

Workplace Walking

Case Stories



Contents

- 1. Tree Tops Community Nursery, Port Glasgow**
Giving Time Back to Employees to Walk More
- 2. Stirling Council Support Service**
Taking Steps to Reward Staff
- 3. The School of Biomedical & Clinical Laboratory Sciences, University of Edinburgh**
Management Support Staff to Count Steps
- 4. Loanhead After School Club, East Lothian**
Staff and Children Count Steps to Better Health
- 5. Eastern Trough Area Project (ETAP) Platform, North Sea**
Onshore Walking Group for Offshore Staff
- 6. South Ayrshire Council**
Pedometer walking challenge
- 7. Heriot-Watt University**
University campus walking bus
- 8. Dundee University**
Encouraging staff to actively commute to work
- 9. Fife Council**
Workplace Walks
- 10. Young's Bluecrest, Stornoway**
More footsteps reduces minibus mileage
- 11. Workplace Pedometer Pack case stories**
Fife Women's Technology Centre
East Lothian Council
Stirling Council
Jubilee Hospital Clydebank
- 12. Workplace Walk Leader Training case stories**
Scottish Student Awards Agency
Argyll & Bute Council
Crown Office
Stirling Council

If you have an innovative way of promoting walking your workplace, please email us at info@pathstohealth.org.uk

1. Tree Tops Community Nursery, Port Glasgow

Giving Time Back to Employees to Walk More

Tree Tops Community Nursery is encouraging staff to be more active by providing outdoor jackets, pedometers, leggings, hats and gloves to employees. The nursery is giving time back to employees to allow them to walk more, by giving an extended lunch break one day per month. Each month, a prize will be given to the walker who increases their step count most.

All 26 nursery staff have been involved in the workplace walking initiative and staff have attended Paths to Health Workplace Walk Leader training. Walks have been staggered to accommodate the different working patterns required by the service. This has meant walking in small groups or in pairs. The staff have been given an additional 15 minutes to add to their lunchbreak once a month as an incentive to do the walk. The walks take place in an urban area which is currently being redeveloped and the staff feel that walking in small groups has the advantage of helping them to feel more secure about walking in the area.

One of the benefits reported was that getting away from the work environment for a while was helpful. It was commented that the walks “blew the cobwebs off” and that it was great to have a chat with other staff from different teams. Some people held ‘walking meetings’, particularly when they felt under pressure, and this was seen as extremely beneficial. Other benefits included changes in travel behaviour with some staff walking to work. Staff get together to walk to and from work rather than use public transport and one staff member has started walking home via a longer route. There are also plans to increase the frequency of the workplace walks and start up an evening walking group.

The benefits have been recognised by management who have agreed that the initiative has been worthwhile. The project has been incorporated into the Nursery’s organisational development plan.

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2. Stirling Council Support Service —Primary Pupil Support Service

Taking Steps to Reward Staff

This workplace project promotes walking through using pedometers and rewarding staff with monthly musculo/skeletal massages. The staff at the Primary Pupil Support Service use pedometers on a daily basis and set themselves target step counts. Charts are used to record steps, targets and comments. The massages are provided at monthly supervision and staff development meetings for staff who have succeeded in reaching their targets.

The project will also consider aspects of mental health and the contribution of that walking can have in reducing stress.

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3. The School of Biomedical & Clinical Laboratory Sciences, University of Edinburgh

Management Support Staff to Count Steps

Staff at the School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Edinburgh are implementing a pedometer based incentive scheme to encourage sedentary/desk based staff to be more active during the working day. The organisers launched the programme during national walking week in September.

All staff have access to the scheme and a promotions programme has been designed to encourage more walking during the working day. The organisers have issued staff with pedometers to measure a 'base step count' for an average day. Personal goals of 10% increase over the month will be set and recorded. This personal approach is hoped to encourage less active staff, giving them a target suited to their own lifestyle. The approach may also encourage staff who do not enjoy the competitive nature of step leagues. Staff who successfully reach their goal are rewarded with a healthy lunch on a monthly basis for one year.

This project has full backing from management who have ensured that extra time in the lunch period is made available for this work. The staff have gained a gold SHAW award and have been innovative in their approach to walking in the workplace.

