

Sairam Babu

Support Group Meeting Assignment

03/11/2023

Groups of like-minded individuals coming together in the pursuit of bettering themselves meet all over the world for as many reasons as there are people attending them. Some groups meet to help each other cope with loss while others meet in order to enact change or illicit action. However, few groups are as well-known as Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Founded in 1953, Narcotics Anonymous describes itself as “is a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem.” (Narcotics Anonymous World Services Inc., 2016). According a survey conducted by Narcotics Anonymous World Services Inc. (2018), NA boasts over 70,000 weekly meetings in 144 different countries. On average, members reported that they attend 2.19 meetings per week which contributed to an average of 11.41 years of being “clean” in regards to their addiction

I was fortunate enough to attend an open meeting of NA on 03/05/2023 that was titled as “Live at Five”. This is a recurring meeting that is held via Zoom every Sunday from 5pm until 6:30pm. Prior to meeting on Zoom, the group held their meetings in an addiction recovery facility in the southern Queens community. Many of the members appeared to be older in nature with many members stating that they had been coming to NA for 10-20 years. Out of the 7 or 8 group members who shared, the youngest person had stated that he was 45 years old. The other group members indicated that they were in their upper 50’s or lower 60’s. The group was predominately made up of African Americans and had an even mix of men and women. The group was led by a singular leader who had specific members whom he would call on in order to facilitate certain aspects of the meeting (reading traditions, rules, etc.). The leader of the meeting

utilized an authoritarian leadership style (Zastrow 2014, p.88) in how he ran the group. He informed everyone of what we were going to do next and keep member's sharing to a certain time limit. The leader had a pre-set agenda that he was following and invited members to participate in the meeting but not in the way the meeting would be run.

The leader began the group by welcoming the attendees to the group and confirming that this was an open, beginners meeting of NA and introducing himself. The group then took some time to read and reflect on excerpts from the *White Booklet*, one of the pinnacle documents of the NA philosophy. The excerpts defined what is an addict, what is the narcotics anonymous program, how it works, and the twelve traditions of NA. After all the literature was read, group members were invited to share their personal history, their current circumstances, and whatever was on their mind. The group leader transitioned from one member's sharing to the next by simply calling on people. Finally, the group ended with the "Serenity Prayer."

Although my experience with NA was brief, it was a rich experience to listen to the stories of various members and the sincerity behind each of their stories and encouragements. NA is classified as a "self-help group" According to Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, and Strom-Gottfried and Larsen, "In self-help groups, members have central shared concerns, such as coping with addiction, cancer, or obesity" (Zastrow 2014. p.277).

While the meeting was technically a beginners meeting, it was apparent that many of the members had been attending meetings with one another for a long time. According to the Garland, Jones, and Kolodny Model of group development, the group appeared to be in the "intimacy" stage of group development. Groups in the intimacy stage of development are characterized by "feelings are more openly ex-pressed and discussed, and the group is viewed as a place where growth and change take place" (Zastrow 2014, p. 20). Group members who

participated in the discussion provided a broad overview of their lives but expressed more intimate feelings of frustration, depression, and personal weakness. When these emotions were expressed, they were routinely met with empathetic responses as well as encouraging statements. When a member expressed that they had not been sober longer than a year, another member responded, saying “Don't get caught up on the years and forget the days.” Another group member expressed sadness after a recent temptation to relapse, to which another member stated “If you ass falls off, pick it up and take it with you to a meeting.” Katz and Bender would consider this group as whose focus is on self-fulfillment or personal growth (Zastrow 2014, p. 278).

The phrase “self-help” can mean a variety of things to different people. However, in its basest form, it is a group of people gathering for the sake of bettering themselves. NA is exactly that. With a simple format and low production value, NA unashamedly proclaims that it is a group of addicts, looking for victory of their disease. While self-help groups provide several therapeutic effects, two specific ones stood out. One of the biggest therapeutic effects of NA is it offers cognitive restructuring for its members. According to Borman, “Members develop a new perspective on themselves and their problems.” (Zastrow 2014, p. 280). In terms of NA, one of the core messages is that the member is an addict and powerless over their disease without help. In fact, one of the members shared a message for newcomers where she encouraged them to “Ask for help and don't tell the help how to help.” The second therapeutic effect is that it offers hope, in that the member “develop hope that their life lives will get better as they see the lives of others with similar problems improve.” (Zastrow 2014, p. 280). Spending an hour and a half, listening to the experiences of group members, was a valuable experience to not only get insight into the daily experience of an addict in recovery, but also witness the ongoing therapeutic

effects that self-help groups can have on anyone. Self help groups, or therapy groups in general, can be a valuable setting to build a therapeutic environment for people to grow and build a support network to continue helping them in their journey.

References

Narcotics Anonymous World Services. (2007). *Narcotics Anonymous White Booklet*. Chatsworth, Calif.:

Narcotics Anonymous World Services.

Narcotics Anonymous World Services Inc. (2016). *Information about NA 2016*. Retrieved from

http://www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/pdf/pr/Info_about_NA_2016.pdf

Narcotics Anonymous World Services Inc. (2018). *Importance of First NA Meeting Influences to Attend*

First NA Meeting and to Stay in NA. Retrieved from

<http://www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/pdf/conference/project/>

2301_MS_2018_Nov19.pdf

Zastrow, C. (2014). *Brooks/Cole Empowerment Series: Social Work with Groups: A Comprehensive*

Worktext (9th ed.). Cengage Learning US.