

Starting a Volunteer Group

What are the reasons for starting a volunteer group and what is needed to be successful?

Volunteer groups are set up to meet community needs. A need may arise for several reasons:

- Perhaps there is a real gap in services or activities in your area, or even activities are not accessible or appropriate for a specific needs and a new group is necessary.
- Maybe a group want to get something done when need is identified; where commitment and time is required.
- A group may be formed to meet social requirements. Lonely people may come together in share of a common goal as a way of passing the time for example through art and craft.
- To help communities access funding. When local facilities are in need of support to stay afloat a group may come together to act as a fundraising effort e.g. for a local club.

Note - A volunteer group should not do any work that there is a statutory obligation to provide. If you are not sure about statutory obligations, please contact your local authority.

What is it like to start a volunteer group?

Starting a group will need a lot of time and commitment, going through the process can be enjoyable and satisfying or hard work and frustrating.

Start by having a meeting with a group of people who share the same views and determine what ideas, skills and time they have to offer. Try to ensure there will be commitment to the project.

Considerations you must have when starting out are:

- What is the end goal/benefit of the project?
- Who will run the project?
- Which professionals are able to provide expertise and support?
- Where and when does the project need to happen?
- Are premises/venue hire required and what will this cost?
- Will equipment be needed and what fees or expertise would this require?
- Are the members capable, available and committed to do the work themselves?
- Is there a plan of action?

Do you need in place a group bank account, committee, meetings, a constitution? Remember, if you need a committee, you should have at least three committee members in most situations.

- Who are the target audience and would this include vulnerable children or adults?
- How will funds be generated and who will be in charge of fund raising?
- What training needs to be put in place?
- What will be needed in terms of public relations?

- Have legal requirements been taken into account for the people whom service is to be provided?
- Will need be fully met by the project or will there be a limit on capacity for numbers receiving service and the areas covered? Will partnerships happen to fill any possible gaps in the service?

Research to ensure you are not duplicating an existing organisation

By researching the internet, library and through public meetings you will be able to determine if a similar organisation is meeting the need locally.

If an organisation already exists, it is worth joining the group. For those who have need it may then be possible to include in the existing organisation activities. Duplication of a group is not advisable as it would mean the existing group would then be in competition for members and funding. Ill feelings may then immerge.

Partnerships are also an option, organisations may choose to share expertise and premises which will help to reduces costs.

It is beneficial to utilise expertise from local councils for voluntary service or other professionals. Good relations within the community are a huge asset towards success.

Having an open meeting is beneficial

Once research into need and ways of implementing is begun and the group feel ready to involve outside people it is useful to hold an open meeting.

People of interest may be:

- Potential service users
- Local authorities
- Other similar groups
- People from voluntary organisations

The meeting is a chance to:

- Gain useful contacts
- Get potential service users interested
- Gain publicity and promotion
- Form links with relevant experts
- Showcasing the idea may interest more people to enquire to join the committee

Moving forward

Once you are certain the volunteer group is viable and achievable you are able to begin getting organised with committees and constitutions.

Voluntary Action Rotherham are able to support you in moving forward. Please contact email triage@varotherham.org.uk, telephone 01709 829821, or visit web <http://www.varotherham.org.uk/> for further information.

