



An Ghníomhaireacht
Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Peer Support Models

Examining models both nationally
and internationally



Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	Methodology	5
3.	Background to Peer Support	6
4.	Peer Support Role	8
5.	Benefits of Peer Support	9
	Provision of Peer Support	10
	Online and telephone support	10
6.	Peer Support Models	10
7.	National Examples of Peer Support Models	11
	7.1 One-to-One Support	11
	7.2 Group Support	14
	7.3 Online Support	15
8.	International Examples of Peer Support Models	17
	8.1 One-to-One Support	17
	8.2 Group Support	21
	8.3 Online Support	22
9.	Key Findings	26
10.	Additional Resources	28
11.	Funding Scheme	29
12.	Recommendations	30
13.	Conclusion	33
14.	Appendices	34
15.	Bibliography	35

1. Introduction

The Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) defines independent living as disabled people “having control over (their) life, to have a family, to get a job, to find housing, to participate socially and to realise (their) goals and dreams.”

For many disabled people, independent living can be assisted with Peer Support.

Mead et al, (2001) defines Peer Support as a “System of giving and receiving help founded on the key principles of respect, shared responsibility and a mutual agreement of what is helpful”.

It is a supportive relationship between people who have shared lived experiences. It is based on the knowledge that disabled people are experts in recognising the barriers they face and the means in which those barriers can be tackled. Peer support is a mutual aid for wellbeing and navigating systems. It bolsters participation, promotes equitable access, and drives innovation.

Peer Support originated in the mental health area and following the success of it in this area, it has since expanded into other areas and organisations including in homelessness particularly in Housing First. In all areas, it has proved extremely successful.

This report will look at national and international examples of Peer Support models from a range of areas, to explore what Peer Supports are currently available and how, if necessary, they could be adapted or expanded to assist disabled people live independent lives in their community.

2. Methodology

Peer Support has continued to grow and adapt both nationally and internationally, this report will explore Peer Support models that are available in the homeless area and in healthcare including the area of mental health. We will also explore examples of Peer Support models already available for disabled people.

For each of the examples, the report outlines:

- A description of the service
- Employment - are staff paid or are they volunteers?
- If qualifications are required
- How can clients access the service?
- How is the service provided? Is it in person or online etc.?
- Training
- Supervision and Supports - what additional supports are available for the person providing peer support?

For international examples, we will review examples from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Europe. The basis for the selection of these countries were that we felt that the models of Peer Support in them may be the most relevant to assist disabled people live independently within their community.

3. Background to Peer Support

The development of Peer Support began in the mental health field in the U.S, New Zealand and Australia, when people began to move from institutions into communities. There was a stigma that mental health patients were dangerous and unstable members of society. As a result, people didn't want them living in their communities. Ex-patients began to find each other and support each other through shared experiences in what is now often referred to as Peer Support.

Peer Support has continued to grow in popularity in the mental health area. It has also adapted and expanded into other areas such as homelessness. While it is not clear when exactly it started in Ireland, it is referenced in numerous strategies since 2006. It is also sometimes referred to as people with similar lived experience who provide mutual support to each other. The key strategies are listed below.

Strategies

- 2006** — A Vision for Change 2006
 - 2011** — The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2011-2016 (*extended to 2021*)
 - 2015** — Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024
 - 2017** — National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health 2017
 - 2018** — Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021
 - 2022** — The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027
 - 2022** — Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022-2026
-

- Peer Support was referenced in A Vision for Change 2006 which states that “Within the expanded model of the community mental health team it is proposed to create a new position of mental health support workers. These new workers in the mental health system will provide service users with companionship, friendship and practical support with daily living activities. They will help service users gain access to services and resources such as housing and employment. These new staff may come from a wide range of educational backgrounds with diverse personal experience and qualifications.”
- The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2011 – 2016 expanded to 2021 and the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027 - The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027 contains an action to examine Peer Support models nationally and internationally to develop structures to support people to live full lives within their communities.
- Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015 – 2024 includes an action where Employer Peer Support Network IBEC will work with The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Chambers Ireland and the National Disability Authority (NDA) to input into the development of a national employer Peer Support network.
- The National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health (2017) references “people with lived experience” as a key concept to helping service users with their recovery process.
- As mentioned, Peer Support has expanded into other areas such as homelessness and is included in the Housing First National Implementation Plan and included in the Housing First Manual for Ireland which states:

“Housing First programmes should have a peer specialist as one of the staff members of the support services team. The peer specialist or Peer Support worker should have personal experience in having sought assistance in overcoming their obstacles and should be currently in recovery from substance use, mental health problems, homelessness, or have overcome other obstacles for a period of at least one year.”

Peer Support is also highlighted as a vital service in the Independent Living Moving Ireland (ILMI). The ILMI was established as the first Irish Centre for Independent Living in 1992 by and for disabled people with the main aim that disabled people achieved independent living, choice and control over their lives and full participation in society as equal citizens.

4. Peer Support Role

“Peer Support offers a level of acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships” (Mead & McNeil, 2006)

The Peer Support role can vary. However, there are some common values that underpin all Peer Support models. These principles would be relevant to consider when developing a Peer Support model for disabled people to assist them to live independently in their community. These include.

