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Strengthening Organizations, Strengthening Communities

PROGRAM IDEAS FOR YOUR SELF-HELP GROUP

“We have done everything! What should we do at the next meeting?” Is this something your group has said? Do you have a basically healthy support group that needs some new ideas of creative things to do at your meetings? If so, here are some suggestions other group leaders throughout Kansas have found to be useful:

1. Make up an “Events Calendar” for the entire year to help the group develop a plan to meet group goals. Include regular meeting dates, special group programs or events, and local community events.**

To Open the Meeting

Go around the room and ask people to:

2. Pick the mood they feel from the “How Do You Feel Today?” chart and tell why.
3. Describe one good thing that has happened since the last meeting.
4. Share what their strengths/gifts are.
5. Share one thing they have learned through their difficult circumstance.
6. Describe how they are feeling based on a category (animals, flowers, colors, numbers (1-10), etc.).

Inside the Meetings

7. Put topics related to the concern of the group in an envelope and each meeting pick one out for discussion.*
8. Ask who in the group has a pressing **need** to talk and let him go first. Then go around the room giving each person an opportunity to share. Use a kitchen timer if necessary to keep it moving.
9. Work on a craft project together.
10. Give away donated door prizes.
11. Play a board game like *Pictionary*.
12. Get *The Book of Questions* to explore creative ways of learning more about each other.
13. Get the book *New Games* to get ideas about interactive games the group can play to get to know each other better.
14. Use *The Encyclopedia of Icebreakers* by Sue Forbess-Greene, which contains structured activities that warm up, motivate, challenge, acquaint, and energize.
15. Show a video, film, or slide show (your church, hospital, health department, or extension office would be good sources).
16. Read a book together and discuss it.
17. Raffle off a donated item.
18. Role play communication techniques.
19. Pick a topic, have each group member write on it for 10 minutes, and then discuss it.*
20. Start study groups where interested members research a topic of concern to the group and share the information with the group.*
21. Do a relaxation exercise.*
22. Adopt a closing (a song, reading, reflection, etc.). Close meetings on a positive note.*

23. Have group members make a collage about something that is important to them, i.e. "What I have accomplished this year," using pictures, words, and phrases that have special meaning. Then members can discuss their collages in the group.*
24. Celebrate birthdays and personal triumphs of members.
25. Utilize art materials to express thoughts and feelings.*
26. Share personal writings (stories, poetry, etc.).
27. Have different members sign up to arrange the programs and to facilitate the meetings.
28. Discuss group successes and/or concerns.
29. Play BINGO together.
30. Exercise together.
31. Once a quarter, honor the families or have a special meeting for the families.
32. Take notes on the progress of group members and refer to them at meetings.

Outside the Meetings

Spending time together outside of meetings can be as important to the development of the group as the regular meetings themselves. Members can form close, caring relationships when they share time together. It can also help them focus on things besides their concern. Here are some ideas to get you started. Be creative and have fun!

33. Go on a picnic.
34. Do a service project together (serving at a soup kitchen or other community service organization, etc.).
35. Take a field trip to a historic museum, art center, etc.
36. Hold a progressive dinner (eat each course of the meal at a different member's home)
37. Once a quarter go out for dinner as a group.
38. Volunteer in the community.
39. Take a trip together or go on a retreat.
40. Have a swimming party.
41. Bake goodies together in a member's home.
42. Visit another support group.
43. Get together for lunch.
44. Go bowling.
45. Attend an athletic event.
46. Spend an afternoon in the park.
47. Attend a workshop sponsored by the Self-Help Network!

Speaker Ideas

48. Have a panel of knowledgeable people speak to your group.
49. Have a professional demonstrate equipment or medical testing related to the topic of the group.
50. Invite group members to give short talks about themselves (i.e. "Who Am I" or "My hope in life").**
51. Look for members who have had unusual experiences and feature them (i.e. "I Was There"). **
52. Ask your county extension agent to speak on stress management or other topics.
53. Invite a professional to speak on active listening, conflict management, or child-rearing.
54. Invite the following to speak to your group: pharmacist; dietician; health department nurse; pastor; physical, occupational, or respiratory therapist; police; doctor; mental health center; judge; social worker; psychologist; attorney; or financial planner.

Celebrate the Holidays

55. Take Valentines to a local nursing home.
56. Make Easter baskets for college students away from home or children in a hospital.
57. Have a 4th of July picnic together.
58. Hold a potluck Thanksgiving dinner.

59. Go Christmas caroling together.
60. Have a Christmas gift exchange.

Community Awareness

61. Write an article about the group together and send it to your local newspaper.
62. Develop a newsletter – each person could share in writing articles.
63. Create a library of materials related to the topic of your group
64. Develop a Speakers' Bureau - speak at schools, church groups, and local organizations like Kiwanis or join the Network's Speakers' Bureau.
65. Participate in local parades and fairs.
66. Write your legislators as a group.

Fundraising Ideas

67. Hold a bake sale.
68. Sponsor BINGO.
69. Hold a dance.**
70. Sell raffle tickets on a donated item.**
71. Set up a table at a flea market.**
72. Organize a benefit concert with local talent.**
73. Hold a walk-a-thon.
74. Create a cookbook.
75. Hold an ice cream social.
76. Collect aluminum cans/recycle.

Please note: When fundraising, first check into your state fundraising regulations. Remember, it's important to include the ideas and suggestions of group members in the program planning. When members are a part of the decision-making and planning they will develop more of an investment in the group. That is what self-help groups are all about!

If you have more ideas, please call CCSR at 1-800-445-0116 We would love to include your suggestions in this handout. Also, if your group is facing a difficulty that needs more technical assistance, please call us.

** From A Guide for Women's Recovery Groups by Terri Kilbride.*

*** From Lead On! The Complete Handbook for Group Leaders by Leslie Griffin Lawson, Franklyn D. Donant, & John D. Lawson.*