



MUMS SUPPORTING MUMS

Getting Organised

Getting a group started

At the beginning most groups want to organise the practical side of things. You need to make sure there is someone doing each of these tasks (or whatever the equivalent is for your group):

- Day-to-day tasks such as buying the coffee and milk or leading the buggy walk.
- Keep a list of the members and their phone numbers or other contact details.
- Be the point of contact for new people who are interested in joining or when people want to find out more.
- Keeping a track of the money side – gathering in weekly payments from members, paying the rent of the hall, buying toys and equipment, money for the coffee and so on.
- Signing things for the group, such as the agreement to use the village hall.

It is a good idea if these tasks get shared out and there is one person (and ideally also a back-up) against each. That way no-one gets overloaded and there is less risk of something getting missed if one person has to drop out.

As you get going there will be specific activities to organise, such as events or fundraising or publicity about the group.

- You can get a few people to take on organising each of these.
- Again, it doesn't have to be the same people doing it all.
- Helping with something specific which is not going to last long can be a good way for new people to get more involved in the group, or for people who are less confident to build up their skills and experience.

Hints & Tips to get you started

Why we wrote these Hints and Tips

Mums Supporting Mums links together small local groups led by mums. We've been developing ways for parents in rural areas to get together.

You will find Hints and Tips to help you if you want to set up local groups or activities. The topics include parents and toddler groups, informal groups in cafes, buggy walking groups and using social media, as well as tips to help you find the money to help your group with its activities.

One of the messages that comes up in all the Hints and Tips is that it helps to spend a bit of time organising what the group does. In the early stages you probably just need someone to organise the practical aspects of what you do. Later you may want to have a committee and make the arrangements more formal. These are our tips on both these situations.

We hope these will give parents in other places ideas on what you can do.

You will find all
the Hints and Tips
on our website at
www.otbds.org

Having a committee and a constitution

At some point you may decide to organise things in a more formal way and have a committee.

The advantages are:

- It is clear to everyone who is taking responsibility for organising things.
- It encourages you all to think about the future of the group as well as the day to day side.
- It makes sense when the numbers in your group are increasing.
- It can reassure other people when your group is organised in the same way as other voluntary groups.

This is how it usually works.

- The group decides its rules on how it works. This is your constitution. It is written down so any member can know how the group works.
- There is a meeting which everyone can come to once a year – the Annual General Meeting or AGM.
- The members choose the committee and the committee are accountable to the members.
- People can take on the role for a year and then stand down, or they can keep going for a couple of years. It is a good idea to have some overlap as that gives continuity and helps the new committee members settle in.
- The good practice is to have a committee of at least 3 people with more if you can do that.
- The traditional roles are someone to chair the committee meetings, someone to look after the paperwork (secretary) and someone to look after the money side (treasurer). The people who do this are sometimes called the office bearers of the group.

“We’re all mums, which means we all have days when one of the children is not well or something has happened at home. Our advice is to always pair up. That way if you can’t do something you just get a message to one person and she knows what to do.”

“We had a big list of all the things we planned to do. The best advice we got was to keep it very general, as that way we could drop some of the things on our list and add others.”

The constitution for a community group does not need to be complicated. The basics are:

- What the group is called.
- Who can be members. For example, mums or any person in a parenting role (which would include dads, grandparents and someone caring for a partner's children). Or you can say anyone who shares the interests of the group. Is it just people living in and around your village, or do you want people who have moved away to be able to stay on as members?
- In broad terms, what you exist to do.
- The minimum number on the committee (has to be 3 or more) and the maximum.
- A statement that payments need to be authorised by 2 people.
- A statement that when the group ends any money that is left will be passed on to another voluntary group.

There is lots of advice around being on a committee and ways for people to learn about the roles. These are our tips:

- Ask someone who has been on a committee of another mums group or something similar to talk to you about what is involved and how they did it.
- Check out the training you can get through the Third Sector Interface or a similar organisation in your area.
- Check out the websites that have advice and training on this.
- Remember that you don't have to organise it in the usual way if there is another way that works better for your group.
- Mums groups tend to have people staying for a few years or less. Some of the other voluntary organisations have people who stay involved for much longer: this is why some aspects of their way of working might not be right for you.

"Mums Supporting Mums has helped us become a group with a formal constitution and now we're applying for our own grants. It wasn't as complicated as we thought it would be."

"We checked out becoming a committee but decided not to. There are only a few families with young children in our area and it felt like too much hassle for us at this stage."



