

## **mates'n'dates (Edinburgh and Lothian) How is the planning coming along?**

For some months now managers from 4 local provider agencies have been meeting to set up a new friendship and dating agency especially for people who have learning and other disabilities. What we have come up with is "mates'n'dates". We have asked a lot of people who want to be members of an organisation like mates'n'dates what they will want to do if they become a member. We have also talked to people running this sort of member organisation in other places to find out what works best and how to make sure that members are getting what they want – enjoying interesting things to do with other people, having fun, making new friends and maybe new loving relationships.

It is hoped that mates n dates can be up and running by the end of the year, and we will let as many people as we can know when this happens so that lots of people will sign up to become members. There will be a membership fee to join but it is important that this is affordable, and so it is going to be around £60 per year ---£5 a month. For this fee members will get regular newsletters telling them about events that are coming up (and there will be lots of things to choose from) and they can join a dating service too. Members will also pay for the events that they choose to go to.

All sorts of things will be organised. We know that people want to go out with other members to restaurants for a meal, to have organised parties and dances, to visit interesting places and to go to sporting events and to listen to live music. They want things on in the day time and in the evening. These are a few ideas and there will be a member's activities committee who will come up with plans for new and interesting things to do. There will be staff to organise things, to help people become members and to get what they want out of membership. This will include organising dating for people who would like to meet someone to find love and a happy relationship.

Before any of this can happen mates'n'dates needs to be set up as a charity. We are nearly there with this. We have also found out which trusts and charities may help with the running costs by awarding grants. We are about to put in some applications to them so please keep your fingers crossed that they like what we do and decide to give us money. Then we plan to get the staff team on board so that you will be able to apply to become a member of mates'n'dates in a few short months.