



## Transcript:

### NAMI – Ins and Outs of Virtual Support Groups

Presenter: Mary Kay Battaglia, Vivian Flanagan, & Vicki Rivera  
Recorded on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020

ANN SCHENSKY: Hello, everyone. And welcome to our webinar today, the ins and outs of virtual support groups. My name is Ann Schensky, and I will be the moderator for today's webinar.

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A couple of housekeeping details today. Our webinar will be recorded and available on the Great Lakes Current YouTube channel and the Great Lakes MHTTC Products page. At the end of today's webinar, you'll be directed to a very short survey. And we would really appreciate it if you would take just a few minutes to complete it for us.

If you are having technical issues during the webinar, please private message either Kristina Spannbauer or Stephanie Behlman in the chat and they will be happy to assist you. If you have questions for the speakers, please put them in the Q&A section, and we will answer them as part of the webinar. As always, if you have any interest in all of the things that we're doing, please follow us on social media. And our speakers today-- Mary Kay Battaglia, executive director of NAMI Wisconsin, will introduce Vivian and Vicki.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Thank you so much. I would like to first say thank you to Great Lakes for providing this opportunity for us to present this information. When I was asked by Great Lakes about this opportunity-- NAMI has gone through a transition during this time period of the COVID pandemic. And we provide support groups and classes to a lot of our members, and we had to figure out a way to continue that service.

And one of the ways we've done that is via virtual support groups. And we were discussing something that we could do to support those that are doing this and making this transition, which is actually going to end up being a wonderful thing, we believe, after the pandemic is over. But when we started talking about this, I thought of two wonderful people who have spend a lot of time gathering information and starting the support groups and have a few



months in on this, and it included Vicki and Vivian. And I'm just going to introduce them real quick.

Vicki Rivera joined NAMI Fox Valley, which is in the Appleton area of Wisconsin, staff in 2016 after completing her peer specialist training. She started her career as a peer companion at an Iris Place, which is a respite center in NAMI Fox Valley area. She is currently the Peer Program Coordinator of NAMI Fox Valley. In this role, she is responsible for all the peer education and support groups.

She has a wonderful relationship with Vivian. And they are able to provide both the family and peer support groups in that area. Vicki holds a bachelor of science in both psychology and human services. And she is certified in LGBTQ mental health from University of Milwaukee.

Vivian joined NAMI Fox Valley in 2017 after taking the 12-week NAMI Family-to-Family class. The many challenges she and her husband were facing as they dealt with their son's mental illness drew them to seek education and support from NAMI. Vivian currently serves as the Family Program Coordinator for NAMI Fox Valley.

She holds a degree in human growth and development from UW Green Bay. She taught 4K for 30 years in the Kaukauna School District, and began volunteering as a reception at NAMI Fox Valley, and is now on staff as the Family Program Coordinator. She has been trained in NAMI family support groups. And she has also been trained in NAMI Mental Health Chat, which is an elementary school-age program.

She is responsible for the Family-to-Family, NAMI Basics, NAMI Familia a Familia and the Family and Friends for NAMI with Fox Valley. Her responsibilities also include providing support to family members via phone, email, and in-person. So I am excited to introduce them and let them start on the conversation about the ins and outs of providing support groups virtually. Vivian and Vicki, ready?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yes, we are. Well, hello, everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining Vicki and I on this busy Monday. We hope it's busy for all of you. We appreciate your company and sharing this time with us.

As a disclaimer to this presentation, Vicki and I want you to know that we are not therapists nor counselors, but individuals with lived experiences who are trained to facilitate and support those that are living with a mental illness. Our perspective is different, as a person who lives with a mental illness and someone who has a loved one living with a mental illness, but that's where the difference ends. We are both passionate about helping our community navigate the mental health journey, especially at this time. We did not want them to be left in the cold, and knew the impact social isolation may have on them.



We also want to assure you that we aren't the experts, but we're pioneers as a result of the COVID pandemic. Our virtual support groups did not happen immediately, but over the course of three weeks. We had Zoom parties with a handpicked group of individuals that we knew had attended our support groups prior to this time. They graciously accepted our invitation to help us work out the bugs.

We even had a little fun during this time. I have some teenage grandchildren. And we Zoomed with them, and they thought that was a stitch.

That being said, I want to give credit where credit is due and let you know that we would not be where we are today if Vicki had not jumped in headfirst to establish our virtual support groups. Her willingness to learn the Zoom format is beyond commendable. Speaking for NAMI Fox Valley and myself, I'm so grateful for her diligence, patience, and her techie talents.

