



# IMPACT REPORT

Sep 2022- July 2023

NOVEMBER 2023

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[openmindsactive.org](https://openmindsactive.org)



# Who we are and what we do

Open Minds Active CIC (OMA) is a social impact organisation working in and around Bristol in the South West. Our purpose is to strengthen mental health and wellbeing within communities, widen access and create opportunities for excluded citizens. Our work involves building a diverse and inclusive community of likeminded people who benefit from connecting with nature and each other in the outdoors to reduce isolation, support wellbeing and foster positive mental health.

We offer year-round programmes that tackle health inequalities, these include:

- A learn to swim project for adult women of colour with sessions specifically for refugee and asylum seekers
- A social prescribing wild swimming for wellbeing project for people with long term mental and/or physical health conditions.
- Spring/Summer inclusive wellbeing activities for community groups in the outdoors including SUP, surfing, hiking, outdoor yoga and movement.
- Suite of nature based wellbeing workshops for businesses and local people that empower participants to discover tools to not only support their own mental and physical health long term, but also encourage those around them.



# Annual update from Founder

The last 12 months have seen us engage with over 1200 local people from across communities in and around Bristol. In this report you will read how our programmes have created community, positively impacted the lives of local people and in some cases saved lives.

I am incredibly proud of our core team of 5 who are all part time, plus our sessional workers who help us deliver, supporting our participants with such passion and care. Plus this year the number of volunteers has significantly grown and we've seen them grow in confidence and move on into new employment opportunities with some of our community partners. One inspiring example of this is Sara Qureshi Ahmed, our part time surf coordinator, who started volunteering on our learn to swim programme and is now employed with our partners, local charity Aid Box Community, to work part time coordinating activities for refugee women.

Going into our fourth year we intend to consolidate our programmes and improve how we monitor our social impact and value. This year we have focussed on wellbeing measures. We know anecdotally that our social prescribing programmes reduce GP visits, medication and risk of suicide. This year we have onboarded a new evaluation and customer management tool that will provide us with an accurate picture as to how our programmes impact participants lives holistically.

Financially, although we've had our most successful year in terms of turnover and are steadily diversifying our income, grant funding is becoming increasingly competitive and harder to secure. Despite our best efforts our future is uncertain. We are hopeful our strategic partnerships both local and national along with securing new corporate partners will help sustain our core community programmes. Continuing to support the mental, physical health and wellbeing for some of Bristol's most marginalised citizens remains our priority. Our learn to swim initiative continues over winter and we hope our social prescribing wild swimming for wellbeing programme will return in April next year.

As always a big thank you must go to our community partners, supporters and funders without whom this vital work could not continue.

Thank you for reading

Maggy Blagrove



# Our Impact

Headline engagement numbers for the last 12 months

This year we engaged 1326 participants across our activities

For period from Sep 2022 to July 2023

Social Prescribing wild Swimming	79
Community Nature Based Events	271
Swim Hike	12
Learn to Swim Women of Colour	65
Wellbeing and Cold Water Workshops	175
Harbour Swim	709
Volunteering	15

New research shows that swimming alone generated more than 2.4 billion of social value in 2022 (Swim England 2023)



## How we provide Social Value

- **Improve mental health and wellbeing** - Our work increases access to inclusive, safe blue spaces, improving people's physical and mental health, overall life quality and benefits communities and wider society.
- **Reduce burden on NHS**- Our programmes can relieve pressure on NHS resources, particularly for GPs and mental health services.
- **Empower the individual** - We offer holistic, affordable nature based interventions that empower individuals to self manage, build social networks and create long term behaviour change.
- **Provide opportunities for local people** - Through volunteering and peer support, participants gain new skills and access new opportunities locally.
- **Protect the environment** - Our work promotes nature connectedness and a collective action to care take our blue spaces and local environment
- **Reduce dependency on medication** - Participants tell us that they are visiting their GP less and reducing their dependency on other NHS services after engaging with our programmes. We have anecdotal evidence that also shows reduction in anxiety and depression medication being taken.



