



# Dementia Friendly Walking Project

## EVALUATION REPORT

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	1
Introduction .....	2
Background .....	2
Methodology.....	4
Community Research Methodology .....	4
Walking interviews.....	5
Focus groups .....	6
Data analysis .....	6
Participants and settings.....	7
Summary of groups.....	7
Findings .....	10
Being with other people .....	11
Socialising and Company .....	11
Friendly Support.....	13
Support for Couples .....	15
Being Outdoors .....	18
Fitness and Physical Activity .....	18
Exploring the Environment .....	20
Traffic, Paths and Rest-Points .....	22
Atmosphere, Ethos & Accessibility .....	24
Safety and Security .....	27
Feeling Safe .....	27
Feeling Confident .....	28
Safety Concerns .....	29
Leadership and organisation.....	30
Appreciation of Walk Leaders.....	30
Facilitating Walks .....	31
Relationships with other Agencies .....	32

Recruitment .....	33
Reflections from Community Researchers .....	35
Kim Strachan’s Reflections.....	35
Sheila Thorburn’s Reflections .....	36
Rog Harrison’s Reflections .....	36
Conclusions .....	37
Socialising.....	37
Health Benefits.....	37
Leadership and Organisation .....	37
Recruitment .....	38
Dementia Friendliness .....	38
Recommendations .....	40
Walk Leaders.....	40
Content of Walks .....	40
Recruitment .....	41
Dementia Friendliness .....	41
Appendix A; Information sheets and consent forms .....	42

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## INTRODUCTION

The evaluation project explored the second year of the dementia friendly walking project. Paths for All were keen to obtain views of people living with dementia, their carers and other walk attendees regarding their experiences of attending dementia friendly walks. Currently approximately 100 group projects are taking place across Scotland, with 500 walks taking place per week. Currently there are 23 dementia friendly walking group projects taking place across Scotland. The purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate the current progress on the dementia friendly walks aspect of Paths for All, and the experiences and perspectives of people living with dementia in relation to the group walking activities, areas of improvement for walking groups, and in relation to project outcomes set by the Life Changes Trust as the project funder.

The goals of the evaluation are;

- To explore experiences of attending dementia friendly walks as organised by walking for health groups within the Paths for All programme.
- To explore landscapes where walks are taking place.
- To explore social interactions taking place between attendees.
- To identify benefits, facilitators and challenges regarding attending dementia friendly walks from the perspective of people living with dementia.
- Identify gaps and make recommendations for provision of dementia friendly walks in the future.

Paths for All invited researchers from the University of Stirling to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation project took place in the months April-June 2017. Fieldwork took place during May 2017.

## BACKGROUND

Paths for All is a Scottish charity, comprising a partnership of 28 national organisations, whose goal is to promote everyday walking in order to promote a healthier, happier Scotland. As part of their remit, Paths for All have been funded by the Life Changes Trust to carry out a project which encourages dementia friendly walking in Scotland. The goal of the funding is to provide training, funding and support to make its existing Walking for Health network dementia friendly. The Dementia Friendly walking project is being funded for three years, and at the time of writing (June 2017) is at the end of year two.

Goals of the dementia friendly walking project are to;

- Develop the existing walking for health network to make walking more accessible to people living with dementia
- Help raise awareness of the benefits of walking to people living with dementia

- Work with over 20 projects over three years to support them to become dementia friendly walking projects
- Develop training, resources and sharing of good practice with partners and projects
- Ensure Paths for All becomes a dementia friendly organisation
- Develop strong communication plans and link in with policies

Locales of dementia friendly health walks vary, with walking projects either being specifically for people living with dementia and their carers, or seeking to be an inclusive, mixed environment which is welcoming to people living with dementia. The project involves developing currently existing health walks, developing new dementia friendly walking groups, and providing training regarding dementia friendliness and dementia friendly walking for walk leader and volunteers within each group.

For this evaluation, six existing dementia friendly walking group projects within the Paths for All Network were identified with the assistance of Paths for All. Groups comprised urban, suburban and rural areas. Four of the six groups were located in the central belt. Two groups were located within Perth and Kinross. Further details of groups which participated in this evaluation can be found in the methodology section of this report.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The project adopted an evaluation methodology based on the principles of co-production and co-creation. A novel part of our methodology was the involvement of three older people as 'community researchers'. Community researchers were equal in status on this project, and contributed to data collection and analysis, and have contributed their reflections to this final report.

### **COMMUNITY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Community researchers were recruited from participants in a research project funded by the Life Changes Trust and taking place at the University of Stirling called 'A Good Life in Later Years', which used a co-production methodology involving over 30 older people from across Scotland. Three community researchers (RH, ST and KS) had taken part in the 'A Good Life in Later Years' project and had expressed an interest in taking part in further research. These community researchers were trained in research principles, methodology, methods and analysis of research data. At the beginning of this project, the three community researchers who volunteered to take part received additional training in conducting walking interviews, so that they had the skills required for this project.

A participatory community research methodology was adopted in this study in order to build research capacity among the research team. Use of a community research methodology also better situates qualitative research within the communities in which the research is taking place; in this case older people and people living with dementia who attend dementia friendly walks. The project methodology involved a series of two workshops, with fieldwork taking place between workshops. In workshop one, community researchers were given an introduction to the project and to the Paths for All charity and its dementia friendly walks programme. Community researchers then received training in principles behind walking interviews, as well as a practical exercise, in which researchers carried out a 'mock' walking interview. Finally, in workshop one discussions were held about priorities for the research project, which contributed to the development of interview schedules. Following this workshop, community researchers then accompanied one of the academic researchers (CP) to carry out fieldwork. Fieldwork involved conducting a separate walking interview with a person living with dementia and, where applicable a carer, family member or other individual accompanying them. The bulk of analysis was conducted during a second research analysis workshop, in which community researchers were invited to the university to take part in the analysis of qualitative data. During the workshop transcripts were coded and major themes were identified through discussions between university and community researchers. After identification of major themes, transcripts were then coded using Nvivo 11 qualitative analysis software.

Ethical approval for the project was received from the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel. Information sheets were provided for all participants ahead of fieldwork and written consent was obtained from all participants before interviews and focus groups (Appendix 1).

### **WALKING INTERVIEWS**

The focus of the evaluation is to explore attendees' experiences of attending dementia friendly walking groups. A naturalistic and experiential research methodology was adopted, using qualitative research methods. Given that the focus of the research is walking groups, a methodology based on walking interviews was deemed most appropriate. Walking interviews are a research method which has been adopted by a small but growing number of scholars. A major strength of walking interviews is their capacity to access people's knowledge and attitudes regarding the environments they inhabit and are moving within. Walking interviews therefore give insights into people's experience of moving through space (e.g. traffic, difficulties with mobility) as well as their changing views of space (e.g. biographical history or connection to particular landscapes or places). Walking interviews have also been used in dementia research, where they give the researcher opportunities to gain insights regarding how people with dementia interact with their environments.

Walking interviews sought to capture two forms of data;

- People's experiences and perspectives regarding attending dementia friendly walking groups
- People's experiences of moving through and interacting with the spaces and places they travelled through during walks.

During walking interviews, Catherine Pemble (CP) and either Rog Harrison (RH), Sheila Thorburn (ST) or Kim Strachan (KS) accompanied a person with dementia and their main carer during a walk. Researchers asked questions regarding their experiences of the walk and about the environment they were walking within. Carers and people with dementia were each interviewed on their own, although frequently other people would also speak to them and the researcher during the interview. Interviews were also audio recorded, using digital voice recorders and lapel mics. Due to weather conditions, some difficulties were found in adequately recording people, for example if conditions were windy. Following the interview, recordings were transcribed and digitally stored on university servers.

During walking interviews, participants were also asked to record photographs during walks. CP carried a digital camera and used this to collect photographs of any events or places of significance to the person during interviews. Community researchers were also provided with disposable film cameras, or used their own personal camera equipment. Participants were encouraged to identify any places or events that occurred during walks, which would then be photographs, either by the person on the walk, or by one of the researchers. Walking group

interviews lasted the length of the walk, and typically lasted approximately 45 minutes. Walking groups were identified with the assistance of the Paths for All project team. Walk leaders within each of the six walking groups assisted with identifying and recruiting people living with dementia.

