



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2023



OVERVIEW

We have provided activities for 10-35 service users every week in 2023. These are mainly asylum seekers residing in Plymouth, and some have refugee status and ARE (appeal rights exhausted). Our clients commonly have experienced trauma, and many – especially those still going through the asylum system - struggle with their mental health. The majority of our participants struggle to express themselves fully in English, do not have the financial means to access activities that require equipment, travel, or entrance fees, and find themselves in a new city and an unfamiliar environment.

The impact our activities have had on our service users has been immensely positive. Our service users have constantly told us how their mood has improved, they have new social contacts, and know new areas in Plymouth including walking and cycling routes. Our skills lessons such as swimming and cycling lessons have been received with particular enthusiasm and gratitude and we are told these have really improved people's confidence.

The activities programme we have run has included an ongoing weekly arts programme with courses in photography, print-making, crafts and sewing to mention but few examples; music learning and sharing; indoor activities such as basketball, bowling, visits to the cinema and food-related workshops during the winter months, and an outdoor activities programme during spring, summer and autumn months which has enabled people to access green and blue spaces around them such as walks on the South West Coastal Path, trips to Dartmoor, cycling around and outside the city, and canoeing on the river Dart. On top of this we have organised cycling and swimming lessons, and started a scheme through which people can access the University of Plymouth Students Union gym.

Our approach for delivering activities has been targeted to address these needs in particular, namely: 1. Getting to know Plymouth through activities; 2. Making new social connections; 3. Learning new skills; 4. Mental health support through accessing blue and green spaces and social interaction

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NEW DEVELOPMENTS

New funding in 2023 has enabled us to establish new professional relationships and contracts with partners which we will continue to work with in the future. These include Plymouth University Students Union Gym, who we haven't worked with before and who we now facilitate a lot of our indoor activities with; and Plymouth Active / Life Centre who have allocated spaces for us on their beginner swimming lessons. We have been able to grow our activities programme to provide a full-year-round support package, with much greater emphasis on learning new skills – rather than just positive experiences.

With Tressa starting in October 2023 as the new activities coordinator, we have also taken a new direction and emphasis on connection to growing and food. By the end of the year her efforts have resulted in three new partners for future: Jar Squad, Apricot Centre in Totnes, and Flax Project.

Number of activities sessions 176

Number of SUs attended 259

Survey taken with a sample of SUs in Winter 2023 tell us

- 85% of service users feel healthier
- 100% feel happier, and
- 85% feel less alone.



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Connecting to Land / Ethical Growing Practices

- Apricot Center Visit: farming, outdoor cooking, harvesting
- Jar Squad: cooking / pickling / fermentation workshops
- Flax Project: growing, harvesting, processing flax

Connecting to Blue Space

- Reclaim the Sea: wild swimming sessions
- WildWise: canoeing sessions on river Dart
- Southwest SUP: stand-up paddleboarding and surfing sessions
- Group trips to local beaches, The Hoe, Plymouth Sound, Devil's Point, Mount Edgecumbe, Whitsand Bay, Mount Batten Beach, Jennycliff, Bovisand
- A family trip to The Aquarium

Movement / Exercise

- Monthly SW Coastal Path Walks: walking along the SW coastal path with Gemma Dunn / SW Coastal Path
- Monthly guided cycling and learning to ride with Jonathan PCC Plymouth Cycling Scheme during summer
- Life Centre: swimming lessons for men and women and swim passes
- Gym access for up to 20 individuals per month
- Basketball sessions during winter months
- Tenpin Bowling
- Referrals and travel expenses to weekly cricket sessions organised by Devon Cricket Association

Art / Creative Practice

- Photography
- Musical Storytelling
- Music Zone music group, weekly group January – May 2023
- Beginner guitar learning with Martin
- Sewing / Textiles
- Gallery / Museum visits: Eden Project, St. Ives, London
- Cinema trips: Immersive Dome, Vue, Plymouth Art Cinema, Cineworld

IT learning

- Tuesday IT classes at DCRS



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Arts programme

DCRS arts programme has grown to be a core part of our whole activities programme. Bev, a volunteer who previously ran the arts sessions on Fridays developed this into a practice that means we now have an arts programme that involves an activity every Friday: from drawing and painting to print-making workshops, photography courses, to sewing and crafts. Since Bev, the programme has been facilitated by Merrydith, a PhD student at Plymouth University, and more recently Tressa our new activities coordinator. The legacy of this group has been immense: two of our previous participants who Bev in particular worked very closely with gained sanctuary scholarships, including one of them to study arts. The DCRS arts group has made close links with The Box, and since October 2023 has relocated to taking place at the museum – which provides this group an impressive venue.

