# Empowering Change

## A Peer Education Manual for Inclusive Communities

# Rainbow Peer Forces consortium

**Saplinq,o.z.**

**Identity. education**

**Tolerantiško Jaunimo Asociacija**

**Ljubljana Pride Association**

**Asociación Colectivo MosaiQ**

**Prague Pride z.s.**

# Welcome to Empowering Change.

This manual is a collaborative effort designed to provide organisations, educators, and peer leaders with a comprehensive resource to develop and implement effective peer education programs.

Peer education has proven to be a transformative approach for building inclusive communities, fostering leadership, and promoting mutual support. Through shared experiences and reciprocal learning, peer educators inspire, mentor, and create safe spaces for growth and empowerment. This manual encapsulates the collective knowledge and experiences of diverse organisations, emphasizing best practices, overcoming challenges, and sustaining impactful interventions. We invite you to explore these chapters with an open mind, ready to adapt the insights to your unique context and community needs. Together, we can cultivate resilient, empowered communities through the power of peer education. Thank you for being a part of this journey toward inclusivity and empowerment.

# Definition and Conceptualisation

In this chapter, we define what peer education truly means. We explore how shared experiences and mutual support lay the groundwork for inclusive learning environments where individuals both teach and learn from one another. By clarifying the unique roles of peer educators and highlighting how these practices align with broader organisational missions, this chapter establishes the foundation for sustainable, community-driven education.

# Defining Peer Education

Peer education is an educational approach where individuals from similar backgrounds and realities provide information, support, and guidance to help their peers make informed and reflective decisions about their lives.

This method involves facilitating dialogue and sharing experiences within a particular group, where the educators and learners are equals. Peer educators, who act as role models by practicing what they preach, are uniquely positioned to empathise with and understand the emotions, thoughts, and language of their peers. This approach is especially effective in disseminating new information and knowledge within the group, leveraging the shared experiences and trust among group members.

For example, in community health initiatives, young people trained as peer educators might engage their peers in discussions about sexual health, mental well-being, or substance use. By sharing their own experiences and fostering open dialogue, these peer educators create safe spaces where participants can ask questions, challenge misconceptions, and make informed, reflective decisions about their health and lifestyle. This approach builds trust, encourages active participation, and empowers individuals within the group to take responsibility for their own well-being.

Similarly, LGBTIQ+ groups may provide a safe and affirming space for other people to explore their identities, share experiences, and build community. In this way, especially for youth, they have peers who can relate to them and show them how to approach a situation.

## Understanding the Role of Peers in Education

Peers play a central role in the peer education process. They act as both learners and educators within the community. Compared to the traditional educational models, through this one, a group of people who have similar backgrounds share their experiences, relate to each other, and support each other. They bring new perspectives and situations they have been through, enriching the educational process and fostering understanding.

In this case, the role of the peer goes beyond simply sharing information. They become knowledge-builders, skill-sharers, and catalysts for exploring alternative attitudes, perspectives and behaviours. Through collaboration with other peers and their own empowerment, they foster a shared learning environment that inspires confidence and encourages positive change within the group.

In conclusion, understanding the role of peers in education brings forth their recognition of the capacity to create inclusive learning environments, promote collaboration and mutual support, and empower individuals to become active members of their community.

# Contributions of Peer Education to Our (and Your!) Organisations

In exploring the contribution of peer education to our organisations, we have to reflect on our organisational structure and past approaches and successes. Peer education has contributed in different ways to our organisational approach, fostering meaningful connections within our communities.

## Contributions of Peer Education to Our Organisations

### Past Successes and Achievements

When it comes to success and achievements, each organisation had experiences. For example, one organisation has successfully launched an interactive call for peer educators, using graphics and engaging social media content to explain peer education to our primarily young, queer audience. This approach attracted over 20 applicants and sparked interest in peer education as a valuable and impactful concept.. New materials, such as a Queer Activist Calendar and a Manual for Activists, were also created, providing resources for future use.

Previously, peer education had not been a structured part of another organisation's approach, nor was it widely understood in some regions, as seen in our national survey results. At Prague Pride z.s. for example, while peer education is viewed positively, its adoption faces challenges, including limited volunteer interest due to high turnover, and existing programs that are hard to integrate with new concepts.

**Implementing peer education has brought several benefits:**

- Responsibility and Teamwork: Training has encouraged peer educators to take their roles seriously, fostered a sense of teamwork, and enhanced understanding of the organisation's mission.
- Strengthened Community Ties: The initiative has helped establish meaningful relationships, attract new members, and engage youth, empowering them to propose ideas and contribute actively.
- Increased Awareness and Community Empowerment: Peer-led workshops have provided safe spaces for LGBTIQ+ youth to discuss health, community concerns, and personal challenges. By empowering youth as peer educators, they have gained ownership over ideas that extend beyond the centre, creating ripple effects in schools and social circles.

This pilot effort has proven that peer education can be an effective tool for community engagement, empowerment, and the establishment of safe, supportive spaces for LGBTIQ+ youth.

### Impact on Target Audiences

The impact of peer education on our target audiences has been multifaceted. Our peer education has reached different segments of our community through diferent approaches. We will explore the specific ways in which our initiatives have impacted the target groups.

One of the primary audiences has been the **LGBTIQ+ youth**. Our programs have offered help and resources to this group, which is often faced with stigmatisation and societal challenges. Through our Pride Centre, LGBTIQ+ youth have a place where they can express themselves without worrying about prejudice or judgment. Because people may now access a community that understands and supports them, this setting has **enhanced people's mental health and well-being.**

A number of people have been empowered to explore their identity with greater confidence, thanks to peer discussions and workshops that brought forward subjects like self-acceptance, discrimination, and mental health.

Another impact that peer education had was the **development of leadership skills**. Being involved as a peer educator, people have become more responsible and fostered a sense of leadership. Some people took the responsibility of becoming leaders and now they possess better communication skills, along with organisational ones.

The outcomes of peer education extends beyond the immediate LGBTIQ+ community, and it reaches the wider community. Our initiatives have increased **the visibility of LGBTIQ+ issue**. By hosting public events, and engaging with local media and authorities, we have brought LGBTIQ+ concerns to the larger public. This increased visibility helps in normalising LGBTIQ+ identities and fostering a more inclusive community culture.

