

Physical Activity – Walking Package



Case Study - Achill GAA Walking Loopers

Club	Achill GAA
County	Mayo
Location	Achill Island, west coast of Mayo
Rural/ Urban	Rural
Codes	Football and Ladies Football
Membership (2016)	562

Plan

Supporting Document: GAA Physical Activity Guidelines [INSERT HERE]

Achill is located on the west coast of Mayo and has a total population of approximately 3,000 people. The vast majority of the parish natives aged 18-34 years live away from Achill and this coupled with a general decline in rural population has seen Achill GAA Club fall on challenging times. However a

new initiative 'The Loop Walkers', aims to include people from the wider community whilst providing a structured social outlet with a focus on inclusivity and general Health and Wellbeing. With 14 existing stunning Loop Walks in the area the Healthy Club team came up with the idea of organising group monthly walking events, open to everyone in the community. Their motto is "Walk and Talk"

Partners

Within the Club

- *Healthy club project team with support of Club Executive*
- *Club volunteers*
- *Club PRO*

Outside the Club

- Mindspace Mayo (specialise in young people and their families' mental health matters)
- Mayo Sports Partnership
- Get Ireland Walking (Two clubs members trained as registered Group Walking Leaders)
- Local community groups (welcome the walkers to their villages and to provide post- walk refreshments)
- Local community centres

Activity

For Achill GAA inclusivity and health and wellbeing are the cornerstones on which the project is based. The monthly walk is usually around 5k and is suitably paced to facilitate chatting along the way. News and views are exchanged before light refreshments are enjoyed by all at the terminus. Due to demand the group also meet up every Saturday morning to walk socially on Keel Beach

The project team developed a registration document for use as both a data collection tool and as a means of encouraging motivation and commitment to the programme as a whole. It also promoted a sense of belonging and inclusion for participants.

The initiative has been cost neutral for Achill GAA as local community groups were only too happy to welcome the walkers to their villages and to provide post- walk refreshments in their local community centres. Before they knew it they were established and tagged as "The Loopers!"

The Club

Historically, (in Achill anyway!) the GAA Club has always been perceived as being for footballers! One of the aims of the Loop Walkers project is to promote the GAA Club as being open to and welcoming of all members of our community. The ethos is that everyone has something to offer. Currently average participation in the walks is 80 people with adult participation of approximately 70%.

The walks have welcomed participants from both within and outside of the GAA Club and it would seem apparent at this point the GAA Club is becoming recognised as an having an open door to people of all ages and capabilities regardless of your footballing talents.

As the project is ongoing no complete evaluation has taken place to date but the team are compiling participant feedback forms.

Quotes from participants:

“I’ve lived in Achill all my life and never walked in this village”

“I never walked in any organised walk before the Loopers but now I see I’m well able.”

“My son (22) wouldn’t be the most confident but this has brought him out of his shell”

Based on the success of the walking initiative the club hosted the Achill GAA Healthy Clubs National Walking Festival between 31st March and 2nd April 2017 which was a huge success with 35 people from all over Ireland visiting. The unique package included 2 local guided walks around the stunning island, 2 nights B&B, lunch, dinner and transfers. The club organised this affordable package in partnership with Achill Tourism. Other partners included Achill Bord na n-Óg, Achill LGF, Mayo Co Council, Mayo Sports Partnership, local hotels and guesthouses and Mindspace Mayo.

