

'The initial idea might come from one of your partners and may not be about promoting physical activity'
Health Promoter, Community Public Health

When Rosie McGrath wrote up the story of the success of the West Coastal Pathway for the ANA newsletter back in 2013, her title 'Good things take time and commitment' was shorthand for perseverance, community co-operation and a lot of hard work.

The idea for the pathway came from a local policeman in 2005. He saw a need for a safer commuter route for cyclists and walkers which was away from the busy state highway. Fewer people were cycling and walking because they didn't feel safe.

There was health input right from the beginning of the project with a small team from the local police, sports trust, public health unit and district health board funding and planning working together. Already existing positive working relationships, developed through other projects, ensured health was not left out. The whole group was aware of the health, safety, community and economic benefits of cycling. In addition, improving walking and cycling infrastructure fitted with each of the initial group members' work objectives. This group came up with a potential route for a cycling and walking pathway, promoted the idea and canvassed support from the community, the district council, DOC and local tourism and business representatives.

Rosie McGrath, health promoter with the local public health unit, took on the important role of secretary of the group. This meant she was always very busy but, importantly, was also always central to what was going on.

The West Coast Walking and Cycling Strategy was being developed at the same time which meant there were lots of conversations about the pathway in the media and support for it developed through the consultation process. This proved to be a good way for the Greymouth group to make connections with other councils on the West Coast and active transport advocates.

By 2008 the group had achieved its goal of getting the Grey District Council formally on board. By setting itself up as a charitable incorporated society, called the West Coastal Pathway (WCP) Society, the group was able to qualify for funding from Development West Coast for a design and scoping study.

This scoping study indicated the pathway met the criteria to qualify for NZTA funding, but a change in transport policy occurred before the funding could be secured. This meant the group had to find other funding options.

This slowed progress but the WCP group didn't give up. It ran a competition for a logo and fundraising activities.

It submitted to the district and regional council plans and the regional transport strategy and continued to take as many opportunities as possible to promote the idea and the benefits it would bring to the community in order to keep the idea alive.

None of the project was an easy ride. There was opposition from vocal people in the community, some local council members had to be convinced the idea had merit, there were land ownership problems and environmental issues to be worked around and sorted. A formal relationship with the Grey District Council and DOC helped facilitate a way through the environmental and land ownership difficulties.

There were lots of submissions to write and the group encouraged supportive members of the public to also submit. Public meetings to discuss the vision and process were also used to garner support in the community.

It wasn't till 2010, five years after the original idea was mooted, when the Ministry of Tourism Cycleway Project was started that the idea really gained traction. Both Grey and Westland District Councils together proposed a much longer pathway – from Greymouth to Ross. The local WCP group continued to work to get the first Greymouth section of the pathway constructed. The first 800 metres of the path near Greymouth was a great boost and once opened was well used by locals. Interest in walking and cycling increased and sales of bikes in the area went up.

The WCP, in partnership with local business interests and interested community groups, continues to promote the care and use of the pathway. Community use and support for the pathway is high. There are many daily users and it is regularly used for community walking and running events.

The whole 122 kilometres of the path between Greymouth and Ross is almost completed and is proving to be an asset for the whole community.

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The factors that made this project a success were:

- a clear purpose and goal that were written down
- working with the council and getting the vision written into planning documents and staff work plans
- the involvement of many people, from many different organisations
- a very supportive councillor who championed the cause
- the many different ways used to sell the idea to the council and the community
- community support, especially when construction started, which helped council and others see its value
- using the different skills and strengths of the group members to their fullest advantage
- supporting other community groups to develop projects involving the pathway
- gathering evidence to support benefits of the project and using it to sell the idea, especially to nay-sayers
- building team relationships and working together collaboratively
- sharing the responsibilities and not dumping everything on council
- celebrating and sharing the successes e.g. a National Walking and Cycling Award, awarded to the WCP group was presented to the council where it is proudly on display in the foyer.

Key learnings

- The initial idea might come from one of your partners and may not be about promoting physical activity.
- It can take a very long time to make progress.
- You may need to work with people you have never thought of working with before - the list for this project includes councils, DOC, sports trusts, local businesses, schools, ACC, landscapers and planners, police, Development West Coast, Guardians of the Paroa Trust (an environmental group), Active West Coast, Community Corrections, Lions and many individual community members.
- It is sometimes surprising where support will come from. Use whatever support you can.
- Relationships can be developed in a multitude of ways - some may be formal and others may develop by the snowball effect, use every opportunity to gather support and encourage collaboration.
- Report positive community support to the decision makers.
- Use submission processes and get others to also make submissions to add to the voice.
- Find other people to champion your cause.
- Use fun ways to garner support and keep a high profile on a project when progress lags.
- Use local media to promote your idea and get support.



Initial stages of construction of the West Coast Pathway



Healthy activity on the West Coast Pathway after completion

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