



FOR A HAPPIER,
HEALTHIER SCOTLAND

Moving Forward:

An evaluation of
using walking with
strength and balance
in healthcare settings

February 2024



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Introduction

Paths for All is a national walking charity with the aim to support everyone to be active in Scotland every day. Since 2018, the Dementia Friendly Walking team has been supporting care homes, community hospital settings and care at home services to implement a walking with strength and balance programme across Perth and Kinross.

Paths for All commissioned Outside the Box to evaluate and summarise the programme in Perth and Kinross to help other care settings, NHS and Health and Social Care Partnerships set up and implement their own programme.

The evaluation explores experiences in three different healthcare settings:

- **Care homes**
- **Care at home**
- **Hospitals**

The aim of the evaluation of the walking with strength and balance programme is to:

- Summarise the timeline and development
- Identify key drivers and enablers which supported the development of the programme
- Identify the challenges and difficulties
- Share success stories

The success stories are from individuals in all three healthcare settings, and they are shared throughout the report.

The evaluation was carried out between February and May 2023.

It is based upon conversations and visits with the following:

- Attendance and discussion at the Care Home Activity Network (CHAN)
- Conversations with key staff at Paths for All and Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership
- Visits, conversations, and garden tours with staff and residents at Beech Manor Care Home, Richmond House, and Muirton House Care Home
- Participating in a gentle movement Live Active Leisure session
- Conversations with staff at Glenhelenbank Residential Home
- Conversations with staff from Blairgowrie Community Hospital
- Workshop with staff from the Home Assessment Recovery Team (HART)
- Conversation with Dr Grant Gibson, the University of Stirling
- Reviewing the resources produced by Paths for All

Why walking with strength and balance is important

“Walking, combined with strength and balance, encourages mobility and independence by increasing a person’s stability.” *Paths for All*

Walking with strength and balance is the key to keeping active in older age. Maintaining or regaining mobility through muscle strengthening activity can be built into daily practice and care plans. Improving stability can lower the risk of falls, or a repeat fall, and can sustain individual confidence to keep moving.

The UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that all adults should:

- Aim to be active for at least 150 minutes per week. This includes moderate physical activity like walking, cycling, running and swimming
- Reduce and break up time spent sitting
- Incorporate activity which improves muscle strength twice each week
- Adults over 65 should take part in activity that improves balance and coordination twice a week

Regular physical activity contributes to the key determinants of healthy ageing: good physical and mental function; opportunities for social interaction; a sense of control over, and responsibility for one’s own health and wellbeing; and managing or coping with disease symptoms and functional limitations. There is now also emerging evidence that increasing physical activity contributes to improving social functioning and reducing loneliness and social isolation.

The value to older adults of activities which improve strength, balance and flexibility cannot be overstated. These components of fitness help maintain physical function, reduce the risk of falls, and help people feel more confident and able to meet the physical activity guidelines. It is now emphasised that activities to improve strength, balance and flexibility can be incorporated into sessions that also involve moderate physical activity, such as walking, rather than necessarily being in addition.



[UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines 2019 Physical activity guidelines: adults and older adults – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines-2019-physical-activity-guidelines-adults-and-older-adults)



Strength and balance development

2017

Getting started

2018

Creating resources



2019
2020

Creating opportunities for people to move more

What happened first

Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership (P&K HSCP) participated in the Care Inspectorate's Care About Physical Activity (CAPA) programme for care homes and care at home. CAPA learning workshops with care home staff identified walking as an area for development for residents living in care homes. Parkdale care home in Auchterarder supported initial developments and pilot work.

"We knew that most residents could walk or could walk with help. They just need the opportunity to do so." P&K HSCP

Partnerships and people

"To make a real difference and change behaviours we knew we couldn't do this alone, we needed and wanted to work with other people and organisations." P&K HSCP

Funding and resources

A successful application to Perth & Kinross Council's Angel Share fund for £2,000 assisted with the pilot phase of walking resource content, pedometers, and seated pedal exercise machines.

Partnerships and Resources

In February a steering group was established with Parkdale staff and residents, Paths for All, Live Active Leisure, and P&K HSCP.

Using the model for improvement framework, the steering group worked to co-produce and design a dementia friendly booklet and step recording chart to inform and encourage residents to walk more. Staff guidance was developed to support conversations with residents. The resource was called Care About Walking.

In October the Care About Walking resource launched at the Care Home Activity Network (CHAN) conference and nationally. Funding allowed printed copies to be made available to all care homes within P&K.

Funding

In November Spirit of 2012 awarded £50,000 to Paths for All and P&K HSCP to work intensively with care homes in Perth & Kinross (2019-2021). Funding ensured the Dementia Friendly Walking team could support care home staff to implement Care About Walking resources, develop strength and balance activities, identify environmental improvements, and monitor and evaluate the impact. In December, P&K Council's Angel Share fund awarded a further £4,000.

