

Pilot Programme Report



Kilkenny

WALKING **THE** TALK

Turning a Good Walk into a Great Walk...



**Men's
Development
Network**



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Introduction

Walking the Talk was a pilot partnership programme run by Get Ireland Walking, Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership (KRSP) and Men's Development Network in Co. Kilkenny from November-December 2021 over 6 weeks. **The premise of the programme was simple – to provide spaces for men to reflect and support one another through life enhancing conversations in the company of other men.** The idea also had a clear tagline for supporting the design and implementation of the programme: *“Turning a good walk into a great walk”*.

In mid-2021, Men's Development Network identified that Get Ireland Walking would be an appropriate partner in transitioning the idea into a reality. Over 3 months of discussions and planning meetings, Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking agreed to pilot the programme in three counties during 2021 and to collaborate with a local sports partnership in the county. The plan was to design, implement and evaluate the programme, with a view to scaling it up for nationwide delivery.

Kilkenny City was identified as one of the pilot host-cities of the programme and Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership were identified as a key partner on the ground in developing and delivering the programme on the ground. In furtherance to this objective, Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking conducted an **online information and training session** on October 4th, 2021, for specified staff members and facilitators of local sports partnerships in Kilkenny, Carlow, Tipperary, Waterford, and Wexford who were interested in bringing the programme to their counties. The online information and training session also served as an induction morning for Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership before programme roll out. During the Zoom session, Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking highlighted:

- Who each partner organisation behind Walking the Talk was?
- What the intention of the programme was?
- Where sessions would be held for the purposes of the pilot programme?
- When the pilot would be held?
- Why the programme was being organised?

- The methodologies for facilitation of the programme.

Pre-Development Phase – Aims, Strengths and Obstacles

In early September 2021, the partner organisations brainstormed the objective, strengths, and potential obstacles of the proposed pilot programme to be able to strategically plan for the design, implementation, and evaluation stages of the programme.

The objective of Walking the Talk was to provide an opportunity for men to participate in a nature-based walking programme. The participants were to benefit from the programme in several ways, the obvious benefits of walking, with an emphasis on good conversations to support how participants can live more focused, flourishing, and healthy lives,

The programme aimed to encourage men to walk within a group setting and/or by themselves in the great outdoors, with some interesting questions to draw from and ponder on with respect to how they could live more connected, enjoyable lives.

Among the many strengths of the programme, it was understood by the partner organisations that:

- a) The **simplicity** of the programme would make it **successful**. The concept of men walking together in the great outdoors, sharing ideas, supporting one another, and partaking in new conversations was seen as having multiple positive aspects for **personal and social development, bridging isolation, and creating spaces for creation of new friendships** after close to 2 years of public health measures and restrictions since March 2020 due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19). Walking the Talk was also seen to have potential in relation to **good health and wellbeing outcomes** for the men participating in the programme.
- b) The programme brought together the Men's Development Network's **expertise** in health, development and engaging with men and the fitness expertise of Get Ireland Walking and Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership.

It was also recognised at an early stage that obstacles could emerge while designing and delivering the programme and the partners attempted to plan for these early on to prepare responses in the event these obstacles came to fruition.

- a) Initial plans to deliver the programme simultaneously in three counties in Quarter 4 of 2021 would be an obstacle to the successful delivery of the pilot programme. Therefore, the decision was made to scale back the programme to Kilkenny City alone, with plans to roll out the programme in **other counties in 2022 informed by the results of the Kilkenny pilot.**
- b) It was also understood that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, that restrictions could tighten at any time if new variants of concern were identified in Ireland. Mitigation efforts were explored to ensure contact was made with the men in this event.
- c) In the event of inclement weather, the group could meet in **Canal Square Café** for a coffee and talk, dependent on public health measures in place at a given time.

Programme Design Phase

Through Summer and Autumn 2021, Men’s Development Network’s Training & Resource Development Manager designed a 6-week Walking the Talk pilot programme, with each of the 6 weeks based around supporting questions upon which **life enhancing conversations** between the men could be based.

