



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water

# Youth Engagement Strategy 2020-2025

Our vision is to engage young people, from all walks of life, in the care and protection of our canals and rivers. We will listen to their voices and work together to create programmes that improve personal, community & environmental wellbeing.



[canalrivertrust.org.uk](https://canalrivertrust.org.uk)



# Together we can achieve amazing things

At the Canal & River Trust, we believe life's better by water. We're passionate about encouraging the millions of people who have canals and rivers on their doorstep to spend more time by them – walking, cycling, canoeing, fishing or just sitting and taking in the sights and sounds. Our canals are at the heart of communities across England and Wales and we want more people to benefit from this free and accessible source of wellbeing.



“The integration of rivers and canals into daily urban life is vital for the aesthetic improvement of our environment as well as for our own mental wellbeing. The opportunity for escape that rivers offer from the hustle and bustle of built-up areas is invaluable for our own enjoyment of the natural world, its biodiversity, and its history.”

We're here to make our 200-year-old canal network relevant to the diverse communities they run through. We'll look beneath the surface to understand the different needs and concerns. And work with local people to co-create activities, events and projects designed to improve personal and community wellbeing.

Young people are at the heart of all this. They bring fresh ideas and new perspectives, offering real opportunities for us to do things differently and develop our practices and approaches. We know that young people are motivated and passionate. With the right opportunities and support, they can achieve amazing things.

In a nutshell, we want to work with them to promote the wellbeing benefits of being by water and make sure that canals and rivers remain an important part of our communities now and in the future.



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Our work in action



## Bringing communities together

In 2019, in partnership with Urban Wilderness, we spent a week in Tinsley Marina, Sheffield, working alongside several groups of young people that we met through local youth charity Endeavour.

Together with Urban Wilderness we engaged the young people in three activities. They created a mural inspired by boat art and nature, cleared and sign-posted a pathway through an area of shrub, and built greenwood benches to create a meeting point that facilitates connection and conversation.

Not only did the project benefit the physical canal environment, picking litter, clearing vegetation and creating wildlife friendly log-piles, it also had a positive impact on the young people involved. The Endeavour support staff noted the young people learnt practical skills, like woodworking and vegetation clearance, as well as developing their communication, teamwork, problem solving and confidence, helping them connect to nature and create havens for their peers.



# Our aims by 2025...



“The more that young people get involved with the environmental issues we have today, the better equipped our generation will be to deal with the global concerns of tomorrow.”

## Half a million

children & young people will broaden their learning and improve their skills per year

## One million

children & young people, reflecting the communities we serve, will be involved with our waterways per year

## 150,000 hours

of youth social action will happen per year

# Why are we doing this?

When we thought about how to engage and support young people, we looked at it from three angles.

## 1 We thought about what we want to do

Here at the Trust, we're clear about the huge benefits of involving the next generation. But we also recognise the risks of failing to engage them in our current work and future plans.

Getting young people involved will help us to:

- **Attract a more diverse demographic** of visitors, volunteers, supporters and workers
- **Open up new opportunities** with partners, funders and supporters for a more sustainable future
- **Raise awareness** of the Trust, our brand and our work amongst new audiences
- **Promote the wellbeing benefits** of canals and rivers by new methods
- **Create a more varied offer** including activities and events that appeal to different communities
- **Demonstrate the Trust's unique role** and how we can add value within youth and charity sectors
- **Extend the scale and reach of our work**, positively impacting the lives of people in more diverse communities across England and Wales



## Growing skills through apprenticeships

**Higher Engineering Apprentice with the Trust, and 2019 Apprentice of the Year, Jonathan Ward, reflects on his experience.**

“The apprenticeship has contributed to my personal development by fully engaging me in the world of engineering and introducing me to the values by which the Trust operates. I've learned key skills whilst at work and at college, which will ensure that I have the correct tools for my career to progress once my apprenticeship has been completed. “The work that I've completed

throughout my apprenticeship has also been a large benefit to my college work, as it has given me practical experience that I can relate to when completing my assignments. It's also contributed to my own wellbeing, giving me the opportunity to work alongside a group of exceptionally hard-working and ambitious people, who act as extremely good role models and mentors. They have also been very supportive and always have my best interests in mind, making my experience of being an apprentice an enjoyable one.”



