Starting, Nurturing and Maintaining Caregiver Support Groups

Groups that are not growing are dying

First things, first

- Please remember this is just a primer. NACAC and others host multi-day trainings on support group development. Feel free to follow up with us and others for additional technical assistance.

- Reconsider calling your group a “support group.” For this webinar, we use the term in instructional ways, but remember—many potential attendees and members will stay away from a support group as they may feel a stigma attached. Consider “coffee hour,” “discussion group,” “grandma’s night out,” anything that indicates camaraderie and normalization, while offering a welcoming reprieve from the daily work of caregiving.

Why do people come to a support group?

- For information
- To have the support of others
- To normalize feelings
- To share their experience
- To get advice from “experts”
- To socialize

Caregiver Group Development

- Primary Types and Evolution of Groups:
  - Frustration/Venting
  - Mutual Support
  - Service
  - Advocacy

Each type will have a unique:

- Reason for Existence
- Purpose
- Program/Services
- Structure
Getting The Group Started

- As a group leader, one of your first tasks is to find other group members and organize your first public meeting.

- Decisions and action to take:
  - Inviting new members
  - Location
  - Day and time
  - Publicity
  - Planning
  - Agenda

Developing Group Identity & Activities

- Clarifying Identity
  - Who are we?
  - What do we care about?
  - What problem do we want to address?
  - What are our needs?

- Building the Foundation
  - Choosing a Name

Exercise: Identify Your Purpose

- Writing Your Mission Statement

Dividing the Work

- Tracking Progress
- Information and Outreach
- Contacts and Membership
- Activities and Events
- Fundraising

Managing Group Meetings

In caregiver group meetings, facilitation is the art of guiding group discussions and protecting the structure of the meeting to help the group be effective and productive.

- Group Member Roles
  - Task-Oriented
- Human Dynamics
- Facilitator Reminders
- Discussions
  - Choosing Topics
  - Education and Training
- Structuring the Meeting:
  * Beginning
  * Middle
  * End
Anticipating Challenges as a Leader

› Balancing support and education
› Childcare and other needs
› Personal crises
› Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

Financial Planning and Fundraising

› A challenge to most groups is finding and keeping a secure funding base:
  ◦ The Importance of Obtaining a 501 (C) (3)
  ◦ Keeping Accurate Financial Records
  ◦ Develop a Budget
  ◦ Identifying Funding Sources
  ◦ Fundraisers / Special Events
  ◦ Dues
  ◦ In-kind Donations
  ◦ Proposals and Grant Writing

Becoming A Nonprofit Organization

› The benefits of incorporating and obtaining federal tax-exempt status are: donations, foundation grants, nonprofit mailing privileges, sales tax exemptions, and more.

Getting Organized

› Name and Mission Statement
› Activities and Services
› Officers
› Board
› Articles of Incorporation
› By Laws
› Tax Exempt Status

* This can be a complicated process – contact us for technical assistance.

Rejuvenating Your Group

› Like a living organism with a life of its own groups can become sick and die. They can be healed and renewed as they grow and mature into something different.

› Be Creative: Value Members Talent
  * Attract New People
  * Have a Retreat
  * Offer Services / Training
  * Respond to Community Needs
  * Retain Members / Allow Others to Lead / Be Open to Change
Stages a group may go through:

- **Stage 1** – nervous leader, silent members, people who come once and then not again
- **Stage 2** – members numbers change, members getting a feel if they want to continue coming
- **Stage 3** – members coming regularly, more commitment, ready to volunteer, trust, talk and laughter
- **Stage 4** – crisis, the founder leaves, or key people leave
- **Stage 5** – regroup and rejuvenate: requires planned succession of leadership and/or shared leadership from start

Keep Members coming regularly

- Keep Communications open eliciting new ideas and participation
- Have the needs of the group changed?
- Feedback/Evaluation– Do you have any suggestions to improve our meetings?
  - Roses and Thorns

Promote Your Group

Spread the word about your group. This helps to create awareness about the issue, gather new members, and gain support from the community

Create a unique angle or “hook” to help in promoting your group – name choice and recognition matter

Encourage group members to spread the word

Newspaper articles and announcements

Promote Your Group Cont.

- Newsletters or E-Newsletters
  - Council members
  - Schools
  - Other support/caregiver groups
  - Community Organizations
- Websites
  - Using the web means that our information is available 24/7
  - It will communicate with isolated or disabled members
Networking

It is important to consistently network to ensure the group’s ongoing development and maintenance.

- Allows for the sharing of valuable contacts and information
- Gain support and referrals
- Establishes relationships

Ongoing Commitment

- Don’t confuse effectiveness with number of participants.
- Maintain your media contacts, stay in touch with your network organizations
- Be aware of your own limitations

Ongoing Commitment

- The more you get your members involved, the more members will feel useful and have a sense of ownership and vested interest in the groups continuance.

Looking Forward

- Reassess Your Community Needs (make sure your group is offering services that meet the needs of the community).
- Collaborate / Form Service Agreement with Agency (approach service delivery or support ideas that follow the lines of support, prevention and recruitment retention).
- Look for New Funding Sources (partner with successful community groups and be open to new approaches)

Connect with Key People!
Resources

- Starting, Nurturing and Maintaining Adoptive Parent Groups: A Guide for Leaders
- Developing a Parent to Parent Support Network
- Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite Care in Your Community
  - http://www.brookdalefoundation.org/RAPP/rapp.html

Grandfamily Resources

- Brookdale Foundation
  - Publications and Multimedia
    - http://www.brookdalefoundation.org/RAPP/rapp.html
  - Relatives as Parents Guidebook
    - http://www.brookdalefoundation.org/RAPP/07-080_n4a_Brookdale_final.pdf
  - Developing Rural Relatives as Parents Programming: Promising Practices
- Grandfamilies Outcome Workgroup (GrOW)
  - madelyn@grandparentsasparents.org

Our Partners

- National Foster Parents Association
  - http://www.nfpaonline.org
- Generations United
- North American Council on Adoptable Children
  - http://www.nacac.org/parentgroups/parentgroups.html

Contact Information

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