A JOURNEY OF PROFOUND CHANGE

How can you help?

“I know to keep on pushing despite not knowing where I am going. I feel more encouraged about life. I recognise the skills I have... I am in control of my own life and destiny.”

Young Explorer
Major setbacks when you are young can be very hard to overcome and take time. British Exploring Society is a world-class youth development charity with a unique heritage, founded in 1932 on the belief that challenging experiences can transform lives.

We work with young people from the age of 14. With us, they can experience some of the most remote wilderness areas on the planet – the Amazon, Namibia, the Himalayas and the Highlands of Scotland, for example – where together they face the extraordinary every day. As they do so, they gain new skills and learn about themselves and the habitats they are exploring. Most importantly, they can move beyond the limits of what they – and society – thought possible.

While any young person can apply to join us, we’re particularly focused on finding and supporting those from areas of economic deprivation, from communities lacking access or the confidence to access learning opportunities outside the classroom, on individuals with poor educational and employment prospects, and young people facing personal, emotional and social difficulties.

In many cases, their lives are already incredibly hard. Then we make them even more challenging.

These young people finish their programmes with newfound courage, resilience, and determination, which they carry forward into their future lives. They forge unshakable friendships and become part of a community of Explorers with us, joining and contributing to an enviable network of peers and role models who will be there for life.

The statistics are compelling. Our Dangoor Next Generation Programme has, over 10 years, taken many young people at the margins of society to the volcanoes of North East Iceland. 95% of the young people on this programme who are not in employment or education when they join us, find employment or return to education after taking part.

“We know that in a matter of weeks, people who previously had a precarious relationship with society, or who some might even see as a burden to it can demonstrate brilliant leadership and outstanding teamwork and it’s so exciting for them to see what they are capable of.”

Honor Wilson-Fletcher MBE FBES
Chief Executive Officer

COME AND JOIN US
Help young people go further than they ever thought possible

“For the first time in my life I felt bigger and stronger than anything that could stand in my way.”
Young Explorer

THE AGE RANGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WE WORK WITH
14-25
Our programmes are designed:

- To build confidence, self-esteem and self-worth in young people who are at risk due to a lack of stability or other negative experiences during childhood.

- To help young people progress into education or employment by teaching them skills for life that will significantly improve their chances of accessing the education training, or work that best meets their needs and suits their capabilities.

- To help develop purpose, and a commitment to community and society. We encourage young people to contribute, and to volunteer. With us they see outstanding role models in action and gain a greater understanding of the most precious environments on the planet.

**HOW DO WE BUILD STRONGER FUTURES?**

- **3 MONTHS PREPARING**
- **14 DAYS TRAINING**
- **35 DAYS ON EXPEDITION**
- **50+ YEARS OF IMPACT**
To widen access to our programmes, we reach out through youth organisations, charities, and schools to young people who are most at risk of developing serious long-term problems.

We look for those already exhibiting high-risk behaviours that get them noticed for all the wrong reasons and for those whose low self-esteem means they can become invisible and fall through the cracks.

Many of these young people have had difficult home lives due to family breakdown or bereavement, or through having a family member in prison. Many also lack strong role models.

But however tricky their starting point, we work hard to help each of them thrive with us.

On a sample of our programmes targeted to young people most at risk:

- 78% had experienced mental health problems
- 65% have had substance misuse or dependency issues
- 61% have experienced significant disruption in their living circumstances
- 25% had caring responsibilities
- 57% had special educational needs

On our programmes as a whole in 2019:

- 24% of our Young Explorers identified themselves as coming from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds
- 23% of Young Explorers identified themselves as living with physical or mental impairment or long-term illness
- 57% of Young Explorers came from areas of multiple deprivation

**AMINA’S STORY**

For 16-year-old Amina, the combination of losing close family members and a good friend to knife crime brought her first to the brink of homelessness and suicide – and then to British Exploring Society.

“Before I left for the Amazon there was lots of chaos in my life: I wasn’t organised, and I wasn’t clear about what my next steps would be. Life was happening, but I felt like I didn’t have control.