### **FOCUS GROUPS**

CP and the community researchers conducted a focus group interview at the end of each walk. Walk attendees and volunteer walk leaders took part in focus groups, which posed more general questions to walk attendees about their participation in dementia friendly walks. Focus groups took place at a meeting place at the end of each walk; usually a café or leisure centre. Typically focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Five of the six interviews and focus groups were audio recorded. Interviews in group five were not audio recorded due to technical difficulties with recording walking interviews, so detailed field notes were collected by CP. A qualitative, thematic analysis was undertaken to provide in depth understanding of people living with dementia's experiences of attending walks.

After fieldwork concluded, a second workshop was then held in May 2017, in which analysis of data took place. Within workshop two, transcripts were divided equally between 3 pairs of researchers, with each pair including a university and community researcher. In their pairs researchers read their allotted transcripts, and then coded transcripts using thematic analysis. Following this initial coding, researchers then came together to develop a series of mind maps which connected codes within each theme. Mind maps were then used to develop major themes and sub themes. After this phase of initial coding was completed, all research data was then entered into Nvivo 11 Qualitative Data Analysis software, and were coded according to the codes and themes developed within the workshop. Themes identified in workshops were then used to develop the structure of this report. Alongside their contribution to data collection and analysis, community researchers also contributed vignettes about their experiences of taking part in research, which are included at the end of this report.

## PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

**Table 1: Interview and focus group participants and locations**

PfA Walk Code	Date	location	Researcher names	Participants
Group 1	12/04/2017	Bonnybridge	CP. ST.	1 person with dementia, 1 carer, 1 focus group
Group 2	19/04/2017	Penicuik	CP. KS.	1 person with dementia, 1 carer, 1 focus group
Group 3	20/04/2017	East Dunbartonshire	CP. RH.	1 person with dementia, 1 carer, 1 focus group. 1 focus group
Group 4	24/04/2017	Stirling	CP. ST.	1 person with dementia, 1 carer, 1 focus group
Group 5	28/04/2017	Stanley	CP.	1 person with dementia, 1 focus group
Group 6	03/05/2017	Muirton	CP. KS.	1 person with dementia, 1 carer, 1 focus group

### SUMMARY OF GROUPS

Bonnybridge "Walk with Braveheart" Walking Group leaves from the only hotel on the town's main road and thoroughfare. The groups taking the longer and shorter routes meet together outside the hotel with local on-street parking available nearby, and take in a range of urban streets and green spaces during the course of their walk. Routes for this group have been chosen to utilize primarily concrete paths and pavements, but do occasionally stray onto hard packed earth that is steady underfoot. Both the long groups conclude at the local cafe where staff have learnt their order. The cafe is long and narrow, with clusters of tables at the window that allow the group to sit together without crowding out other customers.

The Penicuik walking group is based at Penicuik House, a heritage site in Midlothian which sits within a substantial amount of green land. The walkers are allowed to drive down a restricted road and park in front of the house itself- a luxury not extended to all visitors. Penicuik runs a single walking group with walks of varying lengths week by week, all traversing the estate. Prior to walking the group meets in the Ranger's offices, in a room that has ample tables, chairs and reading material to act as an education space if the weather is inclement. The room is dominated by a large wooden table made from a single cross section of wood- it is from here that tea and biscuits are handed out and over this that conversation is had. On the day of the walk, the route took in gravel pathways round to the back of the house and up into a section of private land which could be accessed only because the rangers acted as

guides for the walking group. The route was dry underfoot, but walkers related that poor weather could make the paths slippery and boggy at times. This walk was particularly tied to the exploration of nature, with Rangers pointing out badger footprints and identifying birdcalls.

The East Dunbartonshire group is based out of the local leisure centre and benefits from plentiful parking and a design which prioritizes accessibility. At the time of the walk, there were several walking groups leaving the centre, only one of which was the dementia friendly group meaning that there was a significant amount of movement in and around the foyer/café where the group meets. Despite the loud and echoic nature of the leisure centre, the group was successfully split into two (a fast and slow group) who then moved outside to cluster together before leaving. The East Dunbartonshire routes seek to take in both urban and green spaces, making the most of accessible pathways and routes to maximize participation. This is not always successful- as reflected in the community researcher transcript- as areas of these paths may be closed or inaccessible making traversing difficult for those using mobility aids. These routes required more interaction with traffic and traffic calming measures, but were similar to other groups in that people tended to break off into smaller clusters during the walk and come together at key points. Both groups returned to the leisure centre as part of their routine, and walkers related regularly stopping to have a hot drink or cake together before moving on with the rest of their day.

The Stirling Walking Network group meets at Stirling Community Hospital, making access via driving and public transportation relatively simple, though parking is limited due to the time of day and ongoing construction at the facility. The walking groups once again meet together, in this case at a reception desk near to the front of the facility with sufficient seating to allow comfort, before splitting into the fast and slow groups once outside. Due to the location of the hospital as a base of operations, the green spaces accessible were limited to parks and planned/maintained areas, however both groups specifically navigated away from traffic-heavy areas and into quieter parts of the neighbourhood. As with other groups, the route was often marked by landmarks that may be unnoticed by non-walkers that nevertheless facilitated navigation. Both routes returned to the hospital, specifically to the small café where it was possible to sit and chat with refreshments before moving on.

The Stanley walking group meets outside the “old post office” in the small village of Stanley. This is the first true barrier to accessibility by outsiders or non-Stanley-natives, as the ‘Old post office’ is 200m from the Post Office, and is in fact a Spar. Although the walk begins in Stanley proper, it soon loops out into green spaces and is the only route thus far to introduce any notable elevation gain or more difficult terrain. The route out of Stanley follows an incline up a small local hill, which provides views down into the valley and along the River Tay, before hooking back towards the narrow country roads which navigate between and around fields,

eventually arriving at the river. Given the setting, traffic was a limited issue for these walkers, although cars did come past requiring walkers to move to the side of the road. These walkers were also the only group to report that the community took active notice of their routine, and discussed the numerous people who had reported being 'thrown off' when they'd added an extra walk during the summer on a different day of the week. Stanley is also the only group not to end the walk where it had begun, instead meeting in a small restaurant/hotel, where they are "treated like family" and access the dining room before official hours and with minimum hospitality set up by the staff. They are also afforded reduced rates for cake, tea and coffee alongside exclusive use of the dining room space for the duration.

Muirton's walking group meets at a local church with plentiful parking and easy access via local transportation. This group provides easy access for those with mobility impairments, and a person in a motorized wheelchair was present on the day of the walk. As with other urban groups, this walking group began in the built up space before navigating back into greenery, tracing along the edges of the river before hooking back along the golf course and through the wider area of the school's grounds- all of which included substantial amounts of green space. Despite this, there is discussion in the tapes regarding the ability for walkers to seek shelter during unexpectedly poor weather, and it is clear that there are quick 'exit' routes available in this circumstance. On returning to the church, the walking group enjoys exclusive use of the church facilities, making tea and coffee as well as enjoying food baked and brought by walkers. This is the only walking group which reflected specifically on their ability to remain within this space once the group had disbanded, and the focus group includes mentions of people staying behind to use the ping-pong tables etc.

## FINDINGS

Analysis of interview, focus group and visual data took place in an analysis workshop involving the academic and community researchers. During the workshops five themes emerged from the data. These themes are discussed below;

Data is anonymised by group. The following codes are used:

Gx – group and number. Fg – focus group. Carer – informal carer. Plwd – Person living with dementia.

Photographs, which were taken by walk attendees and/or researchers, are also used to emphasise key points within the analysis.

## BEING WITH OTHER PEOPLE



Photo 1. A walking group meeting in a café at the end of a walk

In all locations, being in the company of other people was the most cited reason for being part of the walking group (photo 1):

*Female - It gives us a reason to come out, to be in the group, to meet the people. (G6fg)*

The following important elements of being with other people are considered further below.

- Socialising and Company
- Friendly Support
- Support for Couples

### **SOCIALISING AND COMPANY**

Participants in all the walking groups we visited described the value of company and socialising that came from being part of their group. Alongside being outdoors, being with other people was the main outcome of participation in a walking group.

