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Groups Guide

This guide has been written to provide you with more information about how **Yorkshire MESMAC** works with groups. It aims to set out some of the theory behind groupwork, show how it fits in with the rest of the work **Yorkshire MESMAC** does, and gives some idea of what support we can offer you if you run, or are thinking about running, a group.

We hope you find it useful, and welcome feedback, positive or negative.

Yorkshire MESMAC, 2002



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About MESMAC

Yorkshire MESMAC Mission Statement

Since 1990 Yorkshire MESMAC has been working with Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men, to:

"Offer support and information promoting informed choices in men's sexual lives.

Create space where men can explore, voice and share their needs, working to develop solutions and act on these both collectively and individually.

Respect and support the right of all Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men to make their own choices, recognising that many external factors work against men making real choices.

We are committed to challenging those structures that limit choice, oppress and exclude Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men.

We believe that Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men have the potential to be experts in their own lives, and as such we are committed to encouraging the sharing of experiences and skills.

We defend the right of groups of Gay men, Bisexual men and men who have sex with men to self define and organise in a way that reflects their true concerns and life experiences.

Yorkshire MESMAC - The Short Story

Yorkshire MESMAC was established in 1990 as part of a Health Education Authority pilot project working in four cities across the UK. Its aim then was to develop health promotion work targeting Gay men, Bisexual men and Men Who Save Sex With Men in Leeds.

In 1993 Leeds MESMAC became Yorkshire MESMAC, an independent project in its own right, establishing new sites in Bradford and Wakefield. In 1994 the organisation expanded services to men in North Yorkshire with a base in York, followed by a base established in Scarborough in 1996.

The project has now grown to be one of the largest independent agencies of its kind in the country. The breadth, depth, quality and innovative nature of the services that we deliver have all contributed to Yorkshire MESMAC being viewed as a centre of excellence both locally, nationally and internationally.

How We Work

Our programme of work is based on a four part framework of health promotion interventions:

- Direct Contact Health Promotion
- Community Health Promotion
- Organisational / Institutional Health Promotion
- Strategic planning and facilitation

All our work programmes are structured to meeting the aims set out in Making It Count. This is a set of strategic aims for reducing HIV infection through sex between men, a framework which is being adopted by organisations both in this country and abroad.

The keys aims of the framework are around giving men access to information and resources, offering the chance to increase skills, and providing settings for this to happen in.

Our work with groups comes under the heading of Community Health Promotion. Broadly, our aim is to develop and assist in the development of groups and networks of gay and bisexual men in the areas we work in.

Working within this framework allows us to maintain flexibility in our approach. Our key aim is to develop services that meet the needs of the men we are working with, so we try to work with what men want.

Whatever group or network you are attending or wanting to develop there will be benefits in terms of skills development, social networks or access to other services which may not initially seem obvious but are still there. These will be explored later.

If you have an idea for a group we will work with you to provide whatever support we can offer to help it happen. If we see an unmet need we will try to set up groups that will be able to continue long past our involvement.

It is also important to note that although this document talks about services for men, we have always supported and will continue to support groups working with a mixture of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Some of the Services Yorkshire MESMAC Deliver

- A programme of Outreach work to the commercial gay scene, including the free distribution of condoms and lube to most gay venues in West and North Yorkshire.
- A programme of Outreach work to public areas where men meet for sex, including cottages and lay-bys, and the free distribution of condoms, lube and sexual health information to men who have sex with men in these areas.
- Support to groups where men who have sex with men can come together, share concerns and take action to meet these.
- A Group Development Fund, offering groups up to £500 towards running costs or a specific project.
- Community Resource centres in Bradford, Leeds, Scarborough, Wakefield and York, offering meeting or training spaces, and resources such as books, magazines and newspapers. Free condoms, information and the free gay press are available during staffed hours.
- The project offers training on a range of topics to statutory and non-statutory agencies and groups, including courses on good practice in working with Gay men.
- Sexual health resource production, including cards, posters and condom packs, targeted as appropriate at all men who have sex with men.
- Contact point and mailboxes for groups and smaller projects to use.

All YM services are free at the point of delivery, and are staffed by trained paid professionals dedicated to working within a code of good practice.

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About Groups

Why Groups?

There are many benefits that can come from working with groups. These can include:

Bringing people together, breaking their isolation.

People share experiences.

It is possible to get support and advice from other group members.

Group discussions can lead to more profound examination of complex issues.

People are often relieved to find that they are not the only one who feels like that / thinks like that.

Groups can be a forum for challenging received notions and for promoting equal opportunities.

People get to meet each other.

Groups can be a springboard for communal action, lobbying, further groups and activities.

Groups can build confidence and self esteem.

