

Hints and Tips

Getting Started

How do groups led by older people start?

Many groups are started by local people getting together and starting an informal group.

- People want to do something together. It could be for a chat over coffee; wanting to share an interest e.g. local history; or they need a few people for an exercise class or walking group.
- They may be aware of a local problem, issue or gap and want to set up something to resolve the problem or fill the gap.
- They decide who else should be involved and can draw in other organisations or people if they want.

Sometimes staff at the Council or the local health board, or people at an existing voluntary sector organisation, identify a gap or need through their work.

- They develop a service, activity or group to meet the gap. It will be something that fits with local or national strategies or their organisation's work such as Improving Health and Wellbeing or supporting older people generally.
- It becomes an activity led by older people when the initial organisers involve local people and they take on a leading part in the development.

Sometimes people from the community and a number of organisations come together and form a partnership to take things forward.

There can be any other combination that brings people, communities and organisations together to develop something that meets local people's needs.

"Start small and plan to grow."

"Our advice is just do it. Don't spend too long planning."

"Keep checking it is meeting people's expectations, learn as you go, make changes as you go."

"Other Mens's Sheds told us to start small and not rely too much on grants. Getting start up grants was easy, getting grants to keep going was more difficult. We decided to keep our costs down and not have too grand and expensive ideas."

"Groups, activities and services developed by users are usually more effective – and benefit from lots of community support."

"Be prepared to try new thing and different things."

"Groups change over time. You might start out with one idea and then add on new things or change as things change in your community. That's what happened to us."

"Some of us wanted to start doing things straight away, others wanted to take a bit more time. Our advice is to find a pace that is right for most people, and recognise that some people are helping by accepting the compromise."

"We visited some other groups and found out what they'd done and how they went about setting up their Men's Shed. They gave us lots of hints and tips and we used that to help us plan how we took things forward."

Different ways to set up groups and activities

You might have an idea how you think a group or activity will develop. Sometimes things start out one way and then change. What starts out as one type of group may evolve into another. It is helpful to keep an open mind and be prepared for groups and activities to change as they develop and progress.

- Informal groups are easy to run. They can have a short note of what they want to achieve and how they plan to organise it, but they don't need a more formal structure. They can start relatively quickly and do straightforward things right away.
- A group with bigger plans will usually set up a committee and apply for start up funding. You can start small and plan to grow in stages. This gives you time to learn to work together as a committee, supporting each other and learning together. People often find peer support develops as they help each other in their roles in the planning group or committee, planning and developing their ideas and applying for funding, as well as through the activities.
- A group can be led by workers or supported by workers. The workers can apply for the funding to pilot the activity or group and have it as part of their work. Workers help to support the group through the stages of learning to work together as a group, working out plans and looking for funding if required.

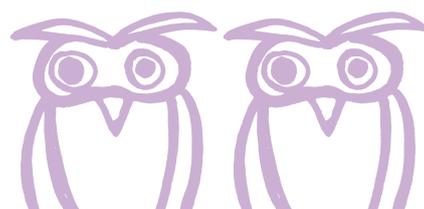
Some groups start as one way or model and then evolve into another.

- They start as an informal group but as they grow and become busier they may decide that they need to become more formal and have a committee.
- They may start as a pilot or activities group as part of the work of one organisation and then decide they are want to become a separate group.

"Keep talking to other people in your community – they can help you in different ways at different times."

"We wanted to get the men in our community along to talk about a Mens's Shed. We decided to put up posters in places that older men or men that had retired might go to. Barber's shop, dentist, doctors, local shops, miners' social club...."

"You will need a group of people to plan and share out all the things that will need doing."



Getting people involved

You will want to get people involved in a range of ways.

- Having people involved in developing the new activity or service helps to make sure there is community support and it is more likely to meet people's real needs.
- You need some people to organise the activities - be the volunteers who do all the practical things.
- Once the activities get started you will want to have people coming along.
- You need a few people to organise the group and plan ahead. This is usually the committee. You want to have enough people to share the work out and not leave it all to a few people.
- It helps to have some people who can give you advice and know what is going on in your area, or about the wider context such as the Council's plans for service for older people.

These are some of the things groups have done to reach more people:

- Have an open meeting.
- Coffee morning.
- Drop in.
- Going round lots of groups and asking people
- A mixture of things.

You can promote the group in lots of ways.

