

# The value of caregiver support groups

by Therese Henman-Phillips

When I text “Anne” to remind her of the date of the next caregiver peer support group, her response is often that she is looking forward to “being with the family”.

Anne isn’t related by blood to any of the other caregivers in her group, but like family, they share a deep connection. This “intentional togetherness” is vital to her caregiving journey.



## Power of connection, community and learning

Caregiving can feel very isolating. At caregiver peer support groups, you can meet others who understand what you as a caregiver are going through, your needs and challenges. It is a place where you can share in a safe, confidential and non-judgmental atmosphere and where you can ultimately feel validated and supported.

As Anne suggests, these groups provide more than just support – they create a community. We know from psychology that humans are wired for connection. Social connection and community support help us reduce emotional stress, allow us to cope and gain acceptance.

Anyone familiar with caregiving knows, sometimes it takes a village! These groups connect participants with others who truly “get it.” While friends and family might be supportive, perhaps they have never been caregivers or don’t quite understand the magnitude of the role. Maybe they are not able to offer an informed perspective. At the heart of the group is the caregiving community.

Peer learning is another powerful aspects of the groups. Some who attend support groups are just starting in their journey, while others have been doing this for some time now. All of them are sharing their knowledge and experience, and all the participants take away as little or as much as they need to support them on their journey.

## Support group format

As a facilitator, it’s a privilege to watch support groups unfold. Our facilitators – who are current or former caregivers themselves — learn so much from these groups. Although we come from various backgrounds, we are not trained medical or mental health professionals. Support groups provide peer support rather than counselling. If a caregiver needs professional counselling or treatment, we can help connect them to the appropriate resources. The facilitator’s role is to guide the support group process.

Support groups at Caregivers NS are open groups. As a result, new caregivers can join at any time and decide when they wish to present. Caregivers can come once to see what we are about or every time a group is offered. Perhaps they only come in times of stress. Participation is optional and there is no pressure to attend. Some caregivers come because they want to express themselves while others come to just listen initially. Sharing is encouraged but not required. If you are thinking about attending a support group, we would welcome your curiosity and participation.

Facilitated sessions are free and open to all caregivers, regardless of age or the health condition of your care recipient. We can also connect you to other types of support groups if this does not seem to be a fit.

## Our support groups

We offer over 25 support groups across the province, with both in-person and virtual options. We strive to enhance caregiver support, especially for underserved populations. We have a French Caregiver support group as well as a pilot for Young Caregivers. Hopefully, you can find one group that fits your caregiving journey. We do understand attending support groups can be challenging, but caregivers often find benefits outweigh difficulties. We welcome any feedback that would make the groups even more supportive and inclusive.

You can explore our support groups [online](#) at or contact our office at the toll-free number [1.877.488.7390](tel:18774887390) for more information.