

Youth Vision Evaluation Report

April 2011

Introduction

This report has been written to evaluate Youth Vision's Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) project which took place between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011.

The original application to the HLF was flexible in the outcomes that it expected from the funding as Youth Vision was a new organisation with developing aims and objectives. The three main aims of the grant were

- To renovate and develop a small steading as well as the surrounding land
- To increase the knowledge and sense of belonging of the young people and their place in the local community; of their local history, heritage and the culture of the farming site and land use;
- Young people will share and learn from the memories of local people through traditional storytelling.

A detailed project plan was also prepared as part of the application form and the achievement of tasks contained in it have been evaluated (see **Annexe 1**) and should be read alongside this report.

This report is a summary of the work done by Youth Vision since its formation in August 2009, rather than a measure of success against funding objectives. It provides clear evidence of what has been achieved so far, the use to which the funding has been put, and makes recommendations for the future development of Youth Vision. The absence of clear outcomes is addressed in the recommendations (section 7).

The information for the report was gathered through interviews with key stakeholders, including participants, teachers, parents, volunteers, and facilitators; meetings with the Director and Administrator, and a workshop day attended by Board Members, volunteers and facilitators.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who gave time to this evaluation, particularly Sara Beauregard and Fiona Murdoch. I am grateful to those who took part in the interviews for sharing their experiences of working with Youth Vision.

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1.0 Youth Vision - the Background

In many Native American groups, the vision quest is a turning point in life taken before puberty to find oneself and the intended spiritual and life direction. When an older child is ready, he or she will go on a personal, spiritual quest alone in the wilderness which usually lasts for a number of days while the child is attuned to the spirit world. Usually, a Guardian animal will come in a vision or dream, and the child's life direction will appear at some point. The child returns to the tribe, and once the child has grown, will pursue that direction in life.

Wikipedia

Youth Vision was formed in August 2009 by Director, Sarah Beauregard to work with hard-to-reach young people aged between 14 and 18 years of age - young people who were having problems focussing at school and remaining engaged with those around them and with wider society; young people who were struggling with the transition to adulthood.

In 2010/2011 Youth Vision now works with around 40 young people through a mixed programme of group and one-to-one teaching.

Most are referred to Youth Vision by teachers and support staff at their schools. The majority are struggling with formal education and in some cases have dropped out altogether. They often have social and emotional challenges which lead to behavioural problems; they often lack stability in their home lives, and many are from single parent homes where there is no positive male role model. Their difficulties with formal education often lead to poor self-esteem and limited ambition, and many are vulnerable to negative peer influences.

Youth Vision provides these young people with the opportunity for change. It develops their emotional strength and confidence and provides them with an opportunity to identify and work out their personal problems, be they problems of isolation, inadequacy of expression, or lack of social or family support. Youth Vision fosters independence, and teaches taking responsibility for emotions and actions rather than just 'kicking off'.

Sara Beauregard, Director of Youth Vision, describes how the organisation developed from her original dream:

"I worked in America with young people from various backgrounds who had been in trouble, been through the juvenile court system and needed help to move on. We worked with these youths in a program which used ideas from Native American and American history such as wagon trains and buffalo soldiers. The groups became very physically involved but more importantly they were given time to reflect upon themselves and their lives. Using the 'old ways' of being provided with

a listening ear and given time to be heard enabled these young people to develop into individuals with more insight into their future.

Youth Vision began to take shape when I met the co-founders of the Foundation for Planetary Healing, Mark Halliday and Claudia Goncalves. They embraced my vision and shared my concern for young people and over the next few years I became deeply involved in the wonderful community work they have been doing whilst they helped to get Youth Vision off the ground”.

The Base

Youth Vision has a fifteen year lease with a “peppercorn rent” on Threipmuir Farm Steading, a ruined cottage within the Pentlands Regional Park on the outskirts of Balerno, Edinburgh. This has become its base, and with the help of The Heritage Lottery Fund, and in partnerships with other organisations and local volunteers interested in socio-archaeology, Youth Vision runs programmes which provide young people with practical, therapeutic skills, whilst at the same time carrying out structural repairs to the Steading and the garden areas. This gives them a keen awareness and responsibility for the natural environment.

