



OUT & ABOUT IN CUMBERNAULD:

**GIVING OLDER PEOPLE A VOICE IN DECISIONS
ABOUT THEIR LOCAL STREETS AND PLACES
FOR WALKING AND WHEELING**

JULY 2023

CREATING WELLBEING THROUGH WALKING



Our Out & About work aims to improve the wellbeing of older people through walking. It brings people together to share their experience and knowledge of walking locally, and gives people a voice in decisions about their local streets and places for walking and wheeling. The Out & About approach helps older people to remain or become more physically active in their community, to stay socially connected, and to be active in improving the walking environment for everyone.

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Nobody should be locked in their house. It's great being outdoors, meeting people, it's good for the soul. - Out & About member

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Getting out is important for mental and physical and fresh air exercise. Plus friendship and chat are important stimulations as one ages to keep one interested and interesting, as well as healthy. - Out & About member

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20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

The lessons learnt from Out & About are highly relevant to the concept of '20 minute neighbourhoods', an important part of Scottish government transport policy. These are neighbourhoods where people can meet all their essential needs within a 20 minute walk. To make 20 minute neighbourhoods work for everyone, it's essential that older people feel confident that their local area is safe and accessible for walking and wheeling. Achieving this means listening to the voices of older people and acting on their ideas.

Thanks to funding from the National Lottery, Paths for All, Scotland Loves Local and Transport Scotland we have been working with older people since 2018. Over three years, we worked with older people in Cumbernauld to make it a better place for walking and wheeling. This case study shares some of the key things we learnt from our work together, and explores the strengths and limitations of the Out & About approach.

Whilst our work in Cumbernauld was specifically targeted at older people, the ideas and issues raised are relevant to everyone who wants to improve their local streets and footpaths and inspire people to walk more.



CUMBERNAULD

Cumbernauld is a town of around 50,000 people in North Lanarkshire, in Scotland's central belt. Most of Cumbernauld was built in the 1950s. It is one of Scotland's best known 'new towns' and renowned as home to the UK's first purpose-built shopping centre. Cumbernauld was designed as a series of distinct neighbourhoods clustered around a hilltop town centre. The town centre itself was created as a massive single building, with shops and community facilities such as the library and bus station all under one roof.

There are now ambitious multi-million pound plans to redevelop the entire town centre. This will include knocking down the old town centre building and creating a new, mixed-use 'town hub' with new homes, learning, health and leisure activity. The creation of better walking routes is a key part of the plans.

Cumbernauld is quite an unusual place for walking. The town was purposefully designed to keep people and cars separate. Instead of pavements and pedestrian crossings, there are separate footpaths away from the road with underpasses and footbridges for crossing the street.

In some ways, this makes Cumbernauld a great place to walk. There are lots of car-free footpaths and green areas. There are peaceful parks, woodlands and nature reserves in and around the town, such as Ravenswood nature reserve and Seafar Wood. One of the themes of our work in Cumbernauld was making it easier for older people to discover these lovely places, as well as getting out and about to see others and use local services in their community.

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**There are many interesting, enjoyable and also peaceful areas in Cumbernauld for walking in. -
Out & About member**

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STARTING OUT & GETTING INVOLVED

We began by talking to local organisations such as 'CACE', a community group in Cumbernauld, to get contacts for older people who might be interested in setting up an Out & About group. By calling people to start the conversation and via word of mouth, we recruited a group of five people who became the initial Out & About group.

Out & About began during the covid pandemic. This meant that our first conversations were over the phone and Zoom, before we were able to meet in person for the first time and walk around the area together to discuss the walking environment.



Together, we prepared an Action Plan of all the things we wanted to change in Cumbernauld to make walking easier. To spread the word about Out & About we then organised an event in the library and invited everyone in the community to come along and find out what we were up to. This generated a lot of interest - it was clear that the state of local footpaths and places for walking was an important issue in Cumbernauld. After this, the Out & About group expanded with 14 new members.

Most of the people in Out & About enjoyed walking but had seen or experienced problems with the footpaths in Cumbernauld and joined the group because they wanted to change things. Others were keen to see if this was an opportunity to influence redevelopment of Cumbernauld town centre, whilst another motivation was to learn how to get around Cumbernauld without a car.

THINGS TO FIX IN CUMBERNAULD

NO SIGNS AND CONFUSING PATH NETWORK

With few signposts, finding your way around Cumbernauld on foot can be confusing. Because there are so few pavements you can't simply follow the road to get from A to B as you would in other towns. There are lots of lovely places to visit around Cumbernauld but no clearly-defined walking routes. Lots of people don't know how to get to places without a car.



