

*I have always found walking to be a healthy, inexpensive way to relax and be able to forget worrying thoughts for awhile.*

In 2007 I noticed an advertisement in the local paper calling for volunteer walk organisers, I made enquiries and was contacted by the Kingston Council who were keen to promote walking groups as a means of socialisation and improving health. After I received my first aid training I became a walk Leader in two areas. On Monday's a group would meet at Parkdale Library and we would often walk along the Parkdale Beach trail. There would often be other walkers at that time of morning that we would pass, so there was a sense of community and safety. While we were talking amongst ourselves the ladies said they did not notice the distance they would cover. They often said they would not walk that far if they were on their own so the encouragement they received from the group was something they valued and encouraged them to make the effort to come even if they were tempted to stay at home to do their housework instead. It was easier for me to commit to the walks when I received feedback that the ladies considered the weekly walks a part of the week that they looked forward to.



I also took a walk group that met at the Chelsea Heights Community Centre on Saturday mornings. My husband came along to that group. It was nice to have a male along as so few men are interested in walking. The comments I hear are that they are more interested in watching sport than actually participating in physical activity themselves. It seems as though walking is often seen as too placid and female orientated by a lot of men who would not consider coming along with their wives when they walk. Due to personal commitments I had to finish my walk volunteer role in 2007. In 2009 I was invited to a Heart Foundation walk group activity and once again I found myself volunteering to start up another group at Chelsea Heights Community Centre. We had many pleasant walks along the wetland area and trails to Patterson River. If it looked like raining we would just take a short walk and then chat. Once again some members moved away while others stopped coming due to health reasons or to spend more time looking after grandchildren.



Due to my frequent volunteering for local causes I was a familiar sight around Chelsea and well known for promoting walking. When the facilitator at Longbeach Neighbourhood house Walk and Talk group in Chelsea became sick she asked me if I would take on her role. At first I hesitated as I didn't want to commit my time again. I now look forward to it. I agreed to help out for a while and I attempted to make it interesting by looking at maps of Chelsea.

The laneways are often suggested so we are sheltered from winds in the cooler weather. We often go to Bicentennial Park which has seating and shelter to rest before our journey back. If I bring my umbrella it will not rain! So far we have been very lucky with the weather during that time of morning and the ladies are not daunted by the possibility of rain. I admire their determination and courage at their age.

In summer it is nice to walk along the pier (before the extreme heat sets in) and watch the world go by and spout our opinions of how to make the world a better place. We are often greeted with a wave and a smile by other walk groups we meet along the way. We walk from 9.30 to 10.30AM. Any Participants who feel like a shorter walk feel safe to walk to walk back to Longbeach and will wait for us while having a cuppa. I try to make the sessions different by bringing along different articles from papers to look at and discuss if anyone feels inclined.



Longbeach Walk and Talk Group at Bicentennial Park

*Members of the group have been walking together for years and will bring along photos, books to exchange and often lemons or other fruit from their garden to offer someone who is a keen jam maker. There is a real sense of friendship and caring that has built up from the simple shared activity of walking together and showing interest in their community and each other's health concerns.*

Debra Wright, Volunteer Walk Facilitator