

# GM Walking Festival - Evaluation Report 2024

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# Introduction to the GM Walking Festival

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# What is the GM Walking Festival?

Aligning with National Walking Month, the GM Walking Festival is an opportunity for people across Greater Manchester to come together and celebrate the joy of walking and wheeling through a programme of free group activities during the month of May.

The Festival is built and shaped by local people and overseen by a steering group convened by GM Moving.

It aims to encourage more walking and wheeling as part of everyday life by including a range of activities suitable for all, from regular walkers to those looking to start their walking and wheeling journey.



## GM Walking Festival 2024 aims:

Encouraging growth and reach of the festival to diverse audiences and organisations.

Increasing engagement and involvement from priority groups identified using national, regional and local data and insight.

Aligning to the Bee Network's 'Bee Active Network' vision that has an increased focus on walking and wheeling for travel and leisure.

Supporting people who don't walk regularly to walk more often.

**Those with long term health conditions** based on increased GM investment into health and social care and a focus on mental health.

**Women and girls aged 18-30** based on knowledge of existing barriers that prevent women and girls in this age group being active.



*'Addressing loneliness  
and improving mental  
wellbeing.'*

*'To see people happy  
through physical  
activity and  
socialising.'*

*'We wanted to start a  
walk to encourage  
pupils to look after  
their mental health.'*

## **Aims of walk organisers**

In addition to GM Moving's aims for the festival, there is recognition that walk organisers will also have their own, additional reasons for participating.

GM Moving continue to work to better understand what drives organisers so we can improve our support for them.

Walk organisers have a desire to be part of a wider network and see recognition of the impact of walking on improving mental health and wellbeing, by fostering social connections and addressing inequalities.

In addition to this, there was also an aim to promote local green spaces and encourage their communities to access/use these spaces.

## Enablers for Change



The enablers for change are conditions we've learnt need to be in place to create system change, culture change, and behaviour change. They help us understand, plan and guide our work in a joined-up way to create changes that enable active lives.

## Learning and adapting:

After considering feedback and insights from the 2023 festival, GM Moving adapted their approach to ensure the festival is better placed to meet the needs of communities in GM.

Consider physical promotional assets to raise awareness, maybe locally.

**Generic posters and flyers for each borough to raise local awareness.**

More PR, perhaps with external support

**Influencer support; comms plan; increased visibility internally.**

Explore ways to gather more feedback, particularly from participants

**Festival focus group session open to walk organisers and participants to share experiences and ideas on how to embed walking/wheeling into everyday life beyond May.**

# Organisation and implementation of the festival

1. Reintroduction of the steering group
2. Walking grants
3. Promotion of the festival



# Reintroduction of the steering group

2024 saw the reintroduction of the festival steering group. Their role was to help shape and support the festival through sharing local knowledge, lived experience, and best practice.

As well as representation from local authorities, activity providers and Transport for Greater Manchester, we involved walk organisers who had previous experience of the festival.

