Supporting Community Activists

Three Ways That SASA! Together Staff Support Community Activists

1. Twice-Monthly Meetings
   - SHARE successes and challenges.
   - PRACTICE new activities, activism skills and challenging scenarios arising in the community.
   - PLAN with community activists their upcoming activities and collect reports on past activities.
   - CELEBRATE success and socialize!

2. Activity Support Visits
   Activity support involves SASA! Together staff being with community activists in the community—observing their activism activities in progress, tracking the response of the community, and most importantly, offering community activists in-the-moment support.

3. Relationship-Building
   - Act like the equals you are.
   - Recognize personal milestones.
   - Make time for personal check-ins (see next page).

For a refresher on supporting community activists, see the Start Phase Book (page 33).
When Supporting Community Activists in the Awareness Phase...

For ANY Kind of Support

Here are some things you can do during twice-monthly meetings, activity support visits or relationship-building. Initiate open and personal discussions with community activists—it will strengthen your relationship and build their confidence as activists.

Talk about solidarity.

In the Awareness phase, speaking about sensitive issues in the community and facilitating activities can feel uncomfortable and even scary—activists can at times feel like a lone voice. Help them feel supported and encourage them to build solidarity with other activists and be supportive of community members.

Here are examples of questions you could ask:

- Sometimes, activism can feel lonely and those we think will support us don’t. Have you experienced this feeling? How did you cope?
- Is there a fellow community activist who you feel especially close to with whom you can share some of your challenges and successes? If so, how is that relationship helping you? If not, how could you connect more with another activist?
- How can I demonstrate more solidarity with you?

Talk about POWER OVER.

In the Awareness phase, activists are becoming more aware of power over in their own lives. This can create internal conflict, sadness and frustration. Community activists may fear they are being hypocritical by saying one thing in activities when other community members might know the reality of their relationships.
Here are examples of questions you could ask:

→ At times, all of us use and experience power over in different relationships in our lives. Are you seeing your relationships in a new light now that you are involved in SASA! Together?

→ How are the discussions of power over in SASA! Together affecting your relationships?

→ What challenges are you experiencing in talking about power over in your community? How can I support you in this?

**Don’t expect perfection, and keep it inclusive.**

→ Community activists, like all of us, have strengths and weaknesses. Focus on the positive when providing feedback to further develop their strengths. Give constructive criticism, but accept that activists will not always conduct every activity as you had hoped. Celebrate the positive; don’t dwell on the negative.

→ Encourage community activists to reach out and motivate others to get involved. Avoid treating the community activists as a “members-only” club. The idea is to encourage as many community members as possible to feel they can and should speak out about violence. Provide extra materials for community activists to share with others to diffuse SASA! Together ideas!

**Practice skills for managing different points of view.**

Disagreement is an essential part of social change. We need community members to openly share their views. Activists’ role is to keep these debates positive and respectful and to encourage critical thinking among community members.

Share the following tips on a piece of flipchart paper with activists, and then brainstorm more ideas as a group. Try to use the actions and responses in the practice sessions and during activity support visits.

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<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>SAY</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Set simple ground rules before every activity (one person speaks at a time, respect everyone’s opinion, allow everyone an opportunity to share, etc.)</td>
<td>“I’m so happy to hear these honest conversations.”</td>
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<td>Keep calm and breathe when things get heated.</td>
<td>“The most important thing is to try to understand each other’s points of view. We don’t have to all agree.”</td>
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<td>Look for allies in your activities, and encourage their active participation.</td>
<td>“It’s very exciting to be talking about issues that usually remain hidden.”</td>
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Practice skills for ensuring respect among the group.

It is possible to have disagreements and still maintain respect within the group. In addition to setting ground rules, there are things community activists can say and do to model and maintain respect in the moment. Community activists can’t plan for every scenario, but a few techniques will go a long way.

Share the following tips on a piece of flipchart paper with activists, and then brainstorm more ideas as a group. Try to use and watch for these situations and responses in the practice sessions and during activity support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
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<tr>
<td>WHEN...a community member insults you or someone else during an activity</td>
<td>SAY...“We’re interested in hearing your opinion, but name-calling isn’t allowed. We can disagree and still remain respectful of each other.”</td>
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<td>WHEN...a community member is heckling (shouting things at you or other participants, which sometimes happens in dramas)</td>
<td>SAY...“I’m going to stop the activity/drama for a moment to emphasize the importance of respecting each other. If you’re not able to treat others with respect (or wait your turn to speak), then we’ll need to ask you to leave.”</td>
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<td>WHEN...a community member continues to interrupt or talk over a fellow participant</td>
<td>DO...interrupt them and explain: “Before we hear additional contributions, we’ll let the participant finish what they were saying.” Shift the focus to the participant who was speaking and invite them to continue.</td>
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<td>WHEN...a disagreement is escalating</td>
<td>DO...remind participants of the ground rules. Emphasize that even when disagreeing, everyone still can (and must!) demonstrate respect in their words and actions.</td>
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