Young Thespians Shine Spotlight on Heritage

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded a £25,000 grant to ‘Tread the Boards’, a west Belfast youth drama group, to carry out a multi-stranded project that will research the origins and history of the United Irishmen in the North of Ireland from 1791 to 1798.

The young people, aged between 11 and 18, will lead the project to research and record the origins and impact of the United Irishmen. Working in partnership with Gortnamona Historical Society they will learn a host of new skills which will enable them to research, identify, record and interpret historical data. They will visit a number of sites associated with the United Irishmen to increase understanding of key events. A diary of their journey will be kept using photographs and film to record the heritage they discover.

The participants will be responsible for designing and producing a range of materials to share this heritage with the wider community. This includes a leaflet which will act as a trail around significant sites of interest, an exhibition which will be displayed at venues across the city and an interactive website. The culmination of the project will be the performance of an hour-long play, written by the young people in association with local playwright and Project Manager, Kieron Magee, which will be staged during the 2011 West Belfast féile, one of the largest festivals in Western Europe.

Funding for the project was awarded through HLF’s ‘Young Roots’ grants programme which provides grants of up to £25,000 for projects that enable young people to learn about, participate in, and celebrate their own or other people’s heritage.

Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: “Young Roots projects aim to help young people get actively involved in heritage whilst learning a range of new skills that will develop their confidence and increase engagement with their local community. This project does all that and more, and we are delighted to be involved. The plans to share this heritage through the website, leaflet and most excitingly, to showcase the play to the many thousands of people attending the West Belfast féile, will be a unique opportunity for the young people to demonstrate their hard work and open up this heritage to a much wider audience.”

Megan Kelly, a fifteen year old actress from Tread the Boards, stated: "I am looking forward to wearing period costume as I think it’ll be great fun pretending to be someone from the late 1700s."

Another young actor, James Woods, said: "I can’t wait to go on one of the historical tours in Belfast that will take us up the Cavehill. I really enjoy history and love going to the places where it all really happened. It brings history to life. I’m also looking forward to downloading all our photographs onto the computer so that we can decide what to put on our website."

Yet another young actor, Gerard McDonald, said: ‘I’m can’t wait to visit both the Down Museum and Roddy McCorley museum because it’s my responsibility to use the camcorder."

Notes to editors

HLF has a range of grant giving programmes to support heritage based projects both large and small, and since 1994

has awarded £135 million to projects across Northern Ireland.

Further information

HLF Northern Ireland on 028 9031 0120.