



**OUTWARD BOUND®**  
INTERNATIONAL

# **BUILDING BACK: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE GO FROM RECOVERY TO DISCOVERY**





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Outward Bound is a worldwide educational and charitable network. Our mission is to change young people's lives through challenge, learning and adventure in nature.

Funding ensures that background or circumstance is not a barrier. Outward Bound partners with schools, colleges, employers, and youth groups globally to inspire young people to believe in themselves. Outward Bound's goal is to empower all young people to succeed for themselves, their communities and society.

Just as we suffered as an organization during the pandemic, we know, more importantly, that our students are now suffering profound social, emotional and mental health challenges. In a post-Covid landscape, our goal is to re-engage young people through real world outdoor learning and experiential opportunities that enable students to rediscover their strengths as individuals and as part of a community.

In this white paper, Outward Bound quantifies how deep the mental crisis caused by the pandemic runs for young people, using data gathered from various surveys conducted all over the world. We have learned that we stand on the brink of a global catastrophe impacting the youth of every nation across the world.

## GLOBAL STATS



**1.6 BILLION STUDENTS**

**63 MILLION PRIMARY+ SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS**

**IN 191 COUNTRIES**

were affected by school closures caused by the pandemic, closures which have created significant long and short-term problems for our children.

## KEY FINDINGS IN THE UK



**94% OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTED AT LEAST ONE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN**

**62% SAID THEY FELT INCREASED ANXIETY**

**57% SUFFERED LOW MOOD**

**52% EXPERIENCED INCREASED LONELINESS**

## KEY FINDINGS IN THE USA



**72% OF HIGH SCHOOLERS REPORTED A POOR SENSE OF MENTAL HEALTH**

**58% FELT SIGNS OF DISTRESS MUCH MORE THAN USUAL**

**78% OF 11TH AND 12TH GRADERS SAID THAT COVID HAD IMPACTED THEIR PLANS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL**


## HOW OUTWARD BOUND CAN HELP

As the world slowly recovers from the worst of the pandemic, Outward Bound is putting young people first, prioritizing their mental well-being through re-connection with nature and strengthening connections with others.



**OUTWARD  
BOUND**





Youth who have experienced Outward Bound reported the following results in our Global Outcomes Survey:

**86%** EXPERIENCED INCREASED RESILIENCE

**86%** FELT MORE CONFIDENT

**83%** FELT MORE CONNECTED SOCIALLY

**83%** FELT A GREATER SENSE OF COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

Source: OBI Global Outcomes Survey 2021

Outward Bound Hong Kong

## CONCLUSION

Our work is central to repairing the damage done to young people by the pandemic and provides a vital lifeline to youth who are suffering the effects of numerous lockdowns.

**We must provide young people with opportunities to connect with their own true potential, their communities and the outdoors.**

**ENABLING YOUNG PEOPLE TO GET BACK TO NATURE IS THE FIRST CRUCIAL STEP TOWARDS RECOVERY FROM THE CHALLENGES OF THE PANDEMIC.**

# COVID: THE MENTAL HEALTH TIMEBOMB

The global Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest physical health challenge and threat to life expectancy since World War II.

Stress, anxiety, social and economic uncertainty, and the isolation of lockdowns have taken a monumental toll on the mental health of populations across the planet, spanning all ages.

But it is children and adolescents – those whose emotional development is the most fragile and vulnerable to trauma and shock – who make up a very significant proportion of these secondary casualties in what has become a pandemic within a pandemic.

**The COVID-19 crisis has turned into a mental health crisis for young people:**

- Young people's (15-24 year-olds) mental health worsened significantly during the pandemic. In most countries, mental health issues among this age group have doubled or more
- Young people were 30% to 80% more likely to report symptoms of depression or anxiety than adults with higher levels of loneliness being reported by young people as well
- Closures of educational institutions at all levels have contributed to weakening of protective factors
- The impact of Covid-19 on labour markets is disproportionately affecting young people, putting them at elevated risk of experiencing mental health issues<sup>1</sup>

**The impact of Covid on young people is global. In Canada:**

- 64% of youth who participated in a Statistics Canada Survey, reported that the pandemic harmed their mental health
- 41% of youth in this age range reported symptoms consistent with moderate to severe anxiety
- Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, the world's largest Children's Hospital, saw a 25% increase in cases involving suicidal ideation or suicide attempts from pre pandemic numbers<sup>2</sup>

