WOMEN'S LIVESLEEDS

Empowering Women and Girls in Leeds

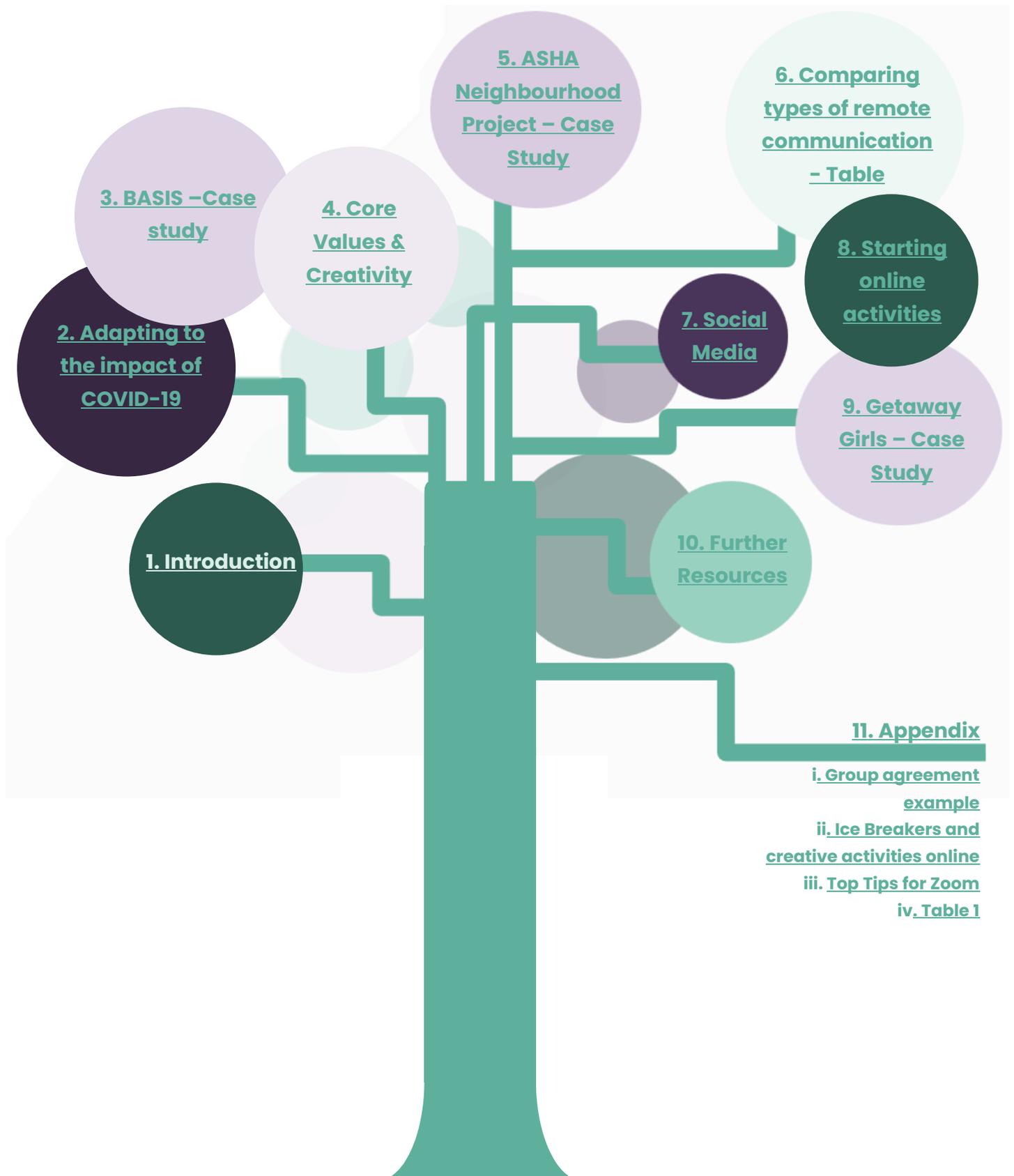# Moving to Remote Peer Support

Women's Lives Leeds Toolkit

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Contents

1. Introduction

This toolkit was written in light of COVID-19, the UK government's social distancing measures and the subsequent increased need of people to find connection and support in Leeds. It is designed with <u>Women's Lives Leeds (WLL)</u> organisations in mind, but will be applicable for others delivering or facilitating activities during the Government-recommended "lockdown" and beyond.

