The SELF HELP TIMES
FOUNDATION SELF HELP NETWORK ZUIDOOST - BRABANT

YOUNG AND ADDICTED | VALUABLE ADDITION | HISTORY SELF HELP NETWORK | WELL ADVANCED CARE
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ALDERMAN HANS MARTIN DON AND JOKE DE HAAS:

It is time for rest of the Netherlands to discover the power of self help

"Annually the City of Eindhoven subsidizes the Self Help Network Zuidoost-Brabant with a fair amount of money. With this, the city government shows that they fully support this kind of informal care". Alderman Hans-Martin Don is a fervent supporter of everything that has to do with self help and mutual aid. Ms Joke de Haas, secretary general of the Self Help Network is very pleased with this cooperation: "It is the ac-knowledgement of the City for all the work of our Network".

Listening ear

Hans-Martin Don: "The City of Eindhoven developed already in 1985 a municipal policy to support lay care and self help. In a city, there are always groups of vulnerable citizens. When there are bottom-up initiatives, based on the assumption that people are able to solve their own problems and when this is also organised, the only reaction you can have as a City Government is to encourage and support these actions. The creation of the Self Help Network was a private initiative and the City is following. Joke de Haas interrupts: "The fact that the City was always willing to listen to us when we had a new idea, pleases me very much. It does not mean that the City always agrees with our plans, but we work together to find solutions. Take a look at 'The Crown', our building. Our rent is paid by the City but this building provided a lot of publicity for the Self Help Network". Don: "It became an anchor, it makes the Network visible". Joke adds: "And the spin off is that the groups also see each other and this contact between the groups stimulates them".

Cold and calculating

"Everything that is organised by the Self Help Network does not have be organised by professional care. Moreover: informal care is sometimes much more effective than professional, individualised care" according to the convinced politician. "It is very smart when a local authority includes self help in their policies. That is the message that I want to give to my colleagues. The effectivity of mutual aid is often bigger than the effectivity of professional care. This sounds cold and opinionated, but I am convinced that when fellow sufferers support each other, this will offer more benefits than when one becomes dependent on professional care. I refer to my personal experiences in professional care before I became a politician. Everything you can solve by yourself has a positive effect on you. What's more, this approach fits perfectly in the Dutch Social Support Act where emancipation, participation, empowerment and problem solving capacities of citizens are key elements".

Disappointing

"The local authorities that surround the City of Eindhoven often lean on us and take few initiatives, while this is where they could take over the structure of the Network without any problems", mentions Don. "I have been in enough town halls to promote the approach of the Network, but up to now they have made the decision not to take up something that has proven to be effective and beneficiary for their inhabitants. And that is disappointing. A missed opportunity as far as I am concerned. I will no longer put any energy into it, because it is wasted energy. Besides that, when 'Eindhoven' is acting as a pioneer, it often has the opposite effect.

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Self help group Tired Heroes and Heroines: for people who, after a major life event, want to regain their self-esteem

Tired heroes and heroines find their strength back

The ground beneath your feet could be washed away after a major event in your life, leaving you physically and mentally exhausted. Your self-esteem takes a tremendous blow. The cause can be very diverse: illness, or the sack, being also falsely accused of a crime, a fight, burn-out, you name it. "You feel so helpless and inferior," says Ben Rooijakkers, along with Harrie Rombout, initiator of the group Tired Heroes and Heroines in Helmond. "But I am convinced that via contact with fellow patients, gradually the sense of self-esteem comes back."

The self help group is made up of people aged about 40 years, who have seen their social and civil life go up in smoke. Dutiful, conscientious and ambitious as they are, they have deployed more than 100%. Often forgetting about their families, their friends and especially themselves. Often you see self-esteem problems play a role in their backgrounds. Think for instance: "Who performs nothing, is worth nothing."

Common symptoms are: anxiety, depression, apathy, insomnia, feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. Simultaneously they also often have a range of physical symptoms. It is not inconceivable that some of them are in a battle or conflict with relationships at home, with their employer and/or business- or insurance doctors. Altogether in the worst case these people have lost contact with their families, their good jobs and all their social contacts. The reality has become incomprehensible to them and they have lost sight of their future.

In the self help group they talk about personal experiences, choices they have made and about the opportunities for maximum recovery. From there on, the future is coloured again. "The focus of this group is not psychological counselling, reinstatement or full recovery. The aim is to give these tired heroes and heroines new meaning to their lives and rediscover their self-esteem, " says Rooijakkers. "Unique to this group is - unlike the rest of the Netherlands - that among the participants are also tired heroines. After all in our society it is not only men who have these experiences . "

GGZE – EINDHOVEN INSTITUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND THE SELF HELP NETWORK CONTINUE THEIR PIONEER WORK.

In the 1990's the Eindhoven Institute for Mental Health (GGzE – Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg Eindhoven) developed a close relationship with the Self Help Network in Eindhoven. Lots of time and energy was invested in establishing the collaboration. The main target of this collaboration was to get self help acknowledged in the professional mental health care, not only on paper but through direct contacts by so-called 'experienced professionals', that is workers with positive personal experiences with self help. Slowly but surely this collaboration is becoming successful and the power of self help is becoming more and more recognized and acknowledged by various professional mental health care and addiction workers.

Marian van Engelenburg, manager at the GGzE of the Centre for Prevention and Participation: "You can say that self help and working with the 'experienced professionals' is becoming less scary for the regular professionals. And it works also the other way around: at the beginning some self help groups were very sceptical of working together with the formal care but nowadays we see a positive turn. Through the contacts between both parties, we now see mutual understanding and respect. Five years ago, I was asked to participate on behalf of the GGzE at the regular meetings of the self help organisations and the formal care organisations. From these meetings the idea to establish a convenant between the Self Help Network, the institute for addiction care in our region (Novadic-Kentron) and our mental health institution was initiated. This convenant was signed almost two years ago and now we are working on the implementation. I am responsible for this in our organisation. The next project is to reach those professionals who are working directly with clients.
This year we have started a campaign to make the professionals more aware of self help. The objective is to inform professionals about the various possibilities of self help, which groups there are in our region and how they can inform their clients about the value of mutual aid. It can also imply that self help could become an integrated part of the professional treatment. Not that participating in a self help group could replace therapy, but it could be of added value. For most of the psychiatric patients, their mental illness remains something they have to deal with for the rest of their lives. Self help can provide an important element for the wellbeing of these patients. You often hear that clients are able to tell their stories in the group: 'There they understand what I mean'. Self help groups are important, not only for mutual support and advice but also for reducing stress. Of course there will be clients who are not suitable for mutual aid or for personal reasons do not want to participate, but I am convinced that most of the patients do benefit from self help groups. The first step to reach this objective is to provide information. We have developed a leaflet for professions, but from experience we know that this is often not enough. The next step is that we will appoint a contact person within the organisation for each self help group. These contact persons can promote the self help groups among their colleagues, but they can also provide information in the groups about the mental illness, medication or possibilities for therapy, for example. The third step is that we will use the 'experienced professionals' of the Self Help Network who will participate in our regular meetings. During those meetings, these 'experienced professionals' can provide information on the self help group, what they do, how they work. The 'experienced professionals' will also get in touch with the clients to explain what self help can mean for them. It is so very important that these 'experienced professionals' provide this information at first hand, to tell their own stories, as they are all convinced that participating at a self help group was significant for their being able to cope with their disease or even their recovery. Finally we have started introducing new professionals in our organisation directly to self help groups. We started with a leaflet , but that is by no means enough; we are still searching for a physical solution so that an 'experienced professional' can tell his or her own story because stories stick in our memory.
We will continue to learn and to benefit from each other's knowledge and experience. This is of extra value, for the clients as well as for the professionals.

