# Centenary Camp 100 shows why Woodcraft Folk’s mix of camping, crafts and debate matters for youth policy



At six I made a small, private choice that turned out to be anything but: I joined Woodcraft Folk. The organisation’s centenary this year invites that kind of looking‑back — not as nostalgia but as a prompt to ask what parts of its practice might still be useful when policymakers talk about youth, play and political education. According to the Woodcraft Folk’s own centenary programme, Camp 100 brought members and international partners together at Kelmarsh Hall between 27 July and 6 August 2025 to rehearse that mix of outdoor life, crafts and debate.
(According to the original report and the movement’s Camp 100 materials.)

The movement’s imprint on those who grew up in it is hard to miss. In a first‑person account published in The Guardian, the author traces values, friendships and practical skills back to Woodcraft Folk membership and lists notable alumni — including a former Labour leader, musicians and journalists — as evidence of the organisation’s long reach. Supporters point to those outcomes as proof that collective, co‑educational youth work can shape civic habits over a lifetime.
(According to the original report and the organisation’s history.)

The Woodcraft Folk did not emerge by accident. Its roots, formally traced to 1925, sit alongside contemporaneous experiments in co‑operation and alternative outdoor education; official histories emphasise founders who rejected militarism and modelled democratic group life from south London onwards. That anti‑militaristic, co‑operative ethos helps explain why the movement’s programme has long combined practical outdoor skills with political education.
(According to the movement’s official history and the original report.)

Its growth in the interwar years made it politically visible. By the late 1930s Woodcraft Folk was sufficiently prominent to be described in parliamentary and public debate as the “appropriate organisation for the children of [Labour] members”, and episodes of intimidation — notably fascists marching outside a children’s camp in 1938 — remain part of the organisation’s remembered past. Those clashes are recorded in contemporary accounts and recalled by former members who went on to public life.
(According to the original report and contemporary recollections reported in later accounts.)

That internationalism translated into humanitarian action. Obituaries and archival accounts detail the role of Woodcraft Folk organisers such as Henry Fair in pre‑war refugee evacuations; one obituary noted that press coverage at the time likened his work to that of Schindler, and that he faced real personal risk for helping to evacuate Jewish children. The movement’s early willingness to combine camping with cross‑border solidarity shaped its reputation as both practical and political.
(According to a contemporary obituary and the original report.)

Across decades the organisation has not shied away from campaigning. It has publicly opposed apartheid, protested against wars and has supported queer youth workers at times when funding bodies withdrew backing. In 2010, for example, reports in the Jewish Chronicle recorded a Woodcraft Folk conference decision by young delegates to adopt a boycott of Israeli goods in protest at the Gaza blockade — a decision that illustrates how the charity’s participatory structures let members take collective positions on international human‑rights questions.
(According to contemporary reporting and the original report.)

These political choices have sat alongside an unglamorous, often deeply practical apprenticeship in adulthood: how to light a wet fire, navigate with a compass, camp with strangers, or coordinate an international tenting expedition. The author’s account of first flights to an international camp, learning to edit film and finding political voice through collective action demonstrates how outdoor activity, arts and debate have been braided together in the movement’s pedagogy — the same strands that recent Camp 100 programming sought to reprise.
(According to the original report and the movement’s centenary programme.)

That pedagogy includes an explicit willingness to talk about difficult topics. The Guardian column argues that children are more capable of grappling with war, sex and politics than many adults allow, and gives a vivid peer‑led example of how fellow members corrected racist language more effectively than adult reprimand. Woodcraft’s formal history and its contemporary supporters emphasise peer education and safe, discursive learning as central to its approach.
(According to the original report and the organisation’s history.)

Yet the public conversation about youth policy right now is markedly mixed. The prime minister, as reported in The Guardian, declared young people “detached from the real world” when unveiling an £88m package to boost youth clubs and after‑school activities; reporting on that announcement details grants for uniformed groups, infrastructure upgrades for clubs in deprived areas and extra‑curricular provision in schools. At the same time the author of the column highlights tensions between ministers’ talk of reconnecting children with the outdoors and other policy moves — including expansion of digital learning and a regulatory environment under the Online Safety Act that, some argue, has made political content less accessible to young people. Those contradictions help explain why many practitioners say simple cash‑for‑facilities interventions will not on their own replicate the civic and peer‑led learning that groups such as Woodcraft Folk have cultivated.
(According to The Guardian’s reporting and the original column.)