"This was a key moment in the development of the strength and balance work. The Spirit of 2012 fund allowed us to work more intensively on the project and with more care homes and residents. We worked directly with care homes and residents, and this was very unusual." Paths for All

The Partnerships grow

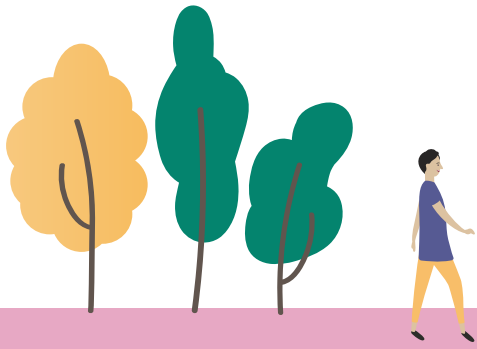
Whilst all care homes were supported with training and resources, nine care homes over two years were given increased support to monitor and evidence impact:

- In 2019: Glencairn, Ancaster, Beech Manor and Stormont Lodge
- In 2020: Kincarrathie, Muirton, Robert Douglas Memorial, Richmond and Strathtay

Seeing the impact

The difference of increased participation in physical activity was becoming more apparent amongst residents. Differences were seen across all aspects of wellbeing; physical, social, and mental health.

"It's often the everyday things that we and residents see. Like to be able to get up from a chair unaided or putting your own socks on. Independence is so good for your mental health and wellbeing." Care home



2021

Strengthening the foundations



Awards for the programme

November 2019: Winner in sportscotland COV Awards in the Coaching for Active Life category.

June 2019: Silver in Perth & Kinross Council's Designing Futures Together Awards for Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health category.

Academic Research

In 2020, Paths for All was awarded £50,000 from Life Changes Trust's Digging Deeper fund to commission the University of Stirling to research the systems, cultures and environments needed for the successful promotion and implementation of physical activity programmes in care homes. Due to Covid-19, the Sit Less Move More report was delayed for publication until January 2023

"A positive culture will mean that people living with dementia and other residents will be able to make walking and other forms of physical activity greater features of their everyday lives."
Sit Less Move More report, the University of Stirling.

Funding and Care Homes

Funding from The Gannochy Trust, £10,000 (2021-2022) allowed five more care homes to be supported: St Ninians, Catmoor, The Birches, Viewlands, and Glenhelenbank.

"During the pandemic it was then more important than ever for residents and care homes that there were opportunities to continue with the activities. There were less services going into care homes and no family visitors."
Paths for All

Resources

All resources were updated and professionally designed, with Care About Walking being made available for download. Strength and balance cue cards and wall vinyls were developed and external installation of strength and balance panels, in some care homes, were completed. A new resource called Walking with Nature was created in response to Covid-19. This helped people in receipt of care to better connect with nature through nature-based activities, either indoors or outdoors.

Paths for All's artist-in-residence, Alec Finlay, created poems inspired by tree species which were painted onto bird boxes, botanical labels, and walking sticks, to encourage residents to go outside and explore the garden.

Care at Home – Strengthening the Foundations

Paths for All joined P&K HSCP's working group 'Strengthening the Foundations' to introduce walking with strength and balance to HART (Home Assessment Recovery Team). Pilot began with staff training and introducing resources into client care plans.

First cascade strength and balance training for seven Senior Reablement Assistants took place. They went on to upskill 140 members of their team. Training was introduced within staff induction process.

HART client packs and care plans include care about walking and strength and balance cue cards tailored for the client.

Work began with hospital wards to create walking with strength and balance circuits along corridors and in other suitable spaces.

Funding

Together for Our Planet (The National Lottery Community Fund) awarded £7,000 (2022-2023) to Paths for All to lead a discovery project with Perth & Kinross care homes focused on climate change initiatives. A one-year project involving staff and residents to raise awareness, commit to action and demonstrate collective impact.

2022

From strength to strength



2023

A sustainable future

Training and resources

P&K HSCP funded six strength and balance workshops and the second cascade training for care at home services, Alzheimer Scotland’s North team, and other care providers. Resources were purchased and made available to all healthcare settings. A walking and falls information cue card was developed.

Care About Walking and strength and balance resources start being introduced within hospital in-patient settings, day care and sheltered housing. Carpenter Court Sheltered Housing fit a suite of strength and balance external panels to raised flower beds in their courtyard, creating a circuit.

Hospitals

Community Hospitals (Pitlochry, Auchterarder and Blairgowrie) and two hospitals, Murray Royal Hospital and Perth Royal Infirmary embed walking with strength and balance on active wards as part of patient rehabilitation plans.

