

GM Walking Festival 2025

Evaluation report

Contents:

Introduction to the 2025
GM Walking Festival

Organisation and
implementation

Evaluating the impact

Next steps

Introduction to the GM Walking Festival



What is the walking festival?

Aligning with National Walking Month, the GM Walking Festival is an opportunity for groups across Greater Manchester (GM) to host a free group walk throughout May and invite people to join in.

The Festival aims to celebrate the opportunities to walk with others, promote the benefits of walking and wheeling, and demonstrate the many ways in which walking can make a difference to people's health, wellbeing, and how they feel about the area in which they live.

The GM Walking Festival is important because it provides a large-scale opportunity to showcase the power of walking to make a positive difference to people's lives, all delivered by community-led local walks.

Through a co-ordinated Festival, we can tell the stories of hundreds of volunteer walk leaders, thousands of weekly walkers, and the diverse range of walks available, all offered by a wide range of organisations across GM.

From city-region to neighbourhood, with over 360 led walks hosted by over 110 different organisations and partnerships in 2025, we are delighted to share the story of this year's festival.



Organisation and implementation of the festival



GM Walking Festival Fund

As in previous years walking grants were made available through the GM Walking Festival Fund. The fund is designed to support walk organisers to deliver a walk during the festival and sustain that activity going forward.

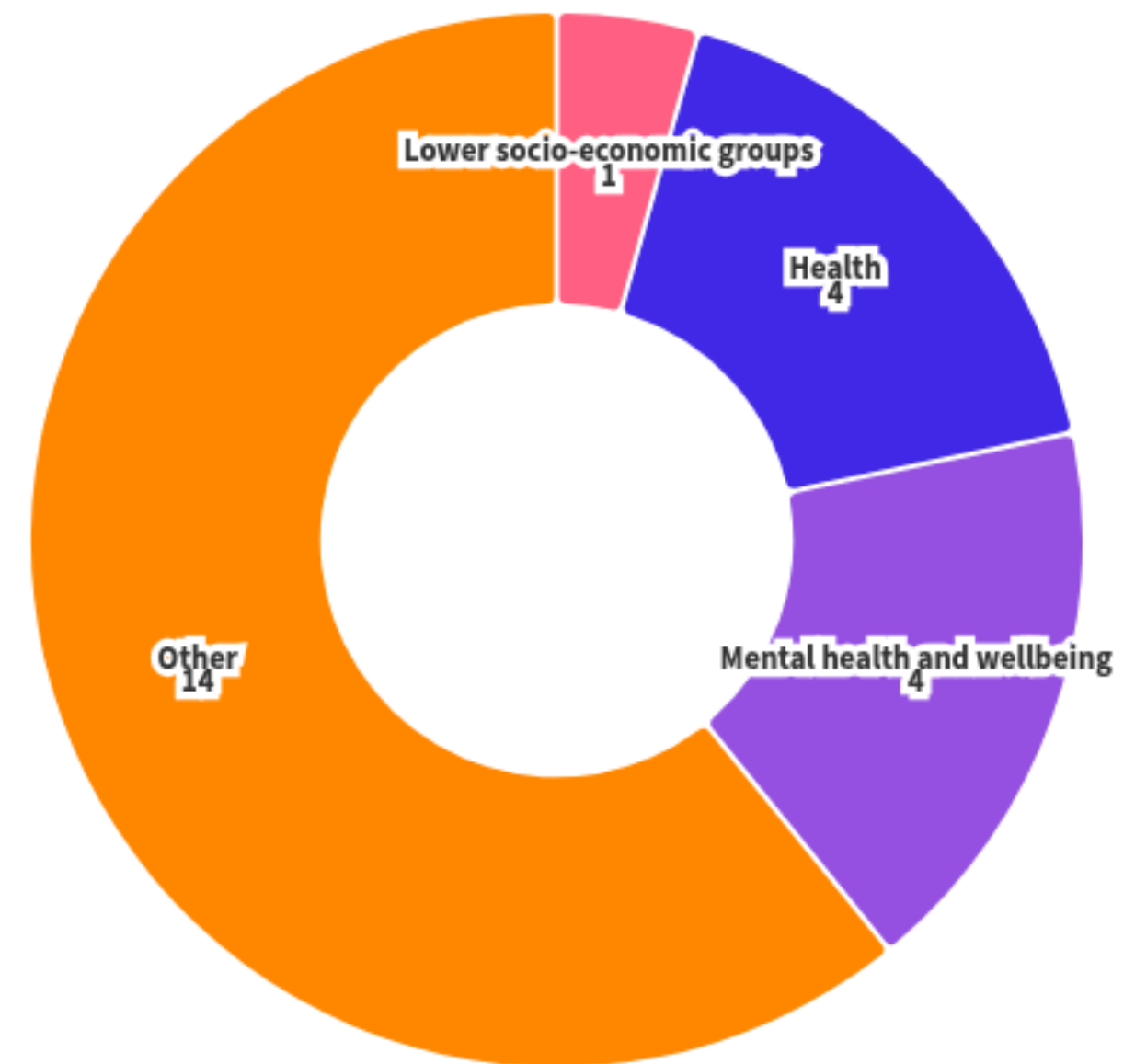
Small grants of £100 were made available for organisations and community groups to access with 23 walking events funded across Greater Manchester.

