

Health, Wellbeing and Happiness

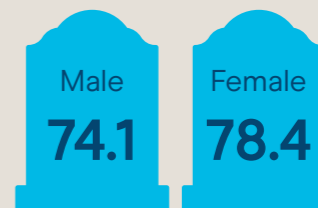


Health, Wellbeing and Happiness

The state of health in England & Wales



1 in 4
people will experience a mental health problem each year. (MIND 2020)



From 2018 to 2020, male life expectancy at birth in the most deprived areas in Wales was 74.1 years compared with 81.6 years in the least deprived; among females this was 78.4 years and 84.7 years respectively. (ONS 2022)



£117.9 billion
Mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £117.9 billion annually. (Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics and Political Science 2022)



Nationally **30%** of children and **26%** of adults do less than 30 minutes of exercise per week. (Active Lives Survey 21/22)



It's predicted that almost **40%** of the UK adult population will be obese by **2040**. (CRUK 2022)



People who are using our network of canals and towpaths, river navigations, docks and reservoirs have improved physical health which is saving the NHS £1.1 billion per year.

The UK is in the midst of a growing national health crisis due to a lack of physical activity and rising mental health issues. This is placing extra strain on our NHS. Promoting and funding 'Preventative Health' measures are seen as instrumental in tackling this crisis, and our network of canal and towpaths, other waterways and waterspaces have a vital role to play.

Our modern way of life and urbanisation presents a variety of public health challenges. These include chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, strokes and obesity, and higher rates of depression, anxiety and mental ill health. Most of these conditions are exacerbated in populations experiencing inequalities. The gap in healthy life expectancy between the most and least affluent areas is 19 years in England (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021). In Wales, the gap in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas remains wide (but stable between 2011-2013 and 2018-2020) with female healthy life expectancy the lowest out of all UK nations. (Public Health Wales Observatory, 2022)

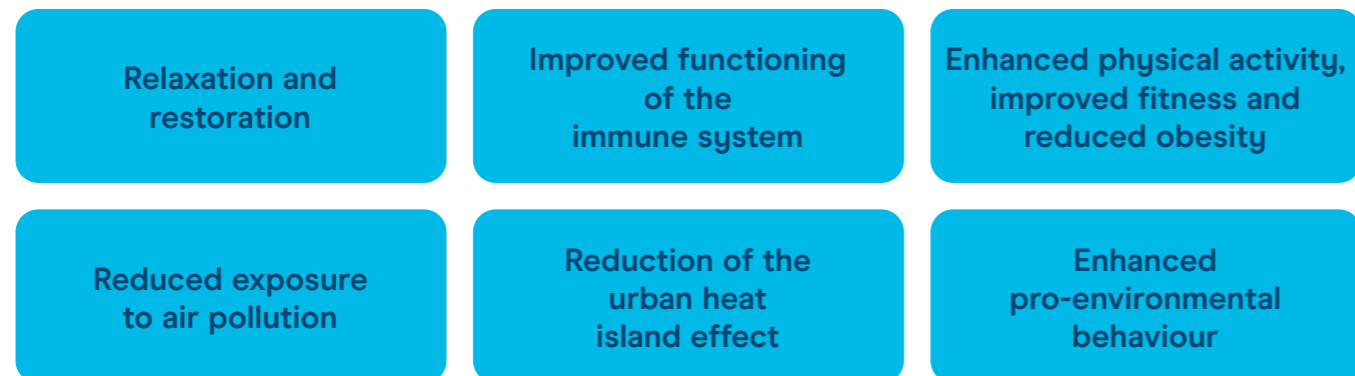
Poor health often has a detrimental effect on stress levels, self-esteem, weight and physical activity; and the evidence shows that activity levels decrease as deprivation increases. (ONS 2020)



"An astonishing nine million people live within one kilometre of a canal and whether you're looking for a free alternative to the gym, a car-free commute to work or the shops, or perhaps just somewhere to hang out with family or friends, I really do urge everyone to find their #HappyPlaceByWater."

