

FIT STICKS TRAILS

Ireland's first Fit Sticks Trail was recently opened for use in Derryounce, Portarlington County Laois. This trail was installed by Fit Walk Ireland through funding from Healthy Ireland Laois. This addition comes from a positive response and growth in the use of Fit Sticks, which are commonly known as Activator Poles.



FIT WALK IRELAND

Fit Walk Ireland Director, Frank Fahey has been involved in the promotion of fitness walking in Ireland for over 20 years, leading in the field of Physical Recreation and Active Living.

A large portion of their work is through Local Sports Partnerships as they see there is large potential and benefit from support of existing structures.

ORIGINS OF FIT STICKS IN IRELAND

Fit Walk Ireland introduced Fit Sticks into Ireland 5 years ago after a rise in interest of Nordic Poles from people with balance issues. The traditional use of Nordic Poles is actually not very appropriate for people with such issues. Franks Fahey of Fit Walk Ireland found Fit Sticks were found to be much more appropriate.

FIT STICKS VS NORDIC POLES

While Fit Sticks and Nordic Poles may appear to be the same, there are many differences.

NORDIC POLES

Nordic walking is in fact a high intensity sport. The poles are intended to be used to propel the user forward by applying force as you walk. When using Nordic Poles you are also strapped to the poles. Overall, Nordic Poles are not the most suitable for people with poor balance.

FIT STICKS/ ACTIVATOR POLES

The main purpose of Activator Poles is to allow support while walking. These were discovered to be a much more suitable option to be used by people with poor balance as the use of activator poles can also enhance stability and reduce the fear of falling.



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Fit Sticks allow all to take part, there is no limitation on who can benefit from using them. Whether you are an experienced walker or those who have low levels of mobility, there is benefit to be taken from using Fit Sticks.

BENEFITS

Through the use of Activator Poles/Fit Sticks, there are many benefits to be achieved. Benefits are not limited to just the obvious physical gains but Fit Sticks users also experience social and mental health benefits. Fit Sticks main purpose is to provide support for users while walking, however, the uses stretch beyond this. Fit Sticks also allow users to execute a number of exercises using Fit Sticks.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

Improves stability

Reduces impact on hips/knees

Develops core strength

Improves posture

Promotes better gait pattern



PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS

"Being a sufferer from Parkinsons I have problems with gait, and muscle stiffness. I found the use of the poles very helpful and improved my posture and gait. Thanks to Catriona Slattery and the girls in LSP we had group walks guided by Donie Molloy around Derryounce Lakes and Emo Court. This was particularly welcome as we could meet which was socially very beneficial." **Participant with Parkinson's**

"The exercises are great, you perform movements you would not usually perform, especially lifting your arms."
Participant

"We have seen great benefit from the use of Fit Sticks on our walks. One individual struggled to walk when he first starting using Fit Sticks but is now capable of jogging lightly" **Participant & Tutor**

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FITSTICKS

RAIL LINE TRAIL

ALONG THE TRAIL

Along the trail there are a number of nature/ wildlife features and exercise stations for Fit Stick users to perform including a warm up/ warm down station at the beginning/ end of the trail.

Exercise stations found on the trail are:

- Warm Up / Warm Down
- Squat
- Arm Up
- Calf Lift
- Lunge
- Arm Lift
- Knee Up



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FIT STICKS IMPACT

Due to the large social element, the participation numbers seem to grow rather than decrease. While there is much to gain in a physical aspect, the social elements are what participants really love. There is always a good atmosphere and fun had during Fit Sticks sessions, which not only brings existing participants back but also attracts new people.

TRAINING

There are 2 forms of training for leaders to choose from:

1. Outdoor Training
2. Indoor Training

Indoor training involves exercises which incorporate the use of chairs, making it suitable for those with very poor balance or those in wheelchairs to participate.

NATIONWIDE



60 people trained up as leaders.



18 Local Sports Partnerships trained up.

The ability to participate in Fit Sticks indoors and outdoors allows people of all abilities to take part. One participant said they are now able to do things they didn't think they would ever be able to do again. The poles can help people perform movements such as getting up off a chair by themselves, although with support, providing a sense of independence.

There are now 60 people trained across 18 counties including 2 individuals with Parkinsons. Initially Laois and Kildare Locals Sports Partnerships received training and there are now 18 LSP's trained up.

In Wexford, Wicklow and Cork, there were programmes run specifically for people with Parkinson's. The programme in Wicklow was only meant to be for 6 weeks but then ran for 6 more, totalling 12 weeks.

In Wexford, Ballyfermot and Tallaght there were programmes run specially for people with C.O.P.D.

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FIT STICKS IN SANTRY

The benefits of using Fit Sticks have reached as far as Santry Clinic in Dublin. Two surgeons who perform hip and knee replacements have recognised the benefits of using Activator Poles/ Fit Sticks. They do not just recommend that their patients use Fit Sticks as part of their recovery, but they actually provide their patients with a set of Activator Poles accompanied with a set of exercises for them to perform.

LAOIS SPORTS PARTNERSHIP AND ACTIVATOR POLES

Through Healthy Ireland Laois we were able to purchase activator poles from Fit Walk Ireland and deliver programmes throughout Laois.

The groups that we deal with are Men's Shed, Parkinson's Group, Arthritis Group, Woodlands for Health Mental Health Group, Older Adult Groups, Care centres for people with disabilities with intellectual & physical disabilities. Participants found the use of the poles very helpful with posture, gait, and mobility & strength.

Prior to the second lockdown we trained up Older Adults on zoom so that they could continue their exercise while cocooning. Through the support of Age Friendly Laois, we distributed poles to homes across Laois and continued activator poles online via zoom. If participants did not have access to broadband, we supplied them with DVDs so that they could do the exercises.

Along the 2km trail, there are multiple signposts with descriptions of a variety of exercises that can be performed using Fit Sticks. At the beginning of the trail there is a warmup and warm down section and along the trail you will find a number of exercises which target different muscles in the body (Squat, Arm Lift, Calf Lift, Lunge, Arm Up, Knee Up). Throughout the trail, walkers will experience a full body work out with the support of the poles.

We have purchased 40 sets of Activator Poles, held a training course with 12 people and delivered 16 programmes which engaged with 410 participants.



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