

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

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HOW SELF-HELP GROUPS SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

- Ed Madara

1. **By Meeting Your Clients' Unmet Needs** for peer support, positive role models, practical coping skills & information, potential friendships, education, quality of life & wellness to supplement your therapy. Especially to relieve a client's sense of isolation and help them recognize that they indeed "are not alone," as well as to improve discharge planning (with groups serving as anchors for support after treatment ends) - thereby both enhancing quality of care and increasing patient satisfaction with & trust in the professional.
2. **Prevent the Burnout** of caring professionals who realize they cannot be "all things" on a "24/7" basis to their clients. Groups and their supportive members are available after agency doors are closed and on weekends.
3. **Your service is perceived as "more caring,"** knowledgeable about, and involved in helping community organizations.
4. **Increase Public Visibility of Your Professional Services & Agency.** Your support to self-help groups often results in enhanced agency outreach and media citations for agencies and supportive professionals, e.g., if you provide free meeting space, speakers from your agency, encourage & network clients to form a new group, expert advice to existing groups, etc.
5. **Groups Serve as Source of Needed & Increased Referrals** - a "2 -way street":
6. group members referring members and others to you, and you referring your clients and colleagues to the support groups.
7. **Source of Ongoing Education & Insights for Your Practice** "Learning from Patients" when professionals ask for client feedback, visit groups to observe dynamics, etc. But can be taken an additional step by involving representatives in presenting at staff meetings, workshops, conferences, and continuing education training presentations resulting in a better understanding of the experience and realities that people face.
8. **Can Serve as Constructive Critics/Partners** in evaluating and improving services, identifying service problems. Working with one's "customers" is a key recommendation in most quality improvement programs, e.g., in CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement), TQM (Total Quality Management, "Reinventing Government," etc.
9. **Can Serve as Needed Constituency** for political and/or community support regarding funding, development of needed new programs, services, facilities, etc.
10. **Can Serve as Helpful Speakers for Public & Professional Training.** By involving members of self-help groups in your conferences, workshops, and continuing education training - you provide **more genuine and reality-based educational experiences** for professionals and the public.
11. Represent a wide variety of **Additional Resources & Potential** that can support and help your clients. In terms of group potential, consider how your encouragement of potential group founders can lead to a needed new community group. Or how your own educational, time-limited groups **can sometimes be grown** into ongoing community resources by your simply suggesting to participants that they consider the option of having their own ongoing self-help group, after your professionally run group ends.
12. Involve in your research efforts, e.g., through participatory research
13. Continue your work - if you launch a group - as a result of having a workshop series