Dr Amir Khan

The World Health Organisation (2016) identified the following pathways linking the observed health outcomes and urban green and blue space and infrastructure:

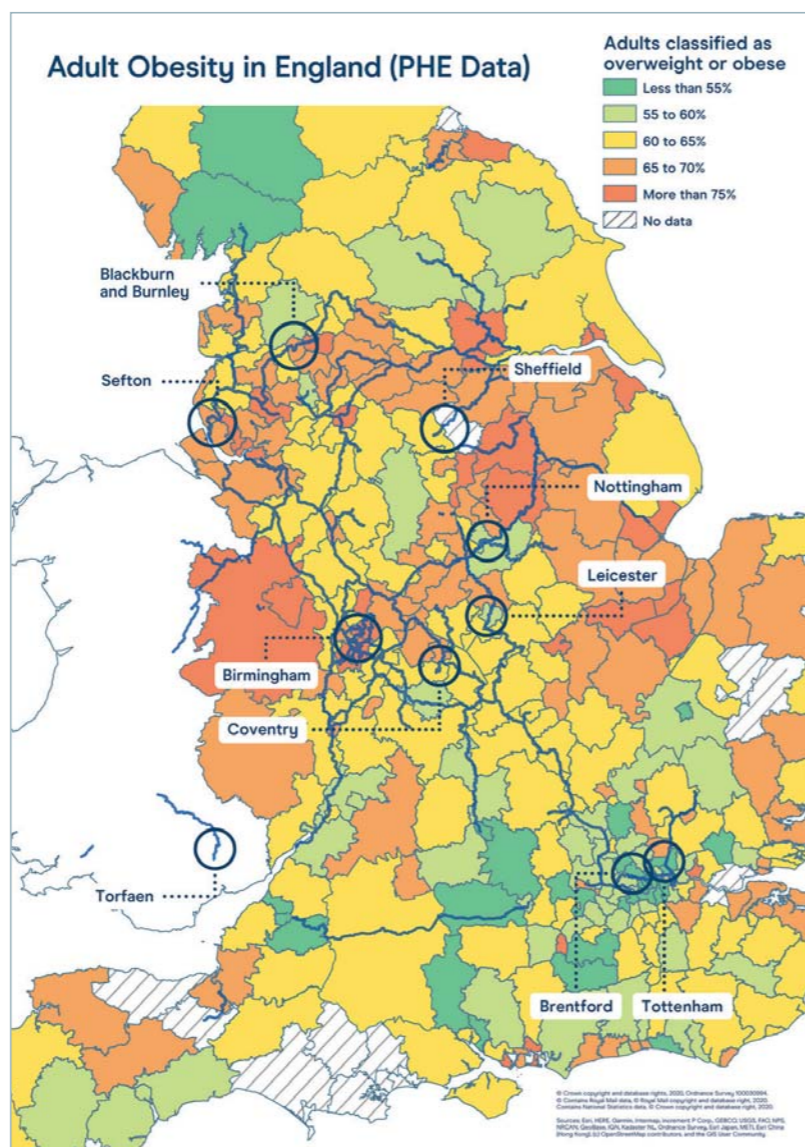


The blue space and blue infrastructure provided by waterways can play a significant role in helping to address many of the challenges arising from the health, biodiversity and climate crises that we face as a nation. They can improve wellbeing outcomes and tackle wellbeing inequalities, particularly for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds living in metropolitan and urban areas in England and Wales.

Poor mental health and physical inactivity present an economic and social cost to the nation. Many of the communities living in close proximity to our canals, other waterways and waterspaces have high concentrations of adult and child obesity and type 2 diabetes, and live in urban areas with green space deficit. There is real potential for our network to help tackle these challenges being faced in these deprived areas.

Unequal access to greenspace leads to health inequalities and disparities such as chronic stress and sedentary lifestyles, placing an intolerable burden on the NHS and the wider healthcare system.

The most economically disadvantaged regions of England and those areas most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in England have the greatest health and wellbeing inequalities, the highest urban green space deficit (access to nature) and limited access to private garden or private outdoor space.



Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Prevention is a key area of focus for the NHS, aligning to ambitions of Sport England's 'Uniting the Movement – 10 Year Strategy', (2021) to improve physical and mental health through physical activity. Programmes to reconnect people with nature can provide a viable early intervention for mental and physical health challenges.

The natural outdoor environment is increasingly valued as an important public health resource. Recent research highlights physical activity, social interaction, and environmental factors as potential pathways linking blue space and health. A research initiative, BlueHealth, found that access to urban blue spaces such as canals and rivers, resulted in significant improvements in wellbeing and mood for individuals walking through urban blue spaces, particularly those from deprived communities.

We have a strategic focus on tackling physical inactivity, promoting an active lifestyle, addressing health inequalities and making a difference for children and young people. Our canals and programmes, in partnership with others, are providing a platform to help improve health outcomes.



“The biggest thing you can do for your health, the most positive thing you can do is to be physically active. If we are serious about addressing things like type 2 diabetes, obesity and the 50% of stuff in the NHS that’s preventable, then we need to do this stuff at scale.”

Dr Ewan Hamnett, Retired Doctor, Quinborne Medical Practice



How people use and enjoy our network of blue spaces

The different ways that people are spending their time on and by the water.



An individual is only counted once in the 'total' figure, they may however have done more than one activity during their visit and therefore the percentage total does not sum to 100%.

* Both trip or excursion boats as well as private boats.

** Includes activities such as canoeing, rowing boats and sailing boats.

Source: Waterway Engagement Monitor 2022/23, conducted on behalf of the Canal & River Trust by DJS Research. The WEM is a year-round, online survey amongst a representative sample of 20,400 adults (15+) across England and Wales.



“For anyone wanting to get active, it’s a great place to come. You know, when you live in a city, there’s not too many green spaces like this about.”

Haroon Mota from Foleshill, a Coventry Canal enthusiast, Founder of Active Inclusion Network

'Canals on prescription'



Case study: Green Social Prescribing

Social prescribing supports a preventative approach to relieve pressure on the NHS. It aims to help improve mental wellbeing and physical health, and prevent non-clinical issues from becoming a medical concern.

With funding from Defra Green Social Prescribing pilot and Thriving Communities Fund, we developed our Waterways and Wellbeing programme in South Yorkshire, Bassetlaw, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

Working with a wide range of health and voluntary sector partners, we engaged over 1,000 members of the local community in a range of activities along the Nottingham

and Beeston canal, including paddleboarding, canoeing and walking, helping them to develop a more active and healthier lifestyle.

As well as improved mental and physical health, the project also aimed to increase care for the waterways, people's sense of social cohesion and sense of civic mindedness, and develop knowledge and skills amongst participants.



Over **1,000** people took part in Trust-led activities leading to:

- ✓ Significant improvements in mental wellbeing – an increase of 23% in wellbeing scores.
- ✓ Increased levels of physical activity.
- ✓ Improved self-efficacy, reduced loneliness and improved perceptions of health.
- ✓ Reported benefits relating specifically to the experience of being in nature.



Waterways and Wellbeing Partnership Project

Supported by the Thriving Communities Fund, made possible thanks to:



“ My mum and sister had strokes and caring for them has taken its toll on my own mental health. After losing my mum in 2019 the waterways have been a great source of calm and somewhere to recover, grieve and find new happiness – pushing myself to do something outside my comfort zone. To get out again in nature and meeting new people, which will all help with my mental health. ”
Velma Hamilton

“ It offers exercise for the body, calmness for the mind and friendship for wellbeing. ”
Female participant, aged 47

“ A holiday from the world. ”
Female participant, aged 59



Watch our film here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eel-l-KiWpl>

Case study: 'Isolation to Inclusion' Project

This research project involved collaboration with partners across Northern Europe to address loneliness. Local projects were tailored for priority target audiences to facilitate a more active and healthier lifestyle.

The aim of the partnership funded by Interreg was to develop (in co-creation with the community) activities to improve social inclusion and loneliness. These activities formed part of our offer for social prescribing and were used by GPs, link workers and community groups for patient referrals.

