



IMPACT REPORT 2023

INTRODUCTION

Active Thames is a partnership programme supporting physical activity on the tidal Thames and inland waterways in London, Kent and Essex.

It launched in 2021 and is led by the Port of London Authority as a key part of their commitment to the long-term development of the tidal Thames – **Thames Vision**.

This impact report outlines the progress made between 2022 and 2023, with an emphasis on the grants awarded to community clubs. We built on the progress of **2022**, and several projects received funding for a second year.

Through Active Thames, the following partners work together to support growth, diversity and inclusion and maximise the use of blue space:



ACTIVE THAMES SURVEY

In 2021, London Sport conducted a survey targeted at anyone who enjoys or organises sport on the tideway or inland waterways in London, Kent and Essex. People were asked about their background, what they think about the potential for blue spaces, and what they consider to be barriers to getting active. The survey was split into two stages; a quantitative online survey, and a qualitative online community consultation.

Sport England recognises several groups that are less likely to engage in physical activity and sport. The same groups were found to be under-represented within the Active Thames research findings across participants, administrators, and coaches.

With 942 responses, the survey provided a huge amount of insight for the Active Thames partners to focus their attention.



KEY FIGURES INCLUDE:

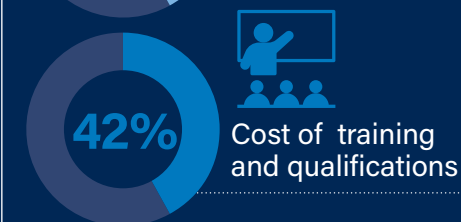
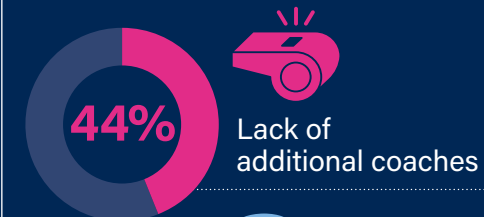


OF PARTICIPANTS ARE FROM A MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUND

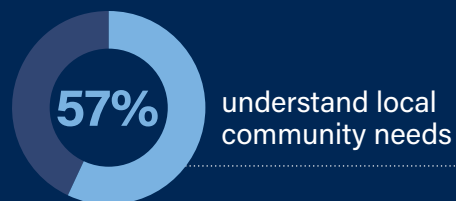
BIGGEST SKILL GAPS



TOP BARRIERS TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE COACH:



100%
OF COACHES ARE CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITY TO DELIVER A GOOD EXPERIENCE FOR PARTICIPANTS, BUT ONLY



In response to the survey findings the Active Thames partners came together to launch a funding scheme, prioritising funding for audiences less likely to be active and coach development.

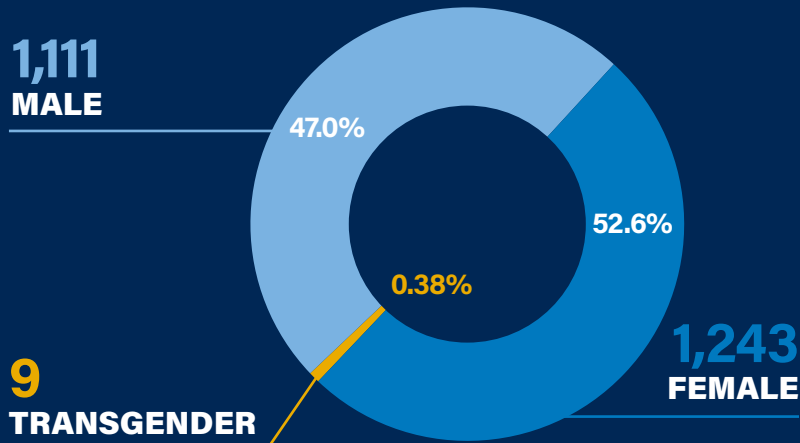
23 CLUBS WERE AWARDED GRANTS TOTALLING £86,422.



2023 IMPACT



26 PROJECTS WERE AWARDED GRANTS TOTALLING £149,420



2,363
PEOPLE
REACHED

+860
SESSIONS
DELIVERED

244
COACHES
DEVELOPED

OF WHICH APPROXIMATELY

24%
560
had a Disability, Long term health condition or Mental health condition



46%
1,078
were under the age of 25



40%
945
were from a minority ethnic background



19%
449
were over 65*



* **6** walking projects were funded through the programme. Of the 835 beneficiaries of these projects, **405 were over the age of 65**. This covers 90% of beneficiaries in the over 65 age bracket.

