



Growing Together:
Dundee Peer Support
Network

Year One 2025-2026

Relaunch Report

Introduction

Dundee Peer Support Network brings together peer supporters from across the city to build connections and share best practice. It is open to anyone involved in peer support: whether formally or informally; paid or unpaid.

This report covers the network's first year of operation following its relaunch.

The purpose of this report is to document what the network has done, what participants have gained from involvement, and what the network has learned. It is based on focus group feedback from peer supporters who attended network activities, alongside data on participation and reach.



The network was relaunched to strengthen peer support across the city and to create a space where peer supporters could learn from each other, build confidence, and influence how peer support is understood and delivered locally. This first year has established the network's core activities and demonstrated the value of bringing peer supporters together around shared practice.

This report sets out what has been achieved and identifies priorities for the year ahead. This report and evaluation process has been supported by Scottish Recovery Network through data collection and analysis support and the use of their Adaptable Outcome Map tool.

Peer Support in Dundee

Peer support is when individuals use their own lived experience to support others who have been through or are going through something similar. It is embedded across Dundee's health and social care landscape, with people with lived experience of mental health challenges, addiction, homelessness, and other difficulties working formally and informally to support others in statutory services, third sector organisations, community groups, and their own networks.

There are already lots of great peer support opportunities existing throughout Dundee. Research and practice consistently show that peer support improves outcomes for people accessing services, reduces isolation, and builds community resilience.

However, peer supporters often work in isolation. They may be the only peer worker in their organisation, or one of very few. They have limited opportunity to connect with others doing similar work, to share what's working or to learn from peers in other settings. This isolation can affect morale, sustainability, and the quality of peer support practice.

Furthermore, peer supporters across Dundee work with different understandings of what peer support means and what good practice looks like. Different organisations have different approaches, values, and ways of working. Whilst this diversity is valuable and reflects the richness of peer support practice across the city, there is an opportunity to develop a shared approach that builds on these different ways of working.

The Dundee Peer Support Network was relaunched to bring peer supporters together and coordinate the strong work already happening across the city. Our role is to help create opportunities for existing groups to develop and grow. We create a space where peer supporters, regardless of where they work or what they support people with, can connect, learn from each other, and collectively strengthen peer support practice across Dundee.

Aims of Dundee Peer Support Network

Dundee Peer Support Network is a space for peer supporters across the city to connect and learn from each other. It is open to anyone, whether they're working in a formal role, volunteering, or supporting others informally within their community. The network is coordinated by DVVA and a peer development worker but is peer-led. Decisions about direction, priorities, and activities are guided by peer supporters themselves.

Practice and learning exchange

The network brings peer supporters together to share how they approach their work including what's working well, challenges they're navigating and what they're learning. Peer supporters exchange ideas, discuss successes and difficulties and learn from each other's experience and practice.

Connection with others

The network brings peer supporters together to build relationships with people doing similar work across Dundee. Regular meetings at venues across the city enable peer supporters to connect locally and access learning and development opportunities at both local and national level through partnerships with a range of organisations.

Feedback and learning on projects

Peer supporters bring their projects and ideas to the network and receive feedback from others with lived experience and peer support expertise. This feedback helps strengthen individual work and collectively builds stronger peer support practice across Dundee. By sharing learning from projects, the network supports the growth and sustainability of peer support in the city.

Skill development and training pathways

The network signposts peer supporters to training, volunteering and employment opportunities with partner organisations. The network aims to co-create steady pathways for peer supporters to develop their skills and progress within peer support work.

Influence over local practice

Helped by the network, peer supporters continue to contribute to shaping how peer support is understood and delivered across Dundee. The network creates opportunities for peer voices to be heard in conversations about peer support practice and development in the city.

Building What Dundee's Peer Supporters Need

The Dundee Peer Support Network had been established previously but had fallen to the wayside due to staff changes and other factors. In May 2025, the network was relaunched to start afresh and strengthen peer support across the city. As part of that relaunch, peer supporters were asked what they needed from the network. They identified clear priorities: regular spaces to connect, opportunities to share and learn from each other's practice, and a genuine voice in shaping how peer support develops across the city. In response, we have aimed to develop weekly drop-in sessions, peer work meetings across Dundee, a shared framework for practice, and platforms to amplify peer voices in wider conversations.

Monthly drop-in sessions

Monthly drop-in sessions are held on varying mornings and afternoons at the DVVA office. These provide a consistent, informal space where peer supporters can connect with the coordinator and each other without pressure or agenda. Peer supporters can attend to chat, share what's on their mind, or simply be present in a supportive environment. Feedback from those involved in the network has led to this expanding to 2 sessions a month, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The regularity of these sessions creates a reliable touchpoint for peer supporters across the city.