We just wanted to say as we begin the presentation, we might not follow the outline exactly, but we hope we cover every item. We also want you to know this is a casual meeting of the minds. Vicki and I-- because that's who we are.

We're casual. We hope to be fun. And yet we are serious when it comes that time. And to begin with, Vicki is going to start out by explaining our registration.

VICKI RIVERA: So one thing when I was developing our virtual support group program was to ensure the security and confidentiality of those participants that are going to be utilizing our support groups. And one aspect to ensure that safe space for those participants was to require individuals to register for each of our support groups. Registration happens weekly.

We utilize different links each week for our groups. I do that just to make sure that the individuals that are signing up for our groups are participants that either are family members or peers. One way that I also ensure safety, confidentiality, is by manually approving each individual that registers for our support groups.

Our peer support groups, we allow between 8 to 10 individuals. We find that eight individuals participating at the time for peer is the perfect number of individuals. For family members, we have roughly around 10 individuals that we allow to attend each group.

One thing with our registration form is that we ask the individuals, if they haven't participated in any of our virtual groups, that they fill out the emergency contact information. If you have attended before, our virtual groups, and we do have on file emergency contact person, then you don't have to fill that information out when you register for each meeting. One thing-- we find that if an individual does not fill out the emergency contact information, have it be a family member or a peer-- Vivian and myself reach



out to that individual and just explain why we ask for an emergency contact, and that being with the situations that we encounter during our groups, we want to make sure that everybody is safe there. And if somebody is triggered during that group, we want to make sure that we have somebody that we can reach out to and let them know that this individual might have been triggered.

If somebody still declines on offering an emergency contact, we then let them know that if for some odd reason they are triggered and we can realize that they are not in a good place, that we are inclined to reach out to the authorities. We call 911 and ask that a welfare check is done just to reassure Vivian and myself that we have done what we can to make sure that individuals are safe that participate in our groups and that we just take that extra step. When you do the in-person groups, obviously we can sit and chat with somebody a little bit further if they have been triggered. But with this whole virtual thing, we don't have the capacity sometimes to do a lot of that one-on-one like we would with our in-person groups.

One thing we have also found with our virtual groups is in the very beginning, being that this is a whole new platform for a lot of individuals, was the uncertainty of what a Zoom support group looks like. So we established a setup in the very beginning, like a meet and greet, where we had random half an hours for individuals just to try Zoom and practice getting connected into a support group. And if they had any other further questions, that was the perfect time to answer those questions.

One thing that we found beneficial with our meet and greet was we do have some individuals that have some extra equipment that they might need to connect with a Zoom account. For example, we have an individual that attends our in-person that is hearing impaired. And that person needed to connect their equipment so that they could participate in the Zoom support group.

So that meet and greet gave us perfect time to really do one-on-one and make sure that they are able to attend our groups. We find that those meet and greets are wonderful times to really have individuals become comfortable with the clicking on joining a support group, and then also just seeing what they are going to experience and what it looks like when they do officially attend one of our groups. We do offer these meet and greets a few times even though we have been offering our support groups now for-- was it two months, Vivian?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

OK. Thank you. We still offer the meet and greets because we have new individuals that are constantly joining our groups. So that is it.



MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Vicki and Vivian, on the starting out registration of your participants, do you do that through Zoom or do you do it through your website? How do you register people?

VICKI RIVERA: We do the registration through Zoom. So we have it set up that we can ask certain questions in the Zoom account. You can set up your registration forms to ask for their name, email address.

We also ask in our registration form, if the individual is going to be attending our group via phone, that we ask for their phone number so that when it comes up in our waiting room, which is where we have individuals joining before they get into the group room, just so I can make sure that I have everybody on my list that is registered in that waiting room. I know then, if a phone number shows up, that that phone number belongs to a certain person that has registered. And I then have the capacity to go in and rename so their phone number does not show up during the support group.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: And collecting the emergency contact, once they register, do you send them an email or do you do that also in the Zoom context?

VICKI RIVERA: So if the individual did not fill out the emergency contact in the very beginning? Is that what you're asking, Mary Kay?

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: When do you have them fill out or how do they fill out the emergency contact?

VICKI RIVERA: All we ask is if it's the first time they've ever are attending our virtual support groups, that they fill out the emergency contact. And that is part of our Zoom registration form.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: OK. Great.