- **Mutual Respect** - It is a relationship that is based on shared experience, empathy, and respect for all individuals involved.
- **Reciprocal** - All participants contribute to and gain from the relationship in a shared process of problem solving.
- **Non-directive** - Within a Peer Support relationship one person does not prescribe what to do, they simply advise.
- **Recovery Focused**, if appropriate - The relationship focuses on helping people to grow within and beyond past experiences.
- **Strength Based** - It recognises participants courage, strengths and skills and how they can use these to better their lives.
- **Inclusive** - Peer Support helps disabled people engage with and contribute to their communities.
- **Progressive** - A shared journey of learning and growing together.
- **Safe** - Feeling able to express themselves freely in a supportive relationship, where everyone feels safe.
- **Supervision and Support** - It is important that the Peer Support provider receives support and training as well.

5. Benefits of Peer Support

Peer Support can provide benefits to both the person receiving the support (client) as well as the person providing the support (Peer Support provider)

Clients benefits through:

- Increased knowledge, skills, and confidence to manage everyday tasks.
- Increased sense of connection and less loneliness.
- Enhanced social participation and involvement.
- Feelings of hope and empowerment.

Peer Support providers can also benefit from the process through:

- Greater self-esteem through making a positive impact on others.
- Gaining helpful knowledge from peers.
- Social connectedness with others.
- In some cases, it can be a source of employment.

6. Peer Support Models

Peer Support can be provided in either a one-to-one basis or as group support. The Peer Support model used should be tailored to client's needs and it should be flexible to allow Peer Support to be provided in a time and place that suits the client's needs.

One-to-one support – Is the most common type of peer support. It is flexible and can occur in a variety of ways such as online or in person. Examples in Ireland include HAIL Peer Support and the HSE Family Peer Support.

Group support – This can either be formal or informal. Formal support groups offer more structured support, for example mental health, or addiction support groups.

Informal groups involve people with shared common interests who often come together to offer each other Peer Support, for example, gardening or crafting clubs.

Provision of Peer Support

With both one-to-one support and group support, it can be provided either in person or online and via phone.

In person support – This involves a Peer Support provider meeting the client face to face. This could be in the community to help the disabled person settle into their new surroundings or it could be in their own home.

Online and telephone support

Sometimes people find it best to connect online or on the telephone. One conversation might be all it takes to help a person begin to feel better. At initial stages of disabled people moving into independent living, this can prove useful as they may require more frequent contact.

7. National Examples of Peer Support Models

As identified, there are different types of Peer Support models in operation, we will first look at examples that are currently available in Ireland.

7.1 One-to-One Support

HSE Family Peer Support Work

Peer Support workers are mental health professionals who use their own personal experiences of mental ill health and recovery to support others in their recovery.

Family Peer Support is available in the following Mental Health Services:

- CHO 2 - Mayo, Roscommon, East Galway, Galway City, Galway County
- CHO 5 - Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford
- CHO 7 - Dublin South Central, Kildare, West Wicklow

Peer Support workers are employed as full and part time positions and to apply for the position, they must meet the below criteria.

- a. *“Personal experience of mental health difficulties in one’s family or close relationship including insight into the Family recovery process*

AND

- b. *Experience of working (paid or voluntary) with individuals or families with mental health needs*

AND / OR

- c. *Hold a recognised certificate in Peer Support or equivalent.”*

The free service is provided on a one-to-one basis and Peer Support providers are paid for their work. Once they start the role, there is mandatory training to complete.

HAIL Peer Support

HAIL provides visiting tenancy support services to those in HAIL tenancy or those who have a social housing tenancy with either a local authority or another Approved Housing Body. However, visiting tenancy support services are not available to anyone in the private rented sector including HAP.

Peer Support Volunteers have been offering support to HAIL tenants and clients in social housing tenancies since 2016. They have lived experience of mental ill health. Peer Support Volunteers complete in-house training to support them in offering one-to-one social, emotional or practical support and offer on average 4-6 hours per week of their time to HAIL. No qualifications are required for this role.

The Peer Support Volunteers work with HAIL tenants and clients on a one-to-one basis in the community. Their main focus is on providing social support to people who may be feeling a little isolated in their communities or who may have recently moved into an area that they may not be familiar with. They also manage and operate a calendar of monthly events for tenants and clients that includes HAIL United football team, a music group, book club, pool group, a walking group and a women's group.

CLAN (Crosscare Links and Advice Network)

Crosscare Links and Advice Network (CLAN) provides peer-led tenancy sustainment support to people out of homelessness. The Peer Support approach ensures that people leaving homeless services can create new links in the communities to help them to integrate.

They also provide social groups to help combat social isolation especially for those leaving congregated settings.

The Peer Support role is a voluntary role with volunteers being asked to contribute 15 hours a week. The main duties of the role are listed below.

- Providing 1-1 support to CLAN clients, helping them to settle into their new home and connect with the local community. This includes helping them identify and achieve personal goals.
- Sourcing information on services in the local area and signposting clients to areas of support.
- Supporting clients to liaise with their landlord and sustain their tenancy.
- Advocating for service users to other supports and services.
- Co- Facilitating groups such as Independent Living Skills training.
- Working with assigned clients to build up trusting relationships.

- Working with empathy and understanding and providing clients with a listening ear.
- Encouraging clients to attend courses in their communities and attending some activities with clients.
- Attending training available for all volunteers in; professional boundaries, manual handling, active listening, report writing and record keeping.

Volunteers must be over 18 and Crosscare “encourage applications from people with a personal experience of homelessness, addiction, mental health or other social services”. They ask that all applicants have been “living independently for at least 18 months.”

