Welcome to Woodcraft Folk

Welcome to Woodcraft Folk! We are a vibrant, democratic children’s organisation led by young people working in partnership with volunteers and driven by our cooperative values.

Our 400 groups have had an amazing year. CoCamp brought together thousands of members with our international friends for a spectacular celebration of cooperation. Work within IFM-SEI, our international umbrella organisation with a million members, involved exchanges and young leaders taking part in seminars and education projects and we’re piloting a project to post young people around the world to volunteer against poverty.

In 2011 we kept to a balanced core budget, putting us in a relatively secure financial position. This successes has, however, been tempered by the continuing struggle of groups to pay high rent prices, particularly in the capital, which will be a challenge in 2012.

We are delighted to celebrate of our record of empowering young people in community politics around the country. Our educational programme has developed this year: We launched “Follow the Trail”, participatory tools for our younger age groups and “Leading for the future”, our leadership program for teenagers.

While young people are being jilted by the neo-liberal policies of our government, we remain proud of our young people who have taken an active role in street demonstrations against cuts, education fees, against the extreme, racist right and for tolerance and peace.

Our relationship with the Trade Union movement developed, providing children's activities for the March for the Alternative and reclaiming their future. The struggle continues and so does the partnership with national Trade Unions, who sponsored our education packs in Bushcraft, Organising Big Camps and Rainbow Resources

There remain too many places where children cannot access Woodcraft Folk, but we are in a great position to grow and develop in 2012 and beyond – with your support.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle
Chairperson 2009-2011
Centres

Centres are a valuable resource for our groups. They also offered a memorable one off Woodcraft Folk experience to the thousands of other young people that stayed in them last year. Our seven sites are working increasingly closely, having built an active network to share best practice and resources over 2010-12.

From the back to basics camping experience of Scarlett’s campsite (South London) and Lurgashall Park Farm on the South Downs, to the fully programmed offerings at Lockerbrook (Peak District) and Cudham (Kent), each Woodcraft Folk centre has something unique to offer. Yet what ties the centres together is their shared purpose – to provide a co-operative space for environmental learning.

Sustainability topped the agenda in 2010-12. Height Gate (Yorkshire) has introduced biomass heating, solar panels, real time energy displays, coppice woodland and an aquatron (low flush) toilet. Lurgashall Park Farm incorporates a mixture of open fields and woodland – making it an excellent site for bushcraft. Hundreds of young volunteers from London have put many hours into managing the woodland and building the infrastructure for a vibrant bushcraft centre. Investment has gone into Darsham centre in Suffolk, improving the building and the heating system. A converted railway station, Darsham is the easiest Woodcraft Folk centre to travel to by public transport. Hamsterly Forest Centre in County Durham offers simple, unstaffed, affordable accommodation in the heart of the forest.

Cudham Centre has run incredibly successful Bivvy and Sleepover weekends, bringing together several smaller Woodcraft groups for a shared collective experience. Centres staff and management committees continue to make visiting a Woodcraft Folk centre an experience that young people will treasure for the rest of their lives.
Woodchips

You’re never too young to start learning co-operation. Opening a new Woodchip group (for under sixes) is a great way to establish Woodcraft Folk in a new area as parents work together to create an environment based on shared values - as parents in Hammersmith, Southend, Cornwall and North Wales all found last year.

Woodchip group nights are varied, active and fun. Newcastle Woodchips put together a term of activities based on food around the world. White City Estate group started when members from nearby Ealing decided to play out in the park and involve local families.

Increasingly groups are being led by dynamic teenagers who have grown up with the organisation themselves. In Highgate a group of 15-16 year olds took on a Woodchip group and have now run it for 18 months – something the Woodchips love:

“I like playing games in a circle and running around”
(Jamie, age 5).
Spanning ages 10-12, Pioneers really start engaging in their communities. Groups are controlled collectively by their members, which is why we launched “Follow the trail” this year. Designed by Elfins and Pioneers, for Elfins and Pioneers this is an activity pack which is not only fun – it also helps groups review their own activities, set objectives, and plan how to achieve them.

With more leaders than ever receiving forest schools and bushcraft training, getting outdoors has become another big focus. A Cambridge Pioneer leader describes their group’s sponsored expedition:

“We spent a series of group nights learning skills (first-aid, map-reading, survival) and planning the route and menus. Finally they set off early one Saturday morning - walking 25 miles over two days with no complaints. They led the walk, read the map, coped with blisters, swung on rope swings, made dinner and washed up, sang themselves hoarse and finally bivvied out overnight, before donning their rucksacks again for the long walk home. The Pioneers raised a fantastic £1700 for PumpAid, and retained a wonderful sense of achievement and companionship”
CoCamp

Our major event of the year, CoCamp, reaffirmed the place of co-operative values at our core. A ten day living embodiment of co-operative practice, the camp brought together 2,500 people from 30 countries – from Pakistan to Peru. The educational experience was created by and for the participants in a mass skill-sharing programme including everything from pedal powered cinemas to nature walks; from a Palestinian road block game to building and cooking in cob ovens. Most importantly, the young people who attended had a fantastic and unique experience that will stay with them their whole lives.
Co-operative

We’ve been gearing up for The International Year of Co-operatives. This summer if you’d gone to Woodcraft Folk’s International Festival of Co-operation you’d have found an organisation living and breathing co-operative principles. 2,500 people of all ages from all over the world coming together for a fortnight of educational workshops, debates, gigs, camping and celebration. CoCamp was like a mini co-operative city with a locally sourced food supply, town libraries, a solar powered radio station and a...
Elfins

Elfin groups enable children age 6-9 to grow in self-confidence as they naturally explore their identity and values. We want them to think globally; developing respect for themselves and others. Rainbow Resources, launched in 2011, helps children explore gender and sexuality. It was created by Woodcraft Folk and others in IFM-SEI (our international friends) as part of our human rights education.

