

<b><u>AGGREGATES LEVY SUSTAINABILITY FUND</u></b>	
<b><u>PROJECT REPORT:</u></b>	<b><u>WILLOW LANTERNS PAGEANT: TAL8027</u></b>
<b><u>DATE:</u></b>	<b><u>MARCH 2009 - FINAL REPORT</u></b>

## **MAIN AIM OF PROJECT**

The main aim of this project was to CELEBRATE the positive effects of the aggregates extraction industry in the Cotswold Water Park at night by creating illuminated willow lanterns and organising a community pageant with young people of the local villages. One deliberate intention was to encourage appreciation of the local wetlands wildlife by creating lantern images reflecting different local species.

Other aims included addressing

- The health and wellbeing of local communities through providing sensory stimuli through creative activities,
- The geographic scale of the Water Park and disparateness of its communities,
- The diversity of the Water Park's communities,
- The versatility of the willow tree and its importance to the ecology.

A key aim was to address the needs of young people, particularly those who are more disadvantaged, and to work with them to address rural issues such as isolation.

It is important to note that this Project is a 'one-off' pilot project. Nothing like this has ever been done in the Water Park before. It will be evaluated by the Cotswold Water Park Society to assess whether a future larger Willow Lantern festival, or cultural event on, for example, a theme like Wetlands, might be a viable project for future years including 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad.

## **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT METHODOLOGY**

The Cotswold Water Park Society worked closely with two partner organisations, Brewery Arts and Gloucestershire Youth Service (and Young Gloucestershire), to develop the creative workshops that would produce the willow lanterns. Twelve distinct workshop groups were identified including four schools (one for children with special needs), the local Army base 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment, a group of 'Home

Educators', a local residents / family group, and five Youth Groups. The groups were chosen because they are located in different communities across the whole geographic spread of the Water Park.

Five creative workshop 'leaders' (artists) were selected to work with the groups.

A special training day was organised to educate supporters –including school staff and youth workers - in willow lantern making techniques and to inform them about the ecology, archaeology, history and industries including quarrying in the Water Park. Dr. Simon Pickering gave an inspiring talk on the Water Park. A visit to Colne Quarry was arranged as part of the training day.

The group workshops started in January. Between January 12<sup>th</sup> and February 19<sup>th</sup>, 56 workshops were planned across the Water Park with c70 participants, The pageant date was agreed as February 20<sup>th</sup> – chosen as the astrological calendar moved from winter to spring.

## **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

A Working Group was set up including John Charles Kimberley Community Artist, Jill Bewley CWPS Education & Events Officer, Lesley Greene Art Consultant, Gwen Rogerson Brewery Arts Education Officer (and also artist in her own right) , and Mary Mychalecky (Central Cotswold Young People's Directorate Officer). John Charles Kimberley managed the project on a day-to-day basis, including identification and purchase of appropriate materials, and provided detailed 'on the ground' project liaison.

Feedback has been obtained from the workshop participants, staff, youth workers and artists. This is summarised in the following evaluation section.

## **THE WORKSHOPS**

The workshops were integral to this project. The workshop process was exceptionally important because they were designed over time to achieve a quality result, and allow for creativity and interaction between participants – the latter being a key component of the 'Health and Wellbeing' agenda.

The most complex part of the project organisation was putting together the timetable of workshops and allocating the right specialists to each workshop group. This was done with the minimum of fuss and worked extremely well, with few problems. Two groups had issues with appropriate venues in which to work, but these were sorted.

Each workshop group consisted of between 6- 12 young people supported by at least one staff member / professional Youth Worker as well as the creative artist. The quality of the creative process and the positive relationships between individuals in each group depended on this number of people being involved. One Youth Group had an initial problem with an expectedly very large group of older young people (upwards of 20) appearing to wish to participate on the first workshop evening, but in fact causing trouble. The professional Youth Support Leader addressed this problem immediately. Overall the feedback has been extremely positive in terms of the workshops arrangements and working.

## **FULFILLING OUR AIMS**

Feedback from the Youth Groups was exceptionally positive and appears to fulfil our main aim of addressing **Health and Wellbeing** through creativity. One key criterion identified to fulfil the Health & Wellbeing aim was *bringing young people together* in a positive creative environment. The following responses suggest that this was fulfilled:

Josh Cooper Fairford: 'I have never done anything like this before; didn't know what it was about – really like it' (**why?**) 'because its hands on and you get something done'

Shannon Hounslow Down Ampney: 'Its cool'(**why?**)'because we're all working together'

Calum McDonald Lechlade: 'It's the first time I'd done anything like this and I spent a lot of time looking at pictures of birds then chose this (a heron in flight); the best thing was working on it together and getting it done'

Jay Goddard Lechlade: '(I've') never done anything like this; it's a carp because I go carp fishing with my Dad'

One artist Helen Lomberg was particularly impressed by her youth group: "...they decided they wanted to do a joint project and were very democratic and listened to each others' ideas before taking a vote on the project they would do...they worked together really well..."