Additionally, our peer educators **can contribute to advocacy campaigns** aimed at modifying laws and procedures that have an impact on the LGBTIQ+ community. By providing people with the information and abilities necessary to participate in advocacy, we can have more informed individuals when it comes to policy discussions and they can make a positive contribution to more fair and informed decision-making processes.

# Aligning with Organisational Goals and Missions

Integrating peer education within our organisational framework aligns with our goals and mission. Our peer education programs, which target particular needs and issues while promoting community empowerment and engagement, have grown to be a vital component of our approach to building a more welcoming and engaged community.

## Addressing Specific Needs and Challenges

1. **Staff Turnover and Organisational Adjustments**: High turnover among staff delayed consistent support for peer educators, leading to group dissolution. Rebuilding required new staff training, project handovers, and adjusted strategies to re-establish structure and engagement.
2. **Balancing Organisational Needs with Peer Educator Interests**: While organisations aimed to involve peer educators in established topics, the educators often had their own interests. Balancing these needs required creating flexible programming, such as incorporating sex education, to align with both organisational goals and the peer educators' preferences.
3. **Low Participation and Limited Awareness**: In places like Spain and the Czech Republic, peer education was not well-known or widely accepted, resulting in low participation. Even with social media outreach, competing initiatives and lack of established interest limited volunteer engagement, particularly among youth.
4. **Value Conflicts and Interpersonal Tensions**: Peer educators, often young and passionate about personal values, sometimes clashed with organisational

compromises, such as sponsorships or partnerships. Value-based tensions and interpersonal conflicts among diverse peer groups further complicated cohesion.

5. **Challenges in Conservative Educational Settings**: Organisations working with schools in Slovakia faced resistance from conservative institutions, limiting the acceptance and impact of queer-related topics. This environment made it difficult to discuss LGBTIQ+ topics without negative reactions or minimal student engagement, especially given the single-meeting format.
6. **Sustaining Motivation and Engagement**: Maintaining contact and motivation among peer educators proved challenging. Large group sizes hindered in-person meetings, and sustaining motivation demanded continuous support and encouragement, often beyond initial project phases.
7. **Lack of Mentorship Experience**: Organisations struggled with providing effective mentorship, particularly with helping peer educators apply their knowledge and pursue goals independently, while also offering necessary guidance to support long-term impact.

Overall, these challenges highlight the complexities of implementing peer education programs across diverse organisations and conservative environments, underscoring the need for adaptable strategies, continuous support, and sensitive handling of value-based conflicts.

# Rationale for Promoting Peer Education

## Advantages and Benefits

### Enhanced Communication and Trust

One of the main advantages of peer education is the trust and the enhanced communication established between peers and their learners. Taking into consideration that peers usually come from similar backgrounds and share similar values, they can relate better to the audience's challenges and feelings. Compared to traditional teachers who are seen as an authoritative figure, peers tend to be perceived as being more approachable, thus creating a trusting bridge between them and the learners.

They can discuss sensitive topics more easily or share their issues and concerns, which is a great step in encouraging behavioural changes.

### Tailored and Culturally Relevant Approaches

Going hand in hand with the details from above and the fact that peer educators usually share similar backgrounds, this helps them create a tailored educational approach. Having the same social or cultural background, the audience feels a greater connection with the peer educators, as they can share experiences and use learning techniques that are relevant for the participants involved.

These types of approaches are great in addressing local challenges and needs, making everyone's voices heard and understood, and, in the end, increasing the likelihood of accepting and implementing the knowledge that was shared.

### Sustainable and Scalable Interventions

Peer education is, by nature, sustainable and scalable. If we look at the process, we see that once the peer educators are trained, they can share the information with their own communities, slowly turning other participants into peer educators themselves. This self-sustained model is great for reducing costs and not having to hire new/external educators every time, being useful in the long term.

If we look at the scalability of this type of program, we can see that it can be expanded to larger communities without a proportional increase in costs. With every new person who is trained as a peer educator, they can further educate others in their own circles and make sure that the educational message is shared.

## Comparative Advantage Over Traditional Education Models

### Peer Influence and Relatability

When it comes to peer relatability and influence,

these are often missing from the traditional education models. In peer education, the people, most of the time are part of the same age groups, same social backgrounds with similar experiences. This makes the peer educator more relatable to the audience, fostering a feeling of understanding and even connection.

If we look at younger groups, we can see that the entourage they are in has a great influence on them. Receiving valuable information and knowledge from their peers, they tend to listen to it more and become more motivated and engaged.

This leads to a better understanding of what was shared, making it more likely to implement it and their day-to-day life and to end up sharing it with their own community as well.

### Breaking Down Barriers and Stigmas

When it comes to traditional education, sometimes it might be hard to break down barriers and address stigmas when it comes to more sensitive topics like mental and sexual health and even drug abuse. While traditional teachers might have a harder time relating to different audiences when it comes to these issues, peer educators can create an inclusive and safe space that allows the community to open these types of discussions. Going hand in hand with the relatability mentioned above, peer educators can share their own experiences, making everyone feel included and have more courage to bring up different conversations.

This helps with the feelings of shame or embarrassment someone might feel. When talking to a person who went through something similar, people are more open to sharing their own experiences or asking for advice.

### Fostering Peer Leadership and Responsibility

In traditional education, the teacher or educator holds most of the power, acting as the primary authority who gives instructions and imparts knowledge. In contrast, peer education seeks to decentralise this power, acknowledging its presence but striving to operate closer to a non-hierarchical model. Peer educators share knowledge within their communities, fostering collective learning and encouraging everyone to contribute and engage as equal participants in the process.

This makes the people involved take on a new responsibility (sharing what they learned with their own peers) and slowly develop leadership skills themselves. With leadership skills come confidence, organisational skills, and a sense of accountability. Peer educators become role models for their peers through their behaviour and attitude, and having a healthy one will make the people around them capture these qualities.

### Flexibility and Adaptability

A great advantage of the peer education is its flexibility and adaptability. Peer educators can adapt quickly to different backgrounds and contexts, using new methods based on their peers' behaviours. Compared to the traditional type, which has a more rigid curriculum and structure, with peer education, you can easily come up with new rules and make sure you tailor them to the specific needs of the target group.

