

Step out Sheffield 2017 Annual Report

Step out Sheffield is Walking for Health's biggest volunteer-led scheme. Approximately 130 trained volunteer walk leaders currently deliver a programme of 25 weekly walks across the city. Walks are well managed and, on the whole, very well attended. A support system provides administrative back-up, holiday and sickness cover, safety protocol and training opportunities. We have our own dedicated website and our profile within the city boundary and beyond is on the increase. In the past 12 months, walker attendances have increased by almost 18%. Health professionals are referring more walkers to our walks and, compared to the rest of the UK, we host more walkers from socially deprived areas.

These are very positive and very pleasing statistics. All the more so given that in February 2016 we learned that the council were no longer in a position to fund our full-time coordinator, and in April an attempt by a steering group of volunteers to fund a full-time coordinator for the scheme fell flat.

On 26th May 2016 a meeting of over 70 volunteer walk leaders approved an outline proposal for self-management and agreed that the Sheffield scheme would be known as 'Step out Sheffield'. Responsibility for access to the national Walking for Health database was transferred from Sheffield City Council to Step out Sheffield. By the end of June, the registers for all outstanding walks had been collected and data records brought up to date, and the system for collecting and recording data improved. Dan Murphy, the Step out Sheffield database manager, provides on-going support and training for all data entry personnel, and data from all walks is now recorded efficiently.

The Step out Sheffield proposal for self-management was based on the simplistic idea of dividing the coordinator role between a number of volunteers, each with their own specific responsibilities. Every volunteer in the scheme has some degree of responsibility. This ranges from leading walks and ensuring the safety of the walkers, on a walk by walk basis, right up to the chairman's role of figurehead and spokesperson for the scheme. In between we have volunteers who act as 'Links' by providing pastoral support for several walks, a volunteer who manages the help-line, another who manages the website and two who are responsible for risk assessment and accident and emergency reporting. Additional volunteers took on the roles of funding manager, Treasurer and Secretary. By dividing the role into defined areas, we hoped to not only cover the role of our retired coordinator but to build upon it.

At the May meeting volunteer walk leaders made it very clear that not only did they want the scheme to continue, but they wanted it to remain a city-wide enterprise. This was an ambitious ask because prior to losing our paid coordinator each walk had operated autonomously and there was only a small amount of cross-over of personnel and ideas from one walk to another. In an attempt to bring volunteers together and get them to recognize that they are part of one big team, a series of quarterly events for volunteer walk leaders was instigated. A second meeting was held in Ecclesall woods in August beginning with a walk

and ending with a cream tea! In November volunteer walk leaders met at the English Institute for sport where tours of the facility before and after the meeting were an optional extra. February's meeting was a purely social affair in the form of a Chinese meal. The May 2017 meeting was timed to coincide with Step out Sheffield's first AGM. Numbers at these events are rising and there is now a much better awareness amongst our volunteers that the walk they support is part of a much bigger scheme.

During this inaugural year establishing partnerships has been an important development. One member of staff and four volunteers from Drinkwise Agewell trained as volunteer walk leaders and now provide valuable support on several walks. Drinkwise Agewell kindly funded a trip into Derbyshire for volunteer walk leaders in October and one of their volunteers continues to arrange monthly visits to interesting city venues for both walkers and leaders. Together with Sheffield United Community Foundation, Drinkwise Agewell supported the development of a pilot health walk from Bramall Lane which launched in March 2017.

Another important partnership has been forged with Move More, the umbrella organization for exercise referral within the city of Sheffield. Step out Sheffield's walks are accredited and therefore suitable for social prescribing. The Move More movement is behind a drive to get a health walk at each of Sheffield's three new Physical Activity referral centres. This development is ambitious but essential for future growth and sustainability.

Step out Sheffield is indebted to another partner, their umbrella organization, Walking for Health (WfH). Over the year, staff at WfH's head office responded promptly and efficiently to all requests for help, and kept the steering group motivated. They encouraged Step out Sheffield to apply for accreditation and nominated us for a Voluntary Action Sheffield award in the innovation category.

Our funding manager secured set-up funding from five local charities and trusts plus revenue funding for 2017/18 from the Big Lottery Fund. In November 2016, a meeting with Sheffield's public health principal resulted in the drafting of a briefing document describing the financial fortunes of Sheffield's health walks since they started in 1999. The upshot of this exercise was a £1,200 boost to our income from the Council's Ward Pot funds.

In November 2016, Step out Sheffield received Highly Commended certificates for 'Innovation' and for 'Small Organization, Big Impact', from Jessica Ennis-Hill at Voluntary Action Sheffield's 90th anniversary 'Make a Difference' Awards. Step out Sheffield went on to win the 2017 Ramblers award for volunteers, in the innovation category.

2016/17 has been a very challenging year but also a very rewarding one. It was a year in which the volunteers came together to make a stronger more sustainable scheme, building upon the legacy of the much loved and highly respected coordinator they'd lost. We are proud to embrace people of all ethnic backgrounds and all levels of fitness onto our walks and appreciate the value of the social aspects of these walks in helping combat loneliness and social isolation, and helping with the management of mental health conditions. We also recognize the need for this service to be free at the point of delivery in order that we do not discriminate against the very people who could benefit most.