



A Refreshing Perspective: The benefits of an Outward Bound residential for teachers



SUMMARY: THE BENEFITS OF AN OUTWARD BOUND RESIDENTIAL FOR TEACHERS

It is widely reported how an Outward Bound residential develops vital social, emotional skills and aspirations in young people. This report looks at the residential through a different lens and aims to uncover the **benefits of an Outward Bound residential for teachers.**

Professionally, the residential provides teachers' with opportunities to develop, strengthen and re-fresh technical classroom management and interpersonal skills. **Personally**, the residential provides valuable time for teachers to challenge themselves and reflect on their skills and capabilities and regenerate their wellbeing outside of the classroom.

There's no denying that teaching is an incredibly tough job. Physically and emotionally challenging work, combined with long hours, increasing scrutiny and monitoring, together with young people's behaviours and needs becoming ever more complex – are all factors which are contributing to a decline in teachers' wellbeing. Many teachers report becoming disillusioned and having to leave the profession contributing to a growing staffing retention crisis that is putting schools and young people's education under ever-increasing strain.

The Outward Bound Trust has been evaluating the impact of a course on teachers for over a decade. Between 2023-2024 we have focused on collecting both qualitative and quantitative data that gives an insight into the personal and professional benefits that attending an Outward Bound course can have for teachers.

For a teacher who feels demotivated, overwhelmed, stressed or who is struggling to find connection and engagement in their classroom, the chance to take a **much-needed break from the physical school environment**, gain a **different perspective** and **re-build relationships** away from the associated pressures and labels of their workplace, has a variety of professional and personal benefits.

- During a residential with an outdoor education professional, teachers are exposed to different approaches to rapport-building and engagement, **teachers' professional skills can be strengthened, developed and re-freshed, leading to increased job satisfaction.**
- The residential provides an opportunity where individual teachers are challenged personally and are given time to reflect in a supportive environment, this can lead to them returning back to their classrooms **feeling re-energised, re-connected and with a renewed sense of confidence and capability.**
- The above contribute in the **longer-term to improvements in students' learning, engagement and cohesion** within the classroom.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

- We conducted an **online survey of 200 teachers** who attended an Outward Bound residential with their school between January 2023 – January 2024. The survey was **completed 3 months after** their course to allow time for reflection and for impact to be realised back at school.
- Within the survey, we incorporated elements of our **‘Understanding Young People’** (UYP) evaluationⁱⁱ. The UYP approach is one that is employed Trust-wide and is underpinned by Choice Theory developed by Dr. William Glasser, it focusses on rapport building, young people’s needs and understanding their behaviour. The aim of incorporating these questions into the survey was to understand the extent to which the UYP approach has an influence on teachers’ interactions with their pupils and their practice within the classroom.

PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS

We know there is a teacher retention crisis; in 2022, **40,000 teachers left the profession** amid a competitive wider labour marketⁱⁱⁱ. There are several reasons for this including **workload stress, burnout** and **increased pastoral demands**, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Whilst we are not saying an Outward Bound course can solve this crisis, our survey indicates there are **several professional benefits**, including **increased overall job satisfaction**.

78% of all education staff are stressed.^v

36% of school teachers are experiencing burnout.^v

64% of teachers reported increased job satisfaction after going on an Outward Bound residential (N=200)

“

I am pushing retirement age and have done many trips like this; I personally always learn something new [from] you guys, but more importantly, you really can't imagine how much this improves our job back in school.

”

Simon Woodward, Technical Support, Walsall Academy

Attending a residential strengthens teacher and pupil relationships. Between two and three months after their course, teachers report **improved relationships with their pupils**, **increased understanding of pupils' needs** and **having observed different qualities in pupils' abilities**. (Figure 1)

