

# SETTING UP FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

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**Hints and tips to get  
you started**



outside the box

# WHY WE WROTE THESE HINTS AND TIPS

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**Everyone is  
welcome!**

Friendship groups give people the opportunity to try new things, have a chat and most importantly, make new friends.

Outside the Box has been involved in many friendship groups over the years. Recently, we have secured funding from the Scottish Government through the Community Capacity and Resilience Fund to deliver the Life Boost Café project.

We have set up two groups for older people and we have seen lots of friendships develop through the project. People from one of our Life Boost Cafés have even started going on holidays together!

These are our hints and tips for setting up your own friendship group, written together with people attending Life Boost Cafe.

Our groups were aimed at people over 50, but this resource can be used by anyone interested in starting a friendship group.

We hope these tips will give you ideas on things you can do to meet more people and make friends.



# GETTING STARTED

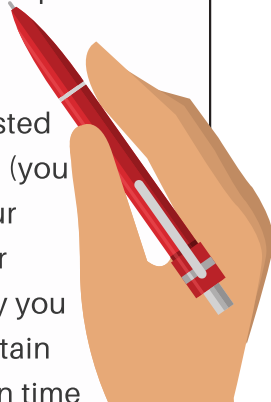
## Find some people who want to meet.

**Any size of group could work. It would just be a different type of group.**

- Talk to friends, family and neighbours and see if they know of anyone who might be interested in coming along to a group.
- Put up some posters - in local shops, post office, village hall and community notice boards.
- Write to your local paper and ask them for a mention.
- Once you have a few people interested, organise a meeting to chat about starting up a group.
- Find out who is happy to do what.

**\* A poster does not need to be fancy, a sheet of A4 paper with colourful writing is enough.**

Explain that you're setting up a friendship group and tell people how you want anyone interested to contact you (you could give your phone number or email, or say you will be at a certain place at certain time each week).



**“It’s good to have about 6-8 people if you want to have group conversations. If there are more people then everyone starts splitting into smaller groups.”**

# FIND A PLACE TO MEET

**You need to make sure you have the right space for the number of people you have.**

There are many possibilities when deciding where the group will meet, for example: community centre, church hall, Scout hall, library, a community space in a supermarket, sports club, such as bowling or golf - and many more!

The three most popular options are meeting in a hired space, in a public space such as a café or in members' homes.

	HIRED SPACE	CAFÉ	PRIVATE HOME
BENEFITS	More space & opportunities for activities.  Refreshments can be bought from a shop.	There is no set up or down required and no dishes to wash.	There is no cost for the space and if everyone brings their own refreshments, there is no cost for the host.
DISADVANTAGES	Usually you need to set up the space at the start and clear at the end. Dishes need to be washed.	Refreshments are more expensive than if bought from a shop. There might be less space and less opportunities for activities.	A lot of trust between members is required, which might be difficult with a newly established group.
COSTS	Space hire and refreshments from a shop.	Refreshments from the venue.	Refreshments from a shop / everyone brings their own.



# WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

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**Have different options for different diets, like vegan and gluten free options.**

**Some of the things you need to think about include:**

- Kitchen facilities
- Toilets
- Tables
- Chairs
- Ease of access
- Tea, coffee, milk etc
- Car parking
- Public transport routes



## **How will the group cover its costs?**

The main costs for the group are likely be the hire of a space and refreshments.

You may decide to meet in a café and everyone pays for themselves and then you don't need to worry about group costs. If you hire a space you will need to work out roughly how much money you need for each meeting.

If your group needs money to cover the costs then there are many different options for that.

# FUNDING A GROUP

**I think it's better if people pay for themselves and you meet at a café. That way everything is a lot easier.**

These are some of the most popular options, but you might have ideas of your own.

## GROUP MEMBERS PAY FEES

## SECURING GRANT FUNDING

## FUNDRAISING

### BENEFITS

You are in control of how much to charge and how best to do it. As a group you can make changes quickly and without external permission.

