Setting up and Running a Peer Support Group

A self-paced learning workbook to be used together with three videos

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This Workbook

“Setting up and Running a Peer Support Group”

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**Produced by**

Diversity and Disability Alliance

**Funded by**

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**About DDAlliance**

Diversity and Disability Alliance is a user-led disability support organisation, run by and for people with disability from diverse backgrounds with the support of families and allies. We are an independent, collective voice committed to diversity and full inclusion.  
  
Diversity and Disability Alliance strives for an inclusive, diverse and just society where people with disability have voice, choice and control over our lives.

# Overview

## Setting up and running a Peer Support Group

This workbook is to be used together with three videos produced to help people set up and run a peer support group – anywhere, anytime.

You can access all videos and all workbooks for free on the peer training section of this website: [www.ddalliance.org.au](http://www.ddalliance.org.au).

There are three videos:

1. Setting up a group
2. The first meeting
3. Keeping the group going

We have also added another short section, not in the video:

1. Closing down the group

## How to use this workbook

This workbook is designed to be used together with the videos. We suggest you use this workbook in the following way:

1. Watch each video first
2. Watch each video again, but pause it at the end of each section and read more about the section in this workbook

Of course, you can use this workbook and the videos in whichever way works for you. You can use it to learn before you do anything, or as a guide on how to do things as you are doing them. You can use this workbook by yourself or together with other people.

## At the end of this workbook you also find:

Transcripts of all the videos

Links to more resources

# 1. Setting up a Group

The first video is about all the things you might like to think about before you have the first meeting of a new peer support group.

There are 6 sections. These are:

* 1. Why Set Up a Peer Support Group
  2. Finding People
  3. Organising a Peer Support Meeting
  4. Finding Allies
  5. Making it Accessible
  6. A close up of a sign

     Description automatically generatedAce’s Tips

## Enjoy the video – Setting Up a Group

It will take about 10 minutes to watch the first video.

If you can, watch it the whole way through the first time round and then watch it again, stopping at the end of each section.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 1.1: Why Set Up a Peer Support Group

**Play the video again from 1.26 mins- 2.80 mins (time signature)**

Ace says: *“For me peer support is a group of experts coming together. It’s a lifestyle. … It’s being equal. It’s that mutual respect.”*

George says: *“Being valued is one of the biggest issues.”*

If you like being with people who:

* value who you are,
* value you for your experiences,
* listen to you,
* treat you as an equal

You might then think about setting up a peer support group.



You might want to ask exactly that question at your first meeting: “Why do we want a peer support group?”   
It’s a great way to find out why people came and will be a good start to finding the purpose of the group.

## Section 1.2: Finding People

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**Play the video again from 2.81 mins- 4.03 mins.**

This seems to be one of the biggest issues people talk about that stops them from setting up a group: “Where will I find other people?”

Ace, Julie and George have some great tips including:

* Be clear on the purpose (why you want a peer group),
* Talk, talk, talk – word of mouth is powerful,
* Start with one other person

Finding one other person is a start and you two can take it from there. Remember you are equals, so work with each other’s strengths. Look at what you are each good at and take it from there.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 1.3: Organising a Peer Support meeting

**Play the video again from 4.04 mins- 5.21 mins.**

Ace sums it all up: *“Peer support can happen anywhere, anytime.”*

Meeting another person in a supermarket, starting to talk and then making time for a coffee the following week can be the beginning of a Peer Support group. That group can be the two of you meeting every week or it can become 20 peers getting together once a month in a community centre.

As Julie says: *“A peer support group doesn’t have to be something formal, it could be a group of people getting together in the park doing some exercises.”*

George reminds us that *“setting up a peer support group doesn't take much resources.”* A room in the library, the quiet back room of a coffee shop, or the park. These are all places where peer support groups can meet and work out what we want to do.

At the beginning, organising a peer support group is really as big as you want it to be. If you have big plans for a big meeting it takes some organising (such as where, when, how to get the word out, etc.), but if you are starting up and you don't know how big it is, just remember:

* Peer support can happen anytime, anywhere
* 2 people can be a peer support group

## Section 1.4: Finding Allies

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**Play the video again from 5.22 mins- 6.48 mins.**

An ally is a supporter. An ally can be a person or an organisation. An ally stands by your side, they share your values and your purpose. They support you. Most importantly: an ally does not take over.

Good allies are great. They have resources and can help you with making your peer group work. Allies can assist you with:

* helping you to get to a venue,
* baking a cake,
* helping make fliers and handing them out at an event,
* giving you a room for free,
* finding some funding so you can make your group more accessible

Who can be an ally?

