

#WalkCreate:

UNDERSTANDING
WALKING AND CREATIVITY
DURING COVID-19

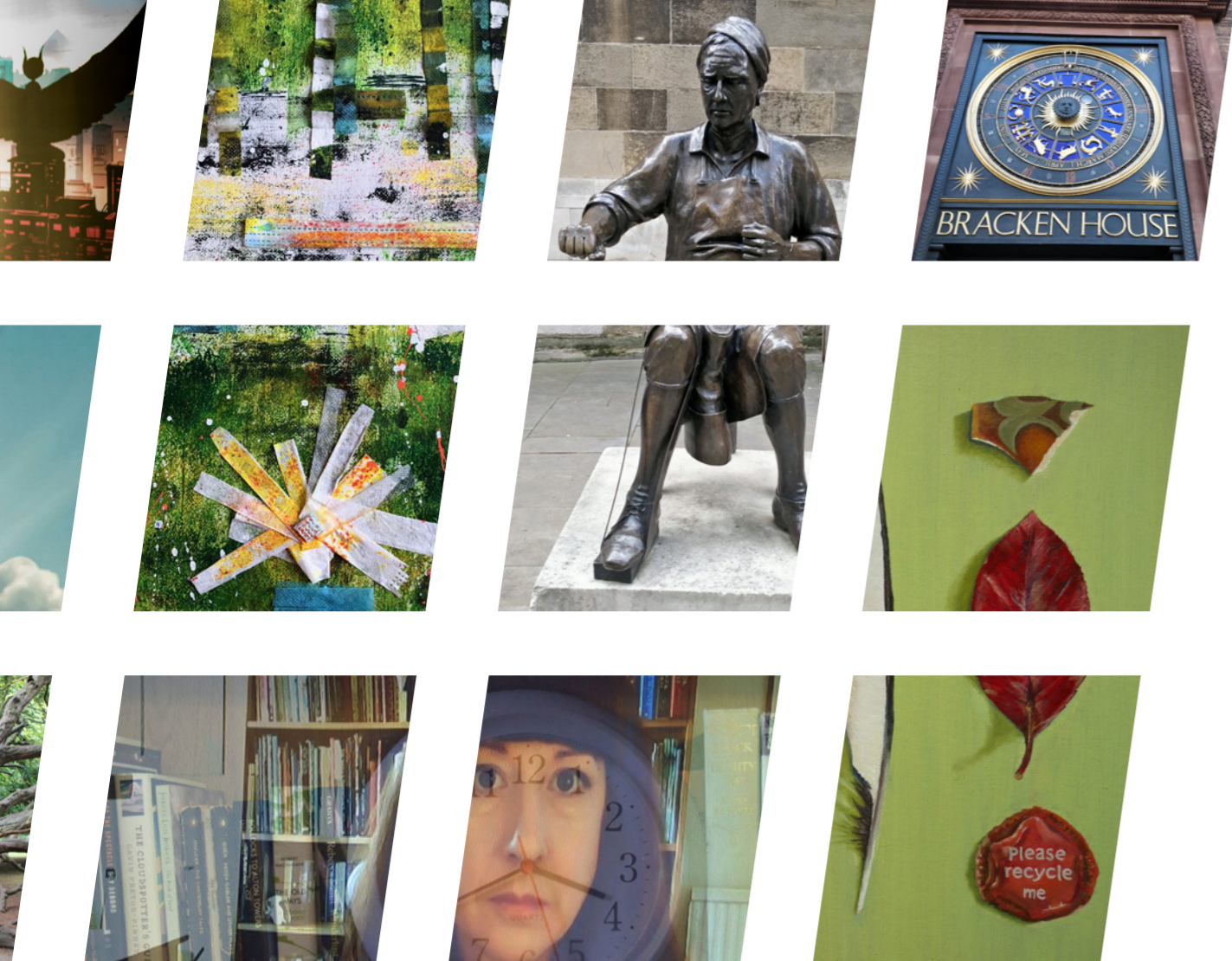
Walking Publics/Walking Arts
Public Report, May 2022

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FRONT COVER: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Clare Qualmann, *Perambulator* – Image credit: Katie Wilson
 Emmie Alderson, *#everydaypilgrimage*
 Claire Hind, *To the Rocks* – Image credit: Amalie Iona
 Sara Shaarawi and Catrin Evans, *Niqabi Ninja* – Image credit: Tiu Makkonen
 Olivia Furber and Ramzi Maqdisi, *The Land's Heart is Greater than its Map* –
 Image credit: Hadeel Sameera
The Monkey Tree. Image credit: Liyanah Riyaz
 Outshift: Rachel Henson and Neil Manuell, *Flickers*
 Phil Smith working with Helen Billingham as Crab and Bee, *Coxside Smoke Signal (final action)* –
 Image credit: Take a Part
 Genevieve Rudd in partnership with originalprojects, *Yarmouth Spring Eternal* –
 Image credit: Becky Demmen/Supporting Your Art

INSIDE COVER: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Sheila MacNeill, *Masking the Canal*
 Alma Boyes, *The Cordwainer* (2004) – Image credit: Clare Qualmann
 Phillip Bentham and Frank Dobson, *Astronomical Clock* (on Bracken House, London, 1959) –
 Image credit: Clare Qualmann
 Marsha Burke, *Finders Keepers*
 Kate Morton, *Dreaming of an Endless Landscape*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shares some of the findings from the research project, *Walking Publics / Walking Arts: Walking, Wellbeing and Community during COVID-19*.

The research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and was led by Principal Investigator Dee Heddon (University of Glasgow), in collaboration with Co-Investigators Maggie O'Neill (University College Cork), Clare Qualmann (University of East London), Morag Rose (University of Liverpool) and Research Associate Harry Wilson (University of Glasgow) with Project Assistant Eleanor Capaldi (University of Glasgow). The team worked in partnership with a range of walking and cultural organisations. The project aimed to understand the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic changed how, why, where and when people walked, and whether they engaged in any creative activities while they walked. It also explored how artists used walking in their creative practice.

One of the research methods this project used was a public survey, which is the main focus of this report. 1221 people completed our questionnaire and our findings support and supplement existing research on the value of walking for health and wellbeing. We also asked about creative walking; by 'creative walking' we mean:

Activities that people or groups may undertake whilst walking, which have some kind of imaginative, playful or task-based framework. This could include, for example, looking for rainbow posters or red cars, drawing shapes to follow on maps or hunting for treasure using digital apps, or taking photographs to share online. It also includes creative interventions, made by others, that you may encounter on a walk (eg chalk messages, art trails, fairy trails, knitted decorations or similar).

Through our research we discovered a range of examples of people using imaginative, task-based and artistic methods to encourage and enhance their experiences of walking throughout the pandemic, and the wider positive impact this delivered.

Our findings demonstrate that:

- Lockdown restrictions were the catalyst for some people to explore their local environment in new and creative ways, which they felt were very positive.
- Simple interventions, such as pebble trails or window posters, helped create a sense of community and mitigated against isolation.
- Many people found walking a useful tool for their mental health and wellbeing, and this effect was enhanced through the use of creative methods alongside walking.
- Daily walking helped establish a beneficial routine when working from home and / or feeling overwhelmed by the impact of COVID-19.
- Nature, green space and encounters with wildlife, such as listening to birdsong, provided solace and inspiration; local parks played a vital role in communities.
- Some families found that walking together created a safe space for conversation with their children, and that creative activities encouraged children to walk.
- Photography, and sharing walks online, helped individuals make sense of what was happening and strengthened connections with people they could not be with physically.
- There are many pre-existing barriers to walking, including material factors (eg poor pavements, lack of public toilets), cultural factors (eg harassment and safety fears) and personal circumstances (eg lack of time or opportunity).
- These barriers were magnified during the pandemic but were often experienced differently depending on personal experiences. For example, many people chose to avoid busy locations and reported concerns around social distancing and sharing space, whereas, for others, quieter streets often felt more intimidating and unsafe. For both groups the perceived threat limited their movement.

Our research foregrounds just how important walking was to many people during the pandemic – some even described it as lifesaving. What we also reveal here

are the additional benefits that creative walking can have for individuals, families and communities, further enhancing health and wellbeing through stimulating the imagination, motivating behaviour, and enacting ways to connect safely across physical distances. Our research demonstrates that creative walking can be a powerful tool for good, helping to encourage more people to walk.

We hope that this report provides readers with an understanding of the practices and benefits of creative walking and inspires them to embrace it as part of their toolkit for wider engagement. This report is aimed at:

- cultural organisations that want to explore how walking can be used as a tool to sustain and expand their work
- walking groups looking for new ways to connect and develop their work
- health organisations who want to promote walking for wellbeing
- statutory bodies who want to understand the importance of pedestrian infrastructure and support for the arts
- community groups interested in how walking and creativity can be good for their members
- researchers looking for evidence into the impact of walking and creative interventions
- artists seeking to think about wider benefits of walking art practices
- policy makers seeking evidence on the impact of the pandemic in relation to health and wellbeing, exercise and isolation, and how to better support people in similar future crises
- anyone with an interest into the potential of walking and creativity to support individuals and communities during a pandemic and beyond.

Walking is an activity that is always deeply embedded in place. Our research also indicates that to enable sustainable and more equitable walking practices beyond the pandemic there is a continued need to provide improved pedestrian infrastructure and more opportunities for everyone who wants to engage in walking. In this, we support the aims of many of our partner organisations and we provide links to their work throughout this report. Our research is part of a wider, and growing, movement enabling more people to walk more, and walk well, into the future.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to #WalkCreate: Understanding Walking and Creativity during COVID-19. This report shares some results from our research into how the pandemic changed the way many people walked. The **aim** of our project was to explore **the potential of the arts to sustain, encourage and more equitably support walking during, and recovering from, the pandemic.** This report demonstrates how creative walking can contribute positively to the experience of, and engagement with, walking, hopefully encouraging more people to walk.

Our definition of walking is inclusive of all kinds of bodies and includes wheelchairs, mobility scooters, walking aids or other technologies to help Disabled people and anyone with mobility issues to move around.

Our research project was divided into two broad strands:

1) WALKING PUBLICS

There is a wealth of evidence that walking and the arts can both play a role in sustaining and improving physical health and mental wellbeing.^{1,2,3}

Recent surveys indicate that people across the UK walked more during COVID-19 (see, for example, UK Government research).^{4,5} There is also evidence that many aspire to walk more after the pandemic.⁶ However, there is some evidence that complicates the picture, suggesting that the increase in walking was more pronounced in the first three months of the pandemic.⁷

Our research aimed to help us understand in more depth how people experienced and felt about walking during the pandemic. We also wanted to know about the creative walking activities that people have created or encountered, ranging from stone trails and window decorations, to chalked pavements or games of I-Spy, and the impact of these on the experience of walking.

2) WALKING ARTS

Our research project also aimed to understand how artists from across the UK used walking as part of their artistic practice, adapting existing work or using walking as a resource for the first time during COVID-19. We wanted to identify artists' expertise and share it more widely to support more people, and in particular marginalised people who may feel excluded from walking for pleasure, to enjoy walking.



Emmie Alderson, #everydaypilgrimage

This report is focused on strand one, Walking Publics, and specifically on a public survey which we conducted. It also includes insights from a small number of in-depth walking interviews we undertook with a range of publics. You can find more information about our work with artists at <https://walkcreate.org/walking-arts/>. This includes our digital gallery of artists' walking work and information about a series of specially commissioned new walking art works. We have also collaborated with artists across the UK to develop a free online resource, *The Walkbook: Recipes for walking & wellbeing*. This offers creative responses to the challenges people have experienced in participating in walking during COVID-19 and hopefully inspires people to continue, or begin, to walk beyond it.

Bridging walking and arts

Organisations drawn from across walking and culture supported us in this research endeavour. We hope that our research helps people understand how creative walking activities have been and could be used to mitigate isolation and anxiety, maintain health and wellbeing, enhance social connectivity, and facilitate cultural participation and empowerment. We believe creative walking can be a very valuable resource for both walking and cultural organisations, helping them support and engage more people.

Who we are

Walking Publics / Walking Arts was led by Professor Dee Heddon at the University of Glasgow in collaboration with Professor Maggie O'Neill (University College Cork), Clare Qualmann (University of East London), Dr Morag Rose (University of Liverpool), Dr Harry Wilson (University of Glasgow) and Eleanor Capaldi (University of Glasgow). The team also included Carole Wright (Project Advisor), Matthew Law (Data Analyst), Mati Marek (Project Placement) and Claire Hind (Project Associate). We are all passionate about walking and many of us are also artists who use walking as part of our creative practice.

Our partners were Arts Canteen, Glasgow Life, Living Streets, MOLA, Paths for All and Ramblers Scotland, and our associate partners were Open Clasp Theatre Company and Sheffield Environmental Movement. Thank you to them all for sharing their expertise with us.

This work was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of its COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The project was funded for an 18-month period (January 2021 to June 2022) and the survey was open between 27th April 2021 and 21st May 2021. This report provides a snapshot of walking in the UK, from the first lockdown in March 2020, to the date the survey closed. We have aimed to represent the diversity of perspectives captured in the survey, but in a report of this size the insights we offer are inevitably partial. We hope that, by making the data available for others to access, different routes may be mapped out in the future. We also acknowledge that the pandemic is not over at the time of writing (Spring 2022) and we cannot know what will happen next. Further, we recognise that there was not one overarching pandemic experience. Individuals and communities all have their own pandemic stories. Within the UK, lockdown regulations were often different across nations and sometimes also regions. Rules also fluctuated over time and these changes were reflected in behaviour, for example the number of people who could walk together and the distance or reasons people were permitted to travel to take a walk.

The impact of the pandemic has been devastating for many people, particularly those who have experienced loss and grief. COVID-19 has also widened existing structural inequalities. We want to be clear from the start that walking is not a magical panacea and should not be seen as a replacement for healthcare, medicine or social support networks. It is just one tool that can be used to benefit some people, some of the time. Walking always needs effective infrastructures, for example accessible and safe environments and free time, to enable people to experience any benefit. Despite these important caveats we believe our research demonstrates that walking in general, and creative walking in particular, can have a positive impact and should be celebrated.

METHODS

This report focuses primarily on the results of an online survey. It was aimed at the general public and was designed to try and help us understand how everyday walking experiences changed across the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was anonymous and answers cannot be linked to individuals because we deliberately did not collect personally identifiable data. We distributed the survey via social media and through networks generated by ourselves and our partner organisations. The survey was only open to people aged 18 or over and who were resident in the UK during 2020.

As a research team we are committed to ethical research, including acknowledging the limits to our knowledge, and we are bound by strict university guidelines for good research. You can read more about the ethics of care that underpins our research practice here <https://walkcreate.gla.ac.uk/care-and-ethics/>.

DETAILS OF OUR SURVEY

We chose to conduct an online survey because we felt it had the best chance of generating a large number of responses. Surveys are a well-established and valuable tool because they enable researchers to ask complex questions in a way that is easy and convenient for people to answer. It was a practical method given the short timeframe we were operating within, and of course Government regulations meant it was not safe to travel or conduct face-to-face surveys. We made the survey available in alternative formats upon request.

We recognise there are limitations to our chosen primary method. For example, we have no way of corroborating people's answers. The online distribution method also means that not everyone who may be interested will have been able to take part. We also acknowledge that there is what researchers call a "sampling bias", because respondents were self-selecting and often found out about our work through links to partner organisations. This means people interested in and positive about walking were the most likely to complete the survey. It is important to acknowledge our survey is not a representative sample and, as the demographic data in section two shows, more work is needed to learn from a more diverse range of people. This should include translation of material into other languages as a matter of course and developing meaningful relationships with wider networks and community groups.

Despite these caveats we believe this survey does provide valuable insights into how some people experienced walking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey included the following types of questions:

- single choice / closed questions – eg 'What is your employment status?'
- multiple choice questions – eg 'Which of the following activities did you take part in?'
- free text / open questions – eg 'Please tell us more about a memorable walk...'

The survey was divided into three sections. The first collected demographic data about the respondent, eg age range, gender identity, local authority area and employment status. The second section focused on everyday walking activities during the pandemic. The third section asked about creative walking. You can find a copy of the survey at www.walkcreate.org.

INTERVIEWS

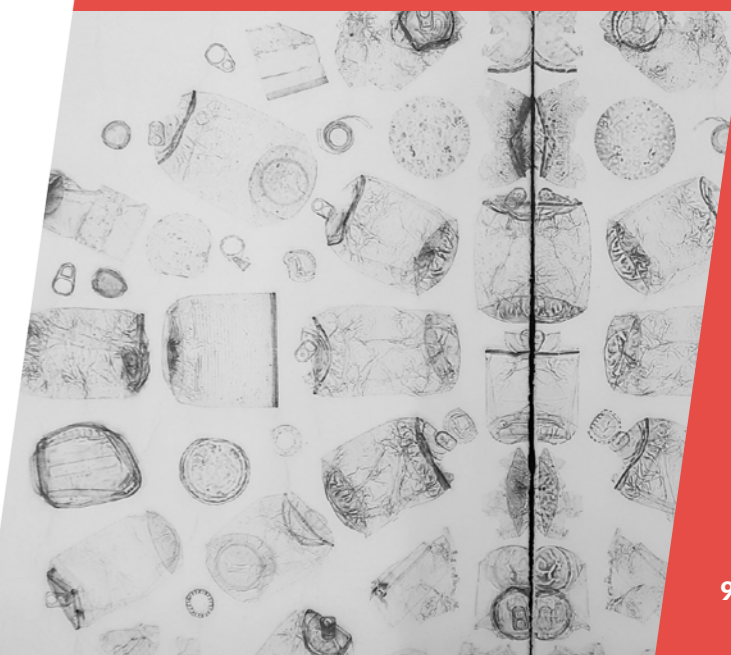
To supplement the survey data, when it was safe to do so, we conducted a series of 14 walking interviews, with 28 people, accompanying interviewees on a walk of their choice, and we recorded the conversation. These interviews were targeted to help us understand different people's experiences in a bit more detail and to enrich the survey data. Interviewees were chosen because they could bring a particular perspective on walking or because they had specific expertise. They included members of walking groups, partner organisations, campaigners for more inclusive and accessible walking, people who use walking as part of their work and individuals known to us who had particularly interesting walking stories to share. As with the survey, interviewees are not representative, but they offer valuable insight into their experiences, which may resonate with others. We have used these interviews to produce the Results Part Three: Spotlights section of this report, and they will also inform further publications. Some interviewees requested anonymity so we have used pseudonyms for them, occasionally also changing location or other identifying details. Where we have done so, it is clearly marked.

