

development  
through  
challenge

# IMPACT REPORT

2023



mile  
end  
climbing  
wall



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# CHARITY OVERVIEW

## VISION

Development through Challenge is the charity that operates Mile End Climbing Wall, one of the longest-established climbing centres in the UK. We believe that physical challenges improve people's well-being, and we are committed to providing that to our local communities through our many training courses and partnerships.

## MISSION

Since our founding in 1988, we have offered personal development opportunities to thousands of people in and around London through our mission to make climbing available to everyone regardless of ability to pay, physical ability, or skill level. We work to support the development and diversity of the climbing community, through offering exceptional facilities alongside subsidised and free programmes for young people and underrepresented groups.

# LETTER FROM THE CEO



**DEAN STRAW**

*CEO Development through  
Challenge*

In 2023, Development Through Challenge refocused to place a renewed emphasis on fostering a strong sense of community. By prioritising connections within our local area, we aimed to create a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome. This community-centric approach has been the cornerstone of our initiatives, ensuring that our efforts resonate with and benefit those around us.

Throughout the year, we continued to expand our charitable activities with schools and youth groups.

By collaborating closely with educational institutions, we provided more opportunities for local young people to engage in enriching experiences. These partnerships have allowed us to inspire and support the next generation, promoting physical activity, teamwork, and personal growth through our charitable delivery.

Our mission to extend our charitable reach has seen us engage with the wider climbing community. We are very proud to support the Association of British Climbing Walls, and the national climbing community, by match funding the role of an Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Manager. We hope that this new initiative will benefit the whole sector and provide much needed education as well as foster a sense of unity and shared passion. By doing so, we have not only broadened our impact but also brought diverse groups together under the banner of climbing and community support.

To better serve our local community, we have invested in enhancing our facilities and offerings. This year saw the development of our site with the addition of a new sauna and a state-of-the-art spray wall. These improvements are designed to provide our members with better resources for training and relaxation, contributing to their overall well-being and enjoyment.

As DtC continues to grow and develop, we are excited to see where we can provide a positive impact for the future, and how we can further change the lives of the people with whom we come into contact.

Here's to the future!

Chief Executive Officer

# 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

## CHARITY NOMINATION

We are proud to announce that we have been selected as 'The Master's Charity' by the Worshipful Company of Horners. Every year they choose a handful of charities to support via their annual fundraising initiative, and this year's Master of the Charity, Barry Maunders, reached out to discuss our work supporting vulnerable youth and people with disabilities access the world of climbing and the benefits of physical challenge. Every Horner is encouraged to donate to our Charitable Funds as well as organise events and activities to support fundraising for our work. With their help, we will be able to develop our focus on climbers with disabilities and our broader aim of removing barriers to participation, and creating a positive and supportive culture that reinforces the idea that climbing is for everyone.

## MAKING CLIMBING ACCESSIBLE

Furthermore, as part of our mission to support the development and diversity of the climbing community, we co-funded a brand new position at the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC) for an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager. Indoor climbing can present numerous barriers to both entry into the sport, and professional growth within the industry, so this role has been created to build an 'inclusion first' mindset across the sector.



“

In my role at the ABC, I am working with walls and the wider sector to break down obstacles faced by underrepresented groups, starting with the disabled community. I am collaborating with stakeholders across the indoor climbing community and advocacy groups to develop guidance documents, educational seminars and community engagement plans. ”

**EL TEMPLE**  
EDI Manager



We were also excited to announce the launch of our first ever Queer Climb Monthly Meetup last June! The group has been organised and led by our very own Elliot Douglas, who outside of working at Mile End, has done a lot of online trans awareness and education, sharing and documenting his transition and moments of queer joy over the years.

Facilitating and giving space to marginalised groups is core to us at Mile End Wall, and one year on this has become an important and loved event by our community.

## QUEER CLIMB

Sessions held:

**12**

Free spaces offered:

**96**



As part of our commitment to creating a diverse climbing community, we run 'SHE Climbs' - an initiative to put on free & subsidised events to encourage and support women and girls in the sport. In addition to our regular sessions, this year we held a 1-day festival with climbing clinics, weightlifting and strength training classes, yoga and socials just for women, as well as a screening of the Women's Adventure Film Festival. Most significantly, we ran an 'Intro to Route Setting' workshop as gender diversity in the sector is notoriously low, and we're happy to say that this provided a springboard for 6 women, one of whom has become a setter at our wall!

