

# “Positive Walkers” – steps ahead...

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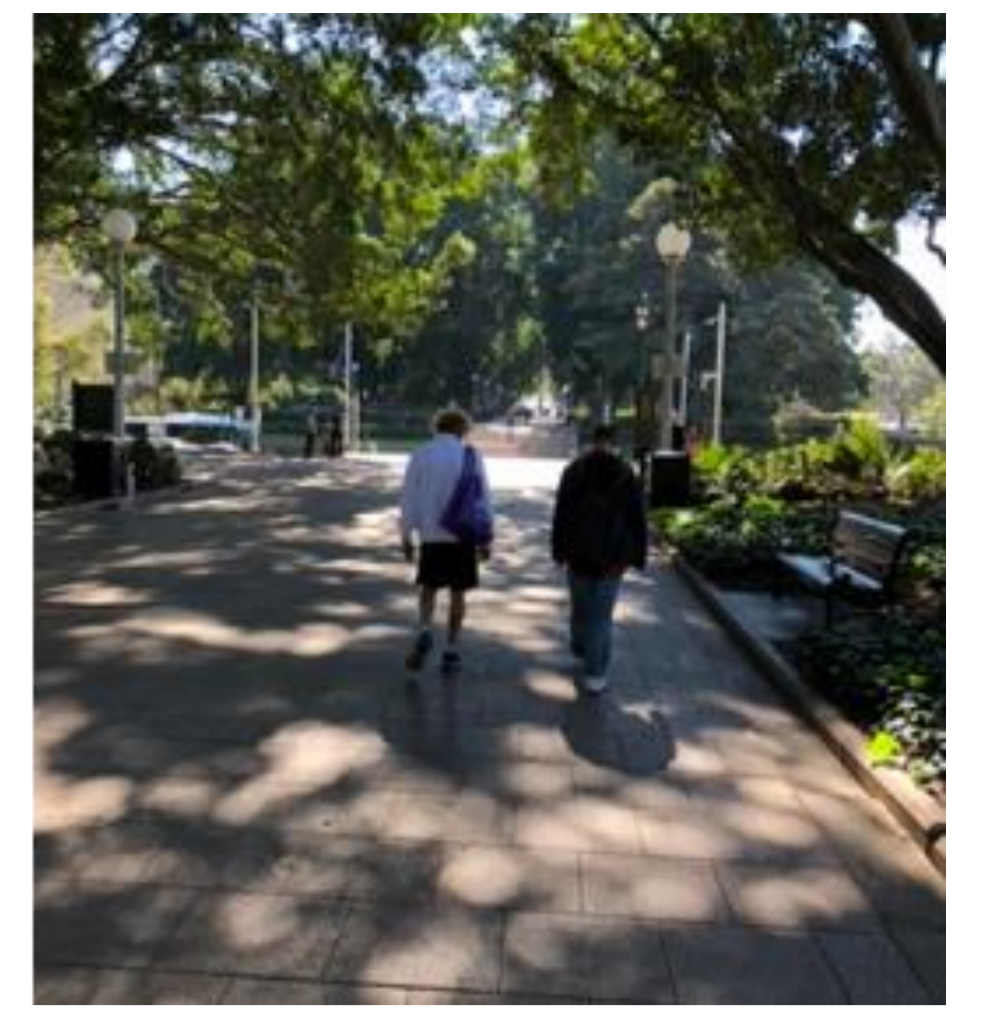
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THE **ALBION** CENTRE  
PARTNERSHIPS IN HEALTH

HIV  
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## 1. Background

- In 2017, a client led walking group for people living with HIV (PLHIV) was commenced, then disbanded...
- Client feedback indicated the need for a structured, sustainable and supported walking group. This prompted a HOT/Albion dietitians and consumer collaboration to encourage healthier lifestyles and address social isolation.
- 20 March 2018 - first walk.
- “Positive Walkers” aligns with SESLHD’s ‘Journey to Excellence 2018-2020’ (community wellbeing and health equity), and the NSW HIV strategy 2016-2020.

