

## Nature walking for wellbeing – study information

**Project name:** Not just a walk in the park: Implementing nature walking groups in rural mental health services as a transdiagnostic approach to promote recovery.



### What is this about?

Walking in natural settings with other people can improve your wellbeing and enhance recovery but we still need to know more about what people like about nature walking and how it affects them. This project aims to learn about your experiences in a walking group run by [SERVICE NAME] and see if it improves your wellbeing.

### What will I do?

- You are invited to attend **12 weekly 1 hour walking groups**.
- The walks will be in parks and gardens around [STUDY SITE] and transport will be provided. Transport will be organised by [SERVICE] and you can either arrange to be picked-up and dropped off at home, or another location.
- No bushwalking experience is required, and the tracks will be mostly flat with no steep hills.
- There will be **thirteen people in the group** including two staff from [ study site name], and one social work student. [STUDY SITE CO-ORDINATOR; PD OR TC] will organise the walking groups.
- During each walk, the group leaders will invite you to do relaxation and nature connection activities. These will be things like breathing deeply and noticing things in nature such as the types of plants and sounds you can hear. A social work student will observe and record how the group interacts, and reacts to the activities.
- You will need to answer some questions about your general health to make sure it is safe for you to do the walks.

As part of the research you will be asked to provide some information about your wellbeing and your experiences on the walks;

1. Complete an online or paper and pen survey three different times. Once before you begin the walking program, at the end of the 12-week program and then a third one 3 months after the end of the walking program. The survey will ask questions about your mood, wellbeing, sleep and if you feel connected to nature. You will be reimbursed \$50 for each survey.
2. Provide 3 saliva samples to test your cortisol levels. Cortisol measures stress in your body. We will ask you to do one saliva sample before beginning the walking program, on the day of the first walk, and 12 weeks after, on the day of the last walk. **This is optional. If you do not wish**



**to provide saliva samples you can still participate in the study.** If you decide to provide saliva samples, you will be reimbursed \$20 per test.

3. Answer one question about your mood before and after each of the 12 walks.
4. Attend a two-hour group meeting at the end of the twelve weeks to talk about your walking experience.
5. Have a phone interview with one of the researchers about what was good and bad about participating in the walking group (the interview will take about 30 minutes). Some of the things we will ask you about will include your satisfaction with the walking group, any positive or negative impacts on your mental health and wellbeing, and your recommendations for future walking groups. We will reimburse you \$40 for your time for the phone interview.
6. Come to a workshop at [SERVICE] to talk through the results of the study and provide advice to the researchers. This is to make sure the results reflect your experiences. We will reimburse you \$50 for your time to participate in the workshop.

**Your decision about getting involved in the nature walking group research will not affect your use of [SERVICE NAME] or your individual treatment plan.**

Staff at [SERVICE NAME] will continue to support you in the same way whether you agree to participate in the walking group or not. Being involved in the study is voluntary and you can leave the group at any time. If you change your mind about participation, any data you have provided will be withdrawn, except for the data collected during the focus group.



#### **Your information is private**

To keep your information private we will give your information a unique code. When we write anything about you we use this code and not your name. We will use this unique code on the saliva samples collected so no identifying information will be provided to the laboratory conducting the test. The interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Everything you answer is confidential (unless you tell a researcher something that is illegal, and they must report it by law).

[STUDY SITE COORDINATOR's] and other staff at [SERVICE NAME] will help you complete the surveys and saliva samples. The information that [SERVICE NAME] gathers (observations on the walks, your answers about your mood before and after the walks) will be securely sent to the research team at CSU using your unique code. [SERVICE NAME] staff will destroy these documents after they have sent them to the Charles Sturt University researchers. We will keep all the study documents and information in locked computer storage at the Charles Sturt University for five years and then it will be destroyed.



### **What are the possible risks of participating in this project?**

As the research requires participants to be physically active, there is a small risk of physical injury. Walking routes will be chosen to lessen the likelihood of trips and falls. If an injury did happen, immediate medical assistance will be provided. Staff in attendance are trained in First Aid. Support staff will call 000 if an ambulance is required. You will be responsible for your own medical expenses. If you become mentally unwell during the research, two mental health clinicians will be there to provide assistance.



### **Benefits of the research**

The research will contribute to understanding whether contact with local natural environments via walking groups enhances recovery and wellbeing of mental health service users. The findings will indicate if the [SERVICE NAME] should encourage and include nature-based interventions. Results from this research will be used for journal or book publications, conference presentations, and as part of teaching resources.



### **How do I find out the results of the study?**

At the end of the walks, you will be invited to come to a workshop at [SERVICE] to talk through the results of the study and provide advice to the researchers. This is to make sure the results reflect your experiences.. If you would like to know about the finalised results, we can send you a summary of what we found out when the study is finished in March 2025. You can ask the [STUDY SITE COORDINATOR] who tells you about the study to send you the report.

### **Am I eligible?**

To be eligible to participate in the study, people need to be;

1. Receiving services at [SERVICE NAME],
2. Interested and committed to be part of a 12-week program of weekly nature walking groups,
3. Physically well enough to walk unassisted for up to 40 minutes at a time.

If you are currently experiencing severe mental distress, the walking group may not be suited for you now. Your mental health clinician can talk more to you about this. If you are not physically well enough to participate, or if you still want to be involved in the study, but not participate in the walks, [STUDY SITE COORDINATOR] can talk to you about how you can still be involved.



### **Who can I talk to about this project?**

You can contact one of the research team if you have questions about the study and your involvement: Julaine Allan (T: 02 6365 7119), Nicole Snowdon (T: 02 6365 7045) from Charles Sturt University. Pete Destrý (T: 02 4286 8700) from Illawarra Community Mental Health Service or Tamiki Carr from LikeMind (T: 0413 409 938). The research team will also include a social work student [name TBA] who will assist with data collection.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Greater Western Human Research Ethics Committee. Anyone with any concerns or complaints about the study may contact the committee's Executive Officer on (02) 6330 5948 WNSWLHD-EthicsCommittee@health.nsw.gov.au and quote: 2024/ETH00561.

This study has also received clearance by the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee (no. H24047). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact either Committee via the following contact details:

Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee  
The Presiding Officer  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Research Integrity Unit  
Locked Bag 588  
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678  
Phone: (02) 6933 4213  
Email: [ethics@csu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@csu.edu.au)

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

This study has received funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.



**What's next?** If you agree to take part we need you to complete the consent form with a researcher and then we will tell you when the walks are and how to join in.

**Thank you for considering this invitation. This information sheet is for you to keep.**