Priority was given to groups and organisations that were new to the festival and those whose work targeted our focus demographics:

- Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- Those with long-term health conditions
- Health-based organisations
- Schools

Walking Festival Fund Recipients

■ Health ■ Mental health and wellbeing ■ Lower socio-economic groups ■ Other



Case story: Lancashire County Cricket

Lancashire County Cricket Foundation was one of the 2025 grant recipients, using the funding to support their community walk by providing refreshments for group members.

Originally set up as part of the 2024 festival, the walk begins at Old Trafford and explores local green and blue spaces. It has continued year round, in all weather, with many participants returning each week, highlighting a shift towards more sustainable active habits.

The Foundation recognised walking as a powerful tool for bringing people together and encouraging physical activity, particularly among those less active or facing barriers to traditional sport. Hosting the walk also helps increase local access to a key community asset.

The impact is clear. The group provides space for regular social connection and the development of relationships across cultures. It also serves as a gateway into more structured physical activity. Since joining, many women have also started to take part in the Foundation's walking cricket sessions. A few, who have never played cricket before joining the walk, now play regularly for a local team.

The growth and success of this walk highlights the role walking can play in creating lasting lifestyle changes, developing new connections, and providing pathways into wider physical activity opportunities.





Festival promotion

For the past 3 years, we continue to attract around 100 walk submissions who say they are 'new' to the GM Walking Festival. Meanwhile, the number of returning submitters is increasing, leading to continued growth for the festival.

The GM Moving team's focus on distributed leadership was reflected in a big increase in the number of walk submissions who heard about the festival via email. More than 40% of submissions came via email, although this was a new field in the form this year (last year 12 people wrote email under the 'Other' category). There was a big decrease in the number stating social media which reflects the partner-driven nature, and importance of trust, in this element of the GM Walking Festival.

Festival promotion

Social media and resource hub

This year, like in 2024, we offered partners a range of assets via the [GM Moving Resource Hub](#), these included social media graphics as well as print at home posters.

Around 20% of the activity on the Resource Hub (year to date) took place during the month of May, with the most recent downloads seeing an even split between social media graphics (45%), photos (30%) and documents/posters (25%).

To keep GM Walking social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) focused on their B2B audience, budget previously used on social media adverts was re-directed to commission a PR expert to use the festival to promoting walking throughout National Walking Month. This meant we relied more heavily on organic reach and partners' channels.



GM Walking Festival
May 1-31

From strangers to friends
Step by Step



 You're invited!
Scan the QR Code to participate or visit:
gmwalking.co.uk/festival

Greater Manchester
Walking



GM Walking Festival
May 1-31

Did you know?