Peer Support Network gatherings

Over the course of the year, four peer support network gatherings were held at different community spaces across Dundee. Each gathering brought peer supporters together at a partner organisation's premises, allowing them to meet in different parts of the city and connect with the organisations and services working in their local areas. These gatherings created opportunities for peer supporters to see the range of community spaces available, understand the landscape of peer support and related services across Dundee, and build relationships with partner organisations. By hosting gatherings in different venues rather than one central location, the network ensured that peer supporters could engage with the work happening in their own communities and recognise the breadth of peer support activity across the city.

“Everyone is so NICE, I love peer workers – supportive and empathetic, funny, experienced, welcoming and non-judgemental”

-Dundee Peer Support Network Member

Co-Developing a framework for peer support

A small working group of peer workers from across Dundee is currently developing a framework for peer support practice. The framework aims to create a shared guide that makes peer support sustainable and encourages its uptake across the city. By bringing together peer workers with a wealth of knowledge, the working group is building something rooted in what works in peer practice. The framework is being developed collaboratively, with peer workers shaping its direction and content. This is ongoing work, and the framework will continue to evolve as the working group learns and refines it based on feedback and experience.

Amplifying peer voices and developing skills

The network has provided practice workshops throughout the year to develop peer supporters' skills and knowledge. These workshops have created structured learning opportunities for peer supporters to develop their practice and share expertise with one another. The network's worker has also presented at a range of meetings and forums across Dundee to raise awareness of peer support and the work of the network. These presentations have taken place in various settings across the city, helping to build visibility of peer support practice and the network's role in bringing peer supporters together.

Who's involved in the network

The network brings together a wide range of attendees, including people interested in exploring peer support roles and those already working as peer supporters. Participants come from across the statutory, voluntary, and academic sectors, reflecting the breadth of peer support activity in Dundee. Organisations represented include NHS Tayside, Scottish Autism, Penumbra Mental Health, the University of Dundee, and Wellbeing Works. Even within some of these organisations, peer supporters come from different teams and departments, bringing diverse perspectives and experience from across their services. This means peer supporters can connect across organisational boundaries and learn from practice happening in different settings across the city.

“Attending the Peer Framework meetings was an opportunity to connect with other Peer Workers that I might never have met otherwise. The meetings were warm, welcoming and inclusive. It felt that there was genuine interest in what we had to say, and it was validating and affirming to think that our lived experiences may contribute to creating a Framework for Best Practice in Peer Work.” - Dundee Peer Support Network Member

Impact

To understand what the network has meant for peer supporters, we gathered feedback through a reflective feedback session and a survey with participants. This is early evidence. We are one year in, so we are looking at how people are feeling right now and what they are learning and gaining, rather than claiming definitive long-term outcomes.

The findings that follow come from a thematic analysis of what participants of the network said. They tell us about the shifts they have noticed in how they feel, what they are discovering about peer practice, and how the connections they have made through the network are shaping their work. These are real changes that are important to people, even though it is still early days.

Psychological safety and acceptance

Participants in the network experienced a sense of safety and belonging within the network:

- Participants felt they could be themselves without judgment
- The network provided a space where peer supporters felt accepted for who they are
- People valued having a place where they could connect with others who understand their experience
- Peer supporters felt their presence mattered and was welcomed

Peer support work can be isolating. Many peer supporters work alone in their organisations or are the only person in their team with lived experience. The network creates a space where they can come as they are, without having to explain themselves or justify their approach. It is a place where they can de-stress, vent about challenges, and connect with others who genuinely understand what the work involves.

When peer supporters feel accepted and safe, they are able to show up more fully in their work. Safety builds confidence, reduces isolation, and creates the conditions where peer supporters can be honest about what is difficult, celebrate what is working, and learn from one another without fear of judgment. This foundation of psychological safety enables everything else that happens in the network.

Recognition and value of peer values and lived experience

Peer supporters reported that the network affirmed the value of peer support and lived experience:

- Participants felt their lived experience was recognised and valued
- Peer supporters saw their own values reflected in how the network operates
- People experienced their knowledge and expertise being taken seriously
- The network demonstrated that peer perspectives matter in conversations about peer support
- People felt they gained new peer and employability skills

This recognition validates the core of peer support work. When peer supporters see their lived experience and values at the centre of what the network does, it strengthens their confidence in their own contribution and in the approach itself.

