

Variety of walking activities
case study

Nordic walking let loose in the Conwy valleys.



Dewch i
Gerdded
Let's
Walk

cerdded **am oes**
walk4life

sportwales
chwaraeoncymsu

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
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Introduction

The Dolwyddelan Nordic Walking Club began in 2009, as one of a number of activities started and supported by Menter Siabod (the local voluntary community rural action group). One of the directors had seen a similar group and thought that it would work in Dolwyddelan. The Menter Siabod Community Project Officer was able to access free Nordic walking leader training from Conwy County Borough Council's sports development team, on condition that she went on to set up a local club.

The club now meets to walk in and around Dolwyddelan for an hour or so every Wednesday morning, attracting eight to ten people each week. The walk time and length was chosen to suit the members, so that they can fit it in with their other activities and commitments. It was felt that people would hesitate to commit regularly to longer walks. The club does not have any transport, so the walks need to be very local.



One of the group members in particular has supported the development officer in identifying and trying out suitable walking routes, making use of his extensive local knowledge about community footpaths.

The walks are open to anyone who wants to join in. Some people get involved through word of mouth, or they see the group out walking and then come along. The Project Officer also puts the walk information into the Community section of the North Wales Weekly News and the local Welsh community newspaper, Yr Odyn, as well as adding photographs to the Nordic Walking Gallery on the Community Website (www.dolwyddelan.org).



Benefits and achievements in relation to the variety of walking activities

The group now has four or five different circular walking routes that they have developed which give them a variety of options to choose from each week. The route to be taken is chosen on the day, in order to get the best fit for the abilities, experience and fitness of the walkers who turn up. The easiest route is flat and on firm terrain. There is another short route, but it can be quite boggy. Two routes are more hilly, one in particular is quite strenuous with a sustained steep hill.

- ↘ Group members also note that they choose **different routes** depending on the time of year. In winter, one of their routes tends to flood; another route is especially popular in spring when the snowdrops and then the bluebells are out. Occasionally, the leader makes small diversions from the main route to visit somewhere of particular interest. For example, on one occasion there was a badger sett that one of the walkers knew about and wanted to show the others; another day, the group visited an archaeological dig that had been set up just above the village.
- ↘ Besides the regular **weekly walks**, the project officer has developed further the activities of the group. She and group members have offered nordic walking taster sessions at community fun days and festivals. The group also ran a walk as part of the Conwy Walking Week programme in 2009 and 2010, and will do so again this year.

- ↘ The walking group has brought benefits for everyone involved. The **walkers** have gained a new skill. Many of them comment on how effective they find Nordic walking, in particular for going up hills. The social element is enormously valued; as one walker said, "People don't stop talking on the way round". Group members talk about enjoying spending time with other members of their community, as well as being part of something that supports their community.
- ↘ For the **Project Officer**, it has helped her to get to know more people in the local community and to work on other activities with them, and it has also helped local people to understand more about her community support role with Menter Siabod.
- ↘ For the **host organisation**, Menter Siabod, there have been benefits in that the Nordic Walking Club has contributed to their success with two local awards – winning the Pride of Conwy award in 2010 and finalist in Her lechyd Conwy in 2009. As the Project Officer notes, "Awards make everyone feel proud of their role, making everyone feel good"; also, she thinks that this success helps to support funding applications, as well as demonstrating to existing funders that their money is being well spent.



Success Factors



There are a number of key factors that have contributed to the Dolwyddelan Nordic Walking Club's success in developing the variety of activities:

- ↘ The local knowledge of different walkers which not only helped to identify the routes that the club regularly uses, but also adds extra interest during these walks, e.g. learning about the history of the village.
- ↘ Community spirit, so that plenty of people wanted to try out Nordic Walking even though it was completely new to them.
- ↘ The continued strong commitment of club members. The club hasn't lost any members since they began walking together.
- ↘ The role of the community project officer in co-ordinating the group and planning for continuity after her funded post finishes.



Challenges



The Project Officer has only been able to recruit one walk leader from the group so far, but hopes that others might come forward. She is trying to get funding to be able to run local walk leader training so that people do not have to travel all the way Chester for it, as this has been off-putting for some people. Also, the training could be delivered through the medium of Welsh, which might be attractive to some.

- ↘ The club would like to attract more younger members, but they note that their meeting time makes it difficult for many working people to take part. The Project Officer has limited capacity to work evenings or week-ends, and the time that they have chosen works very well for existing members. Although Camu Allan's affiliation to the North Wales Outdoor Partnership means that the scheme can buy the training at a discounted price, staff are making preparations to be able to offer in-house tutoring so that it is affordable over the longer term.



Self-sufficiency and looking forwards



The Project Officer wants the club to be able to continue even if in future funding for her post with Menter Siabod can't be maintained. As part of this, she has encouraged one of the regular walkers to begin training as a walk leader. He is now qualified to lead walks if the Project Officer is present, and the next stage of training will enable him to instruct new walkers and to lead walks on his own.

- The funding that the club has received from Let's Walk Cymru has enabled them to buy the equipment they need, and that resource will remain with the club so that people could continue walking even if there is no further funding.
- The Let's Walk Cymru programme has been important because of the funding, above all. However, the Project Officer has also found it a useful source of information, e.g. about training available.

The most significant difference this scheme has made

We asked the project officer to complete the following sentence, *"In my view, the most significant difference that this scheme makes for the people who take part is....just having the routine of it being here, for getting people to come out...they know a friend is going so they'll come as well"*.

And the volunteer walk leader gave his views as well, *"In my view, the most significant difference that this scheme makes for the people who take part is....friendship"*.



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