

Learning and Enhancing Skills



Our canals, river navigations, docks and reservoirs provide a unique space for outdoor learning, connecting with nature, building character and resilience, developing employability skills and preparing for adult life.

2,896 schools and 1.2 million+ young people (15-24 year olds) live within 1km of canal, other waterway or waterspace, many within the most economically disadvantaged areas of England and Wales.

Children and young people across the UK are facing multiple challenges in terms of educational attainment, employment prospects and social mobility. The 'disadvantage gap' – the gap in grades between disadvantaged pupils and their peers which is a leading measure of social mobility in England – is large. Outcomes for the very poorest pupils in long-term poverty have failed to improve after a decade and evidence shows this disadvantage gap can have a lifelong impact on people's life chances and can persist through generations.

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Amongst waterway communities (households living within 1km), the percentage of people with no qualifications, who are unemployed and who belong to the lowest socio-economic group are all higher than the national average. Our network provides valuable opportunities for engagement, skills development, social action and employment to those experiencing the greatest inequalities across England and Wales.

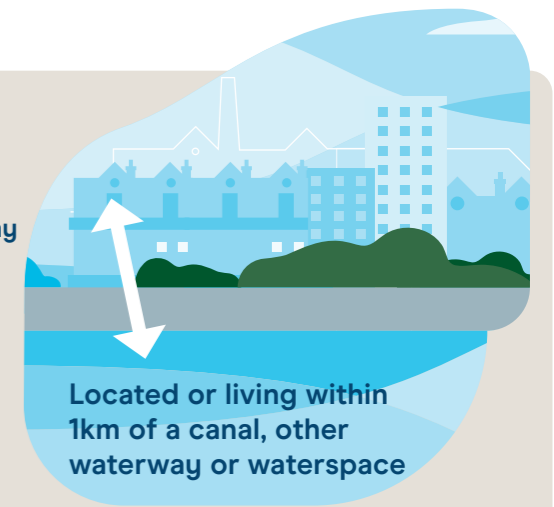
Our insight and evidence-led educational activities are developed through regular consultation with children, young people, teachers, education providers, partners and experts.

1,316,500 pupils attending schools located within 1km of a canal, other waterway or waterspace.

1,217,892 15-24 year olds living within 1km of a canal, other waterway or waterspace (13.8% of the total population).

19.7% of adults living within 1km have no qualifications (v national average of 18.2%). (ONS Census)

4.2% of adults living within 1km are unemployed (v national average of 3.4%). (ONS Census)



Our programme supports teachers in delivering the National Curriculum and our themes align with the Department for Education's broader strategic framework to ensure every child has the chance to build character and resilience, reach their potential and live a more fulfilled life. Our learning programme is designed to align with wider policy objectives and initiatives.

Our offer supports the cross-government Environmental Improvement Plan (2023), in particular its goals and targets for enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment and the commitment that 'learning in and

about nature to happen at every level of education'.

There is extensive independent and academic research and evidence as to the benefits of outdoor learning to pupils, teachers and schools.

The external factors and policies which have shaped our learning and skills programmes include:

- Learning Outside the Classroom Connecting to Nature – cross-government 25 Year Environment Plan
- PSHE Curriculum
- Barriers to achievement Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM)
- Employability and preparation for adult life
- Quality teaching and Continued Professional Development
- Cultural Education
- Water Safety for Children
- Department for Education's initiative on five foundations to build character and resilience



Learning programmes for children, schools & young people




 **334,453** children benefitted from our self-led learning resources.

233,060 children took part in our Canal & River Explorers and STEM programmes. 



 **154,342** children took part in water safety sessions.



192 Explorers education volunteers helped deliver learning to children & young people. 

Case study: Forging canal connections through Pocket Adoptions

Through our School Pocket Adoptions, children learn about and engage with their local canal while making it a better place to be.

Schools adopt a small stretch of a canal or river that's local to them, assess its current condition and then suggest ways to improve it. Pupils work with colleagues and volunteers from the Trust and local groups to improve the area. By involving pupils in a range of activities, from street art and litter picking, to planting and habitat creation, children gain a sense of local pride. They take ownership of their canal, build important connections with the local community, develop new skills and learn lots.

Griffithstown Primary School in Pontypool South Wales, next to the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, took part in our Pocket Canal Adoption scheme.

