

## At court with Henry



Young people on STEPS Ahead have been taking part in conservation work with Swingbridge2, the Surrey Care Trust's environmental training boat.

Swingbridge has been working with the Thames Landscape Strategy and Hampton Court Palace to improve the riverbank alongside the palace walls. For the STEPS Ahead group, the five days they spent with Swingbridge was a chance to learn new skills.



Young people who are on the Surrey Care Trust's STEPS Ahead programme in Woking had an unexpected encounter when they visited Hampton Court Palace and came face to face with King Henry himself!

The young people, who have been carrying out voluntary environmental work along the riverbank which borders the palace, were disappointed to find that on one visit after heavy November rains the river level was so high they had to down tools.

However, as a thank you for all of their hard work so far, the young people were invited to tour Hampton Court Palace.

As soon as they stepped inside, the group were approached by a guide in costume who informed them that today was the day of King Henry's marriage to Catherine Parr and asked if they would like to join the wedding party.

After a few initial giggles they agreed, and dressed in cloaks as ladies and gentlemen of the court, the group enjoyed a guided tour from Lady Mary, Catherine Parr's aunt.

When they reached the Great Hall, the young people were introduced to Catherine Parr and everyone was asked to bow to mark the arrival of the King.

After careful scrutiny, the King told the young people that he saw 'only loyalty in their faces' and wished them all well before bidding them goodbye.

The tour of the palace and grounds also included the seasonal treat of a whirl on the Christmas ice rink.

"The young people had a fantastic day," said Emma Kelly from the STEPS Ahead team. "As one of our young people said, 'I had no idea when I woke up today that I would meet Henry VIII!'"

STEPS Ahead is a programme helping unemployed 16 to 18 year-olds build their skills and confidence, with the aim of them finding work or suitable further education or training.