# Social Prescribing - wild swimming for wellbeing

## Outputs

- 79 Women engaged in weekly activity
- Six social prescribing wild swimming for wellbeing programmes run at West Country Water Park and 1 at Henleaze Lake
- 30% of participants were from ethnic minority backgrounds
- 70% of participants were from areas of Bristol with the highest health inequalities
- All participants referred with mental and/or physical health condition
- 6 Peer mentors and volunteers trained

## Outcomes

- 100% of participants had a positive experience
- 98% made friends and increased their social network
- 90% felt some improvement in their mental or physical symptoms

## Wellbeing scores

We asked participants to score their anxiety and happiness levels on their first interaction with us and again after 6 weeks on programme (using ONS wellbeing measures).

## Anxiety % Decrease

**The range of decrease varied between 14%-100% per individual**

**84 % reported a reduction in their anxiety levels**

## Overall happiness % Increase

**The range of increase varied between 11%-71% per individual**

**86% saw an increase in their overall happiness level**



## Participant feedback

### Nature connectedness

“Over the past 6 weeks I've learnt a lot about safety and my body when cold water swimming. Mentally it has revived me so much. Physically I'm lost for words how much it has helped my body, especially when I can hardly walk. I now understand my relationship with cold water. Being in nature is priceless.”

### Social connection

“Taking part in the sessions was a very important part of the overall treatment I have been having for my depression and anxiety. Thanks to swimming I felt a buzz about the life again and the theory gave me confidence to try it out outside the sessions I enjoyed meeting other women in the group, chatting and feeling of support. It was my first experience of meeting a new group in two years so a big step. Thank you x”

### Better mental health

“These sessions have had a big impact on helping with my mental health. My anxiety always improves when I'm swimming in the lake. It has also helped with my overall fitness which has improved since doing these sessions. I can honestly say these sessions helps in every aspect of my life, thank you for this experience!”



# Learn to Swim for Women of Colour

## Outputs

- 65 Women engaged in our programmes, over half were total non swimmers before who did less than 30 mins physical activity a week
- 50% of participants were refugee or asylum seekers
- 5 volunteers achieved their Swim England Level 1 Swim Teaching Qualification and are now volunteering in our sessions to support new swimmers
- The women represented 15 different nationalities

## Outcomes

- 1 volunteer entered part time employment with our partner Aid Box Community
- 1 volunteer is progressing to Level 2 Swim Teaching
- 8 of the women went on to try surfing
- 15 of the women went on to try open water swimming
- All of the women say their water confidence has increased and many now swim with their children outside of our lessons
- All of the women have formed new friendships
- All of the women are more physically active as a result of the sessions

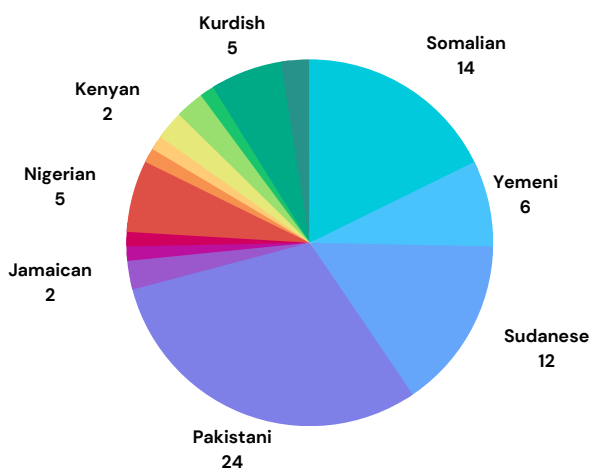


*“The team are so patient, friendly and encouraging. I wouldn’t have been able to get to the stage I am at (basic swimming) had it not been for them. I am continuing with them to develop skills of becoming an independent swimmer.”*

## Breakdown of ethnicities across our learn to swim programme

Somalian	14
Yemeni	6
Sudanese	12
Pakistani	24
Jamaican	2
Guyanese	1
Filipino	1
Nigerian	5
South African	1
Palestinian	1
Kenyan	2
Syrian	2
Ethiopian	1
Kurdish	5
British	2

*“Finding a separate pool, having the session ladies only have been huge factors in me wanting to join the sessions as I knew I would be within a safe, non judgemental environment.”*





# Community Workshops, Activities and Events

**Our mission is wellbeing for all using the outdoors.** Running community events and activities is central to what we do. Our workshops help build community and connection as well as diversify our income streams to build sustainability. This year we launched a wide range of activities that encouraged people to socialise and move in nature.

