



Topics to be considered

Mark Twain to his friend Ben:

Dear Ben,

I'm sorry my letter is so long

I didn't have time to write a shorter one.

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You too are able to host one!

Hosting an Open Day is actually quite simple. And the nice thing is that you don't need to do everything! It is possible to delegate most of the tasks to volunteers, and see supporting them as your only job. Don't forget, Co-Counsellors are autonomous folk: they're able to look after themselves and will often lend a hand, if asked.

Suggestions for making it a success

1. Trust the co-operative spirit of Co-Counsellors

Hosting an Open Day doesn't mean you are responsible for its success! You only provide the conditions; it is up to the Co-Counsellors to get the best out of the day. And in 99% of the cases they will do just that. They will generously offer you all the support you need.....if you ask for it.

If, as sometimes happens, something goes wrong or you get distressed, share this with the group, ask for attention or for specific support.

2. Have a support person

This can't be underlined enough. Just knowing there's someone there in the group especially to support you, is often enough in itself. In addition, doing the preparation together can help you to become clearer, and your support person may come up with some good suggestions. If a problem arises, two heads are better than one. And if this is not enough, what about having a session? For more details about what support you can ask for, see 'Organising your own support'.

3. Prepare yourself & your checklists beforehand

This manual is designed to help you with good preparation. The chapter on 'Topics' covers the different aspects of the Open Co-Counselling Day, while the chapter on 'Check Lists' enables you to make your own check lists.

4. Be aware of the Time Keeping

You are not expected as Open Co-Counselling Day host to offer a programme. But time keeping is a different thing, especially when everybody knows everybody. People tend to talk and to extend the coffee time and the shared lunch: there is a big chance that nobody keeps an eye on the time as everybody expects somebody else to do the convening.

Time keeping could be a job for your support person, or be delegated to somebody else. But make sure that it happens....

Building confidence

Before hosting an Open Day yourself, you could try the following ways of building your confidence:

- offer support to somebody who is hosting an Open Day
 - when attending other Open Co-Counselling Days, take careful note of what goes on and what you think makes the day a success.
 - offer to facilitate part of an Open Day
 - talk to people who have done it and share any misgivings. Remember that an Open Day is run by Co-Counsellors and that everything will get sorted out anyway
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Organising your own Support

What support you can ask for

You can ask your support person

- to act as a sounding board
- to talk the day through with you.
Quite often it is when you hear yourself speak, that you know what you are thinking.
 - about the programme
 - about what you want to learn from your facilitation?
 - about which points you want positive feedback on afterwards
- to take over some of your jobs:
 - welcoming new people
 - collecting the money & checking the subscriptions
 - time keeping and inviting people to come to the opening circle
 - doing (a part of) the facilitation
- to support you during your facilitation

Who is doing the facilitation?

The person hosting the Open Co-Counselling Day may leave the facilitation of the different parts of the day to other people. You can ask for this at the Open Day itself, but for more peace of mind, it would be better to organise this beforehand

Before closing circle: Positive Feedback about your hosting the Open Co-Counselling Day

Ask for a round of celebrations about how you hosted the Open Day. This round will be more effective if people are specific, or accompany their general appreciations with examples.

Ask your support person to initiate this feed-back circle and to write the celebrations down, as there is a chance you may forget them. Later on you can use this list in a session to reflect on the good things and to let them sink in.

Not only is this round good for you, but also other people can hear what it takes to be a good Open Co-Counselling Day facilitator.

Where can you find support?

Go through the address list and ask anyone you think would be appropriate. This is just like asking for telephone sessions. If they don't think they can do it, ask somebody else.

Hosting the Open Co-Counselling Day

Your house is OK

What really counts is that people have the opportunity to have sessions and to meet each other. How they get on with each other, however, is not your job. You provide the opportunities; it is up to the Co-Counsellors to pick them up.

It's not necessary to bother about the cleanness or tidiness of your house. If people don't like it at first glance, it provides them with an opportunity to work on it. Thus, clean and tidy your house if you feel like it and feel better by doing it; or if don't, have a session on how it feels to have other people seeing your house as it is.....

Other people in the house?

No problem, as long as they consent to your having an Open Day. It can be helpful to inform them what they can expect in terms of noise.

The visiting Co-Counsellors need to be informed that there are other non Co-Counselling people in the house and which rooms are not accessible for sessions.

Pay attention to new Co-Counsellors!

Have you ever observed what happens when Co-Counsellors arrive? Each Co-Counsellor goes straight to the kitchen to drop off the shared lunch while hugging and greeting the Co-Counsellors they feel pleased to see again.

