

**FREE
TO BE
KIDS**

**GROWING
CHILDREN'S
EMOTIONAL
HEALTH**



OPERATIONS MANAGER

Recruitment Pack

“We believe in childhood, muddy trainers, new challenges, self-expression, and real human relationships. Our aim is to open up a sense of adventure, freedom and possibility for children who are struggling, whatever life's circumstances.”

-From our website



Thank you for your interest in working for Free to Be Kids. Our mission is to help some of the most disadvantaged children in London to transform their mental health via joy, adventure and the outdoors. By rebuilding the foundations of positive mental health - confidence, self-esteem, belief in one's own potential - we help deeply vulnerable children change their stories about who they are, and who they can be.

Our main programme, Thrive Outside, takes particularly disadvantaged children on week-long countryside breaks, helping them to feel special, valued, brave and successful. For those most in need, we offer follow-on support through further small group residentials, one to one mentoring and our youth leadership programme. Over 2025 we provided approaching 350 therapeutic residential places for some of London's most vulnerable children, and we have ambitious plans to expand towards 500 places over the next 5 years.

We founded Free to Be in late 2015 with a small team of key volunteers. From then, we've grown into a well-established organization with well evidenced impact, a dedicated team of 10 staff, and an over 300 strong volunteer team. In 2024, we won the Head Outside Hero award recognising our work in using joy, adventure and the outdoors to transform particularly vulnerable London children's mental health. The successful candidate will join the Free to Be management team taking lead responsibility for management of all operational systems and procedures, including line managing our high performing Operations and Services Coordinator.

If successful, you'll join our team at a particularly exciting time - working with our small, dedicated staff team to sustain, grow and develop the organisation. You will be at the centre of our work, with opportunities to gain valuable management experience within a successful, impactful and growing small charity, working closely with our inspiring and supportive CEO.

Free to Be is built around the core idea that people coming together with passion and commitment can achieve incredible things for vulnerable children. All staff, including the successful candidate, take part directly in around 8-10 residential projects per year to ensure our identity and culture remain strong. We are proud of our determination and can-do approach - our staff and volunteers go the extra mile, whether it's sticking with a young person through the wind and rain as they figure out a problem, or learning new skills ourselves to respond to challenges as they arise. If this approach resonates with you too, we look forward to receiving your application!

Mike Gee, CEO & Co-Founder

JOB DESCRIPTION

Salary: £38,000 to £40,000pa dependent upon experience.

Hours: Fulltime: 37.5 hours per week. Essential attendance on c.8-10 residential projects a year.

Leave: 25 days per year, plus bank holidays and up to 13 additional pre-set discretionary reward days in September and during the Christmas period.

Start Date: Ideally 25th January 2027

Contract Length: Permanent

Reports to: CEO

Direct reports: 1 – Our Operations & Support Coordinator. Occasionally additional interns/office volunteers.

This is a dual role. You'll be a key part of Free to Be's management team, heading up all aspects of the operational running of the organisation: overseeing all of our systems and processes, year-round operational logistics, data infrastructure, equipment, health & safety, risk assessments, and compliance.

Strategic objectives:

- Continue to develop and strategically implement our new Risk Assessment, Quality Assurance, and Data Protection frameworks across the organisation as we grow.
- Strategically implement and scale up our non-project operational processes including our office, IT, and finance infrastructure.
- Ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the organisation and our residential projects from an operational perspective, including strategically looking ahead to assess key areas to develop as we grow.

As well as this, you will initially attend projects as a 'second coordinator' alongside another permanent staff member. Through training and shadowing opportunities, you will quickly progress to act as a Lead Coordinator on multiple Thrive Outside projects per year, as part of the requirement to attend 8-10 of our residential projects annually.

You'll be joining a vibrant staff team of 11, supplemented by a diverse and committed group of volunteers.

The position is based in London Waterloo, at our office space. Most of the team work a hybrid pattern of 50% home/office based, which would be the expected minimum for this role in order to support our existing team culture.

