

WALK IT. RIDE IT.



Joe's story Burmantofts, Harehills and Richmond Hill (BHR)

Joe is a Walk Leader who works for Touchstone, providing health and wellbeing services to people that live in Richmond Hill, Burmantofts and Harehills. As part of his role he offers a weekly walking group that takes place every Wednesday and Thursday, to help build people's confidence with walking, improve their fitness and create positive social connections.

I've enjoyed walking since I was quite young and I spend a lot of my spare time walking in the countryside and around the city, building up knowledge of nice places to visit, which is constantly developing. I learn something new everytime I go on a walk and it's so nice to help other people do the same on the weekly walk.

It's a free group and people can come along and try it out, meet new people, learn more about the area they live in and enjoy some physical activity. They can enjoy meeting others, walk in nature, have nice conversations and naturally, friendships develop. It's a great way to just get out of the house and do something positive.

There are several members of the group that like walking already but they didn't feel that they had the confidence to go out by themselves.

They had varying concerns such as worrying about getting lost, not knowing where to go, not knowing the area enough or knowledge of any good routes to walk. We provide an opportunity for them to come along to the group where they can gain some confidence with those things and find out about other provisions in their area that they can access. It opens up new opportunities for them at their own pace.

I like to feel that I'm helping people to discover a kind of 'spirit of adventure', to go and find out what's on their doorstep. It's even encouraged people to venture further afield and visit National Trust and English Heritage sites, or areas of outstanding natural beauty, as well as enjoying routes around their own city and local area.

When people start moving their body, they start to actually feel the benefits. Perhaps they might feel a little sore and tired from walking, but their hearts might be full and their head is full of wonder and adventure. Maybe they've learned something new, found out about the history of an area, or they learned about a particular plant, tree, or a bird. It can really change the way in which people live their life. It's the sort of thing that keeps you coming back over and over again.



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We've had a few people come through the 'social prescribing' pathway, which is where they've initially gone to their GP with their concerns, and part of the referral gets directed to a 'Social Prescribing Service' who can then recommend activities and coaching to boost, nurture and improve their overall wellbeing.

If people can take that first step and manage to come along to a walking group, actively engage and join in with it, then almost immediately they've taken one small step towards that change. It can help generate a new, positive habit and then that can then branch out to other areas of their life and offer up new, unexpected and welcomed opportunities for them.

As a Walk Leader I often feel that motivation is the main challenge, making that first step towards positive change is an incredibly difficult thing to do with complexities involved. Through the financial crisis, we have people with challenging living standards, they're stressed and busy and have growing responsibilities with caring. And so, self-care and prioritising your own health and wellbeing is one of the first things to disappear when problems build up. It might be the thing people need the most to help them deal with everything that's going on in their lives, but it's having the time and energy to access it. I try to do everything I can to support the individual.

Every so often, I'll phone round everybody to just check in and say hi. I'll ask how's it going and if there is anything I can help them with to get to group. We've got buddying schemes and their buddy can help guide them to come along to a session. I've also made a few YouTube videos introducing people to the walking group site, just chatting through some FAQs, hoping to dissolve any of those worries or concerns.

I feel that as 'Walk Leader' we play an important role in the community. We can help signpost people to explore a specific service they might benefit from, or encourage them with their journey of self compassion and care. Just by virtue of being out in the fresh air, being out in nature, people open up and start to talk a little more, and it's really quite a privilege to be part of that process. Walking creates a safe space to open up, on the move!

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