



**Working in partnership  
with  
Prospects Across Scotland**

Information for leaders of ministry  
groups for people with learning  
disabilities

# Contents

## Thank You!

### General things to be aware of

1. Partnership with Prospects Across Scotland
2. Contacts for support
3. Training
4. Resources
5. What makes a group?
6. Linking up with other groups
7. Prospects Across Scotland website section for partnered groups
8. Copyright
9. Insurance

### Practical issues when running a group

10. Safeguarding
11. Minimising risk
12. Team working
13. Where and when to meet
14. Making contact with people with learning disabilities
15. Gathering basic information
16. Publicity
17. Finances for the group
18. Permission for photographs
19. Transport

### Activities at the group session

20. Every group is different
21. Worship
22. Music
23. Teaching materials
24. The Bible
25. Prayer
26. Language and communication
27. Involving people with learning disabilities at all stages
28. Finally...

## Thank you!

**On behalf of the people with learning disabilities who will be attending your groups and coming to hear and experience, perhaps for the first time, the message of our Lord Jesus Christ – THANK YOU for all that you are doing in your partnership with Prospects Across Scotland.**

It is our aim that this handbook will help you in the running of your group, and hopefully to avoid some of the possible pitfalls.

If you have questions which are not covered in this handbook, please do get in touch with the Prospects Across Scotland staff at any time. We are here to support you in this work in whatever way we can.

**Running a Prospects group is an adventure in faith**

**Prepare to expect the unexpected**

**Prepare to give - and to receive**

**Prepare to teach - and to learn**

**Most of all, prepare to be blessed in this wonderful work which God calls us to do, and to see God's blessing in the lives of those we serve.**

# General things to be aware of

## 1. Partnership with Prospects Across Scotland



Prospects Across Scotland works to support churches as they respond to the needs of people with learning disabilities.

Groups which are run in partnership with Prospects Across Scotland are run by the host church, or group of churches, and should be seen as an integral part of the ministry of those churches.

Prospects Across Scotland provides advice, support, opportunities for training and a range of resources to encourage and enable churches in this work.

## 2. Contacts for support

The Mission Development Co-ordinator from Prospects Across Scotland will usually be the first point of contact for support.



The Mission Development Co-ordinator can put you in touch with other groups in your area which is a great way of finding out how other groups are run.

The Mission Development Co-ordinator can be contacted for support with setting up a group and then for any ongoing support. Prospects Across Scotland produce a quarterly prayer diary and all groups are included in that with specific prayer points as appropriate.

## 3. Training

Hopefully by the time a group is set up, the leadership team will have been able to either attend a Prospects Across Scotland 'Skills Development Day' or will have had informal training through contact with the Mission Development Co-ordinator.



## **Prospects Across Scotland training days**

Prospects Across Scotland will organise at least 2 training days each year. These skills development days cover all aspects of running a group and offer the opportunity to meet up with and share with other groups leaders.

Training is important when a group is first beginning but also do think about training for new people who join the leadership team of your group.

The Mission Development Co-ordinator would also be happy to talk with you about follow-up or refresher training which may be appropriate for your group.

**Accessing other training** – do take advantage of other training which may be relevant. Many churches or denominations offer training on the **safeguarding of vulnerable adults**. It is important to be aware of your church's policy and procedure regarding safeguarding.

## **4. Resources**

Prospects has some resources available to help you in your ministry. Some are available at a cost, others are available without charge. Resources include songs, Bible teaching notes and teaching material. If you identify the need for a resource you cannot find, please contact us – we may already have something suitable or your request may prompt us to develop something.



For partnered groups and churches pilot teaching plans are available on the group leaders' section of our website [www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk](http://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk)

## 5. What makes a group?

Prospects groups come in all different shapes and sizes and follow different patterns of meeting. The one thing they have in common is the aim to make the good news of Jesus accessible to people with learning disabilities.



- **Style** - There are various styles of group meetings – some groups may meet in the style of a church 'home group' whereas other groups may have quite a mixture of worship, Bible teaching and activities. There are around 30 groups throughout Scotland and every single one is different!
- **Frequency** - Many groups meet monthly, others meet weekly, others have various patterns of meeting according to local arrangements. The important thing is to find what suits your group best.
- **Size** – The same applies to the size of your group. Some groups are small, some groups are larger...

