



Credit: Anna Sass/Mind

How to support mental wellbeing - tips for community groups

Community resilience is the ability to respond to challenges and support members of the community.

Co-op, Mind, SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health) and Inspire have been working in partnership to bring communities together to improve mental wellbeing.

Throughout our partnership we've seen the vital role that communities can play in improving mental wellbeing. So we wanted to share those learnings with communities across the UK.

in partnership with





1. Know your community

Do you know what else is going on in your community? How about in other communities in your local area? Neighbouring areas? A great way to build community resilience is to know your community so you can make links with other organisations and refer people to other groups if needed.

Practical tips:

- Speak to your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). They might have a directory of other community or voluntary services in your area, which can be a good place to start.
- **Co-operate** is an online community hub where you can find out what's going on in your local area. It's also a great place to promote your organisation if you're looking for new members or volunteers.

Case study:

A group of women of South Asian heritage in Lancashire looked at the services in their local community and discovered there wasn't anything available in their council ward. They also found that the community centre was underused. So, they started 'Females Friendship Forum', which meets regularly at the community centre and is for South Asian women to get together and support their wellbeing.



2. Build relationships

Relationships are the cornerstone of resilient communities. When you have strong relationships with other people and organisations in your community, you can trust and support each other. Building relationships takes time, but it pays off in the long run. When challenges or opportunities arise, having strong relationships means you can quickly respond as a community.

Practical tips:

- Regularly make time to build relationships with a range of people and community leaders. You might decide to dedicate a certain amount of time each week or month. Or, perhaps you could attend a new community event or group whenever you see it advertised.
- Start with the intention to have an ongoing, mutual, relationship. Consider what you can offer, and don't feel like you have to be an expert on everything.

Case study:

A community leader in south Wales built a relationship with a local gym. Through this relationship, the gym owners heard about a young people's exercise and wellbeing class that the community leader wanted to run. The gym owner wanted to give back to the community, so they provided a space for the exercise group for free.



3. Listen & learn

Listen to the feedback of the people using your group or service. Where possible, involve them in the design, improvement and delivery of your work. This will improve your organisation, build community resilience, and make your participants feel more engaged with the service.

Practical tips:

- If you're running an existing group or service, ask the people who attend regularly for some feedback. Respond to the feedback if you can – and remember, even if you can't make the suggested changes, let them know why not and what else you're doing to respond to the feedback.
- If you're starting a new service, make sure you involve your audience in the design and development of the service. This will make it more likely that the service will meet their needs, and that they'll engage when it launches.

Case study:

Volunteers at Pennine Lancashire Community Farm fed back that they wanted to feel more connected to each other and the organisation. The organisation empowered them to start a regular check in to talk about their wellbeing, and made time in each session to talk about topics like sleep, stress, anxiety and depression. As a result, they opened up to each other and build stronger relationships. They also feel more invested in the organisation.



4. Collaborate

Many organisations have limited resources, and we can't all be experts in every area. Collaborating with other organisations can be a great way to work together for mutual benefit. It can also be a way to reach a new audience or fill a gap in support. Successful collaboration can strengthen the resilience of both groups and the communities they support.

Practical tips:

- If you're thinking about collaborating with another group or organisation, remember to be flexible and open minded.
- Consider: What can other organisations do better than you? What can you uniquely offer? How might you be able to enhance what they already offer?

Case study:

A Community Café in Cornwall realised that one of their strengths was to provide a meeting space for other voluntary organisations. They invited other voluntary groups along to the café to introduce clients to the café, but also to give talks about the services they provide. It was a great way for organisations to connect with each other, and mutually beneficial to everyone involved – café attendance grew, and those who came along often left with new connections and new participants in their services.



5. Plan for sustainability

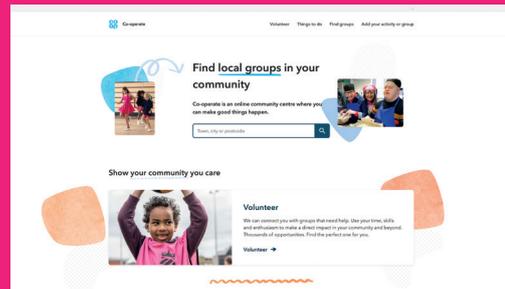
Forward planning can help your group succeed and support others for longer. Involving others within your community not only helps to build community resilience, but it makes it more likely for your project to keep going.

Practical tips:

- Use our Community Resilience Framework to create a plan to make your group sustainable over time. It can also help you evaluate your progress over time.
- Train volunteers and group members to take on leadership roles. This will take the pressure off other leaders, and they can step in if anyone's away. You'll also create a group of engaged supporters who can help each other out when you're not around. This works even better if it's part of your group's model.

Case study:

At a community centre in Scotland, a group of regular participants in a project were empowered to take ownership of the group after the funding finished with support from volunteers of the local charity. Through their relationship with the community center owner, they were offered the space for free and encouraged to continue the group to support their wellbeing and that of the wider community.



Co-operate

co-operative.coop.co.uk

Co-operate is an online community hub, making good things happen in local communities. Co-operate connects people in and across communities with one another.



Together Through Tough Times research

Want to learn more about community resilience? Read our partnership research report at: co-operative.coop/campaigning/mental-wellbeing