Attendance at approximately 8-10 five-to-six-night residential projects per year outside London is a core component of this role. (Note 3)



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Operations Manager (approx. 70% of workload):

Operations and logistics are the backbone of Free to Be Kids. Your drive, problem-solving, and meticulous attention to detail ensure our residential projects and daily systems run safely, seamlessly, and effectively for the children we support. You'll head up the organisation's core operational infrastructure – overseeing logistics, health and safety, data systems, site venues, and project execution, while driving high standards of quality assurance. In particular:

- Take lead responsibility for the systems and processes underpinning the safe, effective, and efficient running of our year-round calendar of residential project work.
- Act as chief 'doer' and operational lead – ensuring key day-to-day operations happen seamlessly – from complex site, food and transport logistics to venue and activity provider relationships.
- Create, implement, and review operational processes and data systems as the organisation grows, ensuring robust structures across our databases, workflows, and policy infrastructure.
- Take the day-to-day lead on health and safety, risk assessment, compliance, and safe working practices across all aspects of Free to Be's work.
- Line manage Free to Be's Operations & Support Coordinator, overseeing their work to maintain smooth systems while stepping in to support hands-on during peak delivery periods.
- Respond with speed, flexibility, and detail to emerging challenges, serving as the first port of call for staff when complex logistics or practical problems need solving.
- Maintain standards and quality assurance alongside the CEO, ensuring all operational delivery remains safe, high-quality, and aligned with our safeguarding and therapeutic ethos.
- From time to time, represent Free to Be Kids at external events and to funders, communicating our vision, values and ethos.
- Play a central role in Free to Be's management team where together this role, the Services Manager, Fundraising & Communications Manager, and Volunteering & People Manager hold responsibility for the day-to-day running of a passionate, growing, impactful children's mental health and adventure Charity with a turnover expected to approach £1million per year by 2030.

Thrive Outside Project Lead Coordinating (approx. 30% of workload):

Our residential projects are immersive, exhausting in all the right ways, and full of opportunities for children to feel included, valued and successful. Children usually spend 5 days at a time with us – many will paddle in the sea for the first time, play hide and seek in the woods, build rafts, canoe across lakes, visit farms, forests, ruined castles and splash through streams. A small number of projects are camping based, but most run from a variety of residential centres which we hire for the purpose. The majority of these projects take place between Easter and the end of October half term, particularly in the summer holidays, though we do run projects year-round.

You will play a key part in circa 8-10 such projects a year. The majority, though not all, of these projects will be in the role of Thrive Outside Coordinator, quickly progressing to the role of 'Lead Coordinator'. Lead Coordinators are the person in charge of that residential week, assuming lead responsibility for its safe running and the quality of support offered. As a Residential Project Coordinator, you will:

- Take lead responsibility for the organisation, structure, and safe running of the project.
- Provide leadership, support and direction to the project's staff and volunteer team. Set the tone and ethos of the project, understand and model Free to Be's approach to supporting young people, and lead the team to create the best experience possible for the children.
- Build excellent working relationships with Free to Be's children and young people, ensuring they feel welcomed and included and that their safety and support needs are fully met throughout the project.
- Support the volunteer team to respond effectively and in a positive manner to children's presenting behaviour, risk issues (including safeguarding issues), or any other challenges which may arise.
- Liaise positively and warmly with the parents/carers of Free to Be children.
- Oversee all safety and quality standards on residential projects are of the highest level by ensuring Free to Be's policies and processes are implemented at all times.
- Be the ultimate problem solver on the project – anything can happen and frequently does!



IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THIS ROLE

An amazing part of working with Free to Be is the community you become part of.

I've met so many funny, passionate and positive people through this organization.

—Free to Be Kids Volunteer

Note 1: Core working hours are Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. There is flexibility to choose how you make up the rest of your hours outside of these by agreement with your line manager. We are office based (London Waterloo) when not on residential, though hybrid working at around 50% is the established norm.

Note 2: Weekend and late working are an ordinary part of Free to Be's residential projects. All staff attending a residential are given two 'rest days' (in effect, days off) which are always taken immediately after returning from a residential. We do not run a time off in lieu (TOIL) system in relation to residential and the extra hours worked during these times are instead returned via the 10 pre-set reward days off in September and 3 at Christmas each year.

Note 3: Attendance on approximately 8-10 residential projects each year (each totaling approximately 5-6 days and nights) is a requirement of the role. Some additional non-overnight travel may also be required. Car ownership is not required.

SAFEGUARDING, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AND OUR CODE OF CONDUCT

As a charity working with vulnerable children, some of whom will at times display behavioural challenges and all of whom will have experienced real hardship within their childhoods, we uphold the highest levels of safeguarding practice. We will support you to develop knowledge and skills in this area as it is a requirement of the role that you respond effectively, safely and robustly to safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection issues arising within your work with Free to Be.