Walking or wheeling short distances:

- Improves your sleep
- Boosts your mood
- Connects you to others and nature
- Increases your energy levels



 You're invited!
Scan the QR Code to participate or visit:
gmwalking.co.uk/festival/

Greater Manchester
Walking

Festival promotion

PR

For the first time, GM Moving commissioned specialist PR support to raise the profile of walking and wheeling throughout National Walking Month, using the GM Walking Festival as the primary hook.

The volume and variety of submitted walks gave lots of interesting angles for local news and lifestyle outlets with BBC Radio Manchester and BBC North West Tonight also featuring groups involved in the festival in their broadcast output. A selection of examples are shown across this page.

In total, we saw 98 pieces of festival coverage including 10 regional broadcast pieces and 38 Greater Manchester regional titles. The direct impact of these pieces on walking participation in the city region is unclear.

Greater Manchester's popular Walking Festival returns next month with more than 400 events

It's time to get out into nature.

Emily Sergeant - 17th April 2025



Greater Manchester's popular Walking Festival events happening.

The GM Walking Festival is back for 2025.



Michelle Dignan
30/04/2025

2:36:21 4:02:59



Danny Drayson
Active lead for Age Stockport
BBC NORTH WEST TONIGHT



NEWS SPORT VOICES CULTURE LIFESTYLE INDYBEST DEALS TRAVEL

Lifestyle > Health & Families

Six surprising health benefits of regular walking for seniors

Doctors say the low-impact exercise can be a game-changer when it comes to cardiovascular health, bone strength, and overall happiness

Camilla Foster • Tuesday 18 March 2025 08:18 GMT



The low-impact exercise delivers numerous benefits



For those, who don't know where to start, Louise Robbins, the strategic lead for walking at GM Moving and GM Walking Festival, suggests starting slowly "and build up the time and distance gradually".

"It's okay if that's only a short walk for five minutes – getting outside and getting the legs moving will improve your mood," she said.

"Arranging to meet someone else as a walking buddy will also help with motivation, accountability, and to establish a routine.

"It's more fun and walking with someone else can help with building confidence too."

Several doctors have compiled the top six benefits of walking for seniors, which reveal how this easy activity can enhance everything from **heart health** to mood.

Evaluating the impact



Data and insight - sector breakdown

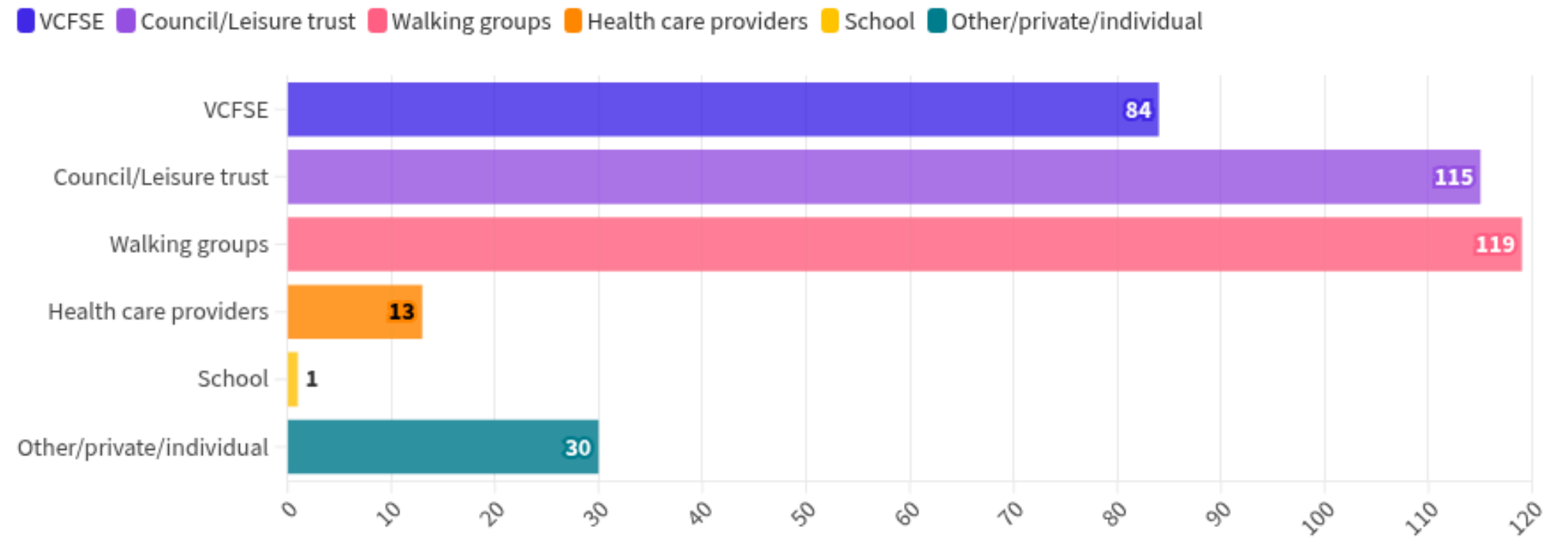
The data paints a similar picture to last year, with walking groups and council/leisure trusts organising the highest number of walks at 119 and 115 respectively.