That is why it is so important, as the world slowly recovers from the worst of the pandemic, that young people's mental well-being is prioritised – and a key pillar to doing this will be to re-connect them with nature, their peers and their communities. Outward Bound in the UK has found that when questioned, young people who have been on their programmes in the outdoors report the following:

- 92% said their mood improved
- 81% said their motivation increased
- 66% made new friends

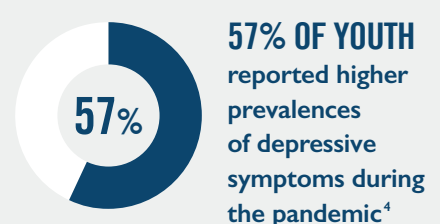
**These stats reveal that it is time for young people to get back to the real world, and to authentic learning that challenges them to achieve at a high level.**



## OUTWARD BOUND HAS FOUND THAT IN SINGAPORE:



## OUTWARD BOUND HAS FOUND THAT IN OMAN:



<sup>1</sup> Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis © OECD 2021

<sup>2</sup> Singh N. Help Me Out: How outdoor education impacts and empowers youth to thrive. Outward Bound Canada. 2022

<sup>3</sup> Results of National Youth Council's regular polls on Singaporean youths' challenges and sentiments on COVID-19

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Omar Al Omari, Prevalence and Predictors of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Youth at the Time of COVID-19: An Online Cross-Sectional Multicountry Study Depress Res Treat. 2020 Oct



## A UNIQUE GLOBAL CRISIS FOR OUR YOUTH

A phenomenal 1.6 billion students and 63 million primary and secondary school teachers in 191 countries have been affected by school closures caused by the pandemic, according to a UNESCO SDG4 Education Committee Report, March 2022.<sup>5</sup> The impact on learning and young people's ability to interact with their teachers and peers, as well as remain connected socially, has been devastating. For those with no digital lifeline, the disadvantages have been exacerbated. Half of all students – almost 830 million children – had no access to a computer during school closures.<sup>6</sup>

Young people have also borne the brunt of Covid's shockwaves in economic terms. A recent International Labour Organization (ILO) report finds that the pandemic has exacerbated the labour market challenges facing those aged between 15 and 24 years, who have experienced a much higher percentage loss in employment than adults since early 2020. The total global number of unemployed youth is estimated to reach 73 million in 2022, a slight improvement from 2021 (75 million) but still six million above the pre-pandemic level of 2019, the report says.<sup>7</sup> The consequence is that many youth have been battling with their mental health on a level that few generations before them have encountered. This is compounded by the fact that they lack the emotional development, experience, and tools to overcome life's everyday shocks and setbacks, let alone emerge from the challenges of a global pandemic.

## THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

The adverse effects of the pandemic on long-term economic prospects are starkly illustrated by a recent UNICEF Report (March 2022) which shows that **Two trillion hours** of in-person learning have been lost globally due to school closures, with long-term implications for learners. This represents a whopping 17 Trillion dollars estimated to be lost in future earnings of current learners. There are **43 million learners** still, in the third year of the pandemic, being affected by school closures across the world.

Research conducted by the Office of National Statistics in the UK reveals the economic uncertainty among young people as a result of Covid, with almost a quarter (23%) saying they do not feel confident about their future work. One in five young people feel scared that their skills and training are no longer useful, with a similar proportion (21%) thinking the pandemic has destroyed their career aspirations.<sup>8</sup>

The pandemic has also magnified poverty and economic inequality that existed before its onslaught. A report prepared by the US Office for Civil Rights, tells an alarming story about how widely - and inequitably - the pandemic has impacted students across America. The report bears witness to the significant challenges that the pandemic has posed for nearly all students in every part of the US. However, of greatest concern are the disparities in students' experiences. Those who went into the pandemic with the fewest opportunities are at risk of leaving with even less, widening pre-existing disparities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> SDG4 Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee Contribution to the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO Teacher Task Force figures, April 2020

<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization, [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

<sup>8</sup> ONS May 2021

<sup>9</sup> Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of Covid-19 on America's Students, 2021

<sup>10</sup> PF. Zuccolo et al, Children and adolescents' emotional problems during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Eur



