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**Popular walks programme welcomes new volunteer leaders**

New volunteer walk leaders have recently completed their training to start leading walks on the latest HeartSmart Walks programme run by Chichester Wellbeing.

The five new leaders come from a range of backgrounds, including some who have completed walks on the programme before, and some who are new to the programme but have a keen interest in walking and the outdoors.

The HeartSmart walks are completely free and range from 30-minute walks of one- mile, to all day walks of 10 miles. The walks take place at different locations across the Chichester District and have been running for over 23 years.

These walks are designed to cater for all ages and abilities, and the latest programme has started with walks available for booking until the end of January 2025.

New walk leader, Jane, says: “I love the outdoors and walking with people, it’s so good for physical and mental wellbeing. I volunteered so that I could give something back to my local community, and I also get to use the skills I learned during many years working as a leadership coach and mentor.”

New walkers are always welcome, and the walks offer opportunities to exercise and meet new people in a safe and friendly environment.

“I started walking with HeartSmart in January 2023 and I have thoroughly enjoyed walking in new places, meeting new people and making friendships,” says new walk leader Phil. “It inspired me to become a walk leader- I recently led my first walk, and I loved it!”.

Regular exercise and time outside have been shown to have positive benefits on a person’s wellbeing, and the HeartSmart walks can provide the opportunity for people to start exercising more regularly, but at a pace that suits them.

Walks are available to book one week in advance, up until midnight the evening before the walk takes place. Comfortable and appropriate footwear and clothing is advised.

People can view the latest HeartSmart Walk programme and book at [**www.chichester.gov.uk/heartsmart**](http://www.chichester.gov.uk/heartsmart) or by calling **01243 521041**.

Councillor Tracie Bangert, Cabinet Member for Community and Wellbeing at Chichester District Council, explains: “The HeartSmart walks are very popular among our residents, and it’s great to see that some of the new volunteers have been involved with walks on the programme before. We always want to encourage even more people to make the most of an activity that’s so good for their heart, health, and mental wellbeing. They’re a lovely way for residents to meet new people and help tackle loneliness and feeling of isolation, which brings further benefits to people’s wellbeing.”

Tracie adds: “The majority of walks start at 10.30am, allowing walkers over 66 years of age to use their free bus passes to get to the start point. Regular exercise like this can help to improve emotional wellbeing, manage weight, reduce blood pressure, stress, and risk of diabetes. It costs nothing and yet can have such a positive impact on wellbeing and health.”

For a copy of the latest programme, or to find out more about training as a Volunteer Walk Leader, people can contact our Wellbeing Team on **01243 521041** or email **wellbeing@chichester.gov.uk**

**For further information, please contact Thomas Carr, Communications Assistant at Chichester District Council on 01243 521297**

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