

LET'S WALK LYNBROOK

Victoria
walks



@LindaScanlonPhotography

“I love being outside, meeting new people, and having a coffee and a chat at the end of the walk. Let's Walk Lynbrook has all of this!”

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About Let's Walk

Let's Walk is a Victoria Walks program, supported by VicHealth, that works with councils and local communities to develop, map and promote safe and appealing neighbourhood walking routes for women. The program targets less-active women, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. *Let's Walk* aims to connect women with each other, leading to safer, more social streets to increase women's regular participation in recreational walking.

Let's Walk was initially trialled in 2017 with funding from Sport and Recreation Victoria in Braybrook, and then in Footscray and Yarraville with the support of VicHealth in 2018. The City of Maribyrnong was a key partner at each stage.

Why Lynbrook?

Victoria Walks was keen to trial *Let's Walk* in a growth area and the City of Casey is the dominant growth area for south-eastern Melbourne.

The City of Casey expressed strong interest in partnering on *Let's Walk* in the suburb of Lynbrook which has many residents from Indian, Sri Lankan and Chinese backgrounds. In 2016, Lynbrook had a population of 8,519 and over three-quarters of residents travelled to work by car as driver or passenger.

Lynbrook has many community assets that made it a suitable location for a trial of *Let's Walk*. The council-run Lynbrook Community Centre is situated within the busy local shopping precinct and offers a variety of popular programs with staff having strong connections to the community. Lynbrook has an active Lynbrook Residents Association and a number of Facebook Groups such as the Lynbrook Social Page with 4000 members.

The Lynbrook area was also chosen as it is a relatively safe, quiet area with attractive parklands, well-maintained footpaths and a range of natural and built points of interest, making it a suitable area to promote walking.

Implementation

Through the City of Casey, a letter of introduction was sent to community contacts requesting they promote and support the program. This resulted in 33 program supporters that included various City of Casey staff and representatives from a range of community groups.

The *Let's Walk* Coordinator organised a walk with relevant council staff to identify the most appropriate walking route. Victoria Walks then mapped the *Let's Walk* Lynbrook online walking route, see www.walkingmaps.com.au/walk/4025.

Victoria Walks also assisted the City of Casey to arrange for coloured footpath markers to be printed and installed along the route to make the walk easy to follow.

Let's Walk Lynbrook commenced with a series of one-hour weekly walks for six weeks to activate the route. This was a 9.30am Tuesday loop walk from Lynbrook Community Centre, led by the *Let's Walk* Co-ordinator, followed by coffee, cuppa & chat social group.

A range of strategies were employed to promote *Let's Walk* Lynbrook, including:

- Advertising the walks on various social media
- Distributing flyers to program supporters
- Producing printed copies of the map to be distributed to the community through the Lynbrook Community Centre and various allied health and related services in the area
- Advertising the Tuesday 9:30 am walk in the Lynbrook Community Centre
- Displaying posters around the local shopping centre

Despite extensive communications to promote the walks, initially the number of participants was fewer than the desired number (a total of 15 participants over the first 6 weeks). The program was then extended for a further three weeks to increase the overall number and diversity of participants and provide greater opportunity for participants to establish a walking routine and better connect with others in the neighbourhood.

Between 16 October 2018 to 5 February 2019 a total of 24 walks were facilitated, including: 11 walks for general participation; 8 'Sunrise Walks' for early risers; and 5 walks for parents with young children in prams.



Results

An external evaluator was engaged to assess the program including whether it encouraged more people within the neighbourhood to walk and if the program was delivered as expected.

Participants were given uniquely numbered key rings on the first walk they went on, both as an incentive and to monitor participation in the program. Participants were asked to bring their key ring to each walk.

Although there was a modest overall number (31) of program participants, the pre-program and post-program survey results indicate that the program encouraged more people within the neighbourhood to walk. Overall, the proportion of participants who walked for 30 minutes or more per week for enjoyment or fitness increased from 75% pre-program to 88% post-program. Most (88%) post-program survey respondents indicated that they plan to continue walking regularly in their neighbourhood.

The evaluation found that attitudes to walking in the neighbourhood improved, with participants generally feeling safer, more comfortable and more connected with people in their neighbourhood and therefore more likely to walk. People will walk more when interesting neighbourhood walking routes are created, mapped and promoted.

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75 %
PRE PROGRAM



88 %
POST PROGRAM

What we learned

Let's Walk appeared to particularly appeal to retired women who were looking for ways to increase their physical activity and connect with others in their community. It did not meet the needs of women who left for work early each morning, which indicates an extra challenge of implementing such a program in growth areas where travel time to and from work can limit opportunities for participating in local activities.

Participants indicated at the start of the program the attraction of walking was for enjoyment/fitness, but post-program they highlighted the benefits of the organised walking groups and associated gains to their mental health and wellbeing.

Four months after the program finished (post evaluation), a core group of 10 people are walking most weeks.

There has been a willingness of the group to continue weekly walking beyond the engagement period, supporting each other to walk. A community walk leader has emerged and has the support of City of Casey and Lynbrook Shopping Village Centre Management to sustain *Let's Walk* Lynbrook. The interest in and support of the shopping centre, which was not unlike the support given to *Let's Walk* Braybrook in 2017 by Central West Shopping Centre, indicates the benefits such facilities can be to local community projects.

“ [I went on *Let's Walk* for my] depression and weight, my doctor photocopied the “*Let's Walk*” advertisement in the Lynbrook Community Centre booklet and told me to go to feel and look better. I'm happier. ”

Let's Walk participant

Let's Walk showed that health professionals are willing to advocate the benefits of, and refer clients to, such programs.



Let's Walk into the future

In 2019 a new *Let's Walk* partnership has been developed with the City of Greater Bendigo (COGB) to deliver the *Let's Walk* in Kangaroo Flat and Long Gully.

The timing is right to align with COGB priorities and enhance the launch of the regional Healthy Heart of Victoria initiative, which aims to improve health outcomes for residents living in Central Victoria. Initial meetings have been positive, and council have allocated resources to enable a strong partnership that will benefit local communities. This presents an opportunity to embed *Let's Walk* in a larger initiative that will likely result in a more significant program.

Victoria Walks will also explore whether the *Let's Walk* model needs to be varied in other contexts, such as an informal regular walking event in parks for women.



“ The route, mapping and flyer exceeded expectations of what Casey staff thought could be done – it was attractive, interesting, accessible and safe! ”

Council Officer, City of Casey



“ I had been living in my community for five and a half years, but I found myself so busy with work and family commitments. I was made redundant, suddenly, three weeks before the start of *Let's Walk* Lynbrook. I saw the post on the Lynbrook Facebook Social Page the night before the first walk. I was feeling pretty low. I remember thinking, 'I have to do that'. I went, and I was the only participant. It didn't matter. We walked and talked and laughed. I am the Number 1 *Let's Walk* Keyring holder. No one can take that away from me. I now have new friends in my community. ”

Christene

“ Even in the early stages the mutual benefits of this walking group project for both organisations were very clear. Everyone seemed to believe that the walking group model of Victoria Walks would absolutely work in specific areas within Casey. Initially council officers were very attracted to the fact that this project could attract multi-cultural women in particular – this aligned with multiple council actions and strategies to focus on women and girls in sport and physical activity in Casey. ”

Council Officer, City of Casey

More information on *Let's Walk*, including previous trials and maps of the routes, can be found here:
www.victoriawalks.org.au/Lets-Walk
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