



# WHY PEER NETWORKS ARE IMPORTANT

## What is a peer network?

**A peer network is where young people with similar experiences or circumstances come together as equals, to provide support for one another. A peer network presents an opportunity and safe space for young people to offer informal support to their like-minded peers.**

## Peer power is a thing

**Young people can benefit from connecting with others, especially those they see as going through similar events and issues. Peer support usually comes from forming relationships and trust between individuals, the development of a common purpose or focus, and a sense of solidarity. It can be informal, taking many forms, such as face-to-face meetings or online.**

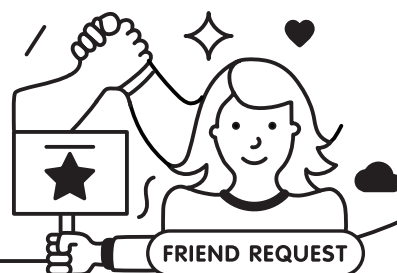
Peer support is becoming increasingly important because it acknowledges and utilises the power of lived experience. This reaps many benefits, for both individuals and the wider community. People become more confident, capable and informed. The impact of this goes beyond, to their lives outside of the peer group. It doesn't replace "experts" or professionals but it is a way of achieving positive outcomes.

In particular, peer networks are seen to provide a safe space for young people to be free from judgement, misunderstanding or formal authority.

Supportive peer networks also increase social connectedness, creating a sense of belonging.

The **Centre for Adolescent Health's Paying Attention to Self (PATS) Programme Guide 2006** is clear about the importance of peer networks:

*"Peer support programs are based on the premise that bringing young people together in a group format can reduce feelings of isolation, provide an opportunity to meet new people and establish friendships. They assist young people to be aware that there are people their own age with similar experiences and issues. It is hoped that this awareness increases the sense of belonging and social connectedness."*<sup>1</sup>



## Paying it forward

**A key benefit people get from a peer network is that each member is giving and receiving help from others.**

Peer support has the potential to be mutually beneficial for all parties involved. A member of the peer network gets support from the group, but it is also likely that, at some point, they will assist another member. This will boost their own confidence as they have valuable experiences to share, helping another person along.

## Partners in policy, and a framework for feedback

**Another important gain is that peer networks represent a powerful channel for information and feedback about emerging policy and practice.**

Through peer networks, young people come to understand that their opinions and voices matter and can influence decision-makers directly. Peer networks will succeed if they “recognise and harness the passion, expertise and potential that young people have to improve the lives of others and society more broadly.”<sup>2</sup>

## The importance of resources and supports

**While much of the energy of peer networks is generated and held within each peer network’s membership, youth peer networks do need access to resources and supports. Included amongst these are peer-led community agencies, who provide a key role in assisting peer networks to emerge, stay focused and deliver value to their members.**

*“Young people interact less with their parents and other adults and move more toward their peer group during adolescence and teens, meaning that information provided by their peers will seem far more relevant and potentially more credible than that provided by adults including parents.”*

<http://mypeer.org.au/planning/what-are-peer-based-programs/benefits/peers-have-credibility/>



Go to the  
link wherever you  
see this symbol



**The first bead is on the string, and you have given some thought about why the peer movement is important and significant for young people.**

The next stage is to think about how you will start a youth peer network and how to get people along to the first meeting. We look at this next.