

## What might sustainability look like for a community group?

Sustainability means different things to different people – one person's vision of how their group can become sustainable may be very different to someone else's vision. It may involve:

### Confidence and resilience

- Having the confidence, resilience and energy to self-motivate and keep trying.
- Feeling confident communicating in English. Groups do not have to be fluent but should feel comfortable pitching their idea to others and completing written forms.
- Not being afraid to ask for things for free - having an attitude of "I'll just go and ask", with the resilience to keep trying again.

### Connections in the community

- Having positive and useful relationships with other groups and individuals, as well as local businesses and organisations. These connections include friends, acquaintances and formal partnerships.
- The community should be aware that the group exists. Being supported by the community, and embedded within it, will make sure the group has an authentic voice.

### Governance

- Having a clear vision or purpose so that the group remains focused.
- Sharing tasks and responsibilities within the group, rather than only having one main leader. This prevents burnout but also helps everyone in the group to gain new skills and feel a sense of ownership.
- Recording what the group has done and how it has developed over time. This is useful for future funding opportunities as well as group motivation.

### Outward-facing

- Ensuring the group is what the community wants and (most importantly) continues to want – being flexible and adapting to meet this demand.
- Having aims that are realistic and achievable. Instead of trying to change an entire system, the initial focus should be based on something which members of the group are knowledgeable about or experienced in.
- Regular reflection on what is working well within the group and what can be improved.

- Thinking creatively and keeping an eye out for new opportunities rather than getting 'stuck in a rut'.
- Encouraging new people to join the group so that it can continue to exist even after some members leave.

## Financial

- Having enough funding for the group or activity to continue. This might not always mean having a bank account, it could instead take the form of resources such as having a place to meet or the capacity to provide refreshments.
- Fundraising should be shared within the group, not left to one person. Everyone in the group needs to be involved in fundraising, even if they don't see it in that way or describe it in that way. Can't just put it on one person.
- It is best to have at least two different sources of income.
- It can be useful for community groups to be self-funded through having a membership fee. However, if this is the case, it should be clear what the membership money is going towards so that members understand the reason for having a fee.

## What can you do as a community development worker?

As a community development worker, you can support groups to become sustainable by:

- 1) Being clear from the beginning that you are **there to support them but will not do everything for them**. It can be useful to ask "what would you like to happen in your community that you're willing to be involved in organising?"
- 2) Helping them to **talk about their aims and the impact they are having**. Give them feedback about what you think they are good at and encourage people to tell stories about the impact the group has had on their life.
- 3) **Familiarising them with jargon** as this can be a barrier for groups who do not understand it or feel comfortable with it.
- 4) Ensuring there is **not just one leader within the group** - responsibilities should be shared out instead of falling to one person.
- 5) Encouraging them to **regularly reflect** on how the group is going and ways it could be improved.
- 6) Encouraging them to **keep records**. This should include a record of money so that everything is transparent, but it is also useful to have a record of decisions made.
- 7) Encouraging them to **think about how they manage their money**. Would it be useful for them to have a group bank account? Can they purchase items cheaper

with a wholesale card? Do they want an option for people to donate online or via social media?

- 8) Taking them along with you to meet partner organisations or attend events. This will help them to **build their own connections in the community** so that they know where to go for support. You may want to brief them beforehand about what to expect and then discuss it with them afterwards.
- 9) **Building up the skills within the group.** Encourage them to share skills between themselves so that individuals develop, or see if there are any relevant trainings available locally.
- 10) Encouraging them to **be positive about what they do and feel confident** - having someone who believes in them is a key part of sustainability.
- 11) If the group wants to apply for funding grants, they may need to have **a health & safety policy and an equalities policy**. You can help them to develop these by providing examples found online from other small charities.
- 12) Don't encourage groups to get bigger unless they are doing something new or otherwise unavailable in the area, as it is unlikely that they will be able to secure ongoing funding. **Groups can develop and improve without growing too much in size.** By staying small, it is likely that they will be more resilient to financial cuts and therefore be more sustainable.

**It is a skill to stop yourself doing things for people, especially as a passionate worker who wants to help.**

**Try to see yourself as a background voice, asking the group if they have thought about X, Y or Z, rather than playing an active role in doing things for them.**

**A useful metaphor is to see yourself wearing a mining helmet with a lamp on the front. If you go too close (intervene too much), only you can use the light and you end up doing things for people instead of with them. By stepping back, the light shines on a wider area and you enable other people to do things for themselves.**

