

Findings from Wigan Centres Alumni Survey, 2018

This document presents the findings of a survey of previous participants of residential experiences at Low Bank Ground and Hinning House, i.e. alumni of the two outdoor education centres managed by Brathay Trust for Wigan Council.¹

The alumni survey sprang from a review of the two Wigan centres facilitated by Brathay which took place in late 2017 and included invited school representatives and Wigan Council stakeholders in discussion and focus groups. A suggestion was made to circulate some open questions to a network of alumni, via an on-line survey, to explore the long-term impact of experiencing residential at the two centres.²

The survey was live from 15/01/18 to 23/02/18 and snowballed to the extent that **691 valid responses were received**; an unexpected and enthusiastic return rate. In detail:

- A wide range of survey participants shared their views and experiences
- The findings include feedback from alumni who visited a Wigan centre as long ago as 1973 all the way through to recent visitors from 2017 (i.e. current school students)
- Some responses were from alumni who attended as a visiting staff member and a few experienced a residential both as a student and later as a visiting staff member.

As stated, the key questions were open (qualitative) questions. Had this project predicted the large number of returns, it would have been structured to include more categorical or scale based questions to investigate long-term impact more systematically. Instead, analysis of the 691 qualitative responses to three open questions was undertaken in two stages:

1. The development of themes across the full data-set for each question
2. The refinement of these themes to produce key categories from which a count of occurrence could take place.

Findings are presented in the form of word clouds, where the font size of each category represents the frequency of their occurrence, i.e. a larger font size indicates a stronger response to questions exploring impact.

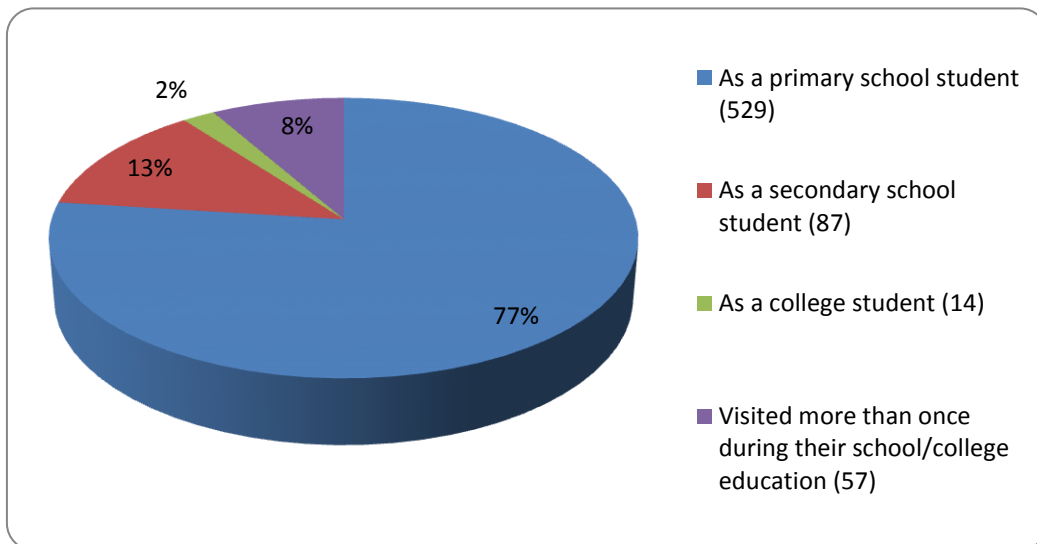
Thank you to Josephine Guy (Research Hub intern) who analysed the qualitative data, brought together the themes and created the word clouds.

¹ <https://www.brathay.org.uk/what-we-do/our-programmes/residential-centres/low-bank-ground-hinning-house>

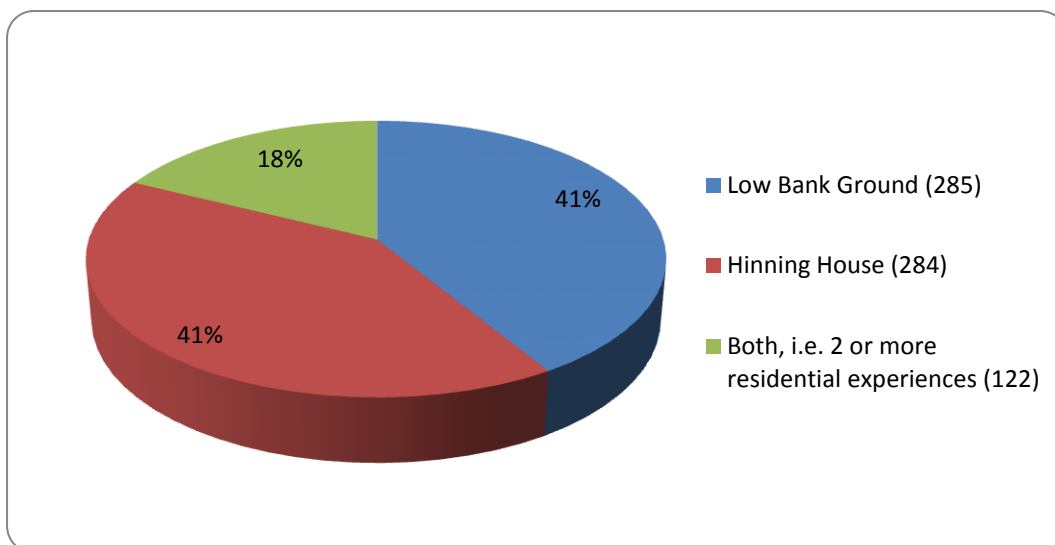
² Please direct enquiries to the Brathay Research Hub: jenny.lee@brathay.org.uk