It is at the Threipmuir Farm Steading that the young people, through practical wilderness exercises, learn about archaeology and history, and through drama, art and discussion circles, they can experience nature, often for the first time, and flourish as they work through the programme.

2.0 The organisation

Youth Vision is a company limited by guarantee (company registration no. 363481) and a registered charity no. SC040741. There is a committed management committee with a range of appropriate skills who meet regularly to review the strategic vision of the organisation.

There are two paid staff member, the Director / co-ordinator Sara Beauregard, and a part time administrator, Fiona Murdoch. A range of facilitators run the project on a session basis and are paid accordingly. Sara Beauregard also acts as a facilitator as required.

The steading renovations are directed by Robin Murdoch, who is not directly employed by Youth Vision, but works closely with Sara Beauregard to ensure that the youth work integrates closely and appropriately with the renovations.

The organisation has a range of regular, dedicated volunteers with professional skills in youth work, art therapy and archaeology. The volunteers support the facilitators in working with the schools groups, and in this way the organisation manages to maintain a high staff/pupil ratio of 1:2.5.

Because of the nature of the space and the activities undertaken health and safety is a high priority. There is a Code of Conduct for participants and facilitators carry out full risk assessments for all activities. If any participant is unable to abide by the Code of Conduct and displays behaviour which is detrimental to the safety and well-being of the group, facilitators work with them on a one-to-one basis or offer counselling within school.

All staff and volunteers are cleared by Disclosure Scotland and go through a full induction programme. Skills such as dry-stane dyking are taught initially to facilitators and volunteers who then teach the young people as this minimises contact with external instructors. At any time there is a minimum of two facilitators and two volunteers working with each group and the number of young people in each group is restructured to ensure that all activities are adequately supervised.

All facilitators and volunteers are experienced youth workers and there is regular training provided in response to any issues which arise. There is always a qualified first-aider on site and all volunteers and staff to undergo general first aid training followed by first aid for wilderness environments.

All information held on participants and staff is stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

3.0 Programmes, methods and approaches

Youth Vision activities are all aimed at encouraging communication and accepting personal responsibility for actions. Earth skills and other practical wilderness exercises are designed to foster independence and awareness of the environment. These include shelter building, tree planting, tracking, survival skills, which lead on to talking about psychological survival skills e.g. inner shelter building, fire-making and campfire cooking.

Arts and crafts are used to externalise often difficult personal discussions e.g. digging up local clay and forming models that the young people then use to talk about themselves and their choices. Person-centred counselling techniques are used during all activities and especially discussion circles, where young people learn to listen and are listened to.

Cooking and fire making are popular activities and it's often the first time that the young people have prepared and cooked fresh vegetables, precipitating discussion about the effects of a high sugar and fat diet.

The young people enjoy being outdoors, working hard, learning new things, problem-solving, meeting new people and completing tasks. They discover that teamwork gets results and that their actions can positively and negatively affect the group as a whole.

Anger management is a big part of the programmes, using reflective counselling techniques. The participants learn to express opinions through discussion circles and the use of props such as our talking stick, which allows them to develop the ability to listen to others in the group and acknowledge

the feelings of others. They realise that problems can be addressed in non confrontational ways. They enjoy the opportunity to influence the day's activities, and feel a sense of achievement, particularly when learning to use tools to solve a problem.

When the groups bond – which usually happens – they create a positive peer network, and develop an appreciation of their collective history. They leave the project with greater confidence and raised self-esteem. Past participants have gone on to positive destinations, into training and jobs. Four participants from 2009 have gone on to college.

The annual Youth Vision programme currently has four main strands – four ten-week programmes for schools, a Saturday group, follow-up work in schools, and the summer camp. This programme is mainly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and matching funding from charitable foundations (see section 6).

School groups

Over the past year Youth Vision has worked with four Edinburgh schools which are situated within the areas of highest deprivation in Edinburgh, with some of the highest percentages of free school meals uptake in Scotland. Pupils lack access to the countryside and generally have poor diets. The Youth Vision Director liaises with school support staff and gives presentations to the young people likely to get the most benefit from the programme. Young people are then interviewed to assess suitability for the project.

