

# Walking for everyone: Getting socially excluded communities back on their feet

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## Abstract

Ironically given the cheapness and accessibility of walking as everyday physical activity, the greatest challenges are in reaching our most socially excluded communities, including people in deprived areas and those from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, who are often disproportionately affected by health inequalities and low levels of physical activity.

In England, people on low incomes can expect 17 years less of disability-free life than those on high incomes. Obesity, poor mental health and low physical activity levels are associated with social and economic deprivation: “the burden of disease falls disproportionately on people living in deprived conditions, and for some health conditions falls particularly heavily on certain ethnic groups” (Marmot 2010: 52). Meanwhile those in professional jobs are twice as likely to walk as those in routine manual jobs, and white people are almost twice as likely to walk as black people (Sport England 2009). The need to target physical activity promotion where there is greatest need is reinforced by the “dose-response” effect, which shows the benefits of sedentary people doing a little are proportionately greater than those of moderately active people becoming more active (HM Government 2009).

The Ramblers Get Walking Keep Walking project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund (Travel Actively 2009), is a unique walking initiative designed to target people in greatest need. Operating in four major English cities, it delivers twelve week time limited facilitated walking programmes supporting and encouraging everyday walking, based primarily at community venues and within grassroots organisations working in the areas of BME, mental health, families and community development. By accessing already established networks and ensuring a presence at community events and public venues, it has reached a wide and

representative cross sector of local populations. Almost half of the participants are from non white ethnic backgrounds. Self reported physical activity at the end of the twelve week programme is higher than compared to baseline.

## **Authors**

Simon is responsible for helping the Ramblers to make 'walking more accessible to more people'. In addition to managing grant funded projects, Simon oversees support to Ramblers volunteers who lead over 500 walks a week. Previously Simon was Walkability Officer at Living Streets after having spent time as a local co-ordinator for Walking for Health.

Des is the Ramblers Senior Everyday Walking Officer, with ten years' experience as a professional engaged with walking promotion. He was a key developer of Get Walking Keep Walking and acted as a representative on numerous expert bodies including National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, Transport for London and the Physical Activity Alliance.

Chris is Project Manager for Get Walking Keep Walking. Prior to joining the Ramblers, Chris worked for twenty years supporting vulnerable adults, in particular around homelessness and mental health, where the "Recovery agenda" clearly links community engagement with mental well-being.

Jonathan is Director of Consultancy at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), and is an experienced consultant who has worked in regeneration, community and economic development for over 12 years. Jonathan has managed research projects for a range of clients including government agencies, regional bodies, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations. In addition to managing CLES Consulting, Jonathan often delivers seminars and training to a range of audiences on topics such as 'using evidence in policy and project development', 'successful project management', and 'evaluation'.

Victoria has combines over five years consultancy experience with an understanding of key debates in community development, health and well-being and regeneration. Victoria is well versed in undertaking programme and project evaluations, and is currently leading on a range of evaluations of health and well-being interventions, including exploring softer outcomes and economic impact.

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## **Overview**

This paper details interim findings from the evaluation of Get Walking Keep Walking (GWKW). GWKW is a four year project developed by The Ramblers to increase regular independent walking amongst previously inactive and insufficiently active people, and is part of the Travel Actively Consortium. The Consortium has been awarded £20 million over four years from 2008 to 2012, through the Big Lottery Fund Well Being Programme, to create projects which enable inactive individuals to incorporate walking and cycling into their everyday lives, and through doing this to improve their health and well-being. The consortium is made up of 17 programmes, attracting approximately 1.9 million direct beneficiaries. GWKW is part-funded by the Ramblers Holiday Charitable Trust, and in-kind funding also comes from host local authorities.

## **The Case for Walking**

Fewer people walk than in the past. Since 1995 there has been a 22% drop in the number of trips made by foot (National Travel Survey 2009) and the UK has some of the lowest rates of walking and particularly cycling in Europe.

Only 39% of men and 29% of women in England meet the UK Chief Medical Officer's recommendation on exercise of at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five times a week (Department of Health 2004). Inactivity is a key factor in the dramatic growth of obesity.

