

A short report on the first summer of Walk and Talk Psychology in the Real World June-Sept 2007

From the original flyer for walk and talk: Might you be interested in...

a regular walk along a stunning stretch of the river Severn opportunities to 'think out of the box' with like-minded people meeting other people interested in psychology (in the broadest sense of the word) and the countryside a chance to talk with a local psychologist

What it involves...

11.00 -12.30 a weekly walk from Shrewsbury town centre along the Severn Way.

12.30 – Option of a drink or lunch in a local pub Organised by Guy Holmes, Clinical Psychologist and Anna Hughes, Service User Consultant

Guiding proverb....Shared joy is double joy, Shared sorrow is half sorrow

Photos taken on the walks: by Nicki Evans



Evidence

US Surgeon General's Report on Physical Health (1996): Physical activity may protect against the development of depression

Priest (2007) Research indicates there are beneficial effects of (i) walking (ii) being in the countryside (iii) spending time in a safe, supportive group

Chief Medical Officer (2004): Physical activity is as effective as psychotherapy and medication re depression

Wells (2007): Dogs are good for our physical and mental health

Hairon (2006): 93% of GPs have prescribed anti-depressants because of a lack of alternatives

Total number of different people who came in summer 2007: 51

Average number of people each week: 10

Some feedback from participants -

"I am so used to writing letters lately complaining about a system that I think has been unfair to me, I barely know how to write a compliment. The Walk and Talk was something that kept me sane over a long 6 week summer holiday that can get very lonely. Even walking in torrential rain was fantastic! I would have sat at home depressed if not for the walk. The similar route each week was very different because of the things I saw and the different people I met. My psychotic mind connected everything personal to me and helped me bury old past memories.....freaky eh?"

"Having read the title Walk and Talk I am still surprised that curiosity led me to find out more. As a child my parents recall that I had a reluctance to do either and as an adult I never acquired the love of walking for pleasure, it was just a means of getting from A to B. I checked out the website, slide show and poster.

The appeal – the informality and accessibility. The suggestion simply to turn up with an open mind and sensible shoes. Happily what was not required – referrals, assessments, waiting lists and notes – appealed to me more. Armed with a promise to myself to do something different I turned up at the bottom of Frankwell Bridge steps.

The experience – a time to be alone, to stop, briefly reconnect and to feel. To escape. A chance to take a risk and find courage. To listen. To be heard. I have been told that I need to help myself and take responsibility; this was one of the few times I was shown how. That the process of change is as important as the outcome. Ultimately an experience of, not so much 'walk in my shoes' as 'walk by my side'.

In the era of targets, specialist services, tight budgets and health and safety it makes a refreshing change for someone to take a simple idea...and walk with it."

Walk and Talk group

I'm early today so I sit writing Will anyone show?
I know they will But I get anxious anyhow
Walking has proved good for me
Talking has helped me grow
It's so difficult to get out
I've been shut away for a long time
That's what I do
I have been shown there actually is a world out there
Maybe there's no need to be scared
It leads to opportunities I did not expect
I just need to take that step
I always freak out at a good opportunity
Whilst walking along the Severn I find
Something I look forward to
The next thing is just round the corner
Whilst this group ends There'll always be something waiting
Something else I look to Something to be involved in
That something that gives meaning

Nicki Evans

Happiness at no extra cost

A simple thing
To walk with nature
To chat freely without worry and constraints
Come rain or shine people always show
A change of scenery no matter how small
Does wonders for the mood
It's a change from the concrete I'm so fed up of walking on
Makes me far happier than spending money
on things I don't need
A bad habit that brings me nothing
I walk everywhere now
The more walking I do I feel I am achieving
I find it hard to get out
I'm not the best when it comes to people
But I find the more I put myself in that situation
I find I'm not the only one thinking like I do
It's nice to know I'm not alone
It's the little things
And it proves the unexpected the happy little moments
Cannot be paid for on my credit card

Nicki Evans



Feedback from organisers: Guy

“We tend to spend a lot of time ‘in our own heads’. One of my aims for Walk & Talk was to give people opportunities to connect with the world outside their heads – the beautiful local countryside, nature and other people. Being on the walks enabled me to discuss this concept and encourage people to do this in the ‘here and now’ – a very different thing from discussing it in the clinic. It also enabled me to be available to a much greater number of people and wider cross-section of people than is usually the case. Conversations often overlapped with the types of conversation I have in the clinic... ‘Why am I like this?’ ‘What might help?’ It also enabled me to let people know what local services are really like and answer questions such as: ‘Why are there long waiting lists for therapy?’ ‘What are psychiatric diagnoses?’ ‘What happens in case conferences?’ ‘What is CBT?’

As in other Psychology in the Real World ventures, as I listened to interesting conversations between people on the walk and in the pub, I was reminded that non-professional people are frequently brilliant psychologists and healers. I also got to witness the healing power of animals: when one person became very distressed and disturbed during the walk I tried everything I know to calm and settle her, without much success. Then a beautiful horse came up and nuzzled her. She completely changed, started to smile and stroke the horse, calming and getting relief from her distressing ‘symptoms’. I’ll never forget that.”

Feedback from organisers: Anna

“It’s been very enjoyable – it’s an interest, and has been a fantastic opportunity to get out of the house and be in the countryside with people in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

As a facilitator I’ve been given recognition and respect...local people, professionals and service users have said “Are you the Anna Hughes from the Walk and Talk”...it’s given me a lot of confidence and raised my self esteem”



Some Relevant References

Dept of Health (2004) *Physical activity: health improvement and prevention.*

Holmes, G. & Gahan, L. (2007) *The Psychology in the Real World - Understanding Yourself and Others Course: An attempt to have an impact on stigma and social inclusion.* Groupwork: An International Journal.

MIND (2007) *Ecotherapy: The green agenda for mental health.*

Priest, P. (2007) *The Healing Balm Effect: Using a walking group to feel better.* Journal of Health Psychology.

Richardson et al (2005) *Integrating physical health into mental health services for persons with serious mental illness*. Psychiatric Services.

Wells, D. (2007) *Domestic Dogs and Human Health: An overview*. British Journal of Health Psychology.