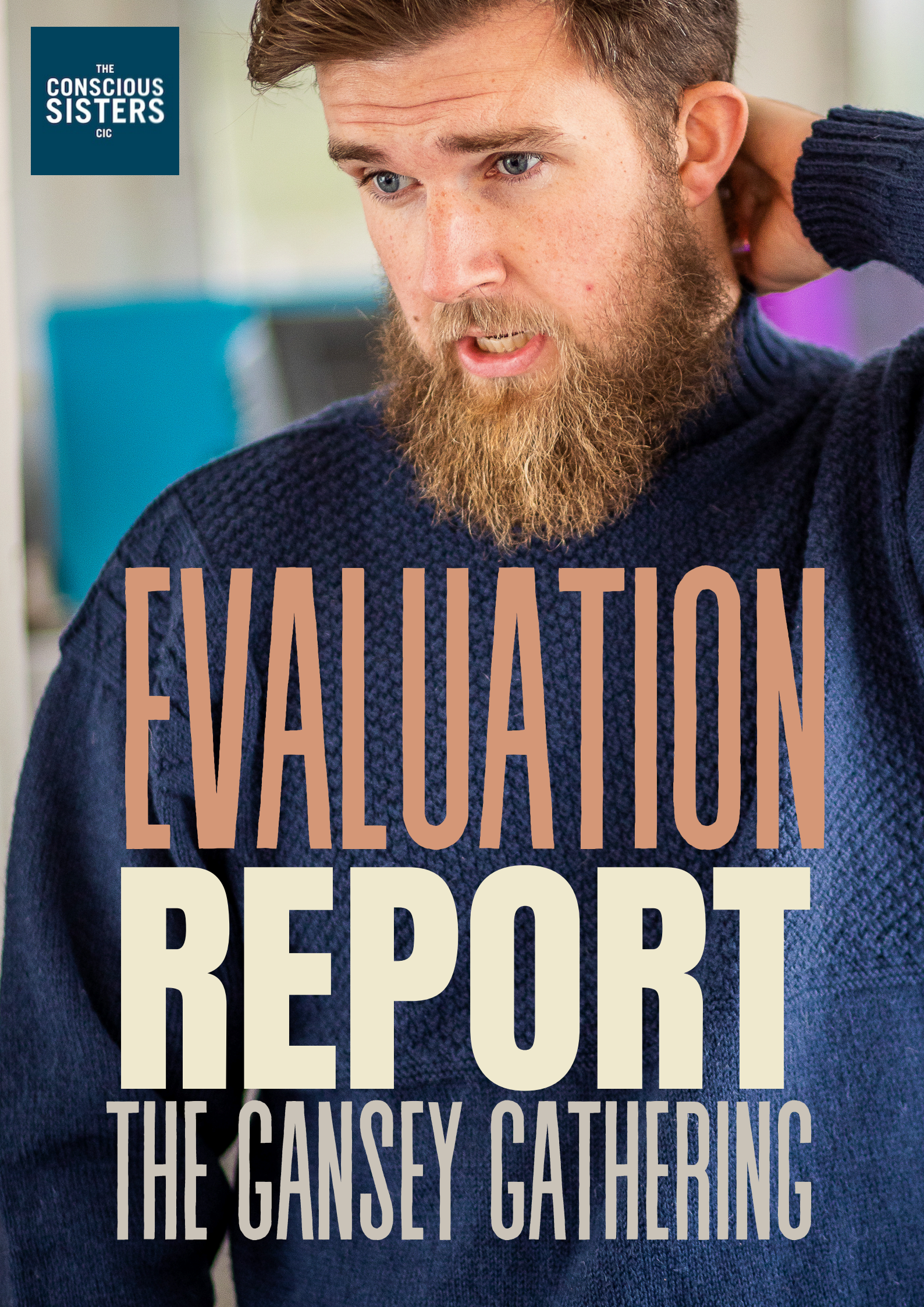


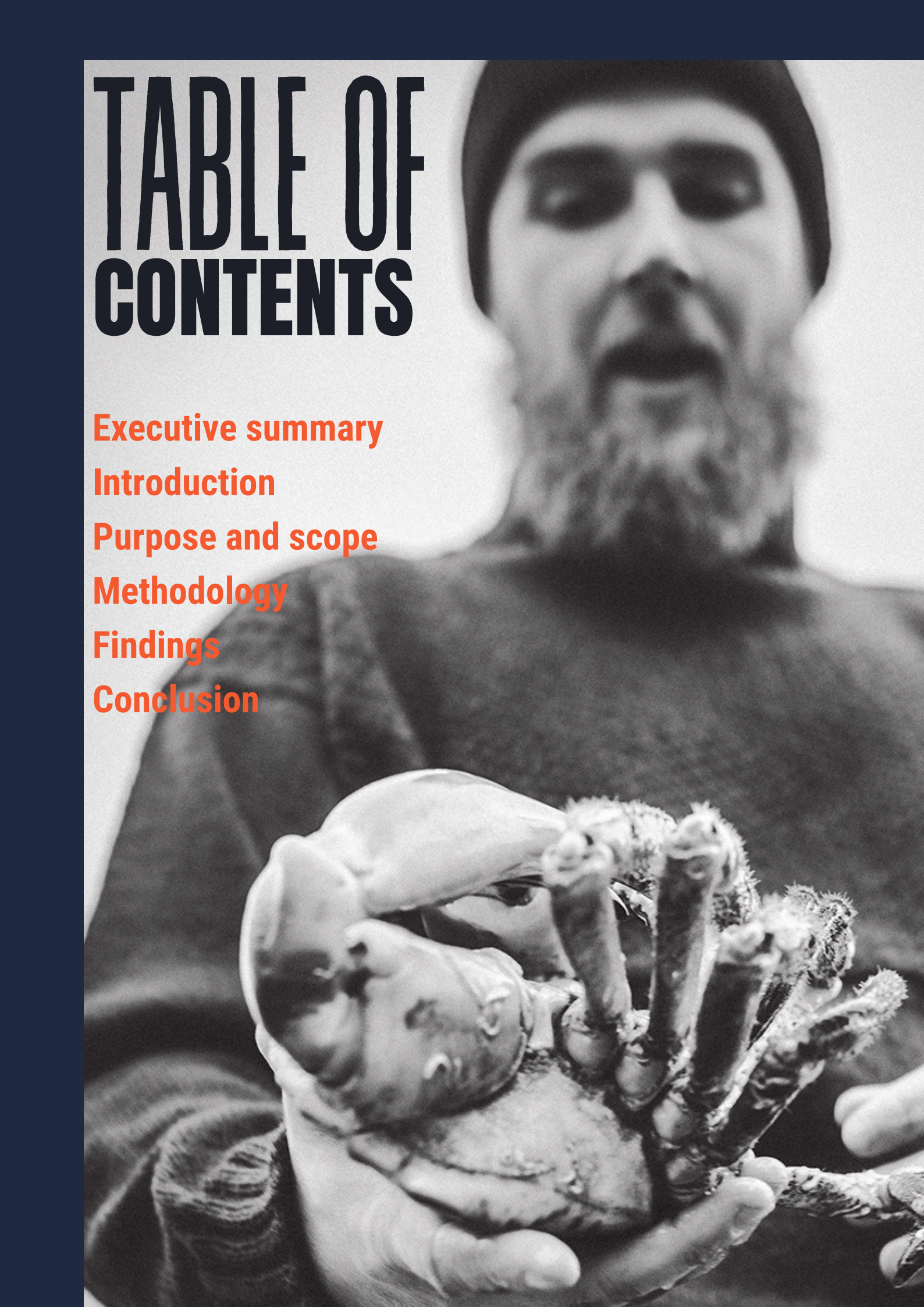


EVALUATION REPORT

THE GANSEY GATHERING



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gansey Gathering was a heritage project that connected local people to Plymouth Sound through learning a lost craft; gansey knitting. The Conscious Sisters CIC developed this work to enable local people to learn to knit the Janner Gansey from a design they found worn in photos of fishers in the 1920s but a garment that was worn in the 19th and early 20th century in the UK.

