks and what can become sustainable relationships.

This was done organically, based on direct communication through UK Youth, rather than embedded as part of the delivery strategy. This is a key point of learning, as going forward we would embed this as part of a future model of delivery as we are confident this would increase the reach to organisations and young people who had never engaged with outdoor learning previously.

Delivery drop out for young people was not recorded for this project. We are aware some providers had drop off, however in almost all cases they were able to backfill with other young people or it was managed within the project. Overall, as we saw from our reach of young people, this project drop off did not compromise delivery numbers.

Outdoor Learning experiences varied between full day sessions and 2-night residential.

To acknowledge the breadth of outdoor learning venues across England there are no set activities listed as essential for delivery within this programme, the focus is on the learning outcomes gained from the experience, although both day and residential experiences each had set criteria, which providers had to adhere to:

**Day visit Criteria:**

- Represent value for money by including a minimum of 5 hours direct engagement time with experienced facilitators/instructors in a green/blue space or outdoor environment using the values of experiential learning.
- Every young person is provided with a meal as part of their experience.
- Each programme strives for excellence and has clear learning outcomes linked to our data impact criteria. Programmes should follow the principles of; inclusivity, respect for the natural environment and promote courage, curiosity and celebrate participation.

**Residential Criteria:**

- Represent value for money by including a minimum of 12 hours direct engagement time with experienced facilitators/instructors in a green space or outdoor environment using the values of experiential learning.
- Every young person is provided with full board accommodation across the duration of their 2-night stay. This should at a minimum include 6 meals of which two must be hot meals.
- Each programme strives for excellence and has clear learning outcomes linked to our data impact criteria. Programmes should follow the principles of; inclusivity, respect for the natural environment and promote courage, curiosity and celebrate participation.

Across all delivery the instructor/facilitator ratio must be appropriate to the activity taking place and where appropriate aligned to National Governing Bodies (NGB) guidelines.

In total 47% of young people attended day sessions and 53% of young people attended residential.<sup>4</sup> Bursaries were offered 'per young person' and so payment was only made for each young person to attend.

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<sup>4</sup> At the time that this data was taken – 10.05.2023



This map shows the regional distribution of outdoor learning providers for AAFH across England. All regions across England were represented in this project with the majority in the North West (33%).

Feedback on the AAFH project from Outdoor Learning providers was overall very positive with a Net Promoter Score<sup>5</sup> of +67.

Many providers described the easy online application system and the direct distribution of the grant as particularly valuable parts of this project, enabling them to quickly open outdoor learning opportunities for groups of young people.

**‘Excellent opportunity for us to use resources that are otherwise unused for communities that may not be able to access us otherwise’.**

(Outdoor Learning Provider, AAFH 2023)

## Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation has been to both test the impact of the Adventures Away from Home project on youth group outcomes as well as test the assumed hypothesis of the project, which is that,

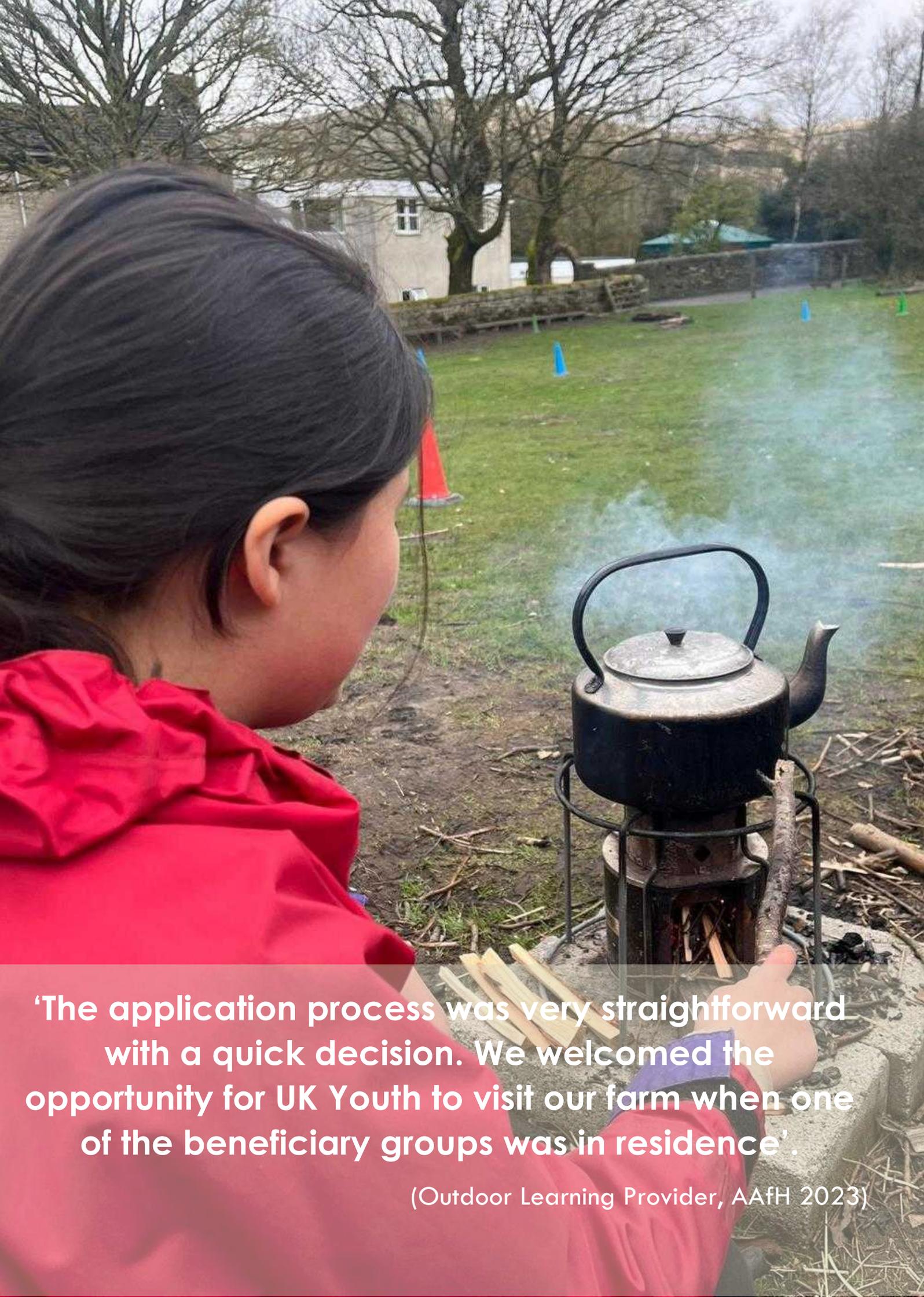
*‘The use of direct funding (in the form of bursaries) will enable young people facing inclusion barriers to access valued outdoor learning opportunities that will enhance their life and work skills and their mental well-being.’*

This hypothesis was then defined into 3 evaluation questions, which helped to frame the learning for this project.

