



# No right turn

**A collection of tools and approaches to support grassroots responses to the far right**

**In this booklet you will find a collection of writings from various people all based on practical experiences of organising in grassroots groups. The idea is to support people setting up anti-fascist groups in their communities, giving some guidance to avoid repeating mistakes that have been made by others. The focus is on working collectively, without leaders, to create effective groups. Some things will be more relevant than others – this has been put together in a rush, with things magpied. Just take what is useful!**

**Inside you will find out about...**

- Developing autonomous groups
- Working without rules
- Things to consider to encourage people to become involved
- Making meetings work, encouraging people to talk, discussions without people dominating
- A basic guide to publicity
- How to hold productive community meetings
- Tips for working with refugee-led groups
- Communication – phone trees and triangles
- Excerpt of a recent article on building anti-fascist communities
- Short bit on burnout

**NO NAZIS ON  
OUR STREETS!**



# Developing Autonomous Groups

## INTRODUCTION

Autonomous groups are useful tools that can be used to challenge power inequalities within groups and within wider society. They are also a way of working without a leader/s. For autonomous groups to work well, everyone has to have access to and understanding of all relevant information, and be involved in decision making. This way everyone feels included, and is far more empowered and inspired to act.

Working in autonomous groups uses skills around involving and including people, without the need to compromise in the face of more powerful interests. This leads to real empowerment and inspiration as people have the ability to make a difference to their own lives. Autonomy has been experienced and developed through direct action movements, and the skills we want to share here are based on our experiences with an autonomous squatted social centre in Leeds.

## FORMATION

Autonomous groups are often formed by people who are frustrated that they are not being listened to by others in positions of greater power. They may take the form of women organising as a group within a male dominated resident's association, or young people on an estate who feel left out of their local community forum. For groups like these, autonomy can serve their interests better as they don't have to apologise for who they are and what they feel, but can just get on with what they want to do about it.

The first step is to get together as a group, check what unites you and decide your aims and objectives:

- Do you give yourself a name, and if so does it reflect what you are about? For example, Year 11 Against Fascism
- Who can and can't join your group? For example, would your group include Year 11 teachers?
- Will your group constantly be open to new people, or will you benefit from being a closed collective who know and trust each other?

## SUSTAINING

One of the main reasons that autonomous groups are formed is to challenge power inequalities. It is therefore important to be aware that there are power relationships, and inequalities, *within* your group.

- Be aware that those who have the most time, energy and enthusiasm can have the most influence over a group (leading to a "hierarchy of the most committed").
- Actively use groupwork skills (see page on involving new people in groups) and give yourself time as a group to reflect and evaluate how well these skills are challenging power inequalities within your group, and within your work as a group.
- Sustaining the group is the responsibility of everyone in the group.
- Investigate making group decisions by consensus – basically *everyone* in the group agreeing with an idea, working through disagreements, not just going to a vote.

## EXERCISE: HOW TO COPE WITH LOTS OF TASKS WITHOUT A LEADER

- when there are many tasks that the group has taken on, it may be useful to group these into similar areas.
- write these up as headings on blank sheets of paper, such as: Publicity, Getting new people involved, Banner making.
- people can then write their name and contact details against the area of work that either interests them or in which they have experience.
- these smaller working groups will need to meet on their own, and report back to the main group on progress made.

## NOTE:

- you may want to make sure that each group has a mix of experienced people and those with little experience who want to learn and contribute.
- smaller groups can be a better way of allowing people to join in, and can be more efficient for day to day tasks. Smaller groups can also be easier for people to develop trust.
- remember that responsibility for the actions of working groups lies with the whole collective. You will have to tell someone if you are unhappy with their actions, and give them praise when it is due.

## SURVIVING

The majority of people are not used to working in autonomous groups, and may even have trouble working *with* autonomous groups. Your group should be constantly aware of threats to how you have decided to work, external as well as internal. For example:

- there may be attempts to co-opt you, bring you into line, with other people's agendas. This may come from national and membership organisations, older and more established groups & people, police liaison officers.
- beware of alliances with official organisations which may seem useful, but are actually highly unequal and may be threats to your autonomy
- as your autonomy helps you to be more active, vocal and perceptive, be aware of interests that may try to divide you from natural allies, who may as yet be less active.

## WORKING WITHOUT RULES

### Introduction

If the group is running without any **written** rules, it is likely that there will be some **unwritten** rules. These could come from a set of beliefs or a way of doing things that is accepted as normal practice by the group. If these unwritten rules are not known or understood by all members of the group you are going to run into problems.

'Hulme Refugee Support' was founded and run by a group of refugees and asylum seekers living in Hulme. The group got on very well at first and for two years managed without any written aims or rules at all. Then, as new people became involved, some disagreements began to arise. Some of the members wanted the group to start running advice sessions. Other members felt equally strongly that the group should focus on running sports activities. There was no recognisable way to call a meeting. Both groups of members claimed that they were 'Hulme Refugee Support', that the room they used in the community centre was booked for them, and that the money in the bank belonged to them and not to the other group. When the community centre management committee tried to find out which group was renting the hall, it got two answers, and no rent.

*From: Organising in Voluntary and Community Groups: Competence Pack (1993)*

Neither a group agreement nor a constitution will prevent problems like this arising, but they can help sort things out when disputes do arise.

### A group agreement

A simple way for everyone in the group to have a clear picture of how the group works is to create a "group agreement". This is like a set of rules, except that the process of writing the agreement involves all members of the group, and no single person alone enforces what is agreed, as everyone is responsible.