Blairgowrie Community Hospital secure funds (£16,000) from Friends of Blairgowrie Hospital to install an anti-slip path and external strength and balance panels.

“The best way to prevent falls is to keep people active.” *Community hospital*

Partnership work with Murray Royal Hospital leads to the development of an NHS Tayside Endowment Fund grant application to improve and enhance two gardens within the Psychiatry of Old Age ward.

Funding

November 2022: NHS Tayside Endowment Fund award £116,000 to improve and enhance two ward gardens at Murray Royal Hospital. Paths for All contributed £38,000. Patients, staff, and families will benefit from meaningful and purposeful improvements to increase accessibility, connect with nature and physical activity opportunities.



[You can watch a short video of the completed renovation work at Murray Royal here](#)

P&K HSCP secured recurring funds for care about walking and strength and balance training and resources to ensure sustainability across all healthcare settings.

All healthcare settings

In early 2023, two Strength and Balance workshops and a third cascade training course took place for eight senior staff within the HART and Living Well team.

Early 2023 saw preparatory work begin on Murray Royal Hospital with key partners and providers, including NHS Tayside, Robertsons Facilities Management, Urban Pioneers, Better Company, SAY Landscaping and Alec Finlay. Work completed in Autumn 2023.

Legacy work continues with the support of Paths for All through strength and balance training and the provision of resources for all settings.

Looking forward

As of September 2023, four Strength and Balance workshops are scheduled, and a fourth cascade Strength and Balance course is open to all senior healthcare staff and the Royal Voluntary Service. A consistent use of care about walking and strength and balance across all healthcare settings is apparent, particularly from those who reside at home or in a care home and have been admitted to hospital.

And finally

“The vision is for strength and balance panels in public places so everyone can use the exercises and benefit from them.” *P&K HSCP*

What makes it work?

This section explores the essential components of the programme that make it successful across healthcare settings.

Test of change – start small and develop gradually

Test of change is a method used to build knowledge about what is working within your system, and why. Based on a working theory, each time a test is carried out, the predicted theory is tested and then adjusted based on the results.

Starting on a manageable small scale and increasing over time, this aids in gathering more reliable data before having the confidence to scale up.



[The process is neatly summarised in the NHS Plan, Do, Study, Act report.](#)

The test of change approach was used throughout the development phases of the walking with strength and balance programme.

The key aspects of this approach included:

- **Starting small** with an idea or change
- Looking for **partners and participants** to work with
- Seeking **funding** to support the new activity
- **Trying out the activities**
- **Reviewing** how it's working and gathering feedback
- Sharing **evidence and results**
- Developing the approach in **different locations and settings**

The test of change phase offered opportunities to involve the right people to shape activities and gather evidence before developing more widely. In this case it was Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership (Falls Prevention), Paths for All (Dementia Friendly team) and Parkdale Care Home (staff and residents).

Test of change example

Parkdale Care Home staff identified that they wanted to focus on encouraging residents to walk more.

Residents brainstormed ideas and decided to test out different ways to count steps and measure walking distances, **such as:**

- Trying out **different types of pedometers**, including watches, devices on lanyards and clips
- Developing **walking routes with pre-counted steps** e.g. the number of steps to the kitchen or a loop around the garden
- Co-creating resources:
 - an **information booklet** to raise awareness of the benefits of walking
 - a **step count recording chart** with space to set goals
 - **motivational posters** to display around the home
- Testing **footprint shaped vinyl stickers** to visually map out walking routes
- Testing coloured **floor painted footsteps**

Paths for All, Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership and Parkdale staff and residents worked together to co-produce and design the content of a dementia friendly booklet to support and encourage residents to walk more. The booklet is called Care About Walking. The name derived from the [CAPA programme](#) (Care about Physical Activity) as one way of continuing its legacy after the programme came to an end. After several versions were tested and edited, in October 2018 the Care About Walking booklet was launched at the Care Home Activity Network (CHAN) conference.

Funding for this work came from Perth and Kinross Council's Angel Share fund which allowed the Care About Walking resources to be professionally designed and printed.

It has since been shared and promoted nationally and is available to download from Paths for All's website.



[Strength and Balance in Healthcare Settings](#)
[| Paths for All](#)



Partnerships

All healthcare settings talked about the importance of working with supportive and knowledgeable partners in setting up, developing, and continuing to maintain the walking with strength and balance programme.

The Care Home Activity Network (CHAN) is an important forum for Activity Coordinators to share ideas and experiences and learn from each other. This network is open to all care homes across Perth and Kinross. The supportive aspect of this group, particularly for care homes within same localities, has had additional peer-to-peer benefits with many 'teaming' up to share resources and services.