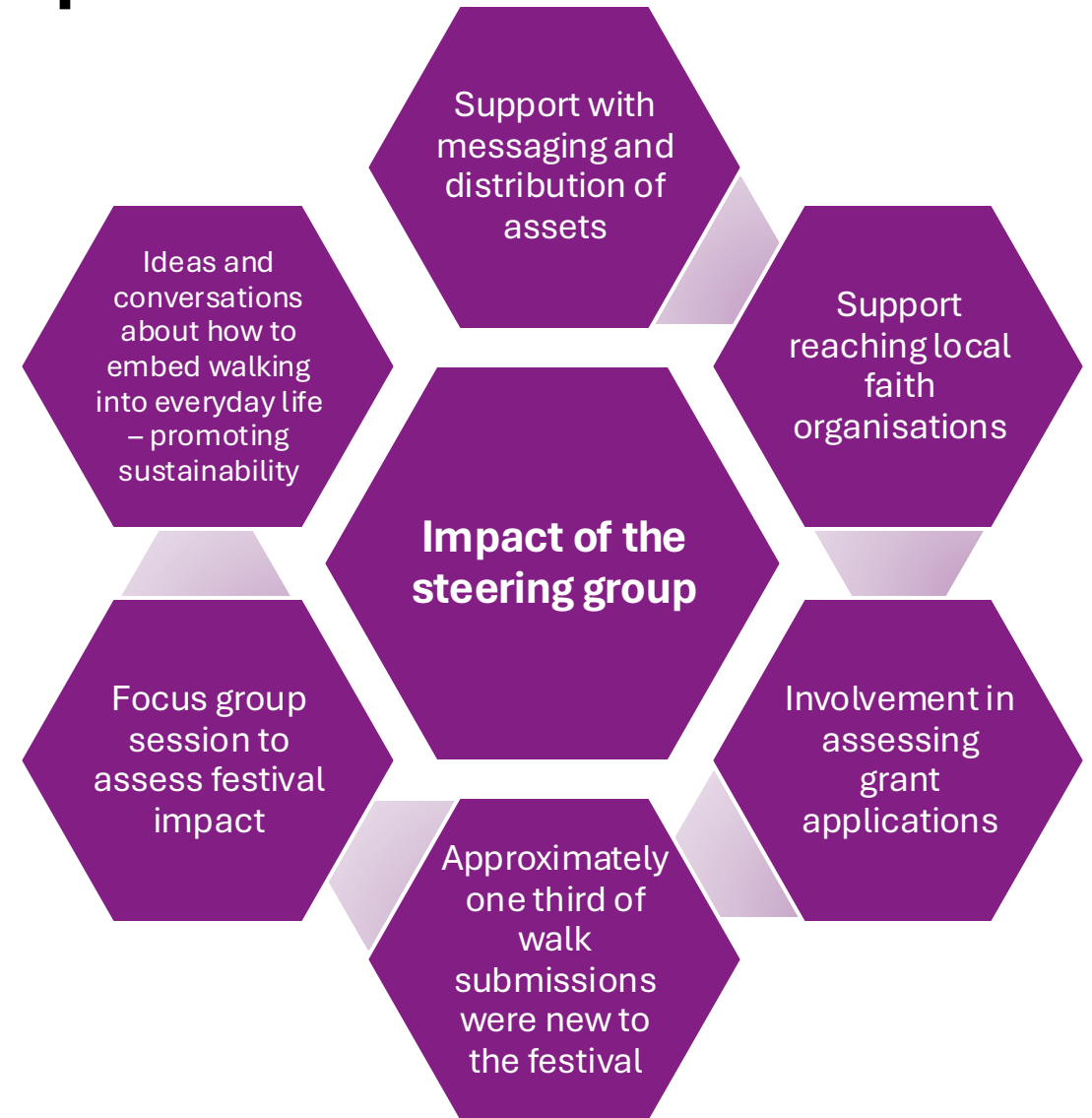
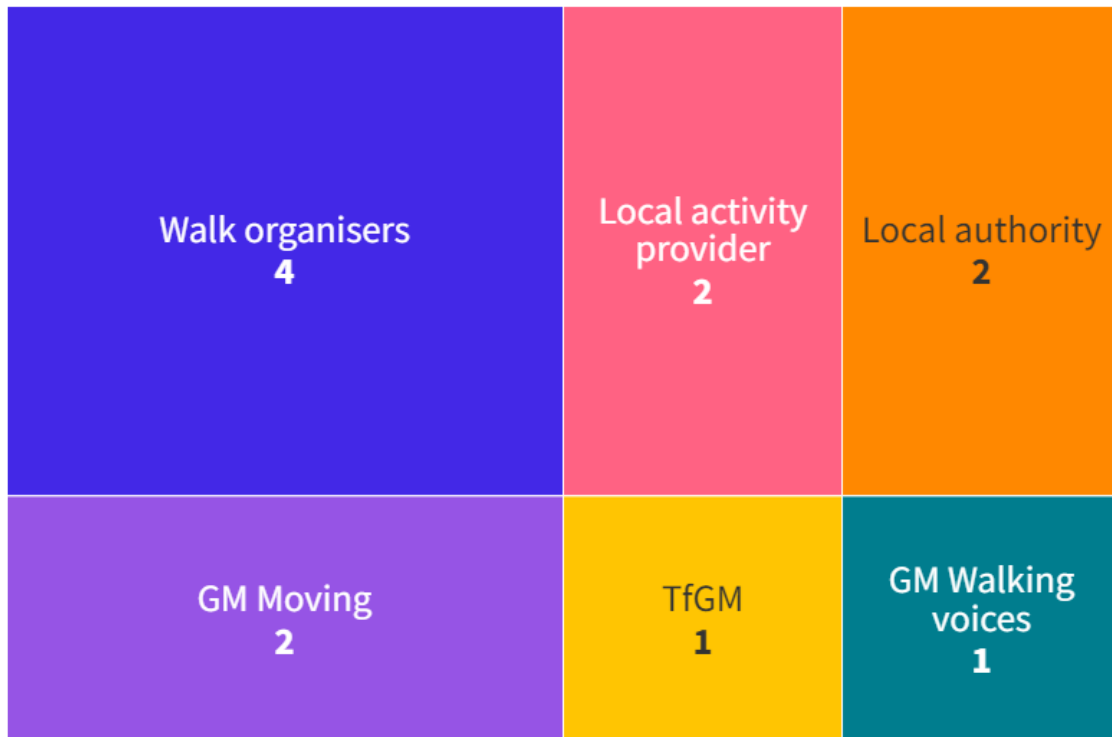


Figure 1.

# GM Walking Festival Fund

Walking grants were made available through the GM Walking Festival Fund.

The fund was designed to support walk organisers to deliver a walk as part of the festival and help to sustain the opportunity to walk beyond this.

Grants of £50 or £100 were offered and priority was given to those who had not previously received funding, or those who were looking to engage people from our focus groups:

- Women and girls aged 18 – 30
- People with long term health conditions.

Over 40 applications resulted in 32 walks being funded (£100 each) across GM. 21 grants went to organisations/groups who were new to the festival.