The century of Woodcraft Folk offers a clear message: if government really wants to empower young people, it should study how voluntary movements combine practical skill, collective responsibility and space for political conversation. Supporters argue that listening to organisations that have spent a hundred years experimenting in youth work would be a more promising start than simply commissioning gym kit or new uniforms. The centenary itself — the international Camp 100 programme staged in the summer of 2025 — was, supporters say, a timely demonstration of what that mixture looks like in practice.
(According to the original report and the movement’s centenary materials.)

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[4]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/projects-campaigns/camp-100/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[3]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/about-woodcraft-folk/our-history/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/about-woodcraft-folk/our-history/), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[3]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/about-woodcraft-folk/our-history/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-henry-fair-1079536.html), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.thejc.com/news/be-afraid-the-elfins-are-boycotting-israel-tv52o8i2), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[4]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/projects-campaigns/camp-100/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[3]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/about-woodcraft-folk/our-history/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/aug/05/funding-youth-clubs-after-school-activities-england), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer), [[4]](https://woodcraft.org.uk/projects-campaigns/camp-100/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/16/woodcraft-folk-jeremy-corbyn-children-scouts-keir-starmer> - This first‑person Guardian column reflects on growing up in the Woodcraft Folk and the organisation’s century of youth work. The author describes how the movement shaped values, practical skills and political awareness, and mentions notable alumni including Jeremy Corbyn and Sophie Ellis‑Bextor. It recounts historical episodes — resistance to fascism, Kindertransport involvement and long-term campaigning on issues such as anti‑apartheid, LGBTQ+ rights and opposition to war — while contrasting Woodcraft Folk’s holistic youth practice with a recent government youth funding announcement and Online Safety Act concerns. The piece argues the government should learn from Woodcraft Folk’s century of practice.
3. <https://woodcraft.org.uk/about-woodcraft-folk/our-history/> - Woodcraft Folk’s official history page outlines the organisation’s origins, founding in 1925 and roots in the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift and the co‑operative movement. It describes early south London groups led by Leslie Paul, the movement’s co‑educational and anti‑militaristic ethos, and the rapid growth of local groups and national camps. The page highlights long ties with co‑operatives and trade unions, campaigns and educational projects through the decades, heritage projects and archive initiatives, and marks the organisation’s continuity from 1925 to the present day while emphasising its commitment to outdoor education, cooperation and social justice.
4. <https://woodcraft.org.uk/projects-campaigns/camp-100/> - The Woodcraft Folk Camp 100 page sets out the charity’s centenary celebration plans for 2025, announcing Camp 100 as an international event at Kelmarsh Hall between 27 July and 6 August 2025. It explains the camp will bring together Woodcraft members and international partners for workshops, music, crafts, political education and outdoor activities in the movement’s tradition. The page describes the centenary programme, how districts and international friends can take part, and links to further Camp 100 resources, signalling the organisation’s continuing emphasis on camping, co‑operation and youth‑led events as part of its hundred‑year commemorations.
5. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-henry-fair-1079536.html> - This obituary of Henry Fair, who served as Woodcraft Folk national organiser from 1936, recounts his leadership during turbulent pre‑war years. It details Fair’s role organising international camps, defending events against fascist intimidation in the late 1930s and his practical work helping to evacuate and care for refugee children. The piece notes his centrality to Woodcraft Folk’s internationalism and humanitarian action, and describes the considerable press and public attention his evacuation efforts attracted. The obituary places Fair within the movement’s pacifist and cooperative tradition and explains how his activism defined a generation of Woodcraft organisers.
6. <https://www.thejc.com/news/be-afraid-the-elfins-are-boycotting-israel-tv52o8i2> - This Jewish Chronicle report from July 2010 describes a Woodcraft Folk conference decision in which members, including young delegates known as 'Elfins', voted to boycott Israeli goods in response to the Gaza flotilla events. The short article reports the emergency motion, the majority support among delegates of different ages, and the rationale given by its proposers, noting the motion’s aim was to press for lifting the blockade of Gaza. The report illustrates Woodcraft Folk’s participatory democracy and its history of members debating and adopting campaigning positions on international human rights issues.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/aug/05/funding-youth-clubs-after-school-activities-england> - This Guardian news article covers the UK government’s announcement of an £88 million package to boost youth clubs and after‑school activities, presented as a measure to tackle young people’s isolation and excessive screen time. It outlines how funds will be allocated — including grants for the Scouts, Guides and other uniformed groups, infrastructure upgrades for youth clubs in deprived areas, and funding for extra‑curricular provision in hundreds of schools — and records ministers’ comments about reconnecting youngsters with community life. The piece also situates the announcement within wider debates about youth services, policy priorities and the forthcoming national youth strategy.