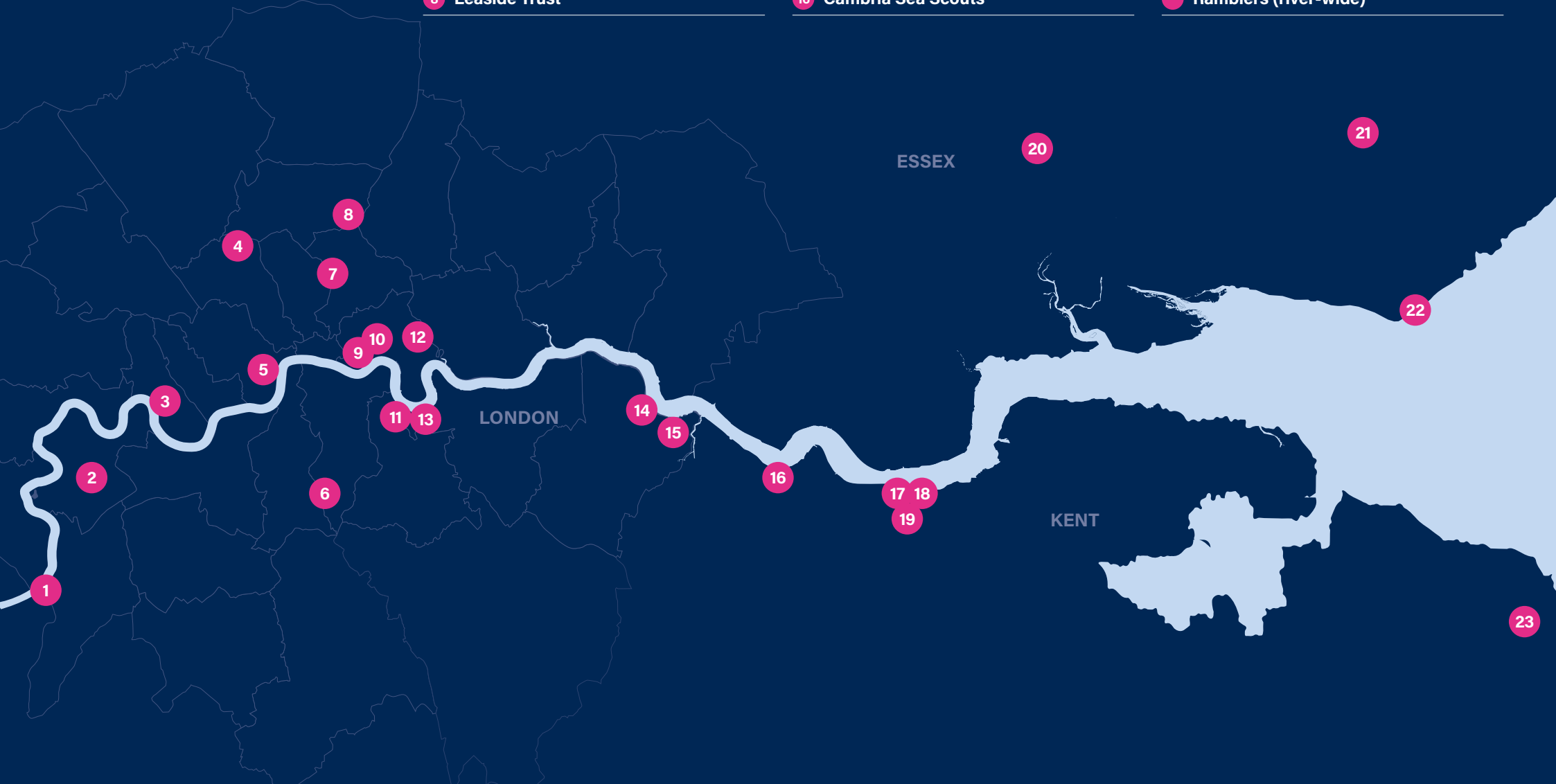


PROJECTS FUNDED

- 1 Lower Thames Rowing Club
- 2 Thames Landscape Strategy
- 3 Fulham Reach Boat Club
- 4 Pirate Castle
- 5 SilverFit
- 6 South London Scouts
- 7 Laburnum Boat Club
- 8 Leaside Trust

