

REPORT OF THE DISCOVERY TEAM LEADER

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF EVALUATION UNDERTAKEN WITH SERVICE USERS OF PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY'S WALKABILITY INITIATIVE

Purpose of Report

To provide information to members of the Operational Review Committee with regard to evaluation of the Walkability initiative and provide the background to a presentation by service users in relation to the project.

Introduction/Background

Walkability is a health and wellbeing initiative launched by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority in 2011, offering supported walking opportunities in and around the National Park. The majority of participants have a higher risk of poor health due to their circumstances or existing health conditions, with many referred to the project via their clinicians through the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS).

Initial funding for Walkability was provided through a Sports Wales project grant, subsequently funding has been drawn from Let's Walk Cymru and from a range of small grant sources in order to develop and expand our work in this area. Walkability is also in receipt of core funding from the Authority.

Comparisons

The Walkability initiative fits into a range of work undertaken by groups and organisations from the public, voluntary and in some cases, the private sector, which has the broad aim of delivering positive health and wellbeing outcomes through active participation. This type of approach is offered with a number of target audiences in mind, from older people to those recovering from some form of illness.

Walkability is unique locally and across the wider family of National Parks in the diversity of different people making use of the service and in the support offered to other groups and individuals aimed at encouraging independent walking activity amongst local people.

Most of the participants are local and (at present) drawn primarily from the following groups:

- Cardiac rehabilitation exercise referral patients;
- Communities First (Pembroke Dock)
- Mental health day care patients and ex-patients;
- Palliative care and disabled groups, where the use of electric mobility scooters is essential;
- Army Family Welfare Teams;

- Local community walking (open to all-comers);
- Cycle mobility for people with special physical and learning needs;
- Hospital rehabilitation day care patients and staff;
- School age pupils with special needs.
- Alzheimers Society groups

The project also supports other local walking groups, such as Steps 2 Health, provides training for walk leaders (both volunteers and staff) and helps to promote the opportunities for group walking offered by numerous local groups and organisations

Options

The evaluation report suggests that the services offered by Walkability are greatly valued by the people who take part. However, the report also acknowledges the limited resources available to deliver against the backdrop of growing demand. Key issues are around how the Initiative (and other similar services), move participants on to become independent walkers or enable them to establish new social walking groups. There is also the opportunity to develop the role of volunteers in leading walks, with the Walkability Co-ordinator providing an 'enabling function' to support groups and volunteer activity.

Financial considerations

At present the NPA provides core funding in support of the project. At the moment this is around two thirds of total costs per annum (approx.. £20,000) with the balance provided by grant aid from Let's Walk Wales (£10k per annum). However grants from Welsh government for this type of work are under review and there is no guarantee of continued external funding from this source. There are opportunities to secure grant aid from other sources for this type of work or (possibly) to enter into service level agreements for some aspects of the activity provided.

Risk considerations

The project is widely recognised locally as providing an important service for those recovering from a range of health conditions. Walkability is 'good fit' with the increased emphasis on health and wellbeing and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act as it relates to the work of PCNPA.

Compliance

As highlighted above the project addresses key areas of NPA policy and corporate objectives as identified in the new Corporate Plan.

Human Rights/Equality issues

The Walkability initiative provides services open to many local people, with a particular emphasis on those recovering from illness. The range of walking groups (both in terms of location and target audience) mean that many local people can benefit from Walkability activities.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Participants engage with the natural environment as part of walking activity, increasing their understanding and knowledge of local biodiversity. There are no discernible negative impacts or conflicts with the National Park Management Plan.

Welsh Language statement

Walkability does not at present deliver services targeted at Welsh speaking communities. The Co-ordinator and some volunteers are able to welcome participants in Welsh, but not deliver activities from start to finish. The recruitment of Welsh speaking Walkability volunteers would improve service in this area.

Conclusion

See the evaluation report conclusion.

Recommendation

For Members to Note

Background Documents

Walkability evaluation report 2016

For further information, please contact

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Walkability Initiative: Evaluation Report 2015/16



Introduction

This report summarises evaluation of the Walkability initiative undertaken at the start of 2016. The evaluation was undertaken as part of a ‘forum’ event attended by a group of service users providing feedback on their experience of involvement in Walkability. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated to a wider group of Walkability participants, providing the opportunity for a wider group to share their experience of Walkability.

Background – the Walkability Initiative

Walkability is a health and wellbeing initiative launched by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority in 2011, offering supported walking opportunities in and around the National Park. The majority of participants have a higher risk of poor health due to their circumstances or existing health conditions, with many referred to the project via their clinicians through the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS).



