



Row the Rhythm 2024-2025 EVALUATION REPORT

**Independently Evaluated by
FitMedia July 2025**



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Row the Rhythm is a programme aimed at introducing rowing to visually impaired people, to enable them to view it as an accessible sport, to assist their physical and social health, and to improve their quality of life. The programme has had a highly positive impact on participants' physical, social and mental wellbeing

Furthermore, 100% of the clubs that delivered the programme said that running the programme had had a positive impact on their clubs, and that they would run the programme again.

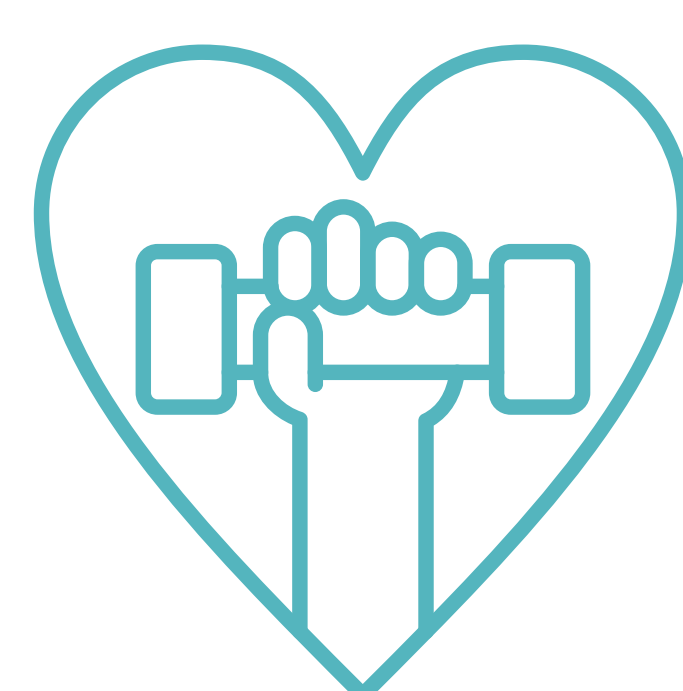
As independent evaluators of the initial stages of the programme, Fitmedia have been immensely impressed with the impact of this programme and we could commend it highly.

81%



of rowers said they felt more socially connected after taking part

90%



of rowers said they felt it had improved their physical health

76%



of rowers said that taking part in the programme had made them feel more confident

90%



of rowers said that taking part had changed what they thought they were capable of

85%



of rowers said that the programme had improved their quality of life

95%



of rowers said that they want continue rowing

“Row the Rhythm has been a light shining in the dark room.

The more I go, the more it illuminates that dark room”

Row the Rhythm is a programme aimed at introducing visually impaired (“VI”) people to experience rowing, enabling them to try the sport, and progress to regular participation as rowing club members.

The programme was initially inspired by Peterborough City Rowing Club, which delivered coaching sessions for visually impaired people in 2023–2024. Love Rowing, the charitable arm of British Rowing, was impressed by the success of the sessions, and facilitated funding to establish a specific brand, called Row the Rhythm, and expand the opportunity in rowing clubs across the country.

Fitmedia were commissioned by Love Rowing to monitor the initial expansion and to evaluate the impact on participants and clubs. This report provides an overview of the programme and a full breakdown of its impact, along with conclusions and recommendations for future work.

BACKGROUND

Row the Rhythm was inspired by a visually impaired rower called Kate Lindgren. Kate has retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic disease which causes cells in the retina to break down slowly over time, causing vision loss.

In 2017, walking along the river just after her 50th birthday, she was inspired to try rowing by the vision of an eight rowing down the river near Peterborough City Rowing Club. Looking for an activity which she could do outdoors, and despite her reduced sight, she contacted the club. The club’s adaptive rowing coach introduced Kate to their biweekly U3A group and shortly after Kate met Peter Forrest, the club’s Chairman, who became Kate’s permanent coach.

Kate fell in love with the sport and over the next seven years she became an adept sculler and competitive indoor rower. Refusing to be hindered by her visual impairment, she persevered through the Covid 19 pandemic, cancellations and lockdowns to complete a number of challenges. These included a 20km row along the River Nene in September 2020, a 12 hour “Rowathon” in May 2022, and a 100km row along the River Nene in May 2023.

Kate now rows regularly at Peterborough City Rowing Club where she leads the Row the Rhythm programme.



Kate's progress and achievements in rowing became known in local and national media. After various articles in the local press and a piece on the local ITV news in December 2018, Kate started documenting her progress on social media, where she became known as "the Blind Sculler".

Aware of how rowing helped her, she was keen to promote the sport to other visually impaired people. In 2021, she appeared on the rowing podcast "The Girl on the River" (<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/girl-on-the-river/id1540279250>) on which she spoke in depth about her journey and her love for the sport. Olympic Umpire Judith Packer heard the podcast and suggested to Sally Corander, then the Foundation Manager at Love Rowing, that the organisation run a pilot to see if they could attract more visually impaired people in rowing.

In March 2023, Love Rowing received funding from the Sport England Jubilee Fund for Peterborough City Rowing Club to provide coaching sessions for visually impaired people to try rowing. In conjunction with CamSight, a Cambridgeshire charity supporting local people with visual impairments, the Club ran six free monthly coaching sessions. The programme, though small, proved so successful that in March 2024, the Row the Rhythm brand was established with the goal of expanding the opportunity in different clubs across the UK.

In May 2024, the newly branded programme provided further funds for Peterborough to allow them to continue the programme for its existing rowers, to expand it to new rowers, and to enable some of the current rowers to transition to full membership of the club. In addition, it provided funds to an additional three clubs – Leicester, Hereford, and Fulham Reach – to each provide a pilot series of sessions to visually impaired people, to enable them to try rowing, develop their skills and ultimately have the confidence to join as club members.

This funding included provision for other expenses to make it easier for people to attend, such as transport to and from the club, and refreshments for social activities.

**"Rowing has given me a new lease of life
and a new purpose."**

**I can refocus on something I never
thought I would achieve"**

The initial objectives of the Row the Rhythm programme were as follows:

- To introduce rowing to the visually impaired community and to break down barriers to participation.
- To use rowing as tool with which to reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing within the visually impaired community.
- To enable sight loss organisations to utilise rowing clubs as an accessible activity for visually impaired people.
- To demonstrate to the visually impaired community that rowing is an inclusive and accessible activity.
- To learn from this initial model and to create a resource that can support other rowing clubs to provide opportunities for people with a visual impairment.

As stated above, Row the Rhythm funded Peterborough to provide and expand its existing programme, and for three other clubs to provide a series of sessions for visually people.

The sessions introduced participants to rowing via a variety of activities, including:

- Indoor rowing on rowing machines (“ergos”).
- Outdoor rowing on a boat on land (“blades”).
- Sitting in a stabilised boat with experienced rowers and coaches whilst attached to the land.
- Rowing on the water with others (eg in a double or a quad) with sighted rowers in the boat.
- Rowing on the water alone in a single scull.

In line with mentoring and guidance from Kate Lindgren and Peter Forrest, clubs were encouraged to design their own sessions, and their coaches were encouraged to work out what to provide, based on the rowers’ individual needs, aptitudes and comfort.



From the outset, Love Rowing and the clubs worked in partnership with a number of organisations and charities specialising in visual impairment. the aim of these partnerships was to promote the Row the Rhythm programme to the visually impaired community and to recruit participants to take part. The partners and a summary of their involvement is provided below:

Organisation	Involvement
CamSight www.camsight.org.uk	• Partnered with Peterborough to promote and recruit rowers for pilot
Action on Disability www.aod.org.uk	• Partnered with Fulham Reach to deliver an “open day” in December
VICTA www.victa.org.uk	• Partnered with Fulham Reach to promote and recruit for an initial
British Blind Sport www.britishblindsport.org.uk	• Partnered with Fulham Reach to deliver an “open day” in December
VISTA www.vistablind.org.uk	• Partnered with Leicester to promote and recruit rowers for pilot

THIS EVALUATION

To evaluate the impact of the programme, and to ascertain the extent to which it achieved Love Rowing’s five objectives, Fitmedia visited the four clubs and spoke extensively to the rowers, clubs and coaches involved.

At the beginning of the programme, interviews were held with the rowers. These looked at the background of the rowers, their current lifestyles and their reasons for taking part. Interviews also took place with the clubs, to examine their methods of delivery and expectations for the programme.

As the sessions progressed, ongoing consultation was held with rowers and the clubs about their view of the programme, the delivery process, and the impact it was having.

Finally, once the sessions had been delivered, two series of questions were asked of the rowers and the club personnel.

The responses from individual rowers and club personnel were collated, analysed and broken down for this report. Copies of the questions asked and the responses received are available upon request.

