



# Annual Review

## April 2023 - March 2024



# The Braveheart Association

**"Through Braveheart, I feel that my self-worth and self-esteem across all areas of my life have been enhanced."**

*Nicholas, Living Well Service User*



*Image courtesy of Charles Colliar, Braveheart Walk Leader and former Braveheart Trustee*

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## Contents

Supporting The Wellbeing of People Across Forth Valley	3
Chair's Report	4 - 5
Key Achievements 2023/2024	6 - 11
Strategic Priorities 2024/2025	12
Volunteering	13 - 14
Thank You	15

**"I learned many things in this Braveheart group but what stays with me the most is the importance of taking control over your own health."**

*Saima, Living Well Service User*



# Supporting The Wellbeing of People Across Forth Valley



Each year, the Braveheart Association supports around 1,500 people across Forth Valley who are living with, or who are at risk of developing, a long-term health condition.

Through our three core programmes – Living Well with Braveheart, Walk with Braveheart and Top Toes - and our drop in Braveheart Connections Hub in Falkirk, we focus on early intervention around conditions such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 Diabetes and dementia. We also support those facing social isolation and mental health challenges.

We listen to those we work with so that we can empower them to develop their own sustainable solutions at their own pace.

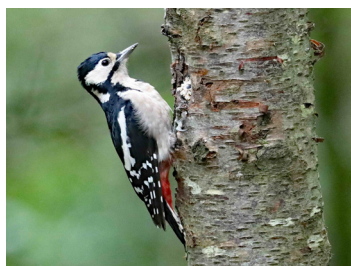
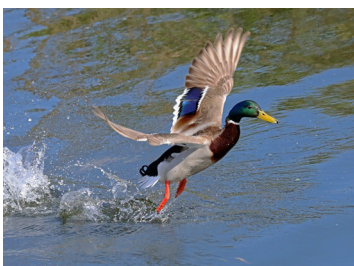
Within our programmes, we run group activities designed to address risk factors

associated with ill health, particularly weight. These include walking, exercise and wellbeing activities, weight management support groups and a toenail cutting service to help clients with mobility and self-esteem.

Established over 20 years ago, Braveheart continues to evolve our innovative health and wellbeing services in line with local, regional and national health improvement policies and priorities.

With the invaluable support of our dedicated staff, volunteers, members, partners and funders, we are proud to play an increasing role in creating resilient individuals and healthier communities across Forth Valley.

*Images courtesy of Charles Colliar, Braveheart Walk Leader and former Braveheart Trustee*



# Chair's Report

**These last 12 months have, in some ways, been the most stable for many years.**

We consolidated a lot of our processes and policies. We started and finished the year with the same staff. The Board remained the same (for ten months of the year).

We also secured long-term funding to deliver programmes over the next three years.

What was the impact of all this positivity?

It helped strengthen the positive and constructive culture we are familiar with at Braveheart, particularly after a period of so much change the year before.

Above all, it means we can plan the future with more confidence than ever before. We can support more people across more of Forth Valley and in more innovative ways.

The Braveheart Connections Hub in The Howgate Centre is central to a lot of what we do but we also operate across many other premises and localities in Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire. Our healthy living programmes, walking and toenail clipping service are delivered to hundreds of people.

Our service users benefit in so many ways from those resources. Behind the overall participation numbers, we lay out in this review, for example, we should also remember that every single person who engages with our programmes also benefits from chat, exercise and camaraderie. There are thousands of such wellbeing interactions across the year.

We are grateful to the many people and organisations who have helped over the past year.

**"We secured long-term funding to deliver programmes over the next three years...and support more people across more of Forth Valley and in more innovative ways."**



*Nina Saunders, Gordon Thomson and Susan Anderson*



Firstly, we are grateful to our funders, who between them gave Braveheart almost £200,000 so that we can make a positive impact on both physical and mental health.