It is a difficult time for many; including those 'self-isolating' due to age, physical health conditions and people living alone. In a time of physical separation, the term 'social distancing' can feel even more isolating. Under usual circumstances, many would have benefitted greatly from social support and interaction. The changing context of peer support (PS) activities has led to an array of creative responses, but has also brought many activities to an abrupt end. **Depending on the people concerned and your own capacity, moving to remote models of peer support can be a method to positively impact service users' wellbeing.**

We hope this guide will initiate beneficial conversations; enabling you to explore more ways of reconnecting and supporting one another. Within it we highlight risks to consider and share resources and ideas for groups and individuals considering setting up, or moving to, remote PS activities. It contains examples of online initiatives and has been created with input from PS participants. **We encourage you to <u>share</u> your experience and learning with us.**

With special thanks to staff and service users at Basis, Asha Neighbourhood Project, Getaway Girls, Nari Ekta and Women's Health Matters for their case studies and input.

2. Adapting to the impact of COVID-19

"I am scared to go out, but when I get sunshine or talk to my family I feel better."

Asha PS participant

When considering remote PS, it's useful to consider the wider changed context which COVID-19 has brought. On 23rd March 2020 the UK government introduced new measures to reduce the spread of the virus; requiring people to stay at home, except for very limited purposes. Many have lost income, childcare and contact with family and friends. There has also been a steep rise in domestic violence.

This unique social, political and economic context has heightened inequality; creating further economic and health disparities. For the more economically deprived areas where WLL organisations work, the impact has been felt on daily life.

More people are applying and waiting for Universal Credit; struggling to look after family members and pay bills with little to no savings. Leeds City Council have reported delivering over 300 food parcels daily to people with low incomes and/or in high risks groups. COVID-19 has been shown to have more severe effects on BAMER communities and people with pre-existing health conditions. Some WLL female service users are sex workers or working in 'low skilled' care and cleaning settings, where they are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 without adequate PPE; having to choose income over health.

In the first instance the emphasis needs to be on safety, signposting and resilience building.' **UKCP**

COVID-19 and related government measures have affected everyone physically and psychologically. We have experienced an increased need for practical information within peer support, such as how to access grants for household bills and school meal vouchers. With the rapid spread of (mis)information; Asha PS service users reported feeling increased anxiety reading the news and uncertainty about the future.

Insecurity and disruption to routine and the end of face-to-face support can exacerbate mental health conditions and trigger past trauma. There is a need to allow for different reactions and accept these as valid responses to uncertainty.

Some WLL session leaders have surprisingly found people feeling more confident engaging online, with reduced anxiety from travelling and face to face meetings, Women's Health Matters have witnessed the opposite,

"... some just feel too self-conscious and anxious to do something online."

Wellbeing, ever present in peer support, has become the main emphasis of online activities. Some WLL PS groups have looked at reflecting on what helps them out of a 'fight or flight' mode; sharing tips on coping with stress and what brings calm and joy in daily life. See **Further Resources** below for more personal wellbeing and mental health resources.

Remote connections can deepen friendships in a supportive environment, where people are able to share pressures of home life, essential information and build confidence. **This opportunity to try out new technology and ideas, leads to a more creative and dynamic way of working, that you can continue to use post-pandemic.**

3. Basis Yorkshire case study

We contacted all the service users we had numbers for and asked them whether they needed support during this time and if they did, what might that look like for them. Asking these questions created a record for how people wanted to engage. We were then able to develop groups based around the type of support people needed, be that: relief from boredom and isolation through to connecting with others; help with budgeting; a chance to vent about previous trauma and negative experiences; exercise classes; support around healthy relationships and goal setting.

