



Free to Be Kids

Growing **children's** emotional health

2019 Impact Report

“Free to Be helps me to know that I have friends and a fun place to be.”
- Temi, age 9

About Free to Be - for those new to our work

We believe that all children deserve to experience joy and adventure within their childhood, whatever other difficulties they face.

Many children referred to us grow up facing real hardships - many experience poverty, unstable housing, bullying, the loss of a family member, emerging difficulties with emotional health, or are growing up in families where parents have difficulties with drugs, alcohol, or mental health. As a result many have very limited views of their own potential, and of who they can be in the world.

Our projects are carefully structured to create opportunities for particularly disadvantaged children to experience feeling brave, adventurous, proud and successful, often for the first time in a long time. Children develop a much richer view of themselves, helping them grow in confidence, increase social skills and believe that they can achieve much more than they had thought.

The majority of our work takes place through our Thrive Outside programme which creates immersive, horizon broadening residential respite projects in outdoor environments, helping children to create lasting positive childhood memories. For the most vulnerable, we offer long term support through our London based Thrive Mentoring programme or through our Journey Programme - a recurring series of specialist residentials with consistent staffing and the same small group of particularly vulnerable young people, spread over a year.

All of our work supports children who are particularly disadvantaged and Thrive Outside is particularly successful at engaging children and families who might not otherwise access more traditional forms of support. For these children, our projects open up a whole new world. Everything we do is aimed to support children to develop their sense of who they are, and in turn to create changes in confidence, resilience and self-belief which help children do better at school, at home, and elsewhere. Schools tell us the impact of Thrive Outside is evidenced by lasting changes in educational engagement, improved emotional health, and real growth in children's belief in what they can achieve.

Beyond our main Thrive Outside work, we also run a Young Leaders' programme, coaching, training and supporting children to return on our projects as young volunteers, directly supporting children facing similar difficulties to their own.

If you'd like to read more about what we do and how we do it, please visit our website: www.freetobekids.org.uk



An Introduction from our Leadership Team

2019 has been another busy and exciting year for Free to Be! We have grown our team to now include 3 paid staff members after employing our first full time employee thanks to generous funding from the Mayor of London's Young Londoner's Fund and The Fore. This has allowed us to increase both our reach and the intensity of our work by offering residential places to more children than ever before and continuing to build the amount of ongoing support we are able to offer to the most in need children. In November, we were proud to win the London Youth Award for Excellence in Outdoor Education, despite some very tough competition. The judges, who included Co-Leader of the Green Party and London Assembly Member, Sian Berry and Lord Lieutenant of London Sir Kenneth Olisa, OBE, particularly highlighted our ability to reach and remove barriers for the most vulnerable children.

As always, none of our work would be possible without the immense dedication, energy and skills of Free to Be's talented, and ever growing team of volunteers, friends and supporters. To those who work directly with our children and those who support behind the scenes with specialist skills, knowledge and funding - thank you - we're eternally grateful.

“We believe in childhood, muddy trainers, new challenges, self expression, and real human relationships. Our aim is to open up a sense of adventure, freedom and possibility for children who are struggling, whatever life's circumstances.”

-From our website

As always, the brave, talented and kind children we have the privilege to meet and get to know through Free to Be are what makes this organisation tick. They are both our biggest fans and our most demanding customers and so it really means the world to us when we see their confidence blossom and their sense of possibility bloom on our projects. We hope you will enjoy reading more about what they, and we, have been up to over the last year.

With best wishes,

Rachel & Mike

I love it here so relaxed and calm I am going to miss it here

Is there anything we should change about Free to Be?
No FTB is Perfect

I loved being here because there is loads of things to explore xx



Draw a picture or write about a memory you've made while we've been away:
Horse Riding
"On top of Beauty, I felt like I was on top of the world."



I learnt how to swim with out goggles and how to swim on the Deep End of the Pool.

Is there anything we should change about Free to Be?
that is could be longer



it made me feel so special and happy also part of a group

Draw a picture or write about a memory you've made while we've been away:
Jokes with the friends I made

making new friends facing my fears

Is there anything we should change about Free to Be?
More goats

Is there anything you've done on this holiday which you never thought you'd be able to do?
Play outside

Is there anything we should change about Free to Be?
it's awesome the way it is

A Summary of what we've achieved in 2019



169 children and young people attended our projects this year.

