

DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT

Activities Report



JAN - JUNE 2025

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Introduction

Devon Cornwall Refugee Support's (DCRS) purpose is to ensure a safe, fair, and humane asylum experience for all. Our aim is to promote independence, prevent destitution and support those seeking refuge to build a new life in the UK.

DCRS Activities and Wellbeing:

- gives service users the opportunity to connect with themselves, one another and the natural world
- provides opportunities to learn new skills, meet new people and places and have fun
- approaches its work with a trauma-informed lens and has embedded safeguarding principles into all of the Wellbeing Department's practices.

We do this by managing a programme of green/blue space activities, life-skills training, gym access, and weekly interest groups to provide clients with accessible retreats from the daily challenges faced by the asylum seeker and refugee (ASR) communities.

Our clients are referred to us via social prescribing pathways from the Livewell Southwest ASR mental health team and DCRS caseworkers.

From January - June 2025, we provided activities for 20-45 service users nearly every week. These are mainly asylum seekers residing in Plymouth with some clients having refugee status or are in an appeal rights exhausted state (ARE). Most of our clients have experienced trauma, and many – especially those still going through the asylum system – struggle with their mental health.

Outcomes

We hosted 117 activities during the first half of 2025.

150

SUs attended at least 1 activity, which means

50%

of all new SUs engaged in at least one activity



Half of the clients that came through our doors engaged in the Activities Program.

Service user feedback surveys taken in July 2025 tell us

88%

of SUs feel healthier because of DCRS activities

88%

of SUs learned something new at a DCRS activity

94%

of SUs feel less alone because of DCRS activities

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a piece of ginger root and a single white egg. The ginger is light brown with some red spots and a small green sprout at one end. The egg is white with some dark speckles. The background is a blurred wooden surface.

Mental Health Benefits

93%

of SUs feel happier
because of DCRS
activities

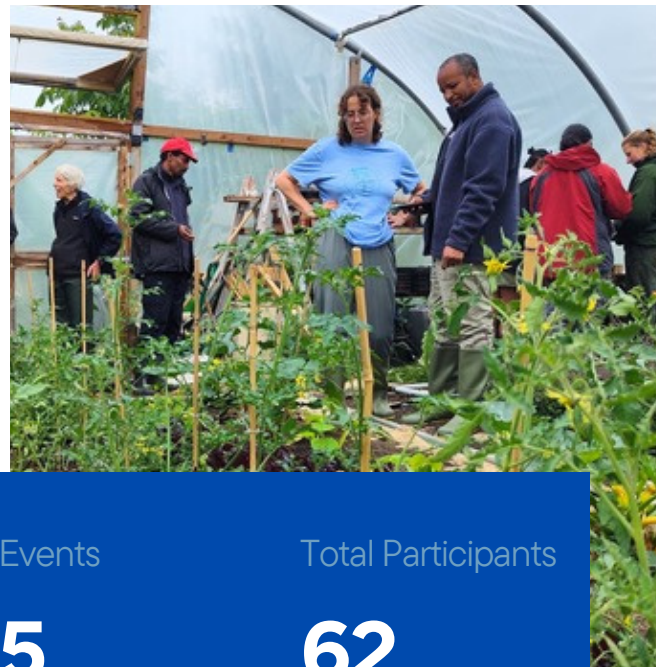
By engaging in regular group activities, participants are finding meaningful ways to manage stress, anxiety, and low mood; as one client told us, “Gym gives me purpose.”

In some cases, the impact has been so significant that individuals have felt they didn’t need as much support for formal counselling. One participant, for example, began attending our Thursday outdoor activities earlier this year. She was referred to us by the Livewell Southwest Mental Health team, who completed an initial assessment and noted her low mood, and symptoms of depression and anxiety.

After attending our sessions for a month, her counsellor told us she subsequently withdrew from the counselling waiting list -- freeing up much needed space for others with more urgent needs. This demonstrates the programme’s dual benefit: supporting mental health while easing pressure on the mental health team and clinical services. The activities are not only cost-effective but also empower people to take an active role in the management of their own health.

Green/Blue Spaces

During the first half of 2025, we continued, expanded, and strengthened our blue/green space activities offering. Both at DCRS, and across the country, research tells us that green/blue space engagement projects are proven to improve mental health, confidence, and physical health*. They also continue to be our most popular and requested activity. Service users tell us they like these kinds of activities because they give them the opportunity to leave the city, see new places, make friends, practice speaking English, connect with local people, and learn new skills. Green/blue activities best suit our goal of fostering connection to improve the mental and physical health of our clients.



