

Countryside Alliance written evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry into the social impact of participation in culture and sport

22 February 2018

Executive Summary

1. Taking part in rural activities such as fishing, hunting or shooting sports has shown to provide a positive impact on social mobility, education, health, and community engagement.
2. Projects such as Casting for Recovery and Fishing for Schools, run by the Countryside Alliance Foundation, demonstrate that positive engagement in rural activities can improve health and educational attainment.
3. We actively encourage participants of our Foundation projects to continue fishing or shooting by introducing them to what is happening in their local areas, putting them in touch with clubs, and our instructors provide informal post course mentoring. We have found a significant proportion of participants endeavor to continue once they have been introduced to rural sports through one of our projects.
4. To enable more people to appreciate the benefits of rural activities we need to see greater support and promotion of how people can participate, including funding to provide access and improve facilities, government recognition of the positive benefits of initiatives such as Fishing for Schools and Casting for Recovery provide and the role outdoor learning can play in improving health and wellbeing.

Introduction

5. The Countryside Alliance works for everyone who loves the countryside and the rural way of life. Our aim is to protect and promote life in the countryside and to help it thrive. With over 100,000 members and supporters we are the only rural organisation working across such a broad range of issues.
6. The Countryside Alliance welcomes this inquiry into the social impact of participation in sport by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and the opportunity to submit evidence on the positive role rural sports can contribute to social mobility, education, health, and community engagement.

7. The Countryside Alliance has a charity which is dedicated to providing opportunities for the public, particularly disadvantaged children and young people, to enjoy the countryside and the wealth of educational, health and wellbeing benefits it offers. The Countryside Alliance Foundation has introduced thousands to the countryside and enabled many young people who get few life chances to participate in positive outdoor rural activities.
8. The Foundation delivers three key projects: Fishing for Schools, Falconry for Schools and Casting for Recovery. Fishing for Schools and Falconry for Schools use the fun and discipline of rural activities in order to enhance education and inject some 'fresh air' into the learning experience. For many young people we offer their first visit to the countryside. We work alongside teachers to ensure that the programme delivered to individual schools fits the needs and abilities of the young people, especially those experiencing learning difficulties. Casting for Recovery enriches the lives of ladies with breast cancer through a programme of support, relaxation techniques and the beautiful sport of fly fishing.

Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland

9. With the support of a wonderful team of volunteers we deliver a fly fishing and counselling programme for ladies with breast cancer. Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland is a unique fly fishing project which marries support, advice, counselling, relaxation techniques and the beautiful sport of fly fishing. Our weekend retreats are free of charge to lady participants and any lady who has, or has had, breast cancer is eligible to apply, subject to medical clearance.
10. We help women overcome the challenges of cancer by providing professional medical and counselling services alongside the experience of learning a new skill; fly fishing. Our two and a half day retreats are held in idyllic rural locations and are staffed by volunteers, including counsellors, psychotherapists, specialist nurses and qualified fly fishing instructors. The ladies gain expert medical advice, boost confidence and acquire a new network of friends to help move forward with their illness.
11. We take women at any stage of their illness with the caveat they must be at least 3 months out of surgery and have medical clearance from their healthcare provider. We are able to cater for ladies with additional needs; for example, ladies who have mobility issues or require additional time to rest.
12. The fly fishing element of the programme is a unique part of the retreat and takes the project far beyond that of a cancer support group. Many ladies find fishing a welcome diversion from their illness. The rhythm of the retreat is fishing, medical session, fishing, counselling session – using the fishing side as a balance and form of therapy and fun to settle the emotions that may have been stirred up at a group session. The focus is very much on helping the ladies to move forward with confidence. Only a small percentage of those who apply to us have utilised any other form of support group in their area. Our initiative allows ladies the opportunity to discuss various concerns at group sessions or one-to-one with a medic or counsellor and learn from the experience of their peers who might be at a different stage of their breast cancer journey.

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Outcomes:

13. Medics have told us of the complementary value of Casting for Recovery. It isn't a cure but for those who have been looking at the four walls of a hospital room, it has a great appeal.
14. Participants feel more confident and better equipped to deal with their breast cancer. Fly fishing tuition provides gentle exercise to aid recovery, with access to green blue spaces reducing anxiety and stress.
15. Participants are encouraged to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of a retreat, allowing us to measure the impact the programme has on the morale and wellbeing of each and every lady. The results assist us in improving the programme and the experience for future participants and shows us that the retreats have a beneficial effect for those taking part.
16. Anecdotal evidence tells us that the effect of the programme 'ripples out' to the families and friends of participants. The wider impact means that those who have been anxious and worried about a participant are delighted to see the positive effect the experience has had on her. This is illustrated by the partner of a retreat participant who recently contacted us to say 'thank you for giving me my wife back'.
17. Retreat participants have a new network of friends with shared experiences of breast cancer. The retreat gives ladies the confidence to talk to their health provider regarding their care and to ask questions regarding their treatment. We offer ladies the opportunity to keep in touch with fellow participants and volunteers after a retreat has ended. Many take the opportunity and are also active on the Casting for Recovery Facebook page.
18. Ladies who attend our retreat gain wider understanding of breast cancer. Ladies find the programme informative and it inspires them long after the retreat has ended.
19. Those women wishing to continue fishing are given every encouragement and are introduced to fly fishers in their home area. Others may just continue with friendships made within the group and our 'Care to share' programme means that participants have ongoing access to support from retreat staff.

Fishing for Schools

20. Fishing for Schools started in 2008 and offers young people the opportunity to discover the joy of fishing, whilst learning new skills in a fun and proactive way. The charity helps pupils re-engage with education, building their confidence and self-esteem, while at the same time assisting with new qualifications and skills.

21. Fishing for Schools runs courses for pupils who often find academic work particularly difficult but respond well to alternative learning. It is a short-course for children age 10-16 years old, often with special educational needs.
22. Where possible we work with courses run by accredited ASDAN, COPE and BTEC schemes giving real qualifications and social value.
23. We have worked with over 80 schools in England and Wales over the last ten years. Almost 300 children benefitted from our programme last year. No other UK organisation offers our blend of fishing and educational modules.
24. We recently worked with five pupils at a school supporting pupils with emotional and mental health difficulties. One group are now working towards a two-year BTEC Fish and Aquatic Environment course, having been introduced to fishing through our work two years ago.
25. We have highly skilled coaches who have established strong links with schools. Our coaches are recruited not only for their coaching skills but their ability to enthuse young people to discover fishing, with consummate patience and empathy to support children with behavioural difficulties and those struggling to engage in school life. Our coaches also work with community groups including Charlton Athletic Community Trust, offering fishing to young people with defined mental health issues, and MCCH in Maidstone, which supports people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs. Charlton tell us that getting the groups outdoors, doing something new and feeling pleased with what they are doing increases motivation and self- confidence.

Outcomes:

26. Participating in Fishing for Schools has a positive impact on young people, both inside and outside of the school environs, helping develop new skills, improve life chances, enhance confidence and self-esteem. We achieve this in three key ways:
 27. Increased confidence in ability and achievement: we enable children who struggle at school to feel successful. You don't have to be academic or able-bodied to succeed. Children complete the course having learnt to fish and a wealth of skills, including teamwork, leadership and communication skills. We help young people to thrive, develop and have fun.
 28. Re-engagement at school and learning: we help young people re-engage at school and build a positive attitude towards learning. Teachers see improved attendance as a result of our work and it has given pupils something positive to talk about at school. Our programme helps school staff understand what further motivates children to learn.
 29. Improved wellbeing: we offer a respite from day to day challenges, providing a calm environment and the wellbeing benefits of the countryside. Teachers discover far more about a young person whilst sitting at the bankside, for

example an insight into their home situation or talking through concerns such as bullying and attendance.

Falconry for Schools

30. Falconry for Schools is a practical and fun activity for school children where they can learn key subjects using falcons, owls and other trained birds of prey. It brings the educational curriculum to life whilst also offering an opportunity for children to experience the beauty and grace of a bird of prey up-close.
31. The course is delivered over two days and mixes classroom work with outdoor activity. Falconry for schools is mapped to key stage 2 in science, mathematics and English, and literacy and numeracy core curriculum and functional skills level 1 in application of number and communication for students 8-11 years old.
32. Falconry for Schools links neatly with the history curriculum; students learn about Falconry's role in British Royal History, WW11, the Middle Ages and myths and legends surrounding birds of prey.
33. Youngsters also learn the traditions of falconry; learn how to fly hawks, falcons and owls, leather craft, knot-tying and training techniques.

Outcomes:

34. Falconry for Schools has proved to be inspirational to pupils who struggle in the classroom, helping them think about traditional subject matter in a different way. Our aim is to inspire pupils to engage positively and creatively in education and school life.
35. It supports youngsters with Special Educational Needs (SEN): learning with nature is particularly suited to youngsters with SEN. Studies have shown that learning with nature has dramatically improved learning skills including attention span and the ability to listen to instructions.
36. Offers the benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy to pupils: Animal assisted learning/therapy has been widely documented to inspire, reduce anxiety and loneliness, help learn responsibility, increase confidence and social skills, concentration and attention skills.

