



Free to Be Kids

Growing children's emotional health

2022 Impact Report

“People at Free to Be, they never judge you, they just boost you. They give you that helping hand that pushes you to do things that you're not confident about.”

- Stevie, 12

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 mental health, or are growing up in families where parents have difficulties with drugs, alcohol, or illness. 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, our roving Saturday Adventure Club 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 eighteen months.

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, our Young Leaders' programme offers a powerful culmination to many young people's journeys with us. With intensive coaching and training, we help 14-16 year olds to transition from receiving support to providing it for others, as they return on our projects as volunteers and are empowered to work directly with children facing similar difficulties to their own. From here, they are supported into our adult volunteering stream when they reach age 18.

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

Welcome to our 2022 Impact Report!

This year has been an especially busy one for Free to Be, as we have grown our staff and volunteer team, increased the number of projects we run and, best of all, had the privilege of working with more children than ever before. Whilst it is exciting to be expanding our work, we do so with the knowledge that, sadly, this is because it is needed more than ever. As the pandemic recedes, only to be replaced with a cost of living crisis, we know that children’s mental health is suffering. NHS Digital reported a record number of more than 400,000 children a month have been treated for mental health problems in 2022 and we, like many other frontline service providers and schools are witnessing an unprecedented wellbeing crisis in children and young adults. Our work has always been vital, but the need for it is only growing.

“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

We hope that reading about the progress made by our inspiring children and young people this year will inspire you to be part of our work in 2023 and beyond. As a charity, our very existence is built upon the kindness, passion and generosity of a wonderfully diverse range of people and organisations - from those who helped us to crowd fund our first pilot project back in 2016, to the brilliant businesses and individuals who have contributed towards our work in 2022, some of whom are mentioned in this report. We are always in need of supporters, who can donate time, money and expertise to grow and shape our work, so if you feel that you could help us make a difference to children like the ones mentioned in this report, we’d love to hear from you.

Sending huge thanks to all who have been a part of our journey in 2022: supporters, volunteers and, most especially children and young people.

Rachel + Mike

Co-Founders and CEOs



A Summary of what we've achieved in 2022



229 children and young people worked with us this year

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

100% of children developed or learnt new social skills on our projects

“ I'd 110% recommend Free to Be to other families. Every one of the staff and volunteers was so, so nice. They took my Saffy under their wings and she felt loved and cared for. She felt like she was with family. ”
- Saffron's mum

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

97% of children reported trying something they had previously not thought possible whilst they worked with us this year



This year, we benefitted from over **15,000** volunteering hours



“ I love Free to Be. I've been coming to projects since I was 8. I was quite shy and scared when I first came and worried that something might happen. But gradually, over time, I realised it was great. We can do so much activities and we meet each other and play nice games and build good relationships. I've learnt to be proud of myself and that I can overcome my fears. It's always pushing me to try things. ”

- Dylan, 11

This year, we provided **319** residential 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 **£180,000**

The Need

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2021 found that 4.2 million children in the UK were living in poverty - an increase of 1/2 million since 2016. Part-time workers, low paid workers, lone parent families, black and ethnic minority households and those in rented properties bore the brunt of the Covid pandemic and now are faring the worst in the Cost of Living crisis.

Poverty and disadvantage is damaging for anyone, but its impact on children is particularly devastating. All of the children we work with at Free to Be are from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds and we support children with the following issues on a heartbreakingly frequent basis:

- Children with high levels of anxiety due to worries about how their families will manage to afford basic living costs such as food, rent and heating.
- Children who are scared about being singled out and shamed as different to their peers because of poverty. Or, worse, children for whom this fear is a reality, leading to them being bullied by peers for being different.
- Children for whom poverty dramatically hinders educational attainment, because they are living in poor housing situations without space to concentrate on homework, or because they are hungry throughout the day, meaning they can't focus in their lessons.
- Children whose experience of the world has been dramatically limited because of a lack of funds, meaning that they have never had the opportunity to benefit from formative childhood experiences like, visiting a farm, seeing the sea, learning to swim or spending time outside of their local area.
- Young people who have become victims of criminal exploitation because they are so desperate to make some money in order to feel a sense of dignity.
- Children with parents who are unable to focus on their emotional wellbeing or to meet their needs because they are consumed with worry about how they will manage to make their income stretch to cover the family's basic needs.

Based on 2022 information from referrers and parents

The challenges our children face:



100% 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.



37% have a history of, or concerns around, potential abuse or neglect.



93% are experiencing emotional, social or behavioural issues.



54% 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.



74% would have no holiday this year without our support, or have no safe access to appropriate spaces to play at home.



For 67% of children, their break with us this summer was their first ever holiday.



Especially when paired with other adverse childhood experiences and trauma, these challenges can have a profound impact on a child's sense of who they are and what they are capable of. Many children begin to internalise the difficulties they face as being their fault or happening to them because they're somehow not as good as other people. Our intensive work to broaden children's horizons and grow their confidence begins to change things. Repeated support throughout childhood provides a vital alternative narrative which, over time, supports children to see that they are so much more than the difficulties they are contending with.