90 volunteers gave their time to support or work alongside our children

98% of children reported positive indicators of improved self-esteem, confidence and resilience

“ When I think about Free to Be, I want to go back right now. It makes me feel so happy - I get to hang out with new people and I know I'm not alone ”
-Jade, 11

100% of referrers providing feedback reported demonstrable improvements in children's confidence and belief that they could achieve more than they had thought after the project

92% of children reported trying something they had previously not thought possible whilst they worked with us this year



This year, we benefitted from over 12,000 volunteering hours



“ The children beam when they talk about their time with Free to Be - you can literally see their faces light up when they recall what they did and the activities they tried. The positive memories help them to identify where they might be able to try something new or take a risk at school. The chance to get away from everything, try new things and be out in the countryside will be a very significant memory for these children as they get older. ”
-School Inclusion Manager

This year, we provided 235 project places for children and young people



Had we paid this year's volunteers at the London Living wage rate, it would have cost us over £130,000

The Need

For many children, the run up to school holidays is a time of great excitement. In homes and classrooms up and down Britain, children share excited stories about holidays to France, trips to Disneyland and days out at the seaside.

In the households supported by Free to Be though, the conversations are very different. Already difficult and challenging home circumstances intensify - there are more mouths to feed; children already acting as Young Carers take on even more; family conflict and tensions spill over into arguments, shouting, and worse. Many families live in overcrowded conditions. Some live in hostels, having fled violence. Most live in areas where parents fear to let children play outside unsupervised, due to worries about gangs and crime. Our children have no access to the carefree advertising images of summer holidays.

Difficulties such as these don't just create material poverty. Growing up with such adversity fundamentally alters children's stories about themselves. Limited horizons and lack of access to possibilities to explore, feel proud, try and then succeed, teach children that their worlds are limited and small. Children increasingly feel "broken", "bad", and "stuck".

Our projects help these children to instead experience feeling included, proud, adventurous and special. We build projects based on our knowledge that the children we support need different, specialised, and supported opportunities in order to experience feeling successful, to realise they can achieve more than they had thought, and eventually, to develop a healthier and richer story about themselves. Through providing real and practical respite for struggling families during otherwise overwhelming times of year, alongside creating a space for joy, exploration, fun, challenge and growth, we give particularly vulnerable children the support and confidence to recognise their own potential, qualities, and innate worth. And to see that the world holds far more possibility than they had imagined.

Based on 2019 information from referrers and parents

The Need for our work



98% of children attending are from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds

including living with parents with addiction or mental health difficulties, facing homelessness or other housing instability, acting as young carers or living in poverty.



50% have a history of, or concerns around, potential abuse or neglect.



96% are experiencing emotional, social or behavioural issues.



50% are either at risk of, or have experienced, an exclusion from school, or have been the subject of a referral to Social Services in the last year.



83% would have no holiday this year without our support, or have no safe access to appropriate spaces to play at home.



For 28% of children, their break with us this summer was their first ever holiday.



From our referrals

The following excerpts from referral information illustrate the challenges faced by some of the children on our projects this year. As with all children mentioned throughout this report, names and some personal details have been changed to protect identities.

“ Coming on Free to Be makes me feel happy. I get to hang out with new people and I know I’m not alone. ”

- Jamal, Age 12

Joseph is 9 and lives with his older sister and his dad in a one-bedroom flat. Joseph's dad is currently unable to work, because he is being treated for cancer and has had one of his kidneys removed. He has been in and out of hospital for many months and the children have been cared for by his partner, who doesn't usually live with them. Joseph and his sister had a very frightening experience whilst their father was in hospital last year - they returned home from school to find an intruder in their flat. They ran back to school for support and the police were called, but the incident really terrified Joseph, who now doesn't feel safe in the flat, even with his dad there. When recounting this story, he becomes very tearful and this, along with dealing with his Dad's illness, is causing him a lot of distress. The family are currently getting by on a very small sickness allowance, and once the rent has been paid, there is very little money left over for food or to be spent on the children's needs.

Kelsie is 12 and lives with her mum and two older siblings in a small flat. There are concerns that the flat is overcrowded and becoming dangerous as a result of the mess that has accumulated there. Kelsie's mum suffers from Borderline Personality Disorder and is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, which has left her with PTSD and a great deal of anxiety. She frequently becomes very depressed, and the children need to care for her when this occurs. Kelsie's two siblings have also recently been diagnosed with their own mental health difficulties and regularly have suicidal thoughts. Whilst Kelsie was doing well at school, the situation at home has impacted hugely on her happiness and confidence over the last couple of years and she currently rarely attends. School, Social Services and others are struggling to support, since mum's past experiences have led to a fundamental mistrust of professionals, meaning her engagement is limited and she regularly threatens to remove the children from school. Kelsie currently has few opportunities to take part in activities or socialising outside the home.