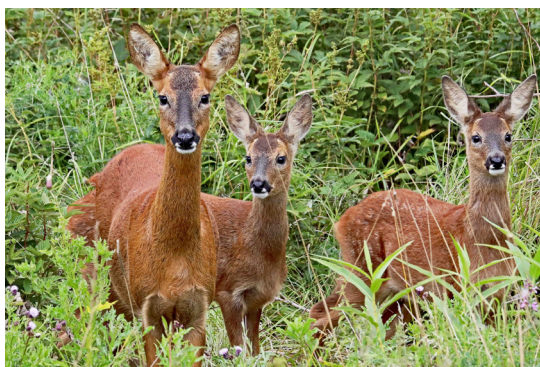
In particular, we are thankful to the Big Lottery which has provided significant long-term funding for the projects which we will deliver from The Hub over the next three years. Credit goes to all staff in helping secure this.

We are grateful to the people that choose to engage with Braveheart, those who trust that what we do together will improve their lives.

We are grateful to our volunteers. They are the driving force of our organisation, welcoming our service users with a smile and offering the advice, support and conversation that makes such a difference. We need to train and support them, listen to them and recognise their contribution. I hope we do them justice.

My thanks go to the staff who have worked in very tough circumstances. There are not enough hours in the day, but they always deliver what they know needs done. They have supported each other, shared responsibilities and helped build the resilience of the organisation.

*Images courtesy of Charles Colliar, Braveheart Walk Leader and former Braveheart Trustee*



**"Every single person who engages with our programmes also benefits from chat, exercise and camaraderie and there are thousands of such wellbeing interactions across the year."**

Thanks to the Board, to Charlie Colliar who stepped down last year and to Susan Anderson who replaced him. Like Charlie, Susan is a walk leader with an understanding of the positive impact Braveheart has in the community.

Last but by no means least, we are grateful to our Members. As a Scottish Charity Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), we rely on our Membership to elect the Board and vote on key issues at the AGM.

If you are interested in what we do and are not already involved, you may want to become a Member or a volunteer. We have many opportunities for those who want to help, from joining the Board to delivering our programmes, and we would love to hear from you.

**Gordon Thomson**

*Chair*

**The Braveheart Association**



# Key Achievements 2023/2024

It was another successful year filled with growth and new initiatives across our key programmes.

## Walk with Braveheart



**5,639** attendances across all of our walks

**456** walks led including

- **13** Weekly Walks (30 minute, 45 minute & 1 hour walk options)
  - Mondays - Polmont Woods, Callendar Park
  - Tuesdays - Forth Valley Royal Hospital, Grangemouth, Polmont Canal
  - Wednesdays - Bonnybridge, Dawson
  - Thursdays - Helix Park
  - Fridays - Stenhousemuir, Camelon, Denny
  - Saturdays - Callendar Park
  - Sundays - Helix Park
- **2** evening walks
- **Big Fit Walk at** Bonnybridge Nature Reserve and Canal Walk
- **3** very successful Away Day Walks
  - **51** walkers on our Pittencrieff Park, Dunfermline, walk
  - **50** walkers on our South Queensferry walk
  - **47** walkers on our 'Walk and Talk' at Drumpellier Country Park

**180** Braveheart regular walkers

**34** new walkers welcomed

**27** regular volunteer Walk Leaders

**£650+** raised at our annual Sponsored Walk on Carmuir's 'Centurion Way'



Strengthened support for our walk leaders and partnerships

consolidating existing and forging new ones with:

- Forth Valley Sensory Centre
- Cycling Without Age
- Forth Environment Link
- Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC)
- Enjoy Life Locally (ELLY) Project – Glasgow University pilot project supporting individuals with low activity levels to join activities in their local area
- Beat the Streets

## Active Travel to Walks

- All Braveheart walks have been designed to start next to a bus route to make attending our walks easy. We also encourage active travel by foot, cycle, train or car share
- **49%** of participants walked or used public transport to the start of a walk
- **62%** reported an increased awareness of the value of active travel

## Winter Step Count Challenge

- **64** participants took part in our week-long challenge striding out...
- **1,338,573** steps and...
- **621** miles



**"The walks have given me the push to improve my health and stopped me vegetating on the couch."**

*Chris, Walk with Braveheart Participant*

**"No matter how unfit you are, always having a Walk Leader to walk beside you and adjust the pace gives a sense of safety and reassurance. It's lovely to walk and blether at the same time."**

*Julia, Walk with Braveheart Participant*



## Living Well - Healthy Way Weight Management and Lifestyle Programme

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Over the year, we delivered a diverse range of evidence-based nutrition, wellbeing and physical activities and educational resources at our Braveheart Connections Hub in the Howgate Centre, Falkirk, and at various community locations.

