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Fun after the storm with free cross-country skiing provided by Manchester Moves

By Jonathan Phelps New Hampshire Union Leader
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Garrett McLarty, a volunteer from Manchester Moves, helps fit cross-country skis in the well-stocked gear trailer for Valerie Sarwark of Manchester at Stark Park in Manchester on Sunday.

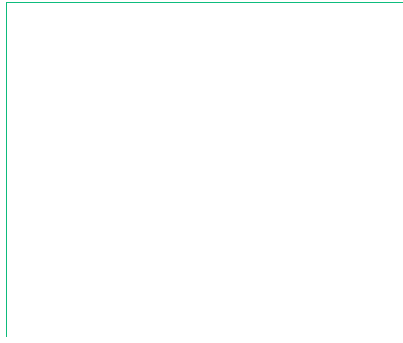
THOMAS ROY/UNION LEADER

Valerie Sarwark decided to try cross-country skiing for the first time Sunday at Stark Park in Manchester after swearing off alpine skiing.

The Manchester woman borrowed the boots, skis and poles from the nonprofit Manchester Moves, which rolled up to the park with a trailer full of cross-country skis, sleds and snowshoes. It's known as the group's Outdoor Gear Lending Library — everything is lent out free of charge.

"I am apprehensive about downhill skiing and they assured me this is nowhere near as bad," she said.

While getting a quick lesson alongside her husband, Nicholas, their three children joined others in sledding. Some enjoyed sitting by a small fire pit and sipped hot cocoa.



“Where we live in Manchester, I feel like we don’t know our neighbors and there is not a lot of community,” Sarwack said. “This kind of thing is reassuring that there is community and these kinds of things still exist.”

Many found the event – complete with free pizza – enjoyable after having to dig out driveways and clear sidewalks of almost a foot of fresh powder.

Jason Soukup, secretary of Manchester Moves, said the trailer is new this year after more informal efforts in years past to help boost outdoor activities in the city. In warmer seasons, the group will lend out bicycles, canoes and kayaks.

The trailer is equipped with more than 70 pairs of cross-country skis, all of which were purchased brand new.

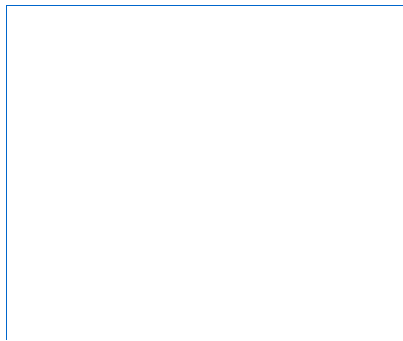
“If we get this kind of snow, we’ll be out all the time,” Soukup said. “It is totally weather dependent.”

Earlier this winter, the group held events at Dorrs Pond at Livingston Park and lent out nordic skates and ice skates.

“Our goal with Manchester Moves is to remove the barriers to outdoor activity,” Soukup said. “One of the biggest barriers is equipment. To buy something you are only going to use once or twice isn’t really feasible. It is not in the cards for most people.”

For the past year, the Friends of Stark Park, Manchester Parks & Recreation and Manchester Moves worked to develop the “Walk in the Woods” trail network and cleared out nearly 15 acres of overgrown land and trails. The trails are an original feature of the park named after General John Stark, which was dedicated in the late 1800s.

Molly Stark, who coincidentally shares the name of General John Stark’s wife, joined the group after a previous storm.



“This is probably only my third time,” she said of cross-country skiing. “It is a great way to be outdoors in the winter.”

“It is awesome,” she said. “I am new to town so it has been a really awesome community I’ve been a part of already. I’m grateful for the people who are doing it and putting the time in.”

Garrett McLarty, who oversees the gear, says the whole goal is to get more people outdoors and to be active. He works at Elliot Hospital as an emergency room nurse and can see the results of inactivity.

“We’ve had a culture where we think fun costs money and means I need to go somewhere else,” he said. “Look at this, we have places in Manchester, parks which are gems of the community to get out in. You don’t need to go far and you don’t need to make a whole day out of it.”

He used to lend the gear out of his garage.

Jason Record of Hooksett brought his own gear after hearing about the group outing. He usually goes cross-country skiing at Bear Brook State Park.

“We got the house cleared out, so we wanted to come out and enjoy the snow,” he said.

He came with his wife, Jillian, and son, Seth, 13.

They often come walking and biking at Stark Park.

“We’re really appreciative of all the efforts that Manchester Moves puts into the trail system throughout the city,” he said. “It’s awesome.”

To learn more about Manchester Moves and it’s outdoor gear library, find them on Facebook or go to

<https://manchestermoves.org>.

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