# CHAPTER 2

# Peer Interventions

In this chapter, we examine how the principles of peer education are translated into actionable interventions. We showcase how practical resources, creative strategies, and community-led approaches empower LGBTIQ+ and at-risk groups. Real-world examples illustrate how flexible planning and targeted initiatives create safe spaces, foster trust, and drive meaningful social impact.

# Introduction and Contextualisation

Peer education has become a powerful and transformative approach within oppressed and at-risk communities, particularly within LGBTIQ+ circles. At its core, peer education operates on the principle that individuals who share similar life experiences, identities, and challenges can effectively educate, support, and empower one another. This method fosters a sense of solidarity and shared responsibility, allowing individuals from within the community to become advocates, educators, and role models for their peers. This process not only disseminates knowledge but also creates a lasting sense of agency and belonging.

In the context of LGBTIQ+ organisations, peer education plays a crucial role in addressing the unique needs of individuals who often face social exclusion, discrimination, and mental health challenges. Peer education programs allow participants to engage with topics that are deeply relevant to their lives—whether that's understanding how to navigate their identity, dealing with societal stigma, or learning how to become advocates for LGBTIQ+ rights. These programs create safer spaces for open dialogue, helping participants to process their experiences while gaining the tools and competences necessary to thrive in both personal and professional environments.

As highlighted in the first chapter, a key strength of peer education lies in its participatory nature. Unlike traditional educational models, which often rely on a top-down approach, peer education fosters reciprocal learning. Participants actively contribute by sharing their experiences and insights, enriching the learning process and grounding it in lived realities. This participatory approach reinforces mutual respect and understanding while challenging traditional power dynamics, creating a more inclusive and empowering educational environment.

The organisations highlighted in this chapter have adopted peer education as a strategy not just for knowledge-sharing, but for community-building and advocacy. These peer-led initiatives focus on empowering participants to lead discussions, workshops, and activities, making the learning process more relatable and grounded in real-life experiences. For instance, peer interventions during events like *International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia* offer platforms for discussion and reflection, allowing participants to explore the intersection of personal experiences with broader societal issues.

Additionally, peer education is not limited to addressing issues related solely to LGBTIQ+ identities. It extends into other areas of life, such as mental health, political engagement, activism, and human rights. For example, organisations have implemented workshops on topics such as creating safer spaces, recognising unhealthy relationship dynamics, and even preparing for important political moments, such as the European parliamentary elections. By broadening the scope of peer education to

include a wide range of relevant issues, these interventions become more holistic, addressing the full spectrum of needs within the community.

However, the implementation of peer education programs is not without its challenges. The process requires careful planning, the allocation of resources, and ongoing support for both the peer educators and participants. For many organisations, balancing logistical issues like scheduling, ensuring broad participation, and tackling online harassment are recurring obstacles. Yet, the success of peer education lies in its adaptability. Organisations can tailor their interventions to meet the specific needs of their communities, utilising both physical and digital spaces to reach as many participants as possible.

In this chapter, we will explore the practical examples of peer interventions implemented by various LGBTIQ+ organisations. These examples highlight not only the diversity of approaches but also the innovative ways organisations have overcome challenges to make peer education a sustainable and impactful practice. Whether it's through regular discussions like *Q.Talks* or the creation of digital tools like the *Queer Activist Calendar*, these peer education initiatives demonstrate the strength and resilience that come from learning and growing together as a community.

# Resources

The success of peer interventions hinges on the availability and effective use of resources. These resources go beyond just the physical tools or spaces utilised—they encompass the human capital, digital infrastructure, and ongoing training that ensures peer educators and participants can engage fully in the learning process. Peer education is unique in that it requires a flexible approach to resources, adapting to the specific needs and contexts of the individuals involved. The following key categories outline the primary resources used in the peer education initiatives described in this toolkit.

## Materials

Materials are foundational to any educational process, and in peer education, a blend of both physical and digital materials is essential. Physical materials, such as pens, notebooks, and printed guides, are still widely used in face-to-face peer education sessions. For example, in workshops like *Valerija's Workshop* at Tolerant Youth Association, participants used stencils and textile paints, which served as both learning tools and mediums for creative expression. These types of hands-on materials can be especially important in peer education initiatives where participants engage in collaborative projects or creative outputs.

However, the rise of digital platforms has greatly expanded the potential reach and efficiency of peer education interventions. Organisations like *Ljubljana Pride* have utilised online tools such as *Google Drive* for document sharing and collaborative planning, *Session Lab* for organising workshop outlines, and *Google Calendar* to coordinate events and schedules. In particular, digital tools allow for real-time collaboration among peer educators and participants, making it easier to plan, develop, and distribute educational content. This shift to digital materials is especially useful when physical spaces are limited or participants are spread across different geographic areas.

Additionally, many organisations rely on social media platforms for dissemination. For example, *Identity.Education* uses Instagram extensively, creating posts, stories, and campaigns using *Canva* to raise awareness about their peer-led interventions. These platforms allow organisations to reach a broader audience while also fostering community engagement online. Whether for promoting events, sharing educational content, or creating safe spaces for dialogue, digital materials are becoming increasingly indispensable.

## Staff and Mentors

Human resources are central to the success of peer education initiatives. Peer educators, coordinators, and mentors provide the structure and support necessary for the smooth execution of interventions. These individuals are often community members themselves, making them well-equipped to understand the unique needs and challenges of their participants. Their roles vary from providing logistical support to offering emotional and intellectual guidance.

For example, *Saplinq* used 1-on-2 mentoring and debrief sessions to support peer educators following their school visits. These sessions involved structured interviews where mentors provided feedback and support, asking critical questions to help peer educators reflect on their experiences. In this way, mentors help maintain the integrity of the educational process, guiding peer educators in adapting their methods to better meet the needs of their audiences.

Mentors also play a crucial role in boosting the confidence of peer educators. By offering reassurance, sharing tips and tricks, and helping

educators navigate challenges, they ensure that peer-led interventions are both effective and sustainable. Many organisations noted the importance of having dedicated staff to organise regular check-ins, provide ongoing training, and ensure that peer educators feel supported throughout the process.

