

**Access Unlimited**

**Safe, fun  
and flexible  
approaches to  
educational  
activities  
outdoors.**

**COVID-secure opportunities that improved  
wellbeing in 2020**

November 2020

**Access Unlimited is a coalition of not-for-profit schools residential and educational providers. It includes YHA (England & Wales), The Outward Bound Trust, Scouts, Girlguiding, Field Studies Council and the National Parks.**

## **Our aim**

Research has proven that school and youth residential provide opportunities and benefits that cannot be achieved in any other educational context or setting.<sup>1</sup>

Our aim is to ensure that there continue to be opportunities for every child and young person to access high quality learning and residential experiences in our National Parks and AONBs.

<sup>1</sup> <http://learningaway.org.uk/impact>

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# Foreword

Two million households faced lockdown without a garden. The benefits of access to the outdoors, to green space, to nature are well evidenced. Yet the inequalities of access that existed pre-COVID have only been compounded. As a coalition, we have dedicated ourselves to ensuring that the gap in experiences between those who have access and those who don't doesn't simply continue to increase unabated.

Collective action is needed by those who value access to the outdoors and to the unique educational benefit of learning outside the classroom. We who believe that residential, and trips and enrichment activities are an entitlement for every child.

With the Government not having set a date for overnight residential to reopen, at least a million children will miss out on overnight stays this year. For many of them this would have been their first, formative trip away from home and their only holiday this year.

We cannot wait for residential to recommence. Children and families need us now. And in the following pages you will find all the ways that we have adapted our services to meet the needs of young people.

These case studies show how we have delivered COVID-secure experiences, flexed to new circumstances, and passed on that flexibility to ensure our beneficiaries were not left out of pocket as the situation shifted.

**Anita Kerwin-Nye**

Director of Strategy & Engagement, YHA



# YHA (England & Wales)

## Health and wellbeing first, no quibble

One of the greatest joys of hostelling is the social side; a principle USP the communal spaces that foster community. YHA is a movement of the like-minded, a culture built on a love of the outdoors, of life-affirming adventures, of learning new things in new places and meeting new faces – at any age.

The pandemic, the lockdown that ensued and the COVID-secure measures we put in place have given hostelling a different hue in this, our 90th anniversary year. But as families rushed back to support the charity over summer, the period has put into sharp focus YHA's unique contribution to health, wellbeing and the development of young people.



## Fostering trust by staying flexible

March 2020 saw the complete, temporary closure of YHA's 150-strong hostel network. On 17th July, we began our gradual reopening –with a clear and transparent commitment to giving our loyal customer base a no quibble refund or booking amendment if coronavirus prevented travel. In so doing, we maintained the trust and goodwill of our users – not least the schools we work with, for whom this approach was crucial.

## Reconnecting people and places

With travel permitted again, guests have shown fantastic support. We welcomed 9,000 people over half term alone. As well as booking stays, they've donated to our Project90 appeal to fund respite breaks for young carers, key workers and low-income families affected by coronavirus.

**9.1/10 – Our most recent customer satisfaction score for cleanliness and hygiene, and overall experience.**

**“Thank you for a wonderful week at YHA Boggle Hole. Yes, there was no self-catering kitchen. Yes, it was a shame not to be able to hang out with other visitors. But the warm welcome you gave us was the same. And the beautiful land and seascapes, the seals, the sand martins, the heather... you can see the delight on my children's faces. We really appreciate YHA more than ever.”** Jenny

## First beneficiaries get free break

A family of seven, two adults and five children, were among the first to receive a free break through YHA's Project90 fund over summer. Without YHA's support, they would not have had time away together this year. Financial difficulties, as well as physical disability and autism within the family, make getting away a challenge.

The family, who remain anonymous, loved their time at YHA Castleton Losehill Hall. They enjoyed the freedom of the space and safety of the hostel and grounds. They reported being much more active than they would be at home, with opportunities for walking. The most precious part of the experience was the opportunity to just be. To enjoy time as a family, be away from it all in a beautiful setting and therapeutic environment. The mum described the trip as "life changing".

## Ready to welcome pupils back with "Day Stays"

With young people back enjoying our spaces with their families, we look forward to reintroducing school pupils to the educational benefits of learning outside the classroom.

We have always offered memorable, perspective-shifting residentials. While we await the lifting of restrictions on overnight school trips, we are making use of our outdoor spaces to support the delivery of the curriculum to local schools. All in a COVID-secure way.