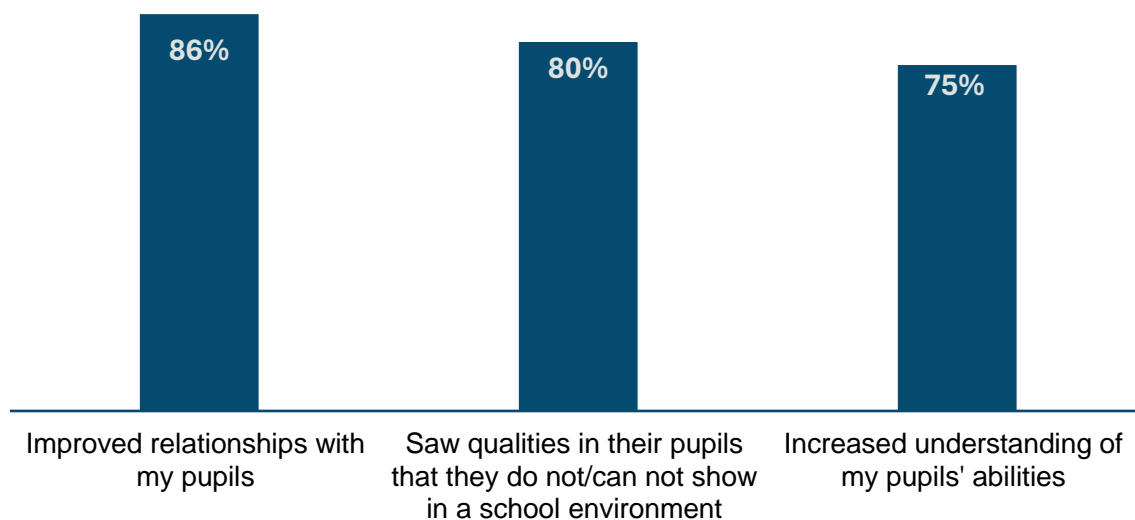


Figure 1: Between two and three months after their course, teachers indicated professional benefits they have experienced as a result of going on an Outward Bound course. Percentages reflect those who reported experiencing improved relationships with their pupils, increased understanding of pupils' abilities and having observed qualities in pupils they haven't seen before. (N=200)

UNDERSTANDING PUPILS' NEEDS

At the start of 2023, influenced by our EDI¹ strategy, we worked together with Developing Youth Practice on developing an '**Understanding Young People**' (UYP) approach. Underpinned by **Choice Theory**^{iv} developed by William Glasser, the UYP approach puts rapport-building at the centre and uses **five basic physiological needs** to explain an individual's behaviours, emotions and thoughts.

An understanding of a young person's needs and context together with a focus on rapport and relationship building are central to the design and delivery of an Outward Bound course. It is very much an approach that is woven into the fabric or culture at Outward Bound.

Our evaluation aims to understand to what extent elements of the Understanding Young People approach and focus on rapport-building employed at Outward Bound together with the team-building experiences, go on to impact a teacher's interactions and understanding of **their pupils needs and behaviours back in the classroom**². Insights from the evaluation highlight the importance of **shared emotional (positive and challenging) experiences**.

¹ Equity, diversity and inclusion

² The Understanding Young People approach, rather than being something that is explicitly 'taught' on a residential, is employed in each and every interaction with an Outward Bound member of staff and

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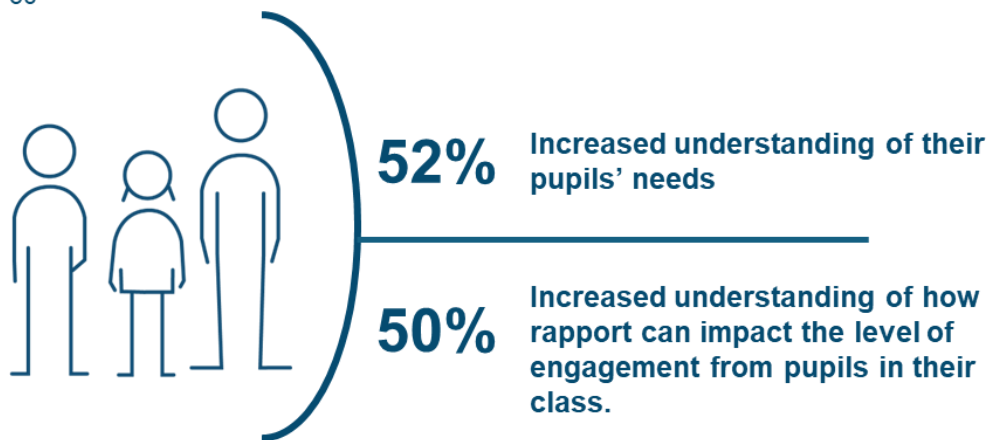
*I think being in a gorge with a group of kids and you're in the same situation and you're clearly uncomfortable with it, there's a **shared experience of that discomfort** and having to deal with it. Walking in the rain, just camping with a beautiful sunset, there are certain moments... having those **moments of awesome wonder**, the kids kind of go, "Wow," and **a teacher becomes part of that landscape.***

”

Jenny Isherwood, Head of Adventure Education, Edinburgh Academy

Between two and three months after their course, teachers agreed they have:

N=60



PERSONAL BENEFITS

Staff workload and wellbeing are inextricably linked. Teachers have highlighted their struggles with **long hours^v**, **increasingly complex student behaviour** post-Covid together

A quarter of teachers work more than 59 hours a week.^{viii}

with rising numbers of **children with additional needs**, all at a time where **school budgets are already stretched** to the maximum^{vi}. By using programmes such as Outward Bound, teachers can experience **improvements to their wellbeing**, feel **more confident** in their role, **more connected to their students** and more **equipped to deal with challenging situations**.

therefore these result reflect to what extent the culture at Outward Bound has an impact on a teacher's interactions back in the classroom.