## SHE CLIMBS

Sessions held:

**58**

Free and Subsidised spaces offered:

**464**

## SCHOOLS & YOUTH GROUPS

School Partnerships:

5

Additional Free and Subsidised kids sessions:

77

Working with young people has always been at the heart of what we do at Development through Challenge. We believe that physical challenges improve people's well-being, and we are committed to providing that to our local communities through our many training courses and partnerships. Using the sport of climbing as a catalyst for development, we work with local schools, youth groups, special education needs groups, pupil referral units and youth offending teams on programmes ranging from GCSE climbing through to AQA awards, and NICAS and Squad programmes. This year we supported 5 schools with regular, free climbing sessions, and offered our local community an additional 77 subsidised kids sessions.



“The best part of my week is going climbing, it helps me relax and focus after a stressful week at school.” - Year 12 student

“

Our students have been taking part in regular weekly climbing sessions since 2022, and they have always come away happy, feeling like they have achieved something. The progress our students are making is excellent, and they always look forward to a new week and new challenge.

Due to a number of factors and circumstances, it is not possible or a priority for our students to take up climbing regularly. Without the support, contribution and time Development through Challenge has invested in CFGS, none of all the great work that has happened thus far would ever have been achieved.

I personally would like to send my deepest gratitude to Dean, Bartek and their team of instructors for all they have done for students at CFGS.

”

**JONATHAN PIOLI**

COMMUNITY MANAGER, CENTRAL FOUNDATION GIRLS' SCHOOL





## SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT IN THE SPORT

Not everything we do is local, or aimed at beginners. In our support of the wider UK climbing community, we have supported the GB Youth squad with specially set competition simulations for training at our wall. We also subsidise our own performance team - a squad of 28 young people. And, we are proud to say that two of the young climbers who we have coached at our wall have gone on to join the GB team, and compete internationally. We continue to support them in their training and climbing development, and are excited to see what they'll do next!

### \* LUCA

Luca Martins started climbing at Mile End in 2014, joining our squad in 2015. This past year he competed in Seoul, South Korea, for the Youth World Cup representing Team GB.

He began competing in 2017 and has since competed in the Junior British Bouldering Championships 4 times, the Senior once, and 3 European Cups.

To help prepare Luca for the World Cup, our staff coached and supported him with areas he felt he could work on, including creating special simulation sets for him to train on.

### \* FINN

Finn Groarke first started climbing at 8 years old at Mile End and has continued to climb here since. At aged 10 he joined our Squad and through the support of the coaches and teammates, he began to compete. At the beginning of this year he was selected to be part of the England National Squad.

“Though I started off finishing nowhere near of the podium, Mile End’s continued support and my own hard work pushed me to continually achieve better places in competitions. I will forever be grateful of what the coaches and people of Mile End have provided me with.”

# OUR COMMUNITY: MEMBER STORIES



Mike Fry is one of our longest-standing members, and has been a part of our community since the very beginning. He first started coming here with his young son Paddy as a way to keep him busy and out of trouble in the sweet shops, but what started as just an after-school activity became a lifelong love for the both of them, and a deep and meaningful way to spend time together as father and son. Mike also got involved at The Wall and did much of the early electrics. He's seen the evolution of this place and all its transformations over the years but a few things still remain the same:

**“I liked the atmosphere here because people have always been coming from all over. It was cheaper here, people were friendly, more down to earth. It’s an evolving sport but in that sense it hasn’t changed. I’ve been here for most of my life now and it’s more my home than where I’m from.”**

Mike & Paddy quickly went from indoor classes to heading off into the hills, with Paddy leading VS at age 11, and E2 by the time he was 14. Paddy got involved teaching younger kids at the wall, and they both developed a community of friends here that still exist today. Many years later, when Paddy passed away, they came here for the funeral reception and built a cairn out of all the different rocks they had climbed, and put up a plaque in the garden to remember him as a lifelong friend of the wall. Mike moved back to Wales recently and has taken the plaque with him, but we still remember him and Paddy, and he still visits and shows us how proper old-school climbing is done.

