



Peer Support Training – information sheet

The Connect Peer Support Training Programme, developed by Anne Ford, MSW, is informed by clinical practice and based on her peer support manuals¹. The function of the manuals is to provide a comprehensive thirty-hour training in order to enhance the existing skills the trainees have, to give them new skills and the confidence to use them, and to help them to understand how they can use their newfound skills with their peers.

Training is **experiential and skill-based**, and designed to introduce, practice and build on the skill set necessary to be a competent and confident peer supporter. Topics covered in training include confidentiality, getting to know a stranger, welcoming and unwelcoming behaviours, effective questioning, active listening versus advice giving, assertive communication, families, cultural awareness, working with people in crisis, suicide prevention, the Peer Support Programme Code of Confidentiality, referrals and limit-setting.

The **style and content** of training increases the **emotional intelligence** (EI) of the peer supporters and, subsequently, that of the peers they are supporting. It is essential that those in training have the space to develop their EI so they understand themselves better and are better able to support those around them without judgment and with compassion. It takes time for participants to feel comfortable in the training group, truly understand the concepts introduced in training, go from feeling de-skilled to skilled, and develop an understanding of what it *really* means to receive and give peer support.

The **skills** developed in training – empathy, an understanding of body language, the technique of reflecting back what is said when listening, being alongside someone despite the chaos they might bring – are all skills that are **transferrable** and can be used in all areas of life. In addition, the training and subsequent supervision sessions help to build **resilience** in the peer supporters, which then enables them to support their peers in an effective, safe and boundaried way.

The **length** of training is designed to allow for participants to have time to engage in the training in a meaningful way. Each session builds on the previous one, with a continuous review of skills, theory and confidentiality. As training is personal and challenging, and because participants train with people they do not necessarily know, it takes time for the **trust** to build in the group. To become truly competent as an active listener, one who is non-judgmental, compassionate and empathic, it takes time to cultivate the skills.

The training manual is designed so that it **can be adapted** to different groups and settings, and has been used with the following groups: university students, school students, a Youth Homeless Project, London Housing Association working with those who have been homeless, London Housing Association working with clients who have experienced domestic violence, in an adolescent oncology unit.

¹ Ford A. *Peer support in colleges and universities: a training manual* (2nd edition). Gloucestershire: Pettifer Publishing Services; 2004, Ford A. *Peer Support in Teenagers Aged 15-18: a trainer's manual for use in schools and Youth Service Agencies*: Pettifer Publishing; (2004).