COMMON FLORA FARM

Events

5

Total Participants

62

In partnership with Beyond Borders Totnes and Common Flora, we attended 3 growing days at Common Flora's farm in east Dartington. Surrounded by acres of farmland and brush, clients were invited to engage in farm work, cooking, creating habitats for particular animals, and foraging herbs, or, if they preferred, to take a solo walk and explore the area. Food was provided by a Food in Community and shared among clients and volunteers. Music sessions broke out after lunch, including improvised songs about the day's events, sing-a-longs, and dancing. One client reflected, "That day is still in front of my eyes, many memorable moments."

Green/Blue Spaces

CASE STUDY: From Fear to Friendship

A 40-year-old woman from the Philippines, Mrs. N, came to DCRS in Jan 2025 asking for help. Her asylum claim having been recently refused and she was suffering from acute depression and anxiety. Our casework team soon learned that N was also a potential victim of modern slavery and needed support both with the National Referral Mechanism and her mental health.

In addition to seeing a counsellor, P started attending activities. During her first activity P was hesitant to talk to anyone or to engage. This behaviour changed rapidly and we started to see P evolve from a small, quiet presence, to a confident, outspoken woman in months. On her first canoe trip, for example, P was scared of the water and hesitant to get in a canoe. By her second trip, she was teaching people how to paddle and confidently leading.

At the Summer Picnic, P brought a new friend. Staff reflected on the day: “P brought a friend! That is a big change from previous presentations. She is really taking ownership of her space in activities today.” In a most recent development, P has befriended another client from the Philippines who has similar struggles with their mental health. The two met on a trip to Common Flora, chatted the whole time, danced together during the music session, and exchanged phone numbers before leaving for the day.



Green/Blue Spaces



**TAMAR
VALLEY
LANDSCAPE**

Events

5

Total Participants

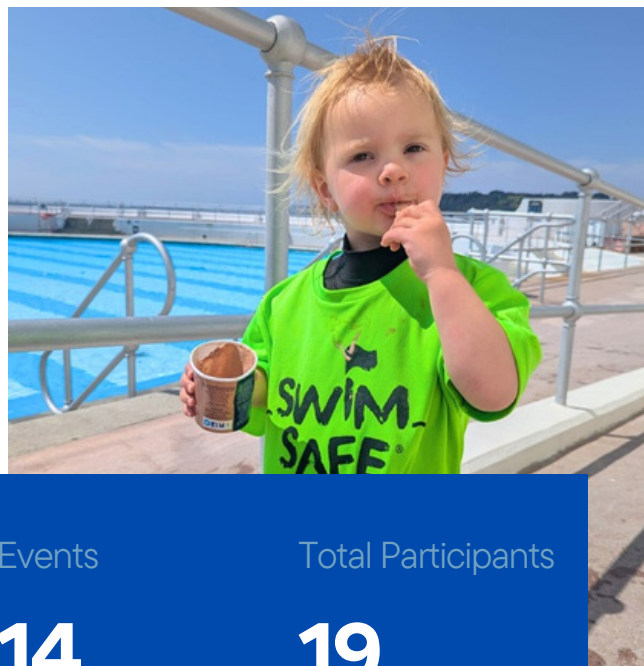
65

In collaboration with Tamar Valley Landscape and 3 artists - Jo Tytherleigh, Hanna Collins, & Matt Bryden - we embarked on a series of walks and farm visits to the Tamar Valley to explore its stunning and accessible train line, the Cotehele Estate, trails along the river, wild cooking, poetry, and photography. Clients were invited to share writing inspired by the landscape. Food was harvested from Harewood farm and cooked in collaboration with clients, who were encouraged to create their own recipes.

As always, the success of these trips is due largely to clients' willingness to be in the community: passing the toddlers among each other to alleviate caring responsibilities from parents, and walking arm and arm with elders who needed to walk slower. All trips were overprescribed and a favourite among clients this summer.



Green/Blue Spaces



SWIM LESSONS & SWIM SAFE

Events

14

Total Participants

19

Throughout the end of winter, two groups of swimmers (male/female) learned to swim at the Plymouth Life Centre over the course of 8 sessions. These events were immediately oversubscribed and was provided as it was a direct request by our clients.