The partnership between Paths for All's Dementia Friendly Walking team (principally the programme's Development Officer) and Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership's Falls Service Manager was central to the development and implementation of the work outlined in this report. From the outset there was both a shared vision of what both parties were trying to achieve as well as a practical understanding about what each organisation was bringing in terms of time, resources, funding, skills, etc. By starting with a project that was relatively modest in scale (the creation of the Care About Walking resources with care home residents in Auchterarder), the partnership was allowed to flourish and grow naturally as the scale and ambition of the partnership grew.

"To make a real difference and change behaviours we knew we couldn't do this alone, we needed and wanted to work with other people and organisations." P&K Heath and Social Care Partnership

Understanding the importance of walking with strength and balance

“The everyday checks show the impact of the exercises, like residents who can now put their socks on, and residents being able to get out of their chairs more easily and often without help. Sitting to standing is a good functional exercise that works well for many residents. It keeps them independent, and it gets people walking and moving.” *Care home*

There was a clear understanding from healthcare staff about the positive impact on residents, clients, and patients’ everyday lives, when people were more mobile, active, and taking part in walking with strength and balance.

Building strength and balance into daily lives increases confidence and can maintain an individual’s independence. This was enhanced when undertaking walking with strength and balance outdoors.

“It’s often the everyday things that we and residents see. Like be able to get up from a chair unaided or putting your own socks on. Independence is so good for your mental health and wellbeing.” *Care home*

All three healthcare settings said that strength and balance was the best way to prevent falls.

“People are more mobile here. In the old place I worked, there were more falls, and people needed more help going to the toilet. Here they are stronger, more mobile, and importantly more independent.” *Care home*

“The best way to prevent falls is to keep people active.” *Community hospital*

“Strength and balance benefit all aspects of life, and we see it in people not having falls, and being more mobile and active.” *HART team*



Many of the individuals supported understood the importance of keeping active and doing strength and balance. A few spoke about how beneficial strength and balance was for them.

“Residents have said to us, we do the exercises because we know it’s good for us and we can see a difference.” *Care home*

“I know how beneficial it is for me to do the exercises, so I do them. They keep me as mobile as possible and that keeps me independent.” *Care home resident*

Healthcare staff

A key factor in enabling and encouraging more mobility and activity for individuals in healthcare settings is motivated, skilled, and knowledgeable staff. Training staff at the point of induction, or at the earliest available opportunity, ensures a consistent and high level of activity remains within each setting. Conversations around an individual’s interest in physical activities should take place regularly and can also involve and be supported by family members.

In care homes this key role is most often undertaken by Activity Coordinators, and in hospital settings Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, nursing, and clinical staff undertake this role. However, walking with strength and balance activity can be encouraged by all healthcare staff who have direct responsibility for supporting opportunities to physical activity, either as a form of rehabilitation or sustaining mobility.

“The single biggest driver for strength and balance is the Activities Coordinator but this is not a universal role and not every care home has one.” *Dr Grant Gibson, University of Stirling*

In a care home setting, the Activities Coordinator role needs to be supported by management and other care staff. If management and other care staff can support and engage with activities, then even when there are staff shortages a minimum level of activity can remain.

Further tiers of support for Activities Coordinators in Perth and Kinross is provided by the health and social care partnership, Care Home Activity Network (CHAN), and by the training and resources provided by Paths for All.

“The activities co-ordinators are hugely creative in how they engage and deliver activities for residents, and they largely work on their own.” *Dr Grant Gibson, University of Stirling*

Flexibility and adaptability

In all three healthcare settings staff are creative in how they deliver and incorporate strength and balance movements into everyday activities. They recognise and work with people with a range of abilities and mobility, and their interest and ability to take part will change day-to-day.

“We also make the activities and exercises fun, starting with some singing, dancing, and different actions. It makes us all laugh and we are more likely to continue with it when we all laugh.” *Care home*

“We are fortunate that we have flexibility, patients can be seen in either the ward and in the gym. It gives us all more options that way and shows also that exercises and activity doesn’t just happen in the gym – it can be anywhere.” *Community hospital*

Staff also talked about the ways in which they improvised and individual ways to support strength and balance.

“We often use what we find in the kitchen – tins of beans are a favourite and the kitchen counters are often the right height for balancing.” *HART team*

No matter how walking with strength and balance was encouraged, it became clear that over time, as staff became more confident and familiar with the movements, that they could be more creative. This was particularly evident in care homes with many linking to events and seasons throughout the year.

Ethos and culture of healthcare settings

The ethos and culture in each healthcare setting and the support from the management team is crucial in prioritising a culture of physical activity for everyone, regardless of all the other challenges they are facing. The comments below give some examples of how walking with strength and balance is incorporated into the daily routine of the different healthcare settings.

“We tend to do the exercises together, so residents can see others doing it and that way, it just becomes normal. It’s just what we do.” *Care home*

“People are included and encouraged and most join in because it’s what we do here. Part of my role as a carer is to show that the activities are for everyone and that we enjoy it, and I do.” *Care home*

One care home also used walking with strength and balance to encourage individuals to set goals for the year.