**A 'group for one'** - If there is only one person with a learning disability in a particular church or area, then it is fine to have a Prospects group for one person. Perhaps it will start off as a 'group for one' but there is always the possibility that others may join in the future. It will certainly be a 'tailor-made' group and offers great freedom in suiting the style to the individual. (In accordance with safeguarding guidelines you would need at least two leaders for a 'group for one').

On the other extreme, many groups grow larger as they become more established. If a group grows so large that the leaders find it difficult to meet the varying needs of all the different group members, then perhaps splitting into smaller groups for particular activities or sessions may be advisable.

The numbers attending a group may change over time for different reasons. Please do not feel discouraged if your group has small numbers of people attending – this can be a very powerful ministry as you will get to know group members well and be able to respond to them on a very individual basis.

## 6. Linking up with other groups

In some areas, the leaders of Prospects ministry groups meet together on a regular basis for a prayer and encouragement style of meeting.



Even if there is not one of these meetings in your area, it can be a great source of support to meet up with other Prospects group leaders. If you are a new group leader, the Mission Development Co-ordinator can put you in touch with an experienced group leader in a 'buddying' situation if you feel this would be useful.

Visiting other Prospects ministry group meetings can be a source of new ideas and can often help to answer some of the questions you may have. As groups tend to differ greatly according to those who attend, and those who lead, ask the Mission Development Co-ordinator to suggest groups which may be most appropriate.

## 7. Prospects Across Scotland website section for partnered groups



The Prospects Across Scotland website is available on [www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk](http://www.prospectsacrossscotland.org.uk) and covers a range of different subjects, news, information, resources, events, etc.

As a leader or team member of a group which is partnered with Prospects, you can register for the group leaders' section of the website. We are currently developing this area, but we envisage it will be a place to share information and experiences.

## 8. Copyright

Most worship songs are subject to copyright control which applies to the reproduction of songs - either in the form of printed copies or via a projector. To comply with copyright control, which is a legal requirement,



churches obtain a licence from Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI). If your Prospects group is operating within a particular church, your group should be covered by the church's licence. Do check with the person who is responsible for this within the church.

If your group is operating independently of any one church, perhaps run by a coalition of people from several churches, you should consider applying for a licence. Further information is available from Christian Copyright Licensing International on 01323 436100 and [www.uk.ccli.com](http://www.uk.ccli.com)

## 9. Insurance

Prospects Across Scotland only has insurance for events they run e.g. holiday weekend and annual celebration. However, Prospects Across Scotland insurance does not cover local group activities as the groups are part of their own churches.



If you want to know more about insurance cover for your group, please speak to the person responsible for this in your church.

## Practical issues when running a group

### 10. Safeguarding

Due to the nature of groups working in partnership with Prospects, safeguarding the adults who attend these groups is of utmost importance.



Safeguarding is the responsibility of the church which runs the group. Each church will have its own safeguarding officer and policy and the group will fit into this safeguarding arrangement in the same way as other ministries within the church.

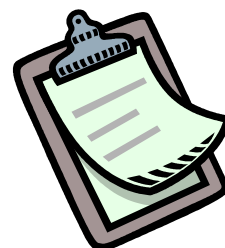


Where a group is run as a joint ministry between two or more churches, a decision must be taken about which church will take responsibility for safeguarding issues.

PVG checks should be done through the church. Prospects recommends that all regular members of the leadership team should have up-to-date PVG checks in line with the church's safeguarding policy.

When a new group partners with Prospects it will be asked about the church's safeguarding policy. What is most important is that the group leader and team know exactly how to contact the church safeguarding officer if any problems or concerns do arise, and that they are familiar with the safeguarding arrangements of the church.

## 11. Minimising risk



It is important that everyone can come along and enjoy the group in a safe environment.

We must do everything possible

- to reduce the risk of accidents and incidents
- to know what to do if an accident or incident takes place
- to be aware and know what to do in the event of a concern or a disclosure about abuse or harm. If you have any concerns or witness actual abuse it is the law that you have a duty to report it – it is not a choice.

