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Personalisation Forum Group

Support Buddies

Foreword



The PFG came together as a group just over a year ago and are a forum for peer support. There are many definitions of peer support and each person who is a member of PFG would give a definition which reflected their own perception and experience.

Most people agree that peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutuality. Most people also agree that peer support is not based on psychiatric models and medical criteria. Peer support is about understanding another's situation empathically through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain and the practical challenges of managing everyday life and navigating complex state health and social care systems. When people find common ground with others whom they feel are "like" them, they feel a connection. This connection can be a deep, holistic understanding based on mutual experience where people are able to be 'at ease' with each other.

Peer relationships can be complex, subtle and catalytic and as trust builds, people are able to respectfully challenge each other when they find themselves re-enacting old roles. This enables members of the peer community to try out new behaviours with one another and move beyond previously held self-concepts built on disability, diagnosis, and even a victim's worldview. Through peer relationships, peers are able to provide confirmation to each other through sharing perceptions, values and beliefs related to their lives and are able to evaluate their own experiences.

The PFG's approach to peer-to-peer support is a far cry from the relationship which exists between a person with mental health issues and a mental health professional; where power, control and hierarchy are clear features of the relationship.

The PFG has gone one step further than most peer groups and has become a dynamic, awareness building, fund raising, award-winning force majeure. A group of people have become a community where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

"a group of people have become a community where the sum of the parts are greater than the whole"

Clare Hyde MBE



PEER SUPPORT

utilising our skills
and strengths to
support others

ACTIVE CITIZENS

recognizing and
valuing every
citizens
contribution and
working together

COMMUNITY STRENGTH

providing creative
solutions to
benefit and build
our community

Support Buddies is a new citizen peer support project launched by The Personalisation Forum Group (PFG). The project is based on a shared journey of discovery where people help and support each other as equals. The PFG believes that peer support is a valuable, effective and an essential part of our mental health services. Support Buddies offers a practical approach to developing solutions to the mental health needs of our community. This is valuable not just in economic terms but also because of the positive achievements that are being made by individuals and communities.

This document has been prepared by the PFG as a guide to our peer support service. It documents our journey, share good practice and explains how we intend to be our community's strongest asset.

The Personalisation Forum Group (PFG)



The Personalisation Forum Group is a group of adults who experience poor mental health. The group came together in August 2010 with the aim of creating stronger support networks for people experiencing ill mental health. The PFG believes that we can do this through supporting the implementation of personalisation and developing new ways of empowering citizens. Personalisation is more than a budget. It brings service users and professionals together as equals to find real solutions.

We must look beyond the professional ‘treating’ mental illness and start to value the expertise of the person.

The PFG has come a long way in a short space of time. Some of our achievements to date include:

- ***Becoming becoming a formally constituted group in November 2010 and***
- ***Launching our Manifesto with backing from Ed Miliband and Paul Burstow***
- ***Developing a new model for mental health with The Centre for Welfare Reform***
- ***Becoming members of a national study (PEOPLE Study) and sitting on the National Advisory Panel for this research***
- ***Launching our own website***
- ***Operating our Support Buddies mobile telephone service***
- ***Winning the 2010 Regional Care Award in the category of Putting People First***
- ***Winning the 2011 Great British Care Award in the category of Putting People First***

We have many plans to continue developing our group but are very proud of our achievements to date.

Support Buddies builds on our work and values - citizens supporting each other. Everyone has their own unique strengths and these can be used to create stronger communities.

Peer Support developed naturally and this shows how people have a natural willingness to turn to their peers to discuss concerns, worries and problems. People who have similar lived experiences can offer each other practical advice and suggestions that are often not considered by professionals. This may not replace professional support, but it does offer a responsive and preventative service that can stop problems escalating to a crisis.

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Who are Support Buddies?

Support Buddies are people who give their time to build a stronger community. Support Buddies is consensual and reciprocal. It works as a time bank where people can put in 'support credits' and take out 'support credits'.

Chris is anxious about completing domestic tasks, he requests help from Support Buddies.

The Support Buddy Co-ordinator takes up the task and Jane commits to 3 hours helping Chris

Jane helps Chris for 3 hours, Chris is debited and Jane is credited 3 hours.

