

Notes on Wem Youth Club activity enabled by donors in 2018

The Club continued to grow in activity and numbers over the Spring and Summer Terms. This is an update for Autumn 2018 explaining how grants and donations have been spent.

Our major outlay during this period has, as usual, been the employment of professional Youth Workers Becca and Jackie, to run the two evening sessions. They continue to be employed through Shropshire Youth Association (SYA) who cover payroll, NI etc and provide much needed YW and volunteer training as well as safeguarding and health and safety guidance. We are particularly fortunate that Becca Lewis, who lives in Wem and whose family members have been longterm volunteers, also contributes her own time and effort outside her paid sessions, for which we are very grateful. Donations and grants secured for 2018 contributed to our staffing costs as well as to the employment of additional 'experts' for one-off or longer project activities, travel and materials, as well as ongoing costs of running the Youth Club building which is leased from SCC.

Our first session in 2018 saw the premiere of the film members made (with support from two *Awards for All* funded digital artists) about 'Living in Wem'. Our young people were excited and impressed with the results of their own work. We showed the film again in February and invited parents and the local community to attend, the reviews being excellent. Key points from the film were lack of facilities for young people and lack of school holiday provision.

Using our donated funds, we ran a trip to Newport for Chinese New Year celebrations, which was open to both our Junior and Senior Groups with three from each group attending, with a Youth Worker and adult volunteers. We also opened the Youth Club for a session over February half term, with a small but enthusiastic group dressing up in SYA Sumo suits for wrestling: however, we felt that the small numbers did not justify the cost of two Youth Workers (who had to be booked in case of larger numbers, adult volunteers not being forthcoming).

We had a new female volunteer join our team at the start of the year and in a very short time, she has gained the trust and respect of our members, taking time to talk and get to know our young people. Unfortunately, due to their work commitments we have lost two of our three male volunteers; but have seen the confidence in our remaining male volunteer soar over recent months as he has become a valued and versatile support.

We closed the Club for the last two weeks before Easter, so that our team could attend SYA training on 'Managing Challenging Behaviour'. The training was attended by both our Youth Workers as well as two volunteers, our Co-chair and a local artist (who has been working with our Junior group (part-funded by *Arts Award*) and who has become our only Parent Volunteer). Our Youth Club was in the majority in this Shropshire-wide training, for which SYA congratulated us.

At Easter we were also able (through a Committee Member) to make links with Shrewsbury Food Hub who now supply fresh supermarket left-overs (but within date) - fruit, vegetables and sometimes baked goods every week (managed by The Fruitful Deli). It has been a delight to see groups of footballers tucking into fresh pears and pineapple with such relish and we have introduced many Club members to new eating this way. We bought a smoothie maker from our donated funds and each week members make smoothies and/or cook. We intend to seek funding for a further healthy eating and budgeting project, which will also involve parents, to start early in 2019.

This food, (plus the help of The FruitfulDeli) enabled us to provide excellent and individualised packed lunches for our Club guided walk with Shropshire Wildlife Trust on

Whixall Moss, including gluten free, vegetarian and dairy free, again funded by our donors. Despite it being so close to Wem, all but two participants had never been on the Moss. We plan to make this at least an annual trip, possibly more often.

Ten members had a fantastic (free) day out with the Masons' Prees Fishing Project, coming back with a 'catch' and enjoying the hospitality and individual attention offered. This was a very popular trip and we are looking forward to repeating it (with more children) next Spring.

We were delighted to have an international carnival Artist (Jon Bielstein, now living in Wem) part-funded by SCC Arts Officer and local donations, to work with our children and volunteers over the Summer Term and Summer school holidays. Our walking parade entry to Wem Carnival, as ten giant insects and butterflies, won First Prizes in two categories. We hope to make our Carnival participation a regular event as in the distant past. Six insect-members and volunteers also took part (with great pride) in the Whitchurch Blackberry Fair parade in October.

Our Juniors (again supported by a local artist and parent volunteer) learnt to screen print and produced nearly 100 printed cotton shopping bags. These were given to supporters or sold at the Co-Op during our free 'give-back-to-our-community' bag-packing event on a Saturday morning and at a Wem Craft Market in Wem Senior Club. Money raised went into our 'ongoing costs' pot. During the year most Juniors and some Seniors also learnt to use an electric sewing machine, a glue gun, the smoothie-maker and other cooking processes.

From our '*Sports for all*' award, we were able to offer our Senior Group a six week boxing course run by a fully qualified boxing coach (offered through *Energize*). For the first few weeks, the young people were enthusiastic and engaged with the coach, but unfortunately numbers fell (perhaps due to the heat-wave?) and it was decided to postpone the last two sessions to this current Autumn term and offer it to the Juniors instead. During this project we made contact with our local Community Police officer who expressed great interest in taking a boxing project further.

