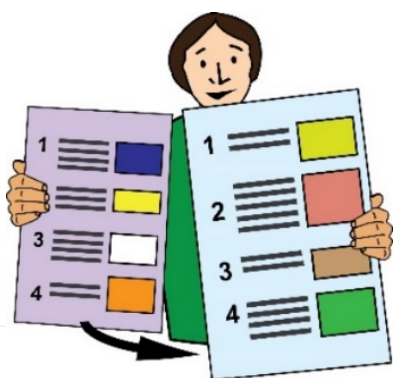


Supporting Each Other Equals Power!

What we did: Part 2

Supporting Each Other Equals Power! was a project that ran for four years. The aim of the project was to make sure people with learning difficulties have the power to support each other. Three groups worked together on the project.



A separate summary explains how the project worked. This summary tells you more about the project.



Read on to find out about some other ways that we have supported people with learning difficulties.

Romance, Sex and Sexuality

Sexuality: this means who a person wants to be with or who they are attracted to. For example, a person could be attracted to men, women, or both.



Lot of clients told us that they would like to date and find someone to spend their lives with.

Clients: in this document, this means the people with learning difficulties that our project supported.



But lots of people found it hard to meet new people and were worried about online dating.

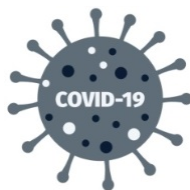


Some people had bad experiences. They had been abused or used by the other person.



The project started working with a special dating agency.

We worked with them to support people to go on dates safely.



Unfortunately, **COVID-19** meant that we had to put this work on hold.

COVID-19: this is the virus that has spread all over the world since 2020. It has changed the way that people live and work. It has affected Disabled people in particular because often, they are in danger of getting very ill if they catch the virus.



Supporting Each Other Equals Power! also supported clients with their relationships and sexuality.



For example, there was one young man with learning difficulties who was gay. He wanted to have **LGBTQ+** friends and a boyfriend.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender + or LGBTQ+: this is a group of people who have different sexualities and genders. People in this community often face abuse because of who they are or because of who they love.



We supported him to go to a LGBTQ+ night and speak to people in the LGBTQ+ community.

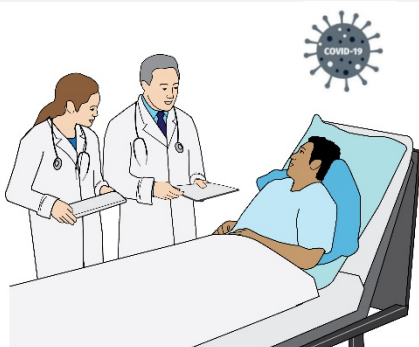




We started working with him to set up a group. The aim of the group was to support people from the LGBTQ+ community in Lambeth.

The group had one meeting before COVID-19 happened. Breaking Out of the Bubble hopes to start this group again when things are a bit safer.

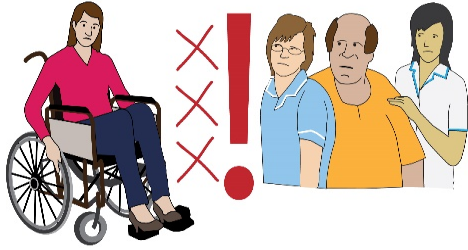
COVID-19 was very hard for people with learning difficulties.



Lots of people with learning difficulties also have health problems. These health problems mean they have a high risk of getting very ill from COVID-19.



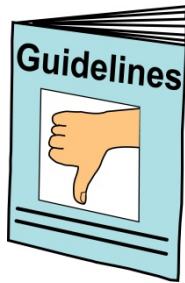
People with learning difficulties were cut off from their communities. Some people with learning difficulties had nobody else to support them.



Lockdown meant that the support people usually got from families and services was put on hold.



Lots of local services stopped giving face-to-face meetings. Some services shut down. Some services started giving less support.



Advice from the government was not always clear or accessible. The advice kept on changing.



We asked our **peer supporters** what they thought about this.

Peer support: in this document, this means when people with learning difficulties use their own experiences to help each other.



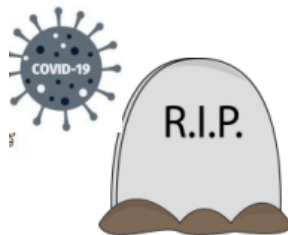
Ray said: “What the government was telling people, I didn't think it was clear at all to be quite honest with you.”



Some people with learning difficulties did not have access to technology or the internet.



Some people did not know how to talk to others or use services online.