SELF HELP HELPS!

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SELFHELPGROUPS ADDICT CARE

Quotes

"I wanted to quit drinking, but knew nobody who had done that before".
Come and meet others
The Alcoholics Anonymous

"You can be addicted to a bad relationship".
Break the vicious circles. Norwood-group

"You're not only gambling with money, but you also put your relationships at stake".
Ask for help
Foundation Anonymous Gamblers and those who surround them (AGOG)

"If you live with an alcoholic, you can use support and understanding".
Dare!
Al-Anon (for people who live with an alcoholic)

"At a certain moment, you realize that your eating habits are different to those of other people; that it has become a compulsive disorder".
Take hold of it!
Foundation Eating disorders Eindhoven

"You have overcome your alcohol-addiction, but you're still homeless. How do you get back on track?"
There is help
Foundation the Good Samaritan

Self help and the general practitioners pointing in the same direction.

Primary health care workers, such as general practitioners , not only provide cure and care but also function as 'gatekeeper' to other levels of care. These other levels of care consist of medical specialists, specialised care or treatment. Self help is not even in the picture. Moreover there is a grievous lack of awareness and many remain in blissful ignorance. The Self help Network and SGE – Foundation of Health Care Centres Eindhoven have developed a pilot project to refer patients of the health care centres to self help groups.

SGE - Foundation of Health Care Centres Eindhoven
This foundation is an umbrella-organisation for nine health care centres in Eindhoven which provide a wide variety of primary health care. About 40 % of the Eindhoven population attend one of these centres. All centres have the same approach to primary health care with an open attitude towards innovations and quality improvement. Health care workers at these centres are aware, in case of chronic diseases, medical professionals are not always able to cure all illnesses. Talking to fellow sufferers in a self help group can be very worthwhile, not only for the patient but also for the health care worker. Insight and knowledge of the disease can improve and patients are able to improve their coping with the situation. Which can lead to improved therapy results.

Project outline
The phenomenon of self help was presented to the workers of the health care centres: what is self help, how does it work and what are the benefits of self help. There is a lot of scientific literature available on self help, but not only the theoretic information on self help was presented. Members of self help groups explained convincingly how self help had improved their quality of life.
Such a 'starting shot' is inevitable, but health care workers are also ordinary human beings. Everyday life also takes over and theoretical information gets lost. That is the reason why the project consists of a solid follow up through newsletters, publications, and other means of publicity so that for the workers of these health care centres, thinking of reminding patients of the possibility of self help groups, becomes a natural reflex.

Nurse practitioners
Nurse practitioners will have a prominent position in the health care centres. They will become the first health care worker who gets in touch with a patient. They are the most fit to inform patients on the possibilities of self help groups and they can establish the first contacts if necessary. The Self Help Network in Eindhoven will train these nurse practitioners on self help groups.

Self help and professional care
In its present form, self help in the Netherlands already exists for half a century. Professional care and informal or lay care have always had separate approaches towards health care and there was not much mutual contact. This compartmentalisation might be typically Dutch, in other countries there is much more collaboration between professional care and self help. Fortunately many changes have taken place in the past ten years. Fruitful collaboration forms have emerged between both groups. The collaboration of the Self Help Network with the SGE-Foundation of Health Care Centres Eindhoven is another step in the right direction. An approach that is beneficial for everybody.

Young and addicted: it's not too late!

For a while you have known that you are dependent on alcohol, drugs, gaming, gambling, internet, sex, you name it. It causes you a lot of fights at home, then you look up the friends who also use or who play down your habits. It costs time and money and it can even bring you into financial problems. Your study and / or your work will suffer.

There is always that little voice in your head that says you can't live without it. Slowly the addiction takes over the control of your life. You want to quit or cut down, but the craving is unstoppable and must be appeased. You make up all kinds of reasons to tell yourself that it's not so bad for you; you know someone who is really addicted or you tell yourself that it's not a daily need. Wrong! When you are dependent on a drug, or a feeling, it is time to seek help.

It is not too late!

BY HELPING OTHERS, YOU HELP YOURSELF

THE HISTORY OF MODERN SELF HELP STARTS WITH THE AA.

The AA (Alcoholic Anonymous) is the oldest and biggest organization for self help with 2 million people worldwide who weekly visit a group. It started in the early 30's of the past century in the consulting-room of Carl Gustav Jung. He told an American alcoholic that neither psychiatry, nor medical science had a solution for alcoholism. Only a mental re-formation could lead to recovery. The American went back home and became a member of the Oxford group, a religious movement with a strong social commitment. Within this group he tried to help other alcoholics.

Bill and Bob
Bill Wilson was a veteran from World War I who successfully worked on Wall Street. He was also an alcoholic who had to be hospitalized on a regular basis. He came in contact with the Oxford group and although he was not so fond of religion at that time, he understood the purpose of the story. He needed companions to come to mental reformation. When indeed he came in need in Akron Ohio he looked for a companion in the local Oxford group. That was surgeon Bob Smith. During their conversations it became clear that if they tried to help each other, they remained sober. In those days and even sometimes nowadays alcoholism is still regarded as a moral weakness. Bill and Bob saw it differently. In their contacts they met a lot of strong people with severe alcohol problems. They pointed out that it is a disease and in 1954 this vision was adopted by the WHO. Bill and Bob developed "the 12-steps to recovery" program .

AA in the Netherlands
They were successful in their approach. In 1941 in an article in the national press, the group was named alcoholics anonymous. In a very short time the AA grew to be a big organization. Soldiers in the second world war brought the AA to other countries. In the Netherlands the first AA group started in 1948. The initiative was taken by psychiatrist Dr. Krauweel, the director of the Jellinek clinic in Amsterdam.

