

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE NOTTINGHAM NARROW BOAT PROJECT LTD

2024 saw the 50th anniversary of the Nottingham Narrow Boat Project. Originally set up by Nottinghamshire County Council and later taken over by Nottingham City Council (SOLAR – Schools Outdoor Learning, Adventure and Recreation), the charity took over the day-to-day running of the project in 2017 when the City Council proposed closing the Project due to a lack of funds.

We are a volunteer led charity, operating from the heart of Nottingham, but taking our service users from across the county. We received funding from The Big Lottery Scheme and other charitable organisations, without whom we would not be able to continue our activities.

The charity continues to provide the opportunity to access the historic canals and waterways of Nottingham and beyond. We strive to create enjoyable and memorable experiences for the groups we work with, and our service users this year have included SEND youth, refugee and Afro-Caribbean organisations, the elderly and individuals experiencing mental and physical disabilities.

2024 has been a difficult year which, in line with many other charities, has seen many of our users struggling with their finances, in part due to the increase in the cost of living which has affected us all.

Additionally, as an organisation we increased our charges, part of our long-term plan to become more financially stable. However, these price increases may have contributed to the decline in trips, and we have now reverted to our 2023 pricing levels which we hope we will be reflected in an increase in the number of organisations booking trips with us in 2025.

At the beginning of the year, our volunteers completed boat-handling, First Aid and river/canal refresher training to ensure they remain competent and confident in taking our service users safely onto the canal and river. We have used our moorings at the Canal House Bar in Nottingham, Colwick Park and the Canal Heritage Centre at Beeston extensively, the latter offering access to the centre via a purpose-built pontoon allowing us to provide wheelchair access directly to the centre. This is a positive outcome for all our users with reduced mobility, and we look forward to making use of this in the future.

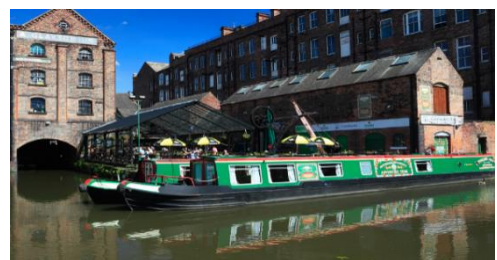
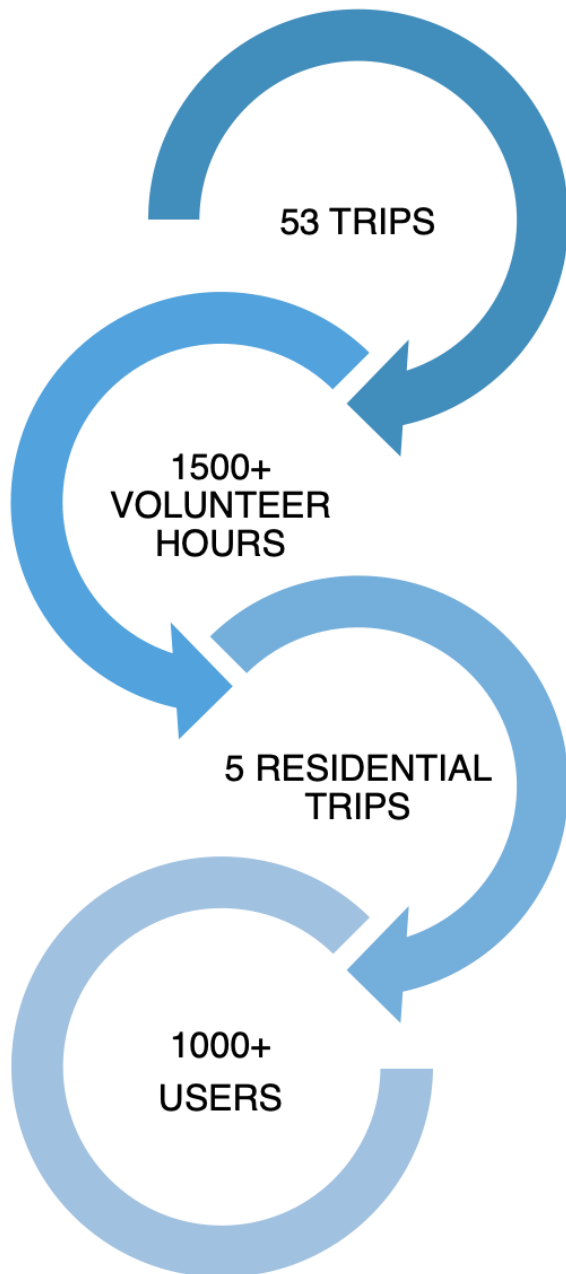
Our Community Liaison Officer (funded by the National Lottery Fund) has reached out to many new community organisations this year, some of whom have gone on to book trips with us. She will be continuing this work into 2025.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the National Lottery commission, and all those other organisations involved with supporting us financially. Moving forward the board of Trustees are

in the process of putting together a strategy to become more self-sufficient and have begun to pursue alternative funding streams which will be vital in securing the future of the charity. We have recently appointed a new Trustee with experience in fundraising to lead on this.