DATA ANALYSIS AND SHARING

Survey and interview data were analysed using thematic coding techniques. This helped us to find recurring and shared ideas across responses, identify patterns among them and generate themes. We have chosen what we consider to be the most significant, interesting or useful cross-cutting themes as the basis for this report. There are lots of things we have not been able to include due to space. Other aspects of our findings will be used in future publications and signposted on our project website www.walkcreate.org. We hope that our data will be engaged with by other researchers in the future and we look forward to learning from their perspectives. We have used direct quotes throughout this report (they are in quotation marks), but we have occasionally corrected grammar or spelling for clarity. If we shortened a quote, gaps are indicated by three dots.

We are committed to making our data open access and at the end of our project we will share our data in freely accessible university repositories linked to on our website. We welcome questions, comments, suggestions and other feedback. You can find contact details at the end of this report. This qualitative, descriptive data is a snapshot into a particular period of time and we thank everyone who shared their stories with us.

Top: Genevieve Rudd in partnership with originalprojects, Yarmouth Spring Eternal – Image credit: Becky Demmen/ Supporting Your Art
Bottom: Lydia Halcrow, Debris Walks #3 (lockdown 1)



Results Part One: QUANTITATIVE DATA

This section summarises demographic data and tells you who did – and did not – respond to our survey. First, we share demographic information to explain who answered the survey and then discuss what they shared about their walking habits.

A total of 1221 people took part, but not everyone answered every question, and some questions allowed multiple answers. Therefore some totals do not add up to 1221.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE

All but two respondents reported their age. The most common age group was 31–50 years of age (521 people = 43.3%) followed by respondents aged 51–70 (477 people = 39.7%). There were relatively few responses from those aged 18–30 (139 people = 11.6%) or 70+ (64 people = 5.3%).

GENDER

Most respondents identify as female (904 people = 75.1%), with the majority of the remainder identifying as male (265 people = 22.0%). A minority identified as non-binary or agender (21 people = 1.7%) or 'Other' (4 people = 0.33%); eight people (0.67%) preferred not to say.

LGBTQ+

By far the most commonly selected identity was heterosexual, with 874 respondents (77.5%). The next most common was bisexual (83 people = 7.4%), queer (43 people = 3.8%), lesbian (41 people = 3.6%), gay (34 people = 3.0%), and transgender (4 people = 0.36%). Respondents could select more than one option and could also self-define.

ETHNICITY

By far the most represented ethnicity among the survey respondents was White British, with 968 respondents (80.5%). This was followed by White: Any Other White Background (136 people = 11.3%) and White Irish (23 people = 1.9%). 54 people (4.5% of respondents) identified as one of the other provided options, with no other ethnicity option individually accounting for more than 1% of respondents. 19 respondents (1.5%) chose to input their own ethnicity.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Respondents were invited to tick as many responses as applied to their employment status during the pandemic, and additionally to input their own 'Other' responses if necessary. The majority of respondents (563 = 46%) were in full-time employment. The most common 'Other' responses included being on sick or maternity leave, along with several individual explanations of the ways in which respondents' employment statuses changed over the course of the pandemic.

DISABILITY

The majority of respondents (989 people = 82.4%) did not consider themselves to be Disabled or to have a chronic illness, while a significant minority did (153 people = 12.8%). A further 55 people (= 4.6%) selected 'Maybe'.

WHERE PEOPLE LIVED

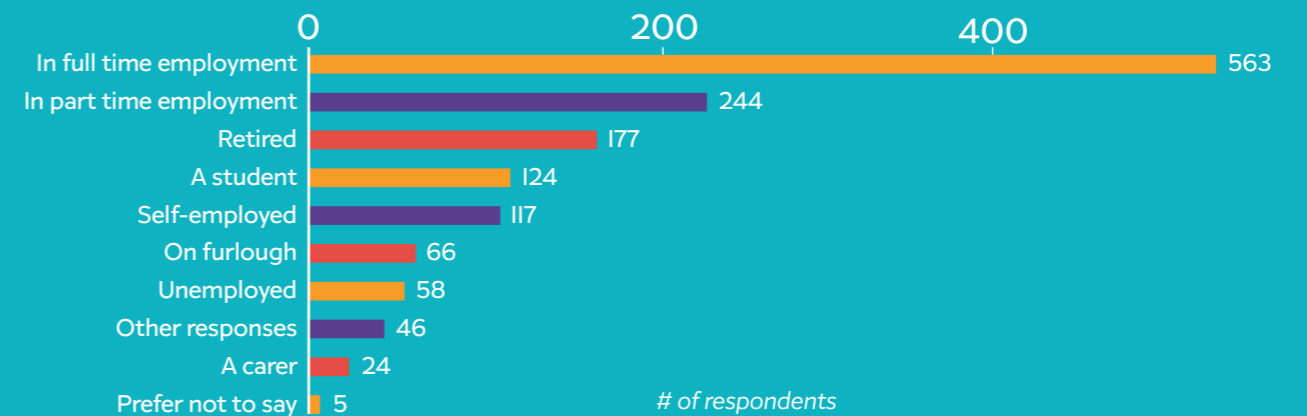
We asked people to tell us which local authority area they lived in and then assigned them to a region within the UK. These were based on Office of National Statistics (ONS) regions. Some regions have been merged together in the diagram as follows: North of England (North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber) Midlands and East of England (West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England) South East and West England (South East, South West). There were large clusters of respondents around places where research team members and partners are based. In particular, Scotland is very highly represented (473 people = 39%). A very significant majority of Scottish responses were from the Central Belt, particularly Glasgow. This is probably linked to additional publicity in the city the project was based in, and to strong local networks. Places were 'Other / Unknown' if respondents told us they split their time across different locations or if they gave an ambiguous answer.

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?



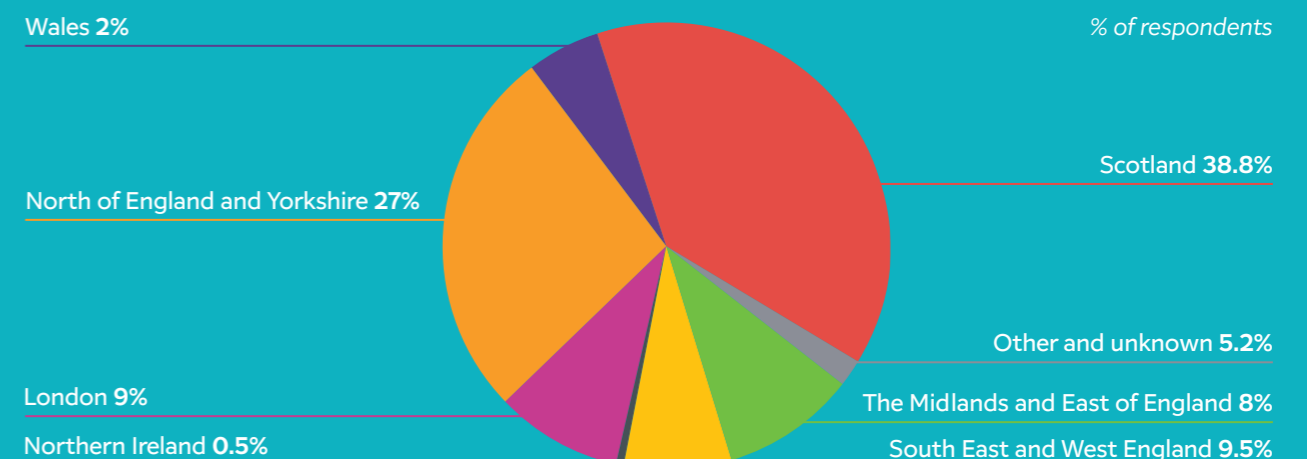
of respondents

During the pandemic which of the following best describes your employment status?



of respondents

Where do people come from?



% of respondents

HOW AND WHY PEOPLE WALKED

We asked how often respondents walk and why, offering 17 different reasons with an opportunity to also specify their own 'Other' reasons and frequency. The responses give an indication of how frequently respondents walked for each of these reasons:

- The most popular reason for walking daily was **exercise**, with 68.8% of respondents (828 people) doing so daily, and a further 22.5% (271 people) doing so weekly.
- Respondents walked **to get out of the house** almost as often as they did for exercise, with most respondents doing so daily (819 people = 68.1%) and a further 249 people (20.7%) doing so weekly.
- Other common reasons for walking daily or weekly were **for health or wellbeing** (66.4% daily, 23.1% weekly), **for relaxation** (57.6% daily, 26.5% weekly), for fun (49.5% daily, 29.7% weekly), and to **visit a park or green space** (35% daily, 38.7% weekly).
- Certain reasons elicited bimodal frequencies, ie those who did walk for those reasons did so frequently, but some never did. For example, 42.1% of respondents (507 people) said they never walked to use a fitness tracker or step counter, while a remaining 30.9% (372 people) said that they did so daily; 66.3% of respondents (798 people) never walked to walk a dog, but 15.5% (186 people) did so daily.
- The most frequent 'other reasons' were for tasks such as going to work or taking children to school, meeting people, or taking part in specific leisure activities such as going to an allotment.

WHO DID YOU WALK WITH?

We also asked respondents who they usually walked with during the pandemic. This was a free text question and this word cloud illustrates the frequency of specific words in the answer.

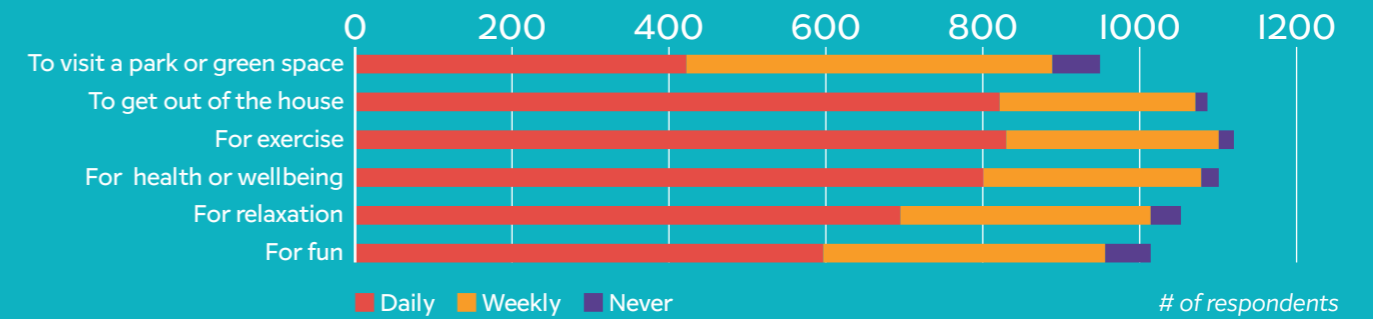
154 people (12.5% of people) told us they walked alone. 253 (20.5%) walked with their partners or spouses. 45 (3.5%) people walked with just their children whilst 136 (11%) walked with children and / or other named family members. 30 (2.5%) people walked just with their dog, although many others included their pet as part of a family group. 59 (5% of people) walked with a friend and 19 (1.5%) with other members of their household or bubble. The most popular answer (359 people = 29%) told us that it varied – sometimes they walked alone and sometimes with others.

HOW THE PANDEMIC CHANGED WALKING

We asked people whether their walking habits have changed because of the pandemic as a whole, and only 76 respondents (6.3%) reported no change. The most commonly reported change in walking habits was walking more often (797 people = 66.3%); other frequent changes include respondents walking more in their local neighbourhood (748 people = 62.2%), walking for their health and/or wellbeing (651 people = 54.2%), walking because there is nothing much else to do (465 people = 38.7%), and walking to be with friends (412 people = 34.3%).

We also asked whether or not respondents' walking changed over the course of the lockdowns. 75.1% of respondents (901 people) reported that their walking had changed, while 20.9% (251 people) said it had not, and a further 4% (48 people) were unsure. Factors that heavily influenced such changes included changes to COVID-19 legislation, developments in personal circumstances, employment status, and location, as well as the changing seasons.

During the pandemic roughly how often have you walked for any of the following reasons?



Who did you walk with during the pandemic?



Do you think your walking habits have changed because of the pandemic?



BARRIERS TO WALKING

We wanted to know what factors might stop people walking. Respondents could tick multiple boxes. The most common barrier was the weather, which was cited by 584 people (48%). This was followed by work commitments (322 people = 26.4%) and COVID-19 restrictions (25.7%) 195 people (16%) didn't have enough time for walking. Physical or mental health prevented 145 people (11.8%) from walking. 109 people (9%) had caring responsibilities. 105 people (8.5%) said "I don't feel safe" and that stopped them walking. This fear could have been about COVID-19, traffic, crime or other reasons, as we did not ask for details here. 27 people (2%) explicitly mentioned harassment; given the sample size there was no significant difference between genders for this answer, however more detailed responses were given to later questions and we will discuss these in Results Part Two. 204 people (16.8%) told us nothing would stop them walking.

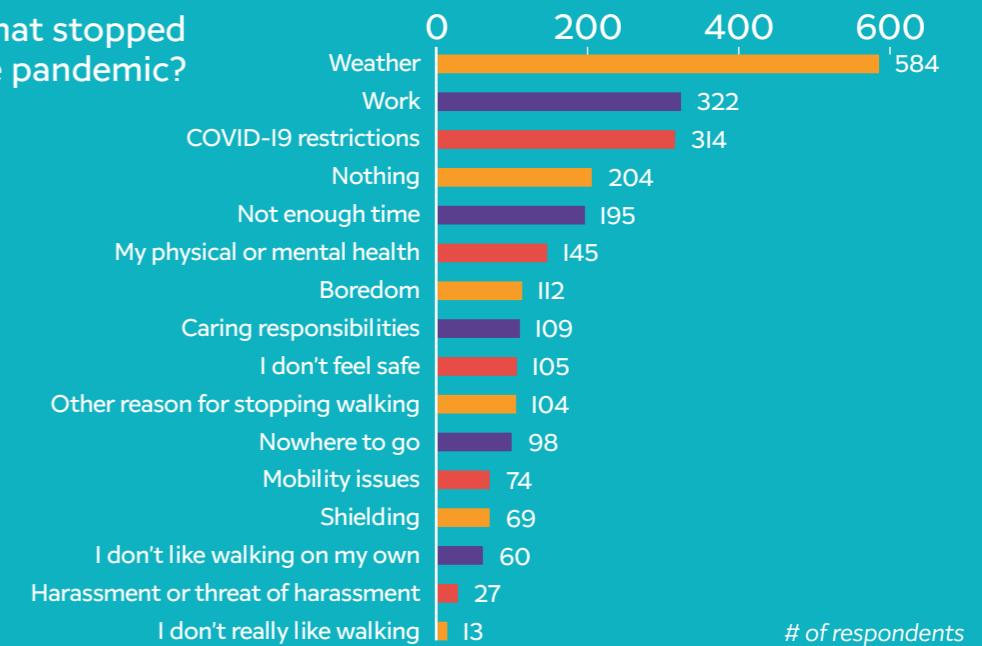
We also asked respondents whether these barriers existed before the pandemic. The majority of respondents (520 people = 42.5%) told us that the problems were not caused by COVID-19 – but for 183 people (15%) the pandemic made those factors worse. For 281 people (23%) the pandemic directly caused the issue that stopped them walking.

CREATIVE WALKING

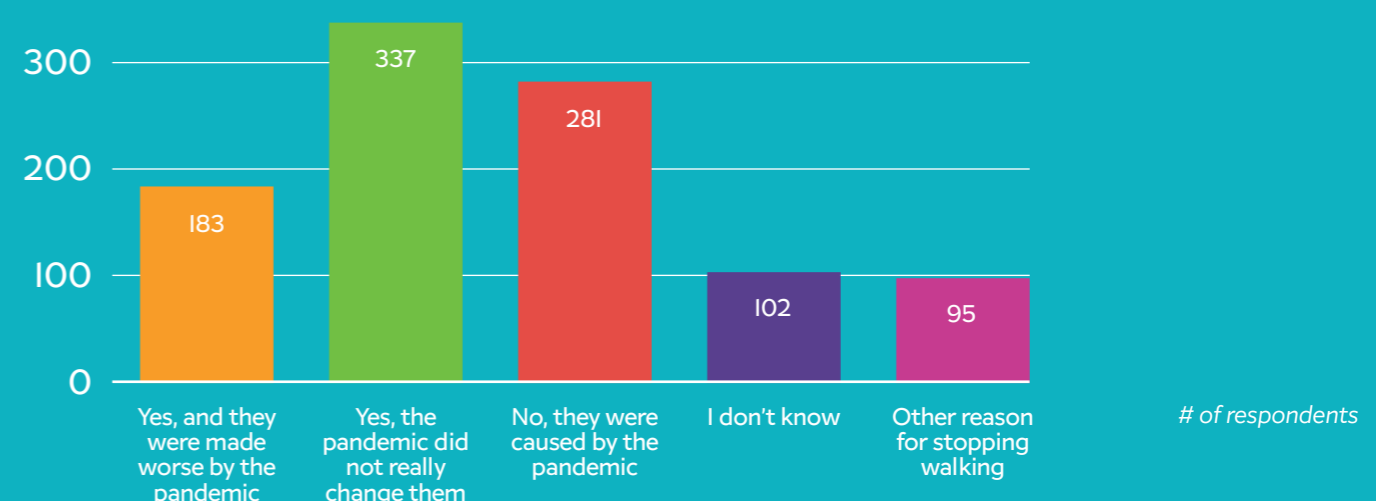
We asked respondents if they had been involved in, or encountered, any creative walking during the pandemic, as well as how often this happened. We gave 18 examples of creative walking, and to make the data easier to visualize during analysis we categorized these under five broad themes. In the next section we will discuss in more depth the experiences behind these statistics.

