

---

# Mae Murray Foundation Inclusive Beach Programme Impact Report

---





# Mae Murray Foundation Inclusive Beach Programme: Impact Report

ISBN 978-1-913643-30-0

Copyright 2024 the authors

## **Suggested citation:**

O’Kane N, Cleland CL, Kerr C, McConnell K, Daly-Lynn J, Hoeritzauer F, Jones SM, Tate C, Glover S, Corr R and Hunter RF (2024) Mae Murray Foundation Inclusive Beach Programme: Impact Report. Available at: [groundswelluk.org/publications/](https://groundswelluk.org/publications/)

## **Photography**

Courtesy of Christopher Tate and © Stephanie Wynne for GroundsWell



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>01</b>	Foreword	<b>12</b>	Impact on mental health
<b>02</b>	Mae Murray Foundation and GroundsWell	<b>15</b>	Impact on social life
<b>03</b>	Inclusive Beaches and ADAPT my Beach	<b>18</b>	Impact of ADAPT my Beach
<b>04</b>	Inclusive Beach Programme	<b>21</b>	Conclusion
<b>05</b>	Surfing and Paddle boarding	<b>22</b>	Meet the team and Acknowledgements
<b>06</b>	The process evaluation	<b>23</b>	Visual summary of findings
<b>09</b>	Impact on physical health	<b>24</b>	Summary of findings in poem

# FOREWORD

---

“ Inclusive Beaches have been created by people with lived experience who were previously excluded from taking part at the beach environment. Members were excluded due to disability, medical condition, age or caring role. There has been a significant amount of learning since we launched our first Inclusive Beach in 2017, which has allowed the project to evolve and improve. Members have told us continually that they enjoy the health benefits that come with accessing blue spaces from which they were previously excluded. We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work with Groundswell to record the impact that Inclusive Beaches have, not only on those who use them, but also on beach visitors who bare witness to the diverse range of abilities when at the beach. ”

**KYLEIGH LOUGH**  
**MAE MURRAY FOUNDATION**



“ Groundswell launched the Innovation Fund to support projects contributing to research on improving the health and wellbeing of people and communities through the use of urban green and blue spaces. We were delighted to be able to partner with the Mae Murray Foundation to further develop their innovative Inclusive Beach project. Their work enables people of all abilities to enjoy the numerous health benefits from spending time at beaches. We were particularly excited to support the development of the first inclusive paddle board programme in Northern Ireland. The research demonstrates a number of benefits for members and their family on health, wellbeing and social impacts. ”



**RUTH HUNTER**  
**QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST**

# MAE MURRAY FOUNDATION

Mae Murray Foundation is a charity which was set up to enable people of all ages and abilities to take part in activities, experience the world, and enjoy friendship together, in an inclusive environment. Their vision is “**to create an inclusive society**” and their mission is “to improve quality of life through participation, of all-abilities, together”.

Mae Murray Foundation delivers a range of innovative all-ability projects for different age groups, in addition to designing and implementing permanent solutions in everyday environments to break down unnecessary barriers to participation. One way in which they do this is through the creation of **Inclusive Beaches** and implementation of an **Inclusive Beach Programme**.



# GROUNDSWELL

The GroundsWell Consortium is a team of researchers, local communities, implementers and policymakers who aim to better understand and evidence the role of **green and blue spaces** within wider social, economic, environmental, cultural and health systems. GroundsWell’s research activity is based in Edinburgh, Liverpool and Belfast, where it is being led by researchers at Queen’s University Belfast.

A key aim of GroundsWell is to encourage, enable, and collaborate on community-engagement and community-led research. To facilitate this, GroundsWell launched a **Community Innovation Fund** programme, where community organisations could be supported in implementing programmes and evaluating impact.



Learn more about the GroundsWell Community Innovation fund [here](#)



# INCLUSIVE BEACHES

An Inclusive Beach is a beach environment that Mae Murray Foundation has planned so that people of all ages and abilities can **take part, have fun, and be included**. Inclusive Beaches will provide access, parking, and disabled toilets. Toilets will always offer hoisting and adult sized changing bench facilities – to full Changing Places standard whenever possible. Inclusive Beaches in Northern Ireland offer free beach equipment loan schemes which support people to access and enjoy the beach, operated as a partnership between Mae Murray Foundation and respective beach operators.