1. Does the bursary help young people facing inclusion barriers to access valued outdoor learning opportunities?
2. Does accessing the outdoor learning environment improve young people’s skills for life, work, and mental well-being?
3. What learning does this model provide with developing UK Youth’s grants+ model for integrating outdoor learning in youth work in the future?

These questions are addressed in this report, together with a series of key lessons and recommendations that support in further developing the Adventures Away from Home project.

<sup>5</sup> Net Promoter Score is a standard metric that measures customer feedback based on whether they are likely to be a promoter or detractor of your service <https://www.netpromoter.com/know/>



**‘The application process was very straightforward with a quick decision. We welcomed the opportunity for UK Youth to visit our farm when one of the beneficiary groups was in residence’.**

**(Outdoor Learning Provider, AAfH 2023)**

# About the Evaluation

## Evaluating Outdoor Learning

The Institute for Outdoor Learning tells us that 'In Outdoor Learning, participants learn through what they do, through what they encounter and through what they discover. Participants learn about the outdoors, themselves and each other, while also learning outdoor skills' (Institute for Outdoor Learning, [What is Outdoor Learning \(outdoor-learning-research.org\)](http://outdoor-learning-research.org)). UK Youth adopts a 'challenge by choice' approach in which young people are encouraged to learn by experimenting through outdoor activities. The 'Experience/Learn/Develop' model (see appendix D) is designed to be centred on the young person and the skills and attributes they want to develop.

In this context, outcomes achieved for young people may not always be 'foreseen' at the outset of a project and being able to systematically measure these outcomes may not always be feasible in an outdoor environment. Indeed, as Anderson et al (2021) describe, this should not always be the focus of outdoor learning, with 'A focus on process and outcome reflects a specific interpretation of learning and reflects an education-biased stance. An activity focus shifts the emphasis to the ways that the learning outcomes are achieved.'

With bursaries being delivered through 45 sites across England instead of a single site location, pre-planning evaluation with youth groups was not feasible for this project. In addition, intervention times of the outdoor learning experiences ranged from 1 day to 3 days, meaning that there needs to be caution in making substantial claims to the sustainability of outcomes achieved.

Therefore, these considerations were incorporated into this evaluation in 3 ways.

- firstly, by the adoption of indicators as a means to measure the benefits of the project. This was based on a 6 metric framework (see Appendix B), which are an adaptation of the intended outcomes for outdoor learning identified by the English Outdoor Council (2015) High Quality Outdoor Learning Framework;
- secondly, by an observational tool that was to be used by youth group leaders to observe and describe the outcomes they see in their youth groups during their AAfH experience. This tool was designed to ensure that youth group leaders could feedback directly to UK Youth on outcomes observed for the purposes of this evaluation;
- finally, the introduction of 'Most Significant Change' stories (see Appendix C) for young people to complete. In certain circumstances these were completed by trusted adults as part of the AAfH project on behalf of young people, where young people's communication needs meant they were unable to complete Most Significant Change stories.

## AAfH Evaluation Methods

A multi-method approach was adopted incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. 3 evaluation tools were developed for this project, detailed below:

**Outdoor Learning Providers Report Form** – All 45 Outdoor Learning Providers were asked to complete a report form at the end of the AAfH project detailing the attendance numbers of youth groups at their centres, as well as feedback on the use of the bursary and how they adapted their delivery to meet the needs of diverse groups of young people.

**Youth Group Leaders Survey** – This helped to detail the observed changes that the youth group leaders were seeing in the groups of young people they were supervising. The survey was completed at the end of the AAfH experience. A total of 202 were completed by the time this report was completed.

**Young Person's 'Most Significant Change' Story** – These were provided to young people during the AAfH experience. Young people were asked to tell us what the most valuable part of the experience was to them and why this was important. A total of 418 young people's stories were completed at the time of this report. These stories were sampled by the UK Youth Research Team and a Most Significant Change workshop was held with staff at UK Youth's dedicated Outdoor Learning Centre, Avon Tyrrell, where part of the AAfH delivery took place.

In addition to these methods, interviews were carried out at Avon Tyrrell with senior staff to discuss delivery of the AAfH project and consider key lessons.

Responses to surveys have been high with 100% of outdoor learning providers; 76% of youth group leaders and 12% of young people (most significant change) providing returns at the time of this report was completed.

## Survey Summary

At the time of this report

- 45 Outdoor Learning Provider forms were completed.
- 202 Youth Group Leader surveys were completed.
- 418 Most Significant Change Stories were completed.



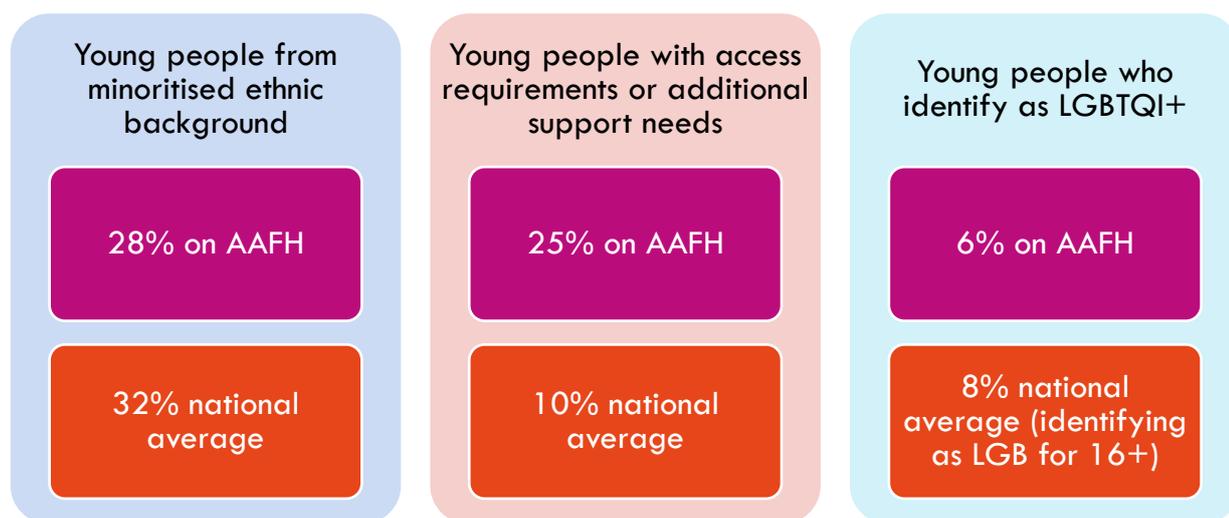
# Reach of Adventures Away from Home

A total of 3,584 young people were able to access Outdoor Learning provision through the AAFH project, exceeding the contracted target of c.2,804 young people<sup>6</sup>. Attendance at Outdoor Learning Providers could vary between 4 young people and 261 young people, with an average of 79 young people per provider (although variation was high).