Anyone and any organisation can be an ally, as long as they are helpful, on your side and do not take over. Peers have found allies among the following people and organisations:

* Family members and friends
* Support workers
* Your local mosque, synagogue, church or other faith-based community
* Your local council (the local library, a councillor, a council worker)
* Community organisations (neighbourhood centres, disability services, other community services)

Get clear on what you are asking for before you approach a person or organisation. It’s much easier for people to say ‘yes’ when they know what is being asked of them.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 1.5: Making it Accessible

**Play the video again from 6.49 mins- 8.17 mins.**

**If you are setting up a group and you want people with different support requirements from diverse communities to take part, you might have to do a bit of extra thinking and doing to make sure your group is accessible.**

**When we say accessible, we don't just mean a ramp or an accessible toilet. What can you do to make sure people with vision impairment can take part? What about people who speak a language other than English? What about other supports?**

**Julie, George and Ace talk about:**

* **Finding libraries because many of them are accessible and have quiet rooms**
* **Utilising the person’s NDIS package (for interpreters, or support workers who speak the person’s language or who can support someone to take part)**
* **Assisting people to get to the venue**
* **Making the room welcoming**
* **Having online meetings**

**Ask people what they need to take part in the peer support group.**

**Don't make assumptions.**

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 1.6: Ace’s tips

**Play the video again from 8.17mins to the end.**

This video ends with some tips from Ace.

Below is a check list for you to use based on Ace’s tips and some of the ideas already mentioned.



Checklist for: Setting up a Peer Support Group

Be clear on the purpose – why?

Find one person first – then, together, you can find more

Remember word of mouth (it’s great advertising)

Look out for allies

Ask people what they need to attend a peer support group – brainstorm solutions to barriers together

Find common ground

Find solutions together

Build on everyone’s strengths – everyone can contribute to make this happen

Remember, peers are the experts in our own lives and peer support can happen anywhere, anytime.

# 2. The First Meeting

The first meeting is always the one that’s the most nerve-racking. Will people come, will it work, what have we forgotten?

There are 8 sections to help you have a great first meeting. These are:

* 1. Acknowledgement of Country
  2. Welcoming People
  3. Peer Leadership
  4. Respecting Cultural Differences
  5. Making Group Rules
  6. Finding Topics
  7. Sharing Knowledge and Experiences
  8. A close up of a sign

     Description automatically generated Finishing the First Meeting

## Enjoy the video – The First Meeting

It will take about 9 mins to watch the whole video.

Watch the whole video, then watch it again, stopping at the end of each section.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.1: Acknowledgement of Country

**Play the video again from 0.36 mins to 1.19 mins**

Start every meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country. This not only gets everyone clear that the land the group meets on is Aboriginal land, owned by the local Aboriginal people, but it starts the group off with showing respect and gratitude to others.

Anyone from the group can do an Acknowledgement of Country. If there is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in the room, they might like to do either an Acknowledgement or even a Welcome to Country. Make sure you ask them before you start (not in front of everyone!)

It can be a formal acknowledgement such as:

*“I would like to acknowledge xx (insert the name of local people), the Traditional Owners of this land and pay my respect to Elders past, present and future. I want us to remember that this was, is and always will be Aboriginal land.”*

Or you could say something like this:

*“I want us to remember that Aboriginal people have lived here for a very, very long time. This is their land. I want to say thank you for having us on your land.”*

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.2: Welcoming People

**Play the video again from 1.20 mins to 2.03 mins**

Making people feel welcome is really important, especially at the first meeting. Think about it, there are people who find talking in front of even a small group really scary. Others love it. Some people are private, while others might share and share. Everyone is different.

Julie’s tips are useful here:

* + - Make sure everyone is welcome
    - Maybe among the group of people organising the first meeting, there is someone who is a fantastic welcomer
    - Be there to support each other

*“Peer groups are there to support each other. So it’s not just the responsibility of the one person, but your whole group, to make someone feel welcome.”*

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.3: Peer Leadership

**Play the video again from 2.04 mins to 3.03 mins**

**If you are someone who normally takes on and feels responsible for everything, this is a really important point. Once you understand how peer leadership works, you will feel more comfortable as you set up the peer support group.**

**Ace says:**

***“****In the peer movement we don’t really use the word leader, there isn’t really a leader. It’s more about the shared responsibility that we all have in making the peer support meeting work. There is no boss, it’s about what each of us brings to the table, it’s all important.”*

**So remember, just because this peer support group was your idea doesn't mean you are the boss, nor does it mean you are responsible for everything.**

**Peer leadership means:**

* **Sharing all the responsibility**
* **Everyone is an expert. We all have different strengths, it’s about sharing them**
* **Sharing the decision making**

**Ace also talks about the importance of accountability. Peers are accountable to each other and hold each other to account. Accountability is important because it builds trust.**

**Being accountable means:**

* Be your word – make your words mean something
* Do what you say – build trust in yourself and have others trust you
* Hold others to their word – build trust in each other and build a movement

**If everyone takes on a role, a task, something they will do at the meeting or for the next meeting and we all trust the person that they will do it (and if they need support, we will support them) – that’s peer support in action.**

**Peer leadership means we hold each other to account and help each other to succeed.**

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.4: Respecting Cultural Differences

