Changing lives: voyages to a better future for Alan



The English language is awash with nautical phrases reflecting the UK’s rich maritime history: ‘fathom it out’, ‘know the ropes’, ‘all hands on deck’. For two Scottish apprentices these phrases have a very personal resonance.

Alan and Gill's lives changed dramatically when they discovered Anchor and Sail, a three-year project run by the GalGael Trust and Clyde Maritime Trust and supported by HLF.

Situated in Govan, once the heart of the River Clyde’s shipbuilding industry, Anchor and Sail is committed to protecting the traditional skills of boatbuilding while rebuilding the participants' own sense of worth.

Thanks to apprenticeships made possible by HLF, two of those people have changed their future – one excited by the launch of a clinker dinghy he has built from scratch, the other on the brink of a career in the film industry.

Alan

Out of work since 2006, 35-year-old Alan Matthews felt despondent and worthless, and his long-term unemployment was having a serious effect on his health.

“I was stressed out and depressed. I was seeing a psychologist and he suggested that I shouldn’t be idle so I started doing a bit of joinery and carpentry volunteering, making tables and chairs. I discovered that I had a knack for it and I

really enjoyed it.”

> “Working in a team in an encouraging environment, I now have a feeling of self-worth. I feel my life has direction and I have control over it again.”
>
> - Alan Matthews

Alan moved on to volunteer with GalGael and his natural talent at woodworking was soon spotted, helping him secure an apprenticeship. For the last 12 months he has been building a clinker dinghy, called *Annie B*, from scratch.

"I have learned so much from putting pencil to paper to do the original drawing, then taking those and translating them into the lofting – full-size drawings for making patterns. I’ve learned how to use lots of machines, such as circular saws, as well as developing fine woodworking skills," he says.

It’s not just the transferable skills that Alan thanks Anchor and Sail for.

"I suffered from shyness and social phobia: it's a barrier to work. Working in a team in an encouraging environment, I now have a feeling of self-worth. I feel my life has direction and I have control over it again."

After several coats of paint and varnish, *Annie B* was launched on the Clyde last weekend and Alan reflects with pride: “So many people lack in confidence and don’t believe in their own ability. I was one. At Anchor and Sail I see incredible raw talent and workmanship from people who didn’t believe they had anything to give.

"It’s amazing what you can rise to if you are given the opportunity."

Gill

“I was in a bit of a rut, sitting daily at the kitchen table on my laptop transcribing videos,” says Gill. "My focus was solely on earning money but I was doing a job which I wasn’t enjoying and didn’t allow me to be me.”

It was while watching one of these videos that 31-year-old arts graduate Gill was inspired.

“I was transcribing an arts project video about GalGael and I just loved what I saw. I got in touch and was soon volunteering regularly. It was a turning point for me. I began to feel human again. It was food for the soul.”

Gill was taken on as an apprentice and for the last 20 months has been building a West Coast Skiff.

> "I’ve realised just how important community is to me. Friends have remarked that I look healthier and happier and I that’s because I am.”
>
> - Gill

“When I started I didn’t know what a claw hammer was. I can’t really believe I’ve gone from that to building a boat! I’ve learned so much and really enjoyed being able to pass on that learning to other volunteers. It’s given me so much confidence and I’ve realised just how important community is to me. Friends have remarked that I look healthier and happier and I that’s because I am.”

Gill’s new confidence led her to apply for a full-time job with the art department of a film company and is starting work in the art department of a horror movie soon - something she admits she could never have done before Anchor and Sail.

Gill has nothing but praise for the National Lottery-funded project that changed her life.









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Changing lives: full steam ahead for heritage railway careers