You get the money you need and there is no need for members to pay, making the group more accessible.

Organising fundraising events can go a long way in promoting your project, you might even get new members through it. You will be able to spend the money in any way the group wishes.

### DISADVANTAGES

This may not be affordable to some people and they won't be able to join/stay.

You need to get prior agreement if you want to make changes to the group.

It requires a lot of time and effort.

### THINGS TO CONSIDER

How will you manage the money received - where it will be kept, how will you keep record of who paid? How often will the fees be due (weekly, monthly etc)?

You will most likely need a constitution and a bank account. You'll need to keep accurate records. Most funders will require you to report on how you spent the money and what difference it made - this can take a lot of time and planning, who will take it on? There is often a long wait between applying for funding and getting a decision.

You will need some outgoing, friendly members to make any fundraising a success. You can also fundraise online.

# FUNDING A GROUP

**At my group we get a cake and drink paid for, anything else we pay for. I think that makes sense.**

## Some of the things people told us:

- Some groups charge weekly fees.
- Some charge extra for tea, coffee and snacks.
- Some groups have joining fees or annual fees.
- Income from weekly fees will go up and down, so you need to budget for this.
- Costs such as room hire will stay the same no matter how many people come each week.
- Ask about the room or hall charge. Does this include heating and lighting?
- For insurance, find out if there is an organisation which supports lots of groups with volunteers, such as the Third Sector Interface. They may be able to help with insurance cover, or know of places which give competitive rates for volunteer-led groups.
- Sometimes it helps to have membership of the village hall or of another group, but remember to check if there is a membership fee.

**I think if the group wasn't free when I started coming along then I wouldn't have bothered coming. We pay now but I already know everyone so I'm happy to still come along.**



# TELLING PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR GROUP

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**It's hard getting a mix of ages as people who look after kids struggle to come along.**

**Promote your group through word of mouth by chatting to people**

- On social media
- At lunch clubs
- At libraries
- At local community groups and organisations

**Write a few sentences about your group and share this with**

- Local newspapers
- Community newsletter
- Church newsletters
- Community Facebook page

**Photos can really help to get people interested, just make sure everyone in them is happy and/or looks interested. And get people's permission to use them!**

**Put posters up in your local area in:**

- Shops
- Cafes
- Library
- Health centres/dentists' waiting rooms
- Community notice board
- Send them to other local groups.

**"We have made a book which includes a few lines about each of the places we have visited with photographs too. Each member of the group wrote, in their own words, exactly what they think of the group."**



# GETTING GOING

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## **Make people feel welcome.**

- Greet everyone individually.
- Introduce any new person to a few people, or to the whole group if there aren't too many of you.
- Make sure you get their contact details.

**It can be quite intimidating to go in if there's a big group of people.**

## **Think about how to organise it.**

- How will you organise the first few sessions?
- How will you lay out the room, if you aren't meeting in a café?

## **Keep records from the beginning.**

- Keep a list of everyone's contact details.
- Keep a note of who comes each time. That helps you notice who is not coming so often and may appreciate a phone call to say hello.
- Keep a record of who has paid their fees – if you're charging fees.

## **Share out the tasks if you have hired a space.**

Having a rota means everything gets shared around, or you can put names in a hat. Tell new people how you organise things so they feel included and can help out. Here are some tasks you might want to plan for:

- Putting out the table and chairs each week.
- Making the teas, coffees and sorting out the juice and biscuits.
- Collecting fees

## **At the start discuss the things you need to have agreement on. For example if you are thinking of doing a different activity or if you want to apply for funding.**

- You can use this time to add new ideas for activities.
- Is someone missing? If they haven't been to the group for a few weeks then someone could call to check in on them.

# MAKING PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME

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**When anyone joins our club, we go out of our way to make them welcome.**

We know that it can be difficult for people to come along and try something new, especially for the first time.

