

BDMLR PUP UNIT MEDIC STUDY - TO INFORM SROI



In July 2020 we surveyed a random sample of our Cornwall pup unit medics (n25).

The short survey was designed and carried out by Blue Health Coach (and one of our volunteers) Lizzi at Going Coastal Blue as part of her wider “Ocean Empathy Project” exploring ***the psychological impact of volunteering within the field of marine conservation***. This independent research builds upon academic inquiry into Blue Health and offers tangible real-world data to inform funders and social prescribers alike.

Survey questions originate from a variety of interconnected models recognized within the field of applied psychology and as such, even with this small sample, the findings have rigor.

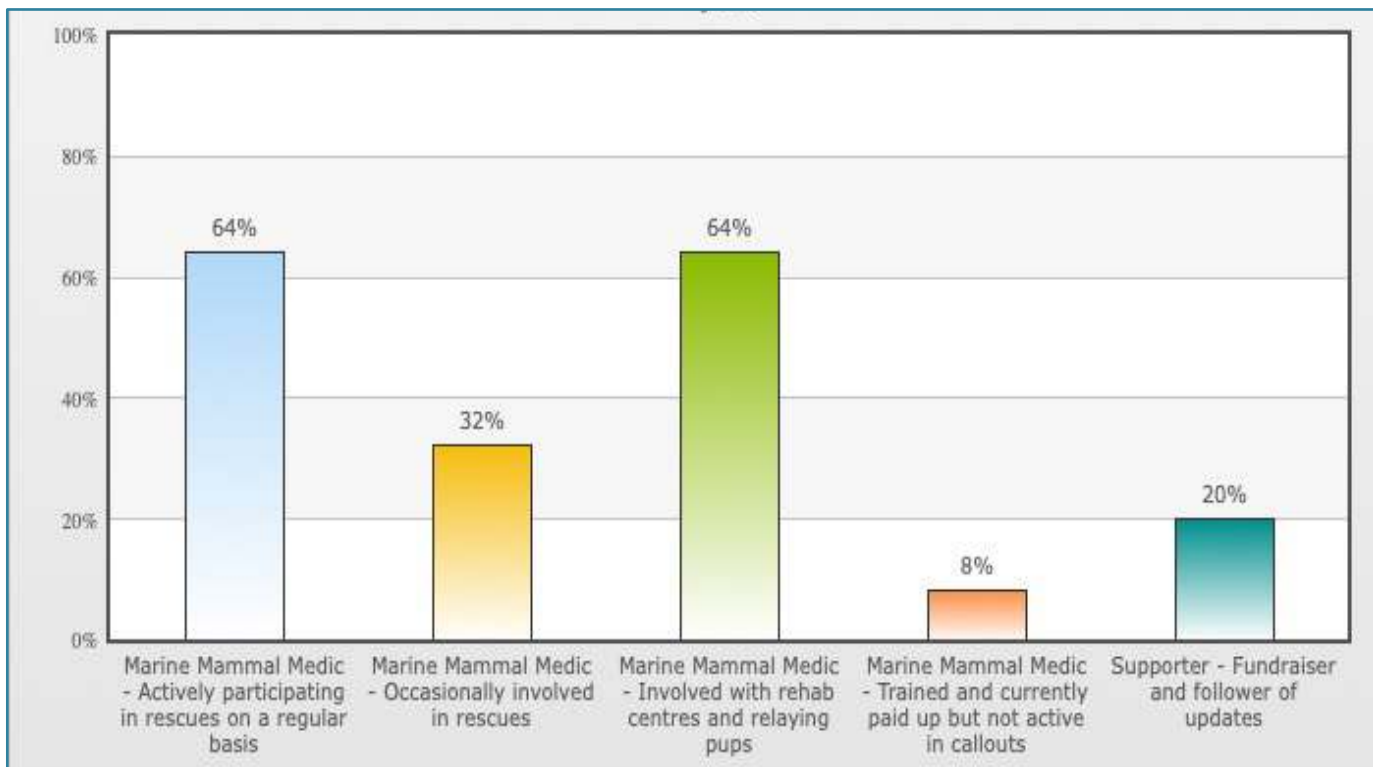
Lizzi has designed a more in-depth study to follow and we aim to include our wider BDMLR community. The insights gained will inform optional SEA* (skills emotions and advocacy) volunteer development activities enabling the charity to invest in both the care of our marine mammals and the wellbeing of our dedicated community of volunteers.

Through a Social Return on Investment (SROI) report BDMLR can evidence even greater positive impact, enabling the charity to grow.

The following document provides a very brief summary of how our medics described their experience volunteering with BDMLR.



