

## Stronger Shores Community Grants Evaluation

### Organisation details

<b>Name of organisation / community group:</b>	International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS)		
<b>Address of organisation / community group: (including postcode)</b>	14 Foyle Street, Sunderland, SR1 1LE		
<b>Details of main contact person:</b>	Name: Julia Wysocka Position: Community Development Officer Address: 14 Foyle Street, Sunderland, SR1 1LE Contact number: 07942583833 Email: julia.wysocka@icos.org.uk		
<b>Name of your Project:</b>	Seeing Blue		
<b>When did your project start and finish?</b>	Start date: 01/03/2025 Finish date: 30/05/2026 (extended)		
<b>Where did your project take place?</b>			
Please tick below.			
Northumberland	<input type="checkbox"/>	North Tyneside	<input type="checkbox"/>
South Tyneside	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunderland	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Durham	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hartlepool	<input type="checkbox"/>

Redcar and Cleveland			

## Evaluation

Please provide a summary of your project, including the following:

- What did your project do?
- Did your project achieve everything it wanted to?
- What worked well?
- What could have worked better?
- Did you need to change anything?
- What is the one thing you would do differently?
- What has been the biggest impact?
- Do you plan to continue your project in any way?

Suggested word count 250-500 words. Maximum word count 1,000 words.

The Seeing Blue project successfully delivered a programme of environmental education and creative activities designed to engage women and children with the local marine and coastal environment. The project exceeded its original targets, engaging 43 women and 51 children, compared to the initial target of 35 women.

A total of 12 educational and creative workshops were delivered throughout the project. Educational activities included a Hendon beach clean-up, rock pooling sessions, seaweed identification workshop, and three sessions delivered in partnership with the Wild Oyster Project. Participants also took part in visits and activities delivered with partner organisations including the National Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust. These sessions increased awareness of local marine habitats, species, water quality, conservation issues, and the importance of protecting coastal environments.

The educational workshops were complemented by a range of creative activities inspired by participants' learning experiences. These included sea glass crafts, sun catcher workshops, underwater sea model making, "Sea Memories in a Jar" sessions, and sea-themed art frame activities. Participants used recycled and natural materials, encouraging environmental responsibility while developing artistic skills and creativity.

The project achieved and exceeded all of its intended outcomes. Evaluation data showed that:

- 85% of participants reported improved awareness of marine environmental issues.
- 66% reported developing new creative skills.
- 78% reported improved wellbeing.
- 81% reported increased confidence.

In addition, 32 women reported gaining new skills, including environmental awareness, communication, teamwork, creative techniques, and increased knowledge and understanding of local marine ecosystems.

One of the strongest aspects of the project was the combination of practical environmental activities with creative expression. Participants particularly valued learning directly from environmental organisations while having opportunities to reflect on their experiences through art and crafts. The project also successfully strengthened partnerships with organisations including the Wild Oyster Project, Durham Wildlife Trust, and the National Trust.

The biggest impact of the project has been the increased connection participants feel with their local marine environment. Many women and children developed a deeper understanding of local wildlife, conservation issues, and practical actions they can take to protect the coast. The project also reduced social isolation, improved wellbeing, and created opportunities for women from diverse backgrounds to build friendships and confidence.

We did have to extend the project because some of the outdoor educational sessions (e.g. seaweed identification) had to be delivered during certain times of the year, cold weather months did not allow our group to deliver activities outside, during these months we tried to focus on the creative aspect of the project.

Building on the success of Seeing Blue, ICOS plans to continue delivering environmental and community-based activities wherever funding opportunities arise. Participants have expressed a strong interest in further marine conservation, citizen science, volunteering, and creative environmental projects, demonstrating the lasting legacy of the programme.

### **Case Study: Monika – From Volunteer to Community Champion.**

Monika is a mother of four, originally from Poland, who has become a valued and consistent member of her local community. Her journey with ICOS began in 2021 when she joined as a volunteer, motivated by a desire to connect with others and contribute positively to community initiatives.

She continues to volunteer regularly and actively participates in events, trips, and workshops, often alongside her children. Her ongoing involvement highlights her strong sense of community and personal commitment to making a difference.

Living in Sunderland, Monika and her children developed a growing curiosity about the marine environment. As residents of a seaside area, they wanted to better understand the needs of the sea, the challenges involved in maintaining good water quality, and the wider environmental impact on marine ecosystems.

Monika took part in several educational and hands-on sessions at the marina, particularly those delivered with the Wild Oyster Project. During these sessions, she was involved in inspecting oysters and helping to clean newly delivered oysters for the oyster nurseries. She also attended educational workshops where she had the opportunity to ask questions and observe how oysters naturally filter and improve water quality.