Activities include archery, shelter building, orienteering, natural art, team challenges, and our popular spy-themed Alex Rider missions. Led by YHA staff, curriculum-linked and tailored to specific group needs, "Day Stays" will reintroduce children to the great outdoors, and boost confidence, resilience and life skills post lockdown.



# Yorkshire Dales National Park

## Young Rangers weekly days out and helpful deeds

Young Rangers are young people aged 11 to 17 who come out to do practical conservation work with us on a regular basis. The Yorkshire Dales National Park runs three Young Ranger groups that cover the whole of the National Park.

The last Young Rangers day before lockdown was on the 7th March. During lockdown, the three groups met virtually and chatted on Facebook, but everyone – young people and adult leaders – missed getting out into the fresh air, meeting friends and making a contribution.

As soon as it was possible to meet outside the Young Ranger team put together a weekly programme of days out. It's been wonderful to be back outside. For the first time all three groups have been meeting together, they've made new friends and explored much more of the National Park than they usually would.

To keep parents occupied whilst their children are busy with Young Rangers, and to save them driving home and back again, our Dales Volunteers have been taking them out on guided walks.

Over the summer more than 20 Young Rangers have met each week and they have cleared a stream bank of Himalayan Balsam, repaired a footpath through Free Holders Wood, raked up hay from a meadow, counted butterflies and cooked on open fires.



# North York Moors National Park

## Youth engagement through lockdown with the Education Service Summer Scheme

The North York Moors National Park Education Service have been working in partnership with a charity called Kidz Konnekt delivering a five-week summer scheme, running from 20th July to 20th August. The children were sourced via primary schools from areas of high deprivation in Teesside.

Following National Youth Agency guidance, participants worked in three 'bubbles' each with no more than 15 participants. Each bubble retained the same adults throughout the five weeks. They rotated around three locations taking part in different activities each week. The locations were based at the charities' centre in Teesside, locally within three miles of the centre, and then within a 30-minute coach ride of the centre within the National Park. Coach travel followed government guidelines for school travel.

Evaluation took place throughout the scheme; a key outcome was to understand the change that had happened for the children and their families. All activities were outdoor based involving nature exploration, outdoor skills and walks, sports and activities to help the environment – litter picks, for example.

**"I can't thank you enough, I'm so glad Izzy started coming here...she's loved week one and three! I work long shifts so she would be stuck home for long periods of time. Seeing her face beaming, loving playing footy, all the activities are just what she needs. Her mental health has improved massively!"**

Parent of participant



# The Outward Bound Trust

## Freedom and fresh challenges for Jessica

Jessica is 11 years old and lives with her mum. Before lockdown, she was in her last year of primary school and looking forward to starting secondary school later in the year.

When the UK went into lockdown, as a lone-parent household, Jessica and her mum had to isolate together. During this time, Jessica's mum fell ill with coronavirus and it was difficult to cope on their own without support.

Eventually, Jessica's mum got better, single bubbles were introduced, and she was able to go back into primary school to see her friends and say goodbye to those who were going to different schools in September.

However, even with the lifting of the restrictions, life remained a challenge for Jessica. She had missed out on so much during lockdown. She didn't see friends and family outside of her bubble for months, including her grandparents. She spent a lot more time indoors, and although home-schooled, she missed the support her school would have provided to help her prepare for secondary.

## Space to breath

Everyone's experience of the pandemic is different, but Outward Bound enabled Jessica to have some freedom away from it and have social interactions with other young people on a level playing field.

Following her experience, Jessica tells us she is now looking forward to starting secondary school and thinks making friends will be easier because she's spent this time at Outward Bound – she's even made some brand new friends who will be at the same school.

Watch our [short film](#) about Jessica.



## Time for adventure

This August, as part of Outward Bound's **1,000 Days of Adventure**, Jessica was able to come to Ullswater for day adventures.

**"I think I feel more free and I feel a lot better as well."** Jessica

Jessica had the opportunity to have fun away from the pandemic. So much her mum said, she couldn't stop talking after her first experience – and enjoyed it so much that she wanted to come back for more!

Jessica did a lot of things at Outward Bound that she hadn't done before – and thought she couldn't do – such as wild swimming, canoeing, raft-building, cliff jumping, rowing, and ghyll scrambling.

# With outdoor residential out of bounds, Outward Bound bring adventure into the classroom

In a normal year, more than 130 schools across Scotland visit Outward Bound's Loch Eil centre for a week-long outdoor learning and adventure residential. With overnight residential currently not possible due to COVID-19, The Outward Bound Trust are taking their outdoor adventures directly into Scottish classrooms to ensure young people don't miss out on these formative experiences.

