

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion



The Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC)

April 2009



Note:

The author of this short paper is Bob Watson, a member of the Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC), Director of the *Sobriety* Project based at the Yorkshire Waterways Museum in Goole and a former Chair of the National Community Boats Association. The paper is a contribution to the debate about the contents of the new UK Government policy statement on inland waterways which will replace the document published in 2000, *Waterways for Tomorrow*.

For information about the work of *Sobriety* please go to the website:
www.waterwaysmuseum.org.uk

Contents

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion	
The Opportunity	2
Some Case Studies	2
The Struggle for National Recognition	4
Hopeful Signs	5
Expanding Social Policies	6
Clear Objectives	7
Good Practice	7
Conclusions and Recommendations	8
Appendix	
Case Studies: Three Individuals and Six Initiatives	9
The People	9
The Initiatives	9

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion

With 12 million people in Britain below the poverty line, with one of the largest prison populations in Europe, and with a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report suggesting that we have some of the unhappiest children in the developed world, we need every weapon in the armoury to combat social exclusion.

The Opportunity

For many years a small number of local authorities and other public bodies have invested in inland waterway community projects to deliver social benefits. Successes include:

- children excluded from school and pupil referral unit returning to mainstream education;
- people leaving prison and not re-offending during the following two years;
- previously housebound women gaining employment;
- offenders on community service orders carrying out environmental improvements in the community;
- adventure residentials for children with a learning disability to help them become more independent;
- adventure residentials for old people in care to help them maintain independence;
- looked-after children being given the opportunity to make new friends and visit new places;
- young people at risk gaining transferable skills to help them find work;
- people with mental health problems getting the confidence to share experiences;
- young people from multi ethnic backgrounds living and working together on a canal boat for mutual learning, enjoyment and teamwork.

Some Case Studies

Laburnum Boat Club in Hackney shows how such successes can be achieved. It was set up in the early eighties by local parents and now runs a programme of activities seven days a week all through the year for children, young people and their families. It is used by schools, youth and community groups and welfare organisations. On the site in Laburnum Street there is a club hut, an open play area, classroom, two narrow boats and seventy kayaks.

Services to the community include:

- an after school youth club;
- a youth water sports training project, equipping unemployed young people with coaching qualifications and finding them jobs in watersports;
- a Sunday family club;
- narrow boating facilities for Hackney's young people, welfare groups and families;
- a schools canal studies project, for local schoolchildren to find out about the history and wildlife of the canal;
- an inclusion project to ensure that children and young people with disabilities make full use of the programme.

The canal and the surrounding area provide a recreational asset in an area of special need. The Club's remit is to enable local people to make best use of the canal – to learn about, appreciate and benefit from it. The Club is a charity and sustains its work partly through grants and donations, but more significantly by delivering service agreements that meet local authority and UK Government targets.

Other initiatives, like the Walsall Borough scheme, work primarily with excluded and at-risk school children. In four years the Walsall project has expanded to comprise 27 practical training courses for young people. The attendance rate and the success rate in gaining the end of course certificate is startling.

The Gloucestershire Disabled Afloat Riverboats Trust (DART) has recently pioneered a new approach to making inland waterways accessible to people with disabilities and to carers. It will offer 629 passenger days in 2009 to registered homes and domiciliary care agencies. In 2007, almost every day offered was taken up. DART has also created an 'access fund' that is currently being used to support work with young carers and work experience students from the National Star College (a further education college for disabled students in Cheltenham).

Most of the work of the River Thames Boat Trust is with old and disabled people. Clinical staff say the programme shows carers how much their disabled partner can achieve; emotional wellbeing is given a huge boost and carers and partners talk about it to their families, friends and neighbours for weeks following their trip.