Despite the majority of the walks coming from the same sectors, in 2025 the walking festival saw growth in a number of other key areas. Walks submitted by VCFSE and health organisations rose signalling a growing diversity in the festival.

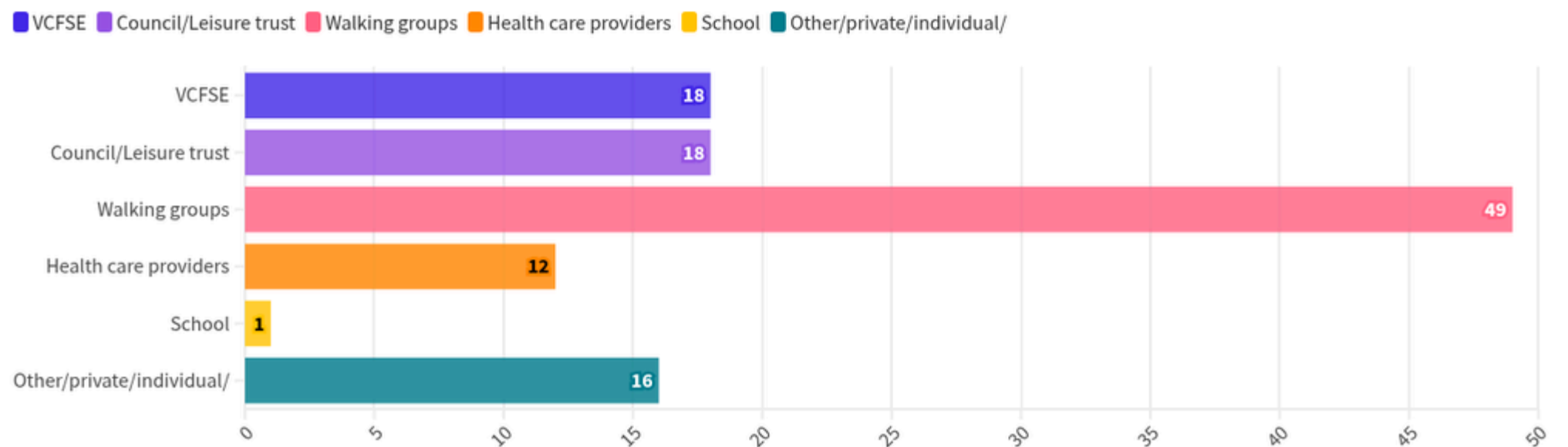
The number of unique organisations involved in the festival this year dropped slightly from the 2024 edition. However, this year there has seen significant growth in the number of walking groups and healthcare providers involved. This highlights the ongoing work GM Moving are doing to connect up agendas across different sectors.

