



# CHECKING YOUR PEER NETWORK'S PURPOSE

**If your peer network never quite gains momentum, it might be worth checking in on the purpose of the peer network.**

This is particularly important for people who are living in group homes or boarding houses. It may take a lot more for them to connect to the network, so having a strong statement of purpose could help people remember how the meeting can help them. It doesn't have to be long winded and convoluted but must have meaning to those who attend. It could be something as simple as, 'we meet to share a meal together, and talk about what's happening'.

## **Start with your own thinking**

Why was this work started in the first place?

What value does it currently bring to those people who live in shared accommodation arrangements?

Could the network offer something else, something new or different to peers who are already coming or to new peers?

Are there practical issues at a network member's group home or boarding house that are stopping the person from attending? Could you or the network help with that?

## **Talk with the peers in the network and peers in your community**

Start by asking some of these questions:

- "Why do we have this peer network?" (What are WE all about?)
- "Why are we here?" (What's our purpose?)
- "What do we value as a group?" (What's important to us?)
- "What do we offer each other?" (How can we best help each other?)
- "Are there things happening for you at you group home or boarding house that make it harder for you to attend the peer network?"

Some of the issues may be very practical. For example, the peer network meeting may be scheduled at the same time as when meals are served at the person's group home or boarding house. Two ways to fix that are (1) change the time of the meeting so it doesn't clash with people's meal times, or (2) find a way to offer people dinner at the meeting. There may be other ways too.



**Talk with people around your community**

Contact community organisations, community development officers, community groups, and any others you can think of.

**Think about gaps**

What is missing in your community for people living in group homes or boarding houses? What could really help them to connect to valued opportunities in the local community? What could the peer network do to help?

**Recruit a peer mentor who has experience of living in shared accommodation arrangements**

One way to hear from the potential peer members is through a trained peer mentor who has experience living in shared accommodation arrangements but no longer does so. They will be aware of the barriers and challenges that exist and will be able to build rapport.

**Be open to ideas and really listen to what people want**

For the peer network to have deeper and longer impact, it's important that its members have a say about how it works and what it does. So find as many different ways as you can to get people's ideas about the peer network and what they want from it.



## Case Study: Our Voice SA and Balyana

**Balyana is an accommodation setting for people who live with intellectual disability.**

It has 2 types of accommodation:

- Houses situated on the property each accommodating up to 5 people, and
- Motel style accommodation where people have their own room with en suite in the main building.

Balyana is situated on a large property close to public transport and to its service provider's venue for supported employment. There are 62 people currently living at Balyana, most of whom also use this service provider for their supported employment or day options.

Our Voice SA, a peer-led membership organisation for South Australians living with intellectual disability, initiated discussions with Balyana about setting up a peer network.

It works as a partnership:

- An Our Voice SA Committee Member had previously lived at Balyana and suggested that this might be a great place to reach others and provide support for this community
- Our Voice started by offering a peer-led training course in self-advocacy as a way of connecting in
- It was hoped that a peer network would emerge from the training
- Balyana agreed to provide the venue
- Our Voice would provide food and refreshments.

This network commenced in 2019, with 26 people attending the first meeting.

## Case study: PWDA

**PWDA based the success of their peer networks of people living in assisted accommodation on the fact that the facilitator was willing to listen and accept choices made by residents that were outside the orthodox disability support response. PWDA heard from the residents that they were:**

- Bored on the weekends
- Bored with group outings with accommodation staff
- Tired of being asked to plan ahead when they wanted to make decisions on the day

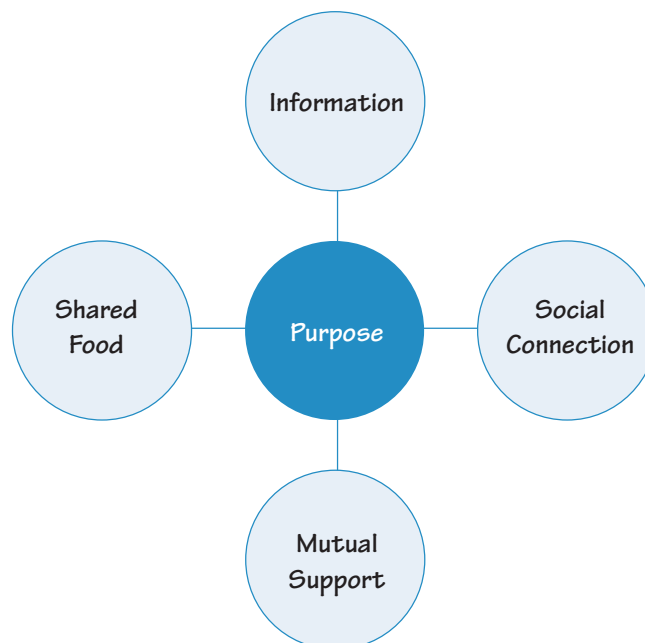
In response to listening, PWDA changed things so that peer groups were:

- Held on the weekends
- Run by and for peers rather than staff
- Held at or near the house so that residents could decide whether to attend or not 'at the last minute'.