The demographic profile of young people attending the Adventures Away from Home project is as follows

- 49% Male, 50% Female, 1% Non-binary/gender queer/gender fluid
- 62% were aged 11-13 years, 27% aged between 14-16 years and 9% were aged over 16 years
- 28% from a minoritised ethnic group (national average for 11 -18 year olds is approximately 32%)<sup>7</sup>
- 24% had access requirements or support needs that would need additional support (national average for 10 – 19 years is approximately 10%)<sup>8</sup>
- 6% identify as LGBTQI+ (national average of 16 – 24 year olds identifying as LGB is approximately 8%)<sup>9</sup>
- 9% are 'care experienced'<sup>10</sup>

We have provided some national averages alongside the demographic profile of AAFH participants. Although these are not always a 'like for like' comparison, they help to give context to the reach of the AAFH project.



<sup>6</sup> At the time that the data was taken for this report

<sup>7</sup> Based on ONS data (accessed at [Ethnic group by age and sex, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicgroupbyageandsex/englandandwales))

<sup>8</sup> Based on ONS data (accessed at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/datasets/disabilityinenglandandwales2021>)

<sup>9</sup> Based on ONS data (accessed at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020>). ONS Census data only asks young people aged 16+ their sexual orientation. The sexual orientation of young people below 16 is not recorded at a national level. We have included here as a contextual indicator and not as like-for-like measure

<sup>10</sup> 'Care experienced' means any young person who currently is or has been in 'care' or looked-after by local authority

Based on the data provided above we can see that

- AAFH had a slight under-representation of young people from minoritized ethnic groups.
- AAFH had a strong representation of young people with additional support needs.
- AAFH had a moderate representation of young people who identify as LGBTQI+ (although AAFH worked with young people who may not be reporting their sexual orientation or gender identity. For example, 88% of young people on AAFH are 16 or below and may not report their sexual orientation)
- AAFH had a strong representation of young people who are care experienced.

As this was a relatively open fund, that was directed towards young people who had financial limitations, there should be caution in making too many conclusions from this data as to the overall representativeness of the participants.

85% of the youth group leaders reported specific barriers that young people were facing in accessing outdoor learning, indicating that the project successfully engaged young people facing inclusion barriers to outdoor learning.



“

I can overcome my fears and achieve what I want to do, when I am focused I am very capable (...) so I've learned something new and overcome my fears .”

- Female, 13, Northumberland

# Outcomes

Based on responses from outdoor learning providers youth group leader observation surveys, as well as young people through their most significant change stories, the AAFH project has shown to deliver positive outcomes in terms of increasing access to valuable outdoor learning for young people with significant access needs and facing inclusion barriers. This has included improving their skills for life and work through building confidence and improving their mental well-being. Although these may be early steps in young people's personal journeys through outdoor learning, this evaluation demonstrates the benefits for increasing young people's access to outdoor learning provision.

## Young people who face inclusion barriers get access to valued outdoor learning

Through an applied survey we ask the Youth Group Leaders to identify any barriers that their group faces in accessing outdoor learning. From the responses we discovered;

- 55% explicitly stated financial costs as a barrier that their group faced to outdoor learning. Through the AAFH project all young people would have had a financial need for the bursary (as was required and confirmed at the point of application), including costs such as overnight stay and transport to outdoor learning sites.
- 20% cited a lack of access to local outdoor learning providers and included the need for providing additional transportation to attend centres away from home.
- 10% cited a lack of 'adult support'<sup>11</sup> in accessing outdoor learning provision, which might include, for example, transport help, emotional support or financial support from a parent or carer to attend.

In addition to these, youth group leaders also highlighted young people's support needs in accessing the AAFH project. Although we do not consider these specifically as 'inclusion barriers', they do highlight additional needs that need to be factored in when providing outdoor learning provision. These included;

- 9% cited that their group of young people had caring responsibilities (for example, of a parent or sibling) meaning they would need to find additional caring support prior to attending
- 9% cited low mental health or lack of confidence in undertaking outdoor activities
- 10% cited neurodiversity and additional educational needs as a barrier to outdoor learning, in part because young people will need adult support to be available to engage with the activities
- 5% cited physical limitations of young people preventing them from accessing appropriate outdoor learning facilities

None of these identified needs will exist in isolation from each other and they will be under-pinned by financial limitations that face these groups, including hidden costs, as one Youth Group Leader told us:

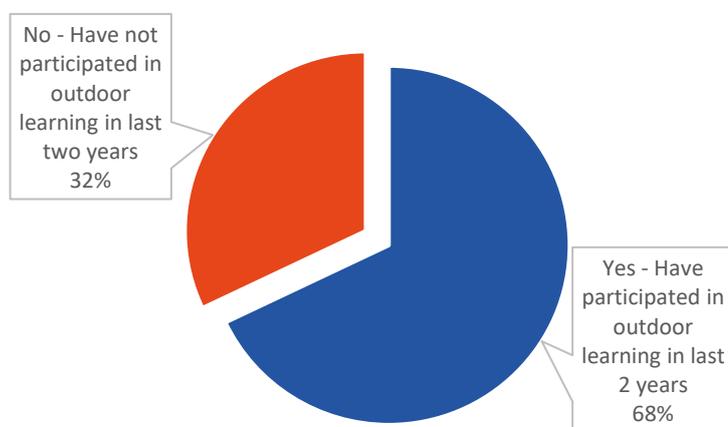
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<sup>11</sup> This is a term we have used to broadly describe where youth group leaders were highlighting that young people do not have parental/carers support to access outdoor learning

**‘The "cost" of having a disability or being a family that includes someone with a disability, is significant. This additional financial burden increases the disadvantage people with disabilities already face in our society and decreases the opportunities available to them. Being able to offer young people in families who face disability related disadvantage fully funded places, and in turn make an outdoor adventure trip affordable for the whole family’**

(Youth Group Leader, AAfH 2023)

Figure 1: Youth Group participation in previous outdoor learning



32% of youth group leaders told us that their youth group had not participated in outdoor learning before or had not participated within the last two years. Although there was no specific target for this, this was perhaps slightly lower than initially expected. This evaluation is mindful that we do not know what the nature of the outdoor learning experience was for youth groups or how frequently each youth group participated in outdoor learning prior to AAfH. This is reflected on in the learning section.