“

*This experience has **definitely increased my self-confidence**, so much so that I am volunteering for another residential trip with students who have higher needs of support. This is **a new challenge for me** as they will need an increased level of support for their trip around the clock with greater responsibility.*

”

Naida Jabar, Teaching Assistant, Pendle Community High School

96% of teachers reported the course benefitted them personally^{vii}.

The most frequently reported personal benefits to teachers were:

- **Enjoying the adventurous course activities.**
- **Enjoying spending time in the outdoors.**
- **Feeling an improvement in their mental wellbeing.**



“

*[Following the Outward Bound course] what I'm trying to do as a school now is to make sure that staff in the curriculum have time **to build up those moments [from the course] to deepen relationships**, to **deepen trust** so that we can then **help engage the students**, ensure they're happy learners, [and] **that they want to come to school**. Then you've got increased attendance, behaviour increases because **you know each other better**, then progress comes.*

”

Jane Brierley, Deputy Head, Queen Katherine School

RESULTING LASTING IMPACT OBSERVED BY TEACHERS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

“

*I've got a year group now who are quite possibly the **poorest attending year group that I've ever had**. I can categorically say that two of them [previously had poor attendance] and since the course, **Bertie has been at school every day**. Whether that's because of the course, you couldn't say but you could argue the fact.*

*I would probably attribute it [to the course] because he's one of the ones that we find in a difficult situation at home and ultimately his attendance was quite poor. **He has been at school every day since the course** and you can't argue with that, can you?*

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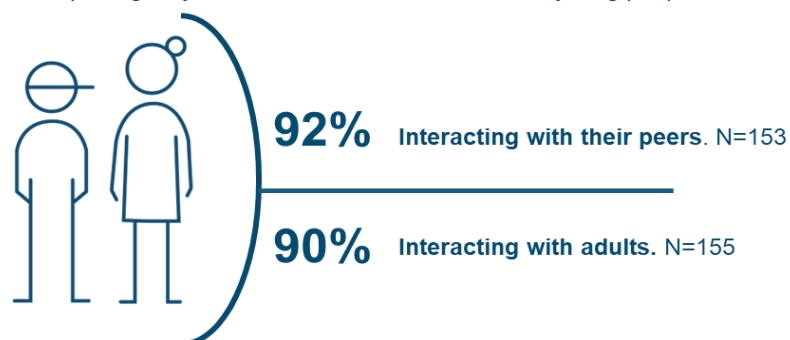
Lawrence Crabb, Head of Year 6, Witton Middle School commenting in 2024, four months after their course.

We know that understanding, rapport and relationships are key to engaging young people and provide the foundations on which transformative learning experiences happen. This theory is central to each of our courses and is woven into our culture. This approach, while not always explicitly 'taught' on a course, is immediately evident through interactions with Outward Bound staff and is often adopted by teachers and applied back in the classroom.

More explicitly, during the residential side of the course and during an adventure in the outdoors, teamworking skills such as communication, problem solving, and leadership are put into practice. Each face-to-face interaction is **key to developing rapport and connection**, spending time with others, **sharing unique and often emotional experiences** away from social labels that may exist in their home lives allow a young person to **deepen their relationships with teachers and peers**. It provides opportunities to develop an understanding of one another, **respect, trust** and a **sense of support** that may not have been felt before. Teachers report that they see **young people more confident in their interactions with their peers and adults** after the course.

School staff report an increase in young people's confidence when interacting with their peers and adults.

% of school staff reporting they have observed an increase in the young people's confidence when:



The **trust, understanding and awareness** developed between peers and colleagues during a course, is something which continues to be observed, felt and built upon back in the classroom months after the course.

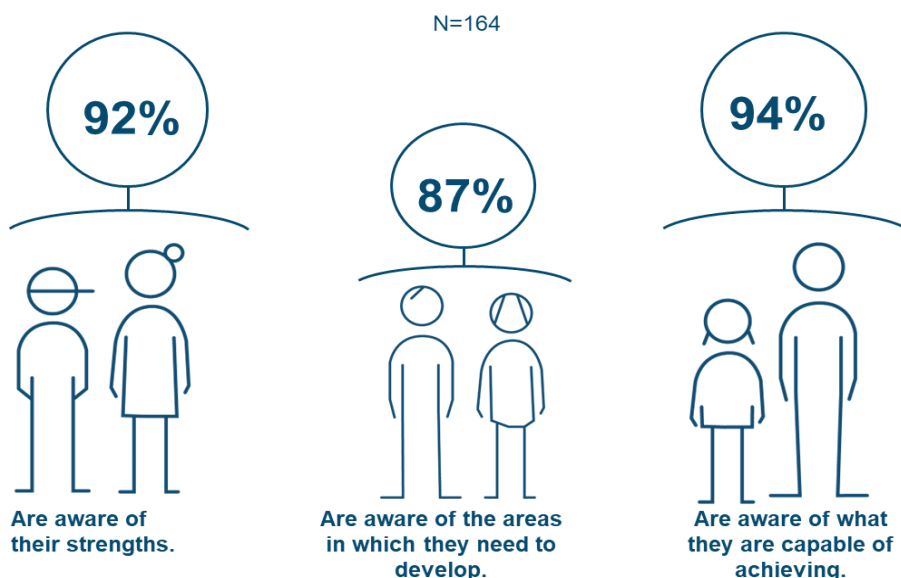
By having a **good rapport with and an understanding of students' needs**, teachers can



