

GROWING BOLDER CASE STUDY : How to get a Lottery grant and run a successful Writing for Wellbeing Group.

By Barbara Bloomfield

In this article I want to tell you how my friend Mary Everett and I managed to get grants to run groups for older people in Bristol. Wherever you live in the world, there are pots of funding just waiting to be tapped by groups and individuals with good ideas and I'd like to encourage you to look around for those sources of funding and think 'I could do that too.' To this end I'd like to share ten tips to consider while you make your own bid.

Mary and I have taken a tremendous amount of enjoyment and learning from the Growing Bolder groups and have been heartened by the leaps in confidence made by people who have attended the groups; some of them lonely or isolated, others with mental or physical health issues and some just needing a nudge to get themselves moving and engaging with the neighbourhood again. Some of our attendees are now running their own groups and cascading their boldness over other parts of the city.

Growing Bolder is a six session group of two hours per week in the afternoons. Using creative writing, poetry, drawing, collage and visual prompts, we look at aspects of later life such as retirement, health and illness, the empty nest, sex, renewing relationships and finding new rituals for your age and stage. Hopeful and creative work with older people is very much needed as anyone who works in this sector will tell you. With our ageing population, Age UK reckon that there are one million isolated and lonely elders living in the UK while statistics from the relationship charity, Relate, suggest that one adult in eight describes themselves as lonely and lacking a best friend.

But running groups is not always straightforward and I hope these following tips might be useful to you if you are thinking of making a bid for grants.

Success Tip 1: Making a short film or a booklet can be part of your bid

Always plan to record what you do with your group: for funders, for participants, for your future networking and for attracting participants. With the help of Bristol Ageing Better and Caleb Parkin, an expert in films and words for wellbeing, we made this short record of our performance at a care home : <https://youtu.be/NvwfCSRn-FI>

2: Choose a short and easy application form.

Our group chose to apply to Bristol Ageing Better, who distribute National Lottery funds, because it was an easy and short application. At ten to midnight on deadline night, I was filling in the form. I finished and pressed 'send' with one minute to go. Some grant applications require you to have a dedicated bank account and to be a charity. We were simply a community group with a great idea.

3: if you need to get paid to run this project, don't sign the form.

If you sign the application form, you cannot be paid to run a group. Get one of your supporters to sign it. And don't forget you need PPI, public and personal liability insurance, in case someone breaks an ankle during the group.

4: if your group is area specific, you can contact potential attendees in your area easily via free internet sites like Streetlife, Streetbank and Gumtree. We forgot to put an advertising budget into our application form but I found free community internet sites to be very good for advertising. The first time I advertised the group on Streetbank, 36 came forward to find out more about Growing Bolder. Politely ask friends to spread the word as no one likes being spammed!

5: Tea and a bun are the sweetest words...

Think about location, food and drink for your group and budget for this appropriately. We hold our workshops in our homes because everyone loves nosing around other people's homes. However, this isn't always possible. When aiming groups at older people, don't forget that care homes and

sheltered housing have excellent public rooms and are always pleased to host events that their residents can join in. Make sure you have a range of teas, coffee, cake or biscuits and fruit for the group. We got our cakes made and delivered by a cake shop, which was very cost effective. Never mind the writing, many said this was the highlight of the afternoon.

6. If you can, work in pairs.

Writing for wellbeing groups can be emotionally draining. You need to be robust and be able to handle emotional material, tears and a range of emotions from anger to bewilderment. There may be disclosures of historical material about abuse or neglect which require very sensitive handling. Some of your participants will be living with mental or physical health issues. If you can, always work in pairs. My colleague, Mary Everett, is a trustworthy psychotherapist and friend with whom I've worked for years. I don't mind when SHE tells me I cocked up something!

7: Get some training.

Without a background in teaching or therapy, it can be quite a climb to running your own writing for wellbeing group. You will need to build your portfolio, a toolkit full of exciting and inspiring ways to use words and prompts. So take training with experienced facilitators or investigate university courses in therapeutic writing. Allow plenty of breathing space in your group sessions. Each session of two hours, for us, consisted of an opener, one exercise, feedback and a closer.

8: Become a conversational artist.

A great strength of therapeutic writing is that it brings forth fresh and unexpected material and avoids the kind of black and white thinking that keeps so many of us in despair, depression and isolation. The conversational artist is always curious and listens more than she pontificates. The world needs more healers, more curious people, more conversational artists...

9: Look Outwards. Connect with your neighbourhood.

Pursuing the theme of Growing Bolder, for me, means connecting with the outside world, and the politics and poetics of my neighbourhood, city, country and the world. But I understand that for some writers for wellbeing, growing bolder means looking inwards and gaining strength in a quiet way. At the end of each group, we plan a public event. Last time, participants read their poems and writings at a care home in Bristol. Next time, we are pulling on purple berets and doing a flashmob with posters and songs to support the NHS, in the centre of the city. Good networking, good politics... and good publicity.

I hope I can speak for Mary as well as myself in saying that running groups for the public, for counsellors and for facilitators, continues to be a wonderful learning experience and we have benefitted tremendously from combining the literary arts with counselling and wellbeing. We are totally committed to using metaphor in the service of wellbeing, which is such a gentle and powerful way to gather our powers back to ourselves.

10: Feel your own body and spirit as it grows bolder. As the poet Ted Bowman said last year at an excellent Lapidus Scotland course run by Larry Butler, Valerie Gillies, Ted Bowman and Ruth Kirkpatrick: "Gather the light, and pass it on."

Please do contact me and Mary with your comments or queries. We would love to hear from you and hear about your groups and your successes. In fact, Mary and I will be running a training the trainers training course this spring in Bristol... would you like to join us?

Barbara Bloomfield, MA: writer, author, trainer, relationship and family counsellor, skype and online, counselling supervisor. Barbara.bloomfield@icloud.com