Principle of Self help
Worldwide the principles from the AA were applied by numerous other groups. The 12-step program seemed to be (with slight alterations) suitable for all kind of chronic issues with which somebody " has to cope". They contain universal values. The principle works everywhere: if you try to help a companion you surely help yourself. Logical, before you tried to help someone else the problem is only a restriction, a burden. As soon as you are going to help others you will discover that there is something positive you can do with your negative experience. It will get the process of acceptance going. At the moment you accept your limitation, your life gets a new meaning.

AA prayer
The AA is not a religious orientated organization. But in remembrance of Jung it offers a spiritual recovery. How people think of God or not : the AA prayer gives direction to recovery in a few words. It is not known who wrote it. It is thought to have been written by an ancient Greek, an English poet, the theologian Niebuhr and even many others. It goes like this:

"God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference."

continuation of page 1

Therefore I can better keep quiet and hope that my colleagues will find wisdom themselves. I am disappointed and you can put this in writing". Joke: "It is not about local governments or politicians, it is about people who need help and support. It is about how to empower people so that they can take care of themselves. Because that is how self help works. In Helmond and other municipalities in the region of Peelland, they have included self help in their social policies and I think this is a good step forward." When asked about the future, Hans-Martin Don replies: "I am in the final phase of my period in local government and I want to use this period to promote the Self Help Network and to make their actions visible in the other parts of the Netherlands. First because I am a strong believer, the Network has a sound structure, self help and mutual aid works and there are many very enthusiastic people involved in the Network. Second, I do want to improve the positioning of the Self Help Network, not only in our own city, but also nationwide." Joke: "There is no national policy on self help in the Netherlands and that is worrying. Self help is not mentioned anywhere. True "self help" are only two words, but they are important as they acknowledge the work that people do. Therefore we need national attention for this phenomenon. When we look abroad, we see, for instance in Germany, that self help is an element of their health and wellbeing policies". Alderman Don adds: "There is some pin money for informal family care or volunteer work, but we need sound national policy on self help. I have an action plan for this last year in local government. First to draw attention for the Self Help Network, this means that at every opportunity I will mention self help and our Network. In November we are going to organise an international conference on self help and where we will put the collaboration in Eindhoven between the Self Help Network with the municipality in the spotlights. As a good example!

Pride
During the past twenty years, we have developed the so-called Eindhoven model that functions well and which can serve as good practice for other local authorities. You can say that nowhere is self help so well organised as in Eindhoven. That is something to be proud of. And it would be great if self help could be firmly rooted in our society in the coming years!"

"You can be so very lonely with your problem"

Even if you live in ideal circumstances. Have an understanding partner. Supportive family. Faithful friends. An understanding employer, name what you will. Still… you feel lonely with your insecurities, your fears, your frustration. Logical, because the others are not able to feel what you are feeling. And that you are always the one who needs help, does not contribute to positive self esteem either.

Knowledge
Knowledge is somewhat different to knowing. Sympathy from others is valuable, but do others understand what you are going through?? When you have a chronic illness, you are often not able to understand your own feelings. Let alone that you are not able to explain to others. This isolates you. It feels like a secret that you want to share, but are not able to. You are getting out of reach for those who are close to you. You get estranged from them.

Knowing
Fellow-sufferers in a self help group are able to understand each other on a deeper level. Of course, each person is different, each have their own feelings. Also they do not always have the words to express their feelings nor do they have all the answers for your questions. But searching for these answers with fellow sufferers is so much easier. You are able to recognize similarities. And you discover that there are no big differences.
And… you know that you are not the only one who is struggling. Working together makes it easier. You are able to open up and that also has its effects on those surrounding you.

SELF HELP

A valuable addition to professional care

Within health care, the different parties need to link effortlessly. This requires coordination between health care professionals and organizations, which have to meet today's patient's needs. If this is a constant process of fine-tuning, we talk about 'chain care' or integrated care: permanently developing and adjusting the right care and the appropriate care professional at the right place.

Self help groups are an important addition to the provision of professional care. Where the latter is finite, self help is a source of long term support for (further) recovery. If the health care professional gives better information about self help groups, participation will increase. Furthermore, if you combine formal care and self help, the total effectiveness will increase.

A good relationship between professional care and self help groups is therefore essential.

The Self help Network 'Zuidoost-Brabant', in close collaboration with 'Eind-hoven GGzE' and 'Novadic-Kentron', takes the initiative to shape chain care between these institutions and self help groups in the Southeast region in Brabant. This cooperation is formalized in a signed agreement, thus ensuring the continuity of care. It is indeed in the interest and for the benefit of the patient, that his care is well organized and meets his needs! Participants in self help groups often form a new social network that helps them to build a new life. This will reduce the risk of relapse.
Moreover, it 's not only the patient who benefits. The sheer existence of self help groups also provide benefits for the institutions: it reduces the 'revolving door' effect.

With all my heart, I welcome the initiative to integrate self help into the chain of health care. For several years, CZ (via the CZ Fund) has been subsidizing 'Self help Network Zuidoost Brabant' and the 'Knowledge Center Self help and Expertise'. For the years 2007 and 2008, the major focus of the fund has been 'Self help and contact with fellow patients, makes you (feel) better'. The objective of this theme is to stimulate publicity for self help and increase par-ticipation. Moreover, in pursuing this objective, we want to attract the attention of the politicians. Activities in this context are also financially supported from the CZ Fund.

We would be enormously pleased if our agreement would function as an in-centive for institutions in other regions to seek new initiatives for cooperation between self help groups and formal care.

Mike Leers
Board Chairman CZ Active in Health

Cooperation between Addiction care and self help is already well advanced

"At Novadic & Kentron new employees get a basic four day course on the organization. One afternoon in the course is devoted to everything around self help. One experienced professional will tell his / her story in this course. It is very important to train workers and to make clear that self help and regular care can very well work together. They do not oppose each other. In fact, they complement each other. Promoting the contact between fellow patients remains a recurring theme, they need to know what the possibilities are, so that workers inform clients and refer to self help. In conversation with Lies van Kempen, addiction counsellor at Roder Consult, a daughter-organization of Novadic-Kentron:

"Our vision is that addiction leads to a chronic condition which can develop into a disease. A disease requiring treatment. I supervise people in the process of beating their addiction or even a step further, to rehabilitation. This can apply to all kind of addictions: to alcohol, drugs, gaming, gambling, you name it. As consultants we work fast. The lines are short. First there is the intake in which we collect information to see what is lacking in the various areas of life. Then I give information and details to the applicants, make them aware of their dependence behaviour and explain the link between addiction and the problems they have. Once they are able to face this, what in itself may be a long process, then we can continue. Besides this I train workers in the first line to make them aware of all the aspects of addiction, because if there are problems in this area it is of great importance to recognise them at an early stage and call in professional help. The sooner you intervene, the greater the chance that clients succeed in getting and keeping the problems under control.