1. Wigan centres alumni survey - breakdown of respondents

a. At what stage in their schooling did the alumni visit Low Bank Ground and/or Hinning House?³



b. Which centre did the alumni visit?



³ Some alumni visited the Wigan centre(s) in their capacity as visiting staff.

c. What were alumni most likely to remember about their residential experience?

Activities - 95% of WC alumni

Time with friends - 64% of WC alumni

Being away from home - 62% of WC alumni

Food - 32% of WC alumni

2. Wigan centres alumni survey – impact on respondents

a. What have alumni learnt or gained from their residential experience?

“How to excel in areas that formal education failed me; learning that a girl from a poor background could become successful in the outdoor education field and be believed in by the amazing teams at both venues.” 1989-2002, primary school, secondary school and college.

As can be seen by the word cloud below, the key inter-related and long-term learning and gains for the alumni were:

1. Trying out new activities, including initiating the acquisition of hard skills such as orienteering, kayaking, sailing, hiking and climbing.

“Orienteering, raft building, walking in the outdoors. It has given me a desire to create the same experiences for my daughter.” 1988, primary school

“A lifelong fascination with canoeing, abseiling, rock climbing and walking up and down big hills.” 1989, primary school.

2. Feeling more independent or self-reliant/developing independence skills, learning to live away from home.

"I learnt I wouldn't melt and die if I was away from my mum. The experience taught me the self-reliance and self-belief I needed as I was going to high school in the September." 1982, primary school

"I recall my mother being extremely anxious about allowing me to attend as I never left her side. I, on the other hand, learned to be more independent." 2000, primary school

3. Teamwork experience/working together as peers.

"I remember learning about team working through orienteering and having household responsibilities to help with cooking and cleaning up for the whole class." 1992, primary school.

"I learned the value of teamwork and that everybody has a different skill set to contribute something to the task." 1991, primary school

4. Life-skills such as helping with chores or making your bed.

"I also had to change my own bed and taught some of the others how to do it." 1993, primary school

"I learnt how to make a bed! How to have fun working together as a team and the feeling of achievement felt that I still remember today. Both centres gave me fantastic memories and my children also had an amazing recently at Low Bank Ground." 1987 and 1989, primary school

5. Awareness of the natural world and life outside the home environment in Wigan.

"That I didn't need wrapping in cotton wool and could literally climb a mountain, walk down rivers, eat wild plants etc. Lots about nature and for someone coming from a background where we did little outdoors, it was fantastic. I am now a very "outdoorsy" person!" 1999, 2001, primary and secondary schools

"Living in a town, Hinning House was just so different, all the open space and no houses/shops etc.; it's like a different world." 1979, secondary school

"My love for the outdoors. I still talk about it now when I'm on walks in The Lakes." 2006, primary school.

6. Growth in self-confidence and self-belief.

It gave me confidence and I felt a sense of freedom and worth at doing something on my own; loved the experience. 1987, primary school.

“Confidence being away from home, activities I’d never done before, canoeing etc.” 1989, primary school.

“When she came home she was a different child. Filled with confidence and a desire to explore and exceed; absolutely without a doubt the best thing she has ever done.” 2017, parent of primary school student

Figure 1: What was learnt/gained from the residential experience at the Wigan centres?



b. In what ways has alumni's learning been useful since the residential experience?

"It's a defining thing for me! I do a lot of things that scare me and always find a way through it now. Without an experience at Low Bank Ground, I don't know if I could do what I do." 1990s, secondary school

Alumni discussed applying the development of confidence, life and outdoor skills/experience, working with a diverse group of peers, independence, and the ability to stretch comfort zones to their future lives, in particular:

1. In their education and career paths.

"It taught me to work with a variety of people of different abilities. That is useful as I am now a teacher." 1987, primary school

"[I] use the ability to be able to mix with people from different backgrounds in all aspects of working life." 1988, college

"I went on to enjoy a long and fruitful career working in the outdoors, inspired partly by my time at both centres." 1990, primary school

2. Supporting, encouraging and teaching children and young people to enjoys outdoor experiences, be it as a parent/carer or as a teacher or instructor.