In addition to this quantitative data, qualitative feedback from young people through the most significant change stories also tell us that the AAfH project was a unique experience for many young people.

Through these stories many young people expressed some nervousness about the experience, with some specifically mentioning being away from home – and being in a more natural environment – as a new and challenging experience.

“It was only my second time away from home and I wasn’t sure if I would enjoy so much time by the sea.

The trip was an adventure from start to finish. It was so much fun! We loved every minute of it. The sun was out and we hunted for fossils, learnt about the outdoors. Got to play by the beach. It was nice to just be outside and not stuck in the house all day long.

With the chance of a funded weekend I was able to go on this trip that I would never have been otherwise.”

– young person, 13-15, Lancashire

One important aspect of the AAfH project was that youth group leaders expressed their positive experience of the project. **98% of youth group leaders stated their experiences as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’** with the additional 2% expressing it as ‘good’. When asked if they would recommend the project to a friend or colleague, youth group leaders responded with a **+90 NPS score**. This describes a picture where youth group leaders could see the benefits of increasing young people’s access to outdoor learning and would welcome further opportunities for doing so.

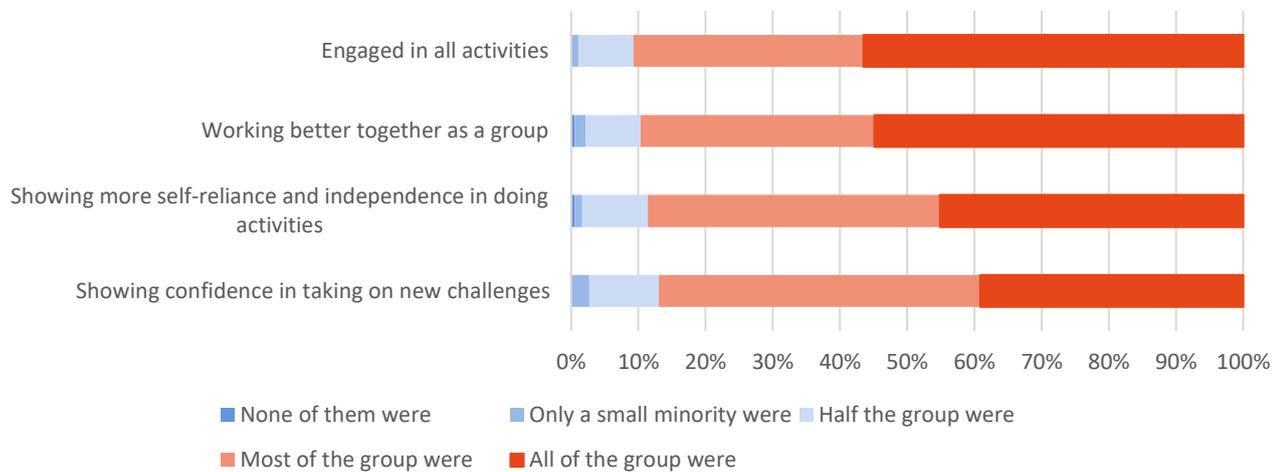
# Improve participating young people’s skills for life and work

To measure this outcome a 4 metric scale was introduced that measured soft outcomes for young people on the following:

- Engagement in all the activities
- Working better together as a group
- Showing more self-reliance and independence in doing activities
- Showing confidence in taking on new challenges

Based on survey responses provided by youth group leaders the results were as follows.

Figure 2: Youth Group observed outcomes for young people, skills for life and work



Across all 4 metrics there was a majority of positive responses (which was considered to be either ‘most of the group were’ or ‘all of the group were’) from youth group leaders. **87% gave positive feedback that their group was showing more confidence in taking on new challenges; 89% showing more self-reliance and independence in doing activities; 90% working better together as a group; 91% were engaged in all activities.** In all 4 metrics this was above the targeted 75% of youth group leaders giving positive feedback.

10 youth group leaders (5%) expressed that they did not see benefits for the majority of their youth group across these 4 metrics. There did not appear to be any significant cause for this as all expressed positive feedback for their overall experience, -

Through the most significant change stories young people told us in their own words how they had developed during their outdoor learning experience. What particularly emerged was an increase in feelings of confidence in themselves and their abilities, improved group working and increased feelings of resilience.

Regarding increased confidence, there were many examples of young people feeling more confident to 'have a go' at new or challenging things after their AAfH experience. Through the activities and spending time in an unfamiliar place away from home, they had learnt that they are able to manage or succeed at things that had initially felt daunting. This developed their confidence to step outside their comfort zone. This was underpinned by the 91% of youth group leaders who responded positively when asked whether their youth group was engaged in all activities.

There was also evidence of increased confidence at a deeper level, regarding the young people's sense of self. Young people told us about the impact of facing and overcoming a fear during their AAfH – it developed their own sense of what they were capable of and even who they were as a person. They told us, **“I am stronger than I thought”** and **“I'm braver than I think”**.

Improved group working skills also emerged as a clear theme from the young people. Many young people expressed initial nervousness about meeting new people as part of the experience and so relationship building and group working skills were key areas of observable change. Several young people told us that they made friends during the experience and several others mentioned that they had been brought closer to existing friends and peers. Many young people identified that their group working skills had improved, and that working as part of a team was something they enjoyed and were good at.

What is the one biggest thing you've learnt about yourself?

I learnt that I am alright just the way I am.

### Are there differences between day visits and residentials?

Based on the positive findings from the youth group leaders' surveys there did not appear to be any significant difference between the observed outcomes for those who attended day visits and those that attended residentials. The table below indicates this.

