

THEORY OF CHANGE

Addressing the Need

Individuals and communities deserve the opportunity to thrive.

And yet, instead of thriving, today's adolescents are experiencing historically high levels of emotional distress (Abramson, 2022).

Young people are spending less time outside, less time engaging with others in concrete experiences, and more time alone on screens. Many young people lack opportunities for tangible interpersonal experiences that are critical for developing skills for thriving. This leaves a generation increasingly disconnected from themselves, each other, and the natural world.

We believe that young people themselves can change this trajectory. When offered opportunities to engage their bodies in natural settings, to challenge themselves in a supportive learning environment, and to reflect on their own behavior and their connection to others and the world around them, *young people thrive*.

This is exactly what thousands of students are experiencing through Outward Bound each year.

Outward Bound participants are developing the skills for thriving while re-connecting with themselves, others, and the natural world. Young people are leaning on these skills and connections as they tackle challenges and opportunities back at home, school, and in their community. In doing so, they develop key mindsets that support a lasting commitment to themselves, others, and the natural world.

Our Educational Foundations

Outward Bound experiences, which vary in length, activity, and focus, are built on a set of core educational foundations:

- Concrete experience supports deeper learning, personal relevance, and transference.
- Natural settings increase attention and engagement with learning by offering authentic adventure and natural consequences.
- Learning happens most effectively in environments that promote safety and belonging.
- Challenge primes the brain for connection and learning.
- Learning is multi-directional. Learning passes from instructor to student, from student to instructor, and from student to student.

Outward Bound also draws on a rich organizational history. Founder, Kurt Hahn, said, "There is more in us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps, for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less." These words continue to guide Outward Bound today.

Our Approach

At Outward Bound, participants are crew, not passengers. Each **crew** is made up of **individuals** with unique identities, life experiences, strengths, and goals. The crew requires active engagement, where each member uses their strengths in the service of themselves, each other, and the shared experience.

Our **skilled instructors** work alongside the participants to guide their learning. They are trained in best practices of outdoor education, social-emotional development, and creating and maintaining culturally responsive, equitable, and inclusive learning environments.



The staff and crew come together in a **unique physical environment**, typically in nature and removed from the stressors and distractions of everyday life. This also creates a **unique social environment**. Relationship building is accelerated for strangers meeting for the first time. Participants with pre-existing relationships break out of their established roles and relationship patterns as they interact in new ways.

While this unique environment offers opportunities to challenge systems and structures of inequality, it also acknowledges the reality participants come from and will return to. The Outward Bound experience is anchored by a commitment to **equity and inclusion**. We acknowledge the barriers and advantages that can impact an individual's access to learning and utilize thoughtful course design and facilitation to help all participants have equitable learning opportunities. Instructors amplify the needs of those who have experienced more systemic disadvantages to foster inclusion for all students.



Outward Bound staff facilitate a thoughtfully designed progression of learning experiences tailored to the program's length and focus. They create a **supportive environment** that prioritizes relationships, structure, and positive group culture so that each participant feels safe to explore and learn.

Together, the crew takes on **challenge and adventure**, which provides the opportunity for them to take risks, push their limits, encounter both failure and success, offer and receive support, and discover that there is more in them than they knew. Challenge takes many forms – physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual – and staff are intentional about

helping participants access the right type and level of challenge to help them grow. Throughout the experience, individual agency, supported by prioritizing participant voice and choice, is balanced with group activities that develop interpersonal skills and highlight interdependence.

Crew members are actively engaged in their own learning, with progressive opportunities to explore, experiment, and feel the consequences of their decisions. Tangible experiences prompt reflection, where participants explore their thoughts, feelings, motivations, and behaviors and their relationships with their crewmates. Participants make connections between what they are learning at Outward Bound and their lives at home. This provides a continuous cycle of **learning through experience** that inspires the application of new knowledge, skills, and mindsets.