Allow a minimum of 30 minutes to come up with a group agreement. Once everyone has arrived, ask a question like: "What things would make this group work well for you?"

You can arrange for people to respond to the question in several ways:

1. Start a group discussion, with comments being written up on flipchart paper for everyone to see.
2. Ask for comments on pieces of paper, one comment per sheet, and group them together on the wall.
3. People start chatting about the question in pairs or small groups.

Once you have drawn out people's ideas, then you can start going through them and see how they can be turned into practical ways of working.

For example, "It is alright to disagree" may be written on one of the pieces of paper. How would this work practically? You could add "by trying to challenge what a person says, not attacking the person

themselves", as in the agreement shown below.

A group agreement should be the responsibility of the whole group (you might all want to sign it), not just a chair or leader. It should also be seen as a living document, so date it and be prepared to make changes. If you write out the agreement on flipchart paper it can go up on the wall at each meeting and remind people how the group operates. It can be as detailed or as brief as the group wishes.

### **Example of a group agreement**

#### **Group Agreement - July 2008**

- It is alright to ask questions
- We all have different experiences – please try and respect everyone's views and contributions
- It is alright to disagree – by trying to challenge what a person says, not attacking the person themselves
- Try not to talk over other people, but to listen to whoever is talking
- It is OK to change our minds, or opinions
- We will end meetings on time

### **A group agreement can help form the basis of a constitution**

A constitution is a more formal document, but can be based around an existing group agreement. Constitutions can deal with issues of:

- Defining and limiting legal responsibilities
- Getting funding – most funders require to see a constitution
- Showing accountability and openness
- Clarifying responsibilities within the group

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### **Contact:**

# Checklist of things to consider in encouraging people to become involved in a new or existing group:

- ✓ Each member could bring a friend or neighbour to the group. Word of mouth and encouragement are the most effective ways of involving new people
- ✓ You could act as a mentor for a new member, explaining references to previous actions and uses of jargon, and generally checking they're alright with everything
- ✓ If you see someone new arrive, welcome them, talk to them... don't ignore them or immediately turn paranoid!
- ✓ Share out tasks among members, from planning actions to facilitating meetings. If you are working on something, try and include at least one person who has never done that particular sort of work before. Work jointly.
- ✓ Thank people where it's due. When things are going well, say so.
- ✓ Publicise your achievements, where this is possible without being legally liable for your actions! If you can't say "we've trashed 3 test sites this year" because you've got your contact details on the same poster, at least let people know that you've been "actively campaigning against GM testing", or something similar.
- ✓ Plan activities that encourage wider involvement sometimes, and make sure that all the usual suspects DO get involved, and talk with new people. What might seem like a "soft" action to you is what might really get someone into things.
- ✓ Try one of meetings at different times, for a talk or video, and on different days to a regular meeting you might have.
- ✓ Recognise the value of people's different life experiences
- ✓ Take account of people's different commitments and abilities to commit time and energy

## Practical considerations

- How accessible are your meetings? For example, can a wheelchair user physically get to your meeting space?
- When do you hold your meetings? Try different meeting times and days, and ask people when is better for them. Consider young people, parents and carers.
- Empower small working groups to get on with particular work, reporting back to the main meeting for support, questions and the OK to continue with that work. These smaller groups should try and have someone new involved, not made up exclusively of regulars or the most experienced.
- Let people add to the agenda which can be passed around before a meeting starts
- Where do you publicise your meeting and actions, if at all? If you want to do something about a gender imbalance, or want to work with more black and minority ethnic groups, does your publicity/word of mouth (a) go to where these people will see or hear about it? (b) welcome them explicitly to your group? (c) encourage them to get involved?
- During meetings, do you challenge put-downs or discriminatory remarks? Do you as a group have an understanding of equality of opportunity and what practically this involves doing? Do you set aside time in any meeting to consider these issues and how they affect your group?

## **What new people can bring to your group:**

### **Contacts and information**

Extend your knowledge of who's who and who's up to what

### **Social skills**

Conflict resolution experiences and knowledge of different cultures

### **Practical skills**

From minute taking to engineering, who knows what you might learn

### **Organising skills**

Someone who wants to and can facilitate meetings, or plan actions well

### **Ideas and humour**

Opens up new perspectives, and is kind of fun

THERE MAY EVEN BE A MYTHICAL HUMAN BEING ENDOWED WITH ALL THESE QUALITIES...

## **As a group:**

It is very useful and effective to employ techniques such as:

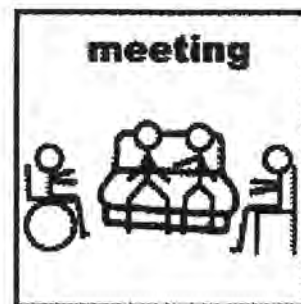
- Talking about aims (what you're about) and objectives (realistic, practical stepping stones towards achieving your aims) and writing these out against a timeline.

*For example, an aim is to involve more new people*

*Objectives could be*

- *by advertising meetings publicly (within two weeks)*
  - *by appointing certain people to welcome newcomers (now)*
  - *by including someone new on the next action (at first stages of planning)*
- Monitor how effective you are.  
*For example, are new people coming? Where did they see the meeting advertised? (try not to cross-examine new people)*
  - Evaluate your aims and objectives after an agreed time.  
*Look back and spend time as a group seeing what worked and what didn't, and think about what lessons you can learn from this.*

# Making meetings work



There are many different ways to run a meeting. It is always worth planning a meeting so it goes well. If the group is new, and there is only one person or just a few of you organising the group, you can be in a position where there is a lot of news and decisions to be made. You need to think about the rest of the group. For them they may be hearing the news you are presenting for the first time. You may be getting familiar with what the group has to do – set up a bank account, writing a constitution, applying for funding – but how do you pass on information so that everyone else can make decisions that are clearly understood.

