Green Exercise in the North West

Natural England is funding eight Green Exercise demonstration projects with local partnerships around the country, aimed at increasing levels of physical activity and people’s connections to their local green spaces. Green Exercise can be any informal physical activity that takes place in a green space or the natural environment: from gardening, cycling and walking in urban green areas, to kite flying and conservation projects in the wider countryside.

Health on Wheels is the Green Exercise pilot project for Natural England’s North West region. It delivers a number of cycling initiatives to help people to start including cycling into their daily routines. These rides aim to build people’s cycling skills and confidence, breaking down all the barriers that prevent people cycling more often, such as learning to ride, where to cycle, cycle maintenance and road safety.

In partnership with Warrington PCT’s ‘Reach for Health’ team, Health on Wheels Warrington takes referrals for individuals with a wide range of health problems, and from cardiac rehabilitation and weight management groups. However, a large proportion of the participants are people from the local community just looking to increase their levels of physical activity in the outdoors.
Bill Hudson was a member of Warrington’s ‘Healthy Hearts’ cardiac rehabilitation group after having a triple heart bypass operation. Bill and his wife joined the cycle group after attending a taster session back in March 2009.

“I joined as I wanted to continue keeping fit and being active but do it outside of gym environment. I hadn’t cycled for years but I enjoy the freedom of the outdoors and fresh air, I feel healthier and happier exercising in the natural environment.”
Bill Hudson

The rides generally follow traffic free routes from various starting points across Warrington, utilising the Trans Pennine Trail from both Sankey Valley and Victoria Park in Warrington. Rides range from thirty minutes to an hour but are suited to groups.

“We started the rides at a slow and steady pace and the ride leaders have progressed us throughout the weeks. It’s great to ride as a group and socialise whilst taking in some exercise. Since I started, I have noticed that my breathing has improved, I am able to walk much further than before and overall just feel much healthier”. 
Bill Hudson

Since taking part, Bill and his wife have now both purchased cycles of their own and regularly ride in their local area. They even now use their cycles to cycle to the shops for the morning paper, incorporating physical activity into their daily lives.

“If anybody was thinking of joining, do not hesitate you are well looked after by all the staff and volunteers. They are great with us!”
Bill Hudson

Since starting the rides in January 2009, over 60 people have accessed the rides with over two hundred weekly attendances in the same time period.

“We aim to have a broader ride programme, in 2010, giving the people of Warrington the opportunity to connect with more of Warrington’s green space”. 
Iain Lancaster, 
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