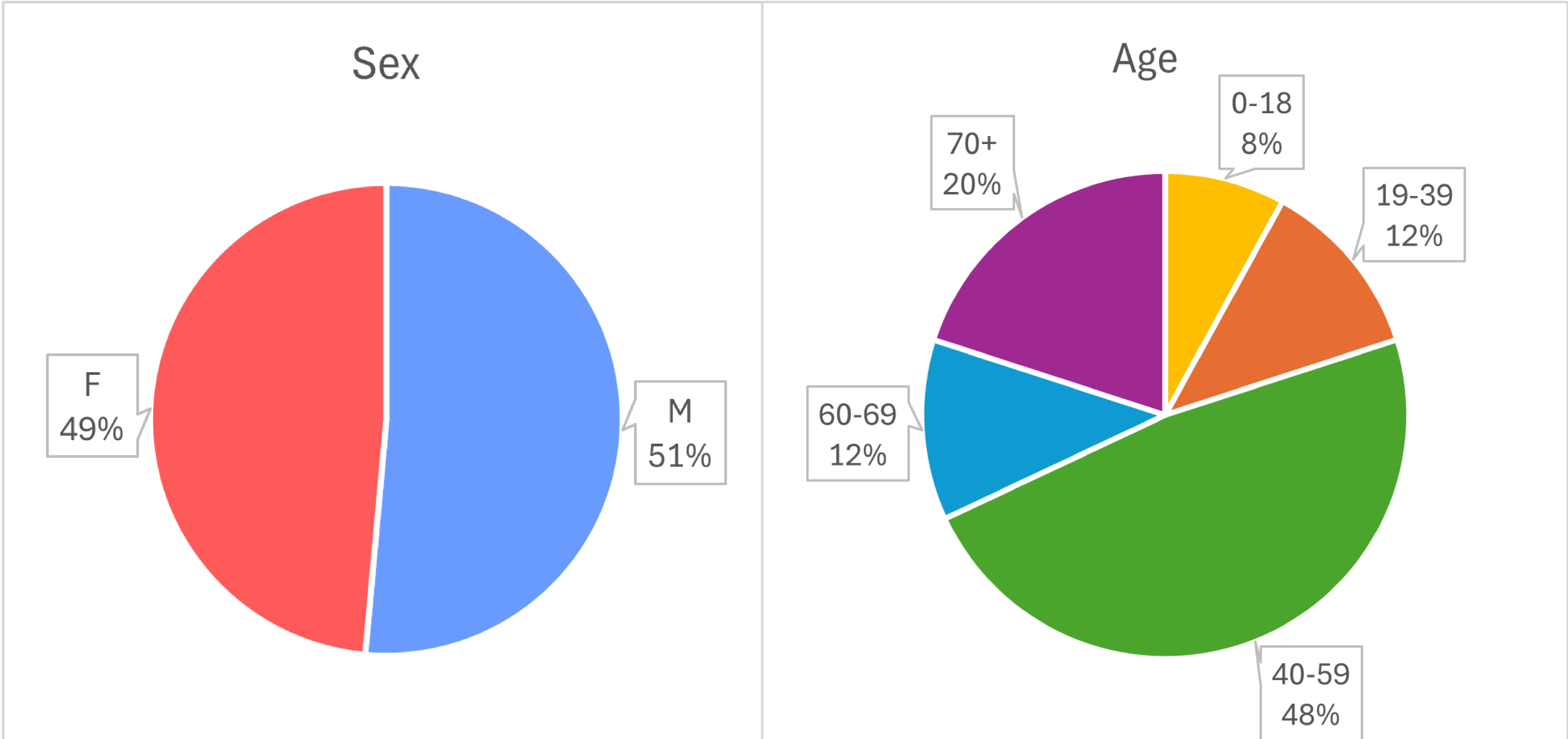
Four rowing clubs took part in the programme. The details of the clubs, their programme leads and their participant rowers are provided below:

Club	Location	Waterway	Programme Lead	Initial delivery period	Participant numbers and details
Hereford Rowing Club	Hereford, HR4 0BE	River Wye	Guy Williams Club Coach	Nov 24 – May 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male (4)• Female (3)• Age range: 18 – 58 years
Fulham Reach Boat Club	London, W6 9GX	River Thames	Julia Philipson Chief of Community Development	Feb 25 – May 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male (6)• Female (4)• Age range 28 – 64 years
Leicester Rowing Club	Leicester, LE2 7AU	Grand Union Canal, “Mile Straight”	Liz Pulford President	Jan 25 – Jun 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male (4)• Female (1)• Age range 13 – 52
Peterborough City Rowing Club	Peterborough PE3 6LN	Peterborough Rowing and Canoeing Course, River Nene	Kate Lindgren Club Member	March 2023 and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male (7)• Female (10)• Age range 55 – 80 years

Peterborough delivers the sessions on an ongoing basis. For the three new clubs (Leicester, Hereford and Fulham Reach), an initial schedule of sessions was mapped out. Some of these clubs have since been able to provide additional sessions outside of these schedules.

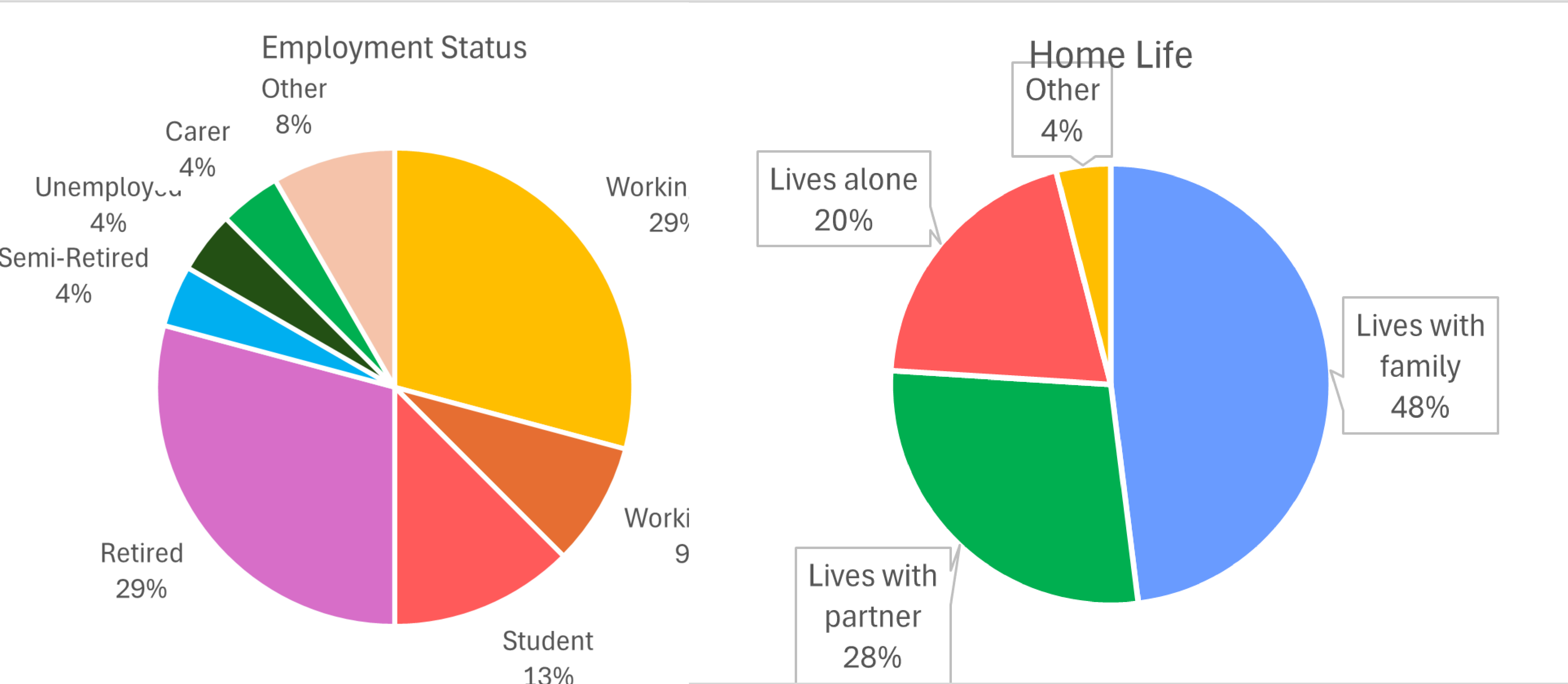
“It’s life changing.
Being with people with the opportunity to
do something amazing has given so many
people a new lease of life”

Information about the participating rowers was collected via a series of questions about their background. The following shows the sex and age of the participating rowers:



As can be seen, the programme was evenly split between the sexes, with only very slightly more men taking part. The majority of the rowers were in the 40–59 age range. A further 32% were above retirement age (60 and above).

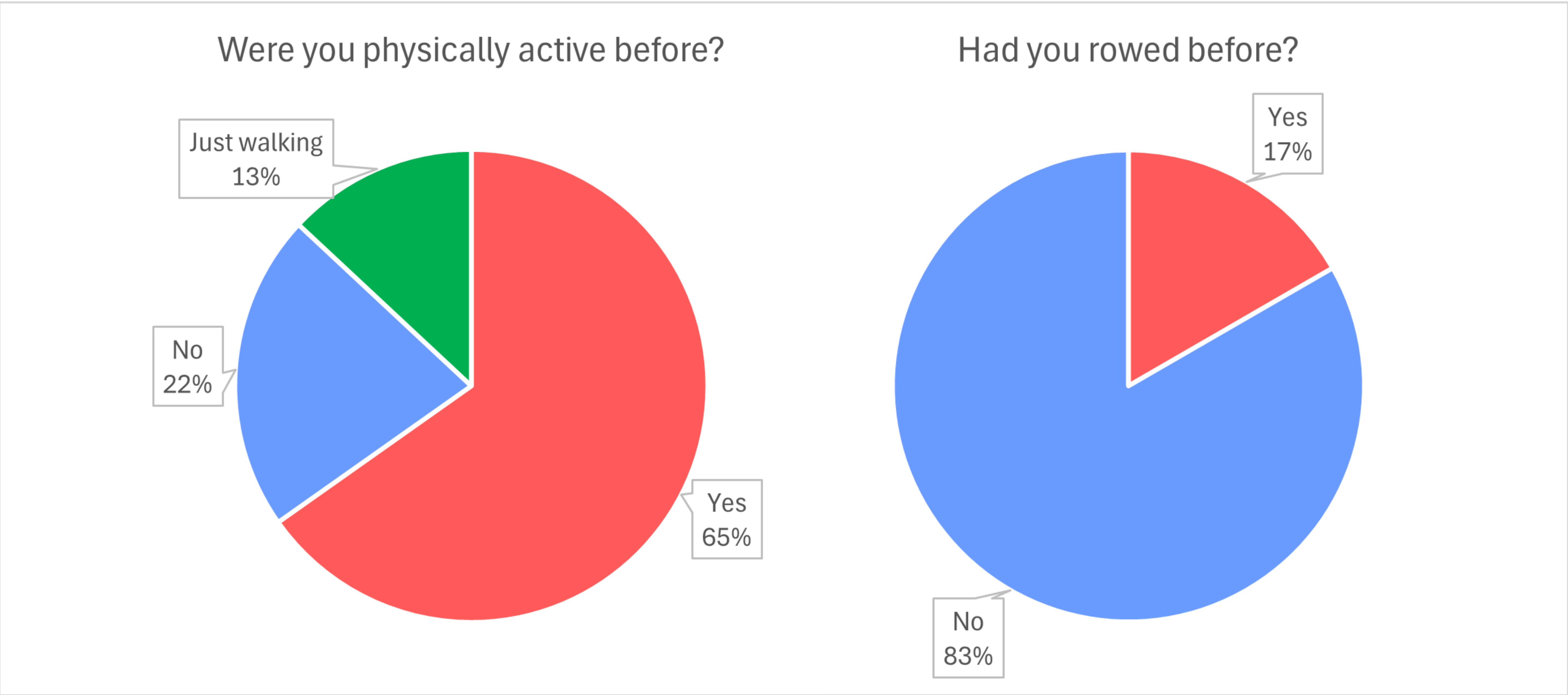
The following shows the living arrangements and employment status of the participating rowers. As can be seen, the largest groups were either working full-time or retired (including early retirement). In terms of home life, the majority of the rowers live with their family or with a partner, but at least a fifth live alone.



