

Working closely with health professionals

The majority of the UK population does not take enough exercise and there are many health conditions where regular physical activity can make a positive and significant difference. For these reasons, forging strong links between WHI health walk schemes and local health professionals is vitally important.



Linking with local day centres

SCHEME: HIGH PEAK
WALKS FOR HEALTH
REGION: EAST MIDLANDS

Many WHI health walk scheme co-ordinators are themselves health professionals and one of the most important parts of their job is making effective links with those working in other sectors of the health service.

Paul Evans is the Community Sports Co-ordinator with High Peak Borough Council and part of his work involves co-ordinating the *High Peak Walks for Health* scheme. Creating health walk links with day centres for adults with learning difficulties and vulnerable adults is an area of work that Paul has maintained and developed.

“Alderbrook Day Centre was running some walks of its own but we invited them to come and join in with the High Peak Walks. About 12 adults with learning difficulties now join one of our walks every week and really enjoy it. The other participants also get a lot out of mixing and, as one walker said, ‘it is great to go out with such nice people that I would never have considered walking with.’”

PAUL EVANS, COMMUNITY SPORTS
CO-ORDINATOR

The connection now goes deeper than simply an invitation to attend existing walks. Building on the enthusiasm of the walkers from



Several adults from Alderbrook Day Centre have seen a considerable improvement in their physical fitness since taking part in High Peak Walks for Health.

Alderbrook, Paul recently ran an adapted training session at the day centre, talking about the reasons for health walks and the importance of risk assessments, among other subjects. At the end participants were given Assistant Walk Leader certificates.

Many of the people from Alderbrook have now been taking part in health walks for over three years and have seen a considerable improvement in their physical fitness. Walk leaders from the scheme have responded by setting up longer walks specifically with these participants in mind.

In recognition of their outstanding contribution to the local community, the High Peak health walk team has

been nominated for a Nationwide Award.

“We have made good links with the staff as well as the adults attending the day centre. One member of staff has trained as a walk leader and leads two or three walks for us each year. One of these is always the Christmas walk which takes place whatever the weather and ends up at the day centre where everyone is invited in for mince pies, tea and a sing-song. Nobody wants to leave and they have to throw us out when the day centre closes at 4.30!”

PAUL EVANS

Reaching new walkers in surgeries, hospitals and the community

SCHEME: KIRKLEES WALKING NETWORK
REGION: YORKSHIRE & HUMBER

Creating strong links between health walk schemes and local health professionals is not a one-way process. When it works well, the partnerships forged can lead to mutual support and informed referrals in both directions.

The benefits of working in this way are well illustrated in Kirklees, West Yorkshire. Julie Hicks, a Physical Activity Development Officer with Kirklees Council Culture and Leisure Services, is the co-ordinator of the local health walk scheme - Kirklees Walking Network.

Julie's post is part-funded by the NHS and the access that this gives her to GP surgeries and the GP referral scheme is extremely useful.

Julie has also made contact with the Health Trainers in the community and makes sure that they are involved and informed. For example, when a WHI National Step-O-Meter Programme training day was held locally, Julie saw to it that Practice Nurses and Health Trainers were invited. The Health Trainers, for their part, remain aware of what the Kirklees Walking Network has to offer and frequently refer clients to the health walks.

"The local surgeries have Practice Protected Time and I have been able to take stands and boards into these sessions and talk about health walks as well as hand out Step-O-Meters to GPs and Practice Nurses. Under the National Service Framework, GPs have to achieve certain targets - e.g. reduction of obesity - and making use of health walks can help them to achieve these."

JULIE HICKS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, KIRKLEES COUNCIL

Two other groups of health professionals with whom Julie is in close contact are the Smoking



Walk leaders Yvonne Arthur and Peter Bower with the Golcar walking group; part of the Kirklees Walking Network.

Cessation Team and the Cardiac Rehabilitation staff at Dewsbury District Hospital.

The links developed with the Smoking Cessation Team have been of mutual benefit. The team now run a health walk before or after each of their sessions and, whenever the Smoking Cessation bus is out and about in Kirklees, Julie is invited to take part or supply information about the health walks.

When cardiac rehabilitation patients reach the final phase of their treatment, health walks are one of

the options open to them under the local Exercise Referral Scheme run by Kirklees Council. The Kirklees Walking Network health walks are open to everyone and several of the walk leaders are ex-cardiac patients who have been invited to train as WHI walk leaders. Their presence on the walks is helpful and reassuring for cardiac patients.

"The important thing is to make and maintain close links and to keep saying 'we are here and this is what we do'."

JULIE HICKS

Working with health professionals key facts

- Obesity levels in the UK are rising at an alarming rate and the current increases have been linked to declining levels of physical activity. *National Heart Forum (2007), Lightening the load: tackling overweight and obesity, London:HMSO*
- Many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society are associated with physical inactivity, such as coronary heart disease, obesity, type II diabetes and hypertension. *At least five a week, 2004, Department of Health.*



Health walks offer prisoners the chance to make lifestyle changes they can take with them on release.

Getting prison walks going

SCHEME:	WALKING THE WAY TO PRISON HEALTH
REGION:	UK-WIDE

Prisoners in the UK do not, on the whole, enjoy good physical or mental health. A high proportion of both short- and long-stay prisoners smoke, abuse drugs, eat a poor diet and take little exercise. In addition to this, the majority of those in prison have a diagnosable mental health problem.

