

Peer support networks: What to do when the network has outlived its usefulness to its members

Introduction

Networks have a life cycle, and sometimes are no longer needed. This Quick Guide will help you think about what to do when the network has outlived its usefulness.

Let's make it happen

Is it time to let go?

It is very important that the group discusses and confirms any sense that the network is no longer useful. It would be very disrespectful to discontinue if others feel that it is still useful to them. If there are only one or two people who still find the network useful, this need can be met in other ways (see below). If all agree that it is no longer useful, then it is also important to consider whether the network can be re-purposed. If a review sees no new purpose emerging, then yes, it is time to let go.

Finishing up well

Things to think about:

- Completing tasks for winding up your network e.g. reports to funders, closing bank accounts, discontinuing social media or a website, returning equipment etc. Write a list and make sure the network has met all its responsibilities
- Capture the collective learning. Why did the network achieve what it did? How did it do this? Perhaps a member could write this up, or record it graphically, or make a short video, and publish on social media, or share with all of the network's members and supporters, and with other networks
- Capture individual learning. What has changed for people because of the network? What can they do now that they couldn't before? Perhaps this could also be written up or recorded in some way and shared
- Honour individual contributions. A gratitude or acknowledgment circle at the last meeting, where everyone's unique contribution is spoken to them by others will leave everyone feeling great about what they achieved individually
- Honouring the contribution of the network. A farewell celebration where people tell stories and show photos and archival materials will give members a good way to close off the network
- Honouring the contribution of supporters. Use your contact lists, look back over speakers, think about who is in your support network, think about who has donated to the network, or supported it or members in any way. Make sure to thank them and share the achievements of the network with them, so they can see what they have contributed to. You could also invite your supporters to the farewell celebration to thank them for their support
- Think about what the work might be now in your community. If a network, even a re-purposed one, is no longer useful, what will be? Who do you know who might do

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this, or help you do it? You will have a great place to start with all you have learned and the connections you have made through the network

Where you can find more information

See Quick Guide: What to do when the peer network loses energy

See Quick Guide: Harvesting the gold: sharing stories

See Quick Guide: Reviewing purpose and rules

Useful web links:

The Centre of Excellence for Peer Support (mental health) has some great resources for peer support networks:

<http://www.peersupportvic.org/index.php/2014-12-15-22-42-49/2014-12-16-02-22-27/Resources/>

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