Rowers had a wide variance of conditions, which included:

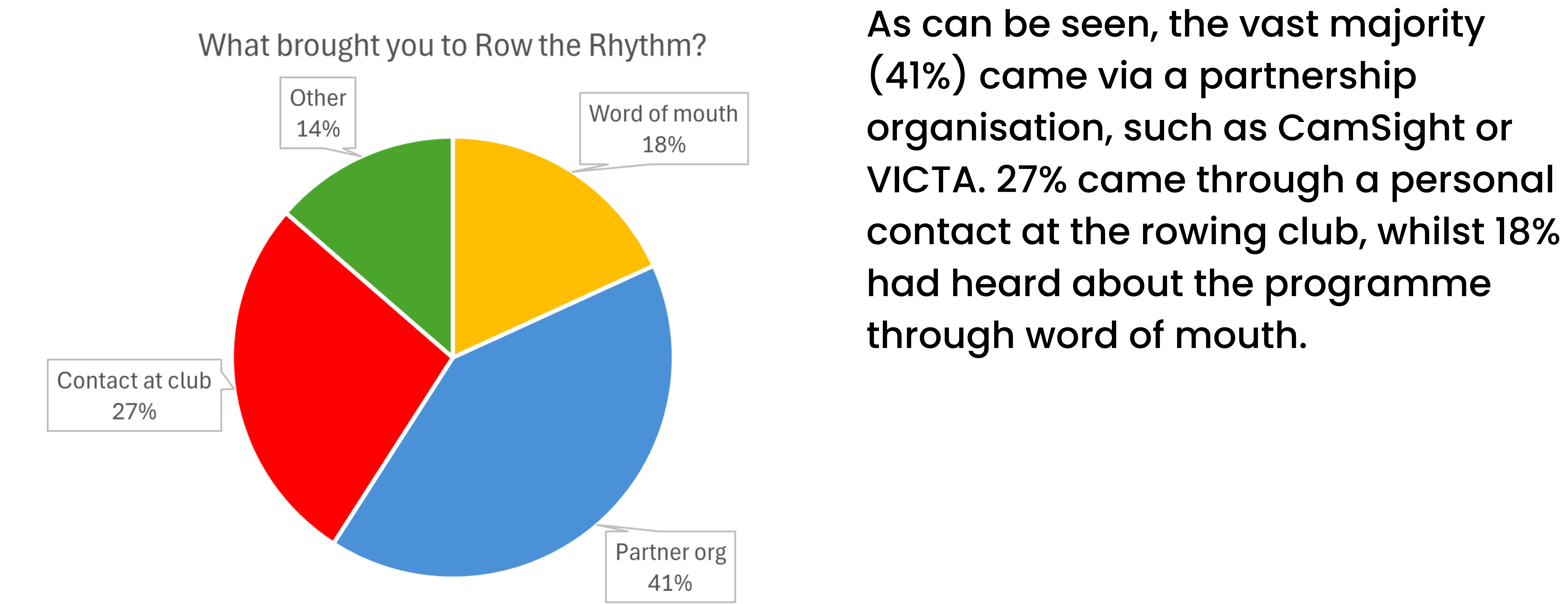
- Being blind since birth
- Retinitis Pigmentosa
- Optical conditions arising from Multiple Sclerosis
- Cone-rod dystrophy
- Cataracts
- Blepharospasm.

Rowers came to the programme with a variety of rowing and physical activity backgrounds:



As can be seen, 83% of the rowers had not rowed before, but 65% of them had been physically active in some way. 13% would not describe themselves as doing physical activity, but did make sure they walked when they could.

We asked the rowers what had brought them to the Row the Rhythm programme:



As can be seen, the vast majority (41%) came via a partnership organisation, such as CamSight or VICTA. 27% came through a personal contact at the rowing club, whilst 18% had heard about the programme through word of mouth.

Rowers were asked a series of questions about their impression of the programme, and how they felt it had impacted on their life. In total, 16 rowers and club personnel responded to the questions, as follows:

Club	Rower respondents	Club personnel respondents
Hereford Rowing Club	3	2
Fulham Reach Boat Club	6	3
Leicester Rowing Club	4	3
Peterborough City Rowing Club	8	2

The rowers were asked about their overall impressions of the project, as follows:

- How have you found the Row the Rhythm programme?
- What’s been the best thing about it for you?

The responses were overwhelmingly positive. These included comments such as:

- “I love it”
- “I have found it quite literally life changing! This is a sport which motivates me and I so look forward to taking part”
- “I look forward to coming every session”
- “I’d recommend it to everyone”

When asked what was the best part of the programme, there was a wide variety of answers. However, the following common themes emerged:

- Being on the water
- Being outside
- Feeling free
- Feeling close to nature.

A full list of the responses to both these questions is attached at Appendix E.

Mary, 59, became visually impaired after developing recurring bilateral dendritic ulcers with glaucoma and cataracts four years ago. Her loss of sight led to retirement after a 36 year career with the Ministry of Defence at the same time as the Covid pandemic began.

The pandemic lockdowns and Mary's sight loss contributed to a sense of social isolation and loss of personal identity. Camsight, a local visual impairment charity, suggested that Mary try the Row the Rhythm programme at Peterborough. In her first session she went out on the water and loved it. The sense of freedom, of peace, and of independence being in her own boat was transformative. She really enjoyed the physical movement of rowing and the achievement of making the boat move through the water.

She now regularly attends and is a full member of the club. She has bought her own indoor rowing machine which she uses at home and trains regularly. She has lost 2.5 stone, increased her lung capacity and improved her stamina. But she emphasizes that the impact is so much more than physical. The programme has given her a sense of purpose and improved her quality of life immensely **"like a light in a dark room"**.

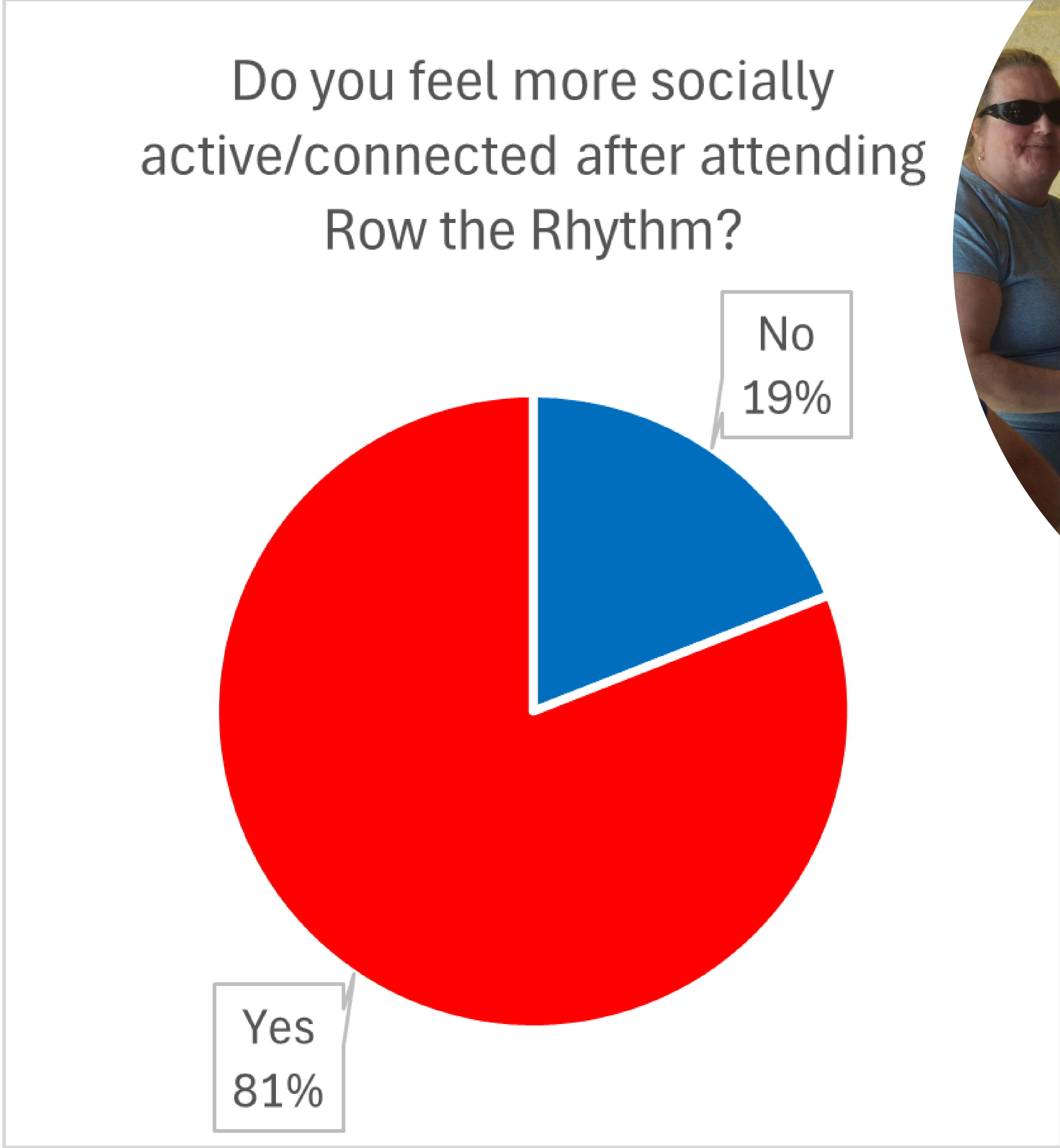
It has enabled her to meet other members of the VI community and share advice, ideas and inspiration. It has allowed her to push herself and see what is possible. And it has increased her personal confidence and sense of independence – she has recently taken her first solo holiday since being visually impaired and has now applied for a guide dog.

For Mary, the Row the Rhythm programme is a multi-layered product. Rowing is at its core, but the elements around it – social, community, club – provide a pathway that is emotionally, mentally and physically enriching for all members of the visually impaired community.



