

Becoming Constituted

Helping small arts groups become legally constituted organisations



Image of Whitburn Acapella courtesy of The Cultural Spring

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The Cultural Spring



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The Cultural Spring

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The Cultural Spring is a Creative People and Places (CPP) programme working to raise participation in arts and culture on South Tyneside and Sunderland.

The six-year Cultural Spring project is part of the Creative People and Places programme, initiated and funded by Arts Council England through the National Lottery. CPP works to encourage more people to take the lead in choosing, creating and taking part in art experiences.

As part of the Cultural Spring's legacy, we wanted to ensure some of the groups that we have helped establish and grow can be resilient without our continuing support.

We wanted to help local groups become sustainable, fully-constituted organisations, enabling them to apply for grant funding to ensure their viable future.

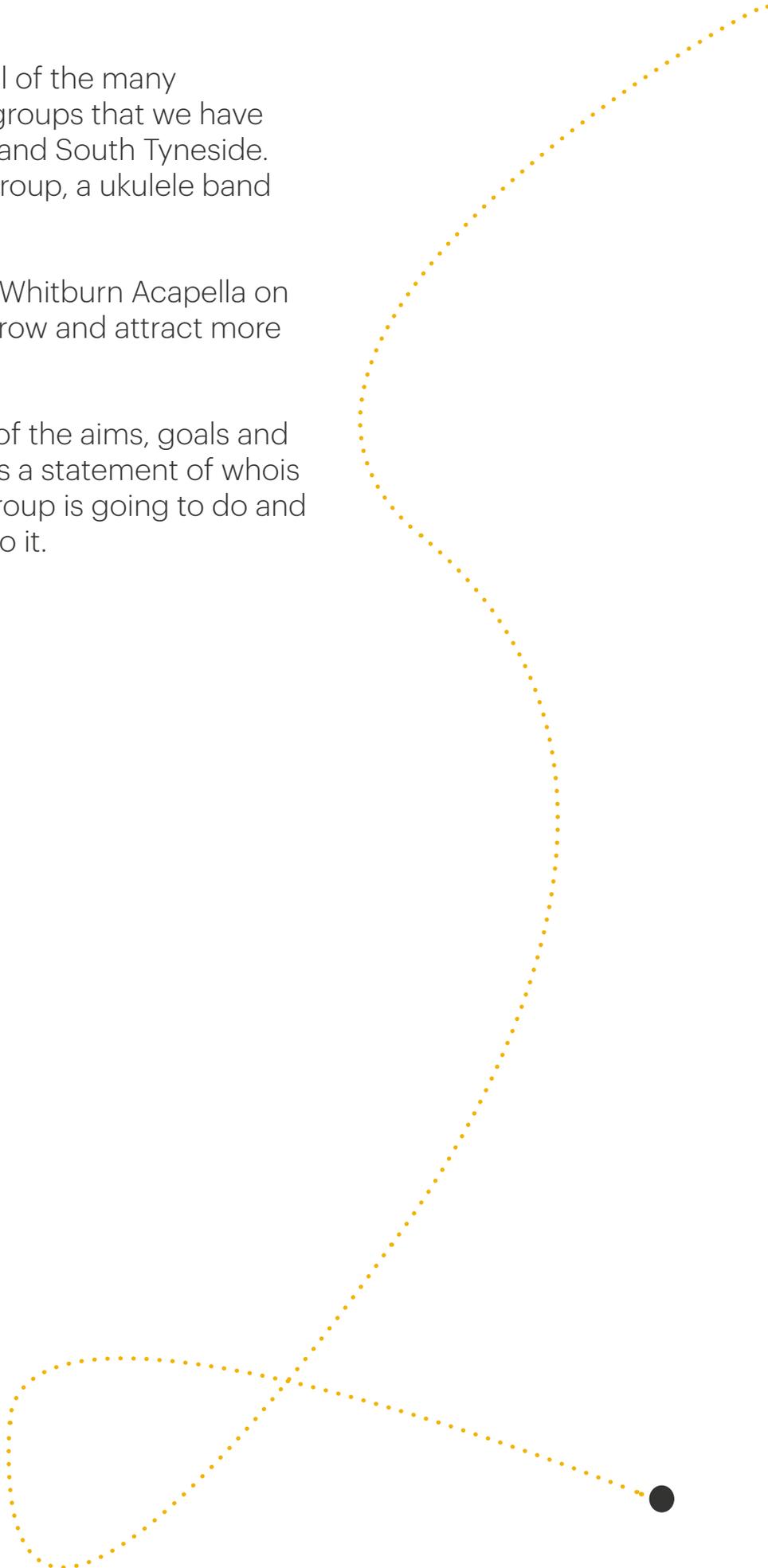


The audience

Our target audience was several of the many unconstituted arts and culture groups that we have helped establish in Sunderland and South Tyneside. These include choirs, a dance group, a ukulele band and others.