**Play the video again from 3.04 mins to 3.50 mins**

**In Australia, people with disability and our families come from over 200 different countries. We speak many different languages, and we have different beliefs and ways of doing things.**

**As a peer support group we must learn from each other and learn to understand and respect our similarities and differences. To make peer support welcoming of people from diverse cultures, we must think about all of those things and ask people what we can do to make everyone feel welcome.**

**Abbey sums it up by saying:**

*“We invite people from different cultures. We are all united, but everyone has their own situation. We have respect for everyone’s cultures, for religion, because all of us are peers, we are equal.”*

**Abby also says rather than ignoring that we are all different, we should get to know each other and learn about our differences:**

*“At the first meeting we have to sit together and welcome all people and work with each other.”*

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.5: Making Group Rules

**Play the video again from 3.51 mins to 4.52 mins**

*“What we like to do when we start a new group is to talk through what they think are the rules that will help make the group work.”* says Julie.

Rules might sound a bit strict; you might call them ‘agreements’, or ‘how we are together’. It doesn’t matter what you call them. They are simply a list of ways of doing things that everyone can agree to and they help run things smoothly.

Group rules are really important, if later on you have some conflict or someone keeps breaking a rule. You can get back to those rules any time you like. Some groups go back to the rules every meeting, other groups put them on the wall and read them out now and then. Whatever you do, it is recommended that you make some rules at the beginning and you go back and check in on them now and then. Change them if they don't work for the group.

Here are some of the more common rules you might already know about:

* We start together on time and finish on time
* We support each other
* We hold each other to account
* We are respectful of each other
* We are community – we look out for each other

And here are some others you might like to think about:

* Taking turns to talk
* Checking in with each other at the end of the meeting
* Confidentiality

One of the things George and Julie talk about is quite important:

*“You can’t hide behind the disability. Because everyone in our peer group tends to have a disability. So people are more accountable towards each other, rather than putting it off because: “ah, poor me, I have a disability”*

*“And that just means that we value what we’re saying to each other.”*

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 2.6: Finding Topics

**Play the video again from 4.52 mins to 6.07 mins**

Julie says: “It’s a good idea to get with your group and ask them what they want. What topics do they want discussed?”

The easy answer to “How do we find topics?” is, ask the group.

*“We always open up the day with what’s been a good thing for us. What can we help each other with? Then a discussion on the topic. It kinda flows.”* says George.

Ace reminds us of the power of the group: *“It’s really funny because when you are organising these meetings you kind of have an idea of kind of what you want it to look like: so this first meeting we will do this and then the next meeting we will do that. But really what needs to be done is: it has to be peer led. It’s about what comes up in the first meeting, what matters to people and kind of developing how we move forward from that.”*

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## Section 2.7: Sharing Knowledge and Experiences

**Play the video again from 6.08 mins to 7.02 mins**

Once you’ve found a topic, you might think about how to talk about it. Outside the peer movement we turn to others: therapists, social workers, government people. There is nothing wrong with that and sometimes peers get together for workshops and events run by them. There is absolutely nothing wrong with it. It’s just NOT peer support.

For us who value our peers and our space, remember the experts are often in the room already!

**Julie reminds us that:**

***“****If you want to get a good speaker, think about the peers that you have. Sometimes the best experts are your peers who have actually lived through it and who really know what they’re talking about, and they can share what they’ve done that really made it work for them.”*

Remember, sometimes your group might want to invite a non-peer or an ally to speak at the peer group meeting. Just make sure that allies respect the space and peers lead the conversations. But remember, peers are the experts in their own lives and we can share and learn from each other first.

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## Section 2.8: Finishing the First Meeting

**Play the video again from 7.03 mins till the end.**

Reflection is the ability to think about something that happened, learn from it and do it better next time.

Our peer support meetings benefit from us reflecting together and making changes based on our needs and what we want to get out of the group. This makes our peer support group better, where you can continue to support your peers.

*“After each meeting it’s really important that peers do some reflection. It’s a way that we can talk about what worked, what didn’t work so well, what we can improve in the future*” says Ace.

George recommends taking 10 minutes before the end of the meeting for reflection time.



Checklist for: The First Meeting

We start every meeting with Acknowledgement of Country

We make sure everyone feels welcome – maybe you can have someone take on the role of welcomer

Peer leadership means we are all leaders – we all share the responsbilities

We are accountable to each other

We learn about and respect our similarities and differences

We make rules together – we stick to them or we change them together

We lead together – we find topics together, we share our knowledge and our experiences

Looking for speakers on a topic – we first look amongst our peers as the experts

We may invite others – but we make sure it is always led by peers

We take time at the end of the meeting to reflect, learn and improve

# 3. Keeping the Group Going

Now you are under way, you may wonder how to keep the group going.