- 9 Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre
- 10 Tower Hamlets Canoe Club
- 11 The AHOY Centre
- 12 Poplar HARCA
- 13 Proper Blokes Club
- 14 Re-Instate
- 15 Erith Yacht Club
- 16 Cambria Sea Scouts

- 17 Gravesend Sailing Club
- 18 London Youth Rowing
- 19 Thames Barbarians
- 20 Writtle University College
- 21 Sea-Change Sailing Trust
- 22 Blue Therapy Active
- 23 Margate Yacht Club
- Ramblers (river-wide)



PROJECTS FUNDED

Lower Thames Rowing Club

1

Lower Thames Rowing Club, based at Old Leigh and Two Tree Island in Essex, has established a strong link with mental health charity Trust Links. With a grant of £5,000 and existing club funds, they were able to purchase a new rowing boat, which allowed them to offer more taster sessions and continue their work with Trust Links together. Through their Learn to Row programme, rowers gained the formal tuition needed to flourish within a supportive environment, and 90% of participants signed on as full members to continue enjoying the benefits of rowing on the Thames Estuary.



"While you are concentrating on rowing you haven't got time to worry about life. It keeps you fit and with pleasant company is a lovely way to while away a few hours."

Participant from Trust Links

Thames Landscape Strategy

2

A grant of £2,000 launched a series of Cool Walks and supported the Rewilding Arcadia project run by **Thames Landscape Strategy**. As well as providing exercise, the walks boosted mental wellbeing and provided companionship for visually impaired people, increasing the activity levels of those who might normally find walking challenging.



"I have so enjoyed them all, and am very much looking forward to next year when I hope you will be able to do more. It has been most beneficial for me, in my newfound situation, of having lost 50% of my sight, to be able to gain enjoyment from something that I have always loved, finding new, local walks. You have facilitated this perfectly, in my opinion, and I have felt empowered to have the attitude "can do!"

Participant feedback

Fulham Reach Boat Club

3

£5,000 contributed to **Fulham Reach Boat Club's** state school rowing project. 59 young people across two schools from year 9 to 13 were given the opportunity to row on the Thames in Hammersmith without any financial barriers. The club worked with local schools to ensure that the students selected were those who were the most likely to benefit from rowing, and if they wanted to continue to row, they were able to sign up as members.

"This programme has been hugely popular. It is an incredibly inclusive programme that allows students with diverse learning needs, ranging abilities and from all walks of life the opportunity to take part. The coaches are always positive and encouraging, allowing all students to have a good experience."

Teacher feedback



PROJECTS FUNDED

Pirate Castle

4

The **Pirate Castle** has several community programmes in place, such as after-school clubs and holiday programmes for young people, LGBTQ+ Rainbow paddlers, and an 'Upper-Deckers' club for over 50s. An award of £4,970 helped to develop 12 new coaches and instructors and qualify them as British Canoeing paddlesport instructors, which in turn helped to increase their capacity and deliver their regular programmes.

"Although I struggle with my mental health at times, The Pirate Castle team and the wonderful Upper-Deckers group have helped me feel so much better about myself. Over the past year, I've been lucky enough to receive free training which has further enhanced my skills and confidence. Along with Safeguarding Level 2 and Emergency First Aid at Work I've also passed the Paddlesport Safety and Rescue Course and become a Paddlesport Instructor. Together, these will enable me to help run Upper-Deckers sessions on a voluntary basis, meaning we can offer more low-cost and free places for over 50s like me to get out onto the water and experience the multiple benefits of paddling on the Regent's Canal in the heart of London."

Male Upper-Deckers member, aged 59



SilverFit

5

SilverFit, founded by the UK's oldest female Ironman triathlete, aims to promote happier, healthier ageing through physical activity and, at the same time, combat social isolation. An award of £5,860 helped to support the charity through developing new Nordic walking leaders, who ran sessions along the Thames Path in Kingston. The charity successfully delivered fitness activities tailored for older members of the community, which is in line with their policy to make Kingston an age-friendly borough. SilverFit sourced new members through targeted outreach into deprived communities, including through GP referrals (social prescribing). 40% of participants reported reduced back pain, with 66% adding that the programme helped to improve their social relationships.

