

## Membership organisations

*Supporting those who promote, provide for and strengthen their members*

At a time when there is an intense commercialisation of much of our social life, membership organisations remain one of the few places where service; volunteering; making a contribution for no other reason than 'having a care' survives.

Membership organisations are an essential ingredient in any society that hopes to term itself 'civilised' or 'caring'. The benefits of membership speak for themselves and there are millions of people whose lives are immeasurably improved and enriched by contact with their local membership society and its networks; the contacts it brings and the diversity of experiences that so many membership societies engender for those who take part.

Maintaining membership however, can sometimes be a challenge. There are times too, when members for all their loyalty have events and situations to deal with in their own lives that limit their capacity to respond and their ability to play their usual part.

Sadly many membership organisations lose excellent members at such times and often for long periods - if not altogether.

Our view is that this need not be so; that there are ways in which members can be supported through the usual and not so usual upheavals of contemporary life for a time in a way that enables them to retain their commitment (if not at full expression) as they progress beyond their situation of crisis or difficulty.

Peoplecare has looked into this dilemma for some time, learned to respond to it and in partnership with our membership collaborators designed support services that are inexpensive whilst enhancing the role of the organisation in the life of the members - especially in times of challenge and difficulty.

Given that the world is going to get more complex and not less; that the dilemmas facing us all will increase and not reduce, then providing a safety net of support that can be relied upon is one valuable resource that can go a long way to membership organisations retaining their vitality and the central role they play in the fabric of our social life.

### Understanding membership organisations

We recognise that membership organisations play a crucial and influential role in society, and those who work within them and run them face unique questions and challenges. As well as providing all that is necessary on behalf of members, organisations must provide sufficient benefits and value for it to be worthwhile for them to come back for more.

To aid in this service approach we offer a ready made nationwide network of support, bespoke and specialist intervention to membership organisations that otherwise would be very costly to create independently.

Oasis staff, directors and associates have considerable experience of the not for profit or third sector in the area of membership organisations. We apply the learning that emerges from our on-going relationship to the sector to help those we work with. Concentrating over 75% of our



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resources as we do on this sector enables us to understand its values and the challenges facing it.

We bring a commitment to the voluntary spirit and the inclusive nature of membership; have hands-on experience of working at key levels with individuals and organisations within the third sector; are engaged in social renewal and are shaping the leading edge approaches to responsible and collaborative leadership.

Our philosophy is firstly to understand your context and particular circumstances, the human and organisational issues that you are facing and some of the possible approaches which are acceptable to you - including the degree to which you can work with unpredictability and challenge. Only then do we create together appropriate ways to progress any next steps.

### **Aligned with volunteers**

As the volunteer workforce changes, we see volunteer roles becoming more complex, and as competition among agencies for volunteers has become more common, volunteer development and managing practices have, by requirement, become more challenging and creative. Aligned with these shifts and changes we offer a range of relationship based responses to:

- the challenges of sustainable volunteering
- the unique nature of the dilemmas and challenges often posed by volunteers and members
- developing retention, reliability, resilience and emotional health
- the specific and often sensitive requirement of young members
- staff and volunteer relationships
- helping sustain staff who in turn sustain volunteers through difficult or prolonged transitions and changes
- identifying key volunteers and offering specific development opportunities
- creating a robust organisation for the future

### **The expected response to the unexpected**

We understand and respond to the issues that arise for some membership organisations where their members may face the kinds of circumstances that can be expected to some time, but cannot be predicted as to when they will happen. For instance, unexpectedly facing distress whether related to accident, abuse, trauma or death. We also offer a range of interventions that can really make a difference in retaining volunteers when personal issues impact on their volunteering role. We don't work with problems; we work with people who may have problems to address as well as options and opportunities to consider.

### **Preferred provider**

When a membership organisation is more of 'an association of member organisations' we have a track record in being a preferred service provider. We offer differentiated packages, recognising that staff within the lead association organisation often call for a different set of services to those who might be involved within a member organisation.

We provide an accessible website for all users that are included in the provision, in some contracts this extends to over one million individuals, as well as 'pull down' services that are offered at favourable rates to all member organisations within a wider association, such as 1-1 executive consulting, mediation and coaching.

**The Oasis School of Human Relations** has a track record of working positively with the issues of human rights, social justice and ecology. We recognise the crucial role of the third sector including membership organisations in working with the challenges posed by poverty, injustice, exclusion and exploitation of natural and human resources.

We work with 'open change', where organisations face questions and issues where they don't know exactly what is needed, nor how to achieve it, as well as 'semi-closed' change where the what is clearer than the how or visa versa. We tend to leave 'closed change' to others - this is when the what and the how are clear and it is only a matter of doing what is already known.

**The Oasis School** is:

- a not-for-profit working primarily with not-for-profit organisations
- aligned with the value base of many not-for-profit membership organisations
- promoting active citizenship and collaborative practice
- a human relations organisation
- committed to sustainable volunteering
- ethical
- keen to assist organisations to seek external funding for our people based services