



Botswana Network of People Living With HIV and AIDS

**Management Guidelines for
Support Groups of
People Living with HIV and AIDS**

Botswana Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS
P.O. Box 1599
Mogoditshane, Botswana

1. Introduction – What are Support Groups

Support Groups are community based public interest, non profit making organisations formed by community members to serve them. Support Groups are not owned by one person or the founder, they are owned by those people registered as members. All support Groups are people centred, that is why their services revolve around the needs of the people in the community.

Support Groups of people living with HIV/AIDS are usually formed to provide care and support to those people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. They help PLWHA and the community to mitigate socio-economic impacts created by HIV/AIDS. One of the key functions of Support Groups is to educate the people and create awareness of HIV/AIDS, and work towards reducing new infections, stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS.

2. Foundations of managing a Support Group

Good management begins with a better understanding of the vision and purpose of the Support Group. Unless you understand this properly you cannot manage the Support Group effectively and efficiently. It is there important for the members to

2.1 Develop a shared vision: Through a participatory process, discuss what the group would like to achieve or see happen in the distant future. This could be that all PLWHAs will have access to quality and adequate nutrition and treatment. And that people will not be stigmatised or discriminated because of their condition. Once you have agreed on the vision please

- i. Write it down on paper for record purposes. Include the date that the members agreed on the vision, keep the list of the members who were there at the time.
- ii. Make copies and give to all your members and if possible to key community and religious leaders.

2.2 Define the purpose of the Support Group: This means understanding why the Support Group was formed. It means understanding the core business of the Support group. By doing so it will help the Support Group remain focused and use its resource more efficiently. This also helps to avoid misunderstanding and creating expectations that you were not intended to deal with. To achieve this Support Groups will need to:

- i. Identify key areas of service delivery they want to work around, i.e. counselling, feeding, income generating activities, support to PLWHA etc.
- ii. Once you have identified the service delivery areas you want to work, develop three to five objectives that you want to achieve over time.
- iii. Be clear on the benefits to people you want to serve. Let them know what you can and can't do for them.

3. Managing A support Group – Understanding the concept

Support Groups are vehicles for service delivery and hence they require effective and efficient participatory management systems. Management means putting human, financial, material and information resources to good use to produce the results you want. The management process

requires that we follow a standard practice that includes planning, organising, implementing and providing leadership. The following is a key step by step process:

Step 1 Plan with the members on what you want to do, when, where and how you will do it. Involving members creates opportunities for sustainability and ownership. Let people decide what they want to do.

Step 2 Organise the resources required to implement the activities you have identified. Resources include information, human, financial, and materials.

Also ensure that you have defined the tasks, roles and responsibilities of all those people going to be involved in the implementation process. This means division of labour.

Step 3 Provide, good leadership to those who are implementing the activities. Good leadership motivates people, allows people to be innovative, and provides clear and objective direction of how things should be done. It also means keeping the process on track (controlling) to ensure that activities remain focused to objectives and anticipated results.

Good management practices depend on the following:

- i. An enabling and participatory environment, where every body has equal opportunity to participate in decision making, and contributing to the entire process.
- ii. Good and efficient communication
- iii. Transparency in decision making.
- iv. Appreciation of other people as “Resourceful persons” regardless of their education and technical skills.

4. Management Structures and systems

Managing any organisation, including Support Groups requires a clear understanding of the following the management structures and the process of decision making. In view of this all Support Groups should start by

- i. Establishing their management structures or governance institutions. These may include the Annual General Meeting, The Executive Committee or the Board, Sub Committees, and the Secretariat if resources allow.
- ii. Once this have been establish elect the officials that will responsibility for the structures
- iii. Decide on their mandate, the roles and responsibilities. Have these written down. If you have a constitution it is most likely that this information will be contained in the constitution.
- iv. Make sure that people know how the election to the committees are done, how long the people can remain as members of a particular committee, and how you will remove them from the committee if you not happy with their conduct and performance. This must be clearly written down.

