**Volunteer contribution to BFER projects**: Healing Waters – the Outdoor Swimming part; and Tales from the River, and volunteers from these projects have helped deliver some BFER river history walks.

In December 2022 volunteers were brought together to celebrate the fantastic contribution they make to a variety of The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme projects. I did a talk which you can see online here, <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/os-brecks-2/volunteer-celebration/>

Selected feedback from volunteers and participants in these projects to December 2023.

**Healing Waters Outdoor Swimming events**

Volunteers are absolutely crucial to running these:

from organising reception, welcoming and reassuring participants.

**Feedback:**

**PARTICIPANTS**

**Sept 2020**

* *I’ve had a marvellous experience today at the wild swimming course. A supportive and welcoming team made a memorable day for me whilst learning vital safety advice through direct experience. Thanks for making this available.*
* *Thank you [one of the volunteers] so much for all your help... you’ve no idea how many times I almost bottled coming! Thank you to everyone for making us feel so welcome. Having only had a few swimming lessons indoors, then not swimming since lockdown I was very much out of my comfort zone! I think the hat kept all my fears in check. The little hints and tips about hot drinks after to make your hand writing neater will not be forgotten.*
* *Loved it, thank you to all the volunteers. Very informative and fab to meet wild swimmers*

**June 2021**

* *I would just like to say a big thank you to all the organisers and volunteers at the event in Mildenhall today. Well organised and friendly. Now I have braved it, loved it I hope to try other places now.*
* *Absolutely loved it. Walked past that spot my whole life and never considered I could swim in there. Very well organised and so many lifeguards! Thanks all.*
* *Had a great time, felt really safe and looked after for my first swim in a river. BIG THANKYOU!*

**Aug 2021**

* *Thank you for a fabulous experience. I very much enjoyed this with my son. The volunteers and organisers at these events are always brilliant, so friendly and put you at ease if you are feeling nervous.*
* *…just wanted to say myself and [daughter] absolutely loved today's swimming, For me to overcome a fear of fish swimming near me, I'm so happy, All your colleagues were so approachable, friendly, helpful.*
* *We had the best time ever and can't wait to get back in the lake, now we know how to safely. Thank you for organising, we really enjoyed it.*

**Sept 2021**

* *Just wanted to say thank you very much, again, for organising yesterday's 'intro' sessions. I thoroughly enjoyed all but trying to get out of my costume whilst preserving my modesty! Thank you to you, and to all the volunteers and lifeguards that gave your time to run the sessions yesterday.*
* *Just a quick email to say how much we (2 parents 2 boys) enjoyed our swim with you at Lynford Lake on Sunday morning. Thank you to you, the lifeguards and all of the volunteers who spared the time to give us a chance to give wild swimming a try, we will definitely be joining you all again. A big thank you for impeccable team + personal experience. Fabulous afternoon. Confidence, Safety awareness, boosted.... Pure Joy.*
* *Had a great time today at the 130pm session - thank you to everyone involved. We had a brilliant time, volunteers were great as were the lifeguards, excellent organisation and so much knowledge. We attended the family session on Sunday morning and had a great time, thanks so much to all the organisers, lifeguards and volunteers. A really fun, informative and enjoyable session. Thank you!*

**May 22**

* *Thank you all so much for putting on this event. It was a great introduction and we'll definitely be doing it again. Really appreciate your all giving up the time that you did x*
* *Thank you for today. Had a great time, everybody was friendly and very helpful.*
* *I’d like to thank you and all the volunteers at today’s swim, I really did enjoy it even on the coldest of supposedly a summers day lol.*

**July 22**

* *Just a quick message to say thanks to you and all the volunteers for this morning coaching session. The session was great. Both coaches had a lot of knowledges that they were happy to share, giving us the confidence to adapted/improve our techniques in a friendly and supportive environment. Another great, friendly and informative event.*
* *Thanks [one of volunteers], it was really fun, many thanks to all the volunteers! My daughter really enjoyed it and loves the badge!*
* *Thanks to you and the team for a lovely afternoon on Sunday!*