Academic research by the University of Stirling explores the culture of physical activity in a report published in January 2023, [Sit Less Move More](#). The research looks at how care homes across the world address this problem and developed a set of key recommendations for governments, local authorities, care home providers, staff, and managers.

“At the beginning of the year, we talk about goals and the things we want to achieve. Residents think about what they want to do and work towards. When people set goals, it gives a sense of purpose, achievement, and progression, and we can support them to work towards them. And it can be small things like walking a bit further and making it to the second (strength and balance) post and back.” *Care home*



Funding

Securing external funding has been critical to the development and implementation of the walking with strength and balance programme.

Small pockets of grant funding awarded at the beginning of the programme enabled the production and rollout of resources which led to increased data and evidence being collected, feeding into the test of change approach. This supported larger grant applications to cover more ambitious projects and development work. Working with a third sector organisation like Paths for All increases the number of funds that can be applied to, as many will have restrictions on the type and size of organisation that can apply, and third sector partners are perhaps better placed and have more flexibility when applying for funding.

During the development phases of walking with strength and balance there have been successful funding bids to a range of local and national organisations including:

- **Perth and Kinross Council – Angel Share Fund**
(£6,000 awarded to P&K HSCP)
- **Spirit of 2021– Changing Lives Through Sport and Physical Activity**
(£50,000 awarded to Paths for All)
- **The Life Changes Trust – Digging Deeper research grant fund**
(£50,000 awarded to Paths for All)
- **The Gannochy Trust**
(£10,000 awarded to Paths for All)
- **The National Lottery Community Fund – Together for Our Planet climate change grant fund** (£8,000 awarded to Paths for All)
- **NHS Tayside – Tayside Health Fund**
(£116,000 awarded to Psychiatry of Old Age ward, NHS Tayside)

The funding has enabled pilot phases of work to commence, creation and distribution of resource including staff training and dedicated staff time to actively drive initiatives and work intensively across Perth and Kinross, in partnership with Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership.

The additional funding has also been fundamental in enhancing and adapting external greenspaces in healthcare settings, making them more accessible, purposeful, and enjoyable, by creating walking circuits and installing strength and balance posts.

A defining achievement with regards to funding was realised in 2022 when Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership secured recurring annual funds within the falls management budget. These funds ensured care about walking and strength and balance training and resources would be sustained and available to all healthcare settings.

Walking with strength and balance training for staff

“Confident and motivated staff are absolutely crucial in encouraging residents to be more active.” *Care home*

Training designed and delivered by Paths for All has ensured that staff from healthcare settings have the necessary skills and understanding to encourage increased physical activity and to deliver a range of movement opportunities to residents, patients, and clients.

Strength and Balance training is a half-day workshop that explains why walking with strength and balance is the key to active older age, and how to build these activities in to daily care.

Key learning includes:

- Understanding physical, social and wellbeing effects of ageing
- Understanding the benefits of being active
- Awareness of current physical activity guidelines for adults
- Understanding why walking with strength and balance is important
- Trying out and practising strength and balance

These are some of the comments from staff who have been on the training course.

“The training helps our confidence and shows we know what we are doing. And the residents have more confidence in us because we have been trained.” *CHAN member*

“Without the training I wouldn’t have got so involved and I would not have considered offering activity sessions for residents. And to think that once we didn’t really do this. We played games but we did a lot more sitting down.” *Care home*

As of May 2023, more than 400 health and social care staff have been trained in Strength and Balance.

Since 2021, Paths for All has offered a cascade model of delivery, upskilling key members of staff within healthcare settings to deliver the Strength and Balance training. This model allows healthcare settings to deliver training in-house using Paths for All's content and resources resulting in training that is more sustainable and responsive to local needs, particularly at the point of induction for new employees. For example, the first Strength and Balance cascade training for seven Senior Reablement Assistants allowed them to train 140 Reablement Assistants within their team. Since then, an additional two cascade training courses have taken place for Senior members of staff (up to March 2023).



[There is more information about Paths for All training for healthcare staff here Strength and Balance in health settings | Paths for All](#)



Materials and resources

All resources were designed in collaboration with healthcare professionals and people living in a healthcare setting. People's input and feedback were instrumental in ensuring all resources were fit for purpose and met both staff and individual needs, including people living with dementia.

All resources have evolved over time, adaptations have been made to reflect best practice and resource developments will continue going forward.

The resources include:

Care About Walking – a dementia friendly pack that details the benefits of walking, ways to get started, stay motivated and to track progress. The pack consists of a Care About Walking booklet, step count wall chart, guidance notes for staff and motivational posters.

