

South Morningside Scout Leaders get prestigious Queen's Award for Volunteering



The volunteer leaders of South Morningside Explorer Scout Unit have been chosen as recipients of the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – the highest award given to volunteer groups across the UK, and this is the first group in Edinburgh to have ever won the accolade.

The announcement of the award was made by the Cabinet Office on the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's Coronation earlier this month, and recognises the outstanding contribution made by the volunteer scout leaders in their local community of Fairmilehead, and beyond.

SMESU, as the unit is better known locally, works with around 80 teenagers, both boys and girls, and provides a wide range of personal development opportunities. Activities include outdoor adventures, camping, community service projects, and international expeditions. The unit, like all scout groups, is completely run by local volunteers. The news of the prestigious award broke as the volunteers and explorer scouts have been preparing for their latest adventure – a month-long expedition to Nepal this summer.

The volunteer leaders who run the unit come from a mix of backgrounds, bringing a range of different experience to scouting locally. The volunteers include teachers, financial sector workers, students and airline support staff, all giving up their time to inspire local teenagers.



Unit leader Neil Mackenzie says it is this mix and diversity that has helped make the unit so successful over the last 10 years:- “As volunteers we get just as much enjoyment from scouting as the young people we support. The adventure of volunteering as scout leader has had a tremendous impact on me, helping me develop my own skills that I use at work and in life more generally. I’d really encourage other adults to get involved so that we can provide these opportunities to more young people.

“Everyone has very busy lives, which is why we know flexible volunteering is key. Some volunteers can give more or less time than others due to work and family commitments, but we all contribute to the success of the unit in our own way.”

SMESU explorer scout Liam Gordon, 16, said:- “I’m really excited that our leaders have been given the Queen’s Award for all the hard work they put into making our time in scouting so adventurous. I can’t wait to go to Nepal this summer and do my own little bit to help others while we’re there. Our leaders’ passion for volunteering is really inspiring to me – it makes me want to do more for other people.”

Another Leader, Barry Hewitt, said:- “We are delighted to have

received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – it just goes to show the great impact you can have by volunteering locally. I volunteer in scouting because it is a privilege to see the teenagers I work with grow and develop into young confident adults. It is also great to see them get so much out of volunteering themselves.”

Another SMESU Explorer Scout Alice Hargest, 16, said:- “It is thanks to our leaders that we get amazing opportunities to travel to places like Nepal. It will be a once in a life-time opportunity for me – a true scouting adventure!”

During the explorer scout unit's expedition to Nepal, 42 teenagers along with 10 adult volunteers will work alongside local craftsmen to help renovate a primary school in the rural village of Chang Patan. They will renovate classrooms and paint school buildings whilst also building wooden desks and an outdoor shelter that can be used by children during the monsoon period.

The Explorer Unit will be travelling out to Nepal at the end of June. Anyone who is interested in tracking their progress can follow them on twitter @SMESU or via the unit's website www.smesu.org.uk