Now I am more driven and focused. I know to keep on pushing despite not knowing where I am going. I feel more encouraged about life. I recognise the skills I have, like emotional intelligence.

I can contextualise things and use effective communication skills when dealing with others.”

**WHO WE WORK WITH**

Entrenched disadvantage takes time to turn around.

**OUR IMPACT IS DEEP AND WIDE-RANGING**

We measure the impact of our programmes using My Compass, an adapted version of the Outcomes Star impact measurement and self-development tool.

This enables young people to set goals and self-evaluate their progress against a range of skills criteria such as ‘Making decisions that matter’, ‘Managing my feelings’ and ‘Problem solving’. My Compass also functions as an impact measurement tool, supplying data to help us keep improving.

By the end of their programme, young people identify transformative outcomes for themselves right across these skills criteria. And at least 70% of participants have seen improvement in every single area in recent years.

Many of our Young Explorers go on to achieve success in science, sport, public service, and the outdoors. They take time to share with us their conviction that the experience they had with us was a powerful positive influence in building their life and career.

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**“This experience was life-changing for me. I am a better person because of it.”**

16-year-old Amina, Young Explorer
HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE FIND THEIR FIRE
Champions of change and witnesses for the world

We have spent 90 years learning how best to combine the challenge of adventure, the acquisition of relevant knowledge and the benefits of intensive personal development.

ADVENTURE
We take young people up mountains and volcanoes, down rivers, through jungles and waterfalls, and across deserts, glaciers and lava fields.

Fires (teams of young people and their Leaders) design their own adventures, come to group decisions, share challenges, and learn to compromise and support one another in an environment equally alien to all of them.

Young people develop new skills in communication, negotiation and tolerance as well as in bushcraft, wild cooking, orienteering and navigation. They develop resilience and good risk management as they trek, canoe, climb and camp. It’s not a holiday. And it’s definitely not about sticking a flag on top of a mountain.

After taking on these challenges, a job or college interview can seem a lot less daunting. And a prospective employer knows you’ve achieved something of stand-out merit.

KNOWLEDGE
On expedition, we occupy the best classrooms on Earth. Young people develop their learning in field science, research techniques, geography, and technology, as well as in creative media, photography and poetry.

They are introduced to basecamp management, night navigation, knot-tying, First-Aid, soil reading, wildlife observation, tree studies (and more), and to the John Muir Conservation award.

Young Explorers develop a richer understanding of how to engage with and look after their community and the sometimes fragile world around them.

For those who have struggled in school, this immersive education, and the shift it can create in attitudes to learning is invaluable.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
Our expedition Leaders and Experts provide young people with access to knowledge and new ideas and with new role models for adulthood.

They can give young people greater control and autonomy than is possible at home or school. Every young person is encouraged to set their own goals, has the chance to lead, to find their strengths and build on them now – and for the future.

Our Young Explorers grow in self-awareness, self-confidence, motivation and resilience. They learn how to communicate and work as a team, while forging life-long friendships.

By seeing just how much they are capable of, young people stop underestimating themselves and start to grow and flourish. They develop strategies to support good mental health, to deal with conflict, and to have the courage to ask for help when they need it.
EVEN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC COULDN’T DAMPEN OUR SPIRIT

“Wildestan is different to anything I have experienced before. I was learning how to build fires one week and then learning about birdsong the week after... [It] has opened my eyes to a world I have always wished to know more about.”

Young Adventurer, Wildestan 2020

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic meant we had to cancel all our overseas activity and then all our UK expeditions and training too.

At the same time, with so much uncertainty about their futures and the restrictions imposed by lockdown, young people desperately needed an environment in which to safely meet new people, learn new skills and develop resilience and self-belief – even if it had to be closer to home.

We adapted to develop new programmes to meet their needs, most notably through the creation of Wildestan; a virtual continent.