## Training

Comprehensive training is a vital resource in equipping peer educators with the skills and knowledge they need to lead effective interventions. Training programs typically cover a wide range of topics, from facilitating discussions and creating safe spaces to understanding LGBTIQ+ identities and experiences in a deeper context. For instance, many peer education programs start with basic training on non-formal education methods, which emphasise participatory learning and collaboration over traditional top-down teaching.

At *TJA*, participants in the peer education process were given pre-event guidance to help them prepare for potential challenges. This training included not only content-related knowledge but also practical skills like team management, collaboration, and problem-solving in real-time scenarios. Such training is essential in peer education because it ensures that the educators feel confident in both their subject matter and their ability to facilitate discussions.

Online webinars and guidebooks, like those used by *Saplinq* in the *Rainbow Peer Forces* project, also play an important role in training peer educators. By providing access to expert knowledge and practical tools, these training sessions help prepare peer educators for the specific challenges they will face in the field.

## Spaces

Space, whether physical or digital, is another critical resource for peer interventions. Many organisations utilise physical meeting spaces such as community centres, rented venues, or even informal settings like cafés for in-person workshops and discussions. These spaces provide a neutral and safe environment where participants can engage openly and without fear of judgement or discrimination.

However, digital spaces are becoming increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of global pandemics or when geographical distances make in-person meetings difficult. Platforms like *Zoom*, *Google Meet*, and *Webex* have become standard for organising virtual peer education sessions. These digital spaces are not only more accessible but also allow for a broader range of participants to join from different locations.

Moreover, the use of social media as a digital space for dialogue, such as the peer-led *Q.Talks* hosted by *Identity.Education* on Instagram, showcases how digital platforms can serve as powerful tools for both dissemination and engagement. By integrating both physical and digital spaces, peer education programs can remain flexible and inclusive, accommodating participants' needs regardless of location or circumstances.

## Ljubljana Pride

### Queer Activist Calendar

This intervention involved the creation of a Google Calendar that highlighted important LGBTIQ+ and human rights events throughout the year. Designed by young queer people for their peers, the calendar serves as a valuable tool for raising awareness and keeping the community informed about key dates, protests, and celebrations. By allowing open access to the calendar, Ljubljana Pride ensured that the resource was widely available and could be easily adopted by other organisations.

### Manual for Activists and Volunteers

The Ratnest Collective, a peer education-based initiative, developed a comprehensive manual aimed at young activists and volunteers. This manual provides guidance on how to organise, advocate, and volunteer effectively within the LGBTIQ+ community. It also serves as a practical resource for anyone looking to start their activism journey, offering tips on everything from event planning to self-care in the face of activism burnout.

### Challenges

Scheduling regular meetings proved difficult, as many participants had conflicting commitments. Moreover, ensuring effective promotion and dissemination of the calendar and manual required a coordinated effort. The organisation adapted by utilising online tools to manage scheduling and delegating specific promotional tasks to different members of the team.

# Examples of Peer interventions by the organisations

## Identity.Education

### Q.Talks

These were peer-led discussions on topics like safe spaces and relationship safety, particularly during significant events like Pride Week. The discussions, facilitated by peers with lived experiences, provided a platform for participants to explore topics such as boundary-setting, recognising unhealthy dynamics in relationships, and accessing community resources. The informal nature of these discussions made them accessible and relatable, allowing participants to learn from one another in a safe and inclusive environment.

### International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia Events

These interventions involved peer-led movie screenings and discussions aimed at increasing awareness of LGBTIQ+ issues. By providing a space for participants to reflect on what they had seen and engage in open dialogue, the events fostered a sense of community and solidarity.

### Challenges

Increasing the visibility and reach of these events on social media was an ongoing challenge. Additionally, online harassment sometimes disrupted the safe space that the organisation sought to create. Identity. Education responded by enhancing their social media strategy, engaging with influencers, and moderating their platforms more actively to ensure a safer environment for participants.

# How to Train Peer Educators

In this chapter, we explore how a structured, inclusive training process transforms shared experiences into professional guidance. We outline key steps such as mapping needs, setting clear role boundaries, and establishing supportive systems.

Our concise three-part training model demonstrates how to equip peer educators with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to serve their communities effectively.

Peer education is a concept that resonates with many of our everyday experiences. Supporting a friend through a challenge you've faced yourself can feel like peer education: you're peers, sharing knowledge, and offering guidance. But what sets peer education apart as a structured and impactful process is the framework of training and support provided to peer educators. This structure equips them with the **specific knowledge and skills that enable them to approach, interact, and engage more effectively with their peers.**

Training ensures that peer educators are not just sharing personal experiences but are equipped to deliver accurate information, enable trust, and navigate (potentially complex) situations with professionalism.

This focus on training becomes even more critical when working with peer educators from marginalised backgrounds, particularly when they are young people. They often face unique vulnerabilities tied to both their age and their marginalisation. A well-designed learning process must consider these intersectional identities, addressing specific challenges while empowering peer educators.

Before planning the training process, it is essential to:
- map out the profile of the people we want to work with / include as peer educators;
- understand their identities through the lenses of intersection;
- ensure we respect and follow inclusive practices that address the specific needs of marginalised groups.

Youth workers or other professionals planning learning processes in the organisation should always search for ways to make learning spaces welcoming and supportive, as that approach empowers participants, builds their confidence, and supports them to engage more fully. These inclusive practices not only ensure full participation but also enable safer spaces by affirming and validating the voices and identities of those young people who are often less visible, heard and present, supporting their bonds and personal growth.

# How to structure the learning process for peer educators

Planning a structured learning process for peer educators prepares the peer educators for their role. Without intentional planning of their learning process, they will lack the confidence and tools to engage and manage diverse peers / young people they will interact with.

## *Important elements of the learning process of the peer educators should include:*

### Understanding of what peer education is - and what it is not;

For anyone considering becoming a peer educator, it is essential to first understand what this role entails. This understanding allows individuals to make informed decisions about whether they wish to engage further in this capacity.

Peer education is a distinct concept, but it often resembles other roles, such as trainers working in non-formal education, coaches, activists, or mentors. To avoid confusion, it is crucial to contextualise peer education clearly and distinguish it from these similar roles. While all these roles share a focus on guiding and supporting others, peer educators work specifically within a peer-based framework that emphasises shared experiences and mutual understanding.