Two-thirds (66%) of men and 57% of women are overweight or obese and almost a quarter of adults (24% of men and 25% of women) are obese (National Statistics 2008). 30% of children are overweight or obese (National Statistics 2007).

People from lower socio economic groups are less active than those from higher groups. Sport England's Active People Survey found that 'participation in active recreation among people from the lowest socio-economic groups' is 16.3%, compared to 25.1% among the highest socio-economic groups (Sport England 2006).

Walking is the easiest way to meet physical activity recommendations. Research suggests that routine moderate activity is possibly more beneficial than short bursts of more intense activity (Westerterp 2001). Walking costs very little and requires no special equipment, training or gym membership. It is also low-impact, with a low risk of injuries and accidents, and can be done almost anywhere and at any time.

If undertaken regularly, walking can improve physical health and often results in future cost savings to the National Health Service. Low levels of physical activity are shown to be associated with greater risk of heart disease and strokes (together responsible for one-third of all deaths), colon cancer, type II diabetes, hypertension (affecting one-fifth of adults), osteoporosis, hip fractures and lower back pain.

Physical activity promotes psychological well-being. It reduces stress, anxiety and feelings of depression and loneliness (WHO 2002). In 2009 the Chief Medical Officer stated: *'The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a wonder drug or miracle cure'* (DH 2009).

Regular walking improves mood, reduces anxiety, aids sleep and improves self image (Mental Health Foundation 2005). Similarly, the Department of Health report that active people have a reduced risk of suffering clinical depression (DH 2004) whilst Mental Health Foundation research found that physical activity is at least as effective as antidepressant drugs in treating mild to moderate depression (Mental Health Foundation 2005).

Walking enhances mental well-being and improves social cohesion and inclusion. Research undertaken with participants in walking groups has found that walking in a group is a sociable activity that can help improve mental health and overcome feelings of isolation and depression (Dawson et al 2006).

## **About Get Walking Keep Walking**

GWKW is the Ramblers' flagship grant-funded programme and contributes significantly to the organisation's strategic aims. It comprises five local projects, (two in London,

Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield) delivering programmes, volunteer opportunities, and Get Walking Packs.

GWKW builds on the Ramblers' experience of promoting walking for health and leisure. This includes walks led by Ramblers' groups and campaigning work around access and the benefits of walking. The idea for GWKW also draws on a wide range of external evidence, learning and experience, such as that from the Department for Health and the Department for Transport, Mind, Natural England's Walking for Health Programme and other exercise promotion schemes such as those run by Living Streets.

### **Why the Ramblers?**

The Ramblers is Britain's walking charity. It works to safeguard footpaths, the countryside and other places people walk, and sets out to encourage more people to take up walking. As such it's about places and people. The Ramblers' overarching aim is for *'Britain to be a place where people choose to go walking, and where it's easy and enjoyable to do so.'* This is supported by Fresh Air, Firm Ground: The Ramblers Strategy 2008 – 2013, which sets out four priority areas for the Ramblers. GWKW is aligned to Aim 2, Making Walking Accessible to All, which states that the Ramblers 'want to do more to spread the positive message about walking, ensuring that those who do not currently walk are able to enjoy the pleasures which walking can bring'.

### **What does Get Walking Keep Walking aim to do?**

In line with the clear need for more walking, GWKW aims to increase the number of inactive people walking, both for practical purposes and for leisure. The programme is targeted at those who do not walk regularly, for example younger people; people from BME communities; and people who live in deprived areas. GWKW aims to exploit the ease and accessibility of walking in an imaginative way. With this in mind GWKW's overriding objectives can be described as:

- informing people of the ease and benefits of walking, and of local walking opportunities;
- encouraging people to become actively engaged with their community through everyday independent walking.

To do this GWKW has a strong emphasis on outreach work, volunteering, and providing targeted and tailored information materials such as walking routes and face-to-face advice. GWKW's contracted target is to register approximately 86,000 people as beneficiaries, of which approximately 12,000 will be on programmes or tasters and 73,500 will have registered for a Get Walking Pack.

## **How is Get Walking Keep Walking structured?**

There are essentially three ways to engage with GWKW.

