



HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland

Are you a member of a craft group or guild? If so, are you happy with the number of members, the mix of people and the life of your group?



A friend recently spoke with concern regarding the lack of new membership at her branch and the rising average age of the existing members. She was talking about ideas to expand membership and we had an enjoyable brainstorm. Were there under-utilised ways of enticing prospective new members to our groups? Were there ways to help people become involved and dedicated members?

We decided that of most importance was for information about a group to be easily accessible. Flyers, newsletters and an informative website are practical ways of achieving this. Newsletters and information sheets can be circulated outside the group into places where prospective members are likely to see them, for example, local embroidery

and quilting stores, popular cafes, art galleries and education facilities. Inexpensive ads may be placed in the newsletters of other craft groups, schools and community groups. Your newsletter could be part of a welcome pack given to people new to the area by local government. Today many people source their information online, so it's important to have an informative and current website.

'New members welcome' is easily written, but if we are serious about warmly inviting and encouraging people to visit us, something more personal is preferable. Many women who visit our showroom express a desire to develop their skills or learn something new in the area of craft. One of the suggestions we make is to join a guild or group. The

response is often met with a look of sheer nervousness, plus comments along the lines of: 'I'd be too embarrassed at how little I know,' or 'I would feel stupid at my age going to a group as a beginner.' Worse is when people tell us that they have already been to the group but found it too intimidating to return!

Turning up alone to a new group is daunting for most of us. (I've just joined a not-for-profit board and was more than scared before the first meeting.) For someone new to the craft or new to town, to someone shy or inexperienced, the idea of fronting up alone to a meeting is, frankly, terrifying.

There are lots of positive ways, however, to welcome prospective new members. One group I know of assigns newcomers with two 'buddies' to answer questions and be on hand as instant friends. A regional quilting group provides a welcome pack, containing lots of thoughtful and relevant information about the group, about quilting and about the members. Another ensures that prospective committee members meet the person prior to the meeting for a cuppa and a chat.

Sometimes we are inadvertently excluding people; for example, are meeting venues wheelchair friendly or is it possible for people with a hearing impairment, to be involved? We would be delighted to hear of your ideas.

As my grandma used to say, "There is little delight in owning anything unshared."

Until next month,

Louise