Peter McVerry Trust Housing First Peer Support Specialist

A Peer Support Specialist (PSS) holds an important place in Housing First support services. A unique lived experience allows for the PSS to serve as a role model for participants within a professional relationship. They meet clients on a regular basis usually weekly on a one-on-one basis and normally in the client’s home.

Currently, within Peter McVerry Trust Housing First services, some of the main requirements for the PSS role are to:

- Have a minimum of 2 years in recovery and be at a point where they have achieved stability regarding mental health.
- Have lived experience of homelessness and/or, addiction/mental health issues.
- With regards to educational qualifications, Peter McVerry Trust maintain flexibility around the level of qualification required by a PSS. A NFQ5 or higher is desirable but is not essential. Relevant areas of study include social care, addiction, and mental health. Potential candidates can be supported in developing skills required prior to initiating the role.

Spinal Injuries Ireland

Spinal Injuries Ireland offer a range of community services to people and their families with spinal cord injuries. This includes community outreach, counselling and Peer Support.

Peer Support is available to all patients with a Spinal Cord Injury from the time of injury for as long as they need it. Peer Volunteers are at least 3 years post-injury and receive mandatory training.

The Peer Support Volunteers can offer a different and unique perspective to the medics and the professionals as they all have “lived experience”. They can relate to individuals affected by spinal injuries in a way that only someone who has “been there and done that” can.

7.2 Group Support

Southside Disability Awareness Group (Limerick)

The Southside Disability Group is supported by Southill Family Resource Centre. This group is for disabled people and people who advocate on behalf of disabled people. The purpose of the group is to socialise and support each other, networking with different groups within the community and shared learning. The work of the group includes taking part in community education courses e.g. Equality training, Personal and Interpersonal Skills, Nutrition and Cookery. They also attend events and take part in social outings.

The group meets every Wednesday from 2pm – 4pm. It is an open group and disabled people or people who advocate on their behalf are welcome to join at any stage. There is no waiting list.

GROW Mental Health Peer Support

Peer Support for Mental Health is where a community of people who have experienced mental health challenges or life struggles come together at a weekly support group and share their own stories in a safe & confidential setting. Everyone attending these groups openly give and receive help which in turn assists their own road to recovery and mental wellbeing.

The format for a Peer Support group which lasts ~ 1.5 hours and includes.

- someone in the group telling their personal story,
- members reporting on their progress during the previous week,
- sharing the wisdom of the program and
- assigning tasks for each member for the following week. For example, a newcomer's task might be to come back next week.

Peer Support groups are available nationally. Interested participants can find their nearest by going to the GROW website. All peer support groups are free of charge.

Debra - Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB) Expert Panel

In November 2022 Debra launched an EB Expert Panel, a group made up of those who live with EB daily.

The EB Expert Panel advise Debra on various topics related to what living with EB in Ireland is like now and what it should look like in the future. With their help, Debra can make sure they provide support in the way that matters to them. Participation is voluntary and every member of the panel is reimbursed for their time.

The Panel meets 2 or 3 times a year as a group.

7.3 Online Support

Aslam

Aslam is Ireland's National Autism Charity. They provide a number of online peer support group meetings for people with Autism. This includes:

- An online weekly adult support: Education and Empower event for any autistic people over the age of 18.
- This group is a women's peer support group, designed to be a safe space for members of the adult autistic community to communicate with one another in a safe, accepting environment.
- Adult support: Trans and Non-Binary Peer Support - This group is open to anyone who identifies as a transgender and/or non-binary autistic adult and is over the age of 18. This group meets on a fortnightly basis.

VVI - Voice of Vision Impairment

They offer peer support groups for people with a visual impairment to share their feelings and experiences with others facing the same challenges.

The support groups all take place over Zoom, with the exception of the Dublin Peer Support Group, which meets in person. There are a number of different peer support groups depending on the needs of an individual. This includes:

Directions -Young Adult Peer Support Group

- For people between the ages of 18 – 30yrs.
- Takes place on the third Thursday of the month from 6.30-7:30pm

Horizons – Parents Peer Support group

- Peer support group for parents whose children have had a diagnosis of an eye condition.
- Takes place the second Thursday of the month from 7:30 – 9pm.

Irish Hearth Foundation

The Irish Heart Foundation offer a range of support services to help improve the quality of life and well-being of people and their carers after a heart event or stroke.

These support services include Let's Talk Telephone Peer Support.

Let's Talk Telephone Peer Support is provided by a volunteer who has lived experience of heart disease or stroke or a person who has cared for someone living with cardiovascular disease. Peer Support volunteers are trained and fully supported by Let's Talk programme lead,

Each Peer Support volunteer has a small case load of calls to make to clients who have requested the service. Members can register and express their Interest on Irish Heart Foundation website. and then where possible Irish Heart Foundation try match volunteers to members that are most suited to help both the volunteers and members really get benefit from the calls.

Irish Kidney Association

The Irish Kidney Association offers a national online Peer Support service for people living with end stage kidney disease.

Peer Support Volunteers:

- Are patients or family members who have first-hand experience of living with end stage kidney disease e.g. dialysis or transplanted?
- Have completed training to provide peer support.
- Come from across Ireland and have a wide range of ages, backgrounds, interests and life experiences.

Peer Support volunteers are not medical experts or trained counsellors and cannot offer advice about medical treatments, kidney diseases or medications.

To connect with a Peer Supporter, interested applicants should complete the request for Peer Support form available from the Irish Kidney's association website.