Being a constituted group puts Whitburn Acapella on a firmer footing, enabling it to grow and attract more singers.

A constitution is an agreement of the aims, goals and rules that your group will use. It's a statement of who is part of your group, what your group is going to do and sets out how you are going to do it.



The Process

We spoke to three organisations:

- **The Community Foundation (Tyne & Wear and Northumberland)** The Community Foundation is a philanthropic charity that helps communities throughout the North East.
- **Voluntary and South Tyneside Council for Voluntary Services (STCVS)** STCVS is an umbrella organisation for South Tyneside's voluntary and community sector and provides funding advice and administration services.
- **Voluntary and Community Action Sunderland (VCAS)** VCAS exists to champion and strengthen local charities, voluntary and community organisations, offering support and development.

We listened to their advice and then set up meetings between these organisations and some of the groups we thought would be interested in becoming constituted groups.

One of these was Whitburn Acapella.

This group, chaired by Lucyanne Mackie, met with Cultural Spring project co-ordinator Michael Barrass in November 2016 and Michael explained the benefits of becoming a constituted group in terms of being able to apply for funding. Lucyanne and Michael then attended three meetings with Billy Tindle, from the STCVS.

Billy specialises in assisting new and older groups with governance skills, funding information, promoting community development, networking and health and wellbeing.

“Billy explained that we needed to be properly constituted should we want to apply for funds from trusts and foundations, which we know we’ll need to do in order for us to keep growing,” explained Lucyanne.

The group had to decide on a Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer, then worked with Billy on forming a formal constitution.

“Billy helped us write this and we added things and edited the document until the group was happy with what we had and then the committee signed it on behalf of the group,” explained Lucyanne.

“We also had to open a bank account with agreed signatories. The whole process did not cost a penny to Whitburn Acapella and went very smoothly and quickly,” she added.

The process was free to Whitburn Acapella and the other groups we’ve worked with to help become constituted.



Results and Benefits

Groups such as Whitburn Acapella are now self-sustaining, without further need of financial support from Cultural Spring. And as constituted groups with bank accounts they can access funding from other grant-awarding bodies.

It took two or three people from each group to take the initiative and spend a bit of time on the process – organising bank accounts and forming a governing body – but so far everyone who has been through the process found it very smooth.

A couple of the groups have reported they feel better organised and more confident about moving forward.

The clearest benefit is that in cases where a group is going to require funding, then forming a constituted group is essential. So beneficiaries of such a process are the group, its participants and the communities in which they work.

Sucesses

Working with the Community Foundation, and in particular, STCVS, was key to our success in moving groups to fully-constituted organisations. If anyone is thinking of taking the decision, find out which organisations in your locality can give such invaluable help and support for free.

and challenges?

It can take groups some time to develop in this way and for people to come forward who want to take on key roles. There will always be groups who don't want to go down this route.

Whitburn Acapella and other groups we've helped through the process have found it easy to do, and essential in terms of finding future funding. Being a constituted group has opened the door to future funders and charities who want to help small, community groups.

www.theculturalspring.org.uk

www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk

Recommendations

These recommendations come from Ellie Turner, Principal Advisor for Culture at the Community Foundation:

In the majority of cases **groups need to create a governing document** to become constituted as a voluntary organisation. Most felt they would not exceed the £5k threshold, after which the Charity Commission expects that you register as a charitable entity.

The governing document will then dictate who can be on the governing body as committee members or trustees. This group will drive the organisation forward, is responsible by law for running the organisation and are responsible for recruiting on to the governing body.

Groups need an organisation bank account with at least two signatories for managing membership fees, applying and receiving funding / small grants, fundraising for equipment etc.

Ensure you have the appropriate policies and procedures in place for your organisation. This will be a requirement of registering your organisation or charity and of receiving funding.

Groups need to agree and decide how they will keep effective records and accounts for managing money and the work of the group / organisation.





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