Zofia is 13 and lives with her parents, two younger brothers and lots of extended family members in a very overcrowded home. The housing situation is chaotic, with 14 people living in very close quarters - she regularly reports lots of shouting and conflict and has no calm time or space to complete school work, relax or play. School are concerned that Zofia is currently self-harming by cutting her wrists and says that sometimes she feels like she blacks out and then realises that she has cut herself. She has been on a waiting list for support through CAMHS for many months. Zofia is overweight and has recently been diagnosed with a chronic liver condition as a result of this. She describes herself as an emotional eater and has been subjected to a number of bullying incidents at school because of her weight. Zofia has also been a victim of racial bullying on her estate. At school, Zofia is very shy and quiet and often doesn't have the confidence to ask for help when she needs it.

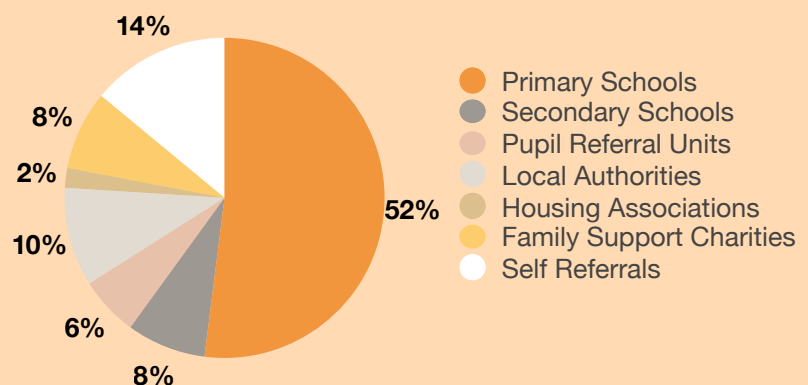
Jason is 11 and exhibiting angry and aggressive behaviour both at home and school. There are concerns about his vulnerability to involvement with gangs. Many professionals are involved with the family, but Jason's mum struggles to engage positively with them. Jason is a young carer to his mum, who has a disability, and his 5 year old sister, and his mum is expecting another baby just before the summer holidays, so his caring responsibility will increase further. Jason is physically well developed and looks much older than his age. He has been hanging out with older children who are known in the community for their anti-social behaviour and was recently apprehended by the police for shoplifting whilst absent from school. Jason has disclosed that both his mother and older siblings are emotionally abusive towards him and this has contributed to his low self-worth and self-esteem. At school, he rarely engages in learning and has admitted to smoking cannabis and cigarettes. School staff are worried that his gentle, empathetic side is slowly disappearing putting him at increased risk of harm. He needs nurture, positive adult attention and support to let his guard down and act his age.

Where our referrals came from:

Our referrals this year came from 43 organisations based across 10 London boroughs. The vast majority of children attending our projects lived in households in significantly deprived neighbourhoods, according to 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation data.

Over half of our referrals were made by primary schools, with the others reaching us from secondary schools, specialist education providers, social workers within local authorities, housing associations and charities working with vulnerable families.

A small but significant percentage of referrals (15%) came from families who self-referred children to us directly, having found out about our projects through word of mouth or via internet searches.

