

Step Out Sheffield 2021-2022 Annual Report

The 2021-22 accounting period began exactly as the old one ended – with no walks because of the social distancing rules relating to the Covid pandemic. However, thanks to the clever people who developed and produced an effective vaccine, and it's mass take up here in the UK, restrictions were lifted in July 2021 and we were able to start relaunching our walks. During lockdown several of our Volunteer Walk Leaders (VWLs) either retired or moved jobs. As a direct result, we were unable to re-launch four of our walks and several more are now critically short of leaders. Nevertheless, by November 2021 we were able to provide a citywide programme of 24 walks each week and consider our service provision 'back to normal'. The average attendances over the period of this report was 1,700 per month. This is quite an achievement given that some walks were unable to restart until November 2021.

In May 2021 our free contract with BTCK to host our website ended and the contract lapsed. In February 2022 Step Out Sheffield launched a new website <https://www.stepoutsheffield.co.uk> to promote its activities. The new site includes an interactive map, has more photographs, and is more modern looking and easier to navigate. Feedback suggests that it has been well received by health professionals and social prescribers as well as by members of the public.

Ramblers support for Walking for Health (WfH) ended officially on 30th September 2021 but the WfH database didn't close until 29th April 2022. Sheffield hosted WfH walks continuously from 1999 until lockdown in 2020 and continued to record walker attendances on the Ramblers WfH database until it closed. Ramblers brought health walks (now known as easy access walks) under their portfolio and Step Out Sheffield is contracted to deliver walks under the name Ramblers Wellbeing Walks Step out Sheffield. As with the WfH walk schemes, there are approximately 400 Ramblers Wellbeing Walks (RWW) schemes across England.

Like Step Out Sheffield, Ramblers have developed a new website. Unfortunately, though, there were delays that saw its launch put back several times between September and its eventual public unveiling in February 2022. This had a knock-on effect on the Walks Manager Platform on their website which in turn affected the launch of the registration systems for Ramblers Wellbeing Walks and the Ramblers App. So, whilst in theory RWW Step Out Sheffield should have been in a position to start rolling out electronic registration in April, in practice we ended the period of this report recording attendances at all our walks on the WfH database.

Across the course of the year SOS hosted a couple of networking events for VWLs. The first, a walk along the Sheffield canal followed by a tour of the English Institute for Sport, was well attended. The second, in November, in the Sheffield United Family Hub rather less so because of memorably snowy conditions on the day. Social events, provided for both VWLs and walkers in August, December, and March, were well attended and much appreciated.

In November Step Out Sheffield hosted four medical students on their community engagement placement. Because of the pandemic on-line teaching had become the norm for these year 3 students and their excitement at meeting up face to face was palpable. They worked well together as a team and between them visited most of the 24 walks. They provided a very informative report about the difference in walker expectations at different sites across the city and produced an excellent short promotional video.

Looking forward to 2022-2023

The transition to RWW brings a change of governance. Ramblers will only communicate with one person from each group. This person, known as the coordinator must be a RWW-trained trainer. Groups can have more than one coordinator and Step Out Sheffield has two trainers and a data manager who are additional coordinators. In Sheffield the coordinators are all volunteers. It is the role of the coordinator to channel information to and from RWW to the other coordinators and to the Step out Sheffield Management Committee. Sue Lee is acting coordinator and, to avoid a conflict of interest, will step down as chair of Step Out Sheffield at the 2022 AGM.

Because the administration of the walks will in future be provided by the coordinators, the administrative responsibilities of the volunteers who manage Step Out Sheffield will no longer apply and the 'Links' will step down from their role. They have, over the past six years played a significant part in the success of Step out Sheffield and their support is gratefully acknowledged. It does however mean that individual SOS groups will necessarily have to become more self-reliant because they'll all be reporting directly to the one coordinator.

Because of the reduced administrative input, it is anticipated that the Step Out Sheffield Management Committee will only need two or three short meetings (probably on Zoom) each year from now on. It is vitally important that the Committee represents its walkers from right across the city and an appeal for nominations was circulated to the membership ahead of the AGM.

The introduction of the Ramblers App for registration.

Ramblers have so far failed to understand the demographic of our service users. Health walks have been provided in Sheffield now for over 20 years and some of our walkers began walking with us as soon as a walk was provided in their area. We are proud to claim that our retention levels are great, and we keep walkers walking longer. When walkers reach 100 as does Handsworth walker Alma Taylor in May 2022, we know we have done an excellent job. It is unrealistic to expect people in their 80's and 90's to be IT savvy, and a big assumption that most leaders would have smart phones and email (84% were over 70 in April 2020).

Whilst the way of the world is heading rapidly towards everything digital and it is an inevitability that electronic registration will eventually take over, the Step Out Sheffield VWLs have made it very clear that any changes we make must be introduced gradually. Initially all groups will continue to register their walkers on paper and provide a cumulative total for the coordinator at the end of each quarter. However, at least one leader at a small number of Groups has indicated they are willing to give electronic registration a go. The coordinator will work with those groups to help their walkers register with the RWW Step Out Sheffield, and to print out QR codes where needed. Once those 'pilot' walks are comfortable with electronic registration any other group wishing to transition to the new system will be similarly supported. Any walk where the leaders lack either the technology or the will to go digital may continue to register their walkers manually without compromising their standing within RWW Step Out Sheffield.

2022-2023 will be another year of change but Step Out Sheffield has survived the withdrawal of Council support and a Pandemic – it can survive, and hopefully thrive, on the new challenge of electronic registration.

Sue Lee

Volunteer Walk Leader and Chair of Step out Sheffield