

## **Case Study – Young Archaeologists Club**

### **1. Overview**

The Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) is the only organisation for young people interested in archaeology in the UK. It operates a network of clubs, six of which are in Scotland (Edinburgh, Dumfermline, Stirling, Kilmartin, Aberdeen and Inverness). The Club is open to 8 – 16 year olds. This case study focuses on the work of the Edinburgh YAC. The volunteer Branch Leader for Edinburgh, Katy Firth, was interviewed and the website was reviewed: <https://edinburghyac.wordpress.com/>

### **2. Edinburgh YAC**

Children become 'Members' of the Club of which there are currently 26 – close to the maximum capacity set by the Club. The objectives in order of importance are:

- Having fun – the primary goal is to ensure the children enjoy themselves and want to continue their membership;
- Learning – the secondary role is to raise children's awareness of archaeology, which is not covered in the curriculum. It is therefore fulfilling a gap in educational provision.

The Club meets once a month on a Saturday morning for two hours. It currently has use of the Historic Environment Scotland Education Centre at Holyrood Park. It also undertakes site visits to archaeological digs and other historic environmental sites. Examples of the sort of work which the children engage with include: bronze age burial re-enactment, making models of prehistoric sites, cave painting using real prehistoric paints, archaeological survey methods and much more.

### **3. Description of volunteering**

A new volunteering team was recruited for the Edinburgh Club in 2011, including the current Branch Leader. This case study describes the experience of the Club from this date.

There is a team of six volunteers; one Branch Leader and five Branch Assistants. They operate a Leader /child ratio of 1:8. Hence, they need a minimum of 3 Leaders for each session. The Club's volunteers have a heritage and /or educational background and bring specific skills and knowledge relevant to the Leader role. Their current employers include Historic Environment Scotland (x 3 volunteers), Creative Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council and Fife Cultural Trust.

The role of the volunteers includes:

- Planning sessions – the volunteers work as a team in planning the topics and content of the sessions
- Developing content – one of the Leaders will be responsible for working up the detail of the session
- Session delivery – Leaders will jointly deliver the session
- Administration – the Branch Leader is responsible for management of membership, liaising with parents/children, PVG ID checking process, financial management, monitoring and reporting, etc.

#### 4. Benefits and impact of volunteering

**Impact on children** – the children have great fun and there is a strong retention of Members, many of whom stay with the Club all the way through from age 8 to 16. Their enjoyment is reinforced by the wide-ranging benefits they derive:

- Education benefits – some of the children develop a real passion for archaeology, and it is quite likely that some of them will ultimately pursue careers in the heritage sector (see discussion of the ‘Young Volunteers’ below). They could become the heritage professionals of the future;
- Outdoor experience – a number of children come from areas of significant deprivation. As a consequence their exposure to the great outdoors can be very limited. The experience of one child sums up the type of impact that can be generated:  
*“I overheard the children discussing their day trip to East Lothian. One little boy woke up at 3 AM he was so excited – and this was only a short day trip from his Edinburgh home.”* Branch Leader
- ‘Young Volunteers’ – a new volunteering role has been created for the older children. This enables them to take on volunteering responsibilities for the younger children and learn important life-skills. This also helps in the sustainability of the Club because it provides engagement for the older children – which can be quite challenging when trying to cater for such a wide age range (8 – 16).



Photo © Katy Firth

**Washing archaeological finds at  
Tantallon Castle – 2014**



Photo © Katy Firth

**Artefact from archaeological dig in  
Northumberland – 2015**

**Impact on Volunteers** - a number of the volunteers have office based jobs and some have little contact with children. By volunteering with the Club they can 'get out of the office' and learn to engage with children.

*"One of our volunteers works in collections and did not have experience of working with children. The Branch Assistant role was initially challenging, pushing her out of her comfort zone, but she now shows great confidence in developing and delivering sessions and thoroughly enjoys her engagement with the children."* Branch Leader

There is also a professional learning benefit, in that they often have to research the session topic and combined with site visits they build up their knowledge and skills of archaeology in Scotland. Perhaps most importantly, the volunteers have a real passion for heritage and they get a real buzz from sharing their enthusiasm with young people.

*"The volunteering role is highly rewarding and this confers important wellbeing benefits for our team."* Branch Leader

## **5. Challenges of volunteering**

Edinburgh YAC benefits from its location, both in terms of the demand from children – membership is currently capped and there is a waiting list – and in terms of the supply of potential volunteers. This reflects the Edinburgh catchment. It also has the benefit of a World Heritage site and a wealth of historic environment sites in the immediate hinterland. The main challenge facing Edinburgh YAC is one of funding. There is a very low membership fee of £5/child, which is mainly allocated to transport costs for children on site visits. The £130 p.a. which this generates is insufficient to cover costs.

YAC UK used to receive funding from the Council for British Archaeology, which in recent years has come under a great deal of financial strain. As a consequence, Edinburgh YAC is facing a new requirement to make a contribution towards YAC UK's running costs. (formerly YAC UK contributed £50 p.a. to the club). To make up for the deficit last year the Branch Leader ran a very successful 'Just Giving' campaign in 2015 to guess the birth weight of her baby. This raised £300.

## **6. Support Needs & Future Prospects**

The key to the long term sustainability of the YAC Edinburgh is effective partnership support. Partners are critical in providing a range of support, for example accommodation (HES provides access to the Education Centre), expertise (Digit2015 provided an education expert to show them how to use 'Minecraft'), and specialist survey equipment (from the former RCAHMS).

Providing there is continued partnership support the future for Edinburgh YAC looks bright. They are providing an important contribution to the education and development of young people in Edinburgh, on a 100% volunteer led and delivered basis, at exceptionally low cost. Their service not only benefits children but also confers important benefits to the volunteers and the wider historic environment of Scotland.

*"Volunteers do an amazing job bringing archaeology to life in an accessible and fun way for young people."* Communications Officer, YAC

For further information on this case study please contact:

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