Initial funding for Walkability was provided through a Sports Wales project grant, subsequently funding has been drawn from Let’s Walk Cymru and from a range of small grant sources in order to develop and expand our work in this area. Walkability is also in receipt of core funding from the Authority (see appendix to the report).

To date, Walkability has provided more than 660 walks across the length and breadth of the National Park, with around 7300 participants enjoying bespoke walking activity designed to provide appropriate levels of physical activity dependent on existing health and mobility.

Most of the participants are local and drawn primarily from the following groups:

- Cardiac rehabilitation exercise referral patients;
- Communities First (Pembroke Dock)
- Mental health day care patients and ex-patients;
- Palliative care and disabled groups, where the use of electric mobility scooters is essential;
- Army Family Welfare Teams;
- Local community walking (open to all-comers);
- Cycle mobility for people with special physical and learning needs;
- Hospital rehabilitation day care patients and staff;
- School age pupils with special needs.
- Alzheimers Society groups

Paul Casson, the Walkability Coordinator, suggests that: “The Walkability initiative helps people to get out and use the (National) Park to recover from an illness or just to improve their fitness, no matter what level they are starting from”.

Walkability works with a number of local partners including Pembrokeshire County Council’s Exercise Referral Team,



Hywel Dda and voluntary led walking schemes such as the Steps 2 Health clubs. Some participants are referred to Walkability (through existing referral schemes), but others access walks independently or come as part of the initiative's work with local groups and organisations.

Summary of evaluation

At the start of 2016 the National Park Authority undertook evaluation work with Walkability service users. The responses were drawn from a range of groups and individuals taking part in walking activity provided through the Walkability initiative. In total we received around 40 responses to the questionnaire together with more wide ranging responses from a smaller group at the Walkability forum event held in St. David's.

One of the key aims of the evaluation exercise was to measure to what extent participation in Walkability has led to behaviour change amongst individuals. In particular we were keen to see to what degree individuals walked independently of the service (or other similar services) offered, either as individuals or in other groups (formally or informally).



Summary of responses

Walkability has clearly been instrumental in introducing people to 'country walking' – evidence from both the group consultation and questionnaire responses suggest this. We know from the number of referrals, from group participation and from the details provided by individual beneficiaries, that the majority of those taking part are likely to have existing health conditions that can be improved through regular physical exercise alongside other treatments.

When trying to measure the value of the Walkability service to those taking part it is clear from the responses to our consultation that the role of the leader and the experience of walking with a group are highly valued.

Walk Leader

Overall it seems that participants value the role of the walk leaders (and in particular the Walkability Co-ordinator). Selecting and guiding the walk are seen as important, but equally valued is their ability to interpret the walk, so much so that some respondents wanted a hearing loop/microphone in the mini-bus.

As might be expected with participants new to regular walking and/or with an existing health condition, the support provided by Walkability and the walk leader is highly valued. Mention is also made of kit such as walking poles and (in particular) mini-bus transport offer as part of the service. Some respondents recognised the health and safety management provided by the walk leader.

Walking as part of a group

A significant number of those taking part in or evaluation rated the value of group walking very highly. There were a number of reasons cited for this with social benefits being the most significant, with some

respondents suggesting it helped to combat loneliness and provided respite from the duties of being a carer. Another benefit of group walking was the sense that it provided the impetus/motivation to go out in all weathers of ‘when you weren’t particularly feeling like it’, something that might not happen when walking alone. One comment suggested that ‘Walkability was similar to Weightwatchers – (we) need the stimulus to lose weight, need the stimulus to walk’.

Skill and Knowledge

When asked what Walkability provided in terms of skills several identified improved navigation and map reading skills. Some felt more confident about using the public rights of way system – knowing where to go and how to get there. The majority felt they had learnt about the National Park its wildlife and heritage.

There was a demand to learn more, particularly around navigation and map reading. It was also suggested that information about rights of way signage would be useful, perhaps in the form of a leaflet.

Having discovered new walking routes and destinations through Walkability, many participants have since returned to walk these routes with their friends and families. This suggests that the scheme does enable independent walking, with increased knowledge clearly important, perhaps backed-up with improved skills and more confidence in relation to countryside walking.

Benefits of taking part

The benefits to personal health and wellbeing were clearly stated by many respondents. Improvements to physical and mental health were mentioned, with one walker suggesting walking regularly helping to combat their asthmatic conditions. It was clear that the social aspect of the ‘Walkability experience’ contributed to the wellbeing of some of those taking part.