Cerian Pugh, Deputy Head Teacher: "Despite being so near to the canal and having so much green space around us, many pupils don't visit with their families. As a school we strive to find opportunities for our pupils to gain life experiences and develop skills beyond the classroom and learn from first-hand experience. It's vital for improving pupil mental health and wellbeing too – these are major priorities for us. "We could see that if we encouraged young people to build a relationship with the canal at an early age, it could make them value the canal and take pride in and care for their local area."

The Trust's Pocket Adoption scheme was assigned to the school's Eco club, made up of pupils from years 2-6. Karen Taylor, Eco Club Leader said: "We're working towards an

Eco Schools Award and the School Pocket Adoption is our way of 'looking after our community areas' and 'looking after our world'. The children get so much benefit from their time by the canal. It gives them new life experiences. Last time we saw ducklings and the children were enchanted."

Hawley Primary School and London Fields Primary School in London adopted a small stretch of the Regents Canal in 2022. They have worked with a local artist to design a mural, have made habitat improvements, carried out litter picks and added lots of new plants to attract bees and butterflies.

Olga Baron, teacher: "There's so much to talk about and so much to see. It's a really enriching place to inspire children and to help them connect with their local area."

It's really, really important to connect these local children to their local patch and let them feel like they can make a positive change. Seeing their curiosity and enthusiasm grow has been fantastic." Mike Wakeford, Learning and Skills Coordinator, LSE.



“ We want to make it environmentally friendly, so we want to include ‘No littering’ signs and encourage people to take their litter home.”
Year 3 Eco Club member

“ We want to put a picnic table and a bench, plus a little station with binoculars to see the birds. We want to give people a reason to stop and look around and notice things.”
Year 6 boy



Watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/ZIDpLg9MFNM>



“Our visit to the canal today to take part in the Junior Lock Keeping Sessions was such a great experience. The volunteers were so knowledgeable and explained how the locks work in such an easy to understand way. Seeing the boaters move through the locks was a great experience and both my daughter and I learnt so much!”

Parent

Learning and Enhancing Skills

STEM Programme (11-18 years old)

Career aspirations are shaped by a young person’s social background and gender and are often formed at a young age. Children who the have most to gain from real-world experience currently have the least access to it.



Our Learning & Skills portfolio addresses these issues by providing opportunities for children and young people from all backgrounds to engage in real-world experiences and discover more about the work that we do. Our growing STEM programme aligns with findings from research recently commissioned by Engineering UK, which highlights the benefits of employers working with children through schools from an early age, particularly for those from the most challenging backgrounds. The research showed that engaging with employers produces positive educational outcomes (attainment) and that employer engagement

activities benefit pupils, primarily through raising confidence and academic motivation.

We offer opportunities for STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) spanning all curriculum stages and topic areas – from understanding biological habitats and calculating the physics of water management, to engineering works and modern ecology challenges. Our canals and river navigations can be used to demonstrate how curriculum-based STEM learning applies in the real world and can provide an exciting new environment for learning.



Case study: Engaging Year 7-9 students at Pedmore High School

Pedmore High school in Stourbridge is situated close to the River Severn and Stour, as well as the Staffordshire & Worcestershire and Stourbridge canals, but very few students are aware of their local waterways.

We delivered our Waterways, Wildlife & Wellbeing workshop as part of a broader STEM careers day for over 100 Year 7-9 students. The workshop focused on ecology, wildlife conservation and environmental impact, introducing students to the work of the Trust, the history of canals and the diverse wildlife surrounding the waterways.



Those leading the workshop talked about their jobs and the pathways they had taken, before encouraging students to take part in experiments to demonstrate how they examine and improve water quality and tackle pollution.

“ I noticed today that Year 8 were struggling with an activity that they would have given up on before the workshop, but they persevered. It has given them resilience, independence, experience of working with others, reading instructions and so much more.”
Teacher

“As a chartered civil engineer, I like to be part of supporting a more diverse and inclusive industry, making it accessible to a wider demography. I enjoy speaking with school children, giving young people an opportunity to ask about the world of work and helping them consider what they might like to do after school. Combining the message on STEM careers with talking about the Trust is very worthwhile to me. The shortage of qualified engineers is an ongoing issue in the UK and at the Trust it impacts our ability to recruit and retain engineers. I hope that by taking the message that STEM careers are for everyone to the younger generation, I can help make a difference to the industry of tomorrow.”

Nicole Rabier, Principle Engineer and STEM Ambassador



Supported by players of **PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY** and awarded funds from **POSTCODE EARTH TRUST**.