"The Silverfit yoga and indoor rowing classes have been ideal for strengthening my core which means my spine is better supported. Since doing the classes I have experienced less pain, have reduced my painkiller dose, and can walk further and longer with less pain. The classes really have made a measurable impact on my health. In addition, I've made some lovely, interesting new friends. I really look forward to attending my classes and hate to miss them. Thank you!"

Participant feedback



PROJECTS FUNDED

South London Scouts

6

South London Scouts ensures that canoeing expeditions and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme are made available to young people, with support mechanisms in place to ensure those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are able to take part in all of their activities. £3,500 supported their work and covered the cost of training and qualifications for 12 volunteers who help run the scout group.



Leaside Trust

8

The **Leaside Trust** received a grant of £2,400 to provide a girls' club that builds upon their engagement with the Orthodox Jewish community. Providing canoeing, kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding sessions, the grant helped support the outreach of the East London charity. Over 50 participants were welcomed through these sessions, with the girls reporting increased overall physical fitness and wellbeing, as well as increased confidence in their abilities and in communicating openly with members from other communities.



"On Tuesdays, I look forward to Mondays. I feel really happy coming to Leaside."

Female participant

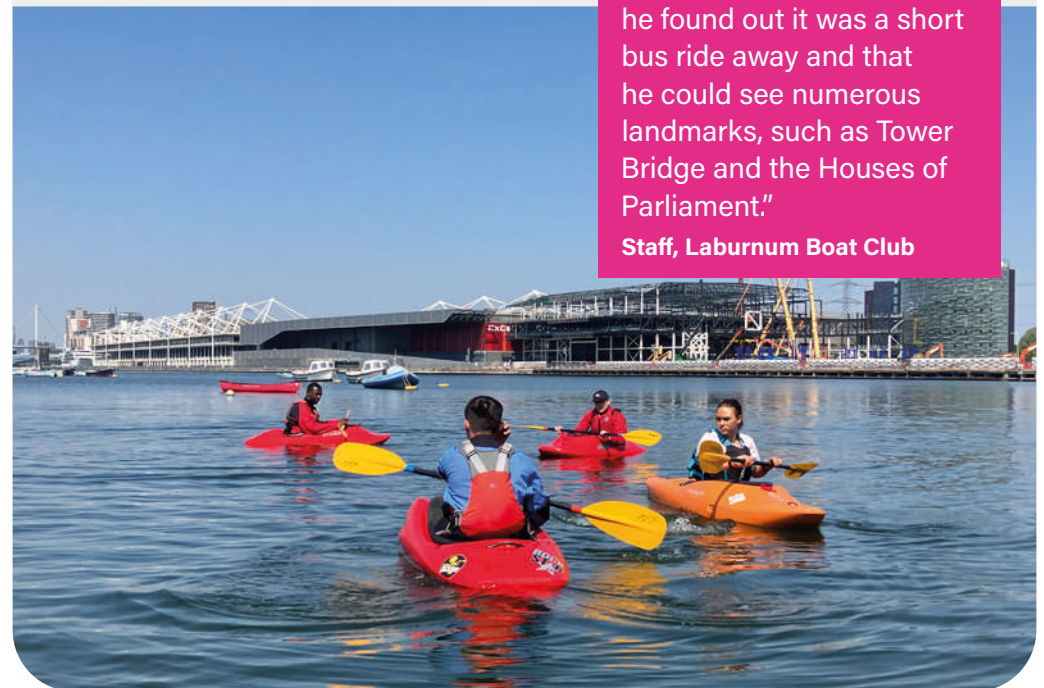
Laburnum Boat Club

7

Laburnum Boat Club were able to continue their **Inclusive Waters** project for a second year. They expanded the project to include walking trips to introduce young people to the Thames Path. This proved to be an extremely popular offering and was a key success of the project as it helped young people feel more connected to the city they live in and enabled them to venture outside of their normal travel area. Disadvantaged young people benefited from kayaking, canoeing, stand-up paddleboarding and walking. The grant of £4,956 also helped to upskill 54 coaches and support their ongoing development.