The benefit of having company was expressed by all participants: people with dementia and carers, and those who lived alone or with other people. Being with other people appeared to be particularly important for people who lived alone since the group provided an organised way of meeting people and developing social contacts:

*Male - It gets you out. There are lot of people out walking on the road and although it is nice and they want to go out for a walk, when you are on your own it is not quite the same. (G1Carer)*

*Female - Yes, because I am just on my own, usually - I think it is a way of meeting people. (G1fg)*

*You are able to speak to different company while you are walking. It is good to have company to walk with - a group of people is good. (G6fg)*

Similarly, meeting people could be important for people who had been widowed as the walk provided a positive focus that took them out of the house:

*Male - There is quite a number of people on the walks who have lost their partners: I lost my wife in the last couple of years - about seven months ago - and I have found this has been absolutely brilliant to come to something like this and meet all these people, and get out the house. It gives you something to focus on instead of sitting at home feeling sorry for myself. It is of great benefit to me. (G3fg)*

Having company was also important for a carer whose partner (with dementia) had been admitted into long-term care:

*Male - It is a matter of getting company when you have been looking after somebody for so long. (G6fg)*

Meeting people also helped to break up the day and provided something different for people to talk about:

*Female - But [you] want to get out and about - it is a chance to meet somebody else and talk about something different. It breaks up your day. (G1fg)*

Humour was another important aspect of socialising within the walking groups. A number of participants commented on the good-natured joking and laughs they had while out on walks, as reflected in the quotes below from people with dementia and carers:

*Female - They walk at the back and they just kill themselves [laughing]. All you hear is them giggling and laughing all the time. (G6carer)*

*Female - It was quite [fun] last week. [Name] chatted away and had quite a laugh.*

*Male - We did, yes.*

*Female - Tears were just about running down our faces with laughing. (G2Carer & Plwd)*

The regularity of the weekly walk also provided participants with something to anticipate:

*Male - Yes, it is very important - it is something to look forward to from one week to another. (G1fg)*

For many participants the format of walks, with a cup of tea or coffee at the end, was an important aspect of socialising with the group:

*Female - Cups of tea for everyone, which is really important, plus you make friends that you meet outwith the group. (G1fg)*

As the above quote demonstrates, friendship was important, with some people developing friendships that could extend beyond the organised walking group sessions. Participants in half the groups we visited met up at other events or activities, such as going to the pub, attending exercise classes or taking part in cultural activities. This extended the social benefits of companionship and socialising that were experienced while walking.

### **FRIENDLY SUPPORT**

For people with dementia, being part of a walking group that involved other people with memory problems provided reassurance and support that enabled them to go out walking:

*Female - Because I am with group. I would not go out walking myself because I would be frightened. I would not come down to [location] on the bus.*

*Interviewer - Does it take a wee bit of the pressure off if you are all together?  
Yes and I feel that there are probably a couple of the folk in the walk that are like me (with memory problems). (G3Plwd)*

This sense of being among people who are in the same circumstances was important to this person. Being able to share their experiences of the same challenges, made them less of an issue:

*Female - Yes and all of us are the same - we all have the same sorts of problems.*

*Interviewer - So whoever it is, folk understand.*

*Female - We understand each other. We know we are talking rubbish, but nobody else notices. (G3PlwD)*

However, despite this understanding, people with dementia also valued being able to connect with a broader group of people, as this same participant later highlighted:

*Female - The likes of this group - I walk along with them and talk as you are going along and it gets you involved with them. (G3PlwD)*

The group also provided opportunities to maintain existing friendships and for support to be provided in this context, such as in this example of a person taking along a seat to support his long-time friend with dementia to be part of the walking group:

*Male - the other person that you are here to talk to, has dementia and [name] and I were two of the original walkers when this started. He has problems now. He always associates with me. ... I have brought [name's] seat with me. He is on that walk and I am on this walk, but I know that he will be sitting. (G1Carer)*

As part of this group support, this same carer refers to another friend who usually joins them, in which they take turns to support a man with dementia who attends the walks:

*Male - we take turns walking alongside [name] to keep him going. (G1Carer)*

Within this same group, a person with dementia described struggling with his condition yet the group getting on well with the rest of the people in the group. He felt well supported by others attending the walk, suggesting that the group responded well to his challenges:

*Male - I have dementia and I am always struggling with dementia. However, we get on very well. Nobody ever swears or does anything like that. (G1Plwd)*

Such groups were therefore supportive and inclusive of people with dementia: a sense of inclusiveness was a recurring feature of participants' descriptions of their walks. For example, despite variability in people's pace, all were included, with groups ensuring that they walked at the slowest person's pace:

*Male - walking in general is not particularly competitive - it is not a race - you go at the slowest person's pace whether that person is 40 or 80. (G1fg)*

*Male - And then you get ones that are going too slow and then you just wait until they catch you up again, and off we go again.*

*Male - You get the rest [name].*

*Male - Which is good - in a sense everybody is looking after each other.*

*Male - They do. (G2fg)*

There was a sense, therefore, of a mix of people coming together to support each other, as evident in the following quotes in which carers reflected on the variety of people in the group: carers and people with dementia, younger and older, fitter and less physically fit:

*Female - We are very lucky. It is quite a mixed group: they are really nice - all different abilities and health issues. They are a nice crowd. (G4Carer)*

*Female - It is quite a mixed group - we all sort of mix and talk to each other. (G6Carer)*

While most groups walked together on one route, one group we visited had three different routes to support different abilities and fitness levels, which seemed to suit participants:

*Female - The three walks are there. I do not know if I will ever go on the brisk one - maybe eventually, but you start off casual. [Name] had a bad leg for a while and still has a bad leg, but it is improving. (G3Plwd)*

The groups also provided opportunities to share conversations and find out information from people in similar situations:

*Female - I think we come as well because everybody is in the same position and you can discuss things on your walks and find out different things. (G2fg)*

## **SUPPORT FOR COUPLES**



Photo 2. A couple on a walk

For some couples, doing an activity together that they both enjoyed was valued (photo 2):

*Male - Yes, I do - that is one thing - the both of us enjoy it. (G2Carer)*

While being able to take part in walking together was perceived to be beneficial, being apart during the walks was also helpful for some couples, and some couples would vary being apart and together on different weeks. When couples spent almost all their time together, having the space to have a break from each other was considered supportive of their relationship:

*Female - Yes, and it gets me out, and it gets [husband] and I away from each other for a wee while because we were just together from the minute we opened our eyes in the morning. (G3Plwd)*

The group enabled this couple to walk separately, as discussed by another member of the walking group, which helped the carer overcome their initial apprehension:

*Female – [woman with dementia] never used to speak; now [she] can speak for Scotland. She came along in the very first walk and he [her husband] was very anxious he would leave her. He did and literally after the third walk, he said that he was fine with these people - you go with your group. (G3fg)*

Similarly, for another couple, it helped the person with dementia to know that her husband felt comfortable because she was being well looked after by other people in the group:

*Female - It gets the people out - people that cannot get out on their own - and somebody is looking after them while they are out. When I am away on the likes of these things, he does not bother about me because I am with people that are looking after me. I am getting looked after while I am there. (G3Plwd)*

In a different group, the wife of a man with dementia reflected on his need to be independent and how being able to walk separately helped him experience this:

*Female - That is true because I noticed a difference in [husband]. He is very independent which I have to hold back a bit because I have got to let him do his own thing. I think that is why he likes it - to get away from me. (G2Carer)*

To support this man to walk ahead while being alert to the potential risk of becoming completely separated from the group, the walk leader carefully would facilitate this by keeping a distance while maintaining the person in his line of sight.

The support inherent in the group developed over time as people became familiar with each other and people's different abilities. This knowledge and the support that developed from it therefore enabled carers to feel secure in walking with different people, knowing their relative with dementia was safe and well supported with other members of the group:

*Female - What I would like to say is, yes, you have got [name], myself and [name] here, but as the group has developed you all now look out for each other as well. Everybody has become good friends: we are all very aware of individuals' abilities within the group, so it is not just us - you are looking out for each other. Some of you come with your partners, but you do not stay with your partners. You maybe use it as an opportunity not to and walk with other people. It is not just us. You all do, as I say, look out for each other now. (G2fg)*



## BEING OUTDOORS



Photo 3. Being outdoors.