This autumn, instructors are joining schools on a weekly basis, offering learning experiences. They start in the school grounds before building up to local adventures.

The first schools to take part are those closest to the Loch Eil centre, where staff are supporting more than 500 young people across all stages, in four schools in the Lochaber area. Outward Bound plans to extend this work to more schools across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The charity has been supported with funding from Mowi Scotland, Swagelok Scotland and a small number of others in Scotland.



Martin Davidson, Director for Scotland and Innovation at The Outward Bound Trust said:

"At Outward Bound we never sit back and say we can't. It's just not in our DNA. If pupils are not able to come on residential at Outward Bound this autumn, then we will go to them!"

"COVID-19 has brought many challenges to the education system, from the isolation many children felt during lockdown to the worry of how schools can open safely. Critically each child has had a very different experience, for some safe and enjoyable and for others challenging or traumatic.

Outward Bound's mission is to help young people see what they are truly capable of, to believe in themselves, to be more than they think. We saw an opportunity to use our experience of working with young people to help schools as part of their recovery curriculums, to adapt to new ways of working and to support young people as they adjust to life back in the classroom after almost five months away."

Of the scheme, Katrina Kelly, Headteacher at Lundavra Primary School in Fort William said:

"Having two dedicated Outward Bound instructors in school is helping our pupils to develop the skills they need to face an ever-changing world. Crucial skills like resilience, confidence and self-belief, as well as a willingness to try things.

The learning is done outdoors, with a firm emphasis on health and wellbeing and play based learning. The children are having fun whilst being helped to address some of the emotional uncertainties of the past few months."

All activities support the Curriculum of Excellence and will adhere to government safety guidelines. As soon as restrictions allow, pupils local to Outward Bound's Loch Eil centre will also be able to travel to their site for bigger adventures to support their learning.



# Girlguiding

## Unit re-united in the fresh air of the New Forest

Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with nearly half a million members. We give girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their communities. Facing the challenge of COVID-19 has been tough – especially for children and young people. The loss of normality, access to outdoor space and community all detrimental to wellbeing and confidence.

With in-person unit meetings on hold as a consequence of coronavirus, we supported our members to continue to connect, engage and stay active. We moved guiding online, for those still keen to meet, try new activities and work towards badges and awards. And we launched our digital programme hub Adventures At Home, offering all children and young people simple ways to create fun, have adventures and boost wellbeing and resilience at this challenging time.

The recommencement of in-person unit meetings, following COVID-secure guidance, has meant so much to many. Here's the reaction following a first post-lockdown meeting at one of our outdoor centres. The excitement is palpable.

**“It was so fun to see everyone again as it's just not the same over zoom. We had so much fun and I loved the fresh air. I can't wait to do it again soon!”** Guide

**“It was so lovely for the girls to be able to meet outdoors, in the fresh air at Foxlease. My daughter has missed seeing her unit face-to-face so enabling this to happen by being outside was a real morale booster. They had a great time”** Parent

**“Meeting at Foxlease made it less stressful for us as leaders, as the space is so big there was room for the girls to social distance without us having to constantly remind them or feel uneasy they were too close together. As an added bonus there was an all-female firefighter crew training there at the same time. We also saw huge bats! Inspiration for the girls that they can do anything. Fun, outdoor space and adventures! We had a great evening.”**

Leader



# Field Studies Council

## Enthusiasm for the outdoors infectious

This year, like many other organisations, FSC has had to operate differently. But even throughout these strange times we have still focused on outdoor learning and encouraging an appreciation of nature.

We have welcomed over 600 people to come and stay at our 18 COVID-secure locations this summer so that they can get back to basics and explore the British countryside. Ensuring that our visitors feel safe when coming to stay has been imperative and the following quotes from visitors show that this has not gone unnoticed:

**“It was the perfect way to get away and have a relaxing break during COVID times.”**

**“The staff were very friendly and explained the COVID-19 related rules to us on arrival, making sure we were comfortable with all of it.”**

In terms of teaching, whilst schools have been closed, we have been offering a variety of online webinars and learning opportunities and a staggering 370,000 learners registered.

**“Really found all the fieldwork live sessions and webinars uplifting at this constrained time. Your enthusiasm to get outdoors and keep learning through experience is infectious – sorry for the analogy – but I have found it has kept me and the students focused and engaged.”** Teacher

We are busy preparing and really looking forward to welcoming school groups back to our centres for day visits for some real life, in the field, learning – in a safe, fun and flexible way.