The rowers were then asked if they felt the programme had impacted them positively in the areas of social health, physical health, confidence, self-belief and quality of life. The answers are summarised below:

1 Do you feel more socially active/connected after attending the programme?
81% of respondents replied positively:



Many examples were also provided. Key themes which emerged were:

- Getting connection and support from talking to other visually impaired people about common concerns.
- Being able to talk to, and learn from, other visually impaired people about how to tackle every day issues.
- Having a regular social event they could look forward to (particularly for those whose living circumstances meant they were isolated).
- Getting inspiration from seeing what others could do.

Mark is a Row the Rhythm participant at Leicester Rowing Club.

Mark, 51, went blind overnight following a life changing incident 14 years ago. From working full time, driving all over the UK, he was unable to work. Life changed and normal pursuits ceased, including football, badminton, and coaching his daughters' football team. He was able to go to the gym, but found himself increasingly inactive and alone at home.

He heard about the Row the Rhythm programme through one of the club rowers, who works with Mark's girlfriend. After only one session, he loved it – he described himself as "buzzing" after he came off the water. He now attends regularly and rows in both double and quad sculls.

The appeal goes beyond the rowing itself. It has enabled him to meet new people and be part of a new community. Never one to back down from a challenge, he has loved mastering a different activity and the sense of achievement it gives him.

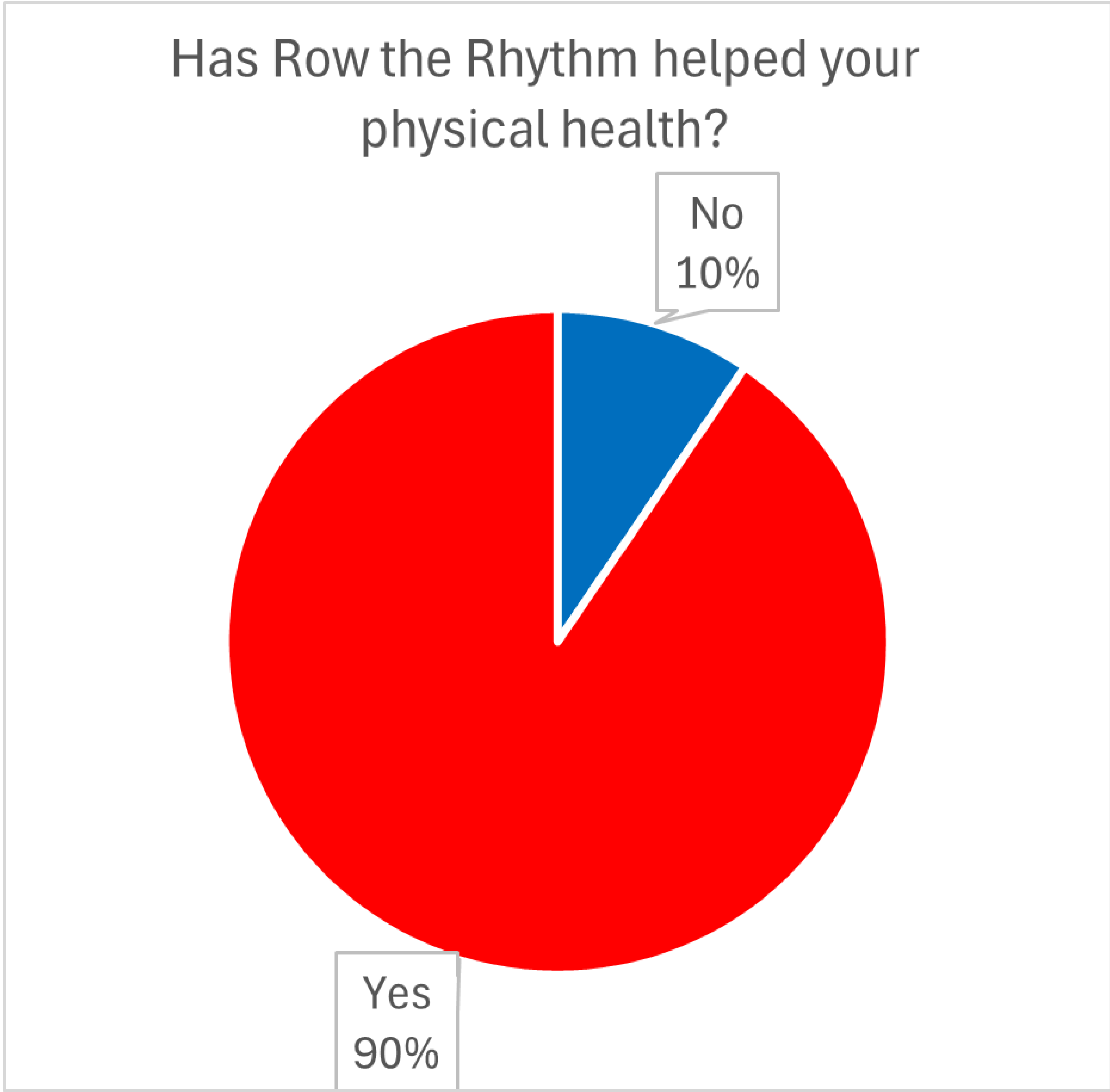
Rowing has provided Mark with a new sense of purpose, as well as increasing his confidence in his own ability to be active and independent. He has now applied for a guide dog and is hoping to return to work. He would like to work with children with visual impairments to help them live active lives and fulfil their potential.



2

Do you think the programme has helped your physical health?

90% of respondents replied positively:



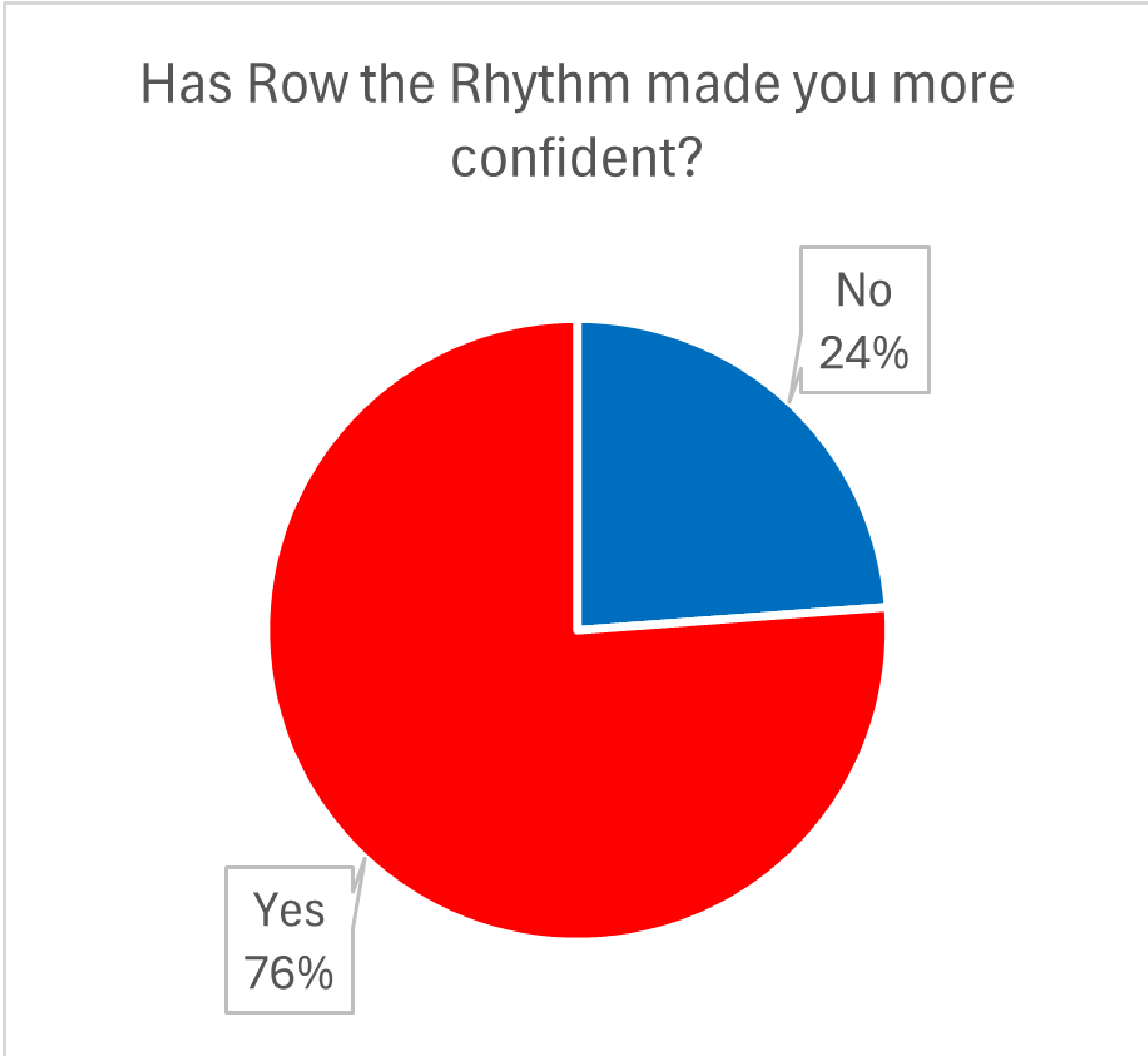
Common themes in the responses were as follows:

- Increases in strength and overall fitness
- Increases in endurance and stamina
- The opportunity to do a new and different form of exercise
- Being inspired to take up further new forms of movement.

3

Has the programme made you more confident in your everyday life?

76% of respondents replied positively:



Many examples were also provided. Common themes in the responses were as follows:

- Being encouraged to try new things in their daily lives (eg taking public transport, walking alone)
- Feeling inspired to take larger steps to assist their lifestyle (eg applying for a guide dog)
- Taking on larger challenges (eg holidaying or travelling alone)
- Feeling encouraged to find different ways of tackling problems.

Elizabeth is a Row the Rhythm participant at Peterborough City Rowing Club.

Elizabeth, 70, became visually impaired after developing Stargardt's disease about three years ago. After attending RNIB courses, CAMSIGHT suggested she try rowing at Peterborough.

She had always liked the idea of rowing and attended her first session in April 2024. She enjoyed it immediately – She found the club welcoming and encouraging and loved going out on the water, hearing the blades and feeling the movement of the boat.

She now attends regularly and has a full time membership of the club funded by Love Rowing's Row the Rhythm bursary scheme. She rows in a quad sculls and has rowed Eton Dorney's Olympic lake in a single scull.