Year-on-year the data highlights a gap in engagement from schools. This may suggest that the GM Walking Festival is not the most appropriate tool to support walking and wheeling for children and young people. There may be need to focus on how we can support initiatives like school streets to do this more effectively.

Number of walks by sector

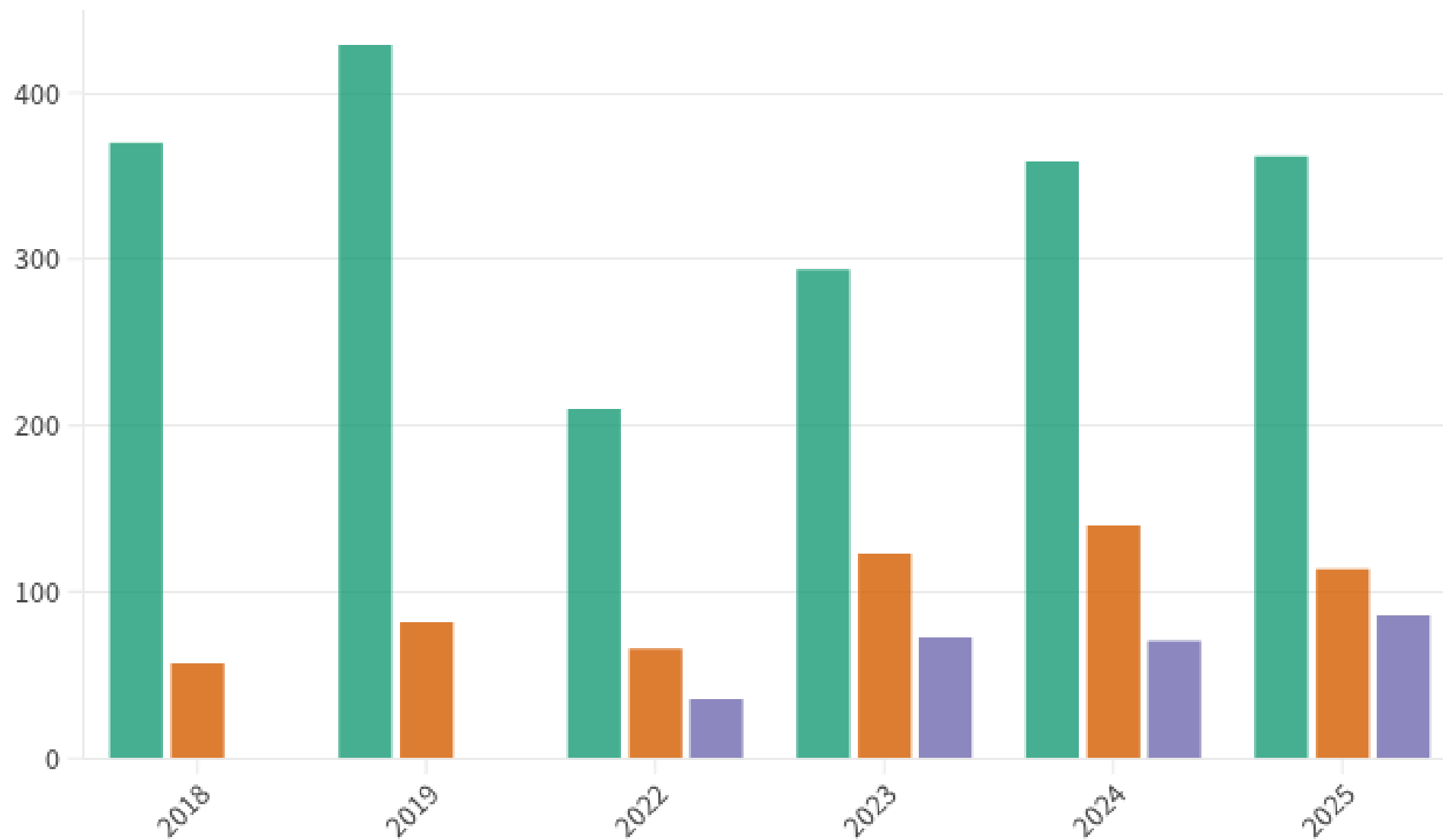


Number of unique organisations



Participation over time

■ Number of walks ■ Number of unique organisations
■ Number of groups new to the festival



