

Health Walk Leaders Update

May 2026



THANKS TO YOU ALL!

We have reached an amazing milestone: **20 YEARS!**

It was lovely to spend the morning with lots of you on Thursday the 7 May to show our appreciation, whether you have been volunteering for a just a few months or many years.

From the messages we received after the event, we could tell you appreciated the thanks from not only our team, but also from healthcare professionals, including those from beyond North Somerset, along with other council staff, and more importantly, the walkers themselves.

For those who could not make it we are making sure you receive a gift bag that includes a lovely coaster as a memento that was made by volunteers at the Brandon Trust in Worle.



Health Walker Progress Report

Last year you helped us to encourage as many walkers as possible to complete a questionnaire. With 179 walkers responding, it allowed us to effectively assess the overall impact of health walks on:

- Physical and mental health,
- Long term health conditions,
- Motivations and benefits in attending a health walk.



North Somerset Health Walks

Progress Report 2025

Authors: Abi Thomas and Kira Thorpe



These findings will support us to continue to meet the needs of current and future walkers. Ultimately, the goal is to enable and encourage more individuals, particularly those with greater health needs, to benefit from increased physical activity through walking.

Another key area of the evaluation was to address the potential barriers to participation to improve accessibility.

The **key points** to highlight from the undertaking of this evaluation are that:

- Health Walks are most effective in engaging older individuals between the ages of 65-86 years old to become and stay physically active through walking.
- Health Walks appeal to women more than men.
- The programme continues to meet the needs of the local community with the capacity to reach more communities.
- Social engagement and reducing loneliness through attending the programme is paramount for many walkers.
- The health walks programme provides this ideal opportunity for those who wish to remain physically and socially active into retirement and beyond.
- The health walk model is just one approach to use walking as a tool to encourage more communities to walk more.
- Walker satisfaction is high across many areas.
- A wider offer of walks would be welcomed but is not required to achieve overall walker satisfaction.

To act on the key findings and summary points above Health Walks North Somerset plans to:

- Increase engagement with underrepresented groups particularly those in areas of higher health need with communities shaping their own tailored health walks programme.
- Continued collaborative working with other partners particularly health care professionals to strengthening clinical referral pathways ensuring those who have long term health conditions are encouraged to attend Health Walks.
- Regular recruitment of volunteers to ensure sustainability of all health walk groups across North Somerset with concerted effort in identifying volunteers for weekend/evening walks.
- Continue to monitor, collect and collate qualitative data to demonstrate the number of walkers attending with long term health conditions.
- Continue to offer 30-minute walks to enable those recovering from ill health or an operation and those with restricted mobility to remain physically active and still socially engaged.
- Increase awareness that the Better Health North Somerset website exists with up-to-date health walk information across all programmes in North Somerset.
- To ensure walk leaders are championing the importance of continuing to walk as you age as a tool for preventative health.
- Continue to work collaboratively with a wide range of partners that can support the scheme in achieving all the above.

If you wish to read the full report you can find it via this link: [Health Walk Volunteer Paperwork | Better Health North Somerset](#)

General Update

- We have had two training sessions in February and May with lower numbers in attendance than normal. However every extra volunteer that comes forward supports our scheme to continue to offer high quality, safe walks and more importantly to 'share the load'.

We hope all those that attended will decide they wish to support their local group:

Charlotte, Clare, Ian & Jo – Clevedon

Janet & Jean, Martin & Suzanne – Portishead

Anita & Zoe – Vision North Somerset

Gill, Kate & John - Weston/Worle

- Dawn (Winscombe), Diane (Nailsea) and Marion (Yatton) have all made the decision to step back from their volunteering roles very soon. They have all very much been the backbone of their groups with Dawn managing the registers and co-ordinating the programme for the fortnightly walks in Winscombe for over ten years. Marion has done the same for almost 20 years in Yatton. Diane has been volunteering for 18 years ensuring Nailsea can offer up to four different ability walks every week. An **extra big thanks** to all three of them and I do hope other volunteers will be happy to fill the gap, it does not have to be just one volunteer and we are very much open to doing things slightly differently to suit you so please make contact with Dawn, Diane or Marion; or us if you wish to help.
- **Attendance figures from April 2025 – March 2026**
New walkers joining the scheme: 139.
Total number of health walk attendances (throughput): 12,199

ICE/Next of Kin

Another especially important reminder for all volunteers when talking to your walkers is to ask them if they have their next of kin details close at hand in case of an emergency.

Here is a link to show you how to put ICE in a mobile phone (Android or Apple).: <https://firstaidtrainingcooperative.co.uk/ice-iphone/>

Thanks for all your support with this ongoing important task.

Walk Leader Training



Health Walk Volunteer Training

Thursday 17 September
10am – 1pm
Town Hall, Weston-s-Mare

Volunteer with your local health walk group to lead or assist with walks, help develop new walking routes or provide admin support at walks.