# THEN TO NOW

Development Through Challenge (or DtC as it tends to be known), was born from another charity – North London Rescue Commando (NLRC). This rather grandly titled organisation was a rescue boat base in case the Thames flooded. The charity work started when a bunch of keen outdoor enthusiasts and educators started taking local young people kayaking and canoeing on the adjacent canal. This led to trips at home and abroad, providing opportunities for disadvantaged inner city young people to experience exciting new things in unfamiliar environments. A small climbing wall was built, and as time progressed, it grew to be referred to as the Mile End Climbing Wall – the first dedicated climbing centre in London. The work of NLRC changed as more young people accessed the climbing centre. Local school and youth groups started attending, and within a few years Development Through Challenge was born.

During the years we have provided thousands of young (and not so young) people with opportunities for development through undertaking challenging activities. We have taken young people all over the world on climbing trips, and we currently have one young person on the GB Climbing Team. Today we provide free access to physical activity to people with no recourse to funds, and a big focus of our work is around accessibility and removing barriers to participation. One of our big challenges is to make climbing as financially accessible as possible. The rise of the commercial climbing centre market (and rising costs) has pushed prices higher and higher. However, the generosity and dedication of those who have been able to support us with their time and money has allowed us to create a lasting impact on the lives of individuals and families in our community. Even by simply climbing at our centre our members help us to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to access this brilliant, beautiful sport.



# NEW DEVELOPMENTS

## \* SAUNA

In July we held a grand opening for our beautiful new Finnish sauna - the brainchild of our staff members Tuomas and Georgia. This has made a huge impact in the wellbeing facilities that we are able to offer our local community, and we have exciting plans in the works to develop the space further, with a focus on mindfulness and mental health.

## \* TRACKSIDE

After many many years of service the time came to say goodbye to our beloved feature wall 'Trackside'. With over a decade of memorable climbs etched into it, our beautiful old wall was getting a bit crumbly and we made the difficult decision to bid farewell to this cherished piece of our climbing history.

However - the spirit of Trackside lives on! Originally developed as a training wall where climbers could create their own routes and moves, we didn't want to lose that aspect of climber-led creativity so we installed a brand new Spray Wall as part of the next chapter of Mile End climbing!

## \* SUPPORTING WIDER INITIATIVES

Along with our own regular clubs for women and queer climbers, we have also supported other local groups that create representation & diversify climbing, including Wanderers of Colour and ClimbMusz, with free and subsidised spaces for climbing.



## \* SUSTAINABILITY

As part of our charitable aims we are committed to sustainability, and this year we've finally realised a dream and installed a huge set of solar panels, which now power a large percentage of the centre with sustainable energy, including the new sauna. We have also supported the charity Trees for Cities, and next, we will be partnering with the City Bridge Foundation to conduct an eco-audit to assess our carbon footprint and improve on the environmental impact of our activities.

## \* A MORE BALANCED MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE

As a charity, accessibility is our priority and we try to limit price changes as much as possible, but in order to keep up with increased costs and meet our commitment as a London Living wage employer, we had to make some changes to our membership structure. We decided not to continue offering 6-month and annual memberships, instead streamlining our options to either a 30-day pass, or Rolling Monthly EFT Membership. We took this decision because while annual memberships are great value for those who can afford them, they are subsidised by higher rate single entry and monthly memberships usually purchased by those who can't put down a big payment at once. Aside from the imbalance of this, if we kept this structure we would have had to significantly increase prices across the board - including on our longer-term memberships. Instead, we chose to create one membership at a monthly rate so that everyone could benefit from a more affordable, and fairer structure.

We are still one of the most affordable walls in London, and we are committed to remaining that way. We deeply value all the support you give to us by having a membership, and by climbing at our centre our members help us to help make provide subsidised and free programmes for youth groups, vulnerable young people, groups with special educational needs, and people from underserved communities.

### 2024 PRICES

#### Pay Per Visit:

Adults	<b>£14.50</b>
BMC & Bluelight	<b>£13</b>
Concessions	<b>£10</b>
Juniors	<b>£7</b>

#### Rolling Monthly Memberships:

Adult Peak EFT	<b>£60</b>
Adult Off-Peak EFT	<b>£50</b>

#### Passes and Punchcards:

Adult 30-day Pass	<b>£75</b>
Concession 30-day Pass	<b>£60</b>
Junior 30-day Pass	<b>£35</b>
Adult 10-Punch	<b>£120</b>
Student 20-Punch	<b>£160</b>

## \* LAUNCHING THE 'PAY IT FORWARD' SCHEME

We are very excited to announce that after feedback from our stakeholders group suggesting we offer a way for our members to get more directly involved in the charitable side of our activities, we are launching a 'Pay it Forward' scheme, where members can choose to add an amount onto their monthly membership, and support one of our charitable programmes to make climbing available to those who might not otherwise be able to access it.



