

Adaptive Coastal Rowing



A Support Guide for Clubs

2018



*Written in partnership between St Andrews Coastal Rowing Club
and the University of St Andrews Rowing the Waves project.*

ROWING THE WAVES



Adapting Coastal Rowing

Introduction

This short guide has been written in partnership between St Andrews Coastal Rowing Club and the Rowing the Waves project at the University of St Andrews. It describes the experiences and lessons learnt by the rowing club in their efforts to include disabled rowers. We hope it will function as a resource for other coastal rowing clubs whose members wish to explore options for accessibility, offering practical insights and tips. The purpose of this document is not to offer a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all formula for coastal rowing clubs, nor is it an attempt to suggest that all clubs must make an effort to become more accessible. Individual clubs have varied incomes, members, geographies and resources, which all impact on how they function and their ability to meet specific access requirements.

The wide appeal of Scottish Coastal Rowing (SCR) means that within each club there is often a wide variety of people, each with their own skill set, some of which might relate to their profession. Similarly, the community ethos of the sport means that clubs, in diverse and creative ways, feature community engagement as a central activity that goes beyond just drawing membership from the local community.

St Andrews Coastal Rowing Club

Within St Andrews Coastal Rowing Club (CRC), the two elements of specific skills and community engagement have combined in the professional skills and interests of physiotherapists Julie and Clayton Hardisty. They have been involved in targeted engagement with disabled people living in and around Fife. This specific combination of skills, engagement and enthusiasm has allowed St Andrews CRC to become one of the leading clubs in providing adapted and accessible rowing sessions to people experiencing a variety of different impairments. Further to the valuable and continuous support of club members, a feature of the development of St Andrews CRC as an accessible and inclusive club for disabled people was the setting of small and achievable targets. The club's development has been defined by taking incremental, manageable steps.

The structure of this document is as follows. First, it explores some of the key issues when developing club accessibility; social networks, location and cost. Second, it goes on to give some detailed breakdowns of practical adaptations made by St Andrews CRC to their boats and equipment, before reflecting on the benefits, practical and social, of increasing the accessibility of SCR. It finishes with a selection of useful resources and contacts for clubs wanting to develop their accessibility programme.

Social Networks

Tip 1 - *Assess the resources you have as a club.*

- *What individual/group connections have you got with community groups?*
- *How much time have your members got to spare to stimulate engagement?*

To avoid being overwhelmed, St Andrews CRC drew on their own social and professional networks to identify potential new rowers rather than approaching new organisations. On the surface this might seem like a simpler task for people working in allied health professions. Something to consider though, is that at some point in our lives we all experience illness and/or impairment, whether temporarily or permanently. Many of us know someone who has an illness or impairment who might like to go out in a St Ayles Skiff given the opportunity.

People that you know might well be linked in with other social groups and organisations. Examples from St Andrews CRC include a member whose child attends a social group in the local community for adults with special needs. Another member introduced a friend who was recovering from a recent illness, and was themselves involved in an organisation supporting people after limb amputation. These pre-existing links are valuable, and provided the foundation to most established relationships to develop between external organisations and St Andrews CRC over time.

An important element of these partnerships is that they have allowed St Andrews CRC to access the highest level of expertise on issues relating to access: expertise from disabled people. When attempting to provide support or adaptations for disabled people, non-disabled people have historically been remiss at including the view and ideas of disabled people in all aspects of public life, including sport.

Sometimes this can result from feelings of embarrassment when talking about disabled bodies and people's ability to perform specific tasks relating to rowing. An important take-away from this leaflet should be that asking a disabled person politely and clearly about what adaptations would best suit them is 100% better than excluding someone on the basis of embarrassment or lack of awareness.

“... the best way to approach this is just not to try and take on too much, just two individuals, and it's just slow and steady progress ...”



Location

Tip 2 - Assess the geographical barriers to access you face as a club.

