A MINDFULNESS-BASED PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL GROUP FOR CAREGIVERS OF OLDER ADULTS: A GRANT PROPOSAL

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The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) predicts that between 2012 and 2060 the population 65 and older will double and the population 85 and older will triple. With this increase of older adults, the need for informal caregivers is also predicted to rise, as the average care recipient is 77 years of age (Takagi et al., 2013).

Although caring for an older adult can be rewarding, it can also lead to considerable stress and burden for the caregiver (Garlo, O’Leary, Van Ness, & Fried, 2010). According to Garlo et al. (2010), 90% of caregivers of individuals 65 years and older report experiencing caregiver burden, manifesting in mental health symptoms, such as depression and stress (Smith, Williamson, Miller, & Schulz, 2011).

Traditional services offered to caregivers include respite care, educational programs, in-home individual counseling and support groups (Lopez-Hartmann, Wens, Verhoeven, & Remmen, 2012).

Complementary or alternative therapies, such as mindfulness, can also provide effective interventions that target specific aspects of caregiver burden. Preliminary studies indicate that mindfulness-based interventions are effective in reducing caregiver stress (Hoppes, Bryce, Hellman, & Finlay, 2012; Minor, Carlson, Mackenzie, Zernicke, & Jones, 2006; Oken et al., 2010; Whitebird et al., 2013).

The purpose of this project was to write a grant proposal in order to increase caregivers’ awareness and competency in the use of mindfulness-based interventions to help reduce their perceived caregiver burden and stress. The goal of this psycho-educational group will be to increase the caregivers’ skill set in mindfulness, increase their coping skills, and decrease their perceived caregiver stress and burden.
With the growing number of older adults in the United States, social workers have a responsibility to be competent and comprehensive in treating the many difficulties that accompany an aging population. One issue of great importance is the mental health of those who care for aging individuals. The proposed program fits with social work’s core value of respecting the dignity and worth of the person (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). In the NASW’s (2008) definition of this value, it emphasizes the social worker’s role in enhancing clients’ capacity to address their own needs and bring about the changes that they desire. This program would satisfy this goal by educating caregivers about mindfulness-based tools that they can later use to increase their own ability to cope with caregiving demands and reduce their stress levels. Providing supportive services to caregivers is also important to the social work profession due to the negative effects that caregiver mental health issues have on the aging care recipient, including an increased risk of elder abuse.
Los Angeles County is a diverse community and is home to individuals with a variety of cultural backgrounds. For this reason, it is important that this program outreaches to individuals of all cultures and be infused with multicultural sensitivity. In order to outreach to individuals of other cultures, culturally appropriate outreach and advertising will be developed and utilized (Gallagher-Thompson, Solano, Coon, & Arean, 2003). These materials will use culturally sensitive language to describe the program and its potential benefits to the caregiver and care recipient (Gallagher-Thompson et al., 2003). Outreach will also be done at several culturally significant locations such as community centers, religious institutions and care clinics. To ensure cultural competency within the program, the proposed program must account for cultural differences in common health stressors among care recipients, caregiver appraisal of stressors, family support and caregiver coping attitudes and behaviors (Aranda & Knight, 1997). The program will be led by culturally competent facilitators and the content of the sessions will be adjusted to be culturally relevant to the majority of the participants in the group. The program will also be sensitive to different cultural beliefs that may make a caregiver more or less inclined to utilize a mind-body intervention such as mindfulness (Whitebird et al., 2011).
Methods

- **Target Population**
  - The target population for this grant is caregivers of older adults living in Los Angeles County who have experienced symptoms of caregiver burden or stress.

- **Selecting a Funding Source**
  - A variety of methods were utilized to explore various funding opportunities for this grant proposal. Search engines such as Google and Google Scholar were used with key words including but not limited to: “grants,” “caregiver education,” “caregiver funding,” “caregiver services,” “mindfulness” and “caregiver mental health.” Websites such as: www.grants.gov, www.tgci.com (The Grantsmanship Center), and www.lbnp.org (Long Beach Nonprofit Partnership) and promindful.org were accessed directly. This search identified multiple potential funding sources and ultimately the Amgen Foundation was selected (Amgen Foundation, 2014).
Sources used for the Needs Assessment
  › Data was gathered from published government reports, peer-reviewed scholarly articles, books and websites.