As a small charity we rely on our volunteers. We capture feedback directly from them and use their valuable contribution to create best practice and training relevant to their needs. It is vital that we continue to create an inclusive environment for all involved, and for them to have a say in the activities and the future of the charity. As an organisation, we will maintain our pledge to support the involvement of volunteers who choose to dedicate their time and skills to us by providing ongoing training and creating a welcoming and appreciative workplace and culture.

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees continues to meet monthly. We are now, subject to confidentiality, sharing the minutes with all our volunteers, and invite volunteers to attend one of our meetings as an observer should they wish to do so.

The Trustee Board now comprises:

Paddy Emmerson, a former Chartered Accountant, has extensive commercial experience in the UK and Europe. He was latterly the Finance Director for VF UK and Scandinavia (Wrangler, North Face, Timberland, Vans, et al). and is a regular volunteer crew. He was instrumental in setting up the Charitable company in 2017 and currently is Temporary Chair and leads on Finance
paddy.emmerson@meganandtinks.org.uk

Carol Greaves is a full-time youth worker and team leader with Notts County Council and is a regular user of our boats. Carol has a BA Hons degree in working with young people and communities and has extensive experience working with statutory youth provision and has a specific interest in Special Educational Needs (SEND) and Diversity in communities. Carol has significant expertise in Safeguarding and takes the lead on Safeguarding for the Board of Trustees.
carol.greaves@meganandtinks.org.uk

Gary Bramley had a distinguished Army career in the Royal Engineers before joining Royal Mail and served in several senior management positions. Gary is qualified in Mechanical Engineering, Health & Safety and Environmental Management and has extensive experience in operations and logistics. Gary lives on a narrowboat, is one of our regular volunteer Skippers and takes the lead on Operations, Health and Safety and Risk Assessment for the Board of Trustees.

gary.bramley@meganandtinks.org.uk

Phil Greenwood had a 38-year career as a multi-disciplined aircraft engineer in the RAF, before spending 10 years as a regional fundraiser for KIDS, a national children's disability charity. A qualified electronics engineer with experience in training, engineering management, operations management and the management of health, safety and risk, he also has an in-depth knowledge of fundraising and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Fundraising. A regular volunteer on the narrowboats, Phil takes the lead on fundraising.

phil.greenwood@meganandtinks.org.uk

During the year, a number of trustees, Amber Tipper, Susan Pynegar and James Barron retired for personal reasons. We are grateful for the time and expertise that we have benefited from and wish them all the best for the future.

The Trustee Board is currently utilising our Trustee Recruitment Policy to actively recruit more members. We are dedicated to ensuring our board is reflecting diversity and equality and comprises a variety of skills to ensure the current and future success of the charity.

VOLUNTEERS



Our activities are run and led by our volunteers, without whom we would not exist. We currently have 15 qualified skippers, and all our crew have completed an accredited National Community Boats Association boat handling course. We now have 6 qualified boat handling trainers who, under the direction of our Operations

Manager, supervise the training of new volunteers.

This year our trainers have delivered training to new skippers and crew and we finished 2024 with 38 volunteers - a slight decrease over 2023.

Our volunteers continue to play a major role in boat maintenance, employing their unique and diverse experience and skills to maintain our boats in good working order. This year has seen volunteers utilise their joinery, metal working, mechanical and electrical skills to complete repairs on both of our boats. Without their input, the charity would endure many extra costs, and we are very fortunate to have such talented, skilled and dedicated individuals volunteering for us. The trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them

for their individual contributions in 2024; we could not have got through the year without their time and dedication.



OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

The following provides an overview of the operations of the Nottingham Narrow Boat project during 2024. The charity continues to provide people from all walks of life, ages and abilities the opportunity to access the historic canals and waterways of Nottingham and beyond.

As a charity, we strive to create enjoyable and memorable experiences for the groups we work with; our service users have included SEND youth, the elderly and individuals experiencing mental and physical disabilities.

The charity has had some significant achievements over this last period and has overcome operational challenges which have highlighted many more opportunities for future growth and improvement. Our volunteers remain loyal and dedicated to continuing the work of the charity, delivering a worthwhile service to the communities of Nottingham.