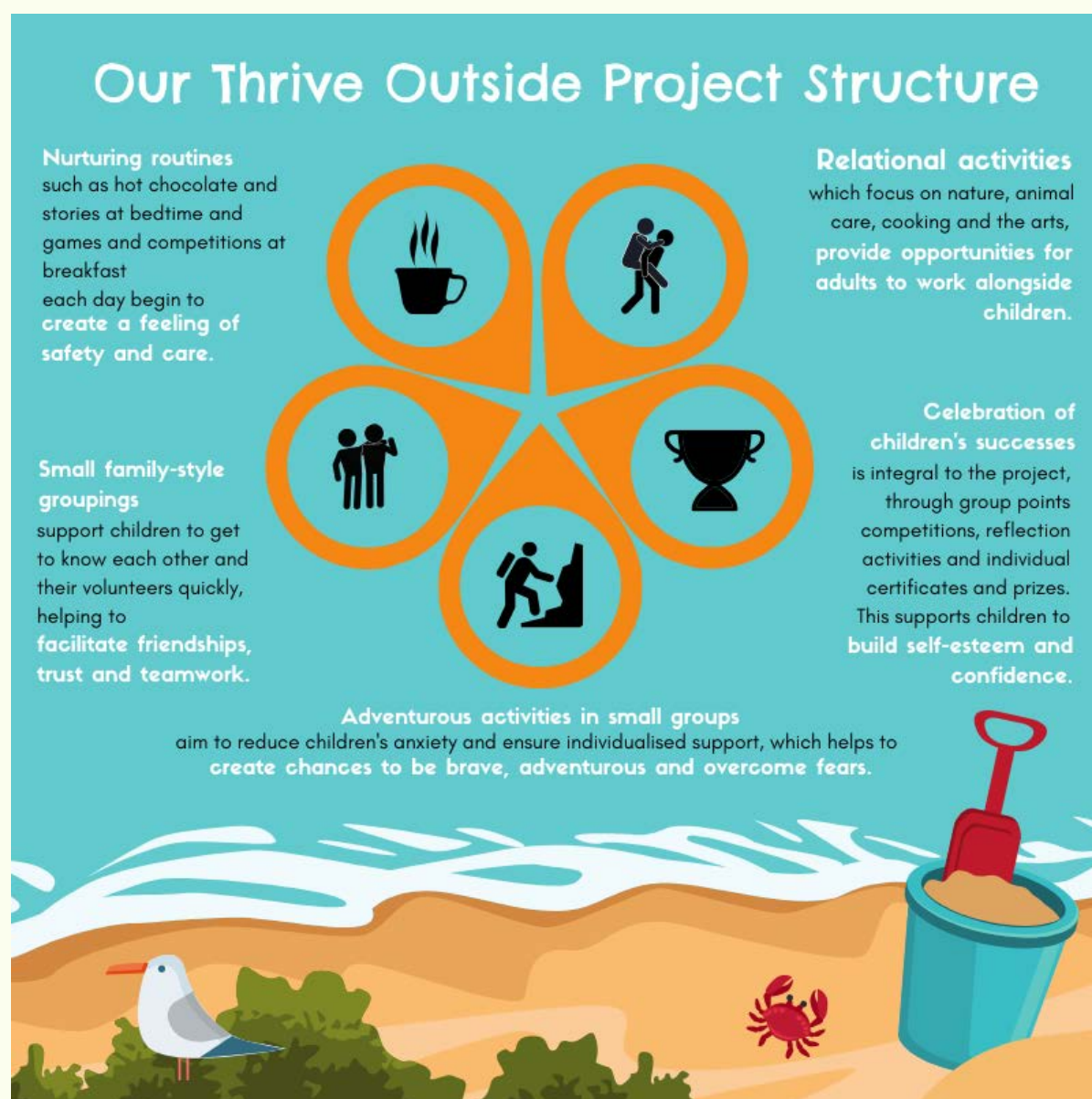


Thrive Outside Programme - the Model

Our Thrive Outside project structure is designed to support particularly vulnerable children, especially those who struggle to engage with or manage more traditional interventions, such as talking therapies, group work or less tailored residential trips. The five core elements of our model are what help children to build relationships and engage with our work, compared to more generalised provision. These principles are at the heart of all of our residential projects:

“Free to Be has taught me that it is good to make friends and be as a team. Since I've been coming, the people there have been helping me to conquer my fears.”

- Dylan, Age 10



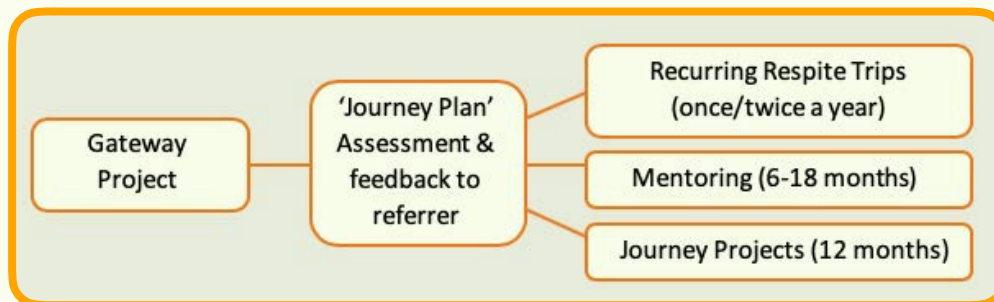
Our model allows us to quickly build a powerful sense of belonging and trust with children who often struggle with these concepts. It also gives us a unique opportunity to really get to know them - every child on a Free to Be project benefits from over 50 hours of direct and intensive therapeutic support from the same, responsive, psychologically minded adults, equating to over a years' worth of weekly clinic or home visits from social workers or other agencies. Through being alongside children and young people as they work together to build a raft, encourage each other to reach the top of a climbing wall, or overcome disagreements as they play together, we gain a better understanding of who they are and how they navigate social situations. We're then able to feed these insights about children's strengths, passions and challenges back to referrers and, where we feel there are particular needs that we can support with, use them as a starting point for longer term work.

Longer Term Support

Many children with particularly entrenched difficulties who are struggling at home, school and with the other types of support they are offered, engage deeply and powerfully with Free to Be when they attend one of our Thrive Outside projects. For these children there is a real need for ongoing support to build on the trust, sense of belonging and powerful shared experiences they benefit from whilst with us. Our Journey Programme provides a range of tailored opportunities for continued support, based on the needs and circumstances of the child.

“The children I worked with all had an amazing time and, by the end of the week, you could see how much they had grown in confidence. One of them told me that they wanted to stay at Free to Be for four years!”

