



29 April 2019

For immediate release

**LIFE CHANGING ...
POLAR MEDALS FOR BATHGATE ACADEMY EXPEDITION TEAM**

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On Friday night (26 April) over 120 guests attended a special dinner and medal ceremony at Dundas Castle on the outskirts of Edinburgh to recognise the achievements of ten pupils from Bathgate Academy (West Lothian). During April, the pupils and Ellis McKay (Pupil Support Manager) participated in a life-changing, ten-day expedition in Eastern Greenland with the youth charity, The Polar Academy.

To loud cheers and more than a few tears, a parent of each expedition team member presented their son or daughter with the prestigious polar medal. Looking on were family members and many of the growing number of supporters and patrons of The Polar Academy. This included founding supporter, Tiso the outdoor adventure retail specialist and representatives of ski manufacturer, Åsnes Skis who travelled from Norway and attended wearing traditional Norwegian attire.

Speaking on stage, Craig Mathieson the Bo'ness-based expedition leader and founder of The Polar Academy, said: "Supported by the charity, their school and families, all at Bathgate Academy involved in this year's expedition fully committed to the programme that included tough and regular physical training. Every week I could see their self-confidence steadily grow. In Greenland, whether tasked with navigating, cutting ice blocks or pitching tents, when the going got tough it was fantastic to watch everyone work as a team and to develop that all important 'can do' mentality.

"I am so proud of these pupils who over the past 9-months of committing to the methods of The Polar Academy have transformed into confident and resilient young men and women. They now know that with focus and effort the seemingly impossible can be achieved."

Expedition team member quotes

Adam Rayner (16) said: "I feel that The Polar Academy has changed me from being a quiet, shy follower to someone with the confidence to lead. I'm definitely much more confident. The Polar Academy has changed my life and I'm really going to miss it."

Alex Cochrane (15) said: "It's an almost indescribable feeling to explain how grateful I am to Craig (Mathieson) and The Polar Academy for the opportunity to be part of the expedition team. It has been a truly life-changing experience. Since getting involved with the programme I've increasingly noticed small positive changes in myself."

Over the past year the expedition team and their families fundraised £75,000 to support their expedition and the future work of The Polar Academy, a charity that's wholly dependent on donations to operate. From next month, all of the pupils on the expedition team will begin talking to

peer groups in schools across West Lothian about their life-changing experiences. They will aim to inspire thousands of other youths to pursue goals thought unattainable.

It is the fifth consecutive year that The Polar Academy has successfully selected and trained individuals from within Scotland's secondary education sector. Identified as 'invisible' at school and affected by issues including anxiety, a lack of self-confidence and esteem, The Polar Academy positively transforms the individuals it selects by using expedition methods to redefine physical and mental limits.

The Polar Academy and the expedition team from Bathgate Academy will feature in a 4-part documentary to be broadcast on BBC Scotland later this year.

The 2018/2019 Polar Academy Expedition Team was again accompanied by expert guides. In addition to Craig Mathieson, they were: Nigel Williams, George MacHardy, Mollie Hughes and Dr Naomi Dodds. Later this year, Tiso Ambassador and adventurer Mollie Hughes will attempt to become the youngest woman in the world to ski unassisted to the South Pole.

www.thepolaracademy.org

The 2018/2019 Bathgate Academy Polar Academy Expedition Team

Abbie Heaney 14
Adam Rayer 16
Alex Cochrane 15
Matthew Wood 14
Emma Severs 13
Jake Duncan 14
Kimberley Codona 14
Max Kilgour 14
Robyn Thomson 15
Orla Morgan 13
Ellis McKay (Pupil Support Manager)

Leadership Team

Becky Houston 13
Craig Waddell 13

PICTURES

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LIFE CHANGING

The 2018/2019 Bathgate Academy Polar Academy Expedition Team pictured with their expert team of guides and charity founder, Craig Mathieson outside Dundas Castle before the medal ceremony on Friday 26 April.



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MARVELLOUS MEDAL

Expedition Team Members Alex Cochrane (15) and Adam Rayner (16) proudly show off their engraved polar medal received from The Polar Academy on Friday night.



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PROUD MOMENT

Alex Cochrane pictured with her mum Fiona Cochrane and Craig Mathieson, founder of The Polar Academy during the medal ceremony.