



GATHER

A “Do It Yourself” Tool Kit for Creating Your Own Community

Learn, laugh and enjoy life.



THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Why Social Groups Are Important



Mark T. – Founder of **The Fun Bunch**

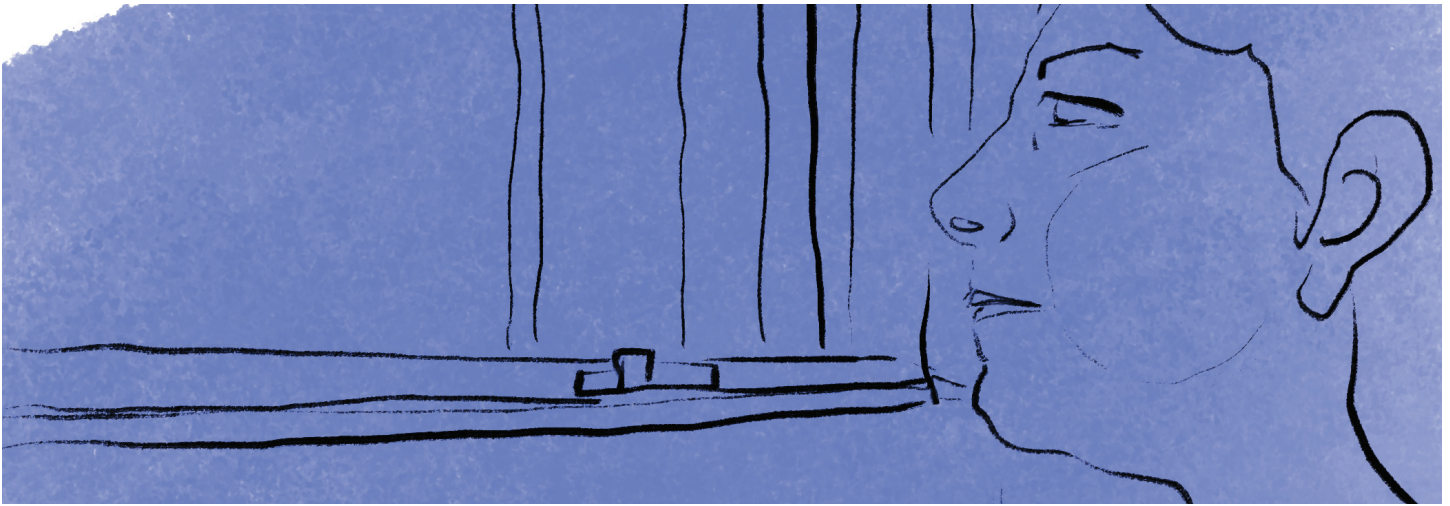
“I feel it is important to have and to be in a support group for learning disabilities as it’s important for one’s morale and self esteem. With a support group one can share success stories and brainstorm ways to work on things that are challenging. Members can assist with moral support and form lifelong friendships. The ambition is the overall success of each individual. Along with every success story comes a boost in self-esteem which is vital for the well-being of every individual with learning disabilities or challenges.”

Carla S. – Founder and former President **The Hangout Hive**

“You start a social group because you want to meet new people. You want to be supported, you share similar interests and you are respected. Members get to know you and you meet people that live around your area. Sometimes you can make friends, and friends can introduce you to another person. You may meet a person in the group and develop a relationship (which happened with two people in the group). You can offer rides to members in the group that live near you. A small group under 20 is nice because you know everyone’s names and can take leadership roles that gives you a higher self-esteem.

