

Ontario Self-Help Network

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*Supporting the development of
new and existing self-help/
mutual aid initiatives in Ontario
since 1992.*

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bulletin and get advance notice of
all our workshops, conferences
and events!



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Lupus Canada training event
with Spencer Brennan (first row
blue and white shirt) in April
2008.

Here are the 21 affiliates across Ontario who work together to promote and support self-help.

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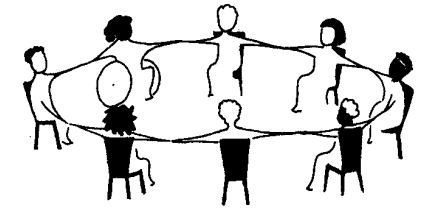
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Self-Help Ontario

The Newsletter of the Ontario Self-Help Network
(OSHNET)



The 3rd "P" in Facilitation: Process

The foundation for any successful group lies in the structure or framework of the group, out of which process flows. This involves a collective agreement on putting guidelines in place, such as open/closed group, time lines, confidentiality, respect, levels of participation, check-ins/check-outs, giving and receiving feedback, evaluating the group's progress, and closures. Establishing members' expectations about what the group will and won't be able to accomplish is important and needs to be revisited periodically by existing and new members.

This article outlines a few of my favourite process tools to engage, support, and sustain a group's healthy spirit. These tools are: introductory gifts and the art of group conversation; the "I" and "You" models of Non-Violent Persuasion and/or the LARA method; and finally, ways of achieving closure. However, all of these tools are inseparable in producing a holistic approach to the interior life of any group, whether forming, storming, or ending.

INTRODUCTORY GIFTS & GROUP CONVERSATION

Whenever a support group begins, the first step is to draw people into the circle, provide basic introductory information about themselves to other members, and reinforce the worth of their participation. Asking people to share what "gift" they bring to the group usually comes as a surprise. People are hesitant about being boastful or concerned when the person before them has the same or a similar gift. Yet when everyone has shared, I then ask "Why did I ask you to do that?" The comments that follow lead into a discussion about the importance of each person's contribution, that everyone's gifts are used for the group's benefit, and the necessity of accepting our differences and uniqueness in order to create a safe collective space.

Another introductory tool is called Group Conversation (GC), which was invented by Rachel Davis DuBois and Mew-Song Li during the 1960's and introduced to many U.S. communities through the Workshop on Cultural Democracy. While currently less well-known, this tool was used to reduce tension and get people talking to each other during the battle for civil rights in the southern US. I have used elements of it as a quick way to bring people together when initiating a group or as a method to help remind group members of their similarities during those times when tension, anger, or conflict predominate.

The basic structure for GC seems deceptively simple: ask people to share their pleasant childhood memories. The object is for one person's pleasant memory to spark that of another, so that invisible bonds are quickly built between strangers. GC is one way of getting to know people during their best or happiest time, before delving into whatever issues have brought them to a support group in the first place. Childhood memories are usually a good starting point (assuming a happier childhood than adulthood) but other commonly used starting points include: best friend growing up, most enjoyable game, favourite relative or adult, most anticipated celebration, talents or thrilling personal triumph. These can

Spring 2009

New Executive Director:

The Self-Help Resource Centre is pleased to announce that Kelly Potvin is the new Executive Director as of April 1, 2009.

Visit the "What's New" section of our home page for more info on Kelly. www.selfhelp.on.ca

Consultations & Training

- Interested in on-site training or consultation? Please contact OSHNET Coordinator, Spencer Brennan at 416-487-4355 or email oshnet@selfhelp.on.ca

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Self-Help Ontario is published twice a year by the Ontario Self-Help Network (OSHNET), a program of the Self-Help Resource Centre. OSHNET is funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion.



The 3rd “P” continued

and should be adjusted based on the responses from group members, making the process authentic to the group.

The “art” of GC lies in being able to redirect any negative comments by reframing them in a more positive light. For example, if someone had a negative response to a story about a best friend, the facilitator could interject with “while it’s true that not everyone may have had a best friend, we could also broaden that theme to include relatives or other adults who took us seriously, and were supportive of our dreams.” Facilitators can also gently remind groups that we are looking for “pleasant memories” as a way of refocusing the conversation. The facilitator can continue to weave the threads of individual stories until either the time or people’s energy runs out, at which a point a break should be called.

CONFLICT & FEEDBACK

One of the concerns frequently raised in facilitator training is about conflict—how to facilitate disagreement between individuals and between facilitator and group in a positive, respectful way. Providing feedback is a useful tool for dealing with conflict in relationships and groups, but is not something we’re ever taught in school, so it’s no surprise that group members don’t usually know how to give or receive feedback very skillfully. Feedback is most helpful when: it considers both people’s feelings; describes reaction rather than analyzes; is about a behaviour that can be changed rather than a personal attack; happens as soon as possible; is never given without permission; and is clear. One of my favourite ways of giving feedback uses the Non-violent Persuasion model (NVP). The NVP model is based on the power of mutual respect. Since support is based on some form of mutuality, relationship becomes vital to receiving that support and sets up an expectation that this will also include reciprocity.

