

## About Walking for Health

Walking for Health is England’s short group walks programme operated by local walking schemes. Walks must be regular, short, graded, free, and led by a trained walk leader. Local walking schemes are independently managed and funded in different ways, but have to meet national criteria. The Ramblers manages the national programme.

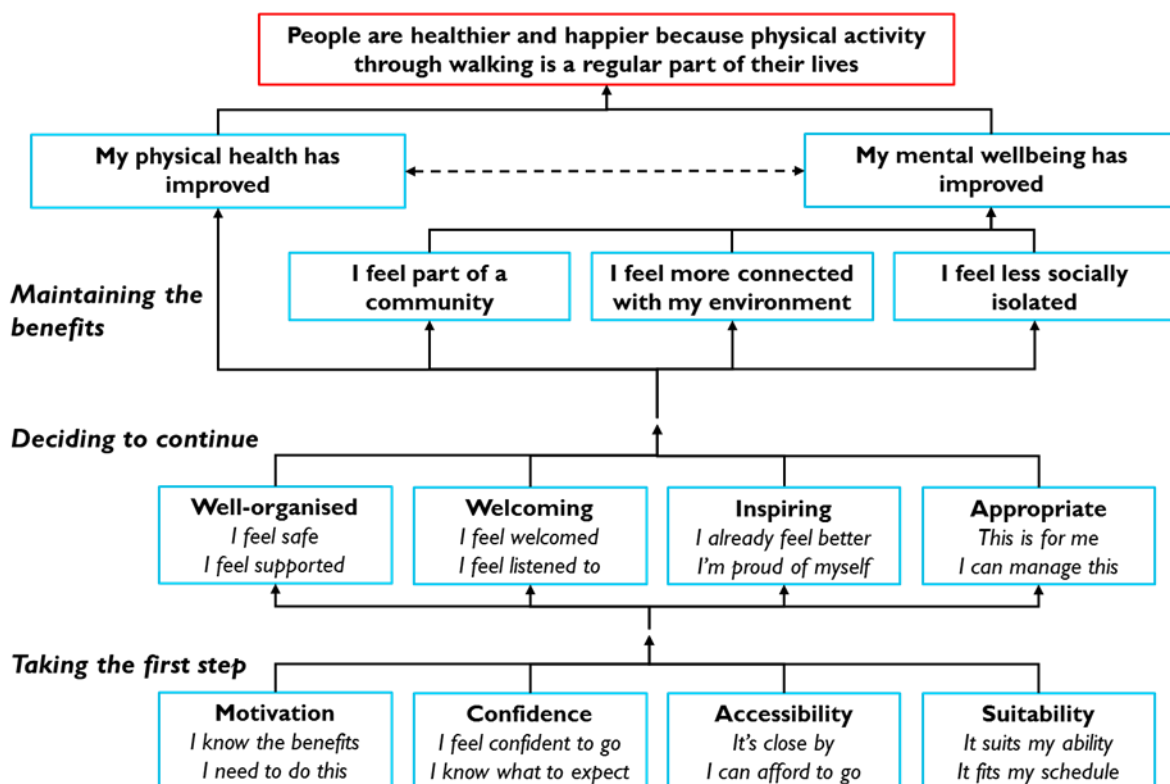
## What is a theory of change?

A theory of change helps to understand the changes (or outcomes) that are required for a programme, service or organisation to achieve its anticipated goals, and how they happen. It seeks to challenge a programme on whether the changes required to deliver on its goal are sufficient and likely to happen. In identifying the required changes *first*, a programme can develop a much clearer understanding of the activities it needs to deliver and where its priorities should lie.

## Two theories of change

The theory of change is divided into two distinct parts. The first reflects local activity and the experience of the participant. The second describes the outcomes delivered by the Ramblers to support the local activity.

## The Participant theory of change



Key: Goal Outcomes

The Participant theory of change describes the goal and outcomes expected for participants, as a result of their involvement in the walks.

