

Re-Union Canal Boats Ltd

Building Boats, Crews and Community

ANNUAL REPORT 2009



Introduction

Re-Union Canal Boats is a social enterprise based on and around Edinburgh's Union Canal. We built and launched our first pilot boat in 2004 which was replaced by our widebeam canal boat in June 2008.

Re-Union offer training and support to a wide range of volunteers in crewing (RYA and NCBA), first aid, hospitality, health and hygiene and a variety of other courses that are identified and driven by the volunteers needs and requests.

We engage meaningfully with canalside communities from Edinburgh Quay to Wester Hailes through a variety of projects including canoe building, supporting the development of a canoe club, orchard planting which is now growing into a healthy eating garden project and co-ordinating community consultations and the Edinburgh Canal Festival.

Re-Union bring people together to develop their skills, learn from one another and realise their potential whilst maintaining and promoting the canal as a remarkable asset for the community.

Funders

In 2009 we continued to receive a variety of funding. Edinburgh Quay Ltd, a partnership between Miller Construction and British Waterways gave us funding to promote the Union Canal at Edinburgh Quay. EDI continued to fund our work to develop community engagement in the Wester Hailes area of Edinburgh.

The Voluntary Action Fund awarded funding to provide training courses for our volunteers including first aid, RYA training and food handling courses. The Henry Smith Charitable Trust funding contributed towards the salary of a Crew Co-ordinator.

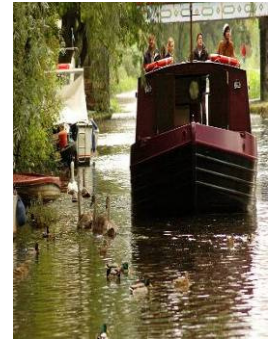
Big Lottery Funding supported the purchase and fitting out of our widebeam canal boat. It also helped provide training to introduce our volunteers to the skills required to fit the boat out. Our final evaluation report to the Lottery was highly complimented and is being used as an exemplar to other Lottery Fund awardees.

City of Edinburgh Council – South West Neighbourhood Partnership – funded equipment and a storage container for the Canoe Club. The Community Safety Partnership awarded funding for us to provide a Floating Youth Club. Funding was also received from City of Edinburgh Council, British Waterways and SW Neighbourhood Partnership towards the Edinburgh Canal Festival.

In December 2009 Lloyds TSB Foundation awarded us £7000 towards a Canal Community Development Worker for 2010 and The Robertson Trust also awarded a total of £30,000 over 3 years towards this post.

Board

The voluntary Board of Directors of Re-Union increased in number in 2009. Sheila Durie, Chairperson, Sam Baumber, Daniel Gotts and Douglas Tharby were joined by Julie Ellam and Gillian Irving in March 2009. The range of skills and knowledge of the Board contribute to the governance of the organisation. The Board has put a great deal of time and effort in 2009 and has risen to the challenge of taking on a trading arm with great tenacity and determination. Gregor Clark, accountant, has also been a very committed supporter of Re-Union during 2009. Not only is he our accountant he acts in an advisory capacity to the Board and attends all Board meetings. This has given the Board an extra layer of reassurance during this development stage.



In early 2010 the Board gained yet another Director, Irene Taylor who is a volunteer on the crewing side of the organisation and everyone is looking forward to having a different perspective brought along to the Board Meetings.

Staff

2009 was a particularly busy year for Re-Union staff. Everyone went the extra mile to ensure services and support to volunteers and customers was not affected by the new acquisition of Capercaillie Cruisers. Although very stretched at times it was great testament to every ones commitment towards making Re-Union successful and sustainable.

Rory Penman, (part time marketing) left to continue his studies, Abby Boulton (Canal Community Development Worker) left in December 2009 to move on to Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust and Nicola Sales (Office Manager) left in January 2010 to take up a post with East Lothian Housing Association.

We have now recruited new staff members and our full team is Pat Bowie, General Manager, Phil Gavigan, Skipper, Sam Adderley, Canal Community Development Worker and Jasmine Cochrane, Admin Trainee – through the Future Jobs Fund.

