



WALKING FRIENDS WALES

A GUIDE FOR
PRACTITIONERS



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO WALKING

Most of us know about the benefits associated with regular exercise, but not everyone finds it so easy to get out and about. Many older adults struggle to walk on our streets and pavements because of poor design, uneven surfaces and parked vehicles.

Walking helps people stay connected and benefits health. Despite this, too many people over 50 face barriers to everyday walking. Many older adults are physically inactive, or at risk of becoming so, which increases social isolation, reduces independence and diminishes physical health and fitness.

We are Living Streets Cymru and we want to make walking the natural choice for everyone. Walking Friends Wales is our project to help people over 50 start walking in their communities, make new connections and voice the need for changes to their local walking environment.

NHS guidelines recommend that adults of all ages should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity, such as walking, every week. Recent figures show that only 64% of adults in Wales get enough exercise based on these guidelines.

WHY WALK?

Walking offers a range of a range of physical and mental health benefits, and for many older people, getting out and about in their neighbourhood is an important way of maintaining independence and being socially connected.

- Walking is a free, gentle, convenient, low-impact activity and requires no special training or equipment.
- It's an ideal activity for people who are less fit or are physically restricted, as it's easy to start with very low, gentle levels of physical activity and build up gradually.
- Walking has significant physical health benefits, helping people maintain a healthy weight and reducing the risk of long-term health conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Walking also has mental health benefits. It can improve self-worth, mood and have a positive impact on self-esteem. It is also linked with reductions in anxiety and depression and can reduce your risk of dementia.
- Walking strengthens your bones and can help to prevent the onset of osteoporosis.

WHY DON'T PEOPLE WALK MORE?

Living Streets Cymru works with older adults to help them overcome barriers to walking, whether that's damaged footways, a lack of resting places or inadequate crossings.

When we carried out research with Ageing Well in Wales, in partnership with the Older People's Commissioner's Office for Wales, we found that 55.9% of older adults would like to walk more. Only 28% felt very involved in the community and 27% wanted to be more involved. Our survey also found that:

- only 21% of people aged 65-74 and 8% of people aged 75+ have taken physical activity three times in the previous week
- loneliness and social isolation are key issues for 10% of people aged 65-74 and 11% of people aged 75+

Other barriers to walking independently include:

- Poorly maintained pavements and paths
- Perceptions of personal safety
- A lack of facilities such as places to sit and access to toilets
- Concerns about traffic and inadequate crossings
- Concerns about health and safety during the pandemic.

HOW WE CAN HELP

Once people have signed up to the project, they will be introduced to a Walking Friend who will take them through an 8-week programme of self-guided activities. The activities are linked to the 5 Ways of Wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice, and Give. Each week participants will be contacted and offered a range of activities that they can choose from. The activities can be done indoors and outdoors and are designed to get people walking at their own pace, so that they can experience all the health benefits associated with regular exercise. The Walking Friend will get to know participants' individual needs and help establish what they want to get out of the sessions. They will also help to identify and report any changes that are needed in the area, like a new pedestrian crossing, that will help people get around more safely.

We're also working with local housing associations, befriending services, community connectors and others to help identify older adults who might enjoy taking part.



HELPING VICTORIA TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME

Tiptree is a large council estate in Redbridge in London, which has some of the lowest activity levels in the city and a high proportion of older residents.

When Living Streets ran Streets Apart, a two-year project which encouraged older residents from the estate to walk more, 72-year-old Victoria quickly got involved and got her neighbours to take part in organised walks. When she started, she would walk only one circuit of the park as she'd had a knee replacement and walked with a stick, but she was determined to keep living an active and independent lifestyle.

Walking has had a really positive impact on Victoria's health and she now regularly walks to the local shops, library and to visit others nearby. She often takes part in walks to keep fit and meet new people. Victoria is now a volunteer for Streets Apart and helps with engagement at events and litter picks in the borough.

“IT'S NICE TO SPEAK TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE ON THE WALKS AND TALK ABOUT THINGS... I LIKE TO KEEP BUSY AND HAVE THINGS TO DO RATHER THAN SIT AT HOME.”

VICTORIA

WALK WITH US!

If you'd like to find out more about Walking Friends Wales, contact Ilona Carati, Walking Friends Wales Project Coordinator. If you'd like to refer a potential participant, please get in touch and we can link them to a group.

Email: walkingfriendswales@livingstreets.org.uk

Phone: 07566 777410

Visit livingstreets.org.uk/walkingfriendswales for more information.

We're looking for people to take part in the Walking Friends Wales project so that it can reach as many people as possible. Please get in touch if you think you can help.

Walking Friends Wales is funded by the Healthy & Active Fund, a partnership between Welsh Government, Sport Wales and Public Health Wales.