Metrics	Day Visit Positive %	Residential Positive %
Engaged in all activities	93%	89%
Working better together as a group	93%	86%
Showing more self-reliance and independence in doing activities	89%	89%
Showing confidence in taking on new challenges	89%	85%

Based on the above findings we can see that the percentage of positive responses was partially higher for day visits across 3 metrics, although the differences in intervention between both day visits and residentials (2-night stays) are relatively small. These are not considered as significant differences. Further evidence (Blagrave Trust, 2015) tells us that longer, overnight stays, typically lead to better outcomes for young people, although this evidence was also centred on longer week-long or 5 night stays. Coupled with findings from this project, we also know that a key component of positive outcomes for young people through outdoor learning is participating in opportunities away from the home environment. This may help to explain why we see an equal benefit for both day trips and residentials through this project

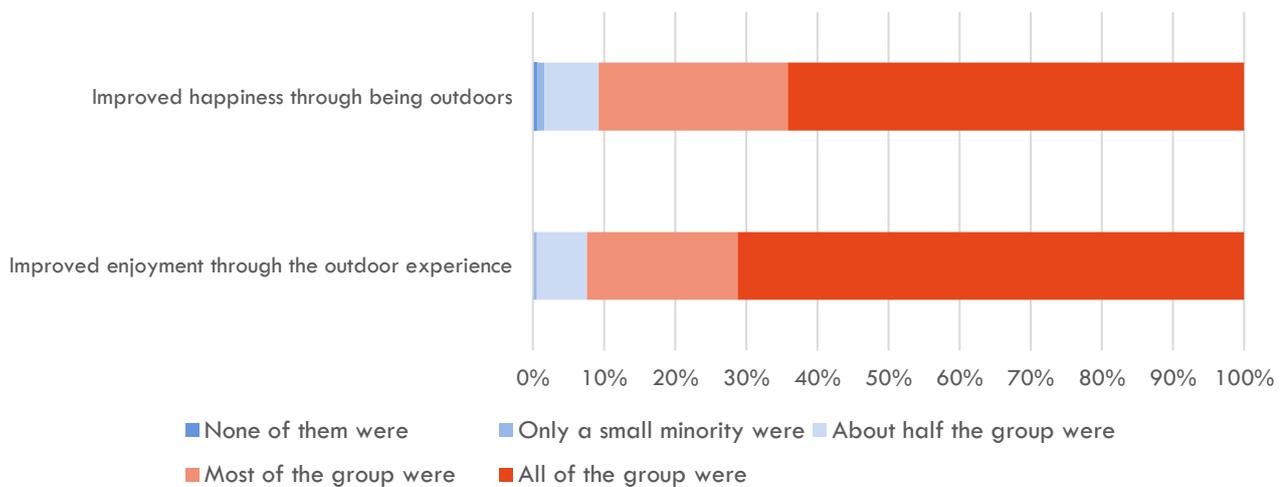
# Improve participating young people’s mental well-being

To measure this outcome a 2 metric scale was introduced that measured soft outcomes for young people on the following

- Showing improved happiness through being outdoors
- Showing improved enjoyment through their outdoor experience

Based on survey responses provided by youth group leaders the results were as follows.

Figure 3: Youth Group observed outcomes for young people, mental well-being



Across both metrics there was a majority of positive responses from youth group leaders with **91% giving positive responses that their group was showing improved happiness through being outdoors; 93% giving positive responses that their group was showing improved enjoyment through the outdoor experience.** For both metrics this was above the targeted 75% of youth group leaders giving positive feedback.

Again, a small number of 10 youth group leaders (5%) expressed that they had not seen benefits for the majority of their youth group across these 2 metrics, although again, their overall experiences were very positive.

Through the most significant change stories we heard from young people about their perceptions of their mental well-being, drawing upon how they felt about attending their AAFH experience, what they learnt about themselves and what changed for them. Stories came through from young people about how outdoor learning helped them to think about themselves, what made them nervous, how they can challenge themselves to try something that brings them out of their comfort zones and how this might help them in the future.

What is the one biggest thing you’ve learnt about yourself?

“To be myself and happy”

Why is this so important to you?

“Because you don’t have to be the person you don’t want to be”

Personal stories of mental well-being were perhaps less reflected upon than other areas such as confidence, resilience, group working (friendships) and engagement with activities through these stories. From this, we can consider that the AAFH experience was very positive for young people, and this in itself meant having time away from thinking about other parts of their lives that may be causing distress.

What is the one biggest thing you’ve learnt about yourself?

“Things that are scary can be achieved with some encouragement and you feel amazing afterwards”

Why is this so important to you?

“I will be more motivated to try new things that scare me”

With 9% of youth group leaders citing mental health and low confidence as a specific barrier for young people, it appears that improving mental well-being was a factor for attending AAFH, even if it was not the most important factor that youth groups were looking towards. Overall, the evidence suggests that young people were there to enjoy themselves, try new things and spend time with friends or creating new friendships. Through this we can conclude that having time to focus on positive aspects of their lives (and build new skills and relationships) gave young people the opportunity to focus on their mental well-being and experience happiness and enjoyment through their outdoor activities.

### *Are there differences between day visits and residentials?*

Again, based on the positive findings from the youth group leaders’ surveys, there did not appear to be any significant difference between the observed outcomes for those who attended day visits and those that attended residentials. The table below indicates this.

Metrics	Day Visit Positive %	Residential Positive %
Improved happiness through being outdoors	94%	87%
Improved enjoyment through their outdoor experience	95%	90%

Again, based on the above findings, we can see that the percentage of positive responses was partially higher for day visits across 2 metrics. These are not considered as significant differences though.

## Key Outcomes for Adventures Away from Home

- Young people facing inclusion barriers were able to get access to valued outdoor learning experiences
- Young people were showing improvements in their personal confidence, independence and self-reliance, group-working and engagement in activities, indicating improvements in their skills for life and work
- Young people were showing greater enjoyment and happiness through their outdoor experience, indicating initial improvements in their mental well-being

The outcomes described here may be considered initial steps in young people's personal development through their outdoor learning journey. The intervention periods for the AAFH project are, at this stage, too short to make any substantive statements about sustained outcomes for young people through this project. However, from the evidence described, we can see that young people facing inclusion barriers were able to access valued outdoor learning opportunities and make positive steps towards improving their skills for life and work, as well as improved well-being through improved happiness and enjoyment outdoors.

# Learning from Adventures Away from Home

This section provides details of the learning that has been gathered through the AAFH project. It draws upon the data provided in the outcomes section as well as reflections from outdoor learning providers, youth group leaders, young people, and the evaluators themselves. The learning from the project has been centred on three learning questions that have been designed to consider the development and extending the AAFH project in the future.

## Does the bursary help young people facing inclusion barriers, to access valued outdoor learning opportunities?

In its simplest terms a grants scheme given directly to outdoor learning providers to provide bursaries for young people facing financial exclusion can help them to access outdoor learning provision. Evidence from this project has shown that young people facing a range of inclusion barriers, including having a lack of access to local green spaces, a lack of appropriate adult support to attend and having additional care responsibilities were able to successfully access the AAFH project.

