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The Workers' Educational Association Inclusive Archaeology Education Project: what is the impact of using our heritage as an educational resource?

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Website: <http://digability.wordpress.com/> (project blog) & <http://inclusivearchaeologyforum.wordpress.com/> (Discussion forum)

<http://www.wea.org.uk/yorkshireandhumber/> (WEA regional website)

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In 2011 the WEA was awarded £200,000 to provide opportunities, over three years, for 300 people under-represented in archaeology to learn about and participate in archaeological education. As the project draws to a close the impacts of this work on the students, including those with learning difficulties, physical difficulties, mental health service users and those from the Deaf community are being assessed. The project never set out to 'create' 300 trained archaeologists, rather its aim was to inspire and excite the groups we worked with. The project created the opportunities for participants to engage with their local heritage and demonstrated beyond any doubt that everyone has a 'right' to share an understanding of our past.

We have exceeded our targets: in total 345 students have engaged with the project, working in 35 groups across the Yorkshire and Humber Region; over 1200 hours of 'learning' has been delivered by 14 tutors.

Every group undertook a tailor-made course that was designed around their individual needs. This flexible approach led to a huge variety of activities from basic timeline creation to detailed survey work. Students reported that they "now look more closely at historic places and see their place in history", that they "notice more as a group", and that most importantly that they "enjoyed" the opportunities the course afforded them. For many it was the chance to "meet like-minded" people, visit new places and to experience 'learning' in a non-threatening and fun environment.

What we did not expect was the significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the participants. Both students and partners from the care sector have commented on this. Students reported that "it makes me feel good", "I love life again", "I feel fitter", "it motivates me". Partners have reported, "social interaction made a big difference and made gave a sense of achievement", there are "on-going communication skills" and that "students showed real commitment".

Since taking part in the project some students have gone on to volunteer within the project, at local heritage projects or have supported at other organisations, largely as a result of the increased confidence they have gained from the project. Others have been enthused to go on to further study with the WEA or with other providers. From our graduate volunteers 3 have found work as a result of their experience and are helping those with "disabilities" in an education setting, whilst others have used the experience to develop the delivery of their specialisms in an accessible manner.

It has been an incredible journey for us all and we have had fantastic support from professional archaeologists, heritage organisations, care providers and local societies. The Project has helped us all to see the possibilities rather than the disabilities, to challenge perceptions and to help break down barriers. Students in wheelchairs can dig and students

with learning difficulties can be part of a survey team that adds information to the Sites and Monuments Record. Most of all the project has demonstrated that the vast subject we call ‘archaeology’ has something for everyone and it’s a subject that everyone can benefit from and participate in.

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