Here are some ideas to help you:



## **Have an agenda that everyone can see**

Use a large sheet of paper stuck on the wall (flipchart or an old poster) and write up all the different things that need to be talked about. This will help everyone else in the group keep track of where the discussion is going.

## **Check everyone is happy with what is on the agenda**

You may need to explain why certain points are written up, but try not to get distracted into talking about the points themselves yet. You want to check if there are any changes or additions – other people may have information to bring to the meeting too.



## **Ask someone to take notes of the meeting**

Also known as 'minutes', these record the discussion and any decisions made. If they involve an action being done by someone, the minutes should include the names of people who are going to do the work.

You may want to ask someone in advance to take minutes so they can be prepared. If you are organising the meeting you should bring pen and paper for whoever takes the notes. It might be useful to buy a notebook so that all meeting minutes can be in the same place for future reference.



## Running the meeting

How you run the meeting will depend on how many points are on the agenda and how formal or informal you and the rest of the group want it to be. Explain to everyone that you want to go through the agenda points one by one. If it is something you have been working on, by all means introduce the news that you know of. If someone else has been doing that work, invite them to tell the group what the news is. Some people may feel shy to talk in front of a group, so be encouraging and supportive. If people interrupt with their own views, ask them to wait and let the person who has been doing the work finish off their report first. Then invite to comment on what has been said – especially questions to clarify what has been said. When you think a discussion has got as far as it can go, see if you can try and

- summarise what actions have been agreed
- who has agreed to do the work
- when it will be done by

It can be useful to write up the agreed actions on the paper on the wall for everyone to see. Then you can move on to the next point on the agenda.



### Take a break

Don't forget to take a break during the meeting. People will take in information differently, so it can be helpful to allow people to have a cuppa or a smoke and chat with each other more informally. Don't let a break drag on too long though, or turn into the meeting ending.

### Summarise what has been agreed at the end

It can be helpful to summarise all the agreed actions and who is going to do them at the end of the meeting. This can help make sure that everyone is singing the same tune. It can also be a positive ending, so that the whole group can see things are happening. A summary of who is doing what will also show who is doing the work – if it is all one or two people, and this is highlighted, this is the group's chance to change that by splitting the work more equally.



### Date of next meeting

Don't forget to agree the date of your next meeting and where it is going to be. If you want to take turns at planning for and leading the meeting, who is going to do this next can also be decided, as well as who will take minutes next time.

## When are meetings held?

- ❑ What time of day does the meeting take place?
- ❑ Some people are nervous of going out at night. Others are working and cannot come during the day. It is impossible to get a time that suits everyone – but holding several meetings at different times of the day means most people can get a chance to attend.
- ❑ Do you check that the date of any meeting does not clash with important holidays, or religious festivals, for different religions.

## Where are meetings held?

Some venues are not suitable for all.

- ❑ For example some people may not be comfortable entering a pub. Others may not wish to use a particular religious building. Some people may not come to a certain area or place – it may be too 'posh' or too 'rough'.
- ❑ Is the building and the room accessible? Access needs vary and you cannot assume that people apparently in the same situation have the same needs.
- ❑ Where it is possible, do you ask people beforehand whether they need extra support to attend and take part.
- ❑ Some people may be unable to use public transport and may have no private transport. Are arrangements made to enable them to attend?
- ❑ Are people with walking difficulties, or in a wheel chair, able to easily get into the building and use the room?
- ❑ Are there suitable toilet facilities, including some accessible to wheelchair users?
- ❑ Are induction loops and signers available where-ever possible?

## Is free childcare available for the parents of young children?

It is easier to pay for childcare costs rather than provide a crèche!

### Holding the meeting:

- ❑ Can everybody hear what is being said?
- ❑ Is there good lighting?
- ❑ Is information such as the agenda, available in a large print version?
- ❑ Are chairs arranged so that no-one is sitting in an isolated position?
- ❑ Is the meeting dominated by individuals or groups?
- ❑ Often some people feel excluded or intimidated from participating by a few dominant individuals, or one group claiming to represent 'the majority.' Training is available on chairing and managing meetings.
- ❑ Does the meeting go on too long?  
Some people cannot sit for a long period. Others, such as carers, have other responsibilities and cannot spend a long time in discussion.

### **Encouraging people to talk**

It is usually helpful, before or after your introduction, to go round the group and ask them to introduce themselves. At the same time get someone to volunteer to take notes on the flipchart.

To encourage people to talk you can:

- go round the group asking for answers to the questions that the workshop has been asked
- ask for examples from relevant experience
- target people whose introductions suggest relevant experience and ask them to say something.

### **Preventing people from dominating the discussion**

In most small groups one or two people are likely to dominate the discussion. Your job as a facilitator is to keep them under control. Do not shirk it: being nice to them means failing the other group members.

Among the techniques you can use are:

- Insist on asking other group members for their views
- When other group members give their views, do not allow people who have already had a lot to say add anything
- If necessary, be formal. Insist that anyone who wants to say something must raise their hand and be given permission to speak - and then only notice the hands of people who haven't said much
- In extreme cases, tell the people who have dominated the discussion that they have had more than their say and you only want to hear from other people.

### **Keeping the discussion to the point**

You will probably need to remind the group at some points what it is supposed to be talking about. There is nothing wrong with seeing and noting the connections with other issues; it may be helpful to write down the connections. However, if you do not keep to the point you cannot report back to the plenary session - at least, not on what you are supposed to report back on.

### **Bringing the discussion to a conclusion**

- Keep an eye on the time. About ten minutes before you are due to finish, tell the group that you need to start winding up
- Remind the group what the original questions were and draw attention to anything on the flipchart notes that answers those questions
- Do not allow new issues to be debated. Keep the group focused on the need to reach conclusions
- Get the group to agree three or four key things it wants to feed back to the plenary session
- Remind the group that the full flipchart notes will form part of the conference record - so anyone's cherished point which is not in the feedback will not be lost.

## A BASIC GUIDE TO GOOD PUBLICITY

### Introduction

This briefing sheet was written to support groups taking action on climate change, but it is quite adaptable to any community groups with messages they want to get across.

To create the big changes necessary to avert climate chaos we need to involve lots and lots of people in taking action both in their personal life and in their communities. How do we best get our message across to them? There are lots of options, but whatever you do, don't just rush into the first thing that springs to mind. Think about what's most effective for your campaign.

### Good publicity helps you:

- ✓ To spread information
- ✓ To get more people involved
- ✓ To increase pressure
- ✓ To be more effective

### 1. What are your key messages?

As campaigners we tend to overwhelm people with information – issues are complex and there is so much we care about. But people are bombarded with lots of messages every day. To get our message across we need to focus on a few simple and clear things that will stick in people's minds. You need to be clear about the aims of your campaign. What are the three most important things to get across to people? These are your key messages. Write them down in a couple of short, clear sentences and focus on them in the publicity. You may need to reword them depending on who you are talking to.

### 2. Who is your target audience?

People adopt different roles at different times throughout their week: employee at an oil company, parent, shopper, car driver, walker, tax payer. The same person will be receptive to different messages at different times.

Think about who you need to talk, and at what time to achieve your aims. Put yourself in people's shoes. What is it they will care about? What will interest them? Look for a way into a conversation.

Targetting people with messages and information relevant to them will be very effective.

### Checklist

- ✓ What do you want to get across?
- ✓ Who do you need to talk to?
- ✓ What do you want people to do?
- ✓ What's the best way of telling them?
- ✓ Do we have the time, skills and resources to do this?

Publicity is about getting people on board and on your side. Be creative and welcoming. If you are confronting people with the consequences of their actions, criticise their behaviour rather than the individual person. Acknowledge people's ability to change and give people options of what they can do to help.

Think about how you come across: is wearing that favourite "car drivers are scum" t-shirt really going to encourage car drivers to listen to your argument?

### 3. What do you want people to do?

All your communications should contain a clear call to action and give people concrete things to do, whether that's joining your group, cutting car use, coming to see a film, boycotting a product, writing a letter, or growing their own vegetables.

Always supply your contact details so that people can find out more or get involved in your group. Having sources of further information ready is a good idea too, for example you could include web addresses on leaflets, posters and newsletters.

- If you do not understand a question, ask the journalist to repeat or explain it. Do not be drawn into topics you know nothing about, you have good reasons to take action, feel free to remind the interviewer of that.

### Radio and TV Interviews

In addition to the above, bear the following in mind:

- Ask whether the interview is live or recorded, if it's recorded you may be able to have another go if you mess things up.
- Speak clearly and more slowly than usual.
- Vary your tone - it needs to match your message. Let your natural enthusiasm come over, this is one of your main strengths.
- Talk to the interviewer and make eye contact with them, ignore the microphone and camera.
- They may only use a really short clip from the interview - as little as 4 or 5 seconds, so make sure you have some sound bites prepared, snappy phrases that cover your 2-3 main points.

### Providing your own pictures and video footage

If you have the skills and equipment you can post your own pictures and videos of the action on a website. If you want the media to use these then you'll have to make sure that:

- They are of high quality (look good, and at least 300dpi for stills)
- Available immediately - ideally while the action is still going on.

### Using the Letters page

Letters to the press can be an effective way of getting your message out to people, particularly local papers where you have a good chance of being published:

- Keep letters short and to the point. They shouldn't be a big rant, but come over as being reasonable.
- Focus on getting a few points across clearly. If you have lots of points to make you could split them between different letter writers.
- Letters are more likely to be published if they contain personal or professional knowledge or experience - so mention these.

### Media Contacts

You can find contacts for many local newspapers at [www.planningsanity.co.uk/media/news.htm](http://www.planningsanity.co.uk/media/news.htm)

Find out about local / national alternative media newsletters and email lists. Here are two:

Schnews - national weekly email newsletter: [www.schnews.org.uk](http://www.schnews.org.uk)

Rising Ride news sheet: [info@risingtide.org.uk](mailto:info@risingtide.org.uk)

Websites where you can post your story yourself:

[www.earthfirst.org.uk](http://www.earthfirst.org.uk)

[www.indymedia.org.uk](http://www.indymedia.org.uk)

[www.climateimc.org](http://www.climateimc.org)

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### Contact:

Seeds for Change [www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk) Tel: 0845 458 4776

# HOW TO HOLD PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITY MEETINGS

## Introduction

This is a checklist for anyone who is organising community group meetings, this may be the Chairperson, the secretary or a facilitator.

### 1. Time is everyone's most valuable thing

Wasting people's time with dull, long, unnecessary and unproductive meetings, will cause anger for wasting their time and for taking them away from what they wish they had done instead of coming to the community meeting. Always ask yourself: should this meeting be held; is it necessary?