VICKI RIVERA: And then once we have that-- Vivian and I, we print out that emergency contact information so we have it with us, and that the individuals don't need to continuously fill out that information.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: And we're wanting people to ask any questions they have because we'll answer these questions at the end. So I'm prodding a few questions. But you are also referencing-- this is a not only peer support, but also a family support that you follow a similar system, correct?

VICKI RIVERA: Yep. We have it set up across the board the same way, just because overseeing all the tech stuff, I don't want to get confused as to multiple different formats. So our registration form is the same across the board. And we require everybody to register each week for whatever group they want to attend.



MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: OK. Great. So here we go. We're going to move to the beginning.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: May I add that Vicki and I are probably at all the support meetings, which isn't practical for everyone, so that I have the emergency forms in front of me at the group, as does Vicki. Does that make sense?

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Mm-hmm.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: OK. All right. The beginning. Well, Vicki and I found this pr-- that we're going to explain right now, this format works best for us. But since this is a new format for many, but a new time for all of us, you have to do what works best for you.

We do ask our facilitators to join the meeting about 30 minutes ahead of time. And we call this our water bubbler chat time. Really, I think you don't know, when your facilitators are coming, what happened to them that day. So it's really a little time to chitchat and get all of that stuff out of the way so that we are connected, and as soon as our first participant joins, we're focused and engaged and ready to go.

Once the first individual enters-- we do allow them to join early. We do put them in a waiting room first to make sure they've registered, to make sure we know who is in our group. Right, Vicki? Yeah?

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: OK. But we found that this is such a nice time to visit-- same questions. How are you?

So glad that you came to join us today. Do you have any questions about how the Zoom works? Just make them feel comfortable, especially if this is their first meeting.

VICKI RIVERA: So one thing with the whole having two facilitators-- and like Vivian shared before, this is what works for us, having two facilitators. We understand that other areas, that might not be an option. But to have one individual oversee all the tech part of the support group and then have another individual be the welcoming person to the group room-- for Vivian and I-- Vivian being the warm, fuzzy person she is, she is our welcoming individual.

And I, being the so-called new tech support person, I oversee letting individuals into our support group room, and also making sure that in the very beginning of our meeting, I let everybody know that is attending that if for some odd reason, we know how modern technology works, Wi-Fi goes out or



their computer battery dies, that I will unlock the room, and they are able to join back into the support group. With saying the unlock the room-- in the very beginning, once we start our group, just another step to security and reassurance that nobody can just join, I do lock the space so that whoever is in that group is in that group, and like I said, nobody else can just jump in. It's just one of those reassuring things that for myself, I know that I have taken care of, and for the individuals participating. So did I touch everything, Vivian?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yeah, you did. Good job.

VICKI RIVERA: OK. Good. Whoo!

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Whoo! So--

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: And explain setting the tone, Vivian.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: OK. Well, I think that you can be-- I do try to make everybody feel welcome and warm, and we're so glad they're here. I think you can be a little casual at the beginning. But then you do have to take on a serious tone, that we're here not to just chitchat, but to be supportive and understanding, offer resources. That answer your question?

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: OK. Once all the participants have joined, we do ask them to mute themselves, and then to unmute when it's their turn to talk. There's always maybe a dog barking, somebody cutting their grass, a lot of distractions, so we ask that they mute themselves. We stress the importance of confidentiality and that please be in your own private space. If you can't be, we ask them to use headphones.

Now, I know everyone here probably isn't a part of NAMI. But as a part of NAMI, we do have set guidelines for our support groups. So at the beginning, we do a screen share and put our guidelines and principles of support on the screen.

Depending on the size of the group, we may do a round-robin reading of those. Actually, they have to unmute when we do that. Or if it's a huge group, then we do-- the facilitators alternate the reading, and people follow along.

But once we are done with that, we do take it off the screen. Otherwise, it just-- I know not everyone does that. But for us, we like to just see people's faces. Yeah.

VICKI RIVERA: One thing that Vivian and I do is when I have that registration list with the names of individuals that plan on attending the meeting, if for some odd reason somebody hasn't shown up yet or joined the group room, one of us reaches out to them either via email or phone before the group



starts just to see if they are planning on joining, if everything is OK on their end. And it's just one of those things, that we like to make sure that we include everybody that is planning on joining the meeting. And life happens and we all forget things that we've registered for, even though two hours before the support group, they all do receive a confirmation email from myself with the link to enter the group.

