

Holding a national family day

group action pack

One of the main difficulties experienced by families of children with very rare conditions is that they have never met any other affected families. Although telephone support between such families is invaluable, many find that meeting together can also be of enormous support and encouragement. Some of the positive outcomes reported by groups and families are:

- an opportunity for families to chat freely
- the chance to meet other affected individuals and families
- a free exchange of relevant information and sources of help
- visiting speakers who can address the group and facilitate discussion
- an opportunity for the children to meet others with the same condition
- an opportunity for siblings to meet and share experiences
- a fun social event where the needs of the children are easily catered for

In addition, if your group is a registered charity you need to hold an Annual General Meeting for which a quorum of the membership is needed. For condition specific groups where the membership is scattered throughout the UK this can be problematic. Many groups decide that the easiest way of insuring adequate attendance at their AGM is to combine it with a family day or weekend and provide events for all family members.

Planning a national meeting can seem daunting. However, with enough forward planning and a clear understanding of what you want to achieve, you can make it a really positive experience for all attending. For many groups the annual family day becomes the central event in the group's calendar.

contact a family
for families with disabled children

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Incorporating
The Lady Hoare Trust

Practicalities

Objectives

Be clear about what you want to achieve through the day. Is the primary purpose to give families an opportunity to meet each other, to meet and speak to leading experts in the condition, to be updated on research or treatments or to contribute to the running and development of the group? Deciding this will affect how you plan the event.

Time scale

Be sure to leave enough time to plan the event thoroughly. As a general guide, start thinking about the event a year before you wish to hold it. Many venues will be taking bookings this far in advance and anyone you might like to invite to speak is likely to also have dates in their diary. Also your membership needs to know the date in plenty of time to ensure they keep the day free.

If you decide to have a family day on an annual basis this will mean that it is almost a constant process. Try not to let one person become left with all of the work, or do not assume that because they did it last year they will want to organise this year's event.

Venue

Check the geographical spread of your membership. Try to find a venue which will be reasonably central for all members. Remember that sometimes a greater distance is easier if the transport connections are more readily available.

Most groups use hotels. As a minimum you will probably need two rooms: one for the main meeting room and another for the children's activities. For larger meetings a few rooms may be needed to allow for different workshop sessions.

Check that the venue is accessible and can meet the needs of your members. Things you might want to consider are:

- accessible rooms and toilets
- disabled parking
- lighting and acoustics
- provision of a loop system
- accessible overnight accommodation

If you decide to hold the meeting in a hotel tell them you are a charity and ask whether there is a discounted rate. Also ask whether there is an inclusive price for attendees who need to stay overnight. Are there family rooms available and what are the facilities for babies and children? If you are arranging a reasonable time in advance it may be possible to reserve a block of rooms at a cheaper rate.

Groups have used many venues other than hotels to hold their events. These include schools, university campuses, sports clubs, parks, leisure centres and zoos. The advantage of using venues like these is that there are some activities or entertainment for the children.

Check with your membership whether they have any contacts with possible venues. If you are struggling do give the Contact a Family Groups Development Service a call: we may be able to recommend somewhere suitable.

Budget

Draw up a budget for the day. Find out the full costs from your chosen venue including;

- lunch
- tea and coffee
- hire of any equipment e.g. sound system, overhead projector, television
- administration (photocopying, postage etc)
- speakers costs (if you are offering to cover these)
- volunteers costs
- childcare and entertainment

Once you have some figures it may be worth looking for some sponsors to cover the costs of various parts of the event. This will help to help keep the costs down for your members.

Administration

Keep a list of attendees, children and volunteers. Prepare badges for everyone. For very young children it can be useful to have two badges, one for the front and one for their back. That way if they pull off one badge you still know who they are!