We risk assessed individuals, ensuring that the content of the group they were in was not triggering, inappropriate or exposed them to safeguarding concerns, such as unhealthy relationships. We created an activity timetable and scheduled group calls on zoom that can be emailed or texted to the participants every week. I try to call the women on our contact sheet once a week to catch up and let them know when the groups are.

As the need for remote support was immediate, we didn't have much time to structure these groups before they started. The process is rather a learning experience; so we are constantly listening to what the women want from these groups and developing and structuring around this need. For example, often women are not able to join the set group times and so I have factored in the need for flexibility, doing 1:1 sessions alongside groups.

"I was a bit scared of it before, but now I'm on it, it's great!"
Basis peer support participant

Zoom has been beneficial for running sessions with women who have access to a phone/tablet/laptop and data or Wi-Fi; as you are able to share your screen and work on PowerPoints together. I would say that it is essential to suppliment this conversation with other types of online support, as zoom can be quite exclusive.

- Izzy Kynoch, Basis PS facilitator

4. Core values and Creativity

Women's Lives Leeds defines Peer Support as:

> *"..a mutually beneficial exchange which is based on women sharing their experience. It can be both formal and informal, and whilst it constitutes different activities, at heart there are core values of shared identity, safety and trust, reciprocity and mutuality, empowerment and agency and a woman centred approach."*

Women's Lives Leeds adopted the above core values, taken from the [Mind Side By Side](#) 2017 research project. In order to maintain high quality and impactful outcomes, the approach and core values of remote PS should not differ; but the design and delivery will need to adapt to a new context.

Take time to reflect on how you can keep these core values at the heart of what you do;

i. Shared identity

The value and benefits to shared activities among people of similar backgrounds, experiences, interests, or goals, is at the core of peer support groups. If you are including new participants or merging two previously face-to-face groups for remote activities; consider the effect this will have and whether this core value can be met.

ii. Safety and trust

Emotional safety

The impact of the current pandemic can compromise a person's ability to cope with day-to-day activities. Previously considered manageable challenges can lead to emotional overwhelm, with a loss of psychological safety.

Some key points to consider:

- Trauma-informed working is essential to create a psychologically safe space. **See below** for more information on this way of working.
- Acknowledge and value all responses and feelings about COVID-19's impact
- Groups can be overwhelming, so consider offering 1:1 support instead
- Be careful of triggering topics; create groups with a focus so that these topics do not arise; for example, you could decide with participants to stick to a lighter online social group
- Consider the home dynamics and how that will affect how someone gets online/stays online

- A group agreement can help clarify the group's purpose, whilst helping to create trust within a safe space

Physical safety

Some additional questions for potential risks to consider;

- Are peer support participants sharing phones or devices with other people in the household? If in an appropriate setting, do they know how to log out of accounts?
- Do people already know each other? If not, think about how you will risk assess and mitigate risks e.g. is there DV, or other concerns, for their immediate or long-term safety if sharing personal phone numbers with PS participants?
- Have you completed an individual risk assessment (RA) for your activity and each participant? This should be in line with your organisation's RA policy.

⟹ See Comparing types of remote communication below, for more risks and benefits to consider.

iii. Reciprocity and mutuality

WLL service users have naturally responded to the "lockdown" by providing emotional and practical support for their peers and sharing resources. We recognise some may just want to be part of a group, without contributing, and may not stay the whole session. It's important to value and show appreciation for all involvement; creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for meaningful connections to form.

"I like the positive encouragement and the varied activities...it's good to also focus on the crisis and meeting people's needs like food parcels, sharing information about jobs and giving each other emotional support."

Tahena - Asha peer support co-facilitator

iv. Empowerment and agency

Remote PS can enable people to support each other with anxiety and ease the pressure and expectations on frontline caseworkers in an unprecedented time. It could be the chance to turn previously staff-led personal development courses into less structured support groups, empowering women to take the lead. This may involve light touch facilitating, or encouraging a few participants to co-lead a PS activity, with training if needed.