“Listening to music while walking has worked really well for one of our residents. It meant that she walked further round both the garden and inside the home. She told us she was just enjoying the music and thought she would just move a bit further along to hear the end of the song and then there was another song she liked so she carried on.” *Care home*

Walking with Nature: Information and Activity Note – a dementia friendly booklet that helps people to spend time outdoors through nature-based interest and interactions. The activities work well for groups, one to one or independently.

“We like the ‘Walking with Nature’ guide. It’s been really useful for the activities and for some residents finding reasons to have a look outside. It’s also great as a prompt for conversations and we see it used by families a lot.” *Care home*

Strength and Balance resources consist of:

- **Cue cards** – dementia friendly designed cards with step-by-step instructions and graphics which detail how to safely guide people through each movement. The cards are designed to allow freedom of where they can be used.
- **Indoor wall vinyls** – vinyl stickers that can be placed along corridors or in prominent places to encourage independent or supervised use. They can be spaced-out to create a circuit and ensure walking takes place between each movement.
- **External posts and panels with optional support handles** – installed in a garden, or appropriate outdoor setting, to encourage independent or supervised use. They can be spaced-out to create a circuit and encourage walking between each movement.



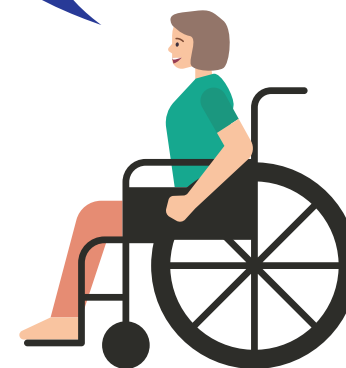
[More information about the resources Strength and Balance in health settings | Paths for All](#)

Resources and materials are used in a range of ways by the different healthcare settings.

The cue cards offer flexibility with people having their own set tailored for their needs and current range of mobility. It also means that people can use the cue cards independently and share with family members.

“Patients don’t have to wait for staff to help with the exercises. We have small cards for each patient with the suitable exercises for them. They can use the cards on their own and family members can help too.” *Community hospital*

“The cue cards give control to the client. We give them cards with exercises just for them, and then they can do them with us and also independently and with family members too.” *HART team*



Environment – internal and external

“One gentleman who was a new amputee in a wheelchair, loved the exercises and posts in the garden and in the ward too. It was brilliant as it helped his strength and endurance. He also identified that there was one section of the path that wasn’t accessible and with help from Paths for All we were able to make the adjustments required and now the path is fully accessible.” *Community hospital*

Creating environments that support people in healthcare settings to be more active, through walking and strength and balance, has been a critical component of the work in Perth and Kinross.

This has meant adapting or repurposing environments to make them safer and more accessible for patients and residents. For example, when strength and balance vinyls have been placed along a corridor wall, an existing grab rail may be used or installed to allow extra stability for people who require it.

In some care homes and hospitals, these corridors become activity circuits and have also been named by residents and patients, such as ‘Activity Alley’.


“We have long corridors so have put up the grab rail and spaced the strength and balance posters out along it. People walk along and work their way through the exercises moving from one poster to another. The grab rail is good for holding onto for the balance things and for the hip exercises.” *Care home*

“We had all the posters for the walls but needed to set up where the exercise stations would be and then install the grab rails – that made a difference.” *Community hospital*


Changes to the external environments were supported through additional funding from Paths for All for some care homes and hospitals. The funding has been used to make external spaces more accessible, pleasant, and interesting to spend time in. This work has included anti-slip pathways, developing level paths or circuits for walking, and adding in strength and balance posts. Some strength and balance panels have also been attached to raised flower and vegetable beds, and suitable seating areas.

Staff in healthcare settings have found the external posts and panels very useful in encouraging walking with strength and balance.


“The posts in the garden have made such a difference. Residents have told us that it makes the walk more interesting – so it’s not just going round in a loop now. Stopping at each post to do the exercises makes it more interesting; you can also challenge yourself to see if you can improve on what you have done before.” *Care home*





"I know there are 70 steps from my bedroom to the kitchen so last night I did an extra walk to the kitchen and back to increase my number of steps." *Resident*




"One of our ladies who will be 100 years old in November came into the home unable to walk. A few months later, after doing the exercises, she can now walk well with a Zimmer frame." *Care home*




"The wall chart helped us to see how much walking we were doing and then try to do some more. It's a good reminder." *Care home carer*




"One gentleman with us is living with Parkinson's and he does the exercises regularly too. His wife comes in every day to see him. She wants to be part of his life and help him stay fit, and importantly it gives them something to do and talk about. Over the last few months, you can see the improvement in the strength and balance of both of them." *Care home*




"People are included and encouraged and most join in because it's what we do here. Part of my role as a carer is to show that the activities are for everyone and that we enjoy it, and I do." *Care home*



"It was important that people didn't lose the strength and balance and fitness they had gained before the pandemic." *P&K HSCP*



"Because of earlier walking challenges and activities, it was easier to encourage residents and care homes to take part. Residents could see others doing it and wanted to take part too." *Paths for All*



"We have a lady who broke her hip about Christmas time and is now back with us. She has been discharged from the physio now. And she told us that 'these are the exercises the physio had me doing'. Her daughter is delighted with her mobility and that she has got her independence back." *Care home*

The challenges

This section explores the challenges and difficulties and the responses to embedding the walking with strength and balance programme in healthcare settings.

