



# Thrive Outside Pilot Project

August 2016



“Is it called Free to Be because when you’re here, you get all freedom and to play and be happy?”

- Sam, age 9



## An Introduction from the Trustees

We're immensely proud to be writing this report having completed our first residential project as Free to Be. We have achieved a lot since our launch in February 2016 and this project represents a real milestone in our development. We couldn't have made the project happen without the generosity, dedication and belief of many volunteers, donors and corporate sponsors and, to all who have helped and encouraged us so far, we'd like to say a huge and very heartfelt thank you.

Twenty seven children, aged between 8 and 13, came away with us this summer, on a residential project that took place over five days and four nights, in the New Forest.



**“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

Twenty four volunteers worked on the project in one form or another, as Group Leaders providing intensive support for small groups of children, managing the catering and looking after the project site, driving our minibuses, recording the week through film and photographs and supporting the project set up and clear up.

Seven organisations, working across South London, referred children to attend the project, and they included schools, homelessness charities, community projects, youth groups and family support services.

The project has provided a great learning opportunity for us in thinking about how Free to Be should grow and develop over the coming months and years and we are looking forward to many more exciting projects to come. Thank you for taking an interest in our work.

**Rachel, Mike & Madi**

“ Kyle’s family really struggle to meet his needs from day to day. He is exposed to domestic violence at home, so it can be a scary place for him. Giving him a week of being in a safe place was a huge relief for him. We were worried about this holiday and were struggling to find play schemes or centres that could take him with our limited budget.”

- Child Psychotherapist

## The Need

Our aim, in running this project was to offer new experiences and respite for children who really needed it. We know that children who have suffered from multiple adversities often struggle with their sense of who they are and where they fit in the world, and this can make life particularly hard on a holiday project, where children find themselves in a new place, doing new things and surrounded by new people.

We wanted to design a project that would work for children who might otherwise struggle to find the confidence to be adventurous, who might be too anxious to reach out and make new friends, or who might usually deal with setbacks by becoming angry or upset. By matching children into small groups with others of a similar age and assigning two

consistent warm and fun volunteer ‘helpers’ to each of these groups, we aimed to cut down on the number of new people each child was faced with at any given time and provide them with a ‘go to’ adult for when things were hard. Each group stayed as a ‘family unit’ throughout the project, working and playing together during the day, sharing meals and occupying a group bedroom each night (with helpers sleeping in a room close by).