"The best conversations have been when two or more service users have been on a zoom call and are able to support each other through these difficult times. The other day I asked one woman to prepare some points to bring to the group and the conversation between her the others really

flourished."
Izzy Kynoch – Basis peer support facilitator & WLL staff member

Remind people it is not only their choice to join and set the activities, but more importantly they can join and leave at any time. It's still possible to find smaller areas of choice and, if people prefer to not take the lead and join in where possible. You can provide a focus or initiating a topic or activity, whilst giving the space for more autonomy, self-expression and new activities to emerge;

"During Ramadan a participant expressed interest in discussing more about prayers in Islam. Not all peer support participants were Muslim, so she was supported with the Asha worker to organise another Whatsapp video call to facilitate this discussion and enable deeper discussion to focus on her faith during this time."

Isabelle – Asha PS Facilitator & WLL staff member

v. A woman centred approach

Can you continue to be inclusive in this new format? Consider adjustments to the format of the group for people who are sight impaired or autistic. Mothers may find early evening a better time for speaking remotely. Be mindful participants may not have their usual carers, impacting on family dynamics and tensions. See below for more potential barriers to consider.

It is important to highlight that remote peer support may not be appropriate for certain groups and individuals. The current pandemic has left people with little time or energy to be able to engage. For example, many female service users from the South Asian community at Nari Ekta, reported not having time to pursue remote learning or peer support activities. They faced expectations by traditional relatives to take on the sole role of carer for their children and household duties during "lockdown". Nari Ekta have instead been supporting their learners with 1:1 phone calls where possible and plan on resuming activities after the lifting of social distancing measures.

After only two sessions of a formal PS group, we had to stop non-essential meetings due to COVID-19. The group was made up of a mixture of adult BAMER women; many with young children. All attendees were contacted to discuss whether and how we could reconnect remotely. Many reported feeling isolated; childcare and the activities they used to attend had stopped. All were keen to keep in contact during this uncertain time. Phone calls were preferred, so we matched people up appropriate to language level and reasons for joining the group. Some wanted a social space, others professional development, to discuss local issues and many stated as an outcome for them to build confidence and meet new people. One service user reported feeling more confident. She felt chatting helped her with anxiety and she does not feel she is being judged. Another said,

"It's good to know what's happening and how others are keeping themselves safe. I live alone. The topics are important, like the way we eat…it's important to have good habits". Asha PS participant

The Asha PS group agreed on weekly calls on a theme for discussion. We started trying to follow the previously agreed topics, such as drugs, crime and policing, but quickly realised these were too 'heavy' to discuss in a time of pandemic. There was a need for lighter topics. These were very loosely around COVID-19. For example; what the guidelines were, self-care practices, how we react to difficulty and stress, parenting. We also ended up sharing practical information, such accessing emergency food provisions and work opportunities. Phone calls don't happen every week with all pairs, but depend on people's availability and energy levels.

I like chatting to know how someone feels… sometimes it's hard to understand, but good for my English.' Asha PS participant

Asha already used different WhatsApp groups to share information with service users. Participants consented to use this to check in and share essential information as a group. Most did not have enough time, phone data, nor expressed interest in trying Zoom. We had met the participants personally and none raised concerns for us around safeguarding. All agreed to use the group to confidentially receive and send personal updates and positive and supportive messages. Sharing photo updates and voice messaging got good responses; this was particularly helpful for people with lower levels of English who could participate easily.

We tried a video call on WhatsApp as a general catch up; it was helpful to use headphones and ensure mothers were in a quieter room if possible. This had a lot of engagement and more weekly 'catch up' video calls have since taken place.

