

Scottish Waterways Trust

The organisation

Scottish Waterways Trust (SWT) is a small charity based in Falkirk and it operates across the whole canal network in Scotland. They work closely with Scottish Canals who maintain and operate all 5 canals. SWT are working to bring benefits to people, wildlife and communities through using canals. There are about 5 FTE staff with 3 of us out on the ground.

The case study was conducted with the Canal officer for cultural heritage, and the post is funded by Historic Environment Scotland and covers the whole canal network. The aim is to engage people with the history and heritage of canals and this is done by involving volunteers, working with schools and providing guided walks, talks & events.

SWT doesn't see itself as a heritage organisation especially, but everything they do is on canals which are all Scheduled Ancient Monuments. For example, the cultural heritage post has focused on projects such as historic locks or listed buildings. There is a mix of volunteer roles and types of engagement. The conservation volunteers events are project based opportunities and one off event opportunities but there are also regular volunteering opportunities. Information is not recorded about the demographics of volunteers but 16-24 year olds are targeted when there is specific funding for it. For example, the Green Action and canal college® programmes focus on employability and job skills for young people in this age range.

Types of Volunteering

“SWT tries to respond to the needs of volunteers and they try to take everyone if they can, although that's not always possible! We get some people who want longer opportunities for involvement, for example we once had a volunteer in the office for 4 weeks researching the historic locks in Falkirk. There is also currently a planning student who is interested in heritage and conservation and he is helping with events.”



Innovative opportunities

The canal college® programme won a Scottish Heritage Angel Award in 2015. This is a 14 week programme that ran in Edinburgh and Falkirk. Between 2013 -15 there have been 6 programmes with a total of 162 participants. Programme attendees sign up for the programme and undertake tasks like environmental projects, archaeological excavations, wildlife surveys and built heritage work such as stone repairs. The programme is co-ordinated and supported and there are opportunities to get qualifications, write a CV and get help to move onto a positive end destination. 71.6% of participants from the last 2 years went on to positive destinations. SWT are currently seeking funding for another canal college® to run in 2017.



One off events have also been developed that link heritage volunteering to other projects such as the Art and Archaeology event last August. This event was held at the Victoria Foundry site in Glasgow. This land is currently owned by Scottish Canals but the land might be developed in the future so they want to know what's there. A half day event was planned to link in with a public art project THEN/NOW (part of the Unlocking the Story canal interpretation project). Glasgow

Sculpture Studios attended with their mobile foundry, archaeologists used historic maps to lay out the outline of buildings and there was a sound-scape of what the site would have sounded like. Volunteers were involved to help with the excavation, which was supervised by Archaeology Scotland, and the opportunity attracted people of all ages. In total there were 15 volunteers and the event was attended by 50 people. SWT and Scottish Canals will be returning to the same site to do a ground survey to see what else is there and hope to use that model of engagement for future events.

Critical Success Factors

"We don't consider ourselves a heritage organisation, we focus on people. We aim to improve environment and structures but it's about outcomes for people. What makes it successful for our volunteers is knowing what they hope to get out of it and how they need to be supported. The outcomes for our projects are often softer such as skills gained and employability, rather than the number of bridges repaired. It's this that helps us to attract new and more varied volunteers."

Benefits of involving volunteers

- The more people that are engaged the more people take better care of canals.
- Scottish Canals, who provide grant funding, get low priority maintenance achieved.
- Volunteers add capacity. On the canal college® there were 24 volunteer mentors (over 25 years old) who bring their skills to the project but also gain a lot personally.
- There are benefits to the communities along the canals who benefit from an improved place and can be empowered to know that they can make a difference. "It's harder to measure the impact of this and we look more at the outcomes of individuals, rather than the whole community."

Challenges of involving volunteers

- The linear nature of canals – "recruitment can be difficult due to a lack of people in some locations along the canal and the opposite where we have lots of interest and a lack of staff time in the right location. Art and Archaeology event – constraint of the location as it was a really tucked away site. We had to do a lot to signpost people to the site."
- Funding – "In common with most small charities funding is a major challenge for the Trust and we are constantly looking to diversify our income to ensure the continuity and growth of

our projects. While we've been very successful in securing funding in the past, with ever increasing competition for a diminishing pot of money it continues to be a major constraint."

- People – the people engaged have a variety of needs both in terms of their health and mental health. SWT recently reviewed their 2 sided application form and think that some volunteers might struggle to complete this but H&S requirements have to be covered. Staff also need to be supportive of volunteers and they relevant of experience of this. The programme for young people had staff who had experience of youth work.
- Remoteness – practicalities can be a challenge such as providing toilets, shelter, tea and coffee. Sometimes, a boat is chartered to moor up nearby on the canal or have to hire in chemical toilets. If the nearest bus stop is 15 minutes walk away and there is no pavement transport such as minibuses has to be organised to get people there safely.

External Influences

Two main areas for Scottish Waterways Trust are Scottish Canals and Health & Safety legislation.

Scottish Canals – everything is carried out on Scottish Canal's land so their permission is needed for everything. SWT also need the appropriate consents, for example if it's a listed building. And environmental impact has to be considered. "We try and act as a buffer for local groups who want to do something (eg. paint a bridge) as we liaise with Scottish Canals to make sure all the permissions are in place so they don't have to – it's what we're here for."

H&S – Projects are always next to water so SWT are very careful and ensure compliance. It does have an impact on what they do and where they can do it. SWT have to ensure volunteers are looked after and physically safe. Staff are also aware of the volunteers' situations when there are partners on site and everyone wants to do their own H&S briefing and they end up hearing it 3 times.

Future of volunteering

Scottish Waterways Trust hope to grow year on year and have fundraisers looking at how to increase funding.

They also hope to become better at sharing with other groups and societies involved in the canals. For example, they are working with the Lowland Canals volunteering group to make the route into volunteering easier.

Support needs

Scottish Waterways Trust work with Scottish Canals to streamline their processes. For example, they are going to have a more centralised approach to recruitment in order to point people in the right direction. "There are lots of organisations out there so it can be confusing for people to know how best to access volunteering." Scottish Canals will also be more able to report back on the full landscape of volunteering on the canals to the Scottish Government.

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