

Value Each Other

by Kathy Castañón

Our group was founded in 1996 in response to a need for more information and understanding about fibromyalgia (FM) by those afflicted with the condition. Those diagnosed with FM back then didn't know where to turn for information or support; their physicians were not much help, either. Our founder, Patti Wright (since retired), was instrumental in raising awareness about FM both in the medical community and in the community at large.



We continue her work today through our monthly newsletters and social luncheons, which provide an opportunity for FM members to get together informally, to relax and be among friends who completely understand the stress and pain of FM. We have expanded our monthly evening educational meetings to include invited speakers from the healthcare community. Plus we implemented a 12-month Wellness Program for our members, incorporating all aspects of wellness: including physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, family, environmental, nutritional and even financial wellness.

Both Lisa and I feel that the most important things we can offer our members are hope, understanding and empowerment. We feel that knowledge is power. With using the knowledge we gain through communication with our healthcare speakers and through advocacy efforts at the governmental level, our members no longer feel hopeless and ignored. Rather they're empowered by the strength and support of the group to keep pushing forward.

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On a personal level, as a co-leader of our support group, I feel happy that I can contribute in some small way to providing our FM members with options in their pursuit of better health. They have taught me so much about perseverance, strength, faith and a positive attitude. When I get discouraged, it's the members of our support group that keep me going, too.



Kathy Castañón and Lisa Collins are co-leaders of the non-profit organization Fibromyalgia Friends Support Group based in Las Vegas, NV, founded in January 1996. More information can be found at www.FMFriends.org.

Leading the Way

A Support Group Leader's Thoughts

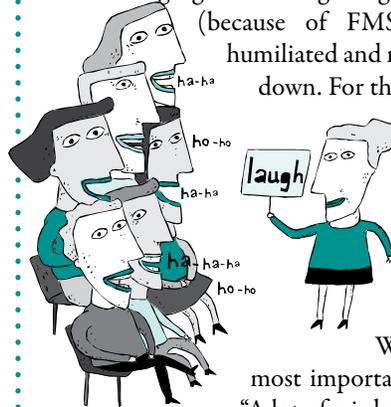
by Diane L. Kennelly

I keep thinking, “I get much more from leading the support group than our members could possibly be getting!” Lots of information. Great conversations. Terrific guest speakers. And meeting so many fascinating people! But the friendships are what I treasure the most. All the people are so wonderful to talk to and supportive of me and each other. Even on our website, members can send e-mails to fellow members, ask questions, post article, make suggestions or comments. Everyone interacts and helps each other! The best thing that we share is our laughter... it really is the best medicine! Laughter brings us closer to each other — sometimes closer than to a family member — because people with FMS understand what other FMSers go through on a daily basis.



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As a leader, helping people makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something again. After getting fired from my last full-time job (because of FMS symptoms), I felt worthless, humiliated and my self-esteem was shot completely down. For the past 11 years, I've both mourned losing my “other self” and gone through “reinventing myself” which led to starting the group in August 2009. I even work part-time now. It feels great! I think I have found the new Diane!



When I asked members what is the most important thing I give them, Wayne said, “A lot of wisdom and knowledge of what FMS is, resources to get answers and a hug that we all need.” Jody says, “I appreciate the social events, fun outings and everyone understands if someone needs to sit down for a while.” Judy adds, “We now have a safe place to mingle with people who share fibro and the problems we may have. Diane's such a caring person and radiates so much warmth that you cannot help but trust and love her.” Lynda mentions, “Consistent, non-judgmental advice, pamphlets and moral support to all. Diane's ability to empathize with us is amazing when she says, ‘Oh, I know, I went through something similar when...’”

Diane L. Kennelly is a leader of a FMS/CFS support group despite her pain. She lives in sunny Mesa, AZ, and loves spending time with grandsons Cody, Donovan and Gavin or socializing with members outside the meetings. Learn more about her group at www.meetup.com/East-Valley-Fibromyalgia-Support-Group.

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