Novadic & Kentron and Roder Consult think it is important that self help will be used as a supplement alongside treatment. Self help can be deployed at any time, before, during or after treatment. The good thing is that people can start at any time in a self help group. This is an added value compared to the treatment in professional care, where it can take a long time before people get help due to the set procedures. Clients need to know there are people who have experienced at first hand what an addiction is. An experienced professional knows exactly what it is to be dependent, the ambivalence toward the medium and what it takes to fight against it. To see someone who has overcome the addiction and who has been able to take back his place in society is encouraging. Talking with people who speak from experience is often a huge relief for a client.

When clients are registered in some cases they have already found the road to self help. If this is not the case, then we put clients in touch with informal help.
Within the organization we work directly with support workers, but we also refer clients to self help groups such as AA, AGOG, etc.. Sometimes when I see a client for the first time, I dial the number of a support worker and hand over the phone to the client and say: tell them yourself. We also have to deal with partners and relatives. They are referred to the partner groups in Novadic-Kentron or self help groups like Al-Anon.
Novadic-Kentron Foundation and the Self help Network Southeast- Brabant have been working closely together for years. I have chaired the working group which is responsible for the self help being part of the regular program. This form of informal assistance has taken a prominent position within the organization. One of the major challenges is to convince the employees of the concept and make sure they stand behind the self help set-up. Something which re-occurs is the need to make known the work of the Self help Network, to explain how the affiliated groups operate and how the referral system works. In other cities the cooperation with the informal care is much less, I know that from experience. Actually you should give them a blueprint of the Self help Network in Eindhoven, but that also means that you have to find key players who can carry the organisation, both within the self help world as in professional care. In Eindhoven the Self help Network is well established and in fact we are spoiled. It is a unique foundation.

Quotes

"Your mind is full of strange things. And then you're diagnosed as borderline. My therapist is terrific, but there are so many little things you want to talk about in a normal way".
That's possible.
Self help group for borderline-clients

"Almost everybody thinks suicide is too scary to talk about. But what can you do if you have suicidal feelings, or that if you have even tried to put an end to your life?"
You can talk about it.
Ex.6 (self help group for people with suicidal tendencies)

"There are so many questions when someone you love has committed suicide? Of course you don't get all the answers, but recognition of the situation is so important for the healing process". You don't stand alone!
"Cocon" (self help group for those who are left behind after suicide)

"Fear controls your life. And of course medication can decrease some of your anxieties. But still some remain. Talking with fellow sufferers does help". Dare!
Phobia-group

"If you are chronic-psychotic and /or schizophrenic, you surely can use support. And with fellow sufferers you can also enjoy yourself". Join!
La folie douce (self help group for people with psychosis and schizophrenia)

" What kind of a life remains for yourself when somebody in your surroundings is psychotic of schizophrenic ?"
Learn to cope with it! Ypsilon
(Group Eindhoven and surroundings)

If there's someone in your immediate surroundings who suffers from psychic or psychiatric problems, you've got your hands full and you can surely use support and understanding".
You are invited!
Foundation Labyrinth- In Perspective, Eindhoven and surroundings

"Manic depression has a big impact on the lives of both the patient and his surroundings. With fellow sufferers you discuss it from a different perspective".
Join and help!
Union for manic depressed and concerned (Group Province Noord-Brabant)

"If you suffer from obsessive thoughts, it dominates your life. How would fellow sufferers deal with it?"
TTogether we can!
Companion group obsessions

"If you suffer from depression, everyone gives you good advice. But can you use it? Talking with a fellow sufferer is different".
Do it!
Self help group depression

"If you have psychic or psychiatric problems, walking, jogging and running helps. And when we do this together, it will help us even more".
Walk along!
Walking group 'De oppeppers'

"There's nothing wrong with the care in the psychiatric institution 'Padua', but support from fellow sufferers and having fun together is just as important. That's why there's a local group for Boekel and surroundings".
Come on and join!
Companions Lot-us

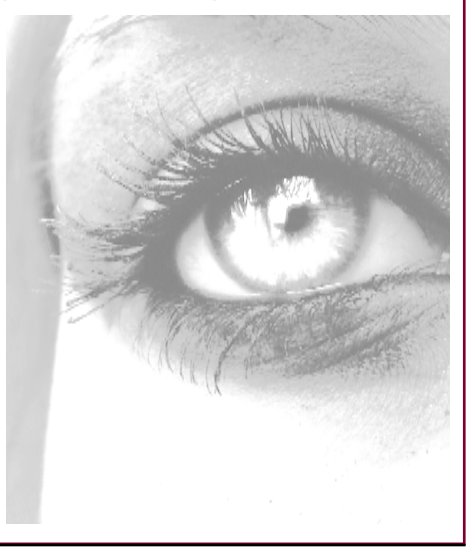
Always receiving help makes you feel needy.

There is nothing wrong with help. Often it is aboutely necessary. Often it is wanted. But sometimes it seems as if everybody is only occupied with giving help. And if there is no more help needed, they keep an eye on you just in case it is needed. As if you are no more than a needy person. This makes you feel as if you are the problem. A frustrating situation.

Help receiver and helper.
In a self help group you are the help receiver as well as the helper. The experiences of every group member are valuable. Sometimes you are the shoulder to lean on and sometimes the other group members offer you their shoulder. Sometimes you are the listening ear and other times you can tell your story. Sometimes you share your sorrow.
Above all… a self help group is not a brooding weeping group. Whoever starts in a group will find out that it can be very animated. Cheerful self-mockery is alternated with great seriousness. Try it. It costs you nothing and from it you will get a lot wiser.

You have to learn to live with it, but where do they teach you this?

For some illnesses there is no cure possible. Very often the symptoms can be treated, but the limitations remain. You have to learn to live with this. That is quicker said than done. In fact it is a matter of trial and error and just trying this and that. Like being in the dark and groping your way. In a self help group you find people who suffer from the same problem. Some have already learnt a lot, others are at the beginning of the process. Exchanging experiences, finding encouragement, pulling together, finding recognition and acknowledgement.
In a self help group you learn to cope.
Try it!



I HAVE THE SPARKLE IN MY EYES AGAIN!

My name is Nicole, I am 25 years old and I had an eating disorder for about six years. With the help of the Foundation for Eating Disorders Eindhoven (SEE – Stichting Eetstoornissen Eindhoven) I am now able to say that my life is no longer controlled by my eating disorder. The history of my eating disorder is too long to describe here, but I would like to inform you about what this self help group has meant for me.