Our full time Operations Manager coordinates volunteer activities, provides skipper and crew training and oversees the daily running of the project.

1. Operational Highlights

1.1. Summary of Service Delivery

- 53 Day trips
- 5 Residential Trips
- Serving over 1000 individuals.
- Community Engagement: Collaborated local schools, care homes, and community groups.
- Special Events: Organised/participated in events including educational KS2 geography river trips, Easter, Summer and Christmas celebration trips.

1.2. Fleet Management

- Boats Operated: 2 narrowboats in regular operation.
- Maintenance: Regular maintenance performed, including engine overhauls and replacements, safety inspections and hull blacking.

1.3. Volunteer Involvement

- Volunteers: 38 active volunteers contributing over 1500 hours of service.
- Training: EFAW, Canal/River refresher, Boat Handling and CCBM training for volunteers focusing on safety, customer service, and boat handling.

2. Impact Assessment

2.1. Beneficiary Feedback

- Surveys: participants reported high satisfaction with the service.

- Testimonials: Positive feedback highlighted the unique and relaxing experience of narrowboat trips.

2.2. Community Impact

- Social Inclusion: Increased participation from marginalized groups.
- Education: Enhanced understanding of local waterways and environmental conservation among young participants.

3. Challenges and Solutions

3.1. Operational Challenges

- Weather Dependence: Adverse weather affecting trip schedules.
- Maintenance Costs: Rising costs of boat maintenance.

3.2. Solutions Implemented

- Scheduling: Implemented an Automated booking system.
- Cost Management: Created working relationships and accounts with local and national companies to receive support and discounts on maintenance expenses.

4. Future Plans

4.1. Expansion Goals

- Enhance Services: Introduce more themed, educational and health and wellbeing trips.

4.2. Strategic Initiatives

- Volunteer Engagement: Expand volunteer base and enhance training programs.
- Community Outreach: Strengthen partnerships with local organisations and schools.

- More active social media presence.

5. Conclusion

Nottingham Narrow Boat Project Ltd has had a productive year, positively impacting many lives through its services.

MEASURING OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

In 2024 we've continued to work towards the four outcomes for Children, Young People, Older People and Volunteers. We are currently working on streamlining feedback and data collection. Feedback forms were created to be completed by group leaders during trips, ensuring opportunities to share feedback were provided. However, we found that these were not always completed and collating data from them was time consuming.

2024 saw the project celebrating its 50th anniversary with the creation of an anniversary booklet to mark the occasion. The booklet charts the history and development of the project from its inception and gives a background to how the charity operates, the work we do and those who have been involved. A canal side celebration was also held which included food, music, creative workshops and short boat trips. The event was a success and many people, who had never experienced it before, enjoyed a short trip on one of the boats. The event was also a time for all our volunteers to come together, socialise and enjoy themselves.

This year has also seen the creation of a short promotional video showcasing our work and the impact it has on the communities we serve. This has proved to be a valuable resource in promoting the project to prospective user groups, supporters and funders and by making it available online we can engage visitors with our website.

For our Christmas offering the project hosted 'Santa trips'. The event enabled us to raise the profile of the charity and reach out to a wider audience. Our volunteers made a great effort to ensure the trips were fun and the event was magical for both young and old alike. The trips were a phenomenal success and increased traffic to all our social media accounts, gaining us more followers, likes and positive comments.

Finally, and most rewardingly, the project has seen the engagement of several new groups from the harder to reach communities, notably from the refugee and Afro-Caribbean diaspora; there has also been engagement from a group recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. The project has given people from these diverse backgrounds, some of whom have never been on a boat or considered accessing the canal environment, an opportunity to have a new experience that can challenge their preconceptions and open avenues of further interest and exploration. Witnessing the positive impact on confidence and self-esteem that comes from helping to work a lock or

steer a boat is a truly rewarding experience and is what makes the Nottingham Narrow oat Project such a unique and valuable service.

User feedback comments:

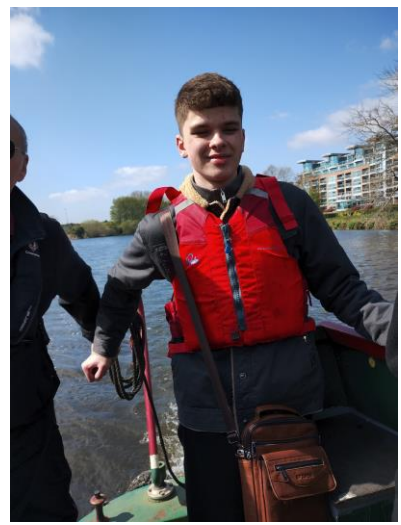
“We had the most wonderful day today with the Nottingham Narrowboat Project. Our experience was made truly special by our driver, Ann, who was fantastic throughout the journey. She guided us up to the lovely Beeston Lock Café and shop, which added a delightful stop to our trip”.