“The best thing about Free to Be is the trips and the fun. I feel like I get a break from home. It's quite stressful at home - we don't have much space and there's loads of us. At Free to Be there's lots of space and so you can get things out of your head.”

- Mason, 11

Case study: Lizzie, 9, is on the Child Protection register under the category of neglect - for the third time in her short life. She was referred to us by her school safeguarding team, who were keen for her to have a positive and caring experience after a traumatic past two years. Lizzie lives with her three siblings in a run down flat on the 7th floor of a London tower block. She's not allowed to play outside due to concerns around gangs and dangerous adults. Both her parents struggle with heavy alcohol use, and in the spring her father was arrested for assaulting her mother with Lizzie listening in from her bedroom. Lizzie's older brother has complex ADHD and has been permanently excluded from school, leaving Lizzie's mum feeling overwhelmed and depressed. With no other way to access any other group or provision, Lizzie would spend all summer in the 7th floor flat if not for our projects.

On arriving on Thrive Outside Lizzie's eyes lit up. She was amazed to discover she could feed the goats and stroke the horses. Lizzie had never left London before and grinned from ear to ear when she went to the beach for the first time. She was brave enough to try riding a horse, and to climb to the top of the climbing wall. When her group spent a night camping out, Lizzie loved having the freedom to run through the woods, climb trees, and later to quietly sit by the fire roasting marshmallows and looking at the stars.

Lizzie's home situation means that she encounters repeated negative messages about herself and this has really damaged her faith in her own skills, talents and place in the world. Having time to play, explore and just be a child was invaluable to her. Away from a home situation with such difficulty, she began to learn a new story about herself - that she can be brave, have adventures and belong somewhere. Most importantly, she saw, repeatedly, that the other children and adults on the project really enjoyed her company and genuinely wanted to spend time with her. This was incredibly powerful, because it challenged the negative thoughts she often has about being unlovable and not as good as other children. We'll keep on supporting Lizzie over the long term as she continues to re-attend our projects throughout her childhood.

