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Peer Support in Education

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Staff

Staff wellbeing supporters

Pastoral support

Students

Student wellbeing supporters

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Outline

Student mental health current picture

- Some statistics
- Wellbeing support in Education

Peer Support

- The need
- What it is
- Peer support issues

Peer Support Benefits

- For those accessing peer support
- For those volunteering peer support
- For education organisations

Wellbeing Support

- Validium's Peer Support training programme

Student mental health - The current picture

Student populations report higher levels of subjective psychological distress and poor mental health compared to the general population

(Bruffaerts et al., 2018)

1 in 3

undergraduates report mental health problems

(Bruffaerts et al., 2018)

73%

of students stating their mental health declined during recent lockdown

(Mind's (2020) covid survey)

18-24 year old's

reported worse mental health and wellbeing during UK 2020 lockdown than any other age group

Peer support

Mind, a mental health charity highlights seeking help and support from peers as a means of coping

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Wellbeing support services in Education

External support

NHS, GP, Charity i.e. Samaritans

Specialist support

By appointment, welfare and pastoral support: counselling and psychological services, disability and chaplaincy

Peer to peer support

By appointment, peer assisted learning, peer assisted study, mentoring, student accommodation support and peer support

Self-help

Can be accessed anywhere/anytime, online resources, knowledge base and websites

FE/School

Pre-arrival and expectations

Peer to Peer Support Research

- A tool to improve wellbeing
- Shared understanding
- Developed by Oxford University
- Similar programmes used across UK/EU

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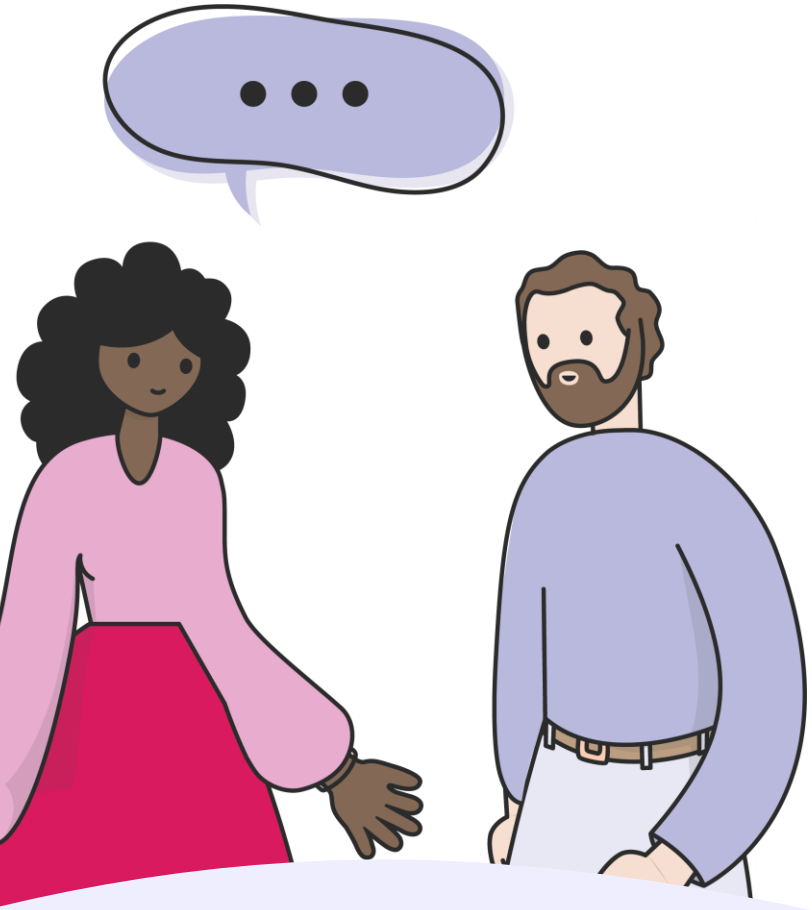
Peer Support need



For Students

- Studying at university creates a unique set of challenges that can increase stress levels due to significant life changes
- The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has adversely affected high numbers of students, many of whom are experiencing a decline in their overall mental health and wellbeing
- Historically, there has been a reluctance amongst students to seek formal help for mental health issues, with many students preferring to seek the support from informal sources, such as peers, family, and websites

For Staff

- Increasing challenges for staff, managers and academics working in HE with increasing workloads
- Increasing audit and metrics
- Increasing interactions with students exhibiting poor mental health
- Emotional contagion from others having a negative impact on their own mental health
- Do not feel equipped to have supportive conversations about mental health
- Staff exhibit higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing than the general population

What is Peer Support?

Definition

Peer support is when people use their own experiences to help each other. There are different types of peer support, but they all aim to:

- bring together people with shared experiences to support each other
- provide a space where you feel accepted and understood
- treat everyone's experiences as being equally important
- involve both giving and receiving support

(Mind.org.uk, 2021)

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Peer Support issues

For students accessing support

- Friendships
- Housemates/living
- Relationships
- Loneliness
- Homesickness
- Social isolation
- Academic work and pressures
- Examinations
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Illness/health issues
- Bereavement
- Coping disorders
- Disability
- Career/future
- Financial pressures
- Transitioning into HE
- Care experienced
- Caring responsibilities

For staff accessing support

- Work related pressures
- COVID pressures seen and unseen
- Face to face/online teaching
- Hybrid working
- Personal challenges
- Pressure from supporting students with poor mental health
- Social isolation and lack of collaboration
- Ongoing uncertainty about role and boundaries
- Job insecurity

