



Walking and Social Capital

experiences of a Walking for Health group

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Ageing Together Learning Event, Leicester

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Scope

- **About W4H**
- **Organisation of local health walks**
- **Production of social capital
and why important**

Walking for Health (W4H)

National network of local walks (Ramblers national sponsor)

Short (1.5 hrs max)

Regular (weekly or more often)

Trained walk leaders (volunteers)

Free membership

Importance of recce



www.walkingforhealth.org.uk

Health benefits

- **Good for health** – systolic and diastolic blood pressure, resting heart rate, body fat, BMI, total cholesterol, oxygenation, depression
- **Improved physical functioning** – fitness, stamina, mobility, self management of health
- **Protective factor** – diabetes, heart disease, COPD, cancer, depression and anxiety, late life cognitive function
- **Activity in green and outdoor spaces better for health than indoors**



Environmental attractions

appreciation of natural beauty
discovery of new places
places with special meaning
psychological wellbeing



Caythorpe W4H

- **Started January 2011**
- **CO-OP local (county) sponsor**
- **Currently 40 - 50 regular walkers**
- **Recruitment – social marketing**
- **14 walk leaders – majority retirees**
- **36 different local walks**
- **Striders and strollers**
- **Key components (i) initial briefing and gathering, (ii) the walk, (iii) tea/coffee 'cool down'**



Signing in

Registering walkers

Keeping basic statistics

Issuing briefings/timetables

Off-road/safety



Dogs welcome – but behave yourself Jasper!



Social capital

.... social networks and the trust and reciprocity they inspire (Putnam)

Importance of *regular* opportunities to:

- interact
- bond and develop relationships and reciprocities
- be integral to creating/maintaining conditions of trust

Exploring social capital

Ethnography:

- **Insider perspective with the Caythorpe W4H group**
- **Taped interviews with walkers and walk leaders**
- **Participant observation**
- **Documents and records from the Ramblers and local district council**

Factors shaping production of social capital

Initial gathering and briefing – an enabling place; ‘buddying up’; welcoming new walkers; briefings as reassurance; a ‘buzz’

The walk – a dynamic constantly negotiated with others; silence or brief and long conversations OK; emancipatory qualities of talking; opportunities for intimacy; opportunities for mutual assistance

The pavilion ‘cool down’ – refuge from the elements; haven for information exchange, planning, and relaxation; networking and fund-raising; empathy with/from tea ladies; ambience a ‘relational achievement’ of the group; a ‘proper end’ to the walk



SUSTAINABILITY OF WALKS

Social capital themes



'Cool down' in the pavilion



Importance of social capital outcomes

Personal

- Personal quality of life - 'being', 'belonging', 'becoming'
- Resilience and personal agency - buoyancy, self worth/affirmation
- Successful ageing – adaptability, contributing, community participation

Organisational

- Adherence to a programme of physical activity

Community

- Community cohesion and multiplier effects

More information

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Publications:

- Grant, G., Machaczek, K., Pollard, N. and Allmark, P. (2017) Walking, sustainability and health: findings from a study of a Walking for Health group, *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 25, 3, 1218-1226.
- Grant, G., Pollard, N., Allmark, P., Machaczek, K. and Ramcharan, P. (2017) The social relations of a health walk group: an ethnographic study, *Qualitative Health Research*, 27, 11, 1701-1712.