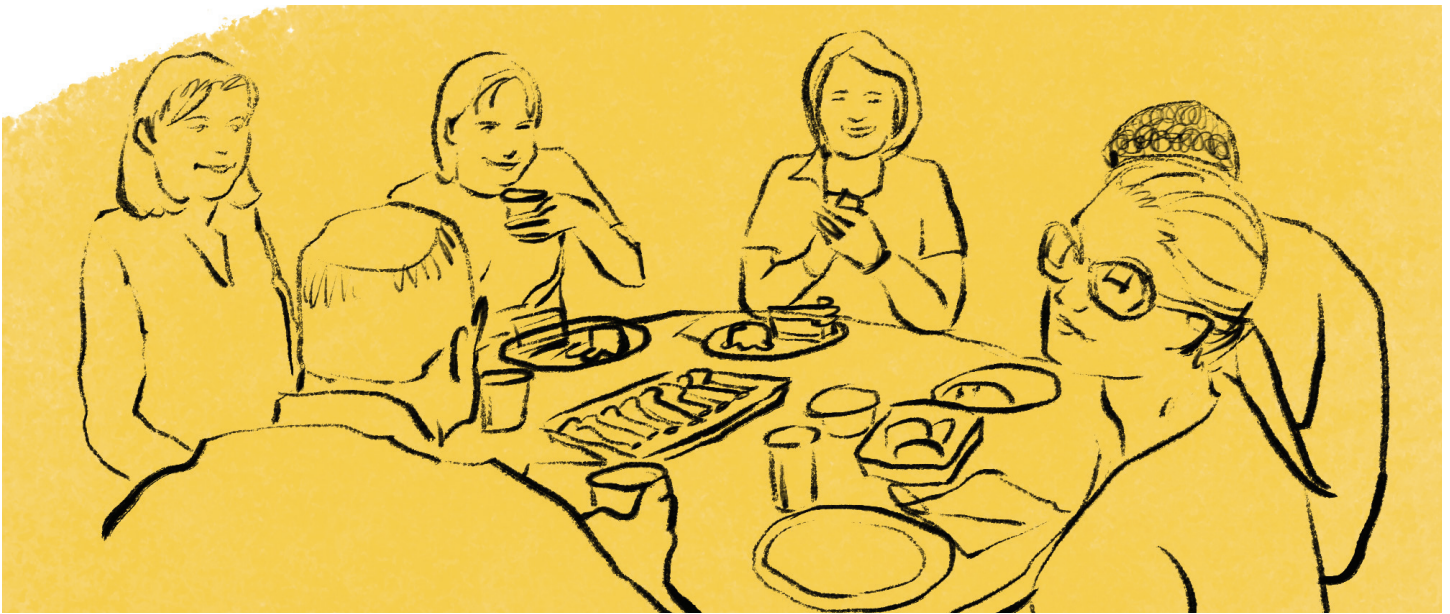
Richard B.I - a parent

“Setting up a social group for adults with disabilities is very much needed since this audience does not have many options for social interaction. The majority of support groups for disabilities focus on middle or high school students, but once they leave high school then there is a tremendous void. These young adults, in order to meet like individuals with disabilities, need a safe environment where there are no judgments or pre-conceived stereotypes. That’s where **The Hangout Hive** meets this need; a self-directed social group with a paid LDAMC (Learning Disabilities Association of Montgomery County) advisor to ensure everyone remains safe with options to get together in a non-threatening environment.”



Wishing there was a Social Group for Adults with Learning Disabilities near you?

If you and a friend or friends would like to organize a social group, we are offering our best suggestions in this “Do-It-Yourself Social Group Tool Kit”!



Drawn from our experience with **The Hangout Hive**, **The Fun Bunch** and **Expanded Horizons**, this Tool Kit covers: Suggestions on how to find people to join your group and some guidelines for keeping the group strong and morally centered.

The essence of joining together is to meet new friends, have fun and feel a true sense of belonging to a community. Friends meet and go to movies, bowling, amusement parks, restaurants, mountain hiking, swimming, set up holiday parties, talk and laugh together.

A little history about our Social Groups

In 1992, Mark T. graduated from a Maryland college and returned home leaving many college friends. He was eager to meet new friends but wasn't sure how to do this. In 1999, he came to a meeting of the Learning Disabilities Association in Montgomery County (MD) to ask for guidance in setting up a new group of friends. We put together a brochure, sent it around, found a place to meet and soon after, he had a small group. He took it from there. His group grew to 25 members and is still running 21 years later.

