

Helping community groups to become self-led and sustainable

September 2020



Introduction:

Time to Shine projects are turning their attention towards legacy and sustainability and often want to assist groups to continue after Time to Shine funding ends. Health for All shared their experience of community development work.

Background:

Since 2015 Time to Shine has commissioned Health for All to deliver 5 separate projects, all of which are based on a community development approach.

Health for All sets up small groups based on the interests and needs of the community. If members wish to develop the group further then Health for All staff help them to become an independent group.

Co-production with group and community members is essential in order for a group to become member-led, independent and sustainable.

Constitution:

Small community groups can start the journey to independence by meeting to write a constitution document. A constitution is simply a set of written rules or an agreement that sets out the aims of your group, its purpose, how it will be run and how the members will work together. It's important that the wording of your document is considered carefully and an internet search can help with this task.

Group members need to:

- Meet with each other and decide what activities to do
- Try out the activities informally to see if there is enough demand
- Meet to write the group's constitution document
- Identify members to take the role of Chair, Treasurer, Secretary
- Identify other Trustees to join the management committee
- Specify roles and responsibilities of the management committee
- Use the constitution document to open a bank account for the group
- Purchase public liability insurance
- Find suitable, accessible venues for the activities

To run activities the group may need to consider the following:

- Health and Safety policy and risk assessment procedure
- Equal Opportunities and Safeguarding policies
- Food Hygiene training

Project staff can support the formation of an independent group by:

- Introducing the group to new contacts and networks
- Link the group with peers who are also setting up independent groups
- Spending time with the group, listening to opinions/concerns, sharing ideas
- Sourcing advice and resources from other organisations
- Offering help and support to:
 - Arrange an Annual General Meeting (AGM)
 - Develop the management committee and recruit Trustees
 - Set up robust financial procedures and an accounting system
 - Write new policies and procedures or adapt model documents
 - Attend funding fairs and find suitable grant schemes
 - Write funding applications
 - Monitoring and evaluating grant-funded activities

Receiving grant funding:

To apply for funding a group must be constituted, have a minimum of three Trustees and hold a bank account for the group. Banks differ in the products and services available to constituted and unconstituted groups, so shop around. An alternative is to apply for funding under the auspices of a larger organisation. Funders may require proof of public liability insurance and relevant policies and procedures before releasing money. Funders usually require evidence that the grant has made a difference and ask for monitoring and evaluation data.

Things to note:

- Groups and activities must be co-produced
- A group will only become independent if members are invested in the group and if key individuals have the passion and drive to make things happen
- Groups can be unconstituted (informal) or constituted
- Constituted groups don't need to formally report to anyone except funders

Next steps:

Some groups progress quite quickly from an informal partnership to a constituted group to a registered charity but this progression isn't always appropriate or necessary. Having a constitution document gives group members a sense of ownership of their group and a clear direction for their work. Applying for small grants initially helps Trustees to refine the group's policies, procedures and working practices and build a track record with funders. Other funding opportunities can then be considered, for example Awards for All, as the group develops and grows.

Sources of advice and support:

[Voluntary Action Leeds](#), the [National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#), [Leeds Community Foundation](#), [Gov.uk](#) and local third sector organisations with a focus on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