Under a new initiative - *Walking the Way to Prison Health* - the Department of Health and Natural England are working with Physical Training Instructors (PTIs) in a number of British prisons. PTIs, who oversee the physical activities available to prisoners, have been offered walk leader training. So far, 40 of the 138 prisons in the UK have taken this up. Many PTIs have gone on to become cascade trainers so that they can train colleagues and/or prisoners to lead walks.

Most prison health professionals have been keen to set up led walks, appreciating why they can be appropriate and effective in the prison setting. The benefits of regular walking to both physical and mental health are well documented and it is relevant that walking can help reduce stress and lessen aggression. Some prisons have exercise fields and all have gyms

where walks can take place.

The led health walks now on offer are clearly helping with physical health, relaxation and socialising. The take up has been very positive with prisoners keen to take part and/or to lead health walks. Many are also making use of Step-O-Meters and increasing the amount of steps they take independently.

HMP Everthorpe, Hull

Niall Almond, a PTI at HMP Everthorpe, has set up a successful led walks programme which is particularly popular with older prisoners and those dealing with mental health problems and obesity.

Niall has developed his own incentives to motivate prisoners to walk more and to make the experience fun - these include completing a virtual climb of Mt

Kilimanjaro by logging the requisite number of steps on a Step-O-Meter.

“There was nothing equivalent to health walks going on in prison before. At first I had to contend with many prisoners simply thinking it was about ‘fatties and loonies’ walking around the pitch. Now that I’ve been able to explain what it’s about we have a waiting list and more prisoners are applying all the time.”

NIALL ALMOND, PTI, HMP EVERTHORPE

HMP Albany, Isle of Wight

Brian Brockwell is the PTI at HMP Albany taking the lead on health walks. Setting up health walks has been a really positive move.

“I talk about the health benefits of walking on day one and then go on to monitor blood pressure and Body Mass Index. These are measured again after four weeks and any reduction in weight noted. Some of the results have been very encouraging. One prisoner has been able to reduce his anti-depressants and another with an arthritic knee no longer has to walk with sticks or take pain relief.”

BRIAN BROCKWELL, PTI, HMP ALBANY

Working with prison health professionals has been an important development for WHI. The opportunity to take part in regular led walks should help prisoners live more healthily in prison and make lifestyle changes they can take with them on release.

Working with health professionals key facts

- The cost of physical inactivity in England is estimated to be £8.2 billion annually. *Chief Medical Officer (2004), At Least Five a Week: evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health, London: DH*
- The biggest health improvements are gained from encouraging sedentary people to do a modest amount of exercise. *WHI Business Plan, 1999*

Connecting walking and weight management

SCHEME: TELFORD AND WREKIN:
WALKABOUT WREKIN
REGION: WEST MIDLANDS

Park Lane, Woodside is an identified area of deprivation and local regeneration within Telford & Wrekin. Levels of obesity and coronary heart disease are high.

Thinking that this might be a good location for a new walk, *Walkabout Wrekin*, a well established, local health walks scheme, carried out a questionnaire survey in the street. A high proportion of those who took part said that opportunities to walk were what they needed and a weekly walk from the Park Lane community centre was duly added to *Walkabout Wrekin's* programme. For the first ten months, however, the number attending was disappointingly low.

Things began to change when Telford & Wrekin PCT's weight management service *Why Weight?* decided to include Woodside in their programme of clinics. At the instigation of Jenny Bradshaw, the PCT's *Let's Get Physical* project co-ordinator for Woodside, a very productive partnership was set up.

"Linking the health walks with an existing initiative has worked well - we made contact with a captive audience of people already aware that they might benefit from more physical activity."

JENNY STRETTON, CO-ORDINATOR, WALKABOUT WREKIN

Jenny got together with Clare Harland, Health Promotion Co-ordinator for Obesity, and Jane Bellingham, Manager of the Park Lane Centre. They decided to combine projects and offer participants the chance to attend the *Why Weight?* clinic and then go on a health walk.

This partnership has proved successful and over half the people



Linking health walks with weight management clinics has led to good results in terms of both weight loss and an increase in physical activity.

who attend the clinic now also take part in the weekly walk.

There are plans to encourage more participation including an incentive scheme whereby a free *Why Weight?* session (normally £2) is offered to anyone who has been to five sessions and taken part in the walks.

Both projects are pleased with the results. *Walkabout Wrekin* has retained its threatened walk and has been successful in promoting other local walks to participants. *Why Weight?* appreciates the opportunity that the walks offer for professionals and clients to talk to each other informally.

"Other 'Why Weight' clinics in Telford offer aerobic exercise sessions but this one is different. The health walks are a stepping stone and have prompted people to go out for a walk with their children during the week or walk instead of driving to the shops."

CLARE HARLAND, HEALTH PROMOTION CO-ORDINATOR FOR OBESITY

"This type of responsive, joined-up approach is exactly what we need to do to help people make positive lifestyle choices."

DR CATHERINE WOODWARD, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, TELFORD & WREKIN



Walking the way to Health (WHI) is the largest national body promoting and setting the standards for led health walks. It is a joint initiative between Natural England and the British Heart Foundation, with additional funding from the Big Lottery Fund.

WHI aims to get more people walking in their own communities, especially those who take little exercise or live in areas of poor health. We've helped to create over 400 local health walk schemes and have trained more than 30,000 volunteer walk leaders. Since 2000, it is estimated that we've encouraged over a million people to walk more.

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The British Heart Foundation is a registered charity No.225971

Health Walk: a purposeful, brisk walk undertaken on a regular basis and carried out for the purpose of improving health.

This is one of a set of WHI case studies. For further information please visit our website.