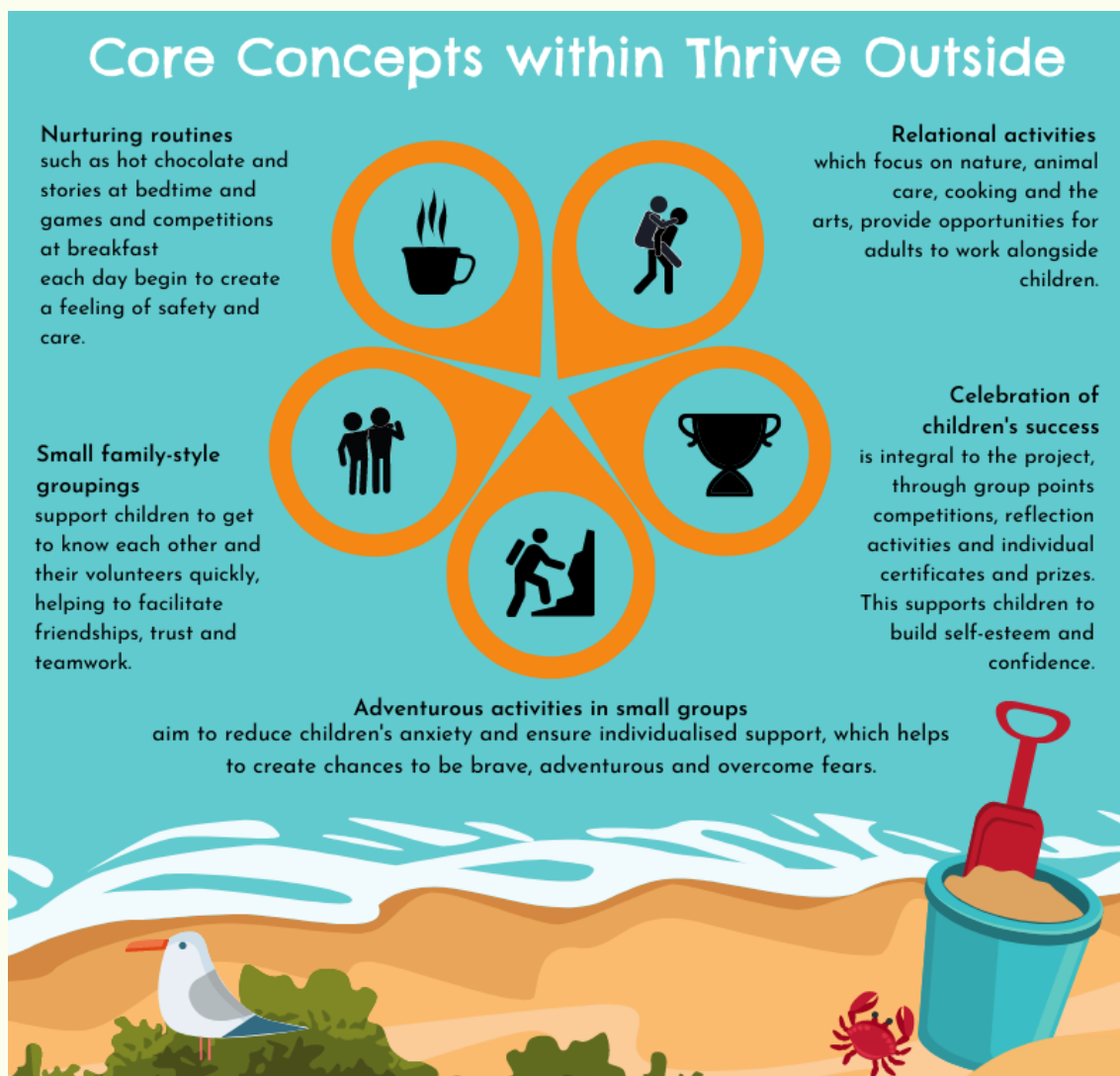


Thrive Outside: Our Model

Our Thrive Outside project structure is carefully designed to support particularly vulnerable children, especially those who find it difficult to engage with or manage more traditional interventions, such as talking therapies, group work or less tailored residential trips. The five core concepts of our model are what help children who struggle in more generalised provision, to instead build relationships and engage with our work.

“Free to Be means having fun with other kids and spending happy time doing lots of activities. The helpers have shown me that I can help other people. If they are struggling with any of the challenges, I can use kindness to help them get through.”

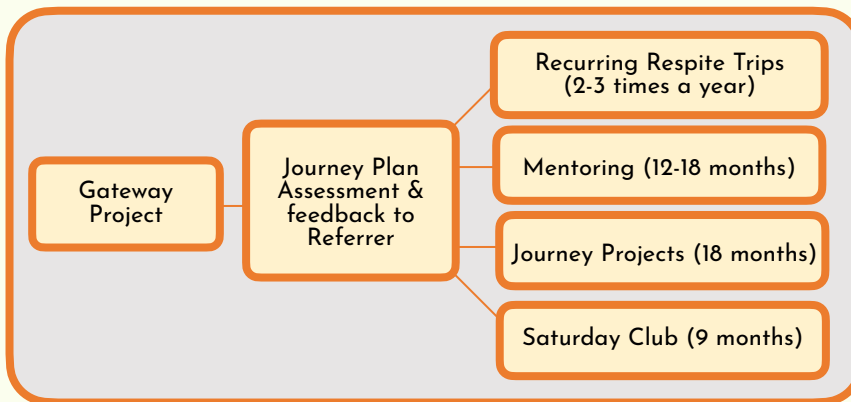
- Rahima, 10



This model allows us to quickly build a powerful sense of belonging and trust with children who often struggle with feeling safe or wanted. **Our 5 day gateway residential projects provide children with over 50 hours of direct and intensive therapeutically structured support from the same, responsive, psychologically minded adults. This equates to over a years' worth of clinic or home visits from social workers or other agencies.** Through being alongside children and young people as they work in teams 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 back to referrers and use them as a starting point for our own 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 Gateway 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.



“Free to Be is like an escape from reality. An escape from South London. The helpers always make me feel appreciated. They allow me to talk without being afraid of getting judged.”

- Destiny, 12

Following on from our Gateway Projects, which would usually 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. In a normal year, we match these children to:

- **Recurring Respite Projects** 1-2 times 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. Sessions revolve around positive activities, planned by child and mentor together, creating regular space and time with a trusted adult.
- Our **Saturday Club**, which offers regular monthly group support in London, culminating in a residential.
- Our **Journey Projects** - six projects, spread over 18 months. These offer more specialised, targeted support to young people with particularly deeply entrenched negative self-narratives. Projects use activities, one to one coaching and facilitated group reflection time to grow confidence and resilience, rebuilding mental health and reforming aspirations for young people who are out of school.



Thrive Outside: Gateway Residentials

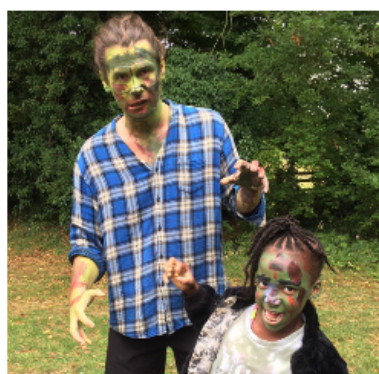
Over 2022, we have been able to offer **206 Gateway residentials** for particularly vulnerable children from across London, referred by their teachers, social workers and other professionals who were worried about their emotional health. As well as providing respite and confidence building support, these projects offer a valuable opportunity to assess children's needs, ensuring that our team are then able to offer the appropriate follow on support for the children who need it most. As always, places were provided entirely free of charge to families, with children collected from and returned to their front doors, removing the financial and practical barriers which would otherwise prevent many from taking part. We were grateful to receive funding from a number of local councils through their Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programmes, in recognition of the healthy food and enriching activities our projects provide. As well as well as supporting children from Greater London, we continued to support children from Birmingham as part of our two year pilot to discover whether our work is transferable to other cities in the UK.

“ I just vividly remember my first trip to Free to Be. I think about the friends I've made here and going to the seaside. They don't force you to do things you don't want to here, but we try new things. Like, I went paddle boarding.”