But we just reach out one more time, if the person hasn't joined that group yet, just to see where they are. So that is one thing that we also do. What else?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I was going to say, Vicki, that another thing we do in the guidelines-- I think because people are in their own home, in their own comfortable space, we don't want them to dominate the whole support group. So we do say to please be respectful of the others in the group and tell your story or tell why you are here today, but then we need to give everyone a chance to share in the group. Because we do have some individuals that would talk the whole hour and a half. And we're not therapists and we're not counselors.

VICKI RIVERA: I have found with my peer groups that there are some individuals that join our support groups or register for the groups-- even if they're in a good place, they might be living alone, and they just might need to see some faces, just that whole connection thing. And so with that being said, if everybody ideally in that group is in a good place, I have to come prepared with a little topic to open up the conversation and get some discussion going. And I find that being prepared and having certain topics ready to go really opens up the conversation with everyone. And everybody then really participates in that discussion.

Both Vivian and I, though, however, let individuals, especially our new participants-- we assure them that this is a space. They are not expected to share. They can share at their own comfort level.

We do, however-- if for some reason an individual hasn't shared, we do ask, hey, do you have any thoughts or any feedback to what we're talking about, just to make sure that they do feel included. But we do let everybody know that our space is something that you do not have to share. We do, however, find that people do share.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: And I wanted to ask Vivian one question specifically for the family members. So if you're a family member, you're stuck at a house with your family member that you're going to be talking about, that's frustrating you, how do you navigate that? Do you make suggestions of where they can go to join? I know the headphones are an issue, but have you had to deal with that being an issue, where they don't have the privacy inside their own home?





VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yes. Actually, we have-- lot of them go into their bedroom. Some people, because of the nice weather, they'll go outside.

We even suggest that maybe even if they want to go in their car-- they don't have to be at home to join the Zoom meeting. And people have done that also. But to be honest, it really hasn't been an issue.

I can only think of one time-- we did our parent caregiver support group. And the boy or girl came in behind his mom and dad. And we just waited. And he left, and then we started our meeting again. I think the flexibility is key to running a Zoom support meeting. So--

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Great. Thank you. And if anybody has any questions, please put them in the question box for us on these. We're going to move from the beginning to the meat of the meeting, right, to--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yes. Oh, OK. Meet participants who are there-- as part of all our in-person NAMI groups, we do begin by sharing what brought us to this meeting.

And I have to be honest. We always try to have someone that's been to a meeting share first, or I may go first, so that the new person or the new family members get an idea of what we're sharing. We always say we're going to share what's happening here and now, not 10 years ago, but what brought you here today. But like Vicki said, we're finding some of our members are in a good place, and they are just feeling isolated and need a place where people understand and then can support them, to talk about what they're feeling and going through right now. Even if it's not drastic to the situation, it's something that they needed the support, understanding now.

Again, I keep saying, we're not counselors. We're not therapists. But there's such wisdom in the group. And I think that-- as one person brings something up, I love how other people chime in and share how they're feeling or what they have found works for them at that time.

VICKI RIVERA: One thing with our peer support groups is I let the participants know that at no time do they need to disclose what mental health, mental challenge, they live with, that we are all here as a community, even though it's a virtual community, and that if they feel comfortable, they can share their diagnosis, but that is something that they do not have to share with everyone. I do always start by sharing who I am and my role at NAMI Fox Valley, and that I too live with a mental illness, just so that they are-- it helps the comfort level of, I understand where they're coming with certain topics or whatever they have to talk about, to a point. I mean, we all might have the same diagnosis, but it's affecting our lives in a different way. So that is one thing that we do with the peer groups.



VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I think something that's real important-- even though we're doing Zoom, you still can read the room. I can still see people wiggling in their seat or turning their heads, that they're disengaged. And it's so good to have two facilitators. Do you want to go ahead, Vicki, and--

VICKI RIVERA: Sure. So with the whole watching the room and-- being the tech person, obviously I watch to see if anybody has left the group for some odd reason, with Wi-Fi or computer reasons. And then I also am just watching their faces and seeing if somebody's zoned out or if they might get distracted with anything else that's going on around them. And Vivian and I have found that either-- we text message each other, like, OK, we've lost a few people in this group.

Or we've also set up the-- I have set our Zoom account that only Vivian and myself can chat with each other. And it's a private chat that nobody in that group room can see our conversation. And I also have it set up that the individuals in their group room are-- they are not able to chat with each other. But, however, also with that chat being said, I or Vivian-- if for some reason we just notice somebody is zoned out or we've just lost them in general, we can send a message to them privately, just making sure, like, hey, is everything OK? Did something come up that we are talking about upset you, just as a little reach out, personal thing that we can do with the individuals in our group room.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: That's amazing. You can't do that in a live support group, quite frankly, because you can't lean over and-- I mean, you can say it out loud in front of everyone, but you can say it privately to them. So that's an interesting added benefit to doing the Zoom meeting, is to be able to private message someone and say, hey, I noticed you're disengaged or not yourself, are you OK, and not embarrass them in front of the group, but to really have that touching out to them. So that's an interesting part of a Zoom meeting.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Very.

