

# **Evaluating the Impact of Volunteering on Health and Well-being**

## **Research Summary 1: Volunteers**

### **September 2010**

#### **Introduction**

The research team in Volunteer Development Scotland were commissioned by Paths for All to undertake an evaluation of the impact of volunteering on health and well-being for volunteer walk leaders. The theory that the research set out to test was that volunteering has a positive impact on well-being.

The evaluation was carried out in two stages. This research formed stage two and involved a pre- and post-test survey design aimed to capture the social and mental health of volunteer walk leaders with regard to sense of belonging, resilience, sense of purpose and self-esteem and confidence as well as general health and happiness.

The pre-test was carried out prior to volunteering, at a Walk Leader training course, and the post-test three months later. The surveys were completed between January and July 2010: 57 volunteer walk leaders took part in both the pre- and post tests.

#### **Key Findings**

The research found that volunteering with Paths for All has a positive impact on some aspects of social and mental health:

- Volunteer walk leaders displayed increased scores on the scales measuring sense of purpose and self-esteem and confidence, indicating an improvement in these areas;
- These positive impacts were greater for those who had led a higher number of walks in the period since training; and
- There does not appear to be a link between volunteering and sense of belonging or resilience.

The research found that around one third of trained volunteer walk leaders have not led walks in the three months since training:

- For these volunteers there has been no positive impact on their general health and happiness or their mental and social health.

#### **Conclusions**

Evidence of the impact of walking on health walk participants is well documented, and it would be expected that volunteer walk leaders would gain similar health benefits. This research provides evidence, for the first time, of the positive impact of leading walks on the social and mental health of Paths for All volunteers.

Benefits for volunteers in areas such as self-esteem and confidence and sense of purpose indicate that while volunteers are supporting others to improve their health, they are improving their own health and well-being at the same time.

The scale of the impact on health and well-being increased as the number of led walks increased, demonstrating that a regular commitment to volunteering is most likely to make a positive difference.

However, trained volunteers who subsequently do not lead walks show decreased levels of social and mental well-being, indicating the importance of getting, and staying involved after training.