

Proxy Walks & Awards Plus

Walking for others



Day walks...Walk-and-talk sessions...Expeditions. Walking is at the heart of Awards Plus.

The full spectrum of walking abilities, however, includes 'limited walking' and 'not walking'. Bringing 'Proxy Walks' – walking for others - into our work with young people across Edinburgh and The Lothians as they participate in a range of nature-based youth awards adds a dimension to volunteering and sharing. It embraces creativity and consideration of others whilst prompting inter-generational exchanges.

Losing the ability to walk might be due to age, disability, or chronic illness. It will have been a feature of life for some since birth. Long covid has impacted 2.3 million people in the UK, restricting walking abilities and creating new limits in life-changing ways for many.



Proxy Walks concept-creator, artist [Alec Finlay](#) has been exploring how walking for others has become an invaluable lifeline for many living with chronic health conditions. "It's only in losing their freedom to walk that people realise what walking meant to them. Being unable to doesn't switch off the desire to walk". "All of us with chronic or terminal illness still have hopes, dreams and aspirations", says Proxy Walk recipient Juliet Robertson.

[A recent blog](#) describes the first Proxy Walk and explains some of the thinking behind it.

What's a Proxy Walk?

In a nutshell: **walk | for someone else | share it with them.**

"The idea is that someone, anyone, will make a walk in a place for someone else, sharing a description of it", says Alec. "The shared experience of a walk can help people feel less isolated and recover a sense of belonging. It's a very simple idea, but also very powerful. It returns the idea of belonging in the world, or on a hill or in a park, to someone who feels they can't. It's an act of solidarity and empathy."

Who can do a Proxy Walk?

Anyone who walks can do a Proxy Walk.

It's ideal for participants in nature-based youth awards. Duke of Edinburgh's Award Expeditions or Volunteering and the John Muir Award Share Challenge offer great tie-ins, for example. Opportunities abound in the Awards Plus Open Programme, in 1:1 Mentoring sessions, in schools and youth club settings.

Who for?

A Proxy Walk can be for a family member, a housebound relative or neighbour. Or it might respond to a request from someone who's ill, hospitalised, or less mobile than they used to be. They may have special memories of a particular place or appreciate sharing in a walking experience.



We're creating partnerships around such requests. "Our community members would love to have young people sharing walks with them" says the volunteering manager at an Edinburgh hospice. "Ted used to walk his dog along Cramond Shore every day. Towards the end of his life his eyesight deteriorated and he could no longer get out and about. For someone to share the sights, sounds and smells of the Forth would have made his day, absolutely."



How?

- Think of someone you know who will appreciate having a walk shared, or respond to a request to walk for someone (maybe someone you don't know)
- Walk
- Share

There are many ways to share, from short and sweet to creative and artistic narratives. It will depend on what the walker wants to do and feels comfortable with, and what the walk-recipient would like to receive. This might be "Anywhere! Anything!" Or it might be a specific request for a special location, particular things to be shared, or a way of sharing. For example: "A photo of the Hibs ground from the top of Arthur's Seat".

- Note some suitable words - a short text message, something descriptive, a haiku
- Take a photo
- Facetime, send/make a video message
- Make a scrapbook – over time, through seasons, see [Make This Book Wild](#)
- From Alec: On the same day, for one hour, the recipient (non-walker) remembers a walk in the place they've nominated and the walker then describes that place by making notes as they walk through it.

Share in person, or by text, email, WhatsApp...or even a good old postcard or letter.

For an update on Proxy Walks – examples, partnerships – contact info@awardsplus.org.uk. Join us in walking for someone who'll appreciate it.

Thanks to Alec Finlay for concept, images, support. For more background see this Paths for All [blog](#). Photos: Anna Pultar Photography

#AwardsPlus #ProxyWalks

