

Northumberland **FACT** Sheet



working together for the voluntary & community sector in Northumberland

Starting a New Group.... getting a group started

Why set up a community group?

There are many reasons why people might want to set up a voluntary or community group;

Perhaps there is a gap in services or activities in your area and local people have identified a need. Could be that a group of like minded people share a vision to improve an area, or have identified an area where some individuals are feeling isolated or need extra support to what they may be currently receiving.

Whatever your reasons one thing is certain starting a new group needs the time and commitment from people like you who are willing to get on and do something about it! This often involves stimulating debate to gain support and attract attention.

Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the amount of work to do, but also about shared responsibility. Starting a group means working together with people who share similar concerns and are aiming to solve a particular problem or meet a certain need.

Considerations when setting up a community group

Setting up a new group involves a variety of tasks and there are a number of things you will need to consider. The more aware you are of what you need to do the easier the task will be.

Forethought and good planning at this stage can save a lot of wasted effort or work later. The following key questions below are provided as an essential checklist.

- What do we want to do?
- Where do we want to do it?
- Do we have the time, energy and commitment to do the work ourselves?
- Do we have a plan for action?
- Do we need policies and procedures?
- Do we have a constitution?
- Do we need a committee?
- When will we hold general meetings?
- Do we need a bank account?
- Does our work involve young people or vulnerable adults? What is the legislation around this?
- How will we generate funds?
- Will we need training, how will we source training?

Avoid overlapping with other groups

Are there organisations that already offer what you intend to provide? You could research this on the internet, at your local library, with the local authority or ask your local development agency. If they exist, join the group. Duplicating can be expensive, a waste of resources, creates ill-feeling with those you compete with and deters funders. Joining an existing organisation and working with them saves a lot of hard work setting yourselves up and getting everything off the ground.

Getting started, it is important to think about the following questions

- What do you want to achieve?
- What kinds of activities will you want to provide to achieve this?
- How do you know there is a need for what you want to do?
- Who needs it?
- How will these people benefit?
- How many people need it?
- Will your group meet these needs in full/ in part?
- What will be the benefits from running your activities?

For each of your proposed activities, consider the following

- Who will run the activity?
- Do you have volunteers or will you need paid staff?
- Is training required?
- What skills or experience do you have within your group to run the activity?
- Will you need premises? For example, hall hire or office space?
- How will you advertise your services and publicise your group?
- How much will it cost?
- Where will funds be sought and who will do the fundraising?

Getting organised

Initially there are usually three to four people who set up a group before evolving into a management committee, which could be any number from three to several people. Responsibility for the group should be shared between a number of people who will make decisions, co-ordinate activities, make sure funding is in place and so on. Your Management Committee will be responsible for ensuring that your group:

- Sets aims and objectives and plans ahead
- Works towards its aims and objectives,
- Acts in the best interests of the people your group is set up to support (your beneficiaries)
- Has enough resources to carry out all of your work, and that these resources are well-managed and used to meet your aims and objectives
- Holds regular committee meetings

The set of rules (constitution)

Your group will need a Governing Document so that everyone knows who your organisation is, what it aims to do, how it will be run and who is responsible for running it. You will also need this document to apply for money (grants/funding) to enable you to deliver your service / activity / project. The normal type of governing document for a small group is called a constitution (a set of rules) and will consist of the following:

- Name
- Objects
- Powers
- Committee
- Annual General Meeting
- Extraordinary General Meeting
- Procedure at General Meetings
- Bank Accounts and Annual Accounts
- Payments or benefits
- Amendments to the Constitution
- Dissolution

The constitution will need to be signed by the Management Committee and dated on the day it is adopted.

Once your group has agreed and signed your constitution, it is a legal document. The committee, not the members, will be personally responsible for making sure the rules are followed.

Your local development agency (LDA) can help you through the process of setting up a new community group. For more information, advice and support contact the LDA covering your area.

For rural Northumberland contact:

Community Action Northumberland

UNIUN Enterprise Building Front Street Pegswood Morpeth
Northumberland NE61 6RG
Tel: 01670 517 178 Fax: 01670 511 400
Website: www.ca-north.org.uk email: info@ca-north.org.uk

Registered Company No 7805401 Registered Charity No's 1144604 / 224798



For Blyth, Cramlington and Seaton Valley contact:

Community & Voluntary Action Blyth Valley

22 Beaconsfield Street Blyth Northumberland NE24 2DP
Tel: 01670 353 623 Fax: 01670 365 783
Website: www.cvabv.org.uk email: info@cvabv.org.uk

Registered Company No 5860971 Registered Charity No 1116430

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For Ashington, Bedlington and Newbiggin by the Sea contact:

Wansbeck Centre for Voluntary Service

107 & 109 Station Road Ashington Northumberland NE63 8RS
Tel: 01670 858 688 Fax: 01670 784 160
Website: www.wansbeckcvs.org.uk email: enquire@wansbeckcvs.org.uk

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