

# Cancer has no borders – neither does fly fishing

→ **JILL GRIEVE** reports that Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland is all set to conquer mainland Europe as Italian fly fishers plan their first retreat.



**W**hen an invitation comes asking you to talk about one of your favourite projects to an enthusiastic new audience, it is only polite to accept. When that invitation comes from Italian fly fishers and involves a trip to Tuscany, then really the only question is when the next flight might be.

So it was that fieldsports' global appeal came into sharp relief in January, when I flew to Pisa at the invitation of the Alleanza Pescatori Ricreativi – or Recreational Angling Alliance – to attend a trade show in Carrara to tell them all about Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland (CfR), the unique form of therapy for ladies with breast cancer that blends counselling, medical advice and fly fishing.

Laura Pisano of the Alleanza Pescatori Ricreativi had spotted the programme on Facebook and, with an eye on encouraging ladies into the traditionally male dominated sport of fly fishing, she contacted us to find out more about the retreat programme, why it works and how it might work in Italy. Laura busied herself with finding support to bolster her plan and when I arrived, alongside long-term CfR supporters and casting instructors Sally and Tony Pizii, it quickly became clear that it was “when” not “if” CfR Italia could be formed. It has always struck me while working on CfR that the kindness, generosity and goodwill of fishermen cannot be overstated, and that was also true in Italy. We were greeted



warmly by Laura, by Daniela Ferrando, a sea angling journalist who wants to play an integral part in the project, Massimo Maggiani, of the Italian National Fly Fishing Association and many of his colleagues – all equally keen to be a part of the project. We were also welcomed by oncologists from the local hospital who were intrigued to find out more about

this previously unheard of project. My presentation was delivered with simultaneous translation and while we didn't necessarily understand exactly what we were saying to each other, our photos of ladies enjoying the retreats and smiling broadly while on the bankside proved to be a universal language. The medics were particularly impressed that the project gets ladies away from the hospital where cancer support groups and activities are traditionally run. We all agreed that fresh air, light exercise and the casting motion all contribute to what can easily be described as therapy for body and mind.

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Of course, one of the therapeutic benefits of CfR is laughter, always very much in evidence despite the seriousness behind the lady participants' presence on retreat. Sally and Tony helped to convey that laughter at Carrara, when Sally whipped out a custom-built 2ft rod and line with a fluffy toy fish on the end of it and, with Tony holding the fish at the end of the line, “played” him to help explain how the instruction side of the retreats work. As Sally says, “coaching is all about



having fun. If people have fun, they learn and enjoy the process. That is what we try to promote and I hope achieve.” Sally's coaching credentials were certainly put to the test when she was handed a rod and invited to show her casting style on a 30m indoor casting pool in the centre of the trade show. Clearly passing that particular test, good humoured as it was, she was then afforded the honour of helping to judge a fly tying competition. Again, the global appeal of fieldsports was very much in evidence, and Sally and Massimo scrutinised each entry and agreed completely on the winning set.

I very much hope we have started the ball rolling for the Italian fly fishing and medical community as they seek to import our beloved programme. Having reported back to the original Casting for Recovery project in the United States, all the signs are positive and we hope that CfR Italia can run its first retreat next year. As I told the assembled group: “The European Parliament confirms that breast cancer is the leading cause of death in European women aged 35 to 59, so it is sadly true that there are no shortage of ladies who could benefit from what the Casting for Recovery model can offer. Cancer has no borders, so there is no reason this project should either.” Where next? ●



**Jill Grieve** has worked with Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland on behalf of the Countryside Alliance for 10 years and since last year has had the honour of being its Director.

For more on Casting for Recovery UK & Ireland, including how to apply to attend a retreat, visit [www.castingforrecovery.org.uk](http://www.castingforrecovery.org.uk)