Additionally, peer educators often address specific, and sometimes sensitive, topics requiring both knowledge and careful handling. It is just as important for them to know their responsibilities as it is to understand the boundaries of their role—what they are not expected or qualified to do. Recognising these boundaries ensures that peer educators can work effectively and ethically while maintaining trust and respect within their peer group.

### Mapping needs, skills and knowledge of the peer educators;

Mapping what peer educators already know and what they need to learn is a key step in planning their training. It helps us figure out their current strengths and areas where they need support, so we can design training that truly fits their needs.

This process also boosts their confidence by showing them what they're already good at and helps us build stronger teams by understanding what each person brings to the group. Mapping gives us a clear starting point and makes sure the training is practical, focused, and helpful for their role.

### Agreeing on how the group will operate and function;

It's important to address how the group will function, including how peer educators will communicate, how often they'll meet, and the purpose of those meetings. Setting clear expectations will help the group to ensures everyone stays organised, better understands their role, and works together effectively.

**Exploring different possibilities of peer interventions;**

In peer education training, it's crucial for each individual to reflect on which topics they feel comfortable addressing and which ones align with their interests. For example, a young queer person might be interested in topics related to queerness, but the specific focus could vary— whether it's discussing mental health within the queer community, sharing personal experiences of being queer, addressing queer sexual health, or even community building for queer individuals. This reflection ensures that peer educators can engage with topics that are both meaningful and within their comfort zone.

It's equally important to consider the methods and contexts in which these interventions will take place. For instance, the approach needed for street action is very different from a school-based workshop or a community gathering.

By considering the topic and context early on, trainers can align the interventions with the mapped skills, knowledge, and needs of the peer educators. This ensures they are better prepared to handle the specific challenges of their environment and engage effectively with their peers.

***Introduction of the support systems for the peer educators.***

Organisations need to think carefully about what support they can realistically offer to peer educators and ensure this is clear from the start. While more detailed guidance on planning support is covered in Chapter 5 and can be found in mentoring scheme for peer educators, it's important during training to introduce the types of support available.

Since peer educators often work with groups they personally relate to, this can bring up shared experiences that may be emotional or complex. Clear and accessible support systems help them feel confident and prepared, knowing they have someone to turn to for advice, resources, or simply a listening ear when needed.

# Example of the learning process planned on the topic of peer education

In this project, we designed a comprehensive learning process for peer educators as part of an Erasmus+ programme, built around three residential trainings. The aim was to support the development of pools of the peer educators within each participating organisation while ensuring participants had the tools and support to be able to do it effectively.

It's important to note that this is just one example of how a learning process for peer educators can be structured. Each organisation should reflect on its specific needs, resources, and context when planning how to approach the learning process for their peer educators. For additional inspiration, an example of a one-day training programme for peer educators is included in the annex.

### First Training: Foundations of peer education

The first training focused on building a shared understanding of what peer education entails. Participants mapped their organisations' needs, challenges, and resources to establish a clear foundation for their pool of peer educators. This step helped organisations define the profile of the young people they wanted to work with, identify the topics they would address, and clarify the intended outcomes of peer education.

Below you can see how the programme of the first training was structured:

| First day - Introduction and Safer Space | Second day - Me in the Local Context | Third day - Me as an Activist | Fouth day - Peer Education | Fifth day - Me and Peer Education | Sixth day- Wrapping Up |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction and getting to know each other | My organisation and my context | Individual reflection on experiences | My experiences as a peer educator | Action Plan | Next Steps |
| Break | | | | | |
| Safer Space | Who do I work with | Influencing exercises | Why peer educaton | Action Plan | Individual mentoring time |
| Lunch Break | | | | | |
| Group Agreement | Challenges and needs | Free | What is a Peer Educator | Action Plan - Feedback Session | Evaluation |
| Group Dynamics | Challenges and needs | | Setting up the pool of peer educators | Action plan | Celebration |

After this training, participants were tasked with initiating the groundwork for forming their peer educator groups. This included putting out a call for participants, meeting with prospective educators, and starting the engagement process in their local contexts.

## Second Training: Support mechanisms

By the time of the second training, participants had already begun working with their peer educator groups. This training focused on addressing the specific needs and challenges they had encountered so far. Particular attention was given to designing support mechanisms, such as a mentoring scheme, and exploring its key elements. Participants also shared their experiences and realities, fostering mutual learning and collaboration.

Below you can see how the programme of the second training was structured:

| First day - Introduction and Safer Space | Second day - Mentoring | Third day - Mentoring Skills | Fouth day - Mentoring Skills | Fifth day - Mentoring Skills | Sixth day- Wrapping Up |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction and getting to know each other | Peer Education 102 | Working mentoring - assessment | Learning Mentoring - Open Questions | Personal mentoring - crisis and conflict management | Action Plan - wrap-up |
| Break | | | | | |
| Who are we | Setting up the Pool of Peer Educators | Learning Mentoring - Active Listening | Learning Mentoring - Feedback | Managing Motivation | Next Steps |
| Lunch Break | | | | | |
| How we want to work together | Intro to mentoring | Free | Learning Mentoring - Reflection and Evaluation | Open Space | Evaluation |
| Break | | | Break | | |
| From the last to this training - where are we | Setting up the Mentoring System | | Personal Mentoring - Setting Boundaries | Open Space | Celebration |

After the training, organisations were encouraged to implement the support mechanisms they h[...] designed and test them with their peer educator groups, further solidifying their local work.

### Third Training: Evaluation and next steps

The final training served as an opportunity to evaluate the work carried out locally, identify challenges that had come up, and collaboratively find solutions. Participants shared their learning, reviewed the impact of the work, and developed plans for the next steps in their peer education work. Emphasis was placed on how participants could continue to support each other beyond the project framework.

Below you can see how the programme of the **third training** was structured:

| First day | Second day | Third day | Fourth day | Fifth day | Sixth day - PRIDE DAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introduction and getting to know each other | Peer Ed experiences | Mentoring & support systems | How can we support each other | Planning peer interventions together | Peer interventions |
| Break | | | | | |
| Who are we | Peer Ed experiences | Open Space | How can we support each other | Preparing Peer Interventions | Peer Interventions |
| Lunch Break | | | | | |
| How we want to work together | Walk and talk | Free | Reflection | Preparing Peer Interventions | Evaluation |
| Break | | | Break | | |
| Mentoring & support systems | Setting up the Mentoring System | | Reflection | Preparing Peer Interventions | Celebration |

In conclusion, we wanted to point **a few learnings we took out of planning this process:**

**Adopt a needs-based approach:**
Tailoring training and support to the specific needs and challenges of peer educators ensures relevance and effectiveness.