### ***Local Programmes***

The most significant intervention is through participation in a local programme, which are delivered in Birmingham, East London, Manchester, Sheffield, and South London. In each of these areas staff, with the support of volunteers, set up short introductory walking programmes. Each programme lasts for 12-weeks. Some of the schemes target a particular audience, others are open to the general public. Each adult programme involves five sessions which incorporate bespoke short led walks, developed specifically for the session. The sessions occur on Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 and 12. Between Weeks 4 and 12 participants are encouraged to undertake independent walking with an independent walking pack, identical to the Get Walking pack. At Week 12 there is a closing session to celebrate participants' walking progress. At Week 4 and Week 12, there is also signposting to other walking opportunities or groups for those who wish to carry on walking.

### ***Get Walking Packs***

The pack contains a number of items, including a log book, a 12-week plan to develop regular independent walking, information on walking and a pedometer. The plan, guidance, log book and pedometer are all designed to encourage people to walk more often and/or further. These have been distributed via local project staff and volunteers, for example at awareness raising events in local shopping centres or at health information days and also via the Get Walking website, across England.

[www.getwalking.org.uk](http://www.getwalking.org.uk) provides information and inspiration to encourage independent walking, as well as local news from the local projects. There are also routes, with descriptions, from each project location that can be viewed or downloaded. With the finite availability of GW packs, the logbook has also been adapted to be an on-line resource.

### ***Volunteering***

One of the key strengths of GWKW is its ability to draw on the experience and enthusiasm of its many volunteers. There are three ways a person can volunteer with GWKW:

- Walk volunteers who help to run the walking sessions, sharing their enthusiasm and helping to motivate and encourage participants.
- Route volunteers who identify, describe and map short, easily accessible routes for the programmes, some of which are being uploaded to the GWKW website;
- Community Champions who promote and endorse GWKW.

Some of these volunteers are also members of local Ramblers groups, or may have been recruited new to the organisation, often having previously been on a GWKW programme and enjoyed the experience.

### **How is Get Walking Keep Walking different?**

There are a number of existing walking interventions in England, including Ramblers' group walks, the Walk to School initiative by Living Streets and Walking for Health currently hosted by Natural England. Although there is some overlap with other walk agencies in terms of target audience, GWKW has a number of characteristics which collectively make it different from other walking interventions:

- Walks are substantially shorter (typically up to 3 miles / 5 kilometres) than Ramblers' group walks (typically from 7 miles) to make them more viable for inactive people;
- Programmes and routes are often developed in more deprived areas, meaning there is walk activity in less green / less well-known or attractive areas;
- Programmes are always set up by full-time staff, which means GWKW has the resources to engage people and groups that have traditionally been difficult to involve in such activities;
- Walks are always accompanied by detailed route descriptions to promote independent walking. On any given programme, there will normally be at least four different routes;
- All interventions are time-limited to a maximum of 12-weeks, with participants signposted to other walking projects and provided with tips on independent walking;
- There is a childrens' version of the adult programme 'Trail Tales', targeted at children up to age 10, which copies features such as the GWKW logbook and pedometer to encourage independent walking; and

- The project has created a website which carries routes, messages, programme details.

## **The impact and success of Get Walking Keep Walking**

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies is conducting a research project over a two year period investigating the reach and impact of GWKW. In time this will extend to include analysis of whether activity is sustained three months after last contact with the project, the economic value delivered and potential improvements to the delivery framework.

### **Overall performance**

Between April 2008 and July 2010 GWKW engaged 61,547 beneficiaries. This is 71% of the total contracted target with Big (the funders) of 86,297 beneficiaries, to be met by the end of the programme in December 2011. Delivery so far breaks down as:

- 8,000 local programme beneficiaries
- 53,000 Get Walking pack beneficiaries
- 627 volunteers, some of whom are walk leaders trained to run independent walk activities; plus an additional
- 50,000 unique views of the Get Walking website

### ***Involving younger people***

16% of GWKW beneficiaries were aged 16-24, 68% were under 44 and just 5% over 65. This is significantly different from similar schemes such as Walking for Health where only 3% are aged between 16-24 and 37% of beneficiaries are over 65 (Natural England 2010). This illustrates that GWKW has been successful in targeting younger people, an important aim for GWKW and very different from the membership base of the Ramblers.