- Isabelle Fathimani, Asha PS co-facilitator & WLL staff member

6. Comparing types of remote communication

	Phone Calls	WhatsApp Messaging	Whatsapp Video calls	Zoom Video calls
Benefits	Easy, quick, as 1:1 can be flexible with where/when, stronger friendships, more time to express self and build trust, cheap	Ubiquitous amongst smart phone users, easy to use, requires less data than Zoom, variety of mediums: writing, photos, audio instant and recorded allows different times/levels of engagement; good to share reliable news sources and creative resources during COVID-19; useful as a check in tool & schedule video calls	Quick & easy; small groups enable better flowing conversations and more intimate discussions; can join using phone and even non-UK numbers	No need to share personal numbers or emails; more security features (waiting room/password); can have lots of people in calls from anywhere in Leeds/wider world and see everyone at once; people can 'drop in' to calls and hide video/take a break when they like (less intense); can share screens and collaborate; can mute participants to avoid interruptions; can increase sense of connectedness and community
Risks / Challenges	Sharing personal numbers, no group discussions; relies on motivation of individuals to organise/report back or facilitator to check-in; high-risk service users building friendships with negative influences & increase exposure to risk e.g. substance misuse	Not instant/discussions hard; Sharing personal numbers; once shared cannot mediate or control alternative modes of communicating if there are misunderstandings; can lead to sharing of negative/false news stories and increase anxiety if left unfacilitated; photos and videos can be forwarded – need clarity & agreement around what should not be shared	More time needed to set up & active facilitation to encourage participation initially; requires quiet private space; limited to 8 per call; if more than 4 can't see everyone at once; Sharing personal numbers; can't mute participants	More time needed to set up initially; requires quiet private space; need to download & create log-in; need good Internet connection (in-browser versions are poor quality); people dropping in can be distracting; 40-min limit on free versions; security features can put-off newcomers; risk of 'zoom bombing' if remove password or link shared outside the group; can't view all participants at once if using handheld device.
Suitable for…	Setting up other communication modes; One- to-one support	Groups based around professional and personal development; 'low-risk' service users	Groups based around professional/personal development; 'low-risk' service users	Variety of groups, from social to issue-specific; can invite guest speakers → See also **Top Tips for Zoom** in the Appendix.

7. Social Media

Social media can be more useful as information sharing points; sending out positive messages and updates. Below are a few examples of these platforms. As with the above communication methods, using them would be dependent on your own organisation's policy and weighing up the balance of potential risk and benefit to your peer support activities.

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	A note on written communication
Benefits	Enables conversations on specific topics and connecting wider communities over similar experiences/ interests; content private outside of the group; can administer and remove people form group; can manually approve people to join (with joining qs and agree to terms or use 'group agreement')	Can help push campaigns and issues raised within peer support groups to the forefront; PS participants can use as a platform to reach high profile politicians/decision-makers	Widely used/ popular platform for all ages and PS participants who are online use this; Can share photos and video temporary stories or permanent posts. Many use this to communicate personally on and keep up with companies or celebrities they are interested in.	As with WhatsApp, it is hard to see how messages land with another person; to sense the tone and mood of the sender. They carry additional risks related to cyber bullying, 'trolling' etc, when using personal social media accounts. If people use hashtags in their posts, these can be seen by others following the same trending topic.
Risks / Challenges	Using personal Facebook profiles to take part removes any anonymity *between* group members; requires strong administrators and clear guidelines to create a safe space	Not widely used by WLL PS participants; Doesn't enable discussions within PS groups but can trigger wider public discussions on key social issues/ campaigns	People can be left negative comments if their account is not set to private, if they have used a hashtag e.g. #Lockdown, or by people who they have granted permission to 'follow'.	**Live streaming** videos amongst larger PS groups is free using Instagram and Facebook. YouTube requires having 1000 subscribers minimum, but comments can be disabled and the video can be accessed afterwards.
Suitable for	Wider issue groups/focus groups; e.g. Leeds Peer Support Network and other city or nation-wide initiatives tend to have these as a platform to share best practice and event across Leeds.	WLL staff/org networking, following trending topics and raising awareness of WLL initiatives, activities and the needs of their service users.	WLL orgs for updates; Young or tech-savvy PS participants	

8. Starting online activities

Scoping

If you are starting a new PS group; check what is feasible with given resources and your capacity. You may need extra support and training to feel confident in setting up activities and helping others do the same. Seek out a mentor or ask an experienced colleague, volunteer or PS participant to help you co-facilitate the group. You can look for support and guidance on peer support platforms.

Contact each person to check the impact of COVID-10 on their immediate support needs. Do an audit of what people have technology wise and what they may be willing to try. An example of initial questions to ask around impact and needs can be found below.