- Jason, 13

Activities on Gateway Projects included: kayaking and canoeing adventures, pony trekking, animal care and bottle feeding calves at the farm, paddling and sandcastle making at the beach, tree top high ropes courses, hilltop hide and seek, campfire cooking, torch-lit night walks, treasure hunts and den building in the woods.

Case Study: Hayley, 11 suffers from extreme anxiety that impacts every aspect of her life. Her worries keep her awake most nights and cause her to suffer from debilitating stomach aches and panic attacks, which cause her difficulty breathing and sometimes make her physically sick. Hayley has been on the CAMHS waiting list for just under 12 months, but hasn't yet managed to receive any practical support. She often can't manage to attend school and, as a result is very behind her peers academically. When she is able to attend, she frequently has to leave the classroom, usually retreating to the toilets where she feels less panicked. Because she struggles to interact with other children without significant adult support, she has no friends in the playground and sees herself as very separate. Her mum and teachers are extremely concerned about the impact this is having on her and how she will cope as she goes into secondary school.



Hayley's school referred her to Free to Be in the hope that a break with us would allow her to begin to realise that she is able to solve problems herself and be more independent. Surprising everyone, she was really positive about the idea, explaining that she loves animals, and would like an opportunity to practice her swimming skills. Her excitement quickly turned to nerves and we arranged a number of Zoom calls to introduce ourselves, answer her questions and show her exactly what to expect on our projects, with a tour of the building and a chance to see her bedroom.

On pick up day, it took lots of patience and another Zoom call to coax Hayley into the minibus and the first night was tough. One of our team sat patiently alongside Hayley into the early hours, supporting her to draw and write about her feelings when talking became too hard and working on breathing and grounding exercises to help with her panic attacks. As the week progressed, Hayley's ability to self-regulate increased. She was so proud when she learnt to swim underwater and loved holding a huge fluffy rabbit during an animal handling session. The other girls in her group tried really hard to involve her in activities and, with her Group Leaders' support, Hayley began to see herself as part of the team. On the first day of school term, Hayley asked if she could come back to Free to Be again. She's since completed another successful week with us, trying camping for the first time and taking huge strides in further growing her confidence and resilience.

“I feel privileged and proud to have volunteered with Free to Be Kids for several years. Many children attend projects year after year and you get to be part of their progressive journey, it's amazing. The emotional rollercoaster the children and you yourself have is life changing. With a focus on the outside and creative activities which challenge, this results in some wonderful memories for all.”

- Shaun, Volunteer

Children and parents told us:

“It's much less bleak here. That's because of all the nature and people's attitudes here. Its cleaner air and you get to run around more. It helps me to take a calmer route. If I'm worried, I can just walk in the forest and chill and I know the adults will help me to resolve the situation.” - **Sami, 11**

“The trip was very good and the Free to Be team were excellent. I'd definitely recommend them to other families. The extra support they gave us was really good and it really benefitted Mason and got him doing things that he wouldn't normally do. He was more sociable when he got back and came home feeling that anything was possible.” - **Mason's mum**

“I like Free to Be helpers. They are kind and helpful and more fun than teachers at school. They give me advice and help me calm down if I'm struggling.” **Ethan, 10**



Thrive Outside: Journey Projects

For a significant cohort of older children, we know that challenges at home and school are further compounded by the fact that they and their family's engagement with 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 projects.

Journey Projects build on this by providing 18 months of support in the form of six 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 build confidence and problem-solving skills. The projects also create powerful opportunities to support young people individually in identifying and working on areas of challenge within their thinking about themselves and relationships with others. The projects provide time for self-reflection and facilitated group conversations (both about issues impacting young people's lives and their own strengths, challenges and ways to support each other). Extended challenge activities stretch young people's perceptions of what they can achieve, and daily Honours Councils, provide opportunities 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.

“ We learn a lot of valuable life lessons, especially with situations where you're scared or anxious, because the activities are purposely there to help you go through the emotions and think, in the future, “Oh, I handled that by doing this!” It kinda helps you think about how to cope if you get into tough situations. ”

- Lauren, 15

Impact and evaluation measurement with our most recently completed Journey Project cohorts showed:

Young people attending increased their global score on the Child Outcomes Ratings Scale* by an average of 3.23 across all domains.

100% of young people self-assessed themselves as having increased their resilience, anger management, confidence or other core social skills.

90% of parents/carers reported that their children had reduced risk in at least 1 key area following the programme (including risk of school exclusion, becoming involved in criminality and developing mental health problems)

90% of parents/carers reported increased ability to manage better when things go wrong

100% of parents/carers reported their children showing improved aspirations and belief that they can achieve more than they had thought by the end of the programme.

*The CORS is a simple, clinically reviewed measure used to assess children's functioning in key areas of life (individual wellbeing, social wellbeing, home/school life and general functioning). Each of the 4 items is rated 1-10 with an average improvement of 3 being a significant positive change.



Four Journey Project cohorts have operated over 2022, between them supporting 29 young people, aged 12 to 15, with particularly complex needs.