The following section illustrates the engagement with the five broad creative themes. The most popular activity was following or encountering a 'thing'. 34% of respondents did this either daily, weekly or monthly. The next most popular activity was DIY walking / creating your own game and 386 (32%) people did this regularly. The majority of respondents (701 = 57%) never played any digital or remote games and 638 (52%) never engaged with an artist. 207 people (17%) gave us details of other creative walking activities they had done and some of these answers are discussed in Results Part Two.

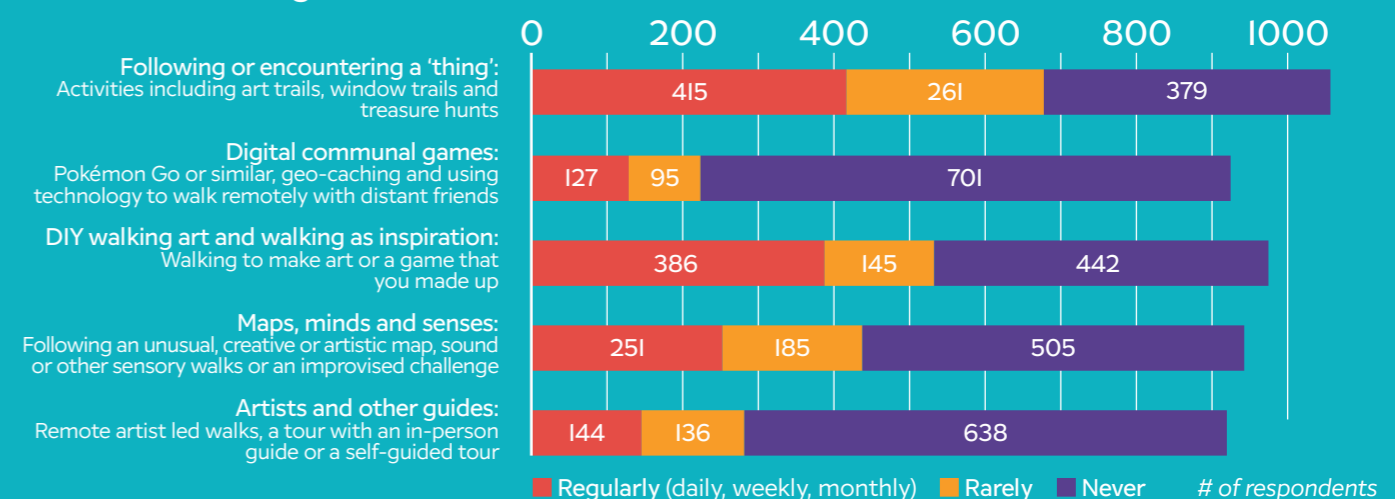
Are there any factors that stopped you walking during the pandemic?



Did the factors that stopped you walking have any impact before the pandemic?



Creative walking activities



Results Part Two: QUALITATIVE DATA THEMES

This section provides more details about how and why people walked during COVID-19. It draws on anonymous answers to survey questions. It has been arranged by broad themes, which reflect respondents' lived experiences. We begin by sharing some of the ways in which people made walking more interesting during the pandemic. These demonstrate how walking can provide an opportunity for something positive to happen even in limited circumstances. We hope this might be useful for both individuals and organisations who want to continue walking if similar restrictions are imposed in the future.

Top left: Liyanah by the love stone. Image credit: Maggie O'Neill
Top right: Jenny Brownrigg, *The State of Education* (2020)
Bottom: Walking Interview in Dundee – Image credit: Harry Wilson



HOW PEOPLE WALKED

Exploring and DIY walks

There were restrictions on where and how you could travel during most of the pandemic, and lockdowns included advice to stay at home where possible. Going outside for exercise was permitted, so many people turned to walking as a relatively easy, affordable and accessible activity. For many this developed into an opportunity to explore their local neighbourhood, sometimes for the first time. This section shares some of the ways in which people shaped the direction of their wanders and how limitations inspired creative walking. You can find more recipes for exploration in *The Walkbook: Recipes for walking & wellbeing*, our free resource to support creative walking.

WALKS OF DISCOVERY

As the first three comments illustrate, limitations can create opportunities for discovery, and this in turn provides some solace in difficult times.

"I walk a lot normally. It was a source of real sadness to me that I couldn't go on normal long walks/holidays/national parks. Instead, I have walked intensively around home. I set myself the challenge of walking on every public footpath on the Ordnance Survey (OS) map where we live. This has been great for visiting never-noticed landscapes and paths. I also got a much more intimate and detailed knowledge of streets and paths around our part of town."

"I've enjoyed the challenge of planning the line of a walk within restricted parameters. I've also enjoyed stumbling on unexpected places when sticking to those lines."

"Being restricted on where I could go has made me really explore my local and neighbouring boroughs. I usually plan a walk to a green space I haven't seen before. It's nice to have some novelty!"

Other walkers used different tactics to decide where to go. These were often ad hoc and unplanned, but led to further wanders such as this example: "Sometimes I just go in search for something I've not seen before, now looking to walk every street in my area." No experience is needed in turning explorations of the local into an adventure. One respondent reminded us of the pleasure found in "exploring by mistake and just following our nose."

This approach, and its rewards, are summed up by the person who told us: "I did that thing where you set off in one direction and try as much as possible to stay walking in that direction just diverting to skirt buildings and other obstacles. You keep going until you realise that you're going to have to walk home from where you've randomly ambled to. It's a good way to explore the local and celebrate the mundane."

EXPLORING THROUGH GAMES

Exploration can also be very playful, turning walking into something fun to do and acting as a motivation to get out, which for some became increasingly necessary as the lockdowns persisted or were reintroduced. Here are some of the games people shared with us:

"A game of 'lockdown bingo', weekly during the second lockdown, in the dark, where you ticked off things (you are looking for) on a bingo card – created by a friend on Instagram."

"We sometimes theme our walks around looking at different types of properties and imagining our future based on living in those homes. We aren't actively house-hunting, but will be shortly, and it's a great way to theme a walk and make it a bit more fun!"

"Sometimes my partner has done 'mystery walks' for me when I've been very bored and fed up, where they plan a route, often taking in places we've not been before (this is also nice for me because with all my other friends I'm always the map-reader)."

HISTORY

Local history can be fascinating and provided inspiration for people walking across the UK. Research to shape these walks included online resources, old maps and talking to past or present residents, as these examples show:

"With knowledge from my Dad, we undertook several walks trying to find old houses lost in a landslip within an overgrown undercliff area. We felt like jungle adventurers and took secateurs. My Dad now has a book on a lost pipeline which he is gradually following the route of and trying to find old remnants of the pipe."

"I have some old OS maps of the area. Much has changed. I walked to see how much remained. For example, Chorlton Ees (in Manchester), which is now a nature reserve, was created where a large water and sewage works once stood. Various walls and pipes can still be traced amongst the dense woodland."

People told us about everything from "walking on Roman roads" to exploring to help "understand local industrial archaeology" and to bring to life "a particular historical aspect... My researches have highlighted eg an old farm or mine that has been forested over, a route that used to be used to access monastic granges, a fossilised piece of ancient woodland in plantation..." Being out in the landscape means you are literally walking through history. As someone told us: "It's wonderful and for me much more thrilling than going to a museum or organised indoor activity."



Treasure trails: Following a 'thing'

Following a trail, or hunting for something, was one of the most popular activities shared in our survey. People transformed windows, streets and community spaces into trails for others to follow, looking for treasure of all kinds. Trails made local environments inviting, encouraging people to get outside whilst still being able to keep safe. Participants could explore alone, or when able in households, bubbles or permitted groups, yet still experience being part of a larger community.

The creation of trails was a form of connection across physical distance, and the prevalence of these trails, reported also in mainstream and social media, reveal just how much people were thinking of others and reaching out with these gestures. There was also fun to be had in creating the trails, and in many cases seeing them grow as others contributed. These are a few of the stories respondents shared about what they did, and how it made them feel.

EVERYDAY ENCHANTMENTS

Examples of trails people created included: "Rainbows in our windows and chalk patterns and games on the pavement in our street"; "We decorated our windows and house at Halloween and Xmas"; and "Hiding/finding painted stones... Our kids sent pictures to the fire station and we went to see all the pictures there. We put teddies in the window."

Respondents also found things, including: "Painted rock trail in local woods. Chalk 'assault course' on our street's pavement, hopscotch and other activities"; "Window Wonderlands"; and "uplifting messages that had been written on cut back tree branches and trunks...These included smiley faces or messages like 'You are beautiful' and 'You can do this.'"

Many people told us how these encounters made them feel; these are just a few comments: "I liked finding the painted pebbles. It felt that other people were present and made me feel part of the community"; "Around Christmas nearby houses had advent windows and it was like a treasure hunt to find them and they were very creative. Made dark December walks more interesting"; "We came across the drawings from kids in windows and on the ground and building with chalk. It was so sweet and made us smile. A local nursery also attached messages from the kids onto the railings, which were full of hope and messages for the future."

It is clear from these responses that creative interventions into our everyday environments had a significant impact on how people felt, offering a sense of belonging and hope, and signalling a more positive future.

SMALL ACTIONS, BIG IMPACT

This respondent sums up the variety and impact that following a 'thing' can have, by describing the interventions she encountered, the activities she took part in and how they made her feel.

"Someone (I think a local community) has created a 'fairy walk' with lots of fairy doors in our local woodland, it is delightful. Doing the fairy walk - it just made me feel happy. There is some sadness attached to it as it was started by a man in memory of his young son, but to have created so much joy for others out of this is beautiful. Really caring, lovely community spirit and wonderful to watch it develop throughout lockdown - there is always more to be found. Great to see other people enjoying it too, and not just children. Doing 'rainbow photo walks' with my sister's children (especially the, then, 10 and 7 year old) was great. We had to 'collect' the colours of the rainbow in photos of plants. Kept them engaged and interested. This year my niece gave me a collage she had made out of rainbow nature colours (leaves etc) that she'd collected on our walks and pressed. Made me cry a little bit if I'm honest."

Photography and making

Walking creates space to think and can inspire creativity. For many people, documenting and sharing their everyday walks was an important element serving a number of functions. For example, several people took photos to help them make sense of what was happening during the pandemic and found focusing on pictures gave them some respite, or allowed them to find interest in the everyday, while, for some, sharing them was a way to support and inspire others.

UNDERSTANDING

Photography can help encourage a literal shift in focus, for example: "Photography gives me a pause from my otherwise hectic life, working full-time and caring for three neurodivergent teens." With focus can come new understanding, echoing the new attachments of locality shared earlier, as this respondent shares (the parenthesis are their own): "I feel like I have moved towards paying much more attention to much closer, smaller, perhaps relatively 'less interesting' things (in most people's estimation), particularly in terms of photography (I always take a camera with me when walking, even just to the shops), and I feel like in the pandemic I have become much more likely to actually take photos of things like buildings, trees, flowers etc, even when going for a short and 'mundane' walk rather than walking to an interesting destination." Several people shared aims similar to this: "I take photos as a diary record of the pandemic experience"; or likewise told us of its personal benefits: "I find it therapeutic and it is part of my creative practice now."

Above left: Jo Delafons, Lockdown Walk Boxes
Above right: Ali Pretty with Kinetika, Land of the Fanns -
Image credit: Mike Johnston

SHARING AND CONNECTING

For many others, taking pictures and sharing them in a variety of ways was an important way to stay connected, as this range of quotes demonstrate:

“Sharing photos has been so uplifting and a brilliant way to connect with distant friends and family, so I will certainly carry on.”

“I’ve found Instagram a really fun way of sharing my walks through photos or reels. It’s creatively satisfying making and editing a mini film and adding the perfect music to it!”

“Taking photos for housebound friends to help them feel less confined and still part of the outside world.”

Photographers felt that sharing their images online made other people happy, and this added to the pleasure of its creation: “I have found that documenting my neighbourhood more seriously... gives people pleasure. I will continue to document my walks.” An enhanced appreciation of nature was an integral part of the experience, such as taking “photos of wildlife and sunsets because I enjoy sharing them to make people happy.”

One respondent took a “daily photo from my ‘anchor place’ in all weathers to share with others – to connect and inspire others to get out. There was a specific tree, and a rocky outcrop that I photographed. Also shared lots of photos from different places.” And another explained: “The creative distraction of photography whilst moving through nature has been invaluable to me and my followers during lockdown.”

WRITING AND MAKING

We’ve noted that for many people walking is a way to think or reflect. This can also help inspire writing and other kinds of creativity, which can be private, collaborative or shared with others afterwards.

“I wrote a kind of diary – Things Learned in Lockdown – and a lot of what I listed were things I’d seen on my walks or discovered in the course of walking. I also shared that with friends and they loved it. It prompted others to do similar lists and journals.”

“The most creative thing I do while walking is to think up stories (which I write when I have time) and to think about the stories I’ve read, many of which take place in an outdoor setting. I think about other creative activities also – for instance I designed a stained-glass window and thought about that.”

“Walking has also been creative for writing, forming ideas. I have used a voice recorder on walks to draft ideas and writing and found this to be very productive.”

People also shared with us some other creative artefacts and artworks linked with their walking, for example: “Making maps and walking and meeting with friends and colleagues to discuss these and think about it as an approach to understanding lives in lockdown”. Others set unusual targets and recorded them creatively: “I am ‘walking to Warsaw’ by adding all my daily walk distances together.... I record the walking with a special art chart I devised. It’s private and creative”. We particularly like the term invented by one of our respondents to describe their walking and making activity: “I walk to think and I write in my head as I walk or I design jewellery in my head as I walk. I call it ‘wolking’ – working and walking.”

BENEFITS OF CREATIVE WALKING

In the section above we have been sharing insights into how people walked, and the wide diversity of creative activities used or encountered. In this section, we look in more detail at the benefits of walking, with a particular focus on the mutual benefits of walking and creativity.

A sense of community

The comments about experiencing trails speak to something bigger, how walking, and the serendipitous encounters that can happen, help build a sense of community and belonging that was more important than ever during the pandemic. As noted earlier, restrictions on walks encouraged people to stay local. This often meant paying closer attention to places we often take for granted, and this led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of neighbourhoods. For many, our relationship with our local areas changed significantly – and mostly positively – during and because of the pandemic.

“I’ve been really surprised by how much I’ve come to love and appreciate my local area... my walks used to involve a drive to somewhere... my daily walks have enabled me to see beauty in the small things. It’s really made a massive change to my life.”

“Walking provides space to connect with others - to smile, speak and share a moment in time. It is a chance to notice, be part of, become curious and celebrate one’s surroundings. I have spent years feeling the desire to move away. Walking through COVID-19 taught me to love where I live.”

LOVE WHERE YOU LIVE

These responses illuminate how feelings for place changed during lockdowns. This new appreciation of the local suggests that the value of the local was, for many, invisible before the pandemic. There may be multiple benefits in really foregrounding these positives as we move out of the pandemic. The benefits of staying local include reduced environmental impact and more sustainable local businesses. There is resonance here with campaigns for 20-minute neighbourhoods.⁸

WALKING MISSIONS

Some people used their walking to give back to their local area by improving it as a space for others to walk in, for example the person who “created an imaginative descriptive account of the new Low Traffic Neighbourhood, with some history, for local groups.” Someone else told us: “I walk in areas that are under threat from development and then post on social media about it”, and another “tested out accessibility, explored potential routes for improvement.” This demonstrates several ways that walking can be part of active citizenship.

Rights of way are important and necessary to enable walking and several people walked as part of “reccy-ing rights of way” because: “So many people need to know about local footpaths and they should be clear to be used.”

“This is not something I would do before, but from the lockdown and exploring the local area I have found a new sense of gratitude in walking in the local area, even though it’s a city, and it’s not green spaces – I have noticed old buildings a lot more, noticed the trees changing colour, noticed unusual plants/flowers in people’s front gardens.”

“I was able to explore my local area and find local beauty spots nearby. A lot of places we’d usually miss, just using our hometown as a commuter base. I definitely felt a stronger connection to place during the first lockdown. Overnight all we had was our local area, we were dependent on it in a different way than before the pandemic.”

Several respondents told us they were angry about litter and so went on litter picking walks, including one who “took a lady out litter picking in the park as she is afraid of dogs (like me). I told her she would be so busy litter picking she wouldn’t see the dogs too much... She hadn’t been in the park for years and loved it, met her old neighbours and chatted to a stranger for ages. We will do it again.”



Opposite left: Walking the Land, Walking Talking Place – Image credit: Richard Keating, Hanging by Rachel McDonnell.
Opposite right: Walking Interview with Stacey – Image credit: Stacey Gritstone

CONNECTING PEOPLE

As the last quote above reflects, walking locally meant people often got to make new and better connections to people as well as place. Given the isolation that many felt during lockdown, this potential of walking to safely facilitate new connections or deepen existing ones is vitally important:

"I began meeting the same people when walking and spend time talking to neighbours I previously hardly knew. I really enjoy this. I've lived here for 29 years and only now know people. I work away and beyond my immediate neighbours I didn't know anyone."

"I find it an enjoyable and stimulating pastime. A good way to connect with people as I live on my own and have self-isolated for over a year."

"During the first lockdown, going on my usual walk meant that I met two new sets of friends. Because I walk the same route every day and people – once there was a little easing, in about late April early May – were sitting out in their front gardens and other green spaces. I got chatting to these two different groups of people ... and now we are firm friends. This has been a great joy to me and something that has helped me consolidate my relationship to my local area much more than it was before."

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

We've discussed already how much pleasure simple window trails can bring to individuals, but they are more than simply fun. People told us that: "Creative walking events, like the windows of wonder walk, help to bring communities together". Such trails "make my community welcoming", and: "It's been nice to see communities pull together to do this kind of thing." Whether individuals co-created the trail or simply followed them, respondents were clear these actions had a "huge positive impact on the community".

That trails were community-initiated seemed to increase the appreciation. People told us: "When they are organised by the community, it is easy to join in"; trails allow you to "feel part of something" and "more connected to my local area". The labour of creating community was also recognised: "[It] brought joy to think that others went to the trouble and effort for us to enjoy. Thank you."

Our research demonstrates that creative walking – whether making things to be followed or following things made – can cheer people up and help them feel part of a community even when they otherwise feel disconnected and alone.

"I loved seeing the Christmas advent windows created by a number of different streets near here. It felt generous and warm, and gave a sense of community. Occasionally I have also happened upon pieces of sculpture or art hanging in trees – an unexpected little moment of delight. There's some very colourful knitted pieces cropping up in unexpected places and this always raises a much needed smile."

"Walking for me was a way to connect to my community which felt so important during this time. Just seeing other people walking felt reassuring, or seeing pictures people had painted on the pavement outside their house or boxes of books for people to help themselves to, or pebbles people had painted for people to take, was really reassuring and inspiring."

Walking together online

Digital tools also helped bring people together despite being unable to meet in person. It is not surprising, then, that they were used by many creative walkers to plan, share or walk together.

PLANNING ONLINE

Online research tools can help shape the direction of an exploration, as in this example:

"I use technology to identify places I've not walked through before and try and find the best 'line' through. And my walks are for my own enjoyment. I'm not creating them for other people. I planned a walk that followed the M60 around Manchester, walked it over three separate days."

Digital tools can also encourage people to go for a walk, as explained by these respondents:

"Unable to walk with my group, I joined an online steps challenge. This motivated me to set higher daily targets... I also started running using the NHS Couch to 5K app, which involves a lot of walking."

The app Zombies! Run! was similarly used for motivation, and many respondents acknowledged the positive influence of setting targets during lockdown:

"I used an app on my phone to monitor steps and to maintain level of walking (8,000) to level before lockdown. This was even more important as there was less everyday purpose to going out, so target became more an end in itself."

The relationship of some digital tools to walking might initially seem tangential. However, just as litter picking involves walking, so these tools provide people with new walking routes. For example, one person told us: "I use the food waste app Olio to collect leftover food. I may thus walk into areas of the city where I've never been before and probably would never have gone."



Claire Hind, To the Rocks – Image credit: Amalie Iona



PLAYING TOGETHER

Several respondents regularly played games such as Pokémon Go or geocaching and found these useful for making connections with other people and exploring new areas. “Pokémon Go has got me out of the house and helped me feel connected to other people (even though I haven’t seen them in person). It has been nice to explore new areas based on where ‘pokéstops’ are located and find out more about the places.” Or: “Being outdoors doing the geocache was fab. The children really looked forward to the novelty.” (Of course geocaching is not just for children).

These games can be as powerful as other forms of creative walking to help people feel connected to each other and the places they are playing in. As someone told us: “I’ve been pleased that ‘group’ walking over Twitter and WhatsApp has allowed me to walk ‘with’ people from all over the world, and also in my local area during this time. I hope that this is something that continues”.

SHARING WALKS ONLINE

Many respondents shared their walks online and found this a positive outlet for themselves and others (see also photography and making in the above section). They did this in both formal and informal ways. For example: “through sharing walks on Facebook I know that many friends have then done the same walk being inspired by my pictures and writing”. Others used on-line resources on a shared task, for example: “Me and a small group created a green map of our area”.

Several Facebook groups were mentioned by respondents, particularly those which encourage photography, as explained by this respondent: “Britain in detail: Quirk, Charm and Detail in the Built Environment. When you are walking around you take pictures of things you find interesting and share - can be anything from a really interesting wall tile, intricate brickwork and unusual grid covering etc.”

Established walking groups also adapted to the lockdown conditions by using digital platforms to remain connected socially, even when physically distanced. As one respondent reported: “I have been walking with Refugee Tales for several years and during lockdown we have walked remotely and shared photos of support for the work they do. We also meet remotely via Zoom and this always includes short creative activities for everyone in between serious discussions about detention for refugees.” We provide further examples of adaptations by organisations in Spotlights one, three and four.

Several respondents also noted that they participated in works created by artists. For one person: “Vicarious creative walking was a big thing ... particularly Craig Mod in Japan who was walking 500km interactively with his audience.” Artist Sonia Overall’s weekly #DistanceDrift, which connects people via Twitter, was mentioned by several people: “#DistanceDrift. Really fun to be out walking with people ‘together apart’ and to discover new things in my locality, and make new Twitter friends..”

Mental health and wellbeing

Many people told us that walking helped support their wellbeing, and in particular their mental health. This was particularly important during the pandemic, which was, for many, a period of extreme stress and anxiety. In our reference list you can find other research that explores this issue. Respondents’ reflections on walking and wellbeing offer further evidence of the multiple and important benefits which walking brings, especially in times of crisis.

WALKING FOR WELLBEING

These comments represent how walking makes people feel better, helping evoke positive feelings and providing a helpful tool for self-care and wellbeing. Respondents told us walking, and in particular mindful or creative walking: “Makes me feel good, soothing for the soul, enriches wellbeing”. Further, “It’s a way of maintaining creativity and can help reduce the stress of lockdown” and “Self-care is my main reason for walking so I hope to continue creative walks.”

One respondent explained how they “used walking to get some headspace, to think through ideas and to shake off jangles” and another was very clear that “I would strongly recommend it as a way to keep calm, relax and enjoy the changing seasons.”

DECOMPRESSION

Our research shows that going for a walk provided space outside the pressures of home and home-working, space to solve problems and, as we have discussed above, come up with ideas. This space-thought continuum mattered more than ever when people were often forced to share space with others for longer, and in more cramped conditions, than they were used to. People told us that they walked “to get a bit of peace from my partner and small kids, to see the seasons change, to think over university work.” Similarly, they walked “to think and to come up with new ideas for work; to have some space from my partner when both working from home, especially when we were only allowed to leave home for an hour a day (and give them space too).”

The space of walking was also recognised as important: “Starting a morning with a walk opens up your brain and sense to something that isn’t your bedroom or office. Starting your day in winter with a walk is better than ending your day in the pouring rain.”

WORKING FROM HOME

Many people also used walking as a way to take a break from work and screen time, or to demarcate work from home, as explained by this respondent: “Walking is a good way to separate home and work life. I often walk on my lunch breaks to take me away from my desk and get some fresh air. I also either walk or run on an evening to signify the end of the work day at 5pm.” As many more people worked from home during the pandemic, it became increasingly important that people found ways to create or maintain a work-life balance. Going forward, with many people electing to continue working from home, or adopting a hybrid working model, the lessons learned during the pandemic can usefully be applied to life beyond it:

“I was sat at a table working every day and I began to notice my legs were aching due to a lack of walking about, so I decided to increase my daily steps. I used a morning walk as a replacement for my commute. In winter my daily walk was a chance to see daylight when working.”

“I’ve found it really important to have a wider vista, to be in nature/green space and to move my limbs. Sitting in front of screen for large parts of the day has been hard and I have come to hugely value walking time as a way of keeping body and soul together.”

“My job was really stressful during the first lockdown so it was good to have some time and space away from work. My desk is in the living room and has been for nearly a year. The separation between work and home is difficult. Getting out of my flat and not having to look at the desk which is a reminder of work is great.”

Above left: Pokéball – Image credit: Shutterstock
Above right: Elspeth Penfold, A Different Lens – Image credit: Fred Adams and Elspeth (Billie) Penfold



RESPIRE FROM DISTRESS

Walking can provide respite from distress, but of course it should never replace medical care and advice. Walking can be a useful part of some people's wellbeing plan.¹ The benefits of walking to wellbeing were highly visible in our respondents' answers to the question "Why do you walk?", with responses often attached to the specific context of the pandemic.

Respondents told us they walked: "To try and make sure I didn't become too terrified of leaving the house at all" and "to escape the mental torture of the pandemic". Mental health benefits of walking were pronounced: "It has helped me find happiness when depressed", and: "It calms my mind and helps defrag my ADHD brain." One person expressed their experiences powerfully by telling us: "It's been one of my lifelines during the pandemic."

Walking, especially creative walking, can be a form of mindfulness. People shared how walking at a slow pace, paying close attention to surroundings, and focusing on the present moment, can be really helpful to them. For example: "For me it's a perfect release, feels quite mindful observing things and taking photos. And I love the ideas that keep popping up unexpectedly." Many people commented on the pleasure of the slower pace, and linked this to the pace of walking and what this enables: "It is very nurturing and the faster life is not", and: "I've slowed down a lot and look harder at

the things around me." Many hope these habits will continue: "I want to continue to make the time to be more present and notice and enjoy what's around. I do not want to return to... just rushing from a to b and never ending work."

One person explained how they used walking to support their mental health: "2020 was pretty much being unable to do anything due to depression/anxiety. So, for 2021, I decided to take a photo a day to post on a blog. This has helped to bring a purpose to the days, and I try to vary the walks I do so I notice something new, or go somewhere new if possible, or just focus on nature rather than my Eeyore thoughts while I'm out and about." Another told us: "Being outside away from stresses helps to calm my mind. Enjoy looking back at photos to remember fun times. Feeling forced to vary times also meant I discovered same trees etc look different in different light. I need the connection to nature to help with anxiety and depression."

Many respondents demonstrated the link between nature and wellbeing which we explore further in the subsequent section Nature and green space. This is just one example: "I feel better when I'm outside and connected with nature. Before the pandemic I did running for fitness and walking to get to where I needed to be. During the pandemic, I've got better at actually undertaking activities outside as well as rushing around."

CREATIVITY

We have given many examples already of different and diverse ways people engaged in creative activity while walking and how such creativity activity helped them to maintain interest and motivation. Creativity is also connected to wellbeing.^{2,3} Creative walking harnesses the well-established benefits of both physical exercise (walking) and creativity. Bringing creativity and walking together enhances the benefits of both, and can become greater than the sum of its parts. Two and two can make five! Also, as we noted earlier, even small interactions enacted while walking can increase a sense of connection and belonging.

"Creative walking has really helped me during tough times with my health to get out the house and to explore my surroundings. I now use it as a means of relaxing and taking space away from work to ground myself. I also find that it brings me closer to my community and the people living within it. It is extremely rewarding."

"It is so important for mental health, wellbeing, physical fitness and it also helps me be creative."

"It has enriched my life considerably and contributed to my sense of resilience and wellbeing."

"I will continue walking every day for wellness and the increased creativity it has given me."

"It's a great activity to help people feel more together and also to help create a 'sense of place'. People really need this connection with each other and also the society that we live in."

"It has lifted my spirits - Walking is an essential part of my daily routine and being able to be creative is the icing on the cake. Without walking the pandemic would have been even harder to endure."

Creative walking can be a way to make a bad situation a bit better and so people use it as a relatively accessible way to improve their wellbeing. These comments underline how, in the words of one respondent, "it's been brilliant both for my/our physical and mental health" and point to the potential use of creative walking for individuals and organisations who wish to support positive action in a way that is non-intrusive, affordable and does not feel too daunting. These quotes are from people telling us why they have made creative walking part of their routines:

"Because I feel that creative activity would benefit my wellbeing and this seems like an accessible and non-threatening means of trying to be more creative."

"Walking is such good exercise but being able to enjoy other levels of it makes it less like exercise and more pleasurable."

"Without it my depression will get worse. I need a creative outlet and walking is a very approachable starting point to all sorts of creative activities."

Above left: Susie Rose Dalton, *Untitled (Unfired porcelain sentences)*
 Above right: Phil Smith working with Helen Billingham as Crab and Bee,
 10 scores for a wild city - Image credit: Phil Smith

Nature and green spaces

Many respondents told us that they found solace in nature and green space, and walking was a way to facilitate a nature connection. This was often very local and sometimes in unexpected places. Lots of evidence supports the importance of nature and green space to wellbeing.⁴ Dogs were often also regarded as cherished walking companions and a reason to walk regularly.

NATURAL MAGIC

Notable in responses was the surprise that 'nature' could be found on the urban doorstep. Given the evidenced link between green space and wellbeing, and the fact that most people live in urban locations, it may be important going forward to find ways to support people to recognise and connect with the nature that surrounds them, wherever they are. Creative walking may provide a valuable route here. In addition, some of this noticing of nature is likely to be enhanced by the creation or protection of environments more conducive to nature's presence. As many of our respondents noted, the drop in cars and noise pollution made a significant difference to what became visible:

"I liked the quietness during the first lockdown and how nature was suddenly more perceptible. No planes, no cars..."

"[The creative walks have] felt so magical! I do think I've reconnected with nature during the pandemic. I used to think I had to go far outside of Glasgow to experience nature, but there's loads of nature right here on my doorstep. I will definitely be seeking out more creative trails to do."

"[Walking] was one of the only reasons you could leave the house (at least in the first lockdown). I live in the city and would go to the parks - because you couldn't travel outside the city, walking in urban parks and green space was the only way to be in nature. I relished the time outdoors and made much more use of our parks and green space than I did before - they basically became a substitute for going to the gym, for going out into the countryside, and the only allowed way of socialising with friends (one at a time)."

The importance of parks during the pandemic is the focus of Spotlight two.

Top: Sheila MacNeill, Masking the Canal
Bottom: Emily Taylor, Walk With Me

GREEN WELLBEING

Being in green space or connecting with nature enhanced the wellbeing benefits of walking:

"Connecting with nature on walks is extremely beneficial and bird spotting is something you can do almost anywhere."

*"To look at wildlife, to rest my eyes, to think, to see the sky."
"I find walking, and connection with green spaces in general, very important for my health and wellbeing. It's the perfect antidote to a lot of screen time. I love the quiet and stillness and the gentle sounds of nature in action through the seasons."*



SEASONAL SHIFTS

In the last quote above, the seasons are commented upon. Many people mentioned the importance of marking time through observing seasonal changes and often the optimism felt by noticing that time was passing and that things were changing. This mattered most during lockdowns where for many people on furlough, working from home or with children unable to go to school, time seemed to slow down or stop because everyday routines were disrupted. Sometimes it could be hard to imagine an end to the pandemic. Walking in nature could provide a way to observe and mark change and the slower pace noted above could bring additional benefits. As this respondent told us, they "have had time to be reminded how much I like to be outside and observing, especially the changes brought by the season, including weather, cloud formation, plants, people etc". Another said they: "Checked the natural evolution of the plants - how the snowdrops came and went, the crocuses, then the daffodils etc."

Our next comment brings together a range of changes in both the natural and suburban world, linking back to the value of creative interventions: "I now also walk to observe how the local environment has changed - bluebells flowering in local forest, whether the signets have hatched on the canal. I never used to observe that sort of slow change, in occasionally walking in my area (monthly), rather than daily. See also - less Romantic, more amusing - the changing tableau of giant stuffed toys (Siberian tiger, squirrel, dinosaurs) one of the neighbours kept in their front garden to entertain their kids (and the locals)."

BIRDS

Birds were a recurring theme in the survey responses, with many respondents expressing particular fondness for birds, and for some bird watching was often at least part of the reason for a walk, while for others it was an unexpected bonus. Notable in some replies was that engaging with the natural environment was combined with a creative task or target, for added motivation. Walking, creativity and nature are combined for triple benefit.

"Walked to observe wildlife and learn bird calls. I can now identify all common UK birds by their song, which I have learned entirely during the pandemic. I have also got to know the habits of foxes, squirrels, rabbits and other species."

"Spotting and identifying the different birds that I encountered on my walk. I've tried to extend this to identifying bird song, but that largely remains a desire. Early on I stopped listening to music and podcasts on walks to concentrate on the pleasure of the surrounding bird song and other natural sounds."

"Bird walks. I went looking for specific birds that were rare but I knew they lived in the area. It took me eight months but I found them!"

OTHER WAYS OF APPRECIATING NATURE

People shared other creative ways of walking with or in nature:

"I memorised 'scent walks' - I would try to walk past gardens or through parks where I would encounter scented plants and trees - daphnia, honeysuckle, roses, lime blossom, mimosa, etc."

"We combined walking with foraging in late August-September during blackberries season. This made us discover new areas of countryside and walked further too."

"I used walks during the summer/autumn to do some 'guerrilla planting' eg throwing poppy seeds over green spaces near my house."

"Counted wild flowers, foraged, investigated overgrown footpaths, walked with the grandchildren to search for wandering stones in our village park. My husband is an archaeologist, so we scour the landscape when weather conditions are right for spotting field scars"

"I specifically followed different micro-trails through the woods looking at what plants had emerged since the last walk, and took photos of nice things for Facebook."

"During winter I went on walks to collect materials on my walks to make Christmas wreaths."

Top left: The Monkey Tree – Image credit: Liyanah Riyaz
Top right: Alisa Oleva, *Walking Home*
Bottom left: Olga Masleinnikova, *Walking Oracle*
Bottom right: Julie Armstrong, *The Green Man*

Children and families

The pandemic had a huge impact on children and young people of all ages. The closure of childcare and schools added pressure for parents, carers and other family members who were suddenly working from home. For ethical reasons, we only invited those aged 18 or over to participate in our survey. We strongly recommend that research which centres the voices of young people is undertaken. Here, some insights into young people's experiences are offered through the voices of the adult respondents.

MAKING SPACE

For many parents, walking with their children provided a valuable and welcomed space to talk, sometimes strengthening familial relationships, as "it is a nice form of exercise and helps bonding with my child." Walking is not just about space, it's also about time – the time it takes to do a walk. This is often shared time:

"My daily walks with my child have been one of the great silver linings of the situation - it was a special time together and we talked for longer and about topics including sensitive ones, in a way which wouldn't have been possible had we been sitting at home. At the beginning I had to twist their arm, but before long they were the one pressing me to come out, so the feeling was mutual. 90% of my walks have been in the same park close to my home. I have greatly enjoyed the sense of community from using it."

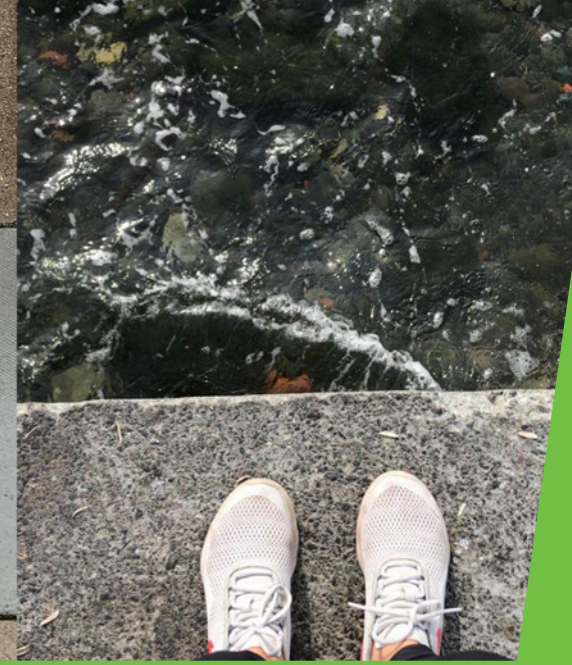
"I enjoyed walking with my two teenagers. Whilst it was an extremely stressful time with minimal online teaching, I actually feel that the lockdowns gave me time to walk and talk with my teenagers who would 'normally' not want anything to do with parents!"

"[Walks were a] chance to talk to my teenage son who rarely wanted to spend time with us inside the house."

Daily walking also afforded routine in a context where it had been badly disrupted.

"Getting outside every day for some walking was a great way to instil routine in a routine-free experience/existence. We used it to end the home-learning day and take a break from screens/talk to each other and generally release some stress."

On the other hand, sometimes walking provided parents with space to be away from children, and also to use that space to hold conversations: "My husband and I use our daily evening walk to connect and spend some time alone together if our daughter is home"; and: "I walked to have open conversations with my partner in the open air and in a neutral space."



FUN DISTRACTIONS

Respondents shared many examples of creative approaches to encourage their families to walk. Given that walking was one of the only things permitted during lockdown, and acknowledging its multiple benefits, it became important to find ways to make and keep it interesting or fun. In many instances, the creative acts served to engage others too, connecting with our previous discussion about walking and community. Creative walking can be contagious, in a positive way! The creativity demonstrated by our respondents is inspiring:

"We walked without destinations in mind, we let our child decide which way they wanted to go and this allowed us to find spaces that we hadn't previously explored. Quiet streets, accessible ramps, walls, car parks, interim spaces all become places to play in and explore".

"Imaginative play, asking questions of toddler to encourage exploring."

"Imaginative walking with a small child – fairies, monsters, wolves, foxes, owls."

"Created treasure hunts and walking instructions to keep my daughters interested."

"We painted a number of rocks for the rock trail, and then visited the trail multiple times to watch it grow."

"At the start of the first lockdown my children and I put googly eyes on objects such as post boxes, bins, fence posts. Over time others have done the same and it is now fun looking all over the area for new faces watching us on our walks."

"We enjoy walks as a family most when there is a creative element, such as a trail or things to find/see. It really helps to engage the children."

"Once in our walk we found some pebbles painted by children praising the NHS and some of them had some nice messages. When we went back home we did the same and next day we put ours next to the others. We also took part in drawing some activities with chalk to encourage children to do some physical activities."

INCENTIVISING EXERCISE

A challenge of lockdown was the sense of repetition – the same walk everyday – which risked boredom. Creative walking was a way of getting children out so they could experience the benefits of walking. It could also make the restrictions of lockdown more bearable when, as this parent told us: "There was nothing else we could do to entertain our four year old during lockdown. We were lucky to have a garden, but he needed to burn off more energy than that would allow him each day, so I took to taking him for a walk locally. We learned a lot about our local area, and the weather was nice."

These responses demonstrate the value of creative walking tools:

"Fun part of getting out with kids (and encouraging them to walk further)."

"It keeps walks interesting for children."

"It is great to take kids out to do... but also gives us a focus for walking."

"Will continue, as it lends a different feeling to the walk, as well as being a double win when with kids (ticking both the exercise and creativity boxes)."

"It's literally the only thing to do to keep the kids entertained and get fresh air. But we walked a fair bit before it's just now that's ALL there is to do."

HOME SCHOOLING

Schools and education providers sometimes used walking exercises and games to engage students of all ages, and it may be useful to think further about how such collaboration could be used going forward. Our survey respondents included parents, teachers and educators who shared examples of this shared space of learning and/through walking:

"My child's class set up a geocache during the first lockdown which was great as we are all local to the school so were able to find it and swap treasure when we weren't able to go far from the house on our daily walk. We have a closed class Facebook page so had to post a picture of the 'finder' and then write some clues for the next person and then nominate them."

"Assigned school work which encouraged our son to look around him and draw what he could see and hear."

"[I] created a self-guided fieldtrip for students to help them engage with local archaeology through note-taking, sketching, photography etc."

"I created a virtual tour for my students picking out places/statues linked to equality and human rights around the city. Family helped with filming/ maps etc! Colleagues also got involved."

IN SUMMARY

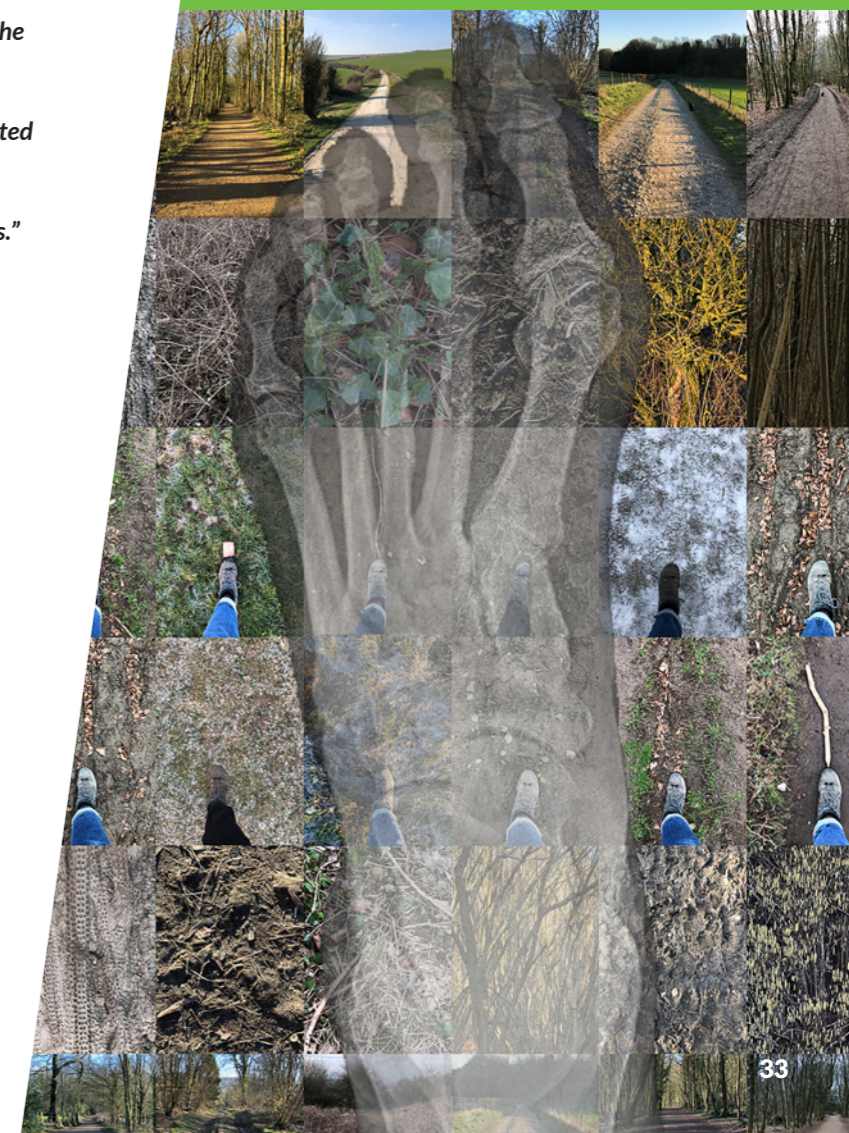
The responses shared here encapsulate why walking with children was valuable for many people during the pandemic – although the final two comments below hint at future challenges and issues, including a possible return to commuting and the loss of time that accompanies this, and the longer-term impact that the pandemic has had on young people's mental health.

"It has been enjoyable, isn't expensive and is fun for the whole family."

"It's lovely to do with children – we enjoy being outdoors as a family."

"It made us realise how enjoyable walking as a family was and how even a four year old can walk a good distance and enjoy it. It is the one thing we have found that all three kids enjoy and they are 15, 12 and 4. We invested in good attire and not once did we feel cold during the harsh winter. I had more time to walk since I was working from home and did not have a lengthy commute."

"I used walking with the dog to get my children out of the house and to keep them exercising while schools were online. Walking clears my head and gets me out of the house, keeps me fit and helps me to meet people. I wanted the children to have the same benefits. This became harder during the last lockdown as they became more withdrawn and I walked more by myself or with friends."



Right: Shirley Chubb, Metatarsal Walk 1

WALKING INTO THE FUTURE

Creative walking did not start with the pandemic, and we are confident that it won't stop when we move beyond the pandemic. Some people told us that they have already planned for their creative walks to be ongoing, for example:

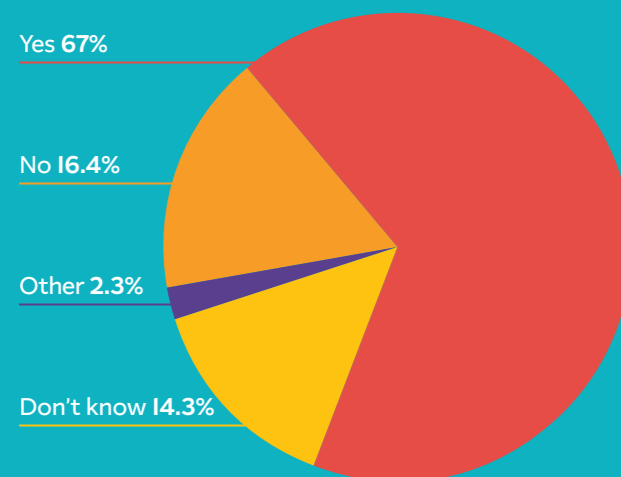
"I'll continue walking, taking pictures and sharing them as it gives me pleasure and hopefully inspires others."

"I've always been artistic but never combined it with walking (which I also enjoy) until the pandemic. It's really added an extra enjoyable element to my walks which I will continue."

"I remember reading William Burroughs once – and he talked about how one of the ways to be creative/free was to see the every-day through a fresh set of eyes every day. And with effort you always can. Creative walking is a key part of that – for me!!!"

Our survey asked more generally if respondents thought they would continue creative walking in the future and the overwhelming majority (67%) said that they would. (16.4% said they would not, with 14.3% saying 'Maybe / Don't know').

Will you continue creative walking after the pandemic?



Reasons to continue walking

Here, we discuss some of the reasons the majority of respondents gave for indicating why they would continue to walk creatively. Of course, this section, looking as it does to a projected future, is speculative. As someone said: "I think it will change but I feel an urge to express thoughts and ideas through walking, and to walk together. Meeting others in this community is also fuelling further ideas and interests"

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Walking and active travel have well documented positive impacts on the environment^{9,10}. Our respondents made it clear just how much concern for the environment had come into focus for them. Local activity and sustainable travel were singled out as reasons to continue creative walking for example: "I will be limiting international travel in the future and creative walking helps explore, enjoy and appreciate the world from my own doorstep." Another respondent told us that when you use creative walking, "each day you learn something new, it brings fresh perspectives, it awakens you to the effects of climate change, it makes you want to live your life [in a] more naturally sensitive way."

There were suggestions there could be lasting benefits to the change, such as: "Hopefully people's changing walking habits will help generate some anger about the ways in which urban space is monopolised by cars and consumerism and lead to change. Well, you can hope!" and: "If I could get people to walk more and drive less in this area I would."

Echoing the reasons people valued walking during the pandemic, connecting to the local environment was also seen as important and worth continuing:

"I'll continue it for a number of reasons; mostly to cultivate a connection to whatever place I live in next, and to talk to/engage with new people."

"I think it is a powerful way to connect people with the landscape of the place they live in."

"The pandemic has galvanised my existing commitment to walking and belief in the importance of participation in creation of public space through practices like walking. I just hope my life doesn't get too busy with things 'opening up' that walking takes a backseat as there is always a danger of that."

GOOD HABITS

Many people recognised that the new creative and everyday walking habits and routines they discovered during the pandemic were beneficial and they felt they would continue to be a positive part of their lives post-pandemic:

"I will continue, because the pandemic made me discover alternative ways of passing the time and I would like to include them in general in my life."

"I think because lockdown has been so long, the routine I have created now has become a habit and the daily walks are (I hope) ingrained into my daily life. I really hope this continues... as a way to connect on a deeper level with nature and I suppose walk less with a purpose in mind and develop a playful way of being outside."

"I have always enjoyed walking, but since the pandemic it has definitely been renewed and I enjoy walking even more, I will continue walking and try to come up [with] and participate in more walking activities in the future for sure!"

DELIGHT

Love, enjoyment and fun were frequently given as words to describe creative walking and these positive emotions should be nurtured and cherished through the promotion and support of walking activity. The sheer delight people felt when walking is palpable across the survey, as evidenced in the words used by respondents to describe their experiences of taking part in creative walking. Many also emphasise the low cost and high benefit ratio:

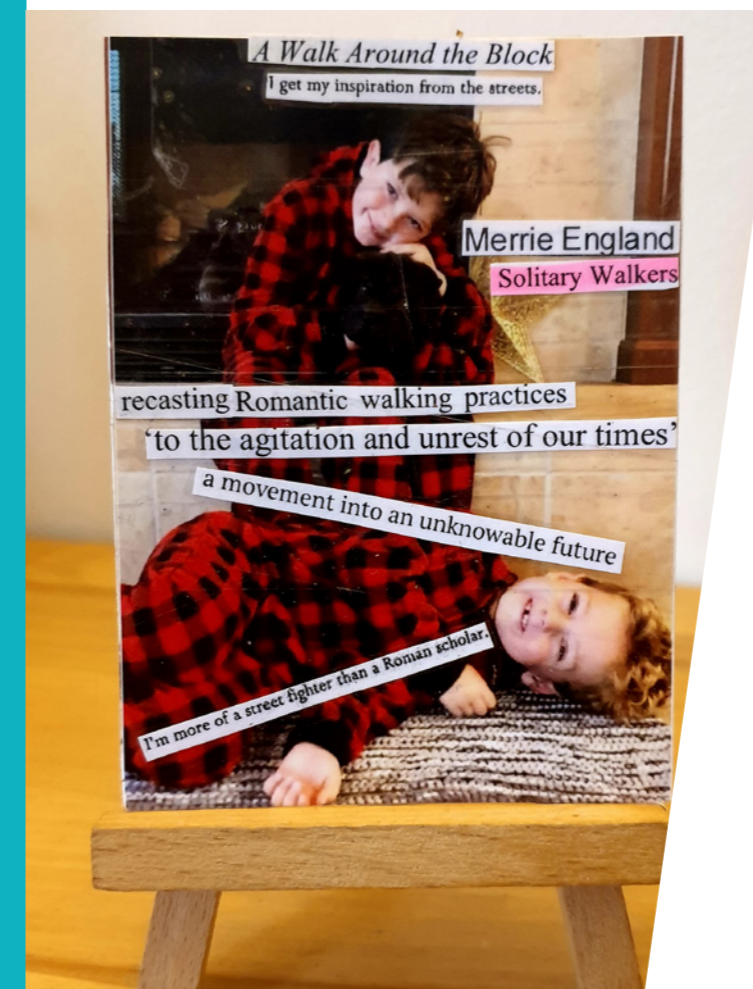
"Because it is fascinating...walking as a project of the self!"

"[Creativity] enriches walking beyond purely for health/exercise."

"It's good for me, free and I am too curious to stop looking at the world like that!"

"It's fun. It's free. It's good for you. You can do it on your own, or you can do it with friends. You can even do it on your own with friends and share the experience with photos/videos/sound recordings etc."

