

DEVELOP THROUGH CHALLENGE



for a fitter, healthier, and more inclusive community

IMPACT REPORT



INTRODUCTION

What a year this has been.

The period since our last impact report has been the most exciting and fulfilling of my five years as CEO of Develop through Challenge. From our day-to-day work at Mile End Climbing Wall to sharing our skills and experience with climbing communities in Zambia, this has been a year in which we have spread our wings and taken our work further than ever before.

The introduction of our bursary scheme has helped more people get active, while Aim2Change, our inclusion summit developed in partnership with the Association of British Climbing Walls, brought accessibility and inclusion within the indoor climbing sector firmly into focus.

I've said before what a privilege it is to work for a charity with such a strong history and commitment to grassroots community sport, and that feeling only grows stronger as I see what we continue to achieve.

None of this happens without our fantastic staff team, who make so much of what we do look effortless, and all those who support our work with their time, expertise and generosity. Thank you.

Here's to the next chapter for Develop through Challenge.

Dean Straw, CEO



WHO WE ARE

Inspiring personal growth through physical and mental challenge for a fitter, healthier, and more inclusive community.

For over 40 years, we've believed the same thing: that challenge changes people.

We started out running watersports activities for young people on the Regent's Canal, before becoming pioneers of the UK's indoor climbing scene and opening Mile End Climbing Wall, London's first dedicated indoor climbing centre.

Climbing is still where most of our work happens today. But our purpose was never really about the wall. It's about what happens when someone takes on something challenging, gets the right support, and comes out stronger.

Our Mission

We provide facilities, programmes, and opportunities for people to be challenged, get active, and improve their physical health and mental wellbeing. We work to remove barriers to participation, in collaboration with others who share our values.

Our Values

Adventurous

Pioneering

Togetherness

Authenticity



Why we exist

Barriers like cost, confidence, and a lack of representation aren't unique to climbing. They show up wherever people try to get active. Our ambition is to take the benefits of challenge into places people wouldn't expect.

Our home, Tower Hamlets, is one of London's youngest and most diverse boroughs and faces some of the city's greatest health inequalities.



Over 1000 young people get active through our programmes every year.



Over 24,000 adults get active through our programmes every year.



We have not increased climbing entry prices since 2024, and over 550 people receive direct financial support from us to access our activities every year.



MILE END CLIMBING WALL

Our base in Tower Hamlets and where our mission began.

Mile End Climbing Wall has brought Londoners together since 1986. It's where most of our work happens, offering climbing, sauna sessions, and a strong sense of community alongside subsidised and free programmes that open activities up to people who might otherwise be priced out or left out.

Everyone who visits is part of our vision of a fitter, healthier, more inclusive community.

Over 600 climbers joined subsidised social climbing sessions in 2025.

We run free of subsidised climbing programmes with over 15 schools.

We have over 17000 visits to our saunas every year.



MEET NURIN



When did you start climbing?

I started five years ago in Year 10, through Central Foundation School. The club was free and they had it on both Mondays and Thursdays. It made it easier for us to get started and then want to do it more on our own time as well.

What do you enjoy most about climbing?

It's mentally and physically stimulating. I love to overthink but when I'm climbing, I kind of silence any noise in my head and focus on how I'm doing the routes and climbing to the best of my ability. I have ADHD and it's something I can do without harming myself, or doing something irresponsible or being over excessive. I also enjoy the socialising aspect. I don't really like to socialise with big groups of people but in climbing I can work independently while having really good connections with everyone who I know, like Nolan and Julian, and the other climbers in the room.

What do you like about climbing at Mile End Climbing Wall?

I have such a good relationship with the staff. Nolan was my instructor when I first started and he taught me for two years, but even now we always speak and get updates on each other's lives. I think everyone here is really nice and inclusive so it doesn't feel daunting to be here. I feel comfortable to have fun and not feel the fear of being judged when I'm climbing.

Do you think there are barriers for people to start climbing?

Finance and representation. I feel like Mile End does a lot better than other centres by having school-run clubs where we can go for free rather than going alone for the first time. If I'm climbing with people I know and who look like me, it makes it less daunting and it's fun to experience that together. When I see like other people who are wearing a hijab, or who are Muslim or brown, in the climbing community it doesn't seem as scary. And in terms of finance, the centre has a lot of support that they offer which makes it a lot easier to go. I don't think I would have tried climbing if this centre wasn't as helpful as it was in terms of finances and that they offer group sessions to schools for free.

BURSARY SCHEME

Financial support to help people access the activities that support their health and wellbeing.

Cost shouldn't stand between anyone and the activities that keep them active and improve their wellbeing. We cover some or all of the cost of climbing, sauna sessions, physiotherapy, or counselling for people who need it. Support is available on a sliding scale and decided case by case, because everyone's situation is different.



24 people have received over £8000 of financial support so far.