**Understand marginalised experiences:**
Recognising the unique realities of marginalised individuals helps create a more supportive working environment.

**Prioritise inclusive practices:**
Applying the principles of inclusion enables belonging and ensures full participation by everyone involved.

**Provide holistic support:**
Addressing personal, emotional, and work-related needs helps peer educators navigate challenges and remain engaged.

**Be flexible:**
Being adaptable allows to respond to changing needs and unexpected situations, ensuring the process remains effective.

**Encourage co-creation:**
Involving peer educators in decision-making empowers them and builds their confidence in their roles.

**Foster connection:**
Creating spaces for peer educators to share experiences and build community strengthens their sense of support and collaboration.

**Recognise boundaries around trauma:**
Peer education is not about sharing one's own trauma with others; individuals with unresolved issues in a particular area may not be ready to guide/educate their peers effectively in that field or in relation to a specific topic they didn't resolve yet.

# Overcoming Challenges

Starting a peer education programme from scratch comes with its fair share of challenges. These can pop up at different stages—from introducing the concept of peer education in your organisation to evaluating its impact. It's important to recognise these challenges early so you can prepare for them and stay flexible when things don't go exactly as planned.

In this chapter, we'll explore some of the difficulties we encountered along the way and share examples of how we approached them. The goal is to offer our experiences and show how tackling challenges can strengthen your work.

# Introducing Peer Education in your organisation

Introducing a new concept, in this case peer education in an organisation doesn't happen overnight. It takes careful planning and making sure it fits with what your organisation already does. This preparation phase is really important because it sets the foundation for working with a new concept. If it's not thought through, it can feel like an extra task rather than something valuable. Below are some common issues organisations faced when introducing the concept of peer education in their organisations and how they tackled them.

## Challenges

### *Making peer education fit into what you already do*

TJA added peer education to projects they were already running, like Out of the Closet and Rainbow Challenge. This way, peer education became part of their mission to promote civic engagement, instead of something extra.



Ljubljana Pride took time to map out where peer educators could help in their existing work. They adjusted their current systems and created a mentoring programme to make sure peer educators had the support they needed.

### *Clearly defining roles and avoiding overlaps*

Saplinq decided to bring in volunteers with experience working in their organisation to be peer educators. Since these volunteers already understood how things worked, it made the transition smoother and avoided confusion about roles.

Ljubljana Pride made it a priority to define the differences between peer educators, volunteers, and trainers. This helped everyone understand their role and work better together. For example, trainers led workshops while peer educators shared personal stories to connect with their audience in a different way.

### *Setting clear goals and responding to community needs*

Identity Education focused their peer education on creating a safe space for young people. This was something their community had needed for a long time—a place where people could share openly, get support, and feel safe.

Saplinq brought peer education into schools with a "living library" project. This allowed LGBTIQ+ individuals to share real-life stories and address the lack of queer topics in high school education.

### *Setting up support systems for peer educators*

Prague Pride faced some hesitation from their management team about starting peer education. To overcome this, they held internal discussions to clarify how peer education could fit into the organisation's work and what support would be needed to make it successful.

TJA built a collaborative environment by involving both experienced volunteers and new people. This created a sense of teamwork and made it easier to manage the challenges of starting something new.

Ljubljana Pride spent time figuring out how their organisation could support peer educators. They created mentoring systems and tested their capacity before launching the programme more widely.

# Recruiting Peer Educators

Almost all of our organisations struggled with recruiting peer educators. The focus was on presenting peer education as an opportunity, engaging potential peer educators, and getting them excited to learn more about the programme. It was important to show them how they could make an impact in their communities and what new skills they would gain by joining. Below, you'll see how different organisations approached recruiting peer educators.

## Challenges

### Identifying the right participants
TJA tackled this challenge by attracting participants through projects like "Out of the Closet" and the "Rainbow Challenge: Twin Communities on Human Rights." They sought out both volunteers and new individuals who were interested in joining the peer education programme.

Prague Pride faced a shortage of peer educators, so they reached out to other queer organisations and individuals outside their network. By widening the recruitment pool, they were able to find new, dedicated peer educators.

### Reaching out to a diverse group of peer educators
Prague Pride tackled diversity by reaching out beyond their usual network, approaching other queer organisations and individuals from various backgrounds to join their peer education programme. This expanded their pool of potential educators and helped ensure the programme was representative of the community they served.

Saplinq used a similar approach by recruiting volunteers already involved with the organisation who had experience with queer topics. They made sure to create a welcoming environment for diverse participants to feel comfortable and confident in sharing their stories.

# First meeting with Peer Educators

Just like with introducing the new concept in the organisation, there are challenges that can arise after we recruit the peer educators and we are meeting with them for the first time - also with the purpose of introducing the concept to them.

## Challenges

### Clarifying roles and expectations

TJA addressed this challenge by organising an additional online meeting before the first group session. This allowed the team to discuss roles, responsibilities, and motivations in a more personal, one-on-one setting, reducing anxiety and clarifying expectations before everyone met together.

Identity Education faced similar concerns, so they reassured participants that there was flexibility in the roles. They emphasised that peer educators were not expected to be experts but could draw on their personal experiences and empathy. This approach made participants feel more comfortable in taking on their roles without pressure.

### Creating a safe and inclusive environment

Saplinq created a welcoming environment by discussing the principles of "safer and braver spaces" with participants. This helped set clear expectations for respect and open communication from the very beginning. They also encouraged peer educators to set their own boundaries, creating a respectful and inclusive atmosphere where everyone felt heard.

Prague Pride emphasised creating a supportive environment by assigning a dedicated contact person to each peer educator. This ensured that participants always had someone to turn to for support, which fostered a sense of trust and

security within the group.

### Building group dynamics and engagement

Saplinq used interactive activities during the first meeting to help participants get to know one another, such as creating stories and discussing communication styles. These activities helped break the ice and encouraged peer educators to engage more openly with the group, facilitating stronger group dynamics.