There are 7 sections in this final video. These are:

* 1. Keeping the Group Going
  2. Keeping it Interesting
  3. Feedback and Evaluations
  4. Different People and Situations
  5. Hearing Everyone’s Voices
  6. Finding Funding
  7. Growing the Peer Movement

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## Enjoy the video – Keeping the Group Going

It will take about 10 mins to watch the whole video.

Enjoy. If you can, watch it the whole way through. Then check each one of the sections in more detail.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 3.1: Keeping the Group Going

**Play the video again from beginning to 1.18mins**

Peer support is all about connecting with people. Keeping a group going is about strengthening the connections between the people who are members of the group.

Ace says: *“When somebody doesn’t show up, they are missed. You need to create an environment where everyone is important, everyone is valued. And how do you practise that if somebody doesn’t show up? You follow up, you check in, and it could be just a phone call ‘Hey we missed you, how are things going for you, what’s been happening?”*

Julie says: *“I often find myself asking fellow peer members if they’re going to be at the next peer meeting, and if they’re not, I like to catch up with them in another time.”*

Building connections between the group members is really important. These phone calls and follow-ups don't have to be done by you. They can be done by any peer. You might have a buddy system to make sure nobody falls through the cracks. Everyone can be a buddy to someone else and then together you make sure you are creating a community of peers. A community that cares for each other.

The other thing to do in between the meetings to keep the group going is to do a bit of planning by:

*“making sure the venue is still available, make sure people know the time, the location and then, if we need to invite guests we invite them, give ample time..”*

Again, these jobs can be shared among the different peers.

## A close up of a sign Description automatically generatedSection 3.2: Keeping it Interesting

**Play the video again from 1.19 mins to 2.25 mins**

**Peer groups are no different than any other groups or activities. They are sometimes more popular and sometimes less. That’s absolutely okay and normal.**

**Here are some tips from George, Julie and Ace on what you can do to keep things interesting:**

* *“Whenever the numbers start to go down, I tend to get on the telephone and just have a chat.”*
* *“Sometimes people might be uncomfortable with the person who’s running the peer group or leading the group. So then it might be up to you to have a conversation with that peer who’s running the group about how they can better work with everyone”*
* *“Sometimes people just want to have a chat instead of being there for a topic”*
* *“People’s schedules might change, so then you may have to reconsider the date and time that you meet.”*

One of the things that was not talked about in the video is that sometimes the group has come to an end. We have included a fourth section to this workbook to help guide us all through the process of ending a peer support group.

## Section 3.3: Feedback and Evaluations

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**Play the video again from 2.26 mins to 3.46 mins**

Getting feedback, or even doing formal evaluation, is important in knowing how the group is going, knowing what works and what needs changing.

You could sit down and take some time at the end of a meeting, asking some questions:

* What works well for you with this group?
* What should we do differently?
* What can we do to improve?
* What should we talk about next?
* Does this meeting time and place work?

Sometimes you can think about those questions together in a group, sometimes it’s great to do a confidential evaluation. People are sometimes more likely to speak their mind when it’s confidential.

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## Section 3.4: Different People and Situations

**Play the video again from 3.47 mins to 5.18 mins**

**It’s important to remember everyone is different and reacts to things differently.**

**Some people come to a group and they might not say anything at first.**

**Julie says: *“****Sometimes, they might want to have that social connection but are more comfortable speaking one on one. So it’s up to you as a peer to approach them afterwards and have that conversation with them.”*

George adds: *“Sometimes people are still very shy to bring their stuff out to a group. But gradually you work on it and you chip away at it.”*

**The other thing you might worry about is that someone in the group might start to cry and be upset because of the topic or what is being said. Of course, that can happen.**

**Ace shares from her experience:**

*“If someone cries, ah, there has been some situation when a topic has hit a heartstring. You know what we do is validate what they feel, and you create a space where they are able to feel that sadness or that frustration. Then you work with peers to make sure that person is okay and you have a peer who can actually check in – maybe after the meeting – just to make sure that that person is okay.”*

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## Section 3.5: Hearing Everyone’s Voices

**Play the video again from 5.19 mins to 7.20 mins**

Peer support is all about hearing the voices of peers. Everyone is important. Everyone matters equally. Sometimes we all have to be reminded of that. Peer leadership is the leadership of equals and no one voice is more important than another.

Of course, that sometimes causes problems. In the previous section we talked about people who do not talk. In this section Julie, Ace and George share their tips about people who love to talk too much, people who hog or dominate the space:

* *“What I do is respectfully say ‘we need to be mindful of the timing, that everyone has had a chance to share their experience or share what they know.”*
* *“I like to tell them, you know, there’s a lot to share, so it might be good for us to talk about it through lunch, afterwards.”*
* *“It could also be a matter of putting it back to the group and saying, okay, so and so is really frustrated with this issue but this is what we have got planned for today, what do we want to do? “*

Sometime, lots of people arrive at a group meeting and they all have a lot going on in their lives that they want to share. Julie has a great way of dealing with that:

*“It might be a good idea to let everyone know that they have 10 minutes at the start of the day to go around.”*

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## Section 3.6: Finding Funding

**Play the video again from 7.21 mins to 8.20 mins**

In the first video George said: “*You don't need heaps of resources to run a peer support group.”*

And that’s true. It’s also true that sometimes having a bit of money to run a group can make things easier and can help make things more accessible for people who might have some additional needs (such as needing additional support, or an interpreter, or someone to scribe, or a helper to get to the meetings).