**Aug 22**

* *My son wanted to say thank you to K (volunteer)*
* *It was reassuring having the lifeguards available. We feel more confident. Thanks to everyone for a really lovely morning.*
* *Just wanted to say a HUGE thank you to you and the team for today. Loved the intro session and already thinking about when I can next swim! X*

**Sept 2022**

* *Just wanted to say a HUGE thank you to you and the team for today. Loved the intro session and already thinking about when I can next swim!*

**July 2023**

* *Thank you so much for the open water swimming introduction experience that you provided today. We all enjoyed it very much and the girls have asked when they can attend again! Parents that were in attendance also showed a keen interest to have a go. (Youth group leader)*
* *A big thank you to all the lovely volunteers for making today's swim session possible. Looking forward to the next adventure! It was great to meet so many amazing people today.*
* *It was a lovely event with like minded people! Thanks for organising and enabling people to build confidence in outdoor swimming!*
* *It was really lovely to meet people and find confidence to join [the local swim group]. L [volunteer] was super supportive. Thank you*

**August 2023 (swim intro)**

* *Thank you. I have wanted to do this in ages. I’m very self-conscious and you made me feel welcome and relaxed.*
* *It was nice to meet other swimmers and the event was well organised.*

**August 2023 (intro to lifesaving)**

* Feeling more confident about my safety and how to help others. Really well organised, lovely water.
* Thank you to all of you who made it possibly for newbies.
* We all had a fabulous time, the children and grownups alike all learned a wealth of important skills. (From cubs and beavers group volunteer)

**VOLUNTEERS**

**Sept 2020**

* *Fantastic day as a volunteer introducing people to outdoor swimming. I even jumped off the ledge! Made the most of a team of life guards. So many happy people.*
* *Had a great day helping at the Outdoor Swimming introduction event, some of us had a swim after.*
* *Just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the event at the weekend and meeting so many interesting and helpful people. Being able to swim [after] was an added bonus*
* *Congratulations on such a successful day on Sunday. It was lovely to be part of the event and see all those smiley faces in the water.*

**June 2021**

* *So pleased people tried swimming and enjoyed it. It was good to share my positive experience with attendees.*
* *It was our pleasure to introduce people to such a wonderful activity.*
* *I really enjoyed my day. It was lovely to have a chance to share some of my experience and the volunteering opportunity also served to raise my self-esteem and wellbeing. So success all round.*

**Aug 2021**

* *I had a lovely day today. Thanks again for including us, it’s great to be part of the crew, to do ‘stuff’ you really want to see delivered. People were so happy.*

**Sept 2021**

* *A brilliant event as usual! It’s good to see new people enjoying the water and learning how to do it safely.*
* *Brilliant stuff; we all know how important knowledge about, and joy in the open water is, but you've actually put that into action. Thanks to everyone involved.*

**May 22**

* *That was a great experience! Had a wonderful time.. thank you for asking me to be one of the volunteers.*
* *Feedback to you from our volunteers from Branching Out – they loved it!!..even one who did the long day!! Very impressed by number of lifeguards & total organisation. Thank you for the opportunity they said!! just shows you, if you are having fun ..the weather doesn't matter...!!!*
* *Great day introducing others to the Outdoor Swimming experience! It rained, we all got wet even if we didn't go in the water, but we made through to sunshine at the end of the day! I wouldn't have my swim community if I hadn't had the opportunity to go on the very first event arranged by @osbrecks in 2020 so it's only right that help make it possible for others to do the same.*

**July 2022**

* *Wonderful day volunteering with Brecks Fen Edge & Rivers LP for events at Lynford. Met some lovely new friends and caught up with other friends I don't see often enough!*

**Sept 2022**

* *Great to be part of wonderful events*
* *Thank you for doing these events it brings the community to nature which is nurture!! It was a bit out of my comfort zone I prefer a one on one wild swim lesson and getting them used to how there body feels but hey the work you do is incredible!*
* *It’s been an absolute pleasure to be involved in the project.*
* *Volunteering for Event Day at Lynford Lakes. @osbrecks @thebreckslp Introducing people to wild swimming. #thebreckslp #wildswimming #nature #outsideswim #familyfun #volunteer #volunteering*

**July 2023**

* *I had such an enjoyable day chatting to all the different people! I look forward to helping again.*
* *I did enjoy it, in particular becoming aware of the benefits for the children.*
* *A lovely day volunteering with the @thebreckslp open water swimming introduction.*

**August 2023**

* Thank you for organising the day. I was so happy to see the 70yr old grandma who absolutely loved her experience. I had a wonderful day!
* So nice to be able to get in and out of the water and also help out with the event! Lots of positives and thanks and the kids said they had fun!

