



Benefits of Self Help Groups

Introduction

The 1999 Report of the United States Surgeon General notes that one of the greatest contributions of consumer organisations has been the proliferation of self-help groups that have improved the lives of thousands of patients.

Self help groups can have a positive impact on members:

- For many people, finding out they are 'not the only one' is one of the major benefits of self help groups.
- Common ground and a common language help participants 'feel normal' again.
- Self help groups provide a comparative perspective of one's own problems.
- Reduced depression has been documented as a benefit of self help group membership.
- For many participants, group membership provides benefits which go beyond the support for their condition. These benefits include friendship and emotional support, increased self esteem, improved communication skills etc.
- Self help groups are banks of knowledge and wisdom which can assist many people in making informed, responsible decisions and so be more in control of their lives.
- Members of self help groups have day to day, practical knowledge and experience in assisting with self care and the maintenance of wellbeing.
- Unlike services provided by hospitals, clinics, professionals etc self help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The help provided by self help groups (for the most part) is free.
- Self help groups provide mutual support – people help each other as they help themselves. There is no distinction between the giver and the receiver.
- Groups may have a stronger voice than individuals working alone. This often helps to express needs, be heard and get things done.

- Self help groups are in a unique position to collect data for researchers and provide useful information to health planners. Some groups have identified secondary factors in their own condition, thereby leading to further scientific research.
- Social health research confirms that the self help process enhances individual well being, increases community capacity and builds social capital. Self Help is endorsed by the World Health Organisation as an important strategy in its 'Health for All' movement.
- Self help groups are instrumental in keeping people out of expensive levels of care in the health system. ¹
- By any measure, this diverse and committed population of people active in their own well being represents not only a significant contribution to the community and the health sector, but also a potentially powerful political force. ²

References

¹ Dorothy M. Bowes "SUPPORT GROUPS: An undervalued community resource."
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² Smyllie, S "Self Help Queensland Directory of Self Help and Support Groups"
2006/2007 Page 2

Reviewed 1/11/2016

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