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For immediate release

FIFE YOUTHS SELECTED FOR LIFE-CHANGING ARCTIC EXPEDITION

Ten pupils from Lochgelly High School in central Fife are preparing for a life-changing expedition to Arctic Greenland next March after being selected for the expedition team by the Bo'ness based charity, The Polar Academy.

The seven girls and three boys (all between 14-16 years of age) now face 8 months of tough training with The Polar Academy to ensure all are physically and mentally equipped for the 10-day, 100km expedition in Eastern Greenland. In the Arctic, each youth will haul his or her own 45kg sledge, navigate, camp on the sea-ice and undertake scientific experiments in support of the Scottish school curriculum.

An additional nine youths from the school have been selected for the leadership team (names below). They will benefit from much of the same life-enhancing training as the expedition team.

The pupils, who in mid June undertook a final challenging selection process at Glenmore Lodge by Aviemore, are the fourth expedition team to be annually selected by the self-funded charity that aims to inspire youth through exploration.

Craig Mathieson established The Polar Academy in 2014, determined to help positively transform the lives of young people he describes as 'invisible' at school and devoid of self-confidence, direction and self-esteem. To date, thirty youths from schools in North Lanarkshire and Edinburgh and with similar personal issues have seen their lives transformed by the work of the charity.

Significantly, over 50,000 pupils across Scotland have also heard first-hand accounts of The Polar Academy experience from former participants. Following their return to Scotland from Greenland, all participants must address school assemblies with the aim of inspiring their peer groups to overcome personal challenges and to pursue their own goals.

Mathieson (48), who in 2013 was named Scotland's first Explorer in Residence in 129 years by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, described selecting the ten pupils for the latest expedition team as "an agonising decision." He explained: "I have no doubt that all twenty of the short-listed pupils would benefit immensely from going to the Arctic – I wish I could take them all.

"The pupils selected should be proud of their decision to bravely step forward and aim to make their lives better. The months ahead promise tough, relentless training and a need for immense individual effort. However, with the support of their school and parents, each youth has already started their life-changing journey and can now seize the chance to shake off the shackles of self-doubt and despair.

"However, let's also be clear. This is no guided school-trip. These pupils will be working as a team to navigate, ski and camp in some of the world's most unforgiving terrain but ultimately it will be a hugely positive, life-changing experience. I am very confident they will return from the Arctic bursting with pride, emanating with self-confidence and ready to inspire their peer groups across the country. Their lives are about to get better."

Carol Ann Penrose, the head teacher of Lochgelly High School and a mother of three children, also experienced the selection process and will be part of the expedition group and training. She commented: "One of our big messages as a school and as part of the local community is not to be afraid of challenge but to take it on and believe you can succeed if you are prepared to work hard, pick yourself up and keep going after every setback. I am very proud of the twenty pupils at Lochgelly High School who have been selected to be part of The Polar Academy. They now have a powerful opportunity to put into practice the school's belief that with real commitment and determination it's possible to achieve.

"To be part of this expedition is a real privilege and a once in a lifetime opportunity for me as a person, as well as a head teacher. I am certain that it will inspire me to continue to strive for and work towards what I believe in and to fulfil my own aspirations in my personal and professional life, working alongside the young people and families of the Lochgelly community."

The Polar Academy is wholly self-funded and does not ask pupils to pay for their participation. With the generous support of companies and private donors, it must annually fundraise over £170,000 to operate. Chris Tiso, CEO of Tiso the outdoor adventure retail specialist, is a founding partner of the charity. Reflecting on the selection of The Polar Academy's fourth intake of participants, Chris Tiso commented:

"Over the past three years I have personally witnessed the remarkable change in the young people who have had the opportunity to experience The Polar Academy. I have no doubt that in 8 months time, the seven girls and three boys from Lochgelly High School will return from Greenland with greater self-confidence and self-esteem, ready to be role models in their local community.

"These are ordinary youths who can – and will – achieve the extraordinary. All at Tiso Group wish them well."

In addition to considerable support from founding partners Tiso Group and Bergans of Norway, the charity is also helped by the likes of Cornhill Building Services, Baillie Gifford and by private donations.

www.thepolaracademy.org

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

The Polar Academy 2017/2018 Expedition Team:

Kieran Burns - 14

Morgan Adam - 14

Carla Masterton - 14

Megan Hargrave - 16

Lauren Scott - 14

Josh Farmer - 15

Conner Harper - 16

Daisy George - 14

Carrie Wetherspoon - 14

Hannah Reid - 15

Carol Ann Penrose - Head Teacher

The Polar Academy 2017/2018 Leadership Team

Daniel Pratt – 16; Lewis Fotheringham – 14; Louise McLeary – 14; Cameron Duff – 14; Louise McArthur – 15; Isla Stewart – 16; Keigan Thomson – 16; Ryan Harley – 16; Erin Cuthbert - 14

Fast facts about The Polar Academy

- The Polar Academy was established in 2014 by the Bo'ness based explorer Craig Mathieson.
- It is a registered Scottish charity with a vision to inspire youth through exploration.
- The Polar Academy has been described as one of Europe's toughest youth training programmes.
- A total of 30 teenage pupils to date from 9 schools have participated in the expedition teams of The Polar Academy. The first expedition team was selected from two North Lanarkshire schools in 2014. Subsequently, The Polar Academy has built further on its growing success by selecting pupils from five Edinburgh schools (2015) and two further Edinburgh schools (2016). All the pupils' selected for the expedition teams were identified by Mathieson as 'invisible' at school and crushed in self-confidence.
- Following selection, the participants undertake 8 months of rigorous training before an expedition in Arctic Greenland. They return as 'ordinary individuals who have achieved the extraordinary.' Those involved with the expedition team have described the experience as life-changing.
- The 'magic' of The Polar Academy is also the requirement of all participants to undertake post expedition talks to school assemblies (and even businesses) across the country. These aim to inspire youth to realise that whatever their personal circumstances, it's possible to make the personal decision to change life for the better.
- The Polar Academy is wholly self-funded and depends on the generosity of private donors and individual businesses. Chris Tiso, CEO of Tiso Group is a founding supporter of the charity. Bergans of Norway is also a founding supporter while Cornhill Building Services (CBS) is among many generous supporters.
- In 2013, Craig Mathieson was named the Royal Scottish Geographical Society's (RSGS) first Explorer in Residence in 129 years. A former military man and expert tax adviser, he has led several successful expeditions to the North and South Poles.

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