Green Recovery Challenge Fund | **Waterside Today I have ...** | **Explorers**

1. Heard a duck quack	2. Discovered a pattern on a leaf	3. Spotted a mooring bollard	4. Seen a flying insect
5. Found a safe place for a nest	6. Spotted polluting rubbish	7. Touched wear and tear with my fingers	8. Spotted something black and white
9. Found a long leaf	10. Listened to the sound of rushing water	11. Spotted a bee on a beautiful flower	12. Imagined the view from a very tall tree
13. Seen wooden lock gates	14. Heard bird song	15. Touched rough bricks on a bridge	16. Listened to the sound of wind in trees

Don't forget to wash or sanitize your hands. Don't forget to Stay Away From the Edge. How many things did you hear, spot or find today? Add them up and put the total in the box.

Write the name of the canal you visited today

canalrivertrust.org.uk

More than 334,000 children have benefited from our self-led learning resources.

Learning and Enhancing Skills

Learning outside the classroom

Connecting children with nature boosts their health, wellbeing and learning and gives them a lifelong love of the natural world that leads them to cherish and protect it forever.



Our Learning & Skills portfolio presents opportunities for children from all backgrounds to engage with nature and improve the environment, through projects that are rooted in a response to climate change, environmental improvement, sustainable living and improving wellbeing.



83% of young people agreed that looking after the environment was important. (Natural England 2022 Survey)



35% of young people say they are connected to nature. This increases to 50% for those who visit a canal or river at least once a week. (Canal & River Trust 2023 Survey)



87% of children and young people agreed that being in nature made them very happy. (Natural England 2022 Survey)



75% of young people agree canals and rivers are vital for biodiversity and wildlife, while 66% agree canals/rivers play a role in protecting the environment. (Canal & River Trust 2023 Survey)

“ We are delighted to be working with the Trust to help develop and deliver programmes that enable more children and young people to benefit from bringing learning to life on their doorstep in their own local environments. It’s a great partnership and one we hope to amplify. The Trust uses its expertise in delivery of engaging, relevant, local activities, and the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom ensures schools, nurseries and colleges can use these activities as a catalyst for a sustainable change in teaching practice, so that students and their teachers can continue to benefit from high quality, regular, and progressive learning beyond the classroom on a daily basis. ”

Dr Anne Hunt, CEO of Council for Learning Outside the Classroom



Children joined a session at Caen Hill, where wetland scrapes and bug hotels were created to protect flora and fauna including rare Common Spotted Orchids and Chaser Dragonflies.



Case study: Green Recovery Challenge Fund, West Midlands

Thanks to funding from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, our 'Waterways, Wildlife & Wellbeing' project, in partnership with the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom and supported by the University of Derby's Nature Connectedness Research Group, enabled us to develop a package of support to build teacher confidence to take learning out beyond the classroom into school grounds and along local canals.

We worked with 500 schools in areas of disadvantage across the West Midlands. We helped teachers to increase pupil contact and connectedness with nature and achieve their learning, wellbeing and pro-conservation outcomes. Our curriculum-linked focussed careers advice and real-world employer engagement supported Green Careers and helped to broaden pupil aspirations.

This evidence-led project addressed barriers to outdoor learning and supported nature connectedness. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom mentored and trained teachers, supporting them throughout their outdoor learning journey.

“Some livelier pupils seem calmer and engrossed with activities. Some quieter pupils engage with their peers more when learning outside.”

Teacher



“The UK has one of the weakest relationships with nature in Europe and the nation is one of the most nature depleted on the planet. Given this and the growing environmental crises, building nature connection across society is essential and children and schools are key. Building teacher confidence and awareness is an essential part of this and applying our research within the project has been an important part of the Nature Connectedness Research Group's work.”

Miles Richardson, Professor of Human Factors and Nature Connectedness, Derby University

We hosted school workshops focussed on ecology and wildlife conservation, and offered practical first-hand experiences, including tree and hedgerow planting events and wildlife surveys. Teachers reported that spending time by local canals encouraged physical activity, improved wellbeing, learning, pro-conservation behaviours and nature connection.

“It's made me a better teacher. It's inspired so many new ideas and made me want to do so much more learning beyond the classroom because I can see the benefits so clearly. Being able to provide this type of benefit to children who don't have the opportunity to spend time outdoors and who may be very restricted in their experiences is extremely satisfying.”

Teacher

Involved **2,500** pupils in canal-based nature conservation activities.

500 schools engaged in environmental activities.