8. International Examples of Peer Support Models

There are many Peer Support models available internationally. The European Network of Independent Living (ENIL) conducted a [Peer Support Survey](#) in 2016 with 26 EU Countries and the UK. This included Croatia, France, Iceland, Italy etc. While, Ireland was not part of this survey, the survey results showed that 25 out of the 26 Countries that responded had some form of Peer Support in place for disabled people.

We have outlined examples of Peer Supports available internationally below.

8.1 One-to-One Support

The Groundswell Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (United Kingdom)

The Groundswell Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (HHPA) is a service which supports people experiencing homelessness to address physical and mental health issues. It is based in London and other cities operating a HHPA service include Birmingham, Manchester and Salford. It is a one-to-one support service, and their aim is to improve people's confidence in using health services to increase their ability to access healthcare independently. It is a voluntary service, and all volunteers have experienced homelessness themselves. In some areas they also have case workers, the majority of who began as volunteers.

The main criterion for volunteers is lived experience, if a person has experienced homelessness themselves the HHPA will have a conversation with the volunteer to discuss whether the training is right for them.

If the volunteer joins the training, then Groundswell will:

- train the volunteer fully to take on the HHPA role.
- cover the volunteers' expenses.
- support the volunteer to access further training.
- help the volunteer to develop their skills and build a CV.

All volunteers go through a rigorous selection procedure including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). DBS is similar to the Garda vetting process in Ireland. It is a way for employers to check if volunteers have a criminal record. Volunteers also attend a comprehensive training programme and receive ongoing support and supervision to enable them to carry out the role safely.

Volunteers at the HHPA support their clients and encourage them to attend and understand appointments and make choices about the next steps they need to take. They give practical support in attending follow ups and hospital stays. They also support clients in finding out information about health and health services and addressing their health issues. Volunteers also pay for travel to these appointments if their client cannot afford taxis etc.

The main role of the volunteers is to break down any barriers that may stop someone from getting to a health appointment and being heard in the way they deserve to be heard. The volunteers provide peer support by bringing people to hospital appointments, registrations for GPs, arranging and booking appointments for them and translating languages if they do not speak English. Basically, whatever help they may need the volunteers can provide.

Many volunteers say that the biggest challenge for them is getting people to open up and trust them, but once a bond has been formed, they say that is the biggest reward of all. They start to see a difference in their client's confidence which in turn makes them feel more empowered to look after their health.

Century House Association (Canada)

At Century House adults can explore opportunities to enjoy activities, programs, events and social connections within a welcoming and supportive community of peers.

Peer Support services address the needs of aging adults and seniors by providing confidential, no-cost, one-to-one support with the help of trained volunteers known as the Peer Support Volunteers.

The Peer Support Volunteers are 50 years and older who are interested in the well-being of aging adults. Their personal experience enables them to better understand the problems and needs of the senior they are helping. A professional counsellor trains and supervises all Peer Support volunteers.

The function of a Peer Support Volunteer is to assist in the smooth transition of a senior to a new experience, to work toward a goal of independence, to enable seniors to enjoy a sense of well-being, and to become an active member of the community.

Peer support Volunteers:

- Maintain confidentiality
- Respect personal boundaries, values and beliefs
- Not judge or give advice
- Empower clients with self-awareness
- Explore options to address needs
- Encourage clients to find their own solutions
- Offer community connections and resources

My Life My Voice Peer Network (New Zealand)

My Life My Voice has a peer network that connects disabled people with a Peer Supporter who is a volunteer with lived experience.

A disabled person can choose a Peer Supporter or My Life My Voice can match a disabled person with a Peer Supporter. In order to assist with choosing a Peer Supporter, each Peer Supporter has a profile of their background and interests. This allows a disabled person to select someone with similar interests and with shared lived experiences.

Then once they are matched, the Peer Supporter will contact the disabled person to set up a meeting via phone, email or online at a time that suits the disabled person. The disabled person can choose how frequent and for how long they would like to connect with their Peer Supporter.

In order to make this process easier, an app has been setup called My Life My Voice. It allows disabled people to connect with Peer Supporters in three easy steps.

1. Browse Peer Supporter Profiles
2. Select a Peer Supporter that a disabled person would like to connect with
3. Select “start chat” icon in the app.

Peer Supporters are volunteers, and My Life My Voice provides them with an optional free training programme. The training teaches Peer Supporters how to make a meaningful connection with like-minded individuals.

It is a 5-day course that covers 5 different topics which are:

- What is Peer Support?
- Identity and connection
- Communication and Peer Support
- Disability in Aoteroa (New Zealand)
- Guidance for Peer Supporters

In addition, it covers privacy, ethics and boundaries.

Pathways (UK)

Pathway is a project that supports and cares for homeless patients in hospital and upon discharge. It is a model of integrated healthcare for homeless people, which puts the patient at the centre of their own care pathway and aims to transform health outcomes for homeless people. The addition of a care navigator to the original team of a specialist doctor and a dedicated homeless health nurse has extended the impact of their service.

A Care Navigator is a paid member of staff and a person with personal experience of homelessness. They are trained to befriend, support, challenge and mentor homeless patients in hospital, helping them navigate the hospital environment, and supporting the homeless health nurse practitioners. The Care Navigator particularly builds a relationship with the patient, initially ensuring basic needs such as clothing are met but also help patients following their discharge from hospital, helping them keep their appointments with detoxification services, with social workers, benefits staff, hostel key workers, street outreach teams, mental health services and many others. As trained, paid Pathway employees, Care Navigators are also role models for homeless patients and can also challenge stigma and negative attitudes among health professionals towards homeless people.

