

Suggestions for Organizing a Neighborhood Cluster

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- Invite a person who has experienced the journey with a mental illness, a peer counselor or recovery support specialist, to attend and help facilitate cluster meetings.
- Invite a family member, from a local NAMI or Mental Health America affiliate to attend and help facilitate cluster meetings.
- Identify and invite a local congregational lay leader who has personal experience with raising awareness about mental illness and other mental health issues to attend and help facilitate cluster meetings
- Identify and invite a representative from a local mental health service to attend and help facilitate the life of the cluster
- Invite a community mental health champion with an interest in the role of congregations to attend and help forward cluster activity

This group of five people serves as an ongoing nucleus of a cluster organization. Who sets in motion these initial invitations? A cluster organizer; this is a person with training in both spiritual care and mental health – a pastoral counselor, a parish nurse, a social worker, a chaplain or other specialized minister/lay faith leader, or a resource person from a clinic or hospital system to the faith community and congregations.

The cluster organizer and core group invite and encourage two participants from each congregation to participate in the cluster meetings.

- A companionship coordinator whose focus is on developing a congregational and community companionship capacity in the congregation
- A mental health team chair whose focus is on developing a “caring congregation” through education, commitment, welcome, service and advocacy

Cluster meetings provide an opportunity for congregational leadership teams to mutually support one another, share ideas, learn together about resources and plan common activities.

- Name a cluster convener to open and close the meetings and gently encourage the flow of the meeting
 - A movement into quiet
 - A brief period of meditation on the needs of individuals and families in our congregations and community
 - Shared reflections on recent activity in our local congregations and cluster life
 - Contemplation of next steps in our individual settings with responses from the larger group
 - Planning for common events or efforts
- Name a cluster communicator or secretary to keep and distribute minutes of the meeting, send announcements of the next gathering

- At the initial meeting of each year begin drafting an annual schedule of
 - Regular cluster meetings
 - Community wide events such as Mental Health Month, and Mental Illness Awareness Week
 - An annual cluster gathering of congregational care givers
 - Cluster or region wide training events and presentations
- Keep a cluster register of participants, cluster meeting minutes and resources
- Identify a host congregation willing to provide space for cluster meetings and lead congregations willing to sponsor the annual cluster gathering and cluster training events and presentations
- Name a cluster clergy contact to help foster communications with religious leaders and pastoral staff in the cluster; include, invite and keep clergy in the loop from the beginning

Suggested Activities for a Cluster of Congregations Sharing in Mental Health Care

- Monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly meetings of cluster leadership
- Exploring together resources for Mental Health Month, Recovery Month, and Mental Illness Awareness Week
- Shared conversation about monthly congregational activities suggested in the Pathways Mental Health Toolkit for Congregations
- Planning an annual mental health focused gathering for congregational caregivers, e.g.
 - A candlelight vigil service during mental illness awareness week
 - A community wide presentation and panel on spirituality and mental health focusing on children and families, trauma, severe and persistent mental illness, substance use, mental health issues of aging
 - A workshop on some aspect of care giving, for example ‘listening,’ ‘recovery,’ ‘self-care, limits and boundaries,’ ‘supporting the healing process,’ ‘sharing spiritual practices of healing and growth,’
 - A resource fair
- scheduling cluster level trainings
 - Introduction to Mental Health Care in the Congregation
 - The Way of Companionship
 - Organizing a Mental Health Team
 - Mental Health First Aid
- Organizing a one time or ongoing clergy/faith leader consultation group

Notes

1. This is a menu; choose what makes sense and seems doable to you
2. *A Mental Health Toolkit for Congregations* and training resources for an *Introduction to Mental Health Ministry, the Way of Companionship, and Organizing a Mental Health Team* are available from Pathways to Promise www.pathways2promise.org
3. Resources for growing a caring congregation are available from Mental Health Ministries, www.mentalhealthministries.net
4. To locate a pastoral counselor in your community see the American Association of Pastoral Counselors www.aapc.org
5. Mental Illness Awareness Week Resources are available from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI Faithnet, www.nami.org