## ADAPT MY BEACH

Having spearheaded the design and implementation of Inclusive Beaches in Northern Ireland, Mae Murray Foundation used their experiences of setting up and sustaining their Inclusive Beach model to create ADAPT my Beach, a guide on how to create, manage, sustain and improve an Inclusive Beach. **ADAPT: Access, Dignity, All-ability, Participation, Transformation.**

Access ADAPT my Beach [here](#).



# INCLUSIVE BEACH PROGRAMME

During the summer season, Mae Murray Foundation runs an Inclusive Beach programme across Northern Ireland at beaches which have been recognised as inclusive. The Inclusive Beach programme aims to provide a range of activities which have taken into consideration differing needs and abilities, particularly those with more complex requirements (e.g., people with physical, learning, sensory or medical needs, deaf/hearing loss, blind/partially sighted) and non-disabled adults and children. By doing so, Mae Murray Foundation will ensure that **nobody is left out**.

Activities include family fun days, adapted surfing, adapted paddle boarding, beach art workshops and sensory-friendly beach experiences. By implementing the Inclusive Beach programme, Mae Murray Foundation hope to create visible, all age / all-ability events and activities and **promote diversity, build understanding and change attitudes** within local communities. Inclusive events also empower beach visitors to learn new skills, push boundaries and achieve, alongside the rest of the community.







# SURFING

Surfing is very popular in the North Coast. Mae Murray Foundation have purchased two specially adapted sit down surfboards, which allows disabled people, including those with more complex needs, to take part in this exciting activity. Local surf schools have taken part in **specialist training**, enabling them to deliver inclusive surf programmes on behalf of Mae Murray Foundation. Whole families can take part together, which each member of the family using equipment which is suited to their needs and ability. This means **everyone in the family can take part**, but also be challenged.

# PADDLE BOARDING

Having gained several years of experience of adapted surfing, and with the popularity in paddle boarding increasing, Mae Murray Foundation looked to the industry to create inclusive paddle boarding opportunities in Northern Ireland. After much research, it was found that much of the existing provision throughout the UK was not necessarily best practice. After discussing the safety of this activity with the Water Safety Forum, it was decided that a new product was required. Mae Murray Foundation have introduced **the first sit down paddleboard to Ireland** in 2024. Members enjoyed taking part in paddle boarding alongside their family and friends, using equipment which is suited to their individual need.

# THE EVALUATION PROCESS

## PEER RESEARCHERS

Seven peer researchers were recruited from Mae Murray Foundation members and trained as peer researchers, to **promote inclusivity**, **build trust**, and **enhance meaningful engagement** with other members during the evaluation. A peer-led approach also amplified the voices of the peer researchers, offering them an opportunity to be upskilled in knowledge, confidence, and communication skills.

Our peer researchers were trained in and implemented a method called 'PhotoVoice' with participants, which is a visual participatory research method combining photograph-taking and interviews. PhotoVoice is beneficial when working with participants who may find it difficult to express their thoughts and feelings through words alone, and allows participation from people with varied levels of ability, education, and research training.

Peer researchers conducted 15 PhotoVoice interviews with members with a disability (physical, sensory or learning), across three of the beaches (Portrush East Strand, Groomsport, Cranfield).

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed by the research team to identify emerging themes. The themes identified by the research team were shared with the peer researchers in a data analysis workshop, where peer researchers confirmed the findings and validated the analysis approach.



Two of our peer researchers: Bethany and Saul

# THE EVALUATION PROCESS

## MEMBER SURVEY

When a lead/nominated family member/carer attended one of the Inclusive Beach events during the summer of 2024, they were invited to participate in a survey. The survey gathered perceptions of Inclusive Beaches and Mae Murray Foundation's Inclusive Beach Programme. Participants were asked to consider the benefits and observed positive or negative impacts of the Inclusive Beach Programme for their family member, their wider family circle, and the community. They were also asked to identify any difficulties or unanticipated challenges, the facilitators and barriers to Inclusive Beaches, and recommendations for future Inclusive Beaches and activities within the Inclusive Beach Programme.

A total of 63 lead/nominated family members/carers completed the member survey. The majority visited Portrush East Strand (n=22, 35%), heard about the Inclusive Beach through the Mae Murray Foundation newsletter (n=43, 68%) and travelled more than 40 miles to be at the event (n=23, 37%).



## BEACH USER SURVEY

During the Inclusive Beach Programme events, other beach users who were not part of Mae Murray Foundation were invited to complete a survey. This survey aimed to gather insight into participants' awareness of Inclusive Beaches, the work of Mae Murray Foundation and their Inclusive Beach Programme, and the perceived potential benefits to other beach users and the wider community. Survey respondents were also asked to consider any difficulties or unanticipated challenges.

