



Activity Agreements Opportunities for All



Helping Young People Engage

HYPE (Helping Young People Engage) is a skills-based project, delivered through West Lothian Council Community Youth Services, to help young people on an Activity Agreement re-engage with learning. HYPE is offered alongside other relevant activities and on-going advice and guidance from a Trusted Professional.

Its approach is to help young people develop personal and social skills through activity-based learning in an informal youth work environment. The activities on offer are varied – from *Make it Monday* – a craft-focused group designed to encourage wellbeing and mental health, to *Challenge Tuesday* (outdoor education) and *Looking Good, Feeling Good*, (addressing self-confidence and body image). All allow young people to try new things, make friends and discover what they are interested in. There is also a photography group which focuses on a different theme each course. Young people can choose to participate in one or more activity; building participation as they feel ready.

The photography group is delivered by a tutor, Lisa Fleming, who delivers photography skills sessions, and supported by Heather Thomson, CLD Worker, who co-facilitates group-work sessions.

A recent group, run in partnership with West Lothian Heritage Services, combined photography and oral history to study people's working lives in West Lothian. Young people attended training in oral history through the Living Memory Association, developing interview skills and learning about the process of oral history. Young people were then given recording devices to interview family members about their employment history. This gave the young people personal connections to some of the places Lisa took them to photographs, including the old Brickworks and Steelworks in Armadale, and helped them develop knowledge of their local community and its employment history.

Alongside these practical activities, group-work sessions helped young people reflect on their learning. By exploring employment through other people's experiences young people developed the confidence to voice their own ideas and attitudes, both during group discussion and through their photography.

Many of the participants are socially isolated due to either their rural location or lack of confidence. HYPE helps young people overcome this by initially collecting them from home to attend sessions, gradually moving to self-travel as their confidence grows. This helps young people to engage and results in high attendance levels at this crucial first stage, whilst ensuring they are able to become independent by the time they are ready to progress. In addition, the project also takes a particularly nurturing approach to ensuring young people attend, collecting young people from home each

session. This has resulted in high attendance levels at this crucial 1st stage learning. Young people are encouraged to begin self-travel as their confidence grows, to ensure that they are able to become independent by the time they are ready to progress. Trusted Professionals also, where appropriate, accompany young people to the group to help them settle.

The photography project also recognised that social media was a vital communication channel for isolated young people. The tutor, Lisa, set up a Facebook group where materials to assist in their learning were posted. Heather Thomson, HYPE Project Co-ordinator, said *"Tapping into this greatly enhanced young people's sense of group identity, encouraging them to communicate with each other out-with the weekly sessions and work together"*. Lisa encouraged the most recent group to work together during a visit to Perth Museum and Art Gallery to speak to educators about the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, and during an event on behalf of SCHUH and West Lothian Schools, where they met with professional photographers. Such new experiences motivated the young people and enhanced their skills and confidence.

Young people's achievements were celebrated and demonstrated at the end of the course where the group staged an exhibition of their work and invited family and friends to celebrate with them. Dawn Roden (OfA Co-ordinator) attended the exhibition and said *"I was blown away by the confidence of the young people, interacting with the public and explaining their photographs. Although this skill was practiced on the course, almost none of them would have been able to do this at the start, let alone have anything they felt proud of showing people. It was crucial for us that the young people themselves recognised what an achievement this was"*.

Alongside increased confidence and communication, young people gained transferable skills such as team-work and ICT and specific skills in photography. For many, photography became an interest they pursued beyond the course. For some, it became a route to formal learning, progressing to study photography at college. HYPE staff supported them through the transition and helped them prepare for college by arranging a meeting with a previous HYPE participant, now studying photography at college, who offered advice on interviews and what to expect at college.

Above all, HYPE supports young people in their first step back into learning, giving them the confidence and self-belief to continue beyond their Activity Agreement.

"thank you for teaching me everything I know so far about photography; dragging me out in all sorts of weather to get amazing shots, helping me boost my confidence. It has been an amazing experience. I have had so much fun and met some awesome people..." Kayla, previous participant