

# Setting up a Walking the way to Health Group



The key to the long term success of community Walking the way to Health groups is sustainability. Groups need to be set up in a way that means if funding comes to an end and a project officer post finishes, the walks will continue.

In order to do this:

- Walking the way to Health groups need to be set up in partnership with community members
- Community groups need to be given ownership of the group, with ongoing support from your organisation if and when needed
- Community groups need to be given all information on Walking the way to Health at the very beginning, and need to be aware of implications such as paperwork and risk assessments prior to getting the group started.

## Step by step guide to setting up a community Walking the way to Health group:

### STEP 1: Make contacts

Make contact, enthuse, motivate and gain as much support as possible from key individuals and groups within a community. For the group to be successful, local people need to be promoting it e.g.:

- Local GP Surgery:
- GPs
- Practice Manager
- Practice Nurses
- Patient Support Groups
- Parish Council
- Church
- Existing groups e.g. WI/walking clubs
- Local volunteering groups e.g. Parish Paths Partnership Group

Through working with these contacts identify a starting location for the group which provides access to facilities such as parking, toilets and refreshments after the walk e.g. village halls, GP surgeries, community rooms, civic centres, churches.

### STEP 2: Hold a community meeting

Working with the key contacts organise a community meeting to present the idea of Walking the way to Health with the aim of building interest, and recruiting walkers and volunteers.

This meeting is best held at the proposed start venue for the walk.

Ideally ask a key member of the community to be involved in presenting at the meeting e.g. ask the GP to do a presentation on the 'benefits walking has to your health' or ask a member of an existing local Walking the way to Health group to share their experiences.

At the meeting ask those that wish to 'register their interest' in the group to providing their name and address, and indicate if they would also consider becoming a volunteer walk leaders.



## STEP 3: Hold a taster walk

Rarely will people commit to joining the group or becoming a volunteer walk leader without finding out exactly what to expect, taster walks are a great way to provide people with all the information they need.

Decide on a date/time/venue for a taster walk and send out details to all those who registered their interest; along with an OHQ (Outdoor Health Questionnaire) for people to complete and bring along with them.

You may only need to lead one walk and your volunteers will come forward, but you may need to spend more time encouraging and re-assuring people but putting the time and effort in at this stage is really worth it.

## STEP 4: Recruit volunteers and hold a meeting with them

Once you have held some taster walks, volunteers will begin to come forward as they begin to understand what would be expected of them.

Volunteers are required for a variety of roles, by offering options and breaking down tasks it is often possible to get more people involved. Invite all those who have shown an interest in volunteering to support the group to a meeting.

### Possible Volunteer roles:

- Walk Leaders
- Group contact (name to go on promotional leaflets etc)
- Rota organiser
- Risk assessor
- Database input
- Paperwork organiser
- County network representative

Every group is different, some may only have 1 or 2 key people who organise everything, whereas others prefer to share out all the roles.

What is important is that the group make and feel ownership of all the decisions. Volunteers need to know what is expected of them from the beginning but how they go about achieving these expectations is their decision. By the end of the meeting aim to have at least one volunteer for each of the possible roles.

## STEP 5: Deliver walk leader training

### Walk leader training works best if it is:

- delivered locally
- free
- lunch provided
- targeted to the specific group

Walk leader training is vital to ensure that volunteers have a full understanding and acceptance of exactly what 'Walking the way to Health' aims to do. The training day needs to:

- Ensure volunteers are committed to the ethos of 'Walking the way to Health' i.e. short walks for beginners
- Outline the exact expectations of walk leaders and what support they will get
- Explain the importance, and purpose, of the paperwork and database
- Provide all volunteers with a clear vision of what they need to do next to get involved



## STEP 6: Address any issues and support volunteers to organise the walks themselves

### Groups may have issues with, for example:

- not having anywhere to socialise after the walk
- lack of non-stiled routes
- no funding to pay for use of a facility e.g. village hall
- difficulties with risk assessments

It is important in the early stages to work with the group to break down these problems and help them to find solutions.

For example, you may be able to help them gain funding or you may be able to improve the accessibility of their local routes by contacting the countryside team in your local council and ask if some stiles can be replaced with gates.

Once any issues have been sorted out the group is ready to be launched. It is important to provide as much support as you can during these early stages, so that over time the group are able to organise and lead the walks independently of you.

## STEP 7: Assist with promotion

The best promotional tool for Walking the way to Health is word of mouth, which is why it is so important to get the community very involved from the beginning. However other ways you could help the group promote themselves could be:

- organising a press release
- inviting a journalist to walk with the group
- producing leaflets and posters and distributing them in the local area
- delivering talks to local community groups e.g. WI, U3A
- developing a display in local facilities e.g. GP surgery, village hall, library

*For supporting documents please refer to 'Walking for Life! Toolkit' Disc*