Actively seek consent and make no assumptions. As mentioned above, we cannot assume everyone will want to engage in PS activities, or how this will look for them. Written or recorded verbal consent can be taken for the sharing of personal details, in line with your organisation's policies. The potential risks of sharing details should be explored in advance with PS participants.

Risk Assess Dynamically

This context requires a constant re-assessment of the activity and participants. The advantages of starting with a pre-existing group are that people already know each other and you are aware of the dynamics of the group; you can therefore try to mitigate risks of a fallout or communication issues.

In collaboration with PS participants, consider:

- the person's history and how they think will cope with a remote communication platform, and ask for help when needed. Plan in time to check-in after meetings with particularly vulnerable participants or if sensitive topics were raised.
- If you have not met new participants face-to-face, plan with them how you will assess for potential risks; were they referred from elsewhere? What is their past

experience of PS, if any? How isolated is the person and what other support networks do they have?

- Is the home situation stable enough for them to be able to chat; would written communication be easier in a PS context? Would it feel safe and appropriate speaking with their children in the room, or at a particular time?
- Be clear about how you would need to report safeguarding risks if concerns were raised online or over the phone. You may need to check and update your own organisation's safeguarding policy for new forms of online service delivery
- If using online resources or attending webinars, how is anonymity maintained?

Setting Ground Rules

Amend or formulate a new group agreement, ideally prior to the first activity. These will be co-produced with peer support participants, but also shaped by WLL's peer support values and principles.

People can experience blurred boundaries and less inhibitions online; remind them to take responsibility for how much they share about themselves; ask them to prepare as they would for a usual meeting and find a quiet space.

See below for an example of a group agreement.

Adapting to different needs

Understand people's motivations before planning activities. Have they joined for emotional support, information, campaigning, professional or personal development, to make friends, have a break from family life, or for some other outcome? Structure the meetings with these in mind, using this in turn to observe the outcomes for participants and evaluate the project.

Discuss different times and modes of communicating, depending on the people involved (age, language, caring responsibilities, if working) and type of activity, such as educational, emotional support, wellbeing-based (keeping active, mindfulness), information sharing, identity or issue-specific (BAMER barriers to accessing services, LGBTQ+ wellbeing, long term health condition experiences…).

Reflect on whether the activity chosen would add to peoples' wellbeing and be a useful resource. Its purpose may need shift to this focus on befriending or simply information-sharing to be beneficial.

Common issues of; no access to public Wi-Fi or paid Internet; poor connection for using Zoom; and varied levels of comfort with using applications/devices without face-to-face support, can induce further stress for participants. Provide an emergency number for technology issues, last minute changes, or if someone needs to chat afterwards.

Keep those who are not able or willing to join remote activities updated, where appropriate. **See Further resources for funding opportunities and training to set up technology remotely for staff and PS facilitators with Digital Leeds**

Facilitating sessions

Ultimately the purpose, frequency of activities and final content will be up to participants. However, an initial session on PS and core values will help shape this.

You may want to;

- Explore WLL PS core values and revise ground rules together in the first few sessions. For example, each person could look a value and present their interpretation of this to the group through words, pictures or lead an activity about it.

- Remind people they can be as involved as they want; more confident participants may like to share the responsibility of facilitating or decide to share more roles, such as; time-keeper, tech support, ice breaker and activity leader.

- Mix content, to balance light and heavy topics and Ice Breakers to create a relaxed atmosphere. **Take a look at Ice Breakers in the Appendix below, particularly useful at the start of video calls.**

- Help PS participants to look after their own and other people's wellbeing by keeping this a key focus; at a time when people may feel out of control of the

wider situation; focus on things they do have control over (news input, exercise, positive distractions, following government guidelines).

- Starting groups or phone calls with a 'check-in' can help you to be aware of a person's mood and level of engagement on a particular day. This can be describing your day or week and any strong (positive/negative) emotions and experiences.
- Focusing on 'self-care' or what makes us feel good and how to prioritise this in our lives. Be aware of potential overwhelm of additional input with PS activities; keep sessions to less than an hour, where possible.

