

IMPACT REPORT

24/25 Programme

THE POLAR ACADEMY

The Polar Academy's 2024/25 programme has been nothing short of transformative. This year, 18 young people from Dalkeith High School and Park Mains High School embarked on a life-changing 12-month journey that culminated in a winter expedition to East Greenland.

Through rigorous training, scientific exploration, and powerful personal growth, our participants emerged as confident, empowered young leaders.

We are proud to share their achievements and the profound impact our programme has had on individuals, families, schools, and communities.

Craig Mathieson, Founder

THE POLAR ACADEMY'S 2024/25 PROGRAMME SUMMARY

In 2024/25, The Polar Academy worked with 30 young people from Dalkeith High School and Park Mains High School. Chosen for their struggles with low self-esteem, anxiety, or other mental health challenges, each participant was supported by a parent or carer to ensure full family involvement from the outset.

The journey began in spring and summer 2024 with intensive selection weekends at Glenmore Lodge in Aviemore. Both pupils and parents faced physical and emotional challenges including canoeing, hill walking, climbing, and personal presentations, helping build confidence and shape the expedition team.

From August through February, weekly training sessions at the schools focused on cardio, strength, and teamwork. Endurance tyre-hauling days at Strathyre, the Trossachs and West Sands, St Andrews included support from families, teachers, and Polar Academy alumni.

October's week-long Cairngorms training camp equipped the teams with survival skills and earned them Bronze National Navigation Awards, contributing to SQA accreditation. In December, the new Polar Academy HQ in Livingston hosted its first training day, featuring Nordic skiing, kit fittings, and academic sessions.



January brought helicopter training in Fife to simulate Arctic logistics, followed by a STEM day at St Andrews University in February, where students explored oceanography, meteorology, and environmental science.

In March 2025, the group embarked on a 10-day winter expedition to East Greenland. Travelling via Iceland to Tasiilaq, the team hauled sledges in -25°C temperatures across sea ice, conducting environmental research such as water temperature and salinity, micro plastics sampling and weather monitoring.

Throughout the year, participants and their families received regular pastoral support and equipment. Community engagement played a key role, with pupils delivering inspirational talks at schools, businesses and events. Parents also participated in fundraising efforts like the Kilt Walk and community litter picks.

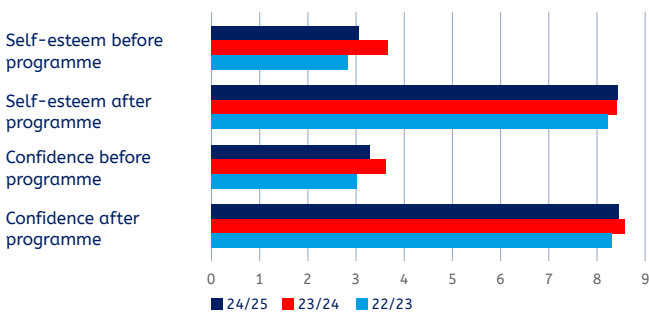
By the end of the programme, the young people had undergone profound transformation, emerging stronger, more confident, and ready to inspire others as resilient role models.

IMPACT

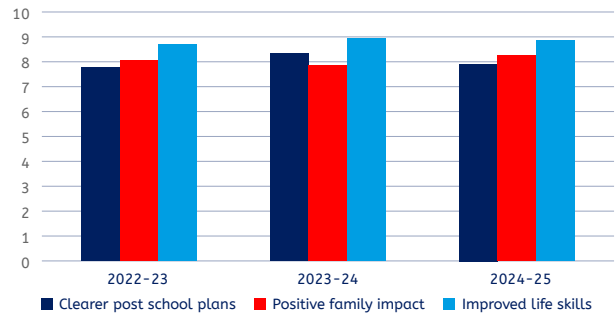
The 2024/25 Polar Academy project set out to transform the mental health and self-belief of vulnerable young people, helping them move from a place of anxiety, low confidence, and social invisibility to becoming resilient, empowered role models within their communities.

Over the past 3 years our track record of positive impact has maintained consistently high standards.

Self-esteem and confidence impact



Post programme scores on wider impact/10



YOUNG PEOPLE FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

“I can’t thank Polar Academy enough for showing me there is a light at the end of a dark tunnel. They gave me the ambition to never give up. Thank you for changing my life.”

“Before Polar, I trusted no one and broke down talking to strangers. Now I feel confident and seen. I’ll forever be grateful.”

“I overcame my fear of going. I pushed myself to the limit mentally and physically. I am more confident in my abilities than I was a year ago. It’s made a difference.”

PARENTS WITNESSING TRANSFORMATION

“Before Polar Academy, my son wouldn’t even get a haircut—it drew too much attention. Now he’s confident, sociable, and stands up for his friends and himself. Polar brought our family back together.”

“My daughter was on suicide watch and wouldn’t speak to us. Now she mentors others. Her belief in herself—and in the kindness of others—has been completely restored.”

A RIPPLE EFFECT ACROSS FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

“Polar Academy didn’t just change our daughter—it changed our entire family. It gave us hope and helped her find her purpose in life.”

“We were stuck in an endless NHS waiting loop with no answers. This programme changed the entire trajectory of our family’s thinking.”

“Her anxiety kept her in her room, glued to her phone. Now she’s out in the world, full of confidence and joy. I’ll always be thankful to Polar for bringing her back to life.”

We are enormously grateful to everyone who made this programme possible. Find out more at www.thepolaracademy.org