

Fishing for Answers:

Final Report of the Social and Community Benefits of Angling Project

Section 2: Angling and Health and Well-Being

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2. Angling and Health and Well-Being

In Brief

This section describes the positive role that angling plays in improving public health and well-being. Angling offers specific health and well-being benefits:

- As an informal recreational activity that can build resilience against ill health through opportunities for relaxation, relief from stress, improved physical activity and access to natural environments.
- As part of targeted intervention programmes that assist in the restoration and recovery from physical and mental ill health

2.1 Introduction and Context

Improving health and well-being is a priority across policy areas because it can positively impact on wider outcomes in education, employment, and social exclusion. Two recent papers, *No Health Without Mental Health*²⁷ and *Confident Communities: Brighter Futures*²⁸, call for a cross-departmental approach to improve the mental health and well-being of both vulnerable individuals and the general population. These papers stress the need for an integrated approach to mental and physical health that recognises the importance of:

- Connected communities
- Purposeful participation
- Building the strength and resilience of both people and communities
- A 'whole life course' approach to achieving health and well-being.

Angling makes a distinctive contribution to health and well-being in three ways:

- i) It incorporates a **range of physical activity levels** and encourages activity amongst the inactive, those recovering from illness and older age groups who may not participate in other sports.
- ii) It incorporates **therapeutic engagement** and contact with 'blue-green spaces', and as a consequence helps maintain positive mental health, provides stress relief and can support programmes for people experiencing mental illness.
- iii) It provides a rich social world that facilitates the relationship building, connection and **participation in social life** essential to securing well-being and active ageing.

Evidence our project has generated about angling's contribution to health and well-being comes from our angling participation survey, over 150 in-depth interviews with anglers, research visits to projects that employ angling as a tool to intervene in physical and mental health, and an online comment facility that collected anglers' personal interpretations of the health and well-being benefits of their participation. Indeed, improved health and well-being has been one of the most cited personal benefits of angling during the project, for young and old alike.

²⁷ Department of Health (2011) *No Health Without Mental Health: A cross government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages*, London DoH

²⁸ Department of Health (2010) *Confident Communities: Brighter Futures. A framework for developing well-being*, London DoH

In Focus: What is Well-Being?

Well-being is a dynamic, multi-dimensional state relating to how people feel and function in life.²⁹ It takes into account:

- Subjective well-being (how people think and feel about the quality of their lives)
- Psychological well-being (the ability to cope with stress, self-esteem, sense of purpose)
- Physical health and sense of bodily wellness
- A sense of connection to people, communities and the environment.

Consequently, well-being is more than the absence of mental or physical illness, or the satisfaction of basic needs, as it takes into account a wide range of domains that enable people to live happy, healthy, productive lives.

The UK public health white paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*³⁰ sets out an increased role for local authorities in encouraging active ageing and the development of communities for well-being that facilitate greater access to green spaces. *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*³¹ places particular emphasis on active citizenship, and calls for the Third Sector in Scotland to innovate new approaches and interventions for health and well-being. Overall, both the Scottish and English policies echo the findings of the 2010 Marmot Review into health inequalities, which drew attention to the importance of combating social isolation, providing access to restorative local environments and the role of positive social networks in improving health and well-being outcomes.³²

2.2 Angling's Contribution to Health and Well-being

2.2.1 Physical Health

Angling contributes to preventative and restorative measures by increasing physical activity and providing programmes that assist in recovery from physical illness.

Although we have already discussed some aspects of angling and physical activity in Section 1, it is worth highlighting the distinctive health benefits here.

i) Physical Activity and Health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises physical inactivity as the fourth leading risk factor in global mortality³³. Only 39% of adults are meeting recommended physical activity targets in Scotland³⁴, while in England 39% of men and 29% of women³⁵ are meeting them. Approximately 23% of adults in England³⁶ and 28.2% in Scotland³⁷ are considered obese. Without intervention, by 2050 obesity is expected to rise to 60% for men and 50% for women and will cost society £49.9 billion per year.³⁸ Crucially, for those who are inactive, the ability to gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity over time is critical in order to reach activity goals.

