

Steps-Walking the Way to Health

The ability to reach out to a variety of residents with different needs isn't an easy one but 'Steps'- a *Walking the Way to Health* initiative is doing just that. Based in South Derbyshire and the National Forest, this walking and outdoor activity project provides opportunities to be active while increasing awareness of the health and social benefits of physical activity.

Debbie Chesterman, Healthy Walks co-ordinator, strongly believes that a steering group consisting of funders, PCT, council and target group members is a definite advantage when set up from the start of the project.



Partner agency involvement made it possible to target individuals in cardiac rehabilitation, people with mental health problems, those in socially excluded groups and patients in GP referral schemes.

Debbie says: 'the enthusiasm and commitment between partner agencies helped the project reach targeted groups with relative ease, but reaching individuals proved to be more of a challenge'. Recruitment of individuals takes place through extensive publicity and running of regular themed-walks at different times and venues.

The positive relationships that developed between the co-ordinator, managers, partners, walk leaders and walkers is seen as a key to success. Walkers from targeted groups are now walking on a regular basis and recognise the physical, social and mental health benefits they gain. One walker became a volunteer walk leader and is now an active member of the steering group and other groups in the community.

The sense of ownership provided by active involvement in; the day to day running of the scheme, consultation in the decision making process and the organisation of regular meetings and social events, helps to maintain the walk leader's interest and offers the support they need.

The project was [evaluated](#) using a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to provide evidence for the successful application for *Walking the Way to Health* '3 heart' accreditation. Open dialogue was found to be very effective in informing the project of success and attendance records supported findings as high retention rates were shown. Ongoing evaluation now focuses on use of the 'voice of the walker' evaluation, which monitors participant's experiences, thoughts and feelings of the walks.