### **Accidents and Incidents**

Look around for any potentially dangerous items/areas. If you see anything, do something about it or report it to someone who can act.

Things to look out for include:

- Trailing cables
- Uneven ground/floors
- Exposed wiring
- How hot drinks are served
- Triggers to behaviour that can be challenging to others.

The premises where you meet must have an accident book to record any accidents or incidents. Groups may also want to have their own accident/incident book – it is good practice to make an entry in it after every meeting. Just put the date and any information – this will include entries saying “No accidents or incidents”.

### **Abuse or allegations of abuse or harm**

Sadly, vulnerable people are much more likely to be abused than other people. We have a duty to report any incident of abuse or any disclosure or allegation of abuse regardless of where this happened. If someone tells you of an incident of abuse, even if it has happened elsewhere, the law says that we must report it.

The main different forms of abuse are:

- **Physical** - including hitting, slapping, pushing, and kicking
- **Sexual** - including sexual assault or sexual acts to which the person has not consented
- **Psychological** - including emotional abuse and verbal abuse
- **Financial** - including theft, fraud and exploitation
- **Neglect** - including ignoring medical or support needs.

If someone makes an allegation of abuse you must act on it – here are some ‘**do** s and **don’t** s’:

#### **Do**

Stay calm.

Treat the allegation seriously.

Fill in a reporting concerns form – a sample form will be available on the group leaders’ section of the website.

Pass it on to group leader or church safeguarding co-ordinator in your church.

Ensure you have the contact details of the safeguarding coordinator in advance – don’t wait until there is an incident.

Try to attend protection of vulnerable adults training in your area.

Speak to your Mission Development Co-ordinator if you need more advice – however, as a church group, your first point of contact must be the church’s safeguarding coordinator.

## Don't

Dismiss the allegation.

Say you will keep a secret.

Don't ask too many questions – just listen and report.

The golden rule if you witness or suspect harm is

**Recognise, Report and Record** – then, once you have passed it on, it is for others to make the decision about what happens next – your role then is not to worry about it, and to pray.

## Some simple steps to keep everyone safe

- Don't be alone with group members – this is especially true of members of the opposite sex. (A Prospects 'group for one' would need at least two leaders).
- Do think carefully about offering group members a lift in your car.
- Don't offer anyone assistance at the toilet – family members or support staff must do this.
- Don't administer medication.
- Don't use physical restraint.
- Do speak in positive and reassuring ways – never shout.

## 12. Team working

Running a group needs team work and should not be centred on individuals. A good leader is one who delegates and encourages everyone in the team to participate. Regular planning meetings are important not just to discuss the programme but also to pray and seek God's guidance.



Think how you can include people with learning disabilities on the leadership team. They will have a great deal to contribute but you may have to make changes to your planning meetings.

Think about:

- Where and when will it take place?
- How long it should last?
- What about transport to and from the meeting?
- Is the language simple and appropriate?
- Is it appropriate to use visual aids?
- How will people with learning disabilities be encouraged to speak up?
- How you will check out if the person with learning disabilities has understood what has been agreed?
- Concentration span – may be short so plan breaks as appropriate to hold attention.
- Notes/minutes need to be in accessible format – simple language or audio as appropriate.
- If the person with learning disabilities has agreed to do something how will they be supported to do this?

While you may not be able to do all the above – just do the best you can – the effort will very definitely be worth it.

Within the team there will be various roles which need to be covered. These vary from group to group, but generally:

- Group leader/co-ordinator
- Speaker/ someone to lead the teaching for each session
- Welcomer
- Musician
- Refreshments organiser.

It is good if these roles change around and are not always done by the same person – that way the group is much more able to continue if one of the team is absent.

It is good to think ahead about how the group will run when current leaders are no longer available – think about getting new/younger people involved to keep the group going in the long term.

### 13. Where and when to meet

When choosing a venue for the group to meet, do think about issues such as wheelchair access, suitable toilet facilities, heating and parking.



