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BLAP and volunteering article – September 2019

Play is so important to children’s wellbeing that the United Nations has recognised it as a human right, along with shelter and education. In addition, low-cost after-school clubs and playschemes are often seen as a lifeline for many parents on less affluent estates in Oxford.

Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground (BLAP) has been part of Blackbird Leys since the 70’s. BLAP provides a place where children from 8 – 13 years old know they are safe, will be listened to and can have fun and play. BLAP magic turns children lacking self-confidence into self-assured thoughtful young people. “If only I had known BLAP existed before”, commented a recent visitor to the playground. A parent of an 8-year-old told staff, “My daughter just loves coming to BLAP she would come every day if I let her.”

At BLAP children thrive because they can choose what they want to do from a range of engaging activities. Most youngsters start their sessions by having a cooked snack (some of the ingredients are kindly donated by the Oxford Food Bank) and then go on to enjoy outside play with the trampoline, hanging bars, zip wire, football or dodge ball. Inside activities such as table tennis, pool, dance and keep fit sessions are equally popular. One of their young volunteers has recently re-organised the arts and craft area and this is proving to be a huge hit with children of all ages.

Funding from The Oxford Funding Network has allowed their kitchen to be re-furbished and children are have really enjoyed getting back in the kitchen to do more cooking.

There are several opportunities to volunteer with the organisation and age is no barrier. They have volunteers ranging from 14-year to 70 plus! Volunteers can help by supervising, listening and mentoring young people or helping with cooking, arts and crafts, or sport activities. In addition, they have a garden and tree house that is rarely use and would welcome some volunteers to help deliver engaging activities in a safe and exciting environment. They would also welcome volunteers with Practical DIY skills in order to maintain and develop the facilities.

Other equally important roles crucial to BLAP’s success, for which they are looking to get volunteer help, are an administrator- to make sure that they are up to date with policy requirements and someone with fundraising, particularly grant funding application, experience.

Their centre manager says volunteers often move on to paid employment drawing on the confidence and skills they have gained at BLAP.

One 73 year old volunteer says she loves seeing the impact BLAP has on the children “shy children come out of their shell and the over boisterous ones start being more thoughtful of others”.

The 14 year old volunteer who has transformed the art area said after the re-organisation:” I am in heaven”. Certainly, the children who chose to spend the whole afternoon in the art area were pleased as punch with the new layout.

Volunteers can help transform young lives. To explore volunteer opportunities with BLAP further please phone Sarah, the Play and Project Leader, any weekday afternoon on 01865 236646.or email blap76@yahoo.co.uk or visit their website www.BLAP.org.uk.

To find out more about these and lots of other volunteering opportunities in Oxfordshire visit oxonvolunteers.org, you can also visit soundabout.org.uk/volunteering

This article was developed in partnership with the Volunteer Centre at OCVA. If you would like a feature about your **community group, charity or social enterprise** in the Voluntary Voice section of the Oxford Times please email: vol@ocva.org.uk