Conclusions

The evaluation undertaken sought to measure to what extent participation in Walkability has led to behaviour change amongst individuals. In particular we were keen to see to what degree individuals walked independently of the service (or other similar services) offered, either as individuals or in other groups (formally or informally). Walkability and other similar initiatives have limited resources with which to provide the opportunities on offer and so acting to enable individuals to walk independently will enable others to make use of the Walkability offer.

We also wanted to measure the success of the initiative in terms of its benefits to health and wellbeing. Finally the evaluation will help us understand how to develop the Authority’s work in this area, with particular reference to access issues (both physical and intellectual) and ways in which we can improve and adapt our services to meet the needs of those most likely to benefit.



The responses show that the vast majority of those taking part place a high value on the services offered through Walkability to the extent that even amongst those willing and able to walk more independently, many prefer to do at least some of their walking through Walkability. However, the impact of this choice

made by existing service users is that there are fewer places available for new walkers given the limited resources available to run walkability and the continued stream of referrals/interest in walking as a form of exercise/therapy. The Initiative has been able to train volunteers to lead some Walkability sessions, but as yet this additional resource has not managed to keep pace with existing demand.

The most valued aspects of Walkability mentioned include:

- 'Great leaders', who provide support and a 'safe walking environment'
- Social benefits of group walking
- Regular opportunities to visit new place
- Transport and kit (such as walking poles, mobility scooters) provided
- The 'motivation' of group walking
- The information and guided aspect of the walk

It's clear that we need to remove some of the barriers to those less inclined to walk independently and provide where possible suitable alternatives to Walkability that are easily accessible to those most likely to benefit.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with reference to the finding of the evaluation report.

1. Continue to develop the role of volunteers in leading walks as part of the Walkability initiative
2. Develop the Walk Leader training programme in order to achieve the above
3. Work with Walkability partners and potential collaborators to support them in establishing self-sustaining walking groups led by their own staff/volunteers
4. Promote alternative opportunities that provide at least some of the most valued aspects of the Walkability model – produce a directory of local walking groups
5. Develop suitable new models that will enable people to 'move-on. Encourage and facilitate 'friends walking' groups might provide an attractive alternative for some.
6. With reference to the above deliver a series of 'friends walking' days open to local people, giving attendees the skills and confidence to providing
7. Improve access to (and promotion of) footpath network, in particular the resource of 200+ circular and easy access walks across the national park

Report appendices

i. Responses from Walkability participants – group evaluation meeting 29th January 2016

The tables below record the feedback of respondents as part of (i) the group evaluation exercise and (ii) the circulated questionnaire.

The group evaluation took place in January 2016 with representatives from 3 Walkability groups attending the event at Oriel y Parc. The meeting was chaired by Anthony Richards, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Access Manager and member of the Walkability Steering Group

Questions put to group	Summary of responses
Why do you take part in Walkability activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information provided by the leader is useful • I walk anyway- I'm 'stretched' by Walkability - walking with someone else helps. • Walkability pushes me –walking further • Brilliant places – even on doorstep • Introduced to new places • Walk a lot anyway, but Walkability introduces new places – confidence to go out on your own. • (Walkability) provides a safety angle – for some • Good for mental health as well • Pushed to do new walks with a group – groups is key for me • Paul (Casson) and Dave Braithwaite (PCC fitness trainer) good • Quite a few women have disabled husbands- one opportunity to get out in a social group. • Regular and consistent opportunities are provided • Wouldn't go on own if pouring down with rain, but do with Walkability! • Social side- great motivator – or can walk on own. • Like to be surprised in terms of where were going.
Do you feel better when you are out walking?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health benefits - Asthma sufferers- makes me feel better • Made a huge difference to my life • It's a 'win win', we're social, healthy and learn • Learning is a great motivator
Have you ever gone back and walked routes on your own or have you introduced friends or family to these walks/places?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most (6 out of 7 respondents) have gone back and revisited routes shown by Paul/Walkability. 'Wouldn't have done that before Walkability'. • It's sometimes a challenge for participants to navigate across fields- maybe more work on navigation is required. • A leaflet about rights of way signage (would be useful)

