Young people hold key to taking Wales' heritage into the future

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Since awarding our first ever Young Roots grant to Prince's Trust Cymru back in 2002 to produce a drama and create a documentary film about Aneurin Bevan, HLF has invested more than £1million to help young people explore the history that interests them. From learning new skills to gaining more confidence, these projects help give young people new opportunities and increase the motivation they need to succeed in school and improve their employability.

The programme empowers young people from all backgrounds and communities to influence how the projects are planned – deciding which part of their history they wish to explore and who they will work with, through to how they will share what they have discovered creatively, whether it's through drama, music or digital technology. Along the way they will develop a range of skills ranging from research and interpretation techniques to performance arts, web design to DVD production.

One of the 55 projects in Wales to have benefited from a Young Roots project is the Merthyr Tydfil District Scouts, which was awarded £8,200 in 2012 to research the history of the scout movement in Merthyr in its centenary year.

Rhianwen Long, a 24 year-old volunteer for Merthyr Scouts, has secured a promotion as a result of her involvement in the project.

Rhianwen said: "I've been a scout leader for five years and felt really passionate about researching the group's history in the area. I've been responsible for planning and organising a number of events as part of the project. Two particular highlights are Wogglestock - a traditional activities day which took place at Cyfarthfa Castle involving 80 scouts, and *Meet the Gang* – a production which showcased how music has changed in Wales over the ages.

"The events have brought together three different scout groups in Merthyr and it's brilliant to see so much community spirit. In addition to the events, six scouts are researching the history of the group to create an exhibition, DVD and book based on their findings.

"On a personal level, I've gained a great deal of confidence in leadership, organisation, timekeeping and event management. This has had a direct impact on my current role as an assistant librarian as I've been given a promotion which will see me getting young people more involved in their local library through events and outreach activities."

People Around Here, the most recent project to benefit from a Young Roots grant, received £37,900 to capture the history of Butetown and Grangetown between 1952 to 2012. Through recording oral histories and visits to Cardiff Story Museum and Butetown History and Arts Centre, the young participants are working on creating a documentary film, art exhibition, fashion show and multicultural feast as well as presentations at community venues and a local school.

19 year-old University of Glamorgan student, Amira Shaddad, is a volunteer on the project. Having grown up in the area, Amira is keen to find out more about her roots and how the area became home to such diverse communities.

Amira said: “I first heard about the project at Yemeni Community Centre and I was keen to get involved as I really wanted to develop skills in art and film. I’ve often wondered about how the different cultures in my community began mixing, when different foods were introduced and how fashion has changed over the years so this is my chance to find out.

“Girls in my community don’t often get these types of opportunities, such as learning how to use digital recording equipment and developing interviewing techniques, so it’s very exciting. It will be a real achievement to see our exhibition displayed at Cardiff Story when it’s completed.

“As well as practical skills, I also hope to gain more confidence and people skills through the project. I’m studying criminology and law at university, and one day I’d love to use my degree and experience of working with local people to do great work within the community.”

Rhianwen and Amira are testament to the new opportunities Young Roots projects provide young people. They are just two out of 60,000 young people across the UK who have been given the support, respect and the encouragement to succeed and as a result have flourished.

By taking on the responsibility for the success of projects, young people demonstrate great commitment, passion and enthusiasm as well as a renewed sense of pride and interest in their area. We know that these experiences can impact on decisions about future education or career paths and we want to continue to help ensure a new generation of young people are passionate about the heritage of Wales and are equipped with the right skills to carry on sharing the stories that make us who we are today.

We’re always looking to help fund new Young Roots projects - find out more on the Young Roots programme page.

A word from Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales: “It is always great to see young people accessing opportunities to fulfil their own potential. Our culture and heritage in Wales is as rich and diverse as the contribution that our young people can make given the chance. It is really pleasing therefore that the Heritage Lottery Fund has sustained its Young Roots programme because it has given so many young people the chance to participate. I have enjoyed seeing and hearing about the results but that is as nothing to the sheer delight that so many young people have enjoyed as they learn new skills and grow from the experience.”

Further information

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