

WORLD HERITAGE

YOUTH AMBASSADORS

Youth Ambassador MODEL OF ENGAGEMENT



The World Heritage Ambassador Youth Engagement Model

The Blaenavon World Heritage youth ambassador programme's vision is to empower young people aged 13-25 to have an active role and voice in the management of their World Heritage Site. It is an incredibly successful programme, winning awards for its approach, and gaining both national and international recognition for its success in engaging a youth audience. Through its activity, a model of engagement has been developed to appropriately and successfully engage young people in heritage, a model that can be applied to other sites.

As the programme is a mix of both voluntary and participative activity, a definition of engagement is necessary: World Heritage Youth Ambassador Engagement is defined as **"Young People independently engaging with World Heritage Sites in a voluntary capacity for the purposes of personal development and promoting the aims of World Heritage both locally and nationally"**.

The World Heritage Youth Ambassador programme recognized that true engagement, that which helps young people take custodianship of their World Heritage Sites, needed a new approach, one that is not currently found within World Heritage sector. Formal learning, and individual start and finish projects, which are the primary delivery mechanism by heritage organizations to a youth audience, is a barrier to long term engagement; it is too structured, focused on the needs of the organization trying to impart information, rather the needs or wants of the young people.

In order to cultivate a real sense of ownership that leads to positive action, young people needed to feel not only a sense of power and choice, but see World Heritage Sites as safe and enjoyable places for them. For most Young People, heritage is of secondary interest, therefore World Heritage Youth Ambassadors provides the opportunity to respond to the needs of the young person, making heritage venues places that are safe, flexible, and sociable and where they can have fun; in short the type of place that young people want to come to and engage with. This then in turn leads not only to a real understanding of, but a true engagement with World heritage, because it is their choice, and this in turn leads to positive action and influence, and makes a positive impact for young people's lives.



The Model

1. Youth work Values and Principals

The National Youth agency defines youth work as:

“an educational process that engages with young people in a curriculum built from their lived experience and their personal beliefs and aspirations. This process extends and deepens a young person’s understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes. The youth worker builds positive relationships with young people based on mutual respect”

Youth work is above all an educational and developmental process, based on young people’s active participation and commitment. However, there are a number of fundamental principles that Youth Ambassadors adhere to:

Voluntary engagement: The voluntary principle distinguishes the youth work concept from other services; Young people are able to freely enter into relationships with youth workers and to end those relationships whenever they want. This has fundamental implications for the way staff have to operate and the opportunities available to them. It encourages staff to think and work in more dialogical ways and it also means that sites have to develop programs that are attractive to young people. The last place a young person would relate voluntary engagement with is probably school, so the programme must be as far from school as it can be.

Building Relationships: A crucial aspect of the youth work approach is the ability to build relationships. Because of the voluntary nature of youth work, staff need to have the space and time to be able to build a meaningful and direct relationship with young people; something that can be a challenge in a more time and resource limited, or formal, setting. Youth work is committed to having meaningful conversations to give young people the ability to build their voice and ability to play an active role in decision-making processes that impact on their lives and build a sense of control and worth. To do this young people need to be given the right tools; self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment; complex tools to build. These can be difficult to build for young people, and staff need to develop trust with a young person in order to tackle such complex issues, so then relationships and conversation is the key.

It is worth noting that any relationships built should always be professional; the aim is to engage in a friendly way, not become “friends”; the balance of power is not equal, which is why staff that work with young people are expected to hold sound values, have a good character and solid principles.



Informal Educators is a style that runs through all youth ambassador methods of delivery. It relies on engaging young people through conversation and skilfully using that dialogue as a way of raising issues and engaging. Good quality youth engagement makes use of opportunities as they arise to support young people in exploring ideas and issues through conversation and action. In terms of Youth Ambassadors practise, this means that sites and staff must adapt to the learning needs of our young people; if they are more comfortable working outside, work outside. If Young people feel a need to take the conversation a certain way then allow them the space to do so, even if it takes the session “off topic” for a while.