The following themes in relation to Being Outdoors are discussed;

- Fitness and Physical Activity
- Exploring the Environment
- Traffic, Paths and Rest-Points

The value of being outdoors was another key reason why people took part in the walking groups, as summarised by this participant:

*Male - Getting out and about and fresh air, basically and meeting people as well.  
(G1fg)*

### **FITNESS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Maintaining health and fitness within the outdoor environment was a key feature of walking group participation. Several people suggested that when maintaining fitness, getting outside was more enjoyable than going to the gym:

*Male - The gym is boring. I think maybe for younger people with the treadmill and running. You get the benefit of getting the walk. It is a recognised thing that people out walking (particularly in the countryside) have a feel good factor. (G1fg)*

This person with dementia emphasised the value of the group in helping him to maintain an activity that he had always done, thereby supporting continuity with past interests:

*Male - Yes, I have had a history of walking and I do not want to stop. (G1Plwd)*

Both carers and people with dementia conceptualised the walk as a 'health walk' that maintained fitness particularly as people became older:

*Female - I have been coming the last few months. It is a health walk.*

*(G3Carer)*

*Male - I am walking to keep myself alive. (G3Plwd)*

This perception of the walking group aiming to maintain health and fitness was preferred rather than viewing dementia as the reason for attendance:

*Male - We are here to get fit. It is nothing to do with dementia as far as I am concerned.*

*Male - Over the last couple of weeks we have noticed that everybody has got fitter over the year because we are actually going round the courses a lot quicker. You and I have been talking about trying to extend them a bit longer for the Thursday walk. There is a big difference in your health. (G3fg)*

The physical activity of walking in the fresh air could also be beneficial for helping people to sleep, as this person with dementia indicated:

*Female - I slept well last week because we had been down that hill and back up. (G2Plwd)*

People also discussed feeling 'good' after their walk, with benefits to their mood:

*Female - You feel good after it. (G4fg)*

*Male - It is getting you out. You sort of forget any worries when you are wandering round. (G1fg)*

While walking was considered valuable for its physical benefits, the social aspect of activity was a key element for many participants:

*Male - If you are on the bike or if you are on the treadmill, it is just you, whereas when you are out on the walk, you have all the others. (G1fg)*

*Male - I come for the company, the people and the fitness because it does keep you fit. (G6Plwd)*

This social element also provided motivation for exercising and maintaining fitness:

*Female - I am supposed to walk for a certain amount of time every day, but it is very boring because I am very slow. It helps pass the time when I have somebody to talk to while I am walking. (G4fg)*

*Male1 - I have said before, when I went to the gym after two minutes on the machine I was bored out of my skull. Here, I walk for an hour no problem.*

*Male2 - You never really notice because you are that busy blethering to folk.*

*The time just goes like that. (G3fg)*

Consequently, the physical and social aspects of the walking groups are fundamentally intertwined, with the social element motivating people to maintain their fitness.

#### **EXPLORING THE ENVIRONMENT**



Photo 4. Sheep on a walk

During the walking interviews participants discussed the environment they were in, whether the local architecture and history in urban areas or nature and wildlife in rural settings (photo 4).

*Female1 - The routes that have been chosen for years. It is a bit of green space. You have the houses and then you have to walk a certain distance to get to the canal so that is really the route taken to the canal.*

*Female2 - Bonnybridge has the Antonine Wall and the castle too so there is a bit of history as well. (G1fg)*

*Female - Everything is all nice and green and whatnot. You can look at the birds coming down. (G2Carer)*

*Female - Sometimes there are otters in there. ... And there were beavers down the river as well. (G6Carer)*

Participants highlighted their enjoyment of being shown interesting sights by the walk leaders:

*Male - You are seeing parts of the locality that you might not see: the leaders point things out to you - there is this animal, there is this old house or whatever and it is things like that that you would maybe miss. (G1fg)*

Beyond seeing interesting sights, connecting to nature provided opportunities for engaging with the sensory and tactile aspects of the environment:

*Female - Watch these bits (sections of roots on a path).*

*Int - I am just kicking them up here. Some of these are underground roots. I have that in my grass - it is a pest. It is coming from that tree.*

*Female - I wonder why that has got colour.*

*Int - It is all mossy: green with age.*

*Female - There is one of those trees back at the house that they say has a rubber bark. You can press it and it comes back out again. (G2Carer)*

The local environment, such as the species of trees, flowers and birds in the surrounding area, and conversations about changing seasons and weather were frequent topics of conversation:

*Female - I do not know if there is a favourite season really because there are many things at different seasons that make it good for that season. (G2Plwd)*

The interest and social interaction created by these types of conversation – whether about nature or local history - provided an incentive for people to participate:

*Male - Also, you do not really feel like it is exercise. The fact that you have company and you are meeting different folk and seeing places you might normally go to yourself, it does not feel like exercise, therefore there is an interest factor. (G1fg)*

While one group had a variety of routes that participants could choose from, most groups walked the same route each week. This familiarity could be particularly helpful for people with dementia:

*Female - There are not too many routes that could be done for our group so that I think that is why we stick to the routes that we have and I enjoy that.*

*Normally, [name] knows where his stops are along the way and it is nice because you know where you are going - it is a familiarity.*

*Male - It is repetition. (G1fg)*

Again, the social element of the activity was highlighted, with the group discussing and agreeing which route they wished to take on a given day:

*Male - That is what we are all saying: that is the way the group has grown and developed because we are all interacting saying, I found another route today and then we discuss it and go out and walk. Socially, it is a great group. (G3fg)*

For this person with dementia, the support of the group enabled them to go somewhere they would find challenging to walk alone:

*Female - I would not come here myself. I would never get out of here. I would need to run into one of those offices and shout for help. (G3Plwd)*

Day trips were popular, with one group taking a minibus once per month to walk somewhere different, and another taking a minibus once a quarter. Use of minibuses in this way allowed for variation of walks, provided people with a means of accessing other areas, as well as an increased social aspect as people had somewhere different to visit:

*Male - We have a monthly walk. She runs a 16-seater and you can go on that for a monthly walk, have a cup of tea and come back on the bus. That is the kind of trips that we do. (G1Carer)*

*Female - Three times a year we get a minibus and we go for a walk outwith here, so we are going to Stanley next Tuesday morning. We get a minibus out and the minibus is leaving here at quarter to ten. We are meeting at quarter to ten. (G6fg)*

Therefore, participants benefited from exploring the immediate environment of their walking route(s) in addition to going further afield for variety and interest on occasions. However use of minibuses added a further layer of organisation on the part of walk leaders, as well as introducing further costs in terms of minibus hire or fuel charges.

### **TRAFFIC, PATHS AND REST-POINTS**

For those walking near roads, issues with traffic could prove challenging. One carer spoke about trying to make himself and his wife more visible to motorists by wearing more visible clothing, although his wife appeared reluctant to do this:

*Male - I gave you a row last week because you did not have it on last week and I had it on.*

*Female - Are you supposed to wear it?*

*Male - No, [name] gave it to me about two years ago to make me more visible crossing the road.*

*Female - It is a bright day today, but on a dull day.*

*Male - They toot their horn and shake their fist at you.*

*Female - Motorists are very selfish.*

*Male - But there you are - I have not been knocked down yet. (G1fg)*



Photo 5 – seats on the walk

Negotiating traffic and street furniture were difficulties in many walks. Getting across the road could be intimidating as in this experience of a person with dementia:

*Male - Of course. We have to get tight together to go across because the traffic was whistling past.*

*Female - It is quite intimidating.*

*Male - It certainly is. This is the problem.*

*Male - I am sure they just wait for us coming.*

*Female - That is it - they are like, someone wants to cross, off we go.*

*Male - We are going now.*

*Female - I think after that. Is this why it is the short walks you can stand and wait for the traffic. Another one - three white vans - now after the third one: this one is going to let us go - come on John.*

*Male - Give him a wave.*

*Female - I waved. It is good that folk let you out to cross the road. (G1Plwd)*

Walking in areas without traffic could therefore be more reassuring:

*Male - It is good in the sense that there is no traffic round about here as well. You are not worried about traffic coming. (G2fg)*

While the pace of walks was suitable for participants, and as discussed above in relation to support, the groups walked at the pace of the slowest participant, some people felt they would benefit from having more rest-points, such as in the quote below (photo 5):

*Female - Is there a particular bit of the walk that you like the best?*

*Male - When you sit your bum down.*

*Female - That is my favourite - that and the tea and cake at the end - those are my two favourite parts of walking. Have you got a couple of "park your bum" spots?*

*Male - Not really. We used to have maybe eight or ten stops and now we only have one or two. (G1fg)*

*Int - I am hearing loads of great things, but I am going to ask a difficult question now, which is - is there anything that could be better or needs to be tweaked?*

*Female - I think, maybe, a wee rest for some people with seats dotted about somewhere, around that walk especially - maybe a picnic table there. Just a wee rest for some people. (G2fg)*

Being outdoors was therefore a positive experience that could be enhanced for some participants with a greater number of rest-points, less traffic and better paths maintenance.