Created by Marshall Rosenberg, the NVP model follows this process: “When I (see, hear) you (do or say something that is observable, like slamming a door or speaking in a certain tone of voice), I get (angry, sad, upset) because I interpret that behaviour to mean (... fill in your interpretation). In future I’d appreciate if you could (... give options). Do you think you could do that?” The other person can respond with whether the suggestions are doable and, if not, offer alternatives. The process goes back and forth until there is agreement by both parties about the next steps. If the behaviour continues, the process is repeated with, “we had an agreement, but the behaviour has occurred again, how do you wish to resolve this?”

Taking responsibility for giving feedback, or “I” model as it is called, doesn’t mean that one can’t use the word “you.” In fact, the “you” model is the flip side of the “I” model in that it provides an opportunity to help other group members articulate what may be happening for them, and clarify how do proceed.

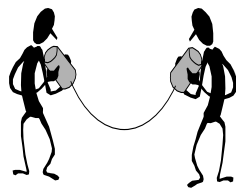
For example: “Mary, when John said ‘don’t be a wimp’ after Charles became emotional, you had a strange expression on your face and I wondered if you were upset?” asks the facilitator. “Yes,” says Mary. “How did you interpret his remark?” probes the facilitator. “I thought he was putting Charles down and I didn’t like that,” says Mary. “So, what could John have done differently?” Mary offers her suggestions which are then discussed with John, and an agreement about future comments is made. Using this approach whenever members exhibit inappropriate or self-oriented behaviours allows the facilitator to review and/or revisit group guidelines.

The person giving the feedback ultimately has the option to withdraw from the other party—something that would be difficult on group dynamics. However, when the behaviour also upsets other members of the group, the weight of group withdrawal can have a persuasive impact and may even result in an individual removing themselves from the group. While this may not be ideal, it certainly demonstrates how much the group’s existence is valued by its’ members.

When issues emerge in a group that cannot be dealt with quickly, the LARA method might be worth a try. This method was created by a group of gays & lesbians in response to an Oregon

What are the first 2 “Ps”?

Check out previous issues of Self-Help Ontario available on-line at www.selfhelp.on.ca



The 3rd “P” continued

proposition that all gay & lesbian teachers should be fired, since they allegedly posed a threat to the children in their charge. In response, the gay & lesbian communities began to speak out at public gatherings and engage people using this newly-created method in an attempt to de-escalate the tension and rhetoric. This process was so successful that many who supported the firing of all gay & lesbian teachers came away from these exchanges with new information and different perspectives which challenged their strongly held beliefs.

LARA is an acronym for Listen, Affirm, Respond, and Add. When people are angry, they are in their feelings, not their heads; therefore, **listen** without interruption to what they have to say regardless of how distressing their comments might be. While listening, try to find a common theme on which to build a connection to their viewpoint. What is it about the issue that you can agree with them on? Once you have found the common theme, **affirm** your agreement with them on that specific point. Next, **respond** to their initial question (usually “do/don’t you agree that ...”) with a clear yes or no. Then **add** your one piece of information (ONLY one) that contradicts their argument. This will likely ignite further volleys prompting a return to Listening, Affirming, Responding and Adding until there is a mutual agreement to stop. This process results in the other party feeling heard and affirmed, yet still respectfully disagreed with, allowing for the possibility of bridge-building where none existed before. This approach requires a great deal of perseverance on the facilitator’s part but can be a helpful during the storming and norming stages of group development. *To be continued in next issue...*

OSHNET AFFILIATE PROFILE: SELF-HELP ALLIANCE

Peer support, self help and recovery are the values by which the activities of the Self Help Alliance are deeply rooted. In 2003, four consumer/survivor organizations in Waterloo region and in the counties of Wellington/Dufferin decided to form a partnership. This alliance combined resources to better meet the needs of the individuals in the respective areas. By coming together to share resources and staff, the Self Help Alliance has been able to develop a dy-

namic approach to providing services. The services offered at the different sites include, but are not limited to: Self Help Recovery Centres; One-to-One Peer Support; Self Help Resource Centres and Peer Support Groups.

For more information, contact the Self Help Alliance at (519) 766-4315, 5420 Highway 6, North, RR#5, Guelph, ON, N1H 6J2.

Ontario Health Promotion Resource System (OHPRS)

OSHNET is a member of the OHPRS, which supports health promoters across Ontario. System members provide training, consultation services, print and electronic resources, referrals and network-building opportunities for a wide variety of organizations and individuals who want to increase their capacity to effectively promote health in Ontario communities. Each member has a different area of expertise. The OHPRS is funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion. For more information, go to www.ohprs.ca. Here we profile one member, and a useful resource for groups:

The Physical Activity Resource Centre (PARC) provides support to Physical Activity Promoters across Ontario through consultation, training, networking, referrals and Information-sharing. PARC services are intended to support capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and learning opportunities.

Walk This Way is a self-help kit designed to assist adults, of all ages, in beginning and adhering to a walking regimen. While helping participants increase their physical activity levels, Walk This Way helps contribute to the promotion of healthy weights and the prevention of chronic diseases.

To learn more, go to: www.ophea.net/Ophea/PARC/WalkThisWay.cfm

When we walk to the edge

of all the light we have

and take a step

into the darkness of the unknown,

we must believe

one of two things will happen□

there will be something solid

for us to stand upon,

or we will be taught

to fly.

Anonymous