### 2. The reason to hold a meeting is to plan action

Your community group exists for action, not meetings. It is very easy to slip into the opposite; meeting because it is the first week of the month, for example.

### 3. Plan the meeting

Pre-plan the meeting as if you were putting on a play:

- Remind people to come. Don't rely on the fact that you sent out the agenda. Call all members three days before the meeting. Have as many people as possible make the calls. Remind each member of the: date - time - place of the meeting.
- Delegate tasks such as: serving soft drinks - welcoming people - layout of the room - clearing up afterwards.
- Tell people why the meeting is important, the main issue, and the decision that has to be made. Ask each person directly "can you come?" Then say, "Good, I'll be looking forward to seeing you".
- Always plan for fewer people than you expect. Empty chairs are a "turn-off". Let people coming into the meeting get a chair from the chair stack. Don't let the layout of the meeting room be dictated by the caretaker.
- If the sun is hot make sure the blinds are pulled long before the meeting starts. If the weather is cold, check the heating gets the room warm before the community meeting starts.

### 4. The Agenda

- Have a printed agenda which is sent out at least 11 days before your committee meeting. If you have a building, then stick-up the agenda on the front door.
- Pruning the agenda is your job, whatever length it starts or grows to.
- Limit the total length of the meeting; write the closing time on the bottom of the agenda.
- Put peoples names beside agenda items so they know they are needed at the meeting:

*Item 4. To decide on what to do about the overflowing river in the Muddy Flats part of our neighbourhood. [Please see action report prepared by Ms Jian Fan]*

- Put the proposed date of the next meeting at the bottom of your agenda.
- If you have an item on the agenda with the title "Any Other Business"; get people into the habit of telling you beforehand what topic they will raise under that agenda item.

## 5. The Chairperson

- The chairperson is the leader of the meeting and has the job of moving the meeting forward.
- You need to know your Constitution, many community groups lose sight of their reason for existence so always have a copy available at the meeting.
- The chairperson needs to know before the meeting what has to be decided for each item on the agenda.
- The chairperson may decide to ask each person at the meeting what they think about an item on the agenda, so everyone at the meeting gets a chance to voice their opinion.
- Arrange that as chairperson you sit near the door, so you can see people coming and welcome them.

## 6. Decisions

- Have your own proposal ready for each agenda item. Never have an item on the agenda if you have no idea what the answer is in terms of action to be done by whom, when and how much it will cost.
- It is no good getting to an agenda item and then chairperson saying; "What would you like to do?"

*Item 5. "We need to debate if we are going to support or not the Mayor's proposed voter registration campaign ". "Ms Liao Zijing I believe you have a proposal to start us off?"*

- In a democratically run meeting, two groups have rights. The majority on a topic has rights and so does the minority. It is the right of the majority to end the debate and move on to the next item on the agenda.
- One way to settle differences of opinion is to vote which can avoid going round-and-round in circles.
- The person at the community meeting, who writes down decisions, is often called the minute's secretary. The minutes are a record of the exact wording of decisions made. Not a record of who argued with whom over which word to include or leave out.
- At the start of the meeting check there is somebody to take the minutes.

*Item 1. Before we start, I see our Minutes Secretary is absent. Can I propose that Ms Liu Yang stands-in and takes the minutes of this meeting: all agreed? Thank you Ms Liu.*

- With complicated decisions, it is useful to ask the minute's secretary to read out the wording they have written down.
- Agree who will do what by when and inside what budget

*Item 6. Agreed Ms Gao Bo [assisted by Youth Club members] will produce cardboard posters size A0, spelling out the words "NO CUTTING DOWN OF TREES IN CERAMIC CITY ROAD". To be done before August Bank Holiday Monday at a cost of all materials not higher that £30.*

## 7. After the Meeting

- At the end of the meeting stand by the door; and say "Goodbye" to everyone who came.
- The chairperson needs to check the follow-up on decisions within the timeframe agreed.
- Call or go and see those absent from the meeting to bring them up-to-date with the actions agreed. Tell people the date of the next meeting.

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH REFUGEE-LED GROUPS

### Introduction

This is a list of practical tips to consider when working with refugee and asylum seeker-led community organisations. There is as much variety among refugee community organisations as among any other community organisations, so it is important to remember to start from where the groups are at and not make assumptions about their needs.

#### 1. Go the extra mile

Refugee groups tend to be under a lot of pressure due to the acute needs of their members. Always remind people about appointments the day before and ring round to remind groups about training days. Contact groups in between meetings to see how things are going.

#### 2. Remember the language barrier

Allow for interpretation where necessary but if it's not required be prepared for written work to take longer. Make sure that people have understood things by asking them to repeat back at the end of a meeting what they think has been agreed. Provide a clear written record to take away with a copy for the group to provide an example of record keeping. Allow groups to have access to your notes if they lose track of their own records.

#### 3. Allow for orientation and network locally

If there is an event in an unfamiliar venue, meet up with groups at a well-known landmark or your office and go to the training together. Take the time to explain where Support Agencies are, what they provide and how to get there. Offer to accompany people on a first time visit. Make sure groups are networked locally- have they got the key contacts in regeneration teams, Councillors, Sure Start etc.?

#### 4. If in doubt, visit

Go to see the group in action, doing their activities. Insist on being invited to meetings, even if just as an observer. Be prepared to go at a weekend or in the evening. AGM's are also a very good indicator of how a group is operating - go to them as often as you can.

#### 5. Learn about immigration issues

Immigration legislation is constantly changing. Try to stay updated through websites and newsletters. Get good signposting information in your office for legal centres and emergency help for asylum seekers.

