

BRIGHTER FUTURES

How to Run a Simple Community Wellbeing Activity

A practical guide for small community groups

*Start with the people. Keep the activity simple. Give everyone room to
take part in their own way.*

This guide draws on Brighter Futures experience of creative, healthy-living and community activities. It is intended as a practical starting point rather than a substitute for your organisation's own safeguarding, health and safety or data-protection procedures.

Brighter Futures - August 2026

Begin with the people, not the activity

A community wellbeing session does not need to be elaborate. A table, a simple activity and a reason to spend time together may be enough.

The most useful starting question is not "What workshop shall we run?" but "Who are we hoping will come, and what might make taking part easier for them?"

People may be dealing with poor health, disability, anxiety, caring responsibilities, bereavement, isolation, financial pressure or a major change in their lives. You do not need to diagnose or solve those problems. Your job is to create an activity that people can enter without having to explain themselves first.

A useful principle

The activity gives people something to do together. Conversation can then happen naturally. Nobody should have to disclose personal information, tell their story or perform sociability in order to belong.

Ask before you plan

- Who is the activity for? Be specific enough to plan well, but do not make assumptions about what everyone in that group will want.
- What barriers might make attendance difficult - transport, cost, confidence, mobility, hearing, vision, fatigue, language, caring duties or the time of day?
- What do people themselves say they would enjoy or find useful? A short conversation, expression-of-interest form or trial session can tell you more than a polished programme devised in isolation.
- Does the activity need a fixed venue, or would it be better to find out where interested people are based before deciding where to meet?

A small, well-attended activity is usually more useful than a complicated programme designed to look impressive.

Choose something with a low barrier to entry

The best community activities often have an obvious point of entry. People can understand what will happen without needing specialist knowledge or confidence.

Useful examples include simple arts and crafts, dominoes or card games, basic computer help, making puppets, cooking demonstrations, a gentle nature walk, planting, storytelling, music listening or an informal practical workshop.

The activity itself does not have to be described as therapeutic. In many settings, calling something a "wellbeing intervention" can create more pressure than simply inviting somebody to paint, learn how to send a photograph from their phone, play dominoes or have a cup of tea.

A simple activity usually has these qualities

- Easy to understand: somebody can see what is happening and join without a lengthy explanation.
- Adaptable: the task can be made easier, shorter or more challenging without making somebody feel singled out.
- No requirement to be good at it: the session is not an examination, competition or performance unless participants specifically want that.
- Room for conversation: people can talk while doing something rather than having conversation as the sole purpose of attending.
- Room for quiet: someone who does not feel like talking should still be able to take part comfortably.
- Affordable: wherever possible, participation should not depend on buying specialist equipment or materials.

Do not overprogramme

Leave gaps. A session that is scheduled minute by minute can become tiring and makes it harder to respond to the people in the room. Prepare enough activity to keep things moving, but do not assume every prepared element must be completed.

Build a session people can settle into

A predictable shape can make a group feel easier to enter. People know that there will be time to arrive, understand what is happening and leave without being rushed.

For a 60 to 90 minute session, a structure like this is often enough:

Arrival	10-15 min	Welcome people individually. Offer refreshments if appropriate. Let people settle without launching immediately into instructions.
Introduction	5 min	Explain what the activity is, what is optional, and where practical things such as toilets and exits are.
Main activity	35-50 min	Demonstrate simply, then allow people to work at their own pace. Move around and offer help without hovering.
Pause / conversation	as needed	Do not force a formal discussion. A natural pause for tea or conversation may be enough.
Finish	5-10 min	Give notice that the session is ending. Explain what happens next and how people can give feedback or register for another session.

Explain choice clearly

If an activity is optional, say so plainly. "You can have a go at this, carry on with what you are doing, or take a break" is clearer than telling somebody there is "no pressure" and then continuing to encourage them until they join in.

If somebody arrives late, needs to leave early, requires more time or wants to observe before participating, build enough flexibility into the session for that not to become a problem.

Refreshments are part of the session

Tea, coffee and a biscuit may seem incidental, but they give people a familiar reason to pause and talk. If you provide food or drink, check allergies and dietary requirements where relevant and follow appropriate food-safety arrangements.

Choose a venue people can actually use

A good activity in the wrong venue is still the wrong activity.