Volunteers



We have worked with 38 volunteers throughout the year, 8 have moved on but kept in touch and we have had 10 new applicants. We continue to recruit through word of mouth, and links with the Wester Hailes Health Agency, Departments within City of Edinburgh Council, the NHS Keep Well, the canoe club and the community.

We have retained many of our volunteers from the ‘wee boat’ days, through the ‘big boat build’ and now into operating the ‘new boat’. These old hands combine with new recruits and many are taking on mentoring roles, taking new recruits under their wing. We are promoting PAL (Peer Assisted Learning) which enables existing volunteers to support and encourage new recruits.

The feedback we receive from volunteers is very positive and we also hear anecdotal evidence about how their health has improved, how their quality of life has changed and how their confidence has grown through our programme. This all emphasizes the continued core values of Re-Union are being upheld.

“J has seen his health improve since volunteering with us over the last six months. This improvement was commented on by his GP when he last visited.

D’s support worker commented that D seems a lot calmer and more content and that volunteering with us has had significant positive effect on his wellbeing.

C continues to gain confidence and is actively involved in developing the canoe club and the orchard project.”

Activities

Crew training – Takes place every Monday. Attendance is good and volunteers continue to learn crewing skills, emergency procedures, boat maintenance, canal history, team working etc.



Volunteer Mondays – These monthly sessions have evolved to include guest speakers on subjects such as canal history, ecology, environment, health and safety, archaeology, canoeing etc. Visits have been arranged to a variety of places which enables our volunteers to socialize outwith the boat setting.

RYA - We now have RYA accreditation and 6 volunteers have completed their RYA Helmsman Certificate. Re-Union is now a registered training centre for the RYA and can offer training courses to the general public.

NCBA - 16 volunteers are currently working towards their Complete Crew certificate

First Aid - 10 volunteers have attended Basic First Aid courses during the year. The courses were provided by Mike Martin who is a qualified First Aid instructor and also volunteers for Re-Union as a canoe instructor.



Canal History - Training for volunteers in canal history is being led by Bert Dempster, a Re-Union volunteer and local historian.

Organic gardening - 3 volunteers have completed the organic gardening course at Bridgend Allotments through BTCV. They are now involved in establishing a Healthy Eating Garden adjacent to the Orchard at Calders Crescent.

Floating Youth Club - 2 volunteers assisted with the floating youth club in early 2009 and gained youth work experience under the supervision of City of Edinburgh Council Working With Families Unit.

Newsletter - One volunteer, is producing a regular edition of 'Tales from the Towpath' which is circulated to volunteers and Friends of Re-Union

Press and Media Library - Another of our volunteers regularly visits the office to catalogue press clippings and media stories about the Union Canal, Re-Union and other relevant topics.

Promotion - We have a volunteer who comes into the office in an admin capacity when we are carrying out promotional activities and has helped put together a database of potential customers.



Canoe Club – Several volunteers have become involved in the Canoe Club. They have been trained to SCA one-star certificate and hope to take this training further. Two volunteers have now taken on the roles of Chair and Treasurer as this group becomes a constituted association.

Board member - Another volunteer has now become a Board Director and is keen to represent the crew volunteering side of Re-Union on the Board.

As can be seen from the above activities our volunteers are given a great many opportunities to explore their talents and put them to use whenever and wherever they think they would be best used. By encouraging everyone to try different things we are building a great pool of volunteers with increased self confidence and belief in themselves. We are also giving them practical experience in the workplace which they can add to their CV's if applying for positions.

One of younger volunteer has recently been appointed as a front of house trainee at the Bridge Inn at Ratho and he felt that his experience with Re-Union helped him gain this post.



Projects

Canoe Building – No canoe builds took place in 2009. This was due in the main to lack of space to store canoes. Canoes from previous canoe builds had completely filled the container at the canalside and our priority was to get another container for storage before building more canoes. Funders were not keen to commission more canoe building unless storage was in place. We now have the funding and permission to do this and a new container should be on site by June 2010. Prospect Housing has funding in place for another canoe build and together we are exploring further funding opportunities to increase this number.

Canoe Club – As stated above there are now a number of canoes available for community use and we have worked closely with Prospect Community Housing to develop the Wester Hailes Canoe Club. Funding has been received from the Neighbourhood Partnership Community Grants Fund to purchase equipment and clothing and storage facilities. The club has put 12 members through the SCA one-star certificate and continues to train members through the grading system. It is hoped that some will be proficient enough to become canoe instructors within two years.

