GROUP WORK

A group... collections of people may seem unique, but each possess one critical element that defines a group: connections linking the individual members... members are linked together in a web of interpersonal relationships. Thus, a group is defined as two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships (Forsyth 1990).

Attributes of a group

- A set of people engage who engage in frequent interactions
- They identify with one another
- They are defined by others as a group
- They share beliefs, values, and norms about areas of common interest
- They define themselves as a group.
- They come together to work on common tasks and for agreed purposes

(Benson 2000)

Importance of groups

Humans have always been small group beings. The ubiquitousness of groups and the inevitability of being in them makes groups one of the most important factors in our lives. As the effectiveness of our groups goes, so goes the quality of our lives.

Groups are a fundamental part of human experience.

- They allow people to develop more complex and larger scale activities
- They are significant sites of socialisation and education
- They provide settings where relationships can form and grow
- They are where people can find help and support.

While working in groups we are we are spending time in the company of others. They have allowed us into their lives – and there is a social, emotional and moral relationship between us (infed.org. What is a group?)

For those who are involved in working with groups it is an opportunity to learn from those in the group their experiences and their stories. The skill of working within groups is working in a way that handles this information with sensitivity and understanding.

"Values are like finger prints you leave them over everything you do" (Elvis Presley)

Why values matter

Attention to our values helps us

(a) become more self aware,

(b) make ethical decisions,

(c) prioritize our tasks,

(d) develop credibility as a leader.

www.wright.edu/~scott.williams/skills/values.htm#

Understanding our values...

Our personal values define who we are, they are unique to everyone, they develop and change over the course of a lifetime. Understanding our own value system creates self awareness.

In group working having an awareness of our own value base is important as many of issues discussed or dealt within a health and well being context can be emotive and/or divisive within a group. For example, if you believe that smacking a child is wrong in any circumstance and someone else within the group feels that smacking a child is an acceptable form of discipline, language and emotion can become heated and confrontational. Recognising that what you believe is important but that this may not be shared by others is an important skill of working within groups. Developing the ability to suspend your own judgements and feelings in these situations is essential when working as a facilitator or group leader.

"I said many beautiful things, but made no impact. This is because I used my frame of reference not theirs".

Paulo Freire wrote about working alongside the people in the poor areas of Recife. He demonstrates the importance of understanding the perspective of those we are working with. When we understand the context of their lives and work together, alternative ways of understanding or addressing an issue can be found.

References

Benson 2000 in http://infed.org/mobi/what-is-a-group/ accessed 23 Feb 2015
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Health and wellbeing - the benefit of groups

In 2000 CDHN undertook a consultation for the public health strategy for Northern Ireland Investing for Health, when asked what was the most important influence on health and wellbeing the response was overwhelming, *having friends family and supporters.*

Ronald Labonte highlights that well-being is determined by a balance of the physical, mental and social aspects of life. He emphasises that building a sense of connectedness is essential to reduce feelings of powerlessness and lack of control that negatively affects health and wellbeing.

Sir Harry Burns, former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, observed that as a surgeon working in Glasgow he saw a difference in the recovery rates between patients in richer and poorer areas of the city. Those in the wealthier areas had faster recovery... he explains that this is in part due to people in poorer areas feeling alienated and isolated. He supports a salutogenic approach to health which invests "in the things that make people well," a sense of purpose and feeling part or connected to the wider society they inhabit.

Being involved in groups can give us this connectedness, in our families and communities they are a critical part of our social support structure.

CDHN believes that group work is a vital component of community development practice. It builds the capacity and confidence of individuals and generates opportunities for collective action. Working together will increase knowledge, skills and confidence so people can identify and address issues together. This begins the process of empowerment for individuals and communities to take control over their lives.

Member Experience - NI Chest, Heart and Stroke ran a "Cook It" programme with their homelessness project. Sarah Perry learned that allowing the program a degree of flexibility was needed in response to the participants particular needs. She reflected that those who attended were more confident in both cooking and preparing food, they also reported increased confidence in taking part in group. One member went on to further training and now has a job within the catering industry in Belfast.

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