A total of 55 beach users completed the survey. Of those beach users, the majority were visiting Cranfield beach (n=32, 58%), and were visitors who reside in Northern Ireland (n=26, 47%). Other beach users were local residents (n=17, 31%), tourists who are not residents of Northern Ireland (n=3, 5%), or other (n=8, 15%).

# THE EVALUATION PROCESS

---

## EVALUATING THE IMPACT

Data from the interviews and the two surveys were analysed by the research team. The following sections of the report present a summary of the impact of the Inclusive Beach programme on Mae Murray Foundation members, their family and friends, and the general public.

This includes four sections which address the different types of impact:

- Impact on **physical health**
- Impact on **mental health**
- Impact on **social life**
- Impact of **ADAPT my Beach**

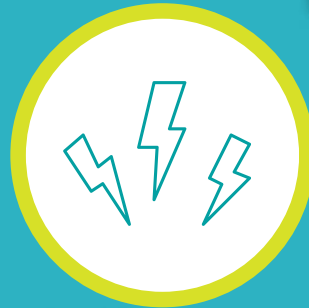
The quotes in the following section come from our interviews and surveys, and some quotes have been paraphrased to maintain anonymity.



# Impact on physical health



Improved sleep



Pain levels



Exercise



Opportunity to use  
beach equipment



Improved health, fitness  
& strength



Sensory benefits



Fresh air &  
time outdoors



Reduced screen time

# PHYSICAL HEALTH



## IMPROVED SLEEP

The beach events were thought to increase levels of tiredness, and help improve sleep following a day at the beach.

“ *They sleep really well after sea air.*

*They were very happy and sleepy on the way home.* ”



## EXERCISE

The beach events and adapted equipment provided members with an opportunity to be physically active and feel energised.

“ *Got my son out of the wheelchair for exercise.*

*Exercise for someone who finds access to exercise difficult.* ”



## IMPROVED HEALTH, FITNESS & STRENGTH

Members reported physical benefits from being at the events, from getting more physical activity and using the beach equipment, they felt stronger after taking part.

“ *Increased strength, relaxed muscles.*

*Improved fitness.* ”



## SENSORY BENEFITS

Members benefitted from the sensory experience of being at the beach, from the sand to the water as well as the various entertainment activities.

“ *Water makes me happy.*

*Sensory heaven.* ”

# PHYSICAL HEALTH



## PAIN LEVELS

Pain levels were discussed both in a positive manner and in a negative manner. Taking part in the beach event activities had the potential to improve or worsen pain levels.

“ *Less pain.*

*They have severe hypermobility so will be sore later.* ”



## REDUCED SCREEN TIME

Particularly with regards to younger children who took part in the beach events, lead family members/carers identified reduced screen time as a benefit of taking part in the events.

“ *Less screen time for the children.* ”



## FRESH AIR & TIME OUTDOORS

Survey respondents identified the simple act of being outdoors beneficial for their physical health. Some identified that, even if it is raining, they feel the benefits of getting fresh air.

“ *Happy to out of house and get fresh air even if raining.*

*Sunshine, exercise and sea air really does make you feel so much better.* ”



## OPPORTUNITY TO USE BEACH EQUIPMENT

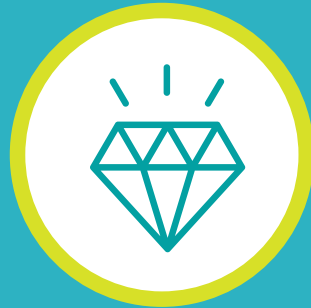
There were positive health benefits through the opportunity to use the adapted beach equipment and have experiences that would not be possible without it.

“ *He'd never be able to experience surfing otherwise.* ”

# Impact on mental health



Happiness and joy



Seen as a  
valued person



Relaxed and calm



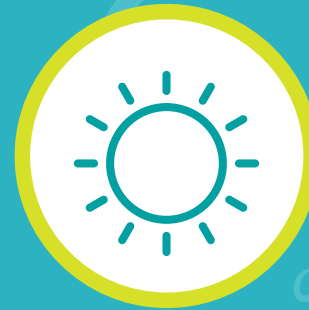
Confidence, pride and  
achievement



Improved behaviour  
and mood



Engagement and  
interaction



Positive outlook



Feeling included



# MENTAL HEALTH



## HAPPINESS AND JOY

Members' families remarked how the beach events led to increased levels of happiness, joy and fun experienced by the members.