Not so for new Co-Counsellors, either those fresh from the Fundamentals or those recently moved to Scotland. For them taking up Co-Counselling and doing the Fundamentals may have been a big step. Turning up at an Open Day is another big step and they may not know anyone at all. Quite often the sad fact is, however, that they are left on their own, as everybody else is busy with greeting their old mates or providing drinks and finishing the last preparations for the Open Day. Though this is understandable, it can feel unwelcoming and can create an in-crowd atmosphere.

What can be done to welcome and integrate new Co-Counsellors?

- Appoint a specific Co-Counsellor (e.g. your support person) to take the job of welcoming and introducing them, including telling them how the day will go
- have a clear 'culture setting', (see page 10) explaining what the structure of the day is
- organise a small welcoming ceremony
- in the opening circle ask the new Co-Counsellors if they would like a buddy for the day
- when pairing up for (mini-) sessions, let the new people have first choice of partner

Large numbers

Sometimes 15 to 20 Co-Counsellors arrive which may be too many for one-to-one sessions in the rooms available. Quite often they want to work in groups and that is just what is on offer at Open Co-Counselling Days.

However, not all Co-Counsellors are used to working in a group or know how to instruct a group to their greatest benefit. It could be worthwhile to run a workshop on 'Getting the most out of working in a group', especially when there are several new Co-Counsellors. If you don't want to facilitate this, ask somebody else to do it.

Shared lunch

One of the high-points of the day. The key importance of this shared lunch is the sharing, not only of food - regularly a culinary surprise -, but of minds. This contributes enormously to weaving or maintaining the network fabric.

Although Co-Counsellors are famous for their improvising talents, you can support the shared lunch by providing plates, cutlery, cups, a place where people can heat up their food.

You can keep up the East-Coast of Scotland tradition by making soup, as the vegetarian soup on Open Co-Counselling Days has become proverbial.

Money Matters

The fee for the day

In the East-Coast the fee for the Open Co-Counselling Day for many years has been £2. Unwaged Co-Counsellors pay £1. People who attend for only half a day pay half. Open Double Days cost

double.

Half of the money goes to the Open Day host for providing the house, soup, drinks (teas and coffees) and tissues. The other half goes to the Co-Counselling Network.

Checking subscriptions for a Co-Counselling Newsletter

The Open Days have proved to be an excellent opportunity to collect subscriptions! People *do* see the announcements in the Co-Counselling newsletters, but this doesn't always result in them paying (or cancelling).

Facilitating the group process

Culture setting

The more new Co-Counsellors there are, the more important this part, as generally during the culture setting the general structure of the day will be clarified.

The shorter the 'culture setting', the more effective it will be.

Several topics can be addressed:

- the timetable for the day
- what you expect from people using your house and where the rooms for sessions are situated
- how late-comers will be accommodated
- the fee for the day & the subscriptions for Co-Counselling newsletter
- a buddy for new Co-Counsellors

'Needs, Wants & Offers'

During 'Needs, Wants & Offers' the group comes to a decision about what is going to happen during the morning, afternoon or evening.

There are two stages:

1. first everybody gets a turn to state what they want or have to offer, while the facilitator listens or makes notes. This rarely leads to conflicting wishes, but it does happen
2. consequently the facilitator makes proposals in an attempt to try and accommodate everybody's wants

You as facilitator may find it difficult to hear all the information, to take it in and to produce proposals. Being prepared can make a difference.

How to make 'Needs, Wants & Offers' a success?

- stress that everybody state what they need independently of what others say
- have pencil and paper ready to make short notes of what people want, if it helps you
- ask that nobody leaves the room before a satisfactory solution has been found, unless an alternative agreement is reached
- give a summary of what people want
- ask people who have agreed to work with each other, to stand or sit together, so that everybody can see who is free to choose from
- if you don't feel like facilitating this, ask somebody else with experience with 'Needs, Wants & Offers' to do it

Co-Counsellors who feel rusty

Sometimes Co-Counsellors use Open Co-Counselling Days to resume Co-Counselling and to meet potential Co-Counselling partners. Also other Co-Counsellors may feel rusty. At present there isn't an approach to this, but an awareness of this is, in itself, a step forward. If you have any suggestions, let me know.

On cancelling the Open Co-Counselling Day

In the former East of Scotland Community it was agreed never to cancel an Open Day. This is my recommendation: even when only one Co-Counsellor turns up, have at least one (big) session. Or when you can't be a host, ask somebody else to take over. This policy creates trust in Open Co-Counselling Days.

The worst thing is cancelling an Open Day without telling the people who have announced their attendance. Next time people may not bother to go to an Open Day hosted by you or lose their trust in Open Co-Counselling Days.