163 schools received additional mentoring to embed outdoor learning.

Created **4** apprenticeships and **8** new jobs.



50% said outdoor learning is now embedded in their practice.

Over **75%** said it had been effective or very effective in overcoming their barriers to outdoor learning.



The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom attendees



Learning and Enhancing Skills

Water safety education

Learning to be safe near water is an important part of every child's education. We ensure water safety messages are clear, consistent, and memorable.

We want children and young people to understand the risks around water and encourage them to make informed and safe decisions. We embed safety messages early and build upon this knowledge over the years, as growing independence increases exposure to risk.

Our canals, river navigations, docks and reservoirs run through some of the most heavily populated communities. We are actively engaged in 21 Water Safety Partnerships across England and Wales; through these partnerships we proactively raise awareness of water safety and drowning prevention within these local communities.

We work alongside Fire & Rescue Services and other water and safety charities such as RLSS, Swim England and RNLI, and we're part of the National Water Safety Forum working to reduce the number of deaths from drowning.



Since 2021:

Our Canal & River Explorers team delivered water safety sessions to **154,372** children and distributed over **218,998** water safety activity booklets.



We supported the RLSS Don't Drink and Drown campaign.

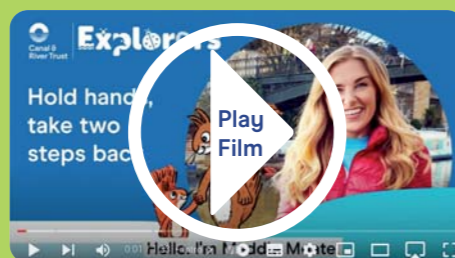
We launched our first ever Toddler Water Safety campaign.



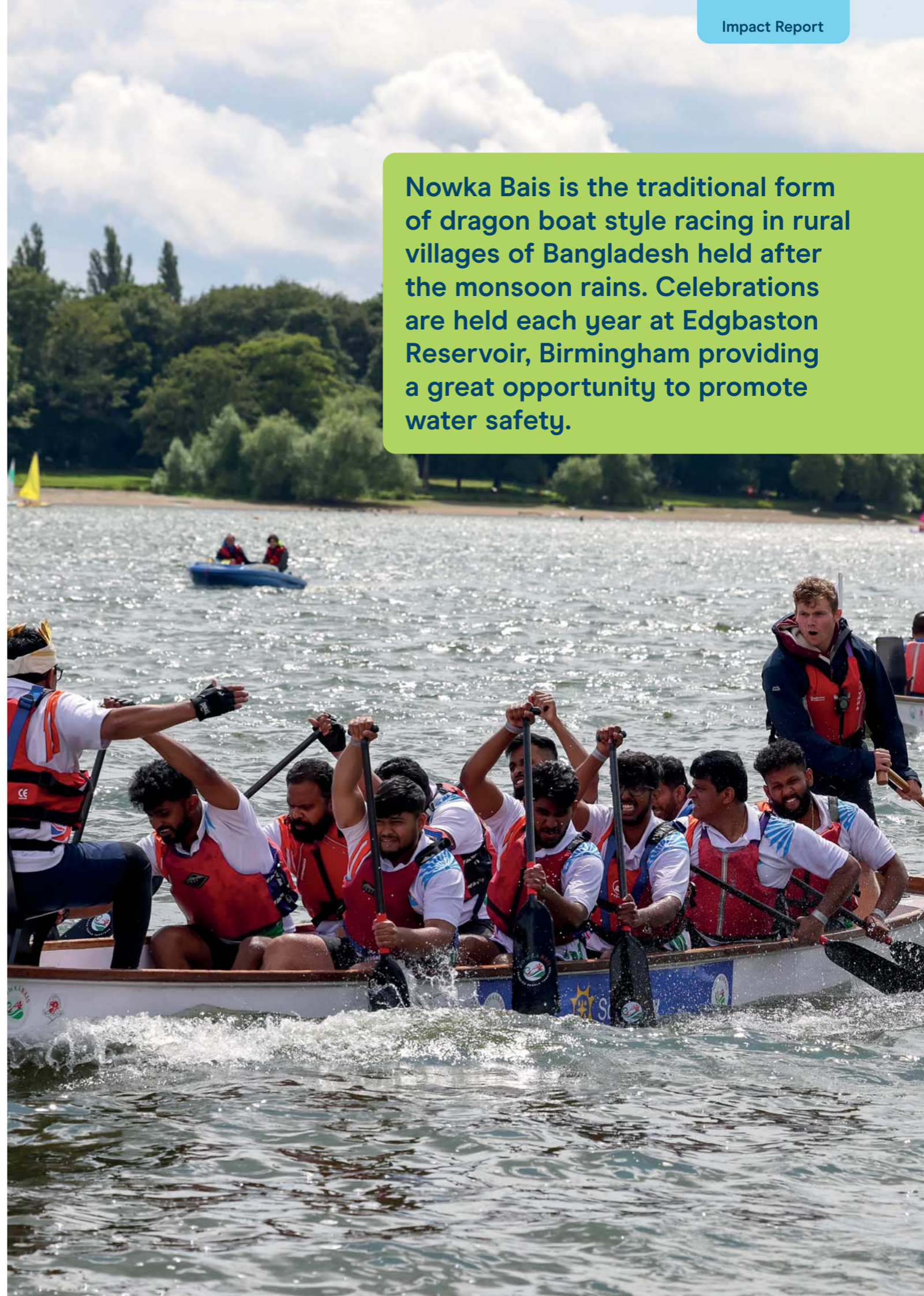
“We've been working with the Canal & River Trust for several years. Their support at our Safe+Sound events has ensured a consistent water safety message is delivered to all the children who attend our events. The Trust works with us alongside our other partners such as the RNLI, Staffordshire Police, HSBC Bank, DHL and St. John Ambulance. Our Safe+Sound events deliver five life-skills themed workshops to children in Year Five, four of which are delivered by our partners, and the fifth is fire safety in the home delivered in our immersive interactive pod. We hope to continue working with the Trust on initiatives and engagement events in the future.”

