



# Active Volunteering



Volunteering in the natural environment has been shown to have a variety of beneficial effects to an individual's health and well being, for example it can reduce stress (a major risk factor for coronary heart disease), aggression and mild-moderate depression.

Walking for Life! has been responsible for developing, delivering and promoting a wide range of volunteering activities.

This guidance will focus on 3 main areas of work within Walking for Life!:

- 1 Developing new and supporting existing Parish Paths Partnership Groups
- 2 Promoting the wide variety of volunteering opportunities across Shropshire
- 3 Creating an Active Volunteering Partnership group

## I Developing new and supporting existing Parish Paths Partnership groups (P3)

The Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme (a national initiative) has been running in Shropshire for around 15 years and is supported and promoted by part of Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation Team (based at Old Nils Quarry, Pontesbury).

The work of over 50 voluntary P3 groups enables local networks of Public Rights of Way to be used to their best advantage. The P3 groups are formed from:

- local communities
- ramblers
- riders
- cyclists

The P3 groups agree how best to look after their local network and then depending on ability, they can perform tasks ranging from simply walking the routes and reporting problems, to installing new stiles, gates, bridges and way marking. The opportunity exists to create circular walks and rides which can be themed around places of local interest, legend, flora and fauna or natural beauty. Groups can access grants to help with promotions to attract visitors to the area.

Walking for Life! has helped to support and develop new P3 groups through providing support and funding. Walking for Life! aims to work with P3 groups to achieve the following:

### Link P3 groups to existing Walking the way to Health groups

#### Walking for Life! aims to:

- encourage P3 volunteers to train as walk leaders to help their local Walking for Health group.
- create communication channels between existing P3 groups and Walking the way to Health groups to enable them to support each other e.g. the P3 group may be able to make some routes more accessible for the Walking the way to Health group by replacing stiles with kissing gates. Alternatively some of the walkers may like to volunteer to be part of the P3 group.

#### For example:

In May 2008 the Pontesbury Walking the way to Health group was launched, in preparation for this the local P3 group carried out some fantastic work negotiating and replacing stiles with self closing gates to make local walking routes more accessible. These routes have been well used by Pontesbury Walking the way to Health group and the work is of particular importance to those members who have mobility problems and find climbing stiles very difficult.



## Support P3 groups to set up their own Walking the way to Health group or community walking group

P3 groups are an ideal starting point for setting up Walking the way to Health or community walking groups in areas of need, as the groups provide an existing pool of volunteers who often have strong links to other groups and organisations within the local community e.g. Parish Councils.

### For example:

Over the past 12 months Shawbury has become a very active community within the Walking for Life! project. Initially the group set up a Walking the way to Health group as a result of their Parish Plan. Since then longer monthly walks have been developed for those who wish to walk a little further, and very recently a P3 group has been established to ensure the local footpaths are improved and maintained.

## Provide funding and support for the development and promotion of independent walks leaflets

Walking for Life! has offered P3 groups the funding and support required for the publication and promotion of short circular walks in their local area.

Over time it has been recognised that it is vitally important to include P3 groups and other members of the local community in the development of walks leaflets. Local knowledge when identifying suitable routes is priceless, as is the fact that if P3 groups may also be able to assist with the maintenance of the route once it is promoted. There is nothing worse than promoting a route then failing to maintain it sufficiently. P3 groups in a number of areas in Shropshire have been provided with funding to produce their own leaflets.

### For example:

Cleobury Mortimer Footpaths Association were provided with a grant from Walking for Life! to produce a series of short walks leaflets in the local area. The group have since also gained funding from Awards for All which has enabled them to produce a total of 24 short walking routes around Cleobury. All of these routes will be regularly surveyed and through links with Shropshire Council and the P3 initiative will continue to be maintained to a high standard.

## 2 Promotion of active volunteering opportunities

An audit of the range of active volunteering opportunities across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin identified that Shropshire offers a huge range of activities through organisations such as:

- Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- Natural England
- National Trust
- Shropshire Council
- BTCV
- Butterfly Conservation

It was identified that what was lacking in the county was a more co-ordinated approach to the promotion of these opportunities.

For this reason two methods of a county approach to promotion were developed:

- *Your Guide to Active Volunteering*: this is a signposting guide which provides information about a huge variety of activities taking place across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin
- Shropshire Active Website  
[www.shropshireactive.co.uk](http://www.shropshireactive.co.uk)



The purpose of this website is to provide more detailed information on the range of activities described in the signposting guide. The website is still being developed but the long term plan is that each organisation will regularly update the website with their work party and activities programme.

The website offers a search facility allowing the user to search either by:

- area
- type
- organisation e.g. Natural England/ Shropshire Wildlife Trust etc
- date



### 3 Creation of the Shropshire Active Volunteering Partnership (SAVP)

The Shropshire Active Volunteering Partnership has been developed with the aim of increasing co-ordination and networking between the variety of active volunteering provider organisations across the county. It was identified that although the organisations were well aware of each other, they often worked in isolation. Walking for Life! identified that there was:

- No central place for potential volunteers to find out what opportunities exist
- No central place for volunteers to find out about work parties and training opportunities
- Limited capacity for each organisation to run training events
- Few opportunities for volunteers to work on other organisations' sites
- Limited resources for organisations to thank their volunteers

- Little sharing of resources such as tools and equipment
- Little sharing of best practice between organisations and volunteers

The SAVP was developed based on the model of the Worcester Wardens, who kindly carried out a presentation on how their group works, its aims, objectives and benefits involved.

The group worked together and identified the following aims for the group:

- Creation of a Shropshire Active Volunteering Partnership Charter which set out the partners' commitments to their volunteers and each other; to be signed by all member organisations
- Continued development of the Shropshire Active Website [www.shropshireactive.co.uk](http://www.shropshireactive.co.uk)
- An joint annual "thank you" event for volunteers
- A programme of training events open to all volunteers – providing opportunities above and beyond what an individual organisation could offer
- A programme of work parties open to all volunteers – building extra capacity at key sites