I developed my eating disorder when I was eighteen years old. It started with anorexia. I had a tight sport schedule as well as a tight, minimal eating schedule. I developed more and more fear for certain foods and I knew exactly what was "good" or "bad" food. I wanted to keep in control of my eating, and that felt very powerful. The smallest deviation from my eating schedule resulted in vomiting. For of fear of gaining weight, and out of anger for not keeping to my schedule. The feeling of guilt predominated, my weight decreased and I lost my hair. I wasn't myself anymore; my smile had disappeared and I was bad-tempered. The sparkle in my eyes was gone. My eating disorder was my best friend, but at the same time my worst enemy. I recognized that this could not continue and my cousin took me to the doctor. He did put me on a scale, stated that I still had a safe Body Mass Index and referred me to a dietician. That was not what I needed, I needed psychological therapy. I was determined to solve the problem myself. I managed to do so with all kind of ups and downs, but the eating disorder remained.

In 2006, I decided to get into therapy. It started with face-to-face meetings with a psychologist whom I visited every fortnight. But it didn't help. In February 2008 I got in touch with the Foundation for Eating Disorders Eindhoven (SEE) and I felt immediately at home. The warm atmosphere, the listening and positivism appealed to me. I joined their self help group. This group consisted of people with various eating disorders. The group was supported by experienced self helpers who also had suffered from an eating disorder. By sharing experiences, emotions, recognition, tears, smiles and hugs I progressed step by step. My eating disorder was finally recognized, something I had been looking for such a long time. You could decide on your own tempo through each step you took.
I have learned so very much at SEE. I have admitted that my eating disorder was a symptom of other problematic issues. My eating disorder had given me the illusion that I was in control over my own life, but the truth was that I had just lost all control: all my choices were influenced by the eating disorder and were not "my" proper choices. Slowly I have learned how to enjoy life and even food and I have learned to know "myself" again. Step by step I have said farewell to my eating disorder and I have started to do what I enjoyed. Not what my eating disorder obliged me to do. I have discovered, when you really want it, that there are unlimited opportunities in a self help group. You will have to work hard and you have to do it by yourself, but the group members offer you the support and the insight that you need. Sharing experiences with people who understand and recognize them, has been of tremendous additional value in the self help group. Because everything went so very well, I decided to stop the group sessions. At the farewell session, one of the group leaders asked me what had been the most beneficial for me during the whole process. My reaction was: "Not only am I recovered from my eating disorder, but also I have found my "sparkle" again".
I am back to life and in the future I want to act for the SEE myself.

SELF HELP HELPS!
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Do not allow a physical illness to take over your life.

Everything will be affected by a cancer, a cerebral infarction, multiple sclerosis, asthma, you name it. The illness has an impact on every level, your body, your mind and even your social life. It makes you feel lonesome because partners, friends and relatives do not fully understand what you are going through. On the one hand you do not want to talk about your complaint, but on the other the need to talk is great. It is difficult, because it has taken over your life.

There is nothing better than talking to fellow-sufferers, to people who know exactly what you are talking about. The recognition, the acknowledgement, the understanding and the mutual support make a difference. Fellow-sufferers help patients to put the complaint or the physical illness in perspective. You discover the illness is only a part of who you are. The discovery gets you out of your isolation and makes you stronger. Don't be afraid of the seriousness, there is also time for relaxation and sociability. Also there are information meetings now and then and several groups organize activities. There are also groups for partners, friends and relatives. If you suffer from an illness or are you involved with someone who does, talk about it with fellow-sufferers. It helps. ***Self Help Helps***

COLUMN

Acquaintance

It was in the early 80's of the previous century. It was a pretty joyful world in which I lived and I enjoyed my drinks. Although there were some who thought of me as an alcoholic. There were also some pubs where the owner didn't have to ask what I liked to drink. As soon as I entered through the curtains behind the door he served the first one. There was always a hearty welcome from the regular boys because then there was always a chance of a round.
One day there was someone who called me an alcoholic. I thought of myself as a spirited, sociable drinker, but me, an alcoholic??? I knew some alcoholics. Such as the man in the pub who fell from his stool. I was almost never drunk, but also never sober. I also knew a man who hit his wife and children, but from me my dog never even got a slap. I just fell asleep now and then and he who sleeps cannot sin. Asleep under a bridge? Never done, although I regularly fell asleep in the train to wake up 80 km further than my arrival station.
From a certain moment too many things started to go wrong. And my health started to deteriorate. In a moment of honesty I told my doctor what was happening. I knew he liked a good glass himself, because I met him now and then in the pub. And … I knew the definition of an alcoholic: someone who drinks more then his doctor.

It was apparent that he was worried and he made an appointment for me with a rehab clinic. I dressed myself well: a beautiful suit, shiny polished shoes, a modern cashmere tie (it was after all the 80's) and my pride, the gold Johnny Walker cuff-links. I was not aware at that moment that in fact it was an intake for hospitalization. The counselor was a friendly, shabbily dressed bearded man, who asked a lot of questions and eagerly wrote down everything. After filling two and a half pages of his notebook, he told me to come back next week. In the second consultation Beard Man was accompanied by a woman who had definitely graduated cum laude on a feminist course to become assertive. She offered me a care plan which I certainly "could not refuse" and told me this in such a way that even Godfather Don Corleone would have got an inferiority complex. I was told my personality would be completely shattered and built up again in nine months. In the first instance it seemed o.k. to me. I was not that satisfied with my character anyway. In my enthusiasm and as I was not familiar with this world I asked: what will this new personality look like? I thought in this way I was showing my commitment and motivation. It appeared to be the wrong question. Beard Man looked disappointed, Garden Trousers (it was still the 80's) fearlessly opened the drawer with pseudo-psychological clichés: come closer to oneself, feel good about oneself, improve self esteem, dare to say no, learn social competencies and more of those beautiful things. Even though I was not very clear myself, this seemed to me no clear answer to my question. I had not had a course on assertiveness and I asked if they could put this on paper for me to be able to think about it. Never heard of them again. The doctor choose plan B. The psychiatric hospital. Again me wearing my best clothes for the intake. It started with an agreeable conversation with a psychologist. He asked if I would fill in a questionnaire. Filling in a tax paper form for a modest multinational is easier. What a job! After a few days I sent in the questionnaire and they invited me for a second appointment. I appeared to be the owner of a long list of personality disorders and they invited me to make acquaintance with a group with similar disorders . An experience one never forgets. Twelve people who are together the whole day. During the lunch one of them said that he didn't like peanut butter. The whole group, one after the other, jumped in to tell him: "it was very courageous of you to say so", "brave", "look how far you came". Then they fell into each other's arms and started to hug. My thought: "well you could just as well have taken the jam instead", was completely wrong. This also didn't seem to be the best environment for me.

On my way home I dropped in on my favourite pub. There I met an old mate of mine. We hadn't seen each other for a while. When he asked me: How are you? I told him my experiences and I suddenly noticed he was drinking coffee . He looked at me seriously and said: "Maybe you belong in that madhouse, I don't know, but what I do know is that you are definitely an alcoholic. If you stop drinking now, you can come with me to an AA meeting this evening."