29 Newton, J. (2007) *Well-being and the Natural Environment. A brief overview of the evidence*, University of Surrey <http://www3.surrey.ac.uk/resolve/seminars/Julie%20Newton%20Paper.pdf>

30 Department of Health (Nov 2010) *Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England*, London: DoH.

31 Scottish Government (May 2009) *Towards a mentally Flourishing Scotland: Policy and Action Plan 2009-11*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

32 Marmot Review (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: A Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*

33 World Health Organisation (2010) *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health*. To improve and maintain physical health, the WHO recommends minimum targets of 60 minutes moderate to vigorous intensity activity a day for young people (aged 5-17 years), and 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity throughout the week for 18-64 years and those aged 65 years or over.

34 Scottish Government. (2011) *Scottish Health Survey 2010*.

35 The Health and Social Care Information Centre (2010) *Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet: England, 2010*.

36 NHS Information Centre (Dec 2010) *Health Survey for England 2009: Health and Lifestyle* Leeds: The NHS Information Centre

37 Scottish Government (Sept 2011) *Scottish Health Survey 2010*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government

38 Foresight (2007) *Tackling Obesities: Future Choices Final Report*

Due to the variability of physical activity levels possible in angling, it is a sport that delivers a means by which inactive people can become more active. Angling allows for gradual increases in participation frequency, duration and intensity as confidence, fitness and skills develop. This characteristic makes it particularly accessible to individuals who are inactive or have underlying disabilities with limited opportunities for physical activity and it is these individuals who are most at risk from poor well-being due to low activity. By moderating technique or location, anglers are able to remain physically active long after their ability to participate in other sports and leisure activities has declined.

In our participation survey, more than half of the sample (52%) rated their participation in angling as important, very important or extremely important to them being physically active.³⁹ It also offers opportunities to build up activity and for older people to get active:

'I broke my back in an accident. After a few operations I started to walk. I was told to try and get some exercise and build slowly. I went with my brother salmon fishing. I only watched to start but after a year of doing this I started to fish myself, two or three casts to start with, slowly building my stamina. I honestly believe that without the exercise I got from angling I would be in a wheel chair. I am not alone - my surgeons think the same.' (Web comment submitted 23/07/11)

'[I have] walked more than eight miles in a fishing match, made a 600ft cliff descent and subsequent ascent and weighed myself before and after a hard bait digging session and recorded a 4½ lb weight loss. Angling is as physical as you want to make it.' (Survey comment made by 61-year old male sea angler)

Furthermore, angling creates opportunities for physical exercise in 'green' or 'natural environment' settings. Research by the University of Essex⁴⁰ has emphasised that 'green exercise' can lead to:

- Improved psychological wellbeing by enhancing mood and self-esteem
- Improved recovery from physical illness
- The facilitation of social networking and creativity

Mental health charity MIND, the Countryside Recreation Network and research by Pretty *et al* (2006) have all identified these additional benefits of taking exercise in natural/green spaces in their work.⁴¹

ii) Recovery from Physical Illness

While angling can help increase the physical health of the general population by raising levels of physical activity, it can also have specific benefits for those recovering from ill health. A growing body of research has pointed to the positive effects of green environments on physical recovery,⁴² and many hospital and outreach programmes now include green activities such as horticulture to facilitate patient recovery.⁴³

Recovery is both a physical and mental process. Reflecting this, angling provides opportunities to assist recovery from physical health problems in three ways:

- Increased physical movement
- Psychological benefits of being in green environments
- Increased social connection

'As an 82 year old man with cancer, I feel it an effort to get motivated to get out and about. However, when fly fishing a still water I very much enjoy the technique involved in making high-quality casts, the thrill of the take of a fish, the pleasure of being out of doors in a rural environment, and the kindness of strangers (mostly elderly men who feel as I do) on the waterside.' (Web comment submitted 16/09/2011)

While people can access the restorative benefits of angling through their own recreational participation, many projects now also offer targeted programmes of support.

