Self-Help and Health Promotion

What is self-help?
Self-help is a process of sharing common experiences, situations or problems.

- Self-Help is participatory in nature - it involves getting help, giving help and learning to help yourself as well as sharing knowledge and experience.
- There is no charge to participate - this is generally the case, although a nominal donation to cover expenses is sometimes requested.
- Self-help initiatives are voluntary in nature - they are run by and for participants, they meet on an ongoing basis and they are open to new members.
- Self-help and mutual aid groups provide emotional support, practical support and information exchange. Some groups also engage in community education and advocacy.

Self-Help and Health Promotion: What’s the connection?

Health Promotion is about increasing personal and community responsibility.

Self-help contributes by:
- Encouraging consumer involvement
- Fostering participation
- Developing people’s sense of empowerment to make informed decisions

Health Promotion contributes by:
- strengthening community action
- providing opportunities for individuals to participate with professionals in making related choices

Self-help is about building small scale community-based approaches to issues.

For more information and resources, contact the Self-Help Resource Centre at (416) 487-4355 or (toll free) 1-888-283-8806.
Email: oshnet@selfhelp.on.ca  Website: www.selfhelp.on.ca
Does Self-Help Work?

- Support from families, friends and communities is associated with better health.
  An extensive study in California found that, for men and women, the more social contact people have, the lower their premature death rates.

- Social support networks act as a buffer against health problems and offer a sense of mastery and control over circumstances.
  A U.S. study found that low availability of emotional support and low social participation were associated with all-cause mortality.

- Social support networks contribute to maintaining positive lifestyle changes.
  Individuals attending AA in conjunction with professional counselling are less likely to drink (Emrick et al 1993). Those who chose to attend AA cost 45% less per person in outpatient costs. (Humphreys 1996)

Keys to cooperation between professionals and self helpers

Self-help and mutual-aid groups are an important complement to the work of health promoters and other health professionals. They provide an additional, complementary source of support (along with professional care, friends and family, health systems) for the individual experiencing a unique issue.

Strategies for professionals to make effective referrals to self-help groups

- Contact your nearest self-help/mutual aid centre for listings and information about self-help/mutual aid groups in your community (the Ontario Self-Help Network publishes a list of centres).

- Call self-help groups to get more information about what they do and how they do it.

- Consult literature about self-help and professional collaboration.

- Speak with colleagues who have referred clients to self-help groups.

- Discuss self-help/mutual aid as an option with your clients.

- Make self-help literature and brochures available to your clients.

- For more resources (consultation services, information materials, and training workshops), contact the Ontario Self-Help Network (a program of the Self-Help Resource Centre) at (416) 487-4355/1-888-283-8806, oshnet@selfhelp.on.ca.