- Volunteer



Following on from our Gateway Projects, which take place during the Easter and Summer school holidays, we work with referrers to identify children and young people most in need of ongoing support and match them to:

- Recurring respite projects once or twice a year - designed to top up and sustain the positive changes they have made with us and provide a break from home for children to look forward to throughout the year.
- Weekly/fortnightly one to one mentoring with an adult volunteer (generally one that they already know and trust, having worked with them on their Gateway project) in London. These sessions revolve around positive activities, planned by child and mentor together and ensure a regular space to talk with a trusted adult.
- Our Journey Projects, spread over a year, offer more specialised, targeted support to young people with particularly deeply entrenched negative self-narratives and include activities designed to build resilience, team work and confidence; one to one coaching and facilitated group reflection.



Thrive Outside: Gateway Projects

This year, our Gateway Projects provided 141 much needed residential places for children who otherwise wouldn't have access to horizon broadening experiences or safe spaces to play. Each child had the opportunity to take part in around 20 different carefully curated confidence building activities on each of our Gateway Projects. Places were provided entirely free of charge to families, with children collected and returned to their doors, removing financial and practical barriers which would otherwise prevent many from taking part.

“Coming on Free to Be makes me feel good, because I can get away from home and see brand new friends. I've made loads of good memories - making friends, doing campfires - loads of cool things.”

- Marlon, Age 11

Activities this year included: pony trekking on the South Downs, picking and cooking fruit and vegetables, meeting and caring for animals at the farm, swimming, paddling and rock pooling at the beach, tree top high ropes courses, kayaking and canoeing adventures, hilltop hide and seek, arts and crafts, pond dipping, campfire singing, wild camping, torch-lit night walks, treasure hunts and den building in the woods.

Case study: Jenny has had a traumatic early childhood, which included significant neglect and suspected sexual abuse by a relative. Her father died last year and, since then her mother has struggled to cope, relying on Jenny's older sister to parent the children, with the whole family moving into her two bedroomed flat. Relationships at home are often very volatile and toxic and Jenny misses her father very much. She is struggling with anxiety, and school report that she has worryingly low self-esteem.

Jenny was very nervous to attend our projects and it took a long time to coax her onto our minibus and help her overcome her worries about being away from her mum. From the moment she arrived and saw our bouncy castle, Jenny was smiling - she tried every activity and blossomed over the course of the week. She particularly enjoyed camping, bushcraft and horse riding, and, just as importantly, she also built strong relationships with our volunteers, talking at length with them about the challenges she is dealing with. It was clear that she felt comfortable and listened to and felt able to take a break from her responsibilities and enjoy time to play freely. Since the project, we matched Jenny with one of her Group Leaders as a Mentor for long term support. Jenny now rock climbs and has someone to share the load of her difficulties at home.



Children and parents told us:

"I'd give Free to Be ten out of ten, because it is inspiring. I think you shouldn't invite any other kids on Free to Be, because that way, I could just come every single time!" **Stephanie, 9**

"John came home talking non-stop about trampolining and horse riding and canoeing. He had a wonderful time and had some experiences that he has never had before. I am very glad he got to have those experiences and opportunities. As you know, we've been dealing with a lot as a family recently and it has been a life saver for John to be away at Free To Be. Thank you so much for all the wonderful care you and your team took with him and all the other children." **Parent**

This opportunity has helped our children to become more independent, to have the opportunity to experience a broad variety of activities. The children became more confident in their own abilities and it has given those who were not able to talk about their lives or concerns previously, the confidence to approach an adult and share their thoughts. These breaks give the children the chance to leave behind lives that can be stressful, challenging and difficult for a short time and to enjoy and have fun. **School Safeguarding Lead**

"The best thing in Free to Be is doing loads of activities and having fun." **Joseph, 11**

“I've loved getting to know the children I've volunteered with, and it's always great to see them grow closer over the week - the excitement of new friends and the buzz that they get from being part of a group. The activities always break the ice, giving the children a chance to have fun together and get to know new people. It's feels great to be a part of making that happen.**”**

- Volunteer



Thrive Outside: Journey Projects

For a significant cohort of the older children supported through our Gateway projects, we know that challenges at home and school are further compounded by the fact that they and their family's engagement with the more traditional support interventions through social services, CAMHS and schools is limited or often leads to little change. Despite this, many engage deeply and powerfully with our Gateway Projects.

Our Journey Projects build on this by providing a year's worth of support in the form of four intensive, small group residentials. These retain the sense of fun, nurture and belonging that so deeply resonate with the young people, whilst incorporating a range of more overt work to focus on building confidence, problem solving skills and supporting young people to identify and work on other areas of challenge within their thinking about themselves and relationships with others. The trips are designed to provide time and space for self-reflection, facilitated group conversations (both about issues that impact on young people's lives and about their own strengths, challenges and ways to support each other) and opportunities for the young people to be supported to succeed. Extended challenge activities stretch young people's perceptions of what they can achieve, and

“Throughout the projects, the children are constantly surrounded by a positive atmosphere and ethos from both adults and children, which allows them to develop such a strong sense of identity and self-worth in a way many have never had before.”