## Walking Festival Fund Recipients

■ Women and girls ■ Mental health and wellbeing ■ Long term health conditions ■ Other

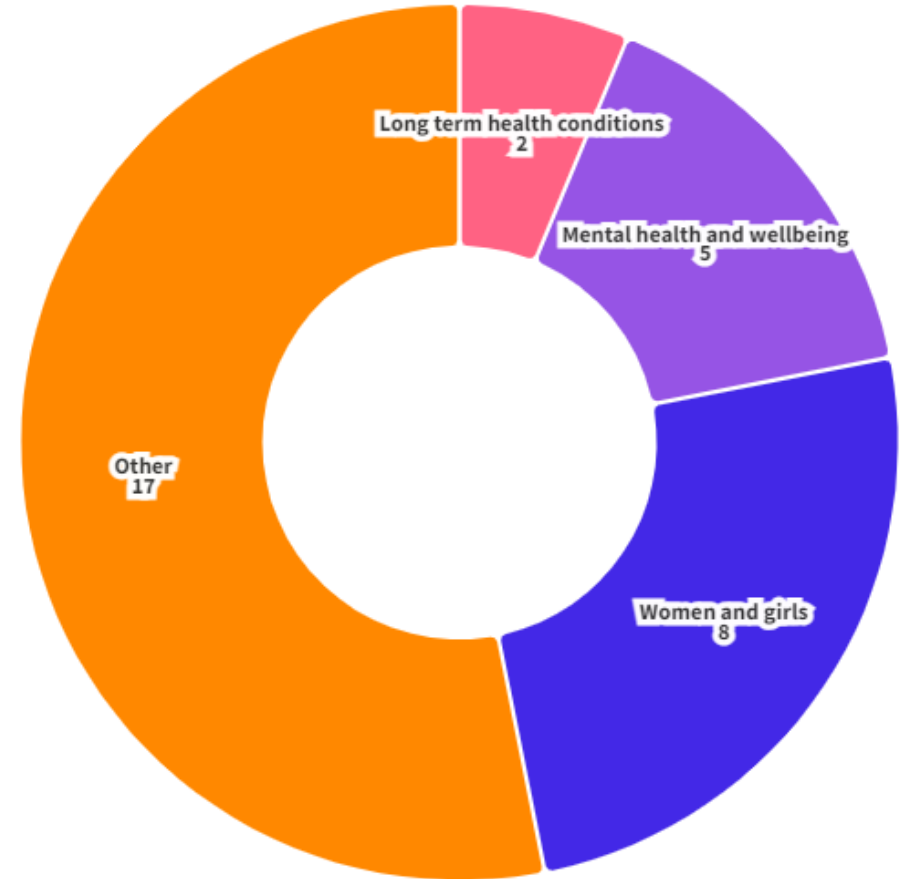


Figure 2.

# GM Walking Festival Fund

Feedback from grant recipients:

‘The walk was a great success. We had 40 pupils and 6 parents join us on Friday 3rd May. Children dressed up with a festival vibe too. They were smiling and really enjoyed the whole experience. We have continued to carry on the walk every day since and still averaging 38 pupils.’

‘The process of holding a walk as part of the Walking Festival 2024 was straight forward, inviting, and supportive. The promotional materials provided enabled BMCA to inform individuals of both the walk being held in their local area as well as additional walks across the city.’

One of the attendees, a volunteer at Assist who is in her late 70s, is really keen to put more walks in the park in our calendar. We are now looking into having Lydia train a small group of volunteers to plan and lead the walks so that they can continue without funding.’

# Festival promotion

Several approaches were taken to promote the festival to residents across Greater Manchester:

## **Paid social media adverts:**

Commissioned creative agency [Carbon Creative](#) to utilise social media advertising spend to boost awareness of the festival and participation in the events taking place.

## **Influencer marketing:**

For the first time, in the 2024 festival we put a small amount of budget towards influencer marketing.

We wanted to investigate whether working with groups/individuals with followings on social media aligned with our target audience could improve awareness of the festival.

A partnership with Girls Who Walk Manchester successfully boosted engagement among 18 to 30-year-old female audience.



**Instagram reel:** 8.6k views, 186 likes, 10 comments

**Grid post:** 8k impressions, reached 248 accounts

# Festival promotion

## Festival assets

Based on feedback from the 2023 edition of the festival we dedicated budget to developing, printing, and distributing printed posters and leaflets to promote the festival.

In consultation with healthcare professionals and community groups we developed messaging which targeted our key priority groups. Figure 3 shows an example leaflet which was used to promote the festival and the walks taking place. They were distributed across GM and made available in key places such as GP's surgeries.

The A5 leaflets we produced were borough-specific, highlighting the festival as well as a snapshot of the walking and wheeling events that were taking place in that locality.



Figure 3.

# Festival promotion

To ensure festival assets were relevant to our aims, we worked with the GM Moving research and evaluation team to map the festival walks promoted in relation to the areas with highest levels of inactivity across GM. (see figure 4)

Other layers mapped included locations of travel shops, Active Practices, and walking grant recipients. This all contributed to identifying priority areas for distributing the assets and increasing reach and engagement.