The Sobriety Project in Goole uses its Yorkshire Waterways Museum, its 7 boats and the local inland waterways as resources for personal development and regeneration to disadvantaged people. These include young people excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, people and their families resettling from a custodial sentence, adults with learning and physical disabilities, people with mental health issues and people suffering from the negative impact of unemployment, low income or rural isolation. The Project is socially inclusive and provides training programmes, work experience and volunteering opportunities on its boats, including the Sobriety barge after which the Project takes its name, in its workshops and in its museum, community garden and cafe.

Community Boat Clubs are not the only organisations using the waterways to combat social exclusion. The "Street Paddler" scheme in Exeter is led by the British Canoe Union and is aimed at young people at risk. Intended to be rolled out across the South West of England, the initiative is specifically timed to take place during the peak time for anti-social behaviour. It is well supported by the Police and County Council.

The benefits to some people taking part in these inland waterway projects can be profound. Desmond Foot was a self employed salesman who had a catastrophic loss of memory resulting in bankruptcy and the break-up of his marriage. Caught in a vicious circle of stress and loneliness he was referred by his doctors to a therapy group run by Doncaster Primary Care Trust. Through the group he came into contact with *Waterstart*, a community waterways project in South Yorkshire. The last year has seen him work through training modules so that he can now take charge of a small passenger boat. He still has memory loss but his cognitive skills have returned, he has a council flat and is looking forward at some stage to get a part time job with *Waterstart*. His observation is that the project has 'brought him back from the abyss'. His doctors agree.

Scott Barkham was excluded from mainstream school, and acquired a police record for stealing, fighting, drinking and drug taking. When he arrived in 'the last chance saloon' of the Youth Inclusion Programme run by the local authority's Youth Offending Team (YOT), he was referred to *Sobriety* at the Yorkshire Waterways Museum, for 'diversionary activities'. An inter-agency panel which included Connexions, Humberside Police, the YOT, school staff and supported by the Youth Justice Board, agreed a programme

requiring that each week he should do boat related activities for three days, literacy and numeracy for one day and personal skills including cookery for one day.

Suddenly during a four day residential course on one of the boats, he organised and cooked an evening meal for twelve people. The skipper, who hitherto had regarded him as a job, was amazed. The improvement continued. In 2006 he enrolled full time with Hull College and in 2007 was voted Student of the Year. His reading and writing has improved, he is now earning money at a factory in Selby but is keen not to leave it at that. He wants to train to be a firefighter.

(More details of the above and other case studies are given in the Appendix)

The aim in each of these projects is to use inland waterways to provide a safe and enjoyable experience, in many cases leading on to training and the development of boating skills – all the time building confidence and a feeling of self-worth.



The use of inland waterways to combat social exclusion is not unique; schemes to benefit young people at risk, prisoners, ex-offenders and some other groups have been run by the Forestry Commission, by sea sailing clubs and by mountaineering clubs.

Inland waterway programmes should not be regarded as being in competition with these initiatives. There is a strong case for expanding a variety of provision to meet the very extensive demand for help, support and training.

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion

However, inland waterways have natural advantages that are particularly helpful in combating social exclusion. Crewing a boat is a new and exciting experience for most people and immediately engages interest. The variety of required skills means that most people, however lacking in confidence, can find a suitable niche, while the efficient operation of a boat requires co-operation and team work. Canal and river boats move slowly, safety concerns are easily handled and crew members can be given early responsibility without feeling under unreasonable pressure.

Inland waterways also have the additional advantage of being local to many communities: 80% of people in Britain live within five miles of a canal or a river. Using inland waterways to combat social exclusion means that people can be helped within their own community, and this brings considerable social benefits.

The Struggle for National Recognition

Unfortunately these inspiring waterways projects to combat the effects of social exclusion are scarcely noticed by many parts of the UK Government. Although UK Government Departments have the task of increasing social cohesion, few see any connection between inland waterways and the achievement of their Public Service Agreement performance targets. The result is that opportunities for individuals to participate in programmes like those in Hackney, Walsall and Goole are patchy and restricted.

