

## Here are our key points on setting up disabled staff networks:

### Preparation

- Be transparent about the reasons for setting the network up.
- Encourage the group to develop strong terms of reference so that members feel empowered to speak up. These would need to address issues such as hierarchy between members which might affect how comfortable people are speaking up. Also have ground rules negotiated by the group rather than imposed and an agreed code of conduct.
- There can be some merit in having a relatively senior person as Chair as this can make it easier for the group to flag up issues and have a stronger voice.
- Ensure the culture of the organisation facilitates declaration.
- Membership can be confidential. Find a way for confidentiality to be maintained - some people might want to find alternative methods of networking with others in the group other than face to face for example.
- Give the group a realistic budget so they can hold events and facilitate access.
- Allow paid time for meetings.
- To avoid tokenism, ensure that there is an effective mechanism in place for issues to be flagged up by disabled staff and actioned. Ensure that 2 way feedback can be given from the group to managers and vice versa and a plan for resolving issues.

### Benefits:

- Collective promotion of disability equality.
- Peer support – members can share experiences, strategies and solutions.
- Mechanism for highlighting common barriers and ways these can be resolved.
- Partnership working with key internal decision makers/committees/other equality staff groups.
- Information, support and guidance for members and outwards to managers.
- Forum for debate and information sharing.

### Potential pitfalls:

- Avoid tokenism, especially in consultation. Group gets seen as a tick box exercise or talking shop.
- Group gets sidetracked by one person's agenda
- Conflict not dealt with effectively, group loses credibility.
- Not enough time given to respond to requests for consultation and involvement.
- Groups' ideas not responded to or acted upon.
- As a result of any or all of the above, group members become disillusioned and leave.

### Considerations:

- Look at ways to cross over with other equality strand staff networks to avoid compartmentalizing people's experiences.
- Look at both Disability Equality Action Training and Self Advocacy Training for group members - ideally on a rolling basis to accommodate new people. This assists everyone to be clued up about key issues such as the Social Model of Disability, 7 needs of Independent Living, the Equality Act and the Equality Duty. It will help the group be more effective at identifying and addressing barriers. Our Training and Consultancy department do Disability Equality Training and our team offer self advocacy workshops:

Self advocacy sessions from Breakthrough can promote:

1. capacity building for group formation and development.
2. group/ self advocacy skills.
3. understanding of barrier removal approach.
4. understanding of employment rights / responsibilities

[http://www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk/OurWork/advocacy\\_and\\_info/self\\_advocacy](http://www.breakthrough-uk.co.uk/OurWork/advocacy_and_info/self_advocacy)

For more information, contact the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre on:

Tel: **0161 273 5412**

Answerphone minicom: **0161 273 5727**

Email: [advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk](mailto:advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk)

Please tell us about any access requirements when you get in touch.