

## **Monthly Community Walks – Monthly Successes**

**Fiona Collins, Marina Norris, Jan Bain, Jenny McDonnell**

### ***Abstract***

Monthly Community Walks were launched in Bunbury, Western Australia on World Diabetes Day in November 1998. Collaborating bodies are Bunbury Primary Health Services, the National Heart Foundation, community volunteers, Diabetes Sub-branch and other agencies. Between 30 to 70 participants attend each walk. The presentation will outline the key factors that have helped to make monthly walks a success in Bunbury.

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***Fiona Collins***

B App Sc., Grad Dip Diet, MDAA

The presenting author is employed as a Community Dietitian at Bunbury Primary Health Services. The Service provides a range of programs from health promotion to treatment and assessment and care, in line with the Ottawa Charter for health. The author has been involved in the service delivery team to coordinate community walks.

***Marina Norris***

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Physical Activity Coordinator with the National Heart Foundation of Australia (WA Division). Previously with the Bunbury Primary Health Service, Community Health Centre, collaborating with the health service on a number of physical activity and healthy lifestyle programs, has now moved to the Perth office of the National Heart Foundation.

***Jan Bain***

Dip Physiotherapy

Jan works as the Community Physiotherapist for Bunbury Primary Health Services. She is very involved in Seniors Health programs including coordinating a number of Over 50's exercises classes whose members regularly attend the monthly community walks.

***Jenny McDonnell***

RN

A Diabetes Educator who coordinates and provides services for people with diabetes in the Greater Bunbury Area. To complement this Jenny is involved with a number of primary prevention activities to encourage people to maintain a healthy lifestyle and reduce their risk of chronic disease including playing an instrumental role in the development of the monthly community walks.

## **Monthly Community Walks – Monthly Successes**

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### ***Introduction***

Monthly Community Walks were launched in Bunbury, Western Australia on World Diabetes Day in November 1998. Collaborating bodies are the National Heart Foundation, Bunbury Primary Health Services, volunteers, Diabetes Sub-branch and other agencies. Walks are run twice a month, with between 30 to 70 participants attending. Over 270 individuals have participated in the walks.

The region serviced by Bunbury Primary Health Services is Greater Bunbury with a population of 53,894 located in 4 shires. The population density is mainly confined to the City of Bunbury and adjacent towns of Australind and Eaton. ie. Bunbury 28,000; Dardanup/Eaton 9,380; Australind 9,431; & Capel/Boyanup 7,083.

### ***The goal, objectives and target population of the Monthly Community Walks***

The goal of the walks is:

*To encourage Bunbury, Dardanup Shire and Australind community members to attend a monthly health theme walk and to participate in a social activity following the walk.*

The objectives of the program are:

- 20% of currently registered walkers to attend each monthly walk.
- 10% of walkers attending each monthly community walk to be new registrations.
- 30% of walkers to be aware of at least three themes for monthly walks held during the year.
- For monthly community walks to be financially sustainable, through sponsorship and donations for morning tea.
- Walks to be sustainable on an ongoing basis through involvement of one health professional and two community volunteers (where possible at least one volunteer will be an exercise leader).

The target group for the community walks are:

- Community members, families, people at risk of lifestyle disease ie. Heart disease, diabetes etc.
- People who need the support of a group to participant in physical activity.
- People who need to improve their level of fitness.

### ***Walk Design***

Walks are based on a number of Ottawa Charter principles. Collaboration through community involvement is demonstrated by two volunteers and at least one health professional (physiotherapist, dietitian, diabetes nurse, Heart Foundation officer or registered nurse) coordinating each walk. Planning meetings are held prior to the

commencement of the new year with all volunteer walk leaders and health professionals setting the calendar dates and themes. Volunteers and health professionals allocate which walks they will organise. A meeting is scheduled midyear with volunteers and professionals to monitor the progress of walks and discuss new items.

A laminated calendar with walk date and theme is produced and posted to all people on the walks database. This system has the additional benefit of reducing postage cost by mailing information at the beginning of the year as a once off. Fliers advertising the following months walk are made available for people to collect at each walk.

