

Revitalizing Cultural Heritage in Petty Harbour: A PLACE Case Study of Fishing for Success

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With a hand-held fishing line and a reliable outboard motorboat, Fishing for Success is turning the tides on the future of Newfoundland and Labrador's (NL) oldest and most controversial industry, the fishery. Founded in 2014 by husband-and-wife team, Kimberly Orren and Leo Hearn, Fishing for Success is "a community-based non-profit social enterprise that works to transmit the intangible cultural heritage of Newfoundland & Labrador's family fishery."² Fishing for Success offers year-round educational programs and tourist adventures based on purposeful and practical experiences of fishing, gathering, and gardening. Their offerings include hand-line cod fishing, boat building and repair, fish gutting, cooking lessons, berry picking, traditional stage building, net knitting and more, all accompanied by a blend of local songs, rhymes and stories. Since its launch, Fishing for Success has developed compelling programming, gained local media attention, raised political support, and made a meaningful impact on the lives of many—especially amongst some of the province's most vulnerable populations.

Despite the urgent need to preserve fishing heritage, Fishing for Success has met many challenges. Restrictive fishing regulations, complex outreach logistics, limited operating budgets, and paradoxical priorities have



¹Jennifer Charles prepared this case as a Research Assistant under the supervision of Professor Natalie Slawinski (University of Victoria and Memorial University) and Dr. Gillian Morrissey (Centre for Social Enterprise, Memorial University). It was reviewed and approved by a designate of Fishing for Success. Funding for the development of this case was provided by Memorial University's Faculty of Business Administration, the Ocean Frontiers Institute and by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This case was developed to illustrate the PLACE Model of Community Resilience and is intended for classroom discussion and other learning purposes. This case is not intended to serve as an endorsement, source of primary data, or illustration of effective or ineffective management.

² Fishing for Success, "About Us", n.d., <https://fishingforsuccess.org/about/>

restricted the organization's growth, financial stability, and sustainability. Yet, through the five pillars of the PLACE Framework: **promote community leaders, link divergent perspectives, amplify local capacities & assets, convey compelling stories, and engage both/and thinking**, we can examine both the opportunities and hurdles Fishing for Success has experienced, and derive learnings for other social enterprises seeking to preserve important, place-based culture and traditions in their own corners of the world.

Fishing to Save a Way of Life

Co-founder, Kimberly Orren, grew up in Grand Falls, NL, summering with her family in the rural fishing community of Leading Tickles. It was here she spent her days hanging around the local fishing wharves, pestering local fishermen to teach her everything about the fish, their habitat, and the industry. She recalled, "Anyone who knew about fishing, they weren't safe, because I wanted to learn about fishing. I wanted to go ice fishing, I wanted to go trout fishing, I wanted to go cod jigging, I wanted to learn about this fish and that fish, fish parts I wanted to know if it was a boy fish or a girl fish, and I want to learn about the ocean."³ But there was a problem, no one would take her out fishing in a boat. "There was an old superstition that girls were bad luck in boats," recalled Orren. So, she learned everything she could with her feet on the shore, until she was old enough to sail and handle a boat herself.

Orren's passion for the natural world led to a career as a high school science teacher. Year after year, despite her best efforts, she watched as her students grew less engaged with the plants and animals in their own backyards. She also noted discouraging changes in the NL fishery following the devastating cod moratorium of 1992. It wasn't just the dramatic decline in the amount of fishing activity, but also the noticeable shift in fishery participation. She shared, "Pre-1992, fishing was a family activity. Before that it was a human activity, what people just did. Then it became categorized as an economic activity. Now you can't be on the water unless you are commercially fishing."

Orren watched as NL fishers became older, and their numbers grew smaller. She noticed how

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³ Kimberly Orren, "Fishing for Success: Casting a Net for a Better Future," August 14, 2018, TEDxSt. John's video, 5:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt9so8FHZy4>

fewer elders knew the secrets and the mysteries of the sea like they did when she was young. She worried that her fishing heritage was at risk of extinction as children spent more time indoors. Despite her despair, Orren recognized an opportunity. If she could **promote** the **community leaders** of tomorrow to find the same joy in fishing as she knew as a child, she could **amplify** and preserve NL's greatest **asset and capacity**, its fishing heritage. In 2006 Orren returned to school to pursue her Masters-PhD in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences and started in on her next big pursuit: to preserve the province's fishing heritage by teaching kids to fish. She was going to need some help.

Fishing for (Love and) Success

It was, perhaps, no coincidence that Orren and Hearn first met in a fishing boat on the waters of Petty Harbour, NL. For Hearn, fishing was a family business. For over 200 years, his family had lived and fished in Petty Harbour, a small fishing community on the east coast of NL. When the 1992 moratorium robbed him of his livelihood, Hearn began working at the dockyard in St. John's, staying close to the water and waiting for his opportunity to get back out fishing. His opportunity arrived in 2005 with the opening of the NL recreational groundfish fishery which allowed the public to partake in small-scale cod fishing on designated days throughout the season. "I started to take people out on the water to get their fish," Hearn recalled.