Helen Wood, Education Manager, Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service

The waterside is fun to go,
But there are things you need to know.
Let's stay safe and not be silly,
The water here is very chilly.
Find your grown-up, hold their hand,
Two steps back is where you stand.
Look out for bugs and ducks that quack,
But always do it two steps back!



Watch the film here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRt0TnKhjtE>



Nowka Bais is the traditional form of dragon boat style racing in rural villages of Bangladesh held after the monsoon rains. Celebrations are held each year at Edgbaston Reservoir, Birmingham providing a great opportunity to promote water safety.

Learning and Enhancing Skills

Apprenticeships & employability experience

Apprenticeships are highly impactful entry-to-work programmes and enable trainees to develop essential work-related skills gaining professional nationally recognised qualifications.

At the Trust, our apprenticeship programmes are helping us to attract new talent into the organisation, diversifying our workforce and

providing valuable skills and opportunities to people from all walks of life.

Since Jan 2021:

57 apprentices across the Trust.
13 of whom have gone on to take up permanent positions at the Trust.

Roles include; Waterway Apprentice, M&E Apprentice, Craft Apprentice, Construction Apprentice, Social Media Apprentice, Cyber Security Apprentice, People Apprentice.



Case study: Kick-starting a career on our network

As part of the UK Government's Kickstart scheme we have offered six-month placements to 47 young people aged 16-24 who were claiming Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

Our programme was nominated by the Department for Work and Pensions for a 'Promoted Diversity and Inclusion' award. The award recognised employers who had actively recruited and developed young people with significant barriers to employment. Thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery, last year we were able to support four of our Kickstart young people through our apprenticeship scheme.

Holly joined one of our waterways teams via the programme in June 2021 following a period of unemployment. Six months later she was appointed to an apprentice position, where she is continuing her training to be a waterways operative.



"Since I've been there, I've done things I never would have done before. And I've found out what I can do. They team you with different people who are more skilled in different sorts of areas. So we've had a wide experience. And then we can just say to our manager we would like some training on say strimmers for example, or we would like helmsman training. And he's always looking and putting us on different ones. So yeah, it's good. I love the job. It's always different we do loads of different things. So every day is different. I'm always outdoors. The team is great, and my manager is great."

Holly



Case study: Apprenticeship Programme – Heritage & Conservation Skills

After 20 years of dereliction, a team of Heritage Apprentices helped to transform the Grade II listed main warehouse at Finsley Gate in Burnley into a special canalside place for the local community.

The project was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Burnley Borough Council and Canal & River Trust.

Luke shares his experience of being involved in this exciting project:

“I’d like to say that before the apprenticeship I had no idea what I was getting myself into but I’m grateful I took the opportunity. I’ve learned multiple skills through all the college work and with working with experienced stone masons, brick layers and joiners.

