

**Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance-Greater Houston
2008 Outcome Study
Executive Summary**

Background

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance-Greater Houston (DBSA) sponsors *free* support groups to aid in the recovery of those affected by depression or bipolar disorder, including the diagnosed, family members and friends. Since 2004, DBSA has grown at a tremendous rate due in large part to the unmet need for supportive services for those impacted by depression or bipolar disorder -- the two most commonly diagnosed mental illnesses facing Americans today. In 2004, DBSA sponsored 5 support groups located in the Houston area. By the end of 2008, our organization sponsored over 50 support groups throughout Houston and its surrounding cities.

In 2006, the DBSA Board and staff decided it would be beneficial to conduct a comprehensive efficacy study or "*Outcome Study*" to determine the qualitative impact participating in a DBSA sponsored support group had on attendees. Dr. Ralph Culler, independent researcher and former Associate Director at the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, was charged with conducting the study.

Outcome Study Process

Dr. Culler developed an outcome questionnaire specifically for DBSA support groups and, in early 2008, gathered questionnaires and data from 133 support group attendees and 19 facilitators at 20 different DBSA support group locations. The 5-page questionnaire asked questions regarding demographics, medical data, outcome assessments and satisfaction with the support group experience.

Responses were analyzed for five (5) subgroups of attendees:

1. Participants: Attendees diagnosed or experiencing the symptoms of depression or bipolar disorder.
2. Family: Attendees in support of another person -- whether a relative or friend.
3. Short-timers: Attendees who had joined a support group within the two (2) months preceding the date of completing the questionnaire.
4. Long-timers: Attendees who had been participating in a support group for two (2) months or more before the date of completing the questionnaire.
5. Facilitators: Attendees who are unpaid volunteers who facilitate support groups.

Outcome Assessments were broken into three (3) distinct categories:

1. Short-Term Outcomes: The short-term outcomes are results that occurred fairly quickly -- perhaps beginning at the first meeting.
2. Medium-Term Outcomes: Seven (7) medium-term outcomes were examined by the outcome instrument to determine changes over time based on assessments by respondents.
3. Long-Term Outcomes: Long-term outcomes are those changes in support group attendees which (i) are experienced after an individual has attended a group for a longer time and (ii) follow logically from the achievement of medium-term outcomes. Long-term outcomes were assessed by having respondents estimate gains (or losses) with respect to their progress toward recovery and quality of life.

Outcome Study's Findings

The tables below summarize the short, medium and long-term benefits of group participation broken down by the five (5) analyzed subgroups.

Short-Term Outcomes

The following table shows how respondents reported support group attendance benefits. Each group member was asked to quantify the benefits listed below on a 6-point scale ranging from "not applicable" to "none" to "very high." The table below lists the percentages of respondents who rated the particular benefit from DBSA support group participation to be a 4 (high) or 5 (very high) on the rating scale.

Percent of Respondents Experiencing High Levels of Support Group Benefits

DBSA Support			PARTIC-	SHORT-	LONG-	FACIL-
Group Benefit	ALL	FAMILY	IPANTS	TIMERS	TIMERS	ITATORS
Support	84%	100%	81%	58%	86%	95%
Knowledge	83%	100%	79%	55%	85%	84%
Advice	76%	81%	75%	75%	75%	63%
Help with Coping	63%	67%	62%	45%	66%	63%
Crisis Management	60%	76%	57%	38%	60%	58%
New Friends	59%	62%	59%	39%	63%	58%
Social Interaction	70%	62%	71%	47%	76%	58%
Sharing Experience	79%	82%	79%	58%	84%	84%
Helping Others	75%	77%	75%	44%	80%	100%
Hope	77%	91%	74%	58%	78%	95%
AVERAGE	73%	80%	71%	52%	76%	76%

Medium-Term Outcomes

The table below reflects how respondents assessed their own medium-term benefits of group participation based on change between the time an attendee first participated in a DBSA-sponsored support group meeting to the time he or she completed the outcome questionnaire. The responses were based on a 5-point scale, so that the maximum change that could be registered in the summary chart below would be 4 points (going from "very low" to "very high"). In every category, the individuals who had attended group meetings more than two (2) months assessed their improvement to be higher than those attending for less than two (2) months.

Mean Change in Medium-Term Outcomes Reported by Group Participants

DBSA Support			PARTIC-	SHORT-	LONG-	FACIL-
Group Outcome	ALL	FAMILY	IPANTS	TIMERS	TIMERS	ITATORS
Empowerment	+1.60	+1.43	+1.64	+1.21	+1.76	+2.37
Utilization of Services	+1.35	+1.38	+1.35	+0.83	+1.49	+2.05
Coping	+1.57	+1.79	+1.53	+1.05	+1.68	+2.11
Social Relationships	+1.12	+0.81	+1.18	+0.75	+1.31	+1.28
Treatment Compliance	+0.89		+0.89	+0.80	+0.92	+1.00
Communication	+0.78	+0.75	+0.78	+0.25	+0.93	+1.11
Hope	+1.50	+1.45	+1.51	+1.30	+1.56	+2.05

Long-Term Outcomes

Respondents were asked to quantify their individual progress toward recovery as a result of attending DBSA peer support group meetings (i.e., resulting from group participation, not other circumstances). Recovery was not defined in order to allow respondents freedom to communicate their own perception of progress toward "recovery." The responses were calculated only for participants (i.e., diagnosed individuals, not family members). The responses were on a five-choice scale from "very negative" to "very positive."

Change in Progress Towards Recovery

Progress Toward Recovery	PARTICIPANTS	SHORT-TIMERS	LONG-TIMERS	FACILITATORS
Unchanged	15%	25%	12%	-
Positive/Very Positive	85%	75%	88%	100%

Similarly, respondents were asked to assess changes in their quality of life attributed by the individual to participation in DBSA support groups. The five (5) possible choices ranged from "much worse" to "much better." Those rating quality of life in the top two (2) choices -- better and much better -- are quantified in the following table.

Change in Quality of Life

QUALITY OF LIFE	ALL	Family	PARTICIPANTS	Short-timers	Long-timers	FACILITATORS
Unchanged	11%	-	13%	35%	7%	-
Better/Much Better	89%	100%	87%	65%	93%	100%

Finally, group attendees (participants, family and facilitators) were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the DBSA support group experience on a five-point scale (from very low, to low to high or very high). Substantially all group attendees rated the DBSA support group experience high or very high as shown in the following table.

Overall Satisfaction with the DBSA Support Group Experience

Rating	Overall
Low/Very Low	1%
-	6%
High/Very High	93%

Conclusion

To our knowledge, the *Outcome Study* conducted on behalf of DBSA is the only study of its kind to explore the impact peer-facilitated support groups has on those affected by depression or bipolar disorder. The findings from the *Outcome Study* confirmed what many in DBSA Greater Houston have believed to be true since the organization's inception -- that our support groups significantly improve the lives of those affected by depression or bipolar disorder. The improvement is evident in a range of specific areas such as support, knowledge of both illnesses, helping others, empowerment and treatment compliance, but more importantly, attendees report improvement in their overall quality of life and their own progress toward recovery. The *Outcome Study* clearly demonstrates and confirms that DBSA-sponsored support groups work.

The gratifying achievements of DBSA are not the result of efforts of one person or one type of treatment modality, but instead reflect the work and passion of those who are committed to DBSA's mission, the strength of our support group model and the desire of attendees for a better life today and a more hopeful future tomorrow. The *Outcome Study* has served to strengthen our commitment and our belief in the work that DBSA does on behalf of those living with the effects of mental illness.