

FISHING FRIENDS PROJECT

This project was funded by Awards for All, Sport England and match-funded by Plymouth Community Homes. PCH provided use of its community centre at Tavy House and the enthusiastic support of its community worker Hayley Kemp who worked closely with the Conscious Sisters CIC on the project. Through workshops, events, trips and a supportive network of neighbours and residents, Fishing Friends helped Plymouth Community Homes residents who live close to the sea to consume free, healthy and sustainable food. Teaching them to catch, fillet and cook fish, forage at the shoreline and access free food via food larders/banks. It helped them get out of their flats mix with others, meet new people and have fun. Developing friendships and a support network. It enhanced their wellbeing and tackled loneliness and social isolation. Participants got access to fresh healthy free food both from the sea and foraged locally but also signposted to food banks and larders. They learnt to cook and eat free food together with the hope they would change/adapt their eating habits, learn how to cook healthy recipes and thereby reduce the impact of the cost of living crisis. It ran from from June 2024 to September 2025.

METHODOLOGY

This project format was developed after a pilot called Marine Edibles which was funded by POP collectives. The Conscious Sisters curated a series of workshops that included fishing, cooking, creativity and heritage. The sessions ran weekly on a Thursday afternoon and residents joined a WhatsApp group that communicated the weekly workshop theme. Participants were also texted details additionally in case they didn't access WhatsApp. The projects used Wemwebs to monitor participant wellbeing to begin with but for some this was a bit formal and triggering so decided to survey at the end. Nine participants were surveyed at the end of the project, those that had attended more than one session for feedback.

CONCLUSION

Although the project delivered the outcomes needed, it suffered from low numbers of regular attendees. This could have been because it was exclusively for Plymouth Community Homes residents and only available during working hours. Some people may have been put off due to the hit and miss nature of fishing. But for those that came more than once, the feedback was very positive and the benefits are summarised below.

- Socialisation and connection: The project provided an opportunity to meet new people, make friends, and offered a
 reason to get out of the house.
- Learning and activities: Respondents learned how to fish, learned about marine life, and learned new skills like preparing a crab. They also enjoyed all the workshop activities.
- Getting outdoors and relaxation: Benefits included getting outdoors and an opportunity to relax from neighbour generated noise.
- Value of the project: It was seen as a valuable thing for getting people out to socialise who normally might not be able to participate in such activities

Feedback on how the project could improve focused on timings, for some the time was inconvenient for children or work and having a regular slot meant not being in sync with tide times and better fishing. Another frustration was the weather which because it's Plymouth, some sessions were rained off or it was too cold. Sustaining fishing all year around was very challenging. Overall it was a successful project that benefited those who attended regularly and 100% of those surveyed enjoyed the social nature of the project the best but to have more community benefit we could have done with a bigger cohort. It might be that a single or a series of short courses may be easier to recruit for than a year long rolling programme and to broaden out the provision to people on benefits, PIPS, the homeless or refugees and asylum seekers.















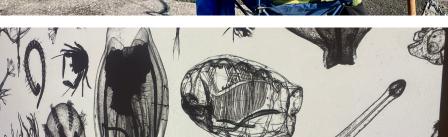
















PROJECT OUTPUTS IN NUMBERS

47 workshops were delivered from 8/08/2024 - 25/09/2025

113 session hours delivered

579 contact hours

249 attendances

24 people accessed the project

5 people attended more than 16 sessions and received a

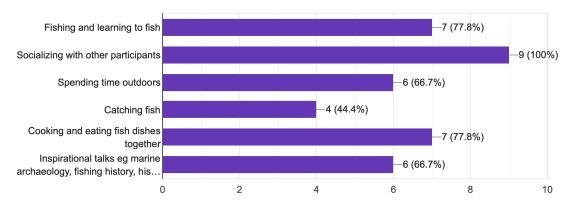
£50 voucher for Market Plaice fishmongers

Learnt to cook 8 recipes

100% participants surveyed had improved mental health

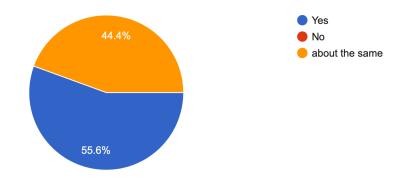
PROJECT OUTCOMES

What aspects of the 'Fishing Friends' project did you find most enjoyable? Please tick three. 9 responses

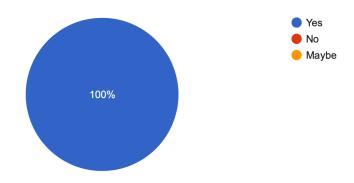


PROJECT OUTCOMES

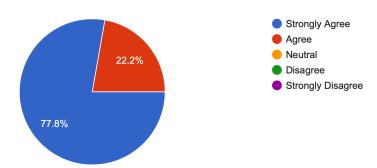
Do you cook and eat more fish now than before the project? 9 responses



Did coming to Fishing Friends help your wellbeing? 9 responses



Did you feel that the 'Fishing Friends' project fostered a sense of community? 9 responses



WORKSHOP PROVISION



The idea was to fish the shore around the city - we in fact fished 5 locations in total, Mutton Cove, West Hoe Pier, Elphinstone Car Park, Mount Batten and Hooe Lake. Over the course of the project we had 3 fishing instructors. 2 of these were residents in social housing. At the beginning of the project we used only telescopic rods but progressed to 12ft and 15ft rods by the end.

