

Ontario Self-Help Network

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

Stay in touch with our monthly e-bulletin and get advance notice of all our workshops, conferences and events!



Sign up today at www.selfhelp.on.ca.



The Self-Help Resource Centre is a United Way agency, also funded by The Ministry of Health Promotion, the City of Toronto and the Trillium Foundation.



Our network is growing! Here are the 21 affiliates across Ontario who work together to promote and support self-help.

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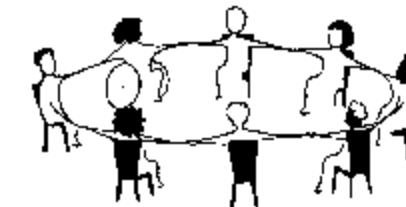
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Self-Help Ontario

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



Fall 2008

Mutual Aid & Mental Health: SHAW 2008

Self-Help Awareness Week will be celebrated across the province from September 22nd to September 27th, 2008. Under the banner of "Mutual Aid and Mental Health," SHAW will see self-help support groups in many Ontario communities celebrate peer support through a variety of local events and activities.

"We know that people who have a social support system feel less lonely and isolated, which in turn decreases stress and increases their ability to cope. And there is even some evidence that having a support system improves the likelihood of longevity," says Spencer Brennan, OSHNET Coordinator.

Through their dedication, self-help supporters and participants are people committed to improving lives and building supportive communities. SHAW is a way to acknowledge and celebrate these individuals' contribution to others, to their communities, and to a happier and healthier Ontario.

For information or to register for events, call (416) 487-4355 or toll free 1-888-283-8806 or visit www.selfhelp.on.ca

The 2nd "P" in Facilitation: People

What is a support group without people? Whether you get to pre-screen potential members or simply have them show up at the first meeting, the people who join your group come with their own needs, personalities, and issues and you as facilitator are supposed to make it work, right? No pressure here ... until people walk through the door and reality hits.

Variables

Over the years I've learned that there are many variables that affect facilitation: Size: An ideal group is anywhere between about 8 and 25 people. At 25 people, not everyone may get a chance to be heard, unless the group is subdivided for that purpose, and reunited at the end of the meeting.

Space: wheelchair accessible? In many workplaces, while the meeting rooms may be accessible, washrooms are not. Be specific in your description of the meeting space.

Sensitivities: Recently I conducted a training workshop where someone was so sensitive to smell we had to rush out and buy crayons for the flipchart. Consider having "no odour" markers and asking attendees not to wear scent of any kind to avoid this issue.

Hearing impairments: For those who are hard of hearing or wearing hearing aids, group situations can be a disorienting and frustrating experience. Knowing who is dealing with hearing loss and arranging seating and supportive processes can increase that person's chances of being an active participant.

Visual impairments/literacy: Knowing if everyone is comfortable in reading Eng-

SHAW Events at a Glance:

- ??How to Start a Self-Help Group (on-line workshop) Sept 22nd
- ??How to Start a Self-Help Group (Toronto workshop) Sept 24th
- ??Facilitator Training Skills (Cambridge workshop) Sept 24th
- ??Dr David Goldbloom, vice-chair of Mental Health Commission of Canada speaks at Self-Help Resource Centre AGM (Toronto) Sept 25th
- ?? Francophone Resource Launch: Sept 26th
- ??Facilitation Workshop (Toronto) Sept 27th

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The 2nd "P" continued

lish or can see properly can be useful in pre-group preparations. If this arises as a barrier during group, one way of saving face is to read any materials out loud.

Location/Diversity: This is always difficult to determine beforehand, but some sense of the stats for your area may help in thinking about members' needs. For example, providing space for Muslim members if the group's schedule clashes with the appointed time for prayer or attempting to assess whether some facilitator attribute (such as age) could be interpreted as a barrier to a group member's participation. Many large U.S. corporations have begun forming affinity groups in their work places to address alienation in the areas of race, culture, disability, orientation or gender. In many cases, what began as feedback to senior management on the corporation's adherence to HR policies and human rights has evolved into giving input on product marketing strategies to each group's particular demographic.

Gender/Sexual orientation: Addictions research has shown that men do better in groups where women are present, but women do not. In that case, asking whether a woman would be comfortable in a male-dominated group and then monitoring whether she is successful in getting her needs met would be one approach. Having an existing women's group would also be an appropriate alternate choice, as well as an expected "given". The same can be said for orientation-specific support groups, where orientation is not a barrier, merely the jumping off point for a shared experience.

