

Peer support networks: What to do when a key organising member is no longer part of the network

Introduction

Networks rely on key people who 'hold the centre' for the network, and get the work done. This Quick Guide will help you think about what to do when a key organising member is no longer part of the network.

Let's make it happen

Honour the person's contribution

Things to think about:

- Honouring the contribution of the person who has left. And make sure you include them if possible in some kind of 'thank you' or celebration of their contribution. This will demonstrate to both the person and the group that contributions are considered valuable in the network
- Capturing the knowledge the person holds, and the methods they used in holding a key position in the network. You could ask them to tell the story of the network from their perspective, ask them to talk about how they went about making their contribution, important lessons they have learned and so on. You could also ask them to mentor someone else
- Asking them to share any material, documents, contacts, photos etc they may have that the group could use, or are part of the network's archive

Opportunity knocks

It is important that you, and the group, views the loss as an opportunity, not a devastating blow, for the network. What is possible now the person has left that wasn't possible before?

Think together about this. Some ideas:

- The person may have always filled a role that another group member can now step into - building their capacity and confidence
- A new key person from outside the group may now be available to step in
- Changes to communication, facilitation style, or group guidelines and activities may now be possible - people might even enjoy these changes!
- Sharing the work. A more collaborative approach may now be possible. Often key people do a lot of work, and this can now be shared amongst people who feel they can't do it all, but can take up some parts of the person's activities and tasks.
- Review the tasks and activities the person undertook - are they all needed? Perhaps some of this work isn't necessary. There may be an opportunity to do less for the same results
- Review the tasks and activities the person undertook and see if they can be completed in another way. Can technology help? The person may have always caught up with people in person - would an email work just as well? Take the opportunity to streamline some of the tasks and activities of the network

- Be positive. As noted, this is a chance to see opportunity instead of disaster, and for people to shift. Thinking positively about what is now possible can energise the group and increase commitment and sharing of the work of the group

Where you can find more information

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

See Quick Guide: Sharing the work around: how to get more network members involved in organising the peer network meetings

See Quick Guide: Harvesting the gold: sharing stories

See Quick Guide: Recruiting additional members to keep the network fresh

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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