



Theory of Change

Big City Mountaineers provides transformative experiences through connections to nature that strengthen life skills and build community for youth from disinvested communities.

WHAT IT TAKES INPUTS

- YOUTH**
- YOUTH AGENCY PARTNERS**
- NATURE**
- STAFF**
- SEASONAL INSTRUCTORS**
- VOLUNTEERS**
 - trail volunteers
 - front country volunteers
 - board members
 - national council
- FUNDING AND IN-KIND SUPPORT**
 - individual donors
 - community partners
 - organizational donors
 - brand partners
- 30+ YEARS OF INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**
 - high-quality gear
 - risk management
 - wilderness permits
 - transportation and logistics

WHAT WE DO ACTIVITIES

- YOUTH PROGRAMS**

Hiking, backpacking, camping, and canoeing. The three distinct programs we offer include:

 - Day trips
 - Overnight front country camping
 - Weeklong backcountry expeditions
- TRAIL CURRICULUM**
 - Outdoor technical skills
 - Team and community building exercises
 - Opportunities for individual and group reflection
 - Environmental education
 - Capstone activities that reinforce lessons learned
- LEADERS PROGRAM**

BCM expedition alumni have the opportunity to advance their outdoor leadership journey and learn more about career pathways in the outdoor recreation industry through:

 - Serving as apprentice instructors on BCM Expeditions
 - Technical skill-building and risk management training
 - Wilderness first aid certification
 - Leadership and group facilitation skill-building
 - Career pathway development in the outdoor industry

WHAT WE ACHIEVE OUTPUTS

- Connection with SELF**

Youth build outdoor technical skills and engage in social-emotional learning to develop greater self-awareness, self-esteem, and improved problem-solving abilities.
- Connection with COMMUNITY**

Youth learn interdependence and team building on the trail and develop a sense of belonging among peers and adults with whom they share the experience.
- Connection with NATURE**

Youth gain a deeper understanding of the natural world and their place in it, developing greater empathy and conservation awareness.
- Connection with JOY**

Youth benefit physically and mentally from spending time in nature, building a greater sense of self-efficacy after completing a BCM trip.

LONG-TERM IMPACT OUTCOME

- Which leads to**

Improved levels of self-esteem in youth, which lowers the risk of mental health disorders, while improving academic performance and resilience.
- Which leads to**

Healthy, meaningful relationships with peers and adults. A sense of belonging has long-term positive effects on an individual's overall well-being.
- Which leads to**

Improved physical and mental health and increased environmental stewardship. Long-term, these experiences in nature lead to greater action to protect our planet.
- Which leads to**

Joyful outdoor experiences that boost self-efficacy, leading to improved mental health, increased motivation, creativity, and purpose. This can impact an individual's confidence, persistence, and determination.



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ABOUT BCM

Since 1989, Big City Mountaineers (BCM) has provided transformative outdoor experiences for youth from communities who have historically lacked equitable access to nature. By providing free, fully-outfitted, and professionally led outdoor and backcountry trips, BCM creates opportunities for youth from disinvested communities to build connections with nature, themselves, their communities, and with a sense of joy. BCM works in six metropolitan regions across the country, including Birmingham AL, Boston MA, Denver CO, Minneapolis MN, Seattle WA, and San Francisco Bay Area CA.

WHY BCM EXISTS

Not every young person has the same opportunity to enjoy and benefit from time spent outdoors. Specifically, youth who come from communities that are traditionally marginalized and disinvested experience material, economic, and social barriers that prevent access to outdoor experiences and the benefits of time spent in nature.

Everyone deserves a meaningful connection to nature. For over 35 years, BCM has been committed to increasing opportunities in the communities we serve for young people to discover their self-potential by accessing transformative experiences outdoors. BCM trips enable youth to build community, strengthen life skills, develop critical social and emotional capacities, and improve their physical and mental health. Research has proven that this has far-reaching positive effects both on and off the trail.

BCM PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

BCM creates immersive nature-based experiences for youth between the ages of 12 and 18 through partnerships with youth agencies, curated programming, funding, donations and sponsors. Programs include day trips, frontcountry overnights, and weeklong backcountry expeditions that encompass activities such as hiking, backpacking, camping and canoeing. During a BCM trip, youth participate in a hands-on trail curriculum that includes team building exercises, environmental education and technical outdoor skills. With a 35 year track record, BCM has conducted over 1,100 trips, served over 11,000 youth, organized more than 5,000 volunteers, and provided nearly 45,000 nights under the stars for youth across the US who might not have otherwise had the opportunity.

BCM PARTICIPANTS

- have demonstrated an increase of **7.2%** in average self-esteem scores.
- have shown an increase of **15.8%** in average self-efficacy scores.
- showed an increase of **16.6%** in average empathy scores.
- showed a **5.6%** increase in average sense-of-social-belonging scores.

BCM IMPACT

BCM programming filters experiences through four core pillars — connection to self, community, nature and joy. As a result, youth show an increase in social-emotional dimensions such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, empathy and social belonging.

CONNECTION WITH SELF

Outputs: Youth build outdoor technical skills and engage in social-emotional learning to develop greater self-awareness, self-esteem, and improved problem-solving abilities.

Outcomes: Improved levels of self-esteem in youth, which lowers the risk of mental health disorders, while improving academic performance and resilience.

CONNECTION WITH COMMUNITY

Outputs: Youth learn interdependence and team building on the trail and develop a sense of belonging among peers and adults with whom they share the experience.

Outcomes: Healthy, meaningful relationships with peers and adults. A sense of belonging has long-term positive effects on an individual's overall well-being.

CONNECTION WITH NATURE

Outputs: Youth gain a deeper understanding of the natural world and their place in it, developing greater empathy and conservation awareness.

Outcomes: Improved physical and mental health and increased environmental stewardship. Long-term, these experiences in nature lead to greater action to protect our planet.

CONNECTION WITH JOY

Outputs: Youth benefit physically and mentally from spending time in nature, building a greater sense of self-efficacy after completing a BCM trip.

Outcomes: Joyful outdoor experiences that boost self-efficacy, leading to improved mental health, increased motivation, creativity, and purpose. This can impact an individual's confidence, persistence, and determination.

VISION

At its core, BCM is here to provide immersive, transformational experiences for youth that enable them to embrace their full self potential. Our programs equip them with tools, knowledge, confidence, and awareness to perpetuate positive change connected to self, community, nature and joy.

Participating youth act with more resilience in the face of challenging situations, develop an increased sense of social belonging among peers and adults, and their connection to nature fosters greater environmental stewardship that ripples into more empathetic behaviors towards our planet. These collective learnings and first-hand experiences result in significant boosts in the overall joy and well-being of youth from disinvested communities.