"I was very nervous at first, but I'm glad I made the effort to join..." - Member of The Fruit Bowl, Wakefield's LGB Youth Group

Why Men Join Groups

Whilst groups for men who have sex with men often have very clear aims or reasons for being, the underlying reasons why men may wish to go along are often left unexplored. It can be important for a group to have an understanding of these, so that a group can respond to the expectations or needs of its members.

Whilst not aiming to be an exhaustive list, men who have sex with men can join groups: -

To learn about a subject or skill, or to be entertained

To gain peer support

To break isolation or loneliness - to meet others

To work through personal issues

As an alternative to the Commercial Gay scene

To meet men for sex

To meet their ideal partner

To do something deemed useful

To be community orientated

Because they feel obliged to go along

Because their friends go to the group

Because the group meets in the warmth, and there is free tea and coffee

Because it is the only place that they feel they can be themselves.

Why might men not join groups?

There are just as many reasons why men who have sex with men don't join groups, and a group should consider these as well. They can include:

- Because they're shy / lack confidence.
- Worries about seeing someone they know
- Wrong time / day / place
- Scepticism / cynicism towards groups in general
- Fears of being left out / ignored
- Because they prefer the commercial Gay scene
- They don't need the group
- Because they doubt the group / the project / the organisers motives
- Because they see the group as a pick-up group
- Because the group is or is perceived to be cliquey
- The image of the group may be exclusive - e.g. only white, middle class educated men attend
- The groups' politics don't fit with theirs
- They've not heard about the group.
- Because the venue and / or meeting is not accessible
- Because of a perception that men who go to groups are losers
- Because they are too busy with other things
- Apathy

Your group can take responsibility to change many of the above, and enable more men to join the group.



What We Can Offer

Principles of MESMAC Group Work

Yorkshire MESMAC believes that groups of men who have sex with men should strive to be self defined, self determined and self-organising.

Group members should be in control over the decision making process of the group, and the agenda and pace of the group.

The process of working together is as important as any outcome this may achieve, and all group members are valuable and valid participants within this process.

The emphasis of our work will be in sharing skills, knowledge and expertise that offers your group independence, and the best chances of longer term survival.

We will seek to work in a way that upholds this, and that recognises that this isn't always easy.

"The financial support gave the group a kickstart, but now we bid for Students Union funding and charge an annual fee so we are self sufficient"

- YorkPride, York University

What Yorkshire MESMAC Can Offer

Yorkshire MESMAC is keen to offer time, resources and support to groups which:

- offer a space for men who have sex with men
- meet within the Project area
- share the Project's anti-oppressive ethos.

Developing and sustaining groups can, at times, be dispiriting and exhausting. Yorkshire MESMAC will assist groups in their development; this might be anything from help with your publicity, to support for key members of your group, to securing funding. We believe that accessible, supported and strong groups are a key part of developing healthier communities of Gay and Bisexual Men in Yorkshire.

For several years we have operated a '**Small Grants Scheme**' for community groups, which aims to offer groups small amounts of money to help them start up or keep going. This scheme has limited funds, and we are keen to move the emphasis away from purely financial support.

With this in mind we have produced a resource identifying sources of funding for LGB groups, which is available from your local office. We can offer assistance in completing applications for funding, and can point you in the right direction for other Agencies that may be of use, such as your local Council for Voluntary Service.

From time to time, MESMAC staff will become aware of a real need in the community that no-one seems to be addressing. Our outreach and other work often makes us aware of a lack of space for some men to meet, or of issues which men want to discuss. It may be that some form of group or initiative could go a long way towards meeting these needs, and MESMAC workers have often set up a group based on such needs.

The Big Idea

You may have a really good idea for a group, have some energy that you'd like to put into community activities, or have a small group of people who wish to get active.

MESMAC workers are able to meet with you to take your ideas forward, and although they won't be able to guarantee a success, by working with you on developing your ideas, offering constructive feedback on these, and maybe offering some resources or skills to the group, your hard work could reach fruition.

Training

The **Yorkshire MESMAC** team consists of over 20 full and part time workers. The Team has a vast range of talents and skills, and many of these we are able to share with your group through training, seminars or giving talks. We may be able to offer the group a structured training programme if this is required. On the next page is a list giving some ideas on what current staff members are able to offer.

"Yorkshire MESMAC has been very helpful to BHSU... the information provided to us was used (on several occasions) as part of a whole college safe sex awareness campaign..."

- Bretton Hall Students Union -

Skills Available

The project has a large and experienced staff team, who have a wide range of expertise. Workers may be able to offer you a workshop in their particular interest, an informal discussion with relevant committee members, or give you some guidance. Areas of specialism are listed below; if you're looking for a skill area which is not listed contact your local site worker and we'll try to help.