**From key project volunteer, Ellen Kirkby, who organises reception and much more on the day and in advance:**

*My #wildswimming journey started on 13th September 2020 at an Introduction to Outdoor Swimming event. Two years on and I've loved every minute of it. I started a fb group for swimmers in my area and 13 months later there are now over 900 of us! …These videos and photos are from our end of Summer …gathering on Friday 9th September 2022. They show just some of the truly wonderful folks that make up our swim tribe, many of whom have attended one of the Introduction events that have taken place since I started. All of us have @osbrecks & @thebreckslp to thank because without them giving me that initial opportunity, none of us would have found each other!*

*I now have lots of new friends I'd never have met without wild swimming and an entire community around me. I love it! Huge thanks to Brecks Fen Edge & Rivers LP, Imogen Radford & the Outdoor Swimming in Breckland group without whom none of this would ever have happened.*

**Some Tales from the River event feedback**

**12 November film launch event and viewing**

* *That was a really lovely event, so well-attended and supported, with all the interactions and sense of community it stimulated. The film was very engaging and informative, and clearly loved by all. I thoroughly enjoyed it, the children were a joy, their enthusiasm was obvious, as was the pride and admiration shown by the children’s families and friends.*
* *Saturday went really well…well attended, and to have the young people so involved was wonderful. It was lovely to be in attendance.*
* *The video is fab, stellar work by all involved and it's not only taught me more about the area but put a big smile on my face this morning.*
* *Fantastic project by a group of young people showing 120 years of history along the rivers at Thetford. It's creative, fascinating and filled with enthusiasm. Huge well done to all involved.*
* *This is great! Well done everyone, I really enjoyed it and learned a lot. Great presenters, you kept me interested all the way. Love the drone footage too.*

**3 May 2022 Thetford oral history and discussion drop-in**

* *It was great to be involved in the Thetford drop-in and I would be pleased to join a further session to scoop up any potential interviewees and any verbal contributions we may have missed on the day. I’m sure people would return as I felt much interest was generated. It was a bit of a whirlwind really, with many people recalling swim spots in and around the area and as well as the fantastic visual displays. I think most people enjoyed the interactive opportunity to put a sticker on the map!* (Volunteer)

**28 March 2022 Oxborough drop-in**

* *Well done to [all involved in organising]. I thought there was a good vibe at the event. Glad it yielded some good contacts and info as well. I was pleased to take part and glad to catch up with other volunteers.* (Volunteer)
* *I enjoyed the afternoon and was really glad that people gave me time to express myself.* (Volunteer)

**8 May 2023 Lakenheath**

* *We had a lovely day at the Lakenheath Big Help out event today – lots of fascinating chats with local people, hearing their stories and showing some of our Tales from the Riverbank exhibition, and looking at all the wonderful range of local groups and activities.* (Volunteer)

**Some feedback from BFER river history walks**

**September 2023**

* *I can't thank you [3 volunteers] enough for a wonderful time on Thursday afternoon, it was so enjoyable and informative. I learned so much about areas of Mildenhall I have walked around in complete ignorance until now.* (Participant)
* *It was a really well thought out and interesting walk. Thank you so much for organising and leading it. Thanks also to the other volunteers. A lovely, interesting and pleasant walk.* (Participant)
* *Thank you, it was a privilege to be part of this lovely walk through the riverside pathways and learn about the fascinating history of Mildenhall from [the other volunteer].* (Volunteer)

**November 2023**

* *Just a quick email to say thanks to you and your volunteers for such an enjoyable walk around Brandon on Sunday.* (Participant)
* *friendly walkers and leader and back walkers [i.e. volunteers]* (Participant)
* *Thank you for the opportunity, I had a lovely day/afternoon. All of the participants were a pleasure.* (Volunteer)

**Note prepared by Imogen Radford December 2023 for BFER Volunteer Celebration**