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Hello, I am Barbara Eifler, the Chief Executive of Making Music.

We are the UK membership organisation for 4,000 music groups (choirs and instrumental groups), comprising around 250,000 adult hobby musicians.

I am going to talk to you about finding, welcoming and keeping new people in your music group.

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Our members tell us their biggest problem is finding new people for their group and to keep the people they already have.

Why is this happening, they ask.

We are nice people. We are welcoming. Anyone can join our group!

So why are people not joining us? Why are people leaving?

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Well, perhaps there are some barriers for those people who could be interested in joining your group, or for existing people to stay.

These barriers could be in three places:

- 1) Before people join
- 2) At the moment of joining the group
- 3) After spending some time in the group

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Before people join:

- 1) Do people know about your group?
- 2) Are you telling people everything they **need** to know?
 - a. When and where you meet
 - b. What kind of group you are, what you do
 - c. How much it costs to join
 - d. What **you** expect from **them**
- 3) And: are you **saying** that they are welcome?

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Then, some possible barriers at the point of joining:

- 1) Have people been given the information they need before coming?
- 2) Have they been asked **before** they come if there are any adjustments you could make, to help them take part?
- 3) Is there someone at the door waiting to greet them, answer their questions, introduce them to others?

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And here are some examples of barriers for your existing group members, perhaps when their life changes:

- 1) They lose their job, they cannot pay any more, but they don't want to say that – so they leave
- 2) They have children, and cannot come to every rehearsal any longer, so they feel they are letting the group down – and so they leave

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The good news is:

Barriers are something you can find and take action to remove.

They are things you can tackle, things in your power to change.

But this is a journey and a process, and there are a few things you need to do to get ready

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The first is to discuss what your group is, and who it is for

For example, is it a Male Voice Choir, that is, a choir for men

Or is it a Lower Voice Choir, that is, a choir for men or women who sing in a lower voice

The name of the 'Brighton Free Choir' tells you instantly where it is, and that you do not have to pay, great clarity for potential new joiners.

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The second preparation is to consider what kinds of people your group is looking for.

'Everyone' is difficult to find.

Better to be specific: 'people from the Polish community'; or 'tenors' or 'young people under 30'.

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The final preparation is to make sure everyone in the group is ready for change.

This sounds easy, but it is not.

Often, one or two of you understand the need for change, and then find it difficult to bring everyone along with you.

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But why everyone in the group? Surely the decision-makers can do this on their own! They don't need to waste hours discussing this with everyone!

But they do.

Yes, decision-makers *could* take action to find new people, to remove barriers, to invite them to join the group.

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But then these new people start coming in, and they are perhaps different in age, sex or ethnicity from the rest of the group, or they are simply many, and new.

And if everyone is **not** OK with change and **not** welcoming, feeling perhaps overwhelmed, then the new people will be in the room, but ignored and still excluded.

They will leave again after a short time, and your group will be back where it started.

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So the whole group has to be on board for this journey!

Decision-makers lead, but **everyone** is needed to make change happen.

Decision-makers can bring new people in, but everyone is needed to make those people feel included and create a space where all feel welcome and able to take part fully in the activity.

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So: now you are ready to identify the barriers that could stop people joining or staying. But how?

1 – by asking **them**

2 – by asking organisations that work with the people you are hoping will join you (for example the Polish community centre, men's groups, the youth club)

3 – by asking regularly, because people's lives change

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Then: good news – you have discovered some barriers, you can take action!

But you are volunteers and worry that you don't have much time, or money...

But small actions make a difference over time.

And **showing** you are taking action will make a difference. People will think: they mean it, I **am** welcome!

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So: what can your group do?

1 – write a plan, set a deadline, make someone responsible for each action, review it regularly

- 2 – be practical, focus on what you *can* do
- 3 – start with the easy wins, so everyone feels there is progress
- 4 – and celebrate success

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One example.

A new person tells you before they come for the first time that they will find it hard to hear what the conductor says in the rehearsal.

You buy a small portable head microphone for the conductor.

The new person is happy, and so are 2 long-standing members, who were too embarrassed to say that their hearing had got bad.

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But you should never assume you know what someone needs, just because of who or what **you** think they are.

No autistic person is like another autistic person.

No disabled person like another disabled person.

No person from your community like another person from your community.

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Instead, you should always ask. Ask about barriers, ask about adjustments.

That means putting that person in charge, they don't have to explain or justify.

'I can't read' is enough. We don't need to know why, only how to help them take part.

Give everyone what they need, don't give everyone the same.

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In summary:

It is not enough to open the door when you are looking for new people.

You need to go out and invite them in.

And: put the kettle on for a welcome cup of tea.

For more information and resources on this topic, go to www.makingmusic.org.uk/resources

Good luck on your journey to more members!