A supportive environment has been achieved by holding walks regularly plus increasing the access of walks to people residing in Australind. Walkers meet at a Community Centre in either Bunbury and Australind to register, warm-up and then set-off for a 40 minute walk which is self paced. Volunteers and health professionals (identified by T-shirts and badges) are distributed at the beginning middle and end of the walkers and a mobile phone is carried in case of need. Walks are scheduled throughout the year on the second Saturday (Bunbury) and the fourth Sunday (Australind) of each month.

Walkers are welcome to stay for a healthy morning tea, short presentation or display on the month's health topic, following each walk. As appropriate, other agencies are invited to be involved to promote the health issue eg Arthritis Foundation invited to promote Arthritis week. These short presentations and displays are a forum for individuals to develop personal skills and knowledge on various health topics.

In addition, walk leaders involved in planning and running monthly walks can gain or expand on their organisational skills. The majority of walk leaders have been part of a peer exercise leaders training program providing knowledge and practical skills to conduct the group warm-up stretches before setting off for walks.

With new volunteers and staff nominating to be involved in the monthly walks a 'Monthly community walks' information package was developed. Background information is provided along with the program goal, objectives and strategies. Plus the finer details required to organise walks i.e. frequency, venue, morning tea menu, route, time table, role of volunteers, what to do in inclement weather, a contact list for health professional's and volunteers involved plus a sample advertising flier. Positive feedback has been received on the ease of use of the package.

### ***Promotion of walks***

A range of advertising assists in attracting new participants. Mediums include a monthly calendar (in two local newspapers and mailed out), community service announcements (radio and newspaper), media releases, Website (National Heart Foundation), Bunbury Beyond 2000 advertising, individual contact by mail (via various inhouse newsletters such as Heartsmart – distributed to participants of a cardiovascular group) and staff promoting walks at various groups (eg Weight management program, Diabetes programs, Joint and muscle group etc).

### ***Funding of walks***

Walks are funded by participants' voluntary donations to cover morning tea costs. More recently the subbranch of Diabetes Australia, WA Bunbury branch donated \$500 to the

program. Some of this money has been used in specific promotion and to cover venue hire cost in Australind.

### ***Record keeping***

A database has been set up to keep a record of who attends. Participants are marked off from the database and new participant details are taken. Details included: name, address and phone number which are updated after each walk (information is accessible on a common database that all staff can access and update following each walk). Laminated calendars are sent to these people as well as any information up-dates throughout the year.

In addition, a budget database records the cost of food, advertising, venue hire and donations.

A contact list of all volunteers is made available to those assisting with the walks. The list has been useful if volunteers need to arrange a replacement person. A health professional database offers the same service.

Process, impact and outcome evaluation measures assist in determining if the goal, objectives and strategies of the monthly community walks are being met.

### ***Conclusion***

The success of the monthly community walks can be shown by:

- regular attendance (even during inclement weather)
- community demand to run a walk in Australind
- social element of morning tea
- fun walk themes
- monthly is an acceptable commitment for people
- satisfaction with this format of walking in a group

In addition, in this success has been achieved through the involvement of volunteers at all levels of planning and implementation. Drawing from a wide pool of health professionals to coordinate walks. Walks being held in a supportive environment and at a time suitable to participants. Utilising the monthly walks as an adjunct for other programs to refer into providing continued support for past clients to maintain healthy lifestyle changes not only in physical activity, but on a range of health issues and benefit from the social support generated by walking as a group.

### ***Acknowledgment***

Without the dedicated support of the following people and organisation the monthly community walks would not be the success that they are. Community volunteers (Glenys Host, Steve & Sue Pager, Ros Davies, Von Evans, Raelene Turner, Jeanette and Jerry McSkimmings, Shelley Paterson, Marie and Ron Burton, Neil Ward, Marjorie Mudeford, Norma McGough, Lesley Claughton, Beryl Barnes, Janet Hadland, Edie May, Pat Malatesta, Cathrine McCormick, Vi Wright, Edith Hamblin, Jocey Fishwick, Gwen Burgoyne), Diabetes Australia, Western Australia Bunbury Subbranch and the Riverlinks Community Centre committee.