In September, 2010, about half of **The Fun Bunch** members wanted to branch out and become an independent support group. **The Fun Bunch** continued as the independent **Fun Bunch Social Support Group** and the new group became **The Hangout Hive**, associated with the Learning Disabilities Association of Montgomery County. Membership in past years have ranged from a few to as many as 37 members, ages 21-45.

Parties have included Thanksgiving feasts, Holiday parties, game nights and sometimes an Open House to interest new members. Events have included: trips to Baltimore, such as the B&O Train Museum, Maryland Renaissance Festival, boat cruises on the Potomac River in Washington, DC, and the fall festival at the Winterbrook/Lawyer Farm, hikes on Sugarloaf Mountain, a visit to the Field of Screams at Halloween, dinners, movies, bowling, swimming, skating, karaoke and mini-golf – whatever members suggest. Virtual events have been movies, bingo, a photo challenge, 21 Questions and more. Each member is responsible for covering his or her own costs.

In 2019, a member, who had an idea for a group focused on outdoor excursions, created the **Extended Horizons** group. We now have three groups in our county, each with different leadership and a slightly different focus. The three groups are friendly to each other, and everyone is welcome to be a member of one or all groups.

The Fun Bunch Social Support Group

Founder

Mark T. – thefunbunchssg@hotmail.com

President 2020-2021

Jeff Weller - jfweller@aol.com

The Hangout Hive Parent and Website Host,

Technical Guru

Richard B.I. – treasurer@ldamd.org

The Hangout Hive Founder and former

President, Current Secretary

Carla S

The Hangout Hive Mentor and Former

LDAMC President

Susan H. – srosehealy@gmail.com



Forming a Group

A group can be three or more people meeting together. If you have a small group, you may simply agree upon how you want the group to be structured.

The following ideas about creating a welcoming group developed over time and are useful in starting a larger group of friends where communication and consideration are vitally important.

These topics cover some of the more important ideas:

- Members and How To Find Them
- Interviews: Talk With Potential Members About Joining (if you don't already know them personally)
- Membership Dues? Does It Cost To Be A Member Or Not?
- By-Laws and a Code of Conduct : Some General Rules About How To Treat Each Other
- Regular Meetings
- Hosting an event: A Suggested Checklist
- Leadership and Elections: Who Is Going To Be In Charge of What?
- Mentoring: A Guide. What Is a Mentor's Role in the group? Is a mentor necessary?
- Communication: Choose a name, start a website, an email list and social media platform.

M members and How To Find Them

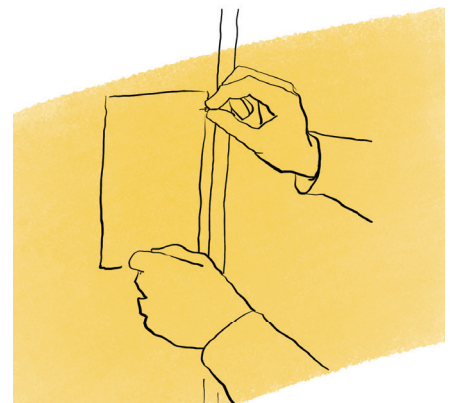
Advertise. Let potential new members know what you are doing.

These questions should be part of your advertisements.– talk to a friend or friends to decide :

- A Name to identify your new group
- WHO are the people you want to invite to your group?
- WHAT do you want to do together?
- WHERE do you want to meet?
- WHY do you want a group?
- WHEN do you want to meet (how often)?
- HOW to become a member – prepare a short application with information that you need; name, contact information, interests,.etc. and where to send it.
- CONTACT information, yours, of course!

How to Get the Word Out: Try a few of these:

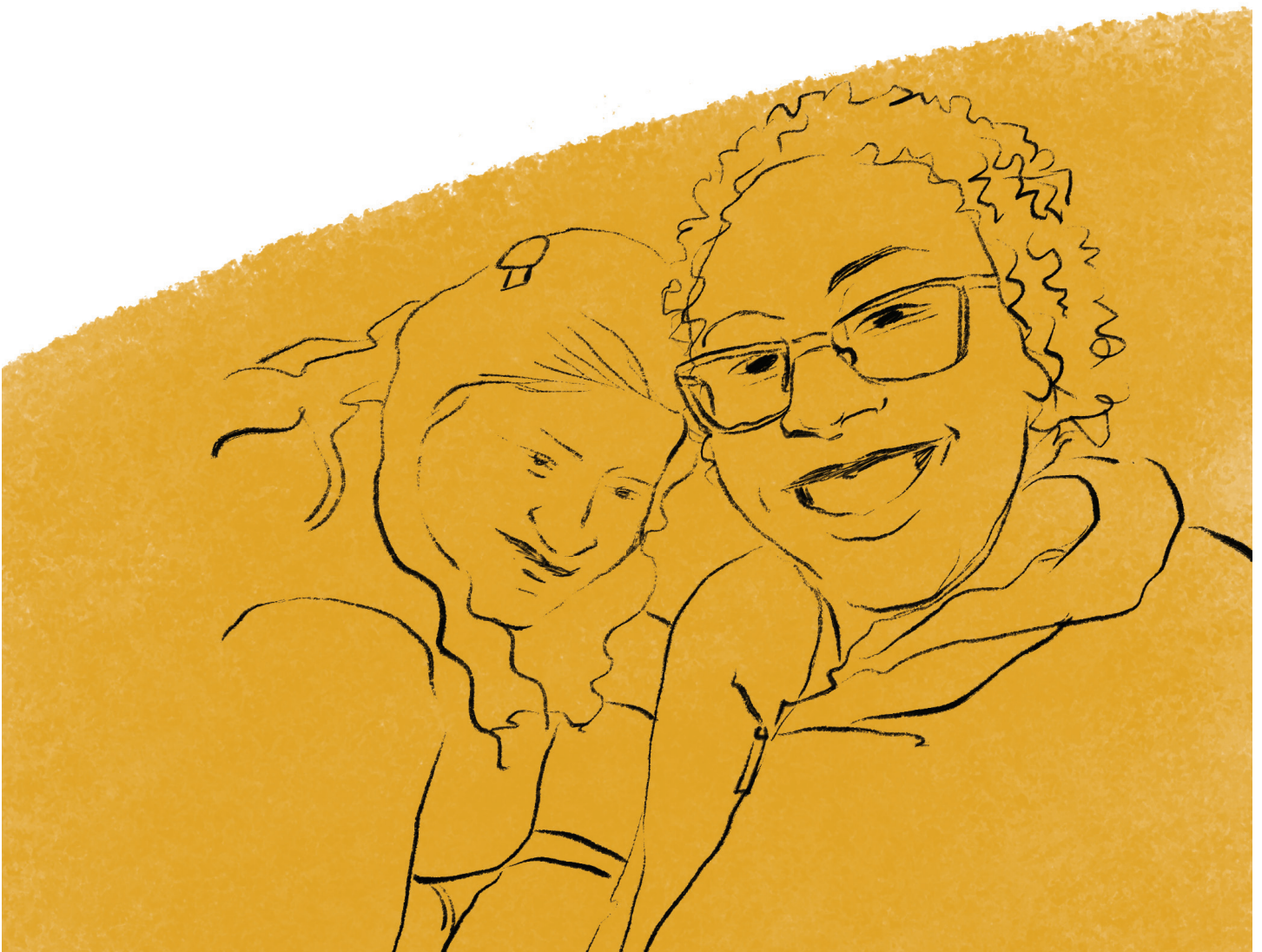
- Choose to print a brochure or a flyer. Start a social media page.
- Contact friends that you knew in school to see if they are interested in your group.
- Check with any organization that advocates for adults with learning disabilities and ask if they are willing to help promote your new group.
- Call religious centers and community centers and ask if they have a flyer, social media page or website where you can announce your new group.
- Contact local colleges with Learning Disabilities support and professionals, such as psychologists and social workers who work with adults with Learning Disabilities.
- Locate a non-profit organization in your community which advocates for adults with Learning Disabilities.
- Post flyers or brochures in your local libraries.
- Public service announcements – some local TV and radio stations may have Public Service Announcements.
- Hold an Open House, an open invitation to the public to come meet the group and hear about what you do.