WEEK	DATE	TOPIC
WEEK 1	WED 3 NOV	Introduction: why we are here
WEEK 2	WED 10 NOV	Caring for myself
WEEK 3	WED 17 NOV	Caring for my family & friends
WEEK 4	WED 24 NOV	Caring in my community
WEEK 5	WED 1 DEC	Caring in my surroundings
WEEK 6	WED 8 DEC	Call to Action: Volunteering

Questions were designed in accordance with best practices for engaging with men from an **experiential, strengths-based, non-judgemental, non-adversarial**

approach based on Men's Development Network's 25 years of community development and practice of engaging with men across Ireland. These questions were drafted in a manner which allowed for open-ended conversation and personal reflection, engagement, and personal call to action.

Get Ireland Walking liaised with KRSP, and it was agreed that they would identify walkways in nature-based settings and facilitate the conversations during the walks. The initial plan was that the facilitation team would follow a co-mixed gender facilitation model, utilised by Men's Development Network across some of the organisation's other Health & Development Programmes & Client Support Services. However, in the week prior to the first session, the local sports partnership was required to change one of the facilitators due to a change in availability and therefore both facilitators were ultimately from the same gender.

Programme Promotion Phase

Men's Development Network's Head of Programmes played the role of **identifying partners** on the ground in Kilkenny City and County who could support the distribution of information about Walking the Talk to men in the community. An Excel database was established of contacts on the ground who ultimately supported in the promotion of the programme. These strategic contacts included:

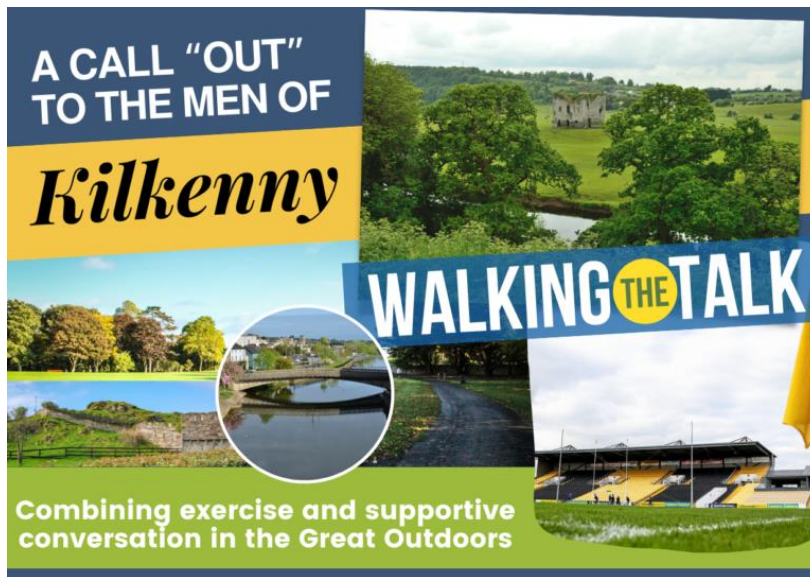
- Kilkenny Men's Shed
- Kilkenny City Library
- Kilkenny Men's Action Network
- The Home Rule Club
- Kilkenny Age Friendly County Office
- Cairde Club
- Kilkenny Active Retirement Association
- Go for Life senior's club
- Kilkenny VTOS
- Kilkenny ETB
- Kilkenny Garda Station
- Kilkenny PPN
- Teac Tom
- Kilkenny-Carlow CYPSC

- Kilkenny Citizens' Information
- Local Family Resource Centres
- Kilkenny Leader Partnership
- Local walking clubs
- Local GAA clubs
- Other sporting clubs/facilities

Meetings were held with each of these partners **in-person and via Zoom**. Additionally, these strategic contacts were also distributed with posters to display in their buildings and through their social media platforms to get the word out about Walking the Talk for men in Kilkenny. The **posters** were designed by Men's Development Network's Communications & Web Management Coordinator. The posters were developed based on themes of **"pride of place" and connecting with that sense of community** in Kilkenny through the use of images of the city and county as well as the use of black and amber as prominent colours associated with Kilkenny GAA.

Walking the Talk was also promoted on Men's Development Network's podcast series, *Your Passion, Your Legacy* in an interview between Men's Development Network's Training and Resource Development Manager and Get Ireland Walking's National Programme Manager.





