

Local RSI Support Groups

What is a Local Support Group?

Many people who contact the RSI Association are also looking for a local point of contact. Local support groups, set up and run by people who have RSI conditions can provide local information about therapists, doctors, and other services for those with an RSI condition. They can offer support and a point of contact for people who may be very isolated as a result of their condition.

You can obtain a list of known contacts from the RSI Association. We do rely on the group organisers for information, as they are not run by the Association.

What services are offered?

Telephone support: 1:1 information or support on the telephone. Many local support contacts operate exclusively in this way, often because the distances involved are too great for face-to-face meetings.

Face-to-face support: you may be able to arrange to meet up with a support person.

Support network: the named contact puts individuals in touch with each other, e.g. those who have worked for the same employer or those who are trying particular treatments.

Support meetings: a group which meets regularly face-to-face. The meetings may be informal group discussions, or formal meetings with a committee and regular speakers.

Information: general information about RSI, RSI consultants or treatment therapists in the area. Guidance or suggestions on certain issues, or specific services such as help with form-filling.

Support: some local contacts can provide someone to accompany you or provide moral support at benefits appeals or employment tribunals.

Counselling: one-to-one support offering options for dealing with emotional issues and life-choices, 'acting as a sounding board.'

Publications: such as lists of contacts or information sheets on local issues.

Reasons for setting up a support group

There are many reasons why you might want to set up a support group, including:

- There may not be a group in your area
- An existing RSI support group covers a large area, making it difficult for some people to travel, or the information they offer is not sufficiently localised

- You can offer something different.

You don't necessarily have to do everything on your own. If possible, try to find others to work with. It is always worth checking if you can work with an existing group first.

Starting out

You don't have to offer every possible service, and certainly not from day 1! Decide how much commitment you are willing to put in, and tailor your services accordingly.

You could start by using existing sources of information to pass on to the people who call you. Then, as you develop more contacts in your area, you can start to work with others, produce your own information sheets, and perhaps set up meetings.

Try publicising using simple flyers in local clinics, libraries, on community notice boards, and newsagents' windows. Some local papers have listings for local events, where you may be able to publish details of when and where your group meets. You may also be able to use local radio stations.

You may be working on your own, or as part of an informal network, with perhaps one or two people sharing the workload. However, if the group becomes any larger, or you start to raise funds, it would be sensible to appoint a group committee with a chairperson, secretary and treasurer. This can help co-ordinate and plan meetings and events, as well as sanction the spending of any funds or subscriptions you might raise. It is very important to make sure that any fundraising is supervised and proper accounts are kept. Many funders expect you to have a bank account with two signatories for all payments.

Offering telephone support and advice

- Many local contacts receive telephone calls from all over the country. Making long-distance calls in response to messages left on answering-machines can be costly, so you might want to set up a message that asks people to call back later
- It can be helpful both for you and those who contact you to have set hours when you will be available
- Focus on the issues raised by the caller. Although you are both likely to be dealing with RSI, their concerns and problems may be different from yours. You might want to consider looking for a local counselling or advice line course you can attend
- There is nothing wrong with admitting that you don't know the right answer. Keep a list of agencies to whom you can refer callers for more detailed advice. If possible, these should be local, or have a local contact
- Know your limits. Don't try to offer information on topics you are not qualified to speak about. In particular, be very careful when offering advice on medical and legal issues
- It is unwise to make negative statements about someone (a particular doctor or therapist, for example), even if you genuinely know they have been unhelpful to people with RSI conditions. In extreme cases, this could expose you to legal action. It is much better to pass on details of those practitioners in whom you do have some confidence, and leave it up to the person who contacts you to make their own choice

- As you build up awareness of treatment and other services available in your area, you can start to compile lists of contacts to pass on to those who call you
- Try to develop relationships with professionals in the area who might be willing to accept referrals or offer advice

Using literature

There are many sources of information on RSI issues. Some of these are on the Internet, and others are books and other printed publications.

You can start to compile your own information sheets by discussing the issues with others in your group, and by listing the sources of local advice, information and support you have found.

The RSI Association has a range of factsheets on different RSI issues. They can be downloaded from our website. We also send out single copies by post. These factsheets may then be printed out or photocopied and distributed freely 'as is,' to provide a useful resource pack.

Please do not copy/extract material and use it in your own publications, as this is in breach of copyright law. This applies to any information you obtain from books, publications or websites. Short quotations are normally allowed provided you acknowledge the source.

Meetings

These can offer mutual support, especially for those who have recently developed problems, or act as a forum for exchanging news and information.

You could use the meetings to circulate any literature you have produced or gathered from other sources, or to exchange books and other publications that members have obtained. This can make the meetings more attractive to potential members. It may also be helpful to suggest collecting a small sum to pay for refreshments, but don't forget to keep a record of any money raised.

As the group develops, you may want to hold events to publicise your work and raise awareness of RSI issues in the area, perhaps in collaboration with other local organisations.

Some groups invite speakers to make themselves better informed about new developments, or gather first-hand information about treatments or coping strategies. This also promotes greater variety, encourages new people to come, and adds to the excitement around the group. Local practitioners and therapists are one possible source.

The benefit to speakers is that exposure can bring them into contact with potential clients, enable them to achieve greater awareness of local issues and concerns, and bring credit to themselves and their profession for work in the community.

You might also want to approach representatives from local agencies and information providers. Consider involving local businesses in your events, as employers are becoming more aware of the importance of RSI prevention in the workplace.

Some ideas for possible meeting places:

- Community centre
- Hospital meeting room
- Local charity or other not-for-profit organisation
- Union branch office
- Library (libraries often keep lists of meeting places in the area)
- Church hall
- School or college meeting room.

The Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) in your area may also be able to give you information. There are over 300 of these in England. Contact the National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service for details of your local CVS.

National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service

177 Arundel Street
Sheffield
S1 2NU

Tel: 0114 278 6636
Fax: 0114 278 7004
Website: www.nacvs.org.uk

RSI Awareness Day

International RSI Awareness Day occurs on the last day of February each year. The RSI Association organises events to coincide with this, and there is much that can be done locally as well. You could contact your local media, preferably with an individual's story that can be used to add a "human interest" angle to an item about the Awareness Day. This would also help to publicise your group.

Finally, if you require details of local RSI contacts or have questions about this factsheet, please don't hesitate to call us on 020 7266 2000.