

CSV Media Clubhouse, Ipswich

An exciting and innovative film project is now entering the final phase of its production.

CSV Media Clubhouse, Ipswich (Community Service Volunteers), have been working with the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, on a series of contemporary films. 'BORN Quest' (Beautiful Outstanding Regional Nature), has enabled young people to be involved with all aspects of film production, from filming on location in the countryside along the beautiful Suffolk Coast, through to editing and sound production. The end result will be a series of four short films, consisting of images and sounds of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB), celebrating and raising awareness of this special protected area among young people, and encouraging them to discover the Suffolk countryside for themselves.

The initial project benefited from the timely introduction of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) – money awarded by central government to AONB's for projects that benefit the environment, economy and society, without jeopardising future resources. The pilot film – 'Winter' – was awarded a significant grant from SDF, while a subsequent successful Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid enabled the remaining three seasonal films to be produced. The Summer and Autumn films are now being edited having been recorded last year, and preparation is now underway for the Spring recording, due to take place over the next few months.

CSV Media raised the preliminary idea of wanting to involve young people in making a short film about the area. The AONB Unit were approached as a source of knowledge and having numerous contacts to enable such a film to be undertaken. The SDF award allowed the initial film to be developed into a larger project, and this was then used as part of the application for the HLF funding to extend the idea further.

BORN Quest is a journey through the seasons, capturing the unique sights and sounds of the living environment, and celebrating the rich and diverse heritage of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. Although there is an overall theme and aim for the four films as a whole, each one has been addressed in turn to establish particular images and sounds associated with each passing season. These discussions have been led by Tanzi Bizounus and Jake Blowers of CSV Media, and Lynn Allen from the AONB Unit. So far, over 40 young people have been involved with the project, with interest increasing with each film. The final recording – Spring – looks set to be even more popular than the previous recordings!

Each film has been broken down into three sections, north, south and central. This approach was chosen because of the great diversity within the AONB as a whole, and this enabled themes to be developed within each film. It meant the task was far more manageable, which was very important as the AONB was quite an unknown environment to most of those involved.

Prior to going out on location, a series of workshops were held to introduce all those involved to the project, equipment, and expectations of the organisers. While a major part of the project was enabling young people to become involved with film production, another key element of the venture was raising awareness and appreciation of the natural history of the area. Many of those involved had never experienced the countryside, and even for those who were more familiar with it, the recording encouraged them to look deeper at the detail and composition of the environment all around them. As time went on, the workshops provided an opportunity to exchange thoughts and experiences, and this even led to the development of further ideas within the project.

Obviously the direction of the recordings was primarily dictated by the requirements for the respective funding bids, but CSV staff and volunteers devised the finer detail, with assistance from the AONB team. Once recording started for the first film, distinct themes soon materialised for each of the areas being focused on. A dark, bleak atmosphere is quite apparent for one section of the Winter film, whereas another has a much more flowing, gentle feel. A later film has a military theme, picking up on the airbases within the AONB and the eeriness associated with the abandoned buildings at Orfordness,

The sound to accompany the films has been equally important as the visual components. The music has been devised using sounds recorded whilst on location. Everything from bird song, waves breaking on a shingle beach, a train approaching, church bells, even a helicopter! All sounds have been incorporated with music to make an appropriate accompaniment to each film.

Although all 4 films will focus on the AONB, the pilot film was particularly concentrating on the Sandlings Walk – the long distance route looked after and promoted by the AONB Unit. The 60-mile Walk links the remnants of the Sandlings Heaths, which once covered a vast area between Southwold in the north, to Ipswich in the south. Consequently, the film has an element of discovery – which ties in with the wider theme of encouraging young people to discover the Suffolk countryside – and this was reflected in the DVD cover design - a black and white image of the boardwalk leading into a reed bed – the sense of a journey...not knowing what lies ahead.

The final element of the films, has been the inclusion of a 'Notebook' section on each DVD. This provides further information about the AONB, CSV Media, and each of the areas focused on in the film. The idea of The Notebook was to put everything in context, and provide detail about the images included in the films.

The first film was previewed to a small audience of people who work with young people in various capacities – youth workers, Suffolk ACRE, County Council staff and so on. Beyond this, it has been sent out to Councillors, education workers etc, and it is hoped that the films will be used in a variety of situations, both within schools and beyond, not just as a way of encouraging young people into the countryside, but also to improve their understanding and appreciation of it, and as a teaching aid as well. Once all four films have been completed, they can be distributed as a complete package, and provide a really useful learning opportunity in a variety of situations.

The whole process has been a steep learning curve for all those involved, from experiencing the technical processes involved in film making, to awareness of the natural history and landscape all around us. Everyone who has been involved with the project at whatever level has taken something away with them, and learnt and benefited from the experience.

CSV Media Clubhouse, Ipswich, comprises a large digital multimedia centre with music and community art facilities. On-going projects range from Ipswich Community Radio, and television, Millennium Volunteers and even careers advice for young people. Although CSV work with all ages and all ethnic groups, the BORN Quest project was primarily aimed at engaging with young people, from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, to ensure the promotion of social inclusion. This is an area of work that the AONB Unit are particularly keen to engage with, and trying to devise projects to encourage the involvement of young people and capture their imagination is no easy task. It is hoped that through CSV Media and this project we really can raise awareness and appreciation by the young community of the precious landscape which we are so lucky to have on our doorstep.

'BORN Quest is a new, exciting and innovative project and a great way for local people to celebrate their heritage, gain multimedia skills and create an important record of our beautiful and outstanding local heritage for posterity.'

- Tanzi Bizounus, Project Co-ordinator and Film Producer, CSV Media Clubhouse, Ipswich.

'The project gave us access to some really sophisticated equipment, and it's been a great experience working with a team to produce a finished product we are all proud of.'

- Ajay, 17, studying Film and Media at Kesgrave High School.

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