The **registration process was handled by Men's Development Network** and applications were accepted through an application form on Men's Development Network's webpage or through calling head office and receiving support from a staff member in filling out the form. Among many questions, the registration form asked participants to identify if they had their own private transport in the event that the walks were being organised across Kilkenny City and County over the 6 weeks. The registration form also asked registrants to self-identify their level of physical activity from: (a) very active (b) active (c) reasonably active (d) reasonably inactive (e) inactive (f) very inactive. This allowed for Facilitators to plan the walks accordingly and to ensure the terrain was inclusive for all. The registration form also asked participants to identify their age cohort from (a) 18-29 (b) 30-39 (c) 40-49 (d) 50-59 (e) 60-69 (f) 70+.

Through the registration process, a total of 17 men registered for the Walking the Talk pilot programme in Kilkenny. This level of interest and engagement in the registration process was particularly noteworthy in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, a core group of 10 men participated in the programme. Some of the registrants were unable to attend due to changed work, personal, and health circumstances in what were challenging and unpredictable times considering the emergence and outbreak of the Omicron variant and associated public health restrictions.

Walking the Talk – A Partnership Throughout

Prior to the delivery of each week of the programme, the co-facilitators from Kilkenny Recreation and Sports Partnership met to discuss the questions for each week. The co-facilitators opted to host each week of the programme on Canal Square with two options for each week (a) to walk past Kilkenny Castle along Canal Walk (b) to walk along the River Nore towards the direction of the Linear Park. The co-facilitators were supported each week by staff from Men's Development Network or Get Ireland Walking and this ensured male representation in the facilitation and support team.

Walking the Talk commenced on November 3rd, 2021, at 10am on Canal Square. Each week of the programme took place on a Wednesday morning at 10am and this supported the participants and facilitators of the programme by having a **consistent and set meeting place and time**. The programme followed the pre-designed schedule for the first 5 weeks of the programme and attendance ranged from 5-12 men between the sessions.

The 6 weeks of the programme focused on the following themes:

1. Introductory Week – Breaking the ice and building the safety in the group.
2. Caring for Myself – Facilitated and peer supported conversations centred on how the participants take care of themselves.
3. Caring for My Family and Friends – Facilitated and peer supported conversations centred on how the participants take care of family and friends.
4. Caring in My Community - Facilitated and peer supported conversations centred on how the participants take part in community.
5. Caring in My Surroundings - Facilitated and peer supported conversations centred on how the participants take care of themselves in their surroundings.
6. Call to Action, Volunteering – Facilitated and peer conversations centred on the health and wellbeing benefits from volunteering and highlighting opportunities to get involved in volunteering in the community.

The 6th session of the programme was postponed due to Storm Barra, with winds that gusted up to 130km/h and left more than 56,000 houses and businesses without electricity. The 6th session took place a week later than scheduled, on December 15th, 2021.

Participants' Evaluations

Walking the Talk was evaluated with 8 participants and the facilitation team on March 3rd, 2022, during a walk on Canal Square, Kilkenny. The evaluation with participants took place in two ways (a) through group conversation (b) through written evaluations.

In group conversation setting, the facilitation method conducted by Men's Development Network followed a strengths-based approach and centred primarily on what the participants thought went well about the programme and what their advice would be if Walking the Talk rolls out again in future.

What Went Well About the Programme?

Many of the men who took part in the programme noted that the social element of the programme in a group setting was what they enjoyed most about the programme: *"I felt part of a motivated group... It's hard to get men involved in things at times and it was the social element I enjoyed the most"*. It was felt that being in the great outdoors and getting exercise allowed the group to open-up more into substantive conversations: *"when you get people walking, you get people talking. One conversation led to another"*.

Others noted that *"it was nice to be part of a group of men"* and that the supportive space of being in the company of other men was most enjoyable. Others highlighted that as they were retired, the programme *"gave them something to do"* in Kilkenny and it was something that he looked forward to each week.

What Advice Would You Give for the Future of the Programme?

The men who participated in the programme noted that they would like longer walks to be organised rather than a shorter distance. The Wednesday morning provided routine which was helpful but as with any programme, the date and time didn't always suit some of the men taking part in the programme and therefore having additional evening options could prove helpful for engagement with more men.

