STARTING PEER NETWORKS

Among people living in group homes, boarding houses and similar types of accommodation

Peer Connect

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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WELCOME

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Welcome to this workbook. It has been created by people running peer networks or organisations around Australia.

This workbook has been designed for:

1. People who are interested in setting up a peer network for people living in group homes, boarding houses or other congregate living spaces

2. People already involved in peer networks for people living in group homes, boarding houses or other congregate living spaces, looking for ways to keep their peer network active.

The workbook is a companion piece to the **Strong Peer Networks: Connecting The Beads Together** workbook.

It is not a recipe book; it is a guide to help you get started, and to help you think through what you might need to start a peer network, and what some of the barriers or challenges might be.

This document provides hints and tips to connecting into people living in group homes, boarding houses or other congregate living spaces.

With these thoughts in mind, and to help you find your way around, this workbook is organised into three parts:

1. Starting a peer network

2. Checking your peer network's purpose

3. Responding to tricky situations.

THIS IS A START...

Arguably there is less experience of peer networks for people living in places like group homes and supported residential facilities compared to the development of peer networks in other areas, especially for people who have been identified as somehow 'hard-to-reach'.

Because of that, this workbook has much less of a connected storyline compared to the main peer networks workbook in this series. We have tried to capture some insights and ideas that we hope can be a useful resource to people involved in developing networks for people living in these types of accommodation. Therefore, we hope that you the reader can see this as a 'living document' that can be updated and developed further as new experiences emerge.

If you have any information or ideas that can help improve this workbook, please contact us at Peer Connect on **admin@purpleorange.org.au** or call **08 8373 8333.**
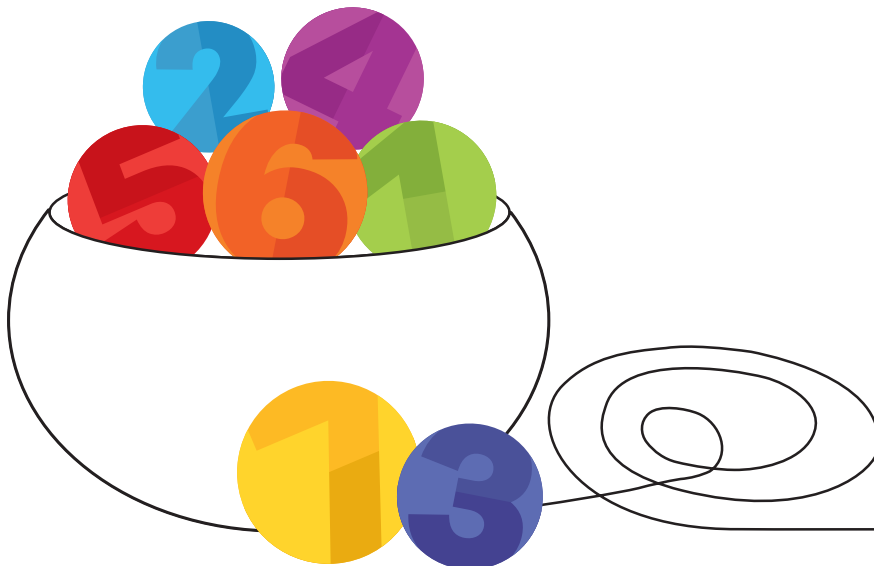
STRINGING THE BEADS TOGETHER

The Peer Connect website currently has lots of QuickGuides on setting up and running peer networks. These are stored as a browsable library resource. The challenge is that these QuickGuides are like the beads sitting in a bowl – you have to rummage through the bowl to find the one you want!

To resolve this, we built a workbook, ***Strong Peer Networks: Connecting The Beads Together,*** that takes the reader through the life cycle of peer networks.

However, we recognise that starting peer networks for people in group homes and boarding houses is a more complex and difficult undertaking. This is for a number of reasons, including:

1. Group homes and boarding houses are known as 'closed systems', where their daily routines don't bring their residents into natural daily contact with people in the neighbourhood. Because of this, it can be much harder to communicate with and connect to people living in these settings

2. Residents in group homes and boarding houses will include people who might be regarded as the most vulnerable within the disability community, and who may carry a great many wounds from their life and service experiences. These experiences may have resulted in very low self-esteem, suppressed capacity, and very low personal networks, if any. Because of this, they may be uninterested in, or ambivalent about, peer networks, even though peer support networks can help with these issues.

Because of these circumstances, the primary and ongoing challenge is how to support people to get along to a peer network or otherwise to connect to its benefits.

This workbook therefore focuses on the first part of the life cycle of peer support networks, exploring ways to navigate the difficult task of connecting to people and increasing the chances of them attending a peer network event.

Just like the main workbook, **Strong Peer Networks: Connecting The Beads Together,** this workbook arranges beads of knowledge into a string, making it easier to move from one to the next. But this workbook mainly focuses on two beads at the front end of the life cycle of the peer network, because that's where the facilitator's energy may need to be focused for a long time, and a third bead: responding to tricky situations.

Three beads are covered:

1.   Starting a peer network

2.   Checking your peer network's purpose

3.   Responding to tricky situations.

Where a peer network for people living in group homes or boarding houses develops stronger momentum and identity, the other beads in the main workbook may then be more relevant.