Full training and support is provided.

To book your place, or for more information please email: GetActive@n-somerset.gov.uk or call: 01275 882 730

<https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/get-active/walking/>
<https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/walk-leader-training/>

Logos: Health Walks, Better Health North Somerset, North Somerset Council

Our next training dates for the rest of 2026 for anyone who is interested in becoming a health walk volunteer are on:

Thursday 17 September and Tuesday 8 December 2026

Venue: Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare from 10am-1pm. If you know of anybody who is interested and who would make a great leader, volunteer back marker, middle marker or helper with any of the paperwork then please pass on our details so they can make contact.

Kira.thorpe@n-somerset.gov.uk 07882 474 692

An overview of the training:

- Outline the aim of the Health Walks Scheme in North Somerset.

- Highlight the positive impact exercise can have on health in the widest sense.
- Understand the role of a walk volunteer from completing the paperwork required to making sure safety and enjoyment is a priority on all walks.
- Be clear about the practicalities of running a safe and enjoyable health walk.

Mental Health Lived Experience Workshop

All volunteers are invited to attend this workshop who wish to gain some awareness around mental health. The training will help the understanding of mental distress, being delivered by facilitators with lived experience.

Thursday 16 July 1-4pm

Vision North Somerset, 3 Neva Road, BS23 1YD

[Mental Health and Lived Experience Tickets, Thursday 16 July • 1 PM - 4 PM | Eventbrite](#)

Volunteer Survey

Last year we asked you all to take a little time to complete our volunteer evaluation. We were incredibly pleased that 64 out of 95 of you obliged!

Here are a few of your responses (number in brackets indicate number of responses. Some questions asked you to tick more than one answer and some questions were not answered).

Why do you volunteer?

Having some free time and then wishing to volunteer as a health walk volunteer (37) as well as wishing to help those in your community (34) were the two main reasons for volunteering. 31 of you volunteered after being asked by existing volunteers.

What do you enjoy about volunteering?

Bringing positivity into people's lives (58) whilst supporting and motivating others to get out and exercise more (57) scored highest regarding what you enjoy about being a volunteer.

Getting fresh air and exercise for yourself (48), feeling part of your local community (40) and feeling valued and part of a team (39) also brought enjoyment for many of you.

How does it benefit your health?

Giving you purpose (45), improving your mood (44), and feeling valued by others (38) were the key benefits to your overall health

Volunteer satisfaction

47 volunteers were very satisfied as a volunteer with 16 saying they were fairly satisfied. All of you said you would recommend this volunteering opportunity to others.

Volunteer recognition

95% of you told us that walkers and the scheme strongly recognises and values what you do as volunteers.

Concerns that raised about the future of your walking groups.

- Growing number of walkers but not enough leaders to manage them.
Solution: To hold regular training sessions for new volunteers (3 x year). To run training sessions with smaller numbers (2-3) who need to be trained quickly to take pressure off existing volunteers.
- Restructure / Changes to NSC
Solution: There is no current threat to our team discontinuing to support the scheme, due to its enormous success it is in a strong position if any structural changes were to happen.
- Updates/re-issues of paperwork
Solution: All updated paperwork can be found on our website: <https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/hw-paperwork/>

Some tasks going forward.

- To ensure all volunteers are very satisfied whilst volunteering with the health walks scheme.
- To ensure clarity of all volunteer policy and procedures
- Ensure all resources and support is given when required
- All enquiries are dealt with promptly.
- Access to a wider range of training to support the volunteering role.
- Having a say in the development of the scheme and sharing ideas
- Offering of more training to include first aid, mental health awareness, dementia awareness and group management and dealing with difficult scenarios.

All the above tasks will be discussed at next refresher session in the autumn (TBC).

The website link has several procedures [Health Walk Volunteer Paperwork | Better Health North Somerset](#)

Most recently added: Complaints Procedure / Prevention of sexual harassment by third parties / Volunteer Agreement.

Finally, I am sharing the news that I will be re-locating to Cumbria sometime in the summer/autumn with plans to take early retirement at the end of the year. I plan to totally immerse myself in mountain life and be slightly more active than I am already which might be a challenge!

You will be seeing more of Catherine who will be coming out to see how you all are and what support you need.

I will miss you all as most of you have become friends and not just a health walk volunteer. If you are planning to come to The Lake District you are seriously welcome to come and stay, my mobile number will not be changing so I may hear from one or two of you!

Thank you for all the tremendous support you have given me whilst working for North Somerset.

Kira

Postal address:

A reminder:

Physical Activity Team, 1 West Post and Print, Town Hall, Walliscote Grove Road
Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ

If you would like us to send you some **stamps to cover any postage costs**, please let us know.

Our website where all the walking programmes are accessible to the public:

<https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/healthwalks/>

Access to up-to-date paperwork:

<https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/hw-paperwork/>

Enjoy the summer.

Kira, Catherine and Lucy