

MISSION HIMALAYA 2018 RESEARCH



LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY
CARNEGIE
GREAT OUTDOORS

OUR RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP

Over the last seven years Carnegie Great Outdoors has provided multi day courses to aid recovery and personal development for wounded, injured and sick serving armed forces personnel, as well as veterans and junior soldiers on behalf of The Royal British Legion. These programmes have a research component integrated into their design. This generates credible evidence documenting the influence the courses have on participants' recovery, personal growth and how that shapes their future.

The 2018 Mission Himalaya project was no exception. A five year longevity study has been developed and is being implemented by staff from the Institute of Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure.



THE NEED FOR THIS KIND OF EXPERIENCE

Global research literature has highlighted the considerable, yet untapped and under investigated potential of nature based physical activity within injured military populations, that can contribute to long-term recovery and rehabilitation. Particularly through programmes that support the enhancement of well-being over time.

There were 11 months between the release of the adverts for Mission Himalaya 2018 and the beginning of the expedition. This included four training weekends for the participants, a two-day launch event and several communications with the coaching staff who were supporting them. The expedition had already become a big part of their lives before any of the participants had even left for Nepal.

A key component of the academic framework that this expedition was built on, was the focus of transfer of learning. It is important that any immersive experiences reflect the participants' personal circumstances so that any change is real and positive. The choice of experienced mountaineering staff on this expedition, also experienced in supporting and coaching clients in personal growth and wellbeing, was therefore an important ingredient to the success of the venture.



WHAT ARE WE INTENDING TO FIND OUT?

This study aims to evidence the extent to which the participants' involvement in the expedition is attributable to various aspects of personal development and growth. We want to understand which processes throughout the whole experience represent the mechanisms that matter that lead to any positive developments. Having witnessed ways in which team members became more functional, resourceful and capable throughout the expedition, over the next five years we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the wider challenges the participants face and how this experience helps them.

This expedition, like every Battle Back experience, is designed to make a significant and positive impact on everyone's perception of their own personal recovery and growth. It is important to recognise that success means many different things to each of the participants and therefore this style of research must be symbiotic and not unidirectional. To genuinely understand the lived experiences of the team members the information must come from the participants themselves and not from a researcher on the 'outside' looking in.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Senior Research Fellow Dr Chris Kay was immersed within the team as the expedition researcher with the specific role of managing the project and ensuring the data collected was of sufficient quality and relevance. This open style allows the researcher to be honest about their identity and purpose and asks the group's permission to observe and hold recorded conversations, generating a more natural situation to report upon. Unlike controlled or covert observations, participant observation is less likely to instigate change in participant behaviour that often occurs when participants know they are being watched by relative strangers. Becoming part of the group being studied is ideal for the environment of conducting a study on an expedition. It can allow deep insights into individuals' lived experience that simply would not be achieved if participants were questioned remotely before and after the expedition.

The practicalities of the research project include:

- Recorded interviews prior to, during and after the expedition at six monthly intervals for two years, then annually for three years.
- Assessment of psychometric aspects of mental well being at each of the research time points.
- Participant observations and field notes taken throughout the expedition.





RESEARCH INSIGHT

In the pre-expedition interviews it was clear each individual had their own unique perception of what they felt the expedition experience could provide for them. Some were very outcome focused and actively sought ways in which they can use an event such as this to proactively drive change and development in their lives. Others were more passive in their involvement and wanted to take part and let the experience take its course. The early conversations with the group highlighted how each individual had a different opinion on what a successful expedition would mean to them. Dr Kay gained insight into what progress means to each individual and their willingness to change.

In the preceding months leading to the expedition, participants spoke about the benefits of having a focus. Knowing they had the opportunity to be selected for what

many saw as a once in a life time experience. A means of also assisting them in influencing and then changing particular aspects of their life that had not been serving them well at this point. One participant had already found that since joining the programme they were getting along better with their family. Even before leaving the country, due to a realisation prompted by their involvement in the expedition, many instigated a lot of positive changes. From becoming fitter and losing weight to some even having the confidence to leave unfulfilling jobs and to progress their careers.

Documenting the participants' experiences from the expedition will shed light upon the extent to which each individual perceives whether their involvement has influenced their life as they have returned home. The expedition evoked a mixture of elation and frustration in all participants throughout the course of the trip. In failing to make it to the

top of Mera Peak, one participant even had the presence of mind to consider that "summitting may have been less of an opportunity for growth than failing to summit."

Their perceptions and the realities of what they have experienced will evolve over time and will continue to influence their lives in many different ways.

This was a unique expedition, supporting wounded, injured and sick serving personnel and veterans. The expedition, coupled with the longevity of the study, allows the participants' voices to be heard. In turn, we can both learn from this experience and allow it to influence our practice in the future. This will then help us in developing better and more informed practice to help others by utilising the natural environment to contextualise personal development and growth through outdoor and adventurous activities.

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To read more of the expedition research work and more in-depth articles please visit www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/cgo/research-and-consultancy