## **ATMOSPHERE, ETHOS & ACCESSIBILITY**

Throughout data collection, participants spoke warmly about the groups that they attended, emphasising the unique contribution that attendance made to their wellbeing. Participants often discussed the importance of regularly attending walking groups as a means of reinforcing their independence and demonstrating their fitness; that they were "not a wimp" and not "completely dependent on anybody". For others, the pace of walks helped them keep up, with participants feeling that they were not slowing other people down:

*Int - "Is it nice being out with older folk that take their time?"*

*Male - "We cannot go any quicker"*

*Female - "Some people, when we were going round that walk especially, were unsteady so S advised that somebody try using a pole, which I think S offered to do and she benefited from that. The next time we were out another one of the members, who is not here today, he was a bit unsteady and I asked him if he would like to try a pole. He said he thought it would help. So, we thought we would get some for the group and just leave them here so that if anybody is having a bad day or wants to try one, they are here." (G2fg)*

While walkers often provided support to one another both during and outwith the walk itself, Walkers also liked to be seen as “hardy people” or “all weather walkers”. While “walks primarily took place in good weather, most group members consider themselves to be “all weather walkers, who would put steps in place to minimise the effects of any bad weather:

*Male - “Walking. The group here struggle at times because there is a gale blowing. You do not go home. You just keep on working and we go to the café. Hello wee doggy.*

*Int - Can the weather make it quite bad for walking?*

*Male - Obviously.*

*Interviewer - [...] what do you do if it is raining? Do you walk down this if it is rainy?*

*Male - Yes.” (G1Plwd)*

This all-weather enthusiasm was often highlighted in group discussions, with group leaders and volunteers praising walkers and emphasising their ‘hardiness’ for ignoring poor weather conditions. Often this determination to walk in spite of the weather reinforced the commitment of group leaders to run groups every week:

*Male1 - Yes, it is very important - it is something to look forward to from one week to another. The only trouble is if it is a really bad day, but even a bad day - over the last years we could probably count them all on the hand the number of days that we have missed - we have gone out in snow and rain.*

*Male2 - I have been walking here eleven years and I think I have cancelled ten walks [...] we may have reduced - we may have just done the short version, but we have cancelled ten walks. [...]Because they have made the effort to come out and are happy by consensus with the weather conditions.*

*Male1 - We usually try to frighten them off. [Laughter]*

*Male2 - That never works. (G1fg)*

The above segment demonstrates the role humour played during walks. Humour served a number of functions in that it not only allowed walkers to downplay challenges of unpleasant aspects of the walk, but allowed an open discussion about sensitive subjects, such as dementia, ill health and death:

*Male2 - When (name) died, and at the funeral he had his wellies nailed to top of his coffin. With Bob, it will be the sticks. [Laughter]*

*Male1 - I used to just use one stick and I was getting an awful lot of muscle spasms. I was talking to the doctor one day and she suggested that I walk*

*with two sticks and it has taken the muscle spasms away. I was going to [town] and paying £40 every fortnight to get them massaged.*

*Male2 - Admit it - you enjoyed the massage. [Laughter]*

*Male1 - No. She was quite a nice woman, actually. (G1fg)*

This humorous atmosphere as an important aspect for more introverted or quieter people, who were described as more open when engaged in such a way:

*Female - He is really quiet at talking unless he is up the back with (name) and (name). [...] They walk at the back and they just kill themselves - all you hear is them giggling / laughing all the time. (G6fg)*

Later in that same interview, another walker described a previous week where they had walked together with a new walker:

*Female - It was quiet last week. (The new walker) chatted away and had quite a laugh.*

*PWD - We did, yes.*

*Female - Tears were just about running down our faces with laughing.*

*Int - You were after them for too much laughter, but last week it was you.*

*Female - That is right. (G2Plwd)*

The value of this comradery is particularly notable when walkers described their encounters with other groups and facilities that were available to them. Other groups are often described as being places of disablement, where the focus is placed upon what people cannot do:

*Male - They asked why I would not go and I said it is not a place for me. They have walking sticks, crutches, scooter and they are all like this. They said, how do you know and I said that I was the lollipop man [...] and they come in to [the school] once a year - the kids serve them coffee and tea. The last time there was a game of bingo and I said no I am not going. I am a 100% fit compared to what is in there. (G6Plwd)*

While the atmosphere of walks contributes significantly to the enabling ethos of the walking groups, the walkers benefit from significant forethought and planning on the part of group leaders. In combination, a positive, inclusive and humorous atmosphere ensured walks were accessible, and were also physically and socially empowering.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

The following themes in relation to safety and security are detailed below;

- Feeling Safe
- Feeling Confident
- Safety Concerns

### FEELING SAFE

In addition to giving people with dementia the opportunity to be outdoors and to socialise with other people, a further important feature of walking groups was they enabled people with dementia to feel safe and secure at the same time. Attendees felt confident that walks were safe, were well managed and had been prepared according to their needs:

*Male - Because obviously we know the routes and we know they are safe - they have been risk assessed. You have to be careful if you take a new route - you would have to look at it first. (G1fg).*

The management of walks, with walk leaders and back markers, gave people security that they would be looked after if they were struggling to keep up. Some walkers did note some anxiety about being able to keep up, but also felt that should they fall behind, the rest of the group would wait for them:

*Int- If feels to me like there is no stress that if you are a slow walker you have to be fast.*

*Female - No, the fast ones just slow down. Sometimes the fast ones are away at the front and then other people go the wrong way and get lost. (G6fg)*

Alternatively, one attendee noted that if someone needed assistance, other people on the walk would always help get them back to the start of the walk:

*Female - Somebody would come back with you if you said I cannot go on.*

*Male - It has been known for somebody to go and get their car and go back for somebody. That is why you have to sign in. If you sign in it means if anything happens to you, they will look after you and you have left your number with them. (G4fg)*

As a result, people felt more secure attending walks, and generally did not need to worry about keeping up or being left behind.

Linked to people's sense of safety and security, and also to the atmosphere of walks, there was a noted lack of pressure by group members. Because walks for different abilities were provided, people could choose the right walk for them. In addition people were free to move around walks, safe that they would not be left behind:

*Female - You realise you are not going for a race or something like that. You are going at roughly the same speed, but at your own pace. You do not feel you have to be the hare or lead the pack all the time. (G2fg)*

People living with dementia particularly valued the fact that walks generally took place at the same pace, enabling attendees to keep together as a group:

*Female - Everybody just keeps together. If you go from here you can go back to the place and come out again - you could really. (G2Plwd)*

### **FEELING CONFIDENT**

The feelings of safety that could be attributed to attending group walks, and being accompanied by walk leaders and other volunteers, also had the beneficial effect of raising confidence in people attending walks. Several people described an affiliation to groups, or even a feeling of belonging when attending groups; that they were with people with shared experiences and interests, who treated them with empathy and compassion:

*Female - It is part of the group - it is part of belonging. When you come to our group, we end up belonging to one another. You are brothers and sisters in this group because we all talk to one another and we all have fun together in whatever way we can - just being there for each other. (G6fg)*

Crucial to developing a sense of confidence in walks were feeling of inclusiveness, that people would be welcomed regardless of health problems, fitness or other difficulties, including dementia:

*Male. No, anybody can join - anybody that wants - does not matter if there is nothing wrong with them. They can come if they want a walk. You put £1 in the kitty - that covers the tea and biscuits. This will be school doing their running. (G6Plwd)*

For the same person, the relaxed nature of the groups meant they felt confident in attending, or conversely in not attending, for example if they did not feel well on that day:

*Male - There is no need to explain yourself for not coming along. I find it is nice to contact to let them know, but I do have a phone number for that woman we just talked to. (G6Plwd)*

For some participants, as their dementia had progressed and health declined, the walking groups provided them to at least carry on with some physical activities they had enjoyed

earlier in life. Although they couldn't engage in strenuous forms of walking such as hillwalking, the walks staged by the Paths for All groups enabled them to carry on walking in some capacity:

*Male - Yes, I did. I used to do a lot of hill walking. Yes, and cycling.*

*Int - You would miss that?*

*Male - Yes, I do - I do miss it. I am not capable of doing it.*

*Int - Well, I think the fact that you are doing this is marvellous.*

*Male - It is. (G1fg)*

As a result, the increased sense of safety people felt when attending walks had beneficial effects for people's wider confidence in continuing to participate in walking group walks and events.