- *Is your launch accessible?*
- *Who else uses/has access to where you launch your skiffs? Can you work together to improve accessibility?*

It is worth considering the geography of your local area. Some coastal villages and towns in Scotland (and further afield), no matter how unintentionally, can be inaccessible to people experiencing mobility issues. Most public spaces have not been designed with disabled people in mind. It is important to place your club in the context of the local area when developing a programme of inclusivity. It does not make sense to focus on making your skiff accessible for a wheelchair user, if the ramp or beach you launch from is inaccessible. However, this does not preclude your club from making adaptations to aid rowers with visual, hearing or cognitive impairments.

There is obviously huge diversity within the disabled community, as there is in the non-disabled community — with no distinct boundary between the two. Some individual clubs will have more success responding to specific demand, rather than attempting to cater to the needs of everyone.

Because of the limited resources or inaccessibility of clubs local to them, some disabled rowers have travelled considerable distances to row with St Andrews CRC. Enthusiastic and supportive members of the club have often gone out of their way to pick new rowers up and drop them off at train and bus stations to accommodate their rowing.

The many coastal rowing clubs that launch from the beach will face a particular set of access issues for potential rowers. Other clubs, though, use harbour facilities. A clear benefit of harbour access is the availability of other coastal community stakeholders to collaborate with.

St Andrews CRC has fostered a close working relationship with its local harbour trust. The two organisations have similar goals and aims in terms of wanting to see as many people as possible enjoy access to coastal recreation, and are able to support each other in providing advice and discussion, as well as developing a practical partnership for submitting bids for funding.

St Andrews Harbour Trust have committed to providing pontoons as they have a hoist at the harbour to aid people getting in and out of boats.





St Andrews adaptive rowing outing
launching from harbour pontoons.

Cost

Tip 3—*Consider adaptations individually.*

- *Some adaptations are cheaper than others.*
- *Is there another organisation you can pool resources with?*
- *Ask for freebies/money off—shy bairns get nowt!*

Cost is an important area of concern for some SCR clubs. For many, their income is almost entirely made up of membership fees and local fundraising, which can mean there is little to spare in the bank. It is worth repeating at this point that a large number of adaptations are low cost, and actually just need time and enthusiasm. For example, inviting people with special needs to row might mean that an outing takes longer from start to finish, and that club members may need to spend some time thinking about how to communicate effectively with people with varied communication styles and needs, but is likely to involve minimal physical adaptations to boats or equipment.

If your club does make the decision to make a specific costly adaptation, remember to return to the previous sections. Explore networks you already have. Who in your local area provides support for disabled sports people? Could you collaborate in some way? Perhaps you could develop a specific working group within your membership, like St Andrews CRC, who focus on accessibility and organise fundraisers specifically for pieces of equipment. Another option is to draw on wider regional and national networks including organisations run by and for disabled people.

Practical examples from St Andrews CRC

This section gives a break down of some of the changes made by St Andrews CRC as part of their programme of inclusive rowing, including estimated time and financial cost.

‘... what we’ve done is basically created a small adaptive rowing group within the rowing club ... that just draws on the skills and the willingness of people ...’



Plastic pins

What was the adaptation?

We swapped our wooden pins for plastic pins to use for adapted sessions.

Why?

We wanted to be able to rig sculling oars for rowers who would benefit from lighter and easier oar handling, and were occupying the bow seat. We also wanted to be able to swap from adaptive to non-adaptive rowing sessions efficiently.

What did you use?

We bought plastic rods from directplastics.co.uk. A club member used a lathe to cut and turn the plastic to size. We drilled a 10mm wide socket into them. We sourced sculling pins and gates which we then assembled, dropped into the hole and secured with glue.

How long did it take?

After receiving materials approximately **4 hours** in total.

How much did it cost?

The overall cost was approximately **£100**, which we were lucky enough to receive as a charitable donation from Disability Sport Fife.

Any additional benefits?

