

# **Mount Cook Adventure Centre's Adventures Away From Home**

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2025, by Madeline Horton**

Mount Cook Adventure Centre is a not-for-profit outdoor activity centre located on the edge of the Peak District. They work with a wide range of young people, vulnerable adults, and corporate groups.

Overcoming barriers for disadvantaged young people is paramount to Mount Cook, and the UK Youth Adventures Away from Home funding has provided an excellent opportunity to engage with groups who are typically hard to reach.

The Adventures Away From Home programme is funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Madeline, the Sales & Marketing Manager from Mount Cook, tells us about their experiences with the programme.

## **About Adventures Away From Home**

In late 2024, we applied for funding from UK Youth's *Adventures Away from Home* grant, now in its third year.

The purpose of the funding is to provide outdoor activity opportunities for young people aged 11 to 18 (or up to 25 for those with special educational needs), particularly for those who have never experienced outdoor adventures before, or face disadvantages and under-representation to accessing the outdoors. This encompasses racialised communities, young people with special educational needs or disabilities, care-experienced individuals, or those from low-income areas.

The programmes are designed to develop social and emotional skills in young people. Another key objective is to collect evidence for UK Youth's annual report. Over the past two years, the reports have confirmed what our fellow outdoor providers have long understood: outdoor learning is invaluable for young people.

This comprehensive report based on programme data is shared widely, including with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We anticipate that the 2025 report (which will include data we collected), will demonstrate the huge benefits the programme delivers for young people.

## **Accessing participants**

Mount Cook Adventure Centre have worked with 95 charities since opening in 2016, many of which are based in Derbyshire. This means we have developed close relationships over time and have a pre-existing network of groups who work with disadvantaged young people.

However, to broaden our reach, we also contacted charities from Derbyshire and the East Midlands, especially those who had never previously attended a residential programme at their centre. My goal was to connect with young people who had not had an outdoor experience before.

Groups identified as underrepresented in the 2024 report, including LGBTQI+ and racialised communities, were also prioritised.

Funding was allocated to seven different charities for a mix of two-night, three-day residential programmes and day trips. Mount Cook provided catering, accommodation, and a full programme of activities tailored to teenagers with a wide range of ability levels.

To give the young people and group leaders a voice in the programme, we encouraged them to choose their own activity sessions to suit their specific needs. Many opted for experiences that fostered self-confidence and individual achievement, such as zip wire, Via Ferrata, and bushcraft. Others focused on teamwork and communication, with activities like high ropes, team challenges, and orienteering.

### **Programme Reach**

Mount Cook engaged a total of 97 young people across 7 different charities for the Adventures Away from Home programme.

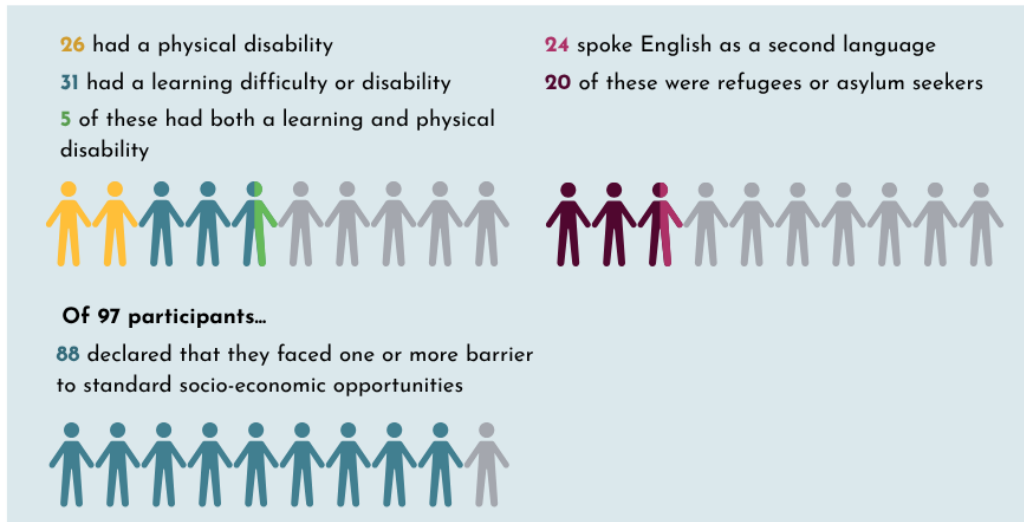
These included three health-based charities, **Umbrella** (a derby-based charity for young people with additional learning needs) **Diabetes UK**, and **Royal Society for Blind Children**.

