



**Group:** *Newtownabbey walking to health group*

**Council area:** *Newtownabbey Borough Council*

### ▶ **Background**

The Newtownabbey walking to health group was established in April 2004 after four people received walk leader training through the Northern Partnership for Physical Activity (NPPA).

Initially the group met at the Valley Leisure Centre in Newtownabbey for a programme of ten local walks. There was also an opportunity for participants to return to the centre for tea and coffee after each walk.

Shortly after the group was established it received funding from the Health Promotion Agency's 'Get active in the community' small grants programme. In recent years the group also received a grant from the Big Lottery Fund and South Antrim Rural Network. These helped fund equipment, transport and volunteer expenses.

### ▶ **Getting started**

The group was initially supported by the Physical activity coordinator based within the local health trust. After the first programme the members decided to continue with the walks and developed links with the rural project officer in the local council who provided advice on walking routes within the area.

The aim of the group is to promote physical activity through health walks and so benefit the health of users (not only their physical health, but also their mental health) through greater social inclusion.

### **Membership**

The group is not targeted at any particular individuals but the members tend to be retired and are a mix of men and women, with some couples. The group has grown each year with nearly 300 members registered since the beginning and 50 walkers regularly each week.

### **Programme**

The group meet weekly at 10.15am for a 10.30am start on Wednesdays. They also organise a summer evening walk programme. Many of the walks take place within the council area and often start from the Valley Leisure Centre. A ten-week programme of walks is developed in advance and provided for all group members. There are 16 trained walk leaders who have all received Heartstart emergency life support training.

### **Partnerships**

A good partnership has been developed with the local council through the rural project officer who provides advice on suitable places to walk and assists with promotion of the programme. The group has been involved in the development of new Highway to Health walking routes provided in partnership with the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association.

### **Advertising**

Leaflets with current programme information are distributed to various local libraries and doctors' surgeries. The local council provide funding to cover costs.

### **Cost**

The walks are free with walkers making their own travel arrangements to get to the walk starting point.



# Newtownabbey walking to health group

## ▶ Evaluation

Group members are regularly asked for feedback from walk leaders and are consulted when devising the walk programme. This feedback has led to a number of additional events being organised for group members such as summer barbecues, short holidays and other activities.

## ▶ Key impacts

The group has gone from strength to strength, largely due to a varied and interesting walking programme.

The trained walk leaders are keen to involve the walkers in decisions and have set up a committee of both walk leaders and walkers to help organise the walks. There is a social aspect to the group and this has helped to bond the group together through various events such as Christmas dinners. Two members who met on a walk recently married!



## ▶ Future developments

While the aim of the group is to promote physical activity through walking, some members of the group have decided to also meet some evenings for other activities such as line dancing classes. This is a good way to increase physical activity and has been a great success, particularly over the winter months when walking is less attractive.

## ▶ Recommendations

- Well trained and motivated walk leaders
- Varied and interesting walks programme
- Involve walkers in decisions
- Develop the social aspect of the group

## ▶ Contacts

**Lynn Dunwoody**

Volunteer walk leader Tel: 028 9096 6803

## Profile of a volunteer walk leader

Betty is a retired lady who lives alone. In 2002 she suffered a stroke that caused weakness in one of her legs. Living on the coast Betty was used to going out for a walk along the shore but her stroke meant that this was more difficult.



However, on hearing about the Newtownabbey walking to health group the following year she thought she would go along. Betty found the support from the group invaluable and says it helped her recover from her stroke by encouraging her to go out walking even when she wouldn't normally have done. She said: "The group inspired me to go out walking because we have arranged a time to meet – you go come rain, hail or snow."

Since Betty became involved with the walking group in 2003 it has grown and because there was a need for more walking leaders she decided to train as one. Within recent years Betty has trained in nordic walking (walking using poles, inspired by cross country skiing) and is now a qualified instructor delivering the training to others!

Betty knows what a difference becoming involved in a walking group has made to her life and the lives of her friends in the group "some of whom were recovering from major surgery", she added. Betty emphasised the importance of the group as a means of getting out and meeting people. She mentioned how walking as a group enables you to walk in places where you wouldn't feel comfortable on your own.



**Health**  
Promotion  
Agency



Designed and produced by:

**Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland**

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (voice/minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

[www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)