How to Start Your Anti-Discrimination Project

_____

Open Up East Midlands Co-ordinator Torsten Shaw shares his tips about how to start your own project. As well as working for Open Up, Torsten is Project Leader for Making Waves, a social enterprise based in Nottingham set up to try to challenge the current understandings about people who have experienced mental distress.

_____

In this factsheet…

1. **What is it you want to achieve?**
2. **Who else might be interested in doing something similar?**
3. **Resources – getting started**
4. **The importance of allies**
5. **Admin and money**
6. **Different forms of organisation**
7. **Project and organisations that campaign on mental health**
8. **Emotional support**
9. **Do we make a difference?**

1. What is it you want to achieve?

Before starting your own project, think carefully about what it is you want to do. You may be thinking about changing the world but you will have to focus on something that you believe is achievable.

For example you may want to take over a building and run a café or a drop in. That is a large undertaking and it may be useful to think about steps you can take now that will put you in a good place to realise this ambition later on.

Don't worry about having business plans, mission statements and constitutions right at the start – these can come later when you have a firm idea about what the project's aims are.

Key points:

- Work back from the big idea to your first steps
- Find other people to share and discuss your ideas with

2. Who else might be interested in doing something similar?

Who else do you know who is or might be interested in working on a project? Are there other groups in your local area already trying to do something similar?
You will probably need some discussion to get everyone's ideas and an agreement on what it is you want to make happen.

Key points:

- Check out what other groups, projects and organisations exist that might be interested in this area of work
- Find out who is prepared to do the work with you

3. Resources –getting started

Think about what resources you will need and how you might access them. Libraries have computers, printers and photocopiers. The Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) may be able to help you to develop a constitution and find potential funders among other things. Cameras and art materials may be accessible through a local arts project. Office space may be available in community centres, or the local council or NHS Trust may let you have an office short term.

Key questions to consider:

- What resources do you need immediately?
- How can you access them?

4. The importance of allies

Who you know is still extremely important to the success of a project, both in terms of getting opportunities but also in gaining credibility. Your project will therefore need allies.

Allies are people who are not directly involved in the project but who are sympathetic to its aims and have power, influence, and/or access to money. Think about whether you have any contacts within the local council, Social Services Department, University, NHS Trust, or Housing Association.

You can often find allies by attending local meetings, forum and events (CVS is a useful place to look). Many of these will be focussed on particular issues such as substance misuse, housing, offending, young people, self harm etc. It is worth attending lots of these in the early days to find out what other organisations there are and who might share your interests and concerns. You will also find out about other meetings and events that may be relevant to you. Join all the mailing lists.

Build up links with people who may help promote your case and give you space to talk about your project (or idea). Find out who the 'gatekeepers' are; these people can help you access key decision makers.

Key questions to consider:

- What contacts do we have already?
- How can we build on these?
- How can we make ourselves known to key influencers/decision makers?

5. Admin and money

It is good idea to establish some systems for keeping records of your project's activity right from the start. This doesn't have to be overly complicated and it is guaranteed to save you time and hassle in the long-run.

Money

Make sure you keep a record of any money spent or received by your project. At the very least keep paper records in a folder, but it is a good idea to also set up a computer spreadsheet (e.g. on Excel) as this makes it easier to monitor your bank balance (and to share it between team members if you are communicating by email).

You may need to invoice individuals or organisations to reimburse you for out of pocket expenses. Writing your own invoice is simple: here we provide you with a template you can copy.

If members of the project pay for things out of their own pocket, keep copies of receipts when reimbursing them from project funds. You can buy petty cash slips in stationers, or you may want to set up your own expense claim form template that people complete.

Establishing a transparent system where all expenditure can be traced and accounted for will undoubtedly help you in the long run – it is especially important when applying for funding and will be necessary when reporting to funders. It will also most likely contribute towards keeping the peace within the team!

Budgeting

When you are planning your project, make sure you include a budget. Make sure you don't commit to anything you can't pay for. If you have been given a grant for your project, do check what you can spend it on! Some grants will not allow you to spend money on things such as salaries or certain types of equipment. Make sure you know this before you commit to buying anything or recruiting paid staff for your project.

For more information about budgeting, including templates, visit the Community Accounting Plus website.

Records of meetings

Whenever you have meetings with the team, write down some notes of what you discussed. These don't need to be lengthy – just a record of decisions made and actions which people have agreed to do. Start the next meeting by going through the notes of the last one – that way things that need to be done or have been agreed won't be forgotten.

Keeping meeting notes often ends up being useful for other purposes as well – for example they may help jog your memory of what the project has done over the last year when writing a report or funding application.

Other paperwork

If you are sending off important paperwork or correspondence by post, make sure you keep photocopies stored safely in case they go missing or you need to refer back to them in the future.

If/Once your project has a bank account, make sure you keep the account details, passwords and bank statements securely.

To start with you are going to have to carry out admin tasks within your group, but if your organisation becomes more established, you may want to recruit a volunteer looking for work experience to help you with the paperwork.

6. Different forms of organisation

If you are applying for funding and/or taking on someone in a paid role, your project will need to take on a formal structure.

You can be an unregistered charity until you have an income of £5000. The easiest structure to set up is a limited company. This will cost about £200 and you can later register it as a charity, a Community Interest Company (CIC) or a co-operative.

It is important to think about how you work together and how you want decisions to be made. Some questions you will need to consider are: Do you want any paid workers? Do you want all members to have an equal say in how the project is run? Do you want the project to be run by a management committee?

For more information about types of non-profit organisations, visit the Know How NonProfit website. You can also read our factsheets on setting up a social enterprise, and constituting your group.

Key questions to consider:

- Do we need a more formal structure?
- How do we want to run things?
- How much work and cost is involved in setting it up?

8. Project and organisations that campaign on mental health

Open Up	www.open-up.org.uk
Time to Change	www.time-to-change.org.uk
Mind	www.mind.org.uk/get_involved
Mad Pride	www.madpride.org.uk
Asylum	www.asylumonline.net
SHIFT	www.shift.org.uk
The Icarus Project	www.theicarusproject.net
Mind Freedom International	www.mindfreedom.org
National Self Harm Network	www.nshn.co.uk
National Hearing Voices Network	www.hearing-voices.org
National Survivor User Network	www.nsun.org.uk

9. Emotional Support

It is really important that you find good support and think about how you will take care of yourself. What support will you get from friends and family? Are there more formal sources of support you can access? Can you find someone to act as mentor (see our Mentoring factsheet)? Can you get external support? Can you swap time with someone else?

There will be times when it all feels too much or pointless and you will feel like giving up. Even the most resilient of us cannot avoid feeling despair sometimes and it is how we deal with this that may determine the success or failure of our projects. Peer or co-counselling may be worth considering.

You can share tips and experiences of maintaining your wellbeing while challenging discrimination on the Open Up forum.

Key questions to consider:

- How will I get support for myself, especially if I am providing emotional support to others?

10. Do we make a difference?

At the end of the day we are motivated to do this work because we want to make a difference. To attract resources we also have to convince others that we make a difference. This can often feel hard, because it may seem obvious that we are and cause a lot of extra work. However, evaluating the work you are doing is an important part of running a project. If you receive funding it is vital – as you will have to demonstrate things like 'outcomes'.

There are often simple and creative ways in which you can evaluate your project's success. A useful starting place is the Charities Evaluation Services website.

See also our Monitoring and Evaluation factsheet.

Key questions to consider:

- How can we demonstrate that our work is effective both to ourselves and others?

Visit the Open Up forum to share your thoughts and experiences about starting your own project.