Both the Inland Waterways Advisory Council (IWAC), which advises on the use of inland waterways, and the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA), which represents navigation authorities, have tried to publicise these valuable social initiatives and to capture the UK Government's attention.

In April 2001 IWAC's predecessor body (the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council) published *The Inland Waterways: towards greater social inclusion*. It recommended that the UK Government should 'require the incorporation into the plans, policies and programmes of the three largest public navigation authorities...of a specific commitment to this work, advise them how best to pursue it, and review their funding needs accordingly'. It should also fund research 'to measure the value of personal and community benefits created by waterways and their use'.

In May 2003 IWAC's predecessor published *Benefits of Sustainable Waterways: British Waterways since 1996* in which it called upon Britain's principal navigation authority to 'develop a targeted inclusion strategy... (in which) priority groups would be disabled people ...disaffected youth and poorer families.'

Later in 2003 in his foreword to *Spring to Release*, an evaluation of the use of inland waterways as a re-settlement resource for women leaving prison, Robin Evans, Chief Executive of British Waterways (BW) gave enthusiastic support to the work: 'It is wonderful to learn how ... 'Waterways Work for Women' has been used to influence future policy in helping discharged prisoners back into employment... I hope we shall see even more use of our waterways for activities like this that clearly deliver real social benefit.'

AINA published *Making more of our Waterways* in 2005 as a practical follow up to the social inclusion recommendations in the 2003 *Benefits of Sustainable Waterways* report made by IWAC's predecessor. AINA insisted that: 'If we are going to reach out to everyone in our local community, we will need to consider how we can become more inclusive and welcoming in our approach. This approach is in line with Government initiatives designed to improve local life and encourage healthier more caring communities... (Beneficiaries will be) for example people with special needs, older people... members of black or other minority ethnic communities, families on low incomes, women who feel vulnerable'.

In spite of these very clear recommendations, to date the story of social exclusion and the inland waterways has mostly been very gloomy. In its review of the UK Government policy published in 2007, IWAC expressed its frustration: 'In the face of uncomfortable changes in society, including the fragmentation of families, the increase in the prison population and the alienation of young people in some ethnic groups, the Government has given increased priority to policies to regenerate communities and enhance community cohesion. Unfortunately the contribution that could be made by the waterways was not recognised in *Waterways for Tomorrow* and has not been recognised since.'

The major navigation authorities are sympathetic but only the Broads Authority, particularly in its work with excluded school children in Norwich, has given the work a high priority. The Environment Agency says that it is keen to develop new social initiatives, but so far has not moved beyond the policy making stage. British Waterways (BW),

the largest navigation authority, clearly wants to do more but, in a period of financial constraint, believes that it is not part of BW's core business to support these social initiatives and that BW can only do so if the work is specifically funded by the UK Government. So in 2004 BW ended its fifteen year support for the National Community Boats Association (NCBA).

The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) appears to take a similarly downbeat view. The 2012 Games were awarded to London after the International Olympic Committee declared that it was impressed by the quality of the proposed legacy. Much publicity was given to the part which the local inland waterways would play in that legacy. The bid also gave the impression that the legacy would provide benefits to the UK as a whole.

However the ODA's Waterspace Masterplan, published in 2007, makes no reference to the social benefits that inland waterways might bring to people in the five nearby London Boroughs. After ODA invited IWAC to be a consultee, in March 2008 IWAC proposed that an Olympic Community Waterways Partnership should be set up to consider how the legacy framework could be used to reduce social exclusion in the five Boroughs. So far the ODA has not responded to that proposal.

Hopeful Signs

In 2008 there were some flickers of hope. After an enquiry and consultation, the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee reported that:

- inland waterways deliver a range of additional public benefits linked to the UK Government's strategic objectives as reflected in its Public Service Agreements (PSAs); and
- consideration be given to 'additional benefits' which might be 'bought' by other UK Government departments.