The relative speed of implementing the 'Adventures Away from Home' project, together with distributing the grants to Outdoor Learning Providers, is testament to the ability of the delivery team to manage this project at scale, ensuring that it could be delivered on time and in budget. Applications for the AAFH grant totalled up £1.356M, with the potential to reach 8,676 young people, demonstrating the demand for this type of fund. Managing the demand for the project and delivering it to target speaks to the ability of the Outdoor Learning Providers to facilitate these opportunities and engage a large audience of young people, as well as to the youth groups for engaging in the opportunity.

There are opportunities to ensure that some more time could be built in to reach out with funding and undertake pre-planning with youth groups facing inclusion barriers to overcome any hurdles they may be facing. As one provider commented.

***‘The short lead in time made it really tricky for us to source appropriate accommodation for the residentials - due to the nature of some of the young people that we wanted to work with, we needed to ensure that the accommodation type was secure and independent from other bookings on site. A longer lead in time would have made this much easier and given more flexibility in offering spaces to different groups’***

(Outdoor Learning provider, AAfH 2023)

Ensuring sufficient time for planning the distribution of the grants, enabling, for example, more promotion time and targeted reach towards youth groups remains a key learning of this project.

At the same time the funding of the bursary was also offered on a ‘per young person’ basis and although there were youth group leaders in attendance (often in the form of youth workers) there was not always specific funding made for extended support networks for young people, such community based trusted adults, support workers or care givers. In some cases, external funding was directed to young people who had caring responsibilities so that those they cared for could attend. This was an invaluable means to ensure that this group was reached out to in this project.

Creating opportunities for extended support networks to attend remains an important part of breaking down inclusion barriers for many young people to attend outdoor learning. Having youth workers or support workers in attendance can act as an important ‘trusted adult relationship’ in encouraging young people to attend sites that may be unfamiliar to them, as well as acting as important mediators between outdoor learning providers, young people, and communities in helping to understand the benefits of the outdoor learning experience (NatCen 2021). The potential benefits of resourcing an extended network of support remains a key learning point from this project.

## **How does accessing the outdoor learning environment improve young people’s skills for life, work, and mental well-being?**

From the outcomes measured through the AAfH project it can be seen that young people were taking early steps towards building their skills for life, work and mental well-being by accessing unique outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor learning is designed to push young people's limits and allow them to explore their confidence and resilience, whilst providing positive experiences through building new friendships and skills, developing their understanding of the natural world and broadening their horizons. These were strongly reflected in the most significant change stories provided by young people, who reflected on their experience and what they personally learnt from it.

The best bit was working as a team to build the raft. [The biggest thing I learnt was] to listen to other people’s ideas because they’re good. It helps me be a team player which is important for family, school, and friends. – AAfH participant, 12, Doncaster

Through these personal testimonies we can see that young people will gain a variety of skills and soft outcomes through outdoor learning that is personal to them and may not have been envisioned at the start.

Exploring and testing their limits, having opportunities to try new things and develop new relationships can allow for outcomes to emerge for young people and give them time to reflect upon these and what they have personally developed.

I can do a lot more than play video games. I don't usually go outside but now after the experience I go outside a lot more often. – AAFH Participant, 11, Dorchester

One challenge that remained through the project was being able to systematically measure the outcomes for young people across a broad range of both structured and unstructured provision. This is in part because there was no specific standardised content across outdoor learning providers as each will have their own unique offers, together with not having needed delivery time to measure the starting points for young people. To systematically measure the long-term sustainability of these outcomes would need further structured content over a significant period of time with a sustained frequency of engagement. However, it is important to be careful as to not over-structure this approach as this may act as a barrier for many groups of young people to participate in outdoor learning. Working closely with youth groups and outdoor learning providers, future iterations of AAFH could record and monitor the skills and attributes young people would like to develop and the outcomes they want to achieve through their outdoor learning experience, without the need to engage in a structured systematic evaluation that may act as a barrier to engagement. This remains a key learning of this project.

## What learning does this approach provide to develop bursaries and grants for integrating outdoor learning with youth work in the future?

The role of bursaries in the AAFH project allowed for groups of young people to gain quick access to outdoor learning opportunities that they may never have experienced before. This 'quick access' approach proved to be a useful lever in encouraging youth group leaders to want to take up the offer and generate excitement and interest amongst their groups of young people without having to commit to a longer structured programme.

***Just what a fantastic opportunity this is, the instructors were great, the young people gained so much from the experience, and we'd love to do it again, with different opportunities and young people.***

(Youth Group Leader, AAFH 2023)

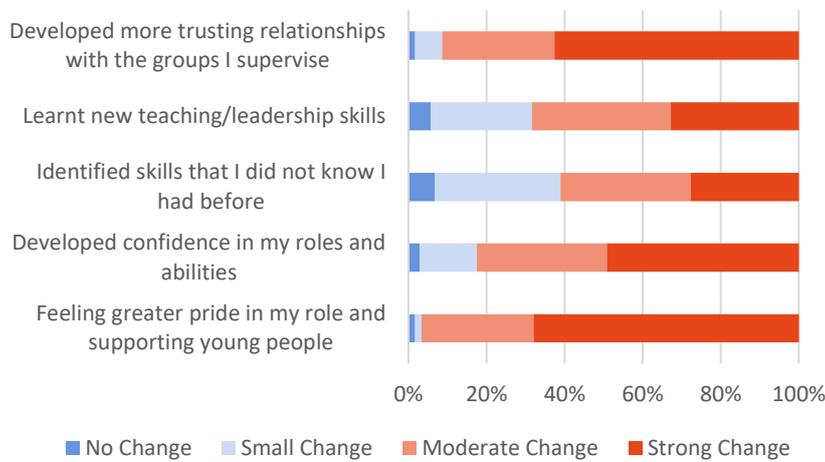
***The bursaries enabled participation by groups who would not usually engage - those who don't usually get the opportunity to access outdoor learning and adventures. The bursaries enabled us to develop bespoke activity packages to meet the individual support needs of participants. We engaged a significant number of neurodiverse young people, some of whom needed 121 support.***

(Outdoor Learning Provider, AAFH 2023)

Having to deliver the project within an 8-week window proved a challenge that was largely risen to by outdoor learning providers, as demonstrated by the reach of young people. At the same time extending this delivery period would give greater choice and options for groups of young people to access outdoor learning when it is most appropriate for them and where there are not other conflicts of interest that may prevent them from attending (for example colliding with religious holidays such as Ramadan or preparations for exams).