Interviews: Talk With Potential Members About Joining

Interviews (also known informally as “Meet and Greets”) give the interviewer (a person who is already a member) a sense that the prospective member can communicate, make decisions and plan on their own. Just meeting a person at a restaurant, on the phone or zoom, can assure the interviewer that this person will be a good candidate for the group.

Ask the person to fill out an application. (Most people who are not a good fit for the group will not fill out the application after the interview.)

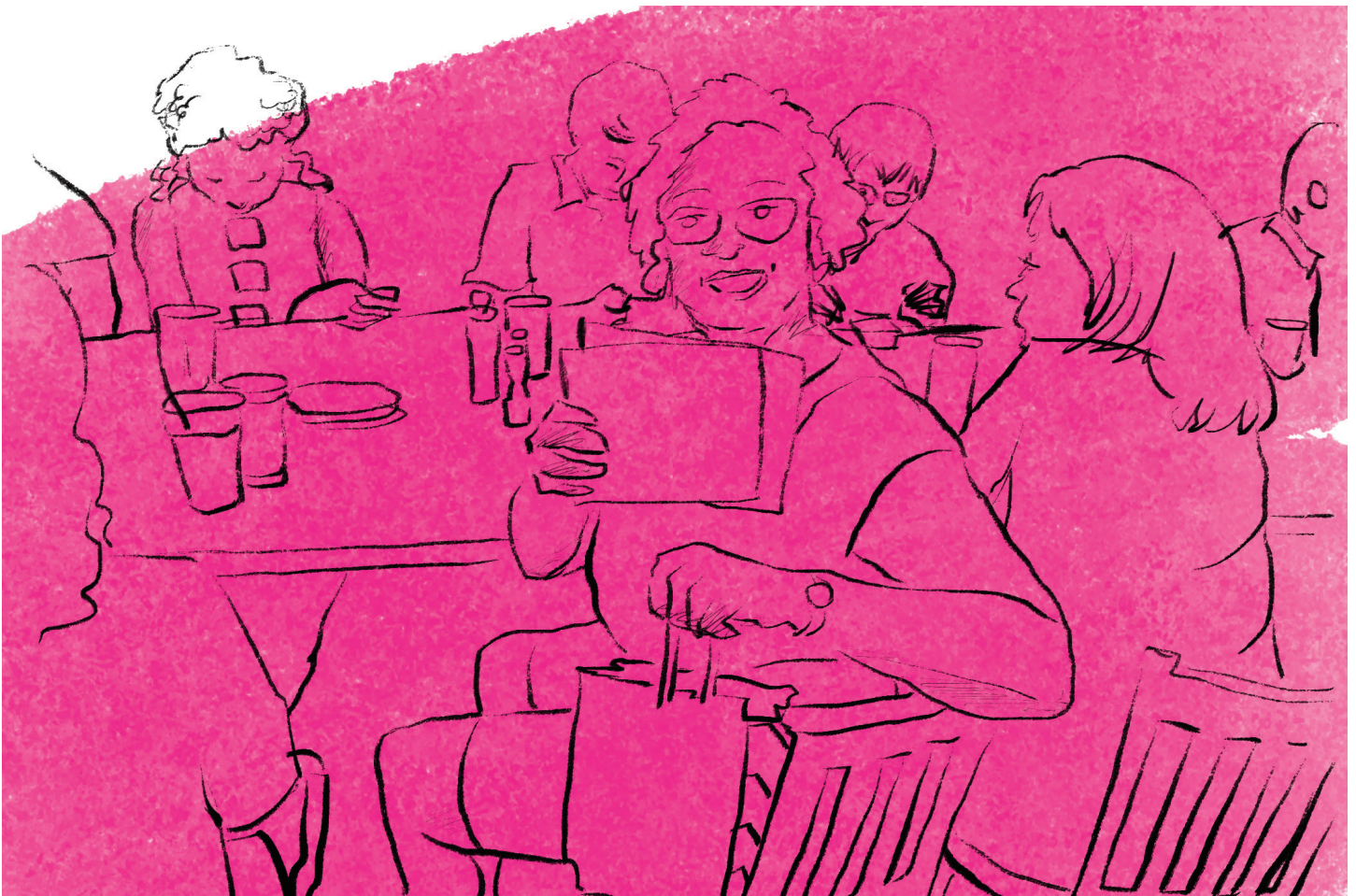


Membership Dues? Does It Cost To Be A Member Or Not?

