

CASE STUDY

SKYLARK IX: RECOVERY THROUGH RECOVERY: IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCOTTISH MARITIME MUSEUM

Claire McDade, Project Manager for The Skylark IX Recovery Trust, talks about the Trust's work, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to deliver woodworking and boatbuilding skills training to people from Alternatives Community Drug Charity in West Dunbartonshire, who are recovering from drug addiction. The Trust hopes to expand and build the Spirit of Skylark Centre in Dumbarton with key partners, the Scottish Maritime Museum, at the Denny Ship Model Experimental Tank, over the coming years.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ABOUT:

The Skylark IX Recovery Trust was formed in 2013 to save the Skylark IX Dunkirk Little Ship and supports people in recovery to develop skills, confidence and restore their sense of self worth.

FUNDERS:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund

PARTNERS:

- Scottish Maritime Museum

THE PROJECT:

This inspirational project supports people with addiction issues, using heritage and skills development to build confidence, resilience and self-worth. The Skylark IX is a Dunkirk Little Ship that ended her working life as a pleasure craft on Loch Lomond before ultimately sinking. Her recovery from the bottom of the river inspired Alternatives, a local boat club and a veterans' charity to form the Skylark IX Recovery Trust, which aims to help people on their journey from personal chaos towards wholeness and citizenship.

We also teach people to build 22 foot long St Ayles coastal rowing skiffs. During Lockdown in 2020 we started teaching clients, over zoom, how to build 1/8 scale model Echo Bay Dory skiffs. From April-July 2020 and again from February-April 2021, our boat tutor from Archipelago Folk School ran weekly sessions. Approximately 8 people living in Alternatives' residential recovery house in Dumbarton and in community housing took part regularly. At the end of each of the Lockdown periods we were able to take the groups to Loch Lomond to celebrate their work and float their boats.

In June our model boat builders returned to our boat workshop in SMM's Denny Tank to resume building the full size skiff. We aim to complete it by September 2021.



“Being involved with the project gives me a sense of purpose and routine. I know I can be at the workshop on Mondays, and Tuesdays and I’ll have people around me I can talk to. I can look back see how far I’ve come as last year I wouldn’t have believed in myself or had the confidence, and I wouldn’t have had these opportunities or been able to do all of these things and the other wee projects within the project. I’d encourage others to get involved, definitely.”

James, client and volunteer

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

- Running a project during a worldwide pandemic posed inevitable challenges as we did not have access to the Museum workshop, and of course had very little contact with each other. Numbers of participants fluctuated. During the latest Lockdown in 2021 we sadly lost one participant who had given a lot to the physical boat build. We are planning a memorial garden for those whose lives have been lost to drugs at the Denny Tank site.
- However, we are very proud of what we achieved. We provided people locked in together in recovery residential accommodation with creative and social activities, facilitating their learning and encouraging cooperation and team working.
- We work alongside people who are socially excluded and stigmatised, building trust, treating all with respect. Everyone becomes a “crew member” when they join our team and they proudly wear the t-shirt. Our Dunkirk Little Ship’s story and her part in rescuing soldiers from the beaches resonates strongly with our participants.
- Our social capital locally is very high because of our consistent communication with our partners

and stakeholders and via social media and the local press. We have worked very hard to ensure people know and understand our purpose throughout with communication and consultation.

THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- We have worked with small numbers of people over the last year. However, the feedback from regular participants is powerful. People report the project is therapeutic and gives them structure, a sense of purpose and routine. One reported that he was proud to be part of the Skylark story as she saved a lot of lives in WW2 and it encouraged him to get up for something worthwhile.
- The project has also impacted on the Scottish Maritime Museum who are now business planning to include the Spirit of Skylark Centre at Dumbarton in their future sustainability plans.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Sustainability of our work is vitally important. We lost a much loved participant during a gap in activity when restrictions made the date of reopening the Denny Tank uncertain. Short term project activity can be very damaging to fragile people who need to be supported on an ongoing basis. We are working with our partners to fundraise for the long term.
- Skylark is a heritage project delivered by a grassroots community drugs recovery charity with an embedded heritage professional working full time alongside key workers. There are no barriers to connecting with the community because we are in the community. Our recent news launch of our new plans to develop a £3million interpretation centre for Skylark received only positive feedback.

GUIDANCE:

- Seek new partnerships, consider new models for jointly operating your sites. Consult and share your plans and progress with local people, supporters and advocates and don’t underestimate grassroots charities.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

If you would like more information about this project please contact Claire McDade, Project Manager, the Skylark IX Recovery Project, email: clairem@alternativeswd.org. Visit our new website at www.skylarkix.co.uk

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