We wanted to know if it was possible to teach 60 people to knit this craft jumper on a 15 week course. We also wanted to teach people about their heritage and foster stronger bonds with the sea which would lead to better sea stewardship. The project also aimed to run 3 pop-up events for the public, accessioning a jumper into the Box collection and including a jumper in the fishing exhibition at The Box.

The project took place at The Box and two courses were run, the first from October 2024 - Jan 2025 and the second from February to June 2025. Each session was planned for 10.30am -12.20pm in the Simmons Learning Room but ended up starting at 10am when knitters arrived on public transport. Refreshments were provided and a fortnightly inspirational speaker or organisation to entertain and educate the participants while knitting.

The Janner Gansey pilot jumper had been developed before this project started and knitted by Maya Izumi. The Gansey Gathering project took this jumper and created a knitting pattern booklet from it which also contained the history of the garment. There were three iterations of the pattern booklet with errata in the pattern being discovered as the project progressed and then amended and reprinted, as is normal with developing patterns.

Gansey artist Tina Barrett was employed to create the pattern for the 'Janner Gansey' and provide knitting support and advice for the course. The Conscious Sisters CIC also set up WhatsApp groups for both courses and Tina provided adhoc advice on this channel. This was a very popular element of the work with hundreds of messages.

The Gansey Gathering provided two courses for 66 knitters in total, 65 cis women and one man. Of these 66 participants 5 people dropped out of the course because of health/mental health concerns and bereavement. So our final project cohort was 61 people. The gansey is a very difficult garment to create being knitted in the round with fine 5 ply wool in a dark navy blue. Many of the knitters struggled with seeing the stitches in the winter and some had to bind sore fingers. A gansey takes around 150 hours but some people took a lot longer. It's no wonder this jumper was referred to as Fisherman's Iron.

On the first course 38% of knitters finished during the 15 week course and on the second course this rose to 59%. By the end of the project 89% of the first course had finished their ganseys and 65% of the second course. A total of 46 people finished knitting a gansey and 60+ ganseys were produced in total. One of our knitters Sue Hurne knitted a jumper we hope to be accessioned into the Box collection in the Autumn and we are looking forward to an exhibition of the gansey project at The Box scheduled for September 2025.

The difference between the first and second cohort was providing a knitting schedule with milestones for the 15 weeks. Also trying to encourage people to come every week and not miss sessions.

So the project broadly achieved its aims albeit on a longer time-frame. Expecting 100% of knitters to complete a gansey over 15 weeks was unrealistic. Despite all the knitters with a couple of exceptions being of an extremely high standard the commitment to knit at home on a regular basis was not possible for everyone. Life got in the way. We also discovered that the gansey was a brilliant portal into coastal heritage and was really well received by the public.

This evaluation is for our funders the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

INTRODUCTION

Janner is an affectionate term that Plymothians use to call each other. It is not specifically known where the word originated - one theory suggests it derives from the old Cornish word for 'one who lives by the sea.'

So it was fitting that the gansey found in the photo below should be branded the 'Janner Gansey'.

The project was a long time coming and it's genesis can be found in a work we did in 2022/23 called The Gathering which was designed to strengthen Plymothians relationship with the sea.

At this time we discovered that gansey knitting was on the endangered list for heritage crafts for Devon. Having gone on TV, Radio and in newspapers trying to find an example of a gansey worn in Plymouth we found nothing.



At this point we took a deep dive into photographic archives at The Box and The Fisher Collection and scoured the internet. Then we found four images that together created a picture of an iteration of a gansey worn in Plymouth at the beginning of the last century which was decorated with moss stitch. At this point we commissioned the pilot garment knitted by Maya Izumi and the idea for reviving the gansey in Plymouth was born.

