

How to write your peer support statement

Writing a peer support statement might seem daunting but don't worry – there's no wrong way! Generally members who submit a shorter statement end up asking to change it for a slightly more in depth version. Around 250 words seems to work well for most. The more you can include in your statement the more chances you have to be matched, but try to keep focused on what is important to you. Here are some pointers to help you.

Who are you?

Peer support isn't about professional advice it's about individuals connecting around shared experiences. You can't really do that without sharing some of yourself and the chances are that you, your friends and others don't see you as defined by your disability or your employment situation. Share something about yourself.

What do you want?

Give some background as to your reasons for joining the group; you might be really keen to share experiences of a specific illness or you may be much more interested in other's experiences of redeployment. It could be that you are a student and want to connect with other students or recent graduates.

You may not have a fixed idea of what you would like to gain from peer support, but would you be happy to speak to anyone regardless of age, disability, work status who joined the group? For some the answer to that question will be yes which is great – and do feel free to put this in your statement. For most, there's a particular topic that they want to discuss, especially as a new joiner. If you're not sure what yours is then putting some general info about your situation is a good place to start.

What do you believe?

For some, individual experience leads to a political aspect to disability. If you feel strongly about enacting change or removing disabling barriers in society, mention it as you are probably not the only one.

How can I reach you?

How do you want to communicate? Most members who responded to a recent review preferred email as there was no concern about disturbing others and they found it easier to "open up". If you only want to give and receive phone support make this clear on your statement. Remember that any contact info that you put on your consent form will be shared with all group members.

Why should I speak to you?

Imagine how someone reading your statement might find its tone; as other members will be given your details and choose whether or not to contact you based on your statement. Peer support is based on reciprocity and members generally hope to get back the effort they put in – but also realise that at certain times you may need support more than them and vice versa (particularly when you are a new joiner).

Remember: You can always change your statement any time by contacting the project coordinator.

3 examples of statements from members

Fell down stairs May 2013, sustained back injury and nerve damage which left me with an atonic bladder. I self catheterise 5-6 times a day and have had numerous hospital admissions for bladder & kidney infections requiring IV antibiotic treatment. I have been allergic to some catheters and require indwelling catheters at times and 2 months with a suprapubic catheter in. I worked with both catheters in. I recently exacerbated my back condition at work and am currently signed off sick following a spinal assessment. I am currently on a first stage caution and imagine I will be given a 2nd stage caution on return to work. I need advice re work issues. I struggle in social situations now due to my atonic bladder as sometimes I have suffer incontinence. I have just turned 36 and am feeling very lost and alone.

I injured my back and foot in an accident at my place of work whilst lifting a semi unconscious patient from a chair on to a bed. At first I felt a little twinge in my back but the next day I could hardly weight bear and was walking with a limp.

I hobbled in to work (as you do as a nurse!) and was shortly sent home, I made an appt to see my GP who signed me off for 7 weeks (I suffered more as the days went by.) I went to see a chiropractor, had treatment at L4/45, the pain continued. Over the years I have had numerous bouts of flare ups due to work overload/stress. Medication was changed several times too, referrals to physiotherapist, pain specialist, Pilates. Tests galore physical examinations and MRIs. Emergency visits to A&E/GP due to flare ups of acute pain one recently June 2012 and all the nurses were complaining of bad backs and my motto is you only have one back but in my situation if I had not helped that lady with a colleague that day she could of died NMC dictates we have to and my inner nurse wouldn't of stopped me nor would my conscience BUT I do regret it now as I am debilitated by my disability I can't wash/dress/toilet/go out on my own the list is endless & I am going to lose my job nearly been off sick for a year. So joining a peer support group I feel will give me links to others like me who are registered disabled, blue badge holders, use equipment & require a carer to assist day to day & improve quality of life. I also feel that I need/want to maintain links with my profession & learn new opportunities perhaps start a new role & of course to advise others that are in my situation.

I am a 35 year old Nurse and was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia last year, after a workplace accident in 2008. I am more than happy to provide support for others by text or e-mail, but I have trouble with my speech and formulating the right words, so a telephone conversation can be quite confusing for those who do not know me. You don't have to have the same condition as me, I will happily support anyone who needs it, even if it is just to let off steam.