



Sandra Stimson

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS



By Sandra Stimson ADC, CALA, CDP Executive Director,
[Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#)

Support Groups are a necessity. There is a place in the Activity Calendar.

Sandra Stimson CALA, ADC, CDP

There are several kinds of support groups that are held in long term care facilities. One that benefits the caregivers who provide care in the home, another is to support the residents living in healthcare facilities and finally the support group for families with loved ones residing in a health care facility. A variety of support groups should be offered. A social worker was overheard stating, "we don't offer support groups because my residents and families don't need it!) Support groups offer support, provide education and comma dare.

Support groups should be offered to residents, families and community on a monthly basis. It is strongly recommended that families and residents not attend the community support groups. One big reason is that families have different issues and concerns vs community care givers. Family caregivers have ongoing issues related to the facility care, clothing, medications and discharge. Families of loved ones providing care in their home have a whole range of different issues. You don't want issues that families have, aired in a community support group and that information taken back to the community.

Residents should have their own support group. For example, it is imperative to have discussions and information about dementia. They have many issues to contend with such as wanderers coming into their space, dealing with disruptive behaviors and communication issues. They need the same kind of education as the families and the community. Because most long term care settings now have 60 to 80 percent dementia, it is imperative that the residents have support groups. Another topic could be developing self esteem in the elderly or adjusting with nursing home placement.

Depending on the needs of the group, the support group may meet monthly or more often as needed. The group sessions should be about 1 hour. If you are providing food, you may want the meeting to run a little longer.

The facilitator should plan for a speaker several times a year to address specific questions, issues and concerns. A speaker can be someone with an agency, association, hospital speaker's bureau, department head and of course the social worker.

You don't want your support group to turn toxic which can happen for many reasons. One common reason is a participant who does all the talking. It is best to address this head on and utilize a timer. They can speak when they have the timer as it's important to hear from everyone. Make sure to explain the rules of the timer or hour glass. If someone is running on too long, simply say, "Thank you for your input but we need to move on and hear from everyone. Allow time for the members to respond to their questions or concerns. Remember, you don't have to have the answers to everything. Let the group provide input as they many ideas and suggestions.

Be sure to advertise the date and location of the resident support group on the monthly calendar, facility newsletter and on the bulletin boards.

A nice touch is to provide a journal to the residents who attend the support group meeting as they may wish to take notes or write down their thoughts. Always thank the residents for coming as it takes a lot to bare your soul.

Support groups should be planned and advertised at times convenient to the group you are hoping to serve. For example, elderly care givers would prefer a midweek early afternoon as many don't want to drive at night. A light lunch should be offered. Younger care givers might want an evening support group due to commitments of family and work. A light dinner should also be offered. For your community support groups you should advertise in the local paper, local tv stations, office on aging and with the Alzheimer's association. There are many care giver wed sites you may wish to also post your monthly meetings. Try to always keep the meeting dates the same, for example, the 3rd Thursday of the month.

The facility should offer support groups for families of loved ones living on the dementia units. These can be held monthly or quarterly. Let your families vote on how often they wish to meet. You should plan the dates of the meetings and the topics to be discussed a year in advance. It is recommend that by the 1st week in January you have posted the dates of the meeting. Families should not bring their loved ones to the meeting as this can impede the flow of the discussion. Always provide a fact sheet on the topic to be discussed. Allow time for the speaker and time for the families to speak and ask questions.

There are an endless list of topics that can be discussed at the community support groups and your resident and family support group. The Alzheimer's Association www.alz.org has free fact sheets. These should be downloaded and kept in your library. Always provide a fact sheet of the topic you will be discussing to each participant. Each time you meet, discuss one of the fact sheets. Be sure to have a sign in sheet and write down the topic on the sign in sheet so you will remember what you discussed.

Do not give out names, phone numbers or addresses of the members of your support group. If they want to provide that information to another member of the group, they will.