During each 10 week programme the days are planned with the input of the participants, and the whole approach is person-centred around their needs. The young people are listened to carefully and respectfully. After the completion of each ten week programme, they are interviewed as part of the appraisal process and this information is shared at staff and volunteer review days (held twice a year); this information is then used to review the and adjust the programme as necessary. All present and past young people are invited to Open days and the organisation's AGM.

Follow up work

After the 10 week school programme, the Youth Vision Director and teaching staff review the progress of all participants to decide if any follow up work is needed with the young person to provide further support. Youth Vision can offer counselling and art therapy with groups and individual young people for a 10 week period in school, after the outdoor experience. This is presently offered between January and April and has been a very valuable part of the organisation's work, supporting the participants and following up any interests that they displayed or shared during the group work.

Saturday Group

The Saturday Groups are open anyone aged 14–18 years of age and run throughout the year in six-weekly programmes. The sessions are much less 'controlled' and led more by group participation and discussion. They are advertised locally in the Balerno area and through word of mouth, with

information flyers available at the Ranger Service Visitors Centre and distributed to libraries and local schools

Some of the Saturday Group have completed the schools programme and now feel ready to take part in a mixed group where more independence is expected of the participants e.g. they are expected to make their own way to Balerno. The Saturday Group also allows Youth Vision staff to develop a relationship with the young people's families, and they often participate in open days and sponsored walks.

The youngsters become more involved in the running of the group, preparation of food and planning of the day. They learn bush craft and survival skills where they are able to work with tools and develop their own interests with a deeper connection. They begin to relate and look within themselves, relying less on the adults around them; they practice meditation and spending time in their own solo spots, developing increased inner awareness.

The Summer Camp

Youth Vision has organised two summer camps for Saturday Group young people who feel ready for a deeper connection with their inner self. The camp lasts for three days, with one overnight solo experience in their chosen spot. The camps are well supervised and staff support the young people at all times. They can either share a large Yurt with others or go out on their own. This is their transition time between child and adult - time to grow, develop, reflect and discuss with trained staff throughout the experience.

In 2010 some of the young people attended a summer camp organised by Blue Skies Earth Skills where they spent four days camping in woods outside Glasgow. This experience ended with their first overnight 'solo' experience which mimics the traditional rite of passage used by Native Americans to help youngsters with the transition to adulthood.

Peer Mentoring

A plan is in development to train past Youth Vision participants who have turned themselves around to act as ambassadors or mentors, talking to schools and youth groups and connecting in a way that professional workers just cannot do.

4.0 Impact and learning outcomes

Learning is accredited through the John Muir Award programme – all participants work towards gaining the John Muir award which encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment.

Archaeology and Social History - by teaching practical traditional building and restoration skills, Youth Vision gives the young people a positive focus for their physical energy. By gaining skills in dry stone dyking, fencing, truss roof building, lime mortaring, that may inspire them to widen their training and career options. Social history allows discussion about attachment to place and a sense of belonging.

Youth Vision also supports the learning outcomes identified in **Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)** which aims of providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18. CfE requires that everyone working within a learning community, whatever their contact with children and young people, shares responsibility for creating a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust where attention is given to all pupils' **wellbeing**. It specified that opportunities and support is tailored to the needs of the individual learner so that every child and young person can develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work and to be effective contributors, successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens.

The kind of changes that support staff, parents and facilitators have noticed in their young people include:

- They are more focussed;
- They have reconnected with the outdoors;
- They have changed from being hostile and uncommunicative to discussing choices in life and considering wider options.
- Their attitude to food has radically changed, with vegetables appearing in the diet sometimes for the first time.

One young man, facing the prospect of being an early school leaver with no qualifications, developed an interest in cooking and food from preparing lunches at Youth Vision. He now attends college on the first steps to becoming a chef.

One young woman has gone to college with the hope of being a filmmaker. This is a direct result of being handed a video camera in order to record some of our activities and deciding to make a documentary about Youth Vision!

The ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the programme is rigorous and detailed:

- Questionnaires are completed at the beginning and end of the programme for school support staff, the young people and their parents/carers. These include information on observed changes when these have occurred. Information from school support staff is important to identify when a young person have taken a new, positive path.
- End of programme interviews are held with the young people as part of the appraisal process, and this information is used at twice yearly staff and volunteer review days.
- The facilitators write daily reports about the behaviour and attitude of participants as they advance through the programme to give a detailed picture of progress. This is done using Participatory Appraisal

and charting journeys using visual timelines and spider diagrams at their penultimate sessions. Case studies are also used to monitor positive changes.

5.0 Partnerships and Relationships

Youth Vision currently has two key partners – the Heritage Lottery Fund who, as well as funding the programmes, provides ongoing support and advice; and the referral schools.

Youth Vision is strengthening its partnerships with referral schools and agencies who starting to recognised the positive impact Youth Vision has in relation to school non-attenders and young people struggling with life and failing in education. These partners recognise the value and success of the Youth Vision methods, and are referring increasing numbers of young people.

Youth Vision works closely with Scotland's Rural Past, a project sponsored by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), who engage local communities to research historic settlements and landscapes. Their Interpretation Officer visits each group and talks to the young people about 'how people lived' when Threipmuir was a working farm. A local archaeologist and former engineer is overseeing the programme of refurbishment and reinstatement of the cottage at Threipmuir, which uses a team of local volunteers. It is intended that some archaeology will take place at the cottage, which was abandoned over 150 years ago. This work will be carried out under the supervision of Harlaw Heritage and will include volunteers from the Edinburgh Archaeological Field Society. The youngsters attending courses at Threipmuir will have the chance to be involved hands-on in the archaeology. A local group of archaeo-social history enthusiasts from Harlaw Heritage works closely with Youth Vision and supplies many of the volunteer workers.

The Pentlands Ranger Service support the organisation by displaying information panels and advertising fliers in the Visitors Centre at Harlaw reservoir, and Friends of the Pentlands have provided hazel to help shield the willow toilet from view.

6.0 Funding and finance

Youth Vision's income is entirely from grant aid. In year 2010 – 2011 this was as follows:

Heritage Lottery Fund	£37,500
Russell Trust	£2,000
Robertson Trust	£10,000
Community Foundation	£1,700
Garfield Weston	£5,000
Neighbourhood Partnership	£3,000
Donations	£800

The total cost of the project for 2010/11 was therefore £60,000

Expenditure is summarised as follows.

Administration	£9,160
Transport	£3,800
Overheads	£28,000
Equipment	£800
Training	£1,800
Repair and Conservation	£7,000
Professional fees	£2,400
Learning materials	£2,000
Mentoring	£960
Volunteer Expenses	£1,080
Contingency	£3,000

7.0 Reflections and recommendations

Youth Vision is a highly commendable project, doing some valuable – and at times life-changing – work with some of Edinburgh's most vulnerable and difficult to reach young people. The 18 months since the start of the project has been “testing the water” to see if the methods and approaches which Youth Vision espouses could deliver outcomes for young people which would meet some of the educational objectives which Scotland has for its young people, as defined in Curriculum for Excellence. There is little doubt that it is delivering those outcomes.

The organisation is now at the point where it needs to build on the learning from the pilot period, to establish stronger partnership relationships, and to become financially more sustainable.

The following recommendations would strengthen the work and provide it with a model which will address possible concerns of funders.

1. The relationship between the heritage and renovation side of the project and the youth work.

There is some evidence that the relationship between those concerned with renovating the Steading and the young people's programmes is tenuous and slightly contrived to meet funding criteria. Where there is no doubt that the environmental and historical setting for the youth work is important and provides a unique “hook” for the personal development of the young people, the rationale for the partnership needs to be more fully thought through and expressed clearly in grant applications. This should then be reflected with confidence in all promotion of Youth Vision, and in the planning of the programmes. It should also be clearly understood by those primarily concerned with the conservation of the heritage of the Pentlands area.

2. The programme outcomes should be more prescriptive and monitored more rigorously to evidence progress.

Much more work needs to be done to identify programme outcomes, and to match them with Curriculum for Excellence. This will also allow the criteria for participation to be clearer, and allow the programme director to identify what needs in the young person are being addressed.