Data and insight - growth over time

Tracking the growth of the festival helps us to measure its success. GM Moving took over organising the festival from Transport for Greater Manchester in 2019. This shift signified a new way of organising the event with a stronger targeted approach focusing on the areas and demographics with higher levels of inactivity. There is no data from 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19, and the data from the last three years is reflective of the festival's post-Covid recovery and a period of testing new approaches.

In 2025 the number of walks submitted grew again, however the rate of growth has slowed from previous years. This year we also saw continued growth in the number of groups new to the festival. This highlights the growing reach of the festival and can help us to understand how taking a targeted approach and developing relationships in a variety of sectors can support the continued growth of the festival.

Why people took part

Through the feedback collected in the walk organiser survey we can begin to understand the variety of motivations people have for being part of the festival. Comparing this data with last year's we can see that the promotion of already existing walks remains a strong and consistent reason for people engaging with the festival. The festival provides a key opportunity to showcase walks happening across Greater Manchester.

Similarly, the recognition of the role walking can play in supporting mental health and wellbeing continues to be a key motivation for people getting involved in the festival. At GM Moving we have done some work to explore how mental health organisations are using walking as a service delivery tool (read more [here](#)).

This year's survey insight also saw an additional motivation around the desire to use the festival to connect different communities in an area.

Why people took part:

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



We are parents who lost our son to suicide. We are passionate about suicide prevention and wanted to bring awareness in our community about Jak's World and engage people without them feeling under any pressure.

We wanted to keep engaging in the programme, supporting people locally and in Tameside to walk more and getting new people to our venue through walking.

How does the festival support walk organisers?

Year-on-year we see the value that the festival brings by providing an opportunity to use the conversation happening around National Walking Month to support organisations to promote walks happening across GM.

Through feedback from walk organisers, it is also clear that the festival is a way for organisations to connect with the wider community and people who may not be engaged with their programmes.

Additionally, the festival can provide the platform for a wider campaign around an issue such as mental health. With walks being an opportunity to open conversations around topics that are sometimes difficult to talk about.



Case study: Urban Village walk with Manchester Talking Therapies

One of the ongoing aims of the GM Walking Festival is to diversify the organisations that participate. Through closer internal collaboration with the GM Moving Health team, this year's festival focused on encouraging greater involvement from the health sector and wider health-focused organisations.

An example of this is the contribution from Urban Village Medical Practice. Their series of walks demonstrated how walking can bring together communities and local services to improve access to health support. One of their walks featured a focus on mental health and wellbeing. Led by the practice's health coach, the walk for patients of the practice followed a route along the canal and local parks.

Beyond being a way to get people moving, the walk created space for conversations about mental health. Attendance of staff from the Manchester Talking Therapies team provided people with information about available services, how to access them, and resources to support wellbeing at home.

In this case, walking acted as a bridge, connecting people with local services they might not otherwise known existed.

Next steps



Plans for 2026...

GM Moving continue to commit to celebrating walking and wheeling and using the festival to provide opportunities for more people in Greater Manchester to move every day. Going forward, we plan to continue to develop the festival to ensure its resources are used in the most effective way to address key inequalities.

Over the next year our key commitments are:

1. Promote the GM Walking Festival as an opportunity for walking groups to organise a walk open to the public and showcase walking opportunities available across GM all year round.
2. Sense check with stakeholders the contribution of the festival to their walking strategy and approach.
3. Explore the role of GM Moving in broadening the opportunity of National Walking Month as a walking awareness raising campaign, with the festival as a part, rather than the festival as a sole focus.



Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who made the GM Walking Festival 2025 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, Jenny Scott for leading on the PR, and everyone who liked, shared, and promoted the Festival in some way.



Get in touch:

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