VICKI RIVERA: We have found, Mary Kay, that with our Zoom support groups, oddly enough, they are more of an intimate atmosphere. And Vivian and I really believe that's because they're in the comfort of their own home. As far as the peer end, because that's where I'm coming from, I have seen individuals sometimes tear up, maybe cry a little bit, that I know wouldn't have shared those emotions in an in-person group room. And it has to do with that they're in a space that's safe for them, that they feel OK with crying. So it's interesting, the virtual versus in-person program, whatever--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: [Laugh].

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yeah.



VICKI RIVERA: It's intimate, in a weird way.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I think even with family-- a lot of times, moms will come. But I think, in this format, that a father might pop in. And you have to be OK with that. I just think maybe that he's trying to get a feel for how a support group would go. So there's just so many pluses for doing a Zoom meeting

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Mm-hmm.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: OK.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: It's easier to test the water because you're at home and you don't have to get in your car and spend the 20 or 30 minutes driving there and 20 or 30 minutes driving home. And you don't have to physically see somebody. You just see a little square. It seems less intimate, but it's interesting you're feeling, while you're doing your groups, that it's feeling more intimate. So that's an interesting added benefit to the Zoom virtual support group.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm.

VICKI RIVERA: Another added benefit too, is, you can wear your pajama bottoms and a nice top and nobody knows it.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Absolutely. Absolutely. Well known.

VICKI RIVERA: Yes. Not saying I've ever done that before, but--

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Uh-huh. Sure. Sure.

VICKI RIVERA: Mm-hmm.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Anything else you want to cover about the meeting itself?

VICKI RIVERA: Be flexible. If there's anything I can say about when you're at that meeting point is flexibility. I know some areas, we have to follow certain guidelines. But the flexibility really helps with establishing a good tone and safe space for everybody.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Absolutely. Yep.

VICKI RIVERA: And humor.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Oh, yeah.



MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So we're going to move to the closure, which has a lot to it, really. So we'll do the ending wrap-up. So tell us what you guys do for that.

VICKI RIVERA: So like I shared way in the beginning, Vivian is the warm, fuzzy person. And so I usually, or other facilitators, allow Vivian to do the warm, fuzzy closure. However, the family and peer closures do-- they are different.

As far as the peer end, I do let the individuals know that if they need to reach out to me, that they can get a hold of me through email. Because obviously, we are working remotely. I'm not at the office. And I also let the individuals in the peer groups know that there is a support system out there, even though it might not be an in-person, we are still a support system virtual, and that they are cared for even-- I let them know that I do care for them and where they are.

And so I just make sure that everybody is aware before they leave our meetings that there is somebody out there for them. They might take it and they might leave it. You never know.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I always say we need to end on a high note. As part of NAMI, we believe that self-care is-- you can't take care of anyone else if you're not taking care of yourself, just like putting the oxygen mask on first if you're in an airplane before you put it on your child. And so one of the questions I might ask-- go around the group and say, what are you going to do for you this week? And I usually start out with what I'm going to do, to give them some ideas.

And if they have things to work on, I might say to them, going forward, what are you hoping to see happen? What positive changes might you be making? And I think also, I-- we might end with an inspirational poem or a reading, something that they can take with them. But I also tell them that they're wonderful and I'm so proud of them and how their loved one is so fortunate to have them in their life. And I also make sure that they know that they have my email, and so if anything comes up during the week, that I would be happy to answer and talk with them.

Because we are funded by United Way, at the end of our group, we ask them to fill out a poll that Vicki pulls up, or I can pull up if I'm the host. It only has two questions. It takes really a second.

And we know it's anonymous. Nobody is going to know what their answer was. But it really helps us-- we can see the results, but don't know who did them. But are we doing well? What could we do better?

VICKI RIVERA: And--



MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So it's your internal evaluation to help [INAUDIBLE], and also you need data for-- and just to clarify, NAMI Fox Valley receives money from your local United Way, but--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yes. Yeah.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So each affiliate may have different sponsors that they have to provide that for grants and whatnot. So this is your evaluation internally and also data collection, right?

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah. And--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And I think that if-- obviously, if they're on their phone, then Vicki emails the poll to them.

VICKI RIVERA: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And the funny part is that people that have been coming to our groups, they will say, oh, aren't we going to do the poll? So--

VICKI RIVERA: [Laugh].

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: They learn that that's part of the group. Yeah. So--

VICKI RIVERA: Another thing, too, is we let the individuals know that if they're new, if we were at an in-person group, they would also be asked to fill out the after survey, but in a paper form. So we just make sure that they know that we're not doing something different with our virtual, as we would in-person ones. Another thing that I like to do is if for some reason during the group, I offer hey, I can email you this information or these resources, I do reach out again. And I let the person know, like, Mary Kay, I have it written down that I was going to email you this information, just to let the person know that I was listening and I do have the note and to expect an email from me, so another little part of our closure. Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Then after we are finished with a group, the facilitators stay online. And we debrief ourselves, like, how did that go? What could we do different? Do you think you should check in with Susie?

And then another thing-- we say, hey, good job, girl. We did it. Everybody left feeling better-- and you can tell that because some people will say, oh, I didn't want to come here, but boy, am I glad I did. We hear that so many times.

VICKI RIVERA: Mm-hmm.



VIVIAN FLANAGAN: So I am sure that in the future, we will continue virtual support groups. Weather, transportation-- some people are up in the boonies and they can't attend. In fact, we have people now that live in the Northwoods that are attending our groups. So as much as I was saying, ooo, I don't want to do Zoom groups, I am so grateful we are.

VICKI RIVERA: And I, like Vivian, was very skeptical too. I didn't know how the atmosphere would be. But I actually enjoy facilitating virtual support groups versus in-person. That might sound weird, but I'm weird, so that's why it sounds that way.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And I--

VICKI RIVERA: One other neat thing, too-- and this might sound, I don't know, weird or whatever. I enjoy doing virtual support groups because when everybody is done with their poll, they leave. And you don't have that lag time of, in-person, OK, we're done, and somebody might still hang around and just chitchat, whereas with the virtual ones, OK, we're done, and everybody leaves, which then gives Vivian and I or the other facilitators a little time to chitchat and figure out what's next on our agenda for groups.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Vicki and I even talked about in Wisconsin, if you live in Wisconsin, there are so many people that, oh, we have to cancel the support group because of snow. But Vicki and I were thinking, oh, we can say, our in-person is canceled, but join us at 7:00 for our Zoom meeting. So the possibilities are endless. And I'm so glad that we've started this. And--

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Well, and I have to applaud you two because you did take this on. And it's not just that you took this on; you took it on in a practical, logical, established way so that it-- you've thought of all of the-- getting the registration, making it a safe place, making sure you have emergency contact, thinking about making sure you have two facilitators because that's really important. And I think the way you guys took your time to set it up and set it up well made a huge difference in how the outcome has been established. Because you have participants that are staying and you have new participants.

So they're not disliking this. They're actually really liking having the virtual program. So yay for you guys. Pat yourselves on the back.

VICKI RIVERA: Thanks.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Thanks.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So we're going to also go on to-- oh, please do this-- other ideas about what happens during using virtual support groups.



VICKI RIVERA: The ability with the virtual support groups is just the flexibility for individuals to join our groups. I know with our parent caregivers, might be difficult for a parent to get out of the house, babysitters or whatever, so the space that they are able to join-- or a peer that really doesn't want to leave, but they want to be joining groups. So those are some interesting things with our virtual support groups.

One thing, if I can emphasize, is we are continuously adapting and adjusting our virtual support groups to meet the needs of our community. That is one thing that I really had to wrap my mind around, is that it's not going to be a black and white, here it is, and that's it forever and ever. It's more of adapting, changing, being flexible, and really understanding that we are doing this for our community and that they are the most important things, that we make sure that we're there for them.

The other thing that I find really important is that the facilitators have-- and that's why it's important for that connection, the 30-minute connection in the beginning-- have that connection with each other. The people in the group can really feel, even though it's through virtual, that there is a connection with the facilitators. Vivian and myself, we have that friendship where we can joke about certain things and just set that tone that it's going to be a relaxed, fun atmosphere, however, serious at times also. So just having that connection between the two facilitators is really important to set that tone and space for the individuals that are going going to be attending your group.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I do have one facilitator that-- he likes to meet the day before the group. Because I go to all the groups, I can let him know how things are going with a certain family. And he likes that.

