

SPOTLIGHT



Women in Rowing

June 2025



Welcome



Welcome to Spotlight, where we highlight the remarkable women who are making a difference in every corner of our rowing community.

From athletes to coaches, umpires to board & committee members, we celebrate their contributions.

This June, we interviewed Caroline O'Brien, Get Going Get Rowing Coordinator for Northern Ireland





1. Can you share your background in rowing and explain how and why you first got involved?

I've been involved in the sport for 30+ years .

I Started in my final year of my undergraduate degree at Queen's University. My friend Claire who had been in London for the first year of her degree before returning to N Ireland suggested I 'come down for the craic', She had been coxing in London and loved it and thought I would enjoy rowing too. Basically she was looking for a partner in crime !

I was hooked after about the third session.

After the first year of rowing the university club encouraged you to coach/ help out with novices, which is a good set up as it means that the learning is passed on and then its not just left to one or two people to grow the sport. Little did I know these early coaching experiences would lead me to my current job working for Rowing Ireland.



2. What keeps you motivated and passionate about rowing to this day?



I love the sensation of floating on the water and how technical it is, keeps the old grey matter challenged. Most of all I enjoy the life-long friendships I've made both at home and abroad. Essentially I discovered Ireland through rowing , I'll never forget my first time visiting Enniskillen to race. I thought it was so beautiful and I love returning, regardless of the weather!

I get a buzz seeing others having fun in the sport and getting super fit. There's always something new to learn which I guess keeps it fresh.

I've learned to tow trailers both small and VERY large trailers of boats both nationally and on the continent. I watch friends and club mates training and showing true grit, sometimes winning sometimes not but whatever the outcome they enjoy the process and the party afterwards!

I love a challenge and discovering new ways of communicating the technique of the sport in different ways . In my current role one of the most rewarding elements has been coaching young people with physical and intellectual disabilities which adds a whole other challenge to my methods of coaching.

Like everyone I've experienced some tough personal challenges in life and the sport and the friends I've made in it have been the common denominator helping me push through and out the other side .



3. What drew you to the role of Get Going Get Rowing Coordinator for Northern Ireland?

To be honest what drew me to the role was seeing the programme thrive in other parts of the island and wanting that for the young people in Northern Ireland. I'm extremely proud of the progress we've made so far, having brought the programme to 25 schools in 8 months.

It's great not only seeing the young people in schools develop but to work with such a variety of young and (shall we say more mature people) as they develop their coaching skills and grow in confidence. Not easy to stand in front of 15-20 expectant teenagers

4. What does inclusion mean to you and how does Get Going Get Rowing cater for a range of different abilities?

Inclusion to me means bringing the sport to every BODY and especially bringing it into schools and communities who think that its only for posh people.

Ball sports are understandably massive in schools and communities, but they don't suit everyone and our sport provides an opportunity to do something totally different. I really see many young women especially taking to the sport in the schools we've been coaching in and it's an anecdotal theory but part of it is I believe is that they enjoy a sport that doesn't involve running round a room or pitch.

Young people love the simple movement of the slide and then the fact that there is a monitor that they can interact with is a win win.

In the Get Going get Rowing programme we have adaptive seats than can be used on ergs and boats to support young people who find it difficult to stabilise on the erg/boat. We adapt the programme, where we can to meet the needs of young people. We use some sign language, audiovisuals and have some adaptive equipment for club boats. we've also undertaken some disability and inclusion training recently as NGB with Active Disability.

Still a work in progress!



5. Why do you think rowing is such a great sport for young people to try?

Its totally different , it can be done individually and/or as part of a team, it can be indoors or outdoors, one can meet great friends, and discover the country, at home and abroad.

6. How can people or schools in Northern Ireland get involved in the Get Going Get Rowing schools programme

Schools can get involved in the programme by checking out the `get going get rowing website <https://www.getgoinggetrowing.com/about-the-programme/>

Or emailing GetRowingManager@RowingIreland.ie or myself caroline@rowingireland.ie