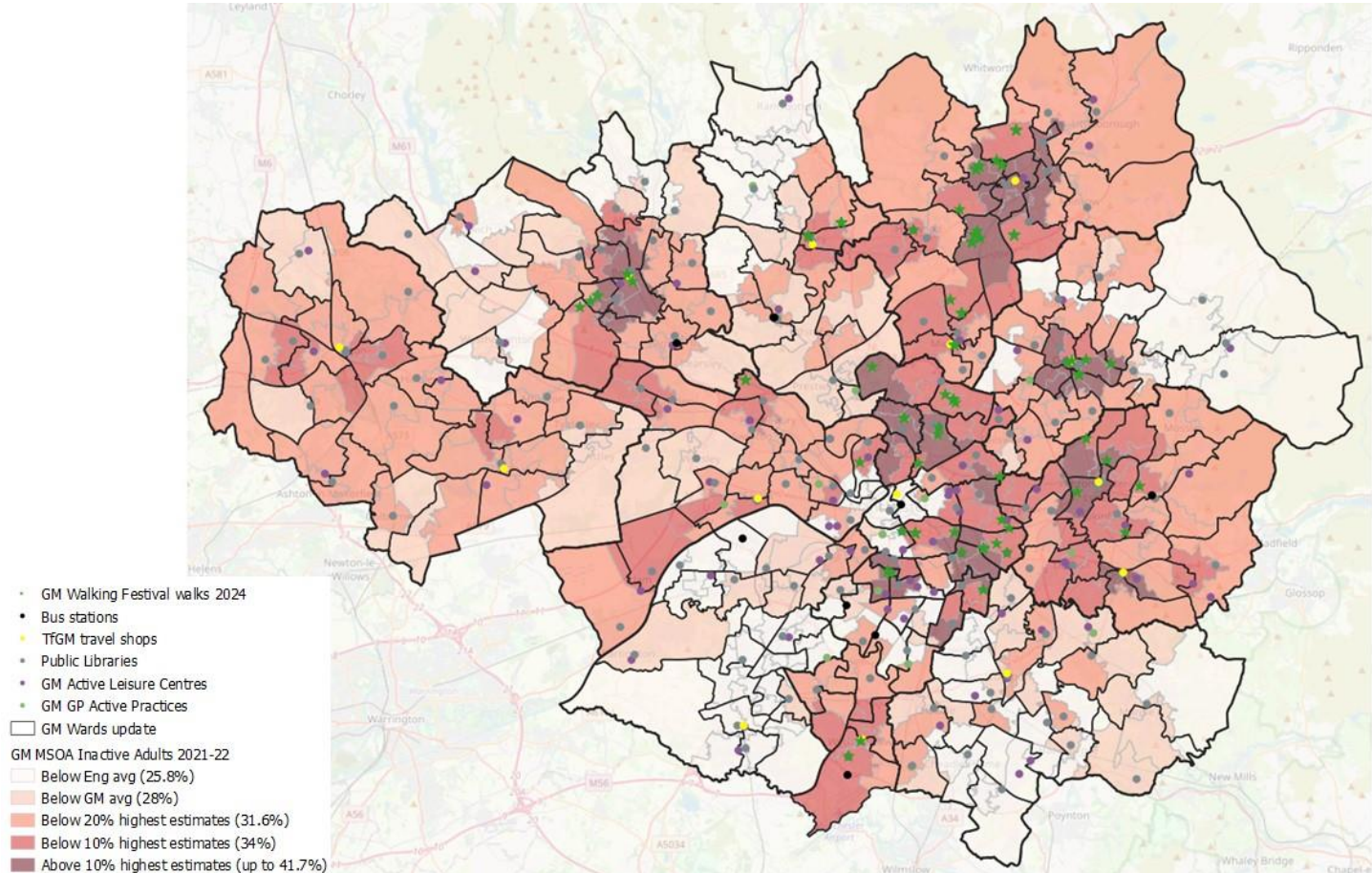


Figure 4.

# Festival promotion

PR:

We worked with partners to share the return of the festival with short news pieces about the benefits to organisations and individuals to submit walks, as well as sharing the availability of grants.

**Phase 1 – Submit your walks (funding)**

thrive Working together in Trafford Ladybarn Group Practice

Manchester Community Central Supporting our voluntary and community sector

action together For stronger communities in Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside

Borough Wide Community Network

**Phase 2 – Participation and Promotion**

The Bolton News Bolton Lever Rotary Club to host free guided walks in May

OLDHAM EVENING Chronicle Pennine Mencap to host Walk or Wheel Club as part of Greater Manchester Walking Festival

The Oldham Times GM Walking Festival: Oldham to 'get walking and wheeling'

Wigan Observer Wigan Post Get outdoors in Wigan as popular walking festival returns to Greater Manchester

Mooch and natter in Mossley this May with the 2024 GM Walking Festival

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Stockport to host 26 events as part of Greater Manchester Walking Festival

WALK, UNWIND AND RECONNECT WITH NATURE DURING THIS YEAR'S GM WALKING FESTIVAL

STOCKPORT GETS MOVING: JOIN 26 FREE GROUP WALKS THIS MAY

Five great tips for staying healthy and well this spring

SUPPORT FOR THOSE WITH LONG-TERM LUNG CONDITIONS IN MANCHESTER THROUGH THE GM WALKING FESTIVAL

STOCKPORT'S GROWING CONFIDENCE IN WALKING AND WHEELING ON DISPLAY DURING THIS YEAR'S GM WALKING FESTIVAL

Once we had walks submitted, we were able to build a bank of press releases which were borough or topic (e.g. mental health) specific.

Borough-level press releases were distributed to community and local newspapers and radio stations.

