

Young members of the Wai Yin Society based in Manchester

Led by a group of Chinese young people, the project will be an exploration of the Chinese Mid Autumn Moon Festival, which falls around each September. The young people will research: the roots, costumes, ceremonial objects, food, music, songs and legends associated with the festival.

They will also interview older people from the Chinese community about their memories of celebrating the festival in the past and the impact it has had on their personal identity. The project runs from the middle of March to the end of November 2014. Young people will learn different skills including interview techniques, research, photography and organisational skills. All of these will benefit the future of the young people and our communities.

In Chinese tradition, the Mid Autumn Moon Festival celebrates the full moon at harvest time. It is also a celebration of the traditional belief in the love story between a hero, Hou Yi, who saved the harvest, and his wife, Change'e. Change'e was forced by the wicked apprentice Feng Meng to swallow the elixir of life. She took flight and flew to the moon so that she would be able to look down on her beloved Hou Yi.

From these beginnings, the festival has become a time to celebrate family, reunions, and plentiful harvests. With this emphasis on fecundity, the festival also became a time to pray for success in romantic love, and a time for matchmaking and organising weddings. Nowadays, the festival is celebrated with family reunions, the eating of moon cakes, which are round in honour of the full moon, the burning of incense sticks, lion dances, and the making and lighting of lanterns,

which have become the symbol of the festival.

Wai Yin Society is an organisation that works with BME communities in Greater Manchester to support them with advice, education and adapting lives in the UK. We also empower young people to learn through developing self esteem, language and communication skills. The Mid Autumn Festival Project will recruit 35 young participants from across the city to get involved. Working with professionals from Manchester Art Gallery and other organisations, our participants will gain a deeper insight into this previously under-researched part of Chinese history, as well as teaching them valuable new communication skills to use as they develop their careers.

Commenting on the award, Dr. Sylvia Sham, Chief Executive Officer of Wai Yin Society, said: “We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and we are confident that the project will support young people in learning about a lost heritage, and to become active ambassadors in introducing our heritage to other communities whilst learning useful skills at the same time.”

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, the Head of HLF North West, Sara Hilton, said: “The Chinese community has played a vital role in Manchester’s lively and varied character. By preserving the stories of the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival and memories of the local community, this project will help local young people to shed light on the wonderful tapestry of Manchester’s Chinese heritage.”

Further information

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