Time

All healthcare settings talked about the time needed to introduce walking with strength and balance to individuals and staff members, to embed it into daily routines. It takes time to make changes: test it over a period of time, evaluate, and then move on to the next stage.

Taking more time at the early stages of introduction to each setting was beneficial, not only for staff members to build their confidence in utilising the resources, but also for building support and capacity in response to the aim of the programme; to increase levels of physical activity.

“It was a gradual process, and it has worked well because of that, but it has taken many years.” *Care home*

“We want to start again with the residents. We will start inside and put the posters up in the corridors so everyone and especially residents see them and can use them and see people using them too. And then when the weather’s a bit better getting residents outside and using the posts will be good.” *Care home*

Other factors which impacted on the length of time to embed resources included:

- Staffing levels/turnover
- Funding and finance opportunities available
- Scale of environmental challenges required
- Management of each setting/capacity
- Cross department responsibility (e.g. facilities department needed to make adaptations to physical internal and external environments)

“There was also a lot of liaising with the estates team to get grab rails at the right height and in the right places – this took around 6 months as there was a backlog from Covid.”
Community hospital

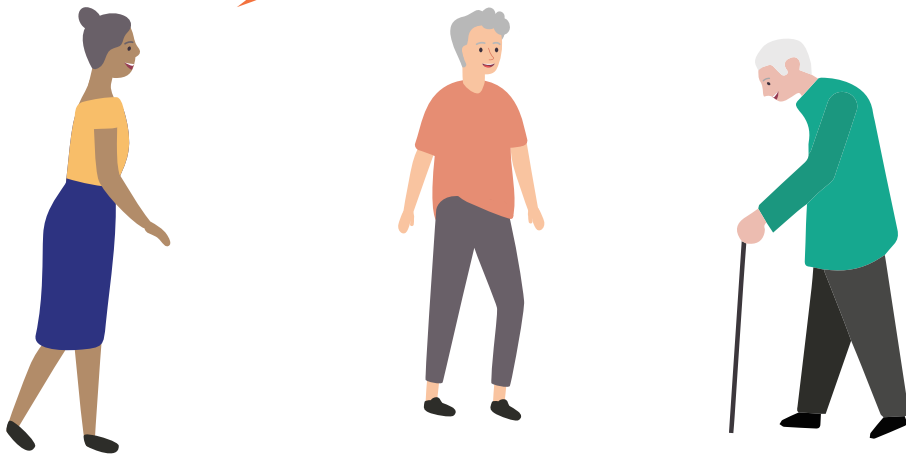
In all cases the commitment was there from healthcare staff to attend training and introduce the resources gradually within their setting. The longer-term aim was clearly recognised and the benefits that would be afforded to people in receipt of their care.

Flexibility and adaptability

One of the key challenges in the direct delivery of walking with strength and balance, is the range of abilities and interest in the activities. However, healthcare staff can be very creative in how they deliver, adapting to the needs of individuals and groups and encouraging participation.

“We do both seated and standing exercises so everyone can take part. There is a variation that works for everyone.”
Care home

“We found a cricket ball in one home. So, we have been using that moving it from hand to hand – it brought back so many memories for the client and we had some good conversations at the same time.” *HART team*



Covid-19

“One of the residents had just returned to us from hospital and said smiling ‘oh no, not more activities’.” *Care home*

Covid-19 had the immediate and detrimental impact of isolating staff and individuals in healthcare settings. Each ‘lockdown’ significantly reduced social interactions with family and friends, as well as with other people being cared for in each setting. After the initial lockdown in 2020, walking with strength and balance became very popular as a way of keeping people engaged, active and mobile.

Keeping the risk of falls to a minimum was essential, therefore being able to encourage independent use of resources to build confidence and physical stability was vital. From this point onwards, new resources were developed with infection control measures in mind (e.g. strength and balance cue cards).

“It was important that people didn’t lose the strength and balance and fitness they had gained before the pandemic.”
P&K HSCP

“The ability of people really impacts what we and they can do. The less people move around the less they want to. And then it takes an awful lot of encouragement and that can be soul destroying, especially when working on your own.”
Care home

Individuals could independently use the cue cards and external spaces to practise strength and balance. Some activities could also be delivered digitally, with adjustments, as another way of keeping physically active. Sessions were being delivered online by Live Active Leisure.

