



Heart Support Group Regional Events 2016



"It was good to meet like minded people who all share a passion for their Heart Support Groups and be able to share information between each other"

Ernest Wilkinson – East Lindsey Heart Support Group

This year BHF held four regional Heart Support Group events across the country, in Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and London, with 70 Members from 33 different groups attending.

The events were a great way for members of different Heart Support Groups to come together to network and discuss their successes and difficulties from the past year. At all four events we heard from a BHF funded researcher, including a fascinating talk by Dr Rebecca Richardson in Bristol about "Using Zebrafish to help us fight coronary heart disease". We also heard about the latest updates in cardiac treatment and dietary advice, including "Diet: Behind the headlines" from BHF dietician Victoria Taylor at the London event.

We also held three group workshop sessions during the day to give attendees the opportunity to focus on different issues that Heart Support Groups have told us they are struggling with:

- running a successful support group
- attracting more members
- raising funds for your group

We've taken the notes from all of the discussions and have compiled them for you in this report. We hope you find some helpful hints and tips to take back to your group and, as ever, if you have any other thoughts you would like us to share with other groups, please do let us know.

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Workshop 1 – Running a Successful Group

Filling Committee roles

Across the events, there was a notable divide between those that are struggling to fill committee roles and those who do not encounter this issue. Although there is no guaranteed way to fill these roles, we would encourage you all to try new approaches and find what works for your group. Hopefully some of the below tips will be helpful.

TOP TIP: CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES

- Ensure that each committee role is clearly defined and the role description is easily accessible to all group members. This will set clear boundaries for the role and people will have a clearer understanding of what the job entails
- Offer a buddy/shadowing system – this will provide people with a greater insight and understanding of the role and give them the confidence to know that they can fulfil it
- Try to match committee roles to specific skill sets or previous career experience – play to people’s strengths
- Share roles or split the role into two smaller roles if possible – this may encourage people to take up a role if they know the work load isn’t too excessive and the responsibility isn’t all on their shoulders
- Ask people to volunteer to do things they enjoy e.g. finding speakers or writing the newsletter and allow this to naturally progress into a more official role
- Keep a look out for potential committee members at all times - even when all committee roles are filled try and be pro-active in getting them involved in committee work
- Ease people into the role - you could ask them to sit in on committee meetings first to observe and then gradually increase their involvement
- Reinforce the notion that every group member is a member of the committee regardless of if they have an official title - everyone’s voice matters. This will make being on the committee less daunting
- Make it personal - always ensure recruiting is done face to face. Take them to one side or ask them round for tea and make sure they don’t feel pressured to take on the role
- Be open to the idea of having non-members on the committee - for example partners or friends who may be able to bring a certain expertise to the role
- There are plenty of websites, such as do-it.org, that allow you to recruit volunteers to fill the roles
- Provide food and drinks at meetings – it’s amazing what people will do for a slice of cake

Finding Speakers

Many of the groups we spoke to have been very successful at finding speakers to come to their meetings, so they have shared some of their top tips.

TOP TIP – BE PERSISTANT

- Ensure you provide a diversity of speakers – they don't all have to be health related
- However, do take advantage of any healthcare professionals who are willing to attend - groups have found this often gets the biggest turn out
- Make contacts within other local organisations e.g. Age Concern. They may be able to recommend speakers and may speak at your meeting in return for you speaking at their group meeting
- People are often willing to speak if it is mutually beneficial – the speaker gets to promote their product and the group gets a speaker, e.g. Wiltshire Farm foods
- Ask members of your own group to talk about a topic that interests them – everyone has something interesting to talk about and it's a great way of getting to know each other better
- Ask your local council for a list of speakers for you to approach
- Contact other Support Groups in your area for speaker recommendations – have a look at the [Heart Support Group Directory](#) to find out which other groups are in the area
- Use a variation of contacts, friends, family and co-workers
- Personally handwrite and post requests to potential speakers – explain who you are and what you do and why you want to hear them speak
- Make it fun – incorporate games or quizzes where possible
- Send out reminder emails about what's coming up to encourage people to attend
- Impose a group agreed limit on the amount you are willing to spend on a speaker
- Always provide a thank you token – this could be a hand written card, a bunch of flowers or bottle of wine. It doesn't have to be expensive but the speaker will remember your gesture and be more likely to come back or suggest others
- Provide food and drink

Charity Status

There are 55 BHF affiliated Heart Support Groups that are also registered charities in their own right. At the events we took some time to discuss the pros and cons of becoming a charity.

Remember this is a decision that will be personal and individual to each group and **becoming a charity does not affect your affiliation to the BHF.**

Pros

- It can make access to funding easier
- You are able to claim back gift aid on donations
- When buying equipment you can claim back the VAT
- Raises the profile of the group
- More people/companies are likely to support and fundraise for a charity

Cons

- Creates more administrative work
- Can be difficult to recruit trustees
- More regulations and restrictions to abide by

If you would like some practical advice about becoming a charity please do refer to the [Charity Commission](#) website.