She describes the programme as "life changing", restoring her sense of identity and purpose. The confidence she has gained from the programme has encouraged her to join a local gym and improve her fitness, and she is now looking forward to finding her next challenge.

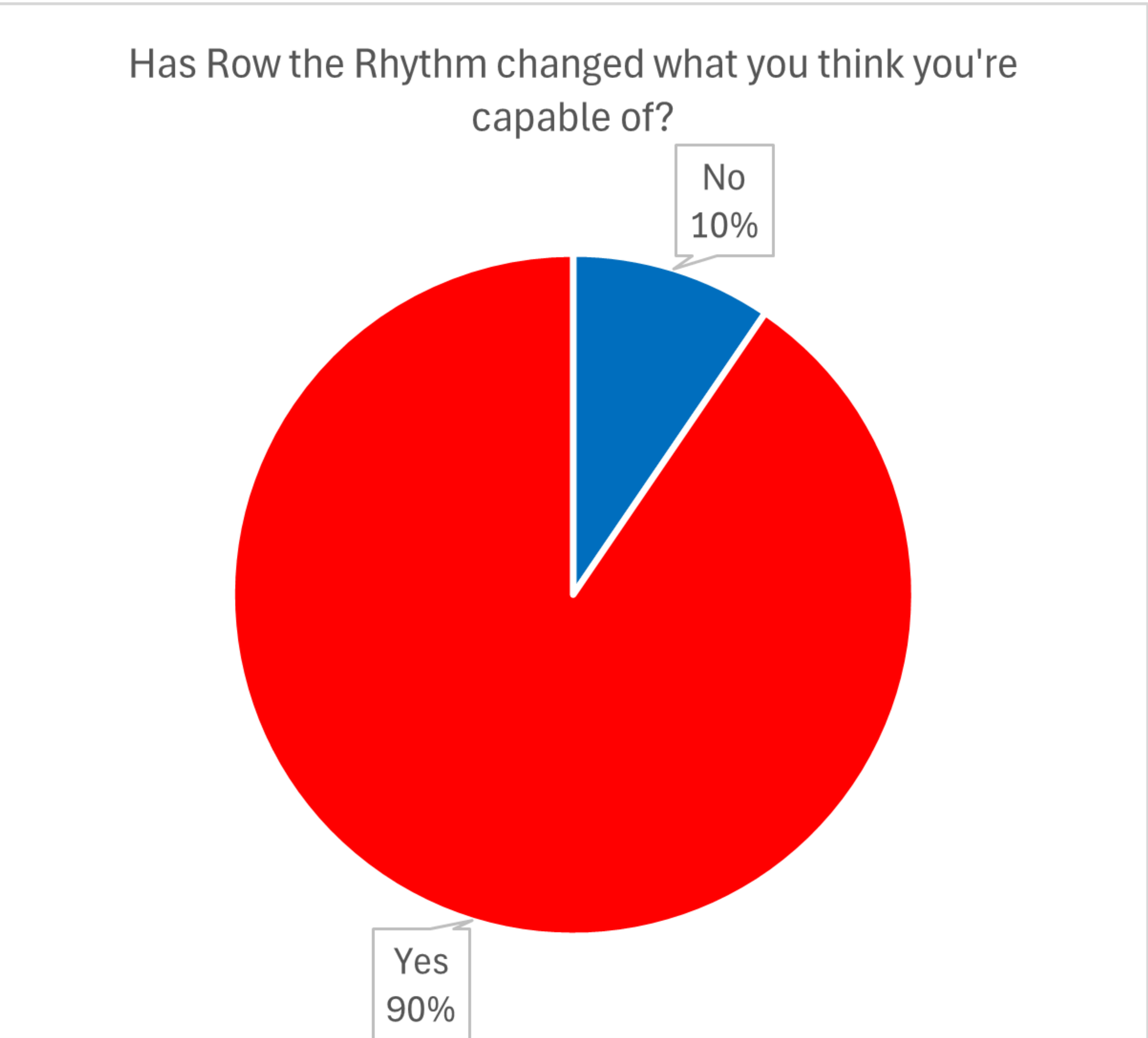


4

Has the programme changed how you see yourself and what you think you're capable of?

90% of respondents replied positively:

Many examples were also provided. Common themes in the responses were as follows:



- Feeling more able to do the things they want to do
- Gaining confidence that they can overcome some of the hurdles in society linked to being visually impaired
- Realising that things are possible, despite being visually impaired
- Gaining ideas and problem solving techniques from other rowers.

“When I became visually impaired, I felt that with my blindness, the part of my life that was about trying anything, was over.

Row the Rhythm has helped demonstrate that anything is possible”

John is a Row the Rhythm participant at Peterborough City Rowing Club.

John, 72, became visually impaired after blood clots developed behind his eyes which starved his optic nerves of oxygen. A very keen runner and swimmer, he was struggling to adjust to his sight loss when Camsight suggested he try the Row the Rhythm programme at Peterborough.

He visited the club and met Kate Lindgren who persuaded him to try it out in January 2025. Initially very nervous, Pete and Kate coaxed him on the water in his first session and John really enjoyed it.



He now attends regularly where he receives coaching from Pete Forrest and the other volunteers. His rowing ability and confidence are increasing each session and he loves the opportunity to be in the open air and feel the wind off the water. More than that, the programme has given John the opportunity to be within a community of others who understand what it is to be visually impaired, but who also want to be active. They have provided advice, support and friendship as he adjusts to his blindness, and he has been able to gain confidence and inspiration from others as he sees what is possible.



It has provided him with a sense of achievement, as he overcomes the double challenge of overcoming blindness and learning to row. The support from the programme has given him hope for the future and given him back some independence.

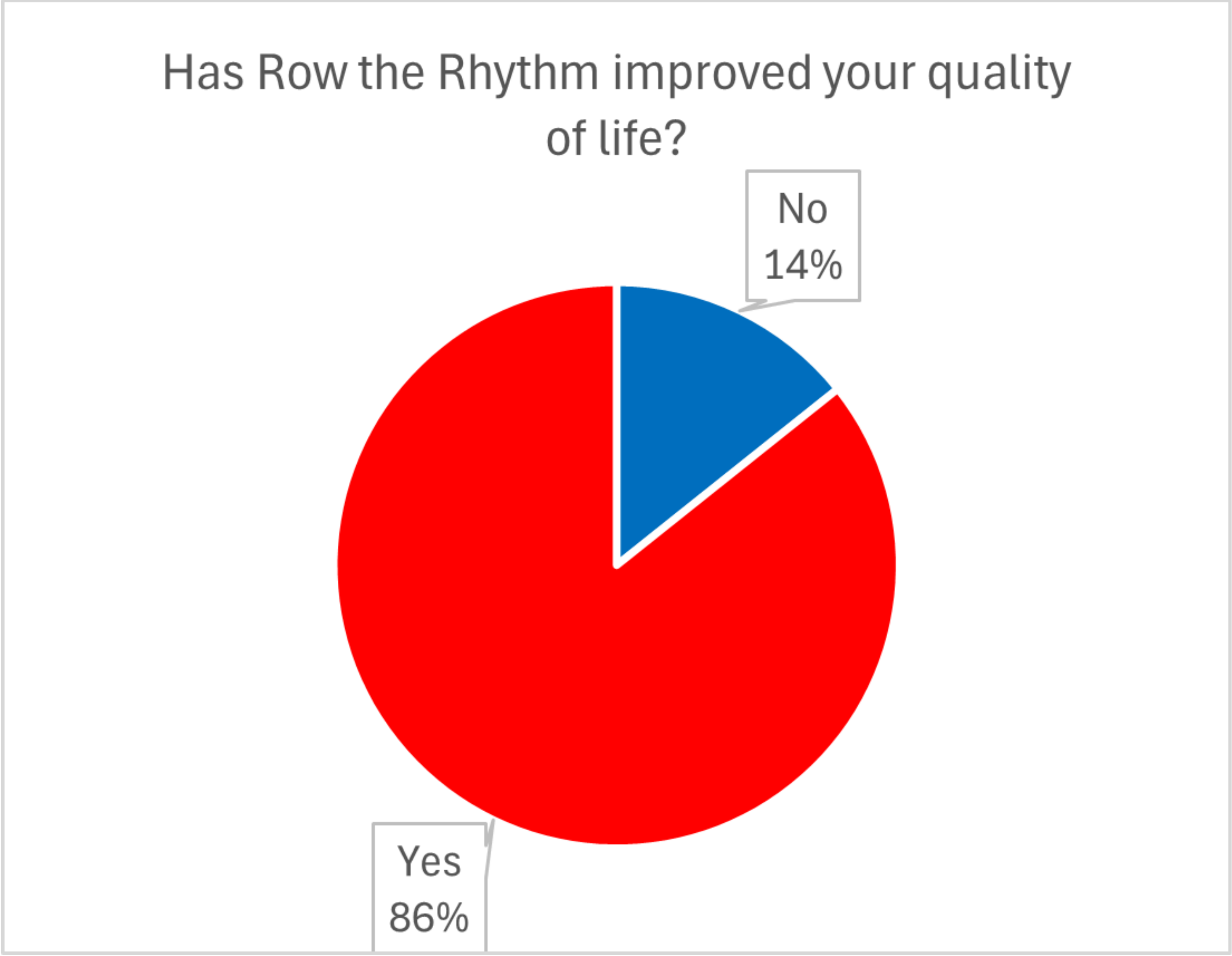
5

Do you think the programme has improved your quality of life?

86% of respondents replied positively:

Many examples were provided. Common themes in the responses were as follows:

- Adding another layer and interest to life
- Giving hope for the future
- Providing a focus and purpose
- Giving themselves a break from everyday life.
- Allowing them to do something independently.



Jaina is a Row the Rhythm participant at Leicester Rowing Club.

Jaina, 41, became visually impaired at 17. She fell ill with Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis, after an unexpected allergic reaction to penicillin, and lost her sight in both eyes within 12 months.

After attending the RNIB, she graduated with a degree in complementary therapies and became determined to understand and promote healthy lifestyles and activities. She became the UK's first blind female fitness instructor and public speaker and now works in fitness and nutrition management.



Jaina discovered the Row the Rhythm programme in January 2025 through a friend at Love Rowing and, always keen to explore new things, went for her first session at Leicester Rowing Club. She immediately loved being on the water, listening to the sound of the river and being part of a team.