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4. Loanhead Afterschool Club, East Lothian

Staff and Children Count Steps to Better Health

This workplace encourages members of staff and children in their care to be more active during the working day. The club has invested in pedometers for staff and children. Those taking part set personal goals and try to increase their steps each day. A weekly step club meeting has been set up to build a routine into the children's day and a wall chart keeps the ideas in their minds.

As an incentive for all, a monthly healthy lunch is offered to encourage and reward those who have become more active. Healthy smoothies are made for the children and they will have the opportunity to dance on the dance mat to celebrate their success!

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5. Eastern Trough Area Project (ETAP), North Sea

On-shore Walking Group for Offshore Staff

The ETAP walking group consists of 21 contract personnel working on the BP ETAP platform in the North Sea. Although these personnel have a physically active job, their work pattern of 2 weeks on/2 weeks off, does put them at risk of inactivity during their 2 weeks on shore. A walking group was formed to maintain and improve their fitness levels while on leave, and 2006 will be its third year of operation.

They range in age from 27 to 58 and organise 5 walks per year, one of which raises money for charity. The group has raised funds to enable attendance for 3 people on a navigation skills course and to purchase 12 pairs of gaiters. To further support the group, the ETAP medics will offer annual fitness assessments.

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6. South Ayrshire Council

Pedometer walking challenge

As part of efforts to receive their bronze SHAW award, South Ayrshire Council Environmental Health Department employees were given pedometers and set a challenge to see how far they could walk in a week. Staff were asked to record the number of steps they took for a week and individual step totals were combined. 7 staff returned a total of 270,882 steps, or 130 miles (208km). This was found to be 1.5 trips from Ayr to Glasgow, or all the way to Edinburgh and hitchhiking part of the way back!

The challenge was so successful that it will be run again, this time with the aspiration of reaching New York (5175km)!

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7. Heriot-Watt University

University campus walking bus

The pilot for a bi-weekly walking bus, known as Watt Walks, was set up at Heriot-Watt University to encourage staff to walk on their lunch break. There were three 'bus stops' around campus and each stop was 10 minutes walk apart. This meant that staff could be picked up and dropped off at the same place after their 30 minute walk. The bus went twice around the circuit to allow staff with earlier and later lunch hours to join in.

The initiative has initially been piloted for 7 weeks, with the aim of testing whether anxiety levels could be reduced among staff that took part. Questionnaires were distributed before and after the 7 weeks to find out whether the walking had an effect on anxiety levels compared to a non-active control group. Initial results indicated that staff had enjoyed participating on the walking bus and that anxiety was reduced.

Following the research phase, it is planned that the Watt Walks initiative will continue as part of the Staff Development Programme.

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8. Dundee University

Encouraging staff to actively commute to work

Dundee University's Institute of Sport and Exercise have been promoting physical activity with the notion of active commuting and increased public transport use.

A walking map was produced and distributed to staff, identifying key commuting points within a 20 minute walking distance from the University. The map enables staff to link public transport routes with walking pathways from the main University Campus. A range of marketing strategies were also undertaken to promote the map, including a "Hike for your Heart" charity walk.

Phase 2 of the project involved setting up a campus walking group. Staff volunteers were trained as Paths to Health Walk Leaders and lead walks around the campus. Physical signage of the routes may be added at a later date. It is also hoped that in light of this initiative, the University Travel Plan will in future contain references to walking.

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9. Fife Council

Workplace Walks

The need for a workplace walking initiative was identified through a participatory appraisal consultation on walking and cycling with Fife Council staff in Glenrothes. The consultation was commissioned by the Travel Plan steering group to look at ways to encourage walking and cycling.

The workplace walking initiative was started in February 2004 with an average of 20 people attending lunchtime walks every Thursday. Numbers have reduced since then; however some of the original walkers who no longer attend have started walking together on different days – a very positive (if unintended!) outcome.

Walks are advertised in many different ways including internal newsletters and A4 posters on the back of toilet doors. When the walks started an email was sent out to remind people who were involved in the consultation of the walk and to encourage them to come along. This took time and resources and some felt it created email fatigue but could have been the reason why good numbers attended the walks at the beginning.

