



# HOW TO GET THE COMMUNITY ACTIVE





**Wellbeing walks provide both social and physical benefits.**



# Wellbeing walks:

## Getting the community active

Walking has to be one of the best things that you can do to improve your quality of life. It's free, you don't need any special equipment or training, it gets you where you need to go, and if you do it in a group you can get to know other people while you do it. It also increases your connection to the local area and is an activity that most people can take part in.

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An established body of research tells us that our increasingly sedentary lives have profound impacts on our wellbeing. If we drive everywhere, sit down all day behind a desk or a checkout, then all evening on the sofa, we are not using our bodies enough to stay healthy. But it can be hard to change habits and society is geared towards encouraging this behaviour. Walking more must be one of the easiest ways to change this and get more active. For many journeys the time it takes to walk is comparable to the time it takes to get the bus, and it can be a lot more reliable.

Wellbeing walks are a way of enabling members of the community to get out and about while simultaneously getting to know their neighbours and their surrounding facilities. By leading groups in gentle walks around a local area, you can introduce them to services they may not know exist. Many places have not been designed in a very walkable way and people may feel unsure or uneasy about being out on the streets. By designing and testing a particular route, you can help people find different ways of getting around and help new behaviours stick.

We are not talking about hardcore, strenuous hiking here. Wellbeing walks are kept to a gentle pace that is accessible and inclusive, with the social benefits as important as the exercise. They can also be a way to view an area in a different light. Organised walks are commonplace in national parks and areas of natural beauty, but are less usual in more urban environments. However, explored in the right way, our towns and cities can be just as beautiful and spending more time walking around them fosters a greater sense of pride and attachment.

### Benefits of wellbeing walks:

- > Members of the community get to know their neighbours and surrounding facilities
- > People can find new ways of getting around
- > Members of the community can discover services that they didn't know existed

# Making a difference:

## Projects in action

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million, five year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England have received funding to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and build the sustainability and resilience of their local community, providing inspiration to other communities and sharing what they have learned.

Many of the projects developed community walking initiatives aimed at increasing wellbeing and connecting with the local area.

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### Manor house PACT

**Manor House PACT** organised regular wildlife and foraging walks, taking advantage of the amazing green spaces in their local area. All of the walks were family friendly and took residents to areas they may not have visited before. This helped locals to enjoy the benefits of the great outdoors and build new friendships along the way.

Each walk had an expert guide who helped walkers learn to appreciate their local open spaces by discovering more about the wildlife and edible plants in the area, learning about the environment and improving health and well-being through gentle exercise along the beautiful new river path.

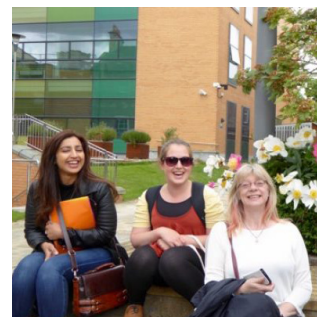
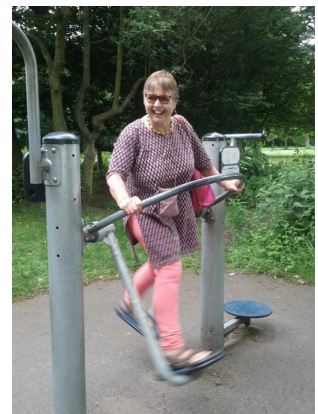
The foraging walks informed locals on how to safely identify and forage wild plants and they also found out how to prepare food with the ingredients they collected. Each walk offered an opportunity to try something different depending on what plants were in season. The wildlife walks focused on biodiversity, and introduced locals to the huge variety of plants and animals in the area.



## >> Greening Wingrove

**Greening Wingrove** are able to support wellbeing walks across the Wingrove and West End areas of Newcastle, through project partner Time Exchange. They were lucky enough to receive a small grant from HealthWORKS Newcastle to help them to do these on a regular basis and they are also planning on making a funky map that will contain lots of information about local services and organisations in the Wingrove ward area that people who live here may want to access.

The walks incorporate local community services and centres that people may not know exist or have difficulty accessing, bringing local residents closer to provision that exists in their area. The walks link up parks and community centres, enabling people to see their local area from a different angle and encouraging them to support a wider range of community activity.





# Make it happen:

## How can you do this in your own community?

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### Use local experts

Every community has people that know the area inside out; if you find local champions who can lead walks and share some of their stories and experiences, the walk really gains some personal warmth.

You can also organise walks around different themes, with Manor House's wildlife and foraging being a good example. People will be keen to participate if they will be learning something a bit different. Local organisations like the Wildlife Trust may be able to provide somebody that can share their knowledge in a particular area. This is especially important with foraging, which should always be led by an expert who can identify plants that are safe to eat.

### Link up services

Think about the route that you take and what facilities it is going to incorporate. If there are centres or services that particularly complement each other, or that it would benefit community members to know about, they could be ideal sites to incorporate on the walk. It could be a park, a clinic or a library; raising awareness of these places can have a big effect on wellbeing.

Link in with events that are already going on; if you can finish at a fair or open day, so much the better.

### Vary start times

Plan times that will accommodate the needs of people you are engaging. For some people, a daytime during the week will work best, while others will prefer early evenings or weekends. A few regular sessions at different times will enable everybody to get involved.

### Be accessible

Test the route out in advance and make sure it's not too demanding. Some gentle inclines are fine but the idea is that it is easy enough for everybody to get involved – don't put people off by putting on a demanding hike. Go at the pace of the slowest person, and pause often. That's why plotting various points to visit enables natural stops along the route.

### Have fun!

Walking is brilliant, and the possibilities are endless. Be creative about what themes and activities you involve. CLS project Sustainable Harborough supported the Eat and Walk initiative, where participants walk between local food establishments, eating one course of a meal at every stage.

# Help it happen:

## How can you support local communities to bring about change?

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### Get the word out

Help with promotion can make all the difference. For wellbeing walks to be successful they need to reach vulnerable members of the community who will really benefit from getting outdoors, meeting new people and linking into the services that exist. Using existing channels to reach people and advertise upcoming walks is easier for a large organisation or statutory body than a small community group.

### Be an advocate

Walking is the cheapest and most accessible form of exercise, and its uptake has the power to transform wellbeing. As a social form of gentle exercise it combats obesity and loneliness, both of which are major causes of premature death. As such it is an incredibly cost effective intervention. If you can support any small costs, such as refreshments or publicity, the impact will be felt many times over.

### Create walkable neighbourhoods

Many things affect the ease with which people can walk around an area – some are physical barriers and some are psychological. Organisations like Living Streets work towards making walking the norm, and can provide some help to improve local areas. Simple things such as enough crossings for people to get across the road, enforcing speed limits and clamping down on pavement parking change the way that an area feels, and how comfortable people are walking around it. Being more visionary, pedestrianising certain areas has a transformational effect!

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