



**25 May 2018**

*For immediate release*

## **ARCTIC BOUND ...**

### **TEN BATHGATE ACADEMY PUPILS SELECTED FOR THE POLAR ACADEMY**

#### **West Lothian's youth targeted for help by life-changing charity**

Ten teenagers, all between 13 and 15 years of age have been selected to benefit from the support of a ground-breaking Scottish charity, The Polar Academy. As part of their involvement, the seven female and three male participants will undertake a self-guided 100km, 10-day expedition in Eastern Greenland next April.

All of the youths selected for the expedition team (names listed below) are pupils at Bathgate Academy in West Lothian. Ellis McKay, a teacher at the school is also part of the expedition team while an additional nine pupils from Bathgate Academy have been selected for the (back-up) leadership team.

Mollie Hughes, an explorer and Tiso Ambassador and who in 2017 became the youngest woman in the world to successfully climb Mount Everest from both the north and south, is one of the expert guides on The Polar Academy Expedition Team.

The charity was set-up in 2013 by Craig Mathieson, Scotland's greatest living polar explorer. His vision is to inspire youth through exploration and to help young people positively transform a life blighted by crushed self-confidence, anxiety and / or a lack of self-esteem.

Over the past five years, Mathieson has worked closely with teachers to identify what he calls 'invisible' youths. To date, four expeditions involving pupils from a total of ten secondary schools have experienced the life-changing methods deployed by the charity that helps participants to redefine their physical and mental limits.

Confirmation of his or her selection into The Polar Academy (that was decided by Mathieson and followed a weekend of physical and mental challenges at Glenmore Lodge near Aviemore) is only the beginning of a rigorous nine-month programme. As 49-year-old Mathieson, explained: "The pupils from Bathgate Academy who have come through the selection process should be proud of their achievement.

"It has been extremely hard to decide those who can most benefit from being part of the 2019 Polar Academy Expedition Team. For those selected, the hard work starts now. Supported by the charity, their school and families, the youths can expect to fully commit to a programme that will include undertaking regular physical training. Like the many positively transformed youths who have gone

before them, The Polar Academy will prepare the expedition team for the experience of hauling a 45kg sledge, navigating, camping, cooking and skiing across the wilds of Greenland in temperatures as low as minus 30C.

“Crucially, in the months ahead, as a team and individuals, they will encounter and overcome challenges that develop self-confidence and awakens the realisation that with focus and effort the seemingly impossible can be achieved. Just as importantly, their post expedition talks to peer groups across Scotland will inspire thousands of other youths to pursue goals they too previously thought unattainable.”

Over 60,000 youths have already been engaged and inspired by the charity that’s regarded as Europe’s toughest youth training programme.

In the Arctic, accompanied by a doctor and expert guides, pupils will also conduct scientific experiments to support the Scottish school curriculum and to further understanding of the impact of global warming. Mathieson, who in 2013 was named the first Explorer in Residence of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in 129 years, is also a STEM ambassador for Scotland.

Despite its growing success, The Polar Academy remains wholly dependent on donations to deliver its programme that costs £170,000 to operate and to which the participants and their families are not asked to contribute. Chris Tiso, CEO of Tiso the outdoor adventure retail specialist and Cornhill Building Services (CBS) are among founding supporters of the charity whose trustees are drawn from the fields of education, business, exploration and the media.

Carol Ann Penrose is the Head Teacher of Lochgelly High School in Fife and was part of the school’s ten-strong 2017/2018 Polar Academy Expedition Team that recently returned from Greenland in April. She is full of praise for the work of The Polar Academy: “The calm, understated approach of Craig and his guides really gets results. They quietly instil a ‘can do’ mind-set in the participants. You come to recognise that with a little more self-belief you can accept and overcome challenges.

“I noticed that the pupils were increasingly unfazed and accepting of tasks they would have recoiled from (when first selected). Previously very quiet, shy and ‘under the radar’ in school ... (there’s a) marked and significant change in their outlook and ‘can do’ mentality.”

[www.thepolaracademy.org](http://www.thepolaracademy.org)

#### **Notes to the editor**

#### **The Polar Academy 2019 Expedition Team:**

- Abbie Heaney 14
- Adam Rayer 15
- Alex Cochrane 14
- Alicia Aitken 14
- Cerys Graham 14
- Emma Severs 13
- Jake Duncan 14
- Kimberley Codona 14

- Max Kilgour 14
- Robyn Thomson 15
- Ellis McKay (Teacher)

### **The Polar Academy 2019 Leadership Team**

- Declan O'Hagan
- Becky Houston 13
- Ciara Wright 13
- Craig Waddell 13
- Matthew Wood 14
- Kieran Duffy 13
- Morgan Paterson 14
- Orla Morgan 13
- Shannon McKay 13
- Jamie Lee Fisher 14

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