Case Study: York 800, York Stories

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Describe the project in your own words

I would describe my role as a story collector for York Stories – a community project which is part of the York 800 celebrations. Stories were recorded from specific groups, such as actors from the Mystery Plays and residents from the Willow House Care Home. The stories would be recorded in audio, visual, or written formats and then would be edited by the group. The aim was to present original and engaging stories which were then put onto the York Stories website, archived with York Council, and used to inspire creations by local artists.

Why did you apply for a team volunteering project?

I have to admit I was partially motivated by my CV – projects like these offer great transferable skills and make you stand out. Most humanities students have a few hours to spare each week and as a second year student I felt that this would be my last opportunity to commit to such a project before finals, internships, and job applications took over. The project required me to get out into York and contact local people. It’s a shame that students can become so easily isolated from the city’s wider community. This particular project interested me because of its connection to creative writing and editing, as I am trying to get into publishing. However, I was surprised by how much it has made me want to stay in York after graduation!

What were the highlights of your project?

The rest of my group were great to work with, and the highlight of the project was going out with them to capture the stories. I think we were a bit nervous, especially the first time, and it was quite a strange experience setting up a tripod and camera in the middle of Mystery Plays rehearsals. There was a definite learning curve, but it was such an amazing feeling to hand over a collection of stories that I was really proud of, and which we had been able to edit from start to finish.

Were there any surprises?

My biggest surprise was the enthusiasm I felt for the project, to the extent that I have continued to volunteer with York Stories as an individual. Currently, I am organising events on campus to encourage students to tell their own stories about York.

What did you gain from your project?

For myself, the most significant aspect was learning interview techniques - how to set people at ease and draw out their stories. I often hear about the importance of ‘communication skills’, but I genuinely feel more confident after stepping outside of my comfort zone and spending a few days engaging with complete strangers!

What advice would you give students considering taking part in a team volunteering project?

Many projects run over the summer term which, obviously, coincides with a sizeable chunk of the year’s assessment, so the main advice I would offer is to BE SURE that you are willing to make time for the project and be available for meetings, even when you are totally burnt out from weeks spent in the library and exam room.