- Word of mouth.
- Posters, leaflets.
- Putting information on a community website or facebook page.
- Getting a piece in the community news section of the local newspaper or on local radio.
- Through other local groups and organisations
- Community centre.
- Local health centre.

Developing your idea

You may have:

- A specific idea – e.g. lunch club or walking group.
- Identified a gap – lots of older men but nothing for them to do.
- A shared interest.
- Or it might be a number of ideas but nothing specific.

You will want to:

- Share your ideas and find out what other people want and need.
- Find more people to help with setting the group up.
- Get community support for your group.
- Find allies and people who can help in other ways.

These are suggestions on what to talk about at a planning session, or when you go to talk to people:

- Tell people about what you are wanting to do.
- Get other people's ideas and suggestions.
- Find out about other groups to go and talk to about your ideas.
- Find more people who want to do the same.
- Talk through what you want to do and some of your ideas how you will do it.

"Have a planning group to work out all the detail and share things out to get it going."

"Keep telling people how you are getting on – your helpful people and allies may be able to help if you get stuck on anything."

Working together as a group

Even small informal groups need some people to come together to plan what you are going to do.

Talking together, sharing ideas, sharing out tasks, coming up with solutions, helping each other all helps you get to know each other and helps you learn to work together as a group.

Think about sharing tasks and building up people's skills from the beginning. That was the group is not relying on one or two people and will be more sustainable over time.

Who can help you?

There are lots of people and organisations who can help you. Look for people who can help you with developing your idea, who know about this sort of activity. Also look for people who know how to organise things, no matter what the activities are.

These are sources of advice which other people have found are helpful.

"We decided to come up with a list of everything we'd need to do and then work out when it would need done who by."

"We tried to come up with a plan and gave ourselves some deadlines to make sure we got things done."

- Other groups doing similar things.
- Other people who have experience of being on community groups.
- People with experience of being on a committee
- Other local groups and organisations.
- Community support workers in the local Council.
- Development staff in organisations that have a role to help community groups.
- Third Sector Interfaces (TSI) – sometimes known locally as the CVS (Council for Voluntary Service - what TSIs used to be called).
- Training courses – some TSIs and other organisations offer training.
- Websites – there are some that have been developed to help local groups – they cover all sorts of information and useful resources.

Look at our list of useful sources of information at the end of these Hints and Tips for contact details and websites.



"Discussions between community workers, health workers, a community organisation and a local older people's forum found there were more older men at risk of depression. One of the community workers had heard about Men's Sheds. They decided to find out more and then organised an event to get local people and men in particular together to talk about setting up a men's shed."

“We invited a guest speaker from another Men’s Shed. He talked about how they set up their Shed, what they did and who came to it. We also invited workers from the council and healthy living centre. They said they’d help us because the idea for men fitted in with their work plans and health and wellbeing priorities.”

“We ran a successful lunch club for older members of the Asian community. Some members wanted a walking group and an exercise class. Our small committee couldn’t do it all. We got the people who had the ideas to get together with one of our committee members. This group did all the planning and organising – and they really enjoyed it and they got their new activities set up. We helped by applying for a small start up grant to pay for some taster sessions and to help cover the costs until enough people were coming to make it pay for itself and become sustainable.”

Further information and sources of advice

There is lots of information and advice out there to help you.

Your local Third Sector Interface (TSI), sometimes known locally as CVS and Volunteer Centre, provide support and help to community groups.

You can find your local TSI at www.vasotland.org or phone: 0141 353 7318

Some TSIs have a community toolkit on their website with lots of helpful information for community groups. They are similar to this one:
<http://www.slcv.org.uk/Community-Toolkit/ctoolkit?PageName=toolkit-home.htm>

Your local Council may have community workers who can help local groups.

Checklist

Some of the common things that groups have to think about.

- What you want to do?
- What to call your activity or group?
- Where you will meet? What matters to you - accessible building, easy parking, bus route?
- What you need? - premises, rooms, access to kitchen area, equipment.
- How will you tell people about the activity?
- What training do you need for volunteers or staff, and who can help with this?
- What will it all cost?
- Where to get the money from (members pay fees, or subs each week, start up grant?).
- Who else can help you – suggestions, ideas, in kind help such as free use of rooms.
- What are the minimum things you need to do before can start?

About Wisdom in Practice

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box.

There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips on topics which groups led by older people have said help them in starting their groups, getting organised, keeping going and finding funds.

There is more information at www.wisdominpractice.org.uk



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