In a parallel development, an Interdepartmental Working Group has been set up by Defra to be a focal point for:

- more effective cross-UK Government coordination on inland waterways matters;
- a fuller understanding and recognition of the contribution that the inland waterways can make to UK Government policies for climate change, environmental improvement, public health, recreation, regeneration, heritage, planning, transport and community cohesion;

- discussion on proposed research into the social and economic value of inland waterways.

This is good news but to prevent the advantage slipping away, the available evidence from the experience of the last twenty years needs to be collated and re-packaged to demonstrate beyond any doubt that the inland waterways' contribution to community cohesion can provide new opportunities for training, increase independence, rehabilitate excluded school children, reduce offending and re-offending, and improve racial harmony.



On the basis of the evidence, the UK Government should promote the value of local inland waterway projects. The 'core vision' set out by the Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force in September 2008 is that *'the most socially excluded adults (must be) offered the chance to get back on a path to a more successful life... (these are people who) may be negotiating a difficult transition such as leaving prison or long term care.'* (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/psa.px)

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion

Ilona Graudins' story shows how the Cabinet Office's vision can be achieved by a well designed waterway project.

After years of abuse and drug taking, Ilona was arrested for conspiracy to murder. She jumped bail and was on the run for 10 years. Eventually she was extradited to the UK from Germany and was sentenced to eight years in prison. After six years in closed conditions she became eligible for re-settlement and arrived at Askham Grange near York.

Her sentence plan allowed her to do community work in preparation for release on parole and she was referred by the prison's Head of Learning and Skills to *Sobriety*, the inland waterway project in East Yorkshire. The aim of the placement, supported by charitable trusts, was to restore her confidence and give her the skills to get a job and lead a law abiding life.

She took to the training with enthusiasm and gained the qualifications necessary to manage a small passenger boat. She also took driving lessons and attended FE College for one day a week.

She was released in September 2008 and is now secure in full time work and earning a salary large enough to run a car, to visit her daughter and grandson and pay her share of rent for a house that she shares with a work colleague.

Ilona's experience demonstrates why UK Government Ministers should give public support to waterway projects that are delivering exactly those benefits that have been identified as policy priorities by the Cabinet Office.

Expanding Social Policies

In times of recession and pressure on financial resources, there is a danger that action to address long term social problems will get lost in the struggle to achieve economic growth.

Helping to put off the evil day when "John's grandma" succumbs to dementia by taking her on an adventure on the canals might seem to be of small importance compared to the regeneration value of lucrative waterside development. Small social initiatives scarcely rate a mention in the media. No journalist will report on the help for "John's grandma" unless they work hard to search out the story. By contrast, re-vamped canal and river access, the centrepiece of a big regeneration project,

quickly attracts investment, wins applause from politicians and is pictured in the newspapers.

The problem is that, as the years go by, more and more of us will have grandmas that need help and support: the NHS already has problems meeting the current expectations of an ageing population. The UK Government should accept that inland waterways do not just provide opportunities for recreation and economic development. With careful investment, substantial social benefits can also be delivered.

A welcome outcome of IWAC's recommendations and of the EFRA Select Committee report into British Waterways is a £150,000 research project funded by Defra and managed jointly by Defra and IWAC to establish the social, as well as the economic, benefits of the inland waterways.

The UK Government must take a lead, but the role of the big navigation authorities is crucial. It is not the main job of navigation authorities to combat social exclusion but, as reports by IWAC's predecessor and AINA explain, they ought to understand how inland waterways can contribute to social cohesion. If navigation authorities cannot deliver the services themselves they should be ready and willing to support the work of others. The work of the Broads Authority should be applauded. The Environment Agency should quickly move on from gestures of goodwill to planning real life initiatives. BW should follow the Broads Authority's example and work harder to reconcile their commercial and social objectives.