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## We looked at what's going on externally

A child's background, family income and location impacts on their wellbeing – from early years to school and beyond. Disadvantaged young people achieve poorer career outcomes as they're much less likely to have access to advice and experiences of work to enable them to turn aspiration into reality.

At the Trust, we're ideally placed to help young people overcome these challenges. Our canals and rivers run through some of the most diverse and most deprived communities across England and Wales so we have a unique opportunity to offer wellbeing experiences on the doorsteps of those who need them most.

Thanks to the breadth of our work – and the scale and reach of the waterway network – we can respond to many of the nation's issues and in turn, support the government's priorities for young people including:

- **Youth Social Action, citizenship & the PSHE curriculum**
- **Mental health & wellbeing**
- **Physical health & wellbeing** including tackling childhood obesity and building an active nation
- **Skills development & employability**
- **Social mobility & equality of access to opportunities**
- **Social connectedness & community resilience**



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## Our work in action



### Developing young leaders

Sports degree student, Hazel, was introduced to canoeing with the Trust through college.

in Blackburn. She's also worked as a canoe instructor for students from Wigan colleges.

As part of the course, she coached children in sport on land, but she really enjoyed being on the water. In 2018, she signed up to a week-long course to become a Paddlesport Instructor and volunteer at the Canal & River Trust. This led to her helping to grow the new #ThisGirlCan canoe club in Wigan.



Hazel

Hazel told us, "Over my time volunteering at Canal & River Trust, I've become more confident with everything I do and say. I've found where I belong and become better at receiving feedback, more creative with coaching ideas and feel a lot calmer dealing with challenges."

In 2019, Hazel worked with a team of Young Leaders to plan and deliver the coast-to-coast relay and festival

Being a Young Leader brought together active participation, skills development, leadership and social action.

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## We listened to young people

In November 2019, we worked with DJS to carry out a survey of 2001 young people aged 16-24. This gave us valuable insight into their concerns and interests – and it helped us to understand more about what the younger generation is looking for from a volunteering opportunity at the Trust.



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Young people who volunteer regularly are more satisfied with their life.

**28%** of young people who volunteer regularly rate satisfaction with their life at least a 9 out of 10 (compared to 14% of general population)

Young people enjoy nature and care about the environment.

**85%** agree or strongly agree that they always find beauty in nature

**79%** agree or strongly agree that being in nature makes them feel very happy

"To me 'making life better by water' means helping the public to gain an understanding and appreciation of the water around them to enable them to utilise it in a way to help benefit their life."

**70%** of young people who volunteer locally feel a strong sense of belonging and satisfaction to their area making our beauty on your doorstep and community safety initiatives a strong fit for young people

**2 in 5** young people disagree there are enough opportunities to get involved in decisions that affect them highlighting the potential of our youth leadership and youth-voice initiatives

### So, what will we do with these findings?

They help us to develop our local and national offers for young people across formal education and within community settings.

For the full youth volunteer survey results and report please visit <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer>





# How we make the greatest impact on young people's lives

By engaging young people early in their lives, we can help them to experience the wellbeing benefits of being by water and build meaningful connections to nature.



This is our approach:

- We're developing **clear pathways of opportunities** so young people can try different activities, take on various roles and stay engaged
- There's no 'one size fits all' approach so we're committed to ensuring all young people are able to **access and enjoy the wellbeing benefits** of the waterways

- We've created **3 pillars of engagement** that, together with our commitment to youth-leadership, underpin this area of our work

"Making life better by water means cleaning up our waterways and making them inviting and accessible for all. People who live near these features deserve to enjoy them and as a society we have a responsibility to preserve them for the future."





