

Ramblers Wellbeing Walks Report for year ending 31st March 2025

There were two stand-out events in this year's reporting period. Short, accessible walks were first launched in Sheffield in May 1999 when they were known as health walks. In August 2024 Step Out Sheffield (SOS) volunteers celebrated 25 years of service with a walk from Endcliffe Park to the Botanical Gardens where Avril Wragg and Tina Moores, who helped set up the Sheffield health walk scheme, were honoured with engraved glass plaques. Sir Ed Clancy, the South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority (SYMCA) commissioner for active travel presented the awards and Cllr Jayne Dunn, Lord Mayor, gave a presentation acknowledging the vital role played by SOS Volunteers, pointing out that many of them had been volunteering for over 20 years.

The other stand-out event of 2024-2025 was that under the guidance of the current chair, Francis Feeley, SOS applied for and achieved charitable status. On 24th October 2024 SOS became Registered Charity number 1210645. This change of status makes no difference to the day-to-day delivery of our walks or the role of our Volunteer Walk leaders. However, with the passage of time the volunteers who administrate the service will be able, because of our charitable status, to consider engaging part-time support to help with the day-to-day administration of the scheme. For example, a part-time administrator could be engaged to manage the database, produce quarterly stats and draw up the lists of volunteers and walkers who become eligible for awards each year. Alternatively, a part-time person might be engaged to administrate the website and to look after promotional work in general, especially social media. These changes would allow the volunteers who currently spend a great deal of time and energy administrating the walks to become regular volunteers like everyone else. Committee members would continue to be the guiding hand of SOS but without having to commit large amounts of time to administration.

It is now nine years since SOS became a self-managed scheme and five years since the start of the pandemic and an 18-month lay-off for walkers and volunteers alike. Approximately 120 active volunteers continue to deliver 24 walks across the city each week and the number of walk attendances annually remains steady at approximately 18,000. This year both our medical and psychology students discovered that the location of walks (urban setting versus parks) was not as important to walkers as the social value of 'walking and talking' with other group members. SOS volunteers are very aware of the many benefits of social walking on physical and mental health and on wellbeing, but it was a bonus to have this demonstrated scientifically.

As SOS looks towards the future, and hopefully another 25 years of providing short, accessible and social walks, we can reflect on this year as being the one where futureproofing began. Since 2016 a small but very dedicated team of volunteers have not only helped to lead walks on a regular basis but also rolled up their sleeves and got on with the work of administering the scheme. These volunteers should be generously acknowledged for their time, effort and expertise because without them a scheme financed by Sheffield City Council and administrated by two full-time members of staff would have fallen by the wayside in next to no time. These volunteers must take the credit for shaping SOS's current success and for securing its future.

Sue Lee

Volunteer Walk Leader and RWW Step Out Sheffield Coordinator (11.04.25)