Elfins benefit tremendously from interaction between age groups, support for greater numbers of young leaders has given Elfins a great chance to develop and have fun with young people they can see as role models. Brighton Woodcraft have felt the benefit: “Cross age activity is beneficial for all. This year one Elfin group had a DF group write a panto about the credit crunch which was then performed by the Elfins; we all had a lot of fun”. In Lambeth, our Playout project saw young people going out to parks to lead outdoor play with hundreds of children.
DFs

Nothing happens in DFs (the 16-20 age group) without being initiated and led by young people. Hundreds attended national events over the year with hundreds more leading locally. With a new events pack, peer support training with the “MEST-UP” programme, a focus on anti-sexism education and a national mentoring programme, it is easier than ever for young people to find their voice personally, socially and politically in a safe, supportive and cooperative environment. The A-Z of good discussion was also published, providing a manifesto for non-violent communication that has been picked up by other organisations.

DFs also provided support to other parts of Woodcraft Folk, pledging £20,000 of money they have fund-raised to support young people setting up new childrens groups and raising additional funds for other projects such as bringing a refugee delegation to CoCamp.
“When we started this project the world was on the brink of a wave of youth leadership... a revolution that would spread across the Middle East, ending a dictatorship and bringing in a new, democratic era in several countries.”

So says the introduction to “Leading for the Future”, our cooperative youth leadership programme launched this year. It comes amidst a very active time for young Woodcraft Folk members, who marched together against education cuts and then again for an alternative to austerity government. Meanwhile, Woodcraft Folk took the role of supporting young people in getting their voices heard: Documenting young people’s actions, providing safe spaces for young people to march together and facilitating an educational process in our groups.

At the huge “March for the Alternative” we ran the children’s tent in Hyde Park – a vibrant space where children sent hundreds of postcards with their messages for the Prime Minister.
We reaffirmed our shared values with the trade union movement and launched an affiliation scheme; we’re enormously grateful to those branches that have joined up. We also launched the “Big Camp Guide” (for camp organisers) with TU sponsorship, and two “Right to Strike” educational packs. We supported the “Choose Youth” campaign, campaigned against rising school hall rents (which affect many of our groups) and challenged Visa restrictions that affect our international camps.

Our biggest campaign this year – a Right to Refuge – was democratically decided upon by young people and included sharing events with refugee groups, awareness raising and developing educational resources.
Venturers

V-Camp in 2010 saw seven hundred 13-15 year olds come together in Derbyshire to create “Vtopia” - not just a camp but a utopian republic with its own passport, currency, timezone and programme - exploring ideas from democracy to internationalism. They also elected the first Venturer committee; providing for the first time a democratic youth led way for this age group to begin organising collectively.

This group achieved a tremendous amount: running workshops for adults on youth participation, representing us in the British Youth Council, creating videos and – crucially – focusing on trying to link up Venturer groups in different parts of the country in creative projects. Elections for the new committee were held at CoCamp; the new group are now planning the next camp in 2013. A revised group night activity pack, and the new resource “Leading for the Future” mean the volunteer youth workers who run all our local groups have the resources to ensure Venturers continue to be challenged, empowered and engaged.
Woodcraft Folk volunteers are also members. This means that as well as assisting the organisation they shape it democratically. Holding two development conferences – North and South, each with a different theme – meant that more volunteers could get involved in writing resources, shaping policy and sharing best practice last year.

We held regular youth leader training courses and strengthened our regional structure with skills sharing events, a South-East and South-West camp, a Northern region conference and establishing a group to plan a camp in the Midlands next year. In Wales, Seven of the eight people elected to Welsh council in 2011 were under 25.

We launched a new website and e-newsletter in late 2010, to which all members can post content. In 2012 we added to our communications The Courier – a printed quarterly newspaper for all members. We also produced a valuable Volunteer Guide – helping districts recruit new members with clear role descriptions.
In 2011 we made a small surplus (£4,022) on our unrestricted funds and spent £56,687 of carried forward restricted funds so that, overall, outgoing resources exceeding incoming by £52,265 during the year.
Woodcraft Folk is a member of:
IFM-SEI | Co-operatives UK | BYC
| NCVYS | NCVO

We gratefully receive financial support from:
Co-operative Group | Big Lottery

The co-operative

Midlands Co-operative

The Midcounties Co-operative

We are proud to work in partnership with:
Co-operative College | Sense | NDCS | National Autistic Society | Envision | De Montfort University | The Centre for Alternative Technology

Woodcraft Folk is a registered charity in England and Wales (1073665) and in Scotland (SC039791)
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Woodcraft Folk
Co-operative Education since 1925