### ***Involving people from black minority ethnic communities***

The data also shows that a high percentage of GWKW beneficiaries<sup>1</sup> (18%) are from ethnic minority backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> This compares favourably with other walking interventions such as Walking for Health, where beneficiaries from an ethnic minority background make up 7% (Natural England 2010). In terms of the 12-week programmes beneficiaries from non white

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<sup>1</sup> The total number of beneficiaries to date includes those who have received a Get Walking Pack and those who have attended a 12- week programme or a taster event. It includes all beneficiaries registered before the end of July 2010.

<sup>2</sup> BME ethnic background is defined as Asian or Asian British; Black or Black British; Mixed; Chinese or Other.

ethnic backgrounds made up 46% of the total. This shows that the outreach activity of GWKW staff and volunteers has been successful in engaging beneficiaries from ethnic minority backgrounds.

### ***Involving people with poor health***

Nearly one fifth (18%) of GWKW beneficiaries who enrolled on a 12-week programme or taster session reported having a health condition.<sup>3</sup> This demonstrates that both the taster sessions and the 12-week programme are targeting and reaching those most in need of regular activity and exercise, and those least likely to be active.

### ***Involving inactive people***

On registering with GWKW, most beneficiaries reported that they had only done 30 minutes of activity on two days in the previous week.<sup>4</sup> GWKW beneficiaries tended not to walk for leisure<sup>5</sup> with most people saying that they walked 10 minutes or more on only two days in the previous week. In terms of walking from place to place,<sup>6</sup> only 20% of GWKW beneficiaries reported that they walked for ten minutes, from place to place, on seven days in the previous week.

### ***Change in activity levels***

Beneficiaries of 12-week programmes reported being more active at the end of the programme than before. For example, the number of days on which people were active for more than 30 minutes increased from 3.9 days to 4.6 days. This is an increase of nearly a full day (0.70 days) and equates to increase of 18%.

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<sup>3</sup> Health condition is defined as Heart condition, joint pain, chest pain when active or resting, and loss of balance or consciousness.

<sup>4</sup> This is compared with the Chief Medical Officer recommendation of 5 X 30 minutes a week.

<sup>5</sup> Walking for leisure includes any walking not counted as walking from place to place

<sup>6</sup> Walking from place to place includes walking to the shops, walking to work or walking done at work

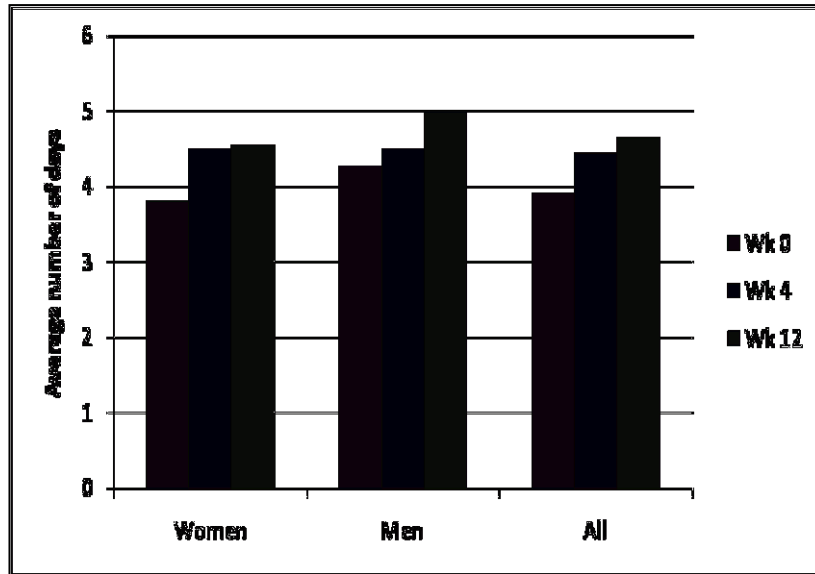


Figure 1 Average change in number of active days, by gender

A similar increase was evident amongst people from ethnic minority groups. The biggest difference was seen amongst beneficiaries from Chinese backgrounds who were more active by almost a full day after being involved with GWKW. Those from mixed ethnic background were also more active at week 12 than week open, despite a small dip in activity levels at week 4. On average the change between week 0 and week 12 was 2.1 days or a 55% increase.

