What’s Your Story? Heritage Lottery Fund helps local people discover their family history

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The project, ‘What’s your story? Discovering Family History’ will enable local people in Tyne and Wear to uncover, record and share their families’ histories. Using Tyne and Wear’s main archives at the Discovery Museum, one of the largest in the UK, the participants will explore local, regional and national family history stretching across Gateshead, Sunderland, North Tyneside and Newcastle.

Led by a group of 12 local volunteers, the project hopes to give people the necessary skills to research their own family trees and bring together a collection of family histories from local communities. They will be involved in developing and mentoring other volunteers to engage in building and planning a community website. The website will then be run and managed by local people who will eventually own it and continue to feed into it in the future.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, Ivor Crowther, said: “HLF is thrilled to support this kind of project as it demonstrates how people’s personal heritage in the North East has become a popular subject. It’s also great to see volunteers and people of all ages working together and sharing their experiences with others.”

In the spirit of the TV show ‘Who do you think you are?’ and using the extensive collection of resources at the Discovery Museum, the project will help make the archives more accessible for everyone, and give the local people a chance to research and look back at their heritage.

Iain Watson, Director of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums explains: “We are delighted to host this exhibition especially as it will give people the chance to learn more about their ancestry, even if they have never thought about it before. By encouraging local people to uncover records and share their family history, we hope this will give resonance to the 2011 census which is also happening this year."

‘What’s Your Story? Discovering Family History’ will encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to join in and tell their stories, including approximately 2,200 primary school children who will take part in a variety of activities including work-shops and family fun days. These will run throughout the summer term time and into the holidays.

Each active member of the mentoring group will have the chance to learn new skills including technical skills needed to maintain the website, leaving a lasting legacy of the project. Being involved in the project will give confidence to the volunteers as well as providing an exciting, interesting insight to local family history.

Notes to editors

- Using money raised through the National Lottery, the HLF sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 30,000 projects allocating £4.5billion across the UK including £214million in the North East.
- Discovery Museum is open Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm and Sunday 2pm to 5pm. Admission is free. Visit the Discovery Museum website or find us on the Discovery Museum Facebook page.

Further information

If you would like to take part in tracing you family history, please call Kylea Little, Keeper of History on 0191 277 2197.