One respondent simply said, "I love it!", whilst another explained the shift they had experienced: "It is really enjoyable! It just requires a bit of effort to think differently and maybe think of a structure or activity rather than walking habitually." That bit of effort was worth it to those who told us: "It was a way to feel like I was living life, and not putting life on hold in the lockdowns", or "It's a fantastic way to get exercise, without realising it and be involved in something creative" and it is "a real eye opener and such a pleasure." This respondent summed up their experiences with this positive endorsement: "Isn't it [creative walking] great and it's also free, accessible, equitable and flexible. Wonderful all round."



Left: Blake Morris, 52 Scores, Score 20

MULTIPLE REASONS AND GOOD THINGS

As the previous comments show, creative walking became a comfort, delight and inspiration during the pandemic. It was not the only reason people walked or continue to walk and some responses really capture the multiple and complex ways walking is integrated into the everyday and the good things a walk can bring:

"I walked to get fit, and because I enjoyed it. It was a way of having fleeting encounters with people in the neighbourhood, meeting their dogs, and exchanging news about local events and so on. I also walked to local shops and services to support them, and to ensure that my days (even when I was furloughed) had routine and structure. The walks also gave me a sense of achievement. I discovered new parts of my neighbourhood, and new routes to shops, and I enjoyed the opportunity to take photographs of flowers, trees, and other sights to share with my friends on WhatsApp."

"[I walk] to enable chance contact and conversation with friends and acquaintances, To look more closely at the city. For fitness and health. To enjoy the dog's company. Occasionally to walk safely with friends and to get out of the house and away from the screen."

Many people told us they experienced new ways of walking during the pandemic, which they believe helped them cope with the situation. They may have begun walking for negative reasons but found unexpected benefits and what often comes through is the sense of embodiment, of being in place and feeling a part of something positive:

"I walked at the start because it was the only thing we could do. I grew to love it and now feel I need it in my day. I would not have started walking locally if it weren't for the pandemic. I have discovered many lovely local green spaces that are easy to get to. Before I would have gone somewhere special for a walk and not very often."

"Walking outside helped me feel still connected to a world outside my home and myself in a way that watching TV news or Zoom calls with loved ones didn't do, it felt a more real connection somehow."

"Walking has allowed me to connect to old and new environments in a slower more considered way. I find this new perspective exciting and fulfilling. I feel more connected and engaged with my local environment. I am also a lot more curious about nature, wildlife and the impact humans have on it. Going on longer walks has also allowed me time to reflect and focus on my life and the decisions I make. Overall, walking has been a positive addition to my hobbies and recreation activities and something that I plan to keep doing long into the future".

Reasons to say no

So far, we have focused on all the positive responses to walking and creative walking. It is important to also pay attention to the 16.4% per cent who said they would not continue with creative walking in the future.

DON'T LIKE CREATIVE WALKING

Several people told us they simply don't like creative walking and for them it spoils a good walk:

"I don't have any interest in this - I walk for myself, not to engage with anything else."

"Walking is enough in itself - being outside, observing, enjoying people watching and the local environment, birdsong etc - it needs no embellishment."

"I just enjoy what's around me and don't need to invent other stuff."

"I just like to chill and switch off on my walk and listen to music. It is the only down time I get."

Active, consensual participation in creative walking is essential and creative walkers need to be conscious of those who might not welcome a creative intervention, such as this respondent: "I want walking to be an experience with my own thoughts or in conversation with someone I'm walking with, or a shared moment with someone else who is in the park or whatever. I don't really want to feel an intrusion from outside by someone trying to guide or intervene creatively in my experience."

OTHER REASONS TO SAY NO

Other common reasons to say no were related to time constraints and the opening up of other opportunities post pandemic. As one person said: "Depends on time - there has been less competition for my leisure time during the pandemic." Another told us: "I'm more excited for ordinary activities once they're safe again (cinema, theatre, visiting favourite places I need to use public transport to get to, seeing friends)"; and a third said: "Hopefully my walks will be mainly up mountains from now on!" One respondent summarised this sense by saying: "I think it was something folk did to alleviate boredom. When they can go back to work, pubs and restaurants, they will be less interested in walking and looking at painted pebbles." Accessibility also limits opportunities: "I don't think my feet and ankles would let me enjoy it," and "It will depend upon accessibility and inclusion". We say more about walking and accessibility below.

Lack of opportunities or awareness was also anticipated as a reason not to walk creatively in the future. This suggests there may be an appetite if walk facilitators

can get the word out or think more inclusively about potential participants:

"I don't think there will be much on offer."

"No because there may be no art trails in my area - if there are, I'll walk them!"

"Would have loved to know about creative walking in my area as would have participated - especially in trails."

Creative walks may also seem not to be for everyone:

"Perhaps they sometimes seem as though they are aimed at children and I don't have any - I'd certainly get involved with artist-led walking activities!"

"I would love to if invited, but it's probably not something I'd initiate. I'd especially like walks that included diverse ages ie some older people (over 70s) and teenagers, which are both groups I don't see much of and who aren't often included/targeted in the walks I've seen advertised."

A PANDEMIC PHENOMENON?

Several people spoke very positively about their experiences, but did not feel they would be sustainable after the pandemic. As one person said: "It was lovely while it lasted, it created a feeling of community bonding. Sadly, I doubt it will continue in its current form. Folk want to move on from COVID-19 and rainbows, painted stones and other such art seen whilst walking. It is a reminder of sad times for many people."

These respondents acknowledge the important role art plays bringing people together but suggest the need will be diminished: "I appreciate artistic interventions wherever I go but I feel like so much emanated out of necessity during the pandemic. We really needed artistic interventions because things were so difficult and draining and monotonous. Even though public art should definitely always have a place, we might, in a good way, need it a bit less than we did last year. I'd still always appreciate seeing such creativity though."

For some, the ephemeral and specific nature of pandemic walking was enough. One respondent said they had "fond memories of a specific time," and another was clear that "walking is a mode of transport outside the pandemic." The positives in this were articulated by the person who told us: "I think it's best when trails are virtual or temporary. I feel even more strongly now that resources for streets and green spaces should go on keeping them clean, safe and accessible for everyone, rather than on permanent art projects, which can sometimes be unnecessary clutter and often aren't maintained long term."

Louise McVey, Alexandra Parade Heart - Image credit: John Devlin



NOT WALKING

This report is focused on the general benefits of walking, and more specifically on the benefits of walking combined with creativity, and we have summarised people's reflections on creative walking as an activity to be engaged in the future. We have also provided examples of reasons why people do not engage in creative walking, or are unlikely to do so in the future.

We feel very strongly that we also need to pay attention to the reasons people do not generally walk. These include personal, environmental, cultural and material factors. Much more research needs to be done to fully understand and then dismantle these barriers and many of them are not just pandemic related. We have acknowledged the bias in our survey – the majority of people who completed it would have had a positive relationship with walking. However, some respondents did offer responses which signalled some of the barriers to walking. This section shares issues raised in the survey, suggesting areas that require further thought and more considered responses in the face of a future crisis.

Pandemic related

Many people told us that during the pandemic they changed when and where they walked, usually to avoid contact with others. We were also alerted to the negative impact of the environment more generally on people's engagement with walking:

"I have definitely felt less inclined to go near city centres and other potentially crowded places, and to prefer walking in more obscure areas, and to find the greenest, least 'built' places that I can within the constraints of living in a city."

"In order to reduce contact with other people during the first lockdown I would only go outside the house and garden when absolutely necessary. This was reduced to only the once-a-week shopping trip when I used a car to get to the supermarket instead of walking, and then walking around the supermarket. After the first lockdown I went for occasional walks in the local area for exercise and a change of view but ensured the walks were during quiet times and in very quiet areas, and avoiding any proximity to other people, especially those not wearing masks. Most of the walking exercise was undertaken at home."

"I think I was almost immobilised/struck with inertia by COVID-19 and shielding and fear. Plus my job became more intense working from home and on Zoom. I was more fatigued and my pain worse. And a lack of green space and benches in some areas made walking both less interesting and also harder as less places to rest."

"When COVID-19 is all over, and everyone is safe I will gradually increase my walking again. I am less fit than I used to be and will need to build up that fitness again. Also, it will take time to feel comfortable walking where people are."

These responses point to actions that could be taken in future pandemics which could enable more people to be able to walk well. These include maintaining green space and pedestrian routes, wide pavements and installing benches that are not closed for use. They also signal the urgency of supporting people to regain their pre-pandemic levels of fitness and confidence in being in shared spaces.

No Cycling / No Skateboarding
All dogs to be kept on a lead



Keeping a safe distance

Physical distancing was a key part of advice for walking safely during COVID-19. Many respondents changed the time or location of their walks to try and avoid crowds, and the difficulties in doing so were often exacerbated by other health concerns, as explained here. The inability to walk evidently has knock-on impacts, including reduced access to green space, meaning that some people were doubly disadvantaged:

"I walk as much as possible but am restricted by my energy levels during chemo and to some extent the number of people I think I may encounter on certain routes at busier times. I avoid parks and the canal path at weekends as it's just too difficult to avoid other people who may not give me the necessary wide berth."

"I would love to have been able to get out, but there has been nowhere safe to do so during the pandemic. I tried once very early morning, but it was very difficult still to find somewhere safe (some people distanced, many didn't, few wore masks). Out of pandemic times, it is still very difficult because of inaccessibility."

The behaviour of other people was criticised, but it should be noted masks were not mandatory out of doors in the UK. The design of space also made walking feel unsafe.

"After March 2020 I hated walking in the city. The pavements were too narrow and lots of people out walking during the first lockdown. People weren't good at giving space and I was walking with a pram and a toddler. It was so dangerous having to choose between walking very close to someone or pushing the pram and toddler off the pavement and out into the road. Our garden was small. I hated leaving the house."

Of course, some people had no private outdoor space within which they could exercise or even take air. If they were not able to access public outdoor space, they were confined to the indoors. We wonder what impact this had on people's physical and mental health, and whether at least some of multiple the benefits attached to walking could translate to indoor activity? For example, early in lockdown, artist Louise Ann Wilson invited people to imagine and sketch a favourite walk that was no longer accessible due to restrictions. Feedback from those who joined her in this activity – a virtual walk enacted by memory and then from hand to page rather than foot to ground – suggests that there was some mental benefit in remembering another place and the joy it brought, and travelling at least in the imagination to that other place.¹¹

Harassment

It is dismaying that some people's movements are limited by harassment or the fear of violence. In the qualitative responses, respondents largely spoke about gender related incidents. More detailed research on this topic supports this⁵. Several women informed us that they avoided going out at night and that quieter streets during the pandemic made them feel less safe. We were told, "In first lockdown there was a very definite increase in harassment", with some women reporting that they could not enjoy their lockdown walks:

"After several incidents where I was approached, threatened or followed by men when I was alone, I changed my route and walking times. Whereas at the beginning of lockdown in 2020 I would walk nearly every day that changed to weekly as I grew more fearful."

"Although they didn't stop me from walking, I did face harassment and aggressive behaviour when out with my daughter, and I was more scared about going out because of that, and because there were less people about I felt more vulnerable."

The respondent below explained how she felt the need to modify her walking, and how the news exacerbated this. Although she did persist with her walking, it is shameful to us all that misogyny is such a pervasive force and has tangible impact on people's experiences of walking:

"I would not have coped very well in the pandemic without being able to walk in the woods so often. It has been a lifesaver. I feel like I have got to know the local woods much better and I am a lot more confident walking alone now. After the Sarah Everard murder I stopped going in the woods on my own for a few weeks – and really felt scared walking on my own anywhere. This brought back to me all the reasons I have felt unsafe walking alone as a woman before. But I made myself overcome this fear – although I still do tend to find paths in the woods which mean that I am hidden, and avoid anyone (especially men) walking on their own. This can mean that I end up diverting my route or going back to keep out of people's way. I feel restricted in comparison to my partner who doesn't ever have these concerns walking himself. But also, the benefits of walking alone do outweigh the background of fear which never quite goes away."

We acknowledge there are many other kinds of harassment which, although less visible in our survey, present urgent and serious issues. Recent racist responses to the Muslim Hikers group on social media have highlighted this issue.⁶ These harmful perceptions occur in a context where (in England) ethnic minorities have on average 11 times less access to green space than people from white backgrounds.⁷

Racism is highlighted in Spotlight one, where we walk with Sheffield Environmental Movement. Two survey respondents also told us about racism, including one White person who challenged abuse on social media

and an individual who expressed concerns about being "viewed differently due to my perceived ethnicity, especially when hate acts spiked in the US being a non-White person in a predominantly White market town." The absence of accounts of other types of harassment is likely due to the demographics of our survey respondents. We believe action should be taken to ensure everyone feels safe to walk where and when they wish and we – individual citizens, governments, organisations – must collectively do better at promoting equality. In any future crises consideration should be given to the ways in which environments might change, the differential impact these changes may have on different sections of the community, and how such impacts can be planned for and mitigated.

Disability and illness

Some people's walking is limited by chronic illness or impairment, such as the respondents who told us: "I don't know if I'll regain the ability to walk much because I don't know if my health will improve. I really hope it does" and "I really love walking but sometimes my health can stop me doing it as often as I'd like."

The issues around social distancing were particularly acute for people who were advised to shield, and many chronically ill and Disabled people felt unable to walk for pleasure. The people they lived with often also restricted their movements to keep loved ones as safe as possible:

"Walking is a recognized treatment for my disability however because my wife was told to shield this raised a serious concern around the risk of bringing COVID-19 in to our home."

"I didn't walk a lot during the first one, as I was vulnerable and being super-cautious. During the second lockdown I walked almost daily to cope with being stuck in. During the third lockdown I walked more with friends and got more confident in walking/meeting people after being vaccinated." One person told us the reason they walked was "to try to stay sane while feeling that I have been imprisoned for being vulnerable, Disabled and retired."

Another respondent offered an interesting proposal for acknowledging and responding to the needs of vulnerable people: "I was in the clinically extremely vulnerable group so was shielding - I walked a lot less than I would have liked to because green spaces were very busy and there were no protected times or routes for those at higher risk."

Future responses and support systems need to consider how those who are shielding can still safely access the benefits of walking, so that they are not further discriminated. As noted, there is also work to do now to support those who have not been walking

during the pandemic to regain their confidence in both their ability to walk and in the safety of their environment. We know that our partners are working hard to reach out to people who might feel abandoned or excluded, and we have included links to their resources at the end of this report.

Access / material

There were a number of material and access issues raised by people in the survey. One respondent spoke for many when they summed up a key problem and something we need to pay heed of as we move out of the pandemic:

"As a wheelchair user who loves walking, I feel frustrated by the lack of thought, info, creative energy given to accessible walking activities."

Several people told us their movements were limited by public facilities and this is an area that we would strongly urge policy makers to review in future planning:

"Lack of loos. We need more public loos. Too many public loos have closed."

"Toilets being closed and rules on bringing food and water were barriers."

As another person said: "While some people have been able to take advantage of the lockdown, not having to commute to work, being able to exercise and go out more to parks etc, for people with bladder conditions, lockdown and lack of access to toilets has been a nightmare, which has restricted the ability of many people to go out and about."

Several people complained about pavements, and pavement parking, as barriers to walking, though these barriers are not exclusive to pandemic conditions:

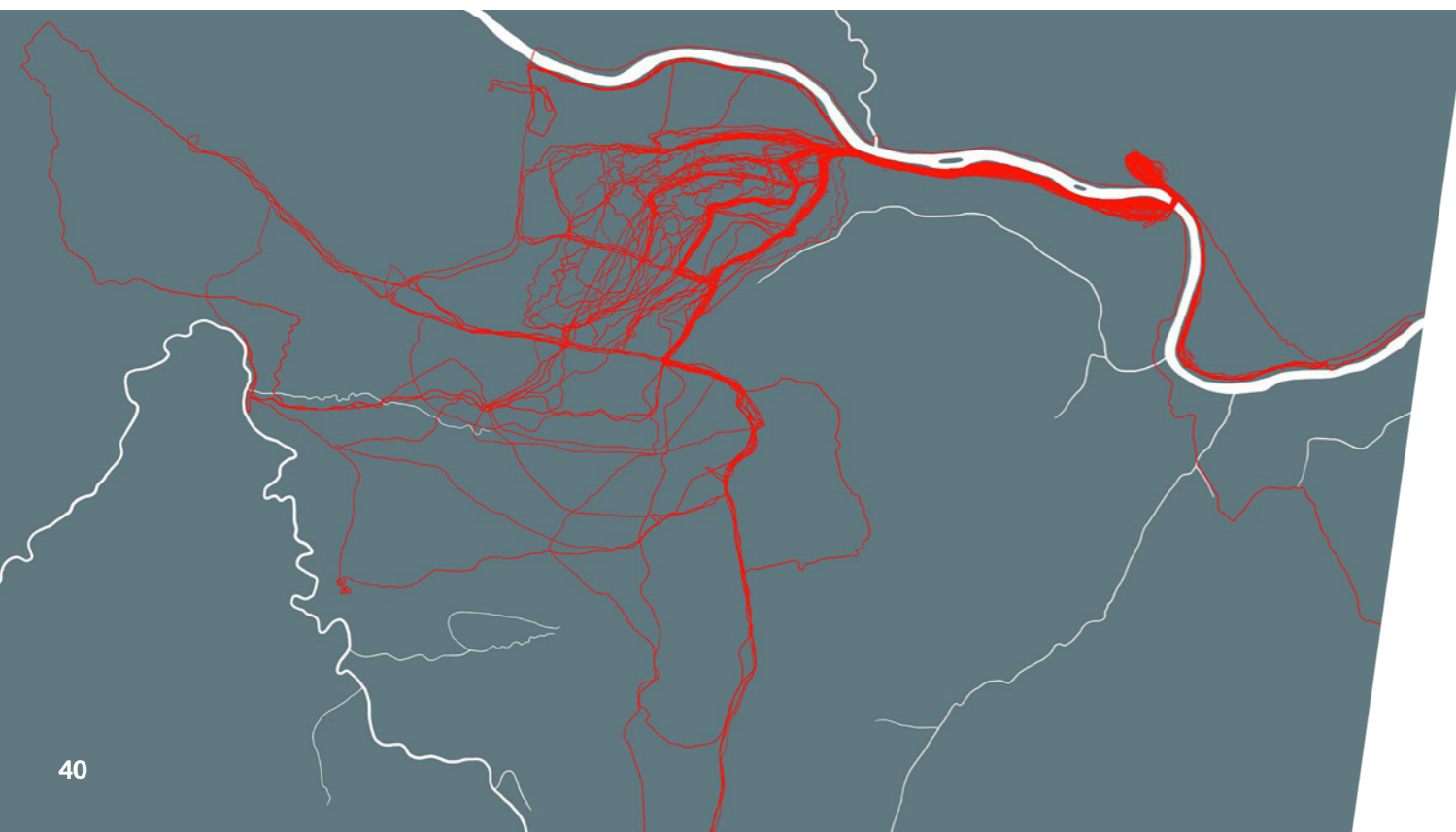
"The city was given money by central government to improve walking and cycling. As a wheelchair user I wanted to test any improvement. There were none. The pavements remained dangerous and uncomfortable."