That same year, Orren found herself in Petty Harbour, out on one of Hearn's fishing trips. The two strangers exchanged fishing stories from their childhoods and shared their sadness for the trajectory of the NL fishery. Hearn announced he had an idea for a business: to preserve traditional fishing skills by teaching them to tourists. Orren admitted that she too had a business idea: to preserve traditional fishing skills by teaching them to

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children. It was a compelling opportunity to **engage both/and thinking**: to teach NL fishing heritage to both children and tourists, combining an educational mandate with a promising revenue opportunity. They decided to work together to build Fishing for Success, infusing place-based fishing heritage into programs and experiences for children and tourists alike.

Orren and Hearn made a complimentary pair. She was well-versed in teaching science-based curriculum, and he had a deep, lived knowledge of fishing heritage, particularly on

the waters of Petty Harbour (**link diverse perspectives**). “She had a background of putting things on paper, I had background in getting people on the water”, reiterated Hearn. Petty Harbour was the ideal location for the organization. Just 15 minutes south of NL’s capital city, with a population of one thousand, Petty Harbour has big city proximity with a small-town feel. Furthermore, since the 1960s, Petty Harbour boasted a protected fishery, free from trawlers and the use of gill nets. For over 100 years, Petty Harbour fishers used hook and line techniques, sparing the local habitat from environmental destruction and micro-plastic deposits.

In 2012, Orren purchased Island Rooms, a small peninsula at the center of Petty Harbour where families in the community once built their stages and tied up their boats. Island Rooms became the official home of Fishing for Success. They incorporated in April 2014, and that same year, Orren and Hearn were married at Island Rooms, exchanging vows at the ocean’s edge, adorned in their rubber boots.

A Place in the Boat for Everyone

Orren returned to her studies once again, this time gaining her Captain’s Ticket and her Fishing Masters IV certification. In summer of 2016, Fishing for Success launched its operations. One of the first programs was Girls Who Fish, a year-round initiative focused on enhancing self-efficacy skills and industry access for females. Inspired by Orren’s personal story of being kept out of boats as a young girl, Girls Who Fish sought to fight back against the industry-wide gender bias prevalent throughout the NL fishery; to change the existing narrative, and create new, compelling stories about the success of young girls in the fishery (**convey compelling stories**). “When you get into teaching kids to fish,” shared Orren, “you realize there are so many issues with fishing, huge inequity issues. Only 20% of NL fishers are women, and less than 2% of them are fishing enterprise owners.” She continued, “People need to see others like them to start imagining themselves in those careers. If you want young women to start thinking about getting into fishing, whether it’s recreational or commercial, then we’ve got to start getting those who identify as female in the boats.”⁴

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⁴ Fishing for Success, “Girls Who Fish,” Nov 4, 2018, video, 2:53, https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=8f1d7cfb950fe36b&rlz=1C5CHFA_enCA1008CA1021&sxsrf=AHTn8zpoCu2vF8cQmCLs

While children were the initial focus of educational programming, Girls Who Fish quickly expanded to encourage all females, aged 8-80, to join in the small, but mighty, ocean-based revolution. “I just want to get kids in boats, one kid at a time. You really have to reach children under 9, which can be a problem. So, you get into intergenerational outreach – moms and their kids,” Orren explained. Orren herself led Girls Who Fish each month, driving the boat, sharing her personal fishing experiences, and demonstrating that girls, do indeed, belong in boats.

Like every good story so often does, word of Fishing for Success’ ambitions quickly spread. Orren and Hearn were effective at sharing their message via social media and successfully captured the attention of local media outlets (**convey compelling stories**). It wasn’t long before other local non-profit groups—such as Association for New Canadians and Choices for Youth—began reaching out to develop joint programming. When first contacted by First Light, a non-profit committed to “revitalizing, strengthening and celebrating St. John’s urban indigenous cultures and languages,”⁵ Orren got to work developing a fishing program for urban indigenous children. However, she quickly discovered First Light wanted all members to be included, regardless of age (**engage both/and thinking**). Orren reflected on the important lesson, “We know that removal of indigenous people from their traditional ways has been a tremendous problem...I realized if I was to provide First Light with fishing access it had to be their access, on their terms.” These were exciting and validating moments for Orren and Hearn, to see other local non-profits finding creative ways to interpret and apply the Fishing for Success mandate. “If you want people at the ocean to have a voice, it has to be all the voices...you have to develop programs to target them—non-white people, urban indigenous—everyone” Orren emphasized.

