

# What is M.A.S.H. ... and How Can I Start a Group?



*Claudia Nelson, Kristine Hill and Robin Millan.  
When Claudia and her Mom came,  
we knew many more would follow.*

Anyone who is dedicated can start a M.A.S.H. Socialization Group. Two parents, Ann Millan and Denice Hill, saw the void of social activities for young adults who were employed or wanted to be a part of their community - and M.A.S.H. was born. They outlined their vision and goals, being careful not to exclude any potential member because they did not “qualify”. Their only requirements were family involvement and the young adult had to be over 21 years old.

Each individual and their family made the decision if they felt they would benefit from M.A.S.H.. Identifying families with individuals interested in this unique concept was our first goal. We developed our Mission statement and contacted local newspapers, always sending them a copy of the statement with each interview. In addition, we contacted support coordinators through the Department of Children and Families. They were a significant source of young people interested in our program.

We looked at other organizations and decided we did not want to incorporate. Our time and energy needed to be spent on positive programming, not bureaucracy. Therefore, we had no funding source. We would be self-supporting. Parents know what their young adults need: positive opportunities to grow in a small environment.

M.A.S.H. members met once a month to plan social activities for the following month. Our first meetings were at our local McDonalds fast food restaurant, until we outgrew the space and moved to a local church. The members actively participated in this planning, with parent direction. A president was appointed. The young adults had to plan carefully how they spent their money on socialization. The parents were the drivers! Every family with an idea for the group was encouraged to develop the opportunity for members. It was incredible how we all worked together. We could not keep them too busy. They loved the friendships. The more we did, the more they wanted to do. Many individuals learned to make “choices” for the first time.



*Kristine Hill, Peter Muzyka, Robin Millan, Allyson Broman, Leslie Peck,  
Brandon Lene, Keith Westdyk, Lisa Magnusen, Claudia  
Nelson, and John Bergner on local dinner cruise.*

## M.A.S.H. Expands

As we were getting inquiries, we felt very strong that we needed structure to secure our existence. Parents are dedicated and wonderful, but we wanted to make sure the program lasted beyond any of the parents' commitments.

We approached our local Y.M.C.A. and they welcomed us. They liked our concept and their staff was eager to develop a program. Swimming activities were planned during the day (twice a week) and weekly Friday night swimming parties quickly brought in more members. Friday nights were a natural because these individuals now had somewhere to go and meet with friends. We approached the “Y” with only 4 members and by the end of the summer we had 15.

At this avenue in our growth, M.A.S.H. became two programs, the Social Group and the “Y” program. Through the “Y”s Share the Vision Campaign, most of the young adults were on scholarships.

Keeping our Social Group, the “Y” gave our young adults needed activities without parental supervision. Members of the social group were not necessarily members of the “Y”. Opportunity for more choices were now available. They were spreading their wings and growing.

## Social Group Activities the 1st Year

- ◆ Special Olympics volleyball. YMCA staff volunteered for 3 months, twice a week for practices. We went to state.
- ◆ Golf lessons at Chi Chi Rodriguez
- ◆ CPR classes
- ◆ Line dancing classes
- ◆ Built float for local parade
- ◆ Socialization classes, night school
- ◆ Modeling classes for the girls
- ◆ Sports game attendance: football, hockey, baseball, arena football, etc.
- ◆ Bowling, movies, dances, field trips, dinner theater, dinner cruises, etc.
- ◆ Mary Kay makeup, Pampered Chef, Christmas Around-the-World, etc.
- ◆ Members hosted various social parties in the homes

## Mission Statement

M.A.S.H. mission is to encourage and support single “challenged adults” to meet and socialize with their peers, and to experience the enjoyment of friendship, fun and social events. Emphasis is placed on single adults living at home with parents or relatives who have goals to expand beyond the home and function in the community.

Challenged young adults are individuals who do not easily interact or are accepted by their peers because of shyness, phobias, insecurities, etc. This includes mentally and physically disabled.

**M.A.S.H.: To be accepted, to have fun, and to grow.**



*A monthly M.A.S.H. Social Group general meeting*

**A**ll those individuals out on their own, and those that have developed such self-assurance, have as a result of the support from the M.A.S.H. Social Group. . . and the Y.M.C.A. M.A.S.H. friends and mentors.”

*Denice Hill*



*John McDaniel, Frank Vericella, Keith Westdyk, Robin Millan, and John Bergner are just a few of the participants in the 3d Annual Drama Club event.*



*Aaron Medlin ready for the next sailing event.*



*Carrie Fambro, Frank Vericella, Lisa Magnuson, and Dan Wethington helping each other learn choices.*



*John McDaniel dancing with a parent.*

**BONUS:**

**T**he young adults have developed friendships with the parents as well as their peers because we all liked each other and not because we are relatives or family friends.



*John McDaniel and Andy Gibson, the best of friends . . . through M.A.S.H.*

*One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar - Helen Keller*

M.A.S.H . . . after 7 years

**M**.A.S.H. began in April 1996. We have changed over the years, but our mission has remained the same. We were right! Positive socialization builds confidence and growth that flows into responsible adulthood and independence. These young people have incredible, positive lives. We have grown to 38 members.

M.A.S.H. members have developed personal friendships with each other and outside of M.A.S.H. Peer pressure has become a natural consequence. Many are employed for the first time, others look forward to being employed. Several members are living independently in their own condominiums or apartments. Several are driving and have their own car. All are active in their communities.

A combination of parents and young adults make up the M.A.S.H. Board for the general meetings. Parents rotate this responsibility, always emphasizing that M.A.S.H. belongs to its members. Leadership is encouraged. There is still a Senior Parent Advisor for all major decisions.

The Special Olympics program is now managed through the Y.M.C.A. Many individuals have expanded their “Y” activities beyond M.A.S.H. and participate in other classes and opportunities at the “Y”.

Families who are involved in M.A.S.H. are proud of their adults. They have become responsible and assertive citizens towards independence.

For everyone, it has been an exciting journey. Each individual has been allowed to grow at their own pace.

**M.A.S.H.**  
*Socialization for  
Young Adults*



*First general meetings were held at local McDonalds.*

*Frank Vericella learning CPR in class at our local fire department.*



*Girls night out at a Mary Kay party.*



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