Our Immediate Outcomes

Through Outward Bound, participants become more deeply connected to themselves, discovering there is more in them than they knew. Simultaneously, each participant connects authentically to others, recognizing their interdependence and the benefits of shared experience. As they spend time in outdoor spaces, they deepen their connection with the natural world, experiencing its value in a tangible way. These **connections** are activated even in short Outward Bound programs and are lived more powerfully through longer courses.

Outward Bound's unique combination of environment and approach accelerates social-emotional development. Through Outward Bound, participants strengthen their **skills for thriving** in four domains:



Courage: *catalyzing strengths to take on challenges and risks*

- **Assertiveness:** Participants demonstrate confidence in putting themselves forward, advancing personal beliefs, wishes, or thoughts and in standing up for what they believe
- **Perseverance:** Participants demonstrate persistence in work and problem-solving despite obstacles

Belonging: *giving and experiencing inclusion and connection in relationships*

- **Group Relationships:** Participants learn to contribute to a connected and cohesive group where each participant's unique contribution is valued
- **Teamwork:** Participants demonstrate a positive attitude towards working with others to solve problems and challenges

Physical Engagement: *experiencing and expressing oneself through the body and its senses*

- **Physical Confidence:** Participants take care of their physical wellbeing and demonstrate competence and motivation for physical activity
- **Self-Regulation:** Participants recognize their emotions and thoughts and apply strategies to meet their own emotional needs

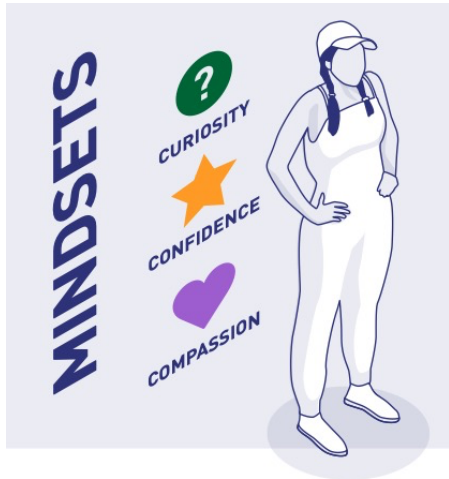
Reflection: *examining and questioning one's actions, roles, relationships, and assumptions*

- **Self-Awareness:** Participants recognize their own strengths, challenges, and motivations and connect these to their behavior, the group, and their communities
- **Social Responsibility:** Participants consider other perspectives and attend to the needs of others, their larger community, and the environment

Our Mid-Term Outcomes

Outward Bound is a catalyst for ongoing, continued growth.

Equipped with increased connection and the skills for thriving, Outward Bound participants embark on a **continuous learning journey** through life. They draw on their Outward Bound experience and new skills as they navigate challenges, engage in relationships, and continue to reflect and learn. Through continued use, these skills transform into enduring mindsets. Each mindset represents a set of perspectives that shape their interactions with the world around them:



Curiosity is characterized by an eagerness to explore, learn, and question. This mindset guides Outward Bound participants to continue to seek new experiences and perspectives, to engage openly with others who are different from them, to solve problems creatively, and to wonder what is possible.

Confidence is a belief in oneself and one's ability to meet life's challenges. This belief helps participants to navigate hard moments and seize opportunities, embracing the idea that more is possible.

Compassion is both an attunement to the emotions and needs of others and the motivation to help. This mindset guides participants to connect authentically to others, to recognize when they are needed, and to respond.

Curiosity, confidence and compassion serve as perpetual guides, shaping how Alumni navigate life.

Our Long-Term Outcomes

No two alumni have the same life journey, and thus the long-term outcomes of Outward Bound are different for each individual. Still, we find commonalities in the stories they share.

Outward Bound serves as an enduring source of inspiration for its alumni. Months, years, and even decades after their course, Alumni reflect on their experience to remind themselves of what is possible and what they can achieve. Embracing the ethos of "Crew, Not Passengers," they are not spectators; they are active members of their communities and participants in their ongoing learning journey.

The connection, skills, and mindsets that Outward Bound alumni carry with them lead to a **sustained commitment to thriving – for themselves, others, and the natural world**. They influence and create the future *they* desire for themselves and for their communities.