Our application for funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund was to revive this garment, see if people could learn the technique and produce a gansey of their own over 15 weeks. To connect the knitters to the ocean and their coastal heritage. To improve their wellbeing and generate civic pride. The project also aimed to bring the story of the gansey to Plymouth through a series of pop-up events, social media and word of mouth.

Also to get a garment accessioned into the Box and if possible displayed in the gallery which explores the local fishing industry.

The project data was collected by a programme called UPSHOT and all our knitters signed a learners agreement agreeing to complete wellbeing surveys sent out at the beginning, middle and end of the project and to feedback on the project effectiveness through a feedback questionnaire after they had finished.

The knitting course provided a range of speakers to inspire the knitters and WhatsApp groups for technical support but also to help create community.

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND SCOPE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation is to see if we achieved the outcomes in our HLF application.

Additionally to see if the project fulfilled other purposes that were not identified within the bid but happy extras we hoped may happen.

This evaluation is also a document to help us assess what worked well and what didn't as we consider how to shape any gansey or heritage work in the future.

We are keen to keep democratising this craft and as socially engaged artists the gansey is a brilliant tool for storytelling and ocean literacy.

71%
KNITTERS
FROM PLYMOUTH

SCOPE

The scope of this document reports on a timeline from July 2024 until August 2025 but also includes legacy that is predicted to happen by December 2025.

The project had 66 participants in total. Six people more than we were funded for. We built in this spillage so that we had a better chance of achieving our outcomes. In fact 5 people left the project because of poor health/mental health and bereavement.

Our knitters came from Devon and Cornwall but with an emphasis on Plymothians. The rationale was that this is their locality's heritage and possibly their own. Secondly it cut down on travel to the project and emissions and increased reliability with knitters not having long drives in the winter which could be off-putting particularly in bad weather.

This evaluation examines the knitters on the course but also the numbers of people reached through pop-ups and social media.

Also project legacy through accessioning a Janner gansey to complement local maritime collections held at The Box and a gansey exhibition for the public to enjoy.

METHODOLOGY

GOALS

1

WELL-BEING AND PROJECT STATISTICS

Our UPSHOT project sign-up page collected a lot of data including gender, age, geography and health. It also sent out well-being surveys at three points during the participants project experience. Beginning, middle and end. There is also the WhatsApp group conversations which are archived which highlight the general mood of the project and any specific difficulties people were having.

3

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

We spent four days engaging with the wider community at 3 pop-up events. Planet Ocean and May Day Super Saturdays at The Box and at Pirate Weekend. We used clickers to count the numbers of people we conversed with. We also made a note of feedback from the community in a notepad. We also ran a social media campaign and noted feedback from this. We also benefited from social media of our partners including the Box. In fact the best response to any social media post from the Box was a gansey post that got over 600 responses.

2

PROJECT FEEDBACK

To help shape the work as we went along we scheduled discussions about the project with the first course and amended anything that could have be improved for course two. All participants agreed to take part in or surveys both wemwebs and project feedback this was outlined in their learning agreement which all knitters signed. We also devised a feedback questionnaire for all participants and additionally conducted some interviews with knitters which were recorded and transposed.

4

SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

We also were very open to discussion with our hosts at The Box who gave us a lot of feedback and will be hosting an exhibition of the work from mid September 2025 in the SLR case. We also received feedback from the wider gansey sector in the UK through our gansey instructor Tina Barrett. We also conducted two zoom meetings, one with the Cordova Gansey Project in Alaska which works with knitters all over North America, UK and Australia and the second, a gansey group connected to the Scottish Fisheries Museum.

