



SCOUTING

'Unless I give children a taste of Scouting during school time, they may never have the opportunity'

Kate, Headteacher, Kent



Spring 2016



Early adopters

Wondering how to put Youth Shaped Scouting into practice? We visited 38th Rossendale Scout Group in East Lancashire to see how it's done

Words: Laura Sagar | Pictures: Andy Lord | Illustrations: Iain McArthur

THERE ARE PLENTY of clever concepts being used in Scouting nowadays. We are encouraged to be 'youth led', improve 'accessibility' and work to make our Programme as 'Youth Shaped' as possible. These are all great at ensuring our Movement remains relevant and open to all, but you wouldn't be alone in wondering what Youth Shaped Scouting looks like in practice. We visited a Troop who have embraced the concept, to hear about the good, the bad and the awkward aspects of becoming Youth Shaped.

The 38th Rossendale Scout Group in East Lancashire has over 30 Scouts, most of whom are relatively young for their age group. Opening the door to their Scout hut, I hear the boisterous chatter and laughter of the Troop. These young people seem to have the voice and confidence I was expecting, but does the Troop have the Youth Shaped attitude to match?

I have to admit to being concerned when I asked 10-year-old Jaxon what he knew about Youth Shaped Scouting and his response was a confused, 'Err, I

haven't heard of it.' However, after briefly explaining the meaning behind the phrase, he told me about the most important aspect of Youth Shaped Scouting: the games!

'Before we start you can ask the leader if there is a game you want to play,' he told me, adding: 'I think it's important for you to have a say, because if everyone doesn't like what we're doing, we might as well have a go at something that everyone likes to do.'

So what exactly is Youth Shaped Scouting? It's difficult to come up with a succinct definition because it's more of an attitude; it's the way that young people are being empowered to undertake their own adventures and are being given the opportunity to shape their own experiences. It's a core concept dating back to 1907, and is an essential part of what makes us Scouts, but as there aren't currently any formal guidelines to follow, it can be hard to know if we're doing it right.

Being Youth Shaped is about more than asking young people to choose

from a shortlist of activities; the idea is to support your young people in making the list in the first place. Group Scout Leader Chris Taylor has adopted this approach and gathers his Scouts' thoughts, hopes and ideas right from the beginning: 'They choose 50 things they want to do and then we'll narrow them down,' he says.

Chatting to Chris and County Youth Commissioner Emma Cooper was enlightening; they talked me through some of the ways that they have become a more Youth Shaped Group and dished out a good few pieces of advice along the way. The Scout Troop has Patrol Leaders, Assistant Patrol Leaders and Troop Forums to provide everyone with a platform to speak out.

'I sit down with the Patrol Leaders each month, and every planning cycle I sit down with everyone – that's when we choose the badges,' Chris explains. 'In the middle of this year we had a planning night and they listed all of the activities that they wanted to do, which of course included things that were simply not possible.' ▶

‘It’s not about the young people taking over, it’s about them giving opinions on what they want you to teach them’

GROUP SCOUT LEADER, CHRIS TAYLOR

Naturally, this Troop have set their sights high: ‘They wanted to climb Mount Everest, which of course is not possible to do on a Wednesday night!’

This led me to ask: how are you meant to respond to such challenging requests without flattening their enthusiasm? ‘We haven’t said, “we’ll never be able to do that”, we just said “we’re working on it”, which is true,’ explains Chris.

Their overall focus is on listening, making changes and responding honestly but with a healthy dose of optimism. That said, the leaders are well aware that there is still more to be done. ‘It’s important to see being Youth Shaped as a continuous process, that no one Group is perfect at doing it,’ adds Chris, ‘because as members come and go the needs of that Group change and there will always be new opinions to be heard.’ This is a very young Troop and he recognises that as they get older they’ll probably want completely different things. By listening and showing the Scouts that their opinions matter, the more ambitious Troop members have started thinking about devoting more time to Scouting long term. ‘I have a couple who are already asking

about becoming Senior Patrol Leaders,’ says Chris. ‘There’s lots of progression available to them and as leaders we need to make a note of that interest and then make sure that we act on it.’ Youth Shaped methods of Scouting are working their magic at 38th Rossendale by securing committed members and potential future leaders.

I’m intrigued to find out what they’ve done when things haven’t gone quite as smoothly; Chris admits that sometimes the process can be tricky: ‘You still have to apply a bit of common sense to some of the things they say. It’s important not to just say, “you want to do it, therefore we do it”; you have to think about what they’re actually asking you to do. Are they asking you for something word for word or asking for the concept of it? So they want to go skiing, well that’s an expensive thing to do, what can we do that’s similar but doesn’t have that element of cost?’ Chris then told me about the most recent request to camp on the dry ski slope in Manchester – an activity which certainly isn’t recommended on their website.

‘I think there are a few areas where it’s still quite difficult,’ says Chris. ‘For example, giving Scouts the opportunity to pick any badge they want. It’s actually quite tricky to do because they will pick the most out-there badge possible, which is normally the most expensive.’

