

Sheffield Hallam University undertook an evaluation of the benefits to attenders at PeerTalk support groups. Under the supervision of Dr Jon Painter and Dr James Turner two Masters' students, Themba Dlamini and Jesse Usman reviewed research literature and consulted a focus group of PeerTalk group attendees. This is a summary of key findings. To read the report in full click here: [PeerTalk Evaluation Report](#)

PeerTalk attendees reported developing richer and deepened personal insights from the process of peer support. **This evaluation therefore supports** previously reported benefits of peer support groups for people with depression, such as the alleviation of social isolation, empowerment, improved self-efficacy and openness

The research identified that organisations such as PeerTalk provide cost-effective services as overheads and staff costs are minimal. The positive contribution made by voluntary organisations may reduce the demand for statutory services.



PeerTalk use this quote to emphasise the importance of being listened to.

PeerTalk support groups can enhance hope, improve confidence, increase social connectedness, and improve subjective wellness and symptom management.

[About PeerTalk Groups](#)

Bradford Support Group Facilitator Nabihah



‘I have been particularly struck by the strength and support individuals offer to each other during the meetings. The energy the group members give to each other and the PeerTalk values they uphold of being non judgemental and respectful throughout the meetings makes me feel so proud to be a group facilitator at PeerTalk’.

[why-volunteer-for-peertalk](#)

Focus group participants valued the way the groups reduced their loneliness, increased their self-efficiency by listening to others coping strategies, and enabled them to be part of something non-judgmental and supportive that *‘by helping other people, you kind of also help yourself as well’.*

Several research studies have indicated that having a social support network, and receiving help from individuals who belong to that network, benefits health and well-being. Social support enabled individuals to deal with stressful events and conditions, functioning as a protective agent against depression and anxiety.

The report stated that given the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having, and the reported increase in mental health problems, policy makers and commissioners should recognise the merits of peer support and ensure voluntary organisations like PeerTalk are made available and accessible.

Although depression is a major cause of disability for all, the burden of depression is 50% higher for women than for men



PeerTalk have a vision to host 100+ [PeerTalk Support Groups](#)

Most participants in this evaluation emphasised how PeerTalk groups triggered a sense of self-worth, purpose and meaning which they associated with an increased understanding of their condition and circumstances, self-efficacy, and coping skills enhancement. Similar findings concluded that peer support groups could reduce the symptoms of depression.

Given such evidence, peer support services should be recognised for the impact they have on the wellbeing of people with depression that, for some, can be as important as medication.

Participants in the Focus group said:

So, you are in a safe space, and you have not got anybody there that is going to judge what you are saying, and nobody is going to laugh because you felt a particular way in a particular situation.

I find going to the group just helps me feel not alone, that I am not in this on my own, that there are other people going through what I am going through.

There are so many times when you hear new people coming to a group who have said, "I thought it was only me," and that is the most common statement you hear. To say, "Oh, thank God for that. I thought it was only me who felt this way," and that is the biggest thing.

I think all I would say is that I have suffered from depression now since 2010, on and off, I have those three major bouts of depression, and I wish I had this sort of group a long time before November last year.

I have been going to the doctor for donkey's years talking about depression, and for the first time, just after Christmas, I was asked if I wanted to see the social prescriber, and I had heard of that person before, so, I said yes, please, and it was the social prescriber who pointed me to PeerTalk.

Sometimes people just need to be listened to. So, if you can listen actively, as everybody does seem to in the group that we are in, then you are contributing even if you say nothing

What I find is that it's just nice to get other people's points of view and their coping strategies with depression. Sometimes you can go away and potentially put some of those ideas into practice and then the week after, or even two weeks after, you can feed it back to people and actually, it might not work, not everything works for everyone, but you tend to find some of the ideas do.

This qualitative evaluation of PeerTalk's support groups confirms research into the experiences of the recipients of peer support services. Peer support groups enhance hope, confidence, social connectedness, and subjective wellness. There is growing recognition of the positive impact and cost-effectiveness of these services. There is also evidence that voluntary organisations, such as PeerTalk, could reduce the burden on and demand for statutory services.

Peer support groups can enable **mutually beneficial relationships** to develop, that are built on **empathy and understanding**. Peer support can enable people to feel **free to talk** about their situation/s and to be a **listening ear for others**. The groups can also have the potential to **enhance social connectedness**, leading to **improved quality of life and overall wellbeing**

Peer support services are **more effective than some conventional treatment methods** in reducing hospitalisation rates, **reducing lengths of hospital stays**, and increasing discharge rates showed that **recurrence rates of depression for outpatients who received peer support services was reduced by 50%**.

The functional recovery of **people receiving peer services was better than that of people receiving services provided by traditional mental health institutions**. One of the possible reasons is that **peer support services give patients more opportunities to communicate while exposing them to a wider range of perspectives**.

PeerTalk®

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