

Progress in Practice

Easington PCT and White Lea Farm Health Walks

In Easington, in the North East, the Primary Care Trust, working with the National Trust and Durham County Council, has developed the White Lea Farm Health Walks, which help promote exercise, as well as awareness of the countryside

Summary

The National Trust owns White Lea Farm, in the coastline at Easington Colliery. The Farm Co-ordinator, appointed to develop the farm as a community resource, formed a community involvement group – one of the aims of this group is to provide opportunities for people to improve their health, with walking as a priority.

As part of this they have developed a programme of led walks. Three walking routes were originally identified: 1.5 miles, flat; just over 2 miles, with some steps; and just over 3 miles, with an incline. Local people were involved in the design and risk assessment of the routes. More routes have been developed recently, involving volunteers, and people progress from shorter to longer walks.

There are now nine volunteer walk leaders, who were recruited through local publicity. Volunteers are trained through the Walking the Way to Health Initiative and they provide one led walk each week. Walks run every Monday morning, 12 months of the year, and there are regularly 15 to 20 walkers each week.

Regular themed walks attract new participants. For example in 2003 an Easter Egg Hunt Walk had 120 participants, a Shorts and Shades Walk had 30 participants, a Halloween Health Walk had 32 participants and a Christmas Health Walk had 20 participants.

A separate walking club, led by a volunteer, offers two walks a month of 5 to 6 miles. Walks are now included as one of the activity options in Easington PCT's Exercise Referral Programme.

The scheme made a successful bid to the Walking the Way to Health Initiative in 2003 for funding the development of independent walk packs, volunteer expenses and work on the footpaths.

Volunteers' comments:

"It has given me more confidence to lead walks in the area."

"The walks have improved my knowledge of the local area, especially from a health point of view."

The Director of Public Health comments:

"The benefits of the health walks are varied from continuing to improve people's health, enhancing social networks and the positive environmental impact."

Links and organisations involved: Easington Primary Care Trust (www.easington-pct.nhs.uk) works in partnership with Durham County Council Sustainability Team (www.durham.gov.uk), the National Trust (www.nationaltrust.org.uk) and the Walking the Way to Health Initiative (www.whi.org.uk).

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