Within the Youth Group sector three groups (Letchlade, Fairford and Down Ampney) joined together during the last workshop day to complete their lanterns and all remarked on the sense of 'working together' that this produced. A Youth Worker commented on the participatory activity: '...Not surprising because at school all attainment is individual and this is a rare chance for the kids to work on a project together'. Another Youth Worker said: 'I have to admit when you first came and did the presentation I didn't think it would work, and said so, but you've proved me wrong; I could get into this big time and its been great the young people working together'.

The procession itself - the pageant – was a huge success. It brought all the groups and the general public together; everyone walked carrying their lanterns down Lakeside and we feel strongly that the sheer enjoyment of the occasions and the sense of participating in a powerful communal activity had enormous impact. Feedback has been universally positive not just from the groups but from members of the public who just ‘dropped by’ – “We came along to see what it was about and never expected anything like this – its fantastic” said one couple.

It was evident that the *quality of the product* was also very important to the young people as an integral part of the process. The role of the professional artists in supporting an awareness of the quality required was integral to this success. Debbie Jones, Youth Worker commented on one group: ‘this group have looked and looked at their work over and over again, and done the wings of the buzzard three times to get it just right’. All the artists were especially concerned to ensure a high quality finish and fully participated in an ongoing contribution to several changes in materials (such as type of tape, lights etc) throughout the process to guarantee a spectacular result on pageant night. Variety of scale and colour was important to the final impact of the pageant and the artists worked throughout the process to encourage – where they could – the young people to develop ambitious ideas. This resulted in images of painted hares and deer, wonderful flying herons, and a huge 12’ high “King of the Water Park” with moving arms and legs, in addition to the many small lanterns. The challenge to youngsters in a physical ‘hands on’ creative process was received enthusiastically, contributing to a sense of well being (‘we can do it’). Youngsters emerged positively throughout the process in many different ways. Helen Lomberg again: “ One of the younger boys emerged as natural leader and with his gift for engineering invented how the figure could move and be lit...he earned a lot of respect from the group for this.”

The artists’ role was also to encourage the young people to *consider the Water Park and respond to its local distinctiveness*, ecology, history, and archaeology in the lantern forms. The young people researched their local species. The lanterns produced included birds familiar to locals such as herons, fish including carp and catfish, a glowworm, dragonflies, deer, hare, and a beautiful collection of fritillaries from a whole class at St.Sampsons School Cricklade. There were other contributions that added up to the overall spirit and contemporaneity of the occasion – such as a fairy from a young girl who had seen a fairy in the Water Park, a drink can, and the ‘King of the Water Park’.

## **ISSUES**

This was a pilot project and the intention is to learn from the experience. There some issues that arose during the course of the project.

The sense of working together within and across the schools groups was less pronounced. Two artists did say they were disappointed that encouraging the children to work together did not seem to work; in one school the children were dissuaded by their staff from working on a project together and the artist commented that this was 'sad'.

Time was a key issue. In hindsight insufficient time was allowed for the workshops overall. This was particularly true of the schools. All the schools workshops were highly constrained by the time allowed for the project within highly targeted curricula. One artist put in additional time to ensure that her class completed their project. Another artist felt frustrated that the time for setting up and clearing up was built into the workshop allocation. She felt that this limited the children's creativity. Finally and unexpectedly, the WEATHER had a significant impact on the workshops. Heavy snow in February meant that the Youth Groups were closed for over a week and even when they were opened at least two artists from other areas of the Cotswolds were themselves cut off. Nevertheless the work was completed.

The materials were well chosen but there were minor frustrations with the type of tape and light sticks. These were remedied.

Storage of the some of the larger lanterns raised questions. The CWPS is providing short-term post pageant storage but if a more ambitious project is agreed in future then identification of better storage resource needs to be built into the budget.

The budget was tricky to manage as there were no precedents and many small items to account for.

## **PRESS AND POST PAGEANT**

There was excellent local press coverage including a 3-minute slot on BBC 1 Points West on the evening of the pageant.

Brewery Arts is mounting an exhibition of the some of the best of the lanterns.

Feedback from local people has been overwhelmingly positive praising the idea, organisers and enjoyment of the occasion.