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From: Katie & Paul <westhilldoe@aol.co.uk>
Sent: Sun, 25 Apr 2021 20:08
Subject: Future of Westhill Open Award Group

Dear participants & parents

We need to let you know about changes in the way the Award is licenced in Scotland which will close down Westhill Open Award Group

As a result of changes to the licencing of groups by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Scotland (DofE Scotland), access to the Award through Westhill Open Award Group for our local participants will stop after the 2021 expedition season. We wish to advise parents and past and present participants enrolled with Westhill Open Award Group of the background to these changes.

The volunteer run Westhill Open Award Group (WOAG) has been offering the Award to local young people since 2007. We are called an Open Award Group because we are community based welcoming local participants regardless of where they go to school. We have had the support and management oversight of Aberdeenshire Council for policies and procedures, volunteer recruitment processes, insurance, volunteer training and adventurous activities approval. We have really appreciated the support of Westhill Academy's Head Teacher, teaching and support staff in relation to access and use of the school facilities.

The establishment of WOAG, and other Open Award Groups, was in response to schools ceasing to offer the Award. The additional extra-curricular workload on school teaching staff was unsustainable. The expectation that staff would give up their lunchtimes, weekends and holidays was unreasonable. Inevitably, the increasing costs of staff back fill had to be passed on to parents and overall it was no longer viable.

With Community Worker support, we set up WOAG to fill the void based on the Award ethos of inclusion, non-competitive personal progress, diversity and equity of access. Over the past 14 years we have enrolled nearly 900 at Bronze Award level, over 300 at Silver and 175 at Gold Award level. With strength in numbers, we have attracted funding and at any given time up to 30 volunteer leaders who train, supervise and provide expedition support to each of those young people at an annual cost to parents of usually £60 but this year £30 (of which £22-28 goes direct to DofE Scotland).

However, DofE Scotland has decided that each Award Group should now be a Directly Licenced Centre (DLC) through a school or uniformed group each of which will pay a licensing fee. Aberdeenshire Council was offered the option to move to DLC via conversations with Duke Of Edinburgh Scotland and accepted this offer. Aberdeenshire Council will be allowed to maintain one Open Award Group but only for participants who are home schooled or have left school. We know that schools currently offering the Award limit how many pupils can access the Award (often asking pupils to compete for access) and outsource expeditions to commercial approved activity providers. Costs for accessing only the assessed element of a Bronze Expedition are currently over £200 per participant rising to four figures for Gold Award Qualifying Expeditions.

We have had no direct contact from DofE Scotland and have not been consulted regarding the changes or we would have shared the information sooner. We do not understand the rationale behind this radical change and believe that the original issues of costs and staffing impacts will still apply so Westhill Academy will not be able to offer the Award. This means that for local participation the only options will be to continue the Award via uniformed groups such as Scouts and Guides or access expeditions through commercial approved activity providers. You will still be enrolled at your current Award level and will still have until your 25th birthday to complete the level you are on but without WOAG support.

We are a successful volunteer led Open Award Group willing and capable of fulfilling the known local need but we may no longer be authorised to do so. If you would like to share your views, please contact us via our website WesthillDoE.co.uk or email WesthillDoE@aol.co.uk.

Katie & Paul
on behalf of the volunteers at
Westhill Open Award Group