*“ He doesn't get much chance to experience adrenaline and have fun, so it was great to be able to see him have fun.*



## RELAXED AND CALM

Being at the beach events, participating in the activities, and being with Mae Murray Foundation staff and other members meant members were often relaxed and calm.

*“ He feels relaxed when he's here as he knows anyone who is connected to Mae Murray Foundation will adapt things as necessary in order for him to have a great time.*



## SEEN AS A VALUED PERSON

Participating in the activities, using the adapted beach equipment, and even just the act of being at the beach meant that members had the opportunity to feel seen and valued.

*“ Our son is seen as a valued person.*

*They see the person inside.*



## CONFIDENCE, PRIDE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Members felt an increased sense of achievement, and were more confident at and after the beach events. Members' family members felt a great deal of pride seeing their loved one participating.

*“ Gained confidence and pride when child was able to surf.*



# MENTAL HEALTH



## IMPROVED BEHAVIOUR AND MOOD

Improvements in behaviour were noted in relation to some members, and improvements in mood for both the members and their family members.

“ *He has been so excited about coming to this session, it definitely improves his mood.* ”

*It really lifted our mood.* ”



## POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Taking part in activities and being on the beach, activities which others may take for granted, instilled a positive outlook in members and their families.

“ *A more positive outlook as we can take part in activities that others might take for granted.* ”



## ENGAGEMENT AND INTERACTION

Members have the opportunity to engage and interact with others at the beach event, not only with their own family and friends, but Mae Murray Foundation staff and others in attendance

“ *He interacts with others in the Mae Murray Foundation team and his response and engagement is appreciated and reciprocated.* ”



## FEELING INCLUDED

Feeling included was highlighted in relation to the Inclusive Beach programme. Members and their families did not feel excluded and enjoyed being around others.

“ *It was great to be able to include a beach activity with my disabled child and feel part of a "normal" family activity.* ”

# Impact on social life



Meeting new people



Spending time with  
friends



Quality family time



Parental socialising  
and support



Sense of  
community

# SOCIAL LIFE



## MEETING NEW PEOPLE

The Inclusive Beach events provided an opportunity for members to meet new people, and people with similar abilities.

“ *We were happy to meet new people, enjoyed spending time outdoors.*

*Meeting others with similar disabilities.* ”



## SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS

Members enjoyed meeting up with their friends and spending quality time with them at Inclusive Beach events.

“ *An opportunity for my disabled daughter to be amongst friends.*

*Able to spend time with friends.* ”



## QUALITY FAMILY TIME

Members and their families appreciated that they could enjoy quality time with their family at Inclusive Beach events, along with other families. Siblings were able to enjoy time at the beach together.

“ *Daughter got to do the same activities as her brothers and sister.*

*It was nice to do what other families do.* ”



# SOCIAL LIFE



## PARENTAL SOCIALISING AND SUPPORT

The beach events were seen as an opportunity for parents of members to socialise and gain support from other parents who are in similar circumstances.

“ We were able to spend time as a family and meet other families who face similar challenges.

Parents able to chat to others in similar circumstances.”



## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Members felt they were included and valued within a community at the beach events, which contributed to feelings of being valued and seen.

“ Disabled son felt part of the community playing on the beach.

”



# Impact of ADAPT my Beach



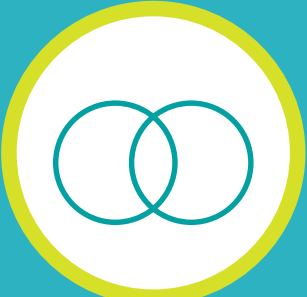
Dignity



Participation



Access



All-ability



Transformation

# ADAPT MY BEACH



## ACCESS

Members provided positive feedback on the ability to hire equipment, the availability of car parking at the Inclusive Beach locations and the use of beach matting. These features made it possible for those living with a disability to access the beach and participate in Inclusive Beach activities.

“ I love every single bit of the equipment because again it gives me freedom. ”



## DIGNITY

When discussing dignity, members discussed the availability of accessible toilets and the majority believed that the toilet facilities were of good quality.

“ You don't have to worry about getting changed or anything coz you know that everything's here. ”



## ALL-ABILITY

Members appreciated that the Inclusive Beach programme was accessible to all individuals, regardless of ability or age.