## 2. Why walk?

### HEALTH BENEFITS

- Strong evidence supports the benefits of physical activity for PLHIV:
  - reduced risk of health complications associated with aging and long term anti-retroviral therapy
  - improved cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition and quality of life.<sup>1,2</sup>

### OTHER POSITIVES

- Free, requires no special equipment
- Avoids the gym (many clients describe being uncomfortable in the gym environment)



## 6. What have we learnt?

- Success requires dedicated and reliable WOs.
- WOs have health problems too, e.g. HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders (HAND) affects ability to organise a walk.
- Multiple medical appointments affect attendance.
- Communication is critical - notification of walks, WOs’ rosters, regular meetings with WOs and HOT/Albion dietitians.
- Same meeting point facilitates attendance.
- Importance of a planned, safe, scenic and enjoyable route.
- Lack of access to the internet (HFW website) is common in this community so requires phone reminders.
- IT support may be required for WOs.
- Many clients need extra support to attend - remembering walks, organising their week, and/or managing social anxiety.
- ‘Closed group’ has meant recruitment is more complex.

## 5. Feedback from Walkers

- ‘I get out of the house which is great, I wouldn’t go out otherwise’.
- ‘It gets me out of bed’.
- ‘I find that walking makes chatting easy. I am a quiet person, I am surprised by how easy’.
- ‘Walking stops me smoking’.
- ‘I breathe easier’. ‘My lungs get fresh air’.
- ‘I get an appetite’.
- ‘Just turning up has boosted my confidence’.
- ‘It’s wonderful walking away your worries’.
- ‘It’s refreshing and enjoyable’.
- ‘The routine motivates you’.
- ‘Exercise is good for my brain and thinking’.
- ‘I go home happy’. ‘I like the social aspect’.
- ‘Being on an organised walk means I can trust the route, I can walk without looking at my feet...I stand taller’.



## 3. Approach taken

- Join Heart Foundation Walking (HFW) – 22 years of experience.
- HFW survey of 20,753 walkers indicated similarities with HIV positive walkers:
  - 57-81% - at least 1 chronic disease/risk factor
  - 60% - overweight
  - 57-73% motivated to walk for social reasons.<sup>3</sup>
- HOT and Albion consumer volunteers run the group as Walk Organisers (WOs).
- Benefits of this approach:
  - HFW expertise and resources including website, area co-ordinator and training of WOs.
  - HIV community engagement as WOs empowers ownership, e.g. ‘Positive Walkers’ name came from the WOs.
  - HIV friendly environment which supports social engagement.
  - HIV community networks accessed for recruitment of walkers.
  - Volunteer workforce - no funding required.
- Confidentiality managed by being a ‘closed group’ requiring referral to join.



## 4. Outcomes/impact

- Weekly walks.
- Duration of walks: 45 mins to 2 hours depending on walker interest and time available.
- Distance: 2 to 6km.
- Speed: ‘chatty’ pace.
- Feedback from fitter walkers who dropped out after week 1 - pace is too slow, would prefer a ‘fitter’ walk.
- 7 participants with an average of 1-2/ walk.
- 3 WOs, only 1 remaining due to health issues.



## 7. Future plans

- Recruit 4 WOs – equal representation and ownership from Albion and HOT.
- Promotion through wider HIV friendly networks to increase participation.
- Recruit through ACTIVATE and ACTIVATE Maintenance (Albion’s Nutrition and Exercise Programme for PLHIV) and WAVES group from HOT.
- Exercise Physiology students – establishing a walking group for fitter PLHIV.
- Quality improvement – health outcome measures - body composition, physical activity levels, quality of life; and qualitative data from focus groups and client satisfaction surveys.

## References

1. Gomes-Neto et al Clinics (Sao Paulo) 2013 68: 1157-1167.
2. O’Brien et al. BMC Infect Dis. 2016 Apr 26;16:182. doi: 10.1186/s12879-016-1478-2.
3. Ball et al. 2017. International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity 14:161. doi: 10.1186/s12966-0

## Acknowledgements

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