In addition, one key aspect of this work has been to help realise the benefits of outdoor learning within a youth work context, drawing upon the bursary to introduce new outdoor learning experiences to groups of young people without too much commitment from them. One important element of this was the benefits this had for youth group leaders in terms of their pride in their role, skills-building, leadership confidence and relationships with young people. As part of youth group leader surveys, we asked additional questions as to what youth group leaders developed during their time on AAfH. The results are as follows:

Figure 4: Youth group leaders outcomes



Across these 5 metrics, there were a majority of positive responses (in this case considered to be those indicating a 'strong' or 'moderate' change). **91% developed more trusting relationships with the groups they supervise; 68% learnt new teaching/leadership skills and 61% identified skills they did not know they had before; 82% developed confidence in their roles and abilities; 97% feeling greater pride in their role and supporting young people**

## Key Learning

- Additional delivery time would help to ensure all youth groups are able to overcome all inclusion barriers.
- Build in extended network of support, including community based trusted adults and ensure they can also attend the AAFH project.
- Work closely with youth groups and outdoor learning providers to understand the skills and attributes young people want to develop and the outcomes they want to achieve.
- Bursary scheme allows young people and youth group leaders to test and develop their outdoor learning journey without the need to commit to a long-term programme.
- This project clearly had a positive impact on the young people who attended, adding value to their life journey. Youth leaders recognised and supported young people to attend showing the powerful opportunity for cross sector collaboration to make a real difference to young people's lives.

These findings are important because they support in showing that youth group leaders can themselves benefit from the outdoor learning experience and from this create strong buy-in from the youth work sector. The use of a bursary scheme allowed youth group leaders to 'test the ground' in young people's access to outdoor learning, consider what benefits there may be in attending, and begin to understand the necessary levers to helping to overcome inclusion barriers, all without having to commit to a longer-term programme. From this they could also see the potential for their own professional and personal development through an outdoor learning experience.

Although the AAFH project was a relatively short-term project, the level of learning developed has been quite considerable. Utilising this learning to develop the AAFH project in the future remains key to the future success of outdoor learning opportunities for young people. A key aspect of this is to develop a learning and evaluation framework that both respects and understands the relative 'developmental' approach to outdoor learning, where young people can learn in an open and challenging environment and begin to explore their own outcomes within a group environment. This is reflected upon in the key lessons and recommendations section.





**“This was an INCREDIBLE experience for these children who had never experienced anything like this before”.**

*(Youth Group Leader, AAfH 2023)*

# Lessons and Key Recommendations

Based on the learning from the project a series of key lessons and recommendations have been developed to support in steering future iterations of the AAFH project. These key lessons and recommendations are intended as guidance and are, of course, contingent on available resources and capacity of respective funders and delivery partners. They have been designed to provide practical actions that could be taken in the future to grow on the success of the AAFH project.

## Networked approach

UK Youth provided an important cross sector networking role in the AAFH project, helping to connect outdoor learning providers with youth organisations who were interested in accessing outdoor learning opportunities and were working with young people with significant access needs and facing inclusion barriers. This provided an important step in building relationships between some outdoor learning providers and groups of young people.

### Key recommendations at a glance

- Producing a network engagement plan prior to delivery to build cross sector relationships between outdoor learning providers and youth organisations.
- Extended delivery window to ensure increased groups and individual needs of young people can be fully catered for
- Learning and evaluation framework that supports young people to identify their own development needs and measure their own outcomes.
- Funding to enable additional 'trusted adults' such as youth workers and community members to attend

**Recommendation:** Producing a project network engagement plan prior to delivery will support the development of relationships between youth organisations and outdoor learning providers. This will facilitate the organisation of funded visits and streamline communication, as well as supporting providers to reach a range of youth organisations local to them. Utilising UK Youth's current network of youth organisations, together with its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system will be an important part for this.

## Learning and evaluation

The AAFH project had pre-defined outcomes, which helped to provide direction to the personal development journey UK Youth were focusing on for young people participating in outdoor learning activities. In addition to this, through the course of the project and most significant change stories, UK Youth discovered that young people were achieving a range of personal and group-based outcomes that were not always explicitly related to the outcomes defined but acted as additional benefits of the project. It highlighted how, through the course of outdoor learning, young people will have unique experiences through which they can build their personal and social development and capturing this remains a key lesson for the project.

**Recommendation:** Future iterations of the AAFH project should build on the learning and evaluation approach adopted for this project and continue to explore and embed ways of capturing outcomes for young people that reflect their own development journey. An accompanying learning and evaluation framework that allows groups of young people to identify the skills and attributes they want to develop and then monitor their progress and how far these have been achieved for each young person, can be further built in to the AAFH project to capture this. A series of youth-friendly learning tools can be both developed and adopted to achieve this aim, building these into the delivery of outdoor learning activity.

## Extended delivery window

With an extended delivery window, youth group leaders believe they would be able to provide more time to develop vital community and family buy-in to the outdoor learning opportunities, ensure they could bring in extra resources reaching more young people, particularly those with the most significant access needs. At the same time there was also the potential for outdoor learning providers to build further relationships with youth groups with whom they have never worked with before. The opportunity afforded by a longer delivery window can provide more flexibility for youth organisations to decide when to attend Outdoor Learning Centres and avoid clashes with key periods in young people's lives, such as exam season or religious holidays.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that future AAFH project should have a delivery window that ensures all groups of young people can be fully catered for and gives them more flexibility in when they attend outdoor learning provision. This can be decided when the aims and objectives of future projects are agreed to ensure that the mission of the project can be fully met. This will support in increasing capacity amongst outdoor learning providers to cater for diverse groups of young people and reduce any potential clashes with other key periods in young people's lives.

## Funding for additional trusted adults

Funding was focused on a 'per young person' basis, although some outdoor learning providers did offer additional financial support for carers or trusted adults to extend access for certain groups of young people (such as those with caring responsibilities). To further reach out to groups of young people with the most significant access needs, consideration of allowing funding for places for carers or trusted adults could be factored into the total funding, with outdoor learning providers identifying additional places to facilitate access as part of their application.

**Recommendation:** Build in funding to enable additional trusted adults of young people, whether these are carers, youth workers or community members to ensure that those young people with the most significant access needs have the appropriate support to attend and benefit the most from the experience. Where there is need for funding additional places for adult peers to attend, this could be outlined and identified within the application process for outdoor learning providers and should be reflected as good practice in supporting young people to overcome inclusion barriers to outdoor learning.

## Concluding remarks

The AAfH project successfully reached over 3,500 young people across England to ensure they could access valuable outdoor learning experiences away from their own homes and in new environments, supporting the government's 'National Youth Guarantee'. The success of this reach, delivered in a two-month period, is testament to the UK Youth outdoor learning team and infrastructure, outdoor learning providers and the youth groups involved to make this happen.