"You've shown me i can be comfortable with others - i don't always feel like this and I used to get into drama but now i can make friends." - Journey Project participant

"I'm getting my daughter back. She lost her dad at the age of 10 and spent the whole of secondary school without his input. The support workers she had from Free to Be were brilliant. She's better at doing tasks, especially school work , she's determined to finish her assignments and persevere." - Parent

Case Study: Treyon was referred to Free to Be aged 12 after his school spotted pictures of him online holding a replica gun, and posing in gang videos. There were concerns around exploitation by older teenagers, taking advantage of Treyon's learning needs and intense desire to feel liked and included. The SENCo at his school reported that his attendance was low and, when he was in school, he would regularly disengage from his lessons when he found learning a challenge. Teachers were concerned that this would often lead to him closing down completely, becoming uncommunicative and presenting as incredibly sad and alone.

Following a successful first taste of Free to Be last summer, Treyon joined our Journey Programme for young people with more complex needs. The almost one to one staffing on the Journey Programme allowed us to provide the intensive nurturing support he was in desperate need of. In the four weeks we have now lived alongside Treyon on our projects, it has become clear that he had a deep lack of belief in his own abilities and worth, and his online posing was a defence against feeling afraid and small.

We learned that, before Free to Be, he'd never had anyone tuck him in at night or read him a bedtime story and, as he has begun to trust us, we've enabled him to enjoy these core childhood experiences that he had missed. On the first Journey Project, Treyon was too nervous to attempt the high ropes course, and it took two hours of patient, loving support to persuade him to try sitting on carriage and having a go at driving a horse. Over time though, he's learned that adults here treat him with respect and don't rush him, and he's realised that, with support, he can succeed far beyond his own expectations of himself. On his fourth project Treyon led the way down a zipwire, and climbed, crawled and slid his way through the caving expedition with new-found belief and heart warming pride. We've still got two projects left with 2022's Journey Project groups and we're looking forward to Treyon developing even further in his belief of what he can achieve.



Team Triumph Saturday Club

Our Saturday Club has been a new addition to our programme in 2022, designed and led by Karl, our Senior Youth Worker. Its purpose is to provide ongoing confidence building opportunities and activities for children, aged 9-12, especially those who require intensive support with developing social skills and self-reflection. Consistent small groups of children attend 8 - 10 Saturday sessions over a nine month period. To begin with, workshops help children to think together and identify the elements of Free to Be that most help them to improve their confidence and self belief. Having done this, they then work together over the rest of the project to design a residential that will meet these criteria, before going away on it as a group, pushing themselves to grow even further. A consistent group of volunteers and Young Leaders, commit to work with the children across the full nine months. The project finishes with a showcase event, where children present back their experiences to their family members, sharing the elements of the project that they are most proud of and creating an opportunity for parents and carers to join our team in celebrating their unique successes, skills and talents.

25 children took part in Team Triumph over 2022, taking part in activities which included: group cooking challenges, trampolining, ice skating, tree top high ropes courses, a food gameshow & taste testing, fire lighting and art sessions. Residentials in Buckinghamshire and West Sussex included: canoeing, night-time zip-lining, swimming, farm visits, campfires and a trip to an inflatable aqua park.

The children said:

"I come to Saturday Club to meet new people, go on adventures and have fun because, at my house, all I have is the park, but on Free to Be, you can go canoeing and make new friends."

"I enjoyed going on the high ropes course, because it made me face my fears. I was nervous, but I saw that other people were nervous too, so we all did it together and that really helped me."

"When we were cooking, all of us were helping each other. Kyreece was the Head Chef and he was helping people who didn't understand and Karl was helping me learn how to cut. We all worked together and we ended up making a great meal."

“Free to Be helpers are kind, they're helpful, they're caring and they'll always be with you, no matter what will happen.”

- Marcus, 9



Thrive Mentoring

Our mentoring programme pairs children and volunteers who have already built trust on our residentials to spend regular time together, generally for 12 months or more. Over that time, pairs work on particular social and emotional goals, which they set together, with input from parents and referrers. Building on a shared experience of our residentials ensures common ground from the beginning, overcoming many of the difficulties which lead to pairing breakdown in more traditional mentoring models. **Sixteen mentors have, between them, provided over 500 hours of tailored one to one support through the programme this year.**

Activities undertaken by mentoring pairs this year have included: Badminton, volleyball, jewellery making, go-karting, indoor skydiving, restaurant trips, theatre performances, museum visits and dog walking.

Case study: Kourtney, 16 was initially referred to us at age 13 by her Family Support Worker. She is a young carer for her 6 siblings and ill father and has little time to relax. Kourtney has diagnoses of ASD and ADHD which have led her to struggle at school, often getting into conflict. During a Free to Be project, Kourtney bravely disclosed that she had been sexually assaulted and was regularly being intimidated by friends and relatives of her attacker, both on social media and in real life. This was causing her great distress and trouble sleeping, which she had been coping with alone, so as not to worry her parents.