For an array of well-researched ideas around planning and delivering your peer support sessions, see Mind's Side by Side peer support toolkit.

Test, learn and adapt

Approach this unfamiliar territory with creativity; it's not one size fits all. Each group and its participants are unique, so you'll need to be flexible and allow groups to change in focus;

At Asha, during Ramadan, people reported less energy to make time for phone calls. Instead, short video calls were used at a later time and they focused on sending general positive WhatsApp messages to support one another.

Isabelle – Asha Peer support co-facilitator & WLL staff member

Remember: people's interest can waver and priorities will change. Make evaluation an ongoing process to be responsive to changing needs and abandon things that aren't working. You can use 1:1 phone calls to ask for feedback and provide opportunities for new ideas. This can also help participants recognise whether they need to pause or step out of the group. Enabling participants to devise an anonymous online survey with simple yes/no answers and space for comments could also work to enable people to be honest with their feedback.

9. Getaway Girls – case study

For the last four years Paulette Morris has facilitated the Getaway Girls creative group SheWrites, for 18 to 25-year-old women; many with mental health conditions. After the COVID-19 restrictions were in place, she invited Side by Side group attendees to join; both had similar interests with crossovers on activities. They provide emotional support for one another and do creative activities. She was unsure of moving online, because of heightened anxiety and the loss of supportive rituals of the group; sharing food and sitting in a circle, which enabled people to reflect freely and share how they were feeling. Some don't go out or socialise outside of the group and one has been allowed to attend the group instead of formal counselling sessions;

"A lot of them struggle to get out of bed, so going to the group is a big achievement"

Paulette faced barriers in using technology herself and need time to adapt; so SheWrites was initially on hold when social distancing was recommended. Getaway Girls received a grant to get service users online and borrowed tablets from Digital Leeds. The group decided on using Zoom for group video calls. After past negative experiences, Getaway Girls decided on a policy against the use of WhatsApp groups, unless service users decided to organise this by themselves. They experienced service users:

"..saying things they wouldn't say face to face. In a group you can mediate... but once something is shared online, there is no control."

Paulette contacts people 1:1 about joining the group, whilst encouraging existing service users to share something or organise a game for the next session. They are more likely to contribute if prepared in advance and inspire newcomers to participate. She helped them set up Zoom and test it out with her first, so they feel confident using it. If she receives a new referral, she will get to know them first to understand how they would fit into the online group and rings them afterwards;

"You get to know the dynamics...who are talkers. If someone finds it hard to join in...I tell them it's ok to just listen which is equally valuable...."

During COVID-19, Paulette has found a big need for signposting. She has found creative ways to interact online; inviting guest poets to speak and recording voices for the SheWrites online book launch. One benefit of being online is getting to see more of person's life outside the group; they show their pets, bring art work, share ideas for crafts - some have even performed. The focus is not solely on writing;

"It's about connecting...and sharing the highs and lows."

10. Further Resources

The above is not an exhaustive list of possibilities and you may find other methods work for you. More resources are listed below.

Tell us about your learning and peer support journey;

➔ **Share your ideas and feedback with us at Women's Lives Leeds online and by emailing IsabelleF@leedswomensaid.org.uk, WLL Peer Support and Inclusion worker**

➔ **Join the Leeds Peer Support Network discussions on Facebook**

Practical online skills and support

Digital Inclusion Leeds 'How to' guides and resources, including free online training for individuals and organisations

Click here for a step by step guide to using Zoom (pdf)

Cross Gates & District Good Neighbours Scheme link to how to use Zoom, Houseparty, and an example of virtual social meet ups

Sharing best practice

Leeds Peer Support Network (LPSN) A group of individuals and organisations who are passionate about the development and delivery of peer support opportunities in Leeds

Peer Support toolkit by Mind - Side by Side Research Consortium (2017) 'Developing peer support in the community: a toolkit'

National Voices Peer Support Hub

Tips for thriving in difficult times by Women Friendly Leeds

Trauma-Informed working – further reading:

- **Trauma informed approaches in mental health** St George's, University of London, Population Health Research Institute, Cranmer Terrace, London, UK
- **The role of Trauma-informed care** Kings Fund
- **Guidance on remote working with children and young people (UKCP)** This is in relation to therapeutic relationships, but may be relevant for young peer support groups.

