

# Targeted support is a recipe for Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award success: an Outdoor Learning partnership between Awards Plus and Wester Hailes High School

Charles Holt, Teacher & DofE Co-ordinator, Wester Hailes High School



## Rationale

A 9-month collaboration between Wester Hailes High School and Awards Plus arose from City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) staff identifying that the school might benefit from extra support to get a Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) programme off the ground. It was timely as the teacher involved had recently arrived and, although an experienced DofE Leader, hadn't worked within the CEC context before.

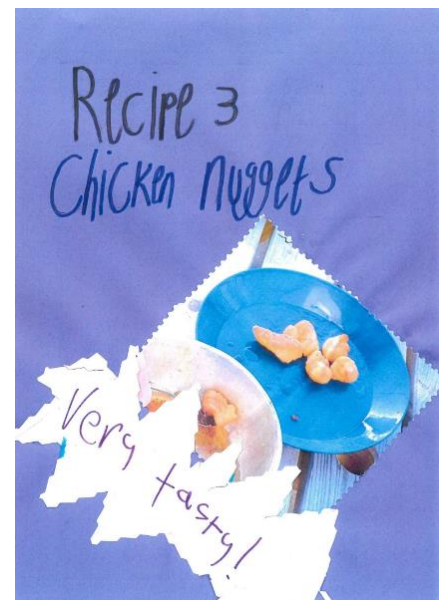
8 S3 students came together as an active group from Autumn 2023 to Spring 2024, all with some level of difficulty within the school setting. Despite a considerable range of challenges, activity engagement and personal achievements have been something that pupils – and the school – can be immensely proud of.



## Weekly Activities: Skill, Physical and Volunteering Sections

The Awards Plus leaders devised and led most of the activities. When it became clear that the group really enjoyed preparing food and cooking it on the Trangia stoves, Awards Plus staff expanded this activity from a brief expedition preparation task into their DofE Skill Section. Students flourished, creating a Community Cookbook of their favourite recipes as the key ingredient of their DofE Volunteering Section. It was great to see how their confidence with kitchen and cooking skills developed - they learned about knife use, how to cut vegetables and meat, how to make dough using yeast, a white sauce, pancakes - to the point that they were able to support each other and critique their cooking.

"We had never made pizza, burgers, chicken nuggets or pancakes before."





Awards Plus staff were brilliant at introducing different activities that might inspire the students - cooking on Trangias, collecting pine cone seeds, making bird- and bat-boxes and bird feeders (which included careful measurement, use of tools and painting). Each interested different students to different degrees, and contributed to Scottish Junior Forester Awards and John Muir Awards too.



"We didn't know bat boxes existed before, now we've made some we know all about them."

The Wester Hailes HS teacher had a key role in supporting activities, arranging school spaces and managing any behaviour issues that arose. From a standing start an effective partnership approach effective quickly took shape.

Walking along the canal to Bridge 8 magnet fishing and learnt to make a raft from canoes all contributed to completing the Physical Section. Pupils especially enjoyed the challenge of magnet fishing, despite heavy rain at times.

"Some pupil show more engagement in the activities in their DofE sessions than in other subjects in school." Teacher

### **Expedition**

The Awards Plus team organised a fantastic expedition on the Union Canal, making use of their qualifications and a collaboration with Bridge 8 Hub to access canoes, equipment and facilities. Exploring the local neighbourhood, and reducing barriers that a walking expedition might have created, made complete sense for this group and helped to meet their needs.

A training day, paddling east towards Edinburgh for a couple of miles, familiarised pupils with canal and canoes – as well as a strong headwind. We stopped at a park to pitch tents and cook lunch before paddling back.







For the 2-day expedition we paddled west from Bridge 8 (at the Wester Hailes bypass) to Ratho for a lunch and toilet break, then on a couple more miles to the Almond aqueduct. This day worked really well though they were tired by the end! We rafted canoes together so that students could work together and paddle (into quite a strong head-wind, again!).

I have to say the group was amazing at the Linwater campsite. Most had no previous camping experience but put tents up quickly and successfully. A windproof shelter using a van and tarps created a handy communal space to cook some of the recipes practiced over the past few months.

"I really enjoyed the canoeing and overnight camping."

Not everyone enjoyed sleeping in a tent, however. Some had a difficult and challenging night, and were exhausted in the morning. However, every single person got back in a canoe and paddled home. We varied the configuration to allow some students to paddle in a single canoe, with some staying rafted-up. There was a real sense of achievement when we got back to Bridge 8!

From a wintery standing start, 9 months of targeted support – and excellent partnership working – has resulted in 12 pupils enrolling for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 30 Sections and 7 Bronze Awards achieved (with more to complete), along with John Muir Award and Scottish Junior Forester Award participation. It's a great foundation to build on in 2024.



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