At the moment detailed information is kept on each young person's progress through the programmes, but it needs to be in a form which can evidence outcomes, set out in a clear monitoring and evaluation framework. This is necessary to support funding applications.

3. The criteria for young people to be referred to the project should be clearer.

At the moment there are no clear criteria for teachers and social workers to use to identify which children would most benefit from the project. From interviews with a teacher, a participant, and his parent, it was obvious that there was no clear rationale why some young people were being referred to the project. This has not been a problem so far, but the teacher would have liked greater guidance to ensure that she was putting forward those pupils who would get the most benefit from participating in the programme.

4. The cost per participant is too high for most grant funding.

Although the overheads for the organisation are low, with home working, use of volunteers and voluntary contributions, the cost of each participant place remains high. This is due entirely to the small number of young people per programme, and the high staff / participant ratio. The programme model should be revisited to identify where costs could be reduced or shared.

5. The relationship with guidance teachers should be regular and continuous while the young person is going through the programme.

There is evidence that some schools are not supporting the young people while they are on the programme, therefore any issues or necessary support is not being provided by school staff. It is important that programmes of this sort are part of a holistic approach to supporting vulnerable and needy young people. The schools should be persuaded that an "out of school, out of mind" approach is not helpful. For some participants, the intensity of the experience on the programme requires on-going support, and regular communication between Youth Vision and the school to address any resultant emotional or behavioural concerns.

6. A programme of follow-up by Youth Vision should be available within the school timetable for the term following participation in the programme.

The ten week programme is only a start in addressing the often deep-seated issues in the young person's life. A further period of follow-up work is vital to embed some of the changes from the programme, and to provide on-going support. This follow-up programme should be designed to further develop the personal outcomes for the young person, and should include a range of counselling, activities and one-to-one work.

7. Development of Facilitator's role.

Currently the facilitators are employed on freelance contracts, and give time to Youth Vision for planning and training. Some facilitators are well connected into the organisation, and others attend paid sessions but take no part in the development of the work. This means that there is a tendency to leave the planning of each individual programme to the Director. In future funding applications the budget should include the ability to pay facilitators for their contribution to planning and development, and to recruit and train new facilitators.

8. The use of skilled volunteers should be developed.

Youth Vision makes good use of volunteers, but could expand their role in the delivery of the programmes. The relationship between the paid facilitators and the volunteers could be better defined and improved, and the skills of some of the volunteers could be better utilised. A volunteer agreement should be drawn up which describes clearly the role of the volunteers, and the benefits in training and CPD to which they are entitled.

Some of the longer term volunteers are very dedicated to the organisation and have played a strong role in its development. This should be recognised and valued by all stakeholders.

9. Funding applications are piecemeal.

It is understandable when an organisation has been living "hand to mouth" in order to establish itself that funding applications have been made outwith the context of a strategic development plan. A priority for Youth Vision over the next few months should be to develop a detailed funding development strategy and 3 year business plan.

10. The organisational structure needs reviewed.

The structure of Youth Vision has grown up around the personal associations of the founding director, Sara Beauregard, who has drawn people into the company through her passion and commitment to young people. Everyone connected to the project believes in it wholeheartedly and contributes time and energy to its survival.

If the organisation is to establish itself as a viable, sustainable third sector organisation delivering nationally important programmes for our most vulnerable young people, it needs to look at how it should structure itself to

best use scarce resources, and bring the necessary expertise into the organisation at management and governance level.

It is recommended that this work should be the subject of an “Investing in Ideas” application to the Big Lottery Fund.

8.0 The way forward

A summary of the above recommendations leads to the conclusion that it is now time for Youth Vision to “grow up”. The pilot period has identified that there is a real need for its work; its methods and approaches are making a real difference to young people lives; and the partnership relationships have been identified and formed.

The key pieces of work that need to be undertaken over the next six months are:

1. Development of a new 3 year Strategic Plan, to include an organisational review to determine governance and structure;
2. A Funding Development plan;
3. Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework based on CfE outcomes, and programme admission criteria.