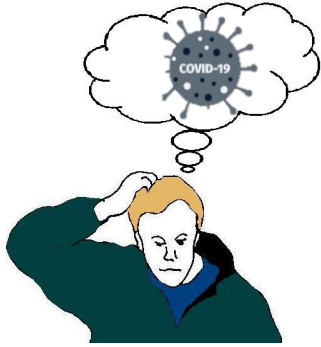


In Britain, lots of people with learning difficulties died in the pandemic. Some people lost their friends. People were worried about their own lives.

Supporting Each Other Equals Power! did lots of work to support people during COVID-19.



When COVID-19 started, we gave really important support and advice to our clients.



Lots of clients did not understand COVID-19 and how serious it was. Clients were confused by the new rules and instructions on keeping safe.



We had to keep explaining about COVID-19 and telling our clients how to keep safe.



Wenda was one of the peer supporters. She said:

“It was so difficult for them, the people with learning difficulties; they didn't understand what Covid was all about.

“And there was me and Gina and Jennifer wanted to say don't go out. You have to stay in. You have to wait a while. If you want to go out, go for a walk. All these different things; it was so hard for them.”

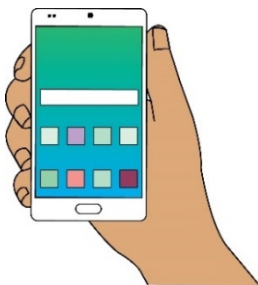
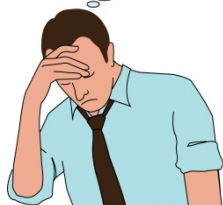
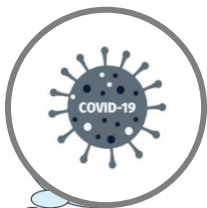


Clients listened to this advice because it came from other people with learning difficulties.



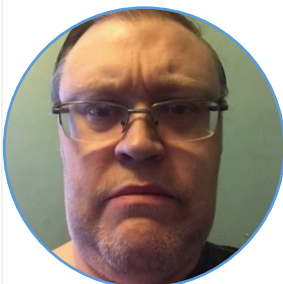
“We had to say to people why it is important to put masks on and so on. Some of the people didn't like the idea of putting masks on.

“But if you're gonna go on public transport, putting on the masks is going to make people safe.”



Our clients were often very worried and upset by COVID-19. Our group called lots of people on the phone and talked to them to make sure they were ok.

We did group calls where lots of people could speak to each other on one phone call. They did not need to use Zoom or a computer.



Neil was one of the peer supporters. He said:

“It reassured them that there were people there ready to help them at any time. If something cropped up, we were there; and the others that would help them as well. People First Self Advocacy would help some people and we would help other clients.



“But I think it was the reassurance that we were there. So, they could phone us at any time to be reassured that things were going to get better. It can be hard to start off, but they were going to get better.”



Our group made phone calls to most clients at least once a week.

Some clients had really complicated problems or were very upset.



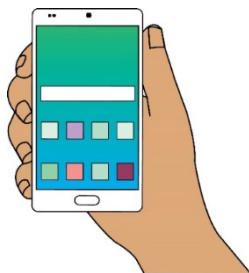
We spoke to these clients even more often, sometimes in the evenings and at weekends.



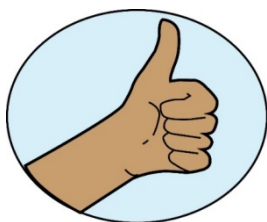
Lots of our clients lived on their own. When the lockdown started it was hard for them to get food, medication and other really important things.

We worked with other services and the clients to get them what they needed.

We carried on supporting people with issues like their housing and benefits. However, it got a lot harder because we couldn't meet face to face with them.



We had to do a lot of phoning to help clients to get in touch with services.



Clients said that the support they got from our group during COVID-19 was really important.

For example, Mary said: “Supporting Each Other Equals Power were really helpful. They sent me colouring books. A peer supporter with learning difficulties sent me messages about have you got enough food in and how are you coping; and she still does.

“I like talking to you on the phone. It helps me to talk with people I’ve known a long time and get on with. It helps you with your mood and your mental state.”

Eileen said: “You helped me with quite a lot. You’ve got me food parcels. Last benefit payment on 3rd of January. We don’t know if there will be a gap.”

Working on the project made peer supporters more confident. They were happy that they were helping other people.

Here is what some of the peer supporters said.



Gina said: “Basically, you're making a difference. And you're helping other people to see if they could do it in other different areas as well. So that kind of helped me a lot.”



“How I work with people is more confident. And it's helped me to do more talking to our clients.”



“What I've learnt now is to be more confident in my work and talk to people more easily so they don't feel that no one's getting hard on them. I can listen to the person more easily, and they can talk to me.”