Ljubljana Pride took a structured approach by using their first meeting to assess each peer educator's skills, interests, and expectations. By identifying each person's strengths and areas of interest early on, they were able to assign roles that matched participants' engagement levels and helped them feel more involved.

### Addressing anxiety and uncertainty

TJA held one-on-one online meetings with participants before the group training to discuss motivations and reduce anxiety. This helped participants feel more at ease and ready for the group sessions.

Identity Education also recognised this challenge and addressed it by reminding participants that they weren't expected to be experts, which helped alleviate the pressure and made them feel more confident about their involvement.
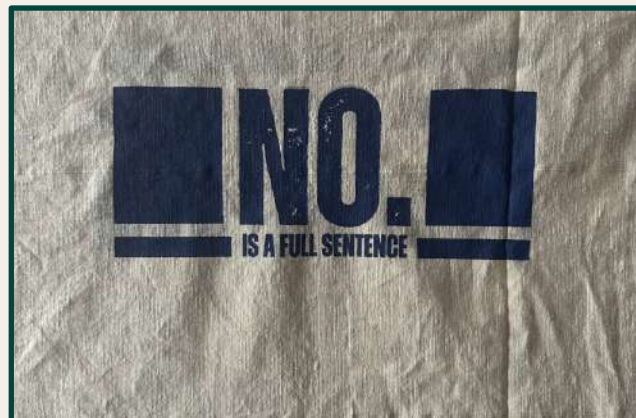


# Continuous meetings with Peer Educators

Ongoing communication and support are essential to keep peer educators engaged, motivated, and on track throughout the programme. Regular meetings provide opportunities for feedback, development, and refining of their skills, but maintaining this momentum can be challenging. Here's an overview of common challenges and solutions that different organisations have used to overcome them:

## Challenges

### Maintaining engagement and motivation

TJA: After the initial training, they faced challenges keeping participants engaged. They found that motivation could be sustained by organising additional meetings, such as one-on-one online meetings with each participant, to address individual concerns, expectations, and motivations.

Saplinq: They kept motivation high by setting clear expectations and boundaries early on, creating a sense of ownership among peer educators. Additionally, they made sure the peer educators could see the results of their work, which helped them feel more connected to the project.

Prague Pride: Peer educators were kept engaged through continuous communication. The organisation ensured regular check-ins and provided opportunities for peer educators to discuss any issues or challenges they faced. This constant support helped maintain interest and motivation throughout the programme.

Identity Education: Motivation became a challenge over time, with some peer educators losing interest. However, they managed to keep a core group motivated by focusing on the leader of the community centre. This person became a central figure, maintaining a stable presence and encouraging others to stay engaged with the programme.

### Building group cohesion
Saplinq tackled this challenge by using team-building activities at their second meeting. They included non-violent communication exercises and discussions on intersectionality to help peer educators bond, create trust, and develop their communication skills. By focusing on shared experiences, the group became more cohesive.
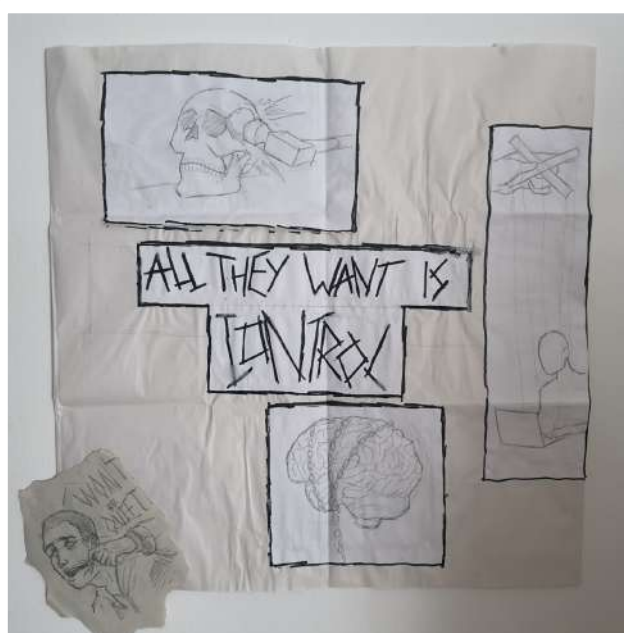


TJA also used early meetings to focus on connecting participants, and by the third session, the group was more engaged and aligned with the project's goals. This helped participants feel more connected to the work and to each other.

### Balancing time and scheduling
MosaiQ addressed this challenge by understanding the time limitations of their peer educators. They worked on scheduling flexible, structured planning sessions that accommodated different schedules, ensuring that everyone had the chance to participate without feeling overwhelmed.

Ljubljana Pride faced similar issues and focused on keeping the group active and motivated by ensuring that peer intervention opportunities were constant. This helped keep everyone involved and prevented long waiting periods that could cause disengagement.

### Ensuring long-term commitment
Identity Education initially faced this issue when their group fell apart multiple times. However, after consistent efforts, they found a central peer educator who became a consistent presence in the programme. This individual helped stabilise the programme, and over time, the group became more reliable.

Saplinq addressed this challenge by selecting individuals with prior experience in their organisation or queer topics. By involving people already engaged with the organisation, they found a more committed group of peer educators who were invested in the success of the project.

# Planning and implementation of peer interventions

Planning and implementing peer interventions is critical to ensuring that the programme's goals are achieved and that the activities are relevant to the community. Well-planned interventions help maintain motivation and ensure that the actions taken are manageable for both the organisation and the peer educators. Without clear goals and realistic expectations, interventions can become overwhelming and less effective.

## Challenges

### Managing expectations and setting realistic goals
Saplinq addressed this by setting clear, consistent, and realistic goals for their peer educators. They recognised that smaller, well-executed interventions are more valuable than larger, unfinished ones. This approach helped their peer educators stay motivated and focused on accomplishing concrete tasks.

TJA shared a similar strategy by setting smaller,



achievable goals for their peer educators. This allowed them to focus on completing projects rather than feeling overwhelmed by larger, more ambitious targets.

### Working with different group sizes
Identity Education discovered that smaller groups were often easier to manage than larger ones, especially when the focus was on open discussions. They adapted their approach depending on the type of intervention. For example, they incorporated trainers for more structured activities, like theatre workshops, and used informal talks for group discussions to allow everyone's voice to be heard.