- 50** multi-sector partner organisations from across Europe.
- 228** people took part.
- 60%** reported feeling less lonely after taking part.



Andrew Salt, Canal & River Trust volunteer supporting the project, said: "I strongly believe the canals are for everyone. They are free to use, they create a great atmosphere of beauty and serenity and I believe this can be of great benefit to everyone in society, but in particular for those who might be struggling due to social pressures or anxieties."



Watch our film 'From isolation to inclusion' here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82J5OX3U5tl>

GP Guided Walks in Birmingham



As well as providing the chance to improve physical and mental health by addressing social isolation and loneliness, our 'Walk with a GP' project offers the chance to check-in with GP at the same time as enjoying the great outdoors of the canal network in Birmingham.



Watch our film 'Walk with a Doctor' here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4mAh7ngoGY&t=1s>

Helping people to discover the benefits of their local canal or other blue spaces

Case study: Keeping communities active and connected

Using funding secured from Sport England's Together Fund we supported local organisations to keep communities active and connected and to combat the effects of the pandemic.

We awarded over £325,000 to 66 grassroot projects in Pennine Lancashire, Sefton and Manchester, to help tackle inequalities exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

Funded projects included supporting young people with additional needs and disabilities through outdoor activities in Sefton; improving women's wellbeing through water-based activities in Oldham and walking and cycling activities with isolated residents from the Chinese community in Manchester.



Together Fund 2020-2023



66 Together Funded projects

(self-led delivery utilising our waterways)



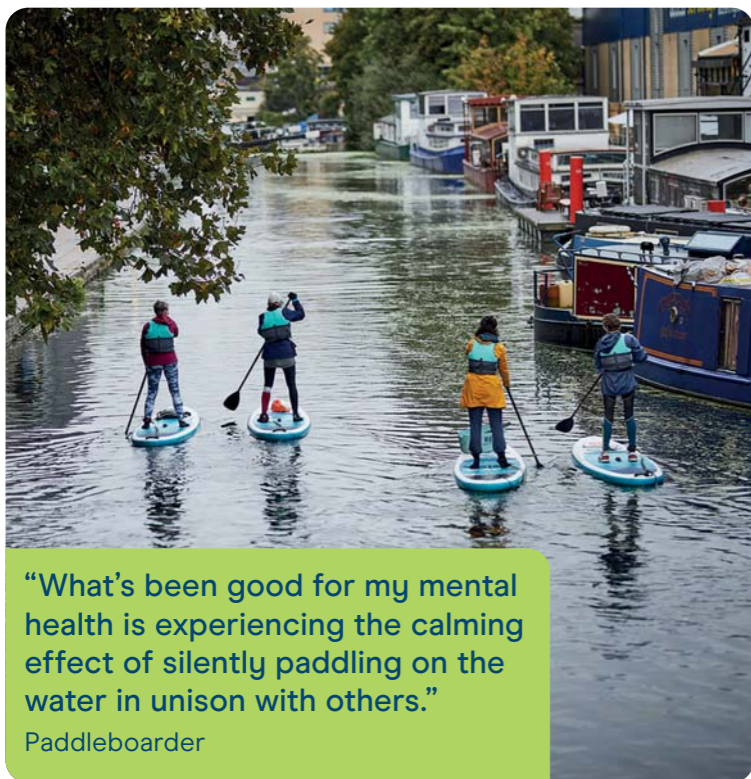
“Working with Support and Action for Women's Network, we have collaborated to do a paddlesport project called 'Women on Water' (WOW) funded by Together Fund with Canal & River Trust. Our project is about giving women the chance to get on the water and train in paddlesports to increase confidence and physical activity and become leaders in canoeing/kayaking. As a result of Together Fund we've built a network of community leaders and funded project such as cycling, walking and paddling in Failsworth that come together to better peoples lives. On the back of this project, we have secured more funding and have even become a British Canoeing affiliated Canoe Club.”