39 Stolk, P. (2009) *Angling Participation Interim Report 2009*, Manchester: Substance, p30

http://resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Research_Task_1_Angling_Participation.pdf

40 Pretty *op cit*

41 Mind (2007) *Ecotherapy: The green agenda for mental health*, Mind Week report May 2007; Countryside Recreation Network (2005) *A countryside for health and wellbeing: The physical and mental health benefits of green exercise*; Pretty, J., Hine, R. and Peacock, J. (2006) 'Green exercise: The benefits of activities in green places', *The Biologist*, 53 (3), 143-148.

42 Newton, J. (2007) *op cit*

43 For example, see the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital's therapy garden

<http://www.rnoh.nhs.uk/clinical-services/rehabilitation-and-therapy/occup/therapy-garden>

Casting for Recovery⁴⁴ is a programme that encourages women who have experienced breast cancer to take part in fly fishing. Physical activity is used to strengthen muscles and increase movement and confidence following surgery. However, the benefits extend beyond the physiological; women find social support in their shared experiences and the camaraderie of angling, as well as a positive mental focus on wellness and having fun.⁴⁵

Angling is also being successfully used to work with people who have experienced strokes, where participation in angling is an opportunity not only to improve motor function and dexterity, but also to reconnect with society and begin to focus on the positive experiences in their lives.

In Focus: Angling and Stroke Recovery in Tameside

'Sometimes when people have a stroke the world becomes a very small place – often the front room of their home – and depression kicks in.'

Three years ago the Stroke Association's Tameside and Glossop Information, Advice and Support Service,⁴⁶ decided to 'test the water' and feature angling as an activity for people of working age. Joyce Booth from the Stroke Association explained the impetus behind starting these sessions:

'We want to engage people in as many activities as we can. The benefit of fishing would be to get out and about in the fresh air, and to see something different...I also think it was just about offering something to people that wasn't focused on their disability, and to show them something that they could do, and could achieve, with as much or as little support as they need.'

The decision proved to be far more successful than the service team thought possible. The Tameside and Glossop service now works closely with Tameside angling organisation Friends of Catch Nature,⁴⁷ and together they have developed sites with facilities that meet the special needs of their client group. Demand for angling sessions amongst those recovering from strokes has been consistently strong, prompting an increase in sessions from 3-4 outings per year to one a week during the summer months.

The Tameside and Glossop team identify angling participation as providing particular benefits for stroke survivors. These include physical improvements such as increased muscle strength, improved co-ordination and exercise, along with improvements to mental and emotional well-being through skill development, socialisation and opportunities to relax.



44 Casting for Recovery was founded in 1996 in Vermont, US. In 2007, Casting for Recovery UK/Ireland was established.

45 From data collected in interviews with members of Casting for Recovery.

46 See the Stroke Association website, http://www.stroke.org.uk/in_your_area/services_map/tameside_and_1.html accessed 5 December 2011.

47 See Friends of Catch Nature website, <http://www.catchnature.co.uk/index.html> accessed 5 December 2011.

2.2.2 Angling's Contribution to Mental Health

Angling makes both a preventative and restorative contribution to mental health.

Angling can assist mental health in two principal ways: by providing an activity that helps the development of positive mental health in participants; and as an activity that is used in a targeted way to treat mental health problems.

i) Promoting Positive Mental Health

Angling introduces protective factors that promote good mental health.

Positive mental health describes a positive state of being rather than just the absence of mental illness.⁴⁸ Developing protective factors, such as resilience and coping skills, as well as a network of social support, helps to maintain positive mental health.

Across the country many people already make use of angling to maintain positive mental health. In our survey of 2,400 anglers, 87% identified rest and relaxation as an important motivation for angling participation, with 30% citing rest and relaxation as 'extremely important'.⁴⁹ 90% of surveyed anglers also claimed escaping crowds and noise was an important, very important or extremely important part of their angling experience⁵⁰.