#### 6. Partner up with "specialist" refugee support agencies

Run training courses at the venue of a refugee-specific agency that refugee community organisations are familiar with. Work with specialist development workers to tailor courses to refugee groups' needs.

#### 7. Get the caterers in!

Ask refugee community organisations to cater at your events- as well as the culinary benefits for you and financial gains for them it will help to build relationships.

#### 8. Signpost to Refugee Agencies

For refugee community organisations to be able to network and influence policy, ensure that they know about existing advocacy initiatives and Forums. Support people attending these Forums by preparing together what they want to say or find out, and chat together afterwards about how well it went, what they would do differently next time. If there are issues about the Forum itself make sure this is tackled - such as people not speaking clearly enough.



## 9. Bear in mind cultural/ religious variables

If you are working with Muslim communities you will need to get Halal food and avoid Fridays for meetings as it is the main day for prayers. Find out when Ramadan will be as people will be fasting.

Buy the SHAP Calendar of Religious Festivals and keep their summary charts handy so you can avoid planning events on the main festivals. (SHAP telephone number is 020 7898 1494 [www.shap.org](http://www.shap.org).)

## 10. Attend refugee social events

Take the time to attend social events. You will get to know people better, learn more and gain trust. Social events can also be an opportunity for refugee community organisations to organise – don't expect everything to be done in formal meetings, so attending 'social' events can be essential if you are supporting the development of a group.

## 11. Contact and support your nearest Refugee Forum

Contact [forum@mrsn.org.uk](mailto:forum@mrsn.org.uk) (Manchester's Refugee and Migrants' Forum) for contact details of your local or regional refugee-led forum, representing the interests of individual refugees and refugee community organisations.

## 12. Rely on facts not myths

[www.refugee-action.org.uk/information/challengingthemyths.aspx](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/information/challengingthemyths.aspx)

[www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk/asylum/rasgame/refugee.htm](http://www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk/asylum/rasgame/refugee.htm)

## 13. Support individual anti-deportation campaigns

As well as financial support, help with media work, lobbying and campaigning skills, offering photocopying, circulating information of events through your own networks and offering venues for meetings can make a lot of difference. See [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk) for information about anti-deportation campaigns.

### Some definitions:

**Refugee** - In 1951 the UN defined a refugee as: "a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her origin and is unwilling or... unable to return to it." In 1984 this definition was expanded to include people who have fled because of war or civil conflict. The UN also talks about environmental refugees.

**Asylum Seeker** - When people escape from their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they usually apply for "asylum". This is the right to be recognised officially as a refugee.

**Migrant** - A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. Migrant workers are key to certain parts of UK society and economy, such as the NHS.

**Illegal Immigrants** - An illegal immigrant is someone who enters a country without the proper papers. However, many illegal immigrants are genuine refugees.

**Refugee Community Organisation** - RCO is the term used to describe any refugee-led community group. This can range from a small relatively informal group through to registered charities providing services to their community members.

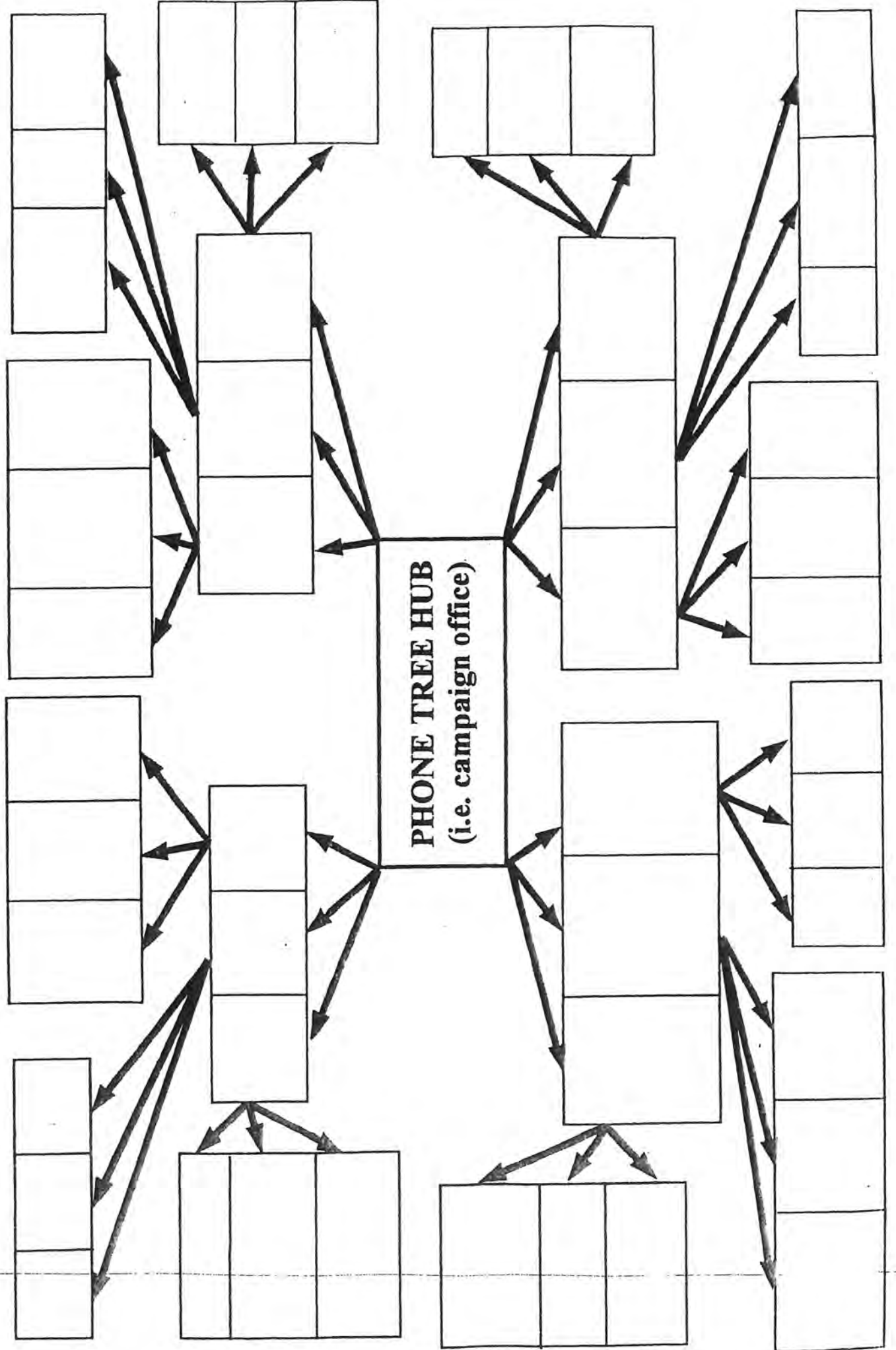
**Border and Immigration Agency (BIA)** - This is the part of the Home Office (renamed in 2007) that deals with immigration policy and manages reporting and detention centres