Alcohol Awareness

Assertiveness Skills

Basic Accounting and Bookkeeping

Basic Computer Skills

Conducting Research (including Needs Assessments)

Counselling Skills

Funding Applications

Groupwork Skills

Housing Rights Advice

Imagery and Representation

Lobbying for Improved Service Provision

Living with HIV

Media Liaison

Mental Health

Minority Ethnic Issues

Photography

Presentation Skills

Report Writing

Self-Esteem

Setting up Youth Groups

Using the Internet & e-mail

Word Processing

Writing and Designing Newsletters and other resources

Youth Issues

Support for Committee Members

Running a group, welcoming new members, or simply keeping a group going, can be a thankless task to members, especially those who have more responsibility within the group. You may well find that it would be useful to talk through with someone outside the group, some of the dynamics or things that are on your mind. MESMAC workers can often be available to listen to your concerns, and can perhaps offer you support or information.

"It has been useful for us as workers to discuss ideas and concerns with MESMAC workers, and borrow resources or make referrals. My links with MESMAC also make me feel part of a community of LGB workers and organisations"

- Out 2 25 LGBT Youth Group -

Meeting Space

We recognise that for many groups working with men who have sex with men, finding a good, safe and welcoming place to hold meetings can often be the biggest hurdle.

To this end, **MESMAC** has several centres around the region, where (subject to availability) free use can be made of meeting rooms, on a regular or one-off basis. This includes weekends, day times and, of course, evenings.

At our centres, your members will find free condoms, lubricants and information, as well as copies of the free gay press. Some centres also have libraries and books or videos which can be loaned.

"The support offered by MESMAC is invaluable in the successful running of the group...the group appreciates the safe space offered as well as the jazzy decor!"

- Out 2 25 - LGBT Youth Group -

Support Services

As previously mentioned, we are often able to be a postal contact point for groups - by arrangement with your key worker your group can use the local **MESMAC** PO Box address to give out as a contact point. It may also be possible to use the **MESMAC** telephone number as an initial contact point for new group members.

We can also provide assistance with day to day administrative support for the group - arrangements can be made for use of PCs, photocopiers and any other equipment available at your local site office.

"We have met rent free at MESMAC's Leeds premises since 1994... Since 1998 we have been using their photocopying facilities for our 8-times a year newsletter"

- Leeds Gay Community -

facilities

Bradford **01274 395815**

Use of several rooms, including meeting room and counselling space
Resource Centre Desktop Publishing facilities

Leeds **0113 2444209**

Large Meeting and Training room
Counselling Space
Overhead Projector and other Resources

Wakefield **01924 211116**

Small office / meeting room by negotiation
Resources

York **01904 620400**

Large meeting and training room; Counselling room
Print resources
Access to free Gay Press
Overhead Projector

All Sites

Use of PO Box Address, telephone number and email as contact point
Access to PC, fax and photocopier by arrangement
Limited Internet Access by arrangement

Please Note:

Bookings should be made direct to the relevant office. Generally groups which use buildings regularly will get priority.

Regular users of **MESMAC** buildings will be expected to nominate a keyholder, and sign a contract covering rules and rights about building use.

Some of our buildings have limited physical access - please check for details.

Group Development Fund

As a central part of our group work ethos, **Yorkshire MESMAC** has set aside monies for a Group Development Fund. A grant from this fund may enable the group to decide on its budget, to pay for a specific activity, or to help with regular running costs. Full details of the Group Development Fund, including application details, are given in the next chapter.

It is worth thinking about whether a grant is what your group needs at the moment - many of the in-kind resources we can offer may be more appropriate.

Finding Other Funding Sources

In some cases, it may not be appropriate for **Yorkshire MESMAC** to offer funding for all or part of the group's activities. There are many sources of funding often available, and our workers can let you know how you may be able to access these, or access other agencies whose expertise is in supporting small community groups.

Funding from other sources may have several advantages, including longer term security that **MESMAC** cannot offer. Your key worker will be able to offer some training in writing bids - almost all funding bodies require fairly lengthy applications and explanations. You will need to consider whether members of your group have the time to put the bid together and then administer any monies awarded.

"The small grants to community groups was a great help. It allowed us to fund a phonenumber, take trips to cultural events and provide suitable snacks at meetings for different religions represented" -

- The Kali Group -

Sample Contract

Contract between Yorkshire MESMAC and AnyGayGroup

INTRODUCTION

This document lays out the terms and conditions for the granting of Group Development monies.

The two parties involved are **Yorkshire MESMAC** Sexual Health Project, known hereafter as the Project, and AnyGayGroup, known hereafter as the Group.

The Project at its Board of Trustees meeting held on 99th Apruary, agreed to pay the Group the sum of £xxx in two equal instalments.