48 World Health Organisation (2010) *Mental Health: Strengthening our Response*. Fact Sheet No 220
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/index.html>

49 Stolk, P. (2009) op cit :30.

50 ibid

Angling provides opportunities to escape from daily stress and moments for respite and restoration. Research suggests mental restoration is best achieved through environments and activities that provide breaks from the effort of sustaining tired cognitive patterns.⁵¹ Amongst the data from our angler interviews, online comments and survey, angling was clearly described as having many of the distinct features of mentally restorative environments that contribute to the maintenance of positive mental health as outlined in Table 4.

Feature	Benefit	Angler response
Escape and 'Getting Away'	Fishing provides an opportunity to 'take time out' and 'get away' from busy fast moving lives. It removes people both physically and mentally from the stresses of their day to day environments.	<i>'Being in the country away from the hustle bustle of fast track living is a great thing, even if it is sitting on the banks of a canal as it passes through a town or city. The noises and sounds take you to another place and the speed of life slows down.'</i>
Attention and Fascination	Angling 'fascinates' attention, allowing people to concentrate for long periods of time seemingly effortlessly. As they become completely absorbed there is no room for other thoughts and the singular focus serves as a mental break. ⁵²	<i>'Fishing provides me with total escape from other worries. I am 100% absorbed in the art of casting, the movement of the water, the weather and the environment around me. It's a great stress buster: there's no space left for thinking of other things.'</i>
Relaxation and Excitement	The relaxation of engaging in an enjoyable repetitive activity is punctuated by moments of excitement and the anticipation of catching. This holds interest, encouraging people to participate for longer, reaping the benefits of taking time out to relax without becoming bored.	<i>'Angling provides a distraction to the stresses of modern living. It requires long periods of concentration to adapt techniques to ever changing conditions. Relaxation comes from intense concentration whilst excitement arises from the anticipation and the unpredictability of catching.'</i>
Access to Nature	Escaping into green spaces and feeling close and connected to nature boosts feelings of well-being, improving mood and enabling people to find respite from life stresses. ⁵³	<i>'I cannot imagine anything else that allows such an escape - it is the ultimate means of levelling out from stress for me. Fresh air, exercise, stimulation and a feeling of being 'at one with nature' all contribute to a very necessary experience in today's world.'</i>
Achievement and Purpose	Active learning and developing skills can provide a sense of purpose and motivation, increase opportunities for achievement and boost self-esteem.	<i>'The only time I get to completely unwind is when we are fishing. A day out with mates, a laugh, being close to nature and sometimes a few fish. Never anything big or record breaking but it still brings a sense of achievement and well-being. Can you put a price on this? I don't think so!'</i>

Table 4: Distinctive Features of Angling Contributing to Positive Mental Health

51 Kaplan, S. (2001) 'Meditation, Restoration and the Management of Mental Fatigue' In *Environment and Behaviour* Vol. 33, p482-506

52 This is a feature of restorative environments described as essential for mental restoration, *ibid*

53 This echoes research on the impact of green environments for improved mental health. Newton, J. (2007).

ii) Assisting Treatment and Recovery from Mental Illness

Angling provides programmes that assist in the treatment and recovery from mental illness.

a) Informal

At any one time, approximately 16% of adults and 10% of children are affected by common mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.⁵⁴ The most recent estimates suggest this costs £105 billion per year in England once all the wider impacts are considered.⁵⁵ In Scotland recent estimates of the social and economic cost of mental illness are in the region of £10.7 billion.⁵⁶ Finding effective ways to assist in the recovery of people from mental ill-health is consequently an important concern for the whole of society.

A significant body of work is emerging to explore how green environments, particular those that include water⁵⁷, can improve mood and self-esteem and stave off mild forms of depression and anxiety.⁵⁸ Increased physical activity has also been shown to have a positive effect on improving mood and reducing symptoms of mild to moderate depression and anxiety.⁵⁹ Participation in angling capitalises on both these benefit areas, while also incorporating a number additional benefits for those suffering from mental ill-health. These include:

- Escape and respite from stressful environments
- Reduced isolation and reconnection with living things (fish, nature, other people)
- Increased access to blue-green environments that improve mood and self-esteem.
- Increased engagement in physical activity
- Opportunities to rebuild relationships with carers or families through positive, shared participation that does not focus on illness
- Sense of achievement and independence from others
- Confirmation of capabilities and immediate sense of gratification and success
- Participation in a calming, therapeutic activity.