- Volunteer

daily 'Honours Councils', provide opportunities for young people to feed back on the skills and qualities they witness in others. This combination allows groups to create a powerful sense of trust and a safe space within which to share authentic feelings about strengths and weaknesses.

Fifteen young people, aged 11 to 15, participated in our two Journey Project cohorts this year. Challenge activities over 2019 included: a 7 mile canoe expedition with time out in the middle of the day for young people to light fires and cook lunch; a shelter building and overnight bivouacking activity and a two day horse care/riding challenge, which culminated in a two hour independent ride across moorland. Both cohorts will complete their final projects in February 2020, allowing us to produce impact data in early Spring 2020, before welcoming two new Journey Project cohorts in April.



Thrive Outside: Mentoring

Over 2019, ten volunteer mentors have provided between them over 600 hours of one to one support for some of our most in need children and young people through our mentoring programme. The programme pairs children and volunteers who have attended our Gateway Projects to spend regular time together in London on a weekly or fortnightly basis for a minimum of six months. In their time together, pairs spend time working on particular social and emotional goals, which they set, with input from parents and referrers. Mentors are supported throughout by regular support and supervision with Free to Be's Leadership Team. Building on the shared experiences of our residentials ensures common ground from the beginning, overcoming many of the difficulties which lead to pairing breakdown in more traditional mentoring models. We aim to grow this programme further over the coming year, with nine new mentoring pairs lined up to begin work together over the first few months of 2020.

Activities undertaken by mentor pairs this year have included: Trips on the London Eye, guided tours at Chelsea Football Club and Wembley Stadium, visits to London Zoo, indoor climbing sessions, pottery painting workshops and theatre performances (thanks to the generous support of the Unicorn Theatre).

Case study: James, (11) has had a long history of struggling at school, including several school exclusions due to aggressive and bullying behaviour. Throughout his childhood, James has witnessed domestic violence between his parents and struggled to come to terms with his fathers' absence, initially due to time spent in prison and, more recently, because his father has a new partner and children and has ceased all contact with James.

James has attended a number of Free to Be projects over the last three years and feels a strong sense of belonging with us. We paired James to Samir, a volunteer he knew well and had spent time with on several residentials. The pair worked together to plan sessions focusing on James' love of cars, bikes and mechanics, including volunteering together at a bike repair workshop. Having built trust through these shared activities, gradually James felt safe enough to open up about his relationship with his dad and how painful the constant cycle of hope and rejection could be. Samir was also able to gently challenge James' sometimes racist language and help him to find more constructive ways to express his anger and sadness. Adults at home and school have commented on how, as a result of this work, James' ability to reflect on emotions has grown significantly.



Thrive Outside: Recurring Respite

We ran three recurring respite trips this year, supporting 31 children who we felt would benefit from ongoing respite during the school holidays.

“Free to Be makes me feel more brave, because the people there always try and support me and I know they are on my side.”
- Emma, Age 12

Our two Under the Stars camping projects took place in August, hosted by the wonderful Kids Farm Trust. Janet, Anthony and the rest of the team looked after us wonderfully, keeping us fed with delicious homemade meals, organising treasure hunts, campfire singsongs and endless walks and cuddles with Hector and Percy the dogs. The children stayed in safari tents, pitched in a woodland clearing by the banks of a lake. We enjoyed exploring the woods - building dens and collecting firewood, picking blackberries to make into milkshakes with our special bike-powered smoothie maker, fishing and paddling in the lake, playing in rowing boats, helping a local farmer to herd his sheep and even having a go at making our own mozzarella cheese! The weather was perfect and the children particularly enjoyed a trip to the beach for a refreshing play in the sea, ice creams and sandcastle building competitions. On their end of project feedback forms, children told us they felt ‘happy’, ‘believed in’, ‘listened to’ and ‘special’.

Our second project, October Outdoors, took place at Longridge Activity Centre in Buckinghamshire, thanks to kind sponsorship from our long term supporters, The Berkeley Foundation. The children enjoyed testing their nerve on the climbing walls, Jacob’s ladder and giant swing, working together to conquer the tricky team building challenges and braving the autumnal cold on a torchlit nightwalk.

The knowledge that they will be returning on our projects provides vital positivity and reassurance throughout the year for children who are struggling with difficulties at home and at school. Children enjoy reconnecting with trusted volunteers, returning to familiar and comforting routines and experiencing a top up of the adventurous activities and confidence building support that they engage so effectively with. Most importantly however, we notice how knowing that they have been held in mind throughout the year by our team supports children to see themselves as special, important and worthy of time and attention.



