

## **POLAR ACADEMY GRADUATE JOINS ELITE GROUP OF ASTRONAUTS, EXPLORERS AND SCIENTISTS AS A MEMBER OF THE EXCLUSIVE EXPLORERS CLUB.**

Iona Somerville, 19 from Edinburgh, has been honoured with an invitation to join the highly exclusive Explorers Club. She will be joining others such as Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to summit Everest; Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, first to the surface of the moon; and Amanda Gorman - Poet Laureate. She will be one of the youngest women ever to join the club as a full member.

The Explorers Club is a society dedicated to the advancement of field research and to preserve the instinct to explore. For over 100 years, the Club has served as a meeting point and unifying force for explorers and scientists worldwide. Entry into the club is highly prestigious and only those who have contributed to the cause of exploration and scientific knowledge of the world may apply.

Iona was invited to join after a recommendation was written on her behalf due to her achievements in inspiring thousands of kids through her efforts in the Polar Academy. At the age of just 14, Iona began the 10-month intensive training programme with the Polar Academy readying herself for her first expedition. Iona was just a regular, unassuming teenager. Slightly shy and nervous, but with a clear determination to succeed. After completing her 10 day sledge hauling expedition with the Polar Academy, Iona was able to use her experience to help with her mental health and better focus her studies.

Sadly, on May 22, 2017, Iona attended the Ariana Grande concert in the Manchester Arena, where a suicide bomber detonated a device as hundreds of youngsters and their families were leaving. The atrocity left 22 dead and 600 adults and 340 children injured. Hundreds of others endured psychological trauma. The scenes Iona witnessed left her on the verge of suicide but using the discipline and determination learnt from the Polar Academy, she has clawed her way back to recovery.

Now Iona plans to honour the victims by becoming the youngest member of a pioneering five-strong Antarctic expedition led by UK Paralympic gold medallist: Karen Darke. It will see a new "Pole" – dubbed the Pole of Possibility. The Pole of Possibility encourages others who have suffered physical or psychological trauma to find their own inner resilience and confidence.

Craig Mathieson, Head of the Polar Academy Said; "It's for people like Iona that I started the Polar Academy. I could see the huge potential in her – her courage, kindness and leadership. With everything that's now happened, I couldn't be any more proud of what's she's achieved and to receive this recognition is truly outstanding. We wish Iona all the best on her next expedition and as she begins this new chapter as a recognised Explorer and Pioneer."

Iona will be invited by Craig to visit the Explorer's Club headquarters in New York, once it is safe to do so, where she will get to meet her heroes and receive a warm introduction as one of their newest members. She will wear her Explorer Club badges with pride on her 2022 expedition to Antarctica.

