

Support Group Meeting Assignment

Charleny Genoval

Department of Social Work, Alliance University– New York

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Dr. Carlton Jean

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Self-help groups are defined by Zastrow and Hessenauer (2019) as “voluntary associations in which members provide each other with various types of help, usually nonmaterial and nonprofessional, for a particular shared, usually challenging, characteristic” (Zastrow & Hessenauer, 2019, p. 252).

I had the opportunity to observe an Alcoholics Anonymous open group for beginners. The group is in New York, but it takes place online which allows members from other states to join. The group members are mainly from the LGBTQ community, but it is open to those of different sexual preferences, gender identities, and different cultures. There is one group facilitator, and he allows other members to take on roles such as timekeepers, readers, and closers. The facilitator allows the members to be speakers and give their testimony to motivate others to do so. Although the group is for beginners, other members have been part of the group for some time and share their stories to encourage others and to make them feel a sense of belonging.

At the beginning of the group, the facilitator introduced himself and went over some ground rules which he also typed in the chat to make sure that everyone can read them throughout the process. After that, he encouraged others to introduce themselves but at the same time, he made sure to emphasize that it was voluntary and if they felt comfortable sharing. The group facilitator did not require everyone to have their cameras on but invited them to turn them on to make the group feel more intimate.

When a member shared, they spoke about how long they’ve been sober. In addition, they shared their struggles, victories, and books that they found useful throughout their journey to sobriety. The rest of the group members provided active listening and gave positive feedback by

using encouraging words or using a heart or clapping emoji. After a member spoke, the rest of the group was able to relate to what was shared and felt encouraged to also speak about their past or present struggles with alcoholism.

At the end of the group session, the facilitator asked for volunteers for the next group meeting to take on the roles available. Additionally, the facilitator shares “The 9th Steps Promises” which consists of declarations that are found in *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* (W et al., 2019). These declarations are read collectively by the entire group which is meant to give the members a sense of acceptance and peace from their experiences followed by a “Serenity Prayer”. Lastly, one thing that I noticed at the end of the meeting was that many of the members shared their contact information in the group chat so that others can contact them if they need support or someone to talk to.

From my experience observing the group and the class lectures, it proved to me the effectiveness of self-help groups. Self-help groups are beneficial because they provide support from a community of people that can understand and empathize with someone’s hardship. For example, one member shared that living in New York made it hard for her to remain sober, and was contemplating going back home, but she struggled to make that decision and being, so being in the group and receiving advice and feedback from others, helped her make that decision which turned out to be very helpful to making progress.

In addition, one thing that stood out to me was that those who shared their stories also had strong feelings toward helping others that are currently struggling with alcoholism. Being helpful to others can also be rewarding to them, which Zastrow and Hessenauer (2019) refer to as “helper therapy” when the helper receives a physical or psychological reward and a feeling of worth.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that in order for self-help groups to be effective, leaders must have strong leadership skills and characteristics. One thing that I noticed in the group was the leader's presence. According to Corey (2016), "presence has to do with 'being there' for the members, which involves genuine caring and a willingness to enter their psychological world" (Corey 2016, p. 15). The leader showed empathy and that he genuinely cared for the group members by providing supportive feedback and letting everyone feel included and respected.

Something I noticed to be useful in the group is mentioned by Zastrow and Hessenauer (2019) that "Self-help groups emphasize peer solidarity rather than hierarchy governance" (Zastrow & Hessenauer, 2019., p. 253). This influenced the dynamic of the group, and it gave the other members the confidence to share. Overall, I think that observing the self-help group was a great experience because I was able to see first-hand the dynamic of the group and experience seeing many individuals with similar struggles have the space to be open about their experiences and hearing about their losses. Although I am not planning to facilitate a group like an AA group, there are many things that I will use like the way that the group was conducted from beginning to end, and the strategies used by the group leader to ensure that the entire group felt like they were in a community and that they everyone had a voice without making anyone feel uncomfortable.

References

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