"S is 22 with learning difficulties and physical disabilities. He is brought to and from sessions by a Support Worker from his sheltered housing. S was delighted when we told him about a day trip to the Thames Path, he told us that he had never really been to the Thames much, even though he lives within two miles. S was even more delighted when he found out it was a short bus ride away and that he could see numerous landmarks, such as Tower Bridge and the Houses of Parliament."

Staff, Laburnum Boat Club



PROJECTS FUNDED

Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre

9

Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre has a strong reputation for developing the young people they work with into watersports coaches. A grant of over £4,000 supported Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre's adventure coach training scheme and enabled 6 young people to obtain their Paddlesport Instructor Award, opening up a pathway to volunteering and employment. With additional qualified instructors, the organisation has been able to grow in capacity, increasing overall access to watersports within the local community.

"Doing my Paddlesport Instructor Award with Shadwell Basin has given me confidence to teach sessions. It has also given me confidence in my daily life, in the outside world."

Course participant

Tower Hamlets Canoe Club

10

Building on the success of last year's Visually Impaired Paddling programme, **Tower Hamlets Canoe Club** secured over £3,000, allowing them to continue running beginner courses and offer kayaking and canoeing trips away from the basin for individuals with visual impairments, many of whom were trying paddling for the very first time. They were also able to purchase equipment to adapt to the needs of blind and visually impaired paddlers, including audio guiding equipment and lights. The club has shown that paddlesports are suitable for VI people and that being visually impaired does not have to be a barrier to participation.

"The other part I like about this VIP trip organised by Tower Hamlets Canoe Club is inclusiveness. The club make a real effort to engage everybody, whether visually impaired or new members, in sport."

Participant feedback

AHOY Centre

11

The **AHOY Centre** received two grants, enabling them to deliver two key projects. The East London Instructor Programme helped tackle the shortage of qualified sailing coaches in London, Kent, and Essex. An investment of £17,400 into the water sports workforce supported 24 young sailors to develop their coaching skills and become qualified. Local clubs were able to signpost young people into this programme and see them progress into coaching. In addition, a £2,700 grant enabled the Centre to upskill 7 new rowing coaches, not only to help with delivery of rowing programmes but also to support the growth of Oarsome Challenge, a key source of revenue for the club.

"We have good kit and equipment, and we have lots of people wanting to get on the water. However, we're a small team and often short on having enough freelance and in-house instructors available to deliver sessions. This new programme will help change that."

Zak Riat, Chief Instructor



PROJECTS FUNDED

Poplar HARCA

12

A grant of over £4,800 has enabled **Poplar HARCA**, a housing association, to build on a successful pilot project that they have been working on with **Moo Canoes**. 16 women from the area were able to complete the Paddle Discover award, and the funding has gone a long way in helping to kickstart a new boat club on the canal. Through the funding, new women were able to enjoy paddle sports, and many families, including SEND families, took to the water for the first time.

"As a Muslim woman, it was important for me to be able to feel comfortable in my Islamic attire and be able to join in at the same time without conforming to too many rules and this felt very welcoming."

Ainy, 43



Proper Blokes Club

13

The **Proper Blokes Club** is a community project for men's mental health. £5,000 supported more walk and talks along the Thames Path national trail, running over 100 sessions across several London boroughs including Greenwich, Woolwich and Southwark.

"Every man coming down is a success story in itself, even if they don't stay with us. This might have been the action to go get the support they need somewhere else."

Scott Oughton-Johnson, Founder

Re-Instate

14

Re-Instate is a charity working to improve employment opportunities, quality of life and wellbeing for disadvantaged people in the London Borough of Bexley including people experiencing mental ill-health, people with learning disabilities, and autistic adults. An award of £5,000 supported the '215 Smiles' project to run weekly walking groups on the Thames path. The project had the dual outcome of engaging clients with learning disabilities, autistic adults and those in recovery from mental ill health in physical activity, and using the Thames to teach/educate the learning disability groups about the history and culture of the river. The project helped participants to become healthier, more socially active, and more aware of their local environment.

"Even though it's still cold we have noticed spring is coming. We walk for an hour each time and I feel tired when we come in but I feel awake for the day. After a year, I feel fitter."

