
Splash the Light Fantastic! Impact Report



SAFE Regeneration: Splash the Light Fantastic!

Impact Report

Suggested citation:

Dawe J, Dawe B, Crook R, King E, Rodgers SE (2026) Forest Bathing: Impact report. Available at: groundswelluk.org/publications/

DOI: [10.17638/03196984](https://doi.org/10.17638/03196984)

Photography

Courtesy of © Allan Melia and SAFE Regeneration

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Foreword

02

SAFE Regeneration and
GroundsWell

03

Splash the Light Fantastic

04

Timeline of Activities and
Who Took Part

05

Evaluation Process

06

Impact

08

Community Feedback

09

Sustainability and Legacy

10

Conclusion

11

Learn More

FOREWORD

“ Splash the Light Fantastic! has been a joyful, inclusive and deeply collaborative project that demonstrates what is possible when communities are supported to reconnect with their blue and green spaces. Delivered in partnership with GroundsWell Liverpool Hub, the programme brought together residents, community organisations, environmental partners and artists to reimagine Bootle’s canal as a place of wellbeing, creativity and belonging. Through paddling, environmental action and collective celebration, the project created new connections between people and place— particularly for those who face barriers to accessing outdoor activity. We are proud of what has been achieved together and grateful to GroundsWell for enabling experimentation, learning and shared impact.

JANE DAWE
SAFE REGENERATION



“ Splash the Light Fantastic! is a brilliant example of what can happen when a community has the time, support and freedom to do something ambitious.

This project didn’t just “deliver activities”. It created real opportunities for people to experience Bootle’s canal in ways that felt safe, welcoming and enjoyable. Seeing that change, through paddling, shared learning and growing confidence, has been one of the most powerful outcomes of the programme.

Splash the Light Fantastic! reflects the spirit of GroundsWell’s Community Innovation Fund: building evidence, testing new ideas, and supporting community organisations to lead meaningful change.



SARAH RODGERS
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

SAFE REGENERATION

SAFE Regeneration is a Bootle-based charity with over 20 years' experience supporting **community-led regeneration**, enterprise and neighbourhood transformation. Originally established as a participatory arts organisation, SAFE has evolved to support communities to take ownership of assets, shape regeneration and improve wellbeing through creative, environmental and enterprise-based approaches.

SAFE owns and manages the Lock & Quay community pub and gardens, the SAFE Hub (home to 13 social enterprises), and an adopted stretch of the Leeds–Liverpool Canal. The organisation works locally, regionally and nationally, supporting community-led housing, social enterprise and neighbourhood planning through partnerships with local authorities, universities, housing associations and grassroots groups.

SAFE's work is rooted in equity, participation and long-term stewardship—creating places where people feel connected, valued and empowered.



To learn more about SAFE Regeneration, [click here](#)

GROUNDSWELL

The GroundsWell Consortium is a team of researchers, local communities, implementers and policymakers who aim to better understand and evidence the role of **green and blue spaces** within wider social, economic, environmental, cultural and health systems. GroundsWell's research activity is based in Edinburgh, Liverpool and Belfast, where it is being led by researchers at Queen's University Belfast.

A key aim of GroundsWell is to encourage, enable, and collaborate on community-engagement and community-led research. To facilitate this, GroundsWell launched a **Community Innovation Fund** programme, where community organisations could be supported in implementing programmes and evaluating impact.



Learn more about the GroundsWell Community Innovation fund [here](#)



SPLASH THE LIGHT FANTASTIC!

Splash the Light Fantastic! delivered a programme of inclusive canal-based activities designed to improve health, wellbeing, environmental awareness and community cohesion. Based around SAFE's adopted canal stretch in Bootle, the project combined paddling sessions, litter-picking, planting and creative activity, culminating in a celebratory Canal of Light event.

A core focus was accessibility, particularly engaging participants from Bradbury Fields and Galloways, two local charities supporting people with visual impairment. The project enabled participants to experience the canal from a new perspective, build confidence, develop skills and form new social connections, while contributing positively to the local environment.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITIES AND WHO TOOK PART

24

people attended four focus groups

30

people attended three creative arts sessions

36

people attended 8 Paddle activities.

6

project Partners co-designed & delivered.