“One of the highlights was seeing the wildlife along the canal. It was a unique experience, providing a peaceful and close-up view of nature that you don't get every day. Having the opportunity to try driving the boat was an exciting bonus, making the day even more memorable. We also appreciated being able to bring our own picnic on board, which added a personal touch to the experience”.

“The whole day felt very relaxed and well-organised. Special thanks to Kat for her help with the booking process. Knowing that everyone involved is a volunteer makes the experience even more remarkable. Thank you all for a wonderful day!”

“I recently took my 3-year-old daughter on the narrowboat with Santa it was lovely. lovely people running it and my daughter loved being on the water and meeting Santa and his reindeer and she also loved her present. I would book again. I hope you do this again next year”

“We had a fantastic time on our half day trip along Nottingham's beautiful waterways. The staff not only share their passion and knowledge, but also encourage guests to get hands-on, showing us how to work and steer the boat and encouraging us to help with the locks. It was a memorable and interactive experience for a great cause!”



FINANCIALS

Our finances remained strong throughout the year, in the main because we had 2 of the 6 tranches of our new Lottery Funding. We increased charges to our users as we tried to reduce our reliance on Lottery funding, but this may have not had the outcome we hoped for as the number of trips declined. We have now reduced charges which we believe will bring back some of our regular clients.

Our raison d'être is to provide our services at a cost which will allow our target groups and charities to make use of our services. Our challenge is to balance booking fees with other sources of income, whilst minimising our running costs. The number of trips this year was down on 2023 but our fee income remained much the same.

Our longer-term objective is to become self-funded and part of that is to constantly review our costs. This year, our maintenance costs were down £8k compared to 2023, largely due to the significant welding required last year. We would expect 2024 costs to be the norm. Our Volunteers have many of the skills we need which keeps our costs down. We have reviewed our IT costs and now use the IT skills within our volunteers who have rebuilt our booking system. We have also utilised Microsoft 365 Non-Profit which has substantially reduced costs by £8k

Finally, we have created a video which shows who we are and what we do. This was a one-off cost of £2k

SUPPORTERS

We are fortunate to have several companies and organisations who support our work.

We remain indebted to the National Lottery Community Fund for the 'Reaching Communities' Grant and received payment for the new funding which started in April 23 ending in April 26. We would also like to thank The Jones 1986 Charitable Trust and the Jesse Spencer Trust for their on-going support.

The project continues to be based at the Canalhouse public house, run by Castle Rock Brewery, and we are very grateful to them for their ongoing support. Our operational costs are reduced significantly by their provision of moorings, workshop and office space in the centre of the city.

We would also like to thank Nottingham City Council who provide us with our mooring at Colwick Park Marina; this mooring is also accessible to wheelchair users. We have enjoyed an excellent relationship with the park rangers and would like to thank them personally for the maintenance and upkeep of our pontoon.

We also maintain excellent working relationships with both The Canal and Rivers Trust and The Canalside Heritage centre. We will continue to engage with them over the coming year; by strengthening our connections through collaborations, we can enhance our offerings and support one another's work wherever possible.



The Jones 1986 Charitable Trust





**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water





The Nottingham Narrowboat Project Ltd

registered charity number 1176252

OUR BOAT TRIPS

We provide a unique Canal and River waterways experience for diverse local communities.

Located on the canal in Nottingham City Centre, Megan and Tinks Leen are two 70ft accessible narrowboats which can offer half day, full day, residential and summertime evening trips for groups of up to 12 or 24 people.

We provide a waterways experience along the Nottingham & Beeston Canal and River Trent including boat steering, working the canal's locks, water safety and a general taste of waterways life.

Each boat is staffed by our highly experienced and qualified skippers and crew. Whichever direction of travel takes in a mix of scenery, both urban & countryside.

Primarily we cater for primary and secondary Schools, Academies, Scouts Guides and Brownies, Youth Clubs, people with autism, disabilities and learning difficulties, community friendship groups and care homes, most of whom can benefit from a reduced qualifying community group fee.

We can also arrange trips for corporate groups as team building exercises or families for celebrating a special event.



CONTACT US

For bookings and enquiries please contact us:

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A booking form can be downloaded from our site: www.meganandtinks.org.uk

[@meganandtinks](https://twitter.com/meganandtinks)



Registered Charity 1176252

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