Trouble at Sea and on Shore

As the success stories increased, so did demand for educational programming and tourist outings. But, despite a mandate to get people out fishing, industry regulations were an ongoing inhibitor to operations and organizational success. Fishing for Success could

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⁵ First Light St. John’s Friendship Centre, “Overview About”, 2025, <https://firstlightnl.ca/about/>

only offer on-ocean programming during the NL recreational groundfish fishery, which was only open on select Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays throughout the season, totaling just 35-45 days a year. Thus, on each recreational fishery day, Fishing for Success had to choose between offering educational programming or holding a tourist outing. Furthermore, the non-profit organizations Fishing for Success was working with didn't hold programming over the weekends. "A few Mondays throughout the summer just wasn't enough time to make the impact we wanted", reflected Orren. As a place-based social enterprise, Fishing for Success' core operations posed a paradoxical tension between achieving its social goals and generating revenue.

They decided to approach DFO to request a special fishing license, one that would permit educational programming, as well as media tours, outside of recreational fishery days.

Late participant cancellations, no-shows, and poor weather aggravated matters further, as did requests from the media. "We constantly have media requests", shared Orren. And while media fishing trips provided an effective avenue for advertising (**convey compelling stories**), it, too,

occupied yet another valuable fishing day. Overcoming the policy barriers would require Orren and Hearn to **engage both/and thinking**. They decided to approach DFO to request a special fishing license, one that would permit educational programming, as well as media tours, outside of recreational fishery days. The package was developed and the application submitted, but year after year, their request was denied.

Turning Tides

By the start of the 2021 fishing season, the future of Fishing for Success was uncertain. It had been five years of restrictive fishing access, juggling priorities, limited operating budgets, and declined applications, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic weighed heavy on everyone's spirits. Despite the odds, Orren and Hearn kept going. Once again, Orren submitted an application for the special fishing license. For years she'd prepared a large detailed binder with depths of research and figures supporting her argument. But, more recently, she'd boiled everything down into a single page focused on what really mattered—preserving NL fishing heritage via teaching women, youth, newcomers, and aboriginal community members to fish. The proposal sat for weeks and weeks with no word, until finally, Orren and Hearn got the call. They received their approval for a Section 52 licence for cod. "They gave us an allocation of trips from Tuesday to Friday for 6 weeks, starting at the beginning of July" Orren beamed. The Section 52 license was reserved for non-profit, media, and research work. Fishing for Success' revenue-generating activities

would continue on groundfish fishery days. “We don’t use the special license for tourist adventures. It’s not fair to other tourism operators if we use it that way”, reiterated Hearn. When asked about the reason for their success, Orren replied, “We have gained many champions over the years, because they recognize we are doing good work.” Finally, the commitment to promoting the province’s youth and vulnerable populations were reaching the ears of the politicians, and the world.

With their new license in hand, the next big goal would be integrating fishing experiences into grade-school curriculum. With the volunteer support of Girls Who Fish members, Fishing for Success created the Sea2School program that “connects youth in coastal communities to fishing as a cornerstone of ocean literacy, climate change, and food equity,” explained Orren (**promote community leaders**). By 2023, a partnership with EcoSchools Canada and an extension of the Section 52 license into the academic year provided greater opportunity to engage more local schools in the Sea2School programming. “The experience of getting in a boat, getting on the water, it’s very personal. I believe it’s going to be transformational, a moment in the students’ lives they are going to mark,” Orren emphasized.

Fishing for the Future

With policy barriers easing, programming opportunities increasing, and the pandemic coming to an end, the choppy waters surrounding Fishing for Success’ future began to calm. Orren and Hearn could finally set their sights to the horizon, building long-term goals for the organization and its succession, and the fishing industry at large. “If I’m not grooming a group of people to take this on in 10-15 years, then nothing we build now really matters” Orren asserted. While Girls Who Fish continued to attract passionate young volunteers and long-term staff, to truly change the trajectory of the fishery for the next generation and engage young people for the long-term, “we need to give them the opportunity to earn money,” Orren shared.

That opportunity was born in September 2024, when Orren joined forces with Fishing for Success Artist-in-Residence, Kelly Jane Brutton, and long-term Fishing for Success employee, Liam Duggan, to launch a new, for-profit initiative, Women’s Fishing and Cultural Co-operative (WFCC). With a feminist approach to ocean-based products and knowledge-sharing, WFCC aims to expand on Fishing for Success’ non-profit ideals by supporting its members’ participation in the for-profit sector of the wide-reaching sustainable oceans economy. By encouraging young people to develop their own creative

ideas around earning a living in the ocean economy, WFCC is enabling young people to remain in the province, connected to their fishing heritage.

By **promoting community leaders, linking divergent perspectives, amplifying assets and capacities, conveying compelling stories, and engaging both/and thinking**, Fishing for Success encourages the next generation of young people to take control of their livelihoods, their food security, their heritage, and their connection to those who fished before. At a time when many NL communities are moving away from the fishery, Fishing for Success is an example of a social enterprise working to increase participation and enthusiasm for fishing; one child, one woman, one immigrant, and one hand-line-caught fish at a time.