Becoming a charity

A charity is a voluntary organisation which is recognised as meeting certain standards around what it does and how it is organised.

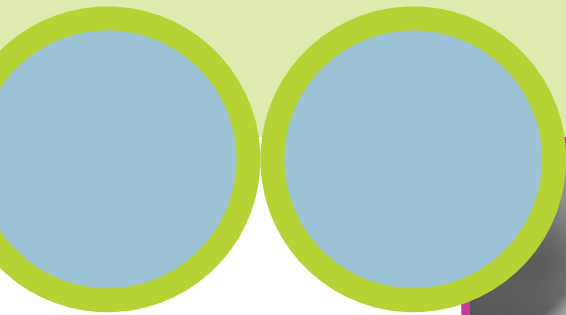
- Being a registered charity reassures people who consider giving the group money.
- It gives the group some other financial benefits, such as not needing to pay some taxes or charges by the council in the way commercial businesses do.
- The committee become the trustees of the charity. The law says what the responsibilities of trustees are.
- The constitutions of charities are more formal because they have to cover more requirements.

In Scotland the rules for charities are set out in an Act of Parliament. Charities are regulated by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator – OSCR (which everyone calls Oscar).

They have LOTS of advice on how to become a charity and on managing the charity.

These are some of the things we have found help:

- Remember that the rules are for ALL charities – some very big ones as well as new or small ones, and charities covering a huge range of activities. Some of the rules may seem as if they are not really for you. Bear with it if you think the information does not seem relevant to your situation: it usually is for you.
- Some of the rules are there because there are people who try to set up charities for dishonest purposes. Remember there is a good reason why you are asked for information about what the group does or is planning.
- The good practice on how charities work is also there for a reason. If charities work in these ways they are less likely to get into serious difficulties.
- If you already have a short simple constitution, build from there. Ask what you need to add to make it work as a charity.
- If you are not sure about something, ask. You can phone OSCR, or write or send an email, and someone will get back to you.
- For the basic guidance notes they often have a short version and a longer one with all the details. Read the short one first. That usually gives you what you need. If you do read the long one it will be easier after the summary.
- The forms to get established as a charity are ok if you take your time and read them through. There will be people to help you with them.



What funders look for

Most funders such as charitable trusts and councils will only give a grant to a group that has:

- A constitution (rules of your group).
- Bank account.
- Committee of at least 3 people. They may ask for someone in a role such as chair, secretary, or treasurer to sign the application.

If you haven't got any of these things then there are organisations that can help you. Go to page 6 for their contact details.

If you are a new group and don't have these things in place but you need some funds to help you get started have a look at the section on donations and fundraising activities and events in our Finding the Funds Hints and Tips.

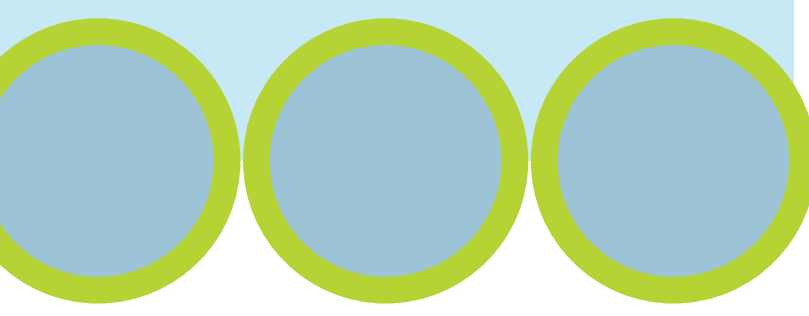
Policies – good practice and keeping safe

Many funders will also ask if your group has a policy or standards on matters such as Equal Opportunities and Protecting Children. You care about these matters too. A policy just makes sure that you have something written down.

- It makes it clear for everyone.
- It makes you think about how you achieve the principles. For example, if you believe in everyone being welcome the policy can remind you to think about people who have disabilities or who are not comfortable with written English when you are doing your publicity.
- You can give a copy to other people who want to be reassured about how your group works.
- If there is ever a difficulty within the group it sometimes helps to have a policy that you can refer to when you are explaining why someone's behaviour is not ok.

You will want to think about how you keep both parents and their children safe. Points that groups have included are:

- Each mum (or dad or gran) is responsible for their own children while they are at the group.
- How you all feel about bringing your children when they are not well.
- Is it useful to know where the contacts are on matters like Domestic Abuse and where to get advice if you are worried about a mum who is having a hard time or is not too well?



"I was asked to help organise the Christmas party. It was a good way to get to know the other mums better and it made me feel a bit more confident in myself."

