Caitlin takes to the stage to share town’s rich history

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Before Caitlin Williams, 15 years old, became involved with the Iron and Steal project in Merthyr Tydfil, she couldn’t stand history lessons but is now trying to get more people involved in their heritage.

After taking a different approach to heritage and history, Caitlin, along with other young people from her area were inspired to create a musical for young people to tell the story of the history of their home town supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Caitlin said: “As part of our history lessons, we watched a musical about the 1984 campaign by miners to buy out Tower Colliery (a project also funded by HLF). I became really interested in the story, so we began researching to find out a bit more about the history of the mining industry in our town.”

Caitlin and her friends visited the Big Pit Mining Museum and Cyfarthfa Museum to find out about how the small Valleys town grew into the largest industrial town in Wales. Using their research, the group wrote a script for a musical and worked with local musician Gwyn Jones to create a score.

HLF awarded 3Gs Development Trust £24,900 to research the history of Merthyr Tydfil and stage a youth musical based on the stories discovered. The whole project was recorded and a DVD and education resource pack produced which have been given to local schools.

Caitlin said: “We chose the title Iron and Steal to make a reference to the stolen lives of the miners who were killed or injured at Merthyr’s ironworks.

“Now I know more about my town, I’m really proud of where I come from and love finding out more and more about the past. We couldn’t believe how much we started to really enjoy learning about history through doing something that we like. Hopefully the DVD we’ve shared with other schools will encourage them to do a similar project in their area.

“I used to be really shy, but being involved in this project has really built my confidence, and I’m getting more involved in theatre productions. I’m auditioning for the big roles in Les Miserables and Fame, and have sung solos in other productions - I love it now!”

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: “Projects like these give local people the opportunity to develop new skills while exploring the history their history their towns have to share. Whether it’s a young person gaining experience or an adult gaining the skills to get back into work, volunteering is invaluable and can be lots of fun.

“People are at the heart of the HLF projects, which is why we’ve produced the Heritage Matters magazine, to give the people behind the projects a voice to share their stories and encourage others to get involved in local projects.”