When you have gathered all your information, sit down ideally with the peers in the group or other supporters in their lives, and look it over and see if there are things that keep coming up – what is MOST wanted from a group homes or boarding house peer network in this community?

You could use a drawing, or sticky notes, or coasters, to brainstorm these ideas. It might be a concept map such as this:



<https://getting-it-together.moadoph.gov.au/images/graphic-organisers/pdf/concept-map.pdf>



Maybe there are several answers to this and perhaps your network is offering lots of good things, not just one.



Some ideas for why peer networks meet and what they might offer are outlined below:

WHY	A PEER NETWORK MIGHT OFFER
<b>Talk about what it's like to live in a group home or a boarding house</b>	Time to talk with each other Peer guest speakers who can talk about group homes or boarding houses, and how they can best support people
<b>Learn about things that could help me, like the NDIS</b>	Information about the NDIS, written in a way that helps people to understand their choices and if they are eligible Peer guest speakers who can talk about how they use the NDIS
<b>Learn together from my peers</b>	Shared meetings on topics ranging from housing service rights and advocacy, through to how to use the local library
<b>Provide mutual support</b>	Have regular meetings Share contact details for support in-between meetings Have a buddy system Develop peer mentoring opportunities
<b>Work together for change</b>	Identify a shared passion and organise a campaign around it (e.g. talking about what's important about having a place to call your home)
<b>Deal with challenges and plan to make things better</b>	A conversation with peers can uncover a whole array of different ways to solve a problem

We have left some space above because your reasons why might be different. And, perhaps people are asking for all of these things – your statement of purpose could be a combination of some or all of these things.

## An example of a statement of purpose

**Disability Elders of All Ages is a peer network for people living with physical disability in South Australia.**

Its purpose is 'to share experiences, tips and ways of managing our lives', and includes a focus on building knowledge and skills in self-managed support.

## Getting your message out

**Once the statement of purpose has been developed or updated, you have to get your message out.**

A few sentences that clearly and simply state the why and what of the network are really useful. You can pin them up at every network meeting, you can have them printed on your flyers, send them to the group home providers and boarding house operators, and so on. Everyone can practice saying them and then everyone talks the same ways about the network, whether you are inviting new members or trying to get some resources from your local council.

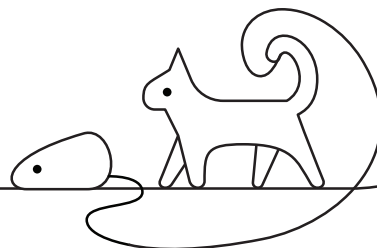
## Defining and acknowledging success

**It is likely that different group members will get different things from attending a peer group. It can be useful to capture these experiences from the group members.**

In the case study above, PWDAs peer groups were well attended and members were encouraged to talk about what made the group valuable to them. This is an example of a peer network acknowledging success.

One peer member stated that he had got 3 big things from the peer meetings:

- "The peer connector has taught me to ask questions of my service provider.
- I was able to negotiate a less time for notifying the service of my not being able to go out for the day due to my mental health. I now only have to give 24 hours' notice which is much better. I got this from our second meeting.
- I cannot use a computer or read very well and did not know how to get the information I wanted and our peer connector got the information and he put it into easier language for me and explained it and I went away and got what I wanted myself. Now I know where my NDIS money is being spent."



**The SA Our Voice Peer Group came up with this list of key things that they think are important for a good peer network:**

- People being nice and kind to each other
- We get things done
- Great bunch of friendly people
- Everyone does what THEY can do
- People listening to each other
- Everyone works together
- Everyone gets a say
- Being fair to one another
- Friends coming together
- Mixing with other people
- We are gentle and kind to each other
- We watch out for each other
- Kindly manners
- No bullying, bossing or upsetting.



## For more information

Read more about this in the *Peer Connect Quick Guide: Developing a value proposition*:



<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/establishment/why-would-you-set-one/>

Templates for creating a value proposition:



<http://torgronsund.com/2011/11/29/7-proven-templates-for-creating-value-propositions-that-work/>

An infographic which captures what makes a great value proposition:



<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/write-value-proposition#sm.0000011mn7ov3vf9!wsjkh5a7wvt>

## Checklist for our statement of purpose

- It's easy to understand  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Every person knows about it  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Every person knows how they will benefit  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Unique to our network  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Hopefully this exercise means that you have checked in on the purpose of the peer network and why it is so important and thought about ways you can tell people about it. The second blue bead can be threaded onto the string.**

A strong peer network will be a network that works well together. Individuals will get along well together and explore different ideas and views in a constructive way. This will make the network most effective for everyone.

People will have different views and ideas. Sometimes people will disagree with each other. Having disagreements is normal. People living in group homes or boarding houses may have had life experiences that are very painful. Some group members may act in ways that disrupt group effectiveness, and this can create challenging situations. These members may need more support.

This is where the facilitator role comes into play. The main aim is to foster communication among the group and to model effective interaction that members can emulate. We look at this in the next section: what to do if someone is creating a tricky situation.



## Reflection

Take a moment to think about why you are setting up a peer network. What purpose does it serve? What will get people to come to the network and keep members coming back? How do you capture and communicate this to other potential members and the broader community? What does success look like?

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