"There were unheeded complaints about the loose/missing paving in my local park, which meant I (and others) needed a bus journey to a park with sound walking surface."

"Access to my local park isn't safe due to cars on pavements ... Lanes are inaccessible due to pavement dining." The issue of pavement furniture, which has become more prevalent since the pandemic, is picked up on again in Spotlight five.

Rights of way were also mentioned several times by respondents. The fact that golf courses and other

Gill Russell, Locking Down the Line



previously closed routes were open to walking was celebrated, but people were alert to the persistence of private land, itself a significant barrier to walking, alongside the lack of alternative or clearly waymarked routes. The advice to avoid public transport heightened the need for local pathways connecting places:

"I don't drive so walk... but am often stopped getting to places by roads with no footpaths and aggressive keep out signs where maps marked a footpath and/or no other way around a dangerous main road. Councils should be forced to make walking/cycling between towns/villages possible like in Germany with a footpath between each place. This was even more important to me when not wanting to use public transport and was often just impossible to get somewhere safely without a car! Journeys that could be walkable, distance wise, are often made inaccessible by main roads or private land. I wanted to walk to my vaccine appointment but was stopped by a private sign which said 'Keep out, guard dogs loose'. This was stopping access to a large tract of land, not someone's private house/garden land and was the only walkable route."

Litter

Several people told us they combined their walks with litter picking and many others told us litter is a menace in their area:

"To be honest it is soul destroying seeing all the litter. On Monday somebody had tipped about a kilo of metal hologram glitter and metal confetti on the rocks and thrown loads of party food in a small lake. In a fairy glen at a nearby park. It crushed me. I will still clean up though. I do sometimes have to have a small break to recover from the sadness and a bit of fury and desperation."

"Footpaths must be kept clear by local council."

"We need to tackle litter picking ... need to be more communities involved. Check out Harold Hill Wombles on Facebook... it will surprise you!!"

Cars and shared space

There were many concerns raised about the problem of shared space, with combined use by walkers, cars, cyclists and joggers. In Spotlight five we discuss how this was a particular problem for Disabled people. The comments here are more general, such as: "I would also like cycle lanes and no-go traffic areas, so I can breathe the air and have some quiet!" and concerns about space: "I wish joggers would give more space to walkers during this pandemic. I wonder if there could be more education about 'safe' walking and running during COVID-19". We think this is useful advice for any future planning and implementation of space-use during a similar crisis as the pandemic. Poorly delineated shared space causes concern and limits the enjoyment of walking, as many of our respondents illustrated:

"I find walking on joint walking and cycle paths sadly stressful as the number of cyclists increased and they generally don't use their bells to warn of their approach behind you. I had a number of near misses and had to remain vigilant and not use music on headphones and felt less relaxed."

"There are also these weird antagonisms between joggers and cyclists and walkers (where I find the former really annoying most of the time in terms of acting like they have ownership of the space)."

Cars remain the biggest danger:

"Walking more often has made me much more aware of dangerous driving in my area. There have been times where on a single walk I've seen multiple (!) car crashes, or had multiple near misses, usually from a car going through a red light or at great speed across a zebra crossing. It's not uncommon to see something like this on every walk and it's made me quite frightened at times."

"The lack of policing of the construction workers, delivery vehicles etc made my area of Manchester very much a 'Wild West' survival of the fittest place. Police even refused to act on a filmed attack on a friend who objected (politely) to a pavement parker."

Temporal challenges

There is much cross-sectoral partnership work on addressing the human-made challenges noted above, and we hope improvements can be made to create safer environments in which people feel confident and safe to walk. However, many of the most commonly stated barriers to walking are hard to mitigate. In Results Part One we showed weather to be the biggest influence on people's walking activity, and many people elaborated on this in the comments section:

"In the winter months, walking did not always make me feel free. I remember one walk where we were walking down a muddy path between the canal and river. It seemed interminable. The others walked too fast for me and I felt despairing. Trudging through the mud felt symbolic of the whole situation."

Most of the UK experienced several lockdowns and these bridged several seasons. In this report we don't have space to explore fluctuations across the period of the pandemic, but for many, walking felt less appealing as winter beckoned. Boredom and frustration also began to set in, even for those who love walking. These comments were typical: "I am however completely sick and tired of the local parks and scenery!" and: "I always walk, everywhere. It's been a nightmare only walking round the same old paths".

In previous sections we have illustrated how some people developed or engaged in creative walking activities to mitigate the feeling of boredom and to remain motivated. Nevertheless, that lockdowns returned had a particular impact on people's enthusiasm, and in future crisis scenarios organisations and agencies might usefully recognise and take on board the shift in people's responses over time, and find different ways to respond to these. Creative approaches may be well placed to address some of these reported challenges, and the expertise that artists can offer in devising and implementing creative approaches which will support people in challenging contexts deserves serious consideration.

"I have always been big on walking, and chose to live where I live in part because it is good for walking and running. At first it was nice to explore more areas locally, but now the pandemic has been going on so long that I am very bored of walking in my local area. As a result, the end of the third lockdown meant that I have been more proactive about going on walks in new places as the rules allow."

Respondents also reminded us that people's situations changed in response to the pandemic, and continued to change as regulations changed, with additional pressures restricting possibilities:

"Really fun to be out walking with people 'together apart' and to discover new things in my locality, and make new Twitter friends. As time went on though, and my workload mounted, and I felt less creative I found it less fulfilling, another pressure to try and be creative when my mind just felt like slush."

"As the lockdown progressed, as a working mother I found I had less and less time to myself. The pressures of working from home with the whole family present meant I had to spend much more time on housework, shopping, preparing meals etc thereby leaving much less time for exercise than anticipated at the start. It does feel like a step backwards for working mothers in some situations."

Don't pressurise anyone to walk

While this report has centred on the benefits of walking and the creative ways people found to support their walking, it is important to remember that walking is not for everyone and for some people it is a painful activity. Thank you to those respondents who reminded us of this:

"I've always been a keen walker (particularly hill walks etc) and my walking habits have only increased during the pandemic. However, I would note that although walking is hugely beneficial for me for lots of reasons (most being the positive impact it has on my mental health), there have been occasions that during the pandemic I have felt pressured to go on a 'daily walk' - and if I didn't, I would feel guilt over this. I think this was particularly prominent in the first lockdown when we were only permitted to leave the house for one hour of exercise per day - if I did not capitalise on this hour, then I would feel guilt."

"I have chronic pain, and the cessation of two hours of daily walking has radically helped this. I therefore feel very mixed about walking less! I love walking very much and find it vital to facilitate parts of my spiritual practice."

"After trying to go for walks for my health/wellbeing etc, I now only walk when I need to go to the shops or doctors. Doctors and others are always telling me to go for daily walks and I find it frustrating and upsetting, because all that trying to walk every day did was cause me more chronic pain and make me bored and stressed - it doesn't help everyone's wellbeing and health."

Results Part Three: INTERVIEW SPOTLIGHTS

We were keen to supplement our large public survey with some in-person walking interviews, with each member of the research team interviewing groups or individuals as they walked together on a route chosen by the interviewee. The purpose of these interviews was to get deeper insight into the lived experiences of walking during COVID-19 and to centre voices which were largely invisible in our public survey, or to engage with the expertise of those who use walking in a professional capacity. Here, we share some insights from these interviews to put a spotlight on certain issues and themes.



Spotlight One: SHEFFIELD ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Maxwell Ayamba is founder of the Sheffield Environmental Movement (SEM). SEM evolved from 100 Black Men Walk for Health Group which was set up in 2004 to promote walking among middle-aged Black men. In 2018 they inspired production of the acclaimed play *Black Men Walking by Testament*, *Eclipse* and the Royal Exchange Theatre. The group changed their name to reflect the inclusive nature of an organisation whose ethos is to “work with Black Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugees (BAMER) communities and environmental organisations to ensure everyone has a clean, healthy environment and access to open green spaces such as parks that would promote a good quality of life and to ensure a ‘fair green deal’ for individuals to help them develop resilient and prosperous communities by ensuring the environmental sector listens to and is guided by all parts of society including people who feel ‘invisible’ and marginalised.”

SEM share many activities together, but at the heart of their programme is the Walk4Health group who go for monthly walks in and around the beautiful Peak District. In the interview, Maxwell shares his love of the countryside, and promotes the health benefits of walking, but tells us that SEM is about much more than the benefits of physical exercise. It creates a space for discussion, exploration and community building. Walking together also challenges damaging stereotypes about who the countryside is for. SEM helps break down barriers to walking, including the fear of racism which members have often experienced. During the lockdown, members were encouraged to walk on their own when and wherever they could and also to share photographs online with each other to stay connected.

Their previous walks together as a group laid a powerful foundation for a pandemic support network.

Maxwell told us: “Walking actually is so important for a whole lot of reasons, and a whole lot of factors. But it is not seen as a cultural hobby among Black communities, because we’ve been culturally severed or detached from our heritage, our roots. And so walking in England is seen as a white privilege, hobby or sport. And that’s why when Black people are walking then they are seen to be out of place. Especially in White spaces. And so we walk in these spaces, but these spaces really don’t reflect us. There has been a lot of Black presence in Britain for centuries. And so basically, we’re walking to reclaim the land our ancestors have walked for centuries, but yet have not been written into that landscape. We see it as our right to walk for freedom, to walk and talk and discuss issues affecting us as Black people.”

Maxwell and SEM say: “where Green becomes White, then there can never be diversity.... you can’t talk about promoting wellbeing if you don’t empower people to have the freedom and the right to walk in spaces and feel comfortable in those spaces.” We are delighted that SEM are part of the WPWA team as an associate partner. As well as supporting and advising on our research they collaborated with artist Jenson Grant and Roshni Asian Women’s group on a sci-art project commissioned by Walking Publics / Walking Arts, investigating air pollution in Sheffield.

For more information please see:
www.semcharity.org.uk
or email info@semcharity.org.uk



Walking Interview with SEM, Image credit: Alan Moffatt



Spotlight Two: THE POWER OF PARKS

Our research highlights the fundamental importance of parks and green spaces. Many people explored their local environment in depth for the first time, for others there was strengthening of bonds and a newfound appreciation. For example, Suraiya and her family live in North East England and their neighbourhood park is interwoven in their family history. She says: "I just like this park because I've lived here for ages and it's kind of like my park, I just know it, it's very comforting, because our back garden isn't very big, so it's basically like our back garden... I think it's a whole family thing." She explained how the park helps her feel she is part of the community, and it includes important personal landmarks such as "the monkey tree". Suraiya says: "this tree is really, really important, to all the children, and it's really important to my children, because they could climb all over." Parts of the park also reminded her of her Sri Lankan heritage, prompting happy recollections and warm feelings.

The size of the park means there are different areas and during the pandemic the family changed the way they used the park to avoid crowds and so the park remained a safe space. Liyanah is a teenager now and

told us that during COVID-19 she began to visit the park much more often and it became a really important place. She often met her friends there, to socialise, relax after revision sessions, to have picnics and to gather before exams. She said: "I wanted to still hang out with my friends, but it would be kind of not really safe for them to come to my house, so then we would just go to the park and then it would be more safer." Like so many other people we heard from, Liyanah began to appreciate the natural rhythms of plants: "I just found how fun it was seeing all the weather changes, because then it's really apparent with the trees, like in summertime it looks like this, but then in winter, all the trees' [leaves] fall and in autumn all the trees' [leaves] fall and then in winter they're really bare and then in spring there's the cherry blossoms..."

Roberta (a pseudonym) also developed a new connection to her local park. She has always enjoyed creative hobbies and realised during the pandemic how she could help others by sharing her skills. She developed a range of tools to encourage her neighbours to explore their local park. These included sharing historical pictures, organising treasure hunts, hiding geocaches

and building a labyrinth. She was "trying to help people, because people were saying 'walking around the park, it can be a bit boring or a bit soul-destroying'. So how could I help people to do different things in the park?" The pandemic made her relationship with her park more intense, and this has inspired her to train as a walk leader and to share relaxation walks with others. Roberta reacted to lockdown restrictions by finding ways to make walking interesting. Meeting this challenge, and developing her skills, helped Roberta and her wider community get through the pandemic. She recalls "when you could only walk for exercise, what was it for, an hour a day? This feels really crazy, to look back on that now. How could you make that as interesting and different each time?"

Amanda and Winnie are friends who meet every day at 5.30am to walk their dogs together in their local park in Dundee. Winnie is over 70 and visually impaired, Amanda is younger and the companionship they share is something special to them both. The routine of a daily walk with their dogs Zelda and Ollie provided some stability during the pandemic, and also gave them a chance to share news, discuss problems and

have a laugh together. Winnie and Amanda discussed the strength of the dog walking community around the park and how they have gotten to know other dog owners through their daily walks. They talked of the park as the dog's "back garden, they know every nook and cranny, you know?" They noticed an absence of some of their walking community during the start of lockdown due to the fear around COVID-19 but found that the earliness of their routine made the walk feel safer for them.

During the walking interview they talked about the accessibility and convenience of walking early in the day, before work and childcare commitments. Amanda and Winnie also both spoke of the wellbeing benefits of their walks. Amanda says: "that walk every morning with Winnie ... if didn't do that... I would definitely would have been a different person" She felt it was important for her physical and mental wellbeing, and knowing someone relied on her also acted as a powerful motivation: "I felt, well, if you got out, I'd spoken to a human being and exercised, and I knew the dog had had exercise."



Walking Interview with Amanda and Winnie in Dundee – Image credit: Harry Wilson



First two images: Walking Interview with Glasgow Ramblers. Third and fourth images: Paths For All – Image credit: Dee Heddon

Spotlight Three: WALKING ORGANISATIONS

There are many organisations which support people to walk well and they had to adapt during the pandemic. We are fortunate to be partnering with Paths for All and Ramblers Scotland and we walked with people from these organisations to learn from them what they did from a national and local perspective.

Paths for All is the lead organisation of the Scottish Health Walk Network. They provide training, support, grants and resources to help around 300 organisations deliver local Health Walks. Helen, who works for Paths for All, told us that the organisation “basically responds to need. So (we provided) an awful lot of support over COVID-19 with guidance of what they could and couldn’t do.” The Health Walks model is designed to be free, regular and accessible, so anyone feels able to join in. They start “right within the community, you know it’s – it’s not to start ten miles out of town, it’s to start from your doorstep so you can access it. 85% of our walks are within two kilometres of a green space. So free, local, under an hour, and accessible.”

Helen began working for the organisation because of her personal love of walking: “It connects me with nature, it grounds me, it transports me, it gives me freedom. I started walking before I drove, I loved the freedom it gave me. ... I walked a lot and what I found was that I was calmer and I was happier when I walked – it centres me. So, it’s become hugely important over lockdown but it’s always been important to me.” Her own walking did change during COVID-19 because she avoided some favourite locations that she thought would be busy. Her own experiences make her a passionate advocate, especially of Paths for All’s ‘Walking with Nature’ campaign.

Paths for All train walk leaders to lead their Health Walks. During the pandemic, the training had to move online. Between March 2020 and March 2021, more than a thousand walk leaders were trained. This was just one example of how Paths for All adapted to the pandemic conditions.

That there was a strong existing network of walks supported the emergence of new methods that were shared across the Scottish Health Walk Network members and walkers: “We had that amazing network throughout those communities that were all in touch with each other, and those walk leaders and walk coordinators that weren’t furloughed just got inventive”. Walk leaders knew that many of the people they support to walk were shielding, and so they incorporated ways to walk inside. This included walk leaders filming walks on WhatsApp and then sharing with others. There were also targeted actions, including distributing 20,000 strength and balance leaflets, campaigns around walking with nature, and hosting buggy walks. They also invited submissions of photos and personal stories for a digital, online exhibition called ‘Humans of the Walk’, where people shared inspiring stories of their walking experiences <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/gallery-details/humans-of-the-walk-lockdown>. These all helped combat isolation by keeping people connected, and this is very much in line with one of the key outcomes of Health Walks. As Helen reflected: “I think initially a lot of people come for physical activity, I think they stay because they’re socially connected. I think the physical activity almost gets forgotten about and the social connection – and the mental health benefit – keeps people motivated.” Finding creative ways to maintain that

connectivity was vital during the pandemic, but it relied on the strength and trust of existing connections, previously developed by grassroots organisations.

