

FRIENDS OF ST. FRANCIS

Refer to NGO Profiles section for basic organizational and contact information.

1. Briefly describe the member groups of your network or coalition, including any rules or criteria for membership.

The characteristics of our umbrella organisation, "Friends of St Francis" is very diverse and far reaching but the following area/grouping can describe what distinguish us from each other.

These are: -

- (a) Children Homes for homeless children
- (b) Religions organization the represent the different from of believes in our country.
- (c) Community Groups that are Broad based and anyone is free to join.
- (d) The parent, teachers Association of several schools
- (e) Sport and Culture Club.
- (f) Youth Club
- (g) Women Organisation

This is quite open to any community group who share a vision to fight underdevelopment and a lack of social service/ resources for the poorest in any community. However some limitations or basic ground rules are in force to ensure unity and respect.

These are: -

- (a) Group must be active NGO with a community focus to serve all, despite race, creed, religious belief, social status, colour or physical/mental disability.
- (b) Every member must be able to respect the diversity of partners and refrain from attacks on others.
- (c) No political loyalty, must be kept personal
- (d) All members must be free to work together to achieve a common goal.
- (e) Members must have a vision of long-term growth and sustainability.

2. Is your organizational structure more formal or informal?

St. Francis Community Developers saw the need, wisdom and greater benefit of collaboration when it invited five NGO's to form a network called "Friends of St. Francis." Today after some nine years our full time membership is nineteen NGO's in Region # 6, an informal relationship with 21 organizations in Region # 5 which we

brought together in 2003 (Community Developers Committee of Region # 5), scores of agencies and NGO's nationwide that we assist in some form or the other.

"Friends of St. Francis," is a formal organisation that has been able to define itself as a force of change that is positively affecting development in Guyana.

- Meetings are held once a week at the Club's Head Office every Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 p.m.
- Office Coordinating Office of "Friend of St. Francis is located in the St. Francis Community Developers Headquarters Complex, East Side Line Dam, Rose Hall Town
- Twelve persons work in this office during the hours of 8:00 a.m to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday and on Saturday from 8:00 am to 2 p:m. All staff members are full time and are paid staff or volunteers.
- Friends of St. Francis have a committee that is made of one (1) representative from full time members and the executive of St. Francis Community Developers.

The Organisation can be contacted on a daily basis at fourteen community offices in Region # 6 namely at: -

1. # 58 Village
2. Kiltearn/Eversham
3. Kildonan
4. Mabicuri – Black Bush Polder
5. Alness
6. Liverpool
7. Port Mourant (3Offices)
8. Rose Hall Town
9. Albion
10. Fryrish
11. Gay Park, New Amsterdam

3. List at least two significant benefits that the organization provides for its members.

The two major benefits that members enjoying are: -

- A healthy effective networking among group which give rise to the sharing of the following:-
 - human resources in the form of volunteers assisting where necessary
 - group that lack equipment, tools and facilities get access to same
 - receive on site training for very specific tasks or program/project
 - receive moral support through sharing of daily experiences
 - assist groups to acquire funding information from each other

- groups without adequate physical space are able to utilize buildings of several other groups
- The second benefit is the ability of work on joint venture projects, which serves a larger target audience, and the success of same is the rewards of all. This arrangement reduces the possibilities of failure since it is a collective effort. Some of the joint projects that we are presently working on are:
 - Food for the Poor, Guyana distribution and bringing relief to the poor and needy.
 - Skills training programme – the manuals utilized was a joint effort, tutors are common, joint graduation ceremonies and sharing resources.
 - Family and children at risk, a joint Regional Project/National
 - Youth At Risk – a HIV/AIDS and STI's National Project.
 - Holding of joint public events such as anniversaries, launching ceremonies, career fair, regional HIV/AIDS fair etc.
 - Fund raising activities
 - Advocacy project to highlight major/ common problem that affect the entire Region.
 - A micro credit project which target youths
 - Making joint application for funding which enhance our chances.
 - Construction, establishment and management of community projects

4. What special challenges have faced you as a network or coalition, and how were they overcome (or not)?

- (a) The success of the network means that we have direct access to thousands of residents and this attracted some unnecessary attention from a politician who wanted our support and loyalty. Our refusal to support any one political force brought the feeling that we are supporting the other, and unnecessary problems, misunderstanding and threats became the order of the day from several forces to destroy this independent body.

We overcame these threats by continuing our delivery of services to all and was able to gain the support of residents who represented our causes and activities. This forced the political forces to reduce their attacks on us for fear of losing support.

- (b) The unique task of understanding every group's diverse background was a major issue since a lot of factors affected the true nature of the issues. To bridge the gaps that divide we had to deal with the social, religions, political and status of each organization. We overcame the differences by dealing with them in a professional manner after identifying them. This was very time consuming task but it was necessary for the unity and understanding we sought.

(c) The level of involvement degree of commitment and diverse interest of all partners were another source of problem, addressed by the following actions: -

- the strong groups were mandated to assist the weaker ones.
- we developed a one to one relationship with the entire membership of each group through regular meetings and exchange visit.
- providing support to enhance group's capacity to serve
- provide exposure to group member for clearer understanding of vision/goals.

5. What advice would you give to others on forming or operating a network or coalition?

- All members of the network must be committed to a common vision that was developed with inputs from all, and same must be respected by everyone.
- Only one person can lead at any given time therefore the democratic process of election must be alive and effective. This means the minority must respect the views of the majority but they must be heard in discussions.
- Group must acknowledge their weaknesses and be willing to engage in constructive criticism to improve status and be open minded to learn from the experiences of others.

6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about networking and collaboration amongst civil society organizations?

Networks must: -

- Represent the poor of the poorest by advocating their views although their view might run against personal convictions or the popular choice to make.
- Must ensure democratic participation, encouraging community initiatives and mobilization of resources to provide responsive actions.
- To create and provide an enabling or open environment for the beneficiaries to lend support.
- To provide visionary leadership which makes decisions to benefit all to be affected and this must be free from one's personal convictions.