



THESE GIRLS CAN SWIM.....WITH SEALS

Aim of the Programme

Delivered by Active Northumberland's Community Sports Officer, an Open Water swim programme was delivered during the summer of 2015, which was designed to engage young women aged 16-25 in the north of the county.

Using Sport England's Sportivate funding, the initial aims of the programme were to:

- Provide a viable alternative exercise activity for young women, which broke down some of the perceived barriers to indoor swimming e.g. very structured and repetitive in lanes with sessions quite often delivered in a competitive environment etc.
- Create sustainable pathways for participants in a safe and enjoyable environment by signposting them onto local open water swimming groups, which are organised by qualified instructors.
- Utilise Sport England's 'This Girl Can' campaign to inspire greater female participation.
- Demonstrate the importance of the health & safety considerations when open water swimming.
- Demonstrate the stunning natural environment Northumberland has to offer.

Assessing the demand

Each of the 12 participants identified for the programme provided their own reasons for wanting to take part, which included:

- Improving their confidence and fear of swimming in the open water
- Wanting to participate in a non-competitive environment
- Taking part in a new activity that catered for all abilities and was fun
- To make new friends

Impact of the Programme

A video case study was developed which provides a snapshot of the journey a small group of local young women went through during this programme from their first attempt at open water swimming in the North Sea, to swimming with seals at the iconic Farne Islands. This journey can be viewed via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfpeysPQQEg>

The programme received excellent feedback afterwards from participants which included:

- *“Had a great time - It was very different to anything I've done before and a fab experience. Very glad to have been a part of it, especially the seal trip.”*
- *“The course was fantastic. I am going to continue open water swimming, and hopefully improve to a front crawl. One of my friends wants to swim the channel, so hopefully I'll be able to do that one day - that's my aim.”*
- *“I was already quite active, but swimming has made me focus on my fitness and strength a lot more - instead of just being bothered about how I look. I also feel a lot more social in the community, which is great as I don't know many people here having moved up from London last year.”*
- *“I thoroughly enjoyed the whole sea swimming experience. I feel privileged to live in such a beautiful place with the sea so near. We are very lucky. The highlight was most definitely swimming with the seals by the Farne Islands - they were so cute and very inquisitive.”*

As a result of the positivity surrounding the programme, there is a real appetite to push on and encourage more women to get involved in organised open water swimming sessions in Northumberland e.g. plans are now in place to deliver an Open Water Swim challenge which is aligned to Northumberland Sport's Sport Relief Mile event in March 2016.

Participants from the programme have also been encouraged to attend open water swimming sessions at local clubs, with two of the participants using their experience to compete in the Great Scottish Swim last year.