As well as liaising with the relevant authorities about this, we arranged for Ayesha, a volunteer Kourtney knew well, to become her mentor, offering a regular space to talk. They arranged weekly coffees or nail appointments, where Kourtney could share things that she wasn't able to broach with her parents. Together, they were able to reflect, with Ayesha helping to bring Kourtney's mum in where needed. As Kourtney's school leaving date neared, she began to worry about going to college. She was scared to make new friends and concerned that a new environment would impact on her ASD and anxieties. School offered little support and her parents weren't able to offer much advice either, so Ayesha supported Kourtney to explore options by visiting colleges, writing applications and practicing interviews with her. Together, they found a specialist SEN college that Kourtney really liked. Her most recent report says she is thriving there and they are delighted with her progress. Kourtney and Ayesha have booked a Mocktail Mixology class together to celebrate!

“Noah has been having mentoring from Sam for a year now and has had a brilliant experience. He's really enjoyed it. During lockdown, Noah gained weight, and this really knocked his confidence. Sam has encouraged him to get more active and introduced him to tennis, which he hadn't tried before. They've been playing regularly and also doing lots of football together. It's really boosted his confidence.”

- Noah's Mum



Young Leaders' Programme

Our Young Leaders' Programme supports teenagers who have previously attended Free to Be as children to return as young volunteers, providing inspirational role modelling to the children we work with. **Over 2022, our team of talented, hard working Young Leaders provided over 1,200 hours of support between them.** For most, this is their first experience of volunteering. They 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 concentrated time away from home with a pool of adults who believe in them.

Over the course of this year, we have been especially proud to welcome three graduating 18 year old Young Leaders to join our team of adult volunteers. It has been a pleasure to see them continue to develop, and use their expertise and skills to play key roles in supporting and inducting new volunteers.

Case Study: Adam, 17, attended Free to Be throughout his childhood. He has a diagnosis of ASD and, in his younger years, was also selectively mute. On his first few trips with Free to Be, Adam said barely a word, but it was obvious to see how much the projects were helping him as he swung himself up into trees, jumped into every bit of water he could find and made campfire after campfire. Slowly, as Adam began to trust us and see us as a consistent presence in his life, he also began to talk. The first time we ever had to remind him to stop a conversation in order to hear some instructions, we couldn't help being thrilled! When Adam reached 13, we were staggered by his maturity, dedication and outdoor skills. Whilst we knew he wasn't ready to lead a group of children, we could see the huge value he would bring to our projects. After completing training, Adam volunteered as an Assistant Camp Manager on one of our camping trips. He managed the fire all week, enlisting children to help him collect firewood. One evening, he sat with a boy who was feeling homesick and gently taught him to build and light a fire. Coming back on subsequent projects, Adam has grown from strength to strength, progressing to Group Leading alongside our adult volunteers. This summer, he ran a whole evening campfire activity, with 6 children hanging off his every word! Adam brings such a calm, dependable presence to our projects and we're incredibly proud of the journey he is on.

“When I got the call to say do you want to be a Young Leader, I jumped at it. It was kind of breath taking and inspiring. Through coming on Free to Be myself, I've learned to calm down so with the children, I know how to calm them down too, because I've been in their situation.”

- Maddison, 16



Our Impact

Based on 2022 evaluation information from children, volunteers and referrers

How our Projects Support Children



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



97% of children reported trying something they'd previously not thought possible whilst with us.



Project workers reported that **98%** of children showed improvement in terms of their self-belief and social confidence over the project, with **81%** 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.



Referrers describe our projects as benefitting young people's education, emotional health and capacity to fulfil their potential. Feedback from schools shows every year that the opportunities we provide translate into observable improvements in confidence and self-belief in the classroom, and that this is still the case when measured at the end of the term after children have attended.

What Referrers say about our impact:

"Many of our vulnerable children have low self-esteem. The trips bring them out of themselves and allow them to shine in a way that we don't see in school or at home - it's such a positive experience. They create wonderful memories which they will hold dear for years to come and are so animated and enthusiastic as they talk about their wonderful experience. They blossom and grow in confidence and self-belief and it is a delight to see."

Designated Safeguarding Lead

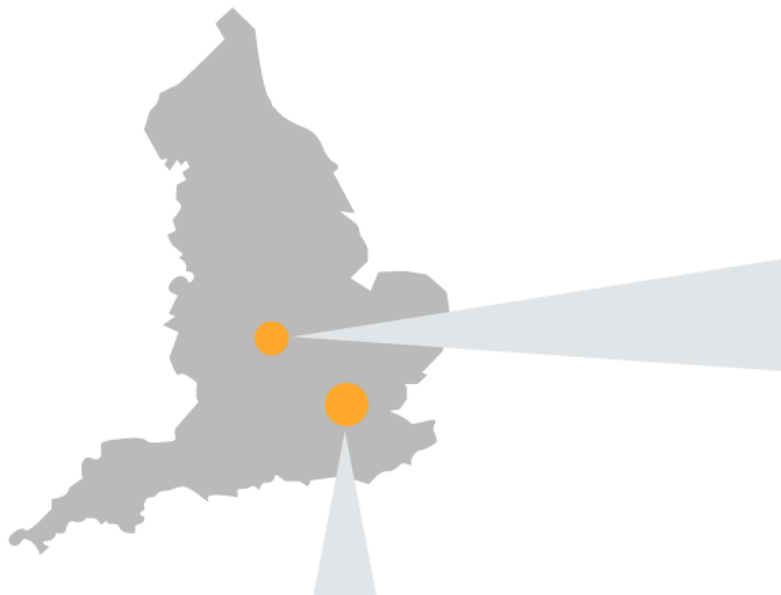
"Free to Be is incredibly useful to us as an outlet outside of school where children can develop socially and build independence and resilience. It takes the pressure off families during the holidays. We value Free to Be's excellent communication following our referrals and have been incredibly impressed with the reports back that we receive for each child that attends. We notice a real change in confidence when children return from trips. They always speak incredibly highly of the experience and all say that they would love to go again!"