### **Goal**

The major societal challenge that the programme seeks to address is inactivity. Inactivity may be addressed through many different routes, but walking is the focus of this intervention because it has been recognised as being particularly appropriate for enabling inactive people to become and stay more active: it is cheap to participate, low impact, can be done just about anywhere, and requires no specialist skills or equipment.

### **Outcomes**

**Taking the first step:** Turning up to a first walk can be a big step for some people:

- People need to be sufficiently motivated to come to their first walk which, for some, may be their first experience of physical activity in a long while
- People need the self-confidence to turn up to their first walk
- People need to feel that the walk will be accessible
- People need to feel that the walk will be suitable for their ability and availability

**Deciding to continue:** Once someone has attended their first walk, it's important that the experience is one which encourages and motivates them to continue to attend in order to maximise the chances of generating the longer term outcomes:

- A walk needs to be well-organised, to ensure that people feel sufficiently safe and well-supported to be confident of returning
- Participants need to feel welcomed
- Participants need to be inspired by the experience
- A walk needs to be appropriate, in that it should not put an individual in a position where they feel unsafe or over-stressed

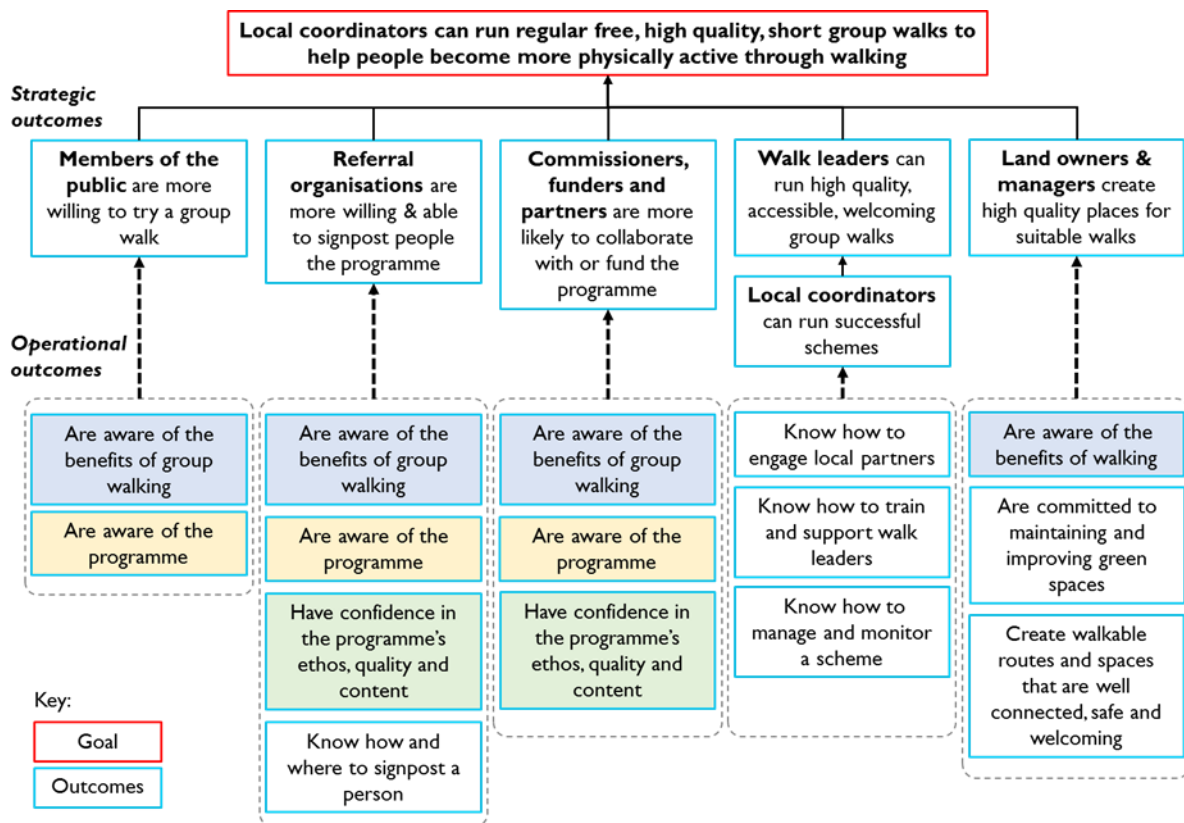
If these outcomes are achieved, then there is a strong expectation that an individual will come back again after their first experience, and over time change their behaviour to make walking a part of their everyday life, opening up opportunities for greater long term health and wellbeing benefits.

