

Patrons and celebrity support



Your group may feel that having a celebrity on board would be useful. The use of celebrities can be very beneficial to charitable organisations but there can be downsides so it is worth thinking this through fully before making any decisions.

Patrons

A patron is a celebrity or public figure who is willing to become a figurehead for a particular charity or cause. This is usually an ongoing relationship and the celebrity and organisation build up a working relationship. A patron is not a trustee and should not be referred to as such. They do not have any responsibility for the management of the organisation and they have none of the legal responsibilities of the trustees.

Their purpose is to lend their credibility and high profile support to the organisation. This should be of help with fundraising, campaigning and public relations.

Patrons may help a charity by:

- being named on group literature / publicity material
- being interviewed in the media
- generating media coverage
- hosting or attending fundraising or other events
- raising funds by encouraging contributions and sponsorship
- contributing to the public image of the organisation
- attracting new supporters

Possible downsides can be:

- the time taken to brief and look after your patron
- risk if they lose their high profile status
- risk if they begin to attract unwanted or negative media coverage

contact a family
for families with disabled children

209-211 City Road, London EC1V 1JN

Tel 020 7608 8700 Fax 020 7608 8701

Web www.cafamily.org.uk e-mail info@cafamily.org.uk

Freephone Helpline 0808 808 3555 (Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm)

Textphone 0808 808 3556

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Who would make a good patron?

If you have decided that your group would like to find a patron, think carefully about what you would like them to do and the personal qualities you are looking for.

- What is your target audience? No patron will appeal to all sections of society. Decide who you want to target and look for someone who is likely to appeal to that group.
- What do you want them to do? Is the purpose of the patron just to generate media interest? Would you like your patron to be able to speak about your cause with some authority?

Finding a patron

Are there any people in the public eye who have a personal connection with your cause and who can speak from experience? Maybe they have the condition, or a member of their family or close friend has the condition. If this is the case it is likely that your group's relationship with them will be stronger and they may feel they can take a more active role.

Ask your membership. Do any of your members have a connection with a likely patron? A personal approach is more likely to be successful so make use of any contacts you do have.

Have some basic information ready to give to a potential patron to make them aware of the work you do, the activities the group undertakes and how they would fit into the work of the group. Rather than sending a whole collection of leaflets, annual report etc, try and condense the important information down to a couple of sides of A4 and just send this.

Be pragmatic about why a patron may be interested in becoming involved. Unless they have a personal connection with the condition their motivation may be more to do with publicity opportunities. Be realistic about the size of the group and the coverage you are hoping to achieve.

Be realistic about the person you ask. If you are a small organisation with a low media profile you are unlikely to attract the support of an 'A' list celebrity. However, particularly for local groups, a local celebrity may be able to help you and secure very useful coverage in the local or regional media.

Managing your patron

Have a clear idea of the duties you would like your patron to perform and talk this through with them. Make sure you reach a mutual agreement about the form their involvement with the group will take and the time commitment you both expect.

Agree the basics in writing with them. Particularly ensure you have their agreement about where you can use their name; on letterheads, publicity materials etc.

Think about making the role of the patron time limited. This has advantages for both parties. For the group it gives you some protection if the celebrity fades from the public eye, or if they become controversial in any way. For the celebrity they know they are not being asked to sign up to an ongoing role which they may feel they will not be able to honour for an indefinite time.

Do not assume that patrons are automatically going to be successful. If you do recruit a patron keep an eye on how much publicity and interest they are generating. How does this compare to the amount of time you are spending looking after them? Be rational about their benefits.

Celebrity support

It is not necessary to recruit a patron on an ongoing basis. If you are involved in a particular campaign, maybe for services your membership families need, or simply to raise the profile of the group, consider asking a relevant public figure for assistance specifically for this purpose. This avoids the commitment of an ongoing relationship and, particularly if you choose your celebrity well, can be very effective at generating interest. To get the most from your celebrity support it will still be advisable to follow many of the rules which apply to patrons.

For more information about securing support for local campaigns see the Contact a Family Group Action Pack guide *Local campaigning*.

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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