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There's not a great deal of pavements, everything seems to be underground. As a driver you don't see the walking routes so you don't know which way to walk.” North Lanarkshire Council employee

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LACK OF SEATING

Outside of the town centre there are few benches on the footpath network. In a hilly town like Cumbernauld it's doubly important that people have somewhere to sit down and rest when out and about.

INCONSIDERATE PARKING

In some parts of Cumbernauld there are more cars than parking spaces. Inconsiderate drivers block footpaths and dropped kerbs. This makes it especially hard for people using mobility scooters or wheelchairs or those with pushchairs to get around.



POORLY MAINTAINED PATHS

Some of the footpaths in Cumbernauld are in poor condition. Common problems include potholes, flooding and litter. This can make getting about a particular challenge for older or disabled people, as well as being unpleasant for everyone.



NO DISABLED ACCESS AND LOTS OF STEPS

Some places in Cumbernauld have no or very poor disabled access. This includes the shopping centre top floor walkway from the ramp heading towards the library, which is accessed through heavy doors that can be difficult for people to open. There is also a lift which is not suitable for mobility scooters. Some bus stops can only be reached by walking up a flight of steps, and steps also block other walking routes.



UNSAFE WALKING ROUTES

The separation of cars from people means that many footpaths in Cumbernauld can feel secluded and unsafe, especially the underpasses. The town centre building can feel lonely and unsafe at night, which is a problem for people who have to pass through it the evening to reach facilities such as the bus station.



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On your own it can feel unsafe. There are usually trees between the paths and the roads. It can be intimidating. It can make you feel vulnerable when you're on your own. You don't see many people. - Out & About member

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MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

Getting things done requires knowing who to speak to and how to influence. But many people don't have this knowledge nor the confidence to tackle problems on their own. Local authorities can feel very distant, bureaucratic and impenetrable.



To take action on the issues identified by the Out & About group, we worked with them to raise awareness and make connections with people and organisations who could help.

Together, we were able to take immediate action on some of the short-term priorities identified by the Out & About group, such as the need for more benches. In the longer term, we helped to make people in organisations such as the Council and community police more aware of the issues and priorities for older people. We achieved this by helping older people to share their experiences and ideas directly with people in positions of power.

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What we need is access to power for example in the council. You need to know where to go and who to speak to. - Out & About member

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We didn't know about the Community Board before. We didn't know how to access it. And I doubt we would have managed to get the Councillors to come along to talk to us without outside help. - Out & About member

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WHAT WE LEARNT

GET IT ON THE AGENDA

A key focus of Out & About was participating in local initiatives like the Community Board where decisions are made about what happens in Cumbernauld. The Community Board is coordinated by North Lanarkshire Council. It aims to make connections between groups, get people involved in local decision-making and help the Council to listen to the concerns of the community and see what it can do to help. Via the Community Board, we presented our ideas to North Lanarkshire Council, local elected councillors and other community organisations. This allowed us to share our concerns directly with the people who are best placed to influence and take action.

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The Out and About group gave a presentation to the Community Board. Some of the things they spoke about, like having no park benches, were things that I had already noticed and wanted to do something about. I was unaware of some of the other challenges like wheelchair access, but it's obvious once it's pointed out to you.

After meeting them for the first time I went along to see them again and to find out more about what they were doing. We got a Council officer to come along to their next meeting to give an overview of council policy and provide information on local issues that could be dealt with straight away. I can't go to every meeting but intend to stay in touch and help where I can. The group is really useful for identifying the problem and the solution. Local knowledge and interest are really useful. It's really good for feeding in issues and making practical changes to fix the smaller issues - Local councillor

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MAKE CONNECTIONS

One of the most valuable benefits of Out & About was the connections we made with people and organisations in Cumbernauld who are in positions of power to make change happen. For example, we met the community policing team to discuss issues such as inappropriate parking, safety whilst walking, dangerous driving and antisocial behaviour. We also made alliances with other community groups and connections with departments in North Lanarkshire Council. We raised awareness of the challenges to getting out and about in Cumbernauld and asked for help to fix some of the problems we had identified.

People told us that speaking to the Out & About group really opened their eyes to problems faced by older people and left a legacy in their minds of what they could do to help. This was particularly true for people who normally drove around the area and didn't know what it was like for walking and wheeling.

PROVIDE EVIDENCE

One of the most powerful things we did was to make film of one of our Out & About members, Robert, trying to access to the library on his mobility scooter. The film showed how difficult it was for Robert to get through the doors on the top floor of the Town Centre leading towards the library. People who saw the film were taken aback at the lack of disabled access to such a prominent public building.