Before confirming a room, think about the journey into the building as well as the room itself. Service providers have duties under the Equality Act 2010 to anticipate barriers faced by disabled people and make reasonable adjustments. In practical terms, accessibility should be considered before somebody has to ask for help.

Check:

- Step-free access where needed, including the route from the street or car park.
- Accessible toilets and enough room for mobility aids.
- Seating that can be rearranged rather than one fixed layout.
- Lighting, acoustics and background noise. A busy cafe may be socially attractive but impossible for somebody with hearing difficulties.
- Public transport, parking and the distance from stops or parking spaces.
- Temperature, ventilation and somewhere to sit down before or after the activity.
- Whether participants can find the entrance easily without drawing unnecessary attention to a sensitive group.

Ask what would help

Do not try to predict every adjustment. Give people an easy way to tell you what would make participation possible or more comfortable. Ask only for information you genuinely need to make the session work.

Do not publish more than you need to

For an ordinary public workshop, publishing the venue and time may be entirely appropriate. For a group where privacy or safety is important, it may be better to share exact arrangements only with confirmed participants. The level of confidentiality should reflect the group and the risks involved, not a blanket rule applied to every activity.

Safeguarding and clear boundaries

A friendly group still needs boundaries. People should know what the activity can offer and what it cannot.

If your organisation works with adults at risk or children, it should have appropriate safeguarding arrangements, know who is responsible for safeguarding concerns, and make sure staff and volunteers understand what to do if something worries them. Adult safeguarding is concerned with protecting an adult's right to live safely and free from abuse and neglect.

For a small wellbeing activity, the practical basics include:

- Make sure somebody has named responsibility for safeguarding and that everyone helping with the session knows how to contact them.
- Use appropriate recruitment, checks and training for the work being undertaken.
- Do not promise absolute confidentiality. If somebody tells you something that suggests they or another person may be at risk, you may need to share that concern through the proper safeguarding route.
- Keep the purpose of the group clear. A creative activity is not counselling simply because people sometimes talk about difficult experiences while taking part.
- Do not ask participants to disclose personal experiences as part of an activity unless there is a clear, appropriate and properly supported reason for doing so.
- Know where to signpost somebody who needs specialist, clinical or crisis support beyond the scope of the group.

The facilitator does not have to fix everything

Sometimes the most responsible response is to recognise that a person needs help beyond the remit of the activity. A clear referral or signposting process is safer than allowing a community group to drift into work it is not equipped to provide.

If the activity is for a particularly sensitive group, write down in advance how enquiries, attendance information, photographs, contact details and disclosures will be handled.

Keep practical risks proportionate

Risk assessment is not about finding reasons not to do things. It is a way of noticing foreseeable problems and deciding what sensible precautions are needed.

Health and Safety Executive guidance says organisations should include volunteers as well as employees in relevant risk assessments. The assessment should reflect the actual activity rather than being copied from something unrelated.

Consider:

- The activity: scissors, hot drinks, cooking equipment, lifting, outdoor terrain, trip hazards, paints or cleaning products.
- The venue: access, fire arrangements, emergency exits, toilets, first aid, flooring, lighting and room capacity.
- The people: whether fatigue, mobility, communication or other needs change how the activity should be set up.
- The team: who is leading, who can respond to an incident, and whether anyone is being asked to do something beyond their competence.
- Getting home: particularly for evening activities, isolated venues or participants who rely on organised transport.

A simple risk note

For a straightforward activity, a short record can be enough: What could cause harm? Who might be affected? What are we doing about it? Is anything else needed?

Adapt rather than exclude

If a participant cannot safely do one version of an activity, first ask whether it can be adapted. A seated version, lighter materials, a shorter route, larger playing pieces or working with a partner may preserve participation without pretending that every activity suits every person.

Running the session

The tone of the room is usually set by small things: how people are greeted, whether instructions make sense, and whether somebody can make a mistake without feeling foolish.

During the session:

- Welcome people by name where possible, but do not make newcomers introduce themselves to the whole room unless there is a good reason.
- Demonstrate rather than over-explain. Show the first step, let people begin, then add information as it becomes useful.
- Avoid correcting work that does not need correcting. If the aim is participation rather than technical mastery, there may be several perfectly good ways to do the same thing.
- Notice who is being left out of conversation or access to materials, but do not make a spectacle of bringing them in.
- Use ordinary language. Avoid professional jargon when a simpler explanation will do.
- Do not assume silence means disengagement. Some people participate by concentrating quietly.
- Keep an eye on energy levels. A shorter successful session is better than pressing on because the timetable says there are twenty minutes left.