We also worked hard to reach and include those with limited means to access support, particularly refugees and those from ethnic minority groups.

It was a successful year during which we were able to advance a number of our innovative projects and capitalise on new opportunities and partner initiatives.

### Key Achievements

**7,576** attendances at...

**204** health and wellbeing group sessions including

- **84** Living Well: Emotional Support Matters sessions helping those living with long-term health conditions
- **42** Healthy Weight programme sessions
- **68** Community Mental Health and Wellbeing programme sessions delivered in Falkirk and Stirling with **165** participants
- **2** Community Wellbeing days with 95 participants
- NHS Keep Well Health Checks
- Creative and social activities

# Key Achievements 2023/2024

**"I am very grateful for the motivation and inspiration. It helped me gain confidence and opened new options for me."**

*Alison, Living Well Service User*

**542** people regularly engaged with Braveheart Living Well services

**94%** of participants reported gaining knowledge and/or learning a new skill

Activities supported:

- weight management
- self-management of long-term health conditions
- healthy eating
- physical activity
- mental health and wellbeing

Beneficiaries included:

- people with learning and physical disabilities
- people and families from ethnic minority backgrounds
- carers
- refugee and migrant adults and their children

**"I have learned so much from attending this group. I am so grateful for your time, energy and expertise."**

*Vicky, Living Well Service User*

**"I have lost two stones! I am certainly eating better and exercising better."**

*Wilma, Living Well Service User*







**"I've always wanted to lead a healthier lifestyle, but this Braveheart group helped me to finally get my motivation and take important and confident steps."**

*Liz, Living Well Service User*

### **Key Health Outcomes**

This year, we recorded sustained and improved physical and mental wellbeing trends, reported by our service users:

**98%** rated Living Well for enjoyment, building confidence, satisfaction and sense of achievement

**89%** reported being better able to manage their long-term health condition

**87%** reported improvement in their social relationships and a decreased sense of isolation

**79%** reported improved general health and wellbeing

**72%** reported an increase in their physical activity level

**64%** of weight management programme participants achieved a minimum of **5%** weight loss

**"I liked the way this course looked at lifestyle and problem solving and taking things step by step. Every time I would go home with good practical information which I found very helpful."**

*Mariam, Living Well Service User*

# Key Achievements 2023/2024

## Footcare with Braveheart (Top Toes)

Good footcare is vital, particularly as we age. It helps reduce falls and increase mobility. It also impacts on mental wellbeing by helping maintain confidence in appearance.

Our Top Toes service, which is delivered through the Braveheart Connections Hub and across our communities, helps people who cannot cut their own toenails, particularly the elderly and those with disabilities.

## Key Achievements

**1,500** regular clients from across Forth Valley

**17%** increase in new clients over the year

**15** new volunteers recruited

**2,000+** volunteer hours contributed

Regular training for new volunteers supported by NHS Podiatry

**"I appreciate the Top Toes service as I cannot cut my own toenails anymore. What a massive difference. I can now do a wee dance."**

*Top Toes User*



**"Our clients are so appreciative of the service we provide them. It is such an honour and privilege to be able to make a difference in someone's life."**

*Top Toes Volunteer*

**Braveheart** **Top Toes service**  
For healthy lives

## Clinics across Forth Valley

Are you unable to cut your own toenails? We can help!

NHS Podiatry trained volunteers carry out clinics in various locations. Each appointment costs £20.

Call or email for current availability.