FINDINGS

PROJECT ELEMENT	DETAILS	OUTCOME
Learning to knit a gansey	These outcomes are for the project life and identify a level of competence in knitting a gansey.	• 66 people joined the course • 61 learnt to knit a gansey • 46 people had finished their gansey at the end of the project • 60+ ganseys produced in total • We predict a further 14 knitters will finish their first gansey in the next 12 months.
Learning outcomes heritage and environmental	This was delivered through our inspirational speakers programme and exhibition tours.	• 32 workshops were delivered in total • 1895 hours of workshop contact time • 10 heritage speakers including marine archaeology, shanty singing and the history of fishing • 4 eco speakers including biodiversity of The Sound, The Rockpool project and exhibition tours of Planet Ocean
WEMWEBS	Wellbeing questionnaire administered 3 times to both courses	• Overall positive impact on the mental health of the knitters • Best result in 'feeling useful' and 'closer to others'
Social Media	Using social media to raise awareness of the project and the Janner Gansey	• Setting up 2 WhatsApp groups for our knitters with 100s of messages • 94,752 reach (paid for) on social media
POP-UPS	Mini exhibitions accompanied by performance knitting by volunteers	• We popped up at 3 events, 2 Super Saturdays at The Box and Pirate Weekend • Whilst we were viewed by thousands, 398 people interacted with the stand and our volunteers finding out more.
Accessioning Exhibiting	Adding a Janner Gansey to the collection	• Accessioning document has been given to the Box and waiting to hear back. • Exhibition of the project at The Box from Sept to Feb 2026

QUOTES AND STATS

“The camaraderie between all the knitters and also being able to keep in contact with ‘WhatsApp’”

“I liked the talks about the marine environment best.”

“I loved meeting new people and have made friends that I will take away from the course with me.”

“Spending time knitting with everyone. The hours of conversation and friendships that have arisen from the Gansey Gathering are so valuable. Such an amazing project to be a part of.”

“I probably wouldn’t have had the confidence to tackle the pattern on my own but the help and support from Fiona, Karen and Tina really helped, supported and encouraged me to complete the Gansey. Finishing it gave me a great sense of achievement and confidence. It also showed me that making new friends and sharing experiences in a group environment with like minded people increased knowledge and enjoyment. It was the first time I sang songs with anyone let alone a group and really enjoyed the sea shanties.”

“Thank you so SO much for having me on the course. Such a special thing to be involved with and I loved all the extra curricular days so much.

I am absolutely in love with my Gansey and I wear it most days.”

“I’m already onto my second one and I know this will be a life long obsession now!”

“I really enjoyed the talk about the history of women in the naval and fishing industries- that was great. My favourite thing though was meeting and getting to know everyone on the project, it’s been really special.”

“I knew it was going to be something that I would enjoy but I didn’t expect it to be such an all immerseve, inspirational experience.”

“It was interesting to learn how important fishing was to the economy, and the livelihoods of local people. Fishing and related activities were the whole way of life for our ancestors on the coast. I also enjoyed finding out about current projects helping to protect our maritime environment in Plymouth Sound.”

“Shanties were great as well as listening to poetry whilst knitting or tour around the Box exhibitions. It was great that different activities were linked to the knitting allowing us as a group find connections and keep developing projects with greater purpose in mind.”

860

Sessions attended by all the participants combined

75%

Of knitters finished a gansey during the project

398

people spoken to about the Janner Gansey

60+

JANNER GANSEYS
KNITTED

7,393,980
STITCHES KNITTED



The Janner Gansey is decorated with Moss stitch which has been interpreted as both sand and seaweed, cable stitch which represents rope and zig zags for waves.

CONCLUSION

Thank you to all the creative talent that helped produce The Gansey Gathering. Maya Izumi who produced the prototype gansey and Andy Lawson for his wonderful photographs of local crabber BJ Tapper.

In particular Tina Barrett our gansey artist for creating the pattern and supporting the knitters to learn to knit this amazing heritage garment.

To all our knitters that took on this incredible challenge and those that are still knitting away, don't stop!

Thank you to all our inspirational speakers including historian Richard Fisher, Nick Helm from Plymouth Sound National Marine Park, Mallory Haas from the SHIPS project, The seagulls, Seaweed in the Fruit Locker, author of 'She of the Sea' Lucy Pearce, storyteller Lisa Schneidau, The Rockpool Project and Planet Ocean curator Sara Marden.

Thank you to The Box and Plymouth Sound National Marine Park for their support.

A massive thank you to Frangipani for providing our wool and needles.

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WE THANK YOU

FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT