



## Where can you get help with resources and save money?

**Depending on the situation, peer networks might need some resources to help them.**

Most peer networks will need help with some things like a meeting venue, transport, refreshments, sending out reminders, and so on.

Some of these resources might come from your peer network's own members. You could even share the jobs so everyone is involved. This might include ride-sharing, a 'tea-and-biscuits' roster, and a host roster where members are using each other's houses to meet.

But sometimes the peer network may need other help. Most Australian communities have resources available to local people, like council-run community centres, meeting rooms at local clubs, or free wifi at local cafes.

Take a moment to think about what types of resources your new peer network might need, and how you can find those resources.

Have a look at the ***Peer Connect Quick Guide: How to make sure the first meeting is a success:***

<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/first-meeting/how-make-sure-first-meeting-success/>



Go to the link wherever you see this symbol

Also, here's a link to something called ***The Art of Asking***, which could help you think about how to approach people for help:

[www.family-advocacy.com/resources/the-art-of-asking/](http://www.family-advocacy.com/resources/the-art-of-asking/)

## How do you invite people to your first peer network meeting?

**First, you need to think about the ways you can tell people about the meeting, like:**

- a notice on your local shopping mall notice board
- a social media post
- word-of-mouth: telling your friends to tell their friends, who tell their friends, and so on
- a community advert in the local free paper.

There will be other ways too. Think about the ways that best fit your network. For example, if your new network is about health and wellbeing, you might ask your local GP practices to put the invitation in their waiting room.

You could try making an invitation that just talks about what will happen at the first meeting. Remember that people may not know much about peer networks and may not know you. They might be unsure about committing to meeting regularly with someone they don't know.

Think about the difference between these two sample invitations:

#### INVITATION TO JOIN A PEER NETWORK

*We are setting up a peer network to talk about the problems for people living with disability finding proper work. We are going to meet on the first Monday night every month. The first meeting is 7pm next Monday at the community centre in the high street.*

*We hope you can be a regular; we can all help each other.*

#### TELL US WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT FINDING PROPER WORK WHEN YOU HAVE A DISABILITY

*We think people living with disability should have a fair go at getting proper paid work. If this is something you agree with, we'd love to talk with you. We are having a meeting at 7pm next Monday at the community centre in the high street.*

*Let's talk about what could be better; we'll all learn something and we might be able to make something happen.*

In the first invitation, people are asked to make a regular commitment. In the second type of invitation, people are invited to have their say about an issue. They are not being asked to commit beyond one meeting.

The first invitation may get fewer people, but those who are there will be your peer network because they are ready to meet regularly.

The second invitation might get more people to your first meeting, but many may not be ready to commit to a regular meeting.

You are in the best position to decide which type of invitation is best suited to your situation. Whichever way you go, don't be discouraged if you don't get many people coming to the peer network. Sometimes, this can take time, so stay with it. Also, even a small network of 2-3 people can do good things.

## How do you make the first meeting a success?

**However you invite people to your new peer network, it is important the first meeting is a success. You might think about success in these ways:**

- everyone in the room was welcomed
- everyone in the room had the chance to have their say and to be respected
- everyone in the room felt like they learnt something
- everyone in the room got the chance to meet someone new
- the conversation finished in a way that led to people want to come back for more
- Set up agreed meeting rules for the group.

See the ***Peer Connect Quick Guide: How to make sure the first meeting is a success:***

<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/first-meeting/how-make-sure-first-meeting-success/>





A great meeting happens when people join a conversation about something really important to them. It may be to hear a guest speaker, to hear from others about their views and experiences or to voice their concerns about an issue that impacts on them.

The Peer Connect website has a section called 'Stuff Peer Networks talk about' and it might be one of these topics that forms the first topic for a meeting and ignites the passion for a peer network. The topics include things like rights, employment, education, transport, supported decision making, and self-advocacy. You can find them here:

[www.peerconnect.org.au/stuff-peer-networks-talk-about/life-issues/](http://www.peerconnect.org.au/stuff-peer-networks-talk-about/life-issues/)



Your peer network may have other topics and you can write a Quick Guide or make a video on that topic to go on the website. Just go to the Peer Connect contact page and tell us.

As the network gains momentum, the network can encourage members to take turns at doing the different jobs, such as sending out the reminders, lining up the guest speaker, making sure the venue is available, bringing the biscuits, and so on. This helps all members share ownership of the peer network. This strengthens the network stronger and helps it last longer.

## Case study – Julia Farr Youth peer network

A South Australian peer network called Julia Farr Youth (JFY) started like this. There was a word-of-mouth invitation that there was going to be a meeting about issues for young people living with disability. A small number of young people living with disability showed up at the meeting. There was a good conversation, and by the end of the meeting there were still some things people wanted to talk about. So they agreed to meet again to finish the conversation. At the second meeting, the young people there started to talk about how it would be good to hear from other young people living with disability, so they put the word out for people to come to a third meeting. And so on.

The JFY network has now been running for more than ten years, and has created a lot of benefits for its members and for young people living with disability generally. And it started with an invitation to one meeting.

## For more information

The **Department of Human Services – Victoria, Australia Peer Support Guide** explains what peer support is and provides ideas about how to do it.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/peer-support-guide>



**The Centre of Excellence Peer Support – Mental Health** has great Peer Support resources. See the document about setting up a peer support group here:

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



## Checklist for starting a peer network

- Think about why you are starting a peer network  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Think what people might get from the network  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Think about how you can get low or no cost resources  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Think about how the group is welcoming and accessible for all  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Think about a venue  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Think about the invitation to the first meeting  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Hopefully, this section has given you some useful ideas about setting up a peer network. We have used the green bead to represent this first stage of a peer network. It is seen as the first connecting thread: the bringing of people together.**

In the next sections we look at some of the highs and lows that a network can go through and how the network might respond to these.



# YOU HAVE A PEER NETWORK, AND WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IT STRONGER

**Starting a peer network can often result in fantastic energy in the network: people are showing up regularly, they are sharing tasks, they are making good connections with each other, they are learning things.**

Even with these benefits, there can come a time when the peer network loses its momentum. Just like the weather or your favourite sports team, a peer network can go through highs and lows. We hope there are as many highs as possible, but there can also be times when a peer network feels low. It might lose energy, members might drop off and it simply feels like too much hard work, not like fun at all.

When this happens, there are things the peer network can do, to either help the network refresh itself, or to bring the network to a good finish.

This brings us to the next bead in our thread; going back and thinking about why the peer network is there.

*While the experiences might be different there was always a connecting thread. It's always coming back to finding what we have in common.*

**Cath Mahony CDAH**

[www.teamup.org.au/resources/](http://www.teamup.org.au/resources/)