FIX THE QUICK WINS

Some of the things we wanted to change in Cumbernauld will take a lot of time and money to achieve. Rather than being discouraged, we identified “quick wins”- practical fixes to smaller problems - so that people could see the immediate impact of their work and keep motivated. With the support of the Council we installed new benches on popular walking routes. We advised on where the benches were most needed and made sure they were in the correct position.

THE OUT AND ABOUT APPROACH

STRENGTHS

The major benefits to the Out & About approach were:

- It gave older people a voice and directly connected older people with decision-makers.
- It let older people set the agenda for what really mattered to them. It was independent
- from other groups with their own agendas.
- It got people involved who didn't typically become participate in community planning.
- It emphasised the importance of quick wins.
- It wasn't political and it wasn't limited to one neighbourhood. It was about bringing people together to connect with each other.

LIMITATIONS

Getting people together in this way and making connections to decision-makers is very resource-intensive. This is particularly the case when reaching people who don't consider themselves to be "activists" and don't typically become involved in local campaigns. Many people do not want the responsibility or paperwork that comes with running a group on their own, and/or feel that they don't have the energy or confidence to do so. A group such as Out & About is therefore likely to require continuing external support.

However in many places there are no local structures or processes in place to support groups like Out & About i.e. those "regular people" who are not experts or typical community activists, and/or who don't want to set up a formal, constituted group. Organisations such as Living Streets can help to set groups up, raise awareness, build confidence and knowledge, but there needs to be way to maintain this in the long-term.

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Who’s going to be responsible for taking it on? It will be very difficult to keep the group going. - Out & About member

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In Cumbernauld, another challenge was reconciling the views and priorities of different participants as the Out & About group expanded. The founding members of the group were focussed on the needs of older adults and walking, and particularly valued the social aspect of getting together as a group. By comparison, some of the people who joined the group later felt that the scope of Out & About should be expanded to cover all ages and related issues such as antisocial behaviour, and favoured a more “business like” or formal approach.

This showed us the importance of being clear and upfront about the purpose of a group like Out & About so that people have the same goals and expectations.



MAKING FRIENDS AND BUILDING CONFIDENCE

One of the major benefits of Out & About was the enjoyment it gave to those involved. Being part of the Out & About group provided the opportunity to meet new people, make friends, reduce isolation and explore the local area.

A key learning point is the need for in-person as well as online Meetings. Not only are online meetings inaccessible to some older people, they also disregard a key reason for why people of all ages get involved in community initiatives in the first place i.e. the social connection of meeting face-to-face.

Of equal importance, Out & About helped to build people's knowledge about how to influence decisions and get things done, and increased confidence in their own ability to tackle local problems.

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One of the best things about being part of the Cumbernauld Out & About group is the friendship, the diverse views, having a common goal. - Out & About group member

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ROBERT'S STORY

“When you become disabled your world changes. It took me a while to start going out again. When I got a mobility scooter I could start taking my dog Charlie out for a walk and I started to enjoy it more and more. It feels great to go out on the paths and connect with other places.

But when I was out walking the dog I noticed things that were making me angry, and making it harder for me to get about. For example, people parking on dropped kerbs. The dropped kerbs are there for people like me but the people parking there didn't care. So when I met Anne [Project Manager, Living Streets] it was a way for me to get my voice heard. If I wasn't part of the group I wouldn't have done it. Being in a group helped me immensely and spurred me on to change. The people in the group are fabulous, they make me feel good. I took it upon myself to do something about the people parking on the dropped kerbs. I thought that if no one else is going to do it I had better do it myself. I started to put notes on their cars and it made a difference. They stopped parking there. And that's me! It feels good. Ravenswood never had a signpost. I asked the councillors - why is Ravenswood the only district in Cumbernauld without a signpost? Within a month a signpost appeared. And it was because of me.

There was a grit bin outside the high school blocking the pavement on the route to the park. It had been like that for a long time. I asked if they could move it and they did. To see the yellow grit bin taken away - that was fabulous. It meant a lot. There are two lots of heavy doors to go through to get to the library. I can't open them myself. There's a nursery up there too and it's hard for the mums to get in with their prams. Annette [Partnership Officer, North Lanarkshire Council] made a video of me trying to get into the library. The video was shown to the next Community Board meeting and that got the councillors involved. They were shocked. Myself and some members of the group are going to arrange a meeting with the Town Centre Manager to discuss solutions.

When I used to go out for a walk there was a bench I loved to sit on. It was lovely, just to be outside. Then all of a sudden they took it away. It felt like they were taking it away from me. They didn't realise how important it was. But now the bench is back. It's good to see the changes I've made.”



Robert - Out & About member



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