I had seen quite a lot of councillors, so I thought I can handle these as well. And anyway there were not many options left. I must admit I was curious and to see a group of alcoholics together, would be quite an experience. At 8 pm I entered a room with 12 men and women. A few of them I knew. Together with Hennie, an old barfly, we sure have had fun. I knew Gerard, he was a real artist at the billiard table. The rest were unknown to me, a bookkeeper, a housewife, an architect, a musician, a construction worker. This group was really a relief. No one used councillors vocabulary, nobody thought that everything was wrong about me. They just allowed me to sit there and listen. And that is what has helped me.

Leila (45) Borderline Group

"I am now proud of myself"

In my life I faced many difficulties. Since I was five, my mother was regularly admitted into a mental hospital and my father took care of me. It meant that I was often on my own. I did not get any mother love. I became mischievous. Because of that I got beaten by my father. This continued later on in my relationships, I always opted for men who abused me and beat me. I let it happen. During my last relationship the abuse was so bad that I had to go to hospital, I was 43 years of age. I could not sleep and functioned at a minimal level. The fear and terror was so deep, but the worst was that my daughter, by then an 11 year old, broke down. That was not acceptable. I had to take care of her, she had seen and experienced too much. I immediately sought help from the GGzE (Mental Intitution). I have had several appointments and followed a VERS training. At the moment I go to Marsha Linehan training. I'm learning to deal with my problems, so that I feel more comfortable with life.

Two years ago I came to the Borderline group and I can assure you I will stay there for a while. I feel very at ease there. Nobody looks at you in a funny way and you can tell each other everything. At home they don't often understand, they say it happened so long ago and you must get over it, but that does not happen overnight. Everybody in the group has his own story and many things remain much the same, but you understand each other. Sometimes the things you hear are hard and then I leave the group with a heavy feeling, but usually it's fine and I'm relieved afterwards. The understanding, identification and sharing of ideas, the laughing together, the crying together, I can't do without it.

I'm not there yet, but I want to go forward. For a long time I felt a total nothing, I was a nobody. But with the help and the Borderline Group I know that I am worth it. This is a big difference from the past. I dare now say that I'm proud of myself.

COURAGEOUS MOTHERS: FOR PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN ARE ABOUT TO BE RUINED BY ALCOHOL, DRUGS, GAMBLING OR INTERNET ADDICTION.

Mothers learn to let go of their addicted children

Your son or daughter is an addict. But as a mother you become addicted to helping this child. To them goes all the care and attention. You get problems with your partner, your friends and your other children, because they feel deprived. These mothers must learn to let go of their children and to give the control of their own lives back to them. For these parents it is a relief to talk in the group. They can leave feelings of despair and powerlessness behind. After a few meetings the burden on their shoulders is lifted and the mothers are able to view the situation with increasing distance. They learn to take responsibility and get on with their own lives.

Two years ago, the grandson of Riet Burema (84), founder of Courageous Mothers in Valkenswaard, became addicted to coke, the whole family was devastated. One day, when he phoned his grandmother to tell her that he had been beaten up, she did not hesitate a moment and allowed him to stay with her for a few weeks, so all parties could come to rest. The youth group to which he belonged welcomed him back and he could stay in the attic. Riet, "I was shocked by what I saw and heard. They had completely lost their way. Hopeless. Drugs belonged to the culture in which my grandchild had grown up in. Someone has to do something about this, I thought." "She had experienced drug use by her own children and now her grandchild was addicted". When I heard of Courageous Mothers in Volendam I thought: this is it, we have to start with the families! We must not focus on symptoms, we must address the cause. A change in mentality is needed. Now children in school get education about alcohol and drugs, but you must start with the young parents. They must learn to set limits, be clear, to pass on norms and values to their children. Maybe you think it is pointless, fighting against a brick wall, but I say, if you start cleaning in one corner, the rest of the room will follow by itself".

The self help group

The aim of the group is not to help children get free of the addiction, but to support the mother and the rest of the family. Burema: We want to teach mothers to let go of their children, let them live their own lives. At a certain age the education is done and you have to let them take their own decisions."

Courageous Mothers is a self help group to show each other:

- They must not cover up the addiction with the cloak of love;
- They must realize that the addiction of their children has made them addicted to helping.
- They must make their problem known so that they can expect help;
- They learn that addiction is a disease;
- They learn to cope with the illness of their child in everyday life;
- They learn their limits and to let go with love;
- They accept that people are responsible for their own lives.

The group meets once every two weeks in Valkenswaard.

SELF HELP HELPS!

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Start your own self help group. It's Fascinating!

Of course it can happen that there is no group for your specific problem. What's keeping from starting up your own self help group? Without doubt there must be people who find themselves in similar circumstances. It's a fascinating task trying to improve your destiny together with fellow sufferers. All who are involved will flourish and embark on a meaningful task. It gives a new sense to life.

But how to start?

Where do you find fellow sufferers? How to organize such a group? Where to find space to meet each other? How to run the meetings? What are the costs? Of course you have numerous questions. Foundation Self Help Network ZO Brabant has a lot of experience. You can always make an appointment for orientation. You are welcome and the coffee is ready! In the past years we have gained a lot of experience with helping to start groups and have developed supporting materials.

We have support material available.

SELF HELP NEWSPAPER (free)	€ 1,20
Notes on the phenomenon self help (1993)	€ 2,75
DVD " Self help helps caretakers" (with instruction book)	€ 22,00
DVD " How does it work? Help for starting a self help group.	€ 21,50
PR-portfolio " how to handle the media?"	€ 12,50
Course to start a Self Help group.	Price on request

Developed course material:

- ❑ Starting a group
- ❑ Self help and professional care: opposites or partners
- ❑ The recruitment of participants
- ❑ Starting a network
- ❑ Brochure "Self help in the care chain"

SELF HELP HELPS!

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Quotes

"If your illness is still unknown, finding support is very difficult. Fellow sufferers at least understand each other".
Go for the outstreched hand! Group for people with an unknown desease

"If you suffer from any kind of lung disease, you're glad of extra information so you can learn about adapted sports- and swimming possibilities. That's pure pleasure!"
Move yourself! Cara-group

"Impaired hearing is also a social handicap. How to deal with that, who can give you information and where can you meet others who struggle with the same problems?"
We are there for you! Group for the Impaired hearing

"If you're diagnosed breast cancer, you search for support and information. Not only medical information, but especially what it does to you and what you can do yourself"
Get stronger! Breast cancer group the Netherlands

"Chronic pain is something you have to learn to deal with. But where do you learn that?"
Come and learn Foundation Pain-hope

"A stroke affects the whole family. It turns everything upside down. How would other families cope with this?"
A clear thought. Group for people who suffer after a stroke and their partners

"Many people think a skin-disease is pretty horrifying. People who suffer from psoriasis have a lot to conquer".
Choose for yourself! Psoriasis-foundation

HISTORY OF THE SELF HELP NETWORK 'ZUIDOOST-BRABANT' *(NETHERLANDS)*

In the AA, around 1985, we met three women who were struggling with their alcohol problem, along with their history of incest. Referring them to a self help group around this theme seemed good advice. But where do you find such a group in the pre-Google age? It took weeks of calling and asking around before we found a clue. But… when self help groups could not even find each other, how could an individual in need find a relevant self help group? So the idea was born to make an inventory of groups in and around Eindhoven and to invite them for a meeting. A meeting to get to know each other and to discuss how we could cooperate. After several weeks, we had listed some 50 groups. But surprisingly, we stood quite alone in our wish for cooperation.