"Absolutely, I talk about my time away from my parents a lot, and all the activities I experienced and how I found my own courage to do things with my own kids now, especially encouraging my 8 year old last year to enjoy Brownie camp & have no fear; go there and enjoy everything because it will be a forever memory." 1986, primary school

"As a teacher, I think the most important thing we can teach kids is to be independent, self-sufficient problem solvers." 1993, primary school

"Taught me to teach my kids to explore the outdoors more." 1994, primary school

3. Travelling away from home, broadening horizons, experiencing adventures.

"It really made me appreciate adventuring into the outdoors and being with nature." 2003, primary school

“Yes it gave me confidence to try new things and be away from home. It also probably started my love of travel and adventure.” 1985, primary school

“I went on to live in Austria for several years, living and working independently, experiencing what the world has to offer. I am now a confident and happy adult.” 1996, primary school

4. Sustaining confidence, social and communication skills, team work and a willingness to try new things, overcome fears and be active.

“Team work and helping each other to get through the task has been useful in every stage of my life.” 1992, primary school

“It helped me to be more confident, sociable and less afraid of being away from home.” 1982, primary school.

“Yes, that you get further working within a team, listening to everyone and then deciding together, rather than just going with the flow and not voicing my ideas/thoughts.” 1990, primary school.

“It’s all part of growing up and I have never been afraid to tackle challenges with a positive attitude.” 1995, primary school

Figure 2: How has the learning been useful to alumni of the Wigan centres?



c. In what ways have alumni changed as a result of their residential experience?

"I think that it helped me to appreciate nature more and built my confidence because I could cope in different places that were alien or out of my comfort zone. It also helped me develop teamwork skills and leadership skills. I have continued to challenge myself throughout my life and have very fond memories." 1992-2012, primary school, secondary school & college

Alumni re-iterated how the gaining of life and outdoor skills and experiences, together with growth in their personal and social development had impacted on their confidence, independence, ability to communicate and work with others, and willingness to broaden their horizons. Examples of impact include:

1. Growing confidence, self-development, resilience and positive mind-set.

"100% grew in confidence and socially evolved." 2001, primary school

"Knowing that I am my own person regardless of background, peers or anyone... Personal integrity and self-awareness is vital to become who you are born to become!" 1988, primary school

"I became more patient and learned about making decisions for yourself." 1992, primary school

"Developing relationships, learning about independence & building resilience." 1990, primary school

2. Developing independence, domestic skills and self-sufficiency.

"I was more aware of the tasks around the home and helped more often afterwards." 1992, primary school

"The activities were all not only about having fun but also gaining some valuable life skills without realising it at the time." 1985, primary school

"Due to the small responsibilities we were given it encouraged us to be independent and, in turn, that's what grew my confidence and social skills." 1997-2002, primary school & secondary school

3. Developing outdoor learning and experiences.

"[I] learned to navigate using a compass during orientation, which came in useful for army cadets as a teenager." 1996, primary school

"It charged my passion for nature, the outdoors and outdoor pursuits which I still do today (particularly canoeing), in my leisure time." 1993-1995, secondary school & college

"[I] found that I really enjoyed outdoor activities, especially mountain climbing which I tried for the first time at Low Bank Ground and still enjoy with my own family now." 1994, primary school

"As I tried certain activities at Low Bank Ground I was keen to try these as an adult. I now take part in orienteering events in Cornwall." 1992, primary school

4. Broadening horizons, adventuring outside the home environment, seeking new opportunities and challenges.

"First time away from home without the family. Realised that it's a big world with lots to see." 1973, primary school

"It made me realise I can do anything if I have the right guidance and put my mind to it." 1987, primary school

"It opened my mind to the world." 1989, primary school

"It made me realise there is a beautiful world outside the towns and cities we grow up in." 2002, primary school

5. A greater understanding and ability to communicate and connect with others.

"Learnt to bond, connect, work together." 1990, primary school

"It improved my confidence and communications skills, helping me to be more outgoing." 1999, primary school

"I became more trusting in my friends and family." 2003, primary school

"I realised material things don't matter, I learnt to put others before myself and to work together to reach your goal no matter what background you're from." 1980, primary school

Finally, a few responses discussed how they have used their experience at the Wigan centre(s) to encourage others to enjoy the outdoors and residential learning. This might be as parents, teachers and leaders within their communities; adopting the approach used at the Wigan Centres to support young people to learn and develop.

“It formulated my enthusiasm for residential[s] and there importance in the education of young people; the reason I ran many school and youth group residentials.” 1986, secondary school

“I now take Guides out on these types of adventures.” 1983, primary school

“Taught me to teach my kids to explore the outdoors more.” 1994, primary school

Figure 3: Ways in which alumni have changed as a result of the residential experience.