We have three social groups today in our county. One has no membership dues and the other two have membership fees of \$25 a year.

Some things to consider when you are deciding:

- Having no fees - The benefit of no membership fee means it is free to join.
- Having fees - The benefit of a membership fee is having group money available for gifts, special occasions, holiday parties, and open houses. Members can vote to use the money in the community treasury to help cover costs of a more expensive event.



By-Laws and a Code of Conduct : Some General Rules About How To Treat Each Other



By-Laws outline the purpose of the group and include a “Code of Conduct” for members. They describe procedures such as elections and responsibilities of leadership.

A Code of Conduct is written and agreed to by all members. It describes how members are expected to treat one another. It can help resolve disagreements.

The Hangout Hive has a simple Code of Conduct, which is written into the group’s By-Laws. If you have By-Laws or not, an agreement among members of how you will treat one another is key to a strong group. Here’s an example of one:

“All members will treat other members with respect and kindness. Harassment, threats of violence, retaliation or discrimination will not be tolerated. Any action or communication showing disrespect and causing fear and/or humiliation will result in that member being removed from the group”.

If all members can agree, then you will have a community that is respectful of YOU! It’s good to have every new member read this Code and agree with it.

Any member is welcome to propose a change in the By-Laws at a monthly meeting and explain why the change is important to them. All members vote to accept or reject the suggested new By-Law. (By-Law examples are included for you to read at the end.)

Regular Meetings

Regular meetings (at least once a month) build friendships. Meetings can be monthly or every other month in condominium community rooms, restaurants, on zoom or in homes – any place where you can meet regularly and easily. **The Fun Bunch Social Support** Group alternates officer meetings and member meetings.

In our experience, meetings cover:

- News about each member – what’s happening in your family, new jobs, new friends, travel?
- Group business: membership dues (if you have them), birthday announcements & cards, a 50/50 Game*.
- Mini-discussions (if members want) on Voting, Work, Social media, Gift giving and receiving, Tipping, Responding to Invitations, Pot luck dinner essentials – plates, cups etc.
- Pot - Luck Dinner
- Planning events next month – What’s a good event? Who will Host?

* How To Play the 50/50 Game : Collect \$1 per ticket per person. Have a drawing where the winner takes half the money, the other half goes into the group’s treasury.



Hosting an event: A Suggested Checklist

We took a survey and found that most members really enjoyed getting together for the regular monthly meeting and potluck dinner. However, meeting in the community for dinner or a movie, or in the country for apple/pumpkin picking is always a happy time.

All members are invited to all meetings and events.

Events are hosted by any member who has an idea that would be fun for all. Most ideas are mentioned at the monthly meeting to test interest.

The host:

- Sends out invitations (email, text, Evite or phone), with the following information:
 - WHAT the event is
 - WHERE (address)
 - WHEN (day and time)
 - HOW to get there (metro, bus, car).
- Makes reservations, if necessary. Always ask for a RSVP.
- Meets members at the start of the event and stays until the end of the event to see that everyone can get home.

Host may wish to gently remind people that everyone is responsible for paying their own way, including gratuities.



Leadership and Elections

If you are just starting out, you may just agree amongst yourselves which person will take which responsibility. Titles are optional.

As you grow in membership, you may find that it is helpful to have positions with responsibilities so that the community work is shared. At this stage, a formal voting process and leadership positions can help.

Leadership requires planning and organizing, communicating and prioritizing – many good skills to learn and use.

Elections

- Elections can be held for positions each year.
- **The Hangout Hive**, for example has 3 positions: President, Vice-President and Secretary/Treasurer elected each summer for one year. Any number of positions are possible.
- Leadership responsibilities are written – if you are interested in suggestions, position responsibilities for **The Hangout Hive** are in the group's By-Laws. (see attachment).
- Members who want to take a leadership position can add their name to a slate one month before the election.
- Voting is by secret ballot with majority vote indicating the winner.
- A non-member tallies the votes and announces results.