He likes to be brought up to date by the people that are attending his group. I think everybody appreciates it, but he really likes that. So--

VICKI RIVERA: And being the tech person for all these groups, I have no choice but to be there for the parent caregiver or the family ones. And actually, I find I've gotten to know some of the family members that attend the groups. So it's just a neat, little added bonus to know, oh, hey, it's Suzy, well, it's good to see you, kind of thing. But then once a group meets or starts, I disappear, in a way. But I'm still there.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Right. And I just wanted to hit that a little bit. Our support groups and our classes through NAMI, our model is a peer. And that peer could mean that you're a family member or you're a consumer, someone that lives with a mental illness.

And so all of our support groups or classes are not provided by, again, therapists. They're provided by somebody that's had the lived experience. And so while Vicki is helping set up the technology for the family support groups, as she says, she steps out because her role is not a family member.



And we usually very much try to keep that separate so that family members are talking to family members and that peers are talking to peers so that they feel safe to say what they're really thinking or feeling and not feel that pressure. So this has just been a challenge, but an added challenge because you've figured out how to navigate this and make it work.

So if you have two facilitators that are both family members or two facilitators that are peer and one can take the technical role and one can take the observant support role, that would be actually wonderful. But a lot of our affiliates don't have that many facilitators that have that much diversity and skills. And so I really appreciate that. But I wanted to emphasize that one of the things about, again, NAMI is that our support groups are, again, not provided by licensed therapists, but by someone that has lived experience, whatever that lived experiences is. So, yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: The wisdom of the group.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Yeah, the wisdom of the group. You learn from each other.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So do you guys have anything else or would you like to open it up to questions now?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: That's fine.

VICKI RIVERA: Sure.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Sure. Questions are great.

VICKI RIVERA: Bring on the questions.

ANN SCHENSKY: All right. We have several questions, which is great.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: So do I stop sharing? Sorry.

ANN SCHENSKY: You can.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: OK.

ANN SCHENSKY: The first question is, are all participants required to use the video?

VICKI RIVERA: No. We give them the option of joining through the phone or joining with video. We also have some individuals that-- sometimes their microphone on their computer might not work, so that they do video so we





can see them, but then they also join through their phone. So they're doing both. But you can join through the phone.

However, we always say it's nice to see their face. And that's where in the video part is beneficial. And if somebody is very unsure about doing it through the video, I let them know, hey, let's set up a time and I will walk you through how to join with the video, just one-on-one, and we can go from there. So--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: But I think the bottom line is, do they have to use the video? No, absolutely not. We love it because body language helps us set the tone, but no.

ANN SCHENSKY: Great. One more. It says, hello, NAMI, Wisconsin. Great job, and thank you. You spoke to the sense of intimacy and ability for online support groups to bring new attendees to support groups. Do you think this is something you will continue doing regardless of the public health need for physical distancing, and why or why not?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Oh, absolutely, positively, we want to continue it. Like I said, we live in Wisconsin. Weather, you never know-- we could have a snow storm, an ice storm, but we could still provide it. Another thing is we have affiliates that are in the Northwoods that they don't even have a support group to go to.

So I guess I better talk to my boss about this, but I would like to open this to all areas. Because I just think that's really important. And another thing. Some people, especially peers-- Vicki, tell me if I'm wrong-- transportation is an issue.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm.

VICKI RIVERA: And not only that. Also, NAMI Fox Valley, our service area is not only just Outagamie, but we have Waupaca, we have Calumet. And so it's a large service area.

And we don't have volunteers or the capacity to offer a support group in those rural areas. So offering it through Zoom is just one added bonus to make sure that everyone in our service area is able to receive support. So--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Right. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

VICKI RIVERA: And I would preface, Vivian, you said that, not me. So when our boss says anything, I'm pointing the finger at you. But I agree. Anyway--

ANN SCHENSKY: OK. The next question is, when in the waiting room, can you see who else is waiting?



VICKI RIVERA: In the waiting room, their names pop up as they are joining, so-- OK, say that question again, Ann. Sorry.

ANN SCHENSKY: When in the waiting room, can you see who else is waiting?

VICKI RIVERA: I can see everybody's waiting.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Right away.

VICKI RIVERA: Anybody that--

ANN SCHENSKY: Can other people see?

VICKI RIVERA: Nope.

ANN SCHENSKY: OK.

VICKI RIVERA: I have it set up only the host and co-host.

ANN SCHENSKY: OK. I think they were just wondering if other people could see. The next question is, do you have other instances where something has been missed because individuals have body language not noticed because we're only seeing people from the shoulders up?

