

## Support Group Paper

The support group that I have chosen for this paper is called Coffee Group. This group is one of the support groups offered by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). The group was created many years ago, around the year 2000's. At that time, individuals with visual impairments expressed their desire to meet with other individuals having similar disabilities to talk about their experiences. Thus, the CNIB created the Coffee Group.

The purpose of the Coffee Group was to bring individuals with visual impairments together. People could meet and discuss, share their experiences with others, and get support from others.

The target population of this support group is all individuals who are blind or visually impaired, from all ages. However, because the Coffee Group is held during the day, most individuals who are attending the sessions are older people.

This support group meets the needs of people with visual impairments, firstly by bringing those people together. By meeting once a week, the group is breaking the isolation of some older individuals. Secondly, the group offers a place to share experiences and hear from others. Participants can find support and advice to resolve an issue or to go through a difficult time in their life. People feel better understood and supported within contact of individuals who have similar disabilities.

The Coffee Group is held every Friday morning, from 10AM to 12PM, in the conference room of the CNIB office in downtown Winnipeg. The address of the CNIB building is 1080 Portage Avenue.

The support group is opened to all individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and who wants to participate. As mentioned in the readings, group forum may not be effective for everyone, and not all people feel comfortable sharing their feelings with others. The number of participants can vary from weeks to weeks. Participants are mostly older individuals, due to the fact that the support group is held during the day. Before Covid, the average number of participants each week was around 20 people, which is a bit more than the number recommended by the readings.

To attract new members to the group, the CNIB organizes phone campaigns, once or twice a year, by going through their list of new clients and clients that could be potentially interested, like recently retired clients. New members can also come from referrals from rehabilitation professionals.

Usually, the CoffeeGroup is led by two facilitators. Those facilitators are employees of the CNIB, and are responsible to develop and organize all support groups held at the CNIB location. Each CNIB location can have different support groups held at different times of the week.

The range of topics discussed is very broad and depends on what the participants want to share. Discussions can be among the whole group, or they can also take place in smaller groups within the group. Discussions inside smaller groups can be different from groups to groups. Discussions are casual. There are no specific topics or timelines to follow. The Coffee Group checks the rationale for support groups for visually impaired listed in the readings.

Before Covid, the Coffee Group met in person in the conference room of the CNIB building. This room is a square room, probably around 30 feet by 30 feet. This room has windows on one side, and fluorescent lights on the ceiling. Tables and seats are organized in a U-shape. Participants sit at tables. In the middle of the opening of the U, a small table was placed for the facilitators, where coffee, tea and cookies were also available. Facilitators, bring coffee, tea and cookies to participants. If the U-shape allows participants to face each other, it does not allow them to really see each other.

During Covid, the support group was held virtually through Zoom and phone, for older individuals who had difficult with technology or had no computer or tablet. Due to this virtual format, the group gained many new members. People who were not able to come in person to the CNIB building, as well as people living outside of the city. With the end of the restrictions, and the return in person since this month of April, the Coffee Group is now offering an hybrid format to its participants. It is back in person at the CNIB office, but for individuals who are not able to come to the office, the group is continuing to be available virtually, through Zoom and phone.

### **Reference**

Graboyes, M. (2022). *Support Groups for People with Visual Impairment*.