

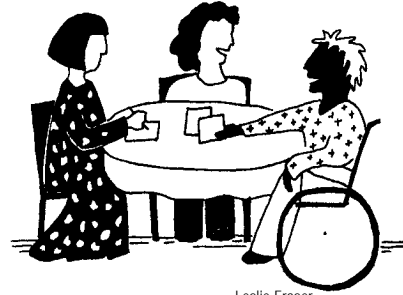
Working with Health Promotion's Informal Economy

Notes and resources from a workshop

@ the Association of Ontario Health Centre Conference, June 2003.

Background

This workshop was designed as a structured participatory exchange to reveal how CHCs are collaborating with informal health promotion groups and to explore directions that broaden our impacts. The workshop was presented at the Association of Ontario Health Centres' Annual Conference in June, 2003. The process was facilitated by Gillian Kranias, Coordinator, Ontario Self Help Network program, Self-Help Resource Centre.



Definitions

- **Health Promotion** is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.
- A **Health Promoter** is anyone who works to promote health - both paid staff and volunteers of organizations or groups from various sectors.
- **Self-Help/Mutual Aid** is a process of sharing common experiences, situations, problems and knowledge. It involves getting help, giving help and learning to help yourself. The primary focus is emotional support, practical support and information exchange.
- **Health Promotion's Informal Economy** was defined as a given community's volunteer-led initiatives that are not formally integrated into non-profit sector infrastructures (e.g. "kitchen table" groups, small self-help/mutual aid groups, other non-incorporated groups, groups operating exclusively with in-kind resources, or groups sustaining their activities through small membership fees/"pass-the-hat" fundraising).



Volunteer, self-help and mutual aid initiatives represent the informal economy of health promotion. In these small groups, community members address a broad spectrum of health determinants and health concerns from an experiential perspective. Issues addressed include: housing, parenting, illness, disability, sexism, racism, homophobia, bereavement, abuse, care-giving, relationships, and settlement.

Workshop Notes

What groups have you/are you connected with?

Workshop participants identified the following (wide) variety of groups that CHCs have connected with:

- Special needs
- Brain injury
- Parent support
- Harm reduction
- Stress reduction
- Parents who have teens
- Chronic pain management
- Newcomers
- Pre and post-natal
- Addictions
- Homeless
- Schools/classrooms
- Suicide
- Mental health
- Prostate cancer
- Smoking cessation
- Diabetes
- School tutoring
- Neighbourhood friendship group
- Computer/internet
- Theatre
- Yoga/exercise/dance
- Aboriginal groups
- Community kitchen
- Women's body issues
- Community garden
- Youth
- Seniors
- Tenants' organization
- Women's peer mentoring
- Breastfeeding
- Arthritis
- Arts and crafts

Some of these groups could be considered “informal health promotion groups”, while others are programs of the CHC (or other agency) that engage and build the capacity of “volunteer (lay) health promoters”.

What collaborative supports have you provided?

In small groups, workshop participants discussed in more detail the nature of specific collaborations with volunteer-led, self-help and mutual aid initiatives. These examples were then analyzed to evaluate the impacts of the collaborative support and interventions provided by the CHC. Participants grouped the various collaborative supports/interventions by “high impact”, “medium impact”, and “low impact”. In sharing their analyses, some noted that the impact of the intervention could vary depending on the kind of group they were working with.

High Impact Collaborations:

- Breaking down the “fear” barriers (e.g. IT, socializing)
- Offering childcare
- Training and Skill Development – not just for staff but volunteers too
- Providing meeting/program space
- Providing lunch and transportation (e.g. seniors)
- Mentoring
- Mobilizing on common issues

- Providing space (and books) as well as admin support

Medium Impact

- Training/workshops
- Marketing support
- Transportation
- Professional materials and support (e.g. needles & counseling for drug use harm reduction)

Lower Impact

- Providing space
- Conflict resolution
- Kitchen, food and books (e.g. community kitchen)

Workshop Conclusion

The workshop's concluding discussion emphasized that similar supports might have different levels of impact depending on the type of group and its stage of group development.

Due to a shortage of time, participants were unable to synthesize the full implications of their discussions. One question which remained unexplored was: how do we let community members know about the collaborative supports our Community Health Centre can provide to their efforts/initiatives?

Some Closing Thoughts

To enhance the scope of these workshop notes, the workshop facilitator conducted an online survey of resources that identify guidelines and tips for the provision of collaborative supports to informal health promoters/volunteer-led community groups.

Selected resources are listed in the section below. Key messages gleaned from these resources include:

- Value and recognize volunteer-led initiatives whatever their size/scope.
- Ask volunteer-led community groups to identify their priorities for activities, projects, and professional/organizational supports; wherever possible, adopt these as your priorities.
- Focus on making the most of and enhancing the assets that already exist in the community.
- Ensure that volunteer-led community groups have knowledge of and access to the resources they need.
- Keep your collaborative processes open – to participation, to comment and to change by the community volunteers you work with.
- Keep conscious about your role in the community and the power dynamics of any “partnership” efforts you engage in.

Further Resources

The following resources materials and organizations are recommended for more general insights regarding the provision of collaborative supports to informal (lay) health promoters and volunteer-led community groups:

“Community Development – YAPA New Worker Series,” factsheet based on an article by Louise King. Available online at <http://www.yapa.org.au/facts/comdev.pdf> or email info@yapa.org.au

“Working with Communities: Ten Lessons” in CHP Notes, published by the Community Health Promotion network Atlantic. Available online at http://www.chpna.ca/newsite/downloads/chpnotes/communities_en.html

“Tips for the Helping Professional: A Different Role in the World of Self-Help,” factsheet published by the Ontario Self-Help Network/ Self-Help Resource Centre. Available online at http://www.selfhelp.on.ca/cgi-bin/resource/webdata_shrc.pl?fid=1057254349&query=Format%3Dfactsheet%26pagenum%3D1%26cgifunction%3DSearch%26submit%3DSearch&cgifunction=form or call (416) 487-4355

“Capacity Building for Health Promotion: More Than Bricks and Mortar” article published by the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, Spring 2002. Available at http://www.opc.on.ca/english/our_programs/hlth_promo/resources/capacity_building.pdf

The Community Development Handbook: A Tool to Build Community Capacity, written by Flo Frank and Anne Smith, published by Human Resources Development Canada, (819) 952-7414, or online <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/community>

Leading By Stepping Back: A Guide For City Officials On Building Neighborhood Capacity (workbook) by Henry Moore and Deborah Punttenney, distributed by ACTA Publications, Chicago. Online order form at <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/stepback.html>