### **SAFETY CONCERNS**

Some walkers did however note a few minor incidents which could take place during walks which raised concerns, most often happening if they came into contact with other path users such as dog walkers or cyclists:

*Female - The only thing we have to worry about here is cyclists racing along. If you walk down to the canal - in fact, John was nearly in the canal one time.*

*The best of it was that it was a family group who had the dog and the dog ran (and it was still on the lead) ran round John. It meant the lead went right round his leg, and he was at the edge of the canal. (G1Carer)*

Road traffic also raised safety concerns, particularly when people had to cross busy roads. This problem was unsurprisingly more common when walks were predominantly located in urban areas:

*Male - Of course. We have to get tight together to go across because the traffic was whistling past.*

*Female - It is quite intimidating.*

*Male - It certainly is. This is the problem (G1Plwd).*

This suggests that, while this is a relatively minor concern, paying attention to who other users of paths and roads may be and whether this might raise any difficulties is worthy of continuing attention, particularly when this means assisting people with dementia with activities such as crossing roads. In addition, walks which require crossing particularly busy roads, or are at particularly busy times should be avoided.

## LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

The following themes in relation to Leadership and Organisation are discussed in the next section;

- Appreciation of Walk Leaders
- Facilitating Walks
- Relationships with other Agencies
- Recruitment

### APPRECIATION OF WALK LEADERS



Photo 6. Walk attendees and leaders

Walk leaders played a crucial role in the walks, which was appreciated by all the participants (photo 6). The walk leader role was seen as critical to the continuation of walking groups, with most people feeling that without the leaders, groups could not continue. Attendees appreciated walk leader's role in leading walks, in organising and coordinating the wider walks programmes and in carrying out a number of other tasks which, while not part of the job description were critical to walking continuing:

*Female - Actually, the walk leaders are absolutely amazing - they really are. Yes, they are amazing. (G4Carer)*

Without the walk leaders taking responsibility for organising and leading walks, many people would not have taken up walking as an activity, or would not be able to walk in their local neighbourhoods as a leisurely activity:

*Male1 - I think it is essential to have a local coordinator. That is a definite.*

*Male2- I do not know if the group would fail without it.*

*Male1 - It could fail.*

*Male2 - But it would not have started without it.*

*Male1- I think it would fail without a leader.*

*Male2 - You would probably get a splinter group who would break away and do their own thing, but that is getting away from the whole concept of trying to get, socially, more people into it and interacting with people. (G3fg)*

Without the walk leader who was able to take responsibility for co-ordinating and organising a programme of walks, walks would not take place, and therefore they would not have had the same opportunity to engage in the walking activities.

### **FACILITATING WALKS**

When facilitating or leading walks, walk leaders played an important role in supporting people, making sure they could participate, and ensuring people enjoyed walks. Earlier, walking group members noted that groups had a positive ethos. In practice it was the acts of walk leaders which determined much of this ethos. Several walkers noted that attending their first walk could be daunting, but that walk leaders, along with other attendees on walks, had an important role to play in making them feel welcome:

*Female - But we hope to expand on that and we are all thinking of new ways to recruit more people into the walks. There might be people sitting at home that would like to join, but they do not have that self-confidence or esteem to join on their own. It takes a lot for someone to say that they will go and join something like some of our walkers here. (G1fg)*

In one case, the walk leader helped a person with dementia and his wife, who needed particular assistance to attend walks by collecting them by car, and then returning them home at the end of the walk:

*Female - but I have to be very honest - if it was not for the fact that (walk coordinator) picks me up (she does on occasion), I would not do it because it would take two buses to get here, and I can no longer walk. (G4Carer)*

Indeed concerns were shared in several interviews about how to best support new member of walks, by encouraging them or by providing a walking buddy:

*Female - we could maybe meet a certain person on their street and then bring them to the walk, and give them a buddy until they settle into the walk. We are hoping to do something like, but, again, that is maybe in the future (not quite yet). That would help people that are lonely and isolated who do not*

*want to leave their house on their own so if we can bring them out another way, we are hoping to do that. (G1fg)*

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES



Photo 7. A group walking on a path

Walk leaders had a wider role beyond leading and organising walks, such as advocating for better path maintenance with local authorities. This was identified as a form of work hidden from walkers, but which was important to the wider provision of walking facilities. Such facilities were failing to be maintained, restricting the range of walks available within a local area (photo 7). Walkers, and especially walk leaders played an important role in co-ordinating the need for such work. However there was also a sense that paths were not a priority:

*Male - There are also other routes that are, basically, inaccessible because of lack of maintenance of routes or tracks. The impression that I have, and both (friend) and I had a meeting, along with (walk leader), with the Council and I do not know so much if they are not interested or whether their hands are tied, financial or otherwise. (...) It would not take a lot of money to upgrade or improve or manufacture routes, which would give it a bigger assortment. I think that is badly lacking in local government. (G3fg)*

Further leadership roles in this regard included ensuring that walks were suitable, and had been properly assessed in terms of their suitability for walks:

*Male - Because obviously we know the routes and we know they are safe - they have been risk assessed. You have to be careful if you take a new route - you would have to look at it first. (G1fg)*

## **RECRUITMENT**

People found out about the walking groups via word of mouth from neighbours or friends, being given leaflets, or through hearing about them while attending another group. A number of people commented on the challenge of joining a new group, with awareness that this might be a barrier for some people to attend, such as in this example:

*Female - But we hope to expand on that and we are all thinking of new ways to recruit more people into the walks. There might be people sitting at home that would like to join, but they do not have that self-confidence or esteem to join on their own. It takes a lot for someone to say that they will go and join something like some of our walkers here.*

*Female - That is what happened with me - I was on my own. I found out where [the group] was (I looked it up online) ..., but I put it off for a couple of weeks because the thought of just going into a group where you do not know anybody, but I made myself do it.*

*Female - Here I am and I am glad I did it, but it did take a lot of courage being on my own to go into a group of people that you did not know. So what he was talking about would actually be quite good for those that would have issues with confidence to join. (G1fg)*

Walkers were also recruited through promotional work and partnerships with health care settings. In the case of one group, the walk leader was based in the local NHS trust, so the group was promoted via locations such as GP surgeries:

*Male - A simple thing, because I was at the nurse (I do like my nurses, you know) and she was asking me what I did exercise wise. I said that I did some walking. She asked me if I did anything with this group and I said, yes I was a walk leader (I was a leader then). This nurse is in the upstairs, away out of the road of everybody in the place, and she turned round and mentioned the group. Of course, there are three notices stuck down in the waiting room at the doctor's side (up on the window there). It shows you. We have been pushing for long and weary to get people to recognise (the walking group) in the medical profession and that is the first time ever. Since (walk leader) has come along the way of doing it has changed and that is part of the proof when the nurse comes in and knew about it. (G1fg)*

Having links with local NHS organisations appeared to be a beneficial form of recruitment, although this also impacted on the remit of the group and how it was viewed by participants

– for example as a health-related activity. This may also shape what is seen as the remit, focus and atmosphere of certain groups; for example if they have a focus on health, this may encourage certain people to attend, but may be less attractive to others. In addition, while one walk was located within the NHS, communicating with other organisations within the NHS was difficult, and may propose a barrier to the further development of groups.

*Female - Yes, there is more advertising now. (walking group) is an NHS initiative, but we do not have that (silly as it sounds) direct link, so we make sure that our publicity is everywhere, for example, doctors' surgeries, we send stuff to practice nurses, sports centres, community centres and libraries. There are always new ways of thinking - we do vox community groups etc., but it is still an ongoing thing with doctors and nurses to do referrals, but the board of (group) (G1fg)*

These two recruitment methods appear to reach a wide number of people, however these may also skew attendance in walks to particular groups, and create particular perceptions about walking groups e.g. that they are about 'health'. These two means of promotion may also lessen their accessibility to people with dementia; targeting people with dementia may involve greater involvement either with dementia health care services such as memory clinics, social care services, or through third sector organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland.

## REFLECTIONS FROM COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS

This project drew on the expertise of three older people, who had been trained as community researchers by members of the research team. Community researchers played a full role in data collection and analysis of research data. Community researchers also provided their own personal reflections about being involved in the project, and about the walking groups they attended. Reflections from the community researchers about their experiences of being involved in this project are given below.

### **KIM STRACHAN'S REFLECTIONS**

I take a walk daily and was therefore very interested in learning more of 'Paths for All' for personal and semi-political reasons.

