

Opening A New Group

The future growth and success of the Federation relies not only on existing Groups but the development of new Groups to expand the boundaries of the organisation.

There are a number of ways this process can take place and there are many advantages in an existing Group providing the manpower and support to open a new Group. It is an exciting and rewarding project, which may seem daunting at first; but with advice and assistance from the Area Development Officer, and careful planning, the new Group will be a success.

This Chapter gives a brief outline of the steps required to open a new Group and full details are available from the Area Development Officer, who will also provide guidance and training to any Group wishing to undertake this type of project.

Feasibility Study

The first stage is to carefully evaluate a number of possible locations to judge if they can support an 18 Plus Group. There is still an enormous potential for the opening of new Groups. It is impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule for the size of town best suited, but it is safe to say that towns with catchments of up to 100,000 people will easily take one Group. However, some very good Groups have been opened in towns of only 4-5,000 people although careful consideration should be given to any area with a population of less than 15,000.

A small committee of experienced 18 Plus members should be formed to carry out the feasibility study under the guidance of the Area and Regional development officers. Information to be gathered includes the availability of premises, transport, communications, similar organisations, general entertainment facilities and the location of other 18 Plus Groups. The type and location of premises is a very important factor - a Pub in a 'rough' part of town with poor facilities will act as a deterrent to potential members. If the conditions are favourable the development committee and the development officers will jointly make the decision to open the Group.

The General Interest Meeting

The purpose of the general interest meeting is to encourage local people to come along and, if they are willing, to assist in the opening of the new Group. It also provides an accurate indication of the likely support for an 18 Plus Group in the chosen town or city, and if it is low, the project can be re-evaluated.

Publicity for the meeting should include advertisements in the local papers and articles in the press if possible - poster campaigns are more suitable for the Group opening pre-publicity.

The objective of the meeting is to introduce 18 Plus and its activities and events together with details of the plans for the new Group and the part the new people can play in the opening. The Group programme of activities and events should be explained and the new people should be encouraged to put forward ideas and suggestions.

Over the next few weeks preparations for the opening night should continue, and involve some of the new people who attended the interest meeting if they are willing - most will be! Actions include publicity campaigns in the press and with posters, planning the Group programme for at least four months and approaching other local 18 Plus Groups for their support, not only on the opening night, but for several weeks or months!

The Group Opening

If all the preparations have been carried out thoroughly there should be a good attendance of prospective new members on the opening night together with members from local Groups. The evening should take the form of a social event with an audio/visual slide presentation showing the range and scope of 18 Plus and its activities. The development committee should ensure that everything runs smoothly, mix with the new people, and encourage them to return the following week and take part in the activities and events. A good local dance is an excellent way of showing 18 Plus at its best and this should be scheduled early on in the Group programme.

The new Group should aim to hold its first General Meeting about 3 months after the opening, which should include acceptance of the standard Group constitution and election of committee members. The original development committee will need to offer advice, guidance and support until the new committee are confident that they can run the Group by themselves.

Conclusion

With a project of this type good preparation and planning will ensure a successful Group. The Area development officer can provide full details on the development of new Groups, and the benefits to the Federation – they are always willing to give a talk at a Group meeting or committee meeting on the subject - all you have to do is ask.

Iain Parkes, 18 Plus Development Adviser