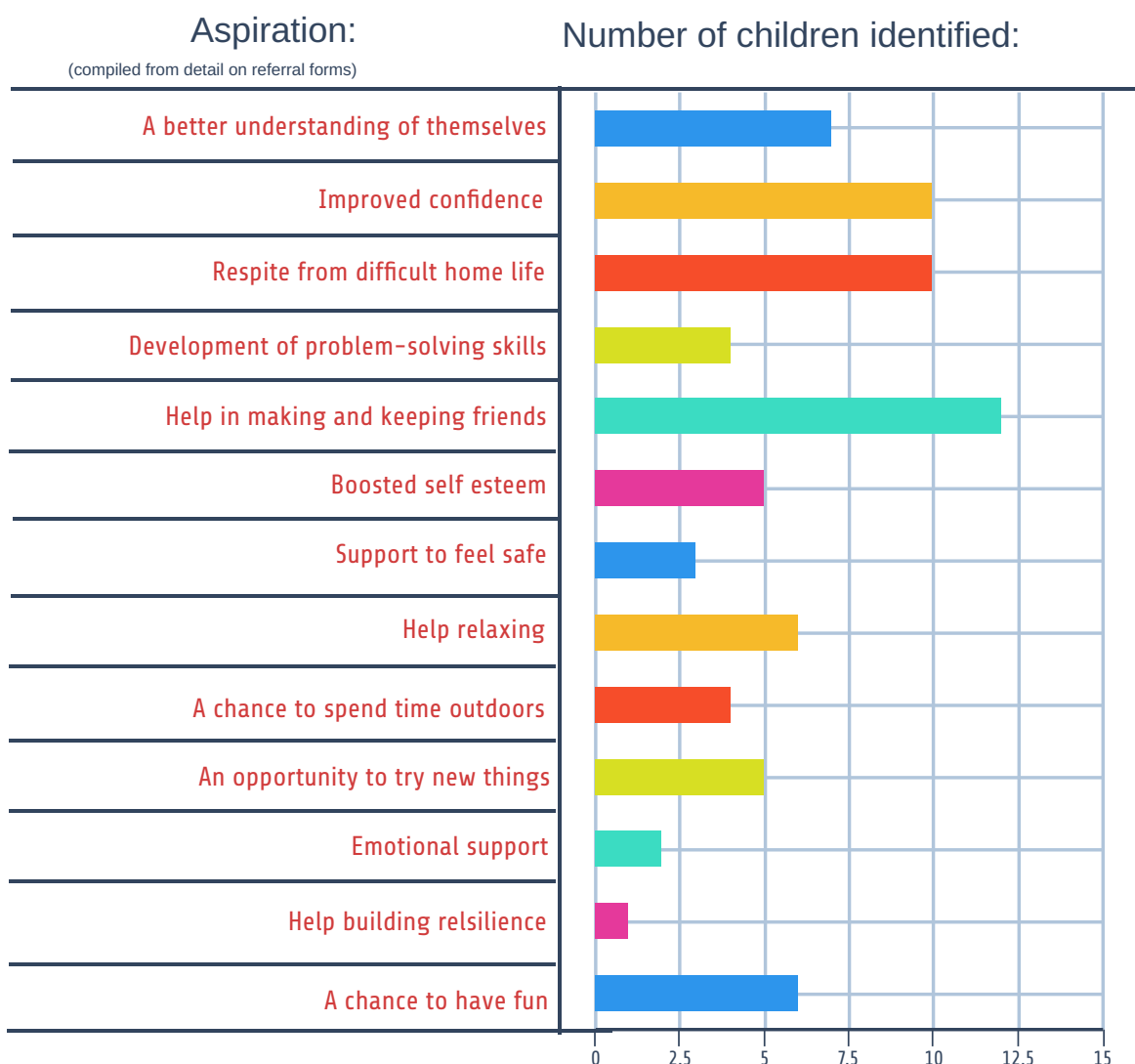
Referrers told us that the families they were most concerned about during the summer holidays were often dealing with multiple, often inter-linked, issues of poverty, emotional and behavioural challenges and historical trauma. Many wanted to find a safe space for children to practice social skills and opportunities for them to grow their confidence and self-esteem by being supported to take on and overcome new challenges.

“This morning we saw a little donkey just walking in the road... that was cool!”

- Esther, age 8



## Referrer's hopes for their children's holiday with us:



“Usually I just watch TV all the time,  
and its good to get kids off TV...  
just staring at it.”

- Lamar, age 12

Our referral forms showed many of the children on our project were contending with multiple serious challenges at home and in their families:

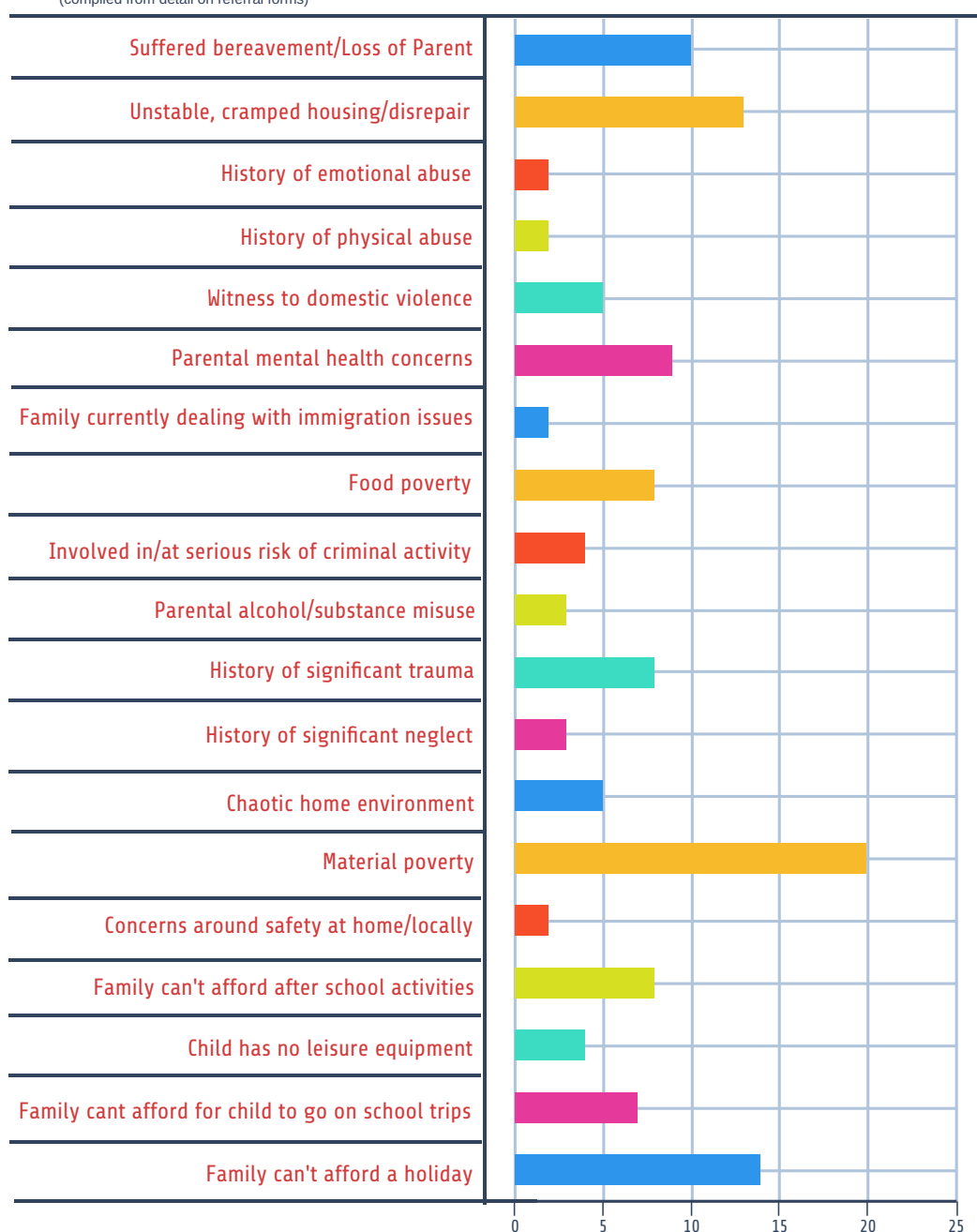


## Background & Home Circumstances (as identified by referrers)

Adversity type:

(compiled from detail on referral forms)

Number of children affected:





## Case Studies

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

**Melanie** lives with her mother and three siblings. Her father returned to the home a few months ago, having been in prison. Since he has been home, he has suffered from serious mental health problems, which have led to him being hospitalised and also meant that the children have had to sleep elsewhere for their safety. This has had a significant impact on Melanie's emotional wellbeing and confidence. The family live in an overcrowded property with serious repair and maintenance issues, and Melanie shares a room with two siblings. The family have an extremely low income, often relying on food bank donations.

**Kevin** is subject to a Child Protection plan. His mother was attacked by a gang a number of months ago and Kevin witnessed her injuries, which he has found very traumatic. Both his mum and dad have had drink and drug problems which have been exacerbated this year due to a bereavement. His parents have had many physical fights at home which he has witnessed. He has been excluded a number of times from school, due to angry outbursts. Often, these happen when he is unable to regulate his emotions enough to focus on his school work.

**Shantae** lives with her grandma, who is an alcoholic. Shantae often has to care for her. As a result, she is very anxious when she is away from home. Shantae finds new situations very difficult and often tries to manage them by attempting to control what is happening. This impacts on her ability to make and keep friends, who can find her overbearing.

**Chloe** is the oldest of three siblings. Her mum is a single parent who suffers from anxiety and depression. The family has very limited resources - the children don't attend any after school clubs and have no access to extra curricular activities. This is the only chance of a summer break for Chloe. Chloe has recently had issues around sleeping and eating. She is a very gentle child, a little shy. She loves animals and nature so we feel the project would be very good for her.