# Measuring our success

All of our youth programmes are developed and evaluated in line with our **Outcomes Measurement Framework**, which cover **Health, Wellbeing & Happiness, Engaged People & Cohesive Communities** and **Learning & Enhancing Skills**.

We aim to make a positive impact across the following areas:

- **Improved personal wellbeing** – have participants enhanced their skills and learning through engagement on our programmes? Has physical health improved and levels of activity increased? Has mental health improved – do participants feel happier, more confident, less lonely? Has a person’s outlook, life satisfaction and aspirations improved?
- **Community connectedness** – have our interventions improved community cohesion, enhanced an individual’s sense of belonging to their community, and / or improved communication, understanding and interaction between different groups within a community?
- **Connection to nature & environment** – do people feel more connected to or an increased awareness and appreciation of the natural environment as a result of their engagement with us?



**Health, Wellbeing & Happiness**



**Engaged People & Cohesive Communities**



**Learning & Enhancing Skills**



**Our work in action**

## Passionately inspiring engagement

Louis Howell originally joined the Trust as a young volunteer in 2013, as part of our Action Squads Programme. Since then he has taken on various roles regionally and nationally, including delivering Youth Engagement Training across the Trust to help build confidence and capacity amongst colleagues.

In 2019 he became Chair of our Youth Advisory Group and from there, joined the Trust’s Council and London & South East Regional Advisory Board. Louis’ journey has taken him from a non-user to a passionate advocate who plays an active role in our governance structures. He’s helping to ensure our canals and rivers continue to play an important role in the lives of communities, now and for generations to come.

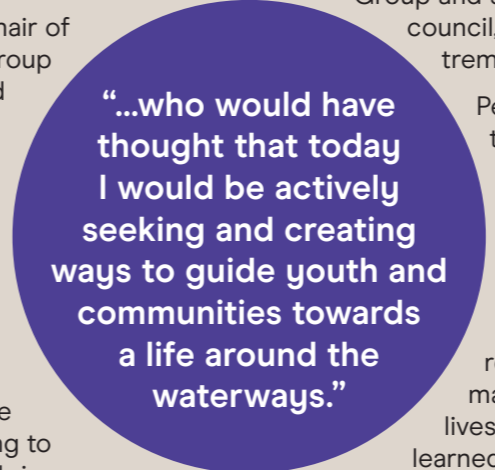
“My ever-growing relationship with the Canal and River Trust is genuinely one to cherish. When I reflect on the fact that in the first 20 years of my life I don’t think I had ever been to a canal, who would have thought that today I would be actively seeking and creating ways to

guide youth and communities towards a life around the waterways.

Starting with opportunities for young people to do social action on the canals, then progressing to equipping the trust’s staff and volunteers to effectively work with young people, to now chairing the trust’s Youth Engagement Advisory Group and sitting on the trust’s council, this journey has been tremendous.

Personally, I am driven to help people appreciate how significant of a community asset the canals and waterways are. They are an amazing resource that we can make use of in our daily lives. Professionally, I have learned massive amounts about how a large charity that has such large amounts of responsibility goes about fulfilling its expectations and improves year on year. All of this has contributed to my own personal and professional development as I progress the businesses I run and charities I volunteer with.”

**Louis Howell, 25, London**  
Entrepreneur, Educator, Activist



“...who would have thought that today I would be actively seeking and creating ways to guide youth and communities towards a life around the waterways.”








**We are committed to working with young people, partners and communities to develop activities and opportunities along our canals and rivers, that engage, inspire and make a positive difference to people's lives.**

For more information on our youth engagement work please visit <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/specialist-teams/youth-engagement>

To find out about volunteering and engagement activities in your area please visit <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer>

Enjoy. Volunteer. Donate.  
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