Conversation: Throughout all of the principals: the common theme is Conversation; youth work and engagement is essentially the ability to communicate effectively with young people. In order for the project to be able to build meaningful voluntary relationships, to engender positive change for young people, numbers should be kept reasonably low, so that staff and young people have the time and space to develop a relationship where meaningful conversations can happen. Barriers should be challenged and where possible knocked down and the group should go out of its way to be proactively inclusive to all young people. By creating an atmosphere that young people feel safe, and listened to, they will feel confident to express their views and need, enabling sites to be truly responsive.

2. Focus on the needs of the Young Person, not the needs of the World Heritage Site.

The National Youth Agency states that “*Youth work offers YP safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop interpersonal skills and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for YP*”

By adhering to the principals of youth work as stated above, relationships will be built that enable young people to confidently express their views and how they wish the project to be shaped for their enjoyment, which in turn leads to a group of young people who can support the shaping of World Heritage Sites. In order to achieve this, the programme needs to be focused and adaptable to the needs of young people and the real issues they can face.

Any programme delivered requires the recognition, that for young people, World Heritage learning is not likely to be the main outcome or goal. Rather accreditation may be a driver or the ability to build their own social capital (make new friends, increase employment skills, and support the development of life skills or simply to have a place to have fun). Evaluation of Blaenavon Youth Ambassadors demonstrates that Young People need an approach that is centered on what they considered “fun”, (day trips, social opportunities, residential). Sites need to use their



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unique heritage as a tool, in the same way youth workers would use a pool table in a youth club; as a way to engage a young person and to build a relationship, and then use that relationship to develop trust and use that trust to educate and empower.

National statistics show us that the issues most relevant to young people today are employment, schools and exam pressures, social media, substance abuse, body image, housing and family. We know that 48% of all young people say they have suffered with bullying (NSPCC), 1:10 suffer with mental health problems, 1:5 are from an ethnic minority background, and there are over 200,000 looked after children. We know that there are currently **3.7 million** children living in poverty in the UK; over a quarter of all children in the UK. 1.7 million of these children are living in severe poverty. The 2016 Prince's Trust Macquarie UK Youth Index demonstrated that 18% of YP don't believe they can change their lives, 16% think their life will amount to nothing, and 36% don't feel in control of their job prospects.

Areas of deprivation, such as Blaenavon and many other World Heritage Site, have high levels of unemployment, higher levels of children living in workless households, which leads to declining belief in future prospects. It is well recognised that poverty has negative impacts on YP's health, aspirations, cognitive social, emotional and behavioural development, and educational outcomes. UK government strategy states that to tackle the causes of poverty, Young People need to be supported.

The Baroness Andrew's report on tackling poverty through culture recognises that culture and arts activity has a direct and measurable impact on increasing local pride, providing key skills and enhancing educational attainment, however, young People today face a world of austerity, full of social issues and challenges; from relationships, to educational attainment, bullying, to family. Heritage, as wonderful as it can be, is very rarely a primary driver for young people; instead it should be used as tool to help young tackle the issues they face increase aspiration and remove barrier to attainment.

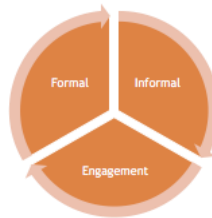
This model, if used correctly, will attract a diverse range of young people. This is something not just to be managed, but to be celebrated. In order to engage with the diverse range of young people, it is essential that the programme is relevant to them: the programme needs to be responsive, have the ability to adapt based on the needs of the young people in the group, to ensure that the programme of activity is something that young people really wanted to attend and something that has true value. In practice this means consulting with young people regular and making young people the decision makers on how the programme is planned, developed and delivered. This can mean making not only reasonable adjustments, but often changing the approach, venue, or activity, often frequently, as the demands of the group and young people engaged dictate. One approach will not suit all young



people. Blaenavon Youth Ambassadors has changed its approach 4 times in 2 years and continues to adapt to the needs of the young people attending.

The Ambassadors programme delivers non formal activities that tackles some of the fundamental barriers to attainment and aspiration; building “character” skills, providing qualified support, alternative learning approaches and removing practical barriers to participation. It also recognises that the activity itself must be “fun” and foster incidental learning rather than continuous “structured” learning, to allow young people to explore what they have learned, through the process of conversation, questioning and challenging. The process supports young people to undertake the process of learning for themselves, rather than educating young people, which is seen as something that “happens to them”. The programme supports young people to learn to value and respect heritage, and see it as somewhere that is “theirs” to look after.