The value of the National Community Boats Association (NCBA) in advancing the social agenda is considerable. NCBA has 70 members. About a third of these are already carrying out work which helps UK Government and local authorities achieve inclusion targets. Unfortunately these organisations live precariously.

For lack of an adequate core income, NCBA is permanently on the verge of extinction. For much less than 0.1% of the total sum that the UK Government invests in the inland waterways each year, the future of NCBA could be secured.

Clear Objectives

In response to arguments from IWAC and AINA that more use should be made of inland waterways to combat social exclusion, there have sometimes been suggestions from the UK Government that no new initiatives are needed, because it is already UK Government policy that inland waterways should be more accessible to all groups in our society. This perception is wrong; the two policies are complementary but fundamentally different.

“Access for all” requires customer research to establish the needs of potential users, the promotion of inland waterways to all sections of society and the removal of obstacles that deter or prevent some groups of the general public from enjoying inland waterways. By contrast, combating social exclusion tackles the generic problems of disadvantaged adults and children by targeted policies. The aim is to transform the lives of individuals by providing a safe and supportive environment where confidence can be gained and a feeling of self worth can be built.

Combating social exclusion requires skilled staff and volunteers. Appropriate contracts have to be designed to meet the needs of bodies such as Regional Development Agencies, local authorities and primary care trusts who have no particular knowledge of inland waterways. The process of delivery requires careful planning, inter-agency working, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as the friendly persuasion and recruitment of beneficiaries, and the ability to create a secure and supportive environment. And, because of the hand to mouth financing of most NCBA members, the staff always have to give attention to the need to plan for the future by constant marketing and lobbying for new contracts.

The task is very demanding but the dedication of staff and volunteers make it work.

Good Practice

After many years of experience it is now possible to identify the main elements of a good practice model for inland waterway partners:

- attending local network meetings to get ideas discussed;
- attending residents' group meetings;
- surveying young people's views about the inland waterway;
- holding discussions with senior officers of public bodies to find out how they would support a project;
- forming a working partnership to promote ideas, receive comments and undertake business planning;
- searching for appropriate premises;
- sending applications to funders;
- appointing staff and volunteers;
- using marketing and publicity.

IWAC is ready to design a good practice model based on these elements but the enthusiastic support of UK Government, the NHS, local authorities, and public agencies will be necessary if we are to turn the current patchwork of inspiring projects into a successful national programme.



- getting involved in local networks of education, training and health providers to identify needs and to find out the inland waterway that can be used for the benefit of their children, clients and volunteers;

Using Inland Waterways to Combat the Effects of Social Exclusion

Conclusions and Recommendations

The inland waterways can be used effectively to combat social exclusion. In spite of strong recommendations from IWAC and AINA little progress has been made. There is a need for a change of perception and understanding by the whole of UK Government and by the navigation authorities: a step change is necessary.

IWAC recommends:

- 1. IWAC and Defra should continue research into the benefits of using inland waterways to combat social exclusion.**
- 2. The updated policy statement that will replace *Waterways for Tomorrow* should contain a section showing the advantages of using inland waterways to combat social exclusion.**
- 3. The UK Government should recognise and promote the value of inland waterway projects that combat social exclusion.**
- 4. Local authorities, Regional Development Agencies and other public bodies should be encouraged by the UK Government to recognise the potential benefit of using inland waterways to combat social exclusion.**
- 5. The National Community Boats Association should be recognised as the infrastructure organisation for accreditation, capacity building and promotion and should receive a measure of public funding to carry out these duties.**
- 6. Working with AINA, IWAC should develop models of good practice and these should be widely disseminated to show the practical stages by which partners can begin to use their inland waterways to meet the needs of individuals facing significant social problems.**

Appendix

Case Studies: Three Individuals and Six Initiatives

The People

Desmond Foot (49) was a self employed salesman in Doncaster with his own TV accessories business. Profits were in excess of £100k per annum. Two years ago he had a catastrophic loss of memory resulting in bankruptcy and the loss of his wife and two teenage sons. Caught in a vicious circle of stress and loneliness he was referred by his doctors to a therapy group run by Doncaster Primary Care Trust.