Outing 1 - Penicuik House. This group met in the most beautiful country park grounds. All were conveyed by private transport as this venue is well off the beaten track. They regularly walk round a large pond. Much discussion was regarding the different aspects of nature as it took place e.g. rippling on the water being made by the breeze, species and colours of birds and flowers were singled out as and when we encountered them. Some of my other chats were of a nostalgic nature including family members, music, past hobbies and holidays. The walk was ably monitored by country rangers who 'topped and tailed' the group by keeping up with those who charged ahead and falling back with those who were less energetic. I believe a head count was also taken for maximum security. Whole group were very caring for each other and quickly spread the word of any obstacle marring the footpath. Partners were familiar and relaxed enough within the group to separate from each other and mingle whilst chatting liberally with other members. A cup of tea and natter session was enjoyed by all in the rangers' office. Our weather was cool and airy but I was told by individuals in the group that they go out in all weathers and still enjoy it. As an observer, I found the whole experience decidedly pleasant and warming.

Outing 2. - Riverside Church, Perth. This building is within a housing estate with a public bus stop directly outside eliminating the need for personal transport. The same route is always walked but the direction sometimes reversed. Terrain was 70/30 rural/built up. Busyish road to cross but this was well controlled by leaders. A very congenial and happy group who are supplemented by volunteers, partners and carers. This group were also happy enough within themselves to indulge in 'mix and match'. When asked about this some joked as to 'enjoying the change of company'. Very nice Church reception/cafe area was available for refreshments round up afterwards. Great chat and humorous conversation took place. I agreed to take part in the project because (a) I was invited to do so (b) I am very interested in the subject matter both personally and generally (c) I am keen to stay active both mentally and moderately physically. My reflections on taking part in the project are that (a) it could perhaps be used as a 'feeder' to get the participants involved in other activities together or apart. It is a very useful, decidedly pleasant and pretty healthy activity. Key issues for me were the transport issues for participants and their ability to 'mix and match' during the period of the get together.

## **ROG HARRISON'S REFLECTIONS**

I like to volunteer and was interested in this project although it is unlikely that I would ever become a member of a walking group. I was surprised how popular this was and how much people enjoyed taking part. There was a social aspect as well as a physical aspect and people seemed to like to participate every week. Some of the walkers were happy to volunteer to be at the rear so no one got left behind and were also happy to volunteer for other roles. Indeed some of the walkers were keen to suggest possible new routes.

Ideally walks should start and finish at an accessible meeting place, preferably with seats, or a café, so people can sit and chat to each other before and after the walk. Walks should take place at a regular time and place so that people who miss a week for any reason can easily join in the following week. There should also be scope to have walks tailored for people of different abilities which would start and end in the same place. I suspect that there would be plenty of scope to expand this project if funding were available as these groups fulfil a need and lead to a healthier life, both mentally and physically, for the participants. I doubt people would continue without enthusiastic walk leaders.

## **SHEILA THORBURN'S REFLECTIONS**

When invited to participate in the Paths for All survey I readily agreed since, although this is an interesting topic, it is unlikely that I would become a member of the walking group.

In April, when we met for the first Training Day, it was obvious that a fitness regime was needed for me to prepare for walking with others. Surveying two groups, I found that each had its own identity. Bonnybridge seemed a lively group, supporting each other and providing a good social-life for all, both on the walk and at other times. I was taken by the resilience of the members in circumstances that might have led to complaints in other places.

Stirling Group was very large but everyone seemed to have a part in it. This was a very sociable group and meeting in the cafe at the Hospital was important to them both before and after the walk. For both the members of the groups and the group leaders' accessibility of the meeting place, the security of being in a group and the regularity both of the time of meeting and the route of the walk were important.

My conclusion is that these groups fulfilled a need and led to a healthier life for the people who were members

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it is clear that the dementia friendly walking groups' programme provided by Paths for All are successful in their aim of encouraging people living with dementia to attend walks. Walking group attendance had two key benefits: providing opportunities to socialise with other people, including but importantly not limited to other people living with dementia; and promoting good health and wellbeing, in terms of encouraging physical activity, and in terms of lessening the risk of social isolation and loneliness.

### **SOCIALISING**

The most important benefit of walking groups were the opportunities they provided for people with dementia to socialise with other people as part of the walking groups programme. People identified groups as being supportive, in terms of encouraging a person to attend and walk, engaging the person with other people, providing a wide range of environmental stimuli for a person, or providing a person with practical assistance when attending walks. Specific benefits of walking groups in terms of social activities were in providing people living with dementia with a relatively safe and secure place to socialise and interact with others, giving carers opportunities for a brief period of respite, and providing a place where future social relationships could flourish. Based on reporting of participants, regardless of whether a person had dementia, was a carer, or was simply attending walks, social benefits appeared to be the main driver of group attendance. Those who were vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation found groups to be particularly valuable. Therefore we suggest that this is an area where the groups can bring added value.

### **HEALTH BENEFITS**

Across all of the groups, health benefits were generally viewed as secondary when compared to social benefits. Health benefits focused on giving people an opportunity to maintain fitness, or to build further fitness, for example if recovering from a period of ill health. Walks were generally short enough to be manageable by all participants. Interestingly, some walks reported a culture of fitness as being one of the reasons for participating in walks with several participants reporting benefits in terms of fitness, and also made statements about not being seen as 'a wimp' if they couldn't keep up. While most of those making such claims enjoyed walks, others may be uncomfortable with such a focus. Benefits of walking were typically related to general health, as opposed to recovering from particular conditions, or being linked specifically to a person's dementia. The findings of this project support the view that health should be an important outcome of walks, but that this should be secondary to promoting the social benefits of walking group attendance.

### **LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION**

Walk leaders were crucial to the delivery of walking groups, and of walking groups achieving their objectives. Walk leaders and other volunteers were universally appreciated, with several attendees also expressing gratitude that the walk leaders appeared to 'go the extra mile', for

example in one case a walk leader collected and returned people to their homes at the start and end of the walks. There was a general feeling that walk leaders played a much more significant role than just leading walks, and that they typically fulfilled numerous roles which went beyond their job description. This suggests that walk leaders are crucial to the groups, and should be valued, and resourced so they can fulfil their function. In addition, recognition should be given to the work walk leaders carry out which may go beyond the core requirements of their role.

Attendees were acutely aware that walking groups were subject to short term funding, and frequently expressed concern that groups could end if funding were cut. There was also a sense that the groups could not depend on networks of volunteers; those who attended groups did not routinely feel that a funded walks co-ordinator should be replaced with a model for walks based solely on volunteers.

### **RECRUITMENT**

Information was not available about whether the promotion of walking groups took place within the care home sector. Whether any barriers exist which may limit the promotion of dementia friendly walking groups within this sector, and how any such barriers may be overcome, warrants further investigation. No information on class, ethnicity or other equality characteristics were taken, so conclusions cannot be drawn regarding levels of diversity amongst those participating in the walking groups. Therefore, how far walking groups are accessed across diverse social groups is an aspect of recruitment to be considered in future.

### **DEMENTIA FRIENDLINESS**

Walks were generally perceived as being dementia friendly, although they took various forms in doing so, and this 'dementia friendliness' was something that acted in the background of walks. Few participants spoke of elements of walks being explicitly targeted at them, nor did any participants speak of joining walks specifically because of their 'dementia friendliness'. Indeed, the general feeling was that walking groups created a place where a person's dementia did not matter. There were few reports of difficulties on walks that could be attributed to a person's dementia, and which were not adequately managed either by a carer or by a walk leader. While one of the groups was closed in order to accommodate people with dementia and their carers exclusively, there did not appear to be a greater sense of enjoyment among people living with dementia who attended this group when compared to non-closed groups. In addition, those people living with dementia attending mixed groups generally did not feel that dedicated groups for people with dementia should be established.

Groups were generally perceived as being inclusive and encouraging to all people, and that specific forms of dementia friendliness was but a secondary part of the inclusive atmosphere that was attached to the walking groups. Marketing groups as dementia friendly was viewed as being useful as a recruiting tool, and was also useful in order to allay carers' potential fears that a walk may not be suitable for them. However, a dementia friendliness label was less

important once people attended groups, with most finding that any potential difficulties that may occur did not happen. These findings therefore suggest that dementia friendliness should be viewed in the context of the wider inclusiveness of walks, in addition to being a specific goal of groups. Indeed, within this context, care should be taken when discussing dementia friendliness to ensure that walks are still seen as inclusive to all.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the report details above, this report makes the following recommendations;

### WALK LEADERS

Walk leaders were identified as critical to the successful running of walking groups.