Written Evaluations

3 additional men who took part in Walking the Talk were selected at random to partake in written evaluations to provide further data from participants for the partner organisations to reflect on and learn from for future delivery of the programme. The

evaluation form was designed by Men's Development Network and the majority of questions were designed for participants to circle a number from 1-10 indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with a set of statements. A sample blank evaluation form is provided below:

:

Walking the Talk Evaluation Form

How many Walking the Talk Programme sessions have you attended?

None

One

Between One and Three

Between Three and Five

More than Five

On a score between 1 and 10 (10 being the highest score you can give and 1 being the lowest)

How do you score Walking the Talk Programme in relation to the below issues?

Enjoyment of how being part of support and connection with other men is good for your wellbeing and health?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Improved your awareness of the power of conversation in relation to sharing about our hobbies, enjoyments, favourite places the way?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Using focused question to have more interesting conversation with other men?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Provided the opportunity for you to think about the gifts and skills you have and that help you contribute to others eg , being friendly, kind, warm engaging, good with your hands, good at helping others?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Provided information in relation to other health and wellbeing initiatives that you might take part in or promote in the future, eg, walking, Men on the Move, Health Information and resources?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Has enhanced or deepened friendships and connections with the other men in through a sense of relaxed fun?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

7. Has your participation on the Walking the Talk Programme had a positive experience on your life and general wellbeing?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Please **mark as many of the words below** that you feel are linked to your experience of participating in the **Walking the Talk** of Conversation Programme.

Listening Learning Friendship Gratefulness Interesting

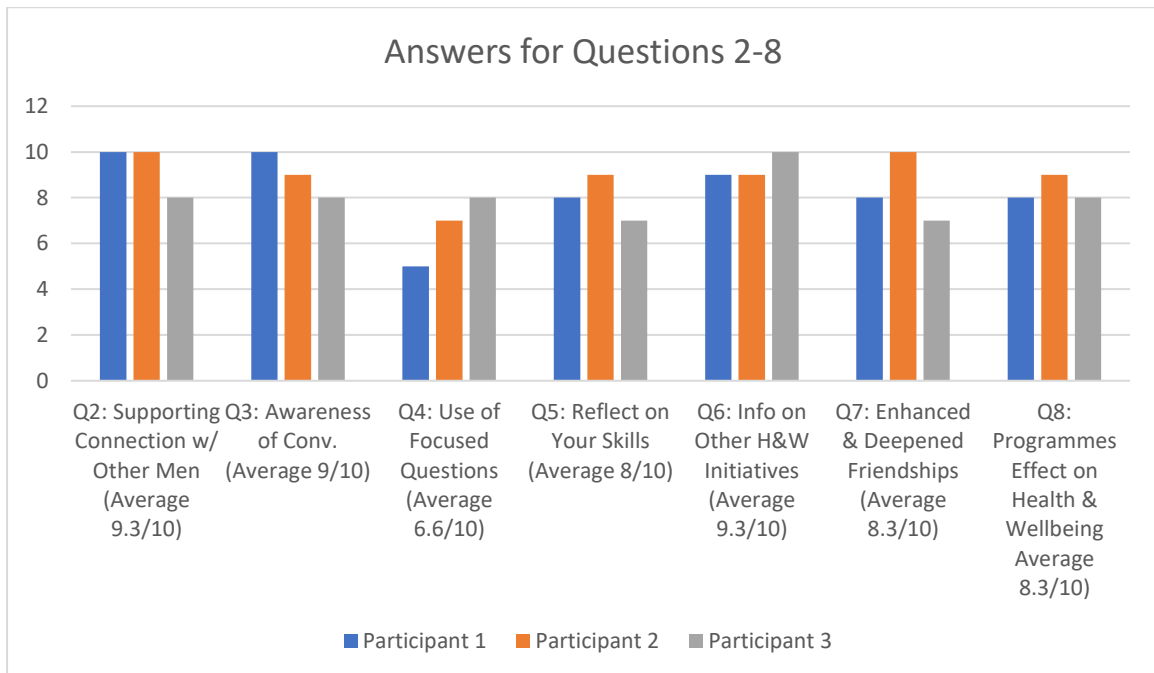
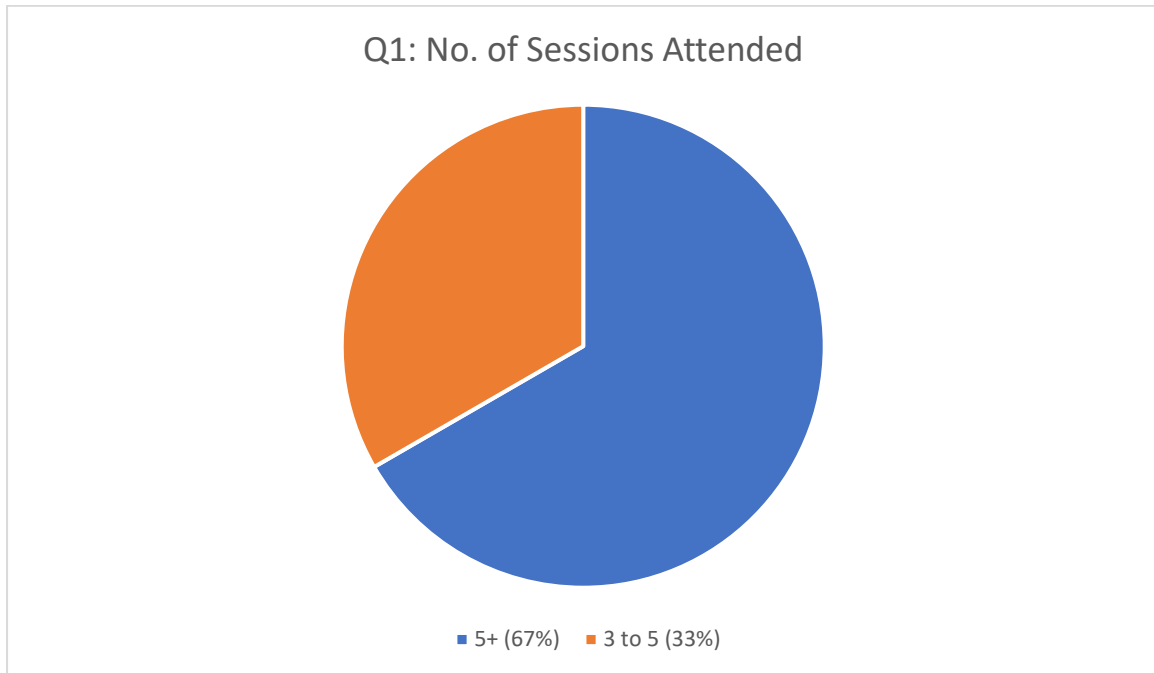
Fun Safety New Insight Information Future Plans