It was through the group that he came into contact with *Waterstart*, a community waterways project in South Yorkshire supported through contracts by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust.

The last year has seen him work through training modules to where he can take charge of a small passenger carrying boat. He hasn't got his memory back but his cognitive skills have returned, he has a council flat and is looking forward at some stage to get a part time job with *Waterstart*. His observation is that the project has 'brought him back from the abyss'. His doctors agree.

Ilona Csatos Gaudins (50) was born in Manchester. She married and had a daughter when she was young but was divorced and fell into relationships in which she was ill treated. During this time she began to become dependent on illegal drugs and lived a life 'in the shadows'. About 20 years ago she was arrested for conspiracy to murder but jumped bail and was on the run for 10 years. Eventually she was extradited to the UK from Germany where she had been working for a catering company and was sentenced to eight years in prison. After six years in closed conditions she became eligible for re-settlement and arrived at Askham Grange near York.

Her sentence plan allowed her to do community work in preparation for release on parole and she was referred to *Sobriety* a waterways project in East Yorkshire, by the prison's Head of Learning and Skills. The aim of the placement supported by charitable trusts was to restore her confidence and give her the skills to get a job and lead a law abiding life.

She took to training with enthusiasm and gained the qualifications necessary to manage a small passenger boat. She also took driving lessons and attended Further Education College for one day a week.

She was released in September 2008 and is now secure in full time work and earning a salary big enough to run a car, to visit her daughter and grandson and pay her share of rent for a house that she shares with a work colleague.

Scott Barkham (18)'s formal education was not a success. In his early teens his aggressive behaviour led to exclusion from mainstream school, statementing and attendance at a pupil referral unit. He then acquired a police record for stealing, fighting, drinking and drug taking and arrived in 'the last chance saloon' of the Youth Inclusion Programme run by the local authority's Youth Offending Team (YOT). He was referred to *Sobriety* at the Yorkshire Waterways Museum for 'diversionary activities' and soon showed that although he wasn't a 'team player' he did want to be a leader.

The programme agreed by the inter agency panel (which included Connexions, Humberside Police, YOT and school staff and supported by the Youth Justice Board), was that each week he should do boat related activities for three days, literacy and numeracy for one day and personal skills including cookery for one day.

Suddenly in the course of a four day residential on one of the boats, he organised and cooked an evening meal for twelve people. The skipper, who hitherto had regarded him as a job, was amazed. The event signified the boy had changed.

In 2006 he enrolled full time with Hull College and in 2007 was voted Student of the Year. His reading and writing has improved, he's now earning money at a pickle factory in Selby but realising the journey he's travelled, is keen not to leave it at that. He wants to train to be a fire-fighter.

The Initiatives

The Laburnum Boat Club in the London Borough of Hackney

A community boating project based in Haggerston by the Regents Canal, Laburnum was set up in the early eighties by local parents wanting physical recreation for their children. It now runs a programme of activities seven days a week all through the year for children, young people and their families. It is used by schools, youth and community groups and welfare organisations. On the site in Laburnum Street there is a Club Hut, an open play area, classroom, two narrow boats and seventy kayaks.

Appendix

Case Studies: Three Individuals and Six Initiatives

Services to the community are:

- A *Youth Club* open after-school, weekends and during the school holidays with a programme of boating activities including expeditions to open and moving water;
- A *Youth Watersports Training Project* equipping unemployed young people with coaching qualifications and finding them jobs in watersports;
- A *Sunday Family Club*;
- Narrow boating* for Hackney youth, community, education, and welfare groups and families;
- Schools Canal Studies Project* for Hackney schools to find out about the history and habitat of the canal and how it's used;
- Inclusion Project* to ensure that children and young people with disabilities make full use of the programme.