Ace has a few ideas on where to turn to for some extra funding for your group:

* Talk to your local council and your local member/s – they might know of some funding you can access or they themselves might be able to help
* Talk to a community organisation such as a neighbourhood centre or a disability service – they might know of some funding or can provide a venue
* Maybe someone in the group is connected to a company that wants to make a donation
* A close up of a sign

  Description automatically generatedYou might want talk to those people who have an NDIS package on how they can use the funding to attend the meetings

## Section 3.7: Growing the Peer Movement

**Play the video again from 8.21 mins until the end.**

George, Julie and Ace feel that they are part of a peer movement. People with disability and our families, friends and allies coming together everywhere to support each other. We are part of a movement that changes the world into a place where people with disability are welcome and actively taking part.

Ace has got some great tips for actions to keep everyone in the movement, to share and learn from each other and grow together:

*“Make sure that when you make connections that you actually record them and keep them. Maybe create a list and keep adding to the list and that’s how you build the movement.*

*You make sure that people are always in the loop of what’s happening in your peer support group. Always share your information, not just in the meeting ‘cause sometimes people aren’t able to attend a specific meeting.*

*Promoting far and wide, which means developing the flyer and actually sharing it with peers for them to actually hand out and distribute popping it up on local notice boards, you know sharing it with the local library, always having it in your bag just in case the opportunity arises. You never know, you could have a conversation with someone.”*



Checklist for: Keeping the Group Going

Build connections – everyone matters – and follow up

Introduce a buddy system

Spend some time in between meetings organising venue, speakers, follow ups, etc.

Ask questions – What works? What can we do better?

Find a way to get to know the shy people and encourage them to take part

Be okay when someone gets upset – support them and maybe follow up

Find ways to share the time and space equally

If you need money, talk to people in the group or in your community

Remember you might be able to use your NDIS Plan to support you to come to the peer support group

Keep spreading the word about peer support!

# Section 4: Ending the Peer Support Group

This was not covered in the videos, but one of the things that’s important to remember is:

Sometimes it's the right thing to do to end the group. There are loads of reasons why a group might end.

Reasons could include:

* We have done what we said we would do – we achieved our purpose
* Our purpose has changed and we need something else
* The peers have moved on to other things
* New peers are interested in something else

Whatever the reasons for a group to end, all members should agree for it to end.

If there are members who want to keep the group going or run it differently or do something else, there should be talk about how to do that.

But if a group ends, there are a few things to remember.



Checklist for: Ending the Group

Celebrate – make your last meeting a joyous one

Acknowledge what you mean to each other – take time at your last meeting to say great stuff about each other

Note what has changed and what you learned

Celebrate and acknowldge all the people who have contributed lots to the group – ideally everyone has made a contribution

Let other people know the group has ended – you might want to direct them to another group if there is one

If you have any leftover money, decide what to do with it as a group, or if it was given for a specific purpose maybe give it back

If you are a formal group (like an association), make sure you do all the paperwork that’s needed for closing down the association

# Attachments

More info

There is so much information out there and much of it seems to be hidden somewhere deep in the internet. If you want more information about peer support, currently (June 2018) the best place to start is here:

<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/>

Transcripts of the videos

**Video1: Setting up a Peer Support Group**

George: Hi my name is George Ayoub. I’m a fairly outgoing person who has been involved for a long time in the peer group session, especially in DDA, doing a lot of the facilitation and training but, most of all, enjoying my involvement in the community.

Julie: I am Julie Duong and I’ve been involved in peer support for over the past year now. I have been going to a peer support group and also helping DDA facilitate and run and bring together the communities to create peer support groups.

George: We actually met at a Blacktown peer group. It was quite a good day and we all just became friends and we hit it off real quick.

Julie: Yep and that’s how I meet George and he introduced me to DDA and we’ve been working pretty much ever since.

George: Aah, its good working with you Jules

Ace: My name is Ace I am a project coordinator with Diversity and Disability Alliance, and we are working towards building the peer movement all across NSW.

Ace: Peer support is about building community. We’ve all got something that we can contribute, being an active and important accountable member of a group.

**1.26 Why set up a Peer Support Group?**

Ace: I didn’t have much to do with peer support before. It’s a great thing to be part of because it’s a lifestyle really, if you think about it. You know that concept about being a peer, it’s being equal, it’s that mutual respect for each other’s experiences; what each other knows and having the environment to share that. I think that is so important, feeling that value as a person with disability.