For wonderful ideas and suggestions on how to run your support group please visit www.njgroups.org, The New Jersey Self Help Group Clearing House or American Self Help Group Clearing House <http://selfhelpgroups.org> or <http://mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/>

Sandra Stimson has experience as a corporate consultant, Corporate Trainer and National Speaker. Her experience is in long term care, as Activity Director,

Director of Alzheimer's Units and Assistant Administrator of a 550 bed long term care county home. She is Co-founder of Pet Express Pet Therapy Club, is a Life Replay Specialist.

Sandra implements dementia units nationwide. Sandra has written several books, Volunteer Management Essentials for Long Term Care and Pet Express Pet Therapy Program. Sandra has been a facilitator for Alzheimer's support groups and is the Awards Chair for the NJ Association of Activity Professionals. Sandra is the Executive Director of **National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners** <http://www.nccdp.org>.

[Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#) offers resources for health care professionals in many areas of dementia care, care plans, Snoezelen products, dementia activity calendars, adult day care calendars, sensory calendars, reminisce videos for dementia, activity books, and dates to remember, party supplies, resources and links.



BOB'S Novelty Store is back with all new original designs. Visit [Activity Director Novelties](#) by clicking on the "Smiley Face"

LINDA'S Amazon.com Store for Activity Directors

Serious Products for Serious Minded Activity Professionals



The Activity Director Community is a gathering place for LTC Activity Professionals. Feel free to express yourself and respond to submissions from other AD's.

This is an important community and you need to be part of it. Membership is FREE so [Join Today](#).

This site is moderated by Robert & Linda Lucas, Owners of The Activity Director website.



NCCDP

National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioner

become a certified dementia practitioner



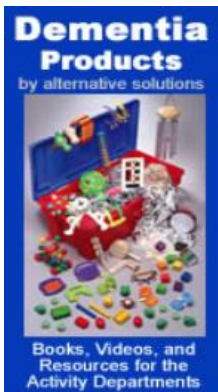
Each Norman Rockwell print is paired with a national standards of Resident Rights and is illustrated by a picture depicting the "Resident Right."

[click here to purchase resident rights prints](#)





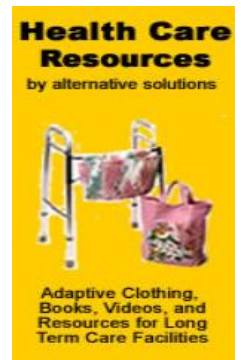
The New Jersey web site has fantastic resources, such as; How To start a self help group, structuring a meeting, finding a guest speaker, ground rules, possible discussion questions, how to keep the meeting upbeat, providing mutual support, group evaluations, getting the members involved, over coming group and member issues, facilitating the group, etc. If you have never run a group this is the best web site to go for lots of information. You should purchase a 3 ring binder and download the information and place in a notebook. In this notebook, you should place one of every fact sheet listed on the Alzheimer's Association so you have a clean master. As you find articles and other resources, add those to your notebook.



Another resource is the Closed Captioned Media. They have a free catalogue and free in-service videos. They will mail the videos to you at no charge. Their web site is www.cfv.org

You should have at least two support group facilitators so one can fill in should you not be able to attend the group. Be sure to keep an updated list of members names, addresses, phone numbers, cell numbers and email addresses. Always obtain an emergency contact number in the event of an emergency. You never know when a member may fall ill.

Anyone can be a volunteer support group facilitator as it requires, commitment, patience, good listening skills, organization and compassion. If you are presenting a topic that requires specific knowledge be sure to read about the topic before the meeting. If you want to start a support group and don't want to run it by yourself, reach out to the Social worker, nurse or facility clergy to assist you with the group. Remember, you are only the facilitator and it's your job as the facilitator to insure that the group runs smoothly. You will find the benefits to the participants are many but what you receive in return for being a volunteer facilitator is priceless.



*Activity Director Today
for Activity Professionals
in Long Term Care Settings*
admin@theactivitydirectorsoffice.com

**Copyright 2004-Present
The Activity Director's Office
All Rights Reserved**

[Disclaimer](#)