Outward Bound Hong Kong

**THE IMPACT ON LEARNING AND STUDENTS' ABILITY TO INTERACT WITH THEIR TEACHERS AND PEERS, AS WELL AS REMAIN CONNECTED SOCIALLY, HAS BEEN DEVASTATING**



Outward Bound Brazil

**OUTWARD BOUND HAS FOUND THAT IN BRAZIL:**

**1 IN 3**

**presented emotional, depression, or anxiety symptoms during the pandemic. Brazil has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with one of the largest numbers of youth impacted by school closure globally.**

Evidence from past economic recessions suggests that young people, which make up a fifth of the total population in Brazil (World Bank, 2019), are particularly vulnerable to long-term unemployment.<sup>10</sup>



Outward Bound Singapore

## A LACK OF HUMAN CONNECTION

Young people surveyed by America's Promise Alliance also reported a decline in their mental well-being.<sup>11</sup> About 4 in 5 (78%) 11th and 12th graders said that the pandemic had impacted their plans after high school 'at least a little bit', with almost 1 in 5 reporting they had been affected 'a great deal'. In terms of youth relationships, more than half said they did not feel at all connected or only slightly connected with classmates, teachers, peers, and their communities.

<sup>11</sup> America's Promise Alliance: Where Do We Go Next? – June 2021

<sup>12</sup> Prevention Radar 2020. Of Dak-Gesundheit.



**RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN GERMANY FOUND THAT ONE IN 4 GERMAN STUDENTS ADMITTED to being 'often unhappy or depressed' and that 18% of children showed mental health problems, nearly double the pre-pandemic rate.<sup>12</sup>**



# POWERFUL EXPERIENCES: SUPPORT FOR HEALTHY LIVES

That is why it is so important to inspire young people, so they become strong, resilient, and curious – ready for the challenges of life. Today, the mission of Outward Bound is more critical than ever before.

Each young person is unique, as are Outward Bound educational experiences that harness the power of nature and real world learning through challenge and discovery.

A large body of literature has proven that spending time in nature has restorative effects both mentally and physically. Research has shown that those with the least access to nature also have the worst levels of physical health and mental well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Recent youth research has found that a lack of connection to nature predicted declines in mental health during the pandemic. **Youth with stronger connections to nature before the pandemic were more likely to continue participating in outdoor activities during the pandemic and experienced fewer declines in mental health.** This suggests that developing a connection to nature can help buffer against declines in mental health during times of stress.<sup>14</sup>



Outward Bound Canada

Outward Bound Canada's Social Return on Investment (Bain & Company) found that the resiliency gains of Outward Bound programs were linked to a lower risk of future anxiety and depression, generating ~\$1.7 million in societal savings on mental healthcare costs and ~\$5.0M in increased workplace productivity.<sup>15</sup>

During the height of the pandemic, Outward Bound UK ran modified programs for 13,100 young people from 273 schools across the UK. The mental health benefits of these programs were clearly evident:

**92% SAID THEIR MOOD IMPROVED**

**81% SAID THEIR MOTIVATION INCREASED**

**68% WERE KEENER TO SPEND MORE TIME OUTDOORS**

**81% FELT MORE CONFIDENT**

**64% SAID THEY WERE NOW KEEN TO BE MORE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE**

**81% FELT MORE CONFIDENT THEY COULD OVERCOME CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE**



## AFTER ATTENDING AN OUTWARD BOUND ADVENTURE IN THE UK



Outward Bound UK

**81% FELT MORE CONFIDENT THEY COULD OVERCOME CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE**

**87% FELT MORE CONFIDENT MEETING NEW PEOPLE**

<sup>13,14</sup> Singh N. Help Me Out: How outdoor education impacts and empowers youth to thrive. Outward Bound Canada. 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Bain & Co., Outward Bound Canada. Outward Bound Canada Why Support 2021



## OUTWARD BOUND ADDRESSES AN URGENT NEED AT A TIME OF CONTINUING GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

The social and emotional skills learned at Outward Bound help students better identify and manage their emotions, establish respectful caring relationships and resolve conflicts, all skills crucial to establishing well-being.