A further three charities focused on local social issues. **SNaP Youth**, who work with children in extremely deprived areas of Derbyshire, **SAYit**, who work with **LGBTQ+** young people in Sheffield, and **Element Society**, who engage with young people to reduce crime and violence in Sheffield.

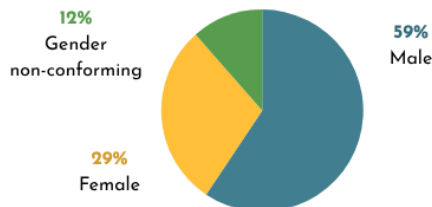
The final charity, **New Routes Integration**, supports young refugees and asylum seekers with cross-cultural integration and community awareness.

Being able to reach so many groups with this funding was so rewarding; to top it off, I even got to get out from behind my desk and work with a few of the groups myself!

## OF 97 PARTICIPANTS...



### Gender



### Ethnicity



## Impact of programme

The UK Youth report for this year is still in development, but the 2024 report highlighted notable improvements across various metrics. For example, 72% of participants reported better emotional management and 75% reported increased empathy.

These impressive results reinforce the belief that outdoor education helps disadvantaged young people become more resilient, socially included, and happier.

Several of the charities who visited Mount Cook Adventure Centre using the Adventures Away from Home funding shared their thoughts and feelings on the impact of the experience.

SNaP Youth have been coming to Mount Cook for outdoor experiences since 2016. Their CEO, Mandy Mangold, reflected on the Adventures Away from Home funded experience; "Mount Cook hosted an unforgettable outdoor residential experience for a group of young people from South Normanton and Pinxton, Derbyshire.

Many of the young people are registered with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and most come from low-income households in an under-resourced community. The residential stay gave these young people a rare chance to connect and explore the natural beauty of Derbyshire whilst taking part in a range of exciting and challenging activities.

For many of the young people, this was their first stay away from home and the Mount Cook staff went above and beyond to provide a safe and supportive environment so that everyone felt comfortable and at home. The staff kindly adapted the activities to ensure that all young people

could take part and feel supported - as a result the young people said they 'felt happy to have a go'.

During the residential trip the young people reported feeling better connected with their peers. The youth work staff observed that the young people had improved in communication, teamwork, and independence.

One young person shared: "I didn't think I could do something like this, but I did - and I loved it!"

The trip not only offered fun and adventure but created lasting memories and a sense of achievement that will stay with the young people for a long time."

Mount Cook staff member, Hannah, worked with SNaP Youth during their stay.

"I was with SNaP for an indoor climbing session and a landkarts sessions. They cheered each other up the climbing wall and faced their fears, then worked together to create working landkarts, with trial and error and strategy. One of the participants was overwhelmed simply by being in a beautiful green area and stopped in the middle of a landkart race to take it all in!

These are by far the most rewarding groups to work with, and there's always a real buzz in the team after the UK Youth Funded groups have visited us.

Seeing the young people thrive in the outdoors is truly special, and it's amazing that the Adventures Away from Home funding gives this opportunity to those who need it most.

Having seen the impact of the Adventure Away From Home programme on the young people we worked with, I would highly recommend all outdoor providers who work with similar groups apply. The funding applications open towards the end of the year."

*NOTE from Madeline: I have included some images on the next two pages. We did not take photos of the AAWFH children for GPDR compliance. These images are of our local secondary school and an NCS group who we have marketing consent for. Please make this clear in the publication.*





