GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

From talking to lots of Heart Support Groups, we know that two of the biggest challenges you face are attracting new members and letting people know about your vital work. This factsheet is packed full of ideas to help you bring new people into your group – and get you noticed in your local community.

We know that you’re doing a great job in providing your members with the mutual support and help they need. But the problem is letting the public – especially other heart patients – know what you’re doing and how you can help. Getting your message across in the most effective way is crucial to getting more people involved.

Making the most of your skills

Ask your members what they can do to help. For example, they could talk to the local press, visit cardiac rehab classes or set up a group to produce your publicity materials. You may find you have hidden talents and invaluable contacts in your ranks.

Link in with your local NHS

We’ve been told that groups who develop links with local health professionals are in a good position to meet potential new members. There are some great examples of group members being invited to their local hospital’s cardiac rehabilitation class to talk to the patients and carers, explain the activities of the group and encourage them to join up. It’s a really effective way of getting together with the people who need to know about your group, and letting them know how you can help. To find out the contact details of your local rehab team visit www.cardiac-rehabilitation.net

Give the team a call and explain what your group can offer their patients. Ask whether you can talk to the group or at least ask to have your contact details handed out at one of their classes.

Unfortunately we’ve also heard from some groups who’ve tried to do this but had no luck – which can be very frustrating. The decision to allow you access to a rehab class is down to the health professional running the programme. So, here are some tips to help you to make your case:

• Give them a specific example of how the group has helped one of your current members. This will help the rehab team understand what your group does, and the value of the support you’re offering.

• If you don’t already have a leaflet which explains what your group is hoping to achieve and how you are achieving it (see next page), write a summary for them. Make sure you include your details. You could even have a business card printed.

Even if you can’t talk to the rehab class directly, you can ask the rehab team to pass around your details so that potential new members can get in touch with you.

But think positive – plenty of groups have been allowed to leave leaflets and business cards in cardiac wards and some have even set up weekly ward visits to talk to patients and their families.
Leaflets and posters

A simple leaflet and an eye-catching poster are a great starting point for attracting new recruits to your group, and letting other organisations know you’re out there. You can include your contact details, activities and times of when and where you meet. Then distribute them in your local hospital, GP surgeries, libraries and other public places like leisure centres. There are sample posters in your Heart Support Groups toolkit.

To help you get started, we've put together a publicity leaflet that talks about the great work of Heart Support Groups. If you’re not ready to put your own leaflet together, why not order copies of ours and simply attach information about your group to that? You can find out how to order copies of our Heart Support Group leaflet on the next page.

Newsletters

Producing a group newsletter can really help to spread the word. To start with, you could ask a few of your members to get together and decide what you want to tell people about your group. Your first newsletter could be a simple A4 photocopied sheet.

Over time you may want to include more information about what you’re doing. For example, a regular newsletter can tell people about:

- your meetings
- social activities past and future
- local events or campaigns you’ve been involved in.

Some groups also include articles on subjects of local or general interest, eg, gardening, a letters page, and advertisements for local businesses, which could help with your running costs. The list is endless, and there's plenty of inspiration to be had – try contacting other local groups and swapping ideas. Many groups also feature their newsletters on their own websites. The British Heart Foundation (BHF) can help here. If you go to bhf.co.uk/map you can search for affiliated Heart Support Groups by area, and then get in touch.

You may know someone, either a member or a friend of the group, who can help you with the design and layout of your newsletter. If not, there are plenty of cheap, or free, easy-to-use design packages available. It doesn’t have to be state-of-the-art design, but making your newsletter look bright and interesting will attract people if they see it in, say, a GP surgery waiting room or on a hospital notice board.

Local media

Your local newspapers and radio or TV station can be a big help in promoting your group. The local media are always on the lookout for interesting stories in their area, so it’s really worthwhile writing a press release and sending it to them. You may find they’ll ask you to do an interview to get more information about what your group does. For useful hints and tips on press releases and doing interviews, please see your Heart Support Groups toolkit. If you don’t have a toolkit, call 0870 600 6566 to order a copy.