It can be beneficial to talk to groups who have gone through the process or thought about becoming a registered charity. If you would like to talk to one of these groups, please get in touch and we'll help put you in contact with a group.

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Workshop 2 – Attracting More Members

Different methods of recruiting new members

Most of the groups that we spoke to said that the majority of their members had joined as a follow on from Cardiac Rehab. As such, this was where they focused most of their efforts when promoting their group. Below are some of the other ways that groups spread the word about their group so that people who need it will know support and help is available.

TOP TIP – BE PROACTIVE - “You must put yourself out there if you want to see results”

- Make contacts within your local hospital and speak to patients who are pre and post-surgery. You have been through it before and can be there to guide and support them through the next steps and they'll remember you when they finish Cardiac Rehab
- Build up a relationship with local GP's and Healthcare Professionals and make them aware of your group and the support it can provide for patients. This may take time, but it will be worth it
- Put up posters in local GP's, Pharmacies, Supermarkets, BHF stores etc... Make sure they are laminated and noticeable
- Use short but effective phrases on your poster. Think about what your Heart Support Group has given you / what does it mean to you / why you would encourage others in a similar position to join. This may help you think of some phrases that you can use to promote your group
- Write a short advert for your group in the local paper – this is often free as they have space they need to fill
- Put an ad in your local hospital newspaper and go on hospital radio – let your voice be heard
- Give talks at other local support groups – e.g. Diabetes UK support groups
- Create a Website/ Social Media page – if no one in your group wants to take this on there are many ways to recruit young people to set this up for you. For example, those completing their Duke of Edinburgh award, a media course at college or university, or someone in the scouts and brownies are often looking for voluntary work and would be more than happy to help you out
- Offer taster “no pressure” sessions for people to see if the group is for them.
- Attend a variety of events to promote yourself and the great work you do, e.g. fairs, open days etc.
- Set up a stand in a supermarket or anywhere with a large footfall
- Invite family and friends along to meetings occasionally – the best way to promote a group is through word of mouth
- Never put pressure on people to join the group – let them come to you when they are ready

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* If you are having any trouble getting your poster into a BHF store please contact us, we can help*

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Keeping Members Interested

TOP TIP: ALWAYS ASK MEMBERS WHAT THEY WANT

- Provide a varied program of activities
- Keep a balance between social activities, exercise classes and meetings
- Provide regular 'what's coming up' updates, via email or newsletters
- Hold larger events or get togethers throughout the year, such as summer picnics, Christmas dinner – try to do one new thing each year
- Have a suggestion box at each meeting for upcoming events

Workshop 3 – Raising Funds for your Group

Whilst many of the groups said their income was sufficient for their needs, nearly all said that more funds for the group would be hugely beneficial. Below are some of the most successful ways that groups have raised funds for themselves.

TOP TIP: KEEP IT FUN

- Organise sponsored activities such as walks and bike rides, or be more adventurous with a dance marathon
- Build up relationships with local companies and ask them to match what you raise – most companies have a charitable allowance in their budget
- Speak to your local Waitrose supermarket about becoming a 'green chip' charity
- Speak to your local Co-op supermarket about becoming their 'community champion'
- Contact your local MP as they have an individual charity allowance to go to who they wish
- If you are a charity look into becoming a local company's "charity of the year"- employees will then fundraise on your behalf
- When you have guest speakers ask each member to contribute a small amount (e.g. £1) for every question they wish to ask and ask the speaker to also contribute, e.g. £1, for every question they are unable to answer
- Charge a small fee for each class/meeting
- Arrange golf days – use relative, friends and co-workers to spread the word.
- Bag packing at supermarkets
- Auction/raffle evenings – ask local companies to donate prizes.
- Hold dinner events at local restaurants
- Work with local shops to put on a fashion show
- 'The Jam Jar Challenge' – each week ask every member to put 10p or 20p into a Jam Jar and at the end of the year put all that has been saved into the group account
- Bucket collections at local football matches
- Coffee mornings and cake stalls
- Choir concerts

Hopefully you will now have some new ideas to share with your group members and we would love to hear from you if you have tried out something new and found it successful. If you have any other thoughts or ideas you think other groups would benefit from please contact us and we will share them.

We are looking to hold more regional events next year so if you have any thoughts on how we can improve the events or what you would like to see at an event please do let us know. These events are for you, so we want you to have your say.



“Attending the Bristol event gave us an opportunity to focus and share ideas in order to help groups in areas they were struggling and similarly we learnt new ideas as well. Wish these events were more regular and the guest speakers were outstanding. All in all a brilliant and positive day, thank you to everyone”

Hilarie Bucknell, Newquay Happy Hearts

“On behalf of myself and the team, I want to say thank you to everyone who attended an event. It was great to see some familiar faces and to meet new members, and to see Heart Support Groups supporting and encouraging each other. We look forward to seeing you all again next year”

Sinduja Manohar – Patient Engagement Officer, BHF

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