"You can't imagine what a difference it will make. I'm so excited to come and climb more, it really has been so beneficial for my mental health - as has the sauna and cold plunge. Thanks so much to the team at Mile End, you've got such a beautiful community."

Thank you to the JPT Charitable Trust and London City Airport Community Fund for their generous funding of our Bursary Scheme.



LONDON TO LUSAKA

Supporting the growth of grassroots climbing in Zambia.

In 2025, our team travelled to Lusaka to work with Pa Mitengo Climbing & Calisthenics, Zambia's first indoor climbing wall. This project is rooted in our own experience building and operating Mile End Climbing Wall and helping to grow the international climbing community.

We donated holds and equipment, shared our expertise in centre development, route setting and coaching, and helped host Zambia's first international climbing competition. Most importantly, we built strong connections. Our team swapped movement tips for cooking lessons, cheered on climbers taking on their first competition, and came home inspired by a motivated community building something new.

We're proud to help lay foundations for climbing in Zambia to flourish and we're excited for where this partnership goes next.



“As it’s a newer and smaller community here, sometimes we can get caught up in how we do things and it limits our horizons. This experience has inspired everyone on the ground to dream big. I think the Develop through Challenge team has left a lifelong footprint on both the sport and community here.”

Dan, Pa Mitengo Wall Manager

Our film tells the whole story. Scan to watch the adventure.





AIM2CHANGE

Improving accessibility and inclusion in indoor climbing.

Aim 2 Change is a project we run in partnership with the Association of British Climbing Walls to make indoor climbing more accessible and inclusive, for everyone.



We educate climbing wall professionals on inclusion and accessibility - not as a tick-box exercise, but as part of everyday decision making.



We work alongside people from underserved communities to share their expertise and experiences directly with the sector.



We promote an approach of progress over perfection to achieve real, honest, and ongoing change.

Aim2Change Summit 2025

In 2025, we ran the first ever indoor climbing summit dedicated to improving accessibility for d/Deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent communities. Over one day, we delivered a programme of talks and practical workshops on topics like neurodivergent inclusion, rope skills for coaching wheelchair users, and parasetting.

102 people attended the summit and 23 climbing walls were represented.



Confidence in championing accessibility rose from 3.1 to 4.2 (on a 1–5 scale) after the event - a full point increase.

77% of speakers and facilitators had lived experience of d/Deafness, neurodivergence, or disability.

The event was shaped by our steering group - Kinnari, Minh, Marie, Piangfan, Lucy, Molly, Fibi, and Neil - whose experience and guidance made the event possible. We are deeply grateful to The Worshipful Company of Horners, whose generous fundraising funded the summit.

What's next?

In 2026, we toured the UK with workshops in Edinburgh and Bristol. We're also sponsoring a dedicated area at the ABC Conference.



"The Aim2Change event was an excellent opportunity to learn about the challenges and solutions to greater inclusivity in climbing. This well organised event brought different providers and communities together in the spirit of collaboration. This allowed me to take some concrete ideas back to Mountain Training."

Guy, Mountain Training

**AIM
CHANGE**

**Delivered in
partnership
with...**



**ASSOCIATION OF
BRITISH CLIMBING WALLS**

AN UPDATE FROM EL

We've co-funded the EDI Manager at the Association of British Climbing Walls since 2023. Here's an update from EL about what they're working on:

The ABC has continued working to make inclusion more practical and accessible across the climbing sector. A key highlight has been co-developing and delivering Aim 2 Change, the climbing Inclusion summit, bringing people together to share practical approaches and drive meaningful change across the industry.

This work has continued through taking Aim 2 Change on Tour with the ABC, delivering Applied Accessibility workshops with walls across the UK, and supporting its presence at the ABC Conference 2026.

Alongside this, we've expanded on support around accessibility and inclusion, including work on plus-size inclusion, resources for mental health, and supporting professional pathways for underrepresented groups.

We've also continued strengthening relationships with national partners, community groups and walls, helping to connect climbing walls with wider inclusion expertise and opportunities for collaboration whilst continuing to provide 1-to-1 support for individual walls, helping centres identify practical steps they can take to create more welcoming and inclusive spaces.



GET INVOLVED

Become a member

Simply by climbing or using our saunas at Mile End, you're supporting our work. Want to go further? Add a small donation to your membership every month. Ask at our reception for details.

Make a donation

Every donation helps fund our community programmes and makes climbing and wellbeing more accessible for all.



Partner with us

We're looking for community groups, charities, funders, and organisations who share our vision. Whatever you bring - funding, expertise, or a community to connect with - we'd love to talk.

Email amy@dtccharity.org to find out more.

Get in touch

Find out more information on our website: www.dtccharity.org

Get in touch by emailing info@dtccharity.org or drop by to visit us at Mile End Climbing Wall.

None of our work would be possible without our community, at Mile End and far beyond it. To everyone who climbs with us, works with us, champions us, and supports us; thank you.



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