Harrogate u3a Health & Safety Guidance Note 2 General Advice

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline general health and safety considerations when planning, organising and running Harrogate u3a events and activities *This information includes tips and ideas for keeping people well and safe at events and activities.*

What is health and safety?

Health and safety is a term that is often associated with red tape and not being able to do the things you want to do. However, paying attention to health and safety in our activities shouldn't stop us from running them – in fact, it should make them more enjoyable and accessible for people.

Health and safety means all the ways that we and our groups think about the welfare of volunteers, members, participants, and the general public. It is about working together as an organisation to make sure we have done everything we can to prevent avoidable accidents and protect people from getting hurt.

Practical steps

What can you do to avoid accidents?

When you are planning activities, meetings or events, discuss within your group steps you can take to avoid people getting hurt. It is useful to consider:

The place the activity will take place

Are there any hazards that you could remove or warn people about? For example:

●You have hired a room for a coffee morning. When you arrive, you find there are some boxes just inside the door. You might decide to move these out of the way so that people don't trip over them as they come in.

The people who will be taking part

Do the participants have any particular needs that would make them more likely to hurt themselves? For example:

●You regularly run a group meeting, but this month you know there is an additional party coming. You might decide to provide extra chairs so that the larger number of elderly people will be able to sit down if they need to.

The equipment that you will use

Are there checks you could do to make sure that the equipment is in good working order? Do people need any particular skills or knowledge to enable them to use it safely? For example:

●You use a hot water boiler every week at your coffee morning. You might decide to check the cable and plug each week before you use it, to make sure there are no bare wires or burnt patches.

The activity itself

Is there anything about the activity you are running that could lead to someone becoming injured? Could you change the activity to reduce this risk, or give people information that will help them to keep themselves safer? For example:

●Your group organizes walks. You have planned a walk which crosses or runs along part of a busy road. The walk is very picturesque, so you don't want to change the route. Instead, before you reach that particular section of the walk, you warn the participants that it is coming up and that they should take care to follow the highway code and be aware of traffic hazards.
●Your group is planning an exercise class for your members. You know that quite a few of your members have medical conditions such as bad backs and arthritis. To make sure the activity is suitable, you find a teacher who is able to run gentle activities for people with limited movement.
Write down the decisions you make so that you can refer to them later. If, in exceptional circumstances, you need to provide evidence that you have taken care to avoid people becoming injured, having a written record of your decisions can help. You could either take note of your decisions in the minutes of the meeting in which you have the discussion, or as a separate risk assessment.

Keeping people well and comfortable?

Health and safety is not just about avoiding accidents. It is also about making sure people have what they need to stay well. Think about what you will need to provide to make sure that people who are affected by your activities are well taken care of. For example, if you are running an event that people will be at for several hours, it is important to make sure there are toilet facilities and drinking water available. Make sure your venue isn't too hot or cold, and that there is adequate space to comfortably accommodate the people who will be coming. If there are things people will need that you are not providing, it is useful to include

this in your publicity. For example, if your activity goes over lunchtime and you are not catering, invite people to bring a packed lunch.

Training requirements

In the day to day running of your group, you will probably find that you already have the information you need to judge whether something is unnecessarily dangerous. For example, you don't need any specialist knowledge to tell that a pile of boxes just inside a door could be a trip hazard! However, there may be some cases in which more information than just "common sense" is needed to run an activity as safely as possible.

There may be activities that your group would like to organise that require specialist knowledge and skills in order to keep it as safe as possible. If you do not have anyone in your group who has this specialist knowledge, you will need to either organise training for an existing member, or find a new volunteer who is competent to run the activity.

If there is an accident

It is useful to have an agreement about who is responsible for taking charge in an emergency situation.

If you organise events or activities, it is also a good idea to check whether you have have trained first aiders available. This may not always be possible in which case someone needs to be nominated to contact the appropriate emergency services if required.. You may decide that there are certain types of activity at which you will ensure that there is always a first aider present.

When an accident happens, it is important to keep a record that you can refer to later if you need to.. An incident Report Form should be completed and returned to Hu3a Secretary. Copies of the form may be obtained from the website.

Fire safety

If you regularly use the same venue, you could adopt a set of regular procedures for checking fire safety. These could include checking that fire exits and escape routes are clear, that smoke alarms are working, and that fire extinguishers are present. If you use different venues, you could agree a set of requirements you have, such as that all venues must have smoke alarms, clearly labelled fire exits and fire extinguishers.

It may also very sensible, if possible, to ask people to put their name on a list as they enter a building, and cross it out when they leave. This way, if there is a fire at your event, you have a list of people who are at your event, and can check whether everybody has been evacuated safely.

Equipment

If you use electrical equipment, you might want to consider adopting a procedure for checking its safety, such as always checking the cables, plugs and connections for bare wires, frayed cables, burnt patches etc., before use.

In general, it is important to think about whether you have any equipment that could be hazardous if not used correctly, and put processes in place for ensuring it is used by a competent person.

Dangerous Substances

If you use any dangerous substances, you should ensure that they are used appropriately and are stored safely.

Responsibilities

You need to know who has overall responsibility for health and safety in your group. In most cases, this will be the group leader as they are legally responsible for the actions of the group.

The Harrogate U3A committee has overall responsibility for health and safety of the social events and meetings it directly runs.

A nominated committee member will have the specific job of thinking about health and safety, and ensuring that the committee's decisions on safety are put in place and promulgated throughout the organisation.

Getting the balance right

When we start thinking about health and safety, it is easy to become anxious about everything that could possibly go wrong. It is important to remember that people are used to taking risks in order to take part in interesting things.

What we need to do is make sure you avoid *unnecessary* risk and check that any equipment used is safe to use before the activity begins.