

Variety of walking activities case study: 'Get going' with a range of walks in Caerphilly.



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Gerdded
Let's
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Introduction

Get Going Caerphilly started in November 2004 when the co-ordinator was appointed as a partnership post between Aneurin Bevan Health Board and Caerphilly County Borough Council to offer support and development to walking groups for 15 hours per week. The aim was to work with GP Referral cardiac rehabilitation patients to increase their level of healthy activity and increase the use of greenspace within the borough. The first walk was held in April 2005 around Bargoed Country Park with a small group of four or five cardiac rehabilitation patients.

There are now six community walking groups active throughout the borough that between them hold 14 weekly walks, each attracting at least 15 people per walk. The remit of the project has broadened to include the whole community. The range of walking activities has increased through taking ideas from existing walkers for different types of walks, such as easy local walks, lunchtime walks for working people and walks targeted at particular interest groups. The aim has been to attract a wider group of people beyond those interested in health walks. Activities and opportunities to join in are advertised throughout the borough, including on the sides of buses and on beer mats. Most of the walks are local to where the participants live or work, following footpaths; no special equipment is required.

Self-guided walks are available on the website and this has attracted a 30% increase in hits; audio trails are also provided for people with sight impairment

The co-ordinator has trained around 160 individuals to date. Members of the public (volunteers), Council staff and people from other local organisations have been trained to be able to lead walks for their friends, colleagues and service users. This includes council day centre and leisure staff, council office staff, Ystrad Mynach College, the police, Hafod Deg and other mental health groups.



All of the community groups are run by volunteers, with support from the co-ordinator to produce walks programmes and advertising where necessary. The co-ordinator sets up new groups, trains health walk leaders and provides on-going support as required. The six groups are at different stages, depending on when they had started and how many walkers they have. One group, the Pengam Strollers, is now constituted which has helped as a model for a further three groups.

Benefits and achievements in relation to the variety of walking activities

The co-ordinator has made links with other organisations and projects running physical activities, the benefit of having such variety of options is that a wider cross-section is attracted to join. The walks are progressive so that people can tackle a walk suited to their ability and build up to more challenging activity. These activities are arranged at different times of day and during the week and at weekends.

- Through their own voluntary activity, members of the groups now have a range of local physical and social activities to take part in; some group members have increased their weekly activity to include joining tai chi and aerobics classes, and attending the local gym.



- An example of the variety of walking now available throughout the borough is demonstrated by the walking festival held May 2010 (WALK IN 2010). The 22 mile walk was a self led walk, with maps and check points, aimed at the 'hardcore' walker. About 112 people went on this walk organised by the Countryside Service. The 12 mile walk was a challenging led walk with hills and mountains, organised by the Countryside Service; about 90 people took part. The 8 mile walk was organised and led by the Islwyn Ramblers; about 20 people attended. The canal walk was a healthy flat walk; this was organised by the Pengam Strollers. It attracted around 40 walkers.

For the walkers, the benefits of the variety of walking activities available include the ease of being able to find a walking activity at a level which suits them that is close to where they live, that they can join in any of the activities within the county, and there are also self-guided walks available which they can do at any time. The range of activities also means that those with variable levels of health and fitness can choose different lengths of walks depending on their fitness that day.

For the volunteers, the benefits are focussed around enjoyment and helping others. They enjoy helping to organise the walks and events. The co-ordinator emphasised that there are all sorts of tasks that the volunteers do that make the walks and social aspect pleasurable, e.g. welcoming newcomers, ensuring tea and coffee are ready. He notes that "it's all the pieces together that make the groups work".

The co-ordinator enjoys working with diverse groups, learning how to attract different people and gaining an insight into the barriers that people perceive, and then breaking them down. He pointed out that there is still a tremendous amount to do and he feels that this project is only reaching the tip of the iceberg; however this is not a deterrent, but something to spur them on, and the groups continue to recruit and spread the word. As he says, "they are the best advert".

There have also been benefits **for the host organisations** – the Local Health Board and the local authority. Aneurin Bevan Health Board needed to reduce cardiac the re-admission rate; they have recorded improvements amongst project participants including anxiety levels, blood pressure and heart rate. Caerphilly County Borough Council wanted to strengthen their links with the Health Service and increase participation in use of the Countryside Service and the local greenspaces.



