

The path to participation

Image by **Nicki Evans**, member of Walk and Talk, who runs the website Psychology in the Real World

Two dogs make their way along the River Severn, ahead of their owners – people taking part in Walk and Talk, a weekly walk that follows a footpath beside the river from Shrewsbury town centre into open countryside. The walk is always beautiful; this time it's remarkable. A January day in 2011, and for the first time in many decades the Severn has frozen over. One dog walks across the ice towards the other bank. Members of Walk and Talk decide not to risk it.

Walk and Talk is one of a number of Psychology in the Real World groups that Guy Holmes, alongside other members of the general public, has helped set up over the past decade in Shropshire (see www.psychologyintherealworld.co.uk). Guy won the 2014 BPS Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology in Practice.

Guy tells us that unlike most groups that

have NHS psychologist involvement, Walk and Talk is open to all. 'People with involvement in mental health and other statutory services both participate in and co-facilitate Psychology in the Real World groups, which take place outside the clinical and often stigmatising venues where most services occur. Such groups bring people together because they have a shared interest – in this case, an interest in walking and being in the countryside – not because they have a shared problem or diagnosis. They are part of a growing movement in community psychology. For participants in such groups the focus is more on critiquing and changing mental health practices rather than passively receiving them, on prevention rather than treatment, and on community participation in projects that improve the social conditions for all local people.'