8.2 Group Support

Peer Support Canada

Peer Support Canada is a Canadian organisation who provide formal peer support to people living with a mental health challenge or other illness. They provide practical and emotional support between two people who share a common experience. A peer supporter has lived through that similar experience and is trained to support others. A certificate is required to confirm one's knowledge, skills and experience as a peer supporter. The certificate is recognised across Canada and the fee for certification is broken down into two payments. Application Fee \$200 and Assessment Fee \$1000.

Having formalised peer support experience means one has experience supporting peers in a manner that is consistent with the peer support Canada values and principles of practice. To qualify for full certification, an applicant must demonstrate they have acquired 200 hours or more of formalised peer support experience. The Peer Support Canada Certification is not a training programme; it is an assessment of peer supporter's demonstration of the national standards of practice. It is recommended that applicants complete peer support training before applying for the certificate.

Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living (Scotland)

Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living (LCiL) facilitates a monthly peer support group for disabled people that is organised by LCiL staff but owned by the group members who meet to:

- Discuss Issues and share information
- Get practical information, find out about resources and who to ask
- Develop skills and build confidence
- Hear from guest speakers and organisations on a range of topics, picked by the group

The members decide what topics they discuss and people who are not peers (for example workers from other organisations) can attend only by invitation from the group.

The group takes place once per month on alternating Tuesdays and Thursday starting at 10:30am and ending at 1:15pm.

Lived Experience Around Disabilities (Canada)

Lived Experience Around Disabilities (LEAD) deliver presentations about what it is like to live with a disability to students aged between 17 and 18 years old in Victoria Canada. Not all students will have a disability. Presentations are delivered by disabled people who have spent a lengthy period of time navigating their daily lives within their abilities. The presenters work in partnership with students with disabilities at each school, giving the students an opportunity to anonymously or personally share what they have experienced at the school in terms of social and environmental barriers.

Ten Times Better (UK)

Ten Times Better is a Peer Support group made up of hostel residents in London that meet one hour a week, for ten weeks, to set incremental weekly goals that they all try to achieve. At the first session, clients generally make what would be viewed as small commitments, but they are very important since they not only build a sense of self-belief and motivation that leads to bigger achievements, but they also generate a culture of peer support outside the meetings as people are more aware of what each other is trying to achieve.

8.3 Online Support

Peer Connect Australia:

Peer Connect is an Australian website which provides practical information about peer networks in Australia. Its focus is on the disability community.

The website was developed as part of a project called the Disability Support Organisation (DSO) Capacity Building Project; the project involved 18 membership-based disability organisations from around Australia who set up peer networks.

The website contains information on Peer Support networks, having choice and control in your life, planning and decision making and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Peer Connect is an online platform where people can come together and share experiences. It is attractive because it is anonymous and convenient, it is there whenever the individual is available and it can provide a sense of belonging, sense of openness without judgment and it is also cost effective, free for the user and instantaneous.

Peer Connect also provides Grow Networks for people with a mental health illness.

Grow is Australia's leading mutual help programme for people with mental illness. There are 200 groups available throughout Australia. Joining a group gives people the opportunity to meet once a week for around 2 hours to share and find solutions to life's many challenges with people going through similar experiences. The meetings are run by recovering and trained Grow members who have gone through the programme and have volunteered to lead the groups.

There are a number of videos and links on their website about setting up and running a Peer Support group and resources that can help individuals get better at being a Peer Support, show how people can work better together and a platform where people can tell their stories. Peer Connect also provides a 3-part training course which covers the following.

- What is Peer Support?
- Building a peer movement of people with a disability, families and allies.
- Ways of being that help the peer movement to grow.
- Skills to be practiced to be better at Peer Support.

The training is available for any peer groups to use and adapt freely.

Mind.org.uk (UK)

[Mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) is a website which provides peer support for people suffering from Mental health issues.

The organisation changes minds across England and Wales by making mental health an everyday priority. They support minds by offering help to those who need it through their information, advice, and local services. They bring people together who share similar experiences and provide peer support groups for different needs.

Mind.org.uk is run by volunteers, and they could not lead the fight for mental health without their volunteers. Mind Volunteers play a huge part in everything they do. And volunteering at Mind can be an incredibly rewarding and valuable experience. Thousands of people volunteer for Mind every day and they value the opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives.

Anybody can volunteer and there are always opportunities available on their website to sign up and help others.

Mind is a charity run organisation and they provide any training and inductions necessary to carry out the volunteering role. The training varies depending on which peer support group the individual will be assisting with.

Mind firmly believes that a volunteer is someone who is unpaid and gives up their own time.

Side by Side (a service provided by Mind.Org.uk) is an online Peer Support community where people can talk about their mental health and connect with others who understand what they're going through. Side by Side provides a safe place to listen, share and be heard. The community is available 24/7. It is moderated daily from 8am to midnight.

Side by Side is grounded in the values of Peer Support. It's a welcoming place for people to make connections, learn from each other, and feel inspired to take positive steps on their mental health journeys.

ReachOut PeerChat (Australia)

ReachOut is an online mental health service in Australia supporting young people during tough times. ReachOut has setup a PeerChat to provides free, one-to-one support to young people delivered by peer workers. PeerChat is funded by the Australian Federal Government.