Female participant

PROJECTS FUNDED

Erith Yacht Club

15

£5,000 helped support several initiatives at **Erith Yacht Club**. Six volunteers were sponsored to achieve RYA Senior and Dinghy Instructor qualifications, and the club purchased a Drascombe lugger to better provide sessions for people with disabilities. The Active Thames Funding enabled the club to deliver accessible sailing to a greater number of local people who otherwise may not have had the opportunity to on the Tidal Thames at Erith. There were over 100 occasions where young people accessed the water. The club can continue to work closely with their local activity centre, **Danson Park Adventures**, so that young people taking part in sport on the lake can progress their skills and enjoy the Thames.

"The £5000 award from the Active Thames Fund has had a far-reaching positive impact for Erith Yacht Club ...it encouraged the volunteers and will continue to make an impact in 2024. The disabled hoist purchased in 2023 is now online and it is intended that more sessions will be offered to people with disabilities including developing the relationship of the club with Re-Instate at Erith."

Coach, Erith Yacht Club



Cambria Sea Scouts

16

Through a grant award of £3,105, **Cambria Sea Scouts** qualified 6 people from Greenhithe and Dartford as Powerboat Instructors, 10 people were upskilled in VHF Radio use, and 12 people qualified as First Aiders. They were also able to purchase a projector and screen as valuable training aids, with the combined overall effect of inspiring young people to become instructors in the future whilst getting more qualified coaches out on the River Thames.

"It's great that the PLA and Active Thames are encouraging leisure use of the Thames... our new instructors have gone on to deliver training sessions throughout the year for our Scouts and Explorers, helping them gain new skills - keeping them out and about and active."

Gravesend Sailing Club

17

Building on the success of last year's project, which also received funding from Active Thames, **Gravesend Sailing Club** used £3,000 to procure a new safety boat to help support their club and community sessions. With the help of their new boat, the club was able to enhance their safety provision, increase capacity, and do more to work with local groups, including the Sea Cadets.

"We have improved our capacity for sailing and improved safety at the club."
Coach, Gravesend Sailing Club

PROJECTS FUNDED

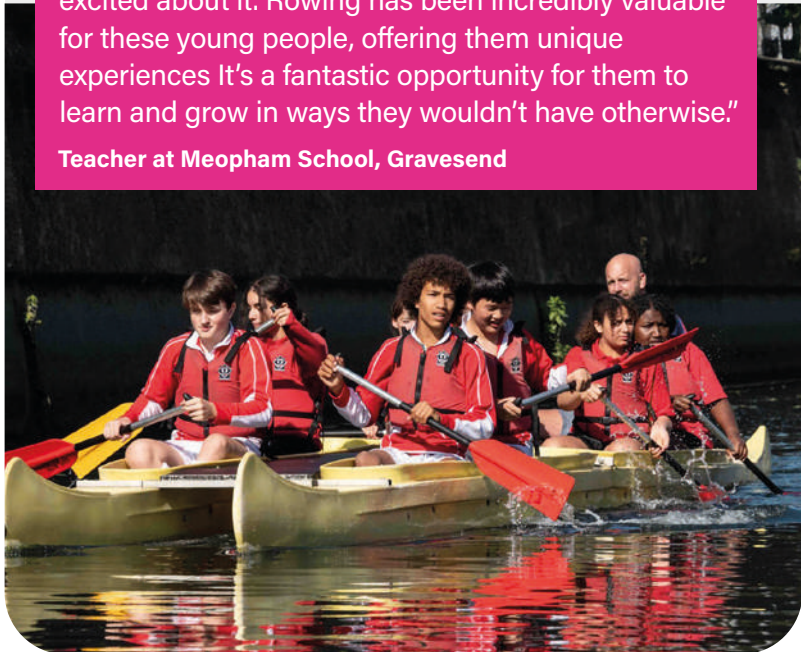
London Youth Rowing

18

A 2-year commitment of £40,000 expanded **London Youth Rowing's** Active Row programme to work in Gravesend. The Active Row Kent Programme collaborated with ten schools, driven by the overarching goal of engaging young individuals facing barriers to physical activity, and typically lacking opportunities to explore rowing. Schools were provided with coaching and indoor rowing machines to set up a club and progressed to rowing on the water at **Gravesend Rowing Club** in the spring and summer. Over 550 young people took part in the programme, improving their wellbeing and equipping them with essential life skills.