We developed a great relationship with South West Sea Baits where we purchased the majority of our bait but also lots of fishing accessories.

Most of fish we caught which were of a decent size were wrasse, except when we went deep sea fishing on two occasions and then we caught a variety of fish including mackerel and dogfish.

We were keen to be sustainable and the majority of our catch was returned to the sea. We also had a session on sustainable fishing with PCC Natural Infrastructure Officer (Marine) Kate Duncan where we learned how to handle a fish and return it safely to the water, alternatives to lead weights and the perils of fishing gear being lost in the ocean.

FISHING



We cooked eight fish dishes in total as a group using the kitchen at Tavy House community centre - Mediterranean fish stew with garlic mayonnaise, oat-coated fried mackerel with potato wedges, monkfish kebabs with roasted vegetables and flatbread, fish pie with puffed pastry, salmon and tuna fishcakes, fish tacos, fish tray bake with pollack and salmon and finally a BBQ at Devil's point where we cooked monkfish and Cornish sardines. Residents also learnt to fillet mackerel and crack crab legs. We also created recipe cards for the participants to take away.

The idea was for attendees to learn to cook simple and nourishing recipes they could adapt for their families and this would encourage them to want to attend for 16 sessions and claim their £50 voucher for Market Plaice in the Pannier Market. A trip to Market Plaice to meet the staff also built confidence on using their voucher and entering a fish mongers. Alongside our cookery sessions we tried mackerel, salmon and crab pate with bread from Jacka Bakery and stir-fried seaweed on our forage with Joanna Ruminska . Richard fisher brought along tinned sardines for his session on fishing heritage in Plymouth.

The savings we made on fish vouchers we used to buy lunch for the residents when they went fishing. 55% of participants cook and eat more fish through attending the project. 45% did not change their eating habits.

COOKING

WORKSHOP PROVISION



Running alongside fishing and cookery provision was a diverse and vibrant workshop programme that covered a range of subjects including natural history, art and heritage subjects. Eleven workshops deepened the participant's knowlegde of ocean heritage and their relationship with the sea.

Heritage workshops included a session focusing on the history of fishing in Plymouth and a walking tour of historic maritime sights on the Barbican with local historian Richard Fisher. Mallory Haas from the SHIPS project chatted about wrecks in the Sound and brought marine archaeology to the session.

The biodiveristy of Plymouth Sound was explored in a workshop with Seadream's Julliette Jackson who treated us to a 3D experience in the Sound and Nick Helm Ranger from Plymouth Sound National Marine Park told us about the incredible creatures living in our waters.

Art and craft workshops included still life drawing of the fish in the Plymouth Sound tank at the National Marine Aquarium, willow fish mobile and woven fish making and cyanotype printing with seaweed.

ART AND HERITAGE



A handful of interesting trips punctuated the project experience.

We started with a trip to Planet Ocean at The Box where curator Sarah Marsden took us around. We also attended the National Marine Aquarium on two occasions for still life drawing with artist Ralph Nel and ex Goldsmith's artist and historian Richard Fisher.

Participants enjoyed two fishing trips on boats where they fished the ocean beyond the breakwater. The end of project celebration boat trip was a great success with calm seas, sunshine and a haul of mackerel. They also benefitted from a seaweed forage at Devil's Point.

During the school holidays we ran a family workshop at Mount Edgecumbe for mums and kids. Participants enjoyed 2 creative sessions right next to the water including cyanotype printing with seaweed. A great day was had in glorious sunshine and some people even went swimming.

TRIPS

THE BENEFITS? WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID

"Spending a few hours outdoors each week with an interesting group of people significantly improved my mental health."

"At times life can be quite isolating, these classes provided a welcome opportunity to connect with interesting individuals and decompress in a natural setting."

"Meeting new friends learning things about what's in the sea, learning new things like getting meat out of a crab that I didn't know how to do."

"Met new people, really helped my mental health."

"It gave me a reason to get out of the house and socialise."

"I found it useful in the fact that I got to meet different people and I really enjoyed all the activities. I think it is a valuable thing as it gets a lot of people out socialising when normally they would not be able to do these activities."

"Meet new people and get out alot more."

"Getting outdoors and trying to relax from noise"

"The team make the sessions incredibly welcoming and enjoyable, their enthusiasm and joy is infectious and it really does make your day brighter."

"The most amazing people I've ever met."