It has been co-produced with young people and professional peer workers to address the unique barriers that prevent so many young people from seeking help. These barriers include the fact that traditional counselling can be overwhelming, and the associated costs can be high.

PeerChat is led by a workforce of professional Peer Workers who have lived and living experience of mental health challenges. Each is trained to safely engage and connect with young people.

PeerChat is a free service that is currently available five days a week (1–9 pm Monday–Thursday, 10 am – 6 pm on Fridays). Each session runs for 45 minutes. To access the service, young people must book in advance on the ReachOut website.

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)

The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) was established in 1989 when over eighty disabled persons and supporters from the Independent Living movement gathered in Strasbourg, France for a conference on personal assistance. There, they agreed on the need for a Europe-wide forum for disabled people to foster and develop the independent living ideas across Europe. ENIL has since become a strong, grassroots NGO that advocates and lobbies for independent living values and principles by targeting European, national and local administrations, politicians, media and the general society.

Personal Assistance Users' Club (PAUC) was launched by ENIL in 2022 as an online peer support group. Participants in this group meet approximately once a month. This group is open, which means that each meeting is independent of previous ones, and individuals can join without any pre-registration.

The group's discussion topics are proposed and selected by the participants themselves through an ongoing online survey. This survey is always accessible and allows participants to suggest new subjects and vote on proposed ones. The range of topics covered has been broad, spanning from individual issues, for example "boundaries when living with a PA?", to matters at an institutional level, for example "How to raise money for independent living".

To date, individuals in eleven different countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, UK, and Sweden) have joined PAUC and contributed to this cross-country peer support network.

9. Key Findings

As set out in previous sections of this report, there are lots of Peer Support models in place across a range of areas. While some Peer Support have similar features such as shared lived experience, other differ in how Peer Support is provided. We will compare and summarise the different Peer Support models below based on the examples above making reference to the comparison table in Appendices 1.

Qualifications and Training

- As defined Peer Support providers should have shared lived experience with their clients in order to provide Peer Support and this was a requirement in all of the above examples.
- Only the HSE Family Peer Support required a formal qualification in order to provide Peer Support services.
- While there was no requirement to have qualifications in most of the examples, the provision of training was mentioned in 14 out of the 23 examples. All one-to-one peer support models provide training to Peer Support providers upon commencing the role. Training varied but included topics such as:
 - What is Peer Support?
 - professional boundaries
 - manual handling
 - active listening
 - report writing
 - record keeping

Employment

In 3 of the examples above, the person providing Peer Support are paid whereas in the remaining 20 examples, Peer Support providers volunteered their time.

In Ireland, both the HSE Family Peer Support and Peter McVerry Trust who provide one-on-one support to their clients are a source of employment for the Peer Support provider.

Additional Requirements for Peer Support providers

In addition to training and qualifications regardless there are some additional requirements mentioned that Peer Support providers might have to meet. This includes:

- Access to transport
- Ability to work in a flexible way which may include evenings and weekends.
- Garda Clearance (or international equivalent)

Frequency of contact

- Based on the Comparison Table, 3 group support meet on a monthly basis whereas 4 group examples, meet weekly. It is unclear how often Debra meet.
- In the majority of one-to-one Peer Support example, frequency of contact was either not mentioned or it varied. Most referenced taking into consideration that clients might need more support initially.

Supervision

- While it was not clear if all examples provided supervision to Peer Support providers, it was referenced as being included in all 5 one-to-one national Peer Support examples above.

10. Additional Resources

There are a number of useful toolkits and resources that have been created to support and develop Peer Support models. These include:

[Feantsa Peer Support: A tool for recovery in homeless services](#) – provides an overview of providing Peer Support services in homelessness. It explores how to set it up and the benefits of the service.

[HSE Peer Support Workers Toolkit](#) – The toolkit acts as a resources to support the HSE and local services in expanding Peer Support working onto multidisciplinary teams across all areas

[Housing First Manual in Ireland](#) – Chapter 8 specifically focuses on providing information on the role of the Peer Support, Training and Supervision and Supports required.

[ENIL Peer Support for Independent Living Toolkit](#) - A Training Manual - This training manual brings together materials developed for the Peer Support Training held on 21st June 2014 in Sofia, Bulgaria. It can be used by other Disabled Persons' Organisations at the local, national or European level, when organising similar events on Peer Support and Independent Living.

[Housing First Peer Support Specialist Toolkit](#) – A key component of the Housing First programme is the inclusion of people with lived experience as members of the staff team. The Housing First National Office has created a Peer Support Toolkit purpose of this Toolkit is to assist organisations with the integration and delivery of peer support services nationally.

11. Funding Scheme

The Prosper Genio Project was a pilot Peer Support project set up in 2012 in the west of Ireland. It was funded by Genio and, although these Peer Support Workers were not directly employed by the HSE, they worked with service users from rehab and recovery teams. As the Prosper Genio project was deemed a success, the Refocus Project began in 2013.

Genio is now working with the HSE through the Service Reform Fund on a national initiative to develop opportunities for people with mental health difficulties to remain in, or to access, work in mainstream settings. The employment initiative is being implemented using the evidence-based Individual Placement and Support. IPS has been developed in line with national mental health and disability policy and strategy in Ireland. This includes A vision for Change, Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2015 -2024, National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities 2016 – 2020. Examples of disability and Peer Support programmes covered include Ability West, Cheshire Ireland and Kerry Peer Support Network.