George: Being valued. One of the biggest issues I find. People’s voices may be heard but never sort of acknowledged and never valued. Coming together with peers, it’s a good place to start.

Ace: For me peer support is a group of experts coming together. It’s about the people who are actually living, living the policies, living the system, living the programs. That’s gold.

**2.81 Finding people**

Julie: Peer support can happen anywhere, anytime. The best way to find people is just through word of mouth. You’ve got friends, you’ve got family members. They know people, so your network just doubles. Another good way to bring people into a peer group is to find someone who is really connected in the community.

George: I have just developed a large network of people and um, when you tell them about this they just come along.

Julie: I think it’s important when you have a purpose so that people know what they’re coming towards. So if you have a purpose you can share it with organisations, who might then know other people

Julie: I actually know of a peer group run somewhere else in Sydney and they usually only have two members come. And that’s okay. Having two is the start of building a movement, a peer movement.

Ace: To be part of a peer support group: really it takes just 2 people. You find someone who you can work with you to make a start, working off each other’s strengths and looking at what each can contribute. Sometimes I can do facilitation, or I am great at developing flyers, really good at using the computer and then from that you kind of look for other people who might be interested to be part of the group and then you just build from there.

**4.04 Organising a Peer Support Meeting**

George: The beautiful thing about our peer group Julie is that we don’t need much resources. What we need is a venue: somewhere safe, quiet, where we can talk amongst each other.

George: Having a safe space so a place where you know it’s somewhere comfortable, for people to share, to talk, is really important.

Julie: You have to do a bit of planning. You have to think about when you want to meet. Is it going to be every fortnight? Every month? And where it’s going to be. People like to know so that they can plan in advance.

Julie: And the beauty about peer support is that it doesn’t have to be in a formal structure. There is a peer support group that actually meets in the park and their purpose is to meet for mental health. Wellbeing. So they get together, they meet in the park and they get to do fitness and work out and that brings them together

George: That’s awesome. It just takes Peer Support to the environment that people are comfortable in. And I think that is so critical.

**5.22 Finding Allies**

Julie: And if you need to grow then you can start approaching your local council for venues or clubs.

George: I find libraries are great places. For one of the peer groups, the local council is very supportive, and they’ve given us free space at a library.

Ace: In actually organising a meeting or peer support group, allies play a really important part. But it’s important that you actually find good allies – allies who have values that are similar to the principles and values that you want to develop in your peer support group.

We are looking for people in organisations who understand the value of peer support and who respect the space that peers create but want to provide whatever support is required for that to happen.

Things like providing a free venue, providing catering. They can also help promote the peer support group. And you also have to be clear on what support you will be wanting from your connections from your allies.

**6.49 Making it accessible**

Julie: I think it’s really important to consider how to make the peer groups accessible to people with different needs. Often times we might ask someone what their needs actually are – if we can help them by getting from the train station, to going to the room that we’re meeting at, to moving chairs around.

Another thing about making it accessible is that it can actually be online or over the phone. You can provide peer support through chatting to someone, through WhatsApp or Facebook

George: I think , It’s really important to have easy English, so people can fully participate in the discussion. If we need to have an interpreter, we sometimes encourage that person to bring a friend who speaks English and can interpret on their behalf. If we have a number. We sometimes try to organise an interpreter. But the interpreter can be a bit costly, so we tend to more often get people in the community who are involved anyway.

Julie: Another way to think about it creatively is to use your NDIS plans to be able to, perhaps, find support workers who speak another language or the language that you need them to interpret.

**8.18 Ace’s tips**

Ace: So some tips for starting a peer support group: be clear on the purpose of the group; find people to start the group with you; meet, chat, do what you have to do. Peer support can happen anywhere anytime.

Find the common ground that you have – the NDIS is obviously an issue that we are all dealing with. Sharing information on issues and topics that matter, finding solutions together, actually getting people together to talk about a specific issue is a great way to start conversations and to start peer support or to start the group.

Within peer support people with disability are the experts and are valued for what we know and that's how it should be.

**Video 2: The first Meeting**

Grace: I am involved in Peer support. When I help people I feel much more happier and much more confident

Pauline: I go to a peer group because I feel like it’s a way for me to give back. People sharing with each other I think is the most important thing about peer support.

Montaha: It has opened the door for me. I have more experiences. I have more self-esteem. This is my family; I am part of it. It gives me good feeling that I am part of it.

0:36 **Acknowledgement** **of Country**

Julie: When we get together in a room we really like to sit in the circle, because everybody is an equal and we can all see each other. And we always start the day with an acknowledgement of country.

Sophon: I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people who are the traditional custodians of this land, of the Darug Nation. We also pay our respect to the elders both past and present of the Nation Darug; Aboriginal Australia

1:20 **Welcoming people**

Julie: We welcome new people if we haven’t seen their faces before, we introduce ourselves. We ask them how they heard about it, and we just talk to them. Just have a chat.