However, the willingness and determination of staff, and individuals receiving care, is inspiring, despite the lasting impact of Covid-19. Whilst it will take longer to rebuild strength in some cases, and increase motivation and encouragement, the promotion of walking with strength and balance has never been more crucial.

“In lock down strength and balance was another activity to do when everything else had stopped but we were still here in the home. Families and organisations couldn’t come in. We took videos to share with families of residents doing the exercises. It worked because it was a way to show family members that their loved one was healthy and following good active habits.” *Care home*

“We had one man with us after having a stroke. In the ward we have the strength and balance posters on the walls with the exercises set out. While he was sat there, he saw them and started trying them out. It also brought him out his room, so an additional benefit was the social aspect of seeing people.” *Community hospital*

Since the pandemic, staff across all healthcare settings have stated that residents, patients, and clients are much more deconditioned than before. This has created additional challenges in supporting and encouraging individuals whose health and wellbeing has declined.

“Since Covid we have noticed that people coming to us are not as able, much weaker and have greater frailty.” *Community hospital*



Staff shortages

Key challenges in healthcare settings are staff shortages, changes of staff, high use of agency workers, and staff, such as Activities Coordinators being drawn into direct care work to cover the gaps. This is also a lasting impact of Covid-19 across the healthcare sector.

“Covid has had a real and dramatic impact on the work. There have been a lot of staff leaving and lots of changes.”
Care home

“Covid has made a huge difference. It is now very difficult to get new staff – and this does have an impact on what we can do and what I do as an Activities Coordinator. Sometimes I help with care work but mostly it means I have to do everything on my own.”
Care home

In some cases, staff shortages have had an impact on the walking with strength and balance programme. It is harder to support group activities with fewer staff, resulting in more one-to-one strength and balance work, which does not offer the same social and wellbeing benefits as group activities.

Staff shortages also mean that there can be more challenges in supporting individuals to attend activities.

“Staff has the biggest impact on what we can do. Now we have less staff we go and get someone who uses a wheelchair and by the time we get back the rest of the group has got bored waiting and has left. Getting a resident who uses a wheelchair to get around from their room and downstairs isn’t something you can do in two minutes.”
Care home

However, despite the various daily challenges being faced by all healthcare settings, it is evident that staff are making efforts which are contributing to every person’s wellbeing. Whether this is part of a person’s rehabilitation journey or receiving longer term care, staff have shown support for the long-term benefits that the programme has to offer and adapting their approach based on staff availability e.g. encouraging independent use of strength and balance, particularly where grab rails or support handles are installed, and where recommended and appropriate for the person receiving care.

“I think the exercises are good. They try to get me into the lounge 4 times a day for meals, so I see people and move about more. I also do my strength and balance exercises on my own in the morning and afternoon. I have been doing them for a few months now and am gradually improving. I have a fused ankle so can’t do all the exercises, but I have a set that work for me. The exercises are do-able. We all have good and bad days, but I keep moving.”
Care home resident

Conclusion

The evidence gathered in this evaluation shows that the development of the walking with strength and balance programme has been very effective in increasing the confidence, mobility, and independence of residents, patients, and clients in all healthcare settings.

The test of change approach adopted from the beginning to gradually embed walking with strength and balance into healthcare settings has proven to be an effective and low risk approach. This approach not only evidenced the case for further funding, but was also flexible and adaptable enough to support and respond to the needs of both staff and individuals in receipt of care. All aspects of partnership working between Paths for All and Perth and Kinross Health and Social Care Partnership evolved over time with increased opportunities for collaboration and development opportunities maximised.

From the development and growth phases, to building sustainability of the walking with strength and balance programme, it has been successful due to the whole systems approach taken. The support and dedication from all partners to drive forward change and create a lasting impact with regards to physical activity has been commendable.

From 2023 onwards no further external funding was required by P&K HSCP, and as evidenced, recurring Health and Social Care funds continue to sustain this work through access to training and resources for all healthcare settings. Paths for All continues to support Perth and Kinross healthcare settings. Moving forward, Paths for All will continue to highlight this work as an example of best practice to other health board areas and encourage the use of the Walking with Strength and Balance Toolkit to support the test of change approach in other areas.



[Download your copy of the Walking with Strength and Balance Toolkit here](#)

Outside the Box

July 2023



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Outside the Box provides development support alongside people who want to make a difference in their communities. All our work with communities promotes and supports respect, dignity and equality. We recognise people's experiences – the barriers and inequalities they face, and work alongside them to identify practical approaches for change that build on people's skills. We are committed to ongoing learning around equality and diversity – across every aspect of our work.

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