

Report of Learning and Inclusion Team (Engagement and Inclusion)

Subject: West Wales Walking for Wellbeing – Project Report

Purpose of Report

To report to members on the activities, outputs and outcomes of West Wales Walking for Wellbeing following the project's completion in January 2024.

Introduction/Background

West Wales Walking for Wellbeing (WWWfW) sought to develop and deliver a programme of 'walking for health and wellbeing' opportunities in West Wales (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire) that were community based, sustainable, and embraced a social prescribing model, seeking to connect to primary health care and communities at a local level.

The Project was funded by the Healthy & Active Fund (a partnership between Welsh Government, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales) between 2019 and 2023 and for a shorter period until January 2024 by Natural Resources Wales, Resilient Communities fund.

The project was active in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire and delivered through a cross sector partnership including Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Ceredigion Actif/Ceredigion County Council; *Carmarthenshire Fifty Plus Forum (Walking Well Carmarthenshire); Carmarthenshire County Council (Sports Actif), Hywel Dda Public Health Team and Snowdrop Independent Living in Haverfordwest.

The West Wales Walking for Wellbeing Project (WWWfW) set out to empower individuals to become more physically active with a focus on those living sedentary or relatively sedentary lives.

The work was delivered by 3 County based Co-ordinators, one each for Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, together with a part-time project administrator. The project was managed by the Learning and Inclusion (Discovery) Team Leader for the PCNPA.

The project involved around 200 volunteers and/or walk leaders from other groups and organisations. Walk leader training was delivered internally by the project's co-ordinators based on a model developed by Paths for All (Scotland), whose trainers supported the project in its early stages.

The walks delivered were designed to be suitable for less mobile/physically active participants and so the majority of walks were between 30 minutes to an hour in duration and focussed on less challenging terrain with minimal gradients.

Over the lifetime of the project 2,231 individual walking events were delivered across the 3 counties, with 16,731 participants joining in, an average of 7-8 walkers per event.

The majority of walkers registered to walk as part of the project and overall, just over 1,000 individuals across the 3 counties registered. Of these, 65% were 60 years old or older, with almost 60% declaring a pre-existing health condition. 75% of registered walkers were female.

The project was evaluated externally by Emma George Consultants; a full evaluative report was completed together with project-based evaluation commissioned by Welsh Government as part of the Healthy and Active Fund.

Evaluators noted that 'Participants found that being part of the walk helped improved their mood and 'lifted their spirits', and that they felt happier once they had completed the walk. The project also reduced social isolation with both participants and volunteer walk leaders. Other wider benefits to participants, such as networking with each other to plan other trips/events and walk independently, were also reported.'

The Walking for Wellbeing project was successful in engaging with some local communities and in particular community-based organisations with an interest in supporting the health and wellbeing of local people. However, there remained 'more to do' in this area with many gaps in the reach of the project in West Wales.

Comparisons

The West Wales Walking for Wellbeing project developed from collaboration between lead organisations originally involved in the Welsh Government led Let's Walk Cymru initiative, which came to an end around 2016-17. Representatives from Ceredigion County Council (Sports Actif), Carmarthenshire 50+ Forum, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority, Hywel Dda Public Health Team and Snowdrop Independent Living in Haverfordwest made up the original partnership included in the bid for funds from the Healthy and Active Fund. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority were the lead organisation in the successful bidding process.

For the National Park Authority, the project complemented the work being undertaken under the banner of Walkability and the WWWfW project co-ordinator's role was delivered by the Walkability Co-ordinator for PCNPA. The focus for Walking for Wellbeing walks was a 'less active' demographic and so the walking activity was less energetic than that provided by Walkability and in general avoided walking in open countryside.

The walking programme provided by the Walking for Wellbeing team was not provided elsewhere in any of the 3 counties involved. The focus on 'community based' walks that were open to social prescribing channels was a unique offer in West Wales. The project's walking programme complemented the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) in Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, with individuals signed up to NERS having the opportunity to joining the Walking for Wellbeing programmes at the end of the 12-week NERS programme.

The project sought to build a social prescribing model built around engagement with GP practice, however, the Covid pandemic had a significant impact on this aspect of the project, making it difficult to build effective working relationships with specific practices and GP practice groups.

Financial considerations

The project was fully funded from external sources:

- 2019-2023 Healthy and Active grant funding totalling £318,000
- April 2023 to January 2024 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Resilient Communities £60,000

The project was completed on 31st January 2024

Risk considerations

The project was completed satisfactorily across a period of just under 5 years. The loss of funding at the start of 2024 means that the Walking for Wellbeing/Walkability elements of the NPA's work are without a significant external funder at present. Work is underway to identify future funding streams for this work. Whilst Welsh Government are reviewing the Healthy and Active (HAF) programme, there is no sign that funding at this level will be available in the future.

Compliance

The project supported the NPA's duty to 'foster the social and economic well-being of local communities. WWWfW supported the National Park Authority's Corporate Wellbeing Objectives relating to Connection, Communities. The projects also supports PCNPA commitments with regard to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Human Rights/Equality issues

The project supported PCNPA's Equality plan and represents a strong demonstration of the Authorities commitment to Equality and Diversity in terms of access to outdoor spaces.

Welsh Language statement

The walks programme was delivered bilingually although to an extent this was dependent on the recruitment of bilingual volunteers who acted as walk leaders for the most part. The project delivery team had bilingual capacity across the 3 Counties and all promotional materials and training were available bilingually.

Conclusion

The project set out to improve the physical and mental health of people by setting up and developing walking groups linked to GP practices or other community settings thereby creating a sustainable model through ownership of the groups. Overall, the project was successful in engaging its target audience of less active individuals. Whilst some of those taking part were 'socially prescribed' to take part in the walking activity, there was limited success in engaging with Primary Health care through GP practices. The majority of referrals and prescribing took place through other health professionals, the community connectors network or through the development of working relationships with specific groups of organisations. There was also a high percentage of self-referrals.

Recommendation

Receive the project report West Wales Walking for Wellbeing.

Author: Graham Peake (Learning and Inclusion Team Leader)