

Name of Project

Teesdale YMCA - Fleece to Fabric

Hot/B2/CIF25

Funding allocation

Community Initiative Fund - £6000.00

Short introduction to the project

The project will highlight the processes involved in turning fleece into fabric, with particular focus on felt-making and dyeing techniques.

Aims and objectives of the project and how they have been met - Referring to the original funding application sections 25 and 26 (see attached)

The YMCA would like to take young people of Teesdale on a journey exploring the region and roots of where they belong. We will investigate the landscape through the animals we farm. The focus will be on Teesdale sheep: the farming, sheering and industry it produces through its wool and felt.

The groups of young people will learn and develop through research, teaching, site visits and practical production throughout the series of ten week courses.

The series of courses will be delivered within the YMCA youth centres at Barnard Castle and Gainford. We will engage the schools, young people and volunteers. The courses will be delivered by a Fabric Specialist, with visits to local suppliers, industrial units and the opportunity to attend 'Woolfest' where the young people will have the opportunity to engage with specialist traders, artists, farmers and much more...

Teesdale YMCA has written and delivered a series of courses aimed at developing young people's skills in textiles and design and awareness of wool, and the processes from fleece through to fabric. The courses have been well attended, with products and designs developed through multi-disciplined learning. The courses have been delivered by Natasha Wake from Thread Therapy, and actively supported by volunteers.

The process of felt making has been thoroughly researched by the young people through numerous practical activities. We have investigated the felt making process, experimenting with wet felting, needle felting, and the creation of seamless three-dimensional objects. We are currently exploring the use of natural dyes such as madder root and logwood, eco-dyeing using kilner jars, rusty nails and solar power, and chemical dyeing techniques. This has included preparation of the wool and fleece, using chemical mordants. Young people were taken on an external visit to Highside Farm, where they had the opportunity to see the rare breed Teeswater livestock, native to Teesdale, and gain an appreciation of sheep farming in their home area. Here they were encouraged to handle fleece in its raw state, prior to washing and scouring, and take part in each of the processes in the transition from fleece into fabric, including carding the fleece, spinning it, weaving, knitting, crochet and felting. Woollen products, both commercially produced and hand-made, have been investigated

and identified, along with the properties and characteristics to help understanding of why it is still a widely used textile medium.

Additional achievements and legacy – community involvement/benefits

The highlight of the project was being invited by 'The Nest' to exhibit some of the work produced. The young people were incredibly moved and proud of their work being shown at such a prestigious art centre. The display itself took the form of a Christmas Tree made from wire by the young people. This helped them explore yet another material and the use of hand tools to shape and cut the wire. Their felted creations were then displayed on the tree. Additionally a wire wreath was created and covered with felted snowflakes. Learners gained the invaluable experience of putting up their own display, as well as creating a promotional poster and story board.

Following this achievement we were asked to create a new piece of work to be shown at the Cockfield Christmas Tree Festival. Again the young people rose to the challenge and delivered a spectacular show of felt making skills, covering the tree in miniature hand-made stockings. These were further embellished using embroidery and stitching skills.

Currently work is being produced to be modelled at the 'Trashion Show' at The Hub in Barnard Castle in March. This will take the form of hand-made felt accessories using a combination of recycled woollen jumpers, recycled jewellery and hand-made felt, thus exploring environmental issues. We are also planning to submit some work to The Woollen Woods, an enchanting outdoor art installation, created as part of Eden Arts CANOPY project. This will take the form of felted leaves, butterflies and other things found in trees. The exhibition will take place between 12th April and 1st September 2014, at Sizergh Castle, a National Trust property, and is a good opportunity for learners to have their work exhibited outside of their local area.

Lessons Learnt

- Knowledge of where and when external displays will be from the outset would assist with time management and efficient production of work to exhibit.
- Not all learners will be imaginative with their creations and will need very clear and precise guidance, along with examples. More effective learning took place where this happened.
- Felt making is a time-consuming process. Waiting for felt to dry before it could be transformed into something was sometimes an issue. We resolved this at times by getting the afternoon group to make the felt and the evening group to produce the products, working like a production line.
- Learners will waste a certain amount of fleece through experimenting with different techniques and trying to cut short some of the felting time. Use the cheapest materials to start with and introduce more complex/ expensive materials as they develop practical skills.

