

Wider application

Health Walks Festivals are an effective way of bringing together new partnerships and delivering successful health improvement initiatives on a regional scale. Project facilitation and a customised support package can help to produce significant additional benefits such as community empowerment, increased public participation and an enhanced sense of ownership for local greenspace.

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 which 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, please contact:

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Red Rose Forest

Red Rose Forest is an environmental regeneration initiative in Greater Manchester and is one of 12 Community Forests being developed in England. It is a partnership between The Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission and six Greater Manchester local authorities. The Red Rose Forest partnership is planting over 25 million trees across 292 square miles of the area, as part of a 40-year programme that will make Greater Manchester a greener and more satisfying place to live and work. At the heart of its strategy is the involvement of local communities in the environmental, social and economic regeneration of the area.

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Further reading

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Urban Forestry in Practice

Developing health walks on a sub-regional scale



CASE STUDY 46

Developing health walks on a sub-regional scale

Introduction

The health benefits of regular walking in green surroundings are increasingly well recognised. Individual programmes of supervised health walks have become widespread, but there is an acknowledged need to increase their number and their accessibility. This is most likely to happen where countryside rangers, park managers and other recreation managers work in partnership with local health authorities over a wide geographical area.

Specific example

Project name and location

RED ROSE FOREST HEALTH WALKS FESTIVAL. A joint health, recreation and environment initiative across the metropolitan boroughs of Bolton, Bury, Wigan and Trafford and in the cities of Salford and Manchester.

Project partners

- Mersey Valley Countryside Warden Service
- Community, voluntary and healthcare groups
- The Countryside Agency
- Manchester Community Nutrition Service
- Manchester Health Promotion Service
- Salford, Trafford and Manchester Health Action Zone
- Red Rose Forest Community Network (150 members)

Project objectives

- To raise awareness of existing health walk schemes within Red Rose Forest and to promote walking for health
- To provide support for the development of more health walk schemes
- To make links and facilitate effective partnerships between health, community and environmental organisations throughout the Red Rose Forest area

Project description

The Health Walks Festival took place in September of 2000, 2001 and 2002.

The Mersey Valley Countryside Warden Service already had experience of a successful individual health walks scheme and Red Rose Forest had the capacity to draw on this expertise in order to facilitate a Greater Manchester-wide programme.

The Festival built upon the strong partnerships that already existed within Red Rose Forest and was designed specifically to meet the objectives of regional and local health agencies, environmental groups and community organisations.

Organisations and individuals from across Greater Manchester were invited to submit new or existing health walks for inclusion in the nine day September festival programme.

Implementation

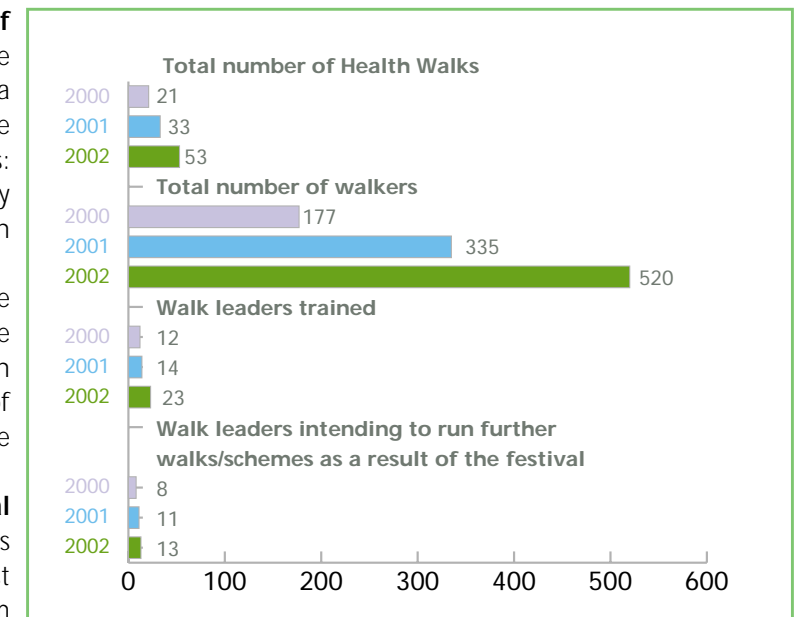
More than 400 organisations and individuals were alerted to the proposed Health Walks Festival and regular communication was maintained with those registering their interest. A dedicated officer coordinated the festival and a support package was developed which could be tailored to the specific needs of the organisations and individuals taking part. The package included:

- support materials such as minimum health and safety requirements for walks, the health benefits of walking and walk risk assessment forms
- links to *Heartstart's* free first aid training programme
- access to a database of relevant contacts
- walk leader training, through the Countryside Agency's *Walking the way to Health Initiative*
- advice on the development of appropriate walk routes
- publicity and marketing of the walks before, during and in some cases, after the Festival

Results

Charting three years of progress

- **Promoted the health benefits of walking:** Over the course of the Festivals, walking for health became a top priority in the campaign to increase activity levels among communities: three out of the six local authority areas involved in the Festival went on to appoint Health Walk Co-ordinators
- **Engaged new communities:** The number of walks organised during the Festival rose from 21 in 2000 to 53 in 2002 and this enabled hundreds of people to get involved with Red Rose Forest
- **Introduced new visitors to local greenspace:** the number of walkers taking part in the Festival almost tripled between 2000 and 2002, from 177 to 520
- **Provided a focus for regional health initiatives:** Organisations were able to promote many other aspects of healthy living in addition to walking for health
- **Formed new cross-sectoral partnerships:** The Festival stimulated skill sharing and joint working between health, environment and community organisations
- **Showcased existing local health walks**
- **Increased numbers of health walk schemes:** 32 regular health walk schemes were established or planned across Greater Manchester as a direct result of the Festival
- **Empowered communities:** Over 45 people were trained as health walk leaders
- **Promoted the multiple benefits of Community Forests:** a programme of targeted local, regional and national media coverage ensured that walking in Red Rose Forest was widely promoted



A portable exhibition of supporting information attracted new people to the idea of health walks



In 2002, the Red Rose Forest Health Walks Festival received a Commendation from the Health Challenge Awards scheme, in recognition of the contribution made towards improving health across Greater Manchester