



# Walking for health

**Group:** *Walking for health Castlewellan*  
**Council area:** *Down District Council*

## ▶ Background

In response to an advert in the paper looking for people interested in receiving walk leader training, Dorothy McAlinden was trained as the Castlewellan walking for health walk leader and the rest is history!

## ▶ Getting started

The group was set up in 2001 due to a need to address physical activity levels among people living in the Castlewellan area and in recognition of the fact that many elderly people were living in isolation. Walk leader training and some volunteer expenses were funded by the local health trust.



## Membership

The group is relatively small, with 10 walkers most weeks but up to 15 on some weeks.

## Programme

There is one walk organised each week. The 'lake walk' at Castlewellan is a regular feature with occasional walks around Murlough nature reserve, the Annalong coastal path, Dinnywater and the Coyle walk in Downpatrick. During the summer months the group has gone for trips to Rostrevor and Carlingford. The group has only one trained walk leader, who has run the group from the very beginning.

The walks tend to be at least three miles in length and if people feel unable to walk that far they are referred to another walking group run by Age Concern in Newcastle.

## Advertising

Most of the advertising is through word of mouth.

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▶ **Cost**

All walks are provided free of charge but walkers must make their own way to the venue.

▶ **Evaluation**

The evaluation consists of verbal feedback from walks which the walk leader uses to help plan future walks.

▶ **Key impacts**

The psychological benefits to walkers are huge and may even exceed the physical ones. The walkers enjoy the opportunity that walking gives them to meet others and develop lasting friendships.

Older people, in particular, can feel isolated and this group helps them 'get out of the house' and provides a safe environment and good exercise.

▶ **Future developments**

No major plans, but the group does hope to gain some inspiration from attending walking festivals and seminars.

▶ **Recommendations**

Recognise the personal benefits of becoming a walking group leader and don't be put off from starting a group by thinking it will be hard work: "It is the most rewarding thing – it's so great when people thank you for helping them."

▶ **Contacts**

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