Through these experiences, Monika gained substantial knowledge about the marine environment and developed a deeper appreciation for conservation efforts. She described the sessions as both highly informative and engaging, emphasising their importance for the wider community.

In Monika's opinion, more people should take part in similar initiatives, as they not only educate but also inspire individuals and families to care for their local environment.

Monika's journey demonstrates how volunteering can lead to personal growth, professional development, and long-term community engagement. Her continued involvement serves as a positive example of how individuals can remain connected and make meaningful contributions.

### **Case Study: Beata – Learning, Creating, and Connecting Through Seeing Blue.**

Beata is a dedicated volunteer who has been involved with ICOS since 2020. As a mother of two and a part-time worker, she balances her responsibilities while continuing to actively engage in community initiatives. Her long-term commitment reflects both her enthusiasm and strong connection to the ICOS community.

Beata regularly took part in the *Seeing Blue* sessions delivered as part of the Stronger Shores project. She values these sessions as an opportunity to learn more about the marine environment while also spending meaningful time with her children and friends in a supportive and welcoming setting.

She has attended a variety of educational workshops, where she gained new knowledge about the sea and environmental issues. One of her favourite creative activities was the "Memories in a Jar" session, where participants used recycled materials to create decorative bottles. This provided a creative and meaningful souvenir while promoting sustainability.

Beata and her children also enthusiastically participated in a hands-on session where they built under water model using recycled materials, inspired by marine life. Another memorable activity was creating sun catchers from materials collected during beach cleans, reinforcing the importance of reducing waste and reusing resources.

In addition to workshops, Beata joined a group trip to a lighthouse, where participants explored the site, took part in rock pooling, and learned more about coastal ecosystems. These experiences allowed her and her children to connect directly with the natural environment and deepen their understanding of marine life.

Beata also contributed to practical conservation work by helping to clean oysters delivered from Scotland, supporting efforts to improve water quality and marine habitats.

She consistently describes the sessions as enjoyable, educational, and inspiring. Beata often expresses interest in attending more activities and values the opportunity to continue learning.

Her children share her enthusiasm—they are particularly interested in marine topics and show great creativity during sessions.

Beata’s journey highlights the impact of accessible, family-friendly environmental programmes. Through her continued participation, she has not only expanded her own knowledge but also fostered curiosity and awareness in her children, demonstrating how community initiatives can inspire long-term engagement with environmental issues.

**Please tell us about the people who have engaged with your project, including the following:**

Total number of people engaged:	43 women and 51 children
Demographics of people engaged (age, gender, ethnicity, disability)	Languages: Polish 57%, English 30%, Other (Spanish, Ukrainian, Thai) 13%

	Ethnicity: White other 68%, White British 18%, Mixed other 5%, Asian 5%, Other: 4% Disability: Yes 7%, No 93%
Total number of volunteers (if any):	10
Total number of staff (if any):	2

**If any volunteers were involved in this project, please tell us about the role that volunteers have played and how has this benefited both the volunteers and your project?**

Ten volunteers were involved in the project, they played a key role in supporting activities and helping to organise sessions, including women involved in our ICOS Women Project Steering Group, who support ICOS on making key decisions about project delivery including, what is working well, how to make the project accessible for all women and children, and what activities should be developed for the group e.g. the women emphasised that they wanted to learn about seaweed and to be able to identify seaweed, so we have set up this session for them.

Volunteers had participated in environmental conservation activities such as oyster cleaning sessions at North Shields Marina, a beach clean-up and supported the delivery of workshops and family activities through hands on support during the sessions e.g. support with filling registration forms.

**We would love to hear from anyone who has taken part in this project! Please add some quotes below from participants below:**

Name	Age	Quote
Kelly Alderson	43	I got visit the magnificent Souter Lighthouse and learn about its history (which is important to our area in the North East and experience its wonderful views. Brilliantly organised. Fabulous company. Fantastic activities which are good for you mentally and physically. Wonderful experience. Thank you ICOS Women.

Barbara Mruk	40	I meet new people during the trips and activities. It was nice to connect with others and share experiences together. The activities helped create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. I really enjoyed the marina workshop with the Wild Oyster Project and the visit to the lighthouse. The memory in the jar activity was creative and meaningful. Everything was well organised and enjoyable.
Boguslawa Dabrowska	54	The sessions were fantastic. I meet some nice people with whom I had a great conversation. I would very much like to take part in such activities again, because they allow us to develop our creativity and imagination. I didn't even think it would be such fun and a great time spent with children & adults. Thank you very much ICOS Women for organising these sessions.

**We would love to see some photos from this project! Please add some photos and a short description of the photo using the space below.**

**Seeing Blue educational activities:**



Seeing Blue creative activities:



