



**Scottish Outdoor Education Centres
Case for Support**

The Problem

Young people in Scotland face considerable problems:

- They are twice as likely to run away from home as any other part of the UK.
- 10% of them have mental health problems so significant that they impact on their daily lives
- 82% of Scotland's smokers take up the habit as teenagers and many children and young people who smoke will continue to smoke all their lives.
- 60% of 13 year olds and 71% of 15 year olds have an alcoholic drink every weekend
- 15% of our 13 year olds have also used drugs

Despite Scotland's vast natural resources, easy access to the countryside and long tradition in exploration and adventure, Scotland's young people are amongst the unhealthiest in Europe. The importance of more healthy and active people and communities cannot be underestimated where factors conspire so that, for the first time in decades, life expectancy is in decline.

Other major challenges are environmental, economic and social. They include Climate Change and Globalisation and these are generating pressures which force changes and expectations in the way young people engage in their communities.

Intelligent Outdoor Learning can and should be part of the solution.

Scottish Outdoor Education Centres

Scottish Outdoor Education Centres is a charity that believes that outdoor education offers opportunities that are highly important and relevant to young people and others in the face of contemporary challenges.

With 4 centres throughout Scotland, we are the country's largest provider of residential outdoor education. We have 65 years experience of enabling people to access the outdoors and the environment in a safe and sustainable way, and welcome 20,000 children to our Centres every year.

We use activities that children find exciting and motivating, such as archery, orienteering, tree climbs and rope walks to teach co-operation, achievement, leadership and problem-solving.

Challenging experiences outdoors impact powerfully upon a young person's intellectual, physical, spiritual, social and moral development.

Use of the outdoors makes a major contribution to physical and environmental education and enhances many other curriculum areas. It contributes to personal growth and social awareness and develops skills for life and the world of work. Qualities such as a sense of responsibility and a purpose in life are nurtured. There is also a great deal of intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction to be experienced from participation in outdoor activities.

For many it is at least life affirming, and at best it can be life changing. Our Centres offer a fun programme of activities led by specialist outdoor tutors, and emphasise key messages such as healthy lifestyle, peer support, respect for others, and awareness of the environment.

These positive experiences endorse and support the message that children can achieve a "natural high" without recourse to alcohol or drugs. They counter the concerns of children "wrapped in cotton wool" by providing experience of challenge in a safe and supporting context. They replace despondency and fears with aspirations and positive mental attitudes. They build better citizens and give children hope and direction for the future.

Why we must increase our services

There is growing concern that opportunities for outdoor learning by school students in Scotland have decreased substantially in recent years.

In the UK, in the past ten years, twenty local authority outdoor education centres have closed.

Many countries, both in Europe and elsewhere, achieve a significantly higher level of outdoor learning in their schools than the UK. Australia, Norway and Canada are particular examples of good practice. Yet Britain, and Scotland in particular, used to lead the world in outdoor education. In particular the carefully constructed and wide-scale provision in the Lothian Region was widely regarded as the ideal model. Several decades of erosion have left such provision in a poor state, not dissimilar to the rest of the UK, whilst several of those countries which adapted the model to suit their own situation now have extensive curricular provision.

SOEC provided outdoor experiential learning programmes for 20,000 young people in 2007. Most visit our Outdoor Centres for 5 days and this equates to over 100,000 school learning days equivalent. But faced with growing societal problems and increased concern for the environment in which are young people are growing up, we want to inspire all young people to enjoy and value the Scottish outdoors.

SOEC see outdoor activities as the medium we use to place young people into learning situations, where they can learn about their potential and the world they live in, will work in, and depend upon. The potential for learning is enormous and SOEC aim to maximise all learning opportunities.

Our plan

Education in an outdoor environment provides one of the most valuable and rewarding learning experiences for a wide range of pupils, regardless of background or ability.

In an age when there is growing national concern about young people's lifestyles, and when many children from some of the more deprived areas do not get the same opportunities as their counterparts elsewhere, it is time for a new policy that will have lasting benefits for pupils.

To achieve this goal, SOEC have developed the ***Great Outdoors Appeal***.

This ambitious but achievable plan will see 2 key milestones:

1. Redevelop the existing Centres
2. Allow every child to experience Outdoor Education

The Great Outdoors Appeal

Our aim is to raise £10m by 2015 to implement a range of specific and targeted services which will significantly impact on the quality of life for generations of Scottish children.

This appeal will allow us to implement 2 major projects:

1. Redevelop the existing Centres

We will significantly re-develop the fabric of our 4 operational centres to address 3 key emerging concerns:

- A. **Sustainable Development** – Centres will develop to provide learning opportunities in specific areas such as biodiversity, waste, energy efficiency and renewable energy, while programmes overall will promote education for sustainable development. We are very positive about meeting these challenges - in 2006, we received our first Eco-Centres Award and were short-listed for a Green Energy Award.
- B. **Healthy Life Options** – we will upgrade our service provision to reinforce messages about health lifestyles, and support efforts in key areas such as drug free lifestyles and healthy eating.
- C. **Inclusion** – we will significantly develop the capacity of our Centres to provide programmes for disabled as well as disadvantaged young people and families e.g. providing respite for families, for young people at risk or having been excluded, and for ethnic groups;

Work to change the physical fabric of our centres is already underway. Substantial redevelopment work has already been undertaken at the Belmont Centre, where refurbishment has included the introduction of renewable energy technology, fully-accessible accommodation and a collaboration with the University of Dundee School of Ecological Design.

We anticipate continued expenditure on the fabric of our Centres to be in the order of £1.6m over the next 5 years.

2. To allow every school age child in Scotland to experience outdoor education at least once in their school “career”

SOECs view is clear. To successfully change the perception of young people so that the outdoors and environment are relevant to them, there needs to be an increase in the number of visits to centres for outdoor education.

Our aim is therefore to support every school age child in Scotland to experience residential outdoor education at least once in their school career.

Our targets are ambitious but we are making headway. Our visitor numbers increased from 16,000 in 2004 to 20,000 in 2007. Our operation capacity in total is currently 60,000. Only Scottish Outdoor Education Centres has the capacity to delivery this volume, and as such we must aim even higher.

The current Scottish schools population is approximately 700,000 children. If each child visited one of our Centres even once in their school career (assuming 12 years) the benefits to Scotland would be huge. While many people are still coming to terms with the extent and threats that these children and young people face, SOEC offers major contributions to their solutions.

Young people need help to prepare for and meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world – a world which will soon be very different from today. We need to provide young people with positive experiences and enable them to acquire the values, qualities, attributes and competencies that are essential if they are to survive and thrive in a changing world:

- Working in teams
- Listening to and accepting diverse opinions
- Solving real-world problems
- Taking the long-term view
- Promoting actions that serve the larger good
- Connecting with the community
- Making a difference in the world

By creating a fund of £250,000 per year to help provide bursaries to children from underprivileged areas, transport for rural schools to reach the centres, and discounts for schools wishing to use the Centres outwith the main “season” we can achieve this ambitious goal within our existing capacity.

Join us

Successive studies have shown that there is clear evidence that outdoor education can impact positively on young people's attitudes, beliefs and self perceptions. Examples of outcomes include independence, confidence, self-esteem, coping strategies, communication skills and teamwork. Evidence is mounting to show that SOEC is highly effective in enabling young people to develop these essential outcomes.

As such, all of Scotland, for years to come, would benefit from the services that will be established through the Great Outdoors Appeal. As a community, we need to help our young people to be as good as they can be. Only through committed and generous support can we all achieve this incredible aim.

Our goal of £10m is only achievable with your help. Please support us today.