"Students are really enjoying the sessions, even those who usually struggle with physical activity. It's been great to see everyone getting involved and excited about it. Rowing has been incredibly valuable for these young people, offering them unique experiences. It's a fantastic opportunity for them to learn and grow in ways they wouldn't have otherwise."

Teacher at Meopham School, Gravesend



Thames Barbarians

19

Thames Barbarians Pilot Gig Club is based in Gravesend. Supported by Active Thames in 2022, this year's grant of £5,000 helped to maintain their momentum in club growth. They continued to provide open days for people to try out fixed seat rowing and recruit new members, whilst also growing their competitive section. Through their work the club raised awareness of the Thames as a place for leisure and recreation, improved the physical and mental wellbeing of participants, and created a pathway for individuals to becoming regular rowers through club membership.



"By offering taster rowing sessions we have been able to introduce people within the communities of Gravesham and South-East London & Kent to gig rowing; giving them an opportunity to get out on the River Thames and experience outdoor activities."

Coach, Thames Barbarians Pilot Gig Club

Writtle University College

20

Writtle University College is now able to offer stand-up paddleboarding to their community of students, local schools, youth groups and disability groups. Having already invested in a jetty for the on-campus reservoir, new equipment helped to launch the reservoir as a new space to be active. With strong existing links to charities such as Chelmsford Disability Club, Writtle was able to run multiple inclusive sessions, as well as events, open days, and work experience opportunities. Engaging a wide range of over 140 individuals, participants reported increased overall wellbeing and confidence, as well as improved social interactions.



"For many, this is an hour doing something new or different that has been spent on the water with others. Staff members and over 50s have had the opportunity to take part in repeat sessions. Each time they are more confident, more likely to stand up on a paddleboard and some have even bought their own or got theirs out of the loft!"

Staff, Writtle University College

PROJECTS FUNDED

Sea-Change Sailing Trust

21

A grant of £6,000 supported two projects at the **Sea-Change Sailing Trust**. The trust provided a sailing residential for 10 people with disabilities aboard the engineless traditional Thames traditional barge the Blue Mermaid, targeting community groups in Kent and Essex. The funding also enabled them to train up 12 new recruits, helping to secure the future of Thames traditional sailing barges.

"The weekend took me well outside my comfort zone and I felt quite excited but also quite anxious. I really enjoyed the challenge of learning new skills and I'm hoping that I can come back again next year to progress my learning."

Adult attending crew training

Margate Yacht Club

23

For **Margate Yacht Club**, a grant of £5,000 provided most of the funding needed to purchase a new engine for their safety boat. The engine allowed the club to confidently provide a reliable and safe environment for people to learn and participate in dinghy sailing, canoeing and paddleboarding. The club has seen an increase in youth and club membership since they obtained the engine as they have been able to host more sailing sessions and events, providing safer support for people with mixed abilities on the water.



"Now we can have double the children on the water and their mums want to do their Powerboat Level 2 course. Win, Win."

Graham Head, Senior Sailing Instructor

Blue Therapy Active

22

Blue Therapy Active is a thriving community of people who enjoy being on, in or near the water. Offering paddlesports, swimming, walking and cycling to the people of Essex, the group continued to expand last year. A grant of £4,980 supported the procurement of new equipment including kayaks and packrafts as well as training to support assisting members, allowing the club to engage with more people overall. Many participants reported great improvements to their mental health.

"Many have spoken about their mental health and how relaxed they have felt after. Getting outdoors including getting active is great for poor mental health and busting the blues."

Coach, Blue Therapy Active

Ramblers

The **Ramblers** received over £8,000 to develop two projects; guided walks along the Thames Path and the England Coast Path and walk-leader training days for community groups and leaders wanting to organise guided walks. 27 individuals were trained in walk leadership and 10 local community groups were supported to deliver robust, safe and welcoming walks for those with mental health challenges, learning disabilities or from LGBTQ+ communities.



"Fantastic course and very grateful for funding the course. This has allowed for more walk leaders to help lead the way with getting people outdoors."

Staff Feedback, Ramblers

Funding awards were also made to **AquaPaddle**, and to **Newham Ability Camp**. Unforeseen delays mean these projects will be delivered in 2024 and so they will be included in our next report.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

50% of projects were allocated funding towards coach development, either by onboarding coaches and volunteers, or by training and upskilling new instructors. Overall, training qualifications were awarded to 250 coaches and volunteers, an increase of at least 146 people from last year.