Some groups have one person who welcomes everyone. In other groups it seems as if everyone is pleased to see you and ready to come and welcome you.

**There are a few things you could try to help people get involved**

- Keep an eye out for anyone who is quiet and make sure they have the opportunity to speak.
- Mix up who you sit next to.
- If someone is taking over the conversation a lot then try to open up the conversation so more people are involved.
- Ask open questions.



**"We assure new members that we do not agree with 'cliques' within clubs like ours, that we are all great friends and hope they will enjoy being one of the crowd."**

# THINGS TO DO AT YOUR GROUP

**A small group works better if you are getting anyone along to share information or to lead a workshop.**

What you do when you meet up is up to you and the members of your group. We have found that what matters most to people is having some company and a chat. But you might want to try some activities together too. Here are some ideas:

- A walk
- Healthy eating/cooking sessions
- Board games
- Learning different types of dancing
- Yoga
- Training on meditation or mindfulness
- Inviting speakers to talk about a topic that people are interested in.
- Birthday celebrations

**“We have done different activities together, like a trip to Glasgow and a meditation session. It’s hard finding something everyone wants to do, so sometimes people don’t come along to all the sessions . That’s OK because there are other times when we will do activities they are really interested in.”**





# KEEPING GOING

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**People come and go but we now have seven members who attend every week. We support each other through the good times and the bad times.**

People will come and go throughout the time you are running the group, this is completely normal. Numbers will go up and down and some years they might drop so much that it becomes difficult to cover the basic costs or it's just not as fun anymore.

## Go back to basics

When the group numbers are down, it can be helpful to look back to how the group first started. Why not have a chat to find out what people want now? For example, you may find that the day or time you meet isn't right for people anymore.

Here are some topics you could revisit within the group:

- What the members want from the group
- How they want it to run
- What they will do
- What day of the week and time to meet
- How to promote it





# SPECIAL EVENTS AND OPEN DAYS

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**We had a tai chi taster session recently which was great for getting new energy in the group**

- Have fundraising events or fun events and get everyone in your community to come along.
- Events help you raise funds as well as tell people what you do and attract new members.
- Have taster days and free sessions.
- If people are paying to come along you could have special offers like that the first three sessions are free so people can decide if they want to then pay to come along.
- Invite special visitors to the group as an attraction.

## **Try another type of group**

If you think that there aren't enough people to cover the cost of hiring a space but the remaining members are still keen to continue, why not try something else?

- See if you can negotiate a reduced rent or more somewhere that works for a smaller group.
- Change to a drop in group in a café for a while.



# BACKGROUND

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Outside the Box has received funding from the Scottish Government **Community Capacity and Resilience fund** to deliver Friendship groups. The project was called **Life Boost Café** and was an extension of a bigger **Falkirk Food Buddies** project, which centres around peer support for older people around food issues.

The Life Boost Café project was to set up drop in peer-support sessions in Falkirk area for people over 50 on low incomes, where food would be used as a tool for making friendships, improving skills and self esteem.

The aims of the project are to empower older people in Falkirk area to help themselves, using a peer support model. The project provides them with the opportunity to learn, share and grow, in a safe and welcoming environment, surrounded by people with similar experiences.



# BACKGROUND

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Food Buddies offers the following benefits to the participants

- Increased self-confidence and self-awareness, allowing them to better deal with issues they are facing
- Improved mental and physical well-being
- Improved knowledge and skills around food
- Improved social networks
- Increased skills, including around running a group



For more info, visit: [otbds.org/projects/food-buddies](https://otbds.org/projects/food-buddies)

# FUTHER INFORMATION AND HELP

Outside the Box provides development support to groups and people across Scotland who want to make a difference in their communities.

We are a small, independent charity and aim to work as a social enterprise. We give practical support and enable people to learn the types of skills that are important both for establishing new ventures and for sustaining them.

## Contact us

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