

LAGAN CURRACHS

TRUSTEES REPORT

for the year ended 31st December 2022

CCNI Reg: 104209



In Compiling this Report the Trustees have had regard to the Northern Ireland Charity Commission's Public benefit requirements statutory guidance.

Objectives and Activities

The purpose of our club is to give people in greater Belfast experience of boatbuilding and rowing traditional boats on the River Lagan in teams of people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. It is open to anyone who is interested in joining and improves community life. Individuals' mental and physical health, fitness levels and wellbeing will be enhanced as a result of our regular rowing activity. Our activity reduces stress and increases a sense of belonging because it is open and accessible to individuals of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Members will get an enhanced knowledge and understanding of traditional boat building, maintenance, rowing, boat handling, river and sea navigation, teamwork and communication skills. The public will be more aware of the river, its heritage, and its usefulness as an unclaimed space that can be used to unite divided communities. These benefits will be evidenced through surveying the participants and public asking how our activities have made a difference to them, and gathering case studies and impact stories.

The charity's benefits are delivered to the general public, women and lone parents, people with mental health problems, trauma, and sensory disabilities. The only private benefit flowing from this purpose is that some individual members will receive RYA training and this is incidental and necessary because we need to make the rowing activities as safe as possible.



Public benefit Statement

The direct benefit which flows from this purpose is to give traditional boat building and maintenance opportunities to people from diverse backgrounds. We will engage people who are unemployed, have disabilities, are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are elderly, and who may have no connection with boats or traditional skills. We are giving people a sense of pride and purpose, using the boat builds and maintenance as a way to bring people together. Now that the boats are built, we use them on the Lagan regularly, at least twice a week, taking bookings from community and voluntary groups. The only cost for this is a small donation for the maintenance of the boat and to cover insurance costs. We will train members to maintain the boats and to lead rows on the Lagan, open water expeditions and we will use the boats in Belfast Lough and around the coast of Northern Ireland. We will try to work with unemployed people long term on other boat builds, to share skills and give a sense of purpose. We will take part in maritime festivals and activities across Northern Ireland and will take part in annual activities in and around the river Lagan.

Health and Social Benefits, Mental Health Benefits

Lagan Currachs club strives to build self-esteem and confidence from the development of new skills, by providing a regular accessible social outlet, and a diverse supportive community of members. Members have reported increased physical and mental health and improved wellbeing as a result of their involvement with Lagan Currachs. 40% of users have also reported an improved feeling of safety in Belfast. Due to the nature of this activity and diverse membership, rowers experience developing teamwork skills with people of age groups, backgrounds and abilities that they would not normally meet. This leads to an increased sense of community cohesion and connection with place.

Developing new skills, including rowing, skippering, navigation and boat maintenance contributes to members sense of wellbeing. Physical activity in a natural environment also decreases stress and anxiety and members have reported the positive impact their involvement with Lagan Currachs has had on their well-being and mental health.

Physical Health Benefits

In a population which has a history of heart, stroke and diabetes problems, the physical benefits of rowing with the Lagan Currach club cannot be underestimated. The physical act of rowing in a Currachs helps facilitate increased muscle development, weight loss, cardiovascular exercise and build strength, promotes calmness and helps with sleep problems. Members have reported strengthening of back problems, weight loss and increased muscle mass as benefits of regular rowing sessions.



Inclusion and Social Benefits

Lagan Currachs is an equal opportunities organisation that encourages membership from all parts of Northern Ireland's diverse community. We strive to make the club as accessible as possible to disadvantaged communities by taking flexible approaches to club membership fees, working with established groups, organisations and charities to provide accessible rowing opportunities for the homeless and physically challenged communities in NI. During the reporting year we have held a number of outreach rows with RNIB to provide visually impaired users an experience they could not usually access. This has enabled the club to reevaluate or practice in terms of accessibility and risk management that prioritises the safety of visually impaired members. During the coming year Lagan Currachs will be supported by RNIB to ensure communication and social media are accessible and will continue to explore new opportunities to increase inclusion of differing abilities and marginalised groups.

Environmental Awareness and Civic Responsibility

The nature of the club activity means that our members now spend a significant portion of time outdoors. This has resulted in increased levels of environmental awareness and appreciation amongst our member base, as well as an increased vigour to protect and conserve the natural habitat of Northern Ireland. Growing awareness and an active approach to addressing issues of water littering, individual responsibility within outdoor habitats have resulted in club members actively cleaning litter from the River Lagan, ensuring no impact is left from rowing expeditions, both on water and on land, and involvement in events to help actively protect the outdoors. This responsibility has extended outside the confines of the club with members reporting an increased awareness of the problems of plastic use, littering, individual environmental impact and ocean and river conservation, as well as getting involved in activities such as beach and river clean ups. Information sharing with Sustrans and links to Healthy Oceans, Healthy Minds has improved members awareness of social responsibility in relation to environmental degradation and climate change.



Achievements and Performance 2022

The Lagan Currachs rowing club was set up in December 2015. It became a registered charity in May 2017. The primary objective of this not for profit organisation is to engage members of the Northern Ireland community in building and rowing of traditional Irish currachs, and participating in regular rowing sessions on the River Lagan and beyond. The twelve person currach, named Mamach Mor, was built over a nine month period, from March to November 2016, through the aid of over 80 volunteers with varying levels of experience and skill sets. Upon the launch of Mamach Mor on the 29th January 2017, the Lagan Currach rowing club has been managed and run by an evolving team of dedicated volunteers for the purpose of engaging with the broad and diverse community of Northern Ireland, and keeping a piece of Irish heritage alive. To date we have involved well over 1000 people in rowing on the river Lagan.