Personalities

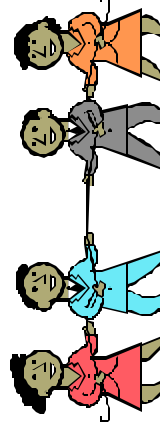
After the preparation and planning, the first group meeting you give you initial insight into the personalities involved and their reasons for attending. Over time people will reveal their inner bruises and habits of the heart they have created to protect themselves against further hurt. Methods of dealing with problems, solutions, conflicts, and goals will usually place people in three broad categories of group behaviours -- task, maintenance, or self-oriented. As the group develops, the facilitator will know who to call or rely on to initiate, be supportive, clarify, keep the group focused and on track. S/he will also have to respond to those who dominate, are aggressive, judgmental, or plain disruptive. Behaviours can be interrupted, redirected or changed. Yet how does one do that without becoming "part of the problem" in a particular member's eyes? The following three approaches have been quite helpful to me: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI); the change process; and a key concept from logotherapy.

While the MBTI has its skeptics and detractors, it can very useful in understanding and responding supportively to group members whose behaviours may seem baffling. Grasping the essentials of a person's energy level, how they function under stress and arrive at decisions makes it easier to reframe their requests, motivations, and needs in the group setting. The dominant talker may actually be extroverting his need to connect and make things happen rather than trying to sabotage; the introvert may simply need a longer period of observation before feeling she has something to say. Those self-oriented behaviours may be frustrations at not being heard, understood, or misinterpreted and so get constantly recycled to everyone's dissatisfaction. Realizing that "thinkers" may operate from principles that sound harsh and judgmental to those "feelers" who may prefer a sense of safe harmony makes maneuvering preferences a little more hopeful. Taking time to explain an issue in very practical terms might bore the "intuitive", but they might be the ones a facilitator can call on to assist with the required explanation a "sensor" needs. While far from definitive, the MBTI can shed light on conflict between members by helping them understand how to change behaviours in order to get their needs met appropriately.

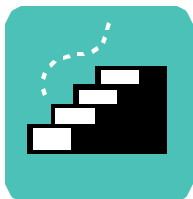
Stages of Change

The "stages of change process", developed by Prochaska, Norcross and DiClemente (PN&D), has been revelatory in the field of addictions because it answered the question "how do people change?" By asking those who had been successful in changing addictive behaviours, PN&D discovered there were distinct stages that people went through:

1. Pre-contemplation ("Problem? What problem? I don't have a problem.")
2. Contemplation ("OK, there might be a problem. Let me think about that.")



"the MBTI can shed light on conflict between members by helping them understand how to change behaviours in order to get their needs met appropriately."



The 2nd "P" continued

3. Preparation ("Yes, I have a problem. What steps and resources would I need to change?")
4. Action ("OK, I have a plan. Here are my goals and I am working on each one.")
5. Maintenance ("I have successfully reached my goal, changed my behaviour, and now I need to maintain that change.")
6. Termination ("I no longer have that behaviour.")

As facilitators, it is helpful to understand how these stages of change may relate to group development. If the group's purpose involves change of some kind, becoming aware of the various stages and the unrestricted time needed to negotiate each stage will help people gain self-acceptance until they are ready to move to the next stage. As Joy Kogawa suggests: "The first choice is to choose to move. If I'm in error, sooner or later I'll find out." However, projecting into the future and reflecting back over one's history can sometimes reframe the meaning of a person's issues and their choice to move.

"Meaning Making"

In terms of Frankl's logotherapy, the most useful piece I use as a facilitator is "meaning-making", the choice to attach significance to one's experience. Each person has certain values, consciously or unconsciously, that are used to determine whether something is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Listening, engaging, relating and examining behaviours in group can readjust one's interpretation about what matters. A quick example would be to write one's obituary or the comments from one's headstone to ascertain an individual's take on 'a life well lived'. People who felt their life was useless or hopeless can suddenly realize that in the larger scheme of things they really did have a purpose and might already be well on their way to fulfilling it. Meaning is always what we make of it, regardless of others' opinions, and when we understand that, nothing can stand in our way.

Questions and References

- ?? What have the members of your groups taught you?
- ?? Does the change process make sense to you and might it be useful in your own thinking about groups?
- ?? How does your personality affect the way you do group?

Once again, the floor is open as I look forward to learning from your unique experience
Spencer Brennan, OSHNET Coordinator

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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. In this issue we profile 2 OHPRS members:

The Alcohol Policy Network mission is to facilitate the development of policies that prevent problems associated with alcohol use and enhance the health, safety and well-being of individuals and communities across Ontario. Web: www.apolnet.ca

Best Start: Ontario's Maternal Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre supports service providers across the province of Ontario who are working on health promotion projects to improve the health of expectant parents and their young children. Web-site: www.beststart.org

What's the first "P"? Check out the previous issue of Self-Help Ontario available online at www.selfhelp.on.ca



"What lies before us, and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring what is within out into the world miracles happen."
Henry David Thoreau