Gina said: “I'd had a bit of practice of organising events. But then I just took it to another level, for other people as well. I did have a little bit of organising practice. But the project has just made it more extreme to the lengths that I've got to. Like, I've kind of organised a lot of things.



“So yeah, it did help. It really did. It made me speak up as well, about the project.”



COVID-19 meant that peer supporters learnt to use a lot of new technology.



Neil said: “We've all learnt Zoom in one way or another, we've learnt Microsoft Teams, we've learnt how to video call, we've learnt group calls. And, there are probably other things that we've learned on how to use technology to see people and talk to people.



“We've learnt so much in the last 18 months in terms of technology, I mean we've just grown in terms of our tech skills.”

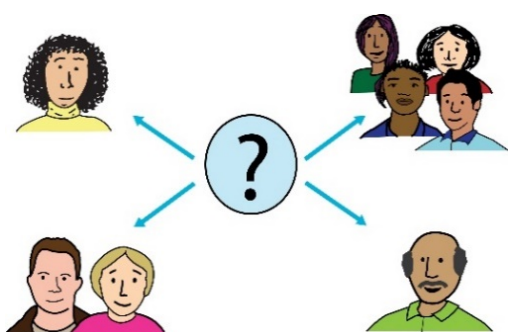


Peer supporters also taught clients how to use technology like Zoom and other video calls.



The work was sometimes stressful, so it was important for everyone on the project to talk to each other, and to take care of each other, and to take care of themselves.

It was important that the groups in our partnership worked together and talked to each other.



Sometimes it was hard for the partners to work together. There were some misunderstandings about who was doing what, and what each organisation wanted to do.



It was important that the partners talked to each other in a clear way when about the project.

This helped to clear up any misunderstandings.

Advocacy and social activities worked well together.

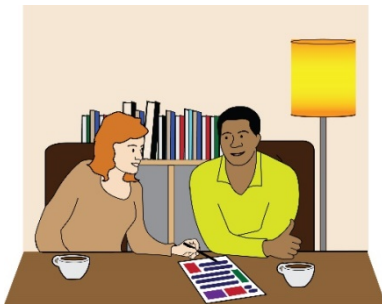
Advocacy or advocating for: here, this means standing up for people with learning difficulties and talking about their rights.



We found out that doing social activities and advocacy at the same time was really helpful.



Some people took part in our social activities first. This helped them to get to know and trust our peer supporters and support workers. When they knew and trusted us, they asked for help with a problem they had.



Some people came to us for help first, but then took part in the social activities as well.



During COVID-19 it was very important that we helped people with their problems. We also got in touch with people who were isolating.



We set up groups to help people feel less lonely.



Having both the social activities and the advocacy helped clients build stronger relationships and trust with our project.

It was important that Supporting Each Other Equals Power! was led by people with learning difficulties.



Because the peer supporters had learning difficulties, they could understand the experiences that clients had.



This helped clients to trust us because advice and support was coming from other people with learning difficulties.



Gina said: “It's very important for people with learning difficulties because they will have the last say. And they know what people with learning difficulties, other people with learning difficulties, what we have gone through. And what we want and stuff like that.

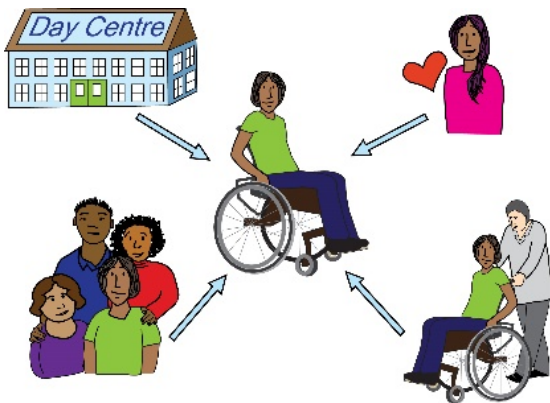


“It's easier for people with learning difficulties to understand other people with learning difficulties, because they will relate to us. They will open up to us.”



Roy, one of the clients said:

“Because you can relate to the person. You've got more of a common cause. They know what you're going through. So, they can help you channel a path through life.”



Peer supporters thought it was important to use this way of working. More people with learning difficulties should get support from other people with learning difficulties. For social, emotional and practical support.



Neil said: “That's very important because I think we've got a very unique way of seeing things, people with learning difficulties.

“I think if we can get a lot of people in this type of work who have learning difficulties it will make it so simple and easier.



“For people with learning difficulties, our clients, to understand what we're doing and what we're trying to do to help them.”

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