



Press Release

Embargoed for midday on Thursday the 22nd of September

Project Northern Lights launched to help Scotland's young people shine

The Muirhouse Youth Development Group (MYDG) today (22nd September) launched Project Northern Lights to help disadvantaged young people in North Edinburgh escape a relentless cycle of crime and punishment.(1) This project is an example of businesses funding a grassroots organisation that works with young people at the heart of one of Scotland's most deprived communities.

The pilot project, let by WildFox Events(2), is supporting ten young people (aged 15-25) through an eight week adventure and personal training programme. Their journey will culminate in a voyage around the west coast of Scotland with the Ocean Youth Trust Scotland this October.(3) Project Northern Lights aims to build the skills experience and confidence of young people who have no formal qualifications and live very chaotic lifestyles.

"The high proportion of repeat offenders who were involved in last month's riots shows that the penal system and political condemnation of behaviour alone isn't going to put a stop to crime and antisocial behaviour," commented Jonny Kinross, Development Worker for MYDG. "We have to also encourage and support young people from Cameron's broken society to become valued members of their communities."

The project will run in four stages:

Stage 1: Personal Training Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in northern Edinburgh are currently working alongside skilled outdoor instructors and youth workers drawn from their communities to develop self-discipline, communication skills, teamwork, problem solving and coaching skills.

Stage 2: Expedition Training (24 – 29 September) A core group of twelve young people will take part in an intensive residential programme of adventure activities in Perthshire, including survival training and team challenges.(3) This will build on the group's team working skills as well as improve individual confidence and physical fitness levels. This stage will culminate in an expedition in the Scottish Highlands and the selection of eight young people to go forward.

Stage 3: The Sail (24th - 28th October) Ocean Youth Trust Scotland will take the final group on *Alba Venturer* for a week long voyage around the west coast of Scotland. The sail training voyage is a physical and emotional test that includes giving individuals responsibility for the boat and crew's safety. The experience of life at sea is designed to help young people build their personal and social skills, gain recognised qualifications and truly broaden their horizons.

Stage 4: Follow up As well as gaining valuable life experiences, those who take part in Project Northern Lights will be able to improve their CV with summary of their achievements and a reference from MYDG as their employer. MYDG will continue to offer ongoing support, including opportunities to gain industry recognised coaching qualifications in outdoor activities such as cycling, bike mechanics, first aid, football and swimming.

If successful this pilot project, funded by the Artemis Charitable Foundation(4) and Finlayson Wagner Black Ltd, will be stepped up to a nationwide programme in 2012 for at least 45 young people. "Adventure activities are an effective way for hooking in young people on the very edges of society," commented Kinross. "Combine this with real training and employable skills and we can really help them turn their lives around"

"Project Northern Lights is all about giving marginalised young people in Scotland the chance to shine," added David Fox Pitt, Director of WildFox Events. "Young people from troubled backgrounds are valuable participants in our society who should be helped and guided rather than judged."

Notes to the Editor

1. The Muirhouse Youth Development Group (MYDG) is a grassroots organization committed to helping young people gain independence and create opportunities for others.
2. WildFox Events is the UK's original adventure challenge company. In the past 10 years their events have raised more than £30 million pounds for charity. Find out more at www.wildfoxevents.com
3. Ocean Youth Trust Scotland inspires young people through the challenge of adventure under sail. Over 800 young people aged 12–25 from diverse backgrounds throughout Scotland participate each year aboard the Trust's three large sailing yachts.
4. WildFox Events is providing the logistics, equipment and training for the week's residential programme on its base in Highland Perthshire.
5. The Artemis Charitable Foundation was set up on behalf of Artemis Investment Management Ltd to support a range of charitable activities, including the work of Cancer Research UK, CHAS and Mercy Corps.

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