



# Walking for health

**Group:** *Antrim walking group*  
**Council area:** *Antrim Borough Council*

## ▶ Background

The Antrim walking group was established in October 2003 following a walk leader training course provided by the Northern Partnership for Physical Activity (NPPA).

## ▶ Getting started

The group was initially supported by the sports development officer at Antrim Borough Council, who helped set up the group, recruited participants, recruited volunteer walk leaders, risk assessed walks and produced advertising materials. Once the leaders were trained and confident in their own abilities they assumed responsibility for the group. The group continues to be supported by Antrim Borough Council's active lifestyles officer who provides advice and administration support.

## ▶ Membership

Antrim walking group is located in Antrim town, although members come from across the whole of Antrim borough. The group is open to all, but as the walks take place on Wednesday mornings the majority of participants are 50+. Antrim hospital cardiac rehabilitation nurses regularly introduce new cardiac rehabilitation clients to the group and during the school holidays grandparents often bring their grandchildren.

There are 118 members registered with Antrim walking group and each week between 40 and 60 participants turn up for weekly walks. There are six trained walk leaders within the group and most of these leaders attend the weekly walks even if they are not nominated to lead.

## Programme

Antrim walking group walks are held every Wednesday morning at 10.15am and each walk takes a different route throughout the borough. However, in order to accommodate those without transport, every second week the walk leaves from Antrim Forum. A walking schedule is produced each quarter detailing walks and meeting points.

All walks are an average of 45 minutes long and mostly on flat ground although hills can be hard to avoid and walks through forests etc can be on rough pathways. During the walk the group naturally splits into two smaller groups walking at different speeds. The volunteer walk leaders are assigned to each group ensuring that everyone can walk at their own pace and do not feel under pressure to walk faster. Examples of walking routes are:

- Highway to Health, Antrim Loughshore
- Rea's Wood, Antrim
- Springfarm Rath and Round Tower, Antrim
- Marina, Antrim
- Tardree Forest, Tardree
- Broughshane Riverside, Broughshane
- Randalstown Forest, Randalstown
- Toome Canal, Toomebridge



# Antrim walking group

## ▶ Partnerships

The key partner involved in this group is Antrim Borough Council. The council provides ongoing support through the active lifestyles coordinator. The coordinator helps to produce regular programmes and distributes these locally.

The group has also a link with the physical activity coordinator based within the local health trust and local cardiac rehabilitation nurses. Through the council the group has been involved in the development of local Highway to Health walking routes provided in conjunction with the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association.

## ▶ Advertising

Antrim Borough Council produce a quarterly schedule of walks, which is forwarded to all members of the walking group, 350 community organisations within the Borough, all council buildings, libraries, health centres etc.

Press releases are issued to local newspapers and all walks are advertised on the council website.

## ▶ Cost

All walks are free and volunteers give up their time and cover their own expenses. Antrim Borough Council covers all administration costs and members pay for their refreshments on most occasions.

## ▶ Evaluation

Antrim Borough Council has evaluated the walking group for Section 75 information, however, the group has not had any official evaluation. Any comments by participants are taken on board by the volunteer walk leaders as and when necessary.

## ▶ Key impacts

The contribution and efforts of the volunteer walk leaders has played a significant part in the development of this group. Walk leaders were recently thanked by the Mayor of Antrim and presented with a token of appreciation.

## ▶ Future developments

Walk leaders plan to introduce a social element into the walking programme, eg ten pin bowling, coffee mornings, lunches etc.

## Recommendations

- Attend volunteer walk leaders training seminars and conferences
- Social networking is as important as health benefits
- Consider those without transport

## Contacts

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