Ace: There is always someone in the group who is a really great welcomer. Who has the knack for bringing people in and actually making peers who are new feel comfortable? So, you find that specific person and they can actually be: the welcomer of the group.

Julie: And remember that peer groups are there to support each other. So it’s not just the responsibility of the one person, but your whole group, to make someone feel welcomed.

**2.04 Peer leadership**

Ace: In the peer movement we don’t really use the word leader, there isn’t really a leader. It’s more about the shared responsibility that we all have in making the peer support meeting work. There is no boss, it’s about what each of us brings to the table, it’s all important.

George: I know when we first met, we all encouraged each other to speak. And that made me feel comfortable that everybody ‘s at the same level. At the same playing field.

Ace: What is great about a peer support group is that it’s peer lead and that we are equal. What that means is we all need to be accountable; we need to be committed to make this work. So that’s about making sure each person is part of the planning.

**3.04 Respecting cultural differences**

Abby: To set up peer support we have to think about language, their cultures and traditions and also how to get to these people and to know more about them what they really like and what their needs are.

In the first meeting we have to sit together and welcome all people and talk with each other. We invite people from different cultures… we are all united, but everyone has their own unique situation. We have respect for everyone’s cultures, for religion, because all of us are peers. Here we are equal.

**3.51 Making group rules**

Julie: What we like to do when we start a new group is to talk through what they think are rules that will help make the group work.

George: You know, part of creating a safe place is having confidentiality. So wherever the peer meeting is taking place, if you ensure there is confidentiality there, people feel safe and comfortable to open up and talk more freely.

Julie: We might want to talk about what kind of values we have, so think about things such as respect, and…

George: …and accountability

Julie: Yep

George: You can’t hide behind the disability. Because everyone in our peer group tends to have a disability. So people are more accountable towards each other, rather than putting it off because, “AAh poor me I have a disability”

Julie: And that just means that we value what we say to each other.

George: Yeah, we do.

**4.53 Finding topics**

Ace: It’s really funny because when you are organising these meetings you kind of have an idea of what you want it to look like, so this first meeting we will do this and then the next meeting we will do that, but really what needs to be done is it has to be peer lead. It’s about what seeing what comes up in the first meeting, what matters to people and kind of developing how we move forward from that

George: We always open up the day with what’s been a good thing for us, what can we help each other with and then a discussion on the topic and it kinda flows.

Julie: It’s a good idea to get with your group and ask them what they want to see? What topics do they want discussed?

George: Hey, you know Julie how we get to a topic that prior month and sometimes we pick that topic and we run with that for the following month theme

Julie: Yeah and sometimes that comes about when someone has an issue

George: Yeah

Julie: And we do a follow up topic

George: That’s like the time you brought the person over who self-manages, and she talked about her experiences.

**6:08 Sharing knowledge and experiences**

Julie: Last year I was having some major issues with my NDIS plan. Basically, they cut my funding in half, and just through the support of my peers encouraging me to push for a review it really helped because I otherwise would have just accepted it.

George: That reminds me of that term we have amongst ourselves as peers. And that is: we get it, we get it, we really get it. And it’s because we knew what you are going through. I felt good to be a part of that group, you know.

Julie: If you want to get a good speaker, think about the peers that you have. Sometimes the best experts are your peers who have actually lived through it and who really know what they’re talking about, and they can share what they’ve done that really made it work for them.

**7.03 Finishing the first meeting**

Ace: After each meeting its really important that peers do some refection, it’s a way that we can talk about what worked, what didn’t work so well, what we can improve in the future.

George: So, Julie before we finish, what I like to do, with about 10 minutes to go is, I like to do, like a checkout where we see how everybody’s feeling.

Julie: Another idea is to create a Facebook group so we can still stay in touch with each other. You can create a flyer so they can have that information on where to meet, but it is important also to get people to say that they want to come to the next meeting. So, you know who to expect and you can hold them accountable.

George: What I like in the peer space, what I love about it is we’ve always got somebody visit who is a peer doing the talking and doing the leading. So, at all stages we are the experts in our lives, and we value that credibility. So, our voices actually mean something. It makes us feel good. Makes us feel really valued and feeling really good about ourselves. I think that’s why we leave every Peer café happy, because we’ve just felt valued.

**Video 3: Keeping the group going**

Ace: Peer support is all about building connections. And when somebody doesn’t show up, well they are missed. You need to create an environment where everyone is important, everyone is valued – and how do you practise that: I f somebody doesn’t show up? You follow up, you check in, and it could be just a phone call “Hey we missed you, how are things going for you, what’s been happening?”

George: Sometimes I like to do a personal phone call, just to sort of, connect with people, just to make sure that they’re okay, you know, to see if they’re gonna come again, engage with them to see what their responses were.

Julie: I often find myself asking fellow peer members if they’re going to be at the next peer meeting, and if they’re not, I like to catch up with them in another time.

George: What I tend to do a lot of is the planning before the meeting – and that’s making sure the venue is still available, make sure people know the time, the location and then, if we need to invite guests we invite them, give ample time, so… there’s a fair bit of planning.

**1.19 Keeping it interesting**

George: Whenever the numbers start to go down, I tend to like get on the telephone and just have a chat, with everybody. See where they are. And then sort of go from there.

Julie: Sometimes people might be uncomfortable with the person who’s running the peer group or leading the group. So, then it might be up to you to have a conversation with that peer who’s running the group about how they can better work with everyone.

Or it might be that sometimes people just want to have a chat instead of being there for a topic. So, you might want to plan different events in between or change up your meeting.

Other times people’s schedules might change, so then you may have to reconsider the date and time that you meet.

Another way to engage people again is maybe to change up your meeting place.

So last week we actually went to the disability expo. And that was a little different to what we normally do

**2.26 Feedback and evaluations**

Julie: Sometimes it is important as well to check in on how you’re going with your peer groups. How are your members feeling? It might then be a matter of having some questions for them to answer every few months, just to see how they’re enjoying it. What could be improved? And it might be a good idea to get someone else who is not the facilitator, or leading the group, and get someone else to ask others about that.

George: It is really important to get that feedback. That feedback leads us towards, I suppose, improving and you know things can become stale otherwise.

George: What I like to do when I’m giving feedback is, yeah, I don’t like to be really blunt, I like to be a bit more tactful. I just make some suggestions for people to have a think about. Sometimes, because you’re so involved you don’t see yourself how you’re performing and giving you that feedback it really helps you better yourself and better what you’re doing.

Julie: What comes out of those surveys and the feedback is really important. Just remember, that feedback is a gift.

George: From the heart.

Julie: Yeah.

**3.47 Different people and situations**

Julie: Everyone who comes to a peer group is different. Sometimes people will come and they won’t say anything and that’s okay. Sometimes, they might want to have that social connection but are more comfortable speaking one on one. So it’s up to you as a peer to approach them afterwards and have that conversation with them.

George: I don’t know about you, but sometimes um, in a real gentle manner, if you probe people they sometimes share a bit of their story and that’s a really good way to engage people.

Ace: If someone cries there has been some situation when a topic has hit a heart string or someone has cried. What we do is validate what they feel, and you create a space where they are able to feel that sadness or that frustration. Then you work with peers to make sure that person is okay and you have a peer who can actually check in - maybe after the meeting – just to make sure that that person is okay.

George: Sometimes people are still very shy to bring their stuff out in a group. But gradually you work on it and you chip away at it as they develop confidence.

**5.19 Hearing everyone’s voices**

Ace: In a peer support group, it’s really important that we all get the opportunity to have our say, to feel that we are heard. There are people who sometimes, who you know. the time of the meeting: space hoggers.

George: Ah, that’s an interesting one, when somebody’s hogging the space. What do you do Jules?

Julie: Yeah, I like to slip in that moment where tell them there’s a lot to share, so it might be good for us to talk about it through lunch, afterwards, because we usually meet for lunch after our meetings, so it’s a more relaxed environment.

It might be a good idea to let everyone know that they have 10 minutes at the start of the day to go around the table. So there is an opportunity for them to speak and just depending on how many people you get you just have to set a bit of a time around that.

Ace: What you do is respectfully say ‘we need to be mindful of the timing, that everyone has had a chance to share their experience or share what they know’. Hopefully that works. Sometimes it doesn’t and it could be a matter of talking to that person, bringing them aside and just talking to them about, you know… you need to be mindful sometimes, you know you need to let others have the opportunity to speak. It could also be a matter of putting it back to the group and saying, okay, so and so is really frustrated with this issue but this is what we have got planned for today, what do we want to do? That’s what peer learning is all about, it’s about us owning the space, us owning the time and just respecting each other’s time as well as creating that environment where we are moving forward somehow.

**7.21 Finding Funding**

Ace: Sometimes peers may come who might have additional support needs that maybe the group can’t cover, so that’s where additional support might be required or we might look for other avenues for support, for money, for funding.

You can always look for projects that are around that support the development of peer support groups. Local councils may be able to support you, so having a meeting with your local MP could be useful in getting some funding behind your peer support group. There is also the corporate sector, corporate social responsibilities.

Another way you can actually participate is maybe by looking into your NDIS package. So you can actually use your NDIS package to participate in peer support groups and peer support meetings.

**8.21 Growing the peer movement**

Ace: Make sure that when you make connections that you actually record them and keep them. Maybe create a list and keep adding to the list and that’s how you build the movement. You make sure that people are always in the loop of what’s happening in your peer support group. It’s sharing your information, not just in the meeting ‘cause sometimes people aren’t able to attend a specific meeting.

Promoting far and wide, which means developing the flyer and actually sharing it with peers for them to actually hand out and distribute popping it up on local notice boards, you know sharing it with the local library, always having it in your bag just in case the opportunity arises. You never know, you could have a conversation with someone.