Most of the people who attend lunchtime walks still drive to work and go for a walk to de-stress and get some fresh air. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is because they feel they have missed out on the way to work.

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10. Young's Bluecrest, Stornoway

More footsteps reduces minibus mileage

Young's Bluecrest in Stornoway who handle and process the Western Isles' abundance of shellfish, namely scampi, are part of Young's the UK's leading specialist fish brand.

A dedicated workforce of 65 consists largely of Russian migrant workers who speak little English. During 2005, the General Manager – John Nicolson, and the Western Isles Health Board SHAW (Scotland's Health at Work) Co-ordinator – Norma McLeod, discussed activities the company could undertake to fulfil SHAW award accreditation. It was decided to raise staff awareness of the health benefits of walking through using pedometers and information translated into Russian.

As a result of using the pedometers the General Manager noticed that staff, normally collected by the company minibus, requested to be picked-up at the bus station. Some were even walking all the way to work. Not only are employees now walking more, the minibus's daily mileage has been reduced by 10 miles, saving the organisation money on their transport costs.

General Manager, John Nicolson has been encouraged by the positive response of staff to walk more, making him consider further workplace health activities. He says: "It's encouraging to see staff responding so positively to a simple gadget such as a pedometer, which has gone on to change their daily routines. The fact that staff started to walk to work was a great result, but that it then led to a reduction in the company's transport use wasn't something I expected. We'll definitely be exploring other health activities for our staff."

Norma McLeod, SHAW Co-ordinator believes that more organisations can benefit from a healthier and active workforce through enhanced staff performance, improvements in attitude, higher levels of motivation, reduced sick leave and in this instance improved operations. She suggests: "Organisations such as Young's Bluecrest's pedometer success provides evidence that workplaces are in a unique position to directly influence the health of their employees to the benefit of the company. Health activities in the workplace needn't cost money, and in this instance it even brought about savings."

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11. Workplace Pedometer Pack case stories

a) Fife Women's Technology Centre - walking around the world

The FWTC is a small training organisation with 9 employees located in an industrial estate in Dunfermline. The FWTC used the PtH workplace pedometer pack to contribute to their SHAW Silver Award.

Weekly step counts were recorded and entered as a group total. The step totals were converted into kilometres and plotted by placing a flag on a map of the world. Each time a new country was reached people brought in food from that country for a themed lunch to celebrate. Everyone in the organisation took part in the project with management fully supporting the idea.

People took part in sponsored walks as a result of their increased knowledge of the health benefits of walking. The project co-ordinator commented, "It increased awareness of how easy it is to fit walking into your daily routine. It's not as big a deal as going to the gym."

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b) East Lothian Council – counting basic steps

East Lothian Council used the pack to record the baseline steps of a number of different council employees. Staff volunteering were given a goodie bag and a free reflexology treatment as an incentive to promote involvement. The daily step counts varied from as little as 1,000 from someone attending a training course to over 10,000 by a refuse collector. Overall however it was commented that it was very difficult to achieve 10,000 steps for most occupations. The staff who took part were also surprised to find that they weren't doing more. The findings from the project will be used to write an article for the SHAW newsletter to raise awareness of the health benefits of walking.

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c) Stirling Council – using step leagues

Stirling Council set up short term step leagues to motivate employees to walk more. Pedometers were distributed on a first come first served basis via e-mail and word of mouth. 4 groups were set up in 4 different sections of the Council's environment department. The workplace co-ordinator talked to the groups about how to use the pedometer and record step counts. The step league included the Countryside Rangers service and desk-bound employees in the research department. The co-ordinator said the leagues "definitely motivated people more so than if they had been doing it themselves." People reported doing more walking in the office, such as walking to deliver messages in person rather than sending e-mails. The research team even organised a lunchtime walk to get their step counts up! People also reported the social benefits of getting to know colleagues better on lunchtime walks.

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d) Jubilee Hospital, Clydebank – targeting individuals

The Occupational Health Department at the hospital issued pedometers to staff through 'lifestyle screening', to people whom they felt were already motivated to increase their levels of physical activity. This helped them work towards their SHAW silver award. Staff who used the pedometers were surprised at the large variations in daily step counts. The pedometers were useful in raising awareness of the levels of walking that people already did and how walking could contribute to a healthier lifestyle. One participant in particular made significant changes to her diet and levels of physical activity as a result of taking part in the pedometer pilot. She has now lost two stone in weight as a result! The workplace coordinator said that the pedometers give people a starting point from which they can build the confidence to increase their physical activity and that walking is much better than the gym for most people.