## What we delivered:

- 1 term of water sports and swimming for young adults with learning needs
- 1 term of Learn to Surf at the Wave
- 3 community wellbeing events including a night glow swim fundraiser for over 200 swimmers.
- 4 Breast stroke to Front Crawl open water swimming and 2 Intro to open water courses
- Swim Hike adventure in North Devon
- Launched our cold water and wellbeing reset workshops, introducing 175 people to open water swimming and the outdoors
- Trained 15 new volunteers and peer mentors
- Co-delivered the second phase of the Swim Bristol Harbour Pilot
- Developed a corporate team day offer
- Festival of Nature outdoor yoga and swimming workshop



**“I found the sessions and workshops so very helpful, because in our home its stressful with the children, when I come back home I can cope better and am more patient.”**

**“Thrilled to have gone from neck aching head up breast stroke to ‘proper swimming’! I can swim front crawl now, it may not be perfect yet but I now know how to work on that! Emphasis on fun too.”**





## Case Study - Lucy

Lucy started with us in Spring 2022. She was referred by her GP who believed the cold water would help with her Fibromyalgia and anxiety. She had never done anything like it before and felt totally out of her comfort zone. Despite her initial apprehension, Lucy soon was an active member of the group and found the water and the community hugely helped her symptoms. She quickly made friends and 6 months on is swimming most days and still feeling the benefits. She now is a volunteer with the project and peer supports new members who access the programme, offering guidance and a friendly face each week.

***“I can not begin to explain how the sessions made me feel. If I said it was 'life changing' you would think what a cliché but it really is true. My confidence and self belief has grown so much since doing the swimming, there is no hesitation now.”***



***“I have had pain reduction since swimming and this has helped me to reduce the medication that I am on and not be dependent on my walking aid. I haven't used that for about 6 months now. With regards to my mental health it has taught me how to reset and to cope that bit better when the going gets a little tough.”***

***“The sessions have been incredible. To me they have been a safe place for me to share how things are going and knowing that I am not alone. I always felt supported by the staff who would sign post you to places if you were struggling. I have made some great friends through the sessions and the support we give each is with more than anything. I have continued to do the swimming following the sessions, now swimming everywhere day. It's amazing. I have found me again.”***



## Case Study - Shazia

Shazia started the learn to swim programme in Sep 2022. She was referred by her doctor after experiencing some mental and physical health issues. She was also aqua phobic, therefore incredibly nervous and worried about swimming and being around water. Within just a few weeks her swimming improved dramatically along with her self confidence.

By spring 2023 we invited her on to the summer social prescribing wild swimming for wellbeing programme. This was the first time she had ever swum outside in a lake. She absolutely loved it and came every week rain or shine. From an aqua phobic to a confident wild swimmer Shazia's learn to swim journey is inspirational. Her determination to succeed has encouraged others, plus her confidence and self-belief continues to grow. She intends to start training as a swim teacher in 2024 so that she can support and inspire other Muslim women to access swimming.



*“Swimming has helped me a lot physically and mentally. I have knee and hip pain along with some stress related pain. After swimming my pains are less, I feel very relaxed mentally and physically.”*



*“I and other Muslim women don't feel comfortable exercising around men, but in this session the pool blinds were down so it was totally private. Even at the lake we had our own area. This helps us relax and go at our own pace. I love it.”*

# Water Stories

This year, in partnership with Orca we produced a series of short films designed to showcase a more diverse and inclusive side of the open water swimming community. Four participants shared their swimming journey, talking about their challenges, the community and the mental health and wellbeing benefits they have found. We wanted this to be a platform for those who are often less visible in blue spaces. Our intention is to educate and inspire.

## Resilience



Simon, a double leg amputee swimmer talks about accessibility and how wild swimming and the open water community that surrounds it helped him build mental and physical resilience, following a life changing injury.

*orca*

## Reconnect



Wafa, a former competitive swimmer and refugee from Sudan talks about the importance of swimming for her own wellbeing.

## Recover



Mehbooba shares her journey into cold water swimming and how its helped her manage her fibromyalgia and mental health.

## Reclaim



Lildonia shares her learn to swim story, discussing the barriers to swimming for people of colour, the perceived stereotypes and reclaiming the narrative around her own personal journey and the joy of learning a new skill and accessing blue spaces.

# Our partners

Community and Delivery Partners



Thank you to our Funders and Supporters