Mentoring: A Guide

Do you think you need a mentor to guide members in planning an event or starting a discussion?

A mentor's purpose is to ask questions and guide discussions not to solve problems or give answers. The group can invite a person in the community who is willing to work with the group – it may be someone from an association or a respected friend.

In **The Hangout Hive**, one of the three groups, the Learning Disabilities Association affiliate in our county pays for a mentor to attend monthly meetings. The other two groups do not have a mentor.

Groups are a great place to work through conflicts and find resolutions.

- Learn how to treat people and develop lasting relationships
- Learn how to include everyone
- How to listen and disagree without rejecting
- How to have ideas and share them without imposing
- Learn the principles of leadership



C Communications

Websites:

The three local groups each have a website. Non-members find us online.

The Hangout Hive, as an example, has a link to a brochure, a promotional video and an application to join the group. It is a place to store contact information for all members, minutes to meetings, By-Laws and photos of past events.

Check out:

www.hangouthive.org, www.thefunbunch.org and expandedhorizonssocial.com

Social Media: a Facebook group is useful for messages, birthday greetings, photos, thoughts and community events. For privacy reasons, some have chosen to have a page open only to members.



A ctivities



THE FUN BUNCH SOCIAL SUPPORT GROUP BY-LAWS

NOT OK TO DO

1. Don't interrupt other members while they speak
2. Don't speak more than 5 minutes on any given subject
3. Don't make fun of other members/tease/use racist, offensive remarks/talk out of turn/be rude/or backstab members/gossip/negative gossip
4. Don't have side conversations during meeting
5. Don't discriminate
6. Don't break laws
7. Don't bring personal issues into The Fun Bunch
8. Don't wait to the last minute to ask for a ride
9. Don't lie
10. Don't bring convicted criminals into The Fun Bunch
11. Don't bring/drink/or provide alcohol at a Fun Bunch meeting or event unless pre-approved
12. Don't provide alcohol to minors
13. Don't talk behind people's backs; no negative gossiping
14. If you RSVP for meeting or event, we will expect you to show up; do not break your promise to attend; please call if you cannot make it.

OK TO DO

1. Be respectful to all the members of the group
2. Try to stay on topic
3. Be polite
4. If angry, politely leave meeting for 15 minutes before returning to meeting
5. Come to 3 meetings and/or events within a 6 month span
6. Try to contribute the same amount of money, or food at activities or events
7. When given a ride, your generosity to the driver is appreciated; If you do not drive, make sure that you have arranged, in advance, a ride in order to come to a meeting or an activity
8. Confidentiality- whatever is talked about in a Fun Bunch meeting stays inside Fun Bunch. In other words, DO NOT talk about private, confidential topics regarding Fun Bunch
9. Notify Mark or Roz if you plan to pay separately for your meal at a restaurant; this helps to know what they owe when the bill has to be paid
10. You are required to be a member of Fun Bunch or know a member of Fun Bunch in order to attend social activities
11. Each member of Fun Bunch can have up to 2 guests. You must give Mark at least 3 days notice for approval, in order to prepare.
12. You must be 18 years or older to be a member
13. When out at an event, only 1 alcoholic drink is allowed {Must be over the age of 21}
14. The maximum cost of the activities is \$30.00
15. Pay dues of \$20 per year
16. When a member has an issue with another member, then PLEASE talk/discuss the issue/issues with that member in private, and also in a respectful manner.

THE HANGOUT HIVE BY-LAWS as of 2021

The Hangout Hive Membership has adopted the following By-Laws and agreeing to them is a prerequisite to joining and continuing participation. All By-Law changes shall only be enacted after passage by the group at a meeting via a balloted vote.

The name of the organization is **The Hangout Hive**, sometimes referred to as “**HH**” and “**The Hive**”.

The Hangout Hive is a social group for high functioning and independent adults with learning disabilities ages 21 years and over. The group is sponsored in part by the **Learning Disabilities Association of Montgomery County (LDAMC)** in Maryland. We are joined together by our life experiences and united as a support group.

