

Breast Foot Forward

is a project registered with the Scottish Health Walk Network, set-up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic after it left breastfeeding peer supporters unable to provide support indoors in groups as they had done prior to Covid-19.



In December 2020, supported by **Paths for All** (national walking charity) and the Aberdeenshire Health Walk Coordinator (**Live Life Aberdeenshire**), 18 volunteers linked to **NHS Grampian's** Breastfeeding Peer Support Service attended Paths for All's walk leader training.

With further support from Aberdeenshire Public Health, in Spring 2021, the health walk project "Breast Foot Forward" was registered, and volunteers began delivering buggy walks in locations across Aberdeenshire.

Adele Hosie (pictured centre) Infant Feeding Peer Support Coordinator tells us more...

"The aim of our project is to get mothers / parents who are breastfeeding and/or expressing for any of their feeds out and about, mixing together to provide social and emotional support with breastfeeding. Parenting a new baby can be a lonely and isolated time so giving people the opportunity to come together and chat about these shared experiences can be really valuable."

The original development planned 8 walks as part of the project but as Covid restrictions eased service delivery indoors was permitted again and some locations decided to return to indoor provision. 2 walks continue to run as part of the wider breastfeeding peer support service in Aberdeenshire.

I (Claire Turnbull, Aberdeenshire Health Walk Coordinator) met with the Breast Foot Forward Huntly group on a fresh Winter's day and their final walk of 2021. During my visit I spoke with 2 mums, Catriona (pictured left) and Petra (pictured right) about their experience of joining and being part of the walks. Both mums have similar aged young children who were born during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. They found out about the walks through social media and have been walking regularly with the group for around 7 months.

Catriona, who travels around 20miles to join the walk, was asked what her motivations were for joining?

"It was the first group activity I seen that I was able to join with my first child. I liked the idea of it being a walk, outdoors and meeting with others. Being outdoorsy and active is something we want for our child"

What do you enjoy most about the walks?

"I enjoy the chat, the company and the peer support. (Joining) has improved my wellbeing as we were indoors a lot at the start because of covid restrictions".

What would you say to anyone who was considering joining the walk but wasn't sure what to expect?

"The walk is very chill, we never go far, it's very relaxed. We have a wander and a chat."

Petra was asked the same questions...

What was your motivation for joining the group?

"I was desperate to find my tribe."

What do you enjoy most?

"It has been good to meet other mums and my son gets to meet other children too. It has definitely improved my mental wellbeing, that's what it is all about for me."

What would you say to others thinking about joining?

"It's relaxed, open and friendly. There's no pressure to breastfeed outdoors, or to even talk about breastfeeding. There's no commitment to turn out every week."

Adele adds...

"(Our numbers vary) from walk to walk and (are) also dependant on the needs of the walker. We want families to feel able to come to the Breast Foot Forward walks whether or not they feel they need "support" but some will only come along if they have a question to ask."

Adele, as well as coordinating the breastfeeding peer support service across Aberdeenshire, has supported the Huntly Breastfeeding Buddies peer group as a volunteer

for many years. She trained alongside the other volunteers as a walk leader to enable her to continue to support parents in the Huntly area.

“The biggest influence is the volunteers who kindly gave up their time to do their walk leader training and deliver the breast foot forward walks in their local community. We have 4 walk leaders that are active and more trained that are available to run other health walks should the restrictions change to where our service is only allowed to operate outdoors.”

Adele experienced some challenges to getting the walks started but said...

“Once we got going the walks were, on the whole, embraced by parents / walkers. Having a health walk project is really worthwhile - when you get to see people out and about, enjoying the fresh air and good company, it makes the overcoming the challenges absolutely worth it.”

If you would like to join a Breast Foot Forward walk you can visit the Paths for All website and have a look at their online map to find the nearest walk to you. Alternatively, you can e-mail gram.breastfeedingsupport@nhs.scot. Call or text 07990541351. Or join a local breastfeeding Facebook Group. Links can be found at www.nhsgrampian.org/breastfeeding.

Breast Foot Forward is just one example of how support organisations have worked in partnership with Paths for All and Live Life Aberdeenshire to adapt their provision to enable them to move their group support outdoors under the health walk model. Walking has many additional benefits to health and wellbeing; it's free and almost anyone can do it.

If you would like to find out more about health walks across Aberdeenshire, please email:

healthwalks@aberdeenshire.gov.uk.

Visit: <https://lifelifeaberdeenshire.org.uk/live-life-well/health-and-wellbeing-programmes/aberdeenshire-health-walks/>.

Call: 01467 534495.