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### Contact:

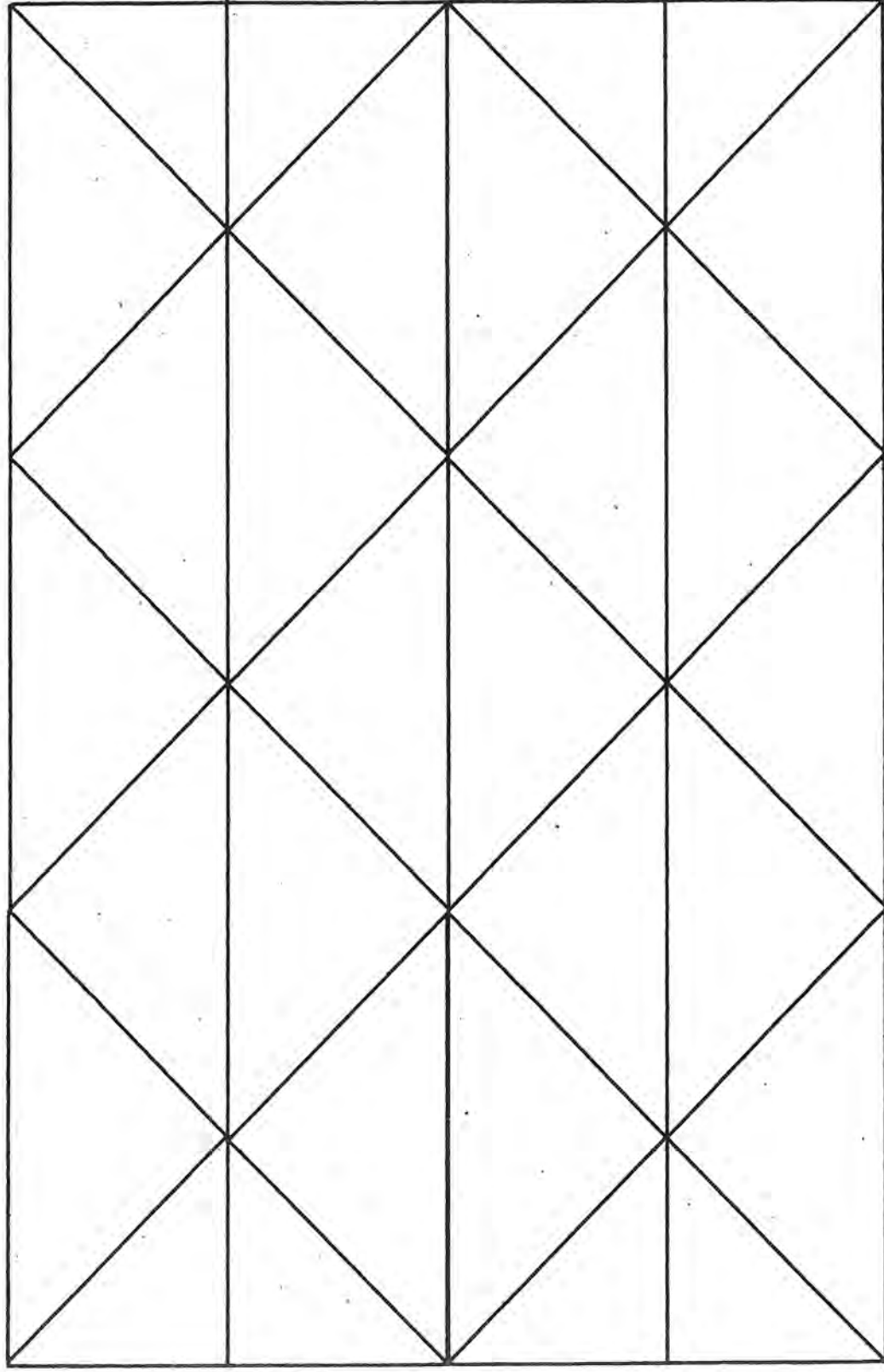
Manchester Refugee Support Network, St. James Centre, 95a Princess Road, Manchester, M14 4TH  
Tel: 0151 232 7420 [www.mrsn.org.uk](http://www.mrsn.org.uk) [forum@mrsn.org.uk](mailto:forum@mrsn.org.uk)

STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRE OF THE NEWBURY LOCAL PHONE TREE (1995/6). EACH BOX REPRESENTS A LOCAL PERSON.