The network functions as knowledge-sharing infrastructure. Through conversation and connection, peer supporters learn from one another's approaches, challenges, and insights. This peer-to-peer learning is powerful because it is grounded in real practice. Seeing how peer support looks across different organisations and settings helps peer supporters understand that there is no single "right way" to do the work whilst reinforcing the shared values that underpin it all.

Through the network, peer supporters gain language and frameworks to understand and articulate what peer support is. Many come into peer roles with strong instincts and lived experience but without formal training or a shared vocabulary. The network provides that vocabulary, giving people the words to explain their work to managers, colleagues, and funders. This is important in order to legitimise and professionalise peer work whilst staying rooted in values. When peer supporters can articulate their approach clearly and reference shared frameworks, they are better positioned to advocate for peer roles, influence policy, and challenge misconceptions.

“Being part of the peer network is absolutely beneficial. Firstly, connection with others working in Peer Support is invaluable - so that we don't feel isolated and also as a way of ensuring we are all working ethically”

-Dundee Peer Support Network member

Connection leading to growth and improved practice

Evidence shows that connections made through the network are supporting learning and development:

- Peer supporters gained new knowledge and skills through connecting with others
- People felt more confident in their peer support practice
- Participants were discovering new ways of approaching their work
- The network created opportunities to learn from peers doing similar work across the city

These connections are creating real shifts in how peer supporters approach their practice. The connections made through the network have a multiplier effect. When peer supporters meet, they build relationships that continue beyond network sessions, becoming channels for ongoing peer-to-peer advice and problem-solving.

Connection leads to practical outcomes. Peer supporters are sharing resources, signposting one another to training opportunities, and alerting each other to job openings. They are learning about how different organisations structure peer support, what works in different settings, and how to navigate organisational systems. This systems knowledge gives peer supporters a broader view of the landscape they work within and helps them see where their own practice fits.

Through these connections, the network is helping participants build more systems literacy: learning how statutory services operate, how funding decisions get made and where the opportunities are to influence change. This knowledge helps peer supporters engage more strategically with the systems around them and advocate more effectively for peer roles.

“I've learned more about peer work, I've met lots of lovely people, I've been kept apprised of job openings and training and other opportunities, and I've felt very supported on my journey into peer work”

- Dundee Peer Support Network Member

What's next?

Building on what we've learned in year one, the network is exploring several emerging priorities and directions for the year ahead.

1. Expanding Monthly drop-ins through varied times

The monthly drop-ins have been a vital space for peer supporters to connect and decompress. We're looking to vary the times of these sessions so they work for different schedules and commitments across Dundee. This could mean more peer supporters can access the network, whether they work shifts, have caring responsibilities, or simply need a session at a different time of day.

2. Hosting more peer meetups across different areas of Dundee

We've been hosting peer meetups in different locations across the city and we're looking to continue and expand this practice. These gatherings allow peer supporters to visit and learn about different organisations, see a range of community spaces, and build connections in different parts of Dundee. By bringing people together in varied settings, we're showcasing the breadth of peer work happening across the city and strengthening relationships between peer supporters and local organisations.

3. Amplifying peer supporter voices in policy spaces

We're aiming to create more opportunities for peer supporters to have a real say in decisions that affect peer support across Dundee. This hasn't progressed as quickly as we'd hoped in year one, but we know this kind of change takes time and sustained effort. We're exploring ways for peer supporters to be heard in policy conversations, planning meetings and strategic discussions, so that peer voices can shape the future of peer support in the city.

4. Publishing the framework for peer support in Dundee

The framework we've developed together needs to be visible and accessible across Dundee. We're looking to publish it so our shared understanding of peer support practice is clear to peer supporters, organisations and partners. It could guide consistent, quality peer support work while staying flexible to different settings and contexts.

“Being involved in the Framework design feels REALLY IMPORTANT – members of network to help introduce it to different services and to keep improving it in the future “
-Dundee Peer Network Member

5. Cultivating the conditions for peer support to thrive

Beyond the network itself, we're working towards the systemic and cultural changes that allow peer support to flourish in Dundee. This means exploring ways to work with organisations and services to embed peer values, create sustainable peer roles and recognise peer support as essential to how we support people across the city.

“It's been very welcoming and warm, as well as educational. I've learned so much about peer work and the many services across Dundee, started working for a service that suits my skills and interests, and met so many lovely people. I'm really looking forward to seeing the future of peer work in Dundee and beyond...”
-Dundee Peer Support Network Member

**Thank you to everyone who has been involved
in the Dundee Peer Support Network so far
and for providing the feedback which has
enabled this report to be produced.**

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