The Active Travel Commissioner [Dame Sarah Storey](#) joined a walk in Rochdale at the end of the festival to promote our keep walking messages for beyond National Walking Month.

# Evaluating the impact of the festival

1. Data and insights – the numbers
2. Why people took part (walk organisers)
3. Assessing the wider impact on participants



# Data and insights – the numbers

Ahead of the festival starting, **359** walking and wheeling events were submitted by individuals and organisations from across GM.

With additional support from the GM Moving team, a total of 394 walking and wheeling activities were made available on the GM Walking festival website page.

Figure 5 shows further breakdown of this data – highlighting the number of walks submitted in each area of Greater Manchester.

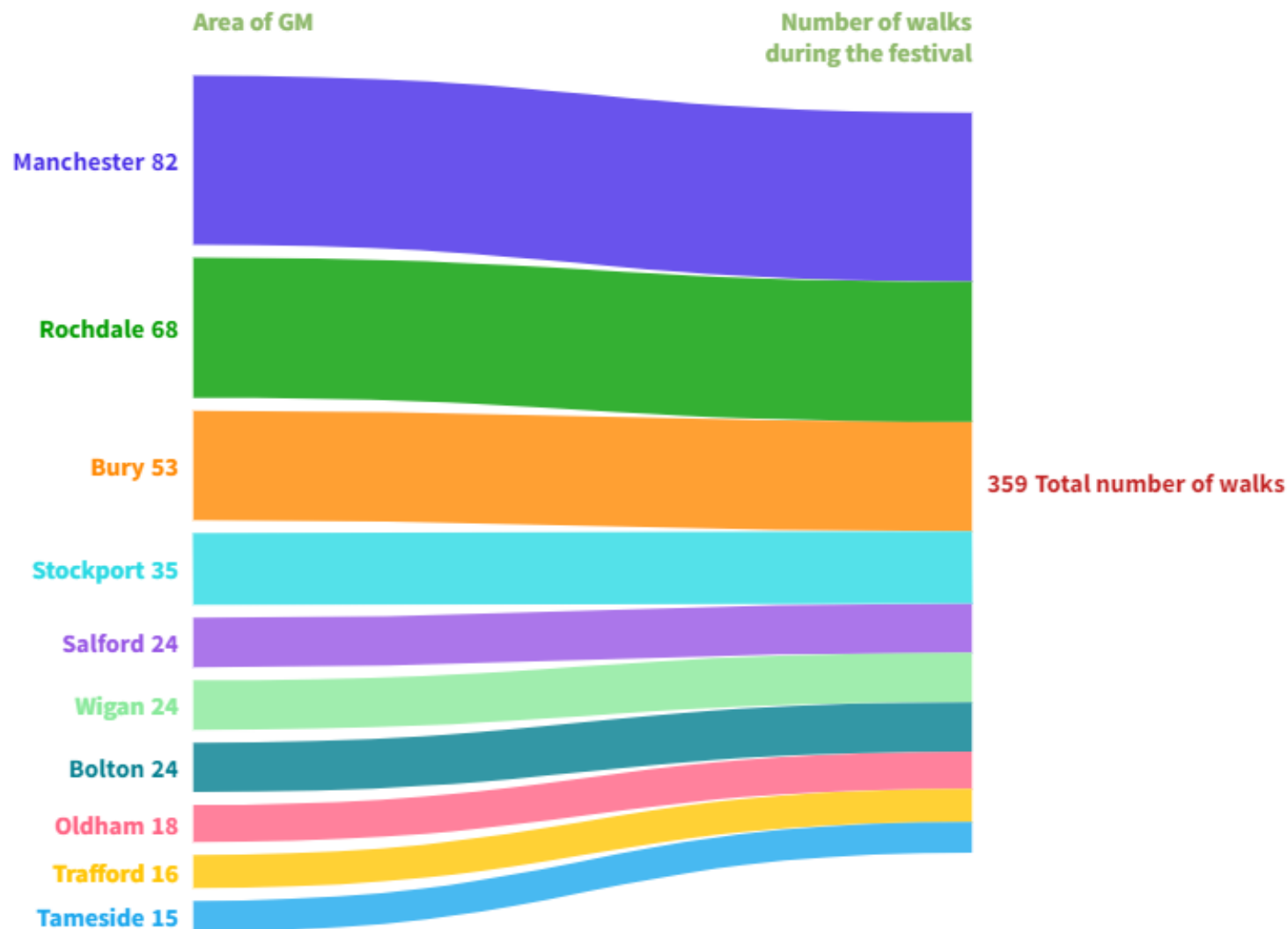


Figure 5.