She now attends regularly at the club and would like to become a member in the long term. Rowing has given her a new form of physical activity which has challenged her and improved her fitness in new ways. It has also provided the opportunity to meet others from the visually impaired community, to share concerns, ideas and support. And it has inspired her to try new challenges – including relearning how to swim!

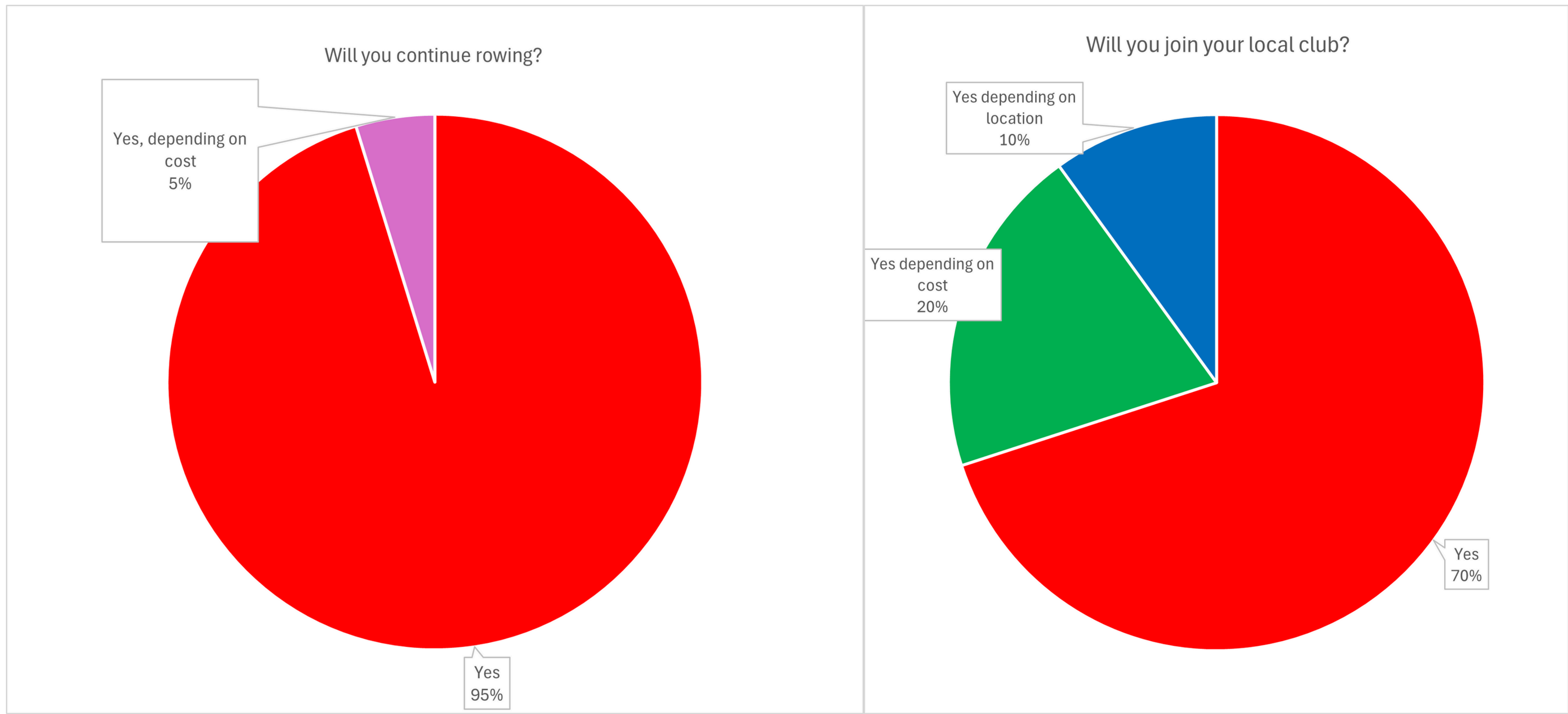


Finally, rowers were asked the following questions about their future in rowing:

Will you continue rowing?

Would you like to join your local rowing club?

The rowers responded very positively:



As can be seen, 95% said they would like to continue rowing. Only 5% hesitated, indicating it would depend on the cost. 70% said they would like to join their Row the Rhythm club. Of the remaining 30%, 20% said cost would be a key factor, and 10% said location was a factor.

These findings reflect the experience at Peterborough, who had received funding from Love Rowing, through an additional grant from the Boost Charitable Trust, to help some of their Row the Rhythm rowers become full time members of the club. The grant funded bursaries to cover the members’ first year subscriptions. Several of the Peterborough rowers mentioned that these bursaries had made a huge difference in facilitating their membership. We discuss further in the “Recommendations” section later in this report.



leaders and coaches from each of the four participating clubs were asked a number of questions about how they felt the programme had impacted on the club, the lessons and best practices learnt and their future intentions with the programme. These are summarised the responses below:

All four clubs were asked if they felt the programme had had a positive impact on the club. All four clubs responded with highly positive answers. They indicated that the programme had been positive in a number of different ways, as follows:



1) Inclusivity

All the clubs said the programme had made them more inclusive. It allowed them to show that inclusivity can work on a practical, rather than an aspirational basis. This extended not only to the Row the Rhythm coaches and volunteers, but also to the existing membership, who became more aware of the visually impaired community; and to the clubs' other stakeholders.

In particular, Peterborough is now a centre of excellence in the area.

2) Coaching

A common theme was how much it had improved coaching skills. Without the ability to demonstrate visually, it made the coaches think more thoroughly about how to explain things and get ideas across. In addition, it taught the coaches to adapt to individual needs on a one to one basis, as well as letting the rower "lead" the sessions, which is key for visually impaired and disabled people.

3) Awareness

A common theme was how it had increased awareness among the wider community, both in and outside rowing, of their work both with visually impaired and mainstream rowers. This gave them a sense of pride as a club and allowed them to deepen those relationships, as well as with other stakeholders.

Finally, the clubs were asked a number of questions about the process of running the programme. These were aimed at learning from their experience and putting together a “toolkit” of best practice and expertise, for use by new clubs in the future. The questions and a summary of the answers are provided below:

What is the main thing you wish you had known before you started the programme?

Common themes across all the clubs were as follows:

How enjoyable the programme could be – all the feedback from the clubs indicated that the coaches really enjoyed their work with visually impaired people and found it extremely rewarding, with a level of pride much deeper than with mainstream rowing. This enjoyment was a key aspect in making the clubs want to continue.

How much time would be required – the initial phase of starting a Row the Rhythm from scratch involved a number of areas, including finding participants, recruiting volunteers, training coaches and volunteers and ensuring safety procedures and equipment were in place.

The session delivery required preparation for coaches and volunteers, feedback & evaluation with rowers, as well as refreshments and debrief opportunities.

Ancillary work included ongoing communication with participants and volunteers for each session, and coordinating press coverage and funder/stakeholder visits.

What changes were necessary to make the club accessible – some smaller clubs may lack full accessibility for visually impaired people. Small practical touches such as highlighted steps and platform edges, clearly marked doors and routes and guide dog friendly areas, made a huge difference to how easy a club is for a visually impaired person to navigate.



What was the most difficult part about delivering the programme?

The three key themes from all the clubs were as follows:

Resourcing – As stated, the programme is resource heavy, particularly across the following areas:

- Recruiting volunteers (all the clubs estimated that the programme needs approximately two volunteers to one rower).
- Organising and managing volunteers.
- Arranging volunteers for ancillary, non-rowing tasks (eg transport).
- Creating space in the existing rowing schedule.

Coaching people with different visual impairments and aptitudes – All the clubs had a wide range of participants, varying in age, visual impairments, experience in rowing, and levels of physical fitness and coordination.

At the same time, rowers came for different reasons, varying from trying something new, to wanting a challenge, to wanting to learn or relearn how to row. This meant the clubs had to cater to a wide variety of abilities and motivations, often in the same session or in the same boat (eg in a quad sculls) which could be challenging.

Managing rowers' expectations – Most rowers were keen to learn and eager to get on the water as soon and as often as possible. However, it was necessary to balance that with:

- the challenges of being in an open and weather dependent environment, particularly a strong and crowded tidal river like the Thames;
- the extent to which they had the skills and techniques to safely do so (particularly in areas such as getting in and out of the boat, and walking to the waterside);
- understanding that people learn at different speeds, and making sure that people who are grouped together (eg in a quad sculls) are at the same skill and capacity level;
- avoiding or allaying frustrations for rowers who need to learn at a slower pace.

“As a coach, it's been amazing to get feedback like 'Today I lived a lifelong dream, something I didn't think would happen' ”

The clubs were asked if they would like to continue to run the programme. All four clubs said they would definitely do it again.

Key influences on this decision were:

- How much they had enjoyed delivering the sessions.
- The sense of reward they got in helping visually impaired people do something they would not have thought possible.
- The sense of pride they felt in doing so.
- How much it had grown their community.



As independent evaluators, we have been extremely impressed by this programme and would commend it highly.

The initial objectives of the programme were to introduce rowing to the visually impaired community as an inclusive sport, and to use rowing as a means to reduce social isolation of those with visual impairments. Interviews with the rowers showed that the programme has more than succeeded in these aims. However, the programme also went beyond this, succeeding in a variety of other (and often unexpected) areas. We highlight these below:

Suitability of rowing as an activity for people with a visual impairment

The programme has shown that rowing is a highly appealing and safe sport for visually impaired people. Many of the rowers interviewed said they felt initially nervous, particularly in relation to being on the water, but their experience was hugely positive. This was for many reasons, including:

Safety – many rowers spoke about how safe they felt on the water, with the stability of the boat and the space around them giving them a sense of security they do not find in everyday life. Initial concerns over such things as capsizing or falling in the water were quickly overcome, through the care and guidance of the coaches, or the use of modified equipment (such as “floaters” on the boats to stop them rocking or overturning).

This sense of being “safe but free” was a common theme among the rowers and contrasted with how uncomfortable or unsafe they felt whilst trying other sports, such as blind tennis or guided running. Some said they felt more stable on a boat than when walking around.

Autonomy – one common theme was how rowing made the rowers feel independent – whether through being alone in their own boat, or being able to set the pace, or not having to rely on others. Emotionally, this had a huge impact on many rowers, particularly those who were still struggling with everyday life after recently losing their sight. It provided them with a boost to their confidence and also to their overall self-esteem, often inspiring them to try new things in other areas of their life.