We asked about participation...



As you can see above the majority are active and participative in rescues, rehab and relaying.

These stats are unsurprising... and skewed... since we surveyed those registered as “seal pup unit medics” – individuals who are likely to be high responders and situated in locations with higher callouts.

Further exploration would provide insights such as:

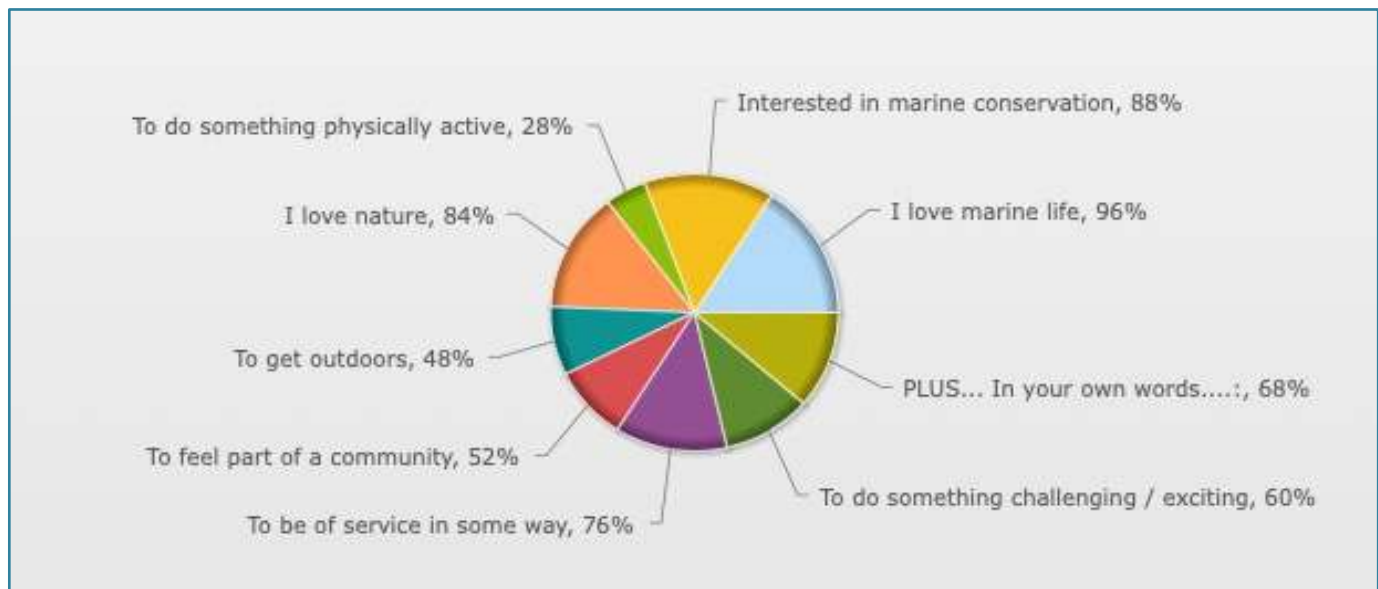
For our most active / participative medics - how significant the role of marine mammal medic is within their day to day lives.

For our least active / participative medics – what the charity can do to facilitate greater charity involvement (if this is desired).

For all medics – motivation for remaining supporters of this charity.



We asked what motivated our medics to join BDMLR...

