

Setting up a men's discussion groups (OM:NI) within the City of Casey **By John Douth**

Our aim was to set up an Men's Discussion Group, incorporating aspects of COTA's very successful Challenging Ageing programme, and at the same time, adhering to the OM:NI model and its guidelines.

The following steps were followed to ensure the success of the planning and implementation of this new Men's Discussion Group.

Approaching the Council. The two male facilitators from COTA undertaking this challenge live in Berwick. We decided to start this group within the City of Casey and to approach the Council for assistance.

We identified and approached the relevant Council Officers who, if they agreed, would be involved in the implementation and planning; the departments approached included Positive Ageing Programme, Volunteers Programme and Men's Health. When doing this we found it was also strategically important to identify who would be the lead Council officer to be the driving force.

Once this senior officer was identified, copies of the "What is OM:NI" document were sent to her to improve her knowledge and understanding of the OM:NI concept prior to any planning meeting.

The planning meeting. At this meeting we came to an agreement in principle to the City of Casey's partnership with COTA to establish a Men's Discussion Group
We also discussed and clarified who would do what. It was agreed that City of Casey would provide:

- a venue for the initial meeting, along with morning tea and lunch.
- assistance with publicity and promotion – an article in the summer edition of City News, the quarterly publication sent to every household within the City of Casey.
- contact details of other organisations within the City that may wish to participate.
- a press release to the local press and a "chat" spot on the local community radio station's *Living Life* programme.

All of this was done within the Council's budget.

It was agreed that COTA (Vic) would provide trained male volunteer facilitators to establish and conduct this group, public liability insurance cover, assistance with publicity and promotion, such as templates for the City News article and 1500 leaflets for letterbox distribution (done by the 2 facilitators) to a selected area with the City of Casey.

Handling the expressions of interest. All the calls that came about the Group were handled at COTA, and followed up by the facilitators who were responsible for implementation and conduct of the group. The participants were contacted one week prior to the event as a means of introduction, and as a confirmation of their interest.

It is pertinent to note that 95% of those who indicated an expression of interest attended the first meeting, along with five others who turned up on the day. A survey was conducted with the participants to find out how they came to hear of the programme. 70% mentioned both the newsletter and the flyer in the letterbox, 15% the flyer only, 10% the newsletter only and 5% the radio programme.

And how are we travelling? The Casey Men's Discussion Group, consisting of 15 men, has now been in existence for nearly 3 years, and although meeting places have changed a couple of times in that period, it has remained very strong. It is a testament to what can be achieved through consultation and cooperation with local government.

Due to the success of this first venture, we have commenced 3 other groups within the City of Casey. Expanding the consultation and cooperation to include local community centres has assisted this process.

Following the success of the Men's Discussion Groups, the City of Casey asked COTA to conduct a leadership program that incorporates COTA's Challenging Ageing. The result is the Casey Champions Program which has been a great success and has been taken up by other councils.