

YoCO

YOUTH CHALLENGE OXFORDSHIRE

Developing young people through
personal challenge

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A bright future ahead for young people on the Leys

YOUNG people who live in Blackbird and Greater Leys have been given an exciting opportunity to take part in a programme that could change their lives and see them travel to Kenya.

Youth Challenge Oxfordshire (YoCO) has launched its third group in Blackbird Leys, offering young people an amazing opportunity for personal growth and development. The group meets at Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground and there are still some spaces remaining for the 18 month programme, that culminates in a volunteer trip to Kenya.

Samantha Young Youth Group Manager said: "We meet every Tuesday evenings during term time at Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground. BLAP is a huge supporter of YoCO and we thank them for their continued support in providing us a Covid-19 secure venue to continue with our sessions through these challenging times. We have two amazing leaders who run the group each week. We are working in partnership with Oxfordshire Youth and The National Youth agency to ensure we are able to keep all our leaders and young people safe so we can continue to offer face to face support for as many people as possible."

The charity supports vulnerable young people aged between 14 and 21, and delivers an exciting programme, designed to develop resilience and confidence in young people so that they are able to overcome the problems they face in their lives such as how to handle social media and stay safe online, managing bullying and peer pressure, looking after their mental health, body image and self-confidence.

Youth Challenge Oxfordshire is supported by Thames Valley Police who have seen the positive impact the charity has had on local young people.



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YoCO and the Leys

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Supt Stan Gilmour said: "We are delighted to support the wonderful work of YoCO who are working with us to increase the opportunities for young people and empower them to maximise their true potential. This is a fantastic opportunity for the young people of Blackbird Leys, we look forward to hearing about their journey through the programme and how we can work together to provide a positive future for young people."

Oliver Kilekas, 18, is one of the young people who has taken part in the programme. He said: "When I started YoCO I wasn't very confident and wasn't very social, but after attending they taught me a great variety of skills. For example, I am great at talking to people now. I find social tasks a lot easier. I feel a lot more confident and comfortable around people and a lot better in myself as a person."

Samantha added: "The programme is run by youth group leaders at weekly meetings with a professional team in support. The young people develop and grow with us throughout the programme which includes intervention workshops around drugs and alcohol, bullying, self confidence, problem solving and team building, staying safe online as well as two residential trips. The young people we work with often come to us after lacking support, guidance and personal confidence and are identified to us by teachers, police, social services or others as young people who are vulnerable to negative influences."

"Our programme includes educational sessions around drug and alcohol abuse and healthy relationships, CV writing and interview skills, team work and leadership skills, healthy eating and cookery sessions, fundraising projects and events, community outreach work such as litter picks, a trip to Youlbury camp, basic Swahili lessons and ultimately a life changing volunteering trip to western Kenya with the Nasio Trust."

The organisation prepares young people not only to travel to western Kenya but also supports them with preparing for adult life and setting personal goals.

Samantha added: "We aim to raise their aspirations and develop key life skills that are essential. After the YoCO experience and volunteering trip to Kenya, the young people then become part of our Alumni programme, and are also supported with help they may need with advice for applications to educational courses, apprenticeships or training, and employment."

Many continue to volunteer with YoCO and go on to become young leaders, inspiring others to develop that important resilience and confidence of their own."

Samantha added: "We have previously run two groups in Blackbird Leys. The last group of six young people travelled to Western Kenya in March and carried out a ten day volunteering programme there. As part of the group each young person is supported to raise £800 for their trip, and we did this by holding

several community events including a non-school uniform day at school, raising £400, bingo nights which really boosted community spirit, raising nearly £1000 and a Survival Challenge which raised £200."

The young people also worked at the Abingdon 'Fun in the Park' and Blenheim Palace, and asked for support from friends and family who made hampers and donated raffle prizes.

Samantha added: "The activities pushed our young people to overcome their fears and worries and learn how to work hard as a team and everyone raised their £800 each four months earlier than expected. While we were in Kenya we took part in a gender violence campaign, walking 21 km to Musanda and back in scorching heat and engaged with the local people by speaking Swahili. Volunteers worked in schools and hospitals carrying out campaigns to remove parasites from people's feet, and we also planted trees, harvested spirulina, a super food grown to help with their feeding campaigns, walked the children to church and sang at the service. There was also a lot of peer learning sessions, sharing our experiences of our different cultures."

There are still spaces for six young people to join the group so please contact Sam Young sam@yoco.online or call 07999 340697 for more details if you would like to join.



Find Out More...
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