## Number of walks by sector

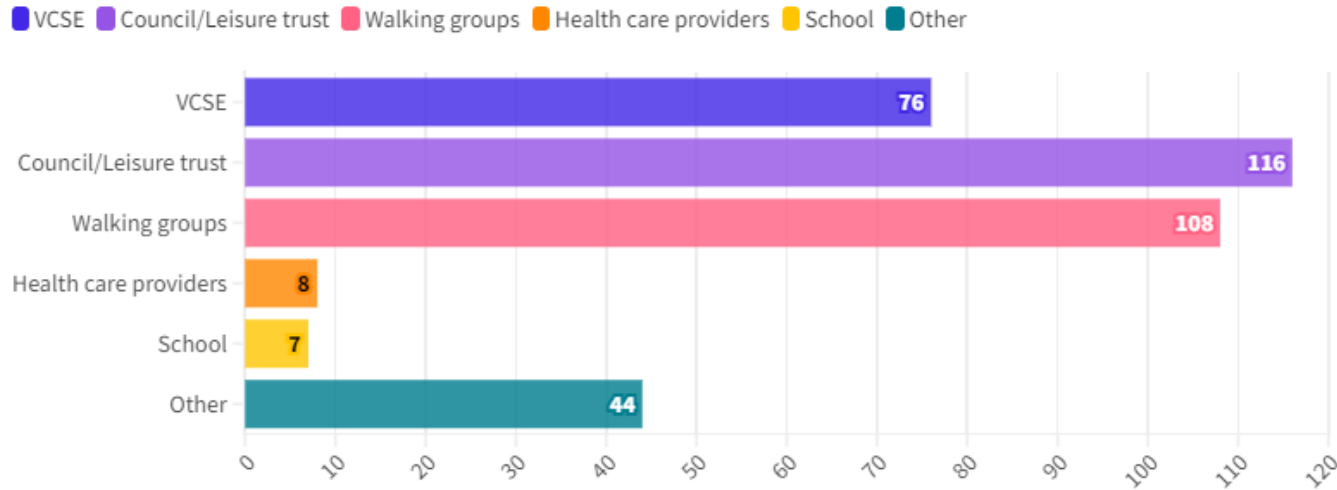


Figure 6.

## Number of unique organisations by sector

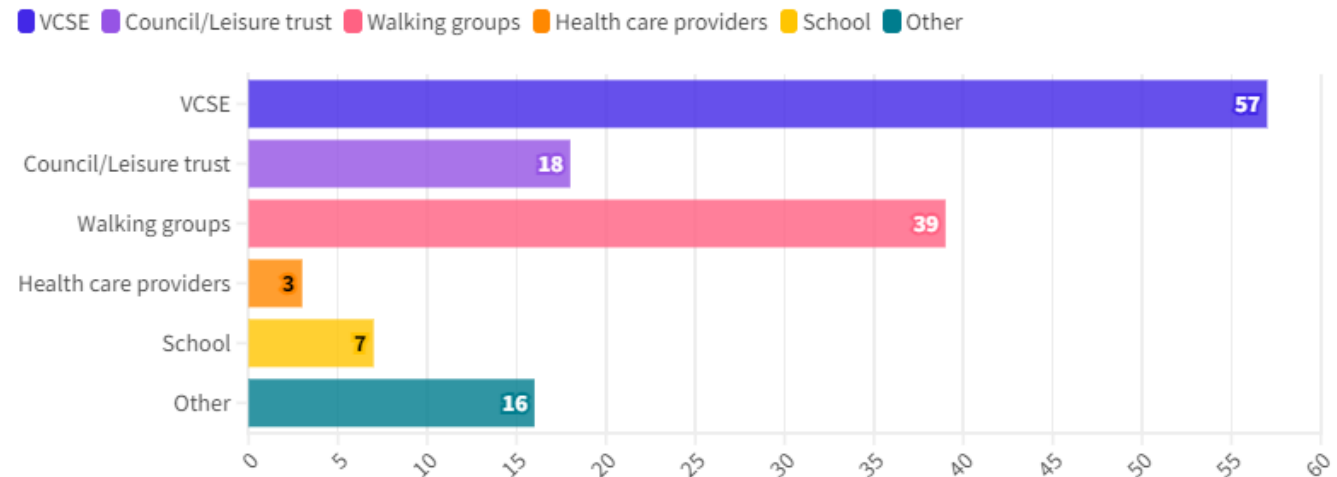


Figure 7.

# Data and insight – sector breakdown

Council/Leisure Trusts and walking groups organised the highest number of walks at 116 and 108 respectively (see figure 6). VCSE organisations were also strongly represented, hosting 76 walks across the festival. The high number of groups/organisations describing themselves as ‘other’ highlights the need to develop more categories for self-reporting to ensure we can build up a better picture of who is taking part.

The number of unique organisations has grown over the last 3 years (see figure 7), and VCSE and councils form over half of the total organisations participating in the festival.

The data highlights gaps in engagement among schools and health care providers in this year's festival. As the GM Moving health team matures and develops its relationships with health partners, it is expected to increase engagement and consistency of organisations from this sector.

# Data and insight – growth over time

One of the key indicators for the success of the festival is its continued growth of the number of groups organising walks for their communities.

Figure 8 highlights the growth in the festival over the last 3 years. GM Moving took over the organising of the festival from TfGM in 2019. This change signified a new way of organising the events with a bigger focus on areas with the highest levels of inactivity. There is no data from 2020 or 2021 due to Covid-19, and the data from the last 3 years is reflective of the festival's recovery from Covid and a period of testing new approaches.

Over the last 3 years the growth of unique organisations and of groups new to the festival is important. Through the targeted promotion we aim for many of the walks to be held in areas where there are high levels of inactivity.