Projected Budget
  › The total budget for this grant proposal is $109,480. This budget includes funds dedicated to personnel costs (including 2 MSWs), office supplies, internet and phone services, utilities, printing, refreshments for group meetings, respite care for the care recipients, transportation for group members and modest incentives for caregivers to complete the group.
Grant Proposal

- Program Summary and Description
  - The proposed program is a 4-week mindfulness-based psycho-educational group for caregivers of older adults. The goals of the group are to increase the caregivers’ skill set in mindfulness, increase their coping skills, and to decrease their perceived caregiver stress and burden. This will be accomplished through providing caregivers with information regarding mindfulness and its benefits, guided mindfulness exercises, assignments to encourage mindfulness practice at home, information regarding community services for caregivers and practice of alternative coping methods. The group will also provide an environment where members can share their caregiving experiences with the group and offer and receive support from other members.

- Population Served
  - There are approximately 28,000 informal caregivers of older adults residing in Los Angeles County, California (Community and Senior Services: County of Los Angeles, 2008). This grant would target a subgroup of Los Angeles caregivers of older adults who live in the city of Santa Monica, California and its surrounding communities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) there are approximately 91,812 residents of Santa Monica, 15% of whom are 65 years or age or older. The population is estimated to be 70.1% Caucasian/White; 13.1% Hispanic/Latino; 9.0% Asian and 3.9% African American/Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This grant is estimated to serve approximately 160 caregivers of older adults during a 1 year period.
Program Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this project will focus on three major areas.

Goal 1: To increase caregivers’ skill set in mindfulness and how mindfulness can be incorporated into their daily routines.

Objective 1: Ninety percent of participants will have a significant increase in knowledge regarding mindfulness as shown by pre and posttests. This will be accomplished through facilitator led lectures, exercises and multimedia presentations throughout the life of the group.

Goal 2: To decrease caregivers' perceived stress and burden through the use of mindfulness practice

Objective 2: Seventy-five percent of participants will have a significant decrease in perceived caregiver burden and stress one month after the end of the group as measured by the Caregiver Appraisal Measure (Lawton, Kleban, Moss, Rovine, & Glicksman, 1989). This will be accomplished through role plays, homework assignments including journaling on mindfulness practice, and in depth conversation regarding caregivers’ success and challenges regarding their use of mindfulness outside of the group setting.

Goal 3: To increase caregivers' ability to cope with their role as a caregiver through increased coping skills and increased knowledge regarding caregiving support resources

Objective 3: Eighty-five percent of participants will have a significant increase in coping skills one month following the conclusion of the group as measured by the Ways of Coping Checklist (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This will be accomplished through role playing activities to try out coping strategies including but not limited to mindfulness, relaxation strategies, exercise, self-talk and reaching out to others for support. Information regarding caregiver programs and services in the community will also be provided.

Program Evaluation

The program will be evaluated based on the accomplishment of the previously defined goals and their corresponding objectives. The data gathered will be compiled at the conclusion of the program and a final report will be provided to the Amgen Foundation. This data will also be used to seek additional funding from Amgen and other foundations to continue this program following the conclusion of this grant.
Lessons Learned/Implication for Social Work

- While developing this grant, the grant writer came across challenges that may affect future grant writers. The first challenge was finding a host agency that supported the use of mindfulness-based interventions. The writer experienced resistance from many nonprofit agencies due to the nature of the proposed program. This experience solidified the need to find a host agency that shares the philosophy and core values of the proposed program.
- It was also difficult to identify a grant funder for a program based on mindfulness. In order to identify a potential funder, the grant writer focused on finding funders who identified innovation as a priority and who had previously funded grants for caregivers.
- This program and other mindfulness-based interventions can help further social work’s goal of providing the best services possible to meet the needs of the community. In the future, social workers can integrate mindfulness techniques into more traditional caregiver interventions such as caregiver educational programs, psychotherapy, in-home therapy and support groups.
- Improving the quality of care and the variety of services for caregivers of older adults is also a priority for social workers due to their role in caring for the growing older adult population. Providing adequate mental health and supportive services to this population can help reduce placement of the older adults outside of the home and reduce the risk of elder abuse (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013). Avoiding placement is cost-effective and in many cases allows the care recipient a higher quality of life than if they received care in a nursing home (Wolf & Kasper, 2006). For this reason, social workers must be proactive and innovative in providing accessible and effective services to caregivers of older adults. This proposed program represents one of many novel and creative interventions that must be developed by social workers in order to meet the needs of these important populations.
References


