



Carers' Self-Help Group Toolkit

ON YOUR MARKS...



This toolkit has been produced to provide practical guidance for anyone looking to set up a self-help group. We hope it will resource more people within Slough to set up local self-help groups for carers.

The toolkit is divided into 3 short sections, **On your marks...**, **Get set...**, **Go...**, and identifies 5 steps for each of the above 3 phases of starting a self-help group.

What is a self-help group?

A self-help group is a collection of people with common goals or similar concerns. The purpose of the group is to provide its members with an opportunity to connect with others in similar situations. Being part of such a group can help people like carers gain support and know that they are not alone through sharing experiences and resources, conversing with or simply listening to others.

Working together, the members of the group can identify what information or support they need and invite professionals and other organisations to help them access this. Groups can also have fun by organising social events and activities as part of their journey together





ON YOUR MARKS...

Don't reinvent the wheel ... before starting to set up a self-help group take some time to look into what other groups already exist in your area. Is setting up a new group the best way forward? A good place to start when identifying what other groups are already active in your area is the Slough online community database, which can be found at www.sloughgetinvolved.org.uk

Ask others to help ... starting a self-help group takes time. If you are thinking about starting a group, therefore, it is worth exploring whether there are 2 or 3 other people who might be interested in helping you. Try to find people who understand the need for the group and are passionate to see it happen.

Decide on the group's purpose and how it will function ... one of the first steps in starting a self-help group is to think about its purpose. Will it exist to provide information and emotional support to its members or will the focus of the group centre on an activity or other service? Will the group run as a 'drop in' or will it be more structured than that? To move things forward, it will help if you can form some idea of how you see the group taking shape and agree this beforehand.

Identify where and how often the group will meet ... you will need to think about potential venues that are in a suitable location. Is it accessible for those who are less able or who have mobility issues? What are the public transport links like? Is there parking? These are all questions you will need to think through early on in the planning process.

You will also need to think through how often the group will meet. Groups can meet on a monthly, fortnightly or even weekly basis. It's worth considering meeting on the same day, e.g. the first Tuesday of each month, and thinking through the time of day the group will meet and what will work best for the type of people the group will be looking to support.

Hold an initial meeting ... before going any further you should consider organising an initial meeting in order to gauge the level of interest and whether there is sufficient momentum to get the group off the ground. Remember, this doesn't need to be a large meeting to be successful. It's good to have a specific focus for such a meeting that will appeal to those you are looking to attract. This could be a video, presentation or speaker. You may also want to divide the meeting into two halves – one half being more formal, with the other half being informal and therefore giving those present more of an opportunity to get to know one another. First impressions last, so it is important that you think through, plan and prepare for this meeting really well. What is it you want to get out of the meeting?





Some of the areas you might want to cover at such a meeting are listed below:

- Welcome & Introductions
- Video / Presentation / Guest Speaker
- Finalise the purpose of the group
- Decide on a name for the group – make sure an existing group isn't using the name or that the name doesn't spell out an acronym that's inappropriate!
- Consider plans and ideas for the group moving forward
- Think through who will do what and begin to assign responsibilities

By the end of this meeting, you will need to be able to make a realistic assessment of whether the group will be viable and sustainable long term (or for the duration of the purpose it is being set up for). This doesn't mean that you need to have all of the answers to all of the questions you or others may have, simply sufficient confidence that it is feasible and a worthwhile investment of everybody's time.

