

How to Start a Social Café

Initial Idea

It is important to realise at the outset whether there is a need for a Social Café and to seek answers to these questions:

Who would it benefit?

Is there a suitable location?

Are there readily available sources of food and utensils?

Are there sufficient potential volunteers?

What is the proposed timeframe?

How often will you run the café?

It is important to research the local area and consult as widely as possible. The Reaching Out Foundation is available to provide advice and assistance.

Hold a Public Discussion

This is an important step as the more community support you can attract the easier your job will be.

Often an initial 'show of interest' meeting can progress the idea and get people involved.

By holding a public meeting you will not only find potential volunteers but organisations and businesses who may provide support to the Social Café in the area.

This is the ideal forum for the project to really start to gain momentum and identify potential needs of the community.

Actions:

Plan a meeting

- Try and find a free venue
- Contact the local council to see if you can use the Community Hall or try Churches or local Clubs
- Identify a key person to lead the meeting – the Reaching Out Foundation can assist by providing a person
- Develop an Agenda
- Seek speakers from other Social Cafes and/or the ROF who could provide information about the experience of other cafes.
- Contact local people who may assist with catering

Advertise

- Place posters in any frequently visited area such as shop windows, notice boards, Doctor and Dental surgery waiting rooms and local pharmacies
- Contact your local newspaper

- Ask the local Council to put a notice on their website
- Use word of mouth
- Contact the local radio station
- Notify local charities and service providers

Invitations

- Local Council
- Members of Parliament
- Service clubs
- Health services
- Sporting clubs
- Seniors groups
- Local identities
- Aboriginal Elders

Run the meeting

- Present the idea for a Social Café
- Introduce speakers to outline how a Café operates
- Open the floor to suggestions and discussion
- Invite volunteers to establish a Steering Committee
- Seek volunteers to run the Café and to raise funds. Be sure to get full contact details from all potential volunteers
- Outline the next steps

Form a Steering Committee

- This Committee will guide the establishment of the Café and oversee the operations once it is established
- By appointing a Steering Committee you will share the load by allocating roles and responsibilities
- You will now be a team with the same goals, moving in the same direction and utilising individual skills and attributes
- Define roles such as Chair, Secretary and Volunteer organiser
- Develop a communication strategy within the Committee, with volunteers and externally to start promotion and publicity

Establish a relationship with the Reaching Out Foundation

The Reaching Out Foundation can support you to establish your Social Café, in accordance with its guiding model and principles. The level of interaction and support will vary depending on your needs.

The Foundation is a Public Benevolent Institution, endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient. It is run entirely by volunteers, and supported by donations and grants where possible. Further information is available on the website – www.reachingout.org.au

You will be able to draw on the Foundation's experience in assisting other communities to establish Social Cafés, and to access the network of organisations sponsoring or otherwise involved in supporting the Foundation.

They can also share the experiences of those involved in operating other Social Cafés and provide ongoing support where needed.

The Foundation may assist in:

- identifying possible venues to house your café
- providing funding where possible
- accessing relevant grants where possible
- promotion and awareness raising activities
- legal advice where this can be sourced pro-bono

Find a Venue

You will need to consider:

- a central location which can be accessed easily
- the size of the café
- suitable kitchen facilities
- storage for food and utensils
- public transport and car parking
- the suitability of the neighbourhood and the likely views of local residents or services
- the cost

In order to identify a suitable site you could contact your:

- local council
- local MP
- Church groups
- Service Clubs eg Lions, Rotary
- community groups
- local businesses

Promote

It is important to get as much publicity as possible. If you are well known it will assist you when you are seeking donations, grants and volunteers.

The local media are always looking for stories, so use them to:

- explain what the Café is about
- provide an update on progress
- publicise the Café opening times
- celebrate milestones

Consider branding for the café including:

- signage
- letterhead
- brochures

Consider a Facebook page or website. The Reaching Out Foundation will place a link to your page on their website. Keep the information updated and provide regular stories on your progress.

Get Active

Getting active in the community will not only keep the momentum of your Committee going, but can help promote your café and raise valuable funds and support.

Visit other cafés and speak to other Steering Committees about their experiences and ideas. Contact details for other cafés are available from the ROF.

Fundraising

Identify possible donors for food, equipment or funds. These could include:

- food collection agencies such as Oz Harvest
- local food suppliers and retailers
- nurseries
- market gardens.

There are a variety of grants available from time to time. The Foundation is available to assist in identifying grant programs and writing grant applications.

You can also generate income by encouraging people from the community who are able to pay to access the café and make a contribution. This has the added benefit of expanding the contact your clients have with a broad range of people from the community.