

AINA CASE STUDY

FAIRER, STRONGER AND MORE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

Basingstoke Canal: a community boat for disadvantaged people



Helping to transform lives through a range of leisure and activity on the waterways of Surrey

The *Swingbridge* community boat programme is managed by the Surrey Care Trust, a charity working to meet the needs of vulnerable people in Surrey through training and education work. The Trust aims to inspire people who face disadvantage to transform their futures by gaining a range of new skills.

In 2001 the hull of a 40 foot long, wide-beam canal boat was purchased with a £10,000 donation from Thames Water. This was fitted out, complete with wheelchair lift, by volunteers and groups of offenders working on community punishment orders. *Swingbridge* was officially launched later that year at Woking, on the Basingstoke Canal, and has seen constant use over the last ten years.

From October to March the boat is used as a base for bank clearance and conservation projects and groups of offenders, supervised by the programme manager, work alongside supportive volunteers. The winter work programme is planned with the Basingstoke Canal Authority, and *Swingbridge* also provides a service to Guildford Borough Council's Countryside Action team, working on land adjoining the River Wey. The project has established a reputation for its valuable environmental work, e.g., clearing rubbish and litter, cutting back overgrown vegetation, tidying towpaths and adjacent land and helping to enhance the waterways as an important wildlife habitat.

Just before Easter each year *Swingbridge* is repainted in time for Woking's Easter Boat Festival, and during the summer volunteers run trips for large numbers of disadvantaged community groups. All volunteers receive accredited training from the Open College Network and many have achieved Certificates in Community Boat Management.

Swingbridge 2 was launched five years later at the National Trust's Dapdune Wharf in Guildford. This cost £30,000, raised from donations by Thames Water, Woking Borough Council and the Thames Heritage Trust. A £50,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund paid a proportion of the initial running costs (including staff, tools and equipment) and the boat carries out a range of social inclusion work. Boat trips are offered to community groups who are caring for people who are disabled, elderly or have special needs.

The project enables the Surrey Care Trust to provide services to the community as well as valuable training and useful work experience for those who volunteer to help.