

# American Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

Nat'l Group Information Helpline **973-989-1122** \* 375 E. McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801 \* [www.selfhelpgroups.org](http://www.selfhelpgroups.org)

## January is “Self-Help Group Awareness Month”

*Help Celebrate by Letting More People Know...*

*How many different member-run groups are available,*

*How they can be especially helpful in a wide variety of special ways, and*

*How they can be readily started by people in communities currently underserved.*

For decades, mutual aid self-help groups have been providing persons in need with the understanding, support and hope that only those “who have been there” can provide. But because self-help groups are volunteer-run support groups in which people help one another without fees, most groups don't have paid staff or budgets for publicity efforts and outreach. To help increase public and/or professional awareness of these helpful groups and their benefits, kindly consider doing something special this month to celebrate self-help groups.

For example, if you've benefited from participation in a self-help group, consider writing a brief “Letter to the Editor” of your local paper or on a community website, describing this month's observance and letting others know of the group(s) and how it helped you.

If you're a professional who knows the value of these groups for your clients, you could also write a "Letter to the Editor" of your local paper, mentioning the observance and your knowledge of the value of specific community self-help groups to those in need.

### **Some Ideas to Celebrate January as “Self-Help Group Awareness Month” for Individuals, Groups, Professionals & Agencies**

#### **For Supportive Individuals:**

1. For your community, workplace and/or church bulletin board, post one or more self-help group brochures. Similarly, if you are in contact with any type of professional in the helping professions, consider sharing a brochure with them.
2. If you've benefited from participation in a self-help group, consider letting others learn from your experience by posting a brief story (anonymously if wished), and referencing the month, on a community or issue-specific message board.
3. It doesn't have to be “Self-Help Group Month” to let a friend or relative, who is going through a difficult time, know of any self-help group(s) available to them. Consider obtaining and passing on a group brochure or webpage, so they can at least quickly recognize that they are not alone.
4. If you're willing and able, consider creating and posting a mini-poster that announces the celebration. It could be as simple as including your favorite quote reflecting the value of self-help groups.

#### **For Self-Help Groups:**

1. Write a press release announcing your January meeting(s), and mention the fact that January is "Self-Help Group Awareness Month."
2. If you have a printed or online group newsletter, let members know of the observance.
3. If appropriate for your group, schedule a special guest speaker for a January meeting and, similar to suggestion #1 above, write a press release announcing the presentation and mentioning it's "Self-Help Group Awareness Month."

4. Contact the "Community Affairs" representative, or any talk show host, at your local radio station to mention the month and ask for an interview.
5. Create and give an award to a helpful professional or agency, photograph presentation, and publicize it.
6. Approach local professionals and agencies that have been supportive of your work, and ask that they please consider any of the other suggested actions listed for professionals.
7. Approach your local public library with a list of key library books related to your group's issue, and ask if they would kindly consider setting up a display of those books along with reference (maybe brochures too) on your group.
8. Consider having interested group members volunteer to do a community service project that benefits the community and publicizing.

### For Professionals & Agencies:

1. In both public and professional publications, consider mentioning the observance and your knowledge of the value of help groups to those in need, to possibly include your citing any research you may wish to highlight.
2. Agencies and hospitals can consider scheduling presentations by group representatives open to professionals and/or the public, e.g., instead of having group reps just come to a staff meeting to explain their group, consider scheduling a presentation by group reps open also to the general public and professionals in other agencies.

### ***Lastly consider possibly linking to our...***

**American Self-Help Group Clearinghouse** website: <http://www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/> where we provide:

- a keyword-searchable database of some 1,100 national, international, and model self-help support groups for most any specific illness, disability, addiction, bereavement situation, parenting, caregiver concern, , or other stressful life situation;
- a listing of local non-profit self-help group clearinghouses worldwide:

<http://www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/selfhelp.php?id=859>

- suggestions on how to start either a community or online mutual aid support group;
- a review of the more rigorous outcome research studies done of self-help groups, you can see a copy of this chapter at:

<http://www.chce.research.va.gov/docs/pdfs/KyrouzHumphreysLoomis2002.pdf>

- for a better understanding of what mutual aid self-help groups are, look over the first chapter of our Sourcebook at: [www.medhelp.org/njgroups/SB-Understanding%20SH.pdf](http://www.medhelp.org/njgroups/SB-Understanding%20SH.pdf)

- and a registry for those trying to start new national or international support networks that don't yet exist in the world.

For information on national, online, or model groups, one can also just phone and speak with one of our staff or volunteers to more quickly determine what particular self-help group might be the most appropriate match for your or another's needs. Dial our National Group Information Helpline at **973-989-1122** (8:30am - 5pm Eastern, weekdays).

*"My years as a medical practitioner, as well as my own first-hand experience, have taught me how important self-help groups are in assisting their members in dealing with problems, stress, hardship and pain... the benefits of mutual aid are experienced by millions of people who turn to others with a similar problem to attempt to deal with their isolation, powerlessness, alienation, and the awful feeling that nobody understands... Health and human service providers are learning that they can indeed provide a superior service when they help their patients and clients find appropriate peer support."*

- former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, MD

*"Mutual support groups, involving little or no cost to participants, have a powerful effect on mental and physical health... The psychological and physical health importance of this diffuse community is striking..."*

*The self-help movement, both in face-to-face and virtual arenas, has tremendous therapeutic potential."*

- American Psychologist feature article "Who Talks?: The Social Psychology of Illness Support Groups" by K. P. Davison, J. W. Pennebaker, & S.S. Dickerson, (55) 2, pp. 205-217, 2000.

*"One of the most important capabilities of community self-help groups is that ordinary people can develop such groups in their local communities when none exist, and subsequently their group usually serves as an extraordinary resource to many in that area for several years. I still find it amazing that to start a group, a person doesn't need a grant, an agency, or even an office - just the inspiration and a few other people who share their experience and hope. What significantly helps in providing such inspiration is a person's knowledge of an existing national organization or a model group, which can provide them with basic information so they don't have to 're-invent the wheel.' "*

- E. J. Madara, "Mutual Aid Self-Help Group Developments" Community Psychologist, 39 (3), 2006, p. 21.