County Youth Commissioner and Cub Pack Leader Emma agrees: ‘We make sure we don’t promise too much and give too little. If they want big things, try and work with them to make it something that is more achievable.’ I ask if there are any potential issues about Youth Shaped Scouting from a

volunteer’s perspective? ‘I think some people need to come around to the idea,’ says Emma, tactfully, adding: ‘People are becoming more aware of it and realising that you are getting a better quality of Scouting by asking young people what they want.’

Youth Shaped Scouting benefits both younger and older members of Scouting, engaging young people and reducing the pressure on volunteers. ‘Youth Shaped Scouting is something that scares people because it’s such a big concept, but once you realise how easy it is, that’s when it just happens naturally. Scouts naturally ask if they can do things, and you just have to listen to them,’ says Chris. ‘It’s not about the young people taking over, it’s about them giving opinions on what they want you to teach them. If they could do it themselves they wouldn’t be here,’ Chris assures us. It’s a mindset that allows everyone to work together, regardless of age.

The list of pros is vast, and for 38th Rossendale it’s visible in the number of Cubs who have moved up to Scouts. ‘They see what the Scouts are doing: if they say something then that means it’s going to happen, and they want to keep going,’ says Emma.

Emma told me about her personal experience too: ‘When I was a Scout I actually left because anything I said wasn’t listened to and it just got to the point where I decided I wasn’t enjoying it; I came back as an Explorer. In terms of more people moving up, it’s down to the fact that we’re listening to what they want more.’

When I asked Scout Kane if he would have stayed on without this Youth Shaped approach he was uncertain. ►



YOUTH SHAPED SCOUTING

'I don't know, I might. I might get a bit fed up.' Despite the phrase 'Youth Shaped' not often being used, the Scouts here still feel passionate about the concept and the way it shapes their experience. But shouldn't the young people recognise what they're doing? Do we need to explain to our young people what the term Youth Shaped means to them?

'I think it depends on the age range,' says Chris. 'The younger sections and younger Scouts just want to have fun. It's only when they start asking, "Well why are we doing this?" then that's when you can explain.'

What's important at the moment is that volunteers and leaders understand what they're meant to do, and that's why February's #YouShape

week was so important, to hone in on the steps people should be taking to develop their Youth Shaped Scouting.

Before any of the actions and targets had been agreed on, I asked Emma how she would feel if she heard there was even more being asked of her. 'I'd be happy to try more things, but at the same time it's situational,' she says. 'Doing something with one Group might not work the same with another Group. You shouldn't beat yourself up if you're not achieving everything that's being said, but if you share your ideas you're going to end up finding things that work for everyone.'

What's reassuring is that many of us will have been taking a Youth Shaped approach without even realising it. As Chris rightly points out: 'It's a lot

'If you're an older leader, don't think that you're too old to do it now'

YOUTH COMMISSIONER, EMMA COOPER

about the atmosphere that's created as well as what you're actually doing.'

Before I headed off at the end of that evening's session, Emma shared her finest piece of advice: 'Just don't be scared of it! If you're an older leader, don't think that you're too old to do it now. It's about attitude, and that's what matters really. It's just a case of listening to one little comment that could change things for everyone.' ❁



OVER TO YOU



HOW YOUR SECTION CAN BE MORE YOUTH SHAPED

FOLLOW THESE TOP TIPS TO EMPOWER YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHAPE YOUR SCOUTING

HOLD A FORUM

Forums create a space for young people to discuss and contribute to their Scouting Programme. They help Scouts to form an opinion, public speaking skills and establish team spirit. For more information, go to tinyurl.com/go42reu.

Ideas for successful forums:

- Create an 'ideas box' or 'thoughts box' to give younger Scouts the opportunity to submit their ideas (anonymously if they wish).
- Make forums more fun and engaging by running them during a District camp.
- Try using smaller groups to enable the quieter Scouts to express their

views more easily. If your section has Young Leaders, they could be used to facilitate discussions.

- Use some of the games featured in the resource pack – there's lots for you to choose from.
- For an Explorer Unit planning forum, why not elect a Chairperson to lead and an Explorer to take notes on the discussion? Members of the Unit could take it in turns to have these roles.

FIND NEW LEADERS

Encourage Scouts to take up leadership roles. Scouting is a great place for young people to learn leadership skills. They can do this by becoming a Cub Sixer or Scout Patrol Leader, by taking part in the Young Leaders' Scheme or simply as part of an activity.

APPOINT YOUTH COMMISSIONERS

Local Youth Commissioners have to be aged between 18–25 years old and can be appointed at County or District level in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Their role is to champion the work so that, by 2018, Scouting in their Districts is effectively shaped by young people in partnership with adult volunteers.

USEFUL LINKS

Local Youth Commissioner's role description: tinyurl.com/j29am9e

#YouShape resources:

Beavers: tinyurl.com/jmktwe
Cubs: tinyurl.com/h9tmedd
Scouts: tinyurl.com/zdytczq
Explorers/Network: tinyurl.com/juakktl