The recommendations highlighted in this report are intended to build on this success and support growing the project in the future to ensure that even more young people can benefit from the opportunities that outdoor learning provides. Providing more time to plan, develop and deliver will enable outdoor learning providers to ensure even stronger outcomes for a greater range of young people in the future.

There was clear appetite for this project across both the youth and outdoor sectors and they demonstrated a strong willingness to work collaboratively. The success was way above expectations therefore there is but one conclusion, young people should have more funded Adventures Away from Home as they 'Make a Real Positive Difference' to young people's life skills now and in the future. There is an opportunity to build upon the incredible outcomes achieved by the Adventures Away from Home fund and create a larger scale sustainable programme for disadvantaged young people and UK Youth would like to explore this with DCMS and other funders.

***“Residential are such powerful things! The conversations, skills and friendships that are forged on them are transformative! Thank you so much for helping make this possible!”***

(Youth Group Leader, AAfH 2023)

**“It was great to be part of a team encouraging and enabling young people to take on challenges and experiences in an outdoor setting was wonderful to see how they developed skills and made new friendships”.**

(Youth Group Leader, AAfH 2023)

**“Staff were excellent with all the young people from start to finish, encouraged and supported those with additional needs, challenged others to achieve more and friendly.”**

(Youth Group Leader, AAfH 2023)

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# Appendix A

## Adventures Away from Home Evaluation framework

### Testing hypothesis

'The use of direct funding (in the form of bursaries) will enable young people facing inclusion barriers to access valued outdoor learning opportunities that will enhance their life and work skills and their mental well-being'

### Evaluation questions

1. Does the bursary help young people facing inclusion barriers to access valued outdoor learning opportunities?
2. Does accessing the outdoor learning environment improve young people's skills for life, work and mental well-being?
3. What learning does this model provide us with developing UK Youth's grants+ model for integrating outdoor learning in youth work in the future?

### Approach

Objectives	Activities	Indicator How is it calculated?	Target What is the target value?	Data source How will it be measured?	Responsible Who will measure and collect it?
1. Provide bursaries for day trips and residential for 2,300 young people aged 11-18 years who face inclusion barriers in accessing outdoor learning opportunities	UK Youth to provide grants to outdoor learning centres to distribute as bursaries for young people  UK Youth to deliver its own bursary through its dedicated outdoor learning site Avon Tyrrell	1. Number of young people aged 11-18 attending outdoor learning centres through the bursary 2. Key demographics of Young People 3. Qualitative reporting of inclusion barriers	1. 3,000 young people aged 11-18 years 2. Minimum in line with pop. Rate 3. 100% of young people groups face inclusion barriers	Outdoor Learning Centres Report Forms  Youth Group Leaders Survey	Outdoor Learning Centres to report and disseminate
2. Improve participating young people's skills for life and work	This includes: - Bursaries for c.1,800 young people to access 2 night residential with all expenses covered - Bursaries for c.504 young people to attend day trips, all expenses covered	1. Youth Group Leaders report on young people's confidence, self-reliance, group-working, resilience and engagement with outdoor activities	1. 75% of youth group leaders report improvements in young people's outcomes across 5 domains	Youth Group Leaders Survey (for observation)	Outdoor Learning Centres to disseminate. UK Youth to analyse and share
3. Improve participating young people's mental well-being		1. Youth group leaders report on young people's enjoyment in the outdoors and happiness in being outdoors 2. Young people's stories highlight the most significant changes taking place for themselves	1. 75% of youth group leaders report improvements in young people's outcomes across 2 domains	1. Youth Group Leaders Survey (for observation) 2. Adventures Away from Home stories	Outdoor Learning Centres to disseminate. UK Youth to analyse and share

## Appendix B

### Youth Group Leaders Survey – 6 metrics used for the AAFH project

	None of them were	Only a small minority were	About half the group were	Most of the group were	All of the group were
Showing confidence in taking on new challenges					
Showing more self-reliance and independence in taking on new activities					
Working better together as a group					
Engaged in all activities					
Improved enjoyment in their outdoor activities					
Improved happiness through being outdoors					

## Appendix C

### Most Significant Change stories – AAFH Project

You can tell us your name here if you choose to do so

What was the name of the outdoor learning centre you attended?

How did you feel about attending before you started any of the activities?

Please tell us what has been the most valued part of this experience for you?

What is the one biggest thing you have learnt about yourself after this?

Please say why this is so important to you?

Please tell us a little about yourself? For example your age, gender, ethnicity or where you live (optional)

## Appendix D

UK YOUTH

Experience, Learn, Develop



# Our Principles



### We are inclusive

We want individuals and communities to have the opportunity to benefit from engagement in QUALITY-DRIVEN outdoor learning and show a respectful understanding for each other.



### We respect the natural environment

It is an integral part of our experience, learn, develop model and is a contributing factor in achieving meaningful outcomes and enables us to promote awareness of the current climate crisis.



### We value the whole experience, our approach is centred around Experiential Learning.

We apply the principles of YOUTH WORK and importance is placed on both the acquisition of skill or knowledge and the steps of the growth journey. We celebrate participation and encourage everyone to set goals to achieve their full potential and promote reflection to recognise individual achievements.



### We value courage and curiosity

We create a safe space where individuals can discover and challenge themselves, knowing that they will be supported and recognised for their own learning styles, strengths, character, and contribution.



### We strive for excellence

To ensure our services and delivery meet the needs of our users WE LISTEN and are adaptable.

## UK Youth - Leaders in outdoor learning

"There are two goals in the experiential learning process. One is to learn the specifics of a particular subject, and the other is to learn about one's own process." - David A. Kolb

Young people 'experience, learn, develop' through what they do, what they encounter and what they discover. When delivered by experienced trained, competent outdoor learning practitioners / youth workers, the experience is holistic, the value comes from looking at an individual's whole self, their individual capabilities and outcomes and is a valuable part of the ecosystem that equips young people to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives.

Outdoor learning combines knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviour change and these can be demonstrated through the following outcomes (not an exhaustive list):



## Experience

- Gain new knowledge through experience
- Active experiences promote health and wellbeing
- Enjoyable fun, positive memories
- Safe environment / a sense of community
- Broadens knowledge of lived experiences
- Risk, delivered within a well-managed environment
- Independence
- The value of trust and trusted relationships



## Learn

- About ourselves and others
- Understand the transferability of that learning
- New skills
- Problem solving
- To recognise and celebrate achievement
- About the natural environment and its importance for both sustainability and personal wellbeing



## Develop

- Essential life skills
- Educational skills
- Character and Citizenship
- Social Skills
- Resilience
- Teamwork
- Confidence to use own voice / be self
- An ability to self-evaluate real versus perceived risk
- Soft Skills

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