MONITORING INFORMATION

The Group will supply financial records to the Project with 14 days upon request.

The Group will fill in a monitoring form every six months outlining progress towards the aims of the grant, monies spent to date, and numbers involved in the group.

The dates for this information to be received by the Project are 99th Febember 1999 and 99th Apruary 2000.

QUALITY MEASURES

That the Group make available at all meetings supplies of Condoms and Lubricant free from the Project.

That the Project will offer two training events during evening meetings for the Group.

That the Group observes the rights and responsibilities as laid down in the **Yorkshire MESMAC** Groups Guide.

The Group ensures it works within **Yorkshire MESMAC's** anti-oppressive ethos.

Sample Monitoring Form

AnyGayGroup

Monitoring information for Yorkshire MESMAC

Dates for completion: 28th Febember 2002
 30th Apruary 2002

1. Approximate Number of people attending meetings in last six months.

2.What activities has the group undertaken in the last six months?

3.Are there any changes in your group or progress you have achieved over the last six months that you would like to inform **MESMAC** of?

4.Do you have any comments about the support you have received from **MESMAC**?

Please return to: Outreach Worker, Yorkshire MESMAC, PO Box 1, Any Town, XX9 9XX

Accessing These Services

After discussing your groups needs with any of our full time workers, it may be useful to look at who will act as a link with the organisation. This is likely to be the most local full time Community Development Worker but there may be particular skills or experience that another worker has that would make them a more appropriate link.

A meeting will be held to negotiate what you'd like from the project; Your key worker will arrange this soon after you contact the project. Groups can arrange a contract with **MESMAC** to formalise their support from the organisation if they wish. This will have to happen if an application is made to the Group Development fund.

Yorkshire **MESMAC** believes that groups should be strong and independent. This means that the group has control over its aims, its activities and its identity. When a group has been working closely with **MESMAC**, or historically has been set up by **MESMAC**, the group can often become reliant on the project, or the project can seem to overshadow the groups own identity.

To prevent this happening, **MESMAC** workers will seek to clarify a process of pulling away from groups, and there are guidelines and quality standards on how workers work with groups. In the event of any major problems arising, a grievance procedure can be invoked.

YM

The Small Print

Rights and Responsibilities for Groups

We are keen not to burden groups with paperwork and rules. However, as a publicly financed project we are accountable to others for how we use our resources, including worker time and budgets. Below we have outlined groups rights and responsibilities.

Rights

- Your request for information or advice about groups or small grants, including our current priorities, will be responded to within 14 working days. This will detail when any Group Development Fund application will be considered.
- Any Development Fund bid will be considered within three months of being submitted.
- You can present your bid and explain it in further detail to the Project Director.
- Your key worker will offer at least two sessions whilst you are identifying support needs or preparing a bid, to chat about, advise and discuss your group and what MESMAC's role might be in supporting you.
- You have the right to ask for a contract formalising any form of support MESMAC has offered you.
- You have the right to expect workers to behave in a professional manner, as specified in the statement on workers rights and responsibilities.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- You will be required to complete a short monitoring form about the groups activities every six months. The exact content of this can be negotiated with your key worker. It may include numbers attending group activities, and how you have used any monies awarded. It will be simple and as short as possible. An example monitoring form is included in the this booklet.
- Building users and recipients of Development Fund grants will be obligated to sign a contract outlining these rights and responsibilities.
- The financial records of groups receiving small grants must be available to MESMAC within 14 days of a written request.
- To uphold the anti-oppressive statement of intent.
- To abide by any building guidelines.

Yorkshire MESMAC workers are bound by a formal code of conduct which covers all areas of the Projects work.

Groups or individuals who have a grievance can invoke the Project's formal Grievance Procedure. This will be made available on request from any of our offices.

We will not work with groups whose aims are contrary to our own - for example our equal opportunities philosophy and mission statement.

Contacting Us

For more details on how we may be able to help, contact your local site office:

Leeds

Po Box 417, Leeds LS1 5PN
0113 244 4209
leeds@mesmac.co.uk

Bradford

PO Box 267, Bradford BD1 5XT
01274 395815
bradford@mesmac.co.uk

Wakefield

PO Box 19, Wakefield, WF1 2YE
01924 211116
wakefield@mesmac.co.uk

York

PO Box 549, York, YO30 7GX
01904 620400
northyorkshire@mesmac.co.uk

Or visit our website at www.mesmac.co.uk

Other Resources

The following resources may also be of use to you in setting up a group. Contact your local site for a copy.

Making It Count

The Strategic framework for HIV prevention work with men who have sex with men.

Yorkshire Counts

Local data from the Gay Mens Sex Survey 1999 - indicators of our local priorities.

Quids In

Yorkshire MESMAC guide to funding sources for LGB community groups.