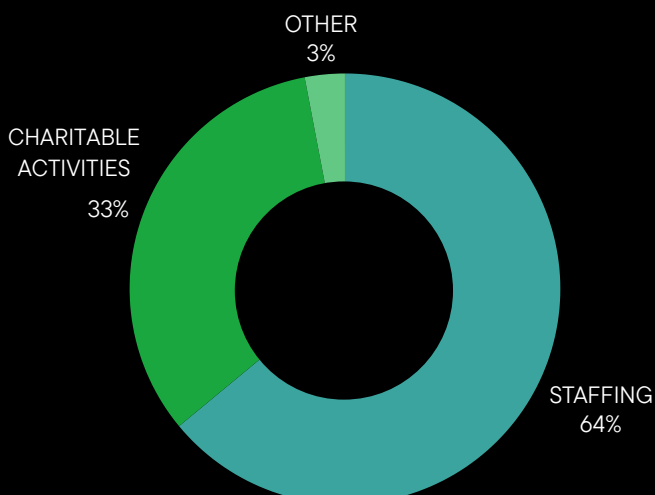
# WHERE OUR FUNDS WENT IN 2023

## \* CHARITY PROGRAMMES

Throughout 2023 we continued to develop our offerings to local schools, pupil referral units and youth and community groups. We provided around £13k of free climbing sessions during the year. This equates to opportunities for around 800 spaces for young people to experience the joy and reward of challenging themselves through climbing. We also helped 5 local schools and charities raise money, by providing raffle prizes.

## \* LONDON LIVING WAGE

As a charity, we think it's important to pay our people fairly. In 2021 we took the decision to pay our staff the London Living Wage. This was a big decision to take, as the increase affected the majority of our staff team and impacts our finances at an already difficult time. Our minimum wage went from £8.90 p/h to £13.15 p/h over the 3-year period, and we believe our people are worth that investment, as they are the amazing team that make everything happen.



## \* OPERATIONAL COSTS

As usual, our main source of charitable income comes via the customers at Mile End Climbing Wall. In 2023, this figure came in at £961,843, an increase on 2022, helping us to provide even more free and subsidised activities for our local community.

The majority of our expense go on paying the staff wages. The rest goes on the upkeep of the facility, and the provision of our charitable aims.

### INCOME

Charitable income	<b>£961,843</b>
Donations	<b>£63,763</b>
Other income	<b>£79,875</b>
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£1,105,481</b>

### EXPENDITURE

Staffing	<b>£745,869</b>
Charitable activities	<b>£387,909</b>
Other expenditure	<b>£35,792</b>
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£1,169,570</b>

# LETTER FROM THE BOARD

The backdrop over the past year has been very difficult for many people in London. The rising cost of living, low wage growth, overstretched public services and poor air quality have all affected people's wellbeing and have made supporting our community even more important.

As well as continuing our core activities we have been looking for new and better ways to do this. Opening our sauna has made a real impact. Serious research widely suggests that regular use of a sauna provides multiple physiological and psychological benefits. We have heard sauna users at Mile End declare it a major factor in their wellbeing since it opened.

We are working on ways we can make our facilities and resources accessible to underrepresented groups while continuing to support the development of our squad and elite British climbers. We're delighted that the Worshipful Company of Horners has selected us as their charity for 2024, partnering with us to improve accessibility to climbing for all.

We are keen to reduce our negative impact on the environment and have installed solar panels among other wide ranging sustainability initiatives. Recent sunny days has seen solar powering most of the centre, reducing our draw on the electrical network, our utility bills and helping us keep our entry prices low.



We continue to be a London Living wage employer, keen to make sure our staff are treated fairly. Our people are the heartbeat of our charity and provide the special environment that makes Mile End Climbing Wall way more than just a climbing wall.

The board has kept close focus on governance and improving processes with a keen eye on safety and safeguarding. The input of the stakeholders committee has been invaluable to this end. The senior team and the board make decisions that are right for the charity's long-term future, even when that's difficult short-term.

If you'd like to learn more about what you can do to support our work, please come speak to our team or visit [www.developmentthroughchallenge.org.uk](http://www.developmentthroughchallenge.org.uk) for more info.

We're delighted that you're following our progress, would love to hear your ideas, and look forward to your support in the future of Development through Challenge.

Thank you.

# CONTACT US



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