Victoria Holden (Northern Lily, Together Fund project Women on Water)

“Taking part in the WOW sessions showed me that I could really do anything I put my mind to even though I initially felt fear I am glad I did it anyway. I learnt a little bit more about myself and my capacity for growth whilst learning and doing the sessions and going on water.”

Mary Anne Oduntan



“What’s been good for my mental health is experiencing the calming effect of silently paddling on the water in unison with others.”

Paddleboarder



Case study: Community Roots – getting communities active

Nature-based activities have been proven to improve mood and reduce anxiety. Whilst tackling more adventurous activities such as canoeing can boost self-esteem and self-confidence.

Through our Community Roots programme, funded by the players of People’s Postcode Lottery, we are exploring new ways to engage people with their local canal and to encourage more people to make use of these waterspaces for healthy activities.

A new Community Paddle Hub on the Sheffield and Tinsley Canal has provided an opportunity for our Community Roots officers to connect with young people in the area. The team co-created a programme of half-term activities, providing opportunities for local people to visit the canal, many for the first time.

One grandmother reflected on her grandson’s experience.



“This was the first time he has ever canoed, he was so chuffed with himself for getting out on the water and having a go. (He) loves the outdoors, so since our Let’s Paddle session, he’s eager to see what else he can try with the Canal & River Trust.”

Case study: Let’s get active together

Canals create connections – between people, communities and with nature. These connections are vital in increasing community cohesion and reducing loneliness.

Funded by the players of People’s Postcode Lottery, our Let’s and Community Roots programmes connect people with their local waterspace and with opportunities to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

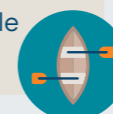
Operating in areas of greatest need, our Let’s activity programmes are making a real difference to people’s lives by increasing access to green and blue spaces on their doorstep.



11,682 people took part in 824 Let’s Walk sessions.



8,652 people took part in 297 Let’s Paddle events.



18,708 people took part in 507 further Let’s activities, including Let’s Yoga and Let’s Paint.



Let’s Move, Sefton

Walking-for-wellness was a transformative 12-week programme aiming to help local people get more out of their walks. The free wellness programme supported the community to explore their green & blue spaces, meet new people and get active using features of the landscape along the canal to perform exercises and build strength.

“I learnt some exercises which will certainly help me stay active and improve my balance.”

Female participants, aged 50+

“At the age of 67 it was a pleasure to meet people of a mixed age group and get involved in activities that I wouldn’t have done if left to my own devices. It certainly improved my mental wellbeing.”

Female participant, aged 67

“I think everything in nature is linked. Being outdoors takes you away from the city. It gives you a break from the realities of this world.”

Dog walker



Case study: Improving lives through Let's Fish

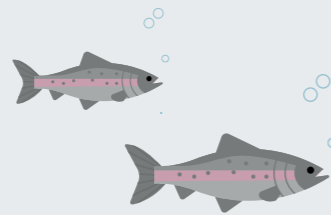
Fishing involves a therapeutic engagement with nature and green-blue spaces, which can have a positive effect on a person's subjective happiness, satisfaction, relaxation levels and overall emotional wellbeing. (Royal College of Psychiatrists)

Let's Fish introduces people of all ages and backgrounds to the green space and fishing opportunities provided by the canals. It aims to connect people with their local waterway and nature for improved wellbeing and create a pathway of regular participation into the sport through angling clubs and as a self-led activity.

Daniel's story

Daniel from Walsall, who attends a school for young people with special educational needs, discovered fishing through our Let's Fish programme and has been hooked ever since.

Daniel's Nan, Lorraine recognised the positive impact of Let's Fish on Daniel's wellbeing and behaviour: "when he comes fishing, he sits there, and he is calm. Let's Fish is the best idea ever. It gets your children out in the fresh air and takes them away from technology."



1,451 Let's Fish events held with a total of 26,985 attendees.