The time, day and frequency of meetings vary enormously between groups. Don't be too ambitious at first – you can always build up the frequency or length if it feels appropriate in the future. Choosing a suitable time and day is important. Think about factors such as when other activities happen which your members may attend. If you are hoping that people from a nearby residential facility may attend your group, find out what might be the best time to plan your group. For example, it makes all the difference if you can avoid times when support staff change over shifts or when staff meetings are held.

### 14. Making contact with people with learning disabilities



Part of the planning will involve getting in touch with people with learning disabilities and letting them know about the group. Personal invitations are always the best. Contact Social Work Services in your area who can give you a list of residential and day services for people with learning disabilities. The local Carers' Centre will be able to put you in touch with parents/carers of people with learning disabilities. There will be charities working with people with learning disabilities in the area, such as Enable – perhaps they would welcome a short article for their newsletter.

### 15. Gathering basic information

The safety and wellbeing of group members is a top priority. You do not need a life history about people but basic information – name, address, phone number, emergency contact details and any other important information on things like seizure procedure or allergies are needed. A sample information form will be included in the group leaders' section of the website. The information on the forms is



confidential – please think about how they will be stored in line with GDPR requirements. If you are not sure about this speak to the person in your church responsible for GDPR.

It is important that this information is available for every group meeting. Make sure that a system is put in place so that those running each group meeting have access to this information, and it is not dependent on one individual - just in case that individual is suddenly unable to attend a group meeting.

## 16. Publicity

A good poster or leaflet will attract people to the group – there are some sample leaflets and posters on the group leaders' section of the website.



Try to make your publicity material as accessible as possible to people who do not read. This means including more photographs, pictures and symbols and fewer words. Clip art is very widely available and useful. You could also use some Makaton symbols but these may not be so easy to obtain.

## 17. Finances for the group

Prospects groups do not generally have high running costs. Running costs may be simply refreshments or possibly craft materials.

However, some groups do face larger expenditure if they must pay towards rent or possibly transport costs.



Some groups receive a financial contribution from their church or group of churches. Others may apply to local grant funders if there is a particular expenditure they wish to cover or hold a coffee morning or other fundraising event. Some groups ask for a small contribution from group members to cover refreshments, although most groups do not. This is very much an individual decision for each group to take and to review if the group situation changes.

Prospects Across Scotland is unable to allow groups to use their charity number for local group funding applications. If you are making a funding application, it may be appropriate to use the church's charity number but please remember to ask first!!

Many groups manage their finances through the church accounts. If a group finds that it needs to set up a separate bank account this should be done in the name of the individual group. Agreement will need to be reached on signatories for the account and how the finances are managed on behalf of the group.

## 18. Permission for photographs

Having photographs of the activities of your ministry group is always useful for encouraging other people with learning disabilities (or other potential leaders) to join your group. However, many of the people with learning disabilities in your group are vulnerable adults. You need to be very careful before using their photographs in publicity material or publishing them on your church website.



Prospects has a form which you can use to record someone's permission to take and use photographs. This is available to download from the group leaders' section of the Prospects website.

## 19. Transport

How people get to and from the group can be problematic so think very carefully before offering any form of transport. If you do offer transport think about everyone's safety when taking people in cars – it's a big commitment and who will offer a lift when leaders are unable to attend e.g. on holiday?



Some groups offer transport either by cars or minibus while other groups offer no transport at all and everyone must make their own way.

## Some things to consider:

### Do

- Think very carefully about offering transport and whether you can sustain it. Better not to offer transport at all rather than start it then have to stop – people find that very difficult to understand and it can cause great disappointment.
- Check your insurance if you are transporting people in cars. Most insurance companies will cover you for driving as a volunteer without any additional cost but many companies require you to inform them of this. The Association of British Insurers gives good advice on their website: [www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)
- Help people to check out bus routes/times etc but don't disempower people – many people with learning disabilities are very well able to travel independently.
- Consider the transport to the group as a separate ministry – are there volunteers in the church willing to offer transport to and from the meetings? If the church has a mini-bus could that be used?

### Don't

- Be alone with people in your car and especially people of the opposite sex – if you do you run the risk of allegations being made against you.
- Offer a lift to people you don't know who may be coming to the group for the first time.
- Be pressurised into offering transport – discuss this with your team, make a decision that is right for your group and stick with it.

## Activities at the group session

### 20. Every group is different

There is no official recipe for how to make a good Prospects group!

As every individual is created differently, so every group is different according to the individuals who make up that group.





Different leadership styles will affect the way the group develops, as will the needs, gifts and talents of those who attend the group. It is also often the case that a group will evolve over time as people come to know each other better, grow in confidence, and hopefully when people with learning disabilities begin to take a more active role in the various aspects of the group.

The important factor is to spend time getting to know the people who attend your group - to respond to their needs and their strengths. What works in one group may not work in another group. It is good to come together as a leadership team regularly to pray and to review the success of the group – looking at how well the group is communicating and teaching the Gospel, how individuals are responding, and whether more could be done to encourage group members to grow in their faith and to perhaps take a more active part in the running of the group.

Most group meetings contain a combination of many of the following aspects:

- Welcome – an important part of any meeting
- Sharing – listening to people's news, both happy and sad
- Bible Teaching and application – possibly including drama
- Worship – simple songs, use of signing, flags, instruments, dance, etc
- Prayer – speaking to Jesus
- Craft – if you have the skills, this can be a good way of reinforcing the theme and spending time with group members
- Refreshments – possibly using special refreshments for special occasions.

## 21. Worship

Worship is the expression of our love, admiration and joy to God. It is important that people with learning disabilities are able, as far as possible, to understand the meaning of worship and to participate as fully as they can, in whatever ways they are able.



The key to this is simplicity – both in the words and the music of the songs used and the ways in which worship is led. There are many simple worship songs produced by Prospects which groups often use. These are not childish songs but easily understood and easy to join in even without the ability to read.

Many mainstream worship songs are also successfully used by some groups. If a song contains a word people may not be familiar with, e.g. 'reverence', or a difficult idea, e.g. 'the Lamb upon the throne', take time to give a clear explanation so that people can understand what they are singing.

Some people with learning disabilities will not be able to join in with singing, many will not be able to read the words of a song, all have different ways of joining in with worship. Here are some ideas:

- Use songs the group has come to know very well
- Use echo songs, where people sing what they have just heard sung
- Use Makaton signing for worship songs
- Encourage people to enjoy worship – clap, dance or be quiet, whichever they prefer
- Have space in worship for people to express themselves through dance, waving flags, playing instruments, etc
- Use songs to reinforce the teaching of the session for greater understanding
- Involve members of the group in planning and leading worship where possible.

## 22. Music

If you have talented musicians on your team, that is wonderful – but please don't worry if you haven't. There are many groups which make use of CDs and Prospects also has DVDs of worship songs which include Makaton signing. It's also possible to download some



Prospects songs from places like Spotify, Amazon, Apple Music etc and some are on Youtube

The important thing is to enjoy worship and to encourage group members to participate as fully as possible.

If you don't have any regular musicians, why not invite some local musicians along to a group meeting as a different way of experiencing praise (both for the group members and for the musicians!).

## 23. Teaching Materials

The Resources section (section 4 above) summarises some of the teaching materials available from Prospects.

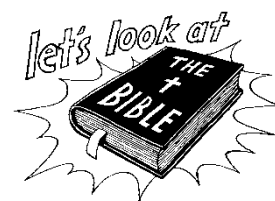


Prospects develops new teaching material every year, not least in connection with the Christian festivals at which we provide a teaching stream (e.g. local Keswicks). Some of these will be made available on the new group leaders' section of the website.

In addition, if you produce some teaching materials which have worked particularly well, why not make them available to other groups to use? Your Mission Development Co-ordinator will be able to tell you how.

## 24. The Bible

Prospects suggests that you use the New International Reader's Version Accessible Edition (currently only New Testament available). You can order this Bible direct from Biblica [www.biblicaeurope.com](http://www.biblicaeurope.com) or copies are available to buy at Prospects Across Scotland events and training days. The Easy to Read version of the whole Bible is more difficult to purchase now but it is available on Bible Gateway [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) if you want to print off specific passages. [www.easyenglish.bible](http://www.easyenglish.bible) is another website you may find useful.