Whilst resourcing coach development has an array of immediate benefits for the coaches and volunteers themselves, it also has the long-term impact of increasing club capacity overall. We know that coaching availability is a common and recurring problem for watersport programmes across the UK, and a lack of coaches was identified as a challenge in the [Active Thames survey](#). Training and upskilling more instructors means that more participants are able to get out on the water and enjoy our shared blue space. This, in turn, goes a long way in developing the sustainability and resilience of the watersports community at large, promoting physical activity in and along the tidal Thames.

Some examples of the positive impact of investing in coach development include:

Poplar HARCA

33 WOMEN ACHIEVED THEIR PADDLE SAFETY AWARD

including 16 women who also achieved their Paddle Discover Award. One participant said, "I feel empowered to achieve more and keen to help other women who are struggling with their mental health to experience the joy that this has brought me and many of the other participants." Through the funding, the women were able to work towards qualifications that they otherwise would not have had access to, increasing their confidence, developing the club, and strengthening their wellbeing overall.

Sea-Change Sailing Trust

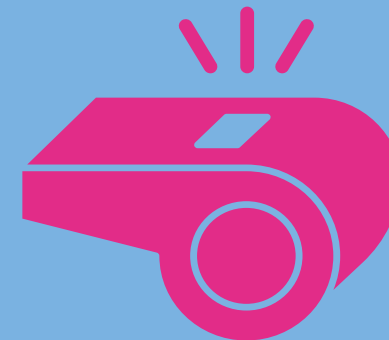
TWO ADULT BARGE CREW TRAINING WEEKENDS FACILITATED THE INSTRUCTION OF 12 INDIVIDUALS

Currently, Thames traditional sailing barges are experiencing a critical shortage of skilled crew, directly impacting the sustainability of the industry. These weekends enabled trainees to develop the skills necessary to navigate a barge while making a start towards addressing the skills shortage across the community.

Shadwell Basin

SIX INDIVIDUALS GAINED THEIR PADDLESport INSTRUCTOR AWARD

Having previously struggled with a shortage of available coaches, this funding directly led to greater organisational growth and increased club capacity with more young people involved in sport. At the same time, participants who progressed through the coach training scheme gained key transferable work skills and employment.



CHALLENGES

There were several challenges faced by clubs including:

AVAILABILITY OF VOLUNTEERS



UPSKILLING AND RETAINING STAFF



DELAYS IN OBTAINING EQUIPMENT



REACHING PARTICIPANTS



BAD WEATHER



This information has helped inform the criteria for grants that will be issued in 2024, including funding workforce development and the procurement of new equipment, as well as encouraging the uptake of public marketing platforms to promote sessions across local communities.

MARKETING

The Active Thames partnership works with Played; an all-in-one booking platform designed for community sports. Played are experienced in helping organisations make their sports programmes, sessions, and facilities easier to discover and book online and can even process payments. They use Open Data to enhance the reach each club can have and work 1:1 with clubs to help them work through any booking system challenges. They are part of a national movement called Open Active.

As part of their grant agreements, clubs are encouraged to open up their data for any sessions available to the local community.

In 2023, there was a continued increase in uptake with Played overall.

OVER 850 ACTIVITIES WERE PUBLISHED TO THE PLATFORM, WHICH IS A 20% INCREASE FROM 2022.

22 organisations published opportunities on the finder, which is a significant step forward towards being digitally inclusive and raising awareness of watersports amongst a wider and more diverse audience.



COMMENTS



"We are delighted to see the progress of another round of Active Thames Funding. Active Thames funding has enabled our clubs and centres to create new opportunities and initiatives for their community either through the support of capital investment or project focused activity."

Steve Mitchell, Royal Yachting Association



"Looking at the stats on the second year of delivery, it is clear that Active Thames is championing access and inclusion, and that clubs are working hard to make themselves more diverse and representative of their local communities. I am really pleased to see the progress and expansion of Active Thames, which remains a core commitment of Thames Vision 2050."

Robin Mortimer, Chief Executive, Port of London Authority

ACTIVE THAMES
EXPERIENCE BLUE SPACE

WWW.ACTIVETHAMES.CO.UK