

Health Walks pave way for mental health conversations in Edinburgh

Scottish walking charity shines spotlight on walking and mental wellness

SCOTLAND's walking charity is supporting the Scottish Health Walk Network (SHWN) to raise awareness of mental health and encourage open conversations during Mental Health Awareness Week.

Paths for All has been working closely with a group of SHWN members to design and deliver a mental health campaign.

The campaign will offer the network a range of useful tools and resources to acknowledge, celebrate and enable discussions around mental health during Health Walks in the Edinburgh area.

It is hoped that the campaign will inspire longer-term conversations beyond Mental Health Awareness Week to reduce stigma, and promote safe, welcoming and accessible opportunities to move more for wellbeing.

Kevin Lafferty, CEO of Paths for All, said: "Walking has numerous benefits for both physical and mental health, and these walks provide a supportive environment for open and honest conversations about mental wellbeing."

"By equipping the network with resources and tools, we hope to encourage more discussions around mental health and further raise awareness of this important issue.

“With Mental Health Awareness week also happening during the National Walking Month of May, it’s relevant more than ever to encourage Scots to get out walking.”

The campaign is part of Paths for All’s ongoing collaboration with Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH) on raising awareness and engagement of SHWN members with the Scottish Mental Health Charter. The Charter aims to change attitudes around mental health and encourage more organizations to promote mental wellbeing.

For the Scottish Health Walk Network, the Charter will support members to design and deliver Health Walks which are even more inclusive of those living with mental health problems.

Robert Nesbitt, Head of Physical Activity and Sport at SAMH said: “We are proud to work collaboratively with Paths for All to reduce barriers to walking for people and communities.

“Recognising the power of walking, together we are creating accessible tools and resources with the Scottish Health Walk Network, so they can continue to play their part in supporting the physical, mental and social health of the people of Scotland.”

The Scottish Health Walk Network is a membership network designed by Paths for All, accrediting and supporting Health Walk provider throughout Scotland. It brings together over 400 organisations with the common goal of creating supportive environments to offer safe, welcoming, accessible walks that meet best practice standards.

Elaine McWilliams is a Group Development Worker at Stepping Stones, a mental health charity supporting people across the West Dunbartonshire area and has been part of the co-working groups supporting Paths for All in developing the campaign.

Elaine said: “We get over 800 referrals every year and currently have 600 active cases and we understand that one

size does not fit all when it comes to providing support.

“Walking groups have been part of our services for over 10 years and we have seen it play a massive role in allowing people to be part of a social group and connect with others, allowing people to build confidence.

“This campaign is extremely important to help Health Walk organisers to understand how they can help and start open conversations about mental health and wellbeing up and down the country.”

Paths for All’s mission is to create opportunities for everyone in Scotland to stay active through walking, wheeling, scooting or cycling, contributing to a happier, healthier, and greener Scotland.

For more information about Paths for All’s work with the Scottish Health Walk Network and the Scottish Mental Health Charter, visit: www.pathsforall.org.uk