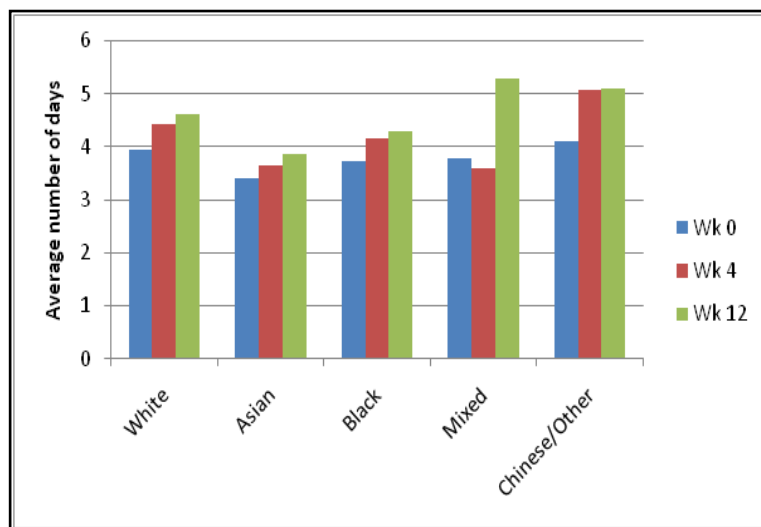


Figure 2 Average change in number of active days, by ethnicity

### ***Greater knowledge of the local area***

Staff and stakeholders reported that beneficiaries were more likely to explore their local neighbourhood. For example, some beneficiaries were made aware of the fact that they lived within a few hundred meters of parks, waterways, open spaces or interesting buildings; whilst others felt safer walking in their local areas after having been on a led walk. GWKW has also encouraged people to play a greater role in conserving their local environment, helping to look after it and improve it.

### **Get Walking Keep Walking and wider success for the Ramblers**

Developing and delivering GWKW has also impacted positively on the Ramblers in the following ways:

*New ways to involve volunteers* - GWKW offers new way of volunteering at the Ramblers. Previously, volunteers had quite defined ways in which they could volunteer through the Ramblers Areas and Groups. GWKW is very different to this; it offers a more hands on model for volunteers and offers opportunities to engage directly with members of the public.

*New ways to involve Ramblers' Areas and Groups* - GWKW and in particular the local programmes have encouraged the Ramblers groups to think about their offer and how they might begin to engage some of the same people, with new shorter and more urban walks. A new Ramblers Group has even been set up in Manchester and Salford specifically to deliver shorter walks, run primarily by GWKW beneficiaries.

*A catalogue of short, urban walking routes* - The routes that are developed as part of the local programmes are a strong resource that underpins the whole programme.

*Learning lessons from a strong online presence* - The GWKW website has influenced and encouraged the Ramblers to think more about their own website and the role it plays in communication and campaigning.

### **Conclusions and Further Information**

The evaluation to date has drawn the following conclusions:

GWKW has engaged its target audience, in particular younger people and people from ethnic minority groups. This is testament to the unique structure of the programme; the

tailored sessions; the skills and experience of local project staff; the dedicated time for outreach and community development work; and the GWKW website.

The GWKW website has acted as an advert and entry point for people wanting to get involved with GWKW, whether as a partner or as a beneficiary wanting to request a copy of the Get Walking packs.

The routes are a great asset. They are tailored to meet the needs of the participants on each local programme. As more routes are added to the website, it will become a key asset in promoting independent walking.

GWKW provides information on ongoing walking opportunities by signposting beneficiaries onto other walking projects, including Ramblers Areas and Groups and Health Walks. This encourages beneficiaries to maintain their new walking habits.

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