

City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

Organisation: Pirate Castle	Grant ref: 10458	Programme area: Accessible London\Accessible sports
Amount, date and purpose of grant: 17/02/2011: £60,000 over three years (3 x £20,000) for the running costs of the Pirate Castle's water sports programme for disabled people.		
Visiting Grants Officer: Tim Wilson	Date of meeting: 12 April 2013	
Met with: Jim Wallman (General Manager) and Gus Alston (Club Development Officer)		
<p>1. Introduction to the organisation: Pirate Castle is a north London charity working with children and young people at a dedicated folly on Regent's Canal near Camden Lock. The charity was established to provide water-based activities, and is well-equipped with canoes, kayaks, buoyancy aids, and even two narrow boats. Pirate Castle's service offer now also includes drama and music, and despite the curious external design of its building, the interior (including the route to the canal) is fully accessible premises.</p> <p>Despite its proximity to some of London's more affluent residential areas, the charity is adjacent to a high concentration of social housing, and draws most of its attendees from these estates. Pirate Castle has an ongoing outreach programme to engage prospective participants, and has seen increased demand for its services, particularly for its extremely popular holiday scheme.</p>		
<p>2. The project funded: You awarded Pirate Castle £60,000 over three years at your meeting in February 2011. The charity drew down its first payment in April 2011, and has submitted one monitoring report since then (at time of visit the second year's report was imminently due).</p> <p>Your funding was sought to help Pirate Castle expand its kayaking and canoeing sessions for disabled participants. These sessions are free for participants, in line with the charity's mission of opening up the canal for all.</p> <p>Pirate Castle proposed to use your grant to run 10 group sessions each year for 12 disabled members each (resulting in 120 disabled people per year enjoying the canal). These sessions, designed along similar lines to their sessions for non-disabled young people, provide games, races, short trips and personal training, and last between one-to one-and-a-half hours.</p>		
<p>3. Work delivered to date: Thanks to the charity's existing stock of Easy Access Kayaks, Canoes and Bell Boats, it was in a good position to start activities after first grant instalment was drawn down. It reduced its ratio of children to instructors for its disabled group work meaning a greater number of sessions would need to take place in order to meet its target for unique individuals, and the end of year report showed that this was well-achieved with 83 sessions running and 154 disabled people taking part.</p>		

Pirate Castle's staff conducted an extensive programme of liaison with local charities and special educational needs departments in local schools throughout the year, and this helped drive new participants to the charity's programmes. Increased demand has come not only for the sessions with disabled people, but also from non-disabled and from commercial clients (who provide much needed cross-subsidy for Pirate Castle's charitable work).

Sessions are inevitably seasonal, with far less activity taking place throughout the winter.

4. Difference made:

Pirate Castle exceeded its beneficiary target for the first year, and was able to gather some rudimentary data on difference made. Its report provided case examples of individual participants, and noted that the charity was developing a new monitoring system to gather improved outcome information.

The success of the outreach work, and the influx of disabled young people as well as young people with more complex needs initially caused some difficulties for staff. As a result, Pirate Castle ensured all staff receive disability and mental health training, and has established a productive link with Camden Council which now gives the charity's staff and volunteers access to their training courses.

Pirate Castle has introduced some new services to reflect changes to its service user base. It now runs a weekly NHS-run mental health clinic for disabled young people and drama-based activities to introduce ideas relating to mental ill health.

The charity has monitored take up of services across the full spectrum of disabilities, and note that it has found least success engaging the deaf community. As a result, the Club Development Manager has studied British Sign Language in order to improve interaction with deaf organisations.

5. Grants Administration:

Records have been kept appropriately, and the charity has recently introduced a new monitoring system with KPIs which will also capture post code data allowing more accurate match of participant details to patterns of deprivation. The charity has a part time Finance Officer who tracks restricted funds and costs as required by funders like City Bridge Trust.

At time of application it was noted that Pirate Castle's financial position was not as strong as its Trustees wished it to be. Unfortunately this remains the case at the start of the third year of grant. Whilst the charity has scope to earn income from venue and equipment hire to commercial firms, increased demand from its core users means that fewer private hire sessions are available. Additionally, the wish to offer sessions free-of-charge to young people means that Pirate Castle incurs a small deficit per place.

6. Concluding comments:

Pirate Castle is a well-regarded local charity which has made tremendous progress engaging disabled participants since you awarded your funding. The commitment of the whole staff team to making the services full accessible is impressive, and the charity has exciting ambitions to expand the services yet further (funding permitting).