

Organising a DAD event

During the past 16 years hundreds of people have been involved in developing Disability Awareness Day into Warrington's largest annual community event, one of the largest in the North West and probably Europe's largest voluntary led pan disability independent living exhibition. Most of all we have been part of a team that has made the best use of our individual skills and experiences to produce an event that combines an independent living exhibition and a family fun day aimed at empowering disabled people, their carers and families, and this commitment has been recognised by the Queen.

During this time we have provided advice, practical support and encouragement to teams from across the world to assist them in planning similar events. The following information aims to provide you with a brief pathway on where to start and what to consider.

Remember, it only takes one person to start the process, and that person could be you!

Where do we start?

You will need to start with a vision, this could be yours or one developed by a small group of people.

The Vision

Before we talk about the vision its worth considering the fact the 83% of disabled people acquire their illness or impairment during their working life, millions don't have any idea where to start to look for information on support.

In February 1992 Nick White Head Ranger of Walton Hall Gardens asked me to look at developing proposals to spend £2000 that had been ring-fenced against "disability projects".

I suggested that we could hold an event aimed at promoting local support services, Nick supported the idea, and this was discussed with other members of Warrington Information Group for the Disabled. Together we developed a vision that our event would:

1. Highlight the range of services available from statutory, private or voluntary organisations. Services that could enable disabled people to be as independent as is possible.
2. The event would promote equipment and aides that could help maintain or improve independence, not just what was offered by statutory service providers, we wanted everyone to see the best and/or latest designs.
3. We want the event to provide an opportunity to showcase what disabled people can do, in the field of sport, arts and entertainment.

4. Overall the event would need to offer something for everyone, whatever their impairment, and the event would be of interest to their families and friends.
5. The event would provide a platform for small family run support groups to promote their services alongside the biggest national charities, and be affordable to all business exhibitors, small and large.

Your vision could include all or some of the above. This will be dictated by various factors including the skills available within your team, the size of your overall budget, the support you can enlist from local agencies and more importantly the commitment you receive from local disabled people, their carers and families.

The Team

Like any good team you will need people with a range of complimentary skills, they will need to take responsibility to complete the tasks allocated to them. But most importantly they must be able to work as part of an overall team.

We have an overall DAD Management Team providing strategic direction and deliver the main organisational tasks. In addition we have three sub groups;

1. The Admin Team provides all administrative functions including minute taking, general correspondence, exhibitor bookings, and communication with service providers, etc.
2. The DAD Event Site Team managing all onsite activities including marking out the site, co-ordinating the services such as marquees, power supply, toilets, furniture, catering units, marking out parking areas, erecting signage and stewarding DAD Week events, many of which are held in marquees and the hall.
3. The DAD Stewards and Support Team including co-ordination of over 70 stewards, information point, VIP reception, car parking, refuse collection, First Aid, Park & Ride sites, co-ordinating the Sports Zone, Centre Arena and Arts Marquee.

In addition to the three main sub groups smaller teams organise Arts, Sports Entertainments, and DAD Week events.

Where

From the start our team focused plans on holding an event at Walton Gardens. Initially we thought about an open-air event, but after considering the weather we agreed on exhibition stands under cover of marquees. An organisation in the North West has developed a similar event that is held inside large open plan exhibition or conference facilities.

When you are looking at the event site you will need to consider accessibility for the visitors, exhibitors and emergency vehicles. DAD 2006 saw 320 exhibitors' vehicles arriving within a 2-hour window and over 20,000 people on the park during the day. You will also need to consider utilities including

drains, power and water. Onsite car parking for the exhibitors, and parking and other transport arrangements for the visitors. We operate 2 Park & Ride services and a free shuttle bus from Warrington Town Centre.

When

We considered holding DAD on a weekday. This was led by the myth and misconception that businesses and statutory services wouldn't attend an event held on a weekend! But after consulting disabled people, carers and families we agreed to hold DAD on a Sunday as this met their needs. We have had several discussions about extending DAD to run over two days; we found that although the larger businesses could attract staffing support, the smaller family run charities would struggle to find volunteers.

When considering the date of your DAD it's worth avoiding school holidays, other national, regional and local events such as bank holidays, county shows, etc. Whilst writing this I've just remembered that DAD 2006 coincided with the World Cup Final and Wimbledon Men's Final!

When you have agreed where and when you want to hold your DAD, you will need a team to share and deliver the vision.

Finances

Once you have developed your vision and recruited your team you will need to produce a business plan that includes an estimated budget. Next you need to decide how you will raise the money!

Exhibitor fees will need to be set to reflect affordability. We have 2 rates. Voluntary organisations pay a lower rate, with businesses and statutory organisations paying a higher rate.

Our main income is delivered through sponsorship. With stepped rates that reflect what the sponsor will receive. Promote the marketing opportunities, our sponsors get their organisations name on 75,000 flyers, 5,000 posters, 10,000 programmes, the DAD website which receives 200,000 hits per year, promotional banners, a VIP reception, radio, newspaper and magazine advertising.

Grants, donations and takings from the Sports Zone make up the balance of our budget

What Else

There are hundreds of other actions that will need to be undertaken. The following topics are taken from the agenda used by our management team.

- Management Team – undertake a skills analysis and consider if we need anyone else, setting meeting dates and times,
- Venues – for the main event and complimentary events,

- Stewards, where will you recruit them from (we have great support from local Lions and Rotary Clubs, Air and Sea Cadets, and local Young Offenders Institute), training, ID badges with photo, tabards, information packs, health & safety procedures, expenses, transport,
- Stewards meetings pre event planning and debrief on site after the event (this has proved essential in understanding where we need to make changes in procedures, it also helps to bond the team. Our team is affectionately known as DAD's Army),
- Funding – DAD 2006 cost over £80,000, raised through sponsorship, exhibitor costs, external grants (Arts and Sports) etc,
- Mail outs, management, administration, exhibitors, return date, invites to stewards meeting, sponsors reception, DAD Week events,
- On site organising team, Volunteers and Walton Hall Staff, etc,
- Facilities – Marquees (DAD 2006 used 11 huge marquees costing over £15,000), furniture (DAD 2006 used over 300 trestle tables and 800 chairs), site office and storage unit (the site office for DAD 2007 will have direct telephone and internet access), power (over 150 electrical sockets were used at DAD 2006), radios (70 portable radios were used at DAD 2006), toilets (5 portable toilet units were used at DAD 2006), fencing (hundreds of feet of metal and plastic fencing was used at DAD 2006), wheelchairs (40 wheelchairs and 20 scooters were used at DAD 2006), security (a professional company supplied staff for the nine days during DAD 2006 protecting nearly £1 million worth of equipment) , insurances (public liability, employer liability & equipment), video & photography,
- Administration of the site and entertainment licences including public advertisements around the event site and in the local newspaper,
- An itinerary of equipment, signs and banners (we use over 250 at DAD which are stored in a metal container located at the charities HQ),
- Support services, St Johns, BSL Interpreters, Police,
- Arts Marquee – reviewing and booking artists, management of the programme and paying the entertainers,
- Slice of Life Film Festival, liaison with the organising team,
- Centre Arena – booking artists, producing and managing the programme,
- On site catering services for visitors with 5 hot food vendors, 4 ice cream vans, the VIP reception, stewards & staff,
- Family & children's activities, inclusive play area, fun fair, super slide,
- Sports area – booking activities, management, tickets and staff,
- Car parking – Walton Hall Car Park (800 spaces) and 2 Park & Rides sites, management, signage and staffing,
- Pulse Sponsored Walk/push – publicity, management, administration, staffing, costs, prizes,
- VIP Reception - management, IT support, invites and sponsors awards
- Advertising – signs, banners, disability press, newspapers, radio,
- Signs and Banners – ordering replacements, date changes, seeking planning permission to erect them, staff to erect and take them down,

- Promotions – 75,000 flyers, 5,000 posters, updating our web site and developing links with partners sites, press releases to charities newsletters including support organisations and CVS's,
- Programmes – advertising, production, contents, stall and staffing,
- Liaison with Police, Fire & Ambulance,
- Shuttle bus service – liaison with bus company, promotion of the service, posters in the companies 140 buses,
- DAD Week - activities Saturday to Saturday, bookings, administration, communication with the organising group or team. DAD 2006 included 12 supporting event held during the week before DAD,
- Internal communications – within the DAD management team,
- All underpinned by Health & Safety – We consider the impact of risk in every aspect of DAD, from planning to application and review.

Key Components

The most frequently asked question we get about DAD is “What is the magic ingredients to organising a DAD”.

The answer is, its not one single thing, but a mixture of:

- A clear and simple vision,
- A committed team,
- Supportive partners,
- Making it enjoyable for all involved,
- Valuing your team, your partners and your volunteers,
- Believing in your vision.

And if two words had to sum it up, they would have to be “teamwork and communication”.

Conclusion

As you can see, organising a DAD event involves hundreds of people and thousands of hours of hard work. But the outcome makes it all worthwhile.

All this effort has helped empower disabled people, their carers and families. Over 250,000 people have visited our DAD events during the past 15 years, and countless thousands have attended other DAD events held elsewhere in Europe.

Our journey started with a simple vision, are you ready to start yours, if you are, and you require further advice, talk to the team, join us at one of our management meetings or visit us at this year's event. For further information please contact the DAD Administration Team on 01925 240064 or email Dave Thompson Event Co-ordinator at dave.thompson@5bp.nhs.uk

Thanks.

Dave

Dave Thompson MBE DL
DAD Event Co-ordinator