The majority of these events were free of charge, encouraging people of all ages to take up the sport and spend more time outdoors. (March 2021 – December 2023)



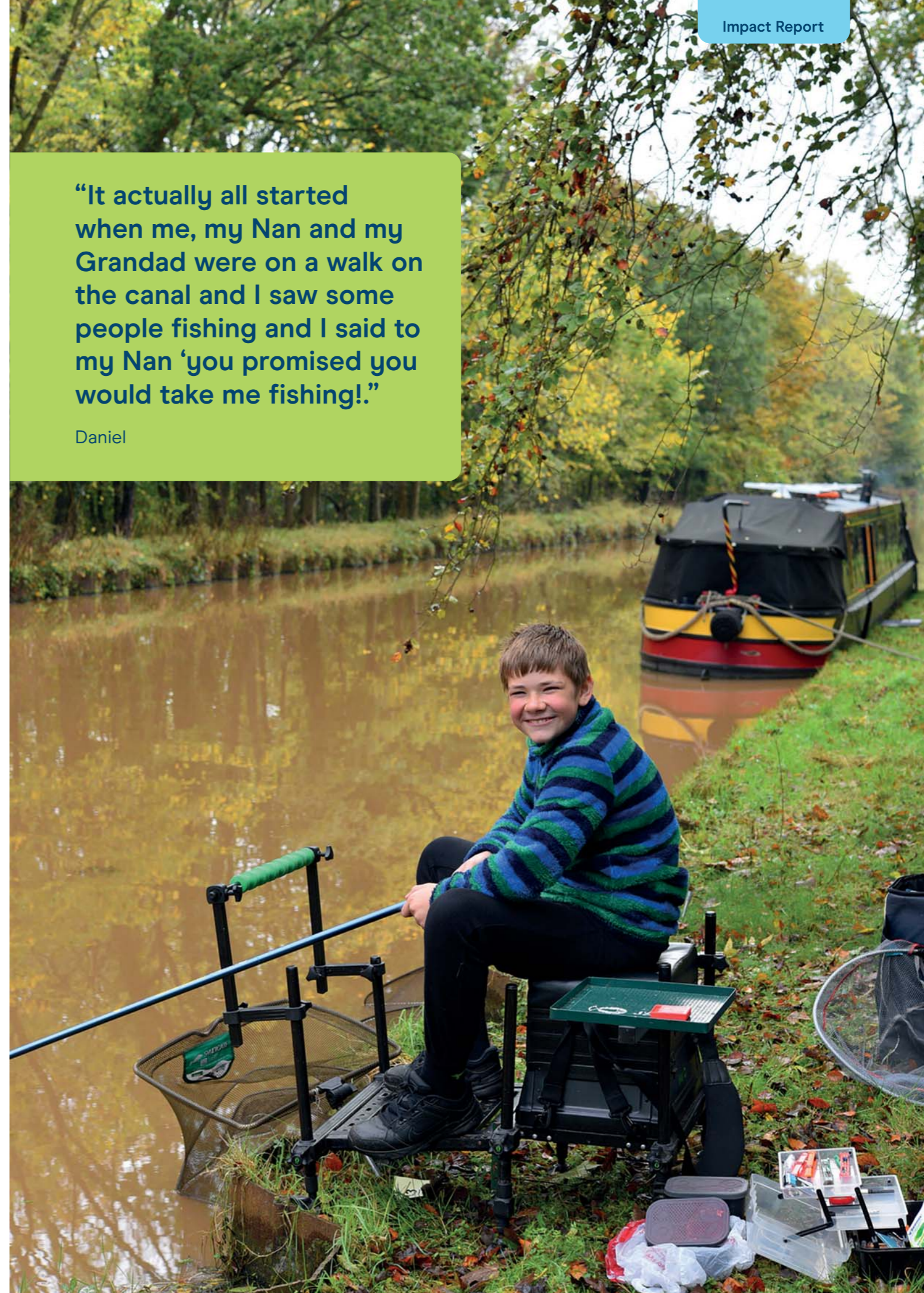
40% of participants go on to fish on their own or with friends since attending a Let's Fish! event.

21% joined an angling club.

15% have since picked up litter on the canal or elsewhere in nature for the first time.

