Appendix A

Reasons men might give for not joining an activity, group or club

These lists should be read in conjunction with the handbook

Staying Connected:

A handbook for involving men in groups and clubs

A list of reasons a man might not join a group

The following lists were generated by workshop participants brainstorming in small groups, and are mainly expressed in the way that an individual might express them.

The reasons fall into three main categories: psycho-social aspects, health and capability aspects, and practical aspects.

Psychological aspects

No interest – reluctance

These are aspects that could be related to depression or fear of moving out of a comfort zone, or they could be genuine expressions of the individual's situation.

- I know about it but it just doesn't interest me
- It sounds boring
- I'm just not a joiner
- It's not for me
- I'm happy as I am
- I prefer my own company, would rather stay home
- I've got my routine – I don't want to change
- I have other interests
- This is one of those groups where they just sit around feeling sorry for themselves

Fear of first step

These are aspects that could be related to a concern about getting involved in something new where there is a fear of being trapped into something he won't like, or a real concern about being part of a social group where self-disclosure is expected. Not everyone wants to share their life story. This list contains many aspects that can be managed through the way the group is promoted and presented and then the way the person is made to feel welcome. Not wanting to go alone is an aspect shared by many people and is possibly the key point to take from this list.

- I might not be made welcome
- It could be run by bullies or cranks
- The leaflet said I had to join but I want to check it out first
- It's hard to rock up by yourself
- I don't know anyone there
- I don't want to admit I have an unfulfilled need
- I lack of confidence, I'm nervous, timid – it's too scary – but I don't want anyone to know this
- They might get my phone number and harass me
- I don't form friendships easily – it's all too confronting
- I have difficulty dealing with new situations and places
- Maybe I'll go next week
- I don't know what to expect - will they be similar to me?
- I'm unsure about being out as a single person rather than a couple (widower)

- I have to go shopping that day
- I might not like the food
- No-one likes what I like
- I don't understand what I will be doing when I get there
- I don't want to go by myself
- They won't want me there
- I've heard bad things about that group
- They might think I am a paedophile (for volunteering with children)
- I was very confronted when they said I had to undergo a police check

I won't fit in

The aspects listed here contain more real, rather than imagined concerns – some of which can be addressed, but others will be outside the scope of the group or organisation to change, modify or make compensation for.

- Feel financially inadequate (I'll be the 'poor' member of the group)
- It could be cliquey
- I know who the members are and don't like them
- Feeling socially inadequate, especially if he has been a long time alone
- Experienced discrimination previously
- Language difficulty
- Poor literacy skills
- Getting to know people requires self-disclosure - don't want to share background
- No real contact with people
- No social skills
- Poor English conversation skills
- Perception of the group

Women / Men

Some men prefer a men-only situation, others prefer, or are happy with, a mixed group provided the men are not outnumbered by women.

- It is limited to men
- It's mostly women
- I'm not ready to meet women - could be pressure to 'date'

Not wanting 'welfare'

This list contains aspects related to sense of self, the need to feel independent and capable, and the way others might think of him. The way the group is presented is very important in overcoming these barriers. Something as simple as a non-stigmatising group name could overcome some of this reticence.

- Don't want to be a member of a 'charity' or 'welfare' group
- My pride wouldn't let me join (too proud to think they need a group)

- I don't need anyone to help me – I can manage by myself
- People will think I need help
- People will think I am weak
- I don't want to be a burden to anyone

Health and capability aspects

Some of these aspects are difficult to overcome with any tactics. While being in a group can be good for mental health, it is not easy to overcome the effects of depression and anxiety to get motivated to join a group.

Compensating for and overcoming a physical disability or limitation should be easier and dealt with regardless. However, loss of hearing in an environment of background noise can be very isolating and distressing. Group members would need to be coached in ways to ensure someone with hearing loss is included (eg speak directly to their face, not to the floor). *Note: loss of hearing was mentioned in almost all 'characters' created in the workshop.*

People who have grown into older age with a disability are usually more able to accept help and supportive technology to keep active. However, people who experience a gradual decline in abilities generally have a reticence to accept help and supportive technology and tend 'adjust' their activities accordingly – that is, they start limiting their activities.

Mental health

- I'm told I am too grumpy, so best not to inflict myself on others
- I'm too depressed to think about being with others
- I haven't got over the death of my wife
- I'm not interested in other people
- I'm not used to company

Disability and reduced capability

- Increasing frailty and chronic health problems can cause worry about having an 'incident' out of home
- Hearing problems makes group setting or public places difficulty/uncomfortable
- Physical access to the venue is impossible, difficult or undignified
- I can't hear the instructions and information on the phone
- I can't walk very far
- I might need the toilet when I am on the bus
- I can't sit down for long
- I don't like eating in public (denture problems)
- I can't hear them anyway, so no point in going
- I don't want them to make special arrangements for me
- Non-verbal person – social activities focused on conversation is confronting

Practical aspects

The following lists probably have the most genuine reasons for not joining, particularly in terms of transport. Some will be due concern for the unknown, such as suddenly being confronted with an unexpected cost. Others will be due to existing commitments that leave little energy, mental or physical, to think about joining a group, even if it were to benefit them. Taking time to understand the situation using personal contact is important in overcoming some of these barriers.

I can't afford it

- Could be expensive
- It costs too much
- May not have enough money

I'm too busy

- I'm too busy with family responsibilities
- I'm caring for a partner most of the time
- I have lots of medical appointments, so do not want to commit to a regular time each week
- I'm over-committed with other things
- I've always got "too much to do" (but not doing much at all)
- My wife has an appointment and I have to drive her
- I have to stay home - the hospital will call and tell me when my operation is scheduled
- I have to look after the grandkids
- I can't leave my pet alone as she is not well

I'm too old/not old enough

This is an issue that is not easily overcome, and is a reminder that not all older people want to spend their time with other older people. While those in the 75 plus range might like to be with people who are younger, those who are 55-60 don't necessarily want to be with people 80 plus - a full generation difference. Where age diversity is apparent, pictures in promotional material should represent this.

- I'm too young to be with old people
- It's only for old people
- I'm too old for that sort of thing
- It says it is for the old people and I'm not one of them

Getting there

- I can't get there easily
- It will take too long to get there / too far to travel
- I can't get there at all
- If I get picked up, will I get a lift back home again?
- There is no nearby parking to the venue
- There is no footpath to get there from my house/bus stop

- The bus ride is too long
- I'll be a burden as I can't walk far
- It starts too early for me as I have to get my wife through her morning routine before I go out
- The meeting times are just not convenient for me/just clash with the only other thing I do in the week
- I have work commitments - I do shift work or casual work and can't commit

No information

Lack of information is a difficult issue: while there is much information about services, social clubs and special interest groups available, knowing where to look is another matter. Not everyone knows about community directories usually compiled by local councils. Regardless, the information in these directories is by definition short and limited to the name, meeting place, and time and perhaps a few words about the purpose or aim. There may also be a lack of confidence or motivation to look for information in the first place, and therefore readily available information is not noticed.

- I haven't noticed any information about groups in my area when I've been out and about
- No-one has told me about any kind of group or club
- I don't think there would be a club for what I am interested in
- I don't understand what it is really about (perceptions rather than facts)
- If someone talked to me about it and invited me along, that might interest me
- Someone said to look online, but I wouldn't know what to put in Google to start searching
- I rely on my daughter to give me information about things