We now use the plastic pins for all training outings avoiding wear and tear on our oak pins which we only use for racing.



Sculling oars

What was the adaptation?

We sourced sculling blades to use with the plastic pins.

Why?

To use with the plastic pins for rowers who might benefit from lighter oars, or row from an adapted bow seat.

What did you use?

We Google-searched a list of sliding seat rowing clubs and emailed them all with a request for any sculling blades that they did not need. Chester-le-street Amateur Rowing Club (in north-east England) offered us two sets of blades that they no longer used. We drove down to Dumfries, where they were taking part in a regatta, to pick the blades up. As a thank-you, we donated whisky and gin to their club for a raffle.

How long did it take?

The whole process took approximately **1 working day**, including searching for clubs online and driving to and from Dumfries.

How much did it cost?

The overall cost was approximately **£40** inclusive of fuel and alcohol.





Tactile marking on skiff

What was the adaptation?

Elevated dimples at positions 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

Why?

To aid rowers with visual impairments in locating their seat.

What did you use?

Wooden dowels.

How long did it take?

Approximately **60 minutes**, as part of the wider building time.

How much did it cost?

This adaptation had negligible costs.



‘Gripping’ gloves

What was the adaptation?

We sourced some specialist gloves.

Why?

The gloves are attached to the oar, lessening the need for a rower to grip. This benefits rowers with limited hand, wrist and/or forearm function.

How long did it take?

Altogether **less than 2 hours**. We spoke to the organiser of a small military charity who was known to us via our professional network. They put us in contact with a man who designs and makes gloves for people with limited hand and forearm function to assist with occupational and leisure activities (e.g. support for holding a golf club or plasterer’s trowel). We spoke to him on the phone and met at a charity event. He generously gave us a selection of gloves to trial at no cost.

How much did it cost?

Our gloves were donated at no cost to us, but usually retail at approximately **£20**.



Adaptive seat

What was the adaptation?

We built one of the skiffs with bow seating and purchased a specialised adaptive seat to use with it.

Why?

The adaptive seat is designed so that rowers do not have to use/strain their legs or core as in the other seats. This means that it is particularly useful for rowers who have limited control/movement from their waist down. This can include rowers with paraplegia, rowers who have had bilateral above-the-knee leg amputations and/or rowers experiencing neurological conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis (MS).

What did you use?

A sheet of marine ply and a specialist adapted seat.

How long did it take?

Approximately **1-2 weeks** as part of the wider building time.

How much did it cost?

The ply was **£70**. The seat was generously donated with an estimated cost of **£500**.

Who helped?

Newcastle Gateshead Rowing Club provided advice and support as they already had an adaptive rowing programme in place. We also could not have proceeded without the generous donation of the adaptive seat.



Are there any other tips for accessories?

We have found a cheap and effective way to avoid plaster and/or prosthetics getting wet on a rowing outing is to wear waders!



Bespoke footplates

What was the adaptation?

We built rower-specific footplates.

Why?

These bespoke footplates are built for individual rowers to take home and bring back with them, and are helpful for rowers who have prosthetic leg/s. It is important to get the correct angle for people with prosthetic legs because if badly positioned, or 'one-size-fits-all', it can result in painful rubbing and chafing where their skin meets their prosthesis.

What did you use?

A small amount of plywood, glue and time.

How long did it take?

Approximately **20 minutes** per footplate.

How much did it cost?

The costs were negligible because we already had the materials.



Bespoke footplate being used.



Harbour trust pontoons and hoist

What was the adaptation?

An ongoing process to make St Andrews Harbour more accessible, including pontoons and a hoist.

Why?

It enables a wider group of people to access boats in the harbour.

How long did it take?

This is an ongoing and time-consuming programme for the Harbour Trust.

How much did it cost?

The estimated cost of the hoist was £7,000 and was paid for by a grant applied for and received by the Harbour Trust, as part of their programme of development for St Andrews Harbour.

