



# A NEW KIND OF ADVENTURE

What do young people need  
now, to unlock their self-belief?

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# A NEW KIND OF ADVENTURE

**After 92 years, a world war and a pandemic, British Exploring Society is now preparing to help young people with one of their greatest challenges – an epidemic in poor mental health and low resilience. Understanding how to help unlock self-belief is more critical than ever.**

The NHS is reporting 4000 referrals a week for young people with anxiety and mental health issues. Persistent absence in England's schools is now at 20% - rising to over 30% in secondary schools serving disadvantaged communities (data; Oasis Community Learning). The term '**The Anxious Generation**' has been coined for those growing up with social media, and through the pandemic. There has been a drop of over 70% in funding for youth provision in the last 20 years, and our most vulnerable young people have suffered from these cuts most of all.

The good news is that young people on our programmes continue to report overwhelmingly positive increases in essential life skills – including confidence, resilience, and improved wellbeing as a benefit of having taken part on our programmes. More young people cite a search for better mental health as a primary reason for joining us, and we continue to adapt our training and programmes to ensure we can support this need. Young people now receive between 300 and 900+ hours of supportive, high quality contact time with our teams during a full programme. We have been using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) since 2021. Increases in Wellbeing scores have risen post-programme each year since then.

**By the end of their expedition, Young Explorers this year scored significantly higher than the SWEMWBS reference point for high well-being putting them inside the top 15% for Mental Wellbeing in the UK population.**

But as young people increasingly absent themselves from school, socialising and the workplace, so they are also dropping out of our programmes before they can experience the expeditions which deliver the full benefit of our approach.

**We cannot help young people who aren't with us. So, we must adapt again.**

We were the original organisation in the UK to run developmental expeditions in wild places with young people and it is important to us that we do not undermine the value of our remarkable expedition model. It has been in place and defining lives for 92 years. But focusing on delivering what makes most impact for young people is what drives us. As we did during COVID, we're tackling a paradigm shift in 2025.



We're trialling a two part, stepped path from first experiences to full participation on an expedition in a remote location so that we can:

- Reach more young people to help them deal with anxiety, to support the development of resilience and good mental wellbeing;
- Give young people more graduated opportunities to increase confidence and reduce anxiety levels on their journeys to adventure;
- Consult and work more closely with young people, Leaders and partners in our planning to make sure that our programmes to develop resilience match the capacity of young people to embrace challenge;
- Provide more opportunities for engagement between Leaders and Young People to support the CPD many of our leaders say they would welcome;
- Prepare a roster of overseas expeditions including new destinations for 2026 and onwards. Our task is to responsibly, sustainably provide expeditions to locations which deliver transformative youth development in an increasingly challenging geopolitical context.

## So, what is the new paradigm? We're calling it 'A New Kind of Adventure'.

Our expedition programmes currently consist of;

- expedition taster weekends and UK-based training in wild places which focus on developing core expedition skills.
- full 2-5 week expeditions (UK & Overseas).

### UK Adventures will have 3 levels of engagement:

1 - Welcome to Adventure:

- **Wildestan** (currently Antarctica) for up to 50 young people aged 14-17 1 hour pp per Adventure
- **Expedition Workshops** 1000+ young people (+/- 40 workshops) 2.5 hours pp



## 2 - Finding Your Feet:

- Residential **Adventure Weekends** For young people aged 14+ who want to try their first nights under canvas and learn expedition skills with us. This provides 43 hours of contact time and 2 nights under canvas and significant opportunity to develop resilience and confidence. These weekends will be run in the context of a residential centre, in Fires, and with Leadership teams in the same high ratios and recruited to the same standards that we always use. Young people will have a genuine first experience of the British Exploring Society approach. We will use a 2-minute My Compass similar to that developed for Expedition workshops to help us track the benefit of these weekends.

## 3 - Hitting Your Stride:

- 5-day, **First Expeditions**, 4 nights under canvas, in Fires with our amazing Leader teams, learning expedition skills and taking decisions on a first wild adventure. These UK-based first expeditions in locations like Dartmoor and Snowdonia for up to 120 young people will run during school holidays for 16+, providing 90 hours of contact. We will continue to use a 2-minute My Compass for these first expeditions.

Young people will for the first time be able to access and participate in a short British Exploring Society UK Adventure programme and receive recognition for their personal development/achievement without committing to a full expedition.

## Ready to Explore: UK and Overseas Expeditions:

Full-scale **expeditions** will be largely but not exclusively recruited from those who have participated in UK Adventures. Our expedition programmes will continue to provide young people with UK-based training and training expeditions.

We can encourage young people to join us on an expedition programme who;

- already know us
- trust our Leaders
- feel more confident and less anxious, having taken part in UK Adventures.

**We will also continue to welcome open applications for expeditions**, if we are confident in the readiness of young people to participate without their engagement in UK Adventures.



## 2025

- We will focus on delivering UK Adventures
- We will open recruitment for UK and Overseas Expeditions
- We will undertake 2+ overseas reconnaissance trips to prepare for future expedition delivery.
- We will co-host 'What's Stopping us?' – an event to bring together our young Members and youth voices from other organisations to learn more about the barriers to participation in adventure and to agree specific actions. This is likely to impact on future programme design, as well as forming the basis for a British Exploring Society Youth Council.
- With expert leaders and young people, we will review our approach to Digital in the Wilderness in the light of the increasing body of evidence which links anxiety and poor mental wellbeing to the use of smart devices and social media in young people.

## 2026

- We will run UK Adventures and UK and Overseas Expeditions, building on all our learning in 2025.

### **Will we be changing what future expeditions look like?**

If we can support young people to reach expedition, the evidence to date is that they thrive. We plan to prepare a challenging expedition programme for 2026 which continues to reflect our theory of change, the remarkable knowledge in our community and which remains relevant and effective. This will include destinations and approaches we already know well – and hopefully some new destinations, partnerships and way of working too. We will rely on our amazing community with us on this journey, as during previous challenges. We will be considering when we go, who participates, and how we explore (is it always on land, for example?) as well as finding great places to go.



## Understanding what we learn and making good decisions

### Leader Review Group

We will be asking for a group of Leaders who would be willing to help us review the work we do in 2025 at key milestones along the way, and in preparation for 2026, too.

### Partner and Supporter Review

We will be asking our partners and supporters to help and challenge us by reviewing the work we do in 2025 at key milestones along the way.

### Young Voices

We will co-host 'What's Stopping us?' and hope to establish a British Exploring Society Youth Council to improve our understanding of how best to support young people on their journey to adulthood.

