



## Step out Sheffield 2020 Annual Report

In May 2019, at our AGM, we celebrated 20 years of continuous provision of Walking for Health walks in the city of Sheffield with a large Birthday cake. The first of our walks began in Parson Cross Park in April 1999 and flourished under the stewardship of the late Gail Griffiths. Gail joined the council to develop health walks in Sheffield after working for several years as a Peak Park Ranger out in Derbyshire. She recruited Project Rangers Tina Moores and Avril Wragg and the three of them quickly established a number of walks, many of which continue to this day. The period of this report (1<sup>st</sup> April 2019- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020) covers the 4<sup>th</sup> year since a small team of Volunteer Walk Leaders took over the administration of the Ramblers Walking for Health scheme here in Sheffield under the banner of Step Out Sheffield.

Step Out Sheffield continues to thrive. Walker numbers are stable, and, thanks to this year's newly trained Walk Leaders, so are volunteer numbers. The cycle of life continues to turn, and some walks have grown in size, whilst others have seen numbers fall. Although no new walks were developed this year we remain the biggest volunteer-led Ramblers Walking for Health scheme. Twice throughout the year every GP practice received a supply of our walks programme leaflets for display in their waiting rooms. This, together with the introduction of the 'People Keeping Well' initiative, where community support workers encourage patients to engage with community activities including walks, resulted in better recognition across the health sector and initiated more referrals. We are now in a position where we can claim to be working *with* health professionals and not merely in parallel with them.

Because we have no staff or office accommodation to pay for, our running costs are very modest. Nevertheless, Nigel Ross, our Volunteer Treasurer continues to seek out available funding and this year, he again made several successful grant applications. In addition to Council funding (£1,432.80 from 12 WardPot funds) to help towards the administration costs of providing weekly walks in those communities, he successfully applied to SOAR for £663 to fund the distribution of our walks programme leaflets to GP practices, and to Zest for £500 to support our work. He also successfully applied for Step Out Sheffield to be adopted as one of the Co-operative Society's Community organisations. The Co-op scheme is on-going and payments are not expected until later this year. That award, when it comes, will not be insignificant, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Nigel and acknowledge his work in securing these various funds.

In December 2019 Step Out Sheffield received a surprise Christmas present in the form of a letter from the University Medical School advising that we were to be paid for hosting the students on their Social Accountability module. Payment was backdated to 2017, and for hosting four students each year for 4 weeks at a time we received the windfall sum of £11,052! This for us is a win, win scenario because each year the students have made a significant contribution to our work in one way or another.

The December 2019 team of four students completed two exercises. They firstly compared and contrasted walks with high and not so high walker attendances. From discussions with the walkers they compiled ideas for promoting walks to a wider audience and found that regardless of how big the group was, the walkers found it helpful to have a choice of walk to suit their ability. They also provided us with some useful pointers for promoting the scheme more widely without depending on volunteer time. The second project was to assess the interest in social media amongst the

walkers and to get the ball rolling to set up a social media presence for Step Out Sheffield. Again, they came up with some very helpful ideas. In April 2019 Volunteer Walk Leader, John Brookes drew up a social media strategy specifically for Step Out Sheffield. After the students' report was published John's ideas were developed and refined by Kelly Scargill, Julie Roberts and Sharon Robson culminating in the launch of a Step Out Sheffield Facebook Page in March 2020.

Step Out Sheffield continues to provide meetings for our Volunteers on a quarterly basis, to help them feel valued and to provide networking opportunities and, where appropriate, to bring a friend or partner. In August 2019 43 Leaders enjoyed a walk across the Longshaw estate. In November 2019 39 volunteers enjoyed a choice of training workshops in the Sheffield United Family & Community rooms on John Street, and in February 2020 56 Volunteers, partners and friends enjoyed a pie & pea luncheon at Hillsborough Arena. Volunteer networking events are always held on a Monday afternoon when there are no walks to prevent some Volunteers from attending.

We are very grateful for the continued support of SYPTE whose City Centre walk is now well attended. Over the year they once again provided meeting room space, advice, guidance and access to their design team. They also very kindly supplied further print runs of our programme leaflets and certificates for long-term Volunteers and all walkers and leaders who had attended over 500 walks. We are very grateful for the free provision of these resources and wish our thanks for their generosity to go on record.

We were sorry to have to say goodbye to another of our partners, Drinkwise Agewell in March 2020 when their five-year project came to an end. They leave behind them the legacy of the Crookes Health walk based in Bolehills Park on Monday mornings and several of their Volunteers have chosen to remain with SOS as VWLs, for which we are very grateful.

In January 2020 Ed Nicholas, Short Walk Groups Programme Manager, Ramblers Walking for Health, attended a Q&A session here in Sheffield with Committee members. Ed was invited because Ramblers Walking for Health funding runs out on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and the Committee were concerned for the future of the Walking for Health scheme. Shortly after his visit Mother Nature, in the form of the coronavirus pandemic, took over. As we know, health walks serve a niche market across the country participants are mainly older folk, with many also having underlying health issues. Most Volunteer Walk Leaders fall into either or both of these categories too so even when the government lift the ban on social distancing for most of the population, it is likely that health walkers and their Leaders will be expected to continue to distance themselves socially. In a nutshell, all Ramblers Walking for Health activities were suspended on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and will not resume until it is safe for older people and those with underlying health issues to socialise again and at which time we will resume our discussions with RWfH.

We began our 4<sup>th</sup> year as a volunteer-led organisation in a strong position financially. The Volunteers who administrate the scheme, worked hard to strengthen and build on the established systems for funding and running our scheme. We continue to be a 'flagship organisation' for Ramblers Walking for Health and, at the beginning of March, were set to record our best year ever with 26,953 walk attendances on 1,404 walks and an extremely healthy bank balance.

Sadly 2019/2020 has ended with a question mark over the future. Many, organisations both commercial and voluntary face an uncertain future, thanks to COVID19. The one thing we can be certain of is that there will always be a role for an organisation that provides a combination of gentle exercise and social opportunity for older people and those with underlying health issues. Step Out Sheffield now has an excellent track record and is best placed to meet those needs, so we are steadfastly looking to plan a future when we can encourage and motivate more people to join SOS and take on the challenge of walking their way to a fitter and healthier lifestyle once again.