The Club is a charity and sustains its work partly through grants and donations, but more significantly by delivering service agreements in line with local authority and UK Government targets.

The canal and its environs are a recreational asset in an area of special need. The Club's remit is to enable local people to make best use of the canal – to learn about, appreciate and benefit from it.

Walsall Borough Council Sport & Recreation Department is in a unique position to exploit the use of its waterways to combat anti-social behaviour and to provide a platform for the reform of young people with challenging behaviour. The canal network covers the most deprived areas of the west midlands and is a valuable resource for tackling local problems.

Four years ago the Borough began a pilot project with a local school for excluded and at risk pupils. Using the National Community Boats Association's (NCBA) training schemes, children followed practical courses to governing body standards and worked on an old tug to get it back into service. In the first year there was 99% attendance and a 100% completion of the certificated courses.

In the second year four schools participated and adapted the programme to fit with local authority targets. Accrediting bodies were NCBA, Open College and ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network)

The Borough now offers 27 ASDAN, Open College, GCSE and AS courses using narrow boats on West Midlands inland waterways. The resources are available five days a week in term time and are used by NACRO and Connexions in school holidays. Including weekend family courses bookings total 348 days in 2009.

The courses are popular with students because they teach practical skills rather than academic study. Young people learn at their own pace and aren't burdened by timetables until they're ready. What takes one student six weeks may take another much longer. As their confidence grows, they are signposted to greater things. Four of them have joined the armed services, two are at college doing bricklaying, one is now a qualified child minder and another is doing a hair and beauty apprenticeship.

Bob Ratcliff, organiser of the scheme, says 'Use the waterways around you, work smart not hard and measure success by student happiness. All the rest will follow'

Last year one of his students said 'It's the first time I've got anything and I want more'. She is now training on a high level course to get a commission in the Royal Air Force.

The River Thames Boat Project is a charity which operates *Richmond Venturer*, a 26m Dutch barge converted into a community boat and floating classroom. It is accessible to people with a disability and equipped with educational resources.

Day and residential courses are tailored to socially excluded groups from London and the South East. Clients come from residential care, day centres and support groups for people with disabilities or mental health problems. Mainstream and special schools also use the barge.

Trips are organised from an office in Richmond and the boat navigates the Thames from Kingston up to Windsor and downstream to Putney. Its staff consists of a full-time manager, a full-time skipper, a part-time administrator and a sessional teacher plus 63 volunteers who crew and maintain the boat and help out with clerical work and special events. 64% of volunteers are male and 36% female; the youngest is 19 and the oldest is 82. 17% of its clients came from minority ethnic groups reflecting the diversity of this part of SW London.

In 2008 much of the work was with older and disabled people but a significant proportion involved education and training activities for children and young people including a Key Stage 2 environmental education programme and respite trips for young carers. The project held five open days and eight volunteer crew training days.

Clients are encouraged to participate in life on board, to steer the boat and assist with navigation or with domestic tasks. Trips are designed to fit with their physiotherapy or occupational therapy care and offer mobility improvements, life skills, self-confidence and better self-esteem. In particular ex-servicemen suffering post traumatic stress disorder get confidence from being in a small group. Stroke victims are encouraged to move, sit, eat, drink and stand, using good posture, limb positioning and movement.

Clinical staff say the programme shows carers how much their disabled partner can achieve; emotional wellbeing is given a huge boost and carers and partners talk about it to their families, friends and neighbours for weeks following the trip.

Gloucestershire Disabled Afloat Riverboats Trust (DART)

has recently pioneered a new approach to making inland waterways accessible to people with disabilities.

DART was set up as a charity in 1990 and by 1992 had built a wide beam riverboat with full facilities for wheelchair access. The boat was used mainly by groups for residential holiday and educational trips, with one or two weeks a year reserved for trips where people were able to book on as individuals. In 2004 dry rot was discovered in the interior woodwork. A refit would have been expensive so the trustees looked for other ways in which they could deliver and expand their services. A decision was taken to sell the hull and concentrate on organising trips for individuals using boats hired from other community boat organisations.