5. Managing Members

Members are the most important assets of any Support Group. It is because of them that the support group exists in the first place. Like in many other organisations, good governance of

members is the key to success and sustainability of support groups. To achieve this goal ensure the following:

- i. Let the community know who can become a member of the Support Group
- ii. Decide whether membership is free or it is by subscription. If it is by subscription make sure that everyone knows how much it is to become a member.
- iii. Use participatory approaches, particularly in decision making and planning process. This will help to strengthen the sense of ownership and belonging.
- iv. Give members equal opportunity when such need arises.
- v. Make sure than no member, their families, friends and relatives feel stigmatised by any actions associated with the Support Group.
- vi. Let the members know their **rights** as members.
- vii. Maintain a **membership register** that can be inspected by any member when they want to do so. Remind members regularly when their membership expires.
- viii. Exercise tolerance and do not expel people from the membership for minor misunderstandings, unless the action is such that it destroys the credibility of the Support Group.
- ix. The members should subscribe to the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the Support Group.

6. Managing Projects

The life of a Support Group depends on the activities they undertaking. When Support Groups, become in-active they die a natural death. , Activities are determined by the vision and the objectives individual Support Groups want to achieve. Successful implementation of such activities will depend on whether the group has a common understanding and are will to see the activities succeed.

It is important therefore for members of the Support Group to:

- i. Planning together:** Identify activities you want implement together, discuss how this will be done, by whom and when. Identify the resources required and assign one person the responsibility to see the activity is done, others can participate in different ways. Make sure people report back on a regular basis on progress being made.
- ii. Working as Team:** Work as a team, where everybody has a role, skill and knowledge to share with others. Those who don't have any skills and knowledge should be given the opportunity to learn. Remember old saying "together we stand, alone we fall". The table below can help in planning for the activities you want to implement.

Activity	Beneficiary	How will the activity be implemented?	Where	When	Resource (what resources are needed)

- iii. Allow community participation:** Give the opportunity to interested community members to participate in your work as volunteers or people bringing in some expertise. Community support is important in ensuring the acceptability of the support group and its long term sustainability.

iv. Client satisfaction: Projects and other activities must provide services that makes client happy. Without a happy clientele, it is difficult to continue with activities of the support group.

7. Partnerships

It is difficult for any one organisation to provide quality and comprehensive care and support as we do not always have sufficient resources and expertise. It is therefore important that Support Groups form strong partnerships and strategic alliances with other organisations and government programmes providing similar services. Support Groups should there endeavour to:

- i. Identify other service providers in their areas, know and understand the services their offer and how that can complement your efforts.
- ii. Establish a working relationship with them and invite them to your Support Group activities and events. Where possible establish joint projects.
- iii. Make sure service provider know your strengths and weaknesses,

8. Code of Conduct

To guide the conduct and behaviour of the members, Support Groups should establish a simple Code of Ethics and Conduct. This provides the opportunity for individuals members to regulate what they do at a personal level in relation to the rest of the Support Group. Code of Conduct creates a moral obligation to do the right things and help others do the same.

Code of Conduct of Oakwood Support Group

- a) Respect each other
- b) Trust each other
- c) Work as a team
- d) Don't get involved in risk behaviour
- e) Don't stigmatise any member or their relatives or people in the community
- f) Attend all meetings unless there is a good reason for not attending
- g) Be accountable for our actions and money we use
- h) Be transparent

9. Monitoring and Evaluation

To make sure that you are on track and you are doing what you said you will do, put together a plan to monitor what is being done. The important thing is to know, when the activities should start implementation and when it will come to an end, know what you are monitoring in the project i.e. are services being delivered efficiently, are resources being used in accordance with the plan, what challenges are emerging and needs to be addressed? etc. If you have a set of measurable indicators use them to measure performance. An example of a measurable indicator is "We shall provide clothing to 45% of the orphans in the community by the end of the year".

At the end of each year, conduct an evaluation of your work. This is mainly to measure the outcomes of the projects you have been implementing and their impact.

10. Reporting

Make sure that you that you provide reports of what you have been doing over the yea to the government, BONEPWA, donors and members. This will facilitate continued support for you. Progress activity report and a financial report are required.