

RJ4ALL - WhatsApp Communities

RJ4All (Restorative Justice For All) is a charitable, user-led international institute with a mission to address power abuse, conflict and poverty through the use of restorative justice values and practices.

At the community centre we deliver on the above by providing a range of free services to the local community i.e. food bank, community fridge, safe house, educational/digital training, wellbeing services and our community gym which provides free, accessible fitness classes.

RJ4ALL has 2 regular physical activity sessions a week, 1 x formal gym session and 1 x youth activity session which runs every other Thursday. The youth activities tend to take the form of tennis, basketball, football, and at our youth clubs (6 x youth clubs a year) we deliver 2 x sports sessions.

How is WhatsApp used to communicate with members/participants?

WhatsApp is used to inform people about new events, workshops, and to remind our service users of what is taking place at the community centre. We've been using this method of communication for approximately 2 years, and the community currently has 372 WhatsApp contacts.

What are the benefits of a WhatsApp community?

“When communicating with service users, we find they are a lot more responsive through WhatsApp as opposed to any other method of communication.

WhatsApp has been a useful way to keep in contact with so many people, and it's a platform which is used by many people so is often very efficient and accessible.

It allows our organisation to communicate important information about our services to those who need it quickly and easily. Using WhatsApp, we can reach and inform new and regular service users about opportunities they might be interested in.



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How have you successfully built and maintained the WhatsApp community?

We've found the most important factor to be consistency; regularly using WhatsApp in the form of providing updates, announcements, and being available to interact and message people directly who may have questions.

The key features we use are private messages, group chats, and regular announcement to members.

Private messages are often more appropriate when personal information is being discussed.

We have also been using group chats, and recently broadcasts/announcements to provide updates and information on services that take place regularly at the centre i.e. wellbeing circles, gym sessions, digital drop-ins etc. These group messages and announcements allow us to spread the word and circulate information quickly and easily to those who are interested.

Our WhatsApp community allows for a clear line of communication to our service users keeping them informed about regular services and new opportunities. Seeing as the majority of our service users already use WhatsApp, we also know they are confident in using this method of communication.

Our WhatsApp community also creates a level of closeness with people who are new to our centre as they are able to ask questions and get quick, direct answers.

It keeps our service users motivated and informed, especially regarding our community gym and accessible fitness classes. There is also a supportive element to using WhatsApp for service users as the group chats can offer a support system where those within the chat can encourage each other and share personal goals and achievements. Often, this leads to more of our service users engaging in physical activity and creating positive, sustainable habits.

These WhatsApp communities can act as a platform for regular check-ins and updates which fosters a supportive environment and holds individuals accountable and connected to their health and fitness goals.

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Would you recommend other community sport & physical activity organisations use WhatsApp?

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I would recommend WhatsApp for other community sport & physical activity organisations as a way to efficiently contact and engage with service users/community members. In my experience using WhatsApp generates the most engagement and response from service users as it's more direct and quicker than other communication methods (for example, email or other forms of online communication).

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What are your three top tips for successfully building a WhatsApp community?

1. Be consistent - consistently and regularly update users through WhatsApp about any events, activities etc. Communities take time to build, and consistency is key.
2. Be responsive - it is helpful to create a trusted line of communication with service users which means responding to individual messages/requests quickly (which will directly help with engagement).
3. Develop community guidelines - which establish clear expectations regarding behaviour, and emphasise the importance of privacy and security.