When using the Bible in your ministry group meeting it is good to have it read by one of the people with learning disabilities, if possible. Many find it easier to read from a sheet of paper with the appropriate verses printed in bold using a larger font size, with greater spacing between the lines and with the verse numbers removed. Although it is a little more work to prepare your Bible reading in this format, many of those with learning disabilities really value this contribution they can make to their group meeting.

## 25. Prayer

Often in groups we concentrate on:

- the praise and music
- the Bible teaching
- the fellowship
- the drama and craft.



Of course, all of these things are important but prayer should be a top priority. It should be high because it is the thing that people can easily do when they are on their own, wherever they are and regardless of ability. Prayer is life-changing.

We can help people to focus on speaking with Jesus as their friend – they then focus on Jesus or God and not on the prayer and having to use the right words.

*“You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I’m no longer calling you servants because servants don’t understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I’ve named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything I’ve heard from the Father”  
(John 15:14-15)*

And so, prayer is talking with a friend.

There are many ways of encouraging people to pray in the group:

- Led from the front
- Echo prayers – leader says a line and then group repeat it

- Everyone joining in – to encourage people to start praying ask them just to say or sign something they want to thank Jesus for – maybe only a couple of words but it can be the start of their praying adventure.
- Pray for each other in small groups – leaders need to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to share concerns and to pray.

For some ideas to encourage prayer in your groups please see the prayer ideas leaflet on the group leaders' section of the website.

## 26. Language and Communication

As you prepare your group meeting programme it will have taken prayer, time and effort. It is, therefore, important that you think about how to communicate with group members in a way they can understand.



Using signs, symbols and pictures in written material will help make it more accessible to people who do not read.

You may also use Makaton signing in your talking and singing if this is helpful to group members – as you get to know people you will find out more about their communication needs. In some areas of the country Signalong is used rather than Makaton – people with learning disabilities and their carers can help you with this and they will usually be very happy to teach you – it's all about us learning more about Jesus and each other.

It is also very good to think about what we say and how we say it – don't worry about it but just be aware of the need to speak simply and clearly – we all get this wrong sometimes – just do your best.

Some of the language we use in church can be complicated and lead to misunderstandings and confusion for people with learning disabilities (and many others!!). Here are some examples:

**Abba** Father – must explain Abba otherwise people will be thinking about Mamma Mia!!

**Lamb** of God – to most people with learning disabilities they will be thinking of a baby sheep in a field – probably best to keep away from phrases like this.

Our God **reigns** – think how confusing this will be as most people will think this is part of a weather forecast!!

Just start to notice what you say and try to say it simply without using abstract concepts. Always remember to speak to adults as adults. As you speak simply your own faith will be deepened in an amazing way.

As you lead the group and especially in the teaching times it is good to ask questions to check if people have understood – this will help as you prepare future meetings. **Remember there are no experts in this** and it will become easier as you get to know people and how best to communicate with them.

## 27. Involving people with learning disabilities at all stages



As has been mentioned throughout this handbook, it is good to involve people with learning disabilities in the running of the group. Not only will this bring a new dimension to group meetings, it will also encourage the individuals involved to grow in confidence, to feel valued, and to move forward in their journey of faith.

Often when a group first begins, it may be almost completely run by the leadership team 'for' people with learning disabilities. However, as you meet regularly and come to know each other better, it may become apparent that individuals have certain strengths and gifts which could be shared with the group. Perhaps one member would like to lead a prayer. Perhaps one would like to do some Makaton signing for a song.

Many groups find that as the group develops further, group members can contribute more and more to the running of the group in many different aspects. This is an exciting stage to reach and wonderful to see individuals developing their own discipleship for Jesus.

## 28. Finally...

If you have read all 28 sections of this handbook – Congratulations!!



Please do not be put off by feeling there is such a lot to think about. These pages have been written to try to help you to aim towards getting things right from the beginning rather than by finding out the hard way!

Have fun with your group. Relax and enjoy the time you spend together. If you are enjoying the group meeting, that enjoyment will spread throughout the group.

Do get together regularly as a team and review how the group is going, making changes and trying out new ideas as you feel ready. Most importantly, spend regular time in prayer for the group and for individual group members and team members.

**May God bless you in this important ministry**

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