Shooting

37. Sports and outdoor activity are increasingly being recognised as important for their contributions to our physical, personal and social wellbeing. Shooting and its associated activities such as beating, picking up or manual work, contribute to wellbeing and health of those who take part.

38. A study into the economic, environmental and social benefits of shooting by PACEC in 2014 found that;

- 97% of shooting participants agree or strongly agree that shooting contributes to their well-being.
- 93% of cases, shooting participants agree or strongly agree that shooting sites are healthy and attractive.
- 87% agree or strongly agree that shooting contributes to the social fabric of the local area.
- 81% agree or strongly agree that shooting contributes to local employment and skills.
- Supervised shooting experience by young people encourages responsibility and discipline at an early age. The degree of skill required for participation in competitive shooting at elite level demands training from a very young age. It is also one of the few sports where able bodied and disabled competitors can compete together. The UK is competitive in all disciplines.

39. Another recent survey undertaken by the British Association of Shooting and Conservation 'the Personal Value of Shooting' found that;

- Shooting makes an important contribution to health and wellbeing among people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.
- Shooting can help to get more adults active through sport and physical activity, reduce social isolation and promote personal wellbeing whilst encouraging people to engage with the natural environment.
- Allowing for variations according to discipline, shooting and its associated activities are moderate to high intensity physical activities, and
- Without shooting;
 - 71% said their physical activity level would decrease.
 - 68% said meeting new people would be harder.
 - 63% said making new friends would be harder.
 - 62% said maintaining friendships would be harder.
 - 77% said their social life in general would be poorer.

40. The Countryside Alliance has continually worked to demonstrate the social and community benefit of shooting and our Love of Shooting project has shown that.

- "A few years ago I managed to train my show bred Golden Retriever (Charlie) to become my first working gundog. Not only did I learn a huge amount in training Charlie I also had almost 3 fabulous seasons picking up with him on our local shoot. Sadly it didn't last as Charlie developed gout 3 weeks ago and did not survive the vets attempts to save him. Whilst I have been heartbroken at losing Charlie at only 4 years of age I have looked back and realise that those precious days out on the shoot with him were actually some of the best days of my life. I have made lots of friends and will be beating for the remainder of this season. A new pup, Wellington (another show bred goldie), arrives on 6 Jan and I will hopefully be introducing him to a shoot day towards the end of next season. On my first days picking up I felt so privileged to be out in beautiful surroundings

working my dog and that feeling will remain as long as I am lucky enough to be on a shoot, in whatever capacity.”

- ‘Although fairly new to shooting, I already completely understand how it brings communities together. I am a beater and have been beating on two local shoots for the last four years. I must say I have met some wonderful people; from businessmen, to farmers, countrymen, gamekeepers, computer technicians, builders, housewives and also children, whose proud fathers are keen to share this interest and lifestyle with them. Out on a shoot, it is really a very special combination of people and while we would not normally come together, we would consider them our closest friends.

Hunting

41. With over 250 hunts operating throughout the UK, hunting plays a key role in many communities.
42. Hunting promotes and encourages diversity. People from all social demographics can be found on the hunting field and everyone is welcome regardless of age or occupation. Prior to Boxing Day the Countryside Alliance surveyed registered hunts about the social demographics of their followers and subscribers. It was found that 70% of hunts have more women hunting and 54% have more young people than they did 10 years ago. Over 94% also had members in every age category ranging from children right up to octogenarians.
43. The majority of hunts organise social activities which can include a point-to-point or a quiz night, while a hunt meet itself gives people in the community a chance to come together. This is especially important for those in the remotest parts of the country where houses are isolated and services such as the local pub are harder to reach or non-existent.
44. With more young people hunting than ever before this must also be positive from a health perspective as they are getting fresh air and exercise rather than sitting indoors in front of a screen. This must be hugely beneficial in today’s society where children rely heavily on mobile phones, iPads and spend much of school life looking at a computer screen while having to deal with the pressures of social media. Hunting provides time away from all of these things and a chance to explore areas of countryside that you wouldn’t otherwise have access to.
45. Hunting also teaches children about aspects of farming and the countryside in general – what crops are growing, why you don’t canter through a field of stock, to shut gates behind them etc – and to look after and respect their horses/ponies as well as the other riders/followers around them.

Recommendations

46. To enable more people to appreciate the benefits of rural sports we need to see greater support and promotion of how people can participate, including funding to provide access and improve facilities, government recognition of the positive

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benefits of initiatives such as Fishing for Schools and Casting for Recovery provide and the role outdoor learning can play.

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