<p>Would you be comfortable if the walk leader just dropped you at the start of the walk and then collected you at the end?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you be comfortable with Paul dropping off and even picking up- some have done this. • Prefer led walks • Prefer not for safety reasons – but also because we value Paul and the information he imparts • Groups have been dropped off and navigate independently (and it seems to work okay) • Gordon and Alison (PCNPA Volunteer Walk Leaders) are great leaders – very knowledgeable
<p>Have you learnt skills/become more confident to walk through participation in Walkability (map reading skills/familiarity with routes and destinations)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like to know more once ‘appetite is wet’. Themed walks might be an option. • Happy to walk independently- but relish Paul’s contribution. • Paul has spent time going over the basics of navigation/map readings. • Map reading – learnt more skills. • Familiarity with routes. • Learnt about wildlife and landscape
<p>Are you aware of the range walks information that is available (web walks/guides/ visitor centre info)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini Bus is important • Paul is a great leader- very good communicator, very knowledgeable - receptive. • Paul is very patient leader. • Mixed awareness of other information for e.g. web walks-more than 200. • Lists where given of easy access walks. • Would you be interested in a directory of walks? - listing groups, other opportunities – Yes (overwhelmingly). • Would information on bus routes help (in relation to accessing walks) – tell you how to get there. • (Staff comment) – What about a ‘quick guide to walking independently in Pembrokeshire’.
<p>What can we do to enable you to become a more independent walker? (try and identify barriers to walking independently)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you consider joining other groups? - Unsure about other groups – Ramblers walk too quickly and too far. ‘route march’. Walkability is filling a niche. • Get much more from the information provided. Some people will walk anyway. But value the social and/or the Information imparted. • Barriers to independent walking (i) Venue to meet (ii) Transport • Similar to weight watchers – need the stimulus to loose weight, need the stimulus to walk – (that’s why Walkability is good. • Kit is important - tracking poles/sticks etc. • Paul provides walking poles. • Selected routes with (for example) handrails and support are very helpful.
<p>Other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about a microphone? - Talk to people, easier to hear. • Distribute copies of route map at start. • Some service users walk with other groups:- Age Cymru Walks, Communities 1st. • Walking with other groups – (build-up connections, contacts, friendships) • WIP Group- Walking in Pembrokeshire are an existing group that supports group walking locally, but have to get yourself there.

- Army wives groups
- Walking for Fun – Letterston
- Some people don't want to know – not interested in group opportunities.
- How do we get people out? Need to get information out.
- Nothing much better than group walking- combats loneliness.
- Need to communicate Walkability and walking opportunities - more publicity at (for example) leisure centres about walking.
- Advertise in medical centres- good place for people who will really benefit.
- "Gets you out on a rainy Tuesday".
- What would it take to get others walking?
- Try it once and then you might come back.
- Not what some people are used to- can't force people.
- Think they can't achieve the walk – place limitations on themselves.
- Word of mouth is powerful- particularly when they can share great, inspirations, experiences.

ii Responses to Walkability Questionnaire completed between January and March 2016

WALKABILITY WALKERS SURVEY 2015-16					
QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. I am more likely to walk as part of a group rather than on my own	14	6	5	2	2
2. I prefer to visit and try new walking routes rather than stick to the same old route	20	5	1	2	0
3. I enjoy learning about nature and the history of the surrounding area when I am on walk	20	9	0	0	0
4. I feel more relaxed when I am on a walk	17	10	2	0	0
5. The Walkability walk leaders have been supportive & well organised	27	2	0	0	0
6. I think I can walk further now than when I started with the group	10	7	6	2	1
7. I have learnt new skills that will help me in planning and going on a walk	8	11	7	1	0
8. I've found that the provision of specialist equipment (walking poles, disability scooter, access to a minibus for example) has made walking easier	17	4	3	2	1
9. Walking benefits my sense of wellbeing	19	6	0	1	0
10. Public transport is helpful in getting to and from the walks I do.	13	3	4	2	1
11. Since being part of Walkability I have visited places new to me when walking	25	3	0	0	0

12. I walk more regularly since my involvement with Walkability	11	10	3	2	0
13. I walk because I enjoy walking rather than for any health benefits I might gain	19	6	3	0	0
14. General comments submitted with completed questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep up the good work, well informed leader. • Wonderful service long may it continue! • Excellent service, have recommended it to others. • Excellent provisions provided by walkability leader. • It is good that I can bring my dog along. • I can't walk, but the mobility scooter provided helps me get out and about when I would otherwise be stuck indoors. • Excellent – thank you for your time. • It is an activity which ticks so many boxes- education, health, social, wildlife, history. • It would be great if we could have a walk every week from Fishguard. • Hurrah for Paul! • More walks please. • Perhaps a weekly walk from Fishguard LC. 				