The resulting scheme has succeeded beyond all expectation. In 2005, 198 passenger days were offered and this has risen to 629 passenger days in 2009. In 2006 and 2008, 98% of places were taken up. This performance has been achieved by marketing to registered homes and domiciliary care agencies, introducing novel risk assessment procedures, forming partnerships with organisations working with carers and young carers and creating an 'Access fund' that allows the trustees to further reduce barriers to access services. For example the fund is

currently being used to support work with young carers and work experience students from the National Star College (a further education college for disabled students in Cheltenham).

In the last 4 years DART has progressed from being a charity that had to engage in continual fund raising to keep their boat running to one that is financially sustainable and focusing on the needs of people with disabilities and carers. Great efforts have been made to identify needs. For example, in June 2008 the Department of Health announced £150m of funding for providing short breaks as part of their National Strategy for Carers. DART is able to offer such breaks and has approached Gloucestershire County Council with the intention of becoming a regular supplier.

The market is not vast but there is room for DART to triple its provision, using the current marketing strategy. There is further scope for expansion with enabling organisations that are not yet required to register with the Commission for Social Care Inspection and by working with carers' organisations outside Gloucestershire.

The Sobriety Project is named after a 1910 Humber barge given to Goole Grammar School in 1973 to make 'a bridge between school and work' and to give opportunities for residential expeditions to children and young people with special problems. In 1989 the Project moved into a new home on the side of the Aire & Calder canal in Goole and adapted the building to display a collection that would become the award winning Yorkshire Waterways Museum.

With an annual turnover of about £500,000 from public and private contracts, Sobriety has 15 staff to deliver the targets of its 2008-2011 business plan for:

- educating children;
- encouraging healthy living and independence;
- working with offenders;
- training for employment;
- making best use of the natural environment;
- conserving and interpreting the industrial heritage of Yorkshire's waterways;
- encouraging enjoyment of the arts.

Appendix

Case Studies: Three Individuals and Six Initiatives

The aim is to inspire volunteers and beneficiaries, including prisoners coming to the end of sentence, to embrace the common purpose of making the Yorkshire Waterways Museum a better place for visitors. By working together to look after customers they will be getting the skills they need to manage their own futures.

The diversity of users and activities helps the Project deliver outcomes and results for 'secular' partners with no waterways connection.

During the last 10 years the *Sobriety* model has been successfully exported to tackle social exclusion in Hull, Rotherham, Thorne and Selby: in York the ISARA community boat project's steering group is trying to raise funds to appoint a part time worker.

At a regional and national level the Project is working with IWAC to encourage the formation of wider partnerships headed by Regional Development Authorities and local authorities and supported by the National Community Boats Association.

The Street Paddler Scheme in Exeter was established in 2008 when the British Canoe Union joined with Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon County Council and Haven Banks Outdoor Education Centre to run the Street Paddler initiative in Exeter.

The canoe coaching programme is primarily aimed at young people at risk of offending and at those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The training course is timed to take place during peak times for anti social behaviour. The scheme lasts three months and leads to a Level 3 coaching award.

The scheme has been evaluated and "the feedback has been superb". The evaluation quotes one 18 year old saying that if he was not canoeing then he would be with friends "having a mess about" and drinking lager or "Vodka straight". An 18 year old girl said, "I was not very confident before. I was very wary of people, perhaps through my Dad's girlfriend knocking me about. The instructors have helped me trust other people and adults."

Editor: IWAC (April 2009)



Inland Waterways Advisory Council
City Road Lock
38 Graham Street
London N1 8JX

Tel: 020 7253 1745
Fax: 020 7490 7656

Email: iwac@iwac.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.iwac.org.uk