As one sea angler explained:

'When my mental health deteriorates I am able to "escape" and go fishing. The solitude of the sea shore, the sound of the waves, and the need to concentrate on watching for a bite clears my mind of negative thoughts, fixing me back into a happier frame of mind. Alternatively when I'm hyper manic the slow rhythm of fly casting and the need to carefully stalk my quarry brings me back down into a calm state.' (Web comment submitted 13/07/2011)

b) Targeted Intervention Programmes

While the aforementioned health benefits are accessible through angling participation more generally, organisations are increasingly beginning to provide targeted intervention programmes for people experiencing mental ill-health.

The mental health charity MIND incorporated angling into their Get Active programme in Worthing, West Sussex⁶⁰. The Get Active programme aims to improve mental and physical health through a variety of exercise and physical activities. Stephen, one of the regular Get Active participants, explained how the 'peaceful, relaxing' experience of going fishing 'takes your mind off [the passing of] time'. By contrast, a day at home presents certain mental challenges. Going fishing removes Stephen from his usual domestic setting – a place where anxiety attacks can be triggered by a ringing telephone or knock at the door – and delivers him to a tranquil environment where he has greater control over the amount of interaction he has with other people.

54 Foresight (2008) *Mental Capital and Well-being: making the most of ourselves in the 21st Century*.

55 Department of Health (Feb 2011) *No Health Without Mental Health: A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages* London: DoH, p10

56 The Scottish Association for Mental Health (2011) *What's it worth now? The social and economic costs of mental health in Scotland*

57 Pretty and J. Barton. (2010) 'What is the Best Dose of Green Exercise for Improving Mental Health?', in *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vol. 44 (10) p 3947–3955

58 Newton (2007:23); Mind (2007) *Ecotherapy: The green agenda for mental health*. http://www.mind.org.uk/campaigns_and_issues/report_and_resources/835_ecotherapy

59 Baker, L.A, Cahalin, L.P., Gerst, K. and Burr, J.A. (2005). 'Productive activities and subjective well-being among older adults: the influence of number of activities and time commitment', *Social Indicators Research* 73, pp. 431-458.

60 Stolk, P. (2010) *Interim Theme Paper 2:Angling and personal Health and Well-being*, Manchester: Substance http://www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Theme_Paper_2_Angling_and_Personal_Health_and_Well-being.pdf

Another example can be found in Scotland, where nursing staff from two NHS mental health hospitals in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Leverndale and Dykebar, introduced angling in 2011 to help calm patients and increase their quality of life. The majority of those engaged are in long term wards and angling offers them one of the few opportunities to change their routine and get out to experience the natural environment.⁶¹

Both of these examples illustrate the potential role angling can play in supporting targeted mental health provisions. Opportunities for this type of involvement would be greatly increased by developing stronger links between angling and mental health organisations and institutions at local, regional and national levels.

In Focus: Working with Anxiety Disorders

In the UK, 4.4% or 195,000 young people aged 11-16 have an anxiety disorder.⁶² A further 3.6% of 16-24 year olds are thought to have a generalized anxiety disorder.⁶³ Anxiety can be complicated by low-confidence and self-esteem, feelings of not fitting in, experiences of bullying, or isolation and limited friendship networks. In young people anxiety can manifest as panic attacks, agoraphobia, or obsessive compulsive disorder, triggered by stressful social situations such as meeting new people or going to school.

Youth intervention project Get Hooked On Fishing (GHOF), has found angling particularly effective for working with young people with anxiety disorders because angling introduces them to a calming activity that can be used to minimize anxiety during engagement sessions. As a result workers are able to discuss difficult issues or introduce young people to social situations that would otherwise potentially trigger anxiety attacks.

