

How to explore a topic of shared interest in a peer support network meeting

Introduction

Peer support can happen when people come together and chat about their experiences. It might be completely informal and freestyle and cover a range of different topics. At other times the Peer Support network might want to talk about a particular topic of shared interest. This may involve more preparation and structure.

A structure for exploring a topic of shared interest is useful:

- To assist the group to build its capacity for self-organisation
- For reducing reliance on a single leader
- For deepening learning through exploration of a topic over a longer period of time
- For facilitating the contribution of existing knowledge from peers
- For building the opportunity for, and potency of, peer to peer support.

Let's make it happen

This quick guide describes a four step structure which progresses from conceptual information to concrete experience, practical strategies and their application for a peer. It's useful at the end of each of the four sections to record feedback from group members on what's been key new learning for them. This can then be referred to at the beginning of the next section, as a reminder and warm-up for what's to come.

The structure could be applied to topics such as:

- Planning and the NDIS
- Going on a holiday
- Engaging your own supports
- Rights

First meeting

The group identifies:

- one or more topics of shared interest
- what they want to know about the topic(s)
- *a potential guest speaker on the topic for the next meeting.*

Second meeting

A guest speaker who has expertise on the topic addresses the group. For example, a person with business or organisational experience, or a person with disability, presents about how they employ their staff or support team.

- The group members consider what additional information each of them can contribute to the group, based on their knowledge and experience of the topic.
- One or all of the group members agree to prepare a brief presentation to the group on the topic based on their knowledge and experience.

Third meeting

- One or all of the group members make a presentation to the group on the topic based on their knowledge and experience.
- One or two group members request the support of the group to help them strategize how they will apply what they have learnt on the topic.

Fourth meeting

- The group focuses on supporting one or two group members to strategize how they will apply what they have learnt about the topic. This process may need skillful facilitation with agreement about group process rules.

Where you can find more information

One of the topics your Peer Support meeting may want to talk about is Community Participation. This Guide published by National Disability Services gives a lot of information about what Community Participation is:

https://www.nds.org.au/images/resources/resource-files/CII_Community_Participation_in_Action_Guide_2016.pdf

The Peer Support network may want to talk about the NDIS and Planning (see the Quick Guides on the NDIS). The NDIS website is a good place to start:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

This guide by Cancer Australia for Cancer Support groups provides a summary of competencies for effective facilitators (page 3)

<http://www.healthissuescentre.org.au/images/uploads/resources/A-guide-for-peer-facilitators.pdf>

The Community Tool Box website has great tips on running a peer network conversation

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

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