450

**people (and potentially more)
attended the flagship Canal of
Light Event.**

March – June 2024

- Project mobilisation and partner coordination
- Accessibility-focused paddling taster sessions
- Instructor refresher training (supported by Natural England match funding)

June – September 2024

- Regular inclusive paddle sessions (rafted canoes)
- Canal clean-ups and planting activities
- Creative workshops, including lantern-making and light-themed activities

October 2024

- Canal of Light community celebration event
- Inclusive water-based procession and performances
- Engagement with wider community audiences

Key Partners

- Bradbury Fields
- Galloways
- Bootle Canoe Club CIC
- Canal & River Trust
- Local artists and volunteers
- Lock & Quay Community Pub & Gardens

EVALUATION PROCESS

SAFE Regeneration worked with GroundsWell to design and use their own evaluation framework, designed to take a multi-layered view measuring against the project's desired outcomes and enabling them to capture, analyse and report not only the individual, social, and environmental impact, but also organisationally and economically.

These wider elements of impact measurement illustrate how each strand of evaluation has empowerment and resilience at its core, encouraging sustainability beyond the project's end.

Over many years co-designing and delivering projects for social impact, SAFE Regeneration have learned to trust their instincts – illustrated in the flexibility and creativity of this framework, which uses a range of tools and methods and an inclusive, multi-perspective approach to record and gather outputs, impact and feed forward to future action planning.



Impact



Individual



Nature
Connectedness



Social



Working Together



Economic

IMPACT



INDIVIDUAL

Increased physical and mental wellbeing from regular activity, connecting and conversation. Feeling a sense of belonging and having a voice.

“ It takes me away from my own problems and gives me a sense of happiness. ”



NATURE CONNECTEDNESS

Positive engagement with green/blue areas: Activities created a heightened environmental awareness of the biodiversity on our doorstep.

“ It feels so free on the water, it’s a great thing when you can’t see too well. ”



SOCIAL

Reduced social isolation, bringing communities together and creating a sense of ownership & belonging. Increased community resilience.

“ I’ve learned so much about paddling, delivering a safe, successful event and how much these events mean to people. ”



WORKING TOGETHER

Sharing best practice, establishing trust and looking out for each other!

“ Illuminating and moving the huge dragon was a challenge but we all worked together and it looked amazing in the end. ”



ECONOMIC

Many visitors attended the public celebratory Canal of Light Event, supporting local community businesses and boosting the local economy.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

This project demonstrated strong local buy-in, with high participation from the local and wider community, including voluntary organisations. Participants were involved not only as attendees but as co-designers, particularly visually impaired participants who shaped how activities were delivered.

Community Benefit

- Reduced social isolation through shared activity
- Increased confidence and independence for participants
- New friendships across age, ability and background
- Greater pride and ownership of the canal environment

Environmental Benefit – Inspired by Green

- Litter-picking paddles improved canal quality
- Planting and greening increased biodiversity awareness
- Activities promoted long-term environmental stewardship
- No negative environmental impacts identified

Health & Wellbeing

- Participants reported improved mood, confidence and physical activity levels. The sensory nature of paddling provided particular benefit for visually impaired participants, supporting GroundsWell's green and blue health aims.



SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

Splash the Light Fantastic! has strengthened long-term partnerships and created demand for continued canal-based activity. Participants from Bradbury Fields and Galloways have expressed strong interest in ongoing paddling sessions and wider involvement in SAFE's programme of events.

Learning from this project is informing future delivery, including inclusive design principles, environmental engagement and creative celebration of place.

The Canal of Light is now established as a repeatable, scalable community event with year 2 in 2025 being co-delivered with an additional 5 community organisations. 2026 will be the 3rd Canal of Light and SAFE Regeneration are looking to secure additional funding to make it an even more spectacular cultural event!

You can watch the video all about how this project started [here](#).



CONCLUSION

Splash the Light Fantastic! demonstrates the value of inclusive, place-based activity in strengthening wellbeing, nature connectedness and community cohesion.

Across the programme, participants experienced Bootle's canal in new and meaningful ways: through paddling, shared environmental action, creative workshops and celebration. The project created opportunities for people to be active outdoors, build confidence and skills, and form new social connections. This was particularly significant for visually impaired participants, whose involvement was key.

The programme also supported environmental stewardship, with canal clean-ups and planting increasing awareness of local biodiversity and encouraging pride and ownership of the canal environment. The Canal of Light event was a joy for all involved and we're delighted at its ongoing success.

Overall, Splash the Light Fantastic! shows how creative engagement with blue space can reduce isolation, improve health and wellbeing, and establish strong foundations for future community-led activity.



LEARN MORE



saferegen.org.uk/



groundswelluk.org



[SAFERegen](https://www.facebook.com/SAFERegen)



[Groundswellcon](https://www.groundswellcon.com)



info@saferegen.org.uk



groundswell@qub.ac.uk