

Scottish Outdoor Education Centres – Social Return on Investment (SROI)

Turning £1 into £11

SOEC is a major educational children's and young people's charity. Operating from 3 Outdoor Centres in Scotland, we deliver many different off-the-shelf outdoor learning programmes including Transition to Secondary, Eco-literacy, Adventure Activity, and Transition to Work etc.

We work with 15,000 young people every year from primary and secondary schools, youth groups, overseas groups and others. We work with many groups of children and young people who face significant behavioural, emotional or physical challenges including groups for children who are blind or who are on the autistic spectrum.

We aim to maximise the learning and development outcomes through our residential experiences, outdoor learning programmes and activities. These include CfE and GIRFEC outcomes and other SG policy priorities including Health and Well-being, sustainability etc.

SOEC aims to enable children and young people to develop the skills, qualities and knowledge that they will need in their futures, in their homes, their communities and at work. These include their:

- Confidence;
- Communication skills;
- Decision making;
- Teamwork, cooperative working;
- Leadership and the ability to delegate;
- Creativity and innovation;
- Appreciation for a healthier and more active lifestyle;
- Resilience, tenacity and determination as well as adaptability;
- Understanding of risk & risk management;
- Ability to reflect on their own potential and contribution to society/group;
- Appreciation of others, their place, and potential contribution;
- Personal management (e.g. time);
- Enhanced motivation;
- Positive attitude toward problem solving; and
- Positive, "can-do" mind set.

Independent consultants undertook a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of SOEC. The SROI attributes a financial value to the social benefits to children and young people arising from our charitable work. This is expressed as a ratio such that every £1 spent results in £x of benefits. In the case of SOEC, the consultants determined a ratio of £1: £11. This is a high ratio.

From the wide range of possible outcomes, the SROI analysis for SOEC looked at improved confidence, self-reliance, optimism and positive mind-set.

A group of 700 young people came to SOEC to undertake a bespoke programme comprising key themes of healthy lifestyles, confidence and rivers. In one group of 25 pupils, 2 had restricted their diet (eating toast or crackers respectively) and 1 was self-elective mute in school. During their stay, 2 started eating a wide range of healthy food options and the other started talking to her teachers and singing in the shower – the teachers quipped they “couldn’t shut her up if they’d wanted to.” Looking into the background of these pupils, we were told that they had been seeing either dieticians or psychologists for 6 years previously with no noticeable improvement.

On their return to school, teachers who had not been on the residential camp were pleased to see that their pupils were now working cooperatively. Cooperative working had been encouraged previously with limited success but the pupils post-camp saw the advantages of working collaboratively.

This shows how a residential experience can deliver a range of educational and developmental benefits, for the group and for individuals within the group as well as their teachers. In fact, this group was not unusual as the SOEC staff team saw similar changes among the other 700 pupils and sees regularly sees such changes among the 15,000 children and young people who stay at our Centres every year.

The SROI led to a reappraisal by SOEC of how they could be so successful. They concluded that this level of success was due to 3 elements combining together:

1. Specialist SOEC outdoor tutors trained to a high standard to deliver an adventurous activity whilst being capable of delivering multiple learning and health and well-being outcomes;
2. SOECs outdoor learning programmes and activities that are exciting, challenging and motivating for children and young people; and
3. Provision of safe and nurturing away-from-home spaces; SOEC’s Outdoor Centres.

SOEC can change a child’s or young person’s self-perception, and creates the conditions for them to make perceptual and behavioural changes away from those that impede learning and health and well-being.