

Presentation by Rachel Ballingall to:

(a) HRH Prince Philip and others and

(b) The Lord Provost, Glasgow and others at the Leadership for Life Awards Ceremony.

I am one of six pupils from the Clydebank area who chose to apply for the Leadership for Life Award. Admittedly, when I filled in the form I knew nothing about the work of the Mark Scott Foundation and very little about the Leadership for Life Award.

The Outward Bound Course is the most intense and possibly the worst thing I've ever had to do in my life! Combined with the Community Project, it demanded hard work, heartache and sheer will power. BUT it has been one of the most rewarding and the biggest confidence booster that I've ever experienced. A year ago the thought of standing up here in front of the number of people that there are tonight would have been enough for me to shrivel up and die. Proof in itself of the impact working on this Award Scheme has had on me.

Like most girls my age I like make-up, clothes, shopping and generally starting the day looking good. So I was less than happy to find out that I had to get out my bed at 6.00 am to go for a long run then dip into what had to be the coldest loch in Scotland! The translations for "dip" should have been stumble over sea-weed covered stones with your shoes and all your clothes on then shove your whole body – full head of hair and all into the icy water that they call Lock Eil! The rest of the day was pretty calm but this was only to lull you into a false sense of security then bam! They hit you with their next idea of madness! Martin and Amanda told us that we were to go a hike up and around some mountains then an overnight stay in a Bothy and we would leave the next morning. OK no problem. BUT the hike consisted of heavy backpacks, big boots, mud and what seemed like a long long trek to the Himalayas! The bothy they talked about wasn't warm or cute or pretty. It was the derelict house of "The Blair Witch Project"! It was small, had no furniture, no toilet and was surrounded by a haze of midgies and a forest of nettles. I swear there were even wee handprints all over the walls!

The Ultimate and most terrifying challenge was called Boy George and it wasa 60-foot tree. The idea is that everyone stands in a line, gets tied together by one long rope and climbs up to the top of the tree and back down – all at the one time. Martin knew fine well that I had a huge fear of heights, I wasn't just scared of heights – I was petrified to the point that just looking at this beast of a tree had me in a fit of tears! Protests ignored, Martin insisted that I went to the front of the line and be the second one up the tree after him! Naturally this led to a bit more crying and a few more wee strops. But eventually I got tied up and began my ascent of Boy George. I was doing quite well until a quarter of the way up when I stupidly chose to look down at my fellow teammates. Of course this set me off again except I refused to budge from this point on the tree. However hearing my enthusiastic and, might I add, brave team encourage and reassure me helped me. I got off my bum, climbed to the top and back down without any more difficulty – except to encourage my so-called brave teammates to keep climbing and to stop bubbling half way up the tree!

It's remarkable how events in your life can change your views and actions immensely. A year ago I was probably one of the shyest and least confident people you could ever meet, but since being a part of this Award Scheme there has been a massive change both in my personality and my outlook on life. I think this was probably to do with the idea our Clydebank team came up with for our community project. We wanted to incorporate in some way the whole reason why the mark Scott Foundation was set up – bigotry. We were well aware that it is a very delicate

situation but also a major problem in society today. This was also one of the main reasons why I applied for the Award. Our team of six is made up of three girls from two schools – one Catholic and the other a non-denominational. We were extremely lucky that we all got on so well together but we appreciated that there was a long running history of tension between our two schools. We knew it is difficult if not impossible to make someone who is 16 or 17 change their views or the way they've been accustomed to living.

We thought it would be better to try and work on the younger generation of our community by making them more aware of Sectarian issues happening in our community today. We wanted to highlight that everyone is entitled to support whatever team they want but that it is their decision and their decision should be respected. Just because they choose to wear green or blue doesn't mean they should receive abusive comments or attacks from an opposing team's supporters for their beliefs. We decided that in order to get this across to children it had to involve Rangers and Celtic. We did fundraising within the schools to finance the project. Ten pupils from St Andrews High School and ten from Braidfield High came together for an induction day. We organized a treasure hunt so the kids worked together as a team to find each clue – with the prize being a trip to Ibrox and Parkhead. The trips went extremely well and as a group we are pleased that the pupils mixed so well together. All in all we feel that the project was successful, not only from the point of view that they all got on well but also that they learnt the history of the Mark Scott Foundation and the horror and heartache that bigotry causes.

Although the project was a huge success our team was presented with a number of problems throughout the year. It wasn't easy. We had pressure of exams and other commitments both in and out-with school. In fact I left school at Christmas because I had a fantastic career opportunity. But I was adamant that I wanted to see this through in spite of working full time.

Just like climbing 'Boy George' I found a courage and determination to continue and the team effort, again like Boy George, helped us see the project through.

To the Mark Scott Foundation thank you for the experience for helping me to discover an inner strength and characteristics that I didn't know I had. My year is over but what I have discovered will stay. In my case, the Leadership for Life is exactly that – for life!