

Volunteering case study: Committee of walking volunteers taking responsibility in Newport.



Dewch i
Gerdded
Let's
Walk

cerdded am ddes
walk4life

sportwales
chwaraeoncymsu

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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Introduction

Walking programmes began in the Newport City Council area in 2004 through the Walking the Way to Health scheme. In 2007, the programme developed further through the Let's Walk Cymru funding. 'Let's Walk Newport' is an umbrella programme for several groups including the local group 'WALK Newport'.

The WALK Newport group is now entirely voluntary, with hands-off support available if needed from Newport City Council's Health Challenge Partnership Officer. The group members undertake a variety of walks on Mondays and Thursdays every week of the year, regardless of the weather. All of the walks in the group's programme are planned as general health walks and are widely advertised in the local area. The walks attract between 20 and 60 participants each. Anyone can join in. Some are short walks of 35 - 45 minutes, others are approximately one and a half hours. The mid-week walks take advantage of local parks and other greenspace.

The group also takes monthly day trips hiring a coach and travelling to other areas of South Wales to walk. Generally these day trips provide an opportunity for two separate walks, one in the morning and another in the afternoon.

There is now a strong committee and experienced walk leaders, the most experienced of whom leads on risk assessments and devising the routes, supported by the other walk leaders.



Benefits and achievements in relation to working with volunteering



WALK Newport has now developed a strong team of volunteers to run the committee and to lead walks. There are assistants for each of the honorary officer committee roles so that volunteers gain skills gradually, sharing responsibility and ensuring that volunteering remains enjoyable and rewarding, and not too onerous. The volunteer walk leaders devise the routes for the walks and some of them have been trained to carry out the risk assessments.

- ↘ **The volunteers** pride themselves on welcoming people to the group; they have had particular success with securing the participation and engagement of those who have been recently bereaved. The group has learned that it is definitely a case of many hands making light - and more enjoyable - work. People have gained new skills whilst having the support of an enthusiastic group.
- ↘ **The walkers** are always able to give suggestions for the events programme and help out with small tasks. Each person is seen as having an important role in supporting and welcoming other walkers.

- ↘ **The co-ordinator** who worked with the group to help them reach this stage says that he has great satisfaction from seeing the group take on more responsibility and become self-sufficient, so that they are walking regularly together without his input. Although he had already gained great job satisfaction from developing and supporting the group, the positive comments and expressions of gratitude from members have given him a considerable boost.
- ↘ **The Local Authority** has been able to gain an understanding of walking as an important activity for local people to maintain and regain health.



Success Factors



Particular aspects that have helped the group to increase volunteering have been:

- ✎ The introduction of assistants for the group's Honorary Officers, reducing individuals' workload and increasing opportunities for shared learning and responsibility.
- ✎ Developing partnerships with the local authority's Countryside Service and Mentro Allan (a national Sport Wales outdoor activity programme, led in Newport by SEWREC and targeting BME communities). Together they ran 18 walks during the county's first Healthy Walking Festival in 2010, through which they gained extra publicity which attracted new members and volunteers, and created and strengthened links with individuals and other groups.

Challenges

- ✎ A real difficulty faced by the group was the early collapse of the committee due to personal circumstances. However, a meeting of the members brought forward a band of volunteers who were determined to overcome the crisis. With the support of the coordinator, the volunteers have now taken over all aspects of running the group. They recognised the need to have a greater number of people taking on the different responsibilities. The coordinator comments, "The value of the larger volunteer base cannot be over-emphasised. Lots of volunteers all working together achieves more and creates a stronger group."



Self-sufficiency and looking forwards

WALK Newport has the simple yet very clear aim - to keep walking, and keep encouraging new people to make progress and become more active.

As well as having a strong committee, the key aspects of their group that contribute to their self-sufficiency include:

- ↘ A full and well planned walks programme, which attracts good numbers of walkers.
- ↘ Printing their own programmes, so that the group is not reliant on others for this.
- ↘ Hand delivering programmes and publicity around GP surgeries, libraries, residential homes and other community buildings, so that they can build up an awareness of the walking activities available locally amongst a broad audience.
- ↘ Individual members invite others to join the group.

As the group members have become more experienced and the group has become more stable, they have needed less professional support. However, they know that they can always call on others for advice should it be necessary; typically, they get in touch with walk leaders and co-ordinators in neighbouring counties.

The role of Let's Walk Cymru has been important in the development of the Let's Walk Newport programme as a whole. Its funding made the coordinator post possible in 2007, and the same grant also funded walk leader training, co-ordinator and other volunteer training such as first aid courses, marketing, and the funds to be able to run Newport walking festival. Let's Walk Cymru also provides an opportunity for groups to be insured through the national scheme.

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 the social interaction, getting to know their local area better and walking together to improve their health ...health by stealth".



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