The Mission of **The Hangout Hive** is to plan fun activities that promote friendship and foster leadership by creating an atmosphere for growth and opportunities for success.

Members:

- Handle and engage in electronic communications
- Comprehend verbal communication
- Attend meetings or events without chaperone
- Get self to and from events
- Understand and pay personal costs at events
- Act appropriately towards other members

Membership:

- Membership requires that you complete the registration form at www.hangouthive.org, pass the interview with leadership, and pay a \$35.00 Annual Membership Fee, payable in cash or check made out to **LDAMD**. Only Members can attend events unless invited by a member.
- If a member lapses their membership but at a later time wants to return to the group, they do not have to be re-interviewed.
- A prospective member can come to an event or meeting twice before having to become a member to attend future events.
- If a member does not pay their membership fee by the end of the third month after it is due, their membership expires.
- Membership is extended for an additional six months free due to the pandemic. (passed August 2020)

Monthly Meetings:

- Once a month – 3rd Wednesday with Pot Luck Dinner
- Gathering for discussions and plans for events in future months.

Social Events:

Event can be hosted by any member. Help organizing event is available.

Host chooses event.

- Sends invitations to all members (Email, Evite, Text)
- Makes reservation at venue, if necessary
- Shows up early to event
- Leaves last and is responsible for clean up, if necessary
- The event coordinator/host shall include all members in an invitation.
- If member invites a guest, let host know his/her name. A guest can come to **The Hangout Hive** events twice then needs to join as a full member.
- Members need to respond to an invitation at least a day before the event.

Conduct within The Hangout Hive:

- Confidentiality - All information within **The Hangout Hive** meeting is considered confidential.
- Drugs or Alcohol - There will be no drugs or alcoholic beverages consumed at **The Hangout Hive** events.
- Behavior - All members will treat other members with respect and kindness. Harassment, threats of violence, retaliation or discrimination will not be tolerated. Any action or communication showing disrespect and causing fear and/or humiliation will result in that member being removed from the group.

Leadership within The Hangout Hive:

(Minimum – 3 Positions: President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary)

President:

- Plans Monthly meeting with other leaders
- Sends out invitations to monthly meeting to all members.
- Chairs the meeting
- Receives applications from new/prospective members, makes arrangements for interview.
- Has access to members contact information for easy communication.
- Oversees events – all members can choose and organize events.
- Meets with leadership group for support

Vice President:

- Adviser to President
- Acts as Chair when President is not available
- Available for Interviews for prospective members.
- Attends recruitment events with leadership
- Meets with leadership group

Leadership within The Hangout Hive: (cont.)

Treasurer:

- Keeps Account of membership fees
- Notifies members when membership is due
- Keeps record of income and expenses in logbook
- Keeps cash box
- Announces balance at each meeting

Secretary:

- Records minutes at each monthly meeting
- Emails minutes to Richard Bell-Irving for posting on website.
- Minutes include attendance at meeting and reason for and outcome of all votes.

Other leadership positions are encouraged but optional.

Elections for Leadership Positions (Annual)

All voting shall be done by Secret Ballot. Ballots will be counted by a non-member and winners announced at the meeting.

Voting for positions will be done at an annual meeting normally held in August.

- All candidates who want to run for election must be present at the August meeting.
- Everyone who wants to vote must be present at the August meeting. (exception during pandemic)
- Board terms last for one year, effective at the end of the August meeting to August of the next year.

Voting process:

- July 1- July 31 - Nominations accepted.
- Names of Candidates (active member for at least 6 months) added to slate.
- July 31 - Slate announced to membership.
- Candidate running for President only must submit a platform. A platform is a short speech detailing why they are running and what they plan to do if elected.
- August - Election (members only) held at the beginning of the August monthly meeting.

New board immediately takes control after meeting concludes.



GATHER : A Do-It-Yourself Kit for Creating Your Own Community.
Based on the strategies of three social groups for Adults with Learning Disabilities in Montgomery County, MD. Produced in part by a grant received from Montgomery County, Maryland 2021. Susan R. Healy.

www.ldamd.org