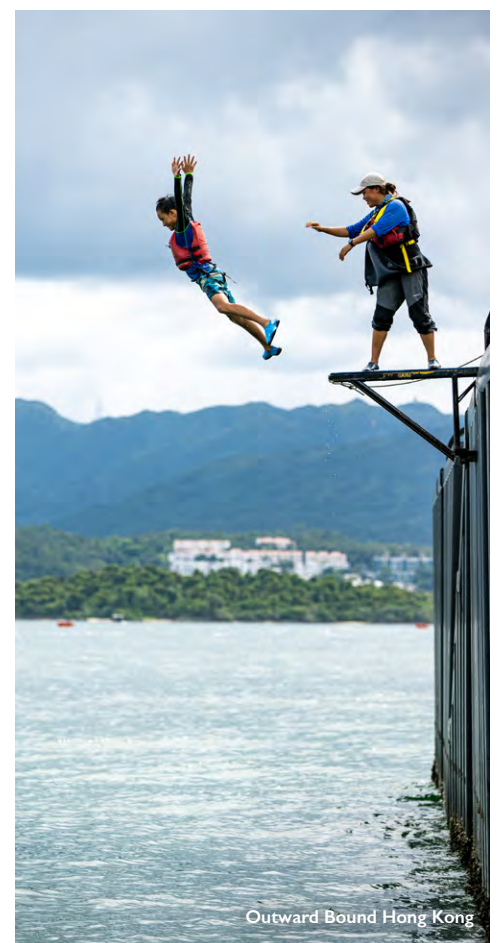
Outward Bound Zimbabwe

In 2021, students on Outward Bound USA courses reported statistically significant, positive changes for 12 separate social-emotional skills, non-cognitive skills that range from self-regulation to the ability to work in diverse groups.<sup>16</sup> These skills are closely connected to mental health. Of the social-emotional skills, “group relationships” had the greatest magnitude of change. These findings likely indicate that Outward Bound programming was responsive to the needs of students who were coming out of social isolation due to COVID-19 and seeking opportunities to socialize and that Outward Bound programming is likely buffering the impact of COVID-19 on participants.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As this report shows, the Covid-19 pandemic has raised huge concerns for the mental health of an entire generation of young people. Young people have been disproportionately affected socially and economically by the pandemic and they will likely continue to feel the impacts of this ‘crisis of a generation’ well into their adult life. We also know that the powerful outdoor learning provided by Outward Bound programs around the globe provides a multitude of health and well-being benefits, providing an ideal environment for young people to develop essential skills that they might be lacking right now, and will most certainly need to draw upon in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to incredibly tough times, but it has also given us the opportunity to “build back better.” Outward Bound, as a global outdoor educational organization, is uniquely positioned to help with this by supporting the well-being of youth and ensuring they have the skills they need to thrive.



Outward Bound Hong Kong

<sup>16</sup> (OBUSA 2021 Outcomes Report)

<sup>17</sup> (OBUSA 2021 Outcomes Report)



# TESTIMONIALS

We love to stay connected with young people we've inspired along the way. Below are testimonials from some individuals who share their experiences and reveal how Outward Bound changed their perspectives, taught them key life skills, and ultimately set them up for the future.

“

Before this trip I had never camped, canoed, portaged or even set up a tent. Now I am able to do all of these things, my confidence has improved enormously, and I am able to converse with new people without feeling awkward. On this trip my strength was being able to offer the group comfort and support, emotionally and physically. However, the hardest thing was being away from home and not being able to talk to or see my family and friends. The biggest thing that this trip taught me was that you never know what your full potential is until you try to reach it. I learned this by pushing myself to portage a canoe solo for 1.3km and it was a success, achieving this was the best feeling because your body feels both physically and emotionally healthier. During the trip there were times where I wanted to give up and go home, but thanks to the close support of friends that I made I felt welcomed and it felt like I was at home

”

Youth Participant, Outward Bound Canada

“

I became a stronger person after leaving Outward Bound. I believe that there's nothing unsolvable, and there's always a solution to each problem. Apart from this, I also become aware of the nature of Hong Kong... I learned how to appreciate the nature and this is an eye-widening experience for me.

”

Youth Participant, Outward Bound Hong Kong

“

Looking back and comparing myself to how closed up I was before Outward Bound, I realised, 'Do you know what? I've opened up a lot to these people who I've only known for three weeks, and I think I like it.' I think being outdoors and spending time with people forces you to open up and build relationships with people, and the most important thing I learned is that it is ok to open up to people.

”

Youth Participant, Outward Bound UK



Outward Bound USA

“

Outward Bound is important to this world because it's building the students who will one day change it.

”

Youth Participant, Outward Bound USA





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