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Support Group

Do

Set up a regular meeting for people who are engaged in different inclusive activities to meet and support each other.

Story

One further education college has a Mental Health User / Student Forum where peer support is offered from fellow students.

The volunteer bureau places people with support needs into ordinary volunteering settings alongside other citizens, they also arrange a monthly support group meeting at a local coffee bar, where people who are involved in volunteering can meet up and offer informal support to each other.

Hints & Hazards

A worker from the support service, the community organisation or another agency (such as a volunteer) might facilitate this group. The group could visit community settings to widen their experience and build trust through sharing activities. If common difficulties are identified, this may reveal barriers to participation that were previously unrecognised, whilst other members may have found solutions. Establishing a support group may be more difficult where few people who need support are involved in community activities. A group might need regular facilitation from a person who is not struggling with the challenge of establishing their own life in the community.

The support group can also invite people who (1) have not yet taken up a community activity, and (2) are 'between' activities. People who share both their experience of disability and their interest in the community activity are more likely to make friends with each other – but they may also want support to develop relationships with other participants. Newcomers who feel that they don't fit into the support group (perhaps because they are of a different age or ethnicity) may be put off the community activity too. Those who find it hard to meet new people will find that getting to know people in their community activity as well as members of the support group is too much at the same time.