In Wildestan, young people can engage and communicate safely with our Leaders and Experts, meet other Explorers, join online adventures, learn outdoor survival skills, get helpful tips on kit and equipment, contribute to and take part in science projects as they explore the ‘wilderness where they stand’.

While nothing will compare with the transformative experience of sleeping in a jungle hammock, seeing the sun rise over the Yukon or dealing with wet boots for three days in a row, the creation of Wildestan enabled us to work with more young people in 2020 than in 2019. And they tell us they have more confidence, greater enthusiasm for learning, increased focus and ambition, and enhanced communication skills through taking part.

“Society is failing to ensure fair and sufficient access to the skills, behaviours and confidence young people need to tackle challenges and seize opportunities. And this is becoming even more pronounced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is now even greater urgency around what we do, but in being forced to adapt, we have discovered new ways to deliver rewarding adventure and reached even more young people. This is learning we’ll take forward with us as we continue to develop our programmes.”

Honor Wilson-Fletcher MBE FBES
Chief Executive Officer

THE NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE WE WORKED WITH IN 2020

229
“My expedition was the most challenging, exhilarating, fascinating and mind-broadening experience I have ever had.”

Young Explorer

With the exception of Wildestan, we take a three-phased approach to each of our programmes to ensure the benefits are deep and long-lasting:

PHASE 1: TRAINING IN THE UK
Before going on expedition, participants must take part in training events, designed to build their confidence and prepare them to safely take on the challenges of an expedition – and to get the most from the opportunity.

PHASE 2: THE EXPEDITION ITSELF
Typically, each programme has one extended expedition phase in a remote environment either in the UK or overseas, lasting two to five weeks. This can be an intense experience, so we have a high ratio of Leaders to participants to ensure that each young person has access to round-the-clock mentoring and support to help them succeed.

PHASE 3: NEXT STEPS
After they return home, participants are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and to take part in organised activities together with their Leader teams. They can consider how far they have come with the goals they set themselves using My Compass, prepare presentations for invited guests, apply their new-found skills to practical challenges and receive additional coaching and ongoing support.

It can be a long journey. For many of the young people we work with, committing to take part in an expedition is a tough step to take.

That's why we listen to their needs, take time to understand any personal issues, and carefully tease out their hopes and aspirations. Much as we want and need to push their horizons, everything we do depends on us building and sustaining the trust of the young people we work with.

Even then, not everyone who takes part will be able to complete all three phases, or all three at one time. While for most, the overall programme length is nine months to one year, others may take two or even three years to get there.

STEP BY STEP: THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS
WHAT WE DO IS UNIQUE
And our Leaders are made of extraordinary stuff

Our impressive unpaid professional Leaders include doctors, scientists, teachers, military personnel and media specialists. They agree to take on considerable responsibility and commit up to 10 full weeks of their time to undergo intensive training in mental health, First Aid, and managing challenging behaviour, and to participate in extensive technical assessments with us.

These rare individuals donate over £300k in time and skills to our work each year because they share our commitment to supporting young people. Many confirm that being part of our community also has a significant impact on their own personal and professional development. And their generosity doesn’t stop. 60% of our leaders return to lead again, some as many as 5 times, a handful nearer 10 times.

“I have no doubt that British Exploring Society has better prepared medics for this pandemic through the resilience, adaptability and team working they have acquired on expeditions and the community support of British Exploring Society that never leaves you.”

Dr Lucy Obolensky FBES, Chief Medic to British Exploring Society GP, EM doctor and clinical academic

Everyone who completes a full programme is invited to becomes a member of British Exploring Society for life.

WHAT MIGHT LONG-TERM SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?
Over the years, we’ve been fortunate to count some remarkable people among our Explorers and Members including:

**SHIRIN GERAMI**
Iran’s first female tri-athlete competing in a world championship. She was named by the BBC on International Women’s Day as one of 100 influential women from around the world for her work to overcome barriers for women from different communities to participate in sport and activities.

**LT ZANNA BAKER**
Was part of the Icemaidens, which completed the first all-female ski coast-to-coast across Antarctica ahead of schedule. Zanna and another British Exploring Society alumnus LCpl Rin Cobb were 2 of the shortlist of 7 from a long-list of 250.