“ I've been the person sitting waiting for my family at the beach - I used to dread it - and now, me and my daughter were buzzing about coming to the beach today and that's only because of Mae Murray Foundation. ”



# ADAPT MY BEACH



## PARTICIPATION

Members felt they were able to participate in the activities taking place at the Inclusive Beach events. Members felt they were part of a community, felt included, and were happy that they could have fun and enjoy the day.

“ *It's nice to actually see them in real life on my own rather than having to rely on other people describing the things to me or having to pretend I'm there.* ”



## TRANSFORMATION

One member specifically discussed transformation and provided suggestions on how changes could be made to transform infrastructure and services.

“ *I also think that it would be really good if there was the option for more councils to have things available rather than having to go to specific foundations or whatever who only have specific days.* ”





# CONCLUSION

Blue spaces, such as beaches, have the potential to improve our physical and mental health, and provide us with social opportunities. However, beaches are settings which can potentially widen inequalities faced by people living with disabilities, older people, and those with mobility needs, due to lack of access and inclusion.

Mae Murray Foundation's Inclusive Beach programme is addressing these inequalities in numerous beaches across the region. Through the provision of adapted equipment available for hire in designated Inclusive Beaches, the Inclusive Beach events, and the ADAPT my Beach guidance, Mae Murray Foundation continues to impact the lives of those who were previously excluded from experiencing the joy of a day at the beach.

Our findings demonstrate that Mae Murray Foundation members, family/friends, and the general public all recognise the significant impact Inclusive Beaches have on the physical health, mental health, and social life of those who take part. Sustaining and supporting these programmes is important to help us ensure that nobody in society is left behind, and that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from blue spaces.



# MEET THE TEAM

Researchers from the Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast (Prof Ruth Hunter, Dr Claire Cleland, Dr Niamh O'Kane, Dr Sophie Jones, Dr Chris Tate, Miss Sophie Glover and Miss Roisin Corr), the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Queen's University Belfast (Dr Karen McConnell and Dr Claire Kerr), School of Health Sciences, Ulster University (Dr Jean Daly-Lynn) and School of Education, Ulster University (Mr Franz Hoeritzauer) were involved in this study. two Occupational Therapists from Ulster University (Michelle Davidson and Chloe Orr) were also on the team. In addition, peer researchers recruited from Mae Murray Foundation (Saul Wilton, Katie Douglas, and Bethany Meneary).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would firstly like to take this opportunity to thank each of the participants who took part in the research study. Secondly, we would like to thank Mae Murray Foundation peer-researchers who volunteered to be trained in PhotoVoice research methods and conducted the PhotoVoice element of the research. Thirdly, we would like to thank the team from Mae Murray Foundation including staff and volunteers who provided guidance, organisation, and support during the research period. Finally, we would like to thank the research team for their dedication and commitment throughout the research project.



Back row, left to right: Roisin Corr (QUB), Pauline Hunter-Graham (MMF), Pete Byrne (NMDDC), Chris Tate (QUB), Claire Cleland (QUB), Ruth Hunter (QUB), and Niamh O'Kane (QUB). Front row left to right: Michelle Stowell (MMF), Jean Daly-Lynn (UU), Hayley Crawford (MMF), and Sophie Jones (QUB).

# THE INCLUSIVE BEACH EXPERIENCE

Our findings were shared with artist Sian, from More than Minutes, who worked with us to help visually represent the Inclusive Beach experience.



Drawn by Sian from [WWW.MORETHANMINUTES.CO.UK](http://WWW.MORETHANMINUTES.CO.UK)

# Inclusive Beaches

by Niamh O’Kane

It’s nice to be at the beach, they say  
For many the path is clear,  
It leads to the great big blue and beyond  
For too long I had to stay here.

No more do I turn down the invites  
From peers, friends, and family alike,  
The mats beneath my wheels are a portal  
To help me see what it feels like.

I can surf, I can float, I can paddle  
I try new things and I’m brave,  
A sense of belonging comes crashing  
Along with the surf of the wave.

The air’s thick with smores, kites and  
laughter  
The salt of the sea it tastes sweet,  
There is music, alpacas and magic  
And – horror! – sand stuck to feet.

At the end of the day, I’ll rest easy  
With a smile and a huge sense of pride,  
For I spent the day with my loved ones  
Who got to see the person inside.

I used to rely on stories  
Tales of waves and swathes of sea,  
But now things have changed, I can see for myself  
The beach is inclusive of me.

