



## **Volunteer Walk Leader: FAQs**

### **Q. How you find a place to meet and have coffees afterwards?**

A. Often your project coordinator will support you to think about route planning and social venues and opportunities. If you begin volunteering with an existing group, it is likely they will already have a coffee stop in mind and they'll have some established routes and meeting points. The option of staying on for a cuppa after a walk is a big incentive to many and the highlight of their walk but isn't a compulsory component! In more rural areas, including island communities, there might not be an appropriate coffee stop. Things to think about if you're trying to identify a new meeting point include finding somewhere with accessible toilets, a sheltered spot to gather (particularly in inclement weather!), and inexpensive refreshments (so as not to exclude anyone on a limited budget). While participation in the walk itself is free, everyone has to pay for their own refreshments afterwards.

### **Q. Can dogs join the walk?**

A. As a general rule, dogs are not allowed on Health Walks – the premise of a Health Walk is that it should be welcoming to all and we know that some potential walkers may be anxious around dogs. An obvious exception to the rule is if it's an assistance or guide dog. You will find that some projects have chosen to provide clearly marketed 'dog-friendly' Health Walks as part of their wider programme and where a need for this has been identified locally. However, as a general rule, dogs are not permitted to join Health Walks.

### **Q. Are people with mobility difficulties able to join in local walks with others who are more able?**

We want Health Walks to be accessible to the widest possible audience. During Walk Leader training, you will learn about how to route plan to ensure you can accommodate for a variety of needs on your walks. To make walks accessible to people with mobility issues and/or using a mobility aid, routes should be fairly flat, avoiding steep slopes and stairs. Once the route has been described to the participants before starting the walk it's up to them to decide whether they're able to take part and it's their responsibility to let Walk Leaders know if they feel unwell or are struggling during the walk.

### **Q. How and who is responsible for the groups getting to the start point and getting them home again?**

Walkers are responsible for getting themselves to the start of a walk and for their journeys home. The walking project may be able to signpost participants to active or sustainable travel options (e.g. bus routes and times).

### **Q. Are there walks for different levels?**

Health Walks should accommodate a variety of needs and be accessible to the widest possible audience. Some projects choose to provide different lengths of walk based on need and ability – but all Health Walks should be under an hour in length. If some walkers feel they are being held back by the rest of the group and could cope with a brisker or longer walk they can be signposted to other Health Walks or other walking groups e.g. Ramblers.

### **Q. Do we have to record information from the walkers or is this done on registration somewhere?**

A. Registers are taken at the beginning of the walk to help check everyone back in at the end of the walk and new walkers are given a form to complete which can then be returned to

us (or the Project Coordinator). This form can alternatively be completed on their own mobile or tablet device. It records basic information about the walker, their activity levels and health conditions and is essential for Paths for All to be able to report to Scottish Government about the programme on a national level.

**Q. Do the walking groups take place at weekends?**

A. There are walks which take place on weekdays, evenings and weekends too. If there isn't an established walk in your area on a day/time that suits you (and if there's demand for it) you could set up a new Health Walk!

**Q. What size are the groups, I take it where the walk involves people with dementia that they have a carer with them?**

A. The groups vary in size project to project - some groups are quite small and others have quite a lot of walkers. Those living with dementia attend the Dementia Friendly walks with a family member, friend or carer. We don't stipulate a maximum number of walkers: it's at the Walk Leaders' (and the Project Coordinators') discretion. From a practical point of view there may be circumstances where you'd want to cap the numbers. For example, if the group is made up of people with limited ability who need slightly higher levels of support, you might want a higher to limit the group to 6 participants and have 3 Walk Leaders.

**Q. How do people get to know about the walks happening?**

A. The walks are published through our website nationally and advertised locally too. The Project Coordinator uses whatever tools and services are available locally e.g. local press, posters, Facebook pages, health and social care professionals (for signposting/referring) etc.

**Q. Is each walk the same route or if not how much does it vary?**

A. Some groups choose to do one route, but others have a number of routes they alternate between. As long as they meet the criteria for a Health Walk, a variety of routes are possible. Each route is risk assessed in advance to ensure its suitable and safe for participants.

**Q. Are the walks weather permitting?**

A. We want to get everyone in Scotland walking as much as we can – including on the rainy days! If extreme weather, such as snow or icy conditions, poses a risk to safety then walks can be postponed. We encourage groups to offer an alternative if this is possible e.g. an indoor mall walk or laps around a community hall.

**Q. How many people would be on a walk? Does it depend on numbers whether you need one or more walk leaders? Wonder about personal safety for walk leaders if leading alone.**

We encourage groups to always have at least two Walk Leaders – one to lead the walk from the front and the other to support those at the back of the group and ensure everyone finishes the walk safely. The number of walkers attending each Health Walk across Scotland can vary greatly, for example from 5 to 20 or more. For popular groups, walkers often split up into subgroups and these can be supported by additional walk leaders.