The delivery approach should use a combination of formal learning (with structure learning outcomes rather than a classroom setting) informal learning (in an informal environment, capturing soft skills, and learning through experience) and provide opportunities for engagement.



Through the work in Blaenavon the following key essentials to combine the 3 pronged approach, and have been found to engage young people:

- **Experiential learning:** Using the World Heritage Youth Ambassador Course; which is broken down into “challenges” young people can choose their own learning to suit. It includes both indoor and outdoor learning, practical and structured learning; dependant on the learning styles of the young people involved.
- **Residential activity.** Residential activity fosters deeper relationships, support experiential learning, and provides new environments for young people to experience.
- **Fun Team Building day:** These should not be focused on heritage specifically; but something totally different; maybe go-karting, or a day at the beach. This allows young people to feel that the World Heritage Site and the staff within it, make a place that is for “them” as well.



- Community events: Supporting young people to volunteer in their community is essential, but young people should be given leadership roles, and real responsibility, or it becomes tokenistic.
- Social Time: This should be free time to explore social connections, make friends, and a time to be able to have conversation with young people about their daily lives. This aspect of the programme is where the relationships are formed. A suitable venue should be found that is comfortable for young people e.g. a staff room, or youth club environment.
- Consultation: Ensure time is set aside to review the programme activity, spaces you use, and staff you work with. Consultation need not be formal – informal conversations will support young people to voice their views more confidently.

This approach combined with the accredited learning package provides the opportunity to make heritage venues places where they feel safe, empowered and have fun. This leads to a real understanding and engagement in heritage, because they choose to engage; are not forced to, which leads to positive action and influence. However in practise this approach can often mean that the social outcomes of the programme overtake the heritage learning aspect: once a relationship has been build, young people may want support with family trauma, or finding new housing, or bullying. Sites and staff need to have the ability to be responsive to this, and need to be equipped with the skill and knowledge to deal with any issues that might arise. A dedicated and robust safeguarding procedure is essential.

3. Adult engagement.

Any youth engagement model needs to be resourced correctly, and often this requires dedicated staff time. Heritage learning and engagement often falls to the learning teams to undertake, who while are usually well qualified and excel at teaching, do not use a youth work approach, as the learning programmes within sites are usually more structured.

Generally, most heritage sites primarily engage families and primary school audiences, as they are commonly the easiest audiences to attract and achieve high numbers of engagement. Sites that do engage with young people age 13-25, primarily do so through externally funded activity based projects, or the application of secondary school curriculum based learning. There is little to no long term sustainable engagement with young people as key stakeholders, or as decision makers, although youth forums are starting to address some of this work, but are being met with varying success. Most heritage sites and staff are comfortable and confident in dealing with young people in a more formal and defined setting, however



engagement and youth work needs a more specific type of skill to understand and respond to the needs of young people.

Youth consultation with the Blaenavon World Heritage Youth Ambassadors demonstrates that Young People need, value and want professional youth workers, and respond to the “youth work” approach. There should be a recognition that even learning teams are not qualified youth workers; which is a recognised profession in its own right, and to take a youth work approach where specialist knowledge is needed can be challenging for staff and organisations. However equally, one cannot expect a youth worker to come into a heritage environment and simply “pick up” detailed heritage knowledge, or be able to manage a full heritage programme without support from heritage staff.

Ideally, sites should employ a professional youth worker with the right skills, to work alongside a dedicated heritage member of staff to achieve the right mix of skill and engagement. However this may not be possible in a time where resources are being stretched, so by allowing heritage staff to be up-skilled in youth work, or to employ a learning team member that is also a qualified youth worker and up skill them in heritage, while working in partnership the same result could be achieved; young people will be appropriately supported to be able to influence change and take control of their own lives, building both social outcomes, as well as positive outcomes for heritage.