Pacing – rowing is highly suitable for VI people because it allows the rower to focus solely on their own actions. Other mainstream sports such as ball sports, racket sports, or combat sports are what we would call “interactive”, requiring constant attention and reaction to what your opponent is doing (eg with a ball or with their body). For obvious reasons, this can be extremely difficult and or stressful for VI people.

We would categorize rowing as a “centred” sport, where there is no interaction with an opponent and the participant can focus solely on perfecting techniques and skills to get optimum performance. On the water, this allows them to go at their own pace, developing their skills and selecting their training objectives based on their own comfort level.

Tranquility – Many of the rowers commented on the peace and calmness of being on the water, which was extremely appealing to them. Being visually impaired, multiple or frequent sources of noise, from other people or the built environment, can be disorientating, so the peace of being on the water made them feel more comfortable and able to focus more on the activity. Extra equipment (eg via the Bluetooth coaching headset) allows them to be coached and guided, but without being overwhelming or confusing.

Variety of appeal

One of the significant aspects of the programme was the variety in demographics of the participants. As noted a broadly even number of men and women took part. There was a wide variety of age groups, visual impairments, physical abilities, and background in rowing and other sports. The programme was able to appeal to all of these demographics for different reasons.

For example, for those older and retired rowers, or those living alone, it provided regular and supportive social connection, as well as the chance to be physically active.

For younger rowers, or those already active, it provided the chance to renew their rowing career or try a new challenge.

For some of the participants who were struggling to adjust to their sight loss, it gave them the chance to build confidence and find a renewed sense of direction and confidence.

For all participants, it provided a safe and communal way to be physically active, in nature, in an environment where they can build long term social and community relationships.

We were impressed with how easily the programme can be delivered by the clubs. The programme has shown that very little extra equipment is required for visually impaired as opposed to adaptive rowing. The programme can be delivered using equipment used by existing “Learn to Row” programmes. However, small refinements to existing equipment did seem to make a big difference.

The equipment which we saw that made biggest difference was as follows:

Bluetooth coaching headset – this is a headset worn by the rower in the boat and attached via Bluetooth to a microphone held by the coach on land. It allows the coach to speak directly to the rower, even at a distance, with the same sound quality as if they were in the boat together. It means the coach can provide directions, guidance and coaching without needing a tannoy (which can be confusing with other rowers around) or needing to be on a boat next to them.

PM5 Performance Monitor – this is a small display screen attached to a rowing machine which shows the rower a wide range of data as they row, including pace, stroke rate and calories burnt. The PM5 has software to link to the rowers’ phone via Bluetooth which enables audio feedback, so the rower can hear the data if they cannot read the screen.

At the same time, no special coaching qualifications or learning was required – all the sessions were delivered by mainstream coaches, using training from VICTA, advice and mentoring from Kate Lindgren and Peter Forrest and ongoing input from the rowers themselves.

This makes it feasible for the programme to be delivered by other clubs, with very little requirement in terms of club size, water type or location.



One of the key aims of the programme was to reduce social isolation for individuals with a visual impairment. The programme more than succeeded in this aim; what was especially significant was the depth, as well as the breadth, of connections made.

A frequent theme in the questionnaire responses was how much support and inspiration rowers had obtained from getting to know other visually impaired people. It had provided a community and network through which rowers learnt from and supported each other with everyday issues; such as advice on transport, guide dogs, or receiving support. Several of the groups set up WhatsApp groups through which they stayed in contact outside rowing, and formed ongoing friendships.



Finally, it enabled rowers to increase their confidence and change their perception of what they thought they were capable of. This allowed them to do more and expand their life beyond perceived existing limitations, providing them with hope and a greater quality of life.

Sustainability for Clubs

As stated, 95% of the rowers interviewed said they would like to continue rowing and 70% said they would join their local club. This clearly provides an additional source of membership and revenue for the clubs from a demographic not previously considered.

In addition, it ensures use of the club at times which would otherwise be quiet. For obvious reasons, the programme rowers took part during what would be seen as “off peak” times for the club – avoiding evenings and weekends, where there are lots of other mainstream rowers using the facilities. For example, Peterborough, Fulham Reach and Leicester run sessions during weekday mornings or afternoons. This not only allows for a quieter and less busy environment for the visually impaired rowers, but ensures the club is in use at times when otherwise it would be unused.

In addition to the above, there were several aspects which we had not expected:

1) Speed of growth

For two of the clubs (Leicester and Hereford), the numbers on the programme doubled within a few weeks. Leicester began with two rowers but ended with five; Hereford began with four but ended with seven.

The closeness of the visually impaired community, particularly in those areas, meant that word of mouth and referrals from other organisations that support visually impaired people were able to spread quickly. This speed of growth could have a significant impact on the long term sustainability of the programme.

2) Enjoyment for the clubs

The feedback from the clubs was immensely positive – as stated above, all four of the clubs said they would do it again without hesitation. Interestingly, a common theme for the clubs commented on how much they had enjoyed it. Club feedback showed they had found it immensely rewarding, particularly in terms of the impact it made on the rowers. This seemed to more than make up for the extra work in resourcing that it involved.



3) Networking effects

As stated in the previous section, partnerships with existing visually impairment focused community and sporting organizations were extremely important in recruiting rowers. What surprised us was the breadth of that cooperation in the sports sector (not known for its collaboration). Several rowers were referred to the programme by other visual impairment or disability sports organizations such as Sailability. Overall, 42% of the rowers were signposted to the programme by partner organisations.

Row the Rhythm were then able to refer rowers to those organisations in turn. Such networking effects can help the expansion and sustainability of the programme in the long term so we would strongly encourage more partnerships in this area. These could go beyond the sports sector: one rower who is an ex-serviceman and a Victus Games competitor said he would recommend the programme to Blind Veterans UK. This kind of partnership could expand its geographical and demographic reach.

4) Impact on coaches

One of the common themes from our interviews with the clubs was how much the programme had improved their coaches' skills. All the clubs commented that working with visually impaired people had made the coaches better in a variety of ways.

These included:

- increasing their ability to work one-on-one;
- understanding how to let the rower lead the session;
- finding different, non-visual ways to describe and demonstrate technique.

This improvement had been noticed across the club personnel, not simply within the coaching staff.



We have been extremely impressed, not just by the impact of the programme, but also how well it has been organised and delivered. This has been primarily due to:

- the initiative of Love Rowing in designing, managing and facilitating the programme
- the funds raised by Love Rowing to enable the programme
- the commitment of clubs and the dedication of their personnel
- the speed with which their coaches adapted to working with visually impaired people (particularly impressive given that few had any experience in this area)
- the ongoing support and availability of the Love Rowing team
- the support the clubs have given each other, particularly the mentorship and direction provided by Kate Lindgren and Peter Forrest from Peterborough City Rowing Club.

We would strongly recommend that the programme continues.

The impact statistics across all five key areas – **social connection, physical health, confidence, self-esteem and quality of life** – show in themselves the importance of the project on its rowers. This is further supported by their personal testimonies, shown in Appendices D and E, which illustrate vividly the differences at a personal level which the programme has made.

In addition, the fact that 95% of the rowers said they want to continue rowing, and 70% said they wanted to become club members, show there is ongoing demand for both the programme, and for Love Rowing's Row the Rhythm's bursary membership scheme. This would also indicate, from an NGB perspective, that Row the Rhythm can expand the reach of rowing to previously unrecognised demographics.

The Future

We are aware that Love Rowing is keen to expand the programme further, by both widening and deepening its reach, and hope this evaluation report supports their goal. At local level, for Leicester, Hereford and Fulham Reach, this means continuing the programme, and incorporating it more deeply within the clubs, such that the Row the Rhythm rowers become as much a part of the club as the mainstream rowers. The model for this is Peterborough, who have now been running sessions for visually impaired people in some form for seven years.

At national level, Love Rowing would like to widen the programme by creating Row the Rhythm clubs throughout the UK. As at the date of this report (July 2025), seven clubs in various regions of the UK have already expressed an interest in taking part for a 2025/26 programme.

“Row the Rhythm is now just a normal part of club life. The club knows when the sessions are and when the Row the Rhythm rowers come in. They are treated like part of the club.”

What is needed

To support these aims, we would make the following recommendations for the ongoing and future programmes:

1) Transport costs

The current programme provides funding for transport costs for those rowers who require it. Many of those we spoke to specifically mentioned this as a huge part of the reason they were able to attend. The rowers face various transport issues, including:

- Living alone in rural areas, with very little public transport, so requiring taxis to get to the club
- Visual impairment conditions making it impossible to use public transport
- Living far away from the club and requiring extensive travel to reach it.

At the same time, cost of living issues are highly relevant for visually people. Several said they would not have been able to attend the sessions without the funding provided by Love Rowing for the transport costs. We would therefore recommend continuing this facility for those rowers who need it.

Interestingly, one of the impacts on the rowers was increasing their confidence and practical skills. As stated above, a number mentioned that taking part in rowing had made them feel more confident in a number of everyday areas, such as walking alone in a public place or getting on a bus. Some mentioned to us that they were hoping to get to a stage where they would not need a taxi to get to their club, and would be able to do so alone.

The initial transport funding may therefore go beyond merely enabling the rowers to take part, to facilitating their long term independence.

2) Liaison with other visually impairment specific and disability organisations

As stated the programme worked with a number of local and national organisations. These were very helpful in promoting and signposting the scheme to visually people in their area. We would recommend continuing and deepening those relationships so that a long term pathway can be built between the visually impaired and the rowing communities.

3) Continued liaison between clubs

One of the most impactful parts of the programme was facilitating clubs new to the programme to visit Peterborough City Rowing Club and talk directly to Kate Lindgren and Peter Forrest about the programme, how it could be delivered, and the issues arising.

Enabling the clubs to liaise with each other was really helpful. Clubs were able to provide guidance, suggest ideas and even lend equipment. For example, Peterborough lent a single scull to Leicester when they began the programme to help their visually impaired beginners get on the water.



4) Eton Dorney Row the Rhythm Day

In April 2025, Peterborough City Rowing Club arranged a day's rowing for six VI rowers at Dorney Lake, Eton. This is a purpose built, 2.2km rowing lake, owned by Eton College, which was also the venue for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics flat water rowing and canoeing events. The rowers spent a day at the lake with their coaches and volunteers, rowed the lake and had lunch at the management offices.