Catherine is Chair of Glasgow Ramblers, which is part of Ramblers Scotland. Their local group has around 300 members. Before the pandemic, Glasgow Ramblers had a busy programme of walks organised by walk leaders. These had to stop during lockdown when “it all became a bit of a shock and for a while we just drifted, I think from April, May, June, July, for those periods we weren’t really doing very much and then ...there was a dedicated page on the main Ramblers website for COVID-19 advice for the different nations for England, Wales and Scotland. Because we were operating under different rules... So it was a lot of change”. They had hoped to be back, maybe in reduced numbers, over Christmas 2020 but rule changes made this impossible. However, the group kept in touch with each other: “Our secretary’s brilliant and he kept in touch with members, sending out a monthly newsletter, and then he circulated these walking quizzes as well.”

When the group could not walk together safely, they were invited to participate in a series of walking quizzes created by Catherine for the University of the Third Age (U3A). These gave people things to find or questions to answer based within a specific area: “The first one that I made up was through the Botanic [Garden]. I mean, the idea really being that you know, during lockdown, people weren’t really allowed to meet with other people, so it seemed a nice idea to give people something to do when they were out walking.” The quiz attracted new members and its success led to the creation of walking quizzes in different areas shared across groups.

Catherine thought this example of creative walking was very important during lockdown because “Ramblers becomes a family of people who get to know other people... They lost all that.” To try and combat the feeling of separation, Catherine suggested using social media to “start a group challenge and so our winter challenge, which ran from November right through to the end of January was to walk as many parks as possible in Glasgow and we started off with a list of 60 and I think by the end of it we had walked through about 120 green spaces... It was remarkable.” Sharing on Twitter meant people beyond the group could be inspired. “It was fantastic”, Catherine reflects. “I think friendships developed through the WhatsApp group... at the time it was really vital to us, to some people. Because it allowed people to be out on their own, but still connecting with others, so the photographs that were being displayed [on Twitter] and it just sort of kept links going”.

Paths for All and Ramblers Scotland are valued project partners and it has been great to work with them. You can find out more about them here:

Paths for All:
<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/>

Ramblers Scotland:
<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland.aspx>

Spotlight Four: A WAY OUT

A Way Out is an outreach and prevention charity, which aims to “engage, empower and equip vulnerable and excluded women, families and young people to live lives free from harm, abuse and exploitation and to reduce life limiting choices and behaviour”. We conducted a walking interview with staff members Lisa, Jo and Leanne.

Staff knew their services would be more vital than ever during the pandemic but they could not meet their clients in the office as usual so they had to adapt. Previously, clients would usually come into the A Way Out offices but this wasn't possible during the lockdown, nor was it safe to visit people in their homes. They experimented with mobile phones and online services but many clients were uncomfortable with this or unable to participate due to lack of training or access to IT. Lisa explained to us: “we were trying to meet the clients' needs, thinking creatively. And a lot of them

said, ‘this is really affecting my mental health, the face-to-face contact is so meaningful and so valuable to me, that’s what I need’. So the clients were really clear about what they needed, so we started working with our management team (doing) risk assessments. To try and make it work. How can we safely during a pandemic offer face-to-face support? And doing outside, working outside, was the way forward. So we started offering doorstep welfare checks, which then developed into Walk and Talk appointments.”

A Way Out have used funding to buy umbrellas and to give clients hats and gloves so the weather is no deterrent. However, there can be some challenges, particularly around confidentiality, when sharing sensitive issues outside, rather than inside in a secure environment. These were tackled through the professional expertise and caring skills staff had developed. They have found some real benefits to

moving outside and walking with their clients such as: “One of the things about Walk and Talks that I love as well is, when we’re in the office doing appointments here, there’s that moment of silence, it can be quite awkward. Because you’re always there for a reason, for a purpose, and it’s to talk. So it can be quite uncomfortable if there’s a moment of silence. But actually, walking in silence can be beautiful. You know, just to listen and take in things. And I think it takes that pressure off the clients as well.”

Overall, they feel using walks and talks has strengthened the work A Way Out does, as Jo explained: “it’s just been the best thing ever engagement-wise, and the feedback we’ve had with clients has been that, actually, on some days, they’ve not had that motivation or they’ve been feeling really low, or they’ve just wanted to hide indoors and bottle up all them feelings, and they wouldn’t have attended an appointment in the

office. But actually, us actually going out to them and doing that outreach, and knocking on the door, has given them that motivation to come out and actually work through the issues. So we’ve had some really positive feedback, and out of all of my caseload, nobody’s ever said that they felt worse after a walk and talk. Everybody has always said that they feel better for it, that they’re glad they’ve come. And one client in particular has said that it’s totally reduced her isolation. She feels less isolated by being able to get out and do that walk, because it’s something she wouldn’t have done alone. And I think, just walking in general, it’s just got that sort of like freedom to it, hasn’t it? You know, you can walk anywhere at any time. There’s no barriers there.”

Find out more about A Way Out and how you can support them here:
<https://www.awayout.co.uk/>



Walking Interview with A Way Out – Image credit: Lisa Pugalis

Spotlight Five: WALKING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE

Many Disabled and chronically ill people were profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Our survey respondents included people telling us they changed their walking routines – where, when and whether they felt safe to go out at all. Several of our interviewees told us in more detail about their experience.

Sandy Taylor, executive officer for the National Federation of the Blind UK (Scotland) (NFBUK), talked about how the pandemic changed his experiences of walking as a blind person. He is active in his local community and walks daily, following paths he knows well, including the one he shared on the interview: “This is a route I’ve learned. You know, some people think a white cane is something magic, that you can walk anywhere. You really do need to have a mental picture of where you are. Mental mapping, we call it. So, this is a route I learned that takes me downtown and allows me to go shopping and so on. But I couldn’t go into the middle of Glasgow and walk about.”

During the pandemic, Sandy could not go to his regular group meetings and also faced additional obstacles to being able to go for a walk. He is angry at the poor maintenance of footpaths that makes them a struggle, particularly where they are overgrown with nettles and low hanging branches, both of which are a risk to him.

He also has serious issues with shared space and interventions which, in theory, are designed to help pedestrians. These do not work for Blind and Visually Impaired people. As Sandy explained: “They took away all the traffic lights at the main four-way junction. All the controlled crossings, most of the curbs. And the idea is that the pedestrian has priority. But not anymore, they don’t. And I’m supposed to make eye contact with a driver and he’s going to let me cross the road?” Sandy is actively involved in local campaigns to improve the situation; priorities include the reinstatement of more controlled crossings and adoption of universal tactile surfaces.

Sandy shared his reflections on new problems created by initiatives to support cafes and bars to move outside onto the pavements during the pandemic. Whilst welcoming ways to sustain local businesses, Sandy advises that this should be done in an inclusive way, rather than adding access barriers. He suggests that the new street furniture which has appeared across his mapped walks should “have screening round it”. He explains: “My cane gets tangled up with the chairs and with customers’ baggage underneath the chairs [and] we can’t self-distance from them... It’s inaccessible to many, many people now.” Sandy calls for “a little bit of thought in the planning and listening.

We keep saying, ‘Please consult with us at the concept stage’. But they tend to make up their mind. And the shared space was one of the first ones. ‘Oh, it’s gonna be wonderful, we’re gonna do this and the traffic’s gonna slow down, the pedestrian will be king.’ The reality is different. People are terrified.”

Sandy’s experiences in Scotland resonate with Harrie Larrington-Spencer in Manchester. Harrie is an active travel campaigner and researcher. “The focus needs to be on pavements and improving pavement conditions. That’s in terms of walking... A person’s very local neighbourhood is actually their immediate space to exercise and maybe people want to go to a park to exercise or go to a gym but for a lot of people that’s not a possibility, or it’s not a desire, like it feels like a right to be able to access that space and for that, one of the main things is the condition of pavements.

Harrie stresses that public transport connections are also important but if she could change anything to improve walking, “my first thing would be a pavement plan. Yeah, looking at what is the issue of the pavements in terms of accessibility, in terms of width, in terms of pavement furniture, so that’s one. Seating is another kind of big thing as well, and bins – if you are going to have seating you’ve got to have bins by your seating.”

Harrie uses a trike to get around as she finds walking painful and also feels self-conscious about being stared at. Just before the pandemic she got a dog, Frida, who transformed her experiences of place, and Frida loves travelling in the cargo-trike. Harrie is passionate about how cycling improves her quality of life. However, having a non-standard bike means she encounters structural problems finding room to move her bike and park it. “It’s a bit like if you designed pavements for a wheelchair user, they’re going to be good for everybody. If you design cycle lanes for a trike, they’re going to be good for everybody, but you’ve just got to think about, it’s not enough to think okay, a trike will fit within your cycle lanes, for example. You need to start thinking about okay, if someone’s cycling a trike, what kind of–, in terms of their body–, what are they going to be able to be doing?... There are a lot of differences in terms of what people need and that’s quite difficult to manage.”

Our walking interviews underscored that there is no one ‘Disabled person’s experience’ of walking before or during the pandemic. Stacey (a pseudonym) is neurodivergent and they told us that for them, “restricted movement was excruciatingly hard because... I can’t just stay indoors... Staying indoors all day is just not something I can ever tolerate really and I’ve always felt like a kind of compulsion to some degree to get out



Walking Interview with Sandy Taylor – Image credit: Dee Heddon

and walk a certain amount every day... I need to move... The simile I used the other day when I was talking to a friend was ‘I’m out of the house like a cork out of a champagne bottle’.

Stacey found the restrictions had a massive impact on them emotionally. “I felt very, very alone in that I felt like I had this desperate need to be in touch with people regularly and online wasn’t an acceptable substitute for that”. Stacey felt very torn because they wanted to protect loved ones yet needed to balance the risk of going outside with their own mental health needs. Part of their solution was occasional trips to the countryside outside their city, timed to avoid off-peak travel and honey-trap tourist spots. Their first post lockdown walk left them “almost euphoric...I was just almost in awe that that world still exists. Because my horizons had narrowed so terrifyingly and so kind of insidiously in a way that I almost felt like I’d been at risk of forgetting what I’d lost, forgetting that there had ever been more to the world than my house and its immediate surroundings and yeah, I definitely felt like

for me to some extent that was kind of turning a corner in terms of okay, despite the pandemic, I’ve got to still try to snatch what I can of life. And you know, I managed a few other walks that summer.”

Sandy, Harrie and Stacey have very different experiences, but all share a desire for a more equitable, accessible and just walking environment and call for more inclusive thinking around how this could be managed better in future crises conditions.

For more information about the National Federation of the Blind UK (NFBUK), including Sandy’s work in Scotland, see: <https://www.nfbuk.org/>

Find out more about Harrie’s research into active neighbourhoods here: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/62322/1/Active%20Neighbourhoods%20in%20Greater%20Manchester%20USIR_theone.pdf

CONCLUSIONS

This research focuses on the amazing potential walking has to make individuals feel better, engage in creative activities and experience a connection to their community. It reinforces and supplements previous work, which demonstrates the many environmental, social and personal benefits of walking. Walking is good for wellbeing, for creating a sense of attachment to place, and can create a space for conversation, inspiration and creativity. It can also facilitate a sense of community and belonging, and can offer comfort or escape in difficult times.

We further demonstrate how these well-established benefits can all be enhanced by creative walking. The restrictions of lockdown paradoxically enabled new forms of being in place, giving solace and distraction, and facilitating valuable new community connections. Being forced to stay local gave many an increased appreciation of their neighbourhood, and in particular their parks and green spaces. Encountering neighbours, either by sharing space or happening upon interventions they had made, was vital for mitigating isolation and anxiety. Relatively small works such as window trails or painted pebbles created powerful feelings of connectedness, shared experience and togetherness.

For many people walking was central to their wellbeing in different ways. It could create space to be alone or to be with others, to solve problems, provide respite from pressure and a break from screen time. Green space and parks often enhanced this positive impact, providing comfort in nature. Creative walking was viewed as a delightful, safe and fun activity, relieving some of their boredom, and encouraging people to walk further, continue walking, or walk more often. It was generally seen as an accessible and low-pressure way to experience and stimulate art outside conventional gallery settings.

However, the conditions must be in place for people to sustain good walking habits. The majority of our respondents hope to build on their pandemic walking and continue to walk but express concern this may not be possible for a variety of reasons. There are also barriers which prevent some people ever taking part in creative walking. These can be categorised into three main areas and we believe action should be taken to tackle these problems.

MATERIAL CONDITIONS

Policy and resources must be focused on creating an accessible environment which will benefit every kind of body. A holistic approach should be taken to what is meant by access, which includes (but is not limited to) infrastructure, such as adequate public toilet provision, and more seating areas with a variety of different benches. Any future pandemic response must be aware of the negative impact on many people if these facilities are closed. We need better quality pavements and pedestrian routes with street clutter minimised where possible. Design should integrate access for Disabled people and statutory bodies should, as a minimum, consult with a range of local Disabled people's organisations about developments in their area. Maintenance and protection of routes, parks and green spaces is also vitally important.

CULTURAL CHANGES

We need to create a culture where walking is a safe and appealing activity for everyone. Harassment and fear of harassment prevents many people, especially women, from participating equally in walking activities. Additionally, as SEM evidenced, more Black and Asian groups are walking, but they also experience racism and hostilities. We must make sure that nobody is excluded from walking due to prejudice or harassment. Support should be given to organisations such as SEM, Boots and Beards, Steppers UK, Muslim Hikers, Black Girls Hike and other groups promoting and enabling walking for more diverse communities. Policy makers must do more to tackle hate crime, whilst individuals and walking organisations should consider how they can be better allies. The dominance of cars must also be challenged and pedestrians should be kept as safe from traffic as possible. As above, this necessitates provision of good quality infrastructure including pavements, paths and walking routes.

OPPORTUNITIES

Many people are unaware of creative walking initiatives and the diverse benefits that creative walking can bring, including introducing people to walking activity and fostering cultural participation and empowerment. There is work to be done by both cultural and walking organisations, supported with appropriate resources, to confidently engage with creative walking.

Artists, cultural organisations and community groups could, and should, be supported to develop resources to encourage participation in creative walking so that its benefits can be more widely realised. Individuals experience pressure on their time and we want to make creative walking an appealing and welcoming choice. Developing resources, which promote creative walking and encourage its adoption in a wide range of contexts, would enable more people to explore how it could benefit them. It could also help individuals and organisations become more sustainable in the event of future lockdowns. As many more people worked from home during the pandemic, it became increasingly important that people found ways to create or maintain a work-life balance. Going forward, with many people electing to continue working from home, or adopting a hybrid working model, the lessons learned during the pandemic can usefully be applied to life beyond it.

We strongly assert the need for work to dismantle all kinds of obstacles to creative walking. You can read more about our policy recommendations at <https://pandemicandbeyond.exeter.ac.uk/walking-publics-walking-arts>. We want to support the development of an enabling culture, where the conditions are in place for people to choose walking. Walking should not be compulsory, and should never be seen as a substitute for healthcare and social support. We support the aims of *Walk Back Better - A Manifesto for All by Paths for All*, *Living Streets Scotland* and *Ramblers Scotland*.¹² This calls for:

- 1) Improved infrastructure and design to deliver better access to walking for everyone.
- 2) Campaigns to make walking easy and enjoyable.
- 3) Action to ensure walking is safe in every community.

Arup, Living Streets' and Sustrans' *Walking for Everyone*¹³ also provides detailed information on making walking more inclusive.

Walking can be a powerful tool, bringing joy, delight, and comfort. It can also facilitate an enhanced sense of community connection and belonging, both in local neighbourhoods and with nature and green space. Simple creative walking initiatives can enhance all these benefits. Our research demonstrates how positive outcomes can emerge out of restrictions and offer respite, solace, fun and inspiration. We want to ensure that everyone who wants to can walk well into the future. During the pandemic, small, everyday moments of magic were created by our footsteps. We believe these desire lines can develop into sustainable and important new paths



Top: Louise McVey, *Golden Fence Topper* - Image credit: John Devlin
Bottom: Minty Donald and Nick Millar, *Erratic Drift: Alluvial Drift* - Image credit: Callum Rice.

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CONTACT DETAILS

For more information about *Walking Publics / Walking Arts: Walking, Wellbeing and Community During COVID-19* please see our website www.walkcreate.org. This also includes links to our other publications and those of our partner organisations.

To contact the authors of this report please email mlrose@liverpool.ac.uk. We welcome your feedback, questions, comments and suggestions. Please also get in touch if you require this information in another format and we will do our best to help you.

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INSIDE BACK COVER: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Helen Billingham, *Coxside Smoke Signal* – Image credit: Gemma Smith
 Phil Smith working with Helen Billingham as Crab and Bee, *10 scores for a wild city* – Image credit: Phil Smith
 Jim Young, *Pebble Poems*
 Walking Interview with A Way Out – Image credit: Lisa Pugalis
 Outshifts: Rachel Henson and Neil Manuell, *unregarded places, easily overlooked small landscapes* – Image credit: Rachel Henson
 Elspeth (Billie) Penfold, *A Different Lens* – Image credit: Fred Adams and Elspeth (Billie) Penfold

BACK COVER: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Louise McVey, *Alexandra Parade Heart* – Image credit: John Devlin
 Ollie the Dog – Image credit: Harry Wilson
 Susie Rose Dalton, *Untitled (Unfired porcelain sentences)*
 Jo Delafons, *Lockdown Walk Boxes*
 Shirley Chubb, *Metatarsal Walk 1*