We require all staff to work in accordance with Free to Be's Code of Conduct, values, ethos and core principles and to build positive and respectful relationships with all other staff, volunteers, children, their families, and other organisations encountered as part of your work with Free to Be. Our goal is to create a diverse and inclusive workplace, and we are committed to building a team that represents a variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and skills.



PERSON SPECIFICATION

We’re looking for someone a little bit different. We believe this is an exciting role with a rare combination of significant management responsibility right at the heart of an ambitious and growing charity, and opportunity to develop your skills working with particularly vulnerable children. It would suit someone with a genuine drive to work in the charity sector, who has strong experience already, but who values the idea and responsibility of being a key cog central to the running of a small charity and all the opportunities for learning, growth and development this brings. Certainly, you’ll have a real passion for, and experience of, working with disadvantaged children. More than anything else, we’re looking for the right person, who is passionate to go the extra mile in joining our committed and growing Free to Be family.

Qualifications

Degree (any subject, at least 2.2 or above), or equivalent other qualification or lived experience.	<i>Desirable</i>
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Past Experience

Previous experience in operations or project management - setting up, running, and reviewing systems and processes to "make things happen".	<i>Desirable</i>
Previous line management experience.	<i>Desirable</i>
Strong experience in working with disadvantaged young people aged 8-16 who can display complex needs.	<i>Desirable</i>
Previous experience of leading projects for vulnerable children.	<i>Desirable</i>

Core Skills

Excellent people skills – from running training with a room full of people, to coaxing an upset or angry 10-year-old out of a stressful situation, you need to be expert at building relationships with a very diverse range of people.	<i>Essential</i>
A real passion and natural strength in working with marginalized or vulnerable young people – we're looking for someone who knows they want to work in the children's charity sector, and who is driven to invest heart and soul into it.	<i>Essential</i>
Good situational judgement. We will develop your knowledge around subjects like safeguarding and working with complex young people, but you need existing skills in making balanced, sensible, but sometimes quick, decisions in fast-paced environments.	<i>Essential</i>
Organisation - you must be able to work quickly and accurately, prioritising competing demands, managing your time efficiently and helping others do the same.	<i>Essential</i>
System & Detail Orientation: A natural flair for creating effective ways of doing things to solve problems, with a love of detail and thoroughness	<i>Essential</i>
Flexibility – we can't stress how key this is. Our shared responsibility is to do whatever it takes to deliver the projects our children need. This can involve stepping into unfamiliar areas of work, doing the unexpected, out-of-hour working, and taking a dynamic, proactive role to Make Things Happen.	<i>Essential</i>
Leadership – setting the tone, getting your hands dirty, leading by example, excellent judgement, confidence and direction setting will be key skills.	<i>Essential</i>
Strong work ethic, resilience, and capacity to work quickly and often under pressure to juggle competing priorities whilst maintaining strong oversight of quality	<i>Essential</i>
Sociable, friendly and keen to work as part of a small tight knit team amidst an organizational culture of pitching in together to make the work happen.	<i>Essential</i>
Kind, empathetic, supportive yet ambitious interpersonal and management style, with a strong interest in how to best help others grow, learn and benefit from your experience.	<i>Essential</i>
Keen to take on increasing responsibility, to grow, and to develop.	<i>Essential</i>
Good proficiency with Word, Google suite, principles of database usage.	<i>Essential</i>
Interest in the outdoors – our residentials are built around nature and the outdoors. You certainly don't need to be Bear Grylls, but you do need the capacity to 'rough it' a little, be happy to spend time outdoors and be comfortable with the idea of helping young people to access adventure by being the first to jump in the lake or get a bit muddy.	<i>Desirable</i>

Practical Requirements

Able to work away from home on 8-10 six day long residential projects per year	<i>Essential</i>
Driving license (car ownership not required/advantaged)	<i>Essential</i>
Willingness and confidence to regularly drive a long wheel-based minibus in London and the surrounding area. Full training will be provided	<i>Essential</i>

STAFF BENEFITS

As a Free to Be staff member, you'll benefit from:

- Very generous holiday allowance (see Job Description) including potential for up to a month off each September.
- Generous sick leave, including 2 'Me days' per year.
- Annual wellbeing voucher worth £150, to be spent on a self-care activity of your choice.
- Enrolment in NEST pension scheme - Free to Be pay annual employer contributions equivalent to 4% of full salary, rising by 1% for every year of service, up to a maximum of 6%.
- Incredible, cohesive and fun staff team waiting to welcome you. Outstanding team morale and inclusive culture.
- Flexible working hours and commitment to hybrid working where we enjoy working closely together in the office, whilst also making the most of the flexibility offered via home working.
- Opportunity to grow and progress in a key management role at the heart of running an incredible children's charity.