Gym

Devon and Cornwall Refugee Support partnered with Plymouth University Students Union (SU) Gym to provide gym sessions for clients. We have trialled a system whereby we created bespoke gym passes which provided 5 sessions for each user – and have been able to give up to 2 of these per person per month for those people who are really keen to use the gym. We have had resources to give out approx. 20 of these 5-session passes per month, meaning we have about 15 active gym users at one time. There is interest and take-up for a lot more.

Our clients have told us the gym gives them a reason to leave their accommodation, gives them energy and a sense that they are working on their own self-improvement, and the use of a public facility makes people feel like they are “the same” as everyone else.

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Walks with South West Coastal Path

Early in 2023 we mapped a plan of walks for the whole year with SWCP, with a walk for every first Thursday of the month, covering a different part of the coastal path each time. These trips have been some of our most well-attended, and always received with much laughter, smiles, and sense of peace and achievement. SWCP have become our most trusted partner and we are lucky to continue working with them in 2024 regularly. Participants approximately 15 per trip.

Canoeing

We have partnered with Wildwise to deliver a series of canoeing sessions down the river Dart; approx. one trip per month during spring and summer months. Having worked with Wildwise in the past we appreciate the quality of service and professionalism. These trips are always hugely popular, and people have reported how they find themselves feeling at ease while on the river, and how they have overcome fears related to being on the water. Most crucially though, these are the days our clients talk about months down the line; providing a positive happy memory to look back to and to draw energy from. Numbers of participants: 20 per trip

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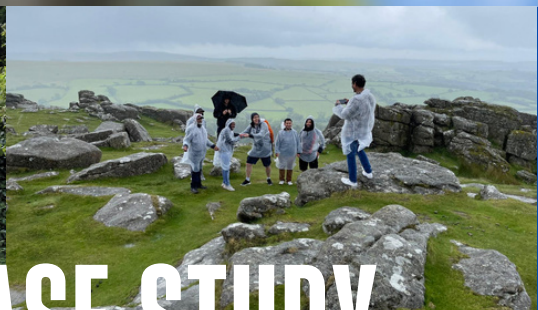


Cycling

We have worked together with Plymouth City Council's Bike Links project to coordinate learning to cycle – focused primarily around women. These are people who have expressed willingness to learn to cycle or to improve their very basic skills. People who have signed up for these lessons include women who come from societies where cycling isn't considered an appropriate activity for women, or where there simply aren't safe roads to cycle on – and thus have never had the opportunity to learn.

To date, we have had 8 women who have either learned – or are still in the process of learning – how to ride a bike. These sessions have provided incredibly uplifting feedback with the women who have participated having said they feel strong, able and feel they can teach their children now too. As well as cycling lessons, we have taken groups of people cycling around Plymouth cycling paths with the aim being to show people how to access more green and blue spaces in their new city. The participants have all reported learning new routes and feeling more confident to get around Plymouth – and have fun doing so!

Finally, we have been able to dedicate staff time to support clients to acquire their own bicycles through referral processes offered by Bike Links and available support schemes ran by the Prince's Trust for those between the ages of 16 and 30. During spring and summer 2023, we had Hannah from Prince's Trust visit our office fortnightly to take referrals to their bike scheme. In 2023 we have supported 19 people to gain a bicycle.



CASE STUDY

Case study: O.K.

O.K. When we first met O at the beginning of the year 2023 they told us they had in fact been in Plymouth for almost two years. They hadn't however engaged in any activities and been almost completely isolated from society during that time. Over the last 6 months there have been a lot of firsts with O, first time socialising with other adults in Plymouth, on a public transport in Plymouth, first time on cycling and walking paths, canoeing, bowling, trips to the sea... The transformation from early January has been immense. O has become one of our most regular participants, they are reliable, sociable, and friendly. They have developed friendships with other clients and tell us about trips they have done in their own time to places we have introduced them to. "I am an asylum seeker, yet instead of suffering I have had all these amazing experiences" O said. This is what they sent after one walk to a sea side location: "Thank you, [activities coordinator] for such a lovely experience! It helped me to break the monotony of my everyday life - I returned back and looked at my usual things with the different eyes :) Of course, I enjoyed it! The place, the sea view touched my heart. Another thing that I mentioned-the feeling of security. I was going to an absolutely unknown place but I had no fear, worries, doubt about what to do, how to get there and so on. I knew that there are some people with me who know everything and I am safe. It is very precious for me - to receive some new pleasant experience and to feel someone near me who I can count on."