Please describe, in your own words, how your involvement in the Walking the Talk Programme has supported you or what your experience has been throughout the programme?

Would you recommend Walking the Talk to other men?

Have you got any further comments that might support improving this programme?

Data from Participant Written Evaluation Forms



Question 9: Words Participants Felt Linked to their Experience of the Programme	
Future Plans	33%
Learning	100%
Friendship	67%
Information	33%
Interesting	33%
Listening	100%
Fun	67%
Safety	33%

In relation to how the programme supported participants, three key themes emerged from the written answers:

- (1) Participants enjoyed chatting in a relaxed way
- (2) Enjoyed being in the company of other men
- (3) Participants hope that the programme continues in Kilkenny

Men's Development Network Evaluation

On March 7th, 2022, Men's Development Network's Head of Programmes and Training & Resource Development Manager conducted an organisational evaluation of the Walking the Talk Pilot Programme centred on what went well during the programme and what the organisation would do differently if running the programme again.

The positive aspects of the pilot programme identified through this internal reflective workshop included:

- The partnership established with Get Ireland Walking worked extremely well. The role of both Training & Resource Development Manager and Head of Programmes was critical to the success of the pilot and both performed different roles in Walking the Talk.
- There was a shared understanding of what Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking both brought to the programme.
- A lot of good work done in such a short period of time.
- Getting 17 men signed up for the programme during the pandemic and in winter.
- The partnerships on the ground in Kilkenny on our database were critical to the dissemination of information about the programme to men in the community.
- The group of men participating in the programme were extremely pleasant, enthusiastic, and good fun.
- The call out to participate in Walking the Talk was successful as the men themselves identified that it was the reason why they joined the programme – to walk and talk.
- The programme attracted a group of men who didn't know each other and through building the safety in the group and having a strong programme, new friendships were formed. By the final week, the group really knew each other and were talking about sustaining the programme and continuing to meet in Kilkenny.
- The Facilitation Team were nice, warm, and engaging.
- Having a set meeting point and walk provided certainty and safety in the walks.