We are supporting this group to become a constituted group with their own autonomy and two of our volunteers are taking positions on the Management Committee.



Canal History

Our local history volunteer led a group of volunteers in a canal history walk from Wester Hailes to Edinburgh Quay. Notes and photos were taken and then made into factsheets that are used when volunteers act as guides on the cruises where this type of activity is requested. The information was also displayed on boards at the Edinburgh Canal Festival.

Floating Youth Club

The Floating Youth Club ran throughout March and April at Hailes Quarry Park, the Calders, and Harrison Park. It was funded by Cashback for Communities and it was very successful in providing diversionary activities for young people. The community police were very supportive of the project and engaged well with the young people. Re-Union volunteers assisted in the delivery of the youth club sessions and are developing their youth work skills as a result.

A positive outcome from this project is that many of the young people who attended the Floating Youth Club now wave to the boat as it passes through their community whereas in the past stones might have been thrown.

Edinburgh Canal Festival and Raft Race – Sat 27th June 2009 - The City of Edinburgh Council and British Waterways sponsored this event and Re-Union was paid a fee to co-ordinate the event. There was a great mix of land and water based activities and the community was involved in providing, taking part in or spectating at the event. The evaluation feedback was very positive with the main comment being we need to arrange the weather better for coming years.

Edinburgh Fringe Festival – We had a booking from the Mehtra Theatre Company during the Edinburgh Festival. We hosted 4 shows a day for 10 days. The performance of their version of Chekov's 3 sisters went down well with patrons and the media.

Open Doors Day – We took part in this event by linking with British Waterways who were offering walks along the Union Canal. We offered teas and coffees to the participants and over the day we had 110 walkers on board.



Community Orchard – Re-Union worked with the Waterways Trust and volunteers from the Royal Bank of Scotland on this project. In addition to Re-Union volunteers we also attracted others from a variety of local groups including Westburn Village Neighbourhood Council, the Calders High Rise Neighbourhood Council and the Wester Hailes Health Agency. Everyone worked together to clear an area at Calders Crescent and plant around 30 trees, a path was laid and natural wood benches were placed amongst the new trees. Sighthill Primary School came along to look at what was going on, eat apples, drink apple juice and draw picture to celebrate the planting.



We are now maintaining the orchard and are in discussion about developing the surrounding site into a Healthy Eating Garden in partnership with Wester Hailes Health Agency.

Calder Crescent Community Consultation – In September Re-Union hosted the second Canal Community Consultation onboard the boat moored at Calder Crescent. The drop in event was well attended and we fed back what had been achieved over the year and gather more information on ideas to go forward with.

Christmas at the Canal – We organised the erection of a Christmas Tree at Edinburgh Quay for the first time ever. The money for this came from some of the surplus from the Canal Festival. We were also involved in co-ordinating a Christmas Craft Fair on 6th December. This compliments our Santa Cruises which were a great success. We ran 3 trips on 3 Sundays in December and were sold out on most trips. This brought around 300 people into Edinburgh Quay to see Santa while cruising on the Canal.

Trips and Bookings - The boat is receiving regular bookings from community, corporate and private parties, although the private parties seem to be increasing while the corporate have dropped off. The community hires are going very well and we continue to attract voluntary groups, charities, schools and nurseries.

We have been involved in delivering educational trips, consultation events, youth provision, multicultural events, music, performance, meeting, networking, pirate parties, choirs, musicians, you name it we have had them on board. They have used in house catering provided by the Broomhouse Café, a social enterprise, or provided their own catering, in some cases cooking haggis, neeps and tatties on board. We have also had a few dinner parties especially during the winter when we are restricted to static hires.

Feedback from hirers continues to be extremely positive, with many promises of future bookings and recommendations to friends and families. We have found that the best promotion of the boat is by word or mouth and a high percentage of bookings come through this route.

During 2009 we have carried a total of 2,600 people over 150 trips. These trips were made up of 68 community, 74 private and 8 corporate bookings.

