

Nordic Walking Focus Group: Delamere Forest

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme a focus group with a Nordic Walking group was run at Delamere Forest. This group was new to recent regular sport and was a group the Forestry Commission had not engaged with at Delamere Forest before. Ten women and one man participated in the focus group, all were aged 55+. This was a group that were starting to become physically active again after not doing much for a number of years. They highlighted the benefits of undertaking physical activity in Delamere Forest.



Motivations, benefits and behaviours

Motivations to participate were to keep fit and be mobile. The benefits included socialising with others in the group, fun and enjoyment, and getting fitter. They enjoyed Nordic Walking (NW) as it was seen as more physical than ordinary walking. One person noticed the strength in her legs improving. Sometimes the group would carry on socialising and go for a coffee after their walk. Most knew Delamere Forest; some had brought their children to the site many years previously. They enjoyed walking in the forest due to the variety of paths which the NW leader took them along.

One of the women specifically changed behaviour by training as a NW leader and fills in when the main leader is on holiday. They all completed a NW beginner's course and the majority had purchased their own poles. They were sustaining their weekly NW and planned to continue attending as long as they could.

Benefits

*'It's more physical than just walking'
 'I'd rather do it than be in the gym'
 'It's fantastic for everything'
 'You have like minded people so you talk a lot'
 'You can go at your own pace you're not pressured into doing anything'
 'I thought I knew the forest but by ... there's so many paths we go on, it's absolutely wonderful'*

Noticing changes'

*'I feel that when I get back I want to keep going'
 'Yes me too, when I get home I don't get changed I go out in the garden and do something – you're warmed up already'
 'It's a good start to the week on a Monday morning'
 'I've noticed strength in my legs has improved'*

Benefits of doing physical activity in the forest

'Yes it's better in the forest, it would be boring otherwise. This is lovely, I think being in the forest it adds to the enjoyment'

'You can hear the birds'

'There are changes in the seasons, you are more observant of what is around you, you look and listen for things'

'There's no traffic either'

'You've got the challenge of uneven terrain and some hills and then level ground That's when you realise how good two poles are because it makes it so much easier walking with poles. You think oh god this is fantastic'

The independent activity provider and Active Forest Coordinator (AFC)

The NW instructor was trained by NW UK and runs training for those who have never carried out NW, and also provides a variety of classes for slower through to more advanced walkers. Providing a range of walks and options is important. The instructor chose to do the walks at Delamere Forest as it was *'ideal with mixed terrain without being too hilly'*. The instructor built up a client base little by little and focuses on recruitment and retention. In terms of publicity word of mouth was seen as most effective as well as email and facebook.

'I see myself doing this forever, its lovely and the people you meet are mostly lovely' NW instructor.

The Forestry Commission AFC at Delamere already runs a fitness business in the forest and now works part time as AFC. The coordinator is interested in fitness for all and developing a variety of core activities and taster sessions to try new approaches. The aim is to try and target off peak activities away from busy weekends. The AFC has received feedback about how carrying out physical activity outdoors provides a sense of freedom after people have been cooped up indoors at work or at home.

Building relationships is of key importance - with participants, independent activity providers who are running activity sessions and with the rest of the Forestry Commission site staff.

Word of mouth and face to face engagement is important in how people find out about the activities on offer and also in building relationships with those mentioned above.

Using existing data and insight can help target appropriate groups at specific sites with relevant interesting activities and opportunities.

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