Programme

The programme for the day will depend very much on the aims you have identified, the needs of your membership and your budget. Some ideas which have worked for groups are;

- Inviting specialists able to talk about aspects of the condition/syndrome
- Inviting researchers who can speak about the latest research and developments in treatments or therapies. There may also be an option for members to become involved in research whilst at the meeting e.g. completing questionnaires, registering for future research projects
- Sessions on subjects of relevance to families of children with the condition; education issues, claiming benefits successfully, ensuring access to respite and other services, updates on technology of relevance to their children, information on therapies and nutrition, opportunities for siblings etc
- Sessions specifically for parents; pampering sessions, making time and looking after themselves etc

Whatever you decide, remember to leave plenty of free time in the programme for the families who attend to meet each other. Families often report that they found this the most valuable part of the day.

Feedback and evaluation

Prepare some short and simple questionnaires for those who attended to ask them their thoughts on the day. Ask how they have found the day, what have been the most useful parts, anything they would like to see in a future family day and anything which was not so useful. Hand these out at the end and ask them to fill them in before they leave. Try not to let people take the forms home to complete - you are unlikely to see them again!

Informing your membership

Give as much notice as possible of a future event. Keep it in people's minds by mentioning it in each newsletter, putting a section on your website etc. Make a point of mentioning it to new families who are joining the group and who may find it particularly useful. Consider having a tear-off reply slip for interested families to book their place.

Remember to include all necessary information in the information and mail-out to families;

- date and times
- venue details and facilities
- costs
- travel arrangements and map
- outline of programme
- crèche information and questionnaire
- details of children's events
- booking details

Childcare and crèches

Having a successful programme for the children will have an enormous impact on the success of your family day. Within your budget is it possible to provide some entertainment which will make the day enjoyable and memorable for the children? Can you provide a childcare service which will allow the parents to leave their children and concentrate on the programme for the day?

Crèches

OFSTED is the body responsible for monitoring and registering crèche and childcare provision. If a crèche operates for five or less days per year it does not need to be registered or inspected.

Guidance on the national standards for crèches and under-eights day-care is available from OFSTED. This includes information such as recommended ratios of staff to children, space and child protection issues.

For a summary of guidance on crèches:

http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/0-B4D245.PDF

For the full report go to: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/docs/2431.pdf>

This is also available from the Ofsted Publications Centre, Tel: 07002 637833,

Fax: 07002 693274 or email: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk

Make sure you get as much information about the special needs of all the children who will be attending the crèche. Send out a short questionnaire with the booking form, and don't accept a booking for a child's place unless you have their information returned.

Some groups use other childcare providers who will have qualified staff and equipment. This can be expensive but will also free up your time and reduce the need for volunteers. If you cannot afford a professional crèche, is there a childcare college nearby whose students would value some work experience? If you try either of these options make sure they are fully briefed on the medical needs of all the children who will be using the service.

Child protection

Organisers of a crèche or childcare facility need to ensure that any staff or volunteers are safe to work with children. In England and Wales checks on people are carried out by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). In Scotland equivalent checks are carried out by Disclosure Scotland. If you are going to use your own volunteers for childcare, you should check that they do not have any relevant criminal convictions. There are two ways to do this.

1. Register the crèche directly with the CRB and check each volunteer. There is a one-off registration fee of £300 followed by a £12 fee for each staff disclosure (check). Checks on volunteers are free.
2. Go to an umbrella body who have registered with the CRB, who will do the check for you. They may charge more than the £12 fee per individual.

For more information, including a list of umbrella bodies, check the CRB website at: <http://www.disclosure.gov.uk> or phone the Information line on 0870 90 90 811.

For groups in Scotland, for information go to Disclosure Scotland at: <http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk> or helpline 0870 609 6006. For an umbrella body go to the CRBS (Central Registered Body in Scotland) at <http://www.crbs.org.uk> or Tel: 01786 849777.

This guide is part of the Contact a Family Group Action Pack. For more information please visit www.cafamily.org.uk or telephone 020 7608 8700.

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