SENCo

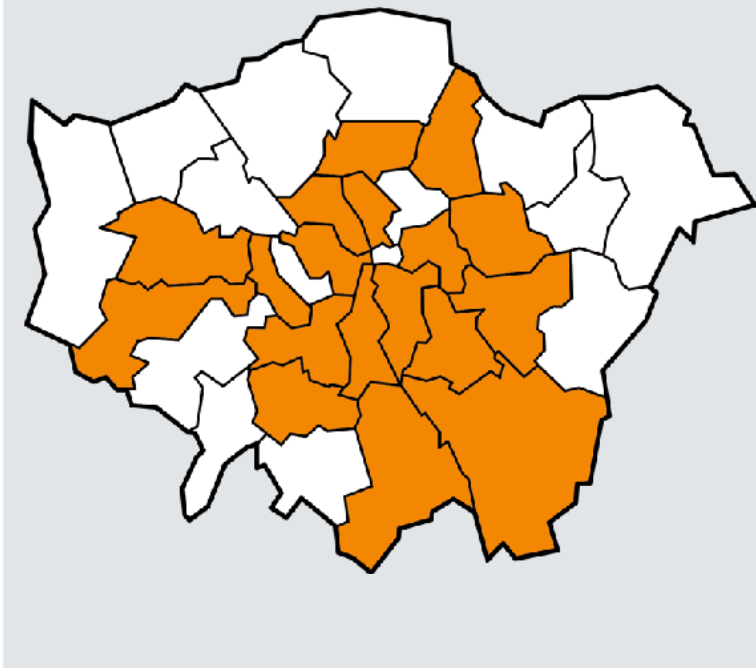
This was the first time Matthew had been away from us overnight and we were all a little anxious. As he left on the minibus we felt emotional. What had we done?! When we had a video call with him on the third evening we felt emotional again, but this time we were just so very pleased to him so relaxed and happy. He returned home proud and confident. Matthew finds unfamiliar people quite challenging - he feels different and is acutely aware of being judged. A clear message of acceptance makes all the difference. From the way that he has spoken about the trip, it is clear that he felt very accepted and able to be himself - a considerable achievement by the team for which we are very grateful.

Self-referring Parent

Our Reach



Referrals from London

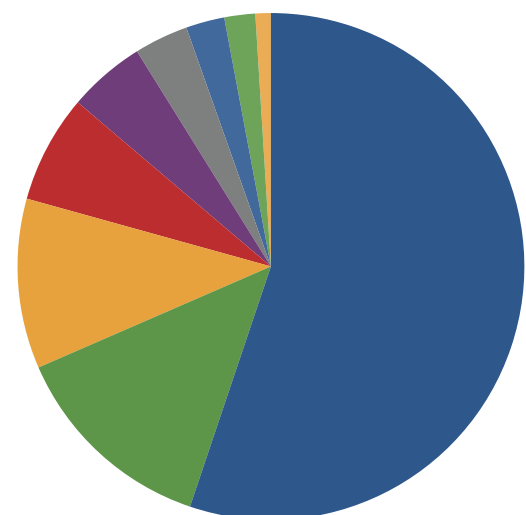


Referrals from Birmingham



Referral Organisations:

Referrals over 2022 came from the following organisation types:



- Primary Schools - 55%
- Children's Social Care - 13%
- Secondary Schools - 11%
- Family Support Charities - 7%
- Family Self Referrals - 5%
- SEMH Schools/Pupil Referral Units - 3%
- Post-Adoption services - 2%
- Young Carers Groups - 2%
- Housing Associations - 1%

“The trip made a great deal of difference to my daughter. She interacted with people from all different walks of life. The activities made her feel more independent and more confident and she can stand up for herself more now. Before, she was very timid and shy but now she thinks she can do a lot more by herself.”

- Bola's mum

Organisational Achievements

This year has been a significant one for Free to Be Kids, with much work taking place to develop our capacity to grow in line with our new 3-5 year strategy, which aims to double the number of places we can provide across our projects in order to respond to surging need.

In April, we expanded our staff team, appointing Johnny Moore and Nina Holland-Jones to manage the operations behind our residential projects. And, in May, we appointed four new Trustees to join our board, bringing with them a wide range of experience from charity fundraising, law, operational scaling and strategy.

We are in the early stages of a partnership agreement with the Woodcraft Folk, which will secure a long term base for our residential work at a beautiful residential centre in Kent. This exciting development will create much needed stability for our Gateway residentials, meaning children can return to the same holiday 'home' year on year, and will ensure greater operational efficiency within our project organisation.