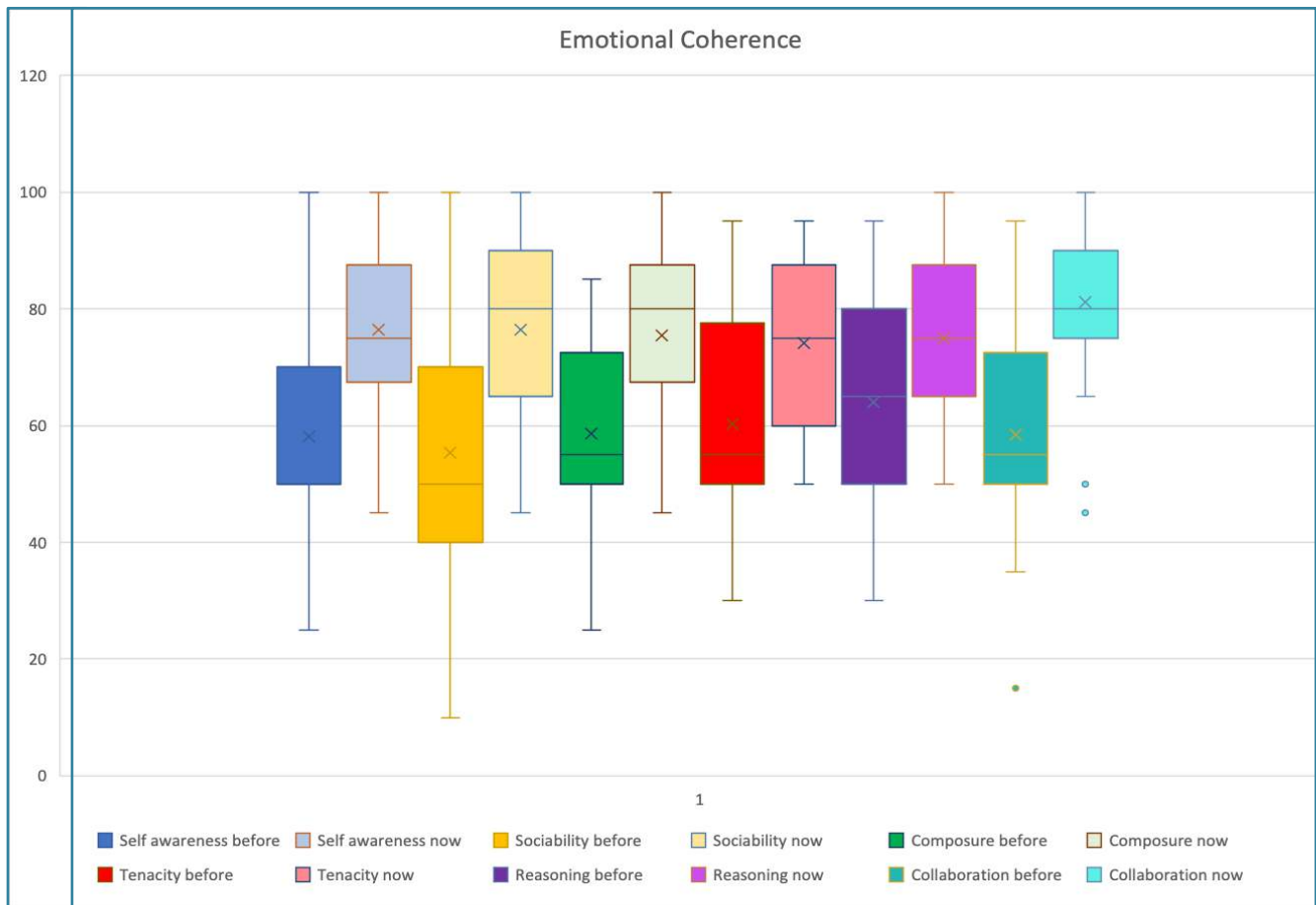


And so our volunteer motivations are clear. This question gave options to “tick as many options as relevant”. Naturally “**nature and the marine environment**” were key draws... but “**being of service**” also scored highly showing that contributing to a wider cause strongly influences participation. Some highlights from the “in your own words” section of this pie chart included:

- I wanted to be part of something that has a positive impact on the world around me. To help and to raise awareness of our marine life and plastic pollution
- I have always had a love for wildlife and love doing something hands on to protect it like to do my bit to help I wanted to be part of integral hands-on conservation work and feel like I was personally making a difference.
- To learn more about marine mammals, help marine life and meet like-minded people.
- I felt right to volunteer my free time to help with these beautiful animals I wanted to be able to do something to help rather than be helpless when marine mammals are injured/ill or need help.
- To help marine wildlife and expand my knowledge. To gain skills and experience in marine mammal rescue, help marine mammals and become part of a team. I wanted to get experience working with marine mammals as it is a possible future career prospect.
- I needed something to keep me physically & mentally fit. I sought something which would enable me to use my skills
- Due to a long list of disabilities, I wanted to be able to challenge myself and gain new skills so helping an animal charity seemed an obvious choice. As a diver I wanted to help marine life too. To be with other like-thinking people & shared interests / goals. Knowing that you are making a difference and saving animals whilst getting hands on experience.



We wanted to know how BDMLR impacts emotional coherence... skills and qualities that have a huge impact upon our wider lifestyles...



We asked medics to score before volunteering and after / during volunteering – the default was 50 and medics had option to show how they felt volunteering had impacted a range of measures. All measures increased appreciably – with **Collaboration** showing a substantial shift.

So it seems that organically our activity is already positively impacting well beyond seal pup health and we plan to provide the tools and mechanisms for our medics to build upon these important and transferable life skills.

Here are some examples of what our medics had to say about volunteering with us...