The day was a hugely positive experience. For the rowers, it provided them with the experience and confidence of rowing in a new location. Additionally, the opportunity to row at one of the world's most famous Olympic courses, among other elite and mainstream rowers, reinforced their self-perception as regular rowers, on an equal footing with others in the sport. For the coaches and volunteers, it provided an opportunity to visit or revisit one of the country's best rowing courses. For all, it provided a focus for their training and rowing activities.

The management staff at the lake could not have been more supportive and have already indicated that they would be happy for Row the Rhythm to return.

We would recommend that all the clubs on the programme consider this as an option for those of their visually impaired rowers who they think would benefit and enjoy it. Furthermore, arranging a day for all the clubs to attend would also enable further cooperation between them.

5) Membership Bursaries

As stated, Peterborough received additional funding for selected rowers to obtain full membership of the club through a bursary scheme. This enabled them to transition into independent members of the club, able to row at their convenience and independent of the Row the Rhythm programme sessions.

Those rowers were extremely grateful for the bursaries and for some it enabled membership which otherwise might have been financially difficult. We would recommend that this scheme is expanded to all the clubs on the programme, to provide the rowers with a pathway into rowing long term and to help the sustainability of the programme for the clubs.



Consultation with clubs and rowers showed that the four clubs each delivered the programme in their own way; however, there were a number of practical areas and lessons which were common to all. We have highlighted them here as a guide for future clubs wanting to join the programme.

“Get your club leadership involved from the beginning”

This should include the leadership and the committee. This builds awareness, support and assistance within the club and means that all the club resources are available and the programme leader has a team behind them.

“Start small”

As stated above, beginning a Row the Rhythm programme is heavily resource and time intensive. All the clubs spoke of the advantages of “starting small” with four or fewer rowers. This allows the club, its volunteers, its coaches and the rowers themselves to familiarise themselves with the process, to recruit long term volunteers and coaches and to understand what works and what is required. Once established, the club can then look to expand.

“Allow more time than you think”

This advice was given as applying across every level of the programme:

- **Programme set up** – it will take longer than expected to get the support of the club leadership, recruit volunteers, find coaches, market the scheme and recruit rowers
- **Session times** – the sessions themselves will take longer than mainstream coaching sessions, as rowers familiarise themselves with the environment, the activities and the logistics around the sessions. During the sessions, it is vital to be led by the rower, and to go at their pace. This may be slower than coaches are used to, so more time should be allowed for and around each session
- **Ongoing admin** – because the programme is resource heavy, finding, organising and managing volunteers – whether coaches, guiders, rowers or just helpers – is very labour intensive. On an ongoing basis, more time will be needed for this kind of administration than expected.

“Allow for at least two volunteers for each VI rower”

This was a common conclusion across all four clubs. This was particularly vital where the rower has less experience, as it allows them to have both a coach and a support rower (for example in a double or a quad). Working on the basis of this ratio will allow clubs to assess if it is feasible for them to deliver every session.

“Get some training for your personnel before the first session”

Some of the clubs were able to undergo some training with the visually impaired specialist partner organisations before they had their first session. This helped the volunteers prepare for what they would need and made them aware of issues that might have otherwise escaped them.

This training can range from the basics, such as how to guide a person safely, to how to make environments more accessible, to more advanced levels, such as understanding the psychological impact of sight loss. Club feedback indicated that even the smallest amount of training was very helpful to coaches and volunteers, the majority of whom had never worked with visually impaired people before.

“Get to know your rowers before the first session”

As stated, this programme showed that within the rowers there was a huge range of ages, visual impairments, experience in rowing, and physical fitness and ability. At the same time, rowers had different aims in taking part and different expectations. Managing that range in one session – or even one boat – was a challenge for the clubs on occasion.

Getting to know each rower before their first session at the club – for example, through an introductory telephone call beforehand – can enable the club to get a profile of everyone involved and what their expectations are.

This can help the club know what they can expect when the sessions begin. It can also help them to provide the right experience for each individual – for example, by grouping similar rowers together, or matching rowers with volunteers based on their aims.

This will also help ease the apprehension of rowers coming the club for the first time – rather than arriving with no knowledge of the people or the programme, the rowers can feel comfortable knowing they have spoken to an individual who knows who they are, who can greet them on the day and who can guide them through their introduction



“Introduce the language of rowing”

Rowing is considered a highly technical sport, requiring a precise series of movements, coordination between the body, the blades and the boat, synchronisation with other rowers and constant adjustments in motion. The terminology relating to the sport is unique and specialised, with terms such as “catch” “finish”, “strokeside” and “feathering”.

83% of those on the programme had never rowed before so such terminology is alien to them. Without the ability to visually demonstrate what these words mean, it is vital to explain these terms early on, so that rowers can understand their use in a coaching situation.

“Get on the water as soon as possible”

Most rowers, whilst nervous, are keen to experience being on the water. Letting them do so as soon as they are ready is both rewarding and enjoyable for them, and can help increase their confidence, whilst inspiring them to return.

“Coach the person in front of you”

Rowing for visually impaired people, like any adaptive rowing, is highly dependent on the rower. It is therefore essential to tailor the coaching approach to the individual and be led by them in relation to their abilities, their objectives and their capacity.

The coaching must involve the rower leading the way – what they can do, how they want to approach a problem, what their goals are for each session, and how and when they require help. This means constant communication, both during and after sessions.

“Use ergos to develop technique on land”

This ensures rowers are comfortable with techniques and movement when they go on the water. This also builds physical fitness and muscle memory in the rowers which helps their confidence and stamina.

This can be done either within sessions, where rowers spend e.g. 20 mins on an ergo before going out on the water; or in separate training sessions specifically for ergo training, which Peterborough have set up.

“Keep the pairings consistent”

As each visually impaired person is different; their individual development is unique to them. Keeping the same coach and volunteer for each individual, week to week, allows them to remember progress, issues and challenges and set the level of activity accordingly. Where this is not possible – for example, for smaller clubs who may not be able to ensure the same volunteers are available week to week – a coaching log for each rower, available to all volunteers, can help with consistency and understanding, so that a new volunteer can be fully briefed on their rower.

“Allow time for the rowers to get to know each other, as well as the club”

One of the most important parts of the programme for the rowers was the chance to meet and socialise with others. This enabled them to connect with others, share ideas, learn from each other's experiences and take inspiration from them. The importance of this social interaction as a positive part of the programme for them cannot be underestimated. However, if time for the session is limited, there is a risk that the chance for this is restricted. As a result, there is a risk that rowers will develop relationships with their coaches and volunteers, rather than each other.

Allowing time after each session, even as little as 20 minutes, to let the rowers speak to each other and connect with each other, can make a huge difference.

“Start with adults”

Where the rowers are under 18, there are added logistical considerations, safeguarding requirements and practical issues – eg parents or guardians being needed for transport etc. These can be onerous, so we would recommend that in the initial phases of the programme, clubs focus on adults, until they feel that they have the systems and resources in place to recruit under 18s.

“Accommodate the dogs”

Many visually impaired people have guide dogs and they are crucial to their ability to be safe and independent. The dogs provide practical support, safety, companionship and mobility. For many, their ability to attend depends on their dog: if they cannot bring their dog to the club, it may be impossible for them to attend sessions. Clubs should therefore ensure that dogs are welcome in their facility, can accompany their owners everywhere and can also be left where they are safe and comfortable whilst their owners are rowing.



Fitmedia is a specialist fitness company which provides a range of health and fitness assessment systems for children, designed specifically for use by schools, local authorities and sporting organisations.

Fitmedia was established by sport and fitness professionals, who were frustrated at the lack of effective, efficient fitness testing for children.

Working with two of the UK's acknowledged experts in this area, Dr Gavin Sandercock and Dr Daniel Cohen, Fitmedia created testing systems to provide users with key data and information about their health, to improve their health and fitness levels, and to help children and young people, particularly those who may not be involved in representative school sports, with a means through which to engage with physical activity.

We have systems for children of all ages and abilities, from 6 to 18 years, to provide a complete overview of a child's physical movement skills, their levels of fitness and their own individual physical aptitudes. Our testing can also help identify and highlight potential causes for concern, such as low levels of fitness or specific injuries or areas of weakness.

Our testing systems are unique in that they are supported by scientific research data which allows us to see how well the children are doing based on their age and stage of development. In effect, they can be compared directly against what would be expected of a child their age and sex. As a result, the children are given a completely objective assessment of how they are progressing – and where and how to improve.



Awards



Whilst Love Rowing have been the driving force behind Row the Rhythm, this is a collaborative programme in funding and delivery. Love Rowing would like to acknowledge and thank individuals, clubs and organisations that have made Row the Rhythm possible.

Thank you to the grant funding organisations who have supported Love Rowing to fund the various aspects of Row the Rhythm, including:

- Sport England Jubilee Fund
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Peter Harrison Foundation
- Boost Charitable Trust
- Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust
- The Thomas Stanley Shipman Charity
- Alpkitt

We are delighted to have also received recent funding to kick start Row the Rhythm in Sunderland and Strathclyde. We look forward to working with Hays Travel, Souter Charitable Trust and Sir James Knott Trust.

Thank you to the sight loss charities who have believed in Row the Rhythm and provided support in areas such as promotion, logistics and expertise:

- VICTA
- Camsight
- VISTA
- British Blind Sport
- RNIB

A huge thank you to the rowing volunteers and clubs who believed in Row the Rhythm. Without Kate Lindgren and Peter Forrest at Peterborough City Rowing Club we would not have created this very special programme. Peterborough City Rowing Club have become a beacon of inspiration and expertise in providing rowing for people with a visual impairment. Thank you to Liz Pulford and team at Leicester Rowing Club, Guy Williams and team at Hereford Rowing Club and Julia Philipson and team at Fulham Reach Boat Club for being open to trying something new, to learning and listening and creating new opportunities for visually impaired people.

Thank you to Fitmedia for sharing our passion in opening the doors to sport for disabled people. We hugely appreciate your value in kind time, effort and professionalism in independently evaluating Row the Rhythm. Finally, thank you to our Row the Rhythm participants for taking part in the programme and the evaluation.

"As a VI person, you feel that no one is considering you. But they have given me this opportunity to make my dream real."



Love Rowing is the trading name for the British Rowing Charitable Foundation (Company number 11490809), registered office 6 Lower Mall, London, W6 9DJ. The British Rowing Charitable Foundation is a registered charity (1179845) in England and Wales.