**Maintaining the benefits:** The programme should expect to generate the following longer term outcomes for participants:

- Participants will improve their physical health by walking regularly
- Participants will improve their mental wellbeing through a number of associated outcomes:
  - Participants improve their physical health
  - Participants feel part of a community
  - Participants feel more connected with the environment
  - Participants feel less socially isolated

With the delivery of these longer term outcomes, short free group walks are helping to ensure that people are healthier and happier, because physical activity, through walking, is a regular part of their lives.

## The National Programme theory of change



The National Programme theory of change describes the goal and outcomes expected among a range of stakeholders whom the national programme can influence in order to support and enable local walks and schemes achieve the participant goal.

### Goal

The national programme goal has added a more practical aspiration to the Participant theory of change, reflecting the national programme's role of enabling and supporting local coordinators and walk leaders to deliver the anticipated long term benefits to participating walkers.

### Outcomes

**Members of the public:** In order to increase the number and range of people participating in the walks, population-level change is required to raise awareness of the programme and walking to ensure that more people are willing to try a walk:

- The public will be more aware of walking as a health-promoting physical activity; and recognise the wider benefits of group walking
- The public will be more aware of local health walks

**Referral organisations:** Ensuring that other organisations are more willing and able to signpost people to the programme should help both with the diversity and the number of people who take part:

- Organisations are more aware of the benefits of group walking, like with the public, but messaging may need to be couched in more detailed terms

- Organisations are more aware of the programme and what it offers, supplementing the work at local level by raising the profile of the programme with relevant national bodies
- Organisations have sufficient confidence in the programme's ethos, quality and content to allow them to give appropriate advice to people looking to address their inactivity
- From a practical perspective, organisations know how and where to signpost a person to a walk delivered by the programme

**Commissioners, funders and other partners:** Wider collaboration, commissioning and funding are critical to the programme's ability to deliver on its intended outcomes and goals. Such partners must be:

- Aware of the benefits of group walking
- Aware of the programme and what it offers
- Confident in the programme's ethos, quality and content to allow them to invest, signpost or support delivery

**Local coordinators:** It is crucial that local coordinators are able to coordinate local activity successfully, including ensuring that walk leaders can run high quality, accessible, welcoming group walks. To achieve this, coordinators need to be able to:

- Engage local partners to encourage signposting/referral to walks; raise awareness of the programme and specific local walks; and exploit local funding opportunities
- Train and support walk leaders to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to lead on delivering the Participant theory of change
- Manage and monitor local activity in an efficient and cost-effective manner

**Land owners and managers:** The quality of the walking environment is important for walks to generate some of the wider wellbeing outcomes, and to encourage walkers to participate. There is, therefore, a potential role for the programme in encouraging land owners and managers (including local authorities, highways agencies and others) to create high quality places for short, accessible group walks by ensuring that:

- They are aware of the benefits of regular walking and the part they can play in encouraging it
- They create or enable walkable routes and spaces that are well connected, safe and welcoming
- They are committed to maintaining and improving urban green space

*The review took place in July and August 2017 run on behalf of the Ramblers by Cloud Chamber*

[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)

<http://www.cloud-chamber.co.uk>