ensure a young person feels **valued**, that they **can be themselves**, feel **understood, welcomed**, and that their **basic needs³ are met**. This allows them to be more self-aware, confident and more open to learning experiences which ultimately are linked to **improved educational outcomes**.

After the young people return to school from their courses, teachers report that they **continue to see positive changes** in the young people's **self-awareness**, in their **approach to challenge** and change as well as their **relationships** with their peers and teachers.

% of teachers reporting an increase in young people's self-awareness up to three months after their course.



³ Choice Theory is based on the understanding that an individual's behaviour can be linked back to a desire to fulfil one or more of the five basic needs: Love and belonging, Self-worth and power, Fun and enjoyment, Freedom and Survival and health.

Insights from our evaluation indicate that the rapport observed and felt on a course continues back in the classroom. It is widely reported that effective rapport can get the best out of learners by **increasing both teacher and student enjoyment of the learning environment**, and of the topic. Good rapport and a supportive, cohesive classroom community also **motivates learners to attend class and focus on learning**^{viii}.

“

*There's one thing that's an **absolute standout and that's teamwork**. They have respect for each other and, in particular, **respect for each other's differences**. They are **still connected socially**, we're months and months later and they're still meeting up and **that has come from the week in the Lakes**.*

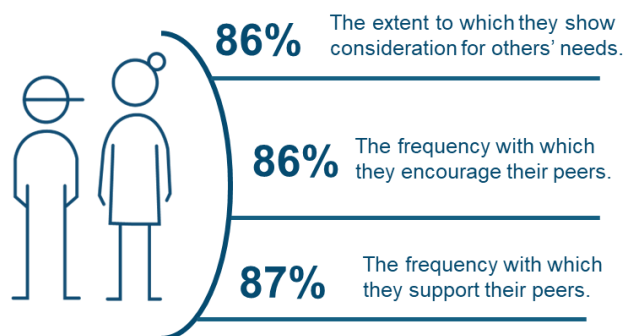
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Lawrence Crabb, Head of Year 6, Witton Middle School commenting in 2024, 4 months after their course.

2-3 months after their Outward Bound course, school staff continue to observe positive changes in young people's interpersonal skills and relationships in the classroom.

They report young people are more considerate, supportive and encouraging towards their peers.

% of school staff reporting they have observed that young people do the following more often. N=156



“

The students that I have worked with since our visit have **learned to reflect** on what they can change and influence and what they are unable to. I have seen **an increase in resilience** with the students who were lacking in that area.

Many had never been out of Stoke prior to our visit. They have incredibly low self-esteem and an attitude of 'I can't'. Participating in Outward Bound really **pushed their boundaries** of what they believed they were capable of and pushed them out of their comfort zone massively, but they participated in each task because it was **completed as a team, without judgement** and with lots of **positive affirmation**. Now they are back in learning, **they are more confident**, and we pull on the experiences we shared to compare with challenges now faced and how we are able to overcome them.

”

Charlotte Barker, Safeguarding Manager, City of Stoke on Trent Sixth Form College



REFERENCES

ⁱ Throughout this report we will refer to all visiting staff as 'teachers', please note this may include pastoral and teaching support staff from schools.

ⁱⁱ The Outward Bound 'Understanding young people' evaluation is a bespoke survey developed to understand the extent to which an Outward Bound experience meets the 5 basic needs for a young person. The approach is underpinned by Choice Theory developed by Dr. William Glasser (ref below).

ⁱⁱⁱ [Inspections deemed 'not fit for purpose' by teachers and education staff as they battle loneliness, stress and burnout \(educationsupport.org.uk\)](#)

^{iv} [Choice Theory in action - William Glasser Institute UK \(wgi-uk.co.uk\)](#)

^v [Teachers 'have worked long hours for many years' - BBC News](#)

^{vi} ['The task is impossible': three teachers on why they are quitting | Teaching | The Guardian](#)

^{vii} % refers to those who accompanied the young people and who reported at least one personal benefit. N=190

^{viii} [The importance of rapport \(futurelearn.com\)](#)