Award milestone in Wales

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is today (Monday 2 November) celebrating reaching the landmark sum of £200 million worth of investment in Wales' heritage.

The massive milestone comes with the announcement of two new grants totalling £90,900 which will bring the social history of two communities in North and South Wales to life.

The Ebbw Vale and District Development Trust and Moelyci Environmental Centre will now join the 1,340 other organisations that have already benefited from HLF funding.

Since the proceeds of the National Lottery started to be distributed to good causes in 1994, HLF's £200 million investment has supported 1,820 projects in Wales. This equates to one grant every three days over the last 15 years, the equivalent of more that £69 for every man, woman and child in the country.

It is also estimated that every £1 million of HLF funding attracts £620,000 from partner organisations in Wales.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: "This £200million landmark is really something to celebrate. Thanks to lottery players we've breathed new life into our neighbourhoods, created new opportunities for volunteering and learning, celebrated our culture and identity, strengthened our communities and ultimately improved the quality of life for the people of Wales. There's still a lot more to do but we've got an enormous amount to be proud of.

"Our investment has not only revitalised museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself by preserving stories and cultural traditions and encouraging people to actively get involved in heritage projects. These two latest projects are perfect examples of how HLF money is helping people to do just that.

"Both projects will rely on local volunteers who will be given the opportunity to develop new skills ranging from DVD production to traditional farming techniques. On average 13 volunteers are involved in every HLF project, providing nearly 450 hours of volunteering time per project, a total of 667,800 volunteering hours across Wales.

Jennifer Stewart, added: "People make projects happen. We're forever grateful to the armies of volunteers of all ages who play a vital role in caring for and sharing our heritage. Volunteering is a great way of getting involved in community life and making a difference. The new skills and self-confidence that can be gained through volunteering can also improve or lead to new employment opportunities".

With the National Eisteddfod set to return to Ebbw Vale in 2010, the Ebbw Vale and District Development Trust has been awarded £45,900 to research and record people's memories of the 1958 Ebbw Vale Eisteddfod.

The results will create a bilingual DVD, educational pack and photographic exhibition, The Eisteddfod Years, which will illustrate what life was like then compared to now.

The Eisteddfod Years will train young people with the oral history skills needed to record the memories of 30 people from the community, which may otherwise be lost forever. The project joins over 100 oral history and reminiscence

projects funded by £4million of HLF money in Wales.

The Ebbw Vale and District Trust is currently looking for the remaining 1958 ‘Flower Girls’ to come forward to help bring the historic event to life for the young people and share their experiences. Themes that will be explored include families, housing, living conditions, music, sport, work and industry.

The project will also conserve, archive and digitise a range of video, film and photographic material, which covers every aspect of the Ebbw Fawr Valley over the last thirty years. Now thanks to HLF support thousands of hours of footage, which would otherwise remain undiscovered, will be accessible to the local public for the first time.

Carl Bainton, Ebbw Vale and District Youth Coordinator, said: “The idea for this project came from young people at a Youth Forum who saw a film about the 1958 Eisteddfod and wanted to find out more about the people in the film and how life compared between the two decades.

“We wanted to give them the opportunity to hear and share real memories and stories from that period. Hopefully hearing their experiences will also encourage the young people to have greater respect for members of their community and build strong intergenerational links.

“The project is open to people of all ages and we’re looking for local people who want to get involved and play their part in recording the history of the 1958 Ebbw Vale Eisteddfod for generations to come.”

In North Wales, The Moelyci Environmental Centre has been awarded £45,000 towards its social and natural heritage project to enhance the visitor experience. The Centre is an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) whose 630 members are committed to managing the farm’s rich natural environment for the benefit of the local community and visitors.

The grant will fund a part time project co-ordinator who will recruit and train twelve local people as heritage volunteers. The heritage volunteers will be split into three distinct groups so that they gain specific skills with a specialist focus.

The traditional building skills group, like 60 other HLF funded projects across Wales, will be given the opportunity to learn skills such as dry stone walling, green woodworking and coppicing. They will also assist in creating a heritage trail and interpretation.

The heritage trail will open up a permanent pathway around Moelyci and live online updates will give local people and visitors more information on the species that can be found at the site - whether it is migrating farmland birds or butterflies and moths.

Members of the oral and visual heritage recording group will produce a permanent exhibition and archive of the local community’s recollections of Moelyci, with an educational DVD and booklet for local schools.

Volunteers in the heritage conservation group will work with a small stock of grazing animals to gain an understanding of how traditional grazing methods have helped shape the North Wales hill farming countryside. They will also train in biodiversity identification and surveys.

Paul Christie, Centre Development Manager, said: “The participants in this project will bring Moelyci’s past social history to life and present natural heritage for the benefit of all those who visit the centre whilst raising the profile of the area.

“Working alongside existing community-led initiatives the project will focus on interpreting how generations of Moelyci’s guardians were able to care for their land successfully using centuries-old land management techniques and rural crafts

within a close village network.

“The volunteers will be vital to the success of the project and in return the skills they learn will be instrumental in helping them on their future career or educational paths.”

If you have memories of the 1958 Ebbw Vale Eisteddfod or are one of the original Flower Girls please contact Carl Bainton on 01495 353 100.