12. Recommendations

As demonstrated from the national and international examples above, Peer Support can be provided either on a one-to-one basis, group basis either in person or online/phoneline. All of these would prove useful when helping disabled people transition into independent living. Additional recommendations that should be considered when setting up a Peer Support model are included below.

Flexibility

When setting up a Peer Support model, there could be a variety of options available, one to one and group support provided online or in person, in order to best meet the needs of the disabled person. Some may prefer individual one-to-one support whereas other may prefer being in a group. The option of online support could prove useful as well particularly in rural areas and when a disabled person first moves into independent living as initially, they may require more support. This additional support might not always be possible in person but the option to be able to call them within reason could prove useful.

Shared Lived Experience

In order to provide Peer Support to a disabled person transitioning into independent living, the Peer Support provider should have similar shared lived experience as the client.

It would also be beneficial if they had similar interests. This could be done by Peer Support providers creating a profile of their background and interests and the person requiring the Peer Support could have the option if they wish to select the Peer Support provider. If not, they could be matched.

Qualification and Training

In Ireland, there are currently two third level colleges providing qualifications on Peer Support. The first is the certificate in Peer Support Practice offered by Galway Mayo Institute of Technology. This course includes a module in Disability and Social care. Dublin City University also offer a certificate in Peer Support Working in Mental Health.

While these qualifications might not be specifically setup to create a Peer Support model for disabled people, it is important to have some form of induction training as well as ongoing training for Peer Support providers. This will vary depending on whether it is one-to-one, group or online but it should include courses such as active listening, report writing and record keeping as well as ethics and boundaries.

Employment

The Irish Housing First Manual recommends that individuals who provide Peer Support should be paid. Both the Peter McVerry Trust Peer Support and The HSE Family Peer Support providers are paid for their work.

Peer Support providers being paid for their work has the advantage of creating employment for disabled people in an area that they are experts in. With one-to-one Peer Support, there tends to be additional requirements such as training and Garda clearance etc. Considering the extra work for Peer Support providers and in order to maintain staff, considerations should be giving to paying Peer Support providers particularly who provide one-to-one support.

While employment would be the first preference, there may be some disabled people, who might already have employment or might not be able to commit to long hours etc. but still want to provide Peer Support, in these instances, there should be an option to volunteer as well. This would work well for group support where both parties are mutually benefiting from Peer Support through shared lived experience. However, a volunteer option should be available for one-to-one support as well.

Supervision and Monitoring

Ongoing supervision and monitoring are an important success factor for one-to one Peer Support models. Supervision offers Peer Support providers the chance to reflect on and share problems with colleagues and management, as well as helping to develop skills and knowledge. Supervision should always be a supportive mechanism for Peer Support providers and should be available for all one-to-one Peer Support models.

As well as the recommendations above based on the national and international examples of Peer Support, there has been additional research and review of current Peer Support models by a number of organisations including Peter McVerry Trust and ENIL. These provide additional recommendations and learnings that could be considered when setting up a Peer Support model to help disabled people live independently in the community.

Peter Mc Verry – A Report on Peer Support Specialists

Peter McVerry created [A Report on Peer Support Specialists: Identification and Stakeholder Engagement within Housing First](#) that identifies a number of key recommendations. While these recommendations are in relation to provision of Peer Support to Housing First participants, some of them may be applicable and useful when designing a Peer Support model for disabled people. We have included the recommendations that we think might be of most relevance below.

- Supervision and Support – The report states that supervision and support is “imperative for successful peer support”. It recommends that supervision should be available frequently and that it can be provided on a one-to-one basis and or at team meetings. Supervision allows space and time for all concerns, issues, and dilemmas to be addressed and alleviated appropriately.
- Recognition and Compensation – It recommends having an appropriate salary reflecting recognition of skills and knowledge and on the same pay scale as other support professionals in the area.
- Training – It recommends having training courses prior to starting the role but also regular training while performing the role. Training modules relevant to disabled people include Trauma Informed, First Aid, Report Writing and Manual Handling.
- Time with Participants - Small Peer support providers to participant ratios are advised to support quality time and engagement. It also recommends weekly meetings.


ENIL Peer Support Survey

[ENIL conducted a Peer Support Survey](#) in 2016. The survey recommends that all disabled people should have access to peer support, which facilitates and supports their right to live independently in the community. Additional recommendations that might be relevant when setting up a Peer Support model in Ireland include:

- Ensure that peer support services are in line with the social and the human rights model of disability, and not carried out using a medical approach.
- Ensure deinstitutionalisation strategies or programmes include peer support services.
- Ensure that peer support is supported at the national level, with the funding allocated to the individual, to ensure equal access throughout the country.

13. Conclusion

As demonstrated, over the past decades, Peer Support models have emerged as a common practice in health and community settings both nationally and internationally. The value of lived experience has been acknowledged as an integral component in assisting marginalised groups such as disabled people to live independently in the community. Having an appropriate Peer Support model to assist disabled people would be extremely beneficial in assisting disabled people to live independently. However, it is important that a number of factors are considered when developing a model as outlined in the above report.