Case study: S.A. and N.A.

S. and N., two siblings came to DCRS in early 2023. We were able to offer them activities to get involved shortly after their arrival which we believe have helped them immensely in not experiencing such a dramatic dip in mental health and wellbeing after relocation and being torn from any social networks they may have made elsewhere – something we witness often with our clients. They have both become eager and regular participants, taking part in swimming lessons, longer walks and cycling lessons. Having grown up in restrictive society they both continue to express their gratitude to learn skills they were never able to. "Thank you [activities coordinator], for making dreams come true." N said in a message after a swimming lesson.



FEEDBACK

Quotes and anecdotal feedback

The feedback we have received from our service users indicates that our activities programme has been a key element in supporting people's mental health and confidence. We receive a lot of positive comments and thank yous at the end of the sessions, during activities, while riding a bike or walking the coastal path, which are difficult to note down. Here are few selected bits.

Music:

- In my life music means similar to food. In this group I feel lifted, happy.
- I come to this group for my mental health. It is very important to me.
- I am feel happy with this group.
- Music is food for the soul, blood and hearts 🥰

Swimming lessons:

- There is calmness in the water
- This is so lovely. I was picked for the improvers group, they noticed my improvement. It is really nice to be noticed by others. Gives me confidence.
- I am so proud of myself, and everyone in this group, all the women.
- I was scared of water before. But I have overcome my fear.
- These lessons are so relaxing. Takes away stress.
- Doing this course has made a difference in the rest of my week. I know Friday and swimming is coming - and it settles you.
- The sessions was really great and all of us made a huge improvement! I'm glad to meet [the other participants], we were supporting each other and kept things positive. V at the beginning was scared of water but she did well when the coach taught us how to swim and after they finished, we stayed [in the pool] a lil bit. Then X taught me how to dip and swim without a noodle!!!! Can you imagine? We were beginners but we really helped each other to be better and to improve! [The volunteer] was wonderful and taught us how to float, it's a bless to have her with us!



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Cycling trips:

· Hi, thank you very much for our today's trip! I really felt like it was a meet-up with a friend. And also this was one of my favourite combinations - riding and being in nature :) There were some things that I have tried for the first time - watching wild birds through the binoculars, met Johnathan, heard about elderberry champagne :) When taking part in your activities I feel safe and taken care of. I do really appreciate this. Have a pleasant summer day!

Connecting to Land / Ethical Growing Practices

· From facilitator: "in every workshop, one or more service users expressed interest in returning to the space to volunteer, spend time with our facilitator, or simply learn more about planting, growing, cooking, and harvesting"

Dartmoor trips / beach trips:

· Amazing trip. My heart rests here. People are kind. The nature is clean. I am happy.
· Thank you very much for yesterday 🍷 Dartmoor trips have definitely taken a space in my heart
· Thank you, for such a lovely experience! It helped me to break the monotony of my everyday life - I returned back and looked at my usual things with the different eyes :) Of course, I enjoyed! The place, the sea view touched my heart. Another thing that I mentioned-the feeling of security. I was going to an absolutely unknown place but I had no fear, worries, doubt about what to do, how to get there and so on. I knew that there are some people with me who know everything and I am safe. It is very precious for me - to receive some new pleasant experience and to feel someone near me who I can count on. And also I do really like our bus journeys :) You just seat, relax, and observe surroundings



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Walks

- "This [walk trip on Southwest Coastal Path] has been awesome. I am spending time in a new place. I have never been here. It is a new experience. I am sharing with people. Interacting with people and I get to know people. I have met new people today. You can forget about problems you have.
- "I am so happy to be outside. It is so beautiful here. The air feels clean, my mind feels free. I am happy.
- "I had a really good day today. Thank you so much for everything. I had a lot of fun.

General

- "I want to use this opportunity to thank and appreciate you. You know many of us entered asylum with depression and broken spirits and not knowing what to do. Depriving us normal life and having us stuck in the bed was a dead sentence. Me personally I came to DCRS and came in touch with you and you made me know that there are some activities that is available to help relief the situation. I made myself available, associating with others, learning how to ride bike, learning swimming and doing gym and improved my mental health greatly. I am no longer depressed but I am a happy person.
Thank you so much for making yourself available in changing lives, may the good Lord help you multiply you and answer all your prayers and give you good health and long life I pray 🙏 Amen"
- The activities are really important for my mental health. They give me life.

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