[www.braveheart.uk.net](http://www.braveheart.uk.net)  
For more info, contact Eleanor on  
01324 633505 OR email:  
[eleanor.paterson2@nhs.scot](mailto:eleanor.paterson2@nhs.scot)





# Key Achievements 2023/2024

## Developing our Volunteers

We continued to support and develop our amazing and valued volunteers – our Health Mentors, Walk Leaders and Top Toes team.

Our volunteers are integral to our work and help their fellow community members live a healthier life by encouraging them to eat well, move well and feel well.

## Key Achievements

**67** active volunteers

**52** attendances at **6** volunteer training sessions including

- Walk Leader & All Abilities Walk Leader training
- Strength & Balance training for Walk Leaders
- 'Confident Conversations' training to help support those with long-term health conditions
- Basic First Aid training
- Top Toes training

**New updated Volunteer Handbook** with updated and new policies

**Volunteer Celebration Day** held during Volunteers' Week

**Christmas Celebration**

## Volunteer Satisfaction Survey

Our newly updated satisfaction survey gave us great results:



All satisfied/very satisfied with their volunteering experience



Our Volunteers joined to meet new people, contribute to community, and gain new skills



All felt appreciated as a volunteer

**"Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose."**

*Colin, Walk Leader*

# Strategic and Service Priorities 2024/2025

This year our Strategic Priorities are to:

- **Grow our services in our Falkirk Hub**, offering a range of new activities for local people to enhance their wellbeing and live well
- **Build our volunteer teams**, extending the range of local people getting involved to contribute to the wellbeing of their local community and take advantage of the benefits of volunteering with Braveheart
- **Continue to recognise, provide development opportunities for and celebrate our volunteers**
- **Increase the visibility of Braveheart services** by running community events and using all available media, talking to groups and consolidating partnership working
- **Continue to build communities of walkers in Forth Valley**, promoting enhanced wellbeing
- **Continue to deliver and enhance our footcare service**, supporting the wellbeing of local people who are unable to cut their own toenails
- **Develop and implement a new staff wellbeing policy** and provide regular team building opportunities
- **Continue to review and update our organisational policies and procedures** with a particular focus on keeping staff, volunteers and service users safe
- **Work together with the NHS and community organisations across Forth Valley** to develop new referral pathways to maximise access to Braveheart services





# Volunteering with Braveheart



**We cannot thank our volunteers enough for all that they do. Without them, Braveheart could not deliver lifeline services supporting health and wellbeing in the community.**

Today, we have 67 volunteers across four core teams:

Our **Walk with Braveheart Walk Leaders** encourage and support people across Forth Valley to get active, enjoy fresh air and connect with others.

Our **Living Well with Braveheart Volunteer Mentors** help deliver our lifestyle programmes including weight management, peer support for health conditions and work with ethnic minority

communities.

Our **Footcare with Braveheart (Top Toes) Volunteers** deliver footcare service in the Braveheart Connections Hub in Falkirk.

Our **Braveheart Trustees** volunteer their time to provide strategic support for the organisation.

All our volunteers receive training and support to ensure they are confident and able to deliver the best service and, importantly, enjoy their time spent volunteering. They are wonderful, committed, enthusiastic and a friendly, welcoming face for our service users.

If you would like to become a Braveheart Volunteer, we would love to hear from you.

**visit [www.braveheart.uk.net](http://www.braveheart.uk.net) or telephone: 01324 673706**

**"Good footcare is so important. Knowing that I've helped improve someone's quality of life makes me feel so happy."**

*Top Toes Volunteer*

# Volunteer Case Studies

**"Volunteering has expanded my social life and helped my own mental wellbeing."**



**Long-standing volunteer Walk Leader and former Braveheart Trustee Charlie Colliar remembers what led him to volunteer with Braveheart.**

"Having retired from a career in the Fire Service, I decided that I would look for voluntary work which would help keep me out of mischief!

"I had seen an advert in the local newspaper looking for walk leaders for the Braveheart organisation. Being a keen

walker and enjoying being outside, I felt that it was something I could do. Also, due to the nature of my job dealing with the public, I felt I had good social skills which I believed would be an asset as a walk leader.