While many of the skills within the learning and engagement team will be transferable:

- Interpersonal and communication skills.
- Emotional intelligence and empathy
- The ability to work independently and flexibly.
- A non-judgemental attitude.
- Good planning and organisational skills.
- Initiative and leadership qualities

Work is needed to support staff to feel confident to deal with young people in wider terms of engagement. To be able to deliver an effective youth approach, additional skills are needed, and an understanding of how to effectively deal with a wider range of issues affecting young people including:



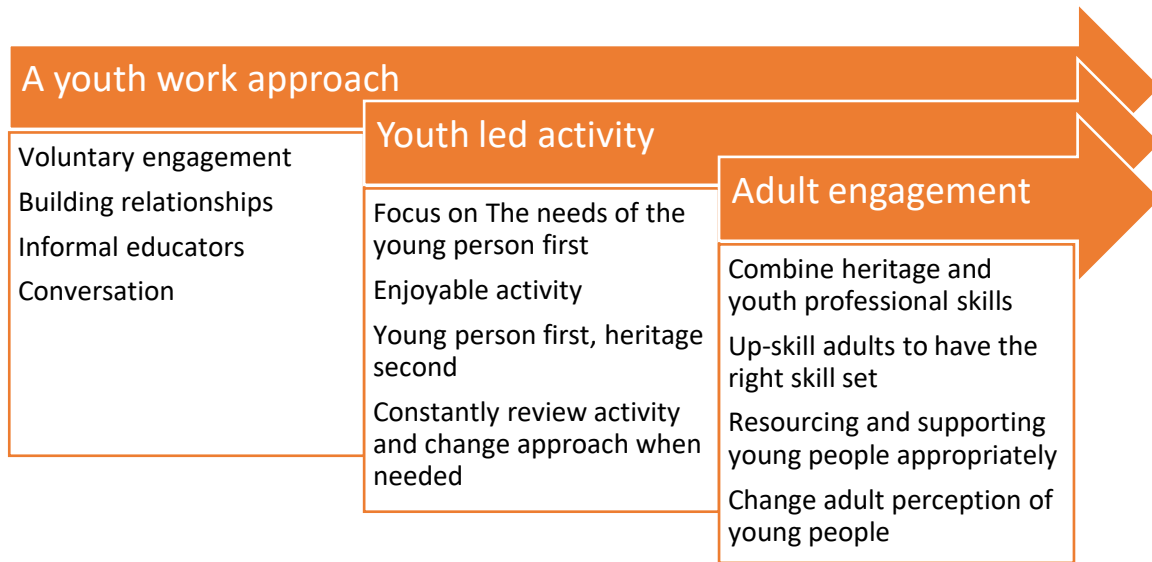
- Unconditional positive regard for young people
- Ability to relate to young people
- Excellent emotional intelligence and consistency of approach
- Excellent listening skills
- Patience
- Understanding and ability to deal with substance abuse or sex matters
- Understanding and ability to deal with safeguarding issues
- Ability to address complex, difficult issues knowledgably and sensitively
- Flexibility and adapting to changing environments
- Ability to deal with conflict and manage aggressive/disruptive behaviour
- Understanding and experience of youth work (not learning or education)
- Strong moral character and upstanding role model

Most leaning teams will be versed in some of these issues, however there can often be a fear of dealing with young people, recognising that they feel heritage is “uncool” and therefore the staff are either over enthusiastic or “nerdy” and un-relatable – but taking a youth work approach addresses these concerns. Building meaningful adult – young person relationships can happen with any kind of person; however staff need to be given the time, resource and skill to build this trust.

Working with and building upon the professional youth work partnerships both locally and nationally can support staff in building the skills they need. Allowing staff to undertake vocational training, often available freely through local youth services, or through local safeguarding teams, allows staff to understand the youth work approach and how it differs from the traditional heritage learning approach.



Diagram of The Model



Conclusion

The National Youth Agency for England states that “*Youth work deepens a young person’s understanding of themselves, their community and the World in which they live and supports them to proactively bring about positive changes*”

By following and adopting the approach outlined in this model, meaningful, long term and sustainable youth engagement can happen. A youth work approach will support young people in building meaningful relationships which can then lead to empowerment and active learning. Letting young people guide the activity and focusing all activity on the needs of young people means a World Heritage Site will be relevant, and therefore engaging. Training adults and selecting the right skill match will support both the young person and organisations to make positive change. Young people are drivers for change, they are an underused resource that can be capitalised on and supported to promote and care for their World Heritage Site. But World Heritage Sites can go further and make a real impact on a young person’s life, helping them to realise aspirations, develop their skills, increase post 16 employment opportunities and support them to become active citizens that are happy, healthy and engaged.



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