14. Appendices

Table 1 – Peer Support Comparison

Peer Support Example	Type of Support	Training	Employment	How frequently do they meet?
HSE Family Peer Support	National One to One Support	Yes	Yes	Not mentioned
HAIL		Yes	No	Varies
CLAN		Yes	No	Varies
Peter McVerry Trust		Yes	Yes	Varies
Spinal Injuries Ireland		Yes	No	Varies
Sue Ryder Carlow	National Group Support	No	No	N/A
Southside Disability Awareness Group		No	No	Weekly
Grow Mental Health		Yes	No	Weekly
Debra Epidermolysis Bullosa		Unsure	No	Unsure
Aslam	National Online/Phone	No	No	Weekly
Voice of Vision Impairment		No	No	Monthly
Irish Kidney Association		Yes	No	N/A
Irish Heart Foundation		Yes	No	N/A
The Groundswell Homeless Health Peer Advocacy	International One to One	Yes	No	Not Mentioned
Century House Association		Yes	No	Not Mentioned
My Life My Voice Peer Network		Yes	No	Varies
Pathways- Care Navigator		Yes	Yes	Varies
Peer Support Canada	International Group Support	Yes		N/A
Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living		No	No	Monthly
Ten Times Better London		No	No	Weekly
Peer Connect Australia	Online Supports	Yes	No	Not mentioned
Mind.org.uk		Yes	No	Not mentioned
The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)		No	No	Monthly

Click to return to [Key Findings](#)

15. Bibliography

Julie Repper. (2013). Peer Support Workers: Theory and Practice. [Online]. ImROC. Available at: https://www.researchintorecovery.com/files/RRNJuly13_ImROCbriefing_peer_support_workers.pdf [Accessed 13 February 2024].

NHS England. (2023). Supported self-management: peer support guide. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/peer-support/> [Accessed 13 February 2024]

HSE. Toolkit To Support Peer Support Workers working in the Health Service Executive. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/mentalhealthengagement/peer-support-workers-toolkit.pdf> [Accessed 13 February 2024]

Genio. Service Reform Fund. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.genio.ie/track-record/srf> [Accessed 13 February 2024].

Sam Tsemberis. (2020). A Housing First Manual for Ireland. [Online]. Available at: https://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/A_HOUSING_FIRST_MANUAL_IRELAND.pdf [Accessed 13 February 2024]

HSE. (2019). A Report on the Impact of Peer Support Workers in Mental Health Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/mental-health-engagement-and-recovery/peer-support-workers> [Accessed 13 February 2024]

Crosscare. (2023). Peer Mentor Role Description. [Online]. Available at: [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fcrosscare.ie%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fcrosscare.ie%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F) [Accessed 13 February 2024].

HAIL. Peer Support Service. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hail.ie/tenant-centre/support/peer-support-service> [Accessed 13 February 2024]

HSE. (2006). A Vision for Change. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/mentalhealth/mental-health---a-vision-for-change.pdf> [Accessed 13 February 2024]

Peer Connect. Welcome to Peer Connect. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.peerconnect.org.au/>

Century House Association. (2024). Peer Support Program. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.centuryhouseassociation.com/service-group/peer-support-program/> [Accessed 28 March 2024].

My Life My Voice. (2024). Peer Network. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mylifemyvoice.org.nz/about-peer-network> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

ReachOut. (2022). Innovative new mental health support for young people. [Online]. Available at: <https://about.au.reachout.com/blog/innovative-new-mental-health-support-for-young-people-launched-by> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Victoria Disability Resource Centre. (2024). Lived Experiences Around Disability (LEAD). [Online]. Available at: <https://drcvictoria.com/services/lived-experiences-around-disability-lead/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Feantsa. (2020). Peer Support: A Tool for Recovery in Homelessness Services. [Online]. Available at: https://www.feantsa.org/download/peer_support_policy_paper2951723577548485776.pdf [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Groundswell. (2024). Homeless Health Peer Advocacy. [Online]. Available at: <https://groundswell.org.uk/what-we-do/homeless-health-peer-advocacy/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.lothiancil.org.uk/how-we-help/peer-support-and-learning/peer-support/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2024). Peer Support Canada. [Online]. Available at: <https://pscportal.ca/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Inclusion Ireland. (2024). Self -Advocacy Groups in Ireland. [Online]. Available at: <https://inclusionireland.ie/self-advocacy-groups-in-ireland/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Southhill Family Resource Centre. (2024). Peer Support Groups. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.southhillfrc.com/copy-of-services-4> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Peter McVerry Trust. (2023). A Report on Peer Support Specialists. [Online]. Available at: <https://pmvtrust.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/A-Report-on-Peer-Support-Specialists-Identification-a> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

European Network on Independent Living. (2016). Peer support survey. [Online]. Available at: https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/10.Peer-Support-Survey_Report.pdf [Accessed 28 March 2024]

European Network on Independent Living. (2014). Peer Support for Independent Living A Training Manual. [Online]. Available at: <https://enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Peer-Support-Training-Manual-Final.pdf> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Peer Connect. (2024). Welcome to Peer Connect. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.peerconnect.org.au/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Mind. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/about-peer-support/> [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Spinal Injuries Ireland. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://spinalinjuries.ie/service/peer-support-from-sii/> [Accessed 29th May 2024]

Grow Mental Health. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://grow.ie/peer-support-mental-health/> [Accessed 29th May 2024]

Irish Kidney Association. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://ika.ie/peersupport/> [Accessed 29th May 2024]

Debra. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.debra.ie/eb-expert-panel-public-and-patient-involvement/> [Accessed 29th May 2024]

Irish Heart Foundation. (2024). Peer Support. [Online]. Available at: <https://irishheart.ie/fundraising/ways-i-can-help/volunteer-with-our-patient-support-services/> [Accessed 29th May 2024]