Many groups also feature their newsletters on their own websites. Visit bhf.org.uk/map to find other groups.

Local events

Popular community events like fêtes, fairs and markets are great places to promote your group. Having a stall at a local event can really bring you into the public eye. You’ll meet plenty of new people and you can explain the important work your group is doing to help heart patients and their families, and encourage people to come along. The BHF can help here too, by providing you with additional leaflets and posters to brighten up your stall. To order some, call the BHF Orderline on 0780 600 6566 or email orderline@bhf.org.uk

Presentations and talks

Why not look around your local community and see if there are other groups and organisations who’d be interested to hear a guest speaker from your group? You could even offer a speaker exchange – you talk at their meeting and they talk at yours.

Prepare a simple presentation about your group and its activities. Some of your members may be used to giving talks, but here are a few pointers:

- Introduce yourself and explain how you got involved in your group.
- Give the audience a short introduction to your talk and say how long you’ll be speaking for.
- Think about who you’re talking to and make it relevant to them.
- Be concise but informative.
- Tell them about your group, what it offers, and what you’re trying to achieve.

Website

A website can be really useful for heart patients who are interested in finding a group in their local area. Currently, around 25% of Heart Support Groups have their own website. As more and more of us use the internet for information, they’re coming into their own as a first point of contact.

You can include all your relevant information, including an online version of your newsletter. Unless one of your members has web design skills, you’ll need to ask around for someone to help you design your site.

But there are now plenty of cheap and easy-to-use online packages that your members can use to help you set up your site. Have a look at the sites that other Heart Support Groups have put together. If you like the look of them, get in touch with the group and find out how they went about it.

In all your communications, but especially when you’re writing for the web, it’s important to keep a few basic rules in mind. You need to be clear and concise. Less is more, but you should remember to include:

- who you are
- what you’re doing
- where it’s happening
- when it’s happening.

To help you get started, we’ve put together a publicity leaflet that talks about the great work of Heart Support Groups. If you’re not ready to put your own leaflet together, why not order copies of ours and simply attach information about your group to that? You can find out how to order copies of our Heart Support Group leaflet on the next page.
Have some fun!

If you’ve tried these ideas and want to try something different, the sky’s the limit. Some larger groups have even created their own logo, and produced badges, keyrings, t-shirts, hats, calendars, bags and many other items to get their message across. You could dedicate your next meeting to coming up with publicity gimmicks that might get people talking. You could have a prize for the member who brings in the biggest crowd or has the most amusing idea.

Local campaigns

Getting your group involved in local campaigns will help to raise your group’s profile. It can also put you in touch with other organisations who have related interests and aims, like patient groups and local NHS services and staff.

More help from the BHF

Get in touch with your local BHF Fundraising team, who may be able to help you promote and publicise your group.

To get in touch with BHF Community Fundraising, speak to your Regional Director:

- England (South and East) 01892 890 002
- England (West) and Wales 0121 722 8350
- England (North) 01623 624 558
- Scotland and Northern Ireland 0131 555 5891

You can use BHF promotional posters and leaflets to publicise your group. To order copies, please call 0870 600 6566 and quote the reference number:

- HSGa – leaflet
- HSGb – A3 multi-activity poster
- HSGc – A3 walking poster
- HSGd – A3 swimming poster

How you can help us

Getting involved with the BHF’s fundraising activities can help your group, as well as raising funds for our vital work. Taking part in our wide-ranging local and national events gives you the opportunity to have fun, get fit, and raise your group’s profile in your area. For more information, please go to bhf.org.uk/events_and_volunteering

About the BHF

The BHF is the nation’s heart charity, dedicated to saving lives through pioneering research, patient care, campaigning and information to keep more hearts beating. But we can’t do it without you and your essential donations of time and money, which allow us to continue our life-saving work. Because it’s only together that we can beat heart disease. For good.