

SUPPORTING A GROUP TO START MEETING UP AGAIN

Borders Buddies is a project started in the Tweeddale area of the Scottish Borders, thanks to funding from Scottish Borders Council's Community Fund. The aim of this project is to reconnect people and groups post-pandemic, especially those who have become isolated and disconnected during recent months. Read more about it here: <https://otbds.org/introducing-borders-buddies>

For many of us, 'normal' life has been on hold for a while now. Gradually, restrictions are beginning to ease and there are some invitations to go back to 'business as usual'. However, we have been speaking to people in the community and many of them tell us they don't feel ready yet for indoor meetings. At the same time they are feeling the effects of staying at home for too long. Here are some tips for getting back to small group meetings so that everyone feels comfortable about things.

HOW

Consider whether you also want to use Zoom access in case anyone is unable/unwilling to attend in person. See below for some tips on 'Blended meetings' and here for some tips on using Zoom: https://otbds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Zoom_guide-4.pdf and joining a Zoom call on an ipad or tablet: <https://otbds.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Digital-Buddies-Instructions-Joining-a-zoom-meeting-1.pdf>

Blended meetings

A 'blended' or 'hybrid' meeting or event is one where some people attend in person, while others access it virtually. This can be tricky to do successfully, but we have a few basic tips from groups who have tried this:

- Set up a table with a screen/laptop in front of all the 'live' attendees.
- You might need 2 or more screens if it's a larger group.
- Before you start, check wifi connection, video, mike and sound.
- Don't try to do everything - ideal to have one person looking after the tech.
- Think about using closed captioning for people who are hard of hearing.
- Make sure you include the people who are accessing remotely - check they have heard things and ask if they want to say anything.
- Allow enough breaks for everyone - people accessing remotely may find it more tiring.
- If your meeting is in the outdoors, ensure the screen is shaded, you have enough charge and a dongle or 4G for internet connection.

For more information about Borders Buddies please contact ruth.n@otbds.org, 07711 210431 or see our website: otbds.org



WHERE?

Inside or out? Ask everyone how they feel about this. Could be possible to be in a very airy room with big doors/windows wide open. Many of the village halls or other venues will have their own Covid risk assessment for users – make sure you and others are familiar with this and follow its guidelines.

If you choose an outdoor or garden venue - dress appropriately! Layers you can add as it gets chilly/blanket or fleeces to put over knees are ideal. Scarves/hats/gloves are not just for winter! Group organisers could think about having some form of open shelter such as a gazebo or tarpaulin.

WHAT?

You may want to take your own equipment – take your own folding chair (many come with a handle/strap to sling over your back for carrying), you can also take your own mug and hand gel, and take a mask in case you need to walk through a confined area or use a toilet.

[Outside the Box can lend equipment for outdoor meetings – camping chairs, table, fleecy mats, mugs, flask. Please get in touch if you would like to borrow some]

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

Social distancing

Make sure you put your chair where you feel comfortable – it's fine to sit back from the others.

Sharing things

Keep this to a minimum, e.g. laptop, papers, books – and have antiviral wipes on hand to wipe things down.

Hand gel

Good practice to use before and afterwards – you may have touched a door handle or other potentially contaminated surface. Take your own pocket sized hand gel.

After people have touched chairs they should either be wiped down with antiviral wipes, or left for 72 hours before the next use.

Be aware of the latest Scottish Government rules (they change so fast) <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>. You can also contact your local Third Sector Interface (The Bridge in Tweeddale) for information and advice, especially around the safety of using indoor venues.

RISK: BENEFIT

It's well established that many people have reduced mental and physical wellbeing as a result of the Lockdowns. Of course it is always up to individuals, but maybe for some it is worth considering risks against benefits. Seeing real people again in a safe setting, instead of on a screen, can improve a person's wellbeing substantially.

Notice and talk about how people feel – before and after the meeting – 'it's great to see real people again!' said one person recently.