- Two options on paths out and back provided some flexibility in terms of routes.
- Canal Square was a great meeting point + the Café was great for a coffee. Having a similar meeting point and facilities in other counties where the programme is run could prove invaluable.
- Our contact with the men was very positive, established great rapport.
- Significant conversations took place with and between the men each week.
- After Week 3, the questions were printed and distributed to the facilitators and men participating in the programme and this worked well in the circumstances, given that the facilitators were less au fait with the questions.
- Staff from Men's Development Network and/or Get Ireland Walking were present every week to support the group and the facilitation team.

The internal workshop also identified aspects of the pilot that were challenging and things we would do differently in rolling out the programme again:

- Securing a gender balance in the Facilitation could further support the project, that was the initial hope for the roll out. Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking attending and participating through engaging men in conversations at each session did provide gender balance and support.
- One Men's Development Network & one sports partnership Facilitator will be helpful in future delivery of the programme.
- Help with strengthening partnership, pre-development, and debriefing
- If you promise anything, deliver it (hats, pens *etc.*)
- COVID made it very difficult, this was challenging and added a fear factor
- Have different groups give brief inputs at the end of walks with signposting.
- Invite the local Volunteer Centre to the final session.

Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership Evaluation

In their evaluation of the pilot programme, KRSP highlighted the partnership model from the very beginning worked well and that each organisation played to its strengths in the design, delivery, and evaluation of Walking the Talk. The partnerships were strengthened through good communication and the easy conversational style between the partners. The facilitator and tutor model created a sense of warmth in the group and men were able to establish and build rapport early on.

In relation to the programme delivery, the partnership highlighted that they initially explored having the walks in different locations but that by having the walks in the set location removed uncertainty and worked very well. The starting point also wasn't too hilly which made the programme accessible and inclusive. The men also noted that three partner groups were interested in supporting the programme roll out, 3 direct agencies with an interest in it. The partnership had hoped to have a male facilitator and that although this didn't work out, the combination of having two experienced tutors with a great sense of fun and interest in the men worked well. Having support from male partners every week at Men's Development Network and Get Ireland Walking also supported the programme roll out with exploring the questions. Having 2 facilitators also allowed for one facilitator to be with men walking faster in the group and the other facilitator to be with men walking slightly slower in the group.

In relation to the future of the programme, KRSP noted that it would be great to keep the programme going through inviting the men to be part of a WhatsApp group to stay meeting. Another possibility would be for KRSP to administer the programme in future and have tutors check in over some of the weeks. An emphasis is also needed on continuing to get the message out there about the programme for successful rollout and implementation nationwide.

Get Ireland Walking Evaluation

Get Ireland Walking highlighted that the sense of informality was an important starting point for the men, and this allowed bonds to be built swiftly. The walking in the outdoors led to significant conversations in the fresh air along the riverside and this nature-based setting was helpful in creating the right environment for such significant conversations to be held. Get Ireland Walking acknowledged the positive impact of the developmental approach in the success of the programme and

highlighted that a key positive outcome from the programme is that the men built real conversational connections.

In supporting future delivery of the programme, Get Ireland Walking provided 5 key recommendations for upscaling of the programme:

- (1) The training with facilitators should take place in-person and focus on how the facilitators might use the key questions and selecting the questions that work best for them and the men in the group.
- (2) The potential for trained champions could be helpful in ensuring the questions remain at the heart of the walking experience in a non-intrusive manner. However, bringing in champions would require reflection on the supports needed for training champions and what is needed for them in supporting and connecting with the men in a safe and supportive manner.
- (3) The programme could be extended to a 10-week programme as that timeframe would allow more settling in the group and the questions could be faded through, mixed and matched along the way and thus the men would have greater time to build awareness of what they value about walking and wellness, friendships, relationships, families, hobbies *etc.*