

Partnership working

'Our volunteers and staff belong to one organisation reaching out to people wherever they live in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We risk reducing the reach of our work, and diluting our support, if we don't take every opportunity to act as one organisation. We must find the best ways to combine our efforts and share information, locally and nationally.'

Sally Light, MND Association strategy

Since the Association started, we have achieved a lot for people living with MND and their carers, and rarely in isolation. By looking for ways to develop partnerships and work collaboratively with others, both within and outside of our organisation, our impact grows daily.

As a branch/group there are many ways partnership working can enhance what you do locally and nationally. Working with others can extend beyond what happens within your own team, and enhance what you can achieve in support, awareness, fundraising and campaigning.

What do we mean by working in partnership? Partnership working is about looking for and using opportunities to

- share information, knowledge and experience
- share ideas
- share resources and time
- share support

in order to make a greater impact.

You may already be involved in some forms of information sharing. For example, the use of the Information Exchange where we share knowledge within the Association on the support we are giving. Or the branch/group information leaflet you send out to health and social care professionals (HSCPs) and organisations in your area and even your newsletter you send to regional staff and David Niven House. These are all aspects of sharing and informing each other in the work that we do.

Partnership working between branches and groups

Branches and groups are all different due to the volunteers involved and the range of skills and experience they bring. One may be particularly focussed and skilled in the type of support meeting it offers whilst another may have more expertise and experience in raising funds or campaigning.

Establishing contacts with neighbouring branches and groups puts you in touch with new and different people offering alternative ideas and experience to learn from. It works both ways. Do not underestimate how much another branch/group could learn from you too. Again, and again volunteers say how valuable and motivating it is to be in touch with others in the support for people living with MND.

Key steps to getting started

- Identify your neighbouring branches and groups. If you are not sure where all your neighbouring branches and groups are this information can be found either through our national website, your Area Support Coordinator or the volunteering team.
- establish a contact within those branches/groups. This could be their branch/group contact, or it may be through their chair or group leader. Phone or write to introduce yourselves and include your branch/group leaflet, newsletter, details of your website and social media address
- ask if they would like to send you copies of their newsletter and branch/group leaflet, and offer to link up with their website and social media page
- offer an invitation to one of your meetings or events and ask if you may visit one of theirs
- offer to keep them informed of your branch/group activities and events throughout the year and ask if they will do likewise

Just keeping in regular contact with each other and sharing information is a useful activity. Being aware of what events and activities your neighbouring branches and groups are planning could help you with your programme of events. From receiving their information, you might recognise an obvious way to share resources by holding a joint support meeting or fundraising activity for example.

Regional forums and planning groups

In many areas branches and groups are coming together more formally to work in partnership through organised regional forums or planning groups. Meeting a few times, a year with regional staff, to share achievements, discuss regional activity and plan areas of collaborative working.

"It has been a real insight and a pleasure meeting other branches and finding out what they are up to and how they work together. As a volunteer it is heartening to know that so many people are working so hard for the same results! It's so worthwhile coming together in a relaxed yet structured way to share our thoughts and enthuse each other."

Sarah Milner, Secretary of Merseyside Branch – part of the North West Forum

Some examples of ways branches and groups have engaged in joint activities with their near neighbours

- one branch organising a talk on research and inviting their neighbouring branches and groups, and HSCPs to benefit.
- Association Visitors from one branch/group area providing telephone support for people living with MND into another branch/group area where there is a shortage
- neighbouring branches getting together to hold a joint social day for people affected by MND, their families and friends. Costs were shared between the branches.
- pooling volunteers from local branches and groups to cover larger events. For example, the Cheshire Branch had the opportunity to do a large fundraising event which needed at least 50 volunteers. By mentioning it at the North West Forum they were offered the extra help they needed.

"I feel these forums have enabled the branches to learn more about what is going on in our individual areas and we had support for our recent Eaton Hall fundraising event from Merseyside, Manchester and South Lancashire branches. Whether this would have come about without the forum, who knows."

Margaret Bailey from the Cheshire Branch – part of the North West Forum

- representatives from one branch/group attending a committee meeting of a neighbouring one to talk about and share their experience in a particular area, e.g. running a successful support meeting, or a fundraising event.

- branches and groups sharing the particular expertise of one volunteer in setting up their social media pages.
- pool funding to provide equitable financial support, as offered by the three branches involved in the South Wales Planning Group.

“South Wales is a large area, where some parts are not covered by a branch or group. Through coming together for mutual events in South Wales, the three branches have decided to combine our financial support and take joint responsibility for those uncovered areas. This ensures that people living with MND across South Wales have access to equitable financial support for their needs”

Maimie Davies from South West Wales Branch – part of the South Wales Planning Group

If you are not already part of a local forum and would be interested in taking part, please speak to your Area Support Coordinator (ASC).

Partnership working within the Association

Partnership working within the Association covers not only what happens in your branch/group locality but involves the wider Association too. Along with the involvement you will have with regional staff, there are the relationships you will have with the staff members of the various central teams in Northampton. Sharing information, ideas and best practice helps in all aspects of our work and we endeavour to keep you informed and involved in all areas of our work throughout the year. We know that this is important in supporting what you are doing for people living with MND, carers and their families.

Likewise receiving local information and knowledge from the branches and groups influences and enhances the focus nationally of the Association. We value local perspectives on issues that are affecting people with MND and often this will direct where we need to be, and who to work with to influence and effect changes.

Look for ways you as a branch/group can share, support and inform others about the work of the wider Association within your branch/group and the locality. For example

- share articles in your local newsletter about our work and achievements nationally
- use a link on your website or social media to direct people to recent news on the Association’s national site
- discuss them at your meetings
- encourage and enable people living with MND and carers to attend events such as Association conferences, national AGM and other events
- ensure representatives from your branch/group attend any Regional Discussion Forum being held in your area so that you can talk directly to our Chief Executive Officer and chair of the Trustees about concerns in your area for people living with MND and hear what other branches and groups are doing

Building partnership working outside of the Association

Nationally we develop and maintain a range of partnerships that strengthen and benefit our work as the leading charity on MND. For example, working with other neurological charities such as Parkinson’s UK, and the MS society we increase our influence on bringing about high quality, cost effective commissioning for people with MND. Also, our work with the Royal College of General practitioners to speed up referrals to neurologists and with the Royal College of Nursing to improve access to specialist MND nursing care.

Locally your branch/group can look for opportunities too. Useful contacts and partnerships can be drawn from lots of areas in your region.

For example

- through making links with businesses and firms who may offer sponsorship or fundraising opportunities and help in raising your profile. Your regional fundraiser can give you advice and support on how best to make an approach

- building a relationship with national and local government representatives – your local councillors, and your local MP could help with influencing care and services
- regional representations of bodies such as the Neurological Alliance and Healthwatch. Discuss how best to use participation in these with your ASC
- linking with the health and social care professionals, the MDTs and CC who are all part of the local care for people living with MND. With their permission include them in your mailing list and invitations to branch/group events. Ask your ASC if they are holding an education event for HSCPs locally that you can give support to and perhaps have an information stall at
- organisations such as the local carers groups and your local hospice
- voluntary organisations who may offer support and services, for example your local Volunteer Centre for your recruitment needs

Consideration of where best to develop your partnerships will depend on what branch/group time you can give and what will be most effective in terms of making a difference for people with MND, their families and carers.