

Action for Happiness Brighton

How our local group is run – why are we successful?

Paul Tofts April 6th 2016

The Brighton group of Action for Happiness is successful; here I summarise how we operate and what I think are the reasons for our success. Since our group is dynamic and continually evolving, see the footnotes to links for up-to-date information on our situation.

A. Corgis and distributed leadership: We have a core group of about 7 co-organisers (a term from Meetup¹); these are abbreviated to corgis. Each corgi has a well-defined group of areas of responsibility, typically 1-3 in number². These can include various kinds of events, media liaison, fundraising etc. Typically each activity has 2 corgis, often with one leading. There is no formal overall 'leader'. With this design we hope to protect against burnout (of a single, possibly driven or even 'charismatic' leader). We avoid detailed discussion of every detail of each activity we plan, asking individual corgis to lead in their area. We invite about two new corgis each year, aiming to have a clear idea of the areas in which they will make their contributions. We try to have a diverse group (gender, age, country of birth etc).

B. Corgi meetings: these take place about every 2 months, in someone's home, from about 6:30-9pm. There is a mixture of efficient business meeting, eating, in-depth exploration of harder topics, and socialising. Previously we met in pubs (which are usually too noisy), and we had long tiring detailed meetings (which drove everyone mad).

C. Meetup does most of our event administration for us. There is a small cost (around £8 per month). Events can easily be created and modified by corgis. People have to sign up to Meetup (and check their preferences to avoid receiving too many unwanted emails). Previously we used a home-made web site³ which worked but required continual updating by a single person. We also had an emailing list which needed continual support. The RSVP system in Meetup is causing us problems as many people say they will come and do not show, squeezing out other people who would like to come. Currently we have 1700 members (who are informed of our events).

D. venues and events

a) big meetings: For talks and big meetings (30-70) we are fortunate in having an arrangement with a well-disposed licensed venue (Latest Bar⁴). We can use the venue for free, and we bring in enough customers who buy enough drinks to make the whole operation financially viable. We also ask for voluntary contributions of around £2-5 from the audience, as they come in the door (see section E below).

¹ <http://www.meetup.com/ActionforHappinessBrighton/>

² See our current group: http://www.actionforhappinessbrighton.org.uk/AfHB_more

³ <http://www.actionforhappinessbrighton.org.uk>

⁴ Latest Bar Brighton: <http://thelatest.co.uk/musicbar/>

b) Happy Cafe: this runs regularly in a cafe free⁵ of charge. Again the participants buy drinks; this makes it financially viable for the owners. The events are led, with drop in options at any time. Smaller cafes can also be dropped into.

c) smaller events (talks and workshops) are held in cafes, sometimes with a charge.

d) outreach: increasingly we are invited to local fairs and events on the well-being theme, where we might give a short talk, run a workshop or have a stall.

E. **money:** our principle source is collections on the door. Currently we keep cash in various places. We are investigating setting up a bank account; however wary of rules for Clubs and Societies which require an AGM. We give speakers expenses (for travelling), and acquire publicity material (badges, posters, cards, brochures), mostly from national AfH. We are adjusting some of the material to give local contact information.

F: **why are we successful?**

- a) We have good leadership (see above). No one individual is doing too much. If a corgi needs a rest they can gracefully step back a little, and ask for someone else to take over. If a corgi goes under a bus, we can survive. Corgis have a range of backgrounds, strengths and comfort zones.
- b) Brighton and the surrounding area are full of open adventurous people.

⁵ Emporium: <http://88londonroad.com/>