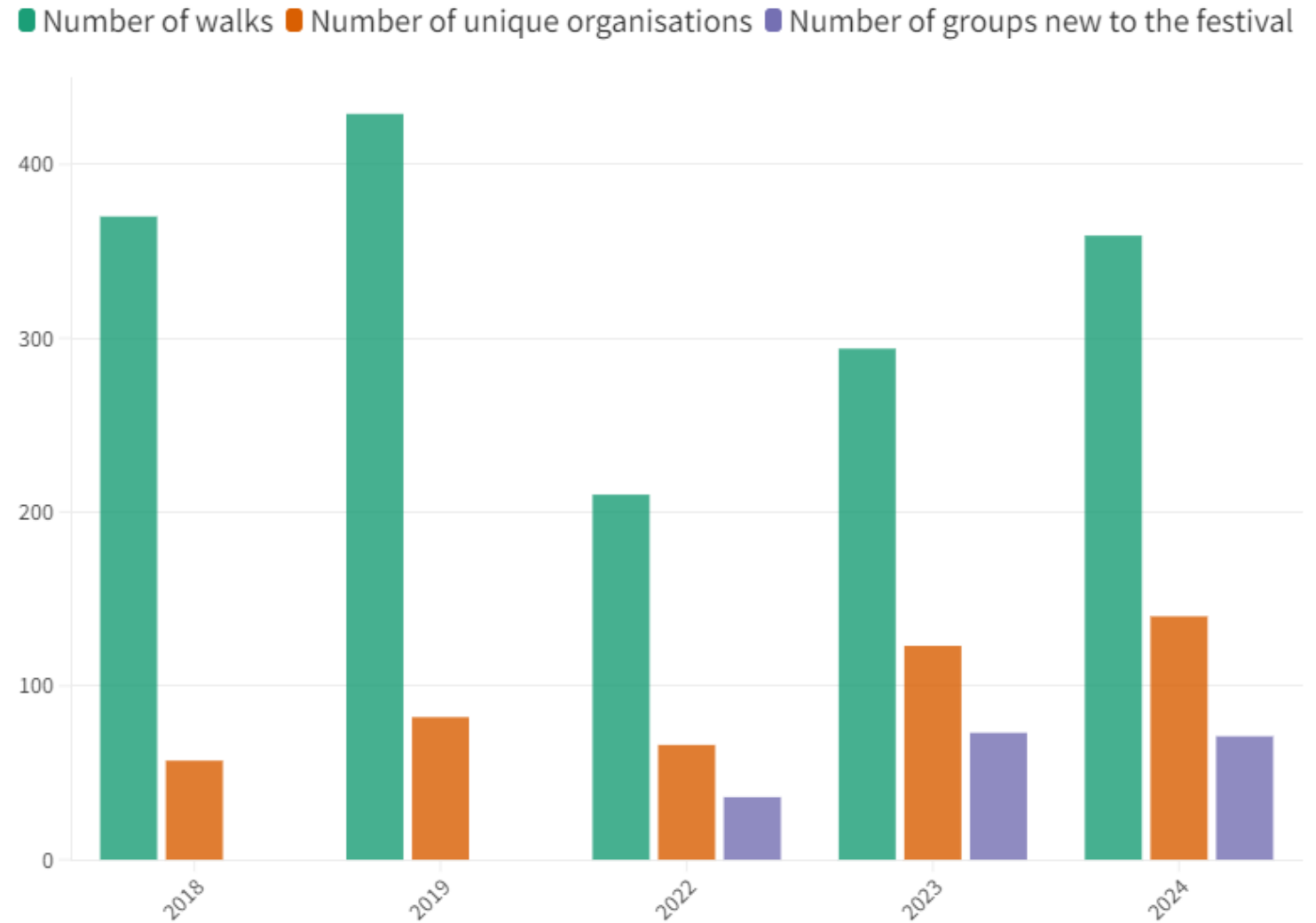


Figure 8.

## Why people took part

The data highlights a growth in the number and diversity of groups/organisations submitting walks to the festival, with 65 more walks taking place in 2024 than in 2023.

From the feedback collected from the walk organisers survey, the overwhelming theme was a desire to be a part of something bigger, a network, a movement that is promoting the benefits of walking on an individual level but also for the wider environment.

**Question:** Please share a little bit about what encouraged you to organise a walk for the festival.



Figure 9.

## How does the festival support walk organisers?

It was reported in our post-festival survey that involvement in the festival provided a key opportunity for groups to promote the walks that they were organising.

By doing this they were able to attract new members and promote the impact of walking on health and wellbeing, social connection, and access to green spaces to a wider audience.

Funding opportunities provided by the festival offered an opportunity for walks to be turned into more of an event and supported capacity building with organisers.

In addition to this, it was reported that the support and resources provided by the GM Moving team throughout the festival enabled groups to have a wider reach.

*'The GM Walking Festival advertising on our social media helped recruit these new members which is amazing.'*

*'The walk was a success, the team at GM festival are very helpful with good communications.'*

*'The £100 funding was an incentive...otherwise we would not have had capacity/confidence to run a walk.'*

# Impact on participants

From the evaluation conducted with walk organisers, it was reported that residents across GM had increased opportunities for social connection through events during the festival.

