

This Information Sheet will help you if you are starting a new voluntary organisation in the Redcar and Cleveland area. It suggests some points to think about right at the start, and tells you how to find out more.

## What will it be like?

Setting up a new organisation can be enjoyable, and can give you a lot of satisfaction. It is a way to get more done about something that is important to you, than you could by working on your own.

It takes energy, enthusiasm and hard work, and sometimes a good deal of patience, to make a success of a new organisation. There are sure to be problems, and there may be setbacks. That is another reason for working closely with a group of like-minded people. You can work on problems together, and encourage and support each other.

## First steps

The best way to start is to bring together a small number of people who share your interest and talk with them about what you could do. Even if they do not all want to be involved long-term, they may be willing to contribute ideas and experience in the early stages.

## How can you find interested people, if you don't already know them?

You could try the 'grapevine' – asking school teachers, community workers, or anyone else who meets a lot of people in the community, whether they know someone who might be interested. Alternatively you could put up a notice, in post offices, libraries, community centres, or places of worship, explaining what you want to do and asking interested people to contact you.

If you want to reach a wider audience, try writing to the local papers, outlining what you propose and giving a contact address or phone number, which they may print free of charge. RCVDA may be able to give you useful contacts, as well as publicity in our newsletter, Inter Action.

## Funding and managing money

Even at this early stage, you may need some money to pay for meeting rooms, leaflets or posters, telephone and postage. If you cannot meet these costs yourselves, or through donations from other people who are interested, you will need to find out about possible sources of funding.



Some funders offer 'start-up' grants to help groups to get off the ground. Funders usually require a group to open a bank account with at least two signatories. At this stage, it is also usual for someone in the group to take on the role of treasurer. RCVDA can signpost you to information, training and advice on managing money and the role of the treasurer.

### **Aims and objectives**

Or in other words, what are you going to do, and how are you going to do it? Now you have found several other interested people, you need to talk this over with them, and start to clarify what you plan to do.

At this stage you are learning to work together as a group. It is important to allow plenty of time for discussion. Even in small groups, there will be different points of view. If you discuss these fully and openly, you may be able to reach agreement, which is the best basis for going ahead. The more you understand each other's views, and respect them, the better you will work together.

A good start is to discuss what the problem is that you are trying to tackle. Do not be surprised if you see it in different ways – try to find out why this is. Often it is because you have different information (and different gaps in your information). It may also be because you have different values. Such differences of values cannot be resolved easily (or perhaps at all) but it is important to know that they are there.

Remember that other people will not bring the same talents to the group as you do. They may be good at keeping the group working together happily, but not at planning and organising – or vice versa. They may have a lot of time to offer, or very little. And they may join the group for different reasons – to use their skills, or to meet other people, as well as to contribute to the group's objectives. It is worth discussing these points with them, and trying to agree on ways that they can help which will suit them.

### **Other organisations**

In Redcar and Cleveland there are many voluntary and community groups. It is worth finding out about the other ones with similar interests to yours, and getting in touch with them. A network of contacts in similar organisations can be an invaluable source of advice and support, and can help you to see things in perspective when your own group faces difficulties.

### **A first meeting**

It is usually a good idea to have an open meeting to launch the new organisation. Contact the local papers and radio stations, both for advance publicity and to be represented if they can.

If you want the group to attract people from all sections of the community, invite representatives from different groups to contribute their ideas at the first meeting, rather than waiting until the group has become established. As well as the people already involved, think about inviting:

- 
- anyone else you know who may be interested in helping
  - other organisations working in a similar field
  - organisations working with specific groups or communities
  - councillors and/or local authority staff

The meeting could be formal or informal. Either way, it is a chance to explain what you have in mind; to make, or strengthen, useful contacts, to seek publicity, to attract volunteers, and to find out how your proposals look to other interested people. It is worth keeping a note of the points that people make, even if you do not have formal minutes.

### **Finding volunteers**

You may find enough volunteers through your own contacts. If not, you could contact RCVDA's Volunteer Support Officer, Trish Waters, who helps groups to find volunteers and advises people who are looking for voluntary work. The Volunteer Support Officer can also give you general good practice advice about working with volunteers.

### **Making decisions**

How will your group make decisions about what it is going to do, and how it is going to do it? At one extreme, all the decisions could be effectively taken by one person; at the other, everything could be discussed until everyone is in agreement. Most groups come between these two extremes. They work out their objectives and methods of work through discussion and agreement, and also try to resolve any serious disagreements in this way. Whatever the formal rules, disagreements should be worked through fully and openly if at all possible, rather than settled by one or two people imposing a decision.

For day to day decisions, it is simpler if the group can agree on a quicker method such as majority vote, delegation to an elected committee, or delegation to elected or appointed officers. These methods are then written into the constitution; which is in effect the rules of the group.

### **Making a plan**

Once your group is going, it is time to draw up a simple working plan. This will tell your members, supporters, and other interested people, what you are doing, why, and how you will go about it. You will need a plan if you apply for a grant.

Your plan should explain:

- What your group intends to do – Objectives
- How it intends to do it – Methods
- The resources it has available (eg. people's time and support; any special skills; money; equipment; use of premises etc)
- Any further resources it needs, and how it hopes to find them (eg. by finding volunteers or raising money)
- How soon it hopes to do things – Timetable.

Drawing up a plan will help you to decide on priorities.



For example, it might show that you have the resources to start one activity, but not another; or that you need more money before you can recruit more volunteers. The plan will also mean that you can measure your achievements because you will be able to compare it with what the organisation has actually done.

### **An outside view**

You may find it helpful to involve one or two people from outside the organisation, to give encouragement and advice from a different point of view, put problems in perspective and offer a wider range of contacts.

Redcar & Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency  
Westfield Farm  
The Green  
Dormanstown  
Redcar TS10 5NA

Tel: 01642 440571

Email: [enquiries@rcvda.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@rcvda.org.uk)