The women's group was led this year by one of our ex-service users, who learnt to swim in the same sessions 3 years ago. She is a delightful volunteer because of her commitment, reliability and because she cares so deeply for women learning to swim. She remarked, "Thank you very much for the opportunity to try myself in something new, to swim in the pool... I like the way how our swim teachers treat us. Very helpful. The girls were trying their best, they usually stay in water longer than me!!"

When the months turned to summer, we invited these swimmers, along with family groups, back for Swim Safe sessions hosted by the Life Centre in the Tinside Lido. Swimmers learnt how to float effectively and what to do in case of an emergency. Participants had never visited the Lido before, requesting information about Mt. Wise Lido so that they may return with their children and teach them how to swim and float as well.

Green/Blue Spaces



WILD WISE CANOEING TRIPS

Events

5

Total Participants

75

In partnership with Wildwise Totnes, DCRS hosted 5 canoeing trip so far this year. Groups of 20 caught the bus to Dartington, where we were met by Wildwise staff, and after an induction, taken down onto the River Dart using Canadian open canoes. These trips saw participants overcome fears of being in a boat and water, and participants having full smiles.

CASE STUDY

JP is a confident man from Iran - despite having not been canoeing before he was excited to try something new - "I will try my best - if not I will get wet" he told us whilst laughing. JP quickly became well liked within the group, always laughing and dancing - he helped build a group dynamic where others could relax and have fun. On his second trip, JP found a small football at lunch and set about showing everyone how to play 'Middle ball' which is a game similar to piggy in the middle, but the ball is thrown at the person in the middle. This game became very popular and is now played at many other activities at DCRS.

JP has become a leader within the group being encouraging and humorous. He told our activities coordinator, "Being outside together gives me strength." JP has recently signed up for swimming lessons and we believe that it is the experience of getting into a canoe and spending time with a group that gave him the ability to tackle this new challenge.

Green/Blue Spaces



CYCLING RIDES & LESSONS

Events

13

Total Participants

76

Bikes Donated

11

Cycling trips and lessons have been more popular than ever this year, running twice monthly and hosting groups of up to 22 participants! Hosted by Cycle Support Officer Jonathan Tutte from Plymouth School Sports, group rides have included trips to Plymouth Hoe, Royal William Yard, Mt. Wise, Devonport Park, Victoria Park, Saltram House, and Central Park. These activities have been particularly popular among our young male clients, catering to people interested in longer group exercise, getting out of the city, playing bicycle tricks and speed cycling, and sport.

Our cycling program also includes cycling lessons for those who would like to learn to ride a bike, which take place within a smaller group settings, sometimes on a bespoke-basis if clients have particular need.

Participants have also been directed to Plymouth City Council Bike Links - programme through which they can claim a free bicycle. We have an on going waitlist for these referrals, but have been able to support in the delivery of 11 bikes from Jan-June 2025.

Movement & Fitness



Gym passes continue to be very popular among service users, particularly for younger, newly arrived men. This year we were pleased to see a social group start to form within the gym-going cohort - 6-9 gentlemen informally meet on certain weekday evenings, supporting each other with certain exercises, fitness tips, and companionship.

**PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY
SU GYM**

Gym Passes

94

Total Participants

56



In May, a service user and his befriender began attending free Park Runs at Central Park; since then, this activity has organically grown to include more and more service users, now constituting a running club. One of the runners approached DCRS to ask for support in running the Plymouth Half Marathon and Rame's Head Marathon. We were able to secure sponsorship from the event organisers and he completed both with Running Club members cheering him on from the side lines.

**RUNNING
CLUB &
MARATHONS**

Events

10

Total Participants

11

Movement & Fitness

CASE STUDY: Finding Belonging at the Gym

S was referred to us through a Health Screening pathway. He was new to the city, vulnerable, and carrying significant trauma. He experiences severe social anxiety and ongoing mental health challenges. Despite this, he was enthusiastic about the idea of going to the gym, seeing it as a step toward building routine and confidence.

To support him, staff introduced S to a more established client who is a regular gym-goer and well-acclimated to British culture. The person agreed to accompany S and staff to visit the gym for the first time. Together, they toured the facilities, demonstrating how to use the showers, sinks, and changing rooms.

During the visit, the group encountered five other DCRS clients who frequent the gym nearly every evening. They were warm and welcoming, eager to include S in their informal gym community. They offered to help him learn how to use the machines and shared their personal routines. One client even explained what was appropriate gym attire and generously brought S some clothing to get started.