'Fishing relaxes me so much. I used to get panic attacks in year 7. And now I'm dead relaxed, it's weird because I used to have panic attacks at school, and then one day I just couldn't breathe, and the next day I was with GHOF again and I was fine. It happens when I have something on my mind to do, coming to school. Whereas tying a hook, having something to do where I'm just sitting here, something to relax. It calms me down.' (Male, 13)

Through an approach that combines the therapeutic aspects of angling with youth intervention work, young people learn to manage their anxiety, overcome fears of social situations and develop social skills that give them greater confidence in social interactions.

2.2.3 Angling's Contribution to Improved Social Well-Being

The quality of people's social relationships has been found to be one of the most robust predictors of well-being.⁶⁴ The two most significant determinants relate to:

- The quality of interpersonal relationships between close family and friends
- A sense of connection, belonging and contribution to a wider community

i) Family

Learning to fish has long been associated with social and family networks, with angling skills, techniques and information often being passed to young people from parents, grandparents, friends or extended family.⁶⁵ While the breakdown of family networks may have disrupted some of this process, our data suggests that young people continue to go fishing predominantly with family.

61 Scottish Herald. (May 2011) <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/health/fishing-on-the-nhs-for-mental-health-patients-its-a-good-sense-of-achievement-when-we-catch-a-fish.13775733>

62 Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, H., et al. (2005) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain 2004*. London: Palgrave.

63 McManus, S., Meltzer, H., Brugha T, Bebbington, P, Jenkins, R. (2009) *Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a household survey*, London: The Health and Social Care Information Centre

64 Raben, M, D. (2010) 'The promotion of well-being: A primer for Policymakers: Working paper 10-25, *Economic and Finance Working Paper Series*, London: Brunel University.

65 Wheelock, J., Oughton, E. and Whitman, G. (2009) 'Well-being and the Values of Angling', Research poster for the *Angling in the Rural Environment* project.

In our young angler survey, 76.4% of the sample indicated that a family member fished. However, only 49.7% said they most often went fishing with family members, and the proportion of respondents was more heavily distributed amongst younger age groups. Nonetheless, in qualitative interviews with young people and their families, spending quality time with family members represented a significant part of their enjoyment, particularly when this gave an opportunity for bonding across gender boundaries.⁶⁶ As one young girl explained, angling was one of the few activities they could do as a whole family where everyone could be equally proficient. For adults too, spending quality time with siblings, children and grandchildren, was cited as an important aspect of angling participation.

'It's something me and my brothers tend to do together, we carry on the tradition that our father passed onto us. Sometimes even though me and my brothers fish together there will be a moments of silence, but generally we have a good catch up, there's also that element of competition there.' (Survey comment made by 39 year old male angler)

ii) Friends and Contributing to the Wider Community

Angling is also an important means of forming connections and meaningful relationships outside of the family unit. As alluded to in Section 1, angling participation involves a wide variety of affiliated activities that support a rich social world, including membership of clubs and associations, coaching and mentoring, contributing to websites and taking part in competitions. Membership of formal social structures such as angling clubs and associations provides opportunities to engage in democratic processes, take on responsibilities, join social events, engage in coaching or volunteering, and meet new people.

For older adults in particular, formal volunteering has been shown to be a protective factor in psychological well-being by providing a sense of purpose and productive roles in later life.⁶⁷ Volunteering opportunities build social capital, and facilitate feelings of collective belonging, civil engagement and connectedness.⁶⁸ Because angling promotes opportunities to build meaningful relationships based on shared interest rather than religious, ethnic, or regional affiliation, it has the potential to facilitate greater community integration (Section 4).



66 Djohari, N (2010) *Young People's Voices Part1: The Well-being Benefits of Angling Participation*, Manchester: Substance. http://www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Young_People_Part1_wellbeing2010.pdf

67 Greenfield, E and Marks, N. (2004) 'Formal volunteering as a protective factor for older adult's psychological well-being', in *Journal of Gerontology*, Vol 95b (5) 258-264; see also Dolan, P., Peasgood, T. and White, M.P. (2006) *Review of Research on the Influences on Personal Well-being and Application to Policy Making*, London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

68 For a detailed discussion of the benefits offered by club membership, see Putnam, R.D (1995) 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6:1, pp.65-78.