## Phone Triangle

These are good for a quick response in an emergency, such as if immigration police are detaining a certain group of people, as anyone can start the chain. Write the name and phone number of a group member in each triangle. Whoever has a message calls the people in the triangles touching theirs and asks them to pass the message on. This gets repeated until everyone on the phone triangle has been contacted. You will need to give a copy of the completed triangle to everyone in the group.



# Building Anti-Fascist Communities

Excerpt from Occupied Times <http://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=12260>

Anti-fascists have historically focused on ridiculing fascists' adherence to biological racism. This argument is increasingly redundant in a Britain where dual-heritage relationships and children are now quite common and regarded as uncontroversial. This victory for anti-racism presents new problems as well as opportunities. Biological racism has been publicly repudiated by all elements on the electoral right, either genuinely or tactically. The political mainstream has the State and the media to propagate their message. In response, we must learn examples such as the 24 year struggle of the Hillsborough Families Campaign, who have shown how to sustain the necessary but less visible work of building resilient relationships in working class communities towards the goal of developing enduring structures of support, mutual aid and solidarity. The militant anti-fascism of groups like Anti-Fascist Action used a dual approach of ideological and physical opposition. Fascist street movements are a physical force so militant resistance is a necessary and a noble tradition but it can only act as a short-term measure. We must organise our communities on a longer timescale.

There are a few key principles that we believe can make our project lasting and flexible for the path ahead. Above all, the national anti-fascist movement must become decentralised, non-hierarchical and democratic. Unlike both UAF and Hope Not Hate, we do not require a professional organised centre but a horizontal network of organically linked groups. Our communities are diverse and there is no one-size-fits-all to anti-fascist activity or community organising. Being non-hierarchical means trusting people who are directly affected to lead their struggle, not push them to follow "experts" from outside. We recognise that the children of migrants have done more to defeat fascists than any "anti-fascist movement". Being democratic means enabling all voices to have equal say, developing structures for reflection and debate, holding elections for roles with delegated responsibility that are recallable and are rotated. This creates the space for new ideas to flourish and builds a greater sense of trust and mutuality.

We also need groups not to work with the police. The police have a shameful history of infiltrating and smearing anti-racist community campaigns, most infamously including the family and friends of Stephen Lawrence. The police protect fascists and escort them into our communities. Through their National Extremist Unit they hold "intelligence" on almost 9,000 people on their database, including legal firms and "radicals" like Jack Straw or perhaps Occupied Times readers. The police exist to protect the racist status quo, not assist us in challenging it. They are not our allies but quite the opposite.

The strengths of anti-fascism are rooted in a rich and proud history with clear goals, if not allies. Its major weakness lies in the fact that anti-fascist ideology is contradictory and largely discredited by the current political context. The traditional ideology of anti-fascism i.e. (anyone but the fascists) needs to be abandoned, in favour of a new practice: building working class solidarity through community organising which is both principled and consistently anti-fascist and anti-racist. We advocate these ideas not because they are politically convenient but because they work. In a climate where Muslims are shot by the police and migrants like Jimmy Mubenga are killed by deportation staff to no public outcry, the rebuilding of class solidarity is crucial. This work has been tried and tested not only in South London, but also in Bristol, by Brighton Anti-fascists and by anti-fascists in Barking and Dagenham. We have seen the success of community work and outreach in various UAF groups, Yorkshire & Humber, Leicester and also in Sheffield.

The Anti-Fascist Network, which organises on the principles we have outlined, may be well founded, but their numbers are currently too small to be effective. Other national groups like UAF are still important when building counter-demonstrations against racists and fascists. Alongside the existence of the old must grow a new network which does the slow and gradual community work that has been neglected on a national scale. Alongside the Anti-Fascist Network we are currently working with mosques, faith, migrant and community groups to build local community networks of anti-racists/anti-fascists against homophobia, sexism and ableism, towards lasting working class solidarity.

## Why burnout is a political and movement issue.

There seems to be an attitude that "if I want to burnout that is up to me" but as we don't work in isolation but in groups then peoples attitude and mental health affect the people around them.

People who burnout are often the most committed activists. The reasons to work so hard are numerous and growing. This is not meant to be an attack on them. But to argue that we need to pace our selves and look after ourselves and those who we are working with. They are often the kind of people who pick up the work that know body else is doing, there bye over loading themselves to breaking point.

People don't usually burnout over night it takes some time and during that time they can be difficult to work with, disruptive, depressive and making their recovery time longer.

Lots of people come back after a burning out, but unfortunately lots of people don't.

Whilst people burn out they can create an atmosphere that is difficult to work with and therefore unattractive to new people getting involved.

If we learn to manage our selves and help our colleagues we will hopefully be able to continue the resistance for as long as we want, not be forced to quit because of burnout.

Often we put each other under pressure to work hard. The people who are near to burnout often set the pace and guilt trip - consciously or unconsciously the result is the same.

What can we do about it?

When people set limits and say they need time off we should respect their decision.

Complement each other when we see good work. Peer approval is free, use no energy and very helpful.

Try not to guilt trip yourself - or others

If you are feeling over loaded or can't do something you said you were going to do, it's better to be clear that you can't do it rather than people thinking it's covered when it's not.

Do something that takes your mind completely off work....sport, partying, being with children, being in nature.....