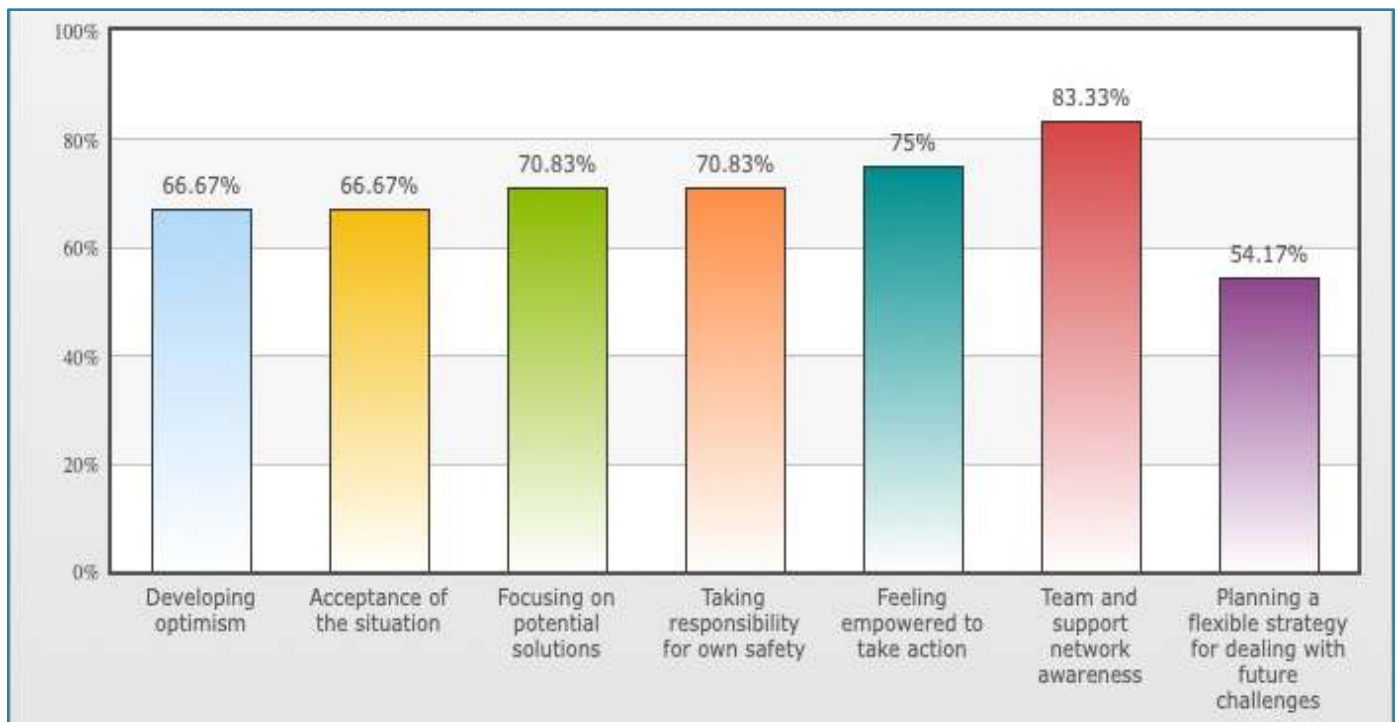
- Volunteering for BDMLR has greatly enriched my life. It has improved my confidence and boosted my mental health.
- I have a huge aversion to being in new situations with people I do not know very well. With a seal pup's safety and wellbeing as my incentive, somehow, I overcome my fears and anxieties.