Wellbeing activities and mental health resources

- **Coronavirus Mental Health Information Hub by Mindwell.** This hub has resources, videos and information to help people in Leeds take care of their mental health at this challenging time
- **Women's Lives Leeds list of financial, wellbeing and educational resources**

11. Appendix

i. Group Agreement example

Basis sex work group

This group is for woman accessing Basis services, we want this to be a safe space and it is important for us all to respect each other. Some women we support sex work, or have sex worked in the past, some haven't. Please don't make any assumptions about other participants of this group and their background. The topic of sex work can be discussed freely in this group. We will be talking about a range of topics, and sex work may come up in a general way or it may come up if you wish to talk about your own sex working experience.

Please keep in mind the following ground rules:

- Respect – other people's response & the session plan
- Let others talk – try not to talk over them or interrupt – it might be helpful for people to mute themselves when they are not talking themselves so that background noise doesn't interrupt the session.
- LISTEN
- Confidentiality – please be aware that what you hear in this session, should not be shared outside the group
- Be as open as you feel comfortable with – this is a safe space
- Non-judgemental – please hear out other people and be respectful even if you don't agree – remember you don't know where they have been or why they believe what they do
- Make no assumptions
- Please feel free to make suggestions / feedback to us at the end of the session or separately
- Any safeguarding concerns raised we will need to raise with management

Anyone can mute themselves, turn the video off or come out of the video chat at any time to have a breather or gather their thoughts. We might not be able to check in with you immediately but we will try and contact you after the group session is scheduled to end. We are here to support you.

ii. Ice Breakers and creative activities online

- Take a few minutes to ground the body; closing the eyes and doing a body scan or short meditation focusing on the breath.
- Sharing talents and interests of the group; a skill/craft/do a cooking show to lighten the mood
- Take it in turns to start with a 'How To' session; plant potting, nail painting, singing, funny 'life hacks', origami (using 'share screen' function)

- Share three things you're grateful for this week
- Write down what happened in a week; create a story or say something you found funny/interesting about your week
- Write a message to yourself for in 5 years' time
- Pick three songs that represent your life
- Each person brings a quote from a book/film/someone they are inspired by

➡ **See WLL's Tips for Thriving in Difficult Times and Mind's peer support toolkit for more ice breakers**

iii. Top Tips for Zoom

- Help people set up Zoom to test it with you first to explore the features; show them how to edit their own name in the description and add a preferred pronoun and hide their 'self-view' or hide their video all together
- Look straight into your camera or move your device further away, to create more natural eye contact
- Turning off video can help with poor Internet connection, or they can simultaneously dial in from a mobile and put their other device on mute, to avoid feedback but be able to see other participants
- Make sessions interactive; share your screen and create quizzes; ask people if they agree by clicking the 'thumbs up' button or they can raise their hand (under 'participants'); create 'breakout rooms' for smaller group chats for a specified time (on paid versions you can control who goes in which chat and send reminders for time left)
- The **Zoom webinar** function, allows cameras and names to be hidden. It could be used for training and where service users are sharing knowledge or lived experience with others; such as when lobbying local key decision makers. It can be a helpful tool to practice public speaking skills, as feedback can be limited to the text chat box. Participants can choose to send questions so that only the speakers/panel or hosts can view them
- See Practical online skills and support above for more advice and guidance

iv. Table 1 – Basis - example of scoping immediate support and technology needs

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	INITIALS	PRIORITISATION LEVEL	Physical health	Mental health	Type Contact	Would you like to get involved with group or 1:1 support during this time?	Access to smart phone/tablet/laptop?	Access to internet (wifi or data)?	Online video call or text based chat (and if latter are you prepared to share your no.?)	What would you like out of this?	What are you finding most difficult about this time?
2											
3											