HOW TO APPLY

We prioritise equality and diversity, and welcome applications from candidates regardless of their sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or any other characteristic. We particularly encourage applications from those who can represent the lived experiences of the children we support.

In compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, we will seek to make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to employment caused by disability or neurodiversity. Applicants with criminal records are welcome to apply for roles at Free to Be Kids. Advice and guidance on disclosing a criminal record can be obtained from Unlock. Successful appointment is subject to references and enhanced DBS checks.

Application submissions

Applicants are required to submit all of the following:

- A copy of your CV or up to date LinkedIn profile.
- A short covering letter (no more than one side of A4) which must address the two questions of: (i) 'Why this role, why now', and (ii) 'What strengths, experience and skills you would bring with you to the role.'
- A short introductory video of 1-3 minutes (maximum) showing your vibrancy, fit for the role and telling us something interesting about yourself! (Top tips: Keep it fast paced and lively; shorter may be better; touch on the person characteristics set for the role; something filmed quickly on your phone which feels organic is what we're looking for). As this is a people facing role including training delivery the video's purpose is to help bring life to your written letter, whilst also helping us filter out solely AI written applications.

Please send all 3 requirements in one email to: employment@freetobekids. A google drive, dropbox or similar link can assist with larger videos. Please ensure video viewing permissions are set to 'anyone with the link' and do not expire until after second interview dates.

Application deadline: 10pm, Sunday 22nd November 2026

1st stage interviews: 30th November and 1st December (virtual). We may offer some interview slots throughout the window but you will not be disadvantaged if you need to wait till towards the deadline to apply.

2nd stage interviews: 7th and 9th December. In-person at our London Waterloo office.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT OUR WORK

The majority of children we support are aged 8 – 14. Most are referred to us by schools, child protection social workers, other family support organisations or parents/carers who self-refer. Most are in mainstream school, though many are struggling to manage and some will be at risk of exclusion, waiting for statutory mental health support, or have other enduring challenges. We specialize in supporting families who are otherwise ‘hard to reach’ and children whose confidence, self-belief, social skills, resilience or belief in their own potential has been deeply eroded. All children we work with have experienced very significant hardship including severe poverty, housing instability, parental difficulties with drugs or alcohol, historical trauma or abuse. As a result, some display a level of social, emotional, mental health or behavioural difficulty, but never at a level of requiring specialist knowledge or skills, and training and support in responding to such challenges is provided.

Children’s time with us begins via Thrive Outside Gateway residential projects, based in countryside settings, which engage and build relationships with particularly vulnerable/hard to reach young people at the start of their involvement with Free to Be. Nature based activities, time spent with animals, cooking and the arts are used as vehicles to engage children in relational work alongside high ratios of adult volunteers. The intensity, sense of immersion and belonging built through these projects allow Free to Be to assess children’s core needs via living alongside them for a week, whilst also building trust and positive relationships, creating a valuable opportunity to understand and begin to work alongside children who may struggle to engage with more mainstream or statutory interventions.

Having engaged children and young people through an initial Thrive Outside Gateway residential, longer term support plans are created for those in highest need. These are tailored to children’s specific needs and may consist of returning on Thrive Outside year after year, individual mentoring, or follow on more specialised, residential work through a sequenced series of Journey Projects across the following 18 months (our ‘Journey Programme’). Journey Projects have a focus on developing confidence, improving social problem solving/conflict management, raising aspirations for those of our older young people whom schools or other referrers see as particularly at risk. They have an adult to child ratio approaching one to one. Once children turn 15, we support a smaller but growing number to return as ‘Young Leaders’, volunteering on projects to support children on the same path they have walked, whilst continuing to access support themselves.



FREE TO BE KIDS

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