

Team Scotland begins in Edinburgh to rally support for the Big Lunch

Team Scotland is just one of the four teams across the UK hitting the road on a 17-day mission to invite as many people as possible to join in The Big Lunch on 1 and 2 June. They will be walking for about four or five hours a day on the way to meeting people around the country who are involved in community projects.

Last year over 6 million people took part in the UK's annual get-together for neighbours. An idea from the Eden Project, made possible by the National Lottery, The Big Lunch is about millions of people getting together to share food and get to know each other better in gardens, streets, communal spaces and parks right across the UK.



Zakia Moulaoui second from right with her walking partner Derek Harper second from left and Monty Roy kneeling in front with supporters of the walk.

Representing Scotland are [Zakia Moulaoui](#), founder of Invisible Cities – a Scottish social enterprise that trains local people

who have experienced homelessness to become walking tour guides of their own cities – and [Derek Harper](#), who has worked as a greenkeeper, an architectural technician, and has even run a pub, but says that volunteering and becoming part of a community has transformed his life.

They were joined for part of their walk in Edinburgh by tour guides who have been trained through Invisible Cities.

Together with the rest of the walk crew, the Scotland team set off from Edinburgh yesterday. They will visit community projects in Shotts, Dunfermline, Dundee, Blairgowrie, Forres, Inverness, Brora, Thurso, Kirkwall, Aberdeen, Fettercairn and Brechin.

Their day in Edinburgh began by visiting Edinburgh Garden Partners, a project that connects up people who have gardens but cannot look after them with people with green fingers who don't have gardens. It has developed from being a gardening project into a befriending project and can help reduce social isolation.

The team then headed to the Edinburgh Royal Community Gardens, run by the Cyrenians charity, which is widely used by patients, their visitors, volunteers and the local community. The garden also offers patient services in the form of therapeutic programmes. Volunteers grow vegetables with the aim of being able to eat something from the garden every week of the year, and once a week they have a big cook-up and share a meal together.

They then paid a visit to some of the projects that have been important to Zakia in her background of working with those who have experienced homelessness. The team visited Social Bite and the office of The Big Issue before stopping in at the Leith Walk Police Box. I caught up with Zakia and Derek there to talk about the walk and the lunch at the beginning of June which Zakia is organising in Montgomery Street Park.

Team Scotland – [@zakmoulaoui](#) and Derek Harper are off around Scotland on the Big Walk rallying support for the [#TheBigLunch](#) We met them at [@Leithpolicebox](#) where they told us about it all pic.twitter.com/qtQvGeflnr

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [May 18, 2019](#)



The police box was bought by Monty Roy in 2012. She lets it out to charities, social enterprises, entrepreneurs – allowing organisations to test the viability of projects without having to invest in premises.

Invisible Cities have used the police box to set up the 'Street Barber Edinburgh' project which offers free haircuts to homeless men and has recently expanded into offering podiatry services too.

Speaking about the box, Monty said: "There are so many different things going on. It's really representative of society. People who have nothing, those living on the streets, foodies, young families, people who have lived in Leith all their life. We're very excited to be part of Zakia's first day on her big adventure."



Team Scotland walkers visited Monty Roy at the Leith Walk Police Box

They finished their day at the Grassmarket Community Project – a charity initially set to support homeless people, but which has since widened to offering support to those with additional support needs. They offer IT skills, walking, yoga, a book group, a choir, a women’s group, science walks, guitar lessons, creative writing, drama, cooking lessons and more.

Jonny Kinross, Chief Executive of the Grassmarket said: “Everyone should be supported to meet their potential no matter what it looks like, everyone should and can contribute to this amazing community. We want people to be putting something back, even when they are their lowest. We’re very happy to be helping to send off Zakia and the team on their journey through Scotland’s communities.”

Zakia Moulaoui, Team Scotland walker said: “A sense of community is probably one of the most important things we can ever have. In a world where everybody is supposedly connected, I think we are maybe a bit less connected in a personal more meaningful way and not heard, so I think empowering communities is the best thing we can do. That’s why I’m so pleased to be starting the walk visiting communities that have been important to me over the years.”

Sandra Brown, Scotland manager for Eden Project Communities said: "People in Scotland are proud of being good neighbours, but we're also aware that recent decades have seen the loss of that community spirit in many ways, and we don't like it! It's no wonder, then, that the idea of The Big Lunch as a way of rekindling those connections in the places where we live, work and play has been so warmly embraced in Scotland over the past year.

"In their different ways, Derek and Zakia have been driving forces behind important positive changes in their own communities, and they know that learning from and sharing with others is the best way to really make a difference."

On the benefits of a 'Big Lunch' Comedian, Presenter and Big Lunch Ambassador Jo Brand says: "Links with community are vital in unsettling times. When the country feels so divided and disconnected, it seems more important than ever to come together and remember the importance of community spirit. It saddens me to think that 1 in 5 of us don't feel we could call on a neighbour if we needed help. It's such a shame that so many people don't even know the people they live closest to. The Big Lunch is the perfect way to address this."

To join in The Big Lunch from the comfort of an armchair, deckchair, rocking chair or swing... get your free pack at thebiglunch.com! EVERYONE'S WELCOME

If you are holding a Big Lunch then please let us know!