Young Leaders' Programme

Young Leaders are former children on our projects who have reached our upper age limit and now work on our residential projects alongside adult volunteers to provide role modelling and mentoring for the younger children. Over summer 2019, our team of talented, hard working Young Leaders provided over 750 hours of volunteer support between them. For most, this work is their first experience of volunteering. Young Leaders tell us that the challenge, sense of belonging and acceptance they find in being afforded trust and responsibility on our projects builds confidence, develops new skills and provides an opportunity to get out of London during the summer to spend concentrated time with a pool of adults who believe in them.

This year, we have worked to grow both the size and scope of our Young Leaders' Programme. In February, thanks to generous support from the Youth Hostel Association and the Santander Foundation, we ran a residential training programme for seven new potential Young Leaders. The young people took part in training sessions designed to develop their existing strengths in teamwork, solving problems and staying calm under pressure, as well as exploring new areas of knowledge, such as risk assessment, child protection and managing professional boundaries. We were hugely impressed with all of them and welcomed four to join our team in time for summer 2019, with the other three, slightly younger participants on track to join us for Summer 2020 after some ongoing mentoring and further training.

Our youth steering committee, the (self-named!) Guild of Young Leaders meets with our Leadership Team termly to feed into project design, volunteer training and organisational decision making. Six guild members joined us in September for our first ever annual residential Young Leader training and thank you weekend to celebrate all that these amazing young people contribute to our work. As a team, we brainstormed, shared feedback, and enjoyed some well-deserved downtime with a relaxing pony trek in Ashdown Forest.

“Sometimes I don't feel that what I do in life matters, but when I come to Free to Be, it makes me feel like everything I do really does matter and I'm helping so many other people. It transfers to things outside of Free to Be as well - I feel more confident in my school work, in making friends and talking to people and I know that when I come back to volunteer again, all my friends will be there still, so I feel like I have people to fall back on and trust when I need them.”

-Young Leader



Our Impact

100% of referrers providing feedback told us that our projects benefitted young people's education, emotional health and capacity to fulfil their potential. Feedback from schools showed that the opportunities we provide translated into observable improvements in confidence and self-belief in the classroom, and that this was still the case when measured at the end of the term after children had attended.

Referrers told us:

"The break gave the children a chance, for a short time, to leave behind lives that can be stressful and challenging. Afterwards, they were more confident in their own abilities and those who were not able to talk about their lives or concerns previously now have the confidence to approach an adult and share their thoughts."
School Safeguarding Officer

"It is clear from your communications how much you care for the children who attend your projects and how well you get to know them in the time that they are with you."

Head of Year

"The residential provided inner city children with an opportunity to explore the countryside and a range of activities that they had not previously engaged in. Our boys felt special and privileged to have such exciting experiences and the opportunities for team work and independence was an excellent preparation for the boys to make their transition to Secondary School." **Family Support Officer**

Demand is very high amongst our referrers, who frequently tell us that they struggle to find appropriate support for their most vulnerable children during school holidays and need much more of what Free to Be can offer. Every referrer responding to our 2019 survey said they would continue to use our services in the future and on average, they told us that, for every child they were able to refer to us, they have four more in similar need of support.

Based on 2019 evaluation information from children, volunteers and referrers

The Impact of our Projects

98% of children who attended reported positive indicators of improved self-esteem, social confidence and resilience, including feeling believed in, trusted, adventurous and special.



92% of children reported trying something they'd previously not thought possible whilst with us.



Project workers reported that 99% of children showed improvement in terms of their self-belief and social confidence over the project, with **82%** of children showing very significant improvement.



100% developed or learnt new social skills on our projects, including making and keeping friends, relating better with trusted adults and managing frustration and challenge more constructively.



100% of referrers providing feedback reported positive change in the child's emotional wellbeing and/or behaviour after our project, including being more positive, having better interactions with others, managing when things go wrong and having a stronger sense of self.



Organisational Achievements

Work over 2019 has centred around growing and developing our core staff team, as well as scaling the number of projects we run:

- In February we acquired our first ever office. Based in a small unit near Waterloo station, this provides a vital permanent base for our operations. We were very grateful to the organisations who donated free equipment and furniture for this space and to the volunteers who helped us to kit it out.
- In March we welcomed Tina Fletcher to the team as our Volunteering Lead and a Project Coordinator, thanks to three years of generous funding from The Mayor of London's Young Londoners Fund and The Fore.
- Over 2019 we grew our pool of volunteers to 155. Ninety of these actively worked to support our children this year, contributing over 12,000 hours, (which, paid at the UK Living Wage, would equate to over £130,000).
- In April we were proud to announce our partnership with new ice lolly brand Nice By Nature. In line with the brand's aim to celebrate the best of nature, they very kindly sponsored one of our Under the Stars projects in August. You can find their products in Tesco. We look forward to deepening this partnership over 2020.
- In November, we won the London Youth Award for Excellence in Outdoor Education, celebrating our commitment to ensuring the most vulnerable children are able to access inspiring opportunities and build meaningful relationships in the outdoors.