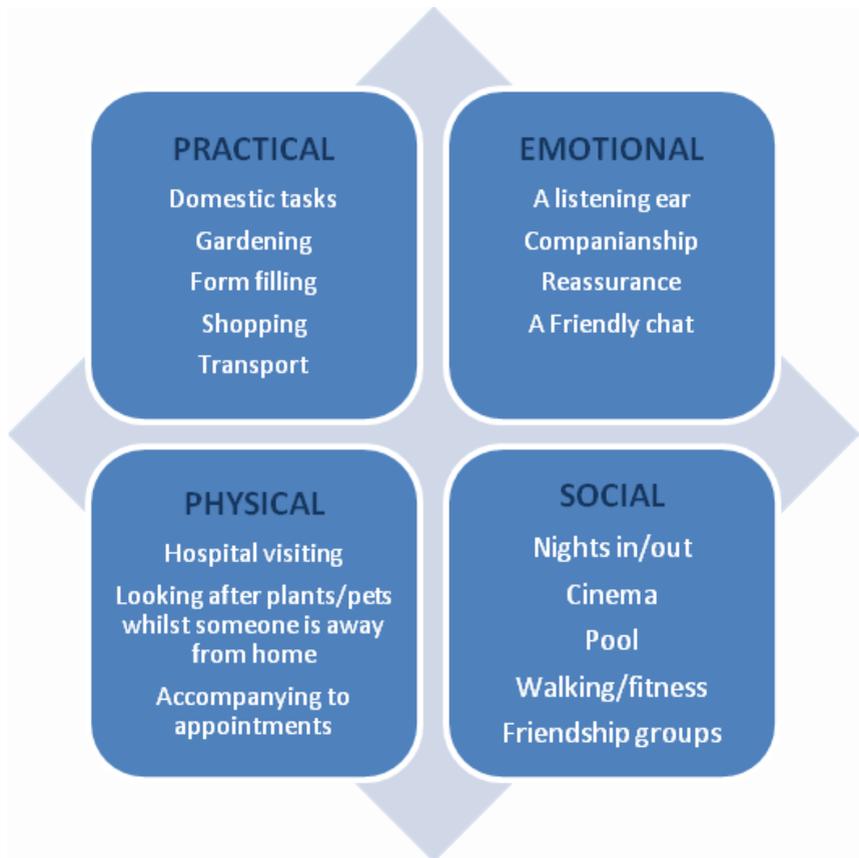
Chris has good computer skills and repays 3 hours helping Adam set up email and facebook accounts

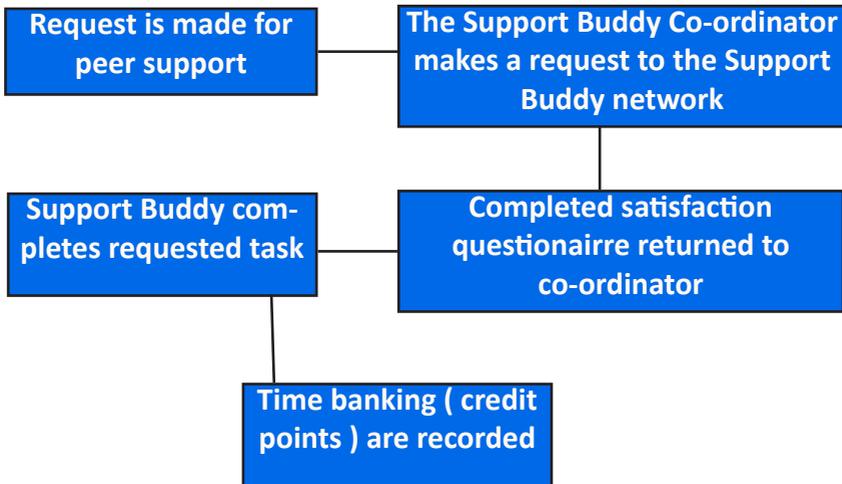
Jane has an appointment in Town but is nervous of travel. Adam repays his 3 hours Supporting Jane with Travel.

The Support Buddy Co-ordinator is advised of the peer support completed

What can Support Buddies do?

We think that the list is endless and the more citizens become involved the more varied the support we will be able to offer. Support Buddies operate on a system of Practical, Emotional, Physical and Social (PEPS) support





Citizens are encouraged to register as a Support Buddy. This simply means giving some basic details to the Support Buddy Co-ordinator: like contact details and the skills that they have to offer. If you register as a Support Buddy this means you both give and receive help. Everyone has something to offer in this model and the more people who register the greater the support we can both receive and provide.

Support Buddies also complete a short satisfaction questionnaire after support has been provided. This helps make sure that people are happy with the support they have got, helps us improve things and demonstrates the positive achievements of peer support. We use this information to support other peer support groups to become established. We hope that we will help to create successful Support Buddies in many other places.

Peer Advocacy

Advocacy is working to ensure that people's rights and wishes are respected. The PFG aims to support its members to become confident self-advocates but we know this isn't always easy. We came together as a group to address a common cause, draw strength from each other and get our collective voice heard. The PFG is a self-advocacy group and we work together to influence and challenge the way services are run. We are not a lobbying group but we are involved in raising awareness and we will provide training to service providers on issues that are relevant.

Support Buddies Peer Advocacy enables group members who have the skill and confidence needed to act as advocates and represent other members' interests. An advocate stands beside their partner and tries to see things from their perspective. The advocate is not there to represent their own views. An advocate does not make judgements about what is in a person's "best interest". An advocate will always encourage a person to speak for themselves where ever this is possible.

Peer Advocacy uses "experts by experience" to describe advocacy relationship where both the advocate and the advocacy partner share similar experiences, difficulties or discrimination. Often it happens that one person can speak up for their partner. They are united in a common cause. The relationship is based on mutual support and empowerment but has the added benefit of the insight and rapport being between the people involved. The primary qualification is their own experience of disability, exclusion or using services. The PFG has found that many of our members prefer to have an advocate, who has similar experiences, because they are then supported by someone who "understands" by experience and will not be judgemental about their circumstances.

Support Planning

Support Buddies recognise that peer support provides the opportunity for real community brokerage to flourish in Doncaster. Support Buddies continues the PFG's commitment to the development of Personalisation. Some of our members have completed Support Planning Training and will be offering information, support and guidance to their peers in planning effective community based support.

Support Buddies is built upon solid principles of mutual responsibility, finding hope and believing that recovery is possible. Support Buddies recognises everyone as having unique value and skills to bring to the project. We aim to encourage a wide and diverse range of people to the project.



Support Buddies do not have to have lived experience of ill mental health as the project is designed to support our whole community. Support Buddies operates within an informal, relaxed and flexible setting. We will retain our non-hierarchical approach with everyone being an equal and valued member.

Support Buddies builds upon the helper principle and believes that helping others is also self healing.

- **Mutuality**
- **Reciprocity**
- **Sharing with Safety and Trust**
- **Companionship**
- **Friendship**
- **Hopefulness**
- **Inclusiveness**
- **Fulfilment**
- **Equality**
- **Empowerment**
- **Being yourself**
- **Independence**
- **Reduction of Stigma**
- **Respect and Inclusiveness**
- **Developing Awareness**



Benefits of Support Buddies

The PFG has used peer support since the group formed in August 2010.

Following are some comments from people involved.

“I have spent the past seventeen years going from one crisis to the next. I can honestly say that since joining the group I have for the first time had six months crisis free. I believe that this is because I feel valued and have a purpose to my life... I enjoy the feeling of supporting others and knowing that there is someone there to give me support when I need it. It's like having a huge extended family”

“I am using skills I never knew I had. I am remembering what it is to be me”

“I don't feel alone anymore”

“I would never tell a social worker or a psychiatrist what I can tell my peers. It's like being able to unload a lifetime of worry without fear or judgement”

“It's the simple things... just being able to talk to someone”

“Having someone to go with me to appointments is the difference between me taking care of myself or not”



“knowing that someone actually gives a damn makes me feel like I am worth something”

“Being able to support someone else takes me away from my own problems...its like a break from me”

We are gathering clear evidence that demonstrates the value of peer support at a personal level. Everyone who has been involved in Support Buddies provides a strong and consistent message that supporting others makes people feel good about themselves.

The main benefits include

- **Shared Identity**
- **Increased self confidence**
- **Building skills**
- **Reduced reliance on specialist mental health and statutory services**
- **A feeling of 'togetherness'**
- **Reduced isolation and exclusion**
- **Increased self worth from helping others**
- **Increased feelings of pride**
- **Increased hope for the future**
- **Increased social opportunities**
- **Greater friendship circles**
- **Greater resilience**

Challenges to Support Buddies

Maintaining independence: we are committed to maintaining the independence of our group and believe that we will retain our independence by adhering to our values and principles.

Being seen as people with skills to contribute: we will continue to provide evidence and measure the outcomes of our work. This will aid in promoting the view that citizens are valuable assets.

Avoiding over bureaucracy: whilst we recognise that there are some aspects of our work that require some level of bureaucracy we aim to keep this to a minimum and build on the ethos of 'natural' support.

Being faced with situations we are not equipped to manage: we will ensure that all of our Support Buddies receive appropriate support and advice. We will recognise situations that require professional intervention. We will be clear and honest about what we can and cannot support people with.

The existing culture and perception of 'service users': we recognise that as people with mental health problems there are still many cultural barriers and attitudes that see us in terms of deficit rather than strengths. We will continue to challenge these attitudes.

Challenges to Support Buddies

Lack of funding: This is a real threat to our sustainability and development. We will continue to show the economic savings that Support Buddies achieves and continue discussions with local services on how to support our project. We will continue to fund-raise.

Lack of support from statutory services: On our journey we have faced many barriers that arise from the lack of a strong relationship with statutory services. As active citizens we could be viewed as a threat. We could be perceived as 'activists' who challenge the system; but whilst we recognise this we do not accept that it is valid. We will continue to try and build a real partnership with services and statutory organisations.

Peoples fear of the benefits system and how 'buddying' could impact: This is a very real fear of people who consider joining the project. Given the current climate and cuts to benefit entitlements people are fearful that if they are perceived to be 'working' that this could have severe financial implications. The PFG will continue to disseminate relevant information regarding benefits. We will support any individual to demonstrate that 'Support Buddying' is therapeutic and could be the start of many people building the skills, support and confidence to return to paid employment.



The PFG have a wide range of support from many individuals and organisations. We are always grateful to everyone who offers their time, knowledge, experience and practical support to help us reach our goal. We would like to give our thanks to the following individuals/organisations that have been awesome!



Simon Duffy & The Centre For Welfare Reform

For believing in the group since we began and giving valuable time, encouragement, knowledge and resources



Clare Hyde & The Foundation For Families

For the advice and experience that she provides and helping us to remain 'real'



HM Office for Disability Issues

For proving funding to help Support Buddies to happen.



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