2.2.3 Angling Across the Life Course

Angling addresses specific well-being issues for both young and older people.

Sustaining well-being is about encouraging healthy life choices at all stages of life, from early childhood development through to old age. Angling, being open to participation across the generations, represents an excellent example for understanding how a single activity, when adapted to different stages of life, can bring health and well-being benefits throughout the life course.

i) Angling, Children and Young People

Angling helps build young people's relationships and confidence.

Securing the well-being of children has become a particularly pressing concern for the UK in the wake of ranking last in UNICEF's 2007 table on young people's well-being across 21 of the richest nations⁶⁹. Among the UNICEF well-being domains where the UK performed poorly were 'family and peer relationships' and 'subjective well-being'.

Amongst the 188 young people we interviewed and the 219 who completed the Young People's Angling Survey, angling emerged as an important contributor to well-being in three distinct ways:

- Building strong supportive social relationships with adults and peers
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem
- Providing respite and escape from stressful situations

'I do it to get away from anything bad happening, I can just come down here, I can escape from everything and it's my space to chill out in, relax and do what you want.' (Male 15)

These benefits are clearly captured in responses to the Young People's Angling Survey (see graphic in figure 2) and reveal the important role angling can play in supporting young people to live happy, healthy lives. For young people who are socially excluded or do not participate in other sports or recreational activities, the benefits of meeting supportive adults and peers can be especially significant.⁷⁰



Figure 2: Well-being Results From the Young People's Angling Survey

69 UNICEF (2007) *An Over View of Child Well-being in Rich Countries*, Report Card 7.

70 More detailed qualitative accounts from young people can be found in the Djohari, N. (2010b) *Young People's Voices Part 1: The Well-being Benefits of Angling Participation*, Manchester: Substance http://resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Young_People_Part1_wellbeing2010.pdf

ii) Angling Benefits for Older People

Angling provides opportunities for 'active ageing'

'When I retired in 2003 aged 67, I found that carrying all the equipment for coarse angling was getting a bit much, and a couple of years ago I took up fly fishing. I joined a Fly Dressing Group and made new friends. The group organises fishing trips, we give demonstrations and teach children. In about a month's time I will be 75. Fishing has given me good friends, a meaningful existence, and a sense of worth I could easily have missed had I retired to the TV sport and old folks' organisations. Life is full and I enjoy every minute.' (Online comment submitted 16/9/2011).

With an increasingly ageing population, and people expected to work longer before retirement, the Foresight *Mental Capital and Well-being report*⁷¹ highlights two emerging social challenges:

- i) How to **maintain mental capital** (cognitive capabilities, resilience, social skills) that will help older people maintain their well-being and independence into old age;
- ii) How to make more use of **older people's capabilities** and reverse negative stereotypes.

Our research has found that angling is contributing to positive outcomes in both these areas by encouraging *active ageing*. **'Active ageing'** refers to people's continued participation in the social, political and cultural aspects of life. It focuses not only on maintaining physical and mental health but also on creating an environment through which older people can maintain their autonomy and independence, and engage in a fulfilling social life. Angling facilitates active ageing in four interconnected ways which are outlined in Table 5.

Active Ageing Criteria	Angling's Contribution
Life-long learning: a protective factor against cognitive decline. ⁷²	- Encourages people to continue engaging in learning, through angling skill development. - Taking on new roles and responsibilities as coaches or within angling clubs.
Continued physical activity: Can delay functional decline and reduce the onset of chronic disease. ⁷³	- Angling participation is not restricted by a person's level of physical ability. - Can be effective at keeping older people physically active long after their ability to participate in other sports and recreation activities have declined. - Older people can come to angling later in life, unlike many other sports.
Reducing isolation and increasing social connection: Can combat increased morbidity and psychological distress in older people. ⁷⁴	- Angling offers a rich social world in which to participate and meet new people. - Participation in angling clubs leads to social networks, volunteering and competitions. - Informal interactions on the waterside also offer potential for developing friendships.
Making a meaningful contribution to society: Recognises and utilises the wealth of experience and helps share it with younger generations.	- Angling is one of the few sports where older people can continue to contribute long past retirement age. - Angling involves an intergenerational exchange of knowledge which is beneficial for young and old alike. - Across angling clubs and projects working with some of the most challenging young people, we have found many retired people take up new opportunities as volunteers and coaches. The ADB report approximately 37% of the 1040 newly qualified UKCC coaches since 2009 were over 50.