Reaping the benefits

There is a significant range of time and economic costs attached to making changes within a SCR club to improve access. As noted previously, for clubs with smaller incomes it might seem off-putting to spend time and money on changes that appear to benefit only a few rowers. Here, we list some of the wider benefits of making coastal rowing clubs more inclusive.

‘... they needed a little more help, and we needed the time to learn in the first instance ... and now that’s been largely achieved, the next step is for them to, you know, put their name down for a routine session ...’



St Andrews adaptive rowing outing

- *Wellbeing*

An immediate benefit of making clubs more inclusive is that everyone involved gets to meet more people, extending their own social networks and engaging with people from their community with whom they might not have otherwise. Furthermore, disabled people, who have long been excluded from social domains including sport (with some exception for elite para-athletes), will access all the health and wellbeing benefits of being involved in SCR that their non-disabled crewmates do.

- *Financial*

The overall intention of making clubs more accessible is not an exercise in tokenism, but a genuine desire to build wider and more diverse memberships. In financial terms, more members equates to more membership fees and more support with fundraising.

- *Improved equipment*

The creative thinking of St Andrews CRC resulted in a number of small changes to equipment and boats. These have resulted in benefits for the entire club. One example is the use of plastic pins for sculling blades used by some rowers in the club. Other club members noticed that these pins do not wear as quickly as the wooden ones, and so now wooden pins are only used in racing, saving time and effort on maintenance.

- *Relationships with other rowing clubs*

Support, guidance and practical help has been offered to St Andrews CRC from a number of groups in the rowing community. The original motivation of the club was triggered by seeing the adaptations made by Newcastle Gateshead Rowing Club while participating in the Great Tyne Row, and the two clubs remain in conversation.

Regional and national relationships

Building links with Scottish Rowing and British Rowing have resulted in St Andrews CRC receiving free sculling blades for some rowers to use. Moving forward, using this guide and support from the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association, St Andrews CRC will be able to share what they have learnt. They will be able to offer tips and support regarding best practice to other clubs, avoiding the replication of mistakes or re-inventing the wheel.

Further to building contacts within the world of rowing, the adaptive rowing project at St Andrews has involved a number of wider collaborations; some specific to the region of Fife, and some with national organisations. For example, their relationship with the Harbour Trust is mutually beneficial. The club benefits from alterations and accommodations within the harbour, and the Trust benefits from more people engaging in coastal recreation, and can signpost people toward an accessible and inclusive activity.

Regional and national organisations such as Finding Your Feet and Disability Sport Fife respectively are also able to promote the club, whilst signposting interested parties on and introducing them to a new, exciting and welcoming sport.





Pictures taken just after an adaptive rowing session.



St Andrews pictures from the Great River Row in London.

Helpful contacts

For materials/products:

- Plastic pins: www.directplastics.co.uk
- Gloves: www.gripeeze.com
- Adaptive seat: www.rowingcentre.co.uk

Specialist charities:

- For people living with amputation: www.findingyourfeet.net
- Military injuries: www.thegdo.co.uk / www.horseback.org.uk

Rowing links:

- Scottish Rowing: www.scottish-rowing.org.uk
- Scottish Coastal Rowing Association: www.scottishcoastalrowing.org

Local groups/resources for Fife:

- St Andrews Coastal Rowing Club: <http://stacrc.org.uk/>
- St Andrews Harbour Trust: www.standrewsharbourtrust.org
- Fife Coast Countryside Trust: www.fifecoastandcountryside.co.uk
- Disability Sport Fife: www.fifedirect.org.uk/orgs
- Rowing the Waves, University of St Andrews:
www.rowingthewaves.wordpress.com

Wider resources for inclusion:

- Scottish Disability Sport: www.scottishdisabilitysport.com
- Disability Resource Centre: www.disability.co.uk



*'... I don't look at people and see what they do
or don't have ...'*





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