**Short talk to Wellbeing Festival 13 March 2024**

**(organised BFER and Restoration Trust)**

**Slide 1**

Healing Waters (Outdoor Swimming)
Wild Swimming groups
Imogen Radford
Project lead
@OSBrecks ‘Bathing in the Brecks’
& wild swimming activist

**People standing** (photo cMorzMarlow)

Swimming in cold water makes me incredibly present in the moment. Focussing only on my breathing and my environment. No thoughts of past or future worries, just embracing exactly how I am feeling and responding in that moment of time.  Shauna, Outdoor Swimming in Breckland group

**Swimmer and water lilies**

Human-nature connection – theme of today

Outdoor or wild swimming could not be more connected

literally immersed in nature/water

**Event, mother and child and others**

reasons people swim outdoors, those chosen by largest numbers

(from Outdoor Swimming Society survey a couple of years ago)

* joy and happiness
* fitness and exercise
* resilience and challenge
* social and community
* communing with nature and self
* adventure

**Multi-group at Mildenhall**

The benefits for individuals

Same as the reasons, benefits and reasons are multiple

Some benefits have more concrete research evidence

Clearest findings

– benefits to mental health

**Winter swimmers Lynford**

– the shock of cold immersion builds resilience and ability to cope with stress physically and mentally (get into 5° cold water in swimsuit and you can do anything!)

– many other benefits reported by swimmers, more research needed

**Lady in pink with reeds**

I love the space it gives me, the sense of community, the friendship, the fact I might be

swimming right next to a hunting barn owl. Sarah, Outdoor Swimming in Breckland group

it’s not just about benefits to individuals;

nature benefits from people swimming outdoors, too!

Many surveys – from government departments and others – have shown that people most closely connected with nature are most likely to care about it and be active in helping it

**Ellen and Sue with old bike**

One survey (reported in Outdoor Swimmer magazine)

found that 75% of outdoor swimmers pick up litter,

20% are members of conservation organisations.

A detailed study by Swim England, The Value of Swimming,

found that 32% of outdoor swimmers volunteered,

compared to 21% of nonswimmers, using Govt figures

**man at lake with others** (photo cMorzMarlow)

*I’ve had a marvellous experience today at the swim intro session.*

*A supportive and welcoming team made a memorable day for me*

*whilst learning vital safety advice through direct experience.*

Participant September 2020

How to get started?

In the Healing Waters project:

introducing people to Outdoor Swimming,

promoting safety and responsibility, and improving access

**Three ladies in pink**

*I have wanted to do this in ages. Thank you.*

*I’m very self-conscious and you made me feel welcome and relaxed.*

Participant August 2023

We have introduced nearly 700 people to swimming outdoors

giving people the chance to have a go with support from lifeguards

**swimmers with arms up**

interactive safety discussion,

experienced swimmer volunteers welcoming and reassuring participants

(many of whom are very nervous coming for their first swim)

**Volunteers with children and SUP**

*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.* Volunteer June 2021

**Two with selfie frames; jumping in**

Volunteers have fun taking part and jumping in

**Mildenhall general view**

More volunteers welcome for Last intro session 8 September this year

*Great day introducing others to the Outdoor Swimming experience! I wouldn't have my swim community if I hadn't had the opportunity to go on the very first event arranged by the project in 2020 so it's only right that I help make it possible for others to do the same.* Ellen, key project Volunteer

Ellen started a Facebook group for swimmers in her area (Wild Suffolk Swimmers) which now has nearly 2000 members, many of whom have attended one of the intro events.

She says:

*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 and the Outdoor Swimming in Breckland group*

*without whom none of this would ever have happened.*

**Ellen and Sue by display stand**

and gain confidence to stand around in swimming costumes!

**Group going into the lake in March 2020**

Another way to get started is to join the local informal swim group

– there is at least one in every area – for information on places

to share experience and safety tips, to meet people to swim with

for companionship and community,

**Large group March 2020**

and to have fun. Groups welcoming

**Swimmers in a waterfall**

*It was really lovely to meet people and find confidence to join [the local swim group].*

Participant August 2023

**Final slide**

Information on safety and lots of other aspects from

.The Outdoor Swimming Society

.Outdoor Swimmer magazine

.My website (www.imogensriverswims.co.uk)

*Info at our stand: on volunteering 8 September, on project events this year*

*on local swim groups, water safety quiz and info, and map activity. Come and see us!*