HLF grant to bring West Yorkshire histories alive

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With a population of 2.2million (Office of National Statistics mid-year 2007), some of the most breathtaking landscapes in the UK and a fascinating heritage, West Yorkshire's past has much to be discovered.

Now, with a grant of £158,200, West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) hopes to enable people to open up and bring their history alive for themselves, with a new project called West Yorkshire – Our Stories. This will empower community groups to play an active part in the conservation of their heritage by providing comprehensive archival training, promoting new projects and improving access to the WYAS collections.

Holding the largest collection of archives outside London, WYAS hopes to transform the perception of its role in the community from traditional guardian of the historical record, to catalyst and broker of local community history, engaging groups to research, create and access the heritage that they have created.

One of five new WYAS projects will be the creation of a 'Sporting Heroes' archive which will involve community outreach work with local sports clubs and supporters in tandem with some of the region's major teams. This will see the archive service engaging with hard to reach communities, liaising with sports teams to contribute oral history interviews, and conduct interviews with key sporting figures.

Councillor Neil Taggart, Chair of West Yorkshire Joint Services Committee, which oversees the work of the Archive Service, said:

"This is an exciting opportunity for the Archive Service. The HLF grant will allow us to widen access to its own collections whilst encouraging and empowering communities to preserve and care for their own history. The 'Sporting Heroes' project will allow us to reach beyond current audiences, as well as preserving a vital part of West Yorkshire's History."

Over the next three and half years WYAS will employ three new archive staff members to deliver the wide-reaching project across West Yorkshire. The HLF grant will enable WYAS to: improve access to existing archives; offer training programmes on archival skills such as copyright and collection care, description of archives and digital preservation; and engage more people in coming forward to explore their heritage, by establishing outreach programmes in all sections of the community. This will result in the creation of new archives such as Sporting Heroes.

Fiona Spiers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the Yorkshire & the Humber region, said:

"The need for this new and exciting initiative is clear. WYAS receives many requests from community groups wishing to research, record and preserve their heritage, and this much needed grant will enable them to learn the skills they need and run high quality archive projects. HLF is delighted to be able to support this exciting project which will engage people with their histories and the heritage on their doorstep."

Notes to Editors:

The West Yorkshire Archive Service exists to preserve the county's heritage of historical documents and to help members of the public make use of them. The Service is funded by the five Metropolitan District Councils in West Yorkshire, and forms part of West Yorkshire Joint Services. The Service has its headquarters in Wakefield, and offices

in Bradford, Calderdale (Halifax), Kirklees (Huddersfield), and Leeds. The Service also gives professional advice and support to the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, also in Leeds. The West Yorkshire Archive Service is committed to reaching the widest possible audience, engaging in community based projects and activities, and works to bring as many people as possible into contact with archives.