Figure 10 (right) shows how attending the festival created these opportunities for social connection and explores some of the wider impacts of this.

This demonstrates the benefits of walking on mental wellbeing in addition to the physical health benefits of moving more.

Hear more about the impact on participants [here](#).

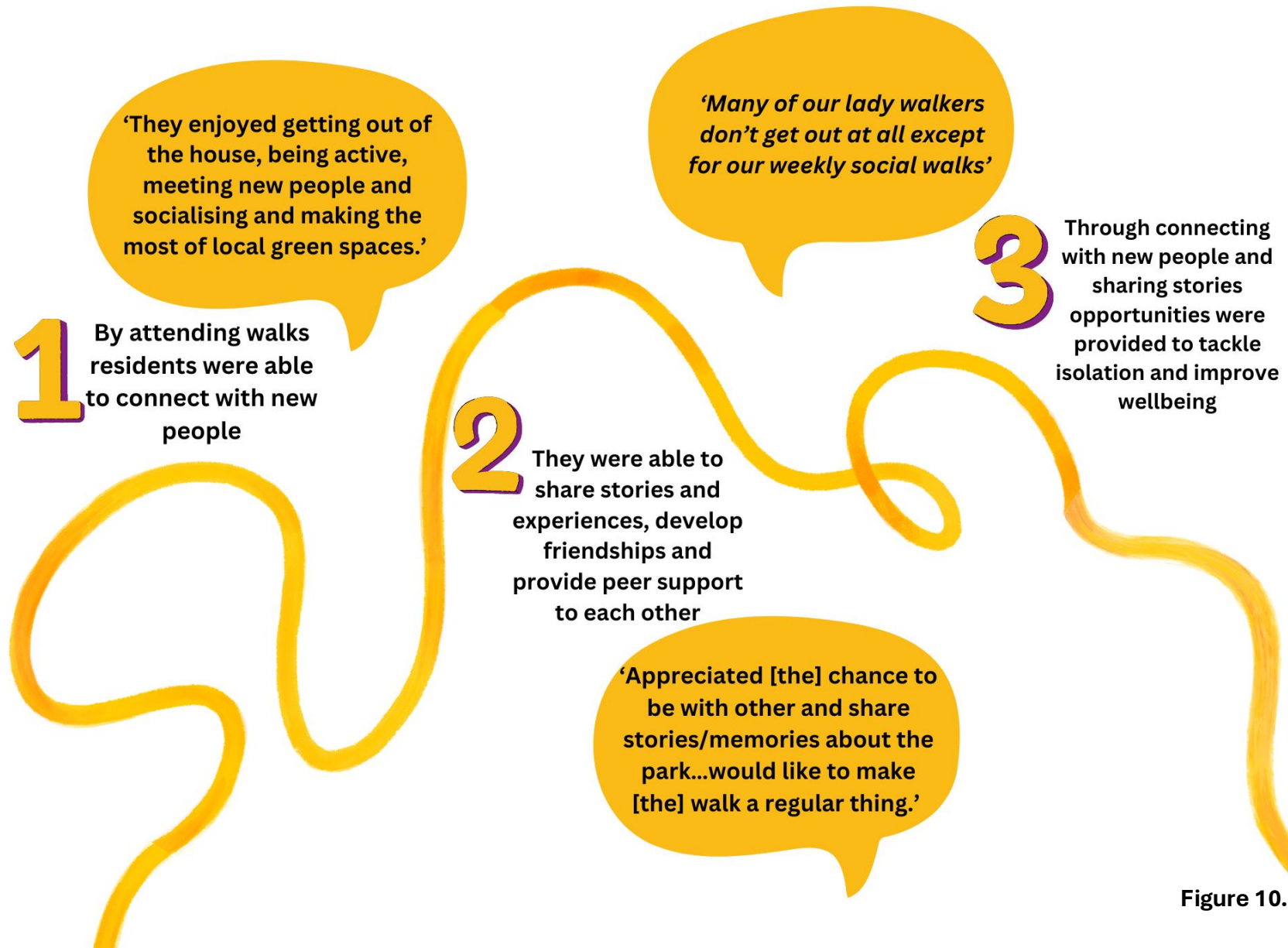


Figure 10.

# Plans for 2025

GM Moving are committed to celebrating walking and providing opportunities to grow walking and wheeling through the GM Walking Festival. For the 2025 edition of the festival, we will be continuing our focus on connecting walking to health care agendas and focussing on reaching our under-served communities.

We look forward to working alongside the steering group, partners, and supporters, on next year's festival.

We welcome feedback on the 2024 festival and input into next year's event – our contact details are available on the next page.



# Thank You!

Thank you to everyone who made the GM Walking Festival 2024 a huge success, including walk organisers, participants, community groups, healthcare professionals, local authorities, leisure trusts, schools and colleges.

We would also like to recognise the contribution of the steering group, Carbon Creative, Girls Who Walk, GM Moving, and everyone who liked, shared, and promoted the Festival in some way.



## Get in touch:

Visit: [www.gmmoving.co.uk](http://www.gmmoving.co.uk) | [www.gmwalking.co.uk](http://www.gmwalking.co.uk)

Twitter: [@gmmoving](https://twitter.com/gmmoving) | [@gmwalks](https://twitter.com/gmwalks)

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