

Community Organizing

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What is Community Organizing?

Community Organizing Means:

- Helping people in your community who care about the same issues or problems find each other.
- Helping them get to know each other better.
- Making your community better with them.

What Can You Accomplish?

You Can:

- Build community and help people get to know each other where you live.
- Help people who are new to your area.
- Advocate to change a specific thing.
- Help and mentor young people more easily.
- Deal with media more easily.
- Quickly respond to current events that affect the disability community.

Let's Talk About What Community Organizing Can Do For You

You Need Help!!!

An organized group of people can do stronger advocacy than one person alone. Good community organizing is a way to make sure that group exists when people need it.

People to Include

- Disabled people, or people with a particular disability, if you want to build stronger disability community where you live.
- Other people who share your goals, especially if you are working on a specific project.

How Do You Find Them?

Outreach

Outreach means reaching out to people and finding people who might be interested in working with you.

Finding People

- Reach out to people you already know if you want to include them.
- Think about how to reach people in your community.
- Try different ways of reaching people.

Let's Split Into Groups

Group 1

Juan wants to start a disability advocacy group. He lives in the suburb of a big city, and works full time in the city center. Most of his neighbors do, too. Juan's neighborhood is mostly residential. It's hard to get out of the neighborhood without a car. People in Juan's neighborhood spend time together playing on the basketball courts at the park and having dinner parties. Neighbors keep up with what is going on in the neighborhood through email listservs. A lot of people spend time at a coffee shop near Juan's house.

How Do You Think Juan Should Do
Outreach?

Group 2

Kate lives in a small town and wants to form a disability advocacy group. Kate is on SSI, and she works part time at her town's only grocery store. Some people live in town. Others live in the county nearby. Internet connections are slow where Kate lives. Not everyone has internet. Older people who are well-respected in Kate's community gather most days at a local restaurant to drink coffee and talk. Otherwise, most of the town's social life happens around local schools and religious services. Kate's aunt, who is retired, publishes a newsletter once a month that pretty much everyone reads.

How Do You Think Kate Should Do
Outreach?

Outreach Checklist

- People you already know
- Newspapers and newsletters
- Neighborhood listservs
- Local radio stations
- Local bloggers
- Community centers
- Public libraries
- Houses of worship
- Places where people talk
- Disability organizations
- Local podcasts
- Social service organizations
- Social media

Can You Think of More?

What To Do When You Find People

Access

- .Hold the first meeting in a public place.
- .If there is public transportation in your community, try to find meeting space near it. Not everyone can drive
- .Try to pick a place that will be quiet during the time when you plan to have the meeting.
- .Make sure wheelchair users and other people with mobility impairments can get into the space you want to use.
- .Don't meet outside in bad weather.
- .If you plan to serve food, ask about people's dietary needs.

Money

.You can hold a meeting without a big budget. Public libraries, community centers, and houses of worship may be good places to get free or inexpensive space for a meeting.

.Some groups like to meet in restaurants or coffee shops. If you want to do this, pick the kind of place that will be okay with a few people in the group not buying anything as long as most people in the do. Some people don't have much money. If you or your group can afford it, buy something for the table to share so no one feels left out.

Having a plan is important.
Wherever you decide to meet, make
sure you reserve space in
advance!!!

Think about Juan and Kate. Where are some good places for them to hold meetings?

Case Study

Atlanta autism and disability groups have met or held events at a college, a private elementary school, a diner, a disability rights organization's offices, a church, and members' homes once people had gotten to know each other. All of this space was cheap or free to use.

Case Study

The group I'm starting in Athens, GA has met in free space at UGA. This fall, we're going to start having socials at restaurants in downtown Athens.

What Do You Do At The Meeting?

Having a First Meeting Part 1

- Introduce yourself and say something about what you want to do and why you want to do it.
- Ask other people to do the same thing. Try not to pressure anyone to say more than feels comfortable.
- Ask people not to talk over each other.
- Listen to what the people who came to your meeting have to say.
- Try to get people to socialize after the group finishes talking about plans.

Having a First Meeting Part 2

- .Try to get people's contact information before they leave. That information is a treasure because it tells you where to find people who care enough about what you're doing to show up for a meeting.
- .Try to schedule a second meeting before people leave.

Don't Get Discouraged

- First meetings are usually small. If you get four or five people, you're doing fine. Movements aren't built overnight. Expect it to take time.
- Keep looking for people. Try new strategies.
- When you have a good idea about outreach, write it down or tell someone else before you can forget it.
- Taking breaks and doing the things you enjoy will help you have good ideas.

People Are Coming To Your
Meetings!!!!

It can be intimidating when people start showing up and listening to you, but it means you're doing a good job of finding people. When this starts happening, you have to figure out how to manage a group. Different people have different leadership styles, but there are a few basic things that will help you.

Leadership

- .Let other people take the lead on projects that are important to them.
- .When you have to criticize someone or tell someone to stop doing something, do it gently and in private.
- .When someone does a good thing, praise them loudly and in public.
- .Say 'thank you' and make people feel appreciated.

Be Yourself!!!!

Not every good leader is extroverted or an amazing public speaker. If you try to be someone you're not, people will probably see through it. People may feel uncomfortable with you or think you're not honest. Faking it will also make you too tired to do your best work. A quieter leadership style is fine. Just make sure whatever style you use is your own.

Set Goals

- If your group is purely social, you will need to plan future social events and prepare for them.
- If your group will do advocacy, you need to set attainable goals and make progress toward them over time.
- Frameworks like SMART Goals are very helpful.
- You shouldn't be the only one setting goals.

The Hard Stuff

When People In Your Group Don't
Like Each Other

Group 1

Juan's group has been meeting for about 18 months. It has fifteen members. Howard has been a member since the beginning, and he's doing a great job managing a fundraiser that helps local teachers get training about running inclusive classrooms. Howard had a bad breakup with his last boyfriend, Clint. Howard and Clint haven't spoken since then except for a couple of times when they've shouted at each other in public. Now, Clint wants to join the group with his new girlfriend, Rochelle.

What Should Juan Do?

Group 2

Kate's group has been meeting for about a year. Kate is proud that her group has six members, which is pretty big given that there are only about 1,500 people in her county. Minjun and Grace both came to the first meeting, and they've been to almost every meeting since. They were friends until recently, but they now support different candidates in the presidential race. They each say mean things about the other candidate's supporters, and their arguments have interrupted two of the last three meetings. Other group members have told Kate that they feel uncomfortable when Grace and Minjun fight.

What Should Kate Do?

Manage Conflict

- As people get to know each other, they will sometimes annoy or offend each other.
- Try to let people work things out on their own.
- Do not take sides.
- If you have to step in, validate hurt feelings without blaming.
- Maybe have a conversation together with the people involved in the conflict to try to clear things up.

Boundaries of Your Group

- .You may be setting your own rules.
- .Be consistent about following them.
- .Example: If you only want your group to include people eighteen and older, do not let your friend's fifteen-year-old brother join.
- .If you connect your group to a larger organization, you will have to follow that group's rules about membership and activities.

Change Over Time

- Groups will usually start small, but you can grow them over time.
- When your group accomplishes its goals, get together to celebrate and set new ones.
- If you need to leave your leadership role, or the group itself, plan for that in advance. Find someone within your group who is willing and able to take over. Help them move into your role smoothly.

The End