Benefits of Peer Support - Student lens

Students accessing support

- Early intervention ensuring September's distress does not become December's mental health problem
- Feel listened to by peers with similar experiences
- Sense of connection
- Reduction in isolation and feelings of loneliness
- Provision of social, emotional and practical support
- Increase in self-esteem
- Empowerment to self-solve
- Increased independence and autonomy
- Potential crisis prevention

Students volunteering support

- Connects and builds relationships
- Provides empathy and compassion skills
- Understanding of risk
- Improves communication skills
- Mental health awareness (self and others); and understanding of mental health problems
- Supporters acquire and hone transferrable skills and graduate attributes that are gained over the course of HE career
- Respected, trusted and highly valued by others
- Volunteering provides social, economic, psychological and practical benefits

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Benefits of Peer Support - Staff lens

Students accessing support

- Early intervention ensuring September's distress does not become December's mental health problem
- Feel listened to by peers with similar experiences
- Sense of connection
- Reduction in isolation and feelings of loneliness
- Provision of social, emotional and practical support
- Increase in self-esteem
- Empowerment to self-solve
- Increased independence and autonomy
- Potential crisis prevention
- **Staff may have a pastoral role either formally or informally - Peer support can assist in the setting of boundaries**

Students volunteering support

- Connects and builds relationships
- Provides empathy and compassion skills
- Understanding of risk
- Improves communication skills
- Mental health awareness (self and others); and understanding of mental health problems
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Benefits of Peer Support – Organisational lens

- Positive impact on student retention
- Provision of gateway to further assistance for students and staff
- Investing in expert training
- Positive impact on progression
- Increases engagement
- Increases motivation
- Reduces barriers
- Continues conversation on mental health issues in University

- Early intervention support for mild mental health
- Potential to create clear pathways and referrals via student services
- Potential reduction in counselling waiting list
- Further support to aid transition for all students
- Trained by mental health expert
- Improvement of student experience
- Improvement of staff experience
- Supports organisation equality and diversity and wellbeing strategy

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Peer Support stories

Rebecca's story

How Peer Support
could have helped

Ex 1st year Law student University

Chaotic family life. First member of family to go to University. Unable to cope with "normal" people. Self-harm, suicide attempt.

PS could have provided:

- Connection, inclusion, belonging
- Authentic empathy and a listening ear
- Sense of community and signposting
- Normalised concerns and built skills

Now unemployed. Accessing PS could have provided a different outcome for Rebecca, the university and society.

Rachel's story

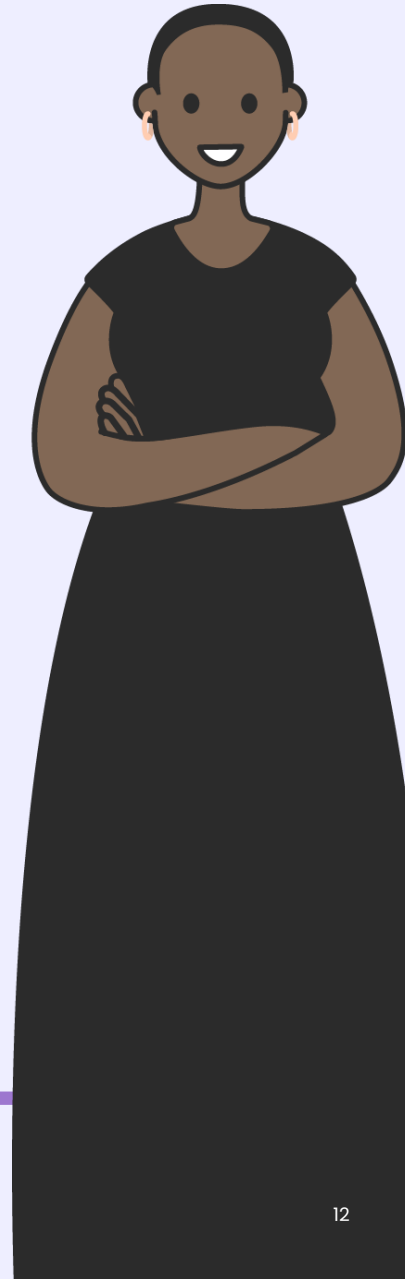
...a new career from
volunteering as a Peer Supporter

Teacher on International Erasmus settling in UK

Teacher in UK from Paraguay on one year adult education course. Completed 10-week PS training, which she believes was instrumental in her achieving a tutoring position with a Russel Group University.

Rachel talks about her increased self-awareness, emotional intelligence and confidence in her ability to listen and respond supportively to people from all walks of life.

Peer support is "giving to others", one of the NHS five ways to mental wellbeing. Helping others is helping Rachel with her own mental health.



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Validium's Peer Support Programme

Wellbeing Support

- 16 hour training programme
- Lead by qualified counsellors/ psychotherapists/ psychologists
- Available online

- Ensures candidates feel confident in their role as Wellbeing Supporters
- Ensures candidates feel supported in their role. Emphasises importance of supervision for Wellbeing Supporters

Covers multiple areas:

- Confidentiality & boundaries
- Common MH issues/risk/suicide and trauma
- Working empathically and active listening skills

- Encourages Wellbeing Supporters to reflect on:

1. Skills development
2. Transferable skills
3. Graduate attributes

For further information on Wellbeing Support in your organisation please contact: **training@validium.com**

Thank you

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