Over the next three years, we have ambitious plans to carefully build our capacity, offering more incredible opportunities to children who need them.

“ I felt thoroughly supported throughout my volunteering. There is undoubted support from the coordinators, they give you their time whenever you need help, (including lovingly waking you up every morning!). The other volunteers also gave me lots of reassurance during my first week and checked in with each other at the end of the day. Everyone on the project was so friendly and approachable - so despite being a new volunteer I felt like I'd known everyone for years.”

-Volunteer

Photos, L-R: 1. Attaching the door sign to our new office, 2. Painting the walls and laying the carpet, 3. The seating area in our office, all finished, 4. Tina represents Free to Be at a volunteering fayre, 5. Rachel and representatives from Unilever launch the Nice by Nature brand at Maltby Street Market, 6. Children on our Easter Escape projects sample Nice by Nature ice lollies, 7. Rachel accepts our London Youth Award from Sian Berry, AM, 8. Rachel and Beth with the award.



Supporters

Our work this year wouldn't have been possible without the kindness and support of large numbers of generous individuals, groups and organisations. There are far too many to list here, but to all those who donated their birthday money, added us to their wedding gift lists, hosted cake sales and karaoke on our behalf, helped sort and carry equipment, wrote letters, stuffed envelopes, bought gifts from our Christmas list, or helped in any other way, we'd like to say a huge and very heartfelt **THANK YOU**.



A big thank you to the team at mtn-i, who continue to support our work - from funding our projects, to gifts in kind, practical help with our administration and staff volunteering on our projects.



The fantastic Booker Wholesale continue to donate all non-perishable food and homewares for all our summer projects, dramatically reducing our catering costs and ensuring healthy and tasty meals for all our children.



Attic Self Store generously provide us with a spacious storage area to keep our books, games, camping gear and everything else clean, dry and secure between projects. Their support ensures our overhead costs are kept low and our equipment is kept safe and organised. We're so grateful for their generosity.



It's been a pleasure to begin working with the wonderful people at Nice By Nature this year. They helped us to ensure that even more children benefitted from time spent enjoying the best that nature has to offer this summer by sponsoring one of our Under the Stars recurring respite projects. Our children also enjoyed cooling down with lots of their delicious ice lollies on our projects and spending time with their staff on a visit to a fruit farm.



The Youth Hostel Association supported our Young Leader's Project in February by providing free accommodation, training space and meals for our young people and volunteers at their fantastic London Lee Valley site.



Gift Your Gear provides us with valuable tents, camping equipment, clothing and footwear donated by generous outdoor brands and members of the public. Their support ensures our children are properly kitted out for their adventures in the outdoors.



RADA very generously provided excellent training for our volunteers at our annual Experienced Volunteers Training Weekend this year, supporting the group to think about their language and presence to feel more confident in communicating with children and young people.



Last but not least, a very big thank you to Janet, Anthony and the Kids Farm Trust, for once again welcoming our children and volunteers to their idyllic Sussex campsite and hosting two of our recurring respite projects this summer.

Special thanks also to: DJ and Producer Jayda G and This is Music for donating proceeds from the JMG Talks series; Chris Brown-Humes and his team at HSBC for giving up treats at Lent to raise money on our behalf; the children, parents and staff at The Dragon School; Printmates Redhill for producing cards and flyers for us; George the Farmer who helped many of our children to have their first taste of camping in one of his fields this summer; Collecteco who donated furniture, carpet tiles and computer equipment to get our office up and running; Sean Brassil (AKA Professor Charlie Saviour) who kept our children entertained this summer with a cunning Secret Mission treasure hunt; Sustrans Sussex for letting us borrow their smoothie bike; Mae-Li Evans for donating her filming and video editing skills; Rosie & Charlie and Lauren & Edward for adding us to their wedding giftlists; TES for providing us with free advertising space; all the donors to our Christmas Wishlist and everyone else who helped us with free and discounted products, services and donations this year.

Grants and Charitable Trusts

We are particularly grateful to the following grant giving bodies and charitable trusts for making our work this year possible:

The Potterspurpy Lodge Trust

The Keith Rae Trust

The Wright Family Foundation

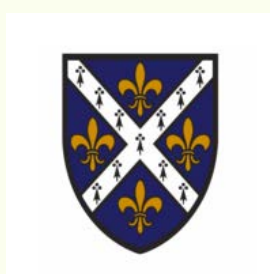


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