Think "host", not "performer"

The facilitator does not need to dominate the room. Their job is to make the activity understandable, keep the environment safe and help people take part. The group is not an audience for the facilitator.

Working with volunteers

Give volunteers a clear role before participants arrive. "Help people with the materials and keep an eye on the refreshment table" is more useful than "just mingle". Make sure they know the boundaries of the role, who to ask if they are unsure and how safeguarding or safety concerns should be passed on.

Afterwards: learn without turning people into data

You need some way of knowing whether the activity was useful, particularly if you hope to repeat it or seek funding. That does not mean every participant needs to complete a long evaluation form.

Useful feedback can be very simple:

- Would you come again?
- What did you enjoy?
- Was anything difficult about taking part?
- Is there something you would like us to do differently next time?
- Is there another activity you would be interested in?

You can also record practical observations: how many people came, whether the location worked, which activities people actually chose, what materials ran out, whether the session was too long, and what questions participants repeatedly asked.

Handle personal information carefully

If you collect names, contact details, accessibility information or other personal data, be clear about why you need it and how it will be used. Keep only what you genuinely need and follow your organisation's data-protection arrangements. The Information Commissioner's Office provides specific guidance for small organisations.

Do not confuse evidence with intrusion

Funders may want to know what changed because of a project. That can often be shown through attendance, short anonymous feedback, participant choices and a few carefully recorded examples. Collecting highly personal information simply because it might be useful later is not good practice.

Review before repeating

After each session, give the team ten minutes to ask: What worked? What did not? Did anybody struggle to take part? Is there anything we need to change before the next session? Small adjustments made early are usually easier than redesigning a programme after six weeks.

One-page activity planner

Use this before a new activity. It is deliberately short. If the session is complex or carries greater risk, your organisation may need more detailed planning.

Who is the activity for? What do we know because people have told us, rather than because we have assumed it?	Who is responsible? Session lead, safeguarding contact, first aid / venue contact where appropriate.
What are we doing? Describe the activity in one sentence.	What could go wrong? List the main foreseeable risks and the sensible steps being taken.
Why might somebody want to come? What is the immediate, ordinary reason for taking part?	What is outside our role? What will we do if somebody needs specialist or clinical support?
Where and when? Is the venue accessible, practical and appropriate for this particular group?	How will we know if it worked? Keep the feedback proportionate and useful.
What will people need? Materials, refreshments, seating, transport information, adaptations, communication support.	

Before the day

Confirm the venue, materials, responsibilities, access arrangements, safeguarding route and any participant information you genuinely need. Then keep the session itself simpler than the planning behind it.

A few final points

There is no single model for a community wellbeing activity. A computer-help session and a stroke support group may both bring people together, but they need different staff, boundaries, accessibility arrangements and safeguards.

What can remain consistent is the approach:

1. Listen before designing. Find out what people would actually use.
2. Keep the activity understandable. People should not need confidence or specialist knowledge merely to enter the room.
3. Make participation flexible. Different people will have different energy, mobility, confidence and communication needs.
4. Know your boundaries. Community activity can support wellbeing without pretending to be treatment, counselling or rehabilitation.
5. Learn and adjust. The first version does not have to be perfect. Pay attention to what participants actually do and say.

Useful current guidance

Adult safeguarding: Department of Health and Social Care, Care and Support Statutory Guidance, including Chapter 14 on safeguarding.

Safeguarding for voluntary organisations: Charity Commission, Safeguarding and protecting people for charities and trustees. The principles are useful to voluntary and community organisations more widely, although organisations should check which duties apply to them.

Health and safety: Health and Safety Executive, Volunteering: Guidance for employers, including risk assessment and protection of volunteers.

Accessibility: GOV.UK, Disability: quick start guide for service providers, on anticipating barriers and reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

Data protection: Information Commissioner's Office, Advice for small organisations.

About this guide

This resource is provided for general community use. It is not legal, medical or safeguarding advice. Organisations remain responsible for making sure their own activities meet the requirements that apply to their circumstances, participants, staff, volunteers and venue.

Brighter Futures
Wellbeing, creativity and connection in East Sussex