"Having met many walkers who have suffered serious illness over the years it has made me appreciate the importance of good health, something most of us take for granted. It has also expanded my social life and, in so doing, helped my own mental wellbeing."

**"Volunteering has been so important to me throughout my life."**



**Top Toes Volunteer Fiona Wilson describes the 'riches' brought by volunteering.**

"Having been involved in Top Toes since it started in 2014, I became a Braveheart volunteer there in March.

"Volunteering has been so important to me throughout my life. I started as a teenager at school helping through the Befriending scheme with care homes and Paired Reading scheme for younger pupils. I've also volunteered with community groups supporting our green spaces and wildlife.

"Through volunteering, I have gained skills, experience, confidence and contacts that have made it easier to enter and return to work when life has necessitated breaks. It has given me space away from my caring responsibilities and reminded me that I have an identity not related to the people I care for.

"I have met so many wonderful people

who have enriched my life in so many ways and I get the joy of knowing I am helping my community in some small way. If I am having a bad day, just being around the people we support helps me forget my problems and makes it all just a little bit easier.

"Braveheart Top Toes is such a wonderful organisation to volunteer for. We help so many people maintain their independence and mobility while offering a friendly chat and a listening ear. I love to hear about our clients' lives, their hobbies, their families. Sometimes my cheeks hurt I have laughed and smiled so much!

"I go home at the end of the day feeling like I have some worth and have put a little more happiness out in the world. I would recommend that everyone volunteer at some point in their lives. There are so many volunteering opportunities at Braveheart and so many chances to do some good in your community. The riches volunteering brings cannot be overestimated!"



# Thank You

We are grateful to everyone who made the year so successful for Braveheart.

- **Braveheart Staff Team**

Anne Black, Braveheart Manager

Maureen Forbes, Support Worker

Eva Finlayson, Volunteer Co-ordinator,  
Walk Development Officer

Munira Farara, Living Well  
Co-ordinator

Eleanor Paterson, Top Toes  
Development Officer

Rumbie Muza, Top Toes Development  
Officer/Walk Development Officer

Iain Currie, Top Toes Finance and  
Administration Officer



- **Braveheart Board of Trustees**

Charlie Colliar, who stepped down from the Board in 2023 after making a generous contribution and Braveheart Walk Leader Susan Anderson who became a Trustee alongside our longstanding Chair Gordon Thomson and Trustee Nina Saunders

- **Braveheart Funders 2023-2024**

Falkirk Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, NHS Forth Valley, Paths for All Smarter Choices Smarter Places, Paths for All Walking for Health, Stirling Communities Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund, The National Lottery Community Fund & Volunteering Support Fund

Our thanks in particular go to NHS Forth Valley, which provides the vital annual funding needed to employ our experienced Manager and access funds from other sources where match funding is required

Early 2024 brought the end of our three-year funding award from the Volunteer Support Fund - Impact Funding Partners. This funding was invaluable in enabling us to employ a Volunteer Co-ordinator, increase volunteer training and develop volunteer recruitment, retention and diversity

- **Braveheart Volunteers**

All our Walk Leaders, Living Well Health Mentors, Braveheart Connections Hub and Top Toes volunteers

- **Braveheart Supporters**

All who contributed and donated individually in person or through Just Giving

## Get Involved

### Helping People across Forth Valley lead Healthier Lives

People who are active and involved in communities, and who feel able to access formal and informal support, are both happier and healthier.

Braveheart delivers free community-led activities and outreach health services to improve the health and wellbeing of people across Forth Valley. We also run a wide-ranging and rewarding volunteer programme.

### Volunteer with Braveheart

For further information or to get involved, visit our website or contact the Braveheart team.

**[www.braveheart.uk.net](http://www.braveheart.uk.net)**

Telephone: 01324 673706

### Donate to Braveheart

To support Braveheart, please visit

**[www.justgiving.com/braveheartassn](http://www.justgiving.com/braveheartassn)**

**THANK  
YOU!**



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