

Ballina Dragons Meitheal Abhainn Boat Club

Opportunities



Overview

Ballina Dragons Meitheal Abhainn Boat Club is a volunteer-led group providing a unique holistic and ecological approach to healing all levels of our well-being with a specific focus on those affected by cancer treatments, life-limiting conditions and supporters, through the sport of Dragon Boating. Our club has approximately 100 members, 40% are people recovering from cancer and/or living with life limiting conditions. The remainder of our members are described as supporters. The age cohort ranges from mid thirties to late seventies and are mainly women.

Dragon boating is not just about physical fitness & mental wellbeing –it's a colourful, dynamic sport that brings people together. The Ballina Dragon Boat Club centre's its objectives on holistic well-being by intertwining physical health, mental health, community engagement, and inclusiveness.

Objective

- **Mental Health:** We provide a safe space to reduce isolation and stress, offering social connection through paddling, Dragons Chorus Choir, and Connect Cafes.
- **Physical Health:** Weekly paddles on the River Moy and pool improve cardiovascular fitness, while activities like Pilates aid rehabilitation and strength.
- **Community Engagement:** Fundraisers, pool paddles, and health sessions foster connection. Creative initiatives like the Dragons Choir and St. Patrick's Parade enhance community spirit.
- **Inclusiveness:** We welcome all abilities and continuously improve accessibility, ensuring everyone feels valued.

Ballina Dragon Boat Club empowers members to enhance physical health, nurture mental well-being, and engage in a supportive, inclusive community.



Location:
Mayo



Project Lead:
Denise Swanick,
Ballina Dragons

Tags:

Development ,Paddling, Events, Tourism,
Environment, Mental health, Women in Sport
Older Adults, Communications, Education,
Collaboration



Challenges

We have navigated several challenges during its establishment and ongoing development, including:

- **Defining a Unique Mission:** Crafting an identity that combines the competitive excitement of dragon boating with a holistic focus on mental and physical health, particularly for those facing cancer treatments or life-limiting conditions.
- **Community Outreach and Engagement:** Reaching & connecting with a diverse audience—especially individuals with specific health challenges—required thoughtful outreach, relationship-building, and overcoming any stigma or uncertainty about participation.
- **Funding and Resource Allocation:** Securing consistent funding, acquiring proper equipment, & managing operational expenses have been ongoing hurdles in maintaining & expanding activities.
- **Logistical and Regulatory Challenges:** Organising regular paddling sessions and large-scale events, eg regatta, involves navigating regulatory requirements, coordinating with local authorities, and ensuring safety on the River Moy.
- **Volunteer Recruitment and Training:** Building a dedicated team of volunteers who can not only manage day-to-day operations but also offer tailored support to members with diverse health needs has been essential and sometimes challenging.
- **Ensuring Continuous Inclusiveness:** As a growing club, maintaining a genuinely inclusive environment requires continuous review and adaptation of practices to meet the evolving needs of all members, regardless of ability or background.

Our actions to support environmental sustainability and climate change:

Reducing Waste:

- We shop locally and reuse drinking bottle and cups
- Batteries are rechargeable
- We reuse fabric for cleaning & drying the boats
- We hope to have discarded fabrics to make the medals for the regatta.

Conserve Energy:

- We use terminal flask to reduce boiling kettles.
- Carpooling is promoted.
- Containers are insulated, reducing heat and/or humidifier. We use natural lighting in the containers.
- We harvest rain water for cleaning boats.

Protect biodiversity:

- Eco- friendly products are used in cleaning
- Participate in coastal and river clean up efforts
- Use Leave No Trace guidelines
- Education and awareness of protecting our waterways and wildlife.

Solutions

The club defined its identity by blending competitive dragon boating with a focus on mental and physical well-being, attracting a like-minded community. We forged partnerships with Healthy Ireland, cancer support networks, and community groups to reach individuals in need.

Initiatives like the Dragons Chorus Choir, health promotion sessions, and social gatherings engaged a broader audience and reduced participation barriers. Fundraisers and sponsorships helped cover operational costs, including boat purchases. We collaborated with the local council and IDBA to ensure safety and operational standards for events and sessions, with detailed planning and risk assessments for activities like the national regatta.

Volunteers with diverse skills were recruited and trained in safety, inclusivity, and community engagement, ensuring effective support for members' varied needs. Regular communication through meetings and surveys helped adapt practices to meet evolving community needs, ensuring all activities remain accessible to individuals of all abilities and backgrounds.



Feedback

"I love the spirit in Ballina dragons, the encouragement and support everyone is given to achieve whatever their goals are in Dragon boating whether it's simple fun or racing, all are equally important. I'd love us to carry that spirit forward and it's the biggest strength of our lead crew, many thanks to all my dragon friends"

Participant

More information

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