Activities and Participation

During the 2022 reporting period Lagan Currachs has had 59 active, regular members. In addition we have welcomed numerous members of the public on taster rows and outreach events. Given the current situation of pandemic recovery, Brexit and the cost of living crisis, the club has retained a flexible approach to membership fees so this does not become a barrier to participation.

Lagan Currachs members took part in maintenance of all three boats while they were out of the water during January and February 2022. This enabled members to develop their skills in removing debris from the hull, treating wood and resurfacing the hull. Members also supported building a new steering oar for Mamach Mor. We also employed engineers to build a bespoke double trailer for the two smaller currachs so that these can be transported to events around the Island. The Committee worked to secure a compound and shipping container on the riverside between the Lagan weir and the Odyssey Complex. This will increase visibility of the club and attract new members during boat maintenance.

Club members took the racing Currach to the Ocean to City event in Cork and won a prize for the best handmade boat. This provided an opportunity for members to learn rowing skills and link up with a number of other Currach and rowing clubs from around Ireland. Club members also participated in the Skerries 3 island challenge race.

Outreach Activities

Lagan Currachs continued to build skills and competency in the safe use of the currach and the club maintained a register of experienced skippers and core crews who are responsive to the specific needs and challenges of diverse groups. Communication, shared action and social time provided by rowing is beneficial both to participants and to those who facilitated the rows alike.



Lagan Currachs were involved in the Lagan River Festival (Feile na hAbhann) delivering taster sessions to residents of the lower Ormeau and members of the public. This provided an opportunity to attract new members and enable the public to connect with the river in new ways.

The group were also involved in delivering taster rows at Sailortown Festival and took part in the Santa row with other river users on the Lagan.

The club supported 15 RNIB service users to take part in weekly rows during Summer and Autumn 2022. Those involved benefitted from developing new skills and increasing access to outdoor activities. Sessions were also facilitated for Sustrans volunteers who shared knowledge of alternative forms of sustainable transport with club members.

In addition, several music rows were organised on the River Lagan, with local musicians playing traditional and Appalachian music on the boat to onlookers on shore.

These events help to build ties with local communities as well as providing income for the group for insurance and maintenance costs.

Training and Skills Development

As a rowing club, training for safety and skills proficiency are of central importance. As such we sought to provide a robust and varied programme of training to all our members. Below is a summary of the training and skills development enjoyed by our members throughout 2020.

Practical Training and Skills Development

Practical rowing training was provided to our members during each row undertaken, overseen by a skipper and facilitated by experienced rowers on each crew. In addition, we ran a number of sessions throughout the year specifically dedicated to enhancing and perfecting rowing skills for our members and aiding in the avoidance of sports injury.

Three club members completed RYA Day skipper training which enables them to safely develop passage plans for expeditions in rivers, loughs and costal rowing across Ireland.

Peer to peer skills development

Peer to peer skills development continued to play an important role including in-house training amongst our membership base. Weekly skipper training, led by trained and experienced skippers, allowed our members to receive regular practical training on the water to enhance and develop the skills and confidence to skipper Mamach Mor on weekly rows. This skills exchange programme included training in manoeuvring and docking techniques, rope work, and safety on the water.



Financial

Reserve Policy

Unrestricted General: We aim to keep in reserve a minimum of the equivalent of 6 months expenditure to enable the charity's work to continue without interruption.

Restricted Reserves: These are held until such times that expenditure is made for the purpose that the donor(s) instructed.



Structure Governance and Management

Governing Document

Lagan Currachs Constitution

Membership

The club is managed exclusively by volunteers, with eight members sitting on the committee with roles ranging from chairperson and treasurer, to a rowing coordinator and a health and safety officer. Regular committee meetings are conducted throughout the year, with members taking weekly involvement in the ongoing running of the club. Regular members also play an extensive role in the regular administration of the club. This involves calling weekly rows, supporting taster rows and community outreach, seeking out new funding streams, boat maintenance and promoting the club to potential members.

Practical Training and Skills Development;

As a rowing club, training for safety and skills proficiency are of central importance. As such we strive to provide a robust and varied programme of training to all our members. Practical rowing training is provided to our members during each row undertaken, overseen by a skipper and facilitated by experienced rowers on each crew. In addition, we run a number of sessions throughout the year specifically dedicated to enhancing and perfecting rowing skills for our members and aiding in the avoidance of sports injury. Peer to peer skills development plays a large role in Lagan Currachs culture, resulting in significant in-house training amongst our membership base. Weekly skipper training, led by trained and experienced skippers, allows our members to receive regular practical training on the water to enhance and develop the skills and confidence to skipper Mamach Mor on weekly rows. Specific training to support members with diverse needs, such as visual impairment, has been delivered during this year. Securing a microgrant from Belfast City Council enabled us to train 3 members in RYA day Skipper training to enhance the safety of our crew. Lagan Currachs has a register of experienced skippers who ensure that there is competent crew on each row and that weather conditions are suitable for the activity to take place.



Reference and administrative details

Name of Charity

Lagan Currachs

Other names used by the Charity

None

Charity number

Registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland: NIC104209

Principal Address:

28 Kirkliston Gardens Belfast BT5 6EE.

Points of Contact:

Website: <https://lagancurrachs.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/lagancurrachs

Instagram: @lagancurrachs

Tel: 07740374197

e-mail: lagancurrachs@gmail.com

Trustees

(Being those in a position of governance)

Ken Geary

Susan Hughes

Rachel Ludlow-Williams

Tim Bloomer

Christine Johnstone

Cati Rojas

Catherine McKenna

Laura McFall



This report was approved by the Trustees on 7 September 2023 and signed on its behalf by

Tim Bloomer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'T. Bloomer'.

Trustee

Rachael Ludlow-Williams

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rachael Ludlow-Williams'. The signature is contained within a grey rectangular box.

Trustee