Our bespoke database is now up and running, significantly reducing the administration burden on our Project Coordinators and supporting our work around clinical and safeguarding thinking and impact measurement.

In May, thanks to the leadership of Augusta Vivian and the wonderful team at Higson Consulting, we held our first ever celebration event. Taking place at Oasis City Farm in Waterloo, guests had a chance to sample some classic Free to Be activities, from meeting animals, to toasting marshmallows around the campfire. We were entertained with live music from Rose and the Thorns, and inspired by speeches from some of Free to Be's young people and human rights barrister, author and former child refugee, Hashi Mohammed. The sell out event was a huge success, raising in excess of £20,000. We hope that it will become an annual highlight in the Free to Be calendar, with planning for next May already in full swing. You can see some photos from the event below:

“Volunteering with Free to Be is always one of the highlights of my year. From the first moment I arrived at a project, the adult team have all been incredibly supportive and kind. Even more importantly, it's such a pleasure and privilege to work with the children - they bring enthusiasm, open-minds and a strong sense of fun to the trips away. Whether you're camping, canoeing or making friendship bracelets, it's always a rewarding and action-packed experience!”
- George, Volunteer



The future and how you can help

We're embarking on an ambitious strategy to double the number of project places we're able to offer to London's most vulnerable children:

Over the next three to five years, this will allow us to:

- Increase the number of children we are able to support by around 75%, ensuring that we work towards meeting the increasing need for our work reported by referrers.
- Ensure that more of the most in need children are able to access ongoing support from Free to Be Kids for as long as they need it throughout their childhood.
- Significantly grow our targeted support work by tripling the size of our Mentoring and Young Leaders' Programmes and doubling the capacity of our Journey Projects.

“Most things I do at Free to Be are firsts for me because at home I don't do much. But here I do a lot. We get to see stars and you realise how big the sky is. You never see that ever in London.”

- Leena, 11

But in order to make this a reality, we also need to double our fundraising and volunteering targets, meaning your support is even more vital than ever.

Please consider whether you or anyone in your network can help us to grow our work by:

- Providing multi-year grant funding
- Nominating us as your workplace's charity of the year
- Committing to a regular monthly donation
- Introducing us to contacts who may consider a significant gift towards our work
- Offering pro bono expertise in any of the following areas: land and property acquisition, graphic design, photography and film, fundraising
- Donating free goods or services to reduce our spend on printing, postage, fuel, vehicle hire and maintenance
- Volunteering on projects or linking us to those in your network who might be interested in doing this

If so, please contact us at hello@freetobekids.org.uk



Supporters

Our work this year wouldn't have been possible without the kindness and support of large numbers of 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, sorted and carried equipment, wrote letters or helped in any other way, we'd like to say a huge, very heartfelt **THANK YOU**.

A extra-special thank you to those long term donors who give via standing order every month of the year - your donations are some of the most important to us because of the financial stability they provide.



The heroes at Attic Self Storage help us with logistics in all sorts of ways - we couldn't run our projects without them! They generously look after our equipment and minibus between projects and act as a gift drop off point for our annual Christmas campaign.



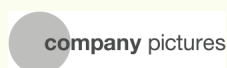
Booker have loyally supported our work since the outset, providing annual donations of food to allow us to cook healthy, home cooked meals for the children on our residential.



101 Architecture+Design have been loyal friends of Free to Be since our inception. They continue to donate generously towards our work.



Higson Consulting, lead by their CEO, our amazing volunteer Augusta, support our work with generous donations, volunteering time and were the lead sponsor and key organisers of our first ever celebration event in May. We are so grateful for all they do to help us.



Instead of sending Christmas presents to their clients this year, the wonderful team at Company Pictures kindly donated towards our work, ensuring that children attending our 2023 projects will benefit from exciting outdoor activities and tasty, nutritious meals.



Markus and the team at Bespoke Training Services very generously donated 5% of their profits towards our work in 2022, funding activities on our residential projects.



Huge thanks to the team at Newton Europe, including our long-term volunteer, Charlie De Cock. In March, 17 of their staff joined a corporate volunteering day with us, creating beautiful signage and decorations for use on our projects.

Special thanks also to:

Everyone who supported our annual Christmas campaign by buying gifts, sending food vouchers and donating money; those who supported our Big Give campaign in June, including Ben Kott and Ben Frith-Salem; all who sponsored, helped to organise and joined us at our Summer Celebration event in May. All those heroic souls who trained for and completed sponsored races and adventures on our behalf in 2022.

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 Potterspurty Lodge Trust
The Jane & Michael Davies Charitable Trust
The Keith Rae Trust



The John Armitage Charitable Trust

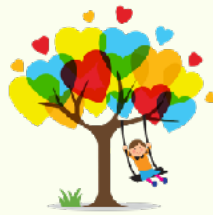


IGEN TRUST



Particularly special thanks to the Childhood Trust and the Wright Family Foundation who acted as our Champion Sponsors, allowing us to double donations received during the Big Give Champions for Children campaign in June 2022.





www.freetobekids.org.uk