Table 5: Angling's Contribution to Active Ageing

71 Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project (2008) *Final Project Report: Executive Summary*, London: The Government Office for Science, p11.

72 *ibid*

73 World Health Organisation. (2002) *Active Ageing: A policy Framework*.

74 *ibid*; Cattan; M, Bond, J; Learmouth, A; White, M. (2005). 'Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: a systematic review of health promotion'. In *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 25, pp. 41-67.

2.3 Issues and Recommendations

2.3.1 Access

One of the greatest strengths of angling is that **participation is not restricted** by a person's underlying physical ability. Nonetheless, those with disabilities and restricted mobility can sometimes find fisheries ill-prepared to meet their needs. In addition, young people face additional challenges to participation, being restricted to fisheries in urban centres or those they can access on their own via public transport. More needs to be done to ensure everyone, regardless of age, physical ability or status, is able to access the benefits provided through angling.

If angling is to develop its delivery of health and well-being outcomes, particularly to those suffering physical or mental health problems, then there is a need to improve access to fisheries and fishing opportunities. Although much good work has been delivered in recent years, supported by angling governing bodies and agencies such as the Environment Agency, more needs to be done. Local authorities should commit to opening or maintaining access to fishing at accessible venues in centralised locations that are close to public transport routes.⁷⁵ Fisheries themselves should continue to improve disability access and facilities.

2.3.2 Connections with Health Providers

Angling as a sector is **not particularly well connected** with health providers or policymakers, locally, regionally or nationally. Although we have seen some very good examples of angling as a restorative health activity and some innovative projects, this is the exception rather than the rule. Angling governing bodies at a national level in the UK, and ADB Regional Managers, County Angling Action Groups (CAAGs) and angling clubs and projects, need to establish these links if the potential is to be realised.

As such there is a need to strengthen links between angling and the health sector. Angling organisations should make links with the health sector at a national, regional and local level. This should involve providing information on the benefits angling can deliver and building relationships, pilots and joint projects with both national and local agencies in mental and physical health work. Work being done with MIND and the Stroke Association are good examples of the fruitfulness of collaborative projects.

- **National policymakers and charities** should meet angling governing bodies to discuss development of the health and well-being benefits
- **Regional managers** should contact regional health forums, open dialogue and develop pilot projects.
- **CAAGs and local angling clubs** should contact PCTs, local authority public health officials and GP forums to provide information on activities they can offer.

2.3.3 Evaluation

The benefits of angling for health and well-being are little known outside of the angling sector. In part this is due to an **absence of demonstrable data**, with few intervention programmes effectively monitoring and evaluating their outcomes. In order to successfully communicate with health care professionals, the future GP consortia expected to replace Primary Care Trusts, and local authorities who will have responsibilities for public health, angling will need to be able to provide robust evidence that programmes are delivering the intended health and well-being benefits.

There is a need for angling to work with health and research professionals to provide evidence of angling's contribution to health and well-being. This can be easily achieved through basic monitoring and evaluation of health and well-being outcomes across angling programmes. For targeted interventions in particular, lessons can be learnt from horticulture and green exercise programmes that have gained widespread recognition within health sectors because they have engaged in more robust evaluations. Commissioning of more in depth specific health research should be explored.

⁷⁵ See Brown, A et al. (2011) *Making the Most of Community Waters: Localism, Health and Angling* (2011), for more suggestions on how to improve community access to angling. http://resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Making_the_most_of_community_waters.pdf