GGD, the Municipal Health Service
In those days we had already built up a good working relation with the GGD Eindhoven. During our inventory, we had found out that pretty much all groups were facing the same practical problems: how to reach the target group? where to go for (preferably free) photocopies? where to find meeting places? These communal interests led to a first concept of the Self help Network: a facilitating organization of, and for, self help groups. The GGD offered free photocopying services and meeting rooms, and supplied a modest budget for generating some publicity.

Starting Phase
All groups, which were known at that time, were invited. Come to the first meeting of the Self help Network, join the Network and enjoy free photocopying facilities. In need of a meeting space? Join the Network. Join the free publicity campaign. And above all: the Self help Network will not interfere with your autonomy, the Self help Network stays out of substantial group matters.

We produced a magazine in which every group could present itself in an article. A travelling presentation, containing a text wall and a computer, was developed. A first confrontation with a computer for many people. The first time that self help groups could present themselves in such a professional way. It was a success.

(In)formal care
A next step was to investigate whether we could set up communication between (people representing) informal and formal care. Both sides expressed doubts and prejudice. The majority of Self help groups was born out of failing or deficient formal care. Formal care on the other hand was sceptical, 'do-it-yourself'-help was not held in high regard.
The Self help Network offered a platform for mutual consultation. This initiative, after some hesitation in the beginning, turned out to be very successful.

New phase
Self help is an organically developing organization. In the absence of financial interests, a person's enthusiasm, talents and personal qualities get a chance to rise and shine. The initiators Hetty and Hans Flaman had both the vision and the imagination to bring the idea in the world. To implement such a project in society requires other competences. Insight, organizational capacities, perseverance, passion – these are the characteristics of Joke de Haas. A contributor to the Self help movement from its very start. She immediately recognized the potency of this initiative. With never ending energy, she took matters firmly in hand. Open and friendly, but when necessary with bulldozer-like convincing powers, she took a firm line with authorities and institutions. Full of commitment and practical ingenuity, she supported Self help groups and helped people to set up new groups. In her typical warm and adequate way, she helped people who searched for help to help themselves.

Premises
Minor and major successes were achieved, but the real breakthrough was getting a home. A building with offices and lots of rooms, where the groups could meet. That is a lot more than 'just' a roof over one's head. The building became the dynamic centre for all activities of the Self help Network 'Zuidoost-Brabant'. Now, Eindhoven houses the leading and most powerful Self help Network in The Netherlands.

Cooperation
The success of the self help movement in Eindhoven is also due to the cooperation between formal and informal care in our city. The Self help Network regularly organizes both symposia and structural meetings. Of course, exchange of information is necessary, but to achieve a really effective policy, people need to know and trust each other personally.

Support Workers
A striking result was the set-up of the Support Workers, some 15 years ago. Experienced AA-members were hired by Novadic, a drug rehabilitation institution in Eindhoven. They are building bridges between formal care and self help. Now, for more than a decade, the Support Workers have formed an integrated and successful part of the Novadic care policy.

Growth
Increasingly people want (and are forced by new laws) to take responsibility for their own well-being. As a consequence, existing Self help groups grow bigger and new groups are established. Of course lots of the groups deal with the well-known problems of psychic and somatic nature. But lately, more and more groups are initiated by members of immigrant populations and by people with psychosocial problems, like the homeless. Logically, an increasing appeal is made to the services of the Self help Network. Not only in this region, but also nationally and internationally, the Self help Network 'Zuidoost-Brabant' functions as an example. Everywhere, people who are in the process of setting up new groups, establishing contacts with the media, initiating communication with institutions for formal care, reaching out for 'fellow allies', search for help and 'best practices'. The Self help Network 'Zuidoost Brabant' has both the knowledge and the experience. Knowledge that has turned out to be unique in The Netherlands and throughout Europe.

SELF HELPGROUPS SEVERAL SECTORS

Quotes

"Of course society is much more open nowadays, but for male and female homosexuals, for bisexual and transsexual men and women, it's still more difficult to find a place in society or even in your own surroundings".
You are welcome. Foundation the Circles

"Being gay or bisexual within a marriage remains a difficult subject. How do you deal with it?"
Don't keep it to yourself Orpheus

"Transvestites and transsexuals need a warm and safe environment. We can offer this".
Join
Group Transvestites and transsexuals

"If your child suffers from ADHD or has dyslexia, you need insight and knowledge to deal with it. And finding good help isn't always easy"
Embrace the help. Balans

"If your child doesn't want to see you anymore, you're left alone with your sorrow and questions. Sharing these emotions with fellow sufferers, gives strength".
Join the club. Self help group Hope

"If you have an Indonesian background, you have a different history and have experienced life in a different way".
It 's good to talk about it with people with the same background
Selamat datang
Foundation Pelita

"A child with Down's Syndrome asks for a lot of adaptation skills. Then it's helpful to meet people who know what it is and how it feels".
We stand ready
Foundation Down's Syndrome

"If you have HIV or Aids, an open dialogue with fellow sufferers give a lot of energy".
Do phone us. The Positive Dialogue

"To find a place in Dutch society you can use support from a fellow Somalian who has more experience".
Come. Foundation Somalian Community Eindhoven

Much misery is based on drug use, but the psycho-pharma industry may cause even more misery."
"Rediscover yourself!"
Foundation Women and drug use

"If everything revolves around your addicted child, you must dare to be defensible." Become stronger!"
National Foundation Parents of Drug users, Division Noord Brabant

If you are involved with youthcare, it is good having people standing behind you to guide you around this world.
" We are here for you!"
Foundation "de Noodkreet"

PD is still a poorly understood disease of arms or legs. Peers understand each other in any case. Take this helping hand!
Dutch society of Post-traumatic Dystrophy Patients

Once more you become the director of your own wellbeing

Of course doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and other care takers are needed. Without doubt. But caretaking becomes more technical, more specialized and more impersonal. Often there are frequent caretaker changes, people with a chronic disease very easily lose grip on their own wellbeing. Your own contribution to your wellbeing becomes less and less. One becomes more and more dependent, and more the patient or client.
In a self help group you get the tools to take responsibility for your own wellbeing again. At the least, you are in part control again. You learn to give your illness its place in your life.