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12. Workplace Walk Leader Training case stories

a) Scottish Student Awards Agency, Edinburgh (Business park setting)

The Scottish Student Awards Agency organised a weekly lunchtime walk for staff in a busy office located in a modern business park. Staff took part in a 30 minute walk every Tuesday around the loch in the centre of the park.

The walk leader reported a number of benefits for those taking part. The walks made people feel refreshed and also provided an opportunity to meet people from other teams.

“Everyone says they feel better going back to work after having a blast of fresh air”

Another outcome was that it encouraged two walkers to attend evening exercise classes. The most enjoyable aspect of the walking group for the leader was *“getting out and about and having a blether. It’s very sociable.”*

The main challenge faced by the walk leader was motivating people to participate. The office went through phases where everyone was particularly busy. There was also the pressure of ‘busy lives’ where people used their lunchtime to fit in trips to shops and banks.

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**b) Argyll and Bute Council, Lochgilphead
(Semi-rural setting)**

Argyll and Bute Council Finance Department organised walks on a Wednesday lunchtime. The walks took place in a rural location and used local forest tracks and viewpoints to maintain variety. Numbers of participants taking part in the walks ranged from 4 - 12 per week. The walk leader felt that the walks had been worthwhile and had exceeded expectations in terms of the number of people the walks attracted. Walkers used flexible working hours to take part and on occasion stopped for a picnic as part of the walk.

The walks meant that participants were no longer sitting at their desks during lunchtime and they provided an opportunity to meet people from different council departments.

“All the participants got on well with each other and it was good to get the chance to talk and mix with others.”

Some of the walkers met once a month to do a slightly longer evening walk.

The walk organiser highlighted that support from the Council’s Chief Executive had made a significant contribution to the success of the walks. He would often come along on the walks with his wife.

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Argyll and Bute Council workers using the local forest tracks for lunchtime walks

**c) Crown Office, Edinburgh
(City centre setting)**

Lunchtime walks organised by the Crown Office in Edinburgh city centre took place every fourth working day to provide people with the flexibility of walking on a different day each week. The half-hour walks attracted a core of around 10 walkers who enjoyed a wide variety of attractive routes around Edinburgh city centre. The walks were promoted through the staff intranet using photos and e-mails.

The main benefits included being able to have a chat and take a break from the office.

“It was nice just to get away from the desk for half an hour.”

Another benefit mentioned by the walk leader was that she learnt more about interesting areas around Edinburgh that she was previously unaware of. There were also plans to develop longer walks at weekends, indicating a further social outcome to the walks.

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Crown Office walkers sign up for the walk

**e) Stirling Council, Stirling
(Town centre setting)**

Stirling Council's workplace walks take place once a fortnight around different areas of the picturesque town centre and attractive nearby parks. Two council buildings are used as alternate starting points to encourage participation from all council services. The walks are promoted through the staff intranet and posters distributed throughout the council. The walks have been very successful with an average of around 10 walkers attending. A picnic was organised for walkers which was regarded as very enjoyable and was seen as a useful way to promote the walks, particularly to new potential walkers.

An occasional feature of these walks is that one of the workplace walk leaders, a local amateur historian, provides information on local historical features as part of the walk itinerary. These themed walks have proved to be extremely popular with around 16 people attending. The development of power walks has been related to the council walking programme and has also been popular, albeit with a very different group of people.

Some of the reported benefits have included reductions in stress, feeling healthier at work and generally feeling better about work. The walk leader noted that walkers had reported feeling healthier overall and less stressed as a result of being able to do something for themselves. A couple of people were reported to have begun to walk more outside work as a result of the workplace walks.

"I'm glad I did that [the lunchtime walk]. I can face the afternoon better than if I sat at my desk."

The social aspects of chatting with colleagues and getting to know people from other departments were also seen as important benefits.

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Stirling Council walkers enjoy a healthy lunch outdoors