- Ensure walk leaders and volunteers in walking groups receive adequate training in relation to health and safety, and soft skills which facilitate social interaction between people living with dementia and other walk attendees to maintain current good levels of support.
- Ensure walk leaders receive adequate dementia awareness training and that volunteers have access to dementia awareness training where required.
- Ensure funding for walk programmes and specifically for walk leaders is maintained, as funding a specific walks co-ordinator was identified as key to the longevity of groups. Where possible, funding of walk leaders should move away from a short-term funding model, as this leads to anxiety among walk leaders and attendees.
- While opportunities for greater involvement of volunteers should be encouraged, there appeared to be little desire among participants for walking groups to become organisations solely driven by volunteers. The report therefore recommends that a model based solely on volunteers should be avoided.
- Recognise and provide support for the wider roles required of walk leaders, such as liaising with other local organisations, driving recruitment, and managing the organisational elements of walks.

### CONTENT OF WALKS

- Ensure access to a range of walks across urban and rural areas, and in particular, access to several potential walks which gives attendees options to attend more or less strenuous walks is encouraged.
- Encourage access to a multisensory walking experience – e.g. different sights and sounds, alongside opportunities for sensory experiences based on smell or touch – e.g. flower gardens etc.
- Walks should generally be accessible to all, including people using wheelchairs or mobility aids. Walks should be carefully selected to ensure that people will not face too many hazards, such as uneven paths, urban traffic or busy roads to cross. Consideration should be given to the availability of rest-points to support people who are less mobile.
- Some attendees may want more challenging types of walks, or may focus on the physical benefits of walks – giving people different options should also be encouraged.
- Based on responses of attendees, mixed groups should continue with an emphasis on general inclusiveness.
- Focus on connections with local authorities and leverage support for path maintenance.

- Providing opportunities for carers and people with dementia to walk separately should be encouraged, in order to give carers valuable opportunities for respite if they wish this. This may require more support of people with dementia from walk leaders and/or volunteers.

## **RECRUITMENT**

- Develop and build links with local health services such as GP surgeries. Consider building closer links with secondary services such as memory clinics in order to promote referral pathways for people living with dementia.
- Build links with dementia organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland local groups.
- Consider developing links with walking charities. In particular, provide signposting to organisations such as the Ramblers for those wanting greater walking opportunities.
- Consider multifaceted approaches to recruitment, which promote the qualities of walking and walking groups for health and for social interaction.
- Specifically target individuals who may be lonely, or develop channels through which individuals who may be lonely can be recruited.
- Word of mouth was a strong driver of recruitment, so consider how existing populations of attendees can further promote groups across their own networks.
- Consider how to support people when joining the group given that participants found this a daunting experience that might put off less confident individuals from participating.

## **DEMENTIA FRIENDLINESS**

- Dementia friendliness should be part of a wider agenda to promote inclusiveness of walking for all, based on the proviso of what will work for dementia will work for all.
- Ensure adequate training of walk leaders and volunteers to support people living with dementia who may require it.
- No concerns were raised about people with dementia attending walks alongside other older people. We recommend therefore that walks should provide opportunities for people with dementia to mix and interact with other walk members.
- Easier walks were requested by people with dementia, so ensure that a variety of times and distances for walks are provided so that all can participate. This may depend on group size, but works effectively at present among groups with a higher number of attendees.
- This report does not recommend that walks or walking groups exclusively for people with dementia should become a common feature of Paths for All groups.

## **APPENDIX A; INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORMS**

### **Paths for All Evaluation: Walking interview Information sheet**

#### **About the project**

We are a team of researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling. We have been funded by Paths for All to explore what people like or dislike about their Dementia Friendly Walking group projects. We hope that the findings from our research can help to improve the development of dementia friendly walking groups in the future.

#### **What does the research involve?**

We are asking people who attend dementia friendly walking group walks to take part in our research.

We would like to invite you to take part in a 'walking interview'. A researcher will accompany you during the walk and will talk to you about the dementia friendly walking group and the walk you are taking part in. The researcher will either be a research assistant from the University, or an older person who has volunteered to help us with the project. They will ask you questions about the walk itself, what you like and dislike about the walking group, and if there is anything else about the walks that is important to you. They will also take photographs with you during the walk. These photographs can be about the walk, the place you are walking, or the people you are with.

The walking interview will last for the length of the walk, in most cases we expect this to be around 30 minutes. The session will take place at the end of one of the walks you attend. During the session we will discuss what you like and dislike about the walks, and how the walks could be improved in the future.

#### **Do I need to take part?**

No, your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not to take part and you are free to stop at any time without giving a reason.

## **What will happen to the information I give?**

We would like to record the conversation, but will ask your permission to do this. The researcher may also ask you to take some photographs during the walk, or may take some photographs with you. The recording and photographs we collect will be treated in confidence. All information will be stored securely and we will not use any names or information that might identify you.

We will have the audio-recordings transcribed. During this process any information that identifies you, or others, and specific places will be removed so that the transcripts of the recording are anonymous. Transcripts will be kept for 10 years in line with the University of Stirling data protection policies.

We will write a report based on the findings and might like to quote you or use photographs you take to illustrate the points made. We will ensure that you can't be identified in any written report.

## **Will taking part benefit me?**

We cannot promise that taking part will benefit you directly. However, we hope that the findings will help improve walking groups in the future.

## **How will we use the information?**

The information will be used to write a report about the walking groups for Paths for All. We may also write a journal article and/or present papers at academic conferences based on the project findings.

## **Further information**

If you would like to take part, or would like to discuss this opportunity further, you can contact Grant Gibson at [grant.gibson@stir.ac.uk](mailto:grant.gibson@stir.ac.uk) or at 01786 466319

If at any time you have concerns about the research, you may contact Professor Alison Bowes, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling: email [a.m.bowes@stir.ac.uk](mailto:a.m.bowes@stir.ac.uk) or telephone 01786 467695, who is not connected with the research.

## **Paths for All Evaluation: Focus Group interview Information sheet**

### **About the project**

We are a team of researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling. We have been funded by Paths for All to explore what people like or dislike about their Dementia Friendly Walking group projects. We hope that the findings from our research can help to improve the development of dementia friendly walking groups in the future.

### **What does the research involve?**

We are asking people who attend dementia friendly walking group walks to take part in our research.

We would like to invite everyone attending groups to take part in a group discussion with other people attending the walking group walks to discuss what is important to you about the walks and what you like and dislike about them.

The session will be attended by other people attending the walks and will last around 30 minutes. The session will take place at the end of one of the walks you attend. During the session we will discuss what you like and dislike about the walks, and how the walks could be improved in the future.

### **Do I need to take part?**

No, your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not to take part and you are free to stop at any time without giving a reason.

### **What will happen to the information I give?**

We would like to record the conversation, but will ask your permission to do this. All the information we collect will be treated in confidence. All information will be stored securely and we will not use any names or information that might identify you.

We will have the audio-recordings transcribed. During this process any information that identifies you, or others, and specific places will be removed so that the transcripts of the recording are anonymous. Transcripts will be kept for 10 years in line with the University of Stirling data protection policies.

We will write a report based on the findings of the group interviews and might like to quote you to illustrate the points made. We will ensure that you can't be identified in any written report.

### **Will taking part benefit me?**

We cannot promise that taking part will benefit you directly. However, we hope that the findings will help improve walking groups in the future.

### **How will we use the information?**

The information will be used to write a report about the walking groups for Paths for All. We may also write a journal article and/or present papers at academic conferences based on the project findings.

### **Further information**

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## Paths for All Walking group walking interviews

Please initial boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I feel happy with the answers provided to me.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving a reason.	
3. I understand that all information, including photographs taken during the interview will be kept confidential.	
4.. I understand that all information will be accessed only by the project team and that audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study.	
5. I give my permission for the walking interview to be audio-recorded.	
6. I give permission for photographs to be used by the University of Stirling in relation to the Paths for All research project, and for photographs to be published	
7. I agree to take part in the above research.	

Participant's name

Signature

Date

Researcher's name

Signature

Date

## Group interview to discuss dementia friendly walking groups

Please initial boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I feel happy with the answers provided to me.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time without giving a reason.	
4. I understand that all information will be kept confidential.	
5. I agree that the information can be used on condition that it is anonymised.	
6. I understand that all information will be accessed only by the project team and that audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study.	
7. I give my permission for the group discussion to be audio-recorded.	
8. I agree to take part in the above research.	

Participant's name

Signature

Date

Researcher's name

Signature

Date