**Working together and practicing problem solving to build rafts**

## Activities and Volunteer Support

Throughout the project, we wanted to ensure that all groups had a chance to try activities that might be new to many of the children, with a focus on being outdoors and surrounded by nature. Some activities also included elements of challenge and safe risk, to help build self esteem and a sense of achievement. Children enjoyed archery, canoeing, paddling, tree climbing, visiting the beach and swimming in a sea pool. Many camped overnight for the first time, learning to build and light a campfire, toasting marshmallows and telling ghost stories with their helpers by the firelight.

Care of animals played a key part too - children fed calves, milked goats and spent time with numerous other furry friends. Being around animals encourages calmness, a focus on emotional regulation and a sense of responsibility.



**“The kids loved the emphasis on nature, squealing when they saw insects and animals, but fighting fears and holding them anyway. It was incredible to see them looking for fish in the rivers, swinging from rope swings and learning about the environment. The focus on nature and exploration was so beneficial; emotionally, educationally and to enable them to have fun!”**

**-Holli, Volunteer Group Leader**

Creative activities also featured, with groups enjoying painting, writing, drawing and cooking.

Most importantly, all activities were completed alongside warm, supportive and interested volunteers, who provided positive attention, affirmation and reassurance to the children throughout their stay. By challenging children's negative views of themselves, helping to label and manage difficult emotions and supporting the formation of friendships, these adults helped children to find new ways of managing and relating to others - strategies which children begin to internalise.

**Cooking dinner as a group over the camp fire ahead of a night camping under the stars.**



## Project Impact

We're still working on the best way to measure the impact of our residential work and, for this project, don't have any quantitative data to help measure if and how the project has improved children's lives. We do however have feedback from children, parents, referrers and our volunteers, which suggests a positive impact:

*"This week of holiday changed my life because I've never been away from home before. We get our own room, and no sisters or anything!"*

*"I'm feeling a bit happy because there's more space to play here, and you get to make things, and we get support when we get hurt or bullied or whatever. There's people to sort it out, and it's just dealt with."*

*"I haven't really been to a camp before. I have a feeling this is very special because we get to do lots of cool stuff and get to have a chance to be free and meet new friends."*

*"This place is amazing, we get to make pizzas and we get to do lots of stuff. You should never be scared of what is fun. Fun is always an adventure."*

*"I'm just trying to have as much fun as possible. Some of it's a surprise even though you know it's coming, cus everything is so fun. Cus you think some things will be fun, but we went swimming and I didn't know there were slides here and I went on a really big slide."*

*"It's important to make sure the children are having fun, and also to give adults a little bit of space. They love us but sometimes they need some space."*

*"I think nature's really good, I picked some blackberries from bushes, I washed them and shared them with my friends. There's lots of butterflies and it's always sunny."*



**Everyone's  
favourite part of  
camping!**

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Referrers and parents tell us they have had enthusiastic feedback from children about their time away and some have noticed a difference in the children since they have returned.

*"I received really positive feedback from all the children who attended. These children have had very unstable home lives and so their behaviour at school can be very challenging. They all loved the experience of going to the woods and being outside. They told me of the new friends they had met and the freedom they felt being away from the stresses of home/city.*

*One particular boy whom we have tried with school counselling and other outside agencies all to no avail has started his year particularly well. He is calmer and responding much more positively to his adults."* **Deputy Head Teacher**

*"When they left to go on the trip, they felt sad, but when they returned, they were happy - they didn't want to come back! It was an excellent trip - a happy trip for the kids and a great experience for them. They enjoyed the other children and the staff were terrific. They learnt independence."* **Parent**

*"One particular boy really sticks in my memory, he seemed to really enjoy every activity and was amazing at supporting the other boys if they were struggling with anything. When we went to the beach, he sat in the shallow water and splashed his hands in and out for hours, mesmerised by the water and waves. I asked him what he thought about our trip to the beach and he said he'd never seen the sea before, and begged us to stay even longer. On the last afternoon, we went to the farm, where he loved meeting the animals, and going on tractor rides. When we gave the children a 30 minute warning that we would be leaving, he burst into tears and begged me to go back to the farmyard with him to say goodbye to the goats. Although he was unable to verbalise his sadness at the project ending, it was obvious to us how much the holiday had meant to him."* **Volunteer**

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**Swinging across  
the stream**



