

Wider application

WHI has become a blueprint for successfully encouraging regular exercise and for increasing the popular use of public green space. It is now being replicated in a similar initiative - *Paths to Health* - in Scotland. Expansion is also planned for Wales and Northern Ireland involving local partners who will work within the UK-wide venture.

Much of the initial focus has been on organised walks. To encourage more independent walking, a national 'step-o-meter' campaign is distributing more than 85 000 specially designed pedometers. Users will be encouraged to increase the number of steps they take (the recommended target is 6 - 10 000 steps a day).

Further information

National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU is a charitable trust and it provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry. If you would like further information on other case studies, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

National Urban Forestry Unit	Tel:	01902 828600
The Science Park	Fax:	01902 828700
Stafford Road	Email:	info@nufu.org.uk
Wolverhampton WV10 9RT	Website:	www.nufu.org.uk

Walking the way to Health Initiative (WHI)

WHI Team	Tel:	01242 533258
The Countryside Agency	Fax:	01242 584270
John Dower House	Website:	www.whi.org.uk
Crescent Place		
Cheltenham GL50 3RA		

Further reading

Countryside Agency/British Heart Foundation (1999)

Practical guidelines for developing walking for health schemes, WHI team, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham

Countryside Agency/British Heart Foundation (2000)

Research note: *Evaluation of a health walks scheme - led walks in the Thames Valley*, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham (CRN 6)

Countryside Agency (2001)

Research note: *Walking for health - the first randomised control trial*, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham (CRN 18)

Photographs: WHI

PRODUCED BY

**NATIONAL
URBAN
FORESTRY
UNIT**



Urban Forestry in Practice

Health walks



Health walks

Some people prefer to walk in large, organised groups, whilst others prefer to walk independently



Introduction

Gentle physical exercise is beneficial to health. At least seven out of every ten people in the UK take too little exercise. The current recommendation is 30 minutes of moderate activity on five days a week.

Green spaces near where people live are an underused asset. They are often poorly maintained, disconnected, difficult to reach and perceived as unsafe. As a result, millions of people are unwilling or unable to walk in the green spaces on their doorstep.

Specific example

Project name and location

WALKING THE WAY TO HEALTH INITIATIVE, England-wide

Project partners

- British Heart Foundation
- Countryside Agency
- New Opportunities Fund
- KIA Cars

Project objectives

- To improve the health and fitness of those who take insufficient exercise or who live in areas of poor health, by promoting regular and brisk walking
- To encourage less active people to enjoy their local green spaces
- To improve the walking infrastructure of paths, routes and trails

Description

The *Walking the way to Health Initiative* (WHI) was launched in 2000. It will run for five years, and it aims to set up and support 200 community-based schemes. People aged 45 and over, ethnic minority communities and those on low incomes have been identified as being at increased risk of ill health due to lack of exercise.

Project design

All WHI schemes are designed to provide three core ingredients:

- Self help information** To inform people of opportunities to walk on their own or with family and friends in their own neighbourhoods, and to encourage participation
- Regular programme of short led walks** Designed for small groups and led mainly by trained volunteers, to provide company and boost confidence
- Places to walk** Making use of green space that already exists such as parks, gardens, canal and riverside paths, tracks, rights of way and commons



Encouraging particular groups within the community has proved to be very effective

Three typical examples

- Walkabout Wrekin* in urban Shropshire — town park walks for coronary rehabilitation patients, particularly within the local Asian community
- Walking for all* in Salford, Manchester, working with council residents associations and several volunteer walk leaders
- Lifewalks* in West Essex. For those at risk from coronary heart disease. A short walk in Epping Forest for those who are less fit and another more challenging walk along a ridge through the forest

Optional ingredients in local schemes include: GP's recommending their patients to walk regularly and incentive schemes which reward people, for example, with shopping vouchers for doing more walking.

Implementation

WHI is managed by a central team and nine regional case officers. They provide a wide range of support for local partners

- Advice** Regional case officers provide help and advice. They organise regional network meetings to exchange ideas and information, a newsletter for health and leisure professionals, and the WHI website (see over)
- Training** Tailor-made training is available locally for scheme promoters and for volunteer health walk leaders
- Insurance** Personal accident and liability insurance is made available free-of-charge to local 'walking for health' schemes
- Financial support** Grant-aid is focused on communities where health is relatively poor. Most grants are between £5 000 and £50 000. Matching funding is required
- Promotional material** To help to promote local schemes, a selection of materials has been developed including:
 - An introductory leaflet, *Walk more - feel the difference*
 - Promotional posters and postcards
 - Poster shells for inserting local information
 - A health quiz about the benefits of regular walking
 - A starter equipment pack containing shower-proof jacket, cap, bag, umbrella, cup, clipboard, pen and key ring
- Accreditation** All local schemes can apply for the *Walking the Way to Health Quality Mark* (1, 2 or 3) This shows that they have met defined quality standards and they can use the Mark in their publicity and in bids for other funds
- Evaluation** All schemes receiving grant aid produce an annual monitoring report outlining what they have achieved and how they plan to improve effectiveness even further. A separate study is measuring overall changes in physical activity

Results (as at April 2002)

In its first year of operation WHI encouraged an estimated 350 000 people to walk more to benefit their health. Seventy 'walking for health' schemes out of a five year target of 200 were successfully set up and grant-aided.

The WHI training service has equipped more than 2 500 people with the skills and confidence to set up and lead walks. A recent evaluation showed that, in addition to leading walks, many volunteers became involved in researching routes, developing publicity and administrative work.