Success Factors



The co-ordinator mentions a few things that have helped to make the project successful:

- ↘ Partnerships have contributed significantly. Because the project works closely with others bodies such as Mentro Allan, Countryside Service, Sustrans, mental health charities, Health Challenge Caerphilly etc, they have been able to share walks and leaders. It also means that if someone is not keen on walking, they can be directed to other activities, rather than remain sedentary.
- ↘ The project provides incentives, such as membership cards, badges, for the number of walks undertaken: 25, 50, 75 etc.
- ↘ Groups are able to use the minibus on occasion to travel further afield, which is a useful incentive.
- ↘ The existence of the co-ordinator role, taking on core tasks such as grant applications, administration and development, as well as providing moral support and guidance to volunteers. This enables the groups to achieve far more than would otherwise be possible.
- ↘ The way that the current walkers attract new people. They have found that rather than talking about health benefits, it is far better to say, "There's a great walk two minutes from you tomorrow; why don't you come along?"



Challenges

The co-ordinator notes that the biggest challenge has always been breaking through the initial inertia and getting people to 'try it once'. He notes that in some localities, walking is seen as socially unacceptable and a bit different; as one man said to him, "I've just taxed the car, why should I want to walk?". Targeting the 'Healthy Hearts' groups attracted the first few walkers; there has been gradual growth since then. The groups are now self-perpetuating, as existing members attract new walkers.

- ↘ The co-ordinator says that learning what works and how to engage different types of people has taken a while, but if one thing doesn't work he tries another approach. For example, in relation to getting more men involved, the co-ordinator commented that posters on buses, beer mats with phrases such as "Walk it off" have worked, as has engaging with the local rugby club. Men have been attracted by informal invitations, such as "Come along, it'll be a good laugh, some of the rugby lads are coming".
- ↘ The co-ordinator has tailored activities to suit different groups. For example, the local rugby club wanted something more adventurous to attract those people who had recently given up training and playing. This group often walks in the Brecon Beacons where there are more challenging walking routes. During the rugby season, they walk when the club does not have a game, mostly on the morning of international matches. The walkers then return to the club to watch the Wales match in the afternoon. When the season finishes, they plan to organise more frequent walks for the summer.

Self-sufficiency and looking forwards



The co-ordinator is keen that the groups increase their level of self sufficiency so that they can continue, formally or informally, in whatever way works for them. He sees getting people to volunteer in different capacities as key to self-sufficiency. He notes that getting volunteers to undertake certain tasks sometimes involves waiting for the right volunteer or for the right time for them to feel able to take on the task. As he says, "One of the most important things is to invite people to take on a task when they're ready, and not to push them too soon". He has found that as walking groups get larger, the volunteering 'load' is spread more thinly, so people are at less risk of being over-burdened by responsibility. Also, the social aspect of volunteering is important to people. Being a permanent post, the co-ordinator has appreciated having the time to enable individuals and groups to develop at their own pace.

Three groups have now started to develop longer, more challenging walks for those in the group that feel like progressing further. To aid them with this, the co-ordinator organised navigation and map reading courses for volunteers from the groups, thus giving members the skills to be able to plan their own routes and broaden the types of walks that they offer to their groups. More navigation training is planned in the future to ensure that this continues.

A county wide walking steering group has been formed and is developing and strengthening links with other groups such as the Ramblers and Sustrans.

- Caerphilly County Borough Council holds its annual walking event in May, and in 2011 the steering group will be heavily involved with the planning and operation. This will be an excellent opportunity to advertise all walking events in the area and increase awareness about walking for health.
- The Let's Walk Cymru grant has been important to Get Going. The co-ordinator has been able to provide incentives and to undertake marketing and promotional activities, as well as funding the minibus reward scheme, audio trails and free training courses for walk leaders.

The most significant difference this scheme has made

We asked the co-ordinator to complete the following sentence,

"In my view, the most significant difference that this scheme makes for the people who take part is.....that to benefit physically, mentally and socially is as easy as taking a walk."

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