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.
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.

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.

“...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 can 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.”

Our work in action

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 these 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.

Bringing communities together

In summary, our Youth Engagement Strategy enables us to achieve our vision of making canals and rivers accessible and enjoyable for everyone. By working with young people, we can create a legacy that will benefit generations to come.
Our aims by 2025...

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’ve 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 more 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 enable 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.”

“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.”

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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’ve 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.

Developing young leaders

Sports degree student, Hazel, was introduced to canoeing with the Trust through college. 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. In 2019, Hazel worked with a team of Young Leaders to plan and deliver the coast-to-coast relay and festival in Blackburn. She’s also worked as a canoe instructor for students from Wigan colleges.

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.”

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

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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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.

Helping facilitate services to others, encourages environmental concern and creates connections to nature. This is the biggest area of our work with young people and our offer – for individuals and groups – is varied with lots of different options.

Our current priorities include:

• Climate change
• Digital and remote volunteering
• Peer-education

Designed to increase awareness of career options, raise aspirations, provide pathways and improve employment outcomes for young people, particularly those facing additional barriers. It also seeks to open up career pathways across the environmental sector to underrepresented groups.

Our programme includes:

• Careers events
• Work experience
• Traineeships
• Apprenticeships
• Mentoring
• Graduate placements

With a focus on physical health and mental wellbeing, this programme provides opportunities for young people to get outdoors, experience the waterway, have fun and meet new people locally. It enables us to understand how young people want to engage with their local canals and rivers and co-create activities that match their interests.

Our activities include:

• Visual and performing arts
• Cultural events
• Sports
• Youth loneliness projects

Youth-leadership is central to everything we do

By putting young people in the driving seat and responding to their ideas and priorities, we can develop activities and projects we know will appeal to other young people and create real opportunities for them to improve wellbeing for them, their peers and communities.

Youth Engagement Strategy

Social Action

Skills Development & Employability

Health & Wellbeing

Canal & River Trust
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.”

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

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?

Our work in action

...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

canalrivertrust.org.uk
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Canal & River Trust
Making life better by water

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