Just give it a try.

IRENE VAN DER MEULEN: "KEEP IN CONTROL OF YOUR OWN LIFE"

In 1987 I ended up as an emergency case in hospital. In 1981 at the age of 17 I was diagnosed with diabetes mellitus (type I), from the symptoms it was obvious: I had to control my diabetes better! This illness was the cause of my symptoms. I began to pay more attention to my health, but through contacts with other diabetec patients I did not understood why I continued to regularly suffer from severe attacks. I also suffered dropped foot, squinting due to an eye infection and no use of my right hand. Meanwhile my diabetes was under perfect control: the perfect laboratory results, and having a different internist did wonders. Still, every few years I kept having strange symptoms and decided to consult another internist and a neurologist. After 7 years, then the truth came out: I had another disease, namely multiple sclerosis. At first I was delighted: "I had not been putting it on", because that's what people around me started to think. There really was something wrong. Now, more then 20 years later, I sometimes use the slogan: "I only had diabetes!" I am having more problems with my MS, but as a result of the contact with other MS-people in the MS contact group we make the best of it. We try to keep in control of your own lives.

COLUMN

Dialogue between self helpers

Why for heaven sake do they call it SELF help, when you have to join a GROUP?

Never thought of it!!

Well, if YOU… have to help ME, than I can better do it mySELF!

If YOU are so good at helping, then YOU… can help ME, as I am not so good at it.

I have always helped others, but helping myself is a bit more difficult.

Do YOU have any problems with yourself?

Well… I don't, but OTHERS do!

Why aren't the others helping YOU then?

They don't know that I might need help and even if THEY did know, …then THEY wouldn't know how to…

What is it that YOU can't do yourself?

Well, I do have an alter-ego; my one half is a teetotaller and the other half is an alcoholic.

That's what I have with smoking, on the one hand I can't stand the smell and I'm short of breath, but on the other hand I keep on puffing and I can't stop.

Actually, it should be possible… that YOUR bad half together with MINE could help each other so that OUR good ego's wouldn't be bothered and could support our other halves!!

Couldn't THEY do that for themselves?

Not without help of course, but I can't provide that help because they don't listen to ME and I have enough problems with myself!.

But what if I speak to THEM?

But how do I know which of YOUR halves are speaking to MINE?

Maybe there are OTHER group members who have more experience and would be able to help?

Most of them have their own problems and in many cases they are not the best healers.

A good talk might help.

That depends if the other half is able to understand!

I don't think that YOU should make such a fuss about it.

Is this YOUR critical approach or are YOU just pretending?

Sometimes I don't know if I want to be helped.

Well, let's start by helping YOU.

Yes, if I could do that, then nobody has to help ME.

That's MY point!

Clear! If you know that YOU are able to do it, then you don't need OTHERS to help, do you?

I agree with YOU and I am happy that YOU are able to understand me.

Thank you so much, it has really helped ME.

ME too.

Wilma

How very glad I was as mother of a son with a psychosis that I was able to tell my story at Ypsilon (self help organization for families of people who suffer from a mental illness). There came a moment that we landed in the midst of a serious crisis situation and we did not know what to do. Thereafter for one year I had weekly contact with one of the people of Ypsilon. I could express my concerns to her and she gave me advice. Sometimes the advice was that I had think more of myself. Furthermore, Ypsilon had contact with GGzE (mental health institution) and during meetings there they discussed my child's situation.

I also attended a lecture at the GGzE, where a (former) patient told about her experiences with psychosis and explained it. That gave me more knowledge and insight about the illness of my son. All this shows how valuable these kind of organizations can be for family and friends.

So, Ypsilon, THANKS!

Essential differences between self help, expertise based on experience and companionship

Around 450 BC, during his visit to Babylon, the Greek historian Heroditus saw that people with a disease were not immediately sent to a doctor, but first they were brought to the market to share experiences with their peers. This is the first known description of the self help principle.

Take responsibility for your welfare, share your experiences with others, and do not be indifferent to people with a similar problem. These are actually the normal basic values in a civilized society. However, because of the individualization of the society and the development of professional skills, these values faded away. Experts have taken over. And not without success. Professional care has improved the quality of life significantly. But man is more than a body to repair.

Self help and professional care.

For several years there has been a visible change. When it comes to serious, chronic diseases and disorders governments, health professionals and insurers increasingly appreciate the value of empowerment, of active involvement of patients with their own health. Someone with problems gets a better insight into his illness through contacts with fellow sufferers, he comes out of isolation, is more able to organize his life and experiences more welfare. One of the benefits is that patients or clients are better treatable.

Too often people with problems are forced into a passive role. The practitioner makes the diagnosis and proposes a treatment plan. Of course, the patient may be involved, but the information gap is too big for real impact. It encourages 'victim feelings' with all the negative consequences belonging to that.

Self help ensures that people, at least in part, get in control of their lives again.

Self help, expertise based on experience and fellow companionship are definitely not the same.

Too often all concepts are mixed up. Self help has become a bit of a collective term for the many forms of help, in which the patient or client is involved. But there are essential differences.

Self help

Self help in its purest form is a group of people who have similar problems and support each other in their recovery. Professionals play no role in the group, although they may be asked to explain their views or give background support. It is obvious that at the same time self help group members might be having care treatment.

A good definition is: "A self help group consists of people who have personal experience of the same problem or life situation, either directly or through family or friends. By sharing experiences with others it gives them the opportunity to give each other a unique quality of mutual support, to collect practical information and ways to deal with the problem. The group is run by and for its members. Some support groups expand their operations still further. For example they provide services or perform campaigns for attitude change. Sometimes professionals take part in the group in various ways, only when asked by the group.
"(J. Wilson, 1995, Nottingham Self Help Center).

Expertise based on experience.

This is a less tightly defined concept. The expertise is widely used in Mental Health. In general it is given by clients who have experienced the problem and the therapy "at first hand" and have usually followed a training or education to transfer this knowledge. To be able to sympathize with the whole process is the key factor.

Contact with fellow companions.

Companions is a very broad concept. Sometimes it is an initiative directed by professionals from a healthcare institution. One prominent example is the so-called buddy-project. Sometimes organized companionship is about a major problem, or sometimes just about something like being red haired. Sometimes it is only an internet community, whoever searches on Yahoo groups, "health and wellbeing", will find dozens.

Self help helps.

In the Netherlands there are hundreds of self help groups with very large membership numbers. The extent is unknown. Partly because many groups (like AA and NA) for reasons of principle (the anonymity) do not maintain membership lists. In Southeast Brabant 57 organizations are active in many different fields. The very fact that they exist prove that they work. Indeed, there are no commercial interests, so groups are not artificially kept alive. Thus the group members benefit from their participation. They feel better for it, despite the fact that self help is not a cure.