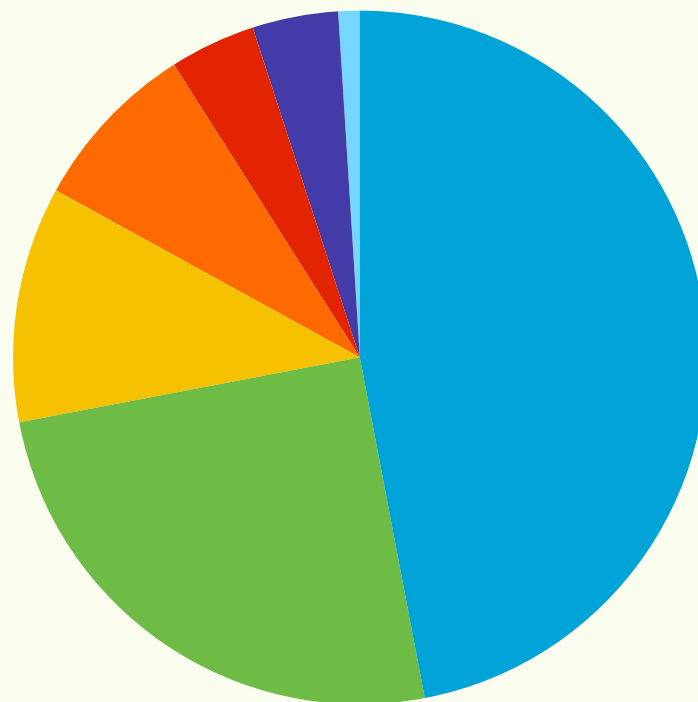
## Project Costs

The total cost of this project was approximately £9,500. This equates to £350 per child. Costs on this pilot project were higher than we would expect in future years, both because we had to pay more for our project site and because, in future, we will be aiming to run multiple projects, allowing us to achieve better value per child. Running several projects, over a number of weeks, will allow us to negotiate the use of a residential school building, as opposed to hiring an outdoor education centre, as we had to this year. This should reduce site hire cost per week by approximately half. With better group deals negotiated on activity bookings and economies of scale achieved on equipment, training and administrative costs, we'd expect to be able to offer similar projects in future years at a cost to us of £225 per child.

**“The Thrive Outside residential was the most incredible week. The structure of the project allowed the children to be themselves and enjoy themselves, knowing that they were safe and valued.”**

- Rosie, Volunteer

Our proportional spend on different elements broke down as:



We benefitted from around 1650 volunteer hours over the course of this project. To give an idea of the value of this, had we paid our volunteers at the UK Living Wage rate of £8.25 per hour, it would have cost us £13,662.



## Supporters

We simply couldn't have made this project happen without the generosity of a large number of donors and supporters. There are too many individuals to list here, but for all those who have helped us with donations of money and goods, provided expert advice and given time to help with admin and set up tasks, we would like to say a great big thank you.

**“We used flint and steel and made a spark without matches, but it takes really long. On Bear Grylls, he does that but he has a fire-starter. I'm pretty sure that's cheating.”**

- Dylan, age 11

A number of businesses and corporate supporters helped to make a huge difference to this project through gifts in kind and other support. Their help allowed us to focus our core funding directly on activities for the children. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge the support of:



Firstly, we'd like to say a huge thank you to the team at mtn - i, without whose incredible help, we simply could not have reached our fundraising target this summer.



Booker Wholesale generously donated hundreds of pounds worth of food and homewares to the project, dramatically reducing our catering costs and ensuring healthy and tasty meals for our children.



ABC Self Store have made us charity of the year at their Southwark branch, providing us with clean, dry and secure storage for our equipment outside of projects. Their support ensures that we can reduce overhead costs throughout the year and keep our equipment in the best possible condition.



Barton Willmore enlisted their graphic designers to create an eye-catching leaflet introducing our work and helping enormously to showcase our vision.



Mavrik Music very kindly donated all proceeds from their Afro Disco evening in August towards our residential project. Raising both awareness and much needed funds at the event.



Lush Cosmetics kindly provided gifts of soap and toiletries for the children to take home at the end of their holiday.

**Most of all, we would like to thank our wonderfully talented, endlessly energetic and incredibly kind volunteers who worked tirelessly around the clock to support our children this summer. Their warmth, enthusiasm and sense of fun was the vital ingredient in ensuring that the children who joined us had a happy and memorable holiday.**