The above will form the foundations for a stronger, more sustainable organisation, built on the work of the past 18 months. Work needs to be done quickly to ensure continuity of the programmes through successful grant applications, and will require some external expertise.

Ali Coates
April 2011

**APPENDIX 1
YOUTH VISION EVALUATION (based on detailed project plan from HLF
Application Form)**

What	What will you achieve	What we achieved
Work with educational establishments to confirm identified groups to work with projects	Working weekly with 8-10 young people from two Lothian High Schools. Also to provide Saturday programme for local young people.	Over the year we have worked with four schools providing four ten-week programmes recruiting 24 young people. We ran four Saturday programme providing places for ten young people, many of whom stayed with us for the whole year.
Staff recruiting and training	Individuals with experience working with youth and volunteers. Showing an interest in renovation work and working in nature.	We recruited a new part-time administrator and brought on over 20 volunteers with varying interests from renovation, civil engineering, historians, outdoor work and youth workers.
Set up group, forward planning and steering group	On going plan for year ahead, working together, confirmed dates for activities and open days	We ran two successful open days, both attracting new volunteers and then later developed a new 'Friends of Youth Vision' group for fundraising. We also ran two open volunteering days encouraging the local community to be involved and help with our project.
Run Youth Vision	The young people will learn about their heritage by working practically in the cottage in the Pentland Hills. Developing their confidence and self esteem with group participation	We ran four ten-week school groups where the youth learned about the 18c farm and how people lived and worked the land then. The groups made their own flour by using grinding stones, they made oatcakes, cooked over an open fire with butter churned by hand. We learned about weaving and how to spin yarn. Our local archaeologist spends a morning with each group to talk about the past farm life and to point out evidence of this from things that are still evident in the surrounding land. Our Saturday groups were well attended with participants going on to attend a summer camp. They all developed individually and gained many strengths. All programs have seen a change in the young people: learning about themselves through the land and the environment,

		beginning to be able to speak out and listen to others, building self confidence and raising self esteem.
Establishing a Volunteer Group	Three groups of volunteers (Youth Work x 5 ; General Support x 6; Gardening and conservation work x 6)	We have a work group of six -eight volunteers which meets every Thursday to work on the restoration of the building. Over the year we have had many different volunteers coming either just for one day or for the duration. We have ex teachers, retired locals and busy mothers with youth related training all committed to support each program. On Open Days locals come along to help and support. We average 12 volunteers working throughout each week, but there have been days where we had 20 helping in one day.
Deliver training to staff and volunteers	Staff will be competent...; 5 will receive conservation and archaeology skills..3 will update first aid training. 10 volunteers and all new staff and volunteers will receive in house induction training inc child protection as well as practical conservation work.	Two of our Facilitators are currently finishing their Forest School Level 3 training, We have provided in-house training for staff and volunteers in Dry stane dyking, Healing Herbs, Wild Foods and traditional fire lighting, all of which can be integrated into the youth work. We run regular inductions for all new staff and volunteers including statutory Health and Safety, Child protection and Risk Assessment training. 3 staff have completed their First Aid training, one volunteer trained to become a John Muir Leader and one facilitator has started Forest School Level 1 training.
Open Days	We will be able to show our work and knowledge to the local community. The young people will show their skills and explain how they have develop and what they have learned through the project.	Our young people have enjoyed being involved in our Open Days and showing our local visitors around. They have proudly served up homemade pancakes with jam that they have made, elderflower cordial and herbal teas that they have grown from seed and shown the dyking they have completed and the well that they have opened up.
Evaluate project	Ongoing evaluation for participants with individual care plans, goals continually reviewed and updated. Accurate numerical records of volunteers, visitors and participants recorded. Participatory	Daily reports have been written with individual summaries. Each school has on-going communication with our coordinator/ counsellor who is able to offer individual after support or recommendations for each young person. We have followed up with some individuals with counselling or Art therapy or encouraged them to continue with Youth Vision by joining

	evaluation will be ongoing throughout events, supervised and written up by a qualified external worker	the Saturday groups. Each group used the Rosenberg's self esteem scale and a participatory circle chart, before and after each program. (however this was hard to follow up) We have had an external evaluator to follow up and provide a final report of our work.
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