Rejuvenating Your Parent Group
How to Heal and Renew!

• Diane Martin-Hushman MSW
  NACAC
  CCN Family Support
  hushman@nacac.org
  # 651-329-4886

Think Positive!
• Why would people want to come to this support group?
• What are their needs?
• What are the five top reasons?
• What do we wish we could do better?
Reasons for Involvement with Support Groups

• For Information
• To have the support of others
• To normalize feelings
• To share their experience
• To get advice from “experts”
• To socialize
• Decrease isolation

You Gotta Believe!

• Value of groups:
• Smith & Howard: more helpful than intensive services like family therapy
• Delaney: Normalizes experience, sets realistic expectations, prepares for crisis, innovative strategies
• Child Welfare Information Gateway: parents less isolated, more empowered & confident

VA State Adoption Services

Their evaluation of 500 families identified three major service needs that led to successful outcomes:

• Parent to parent support
• Respite
• Adoption competent mental health/child welfare practitioners
Post Adoption Services

- Information & Referral
- Parent Support Network
- Training
- Youth Support/Speak Out Teams
- Clinical Services
- Crisis Support

Post Adoption Support

- NACAC/MN DHS parent-to-parent support
- Lessons learned over 15 years:
  - Connecting with support early is important
  - Being with other adoptive families is normalizing
  - Parents learn from one another
  - Technology offers new ways to connect
  - Partnering with others increases outreach to families.

Time to Assess your Group:

- Membership Survey:
  What are the members needs: time, location, child care, educational topics, fun, socialization, relationship building, etc.

  LISTEN TO GROUP MEMBERS!

Methods: Survey monkey, focus group, telephone call, questionnaire
What do you do with the Assessment?

- Create yearly schedule:
  - Usually starting in September
  - Need to recreate every year
  - Plan both educational and social opportunities
  - What are people willing to do to help?
  - What other special skills in the group members?

Yearly Calendar

- Ideas:
  - October: Back to school issues
  - November: Holiday Stress
  - December: Fun time, social activity
  - February: Taking Care of the Care Giver
    - Retreat; couples or mom’s
  - March: Adoption Tax Credit

Yearly Calendar

- Socialization:
  - Family Picnic
  - Families to sporting events
  - Back to school events
  - Honoring the members with a luncheon, awards banquet, small gifts
  - Cultural events

It’s so important to help families play together and have fun!
Yearly Calendar

- Educational
  - What are the issues that your members are talking about most?
  - behavioral issues
  - FASD
  - trauma
  - school issues
  - loss and grief issues

Tracking and Evaluation

- What was successful?
- Meeting/event/support?
  - Presenter/Facilitator
  - Description
  - Discussion
  - Participants
  - Any follow up

The four “C’s”

- Communication:
  - Ownership: Everybody’s group
  - Flow chart of talents/skills
  - Would you do the following?
  - We need your skills/talents to do........
  - When new ideas are incorporated and elicited, point this out to the group
  - Evaluation/Feedback
Four “C’s”

• Connectedness:
  - Share stories, phone numbers, emails
  - Share issues, connect people that have the same issues
  - Newsletter or E-News
  - Social media connectedness:
    - Facebook, website, blogs, internet support groups
    - Promote Your Group!!!

Four “C’s”

• Creativity:
  - Attract New Members:
    - Welcome Committee (phone call or email after the meeting & when next meeting)
    - Mentoring (CT Foster Parent Association)
    - Have present members each invite someone they know to the gathering
  - Networking
    - Have fun together, laugh!

Four “C’s”

• Creativity:
  - Have a family retreat or camp experience
  - Offer cutting edge training:
    - National Child Trauma Stress Network
      (www.nctsn.org)
    - Book: “Wounded Children, Healing Homes” Jayne Schooler/Betsy Smalley
    - Respond to the needs you hear in group
Four “C’s”

- CHANGE
- Meet the needs of your community/group!

Types of Groups:
- Venting Group
- Mutual Support
- Group
- Service Group
- Advocacy Group
- Post Permanency Agency

MFCAA

- Started in 1999 as small support group
- Today: support 850 foster/adopt/kinship folk
- Programs:
  - Advocacy & support
  - Parent mentoring
  - Support groups & Training
  - Information & Sharing
  - Clothing & food pantry

Change

- Look at how the community has changed:
- Groups meeting four times a year and connecting through Face book at other times!
- Specialty group
- Older kids
- More foster to adopt parents
Other Issues

• Whose group is it anyway?
  ✓ Parent Run
  ✓ Parent Run/Agency Supported
  ✓ Agency Run

Facilitation

• Need person to really facilitate a meeting
  ✓ Believe in cause, Ask for help, Be willing to change, take care of self, laugh and find humor in situations, grab an audience, and find balance in this position
  ✓ Don’t be afraid to talk about difficult situations
    Allegations & disruptions

• Facilitating purposeful engaging activities throughout the life of the group is a necessity!
Meetings

• Have a beginning, middle, and ending:
  
• Beginning: mixer, get folk to relax and know each other, engage in the first five minutes, confidentiality
  
• Middle: take time to support as well as give information, make sure everyone has the opportunity to talk
  
• Ending: Send folk home feeling positive and wanting to come back...affirmations, what went well, things we could do better, where the next meeting will be, etc.

Stumbling Stones

• Personal & interpersonal relationships that are damaging & not dealt with
  
• Over-dependence on leader
  
• Lack of support within group/agency
  
• Identifying and securing resources for the group
  
• Delegating responsibility
  
• Lack of problem solving strategies

Strategies for Sustaining

• BALANCE: work, fun, personal time, fundraising events, support, education, hands-on involvement
  
• PLAN: activities for the entire year
  
• DELEGATE: You can not do this alone and this is all the members group
  
• LISTEN and take action
  
• LEADERSHIP that understands support, volunteers, problem solving
  
• FUNDING: be creative, look for new funding sources
Taking Care of the Leadership

• Take time together
• Talk to other groups that are successful
• Meet quarterly with other groups
• Ask for help
• Develop trust within leadership
• Be open to change, ask; “How are we doing? What can be do to improve?”

Have Fun!

• Remember that laughter, humor and fun are good medicine for lots of things!

• My favorite quote:

Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass,
It’s ABOUT
learning
To DANCE
in the rain.