"It actually all started when me, my Nan and my Grandad were on a walk on the canal and I saw some people fishing and I said to my Nan 'you promised you would take me fishing!'"

Daniel



We are improving mental wellbeing

The annual subjective wellbeing value associated with visits to our network is estimated at £2.9 billion per year.



Happiness



Life satisfaction



Worthwhile



Anxiety

Case study: Our research

Since 2018, we have been working in partnership with academics at King's College London to better understand the real-time effect of spending time by canals, particularly the impact on mental wellbeing.

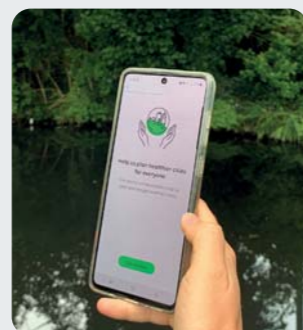


Through the development of Urban Mind, a smartphone-based momentary assessment tool, we have developed a greater understanding of the links between the environment and personal wellbeing. The app collects real-time data to enable research that demonstrates how different aspects of the urban environment affect mental wellbeing.

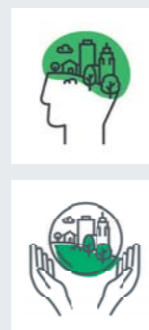
Our collaboration led to the publication of an academic study (published by the American open access scientific journal PLOS ONE on 31 August 2022) which found that visiting canals and rivers was associated with a **6% improvement in mental wellbeing** and that this association is statistically stronger when compared to just greenspaces alone.

“Canals and rivers contain not only water but also an abundance of trees and plants, which means their capacity to improve mental wellbeing is likely to be due to the multiple benefits associated with both green and blue spaces. These findings provide an evidence base for what we thought about water and wellbeing and support the proposal that visits to canals and rivers could become part of social prescribing schemes, playing a role in supporting mental health.”

Professor Andrea Mechelli, Professor of Early Intervention in Mental Health at King's College



Credit Neil Davidson, J&L Gibbons



For more information, please go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/valuing-our-waterways>

Victoria's story:

Spending time on the River Soar boosts wellbeing

Victoria Payne, Head of Geography at Orchard Mead Secondary School in North Leicester, said:

“Our school is in one of the most deprived parts of Leicester, with a high proportion of children qualifying for Pupil Premium funding and free school meals.

“Many of our students are disengaged with nature and the outside world, and we have a growing number of pupils with social and emotional issues.

“We approached Canal & River Trust for activities to fill a four-week block of intervention sessions for pupils struggling to manage emotion, behaviour and attendance.”



“The sessions have had an equally positive impact on them. We all say how much happier we are after the sessions. It's spurred us on to get the students out as much as possible and, where possible, out by the water.”

James' story: Finding confidence, connections and purpose

I have been volunteering with the Trust for about five years now. I was really shy when I started out, but now there's always someone I know when I go anywhere now, and that's really nice, gives me a sense of belonging to something bigger.

I had been stuck at home unable to work due to a disability for years and I wanted to get out and do something, so I started volunteering with the Trust in 2018. I like that I am helping people and the environment. I get a real feeling of accomplishment; I meet new people and make new friends and feel much more confident in myself so much so that I became a Lead Volunteer which I never imagined myself doing.

Volunteering gives me a purpose, it has a really positive effect on me mentally and physically. I have gained so much confidence. I feel useful, I'm a lot more active when I'm volunteering, I get a lot of exercise which is good for my health. I've

made so many new friends and met people who I wouldn't have otherwise. I've discovered I really enjoy speaking to people and hearing about their backgrounds.

After years of dealing with low confidence, it only took a few weeks for me to become more and more involved and take on added responsibilities. Being relied upon grew my confidence and brought me out of my shell. For me, the best part about volunteering is the social aspect. I enjoy making new friends, becoming part of a team, working with people, and having fun. I genuinely look forward to getting out and taking part in events.



“Volunteering gives me a purpose, it has a really positive effect on me mentally and physically. I have gained so much confidence.”

James