“We did a project rebuilding a broken down building on Finsley Wharf and we pretty much re-built it from nothing. We had to take the majority of the building down to re-lay the stones. We had to take the remainder of what was left of the roof off, measure it all up, build a new foundation for it as the old one was deteriorated and now it’s back to a fully functional building.

“I’d say since starting my apprenticeship it has benefited me a lot. I’ve learnt trades I never thought I’d learn and I’ve got a good team behind me and would say it’s been a brilliant experience and one I would recommend to others to take if they get the opportunity.” Luke, Finsley Gate Apprentice, North West.

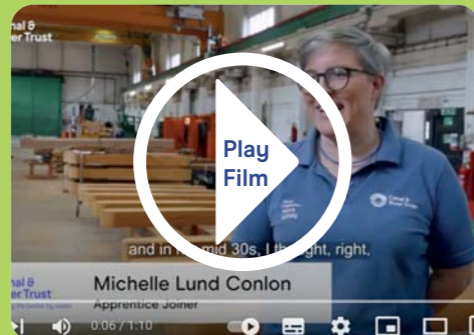


Luke practicing traditional lime mortar techniques at Finsley Gate, Burnley.

Changing careers – from teacher to joiner

Michelle was previously a teacher. In her mid-30’s she decided it was time for a career change.

Michelle is now on a two-year apprenticeship scheme at our Stanley Ferry Workshops where we hand make our lock gates from sustainably grown oak. She’s the first female joiner in the workshop.



Watch the film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd1Vww9PkfY>

Apprenticeship of the Year

The National Apprenticeship Awards showcase outstanding employers and apprentices who are committed to championing investment in learning and in future talent pipelines. This year, one of our apprentices, Corinne Spiller who worked as a Digital Marketing Apprentice on the Trust’s Unlocking the Severn Project reached the regional panel stage review of the 2023 National Apprenticeship Awards. Corinne has now gone on to a permanent role within the Trust’s Social Media Team.



“I am so thrilled that my Apprenticeship Awards application made it so far through the judging process. Of course, I’d have loved to have made it all the way, but regardless it was very clear that my achievements on Unlocking the Severn and work during my digital marketing apprenticeship were highly commended, and I’m hugely proud to have had a stand-out application that made it all the way through to the regional finalists judging stage! Hurrah! Doing an apprenticeship with the Trust was not something I had considered before the role on the Unlocking the Severn project came up. But I’m so glad I did the apprenticeship for quite a number of reasons, including the amazing set of skills it has given me: social media marketing, website management, graphic design, copywriting... even my fish ID skills have seen a marked improvement!” Corinne Spiller

Canals

A poem by Roy MacFarlane

People used to believe there were canals on Mars.
Aliens drawing water from ice caps to preserve a world
drying out. At least they tried to save their world.

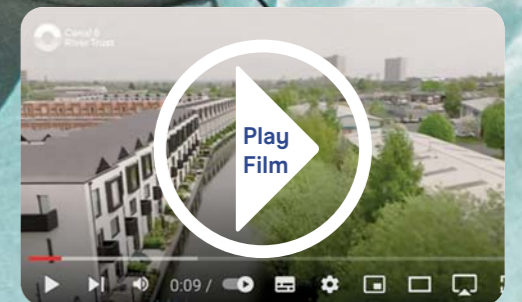
Here in Birmingham, there are loops
found in the canal networks that take you back
in time, the shells of yesterday's industry,
the ghost of steel on concrete floors,
the cast iron bridges as you enter
into wastelands.

The regal heron stands tall
and beckons all who may enter.
The City of the Golden Gates
where the Emperor's Palace and gardens
were found on the top of the hill
and a never-ending stream flowed
into a circular canal which fed four canals
and many waterways across the city of Atlantis.

And in this place of wealth and high society
was a place called 'The Strangers Home'
where refugees stayed and were treated
as guests of the city. I desire every city
to be filled with canals and a 'Strangers Home.'

City of thousand trades, were navvies,
built canals by hand, armed with wheelbarrows,
they picked and shovelled the puddled clay,
walking and stomping along the way.

I pray that aliens from another abode will peer down
upon this place, imagine loops and lines of waterways
in and around a metropolis are more than commercial
gain and profit. That a canal lined with a 50-mile orchid
of apple and pear trees threading through the heart of
a city is another Garden of Eden, where no fruits are
forbidden and all are welcomed.



Watch the film here:
<https://youtu.be/fRDdEJSIDss>