A strong sense of community is growing at the gym, with service users supporting one another in their own time. It's become a shared space where friendships are forming and confidence is growing.

S summed up the day by saying:

"Today is a good day. I am happy. I have met new people, have learned how to use the gym. I feel British."

Movement & Fitness

H came to us in 2023 requesting to start a free martial arts class for clients. We worked with him to connect with the Masters Academy, where he has been offering free Hapkido / Self Defence classes for over a year and a half! He has as regular group of about 5 attendees, plus a few women keen to learn self defence and some body builders keen for a space to workout. This year we are nominating H for the Active Devon Volunteer Awards to thank him for this amazing effort.



MARTIAL ARTS CLASS

Events

20

Total Participants

8-10

In June a SU came to the Activity team asking for Cricket kit; we were able to source the kit from a volunteer and then asked the SU if he was keen to lead a Cricket Club. He has since stepped up in terms of organising times for people to meet and recruiting members. The club has expanded to include various other sports as well - football, tennis. We are looking forward to seeing how the group emerges, believing that client-led activities, while often the slowest to build, are also the most meaningful in terms of impact and legacy.



SPORTS CLUB

Events

5

Total Participants

5

Celebrations & Cooking



SHERWELL COOK-A- THONS

Events

4

Total Participants

55+

In partnership with Sherwell United Church, we hosted another 4 cook-a-thon sessions. Sessions were largely made up of current or potential Befriending matches and included time for meet-and-greets so that new people could learn each other's names and a little about the kind of food we each like to make and eat.

The menu itself crossed continents as a few key chefs stepped up to the plate: from Nepalese dumplings to Kurdish soup to jollof rice to Welsh cakes to pickled chilli sauce, meatballs, and more. During the second session, someone lugged out the Sherwell ping pong table so that while waiting for a few final dishes to cook, we were able to sneak in a table tennis tournament. It turns out that a few of the gentlemen who attended are avid table tennis players and had a go at becoming our tournament champion.

These events are chatty and collective, always piling leftovers into tupperware and pitching in with a massive washing up effort. Cook-a-thons have become a go-to for celebratory events, from connecting the Saltash/Torpoint clients to one another to making cakes for birthdays that fall on activity days.

Celebrations & Cooking



SUMMER PICNIC	Events	Total Participants
	1	50+

We kicked off July with a boisterous picnic on Plymouth Hoe, complete with volley ball tournaments, football, many rounds of boules, guitar, and a spread of food. It was a perfect sunny but temperate day in Plymouth and the space was perfect for allowing people to flow in and out of the party as they wished. One highlight was a game of 4:4 volleyball that came about organically and was punctuated with cackling laughter and impressive set-spikes.

CASE STUDY: Finding Her Voice

B is a new arrival from Afghanistan. Her and her family have been brought to Torpoint on the Afghan scheme. She faced discrimination from within her family due to a speaking disability, has limited English, and feels isolated and confined by her familial obligations to care of her aging parents. She is also unmarried, which means her ability to take part in social activities is limited.

Her ASR counsellor invited her to the picnic and accompanied her. She was notably shy and appeared nervous about speaking to new people. After some time, she took herself off to a separate space outside the main activity. She was joined by her counsellor, DCRS staff and two young female volunteers. She started to appear more calm and smiled at some of the jokes and banter. She attended another activity the next day and was even more social, open, and chatty. B has expressed an interest in attending more activities and is keen to meet new people, which according to her counsellor, is massive growth for her considering her mental health challenges.

What Our Service Users Say

Gym makes me feel better. It is good for my health - my mental health and my physical health. It helps me sleep. If I don't go to the gym, I can't sleep. If I go to the gym then I am tired and I can sleep.

Yesterday is the happiest I have been in a long time. I will always remember that day.

I was writing to thank you for the bike. It arrived a few days ago and I am very happy with it. Thank you very much. May God bless you immensely.

I loved [martial arts class], everything very welcoming and professional, thank you for more of this support.

My favorite thing about swimming lessons was improving my technique and feeling more confident in the water.

I love it because it's good for my health and it helps my confidence to know some self defence. I want to go to the gym now that I can get stronger in between classes

Gym makes me happy. I don't want to stay home all day, I like the gym

Jan - June 2025

Thank you



This work has been made possible by