We attracted approximately 3,000 people into Edinburgh Quay for the Canal Festival and according to British Waterways ped-counters in June 2009 there was an increase in pedestrians at Lochrin Basin +21.08%, Viewforth +52.06% and at Wester Hailes +70.96%. British Waterways did comment that our increased activities at these locations had definitely had an impact on numbers.



Boat

The boat has performed very well during the year and maintenance issues have been minor. While on-going maintenance is always a concern the Skipper manages to cope with any problems that arise. A canopy was a welcome addition this year which helps protect the crew in inclement weather conditions. All MCA inspections have gone well and our next big task will be to have the boat in dry dock to have the hull examined and repainted which will be a necessity in 2010.



Capercaillie Cruisers Ltd

In December of 2008 British Waterways highlighted a business opportunity to the Board of Re-Union. A family business running a holiday hire boat fleet was retiring and looking for a buyer. The Re-Union Board contacted Tim Ford, who was instrumental in setting up the original Re-Union narrow boat pilot, and asked if he would be interested in looking into a joint venture.



After many discussions around how the company would be structured, how it would be funded and legal and OSCR advice being taken, the Board and Tim Ford agreed to go ahead with the purchase. An application, on behalf of Re-Union was made to the Scottish Investment Fund through Social Investment Scotland and a total of £236,150 was awarded as a mix of a loan and grant funding was awarded.

On 1st April 2009 Re-Union and Tim Ford officially took over Capercaillie Cruisers with 51% of the shares belonging to Re-Union and 49% belonging to Tim Ford. Ronnie Rusack (Jnr) and Jay Lamb also came on board at this stage to manage the operations side of the business. Jay Lamb played a key role in Re-Union's purchase of Capercaillie to enable Re-Union both the opportunity of financial sustainability and significant social impact. With the start up phase of this initiative now complete, Jay has moved on to explore other opportunities in the Social Enterprise field.

The fleet consists of 3 Capercaillie, boats that belong to the company and a further 5 ABC boats, 5 Black Prince boats and 3 Marine Cruises boats which are operated on a franchise type of system. The total fleet of 16 holiday hire boats operates out of the Holiday Hire Boat office at the Falkirk Wheel.

The first season was a huge learning curve for everyone involved and hard work and determination ensured that holiday makers all had a good time. By the end of the season a full staff team had been recruited including Ronnie Rusack – Operations Manager, Gail Jones – Front of House Manager, Lynsay Mercer – General Assistant, Martin Poole – Bankside Supervisor and a team of seasonal cleaners and bankside staff. Also Tam Walker was recruited as a contract engineer.

The first year for Capercaillie was a year of learning and consolidation. Both dealing with customers, marketing, turnaround schedules and staff recruitment and retention presented their own challenges as did the 4 different styles of boats, engines, maintenance and equipment. The Falkirk Team has gone above and beyond what has been expected of them and the input of Tim Ford has also been invaluable.

At the end of the financial year the company has shown a loss which was to be expected once it had been established that we would have to input a great deal of resources in this year to bring everything up to speed. We are now moving forward into our second season with more confidence



in the boats and a fully trained team delivering an excellent service to holiday makers. We have also added a floating dry dock to the assets of the company which we are using for the holiday hire boat fleet and hiring out to other boaters.

Re-Union is receiving a monthly management fee from Capercaillie for development support and accounts services provided and in future years there will be a share of dividends. These will go toward making Re-Union sustainable. A condition of the grant awarded to Re-Union was that specific social aims would have to be met and we are now working towards these. The long term view is that Re-Union will be able to replicate in Falkirk what we are providing in Edinburgh at the moment.

The Future

As can be seen from this report, 2009 was a year of great activity and development. Everyone involved is looking forward to the effort that has been put into this year giving Re-Union a solid base to move on from. We are never short of ideas or enthusiasm and thanks to the support of funders we are given the opportunity to deliver most of these ideas.

A huge thank you must go to our Volunteers, without whom our core activity would not work, a forward thinking and go-ahead Board who will take on challenges, and our staff team who are fully committed to getting the best for volunteers, customers and Re-Union.

2010 is the tenth anniversary of the Union Canal being re-opened and everyone is looking forward to an exciting and challenging year and being able to reflect on the changes that have taken place over these 10 years and the input Re-Union has made since its inception in 2004.



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