VICKI RIVERA: I'm letting Vivian answer that.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: No, I don't think we've ever-- I don't think so. I really-- No.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah. I agree.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: I would say no.

ANN SCHENSKY: OK. This one is similar to the one that we already talked about, but it said, going forward, will you tell us how you might facilitate virtual as well as in-person? Will virtual be offered as a way to participate in an in-person group?

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: No. I would say no.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yeah. I would say they would be-- maybe Tuesday night, we have a virtual support group, and Wednesday night, we have an in-person support group. I would do-- that's me personally. I would separate.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah. I agree.



ANN SCHENSKY: OK. And then another just quick question was, do you use the waiting room? And we already said yes, that you--

VICKI RIVERA: Yep.

ANN SCHENSKY: Do you need Zoom training to offer these virtual groups?

VICKI RIVERA: No, but Zoom has really awesome web class thing that you can watch.

ANN SCHENSKY: Tutorials.

VICKI RIVERA: Thank you, tutorial.

ANN SCHENSKY: Yes. We've watched all of them.

VICKI RIVERA: --that you can watch to learn. But I will just say I don't like watching tutorials. I'm the type of person that I will just push buttons and see what happens, which can be a bad thing at times. But if you have individuals, like Vivian had shared in the beginning, family members that are willing just to try it out with you, go for it. It's trial and error.

MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: I definitely would say you don't need training, but it-- I wouldn't do it unless I had what you did, which was a lot of practice. I know a lot of our affiliates that are taking on doing Zoom, because a lot of them across the state have, they've done little practices with each other, with other facilitators. The board members have done a little test. So I definitely think you should learn how to do the waiting room, turn off the mute for everybody.

So I do think there is a learning curve, but it's not that overwhelming. I think it's pretty-- I think the platform of Zoom-- and you could use any platform. But we've been happy with the platform of Zoom. It's pretty easy to learn.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And I have to tell you, we were in a Zoom and I got locked out because--

VICKI RIVERA: I removed her.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And I couldn't get back in. And the Zoom remembered-- I tried a different computer. It remembered. So I couldn't--

VICKI RIVERA: I didn't unlock the room.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: So I couldn't get in. So I am so grateful that we practiced all the scenarios-- well, as many as we could.

VICKI RIVERA: One thing--



VIVIAN FLANAGAN: So we made a lot of mistakes before we got it down.

VICKI RIVERA: Yep.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Yes.

VICKI RIVERA: One thing we didn't touch upon with security is the fact that you can remove someone.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

VICKI RIVERA: One thing that Vivian and I, we have set up, is if for some odd reason somebody does virtual bullying or just won't let up on picking on another participant or whatever, we do a private chat with that person and say, hey, Joe Schmo, back off. That's not appropriate behavior or topic or whatever. We give them a warning.

And then within that warning, we let them know that if this continues, we will remove them from the meeting, and before they can join another meeting, that we will need to sit down and have a conversation with them, just to let them know, we have guidelines. We have certain rules that we need to follow with our groups. And what--

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And they have to be respectful.

VICKI RIVERA: Yep. Exactly.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Just being respectful is important. And to be honest, that did happen. We'll be honest. It did happen.

VICKI RIVERA: Yeah.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: So--

ANN SCHENSKY: We have met our-- we're at an hour. So what we often do is we've-- we probably have about 10 questions that we weren't able to get to. We will send them to you. And you can answer them, and then we can post them on the website with the slides and the recording as a quick Q&A.

And then that way, people are able to get some answers to their questions. Because there's a lot about how you do things, how the polls are done. I think they should be pretty easy. But we just wanted to let people know that we will save their questions and we will make sure that they get answered.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Thank you. Thank you, Ann.

ANN SCHENSKY: So--



MARY KAY BATTAGLIA: Thank you, Ann. And the state made technical policies, and I'm sure Fox Valley has some policies, and I know national has made up some tech policy on how to conduct things. So that is another thing that people may be interested in, and seeing what the policies are that we've come up with, more of a technical process. So thank you, Ann.

ANN SCHENSKY: Fantastic. Well, thank you all for presenting today. It has been very interesting. And obviously, people were very engaged and excited to hear this information.

Again, we should have this recording and the slides and questions up within about a week on our website. And the recording will be on our YouTube channel. So thank you very much.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: And I want to say thank you to all of you for loving and supporting a community that needs it so much.

ANN SCHENSKY: Thank you.

VIVIAN FLANAGAN: Mm-hmm.

ANN SCHENSKY: And thanks to all who attended. Have a fantastic afternoon.