**MARVIN REES FBES**
Born and brought up in the most deprived wards in Bristol. He went on expedition with British Exploring Society in 1990. He read Economic History and Politics and a Master’s degree in Political theory and Government. He later undertook the Yale World Fellows global leadership programme. When he was elected Mayor of Bristol in May 2016 he became the first ever Mayor of Black African-Caribbean descent of a European city.

**ALEX GREGORY MBE FBES**
Double Olympic Gold-medallist rower, and five-time world record holder went on expedition with British Exploring Society in 2001. He is now a Fellow.

**ROALD DAHL**
Author, joined us in 1934, aged 18. He details his transformative experiences on expedition in his autobiography, ‘Boy’ and continued to support the charity throughout his adult life.

**SURESH PAUL, PhD**
Came on expedition with us in 1987. He is the founder of Equal Adventure Developments. His own experiences on expedition and in outdoor education led to his inspiration and he continues to conduct research on equipment design and development and is a passionate advocate to improve inclusion in outdoor adventure activities. Suresh is an Honorary Research Fellow at Leeds Metropolitan University.

**TORI JAMES FBES**
Went on a British Exploring Society expedition in 2000. In 2005 she became the youngest female to complete The Scott Dunn Polar Challenge, a 360-mile race to the Magnetic North Pole. In 2007 she summited Mt. Everest, the youngest British female (at 25) to reach the peak. Tori is now a Fellow.

11,000+
MEMBERS HAVE BEEN ON EXPEDITION WITH US SINCE WE WERE FOUNDED

Marvin Rees FBES,
British Exploring Society President and Member
We know that our model of intensive youth development is genuinely transformational, so we want to ensure that as many young people as possible can benefit from it.

The minimum state annual grant to educate each secondary aged person in England is currently £5k. For that amount, we can provide a life-defining programme for five disadvantaged young people that research tells us is still likely to be the most defining experience of their adolescence, even 40 years later.

The equivalent funding for a whole classroom would enable us to run a whole expedition programme for 60+ young people. Whether you might be interested in that, or in helping the quiet student no-one seems to notice is at risk, every gift helps us to build a stronger future and impacts positively on work and life choices, resilience, confidence and on relationships and the community, too.

To show their commitment, and to help them develop invaluable life and work skills, we ask all young people who join us to commit to fundraise an amount for the charity. Each contribution is based on a simple means test, to ensure equality of access. Their fundraising is supported by a full-time member of our team, and they know that the funds they raise will help other young people benefit from the same experiences as them in future.

We rely on donations to fund our expeditions and other important aspects of our work. This includes the development of science and other areas of knowledge, training to ensure positive and safe outcomes, our sustainability and our understanding of our environmental impact.

If we are to reach significantly more young people, we need the support and funding from philanthropists like you, who share our belief in the transformative power of challenge and adventure.

We are not a glitzy charity offering shiny plaques and fancy dinners.

But we promise our funders the intelligence and attention of a small team of dedicated individuals and a genuine sense of being part of our community. We learn a lot from our funders too. Be part of our vision – and you can help us build stronger futures for more young people.

If all this sounds interesting, we’d love to share more with you.

**OUR SUPPORTERS ARE SPECIAL TOO**

Here’s how you can help

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**FIND OUT MORE**

Explore the role that you as a philanthropist can play in helping us transform young lives. If you’re curious to know more, we’d love to hear from you.

**GET IN TOUCH**

Contact our Development Team or CEO on 020 7591 3141 for an informal chat about how you might help. Alternatively, please email philanthropy@britishexploring.org

Thank you for your interest in helping young people become more than they ever thought possible.

Registered Charity No 802196

“These are the most difficult times to do anything, and we are proud and grateful that you have managed to achieve what you have in these last few months. What you and the team are doing is beyond all expectation and we have the greatest trust that you will continue to be able to do just that.”

John and Catherine Hartz