

# Volunteering case study: Volunteers step up to the mark in Pembrokeshire.



Dewch i  
**Gerdded**  
Let's  
**Walk**

cerdded am oes  
**walk4life**

*sportwales*  
*chwaraeoncymsu*

Noddir gan  
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
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# Introduction



Steps2Health started in 2005. Led by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority the major partners were Pembrokeshire Local Health Board/ National Public Health Service, Pembrokeshire County Council, Pembrokeshire Leisure, Pembrokeshire Greenways, Communities First and PLANED. The initial funding was from the Walking the Way to Health initiative. In 2007, the project moved to Pembrokeshire County Council with funding from Let's Walk Cymru.

- ✚ There are six community walking groups throughout the county based at county leisure centres.
- ✚ Each group has its own distinctive pattern of operation but they all offer health walks of up to an hour, with most offering some extended health walks.
- ✚ There are also two walks every week for adults with learning disabilities from one of the county's Social Activity Centres and also targeted walks for cardiac rehabilitation and exercise referral patients.
- ✚ Recently a community Nordic Walking programme has been started.
- ✚ Physical activity is above average in Pembrokeshire for people of up to 45 years and then drops to 'average' by the age of 65, so all Healthy Walking groups are targeted at the over 45 age group.
- ✚ Walks range from those that cover a similar route every week, or are in the same location such as a nature reserve, to those that visit new places. All walks are circular and avoid traffic as much as possible.
- ✚ The groups use footpaths, coastal paths and cycle routes that provide all-weather walkways wherever feasible. Each group undertakes one weekly walk on a set day, so there are walks throughout the county every day except Friday and Sunday.
- ✚ There are, however, occasional walks on Sundays, when longer 'extension walks' are held, for example walking on the MOD Castlemartin range.
- ✚ Although the groups are locally based, they share walk programmes and people are able to join other groups whenever they wish.
- ✚ There is one member of staff, the Project Co-ordinator, who works twelve hours each week, supporting the volunteers. The programme and the walks are planned by the volunteers, and they then lead the walks; volunteers have also undergone training for first aid and driving the various community minibuses in the county.

# Benefits and achievements in relation to working with volunteering



The Project Co-ordinator has noted a wide range of benefits for the volunteers. The volunteers enjoy the opportunities to increase their skills; for example, they are now being offered training in 'engaging with communities', several people have gained qualifications such as the MIDAS licence for driving minibuses and First Aid, others have become more IT literate. People have learnt to work as a team. Some volunteers who had previously been physically and socially inactive have gained confidence and skills that have enabled them to take on other voluntary work, e.g. in charity shops, and to take part in other activities in their community.

- ✚ For the club itself, it was a significant achievement to become independently constituted in April 2010; also, the constituent groups are now largely self sustaining. The group members see their groups as very much rooted in their communities, with volunteers actively recruiting new members locally.
- ✚ The groups organise their own programmes, routes, and transport when needed, and most groups produce and print their own programmes. They have a template to produce their walking calendar and print hard copies for distribution.

- ✚ Each volunteer organises three or four walks every six months; they work in pairs to plan and lead the walk, but are always willing to step in and take over should someone be unable to lead a planned walk.
- ✚ The Project Co-ordinator has a great sense of pride over what has been achieved and is thrilled that there is a legacy for the future, "something to show for all the effort".



# Success Factors



Above all else, the hard work and enthusiasm of a loyal team of volunteers has been key to the group's success. There are a number of other things that have contributed to the project's success:

- The work to build up the group and volunteer base through presentations to community groups, done continually throughout the life of the project. Gradually volunteers have come forward following talks and from taking part in the walks
- The Co-ordinator felt that being qualified as a health walk leader tutor has made the process of training the volunteers much easier. Also, he has been able to make use of his business skills to set up the project and help it to run smoothly.

# Challenges

- It was much more difficult and time consuming than expected to set up the constituted club for the county and to organise the membership system, however, help from PAVS (the County Voluntary Service organisation) supported the process.



# Self-sufficiency and looking forwards



It was always intended that the groups would develop a life of their own. The Co-ordinator has a simple aim, i.e. to continue to see the groups thrive and prosper. There has been some important progress, including:

- ↘ Each walking group becoming constituted as part of one county-wide club
- ↘ Each group having membership forms and cards
- ↘ A county committee where each group with more than five members has a representative
- ↘ A system where different local models all work together.

Incrementally, the volunteers have taken on more responsibility; the Co-ordinator never asked anyone for a commitment before he was confident they were ready to give it. A key factor in the process has been the Co-ordinator's background in managing change.

The Co-ordinator notes that "Let's Walk Cymru has been invaluable" for the ongoing success of the walking groups. The volunteers have confidence in knowing that the structure of Let's Walk Cymru is there, and they value knowing that they are part of something bigger. He believes that the national infrastructure is vital, including policies, insurance, regular update training, and the national training programme which supports the tutors.

# 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 people who would otherwise be at home or depressed are active, healthy, happy, engaged and contribute to their community".*



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