"I'm enjoying getting involved with group organisation and committee roles."

Find out about whether the mums need to have disclosures (used to be called police checks) if this is something you are worried about.

- Some people do not start groups because their understanding is that every mum will need a police check or other disclosure clearance, and think this will put people off getting involved.
- Generally, parents do not need any checks if the children are with their parents and the parents are keeping an eye on things.
- You might need to get disclosures if an adult was going to be alone with other people's children, especially if it is on a regular basis.
- You can get advice on this from the Third Sector Interface or Scottish Preschool Play Association.
- Be aware about other risks, such as money going missing. Be sensible about it. There is lots of good practice advice that keeps things safe for everyone.
- If you ever come across a situation where you are not sure about someone, get advice about what to do.

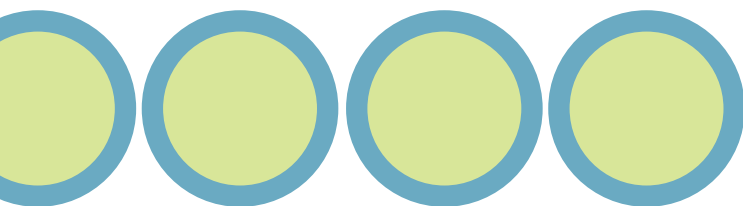
These are some things to think about.

- Have a conversation about what you feel about these points.
- Start with just writing down what you feel in ordinary language. This is about common sense and treating everyone with respect.
- Ask some other groups if you can see the policies they have.
- You can add points that matter to your circumstances.
- One of the reasons why groups have processes such as 2 people signing cheques and sharing out responsibility for tasks is to keep everyone safe and to let everyone be confident in each other.

"We didn't know about VASLAN until you told us. They are now helping us with our annual accounts. We can go back to them for any other help that we might need for our committee in the future. And they've offered to promote our group on their website and newsletter."

"We have become more aware of the support available to us as a group. We have benefited from being able to meet other mums in our own area who are further on and have already got their group going."

"Remember you are talking about your parents group. It is about mums with babies and toddlers who are no further than a few feet away. It is not about what happens when teenagers are on the internet (although we have views on that too)."



Background to Mums Supporting Mums

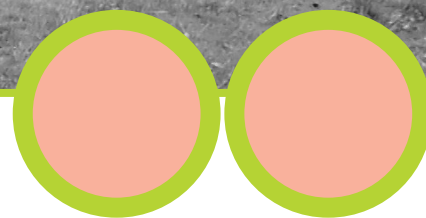
Outside the Box has been working in partnership with Healthy Living Network in Scottish Borders, Healthy Valleys in South Lanarkshire and Building Healthy Communities in West Wigtownshire, Dumfries and Galloway.

The project was aimed at women who wanted to develop small-scale support services and activities for themselves and for others. The aims of the project are to:

- Encourage women to develop small-scale services and activities that support parents and their children, which reflect the circumstances of people living in rural areas.
- Reduce the isolation many mums' experience.
- Point people to sources of advice that will help support their wellbeing.
- Encourage women to use the opportunities for learning and access to employment that are open to them.

The project was funded by LEADER programmes in Dumfries and Galloway, South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders, Hollywood Trust, Comic Relief, NHS Borders, Big Lottery Fund and contributions from Healthy Valleys and Outside the Box.

There is more information about the project and updates on developments in each local area at www.otbds.org/mums



"We feel more confident now in our abilities as a group to continue with our parent and toddlers."

Further information and help

There are local organisations to help you. The local Third Sector Interface (TSI) might be able to help (they used to be known locally as CVS).

To find your local TSI go to www.vascotland.org

There is lots of useful information for setting up groups, constitutions, committees and sources of funding in the Community Toolkit at In the Community Toolkit at <http://www.slcv.org.uk/>

SPPA (Scottish Preschool Play Association) will help with information about setting up a toddlers group and information about insurance. www.sppa.org.uk

For information about setting up a charity go to www.oscr.org.uk

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)
2nd Floor
Quadrant House
9 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

Email: info@oscr.org.uk
Phone: 01382 220446
www.oscr.org.uk

Look for our other Hints and Tips on: Toddler groups, buggy walking groups, finding funds, social media.

Contact us

There is more on the Mums Supporting Mums project at www.otbds.org/mums

Outside the Box
Unit 23, 150 Brand St
Glasgow G51 1DH
0141 419 0451
admin@otbds.org

www.otbds.org

1 905149 08 5



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