Our Summer Holiday activities (part of a Sports England project), involving Parkour (free running, balance, flexibility) in Wem Rec was not so successful, with low take up despite prior commitment and difficulty of securing (partners') staffing. This is apparently a national phenomenon during the long school holidays, perhaps because it relies on parent's facilitating children's schedules. Given the long running success of a local Church summer holiday youth club (albeit mainly younger children, and an established schedule), we are exploring the possibility of simply extending both Club nights into the first two/three weeks of the holiday, building on the habit of attending.

We continue to support young people with complex needs: in our Junior Club we had a new young man with ASD, ADHD. He was very withdrawn when he first began attending, only playing on the PlayStation (alone the majority of the time). The PlayStation has recently become quite popular and he is coping well with sharing turns and even engaging in other activities whilst it is being used by others. His family has commented on how much he enjoys coming and how it is helping him socially.

Meanwhile, for our Seniors the Club provides a refuge from the rather tense environment of Wem Rec, school, and, for some, home. We know this from discussions with the young people, from the number of school exclusions reported, discussions with the local Community Police Officer and our own observations.

In the Summer Term numbers of Seniors fell steadily (a national Youth Club phenomenon for older children) as preparations for a motor scooter 'maintain and ride' course took longer than expected: it is aimed at three 13-14 year old members, two of whom have severe anger management issues (and consequent continual suspensions from school and disruptions at Club) and one of whom has survived abuse. To support this we purchased a off-road motor scooter with local grants donated and recruited a local volunteer with professional experience of working with disturbed teens on similar projects. Other safety equipment was provided through our funding donations and a donation of kit from the Royal Enfield workshop on Wem Business Park, and the project has now started.

This term (Autumn 2018) we have a varied and vibrant programme for both Juniors and Seniors. Six Juniors will complete their *Arts Award Certificates* (important recognition for children who might be short of encouragement), through work on the Carnival and printmaking. Circus skills, a spooky litter pick and Wem Christmas lights lantern parade are on the agenda. Currently Club members are making poppies and for the first time (in many years) Club members will lay a wreath on November 11th. We believe that participation in local community events like this, the Carnival and Christmas lights, is an important anchor for young people.

Numbers attending Seniors have crept up again as the scooter project engages some difficult members (and the weather on the Rec gets colder!). We have been supported at Seniors by two long term, reliable volunteers (female and male) who live in Shrewsbury and Whitchurch respectively. Both groups cook every week, using the Food Hub and other contributions, as some members do arrive hungry.

We are actively recruiting new Committee members and would welcome local funders to take a role in Club planning. We really need some more local adult volunteers, especially now that the Juniors evening is attracting up to 40 young people. All our regular volunteers have a free DBS check through SYA. We have started a waiting list for the Juniors, prior to moving a contingent up to Seniors in the next Summer Term. The new group includes children from Polish and Syrian families. We are delighted to have a new volunteer, a professional cleaner, Jan, who is cleaning the Club every week free of charge, which is wonderful.

We were proud that three of our Young Leaders were selected for separate Community Awards (by the Shropshire Star and West Mercia Police) for their long term volunteering at the Club, but said a sad farewell to two of them going off to University. However, the Junior group is ably supported by a Thomas Adams Duke of Edinburgh Award student who is logging valuable hours' experience and our own 'Young Leader' Sophie, who has come up 'through the ranks' and has this year undergone a range of SYA free training, including First Aid. Both are aged 17. The following is a statement from one Young Leader:

'Since I began Wem Youth Club, I have gained so many new skills and techniques and also personal traits: confidence, team leadership and self-belief.

Before I joined as a member, I had low self-esteem and low self-confidence. After doing my level 1 Young Leader training I feel like I have gained experience in confidentiality and social media awareness.

As I continue with my adventure, I feel like all these new skills would be beneficial for my future: First Aid training and being awarded a Shropshire Good Citizen Award, by the West Mercia Police. The other young leaders and support workers have really given me the confidence to be a good leader and to have independence.

I love the different activities that are held, ranging from: screen printing to games.

I also enjoy marketing the youth club, with creating advertising posters and also being part of the carnival. The Carnival peacock costume was fun to make.

Playing football with the junior members is a great experience, because I love all the respect that is portrayed with them. Teaching the young members life skills is an inspiring factor and I feel fulfilled once I have done a great deed.'

We have been very lucky with local donations this year, including small (and not so small) grants, a Bingo Night (organised by the Treacle Mine) and Quiz Night at the Castle Pub. Without these and the project grants that we have applied for and the continued support of Wem Town Council and SCC (who after extensive lobbying from local supporters and our Chair Mrs Dee, rescinded its proposal to cease to fund rural youth clubs) we could not support our town's children in this constructive way. The great benefit to us of local small grants is that, unlike the project grants, we can use them to support our ongoing activities and flexibly respond to need as it arises - and we are extremely grateful. The benefit of our larger competitive project grants is that they enable us to develop new ways of engaging our most troubled young people.