Waterways and conservation for Solihull Young



Waterways and conservation Solihull project participants

Chelmsley Wood's Waterways and Walks, led by Northern Star Community Arts, will explore the lives and landscapes shaped by the River Cole and equip young participants with vital skills to protect the area's extensive waterways and the wildlife they support for generations to come.

Volunteers from North Solihull Youth Forum have been instrumental in planning the project after another HLF funded project From then 'til now sparked their interest for the area and the stories it holds.

While gathering memories from Chelmsley Wood's original residents, they were surprised to learn how much natural heritage exists on their doorstep.

Amy, 16, is keen to start the new project and find out more. She said: "I loved interviewing some of the residents, especially Sheila who actually built her own house. But what I really loved were the walks by the river – I never knew there was so much water in Chelmsley Wood. I'd love to do more around looking at how we can help save our rivers, especially through Meriden Park."

Waders, maps and cameras will need to be packed as project activities promise to be very hands-on. Walks and wades will follow the path of the river from Chelmsley Wood to Small Heath and new-found cartography skills will come in

useful as groups go off track to see sites of historical importance and find out how the waterways are used. Weekend residential barge trips on the Grand Union Canal aim to give young participants a first-hand experience of how working boat families live.

As well as an appreciation of what their natural heritage can offer them, the young volunteers will build skills to protect and sustain it for future generations. Conservation workshops in bio-diversity, caring for canals and practical ways of caring for local rivers and the wildlife they support are a strong focus of the project.

Young people are at the heart of the project, funded through HLF's Young Roots programme, and they're keen to use their creative skills to document the experience. Film diaries and photography will be showcased at open days and on a specially created website.

Reyahn King, Head of HLF, West Midlands, said: "The natural heritage and local history around the River Cole offers a rich resource for learning and we're delighted to support a project which will not only help young people in the area to access it but to also be actively involved in it. We've already funded a Young Roots project around Chelmsley Wood's waterways and it's really encouraging to see such passion for building on the experience and skills which will help the young people involved to successfully play their parts as the future custodians of our heritage."

Speaking about the project, which will be delivered in partnership with Three Trees Community Centre and Kingfisher Country Park, Helen Roberts and Deborah Fenney from Northern Star Community Arts said: "We are very excited to have received the support of HLF. We are confident the project will support our young people to be actively involved and proud in learning about and sharing the heritage of their local waterways and walks."

Notes to editors

About Northern Star Community Arts

Northern Star Community Arts is a successful community project based in North Solihull. It has been running for the past 10 years, offering a range of arts based activities for all members of the local community, aiming to improve social cohesion, raise aspiration and of course, to just have fun!

Those involved believe that involvement in the arts, whilst of value in itself, also gives people the skills and confidence to address other issues within their lives and their community. This personal development also encourages people to work together within the community on a range of different issues.

For more information visit the Northern Star Community Arts website.

About Three Trees Community Centre

Three Trees is the new name for The Baptist Church Centre in Chelmsley Wood. Three Trees is a community centre which was built at the same time as the estate, way back in the late 1960's. It is locally-run, locally-owned and locally-led. It is are a community centre in every sense with everything from children's clubs to old people's groups and much more in between. For more information visit the Three Trees Community Centre website.

About Kingfisher Country Park

Project Kingfisher was established in 1985 to care for seven miles of the Cole Valley (from Small Heath to Chelmsley Wood) and to improve it for the benefit of both people and wildlife. The important continuous green corridor of land

(approaching 1,000 acres) passes through the otherwise heavily built up areas of East Birmingham and North Solihull. The project now has a membership section called The Friends of Project Kingfisher who show their support for the project's aim of caring for the Cole Valley and improving it for the benefit of both people and wildlife. For more information visit the Friends of Kingfisher Park website.

About From then 'till now

From then 'till now, led by Three Trees Community Centre in partnership with North Solihull Youth Forum, was awarded £40,600 in 2013 through HLF's Young Roots programme. Young people researched, recorded and celebrated the story of Chelmsley Wood, capturing the memories of some of its first residents.

Further information

Rebecca Lamm, HLF Press Office, on tel: 020 7591 6245 or email: Rebecca.Lamm@hlf.org.uk