- I have met many truly amazing people within BDMLR. BDMLR have given me something very special: a feeling of worth in a worrying world. Give back to marine-life that we work around.
- Volunteering with BDMLR has massively increased my confidence and boosted my leadership skills- I'm now happy to arrive on a busy beach amongst a complex rescue scenario and take control- delegating tasks and problem solving.
- Volunteering has been so rewarding, it's amazing to feel part of 'the bigger picture' and more connected with nature. It was my childhood dream to work with animals and in conservation, I love that this gives me the opportunity to do the type of work I have always dreamed of doing
- As well as improving my own skills and learning new things myself, I enjoy the opportunity to learn how to teach others as well and pass on the knowledge I have gained. It gives me an enormous sense of well-being and achievement.
- I had a strong sense of purpose that was lost due to PTSD. I wanted still to use the skills I had learnt and was able to become a marine medic with BDMLR. It gives me a huge amount of sense of purpose, being a valued member of a team. I have met some wonderful people over the years and grown closer to those I already knew. Teamwork and a sense of community helps me to feel centred and really helped with my depression at the start as no one knew anything about me and our aim was the same, to help the animal. Without a doubt the work I do with this organisation has helped me to recover from the awful grips of PTSD.
- Being a member of the BDMLR has opened up further opportunities for me to help marine animals. I help with their post-mortems at the local university to allow us to gain knowledge from their deaths and I have learnt a lot about them too.
- It gives me a purpose and focus outside of home life which has enabled me to make new friends. It makes me feel better about myself that I'm part of an organisation that is helping marine life & actively doing positive things. Having the opportunity to have hands on contact with animals & making decisions for their well being.
- Inspiration - to be a part of a network of volunteers who are dedicated to giving their own time to help their local wildlife at all hours of the day is nothing short of inspiring. I'm anxious by nature so do find the improves confidence and enhanced decision making a hard one for me. I would like to think my time with BDMLR has helped.
- Being a BDMLR medic has helped me gain confidence within myself and be myself too. Being dyslexic, dyspraxic and autistic it's easy to feel like you might not be able to do what others can do but everyone has made me feel like I am very much part of the team
- Community - I have met so many wonderful people working with the BDMLR and now have a community of people to talk to about a range of things. The monthly meet ups are always fun and provide great connections both socially and professionally. Another great thing for me is the work on my mental health issues. I have suffered with anxiety and panic attacks for a few years. Alongside therapy I have found volunteering to be massively helpful, have had several incidents where I have been recovering from a panic attack but either a shift at the unit, or a rescue or a social has come up and each time I have found my recovery is much quicker and much easier to deal with. Working with the BDMLR have also had a massive impact on my knowledge and confidence in this field.
- I gained from the community spirit of BDMLR which helped me to develop my marine mammal skills. Following on from that I get great satisfaction from passing my new skills on to new members & helping to train them. It enables you to be hands on in any location to help marine life that are in need, which in itself teaches others why having charities such as BDMLR are critical for marine conservation.



As we know the outcomes of rescue and rehabilitation are not always positive. We asked our medics how they felt volunteering had impacted their response to dealing with adversity...



Feedback certainly suggested that our volunteer work at BDMLR addresses isolation – with **team and support network** scoring as the highest impact area. Over 50% shared that they had greater confidence in their ability to create future strategies to address challenges... and whilst some might not necessarily know the precise strategy for future challenges volunteers shared an increased feeling of **empowerment**, a **solution orientation** and a sense of **self-responsibility**.



In terms of offering support **to** others and receiving support **from** others, our medics told us...

- On scene people have offered words of reassurance when I wasn't certain I'd done everything correctly- this helps hugely with my self-doubt/anxiety. But the follow-ups I get later on- later that day or the next day even- can mean more sometimes, I get that sense that someone was thinking about me and cared about how I felt. That support is really comforting, and I think makes me think about others more too
- Even outside of the work with BDMLR other volunteers have offered me support in circumstances, in a short time volunteering with the BDMLR I have made some amazing friendships with people who have already offered me more support in times than people I have known my whole life
- There is always a really strong support network both in person and on social media maintaining connections, both virtual and real, and always being available to help each other.
- Whenever there has been a difficult situation, I always know I am fully supported by my peers and by the more senior / knowledgeable members of this incredible team.
- Everyone in the group has been kind and sympathetic, with supportive messages when needed offering praise and reassurance.
- As my confidence has grown, I have been better at accepting situations due to more knowledge about what is happening, I have taken more responsibility for my own safety as well as others as now I feel more capable
- When I attended my first stranding of cetaceans & seal pup rescues, the support & training I received from experienced volunteers & vets was life changing.
- I think I was already an 'emotionally aware' person before volunteering, but this has increased massively, and I now feel much more able to reassure and support people during rescues which can be sometimes be stressful or upsetting.
- We are a team and a community- supporting each other is critically important. I have endeavoured to be available to react quickly and effectively in urgent situations and to support and praise other volunteers who have done amazing work when I haven't personally been able to assist.
- On rescues I've had people doubt the decisions they've made but I always remind them that any decision they have made is always in the best interest of the animal's wellbeing even though the result might not have been positive.
- I have ensured I have stayed in contact with people and that they know I am there for them.
- With the BDMLR there is a massive feel of community. During difficult times everyone supports each other either through messaging or phone calls. Rescues are quite often followed by coffee with the rescuers where you can debrief and discuss feelings and emotions from the rescue.
- I have been there for friends and animals in need of help that perhaps before I would have told myself are ok or that somebody better trained would help. This varies from friends with mental health issues, friends who have lost loved ones and animals that I have collected and taken to wildlife rehabilitation centres