MosaiQ also faced challenges with consistency in larger groups. They focused on smaller, more manageable group settings to ensure a higher level of engagement and a more consistent delivery of interventions.

### Engaging participants in less popular topics
Ljubljana Pride transformed their European parliamentary elections workshop by incorporating interactive elements, such as role-playing and simulations. These non-formal education methods made the subject matter more tangible and relatable, allowing participants to see the connection between civic engagement and their own rights as LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Similarly, organisations like Saplinq focused on incorporating reflection exercises into their interventions, making them more interactive and ensuring that participants understood the importance of long-term development in peer education.

### Dissemination and reach
Identity.Education collaborated with influencers and popular figures within the LGBTIQ+

community to amplify their message and attract new participants. Additionally, organisations have experimented with targeted advertising and campaigns to reach specific segments of their audience.

### Ensuring digital safety

Identity.Education, have implemented stricter moderation policies for their social media platforms, quickly removing harmful comments and blocking users who engage in hate speech. Additionally, some interventions have moved to private or invite-only groups to ensure that discussions take place in a safer, more controlled environment.

# Ensuring Safety for the LGBTIQ+ Peer Educators

Creating a safer and supportive environment for LGBTIQ+ peer educators is essential for their participation and engagement. Given the specific challenges and potential vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ+ youth, it's crucial to establish clear boundaries, ensure physical and emotional safety, and offer the right support. This helps LGBTIQ+ peer educators feel confident, valued, and empowered to carry out their roles effectively.

## Challenges

### Creating safer spaces for LGBTIQ+ young peer educators

Saplinq set up the time where LGBTIQ+ peer educators discussed potential challenges and how to handle negative situations. They also created clear steps for addressing problems like hateful comments or uncomfortable interactions at schools.

### Addressing psychological and emotional needs

Prague Pride works with experts in psychology and social work to support the mental health of peer educators. They also have regular check-ins to ensure their well-being.

### Ensuring clear boundaries

Ljubljana Pride: They made sure to discuss and establish boundaries early in the process, ensuring that all peer educators felt comfortable and understood the limits of what was acceptable.

### Personal triggers

Ljubljana Pride discussed potential triggers with the peer educators before starting their peer interventions, and developed strategies for managing them. They also planned ways for peer educators to support each other if one of them was triggered during an activity.

### Managing safety in uncontrolled spaces

Identity Education prioritises safety by holding activities in private, secure locations and ensuring that events involving trainers are held in spaces where participants feel safe.

By addressing these challenges and offering ongoing support, organisations can help peer educators gain competences and important values as peer educator, creating safer and more inclusive spaces for LGBTIQ+ youth. This support is vital not only for the peer educators' growth but also for the overall impact of the work of peer educators. In the next chapter, we'll explore the support systems that keep peer educators engaged and supported as well as ensure the programme's lasting impact.

# Support Systems

In this chapter, we explore the essential support systems that underpin successful peer education. We discuss how different forms of support—educational guidance, mentoring, individual and team support—create safe and empowering environments, using real-life examples from the sbarvouven.cz online counselling centre. You'll learn about the qualities and skills required for support workers, the importance of ethical practices, and practical tips for preparing to meet the unique needs of young queer peer educators. This chapter demonstrates that a strong support structure is key to fostering resilience, trust, and inclusivity within peer-led initiatives.

This chapter focuses on some of the most important topics related to supporting peer educators in their centre. The text is complemented by examples of how support is handled in the *sbarvouven.cz* online peer-to-peer counselling centre, which is run by the Prague Pride. Although there are no peer educators working in the counselling centre, the principle is quite similar - there is a group of volunteers, and the organisation needs to provide them with the necessary support.

*Prague Pride has been operating online LGBTQ peer-to-peer counselling centre since 2015, a year after the suicide of 14-year-old Filip to protest homophobia in the Czech society. The service is based on peer-to-peer online chat – the clients themselves choose the volunteer and approach them in a discreet chat environment. There is a team of three expert mentors who provide support to volunteers.*

# Introduction

Peer education support is essential and can help prevent many challenges, or help to solve them if they do arise. Support workers can provide invaluable assistance for peer educators, ensuring that everyone's unique needs are met with empathy and understanding. They offer encouragement, emotional support, and a listening ear during difficult times. Systematic work with peer education in queer organisations cannot be realised without a quality support system.

This chapter also complements the mentoring scheme, but has a different structure and content. We do not want to be repetitive, however we consider it important to familiarise yourself with both materials, the mentoring scheme and the toolkit, if you are thinking about working with the concept of peer education with queer people.

# Basic Types of Support for the Peer Educators

## Educational Support

Type of support focused on the area of knowledge base, organisation and implementation of educational activities and creation of the education plan for queer educators as well. Includes the possibility to consult topics and questions related to the knowledge base (queer education in the case of queer organisation). It should also be connected with building and updating knowledge on the LGBTQ topics.

## Mentoring

Guidance and support focused on the individuality of the person we are mentoring. Support of the well-being of individuals and group or organization as well. Possibility of personal and emotional support or giving advice when needed. Planning a mentoring activity as a systematic process with an individual or a group.

Building trust and a safe environment should be part of the mentoring process. The possibility to talk privately with a mentor about anything that bothers a peer educator in connection with the activities or people in the organization should be guaranteed. You can read more about mentoring in our mentoring scheme.

## Individual support

Offering the possibility of individual support should be a matter of course when working with peer educators. As mentioned above, a safe environment and trust between the peer educator and the mentor are necessary conditions here. It can be done in person or online if both parties are comfortable with this method.

## Team support

Working with a group has its specifics, because each person has their own individual characteristics, needs, ways of communication, etc. Group dynamics need to be considered and worked with. In any case, it is necessary to ensure a safe environment, the consent of all participants in all activities, and the possibility for any participant to refuse participation in the activity without giving a reason.

*The possibility to talk privately with a mentor about anything that bothers a volunteer in connection with the activities or people in the organization – example from the sbarvouven.cz counselling centre:*

*"As a volunteer, I used this option several times. For example, we had an online meeting during the covid. It was the meeting for the whole counselling centre. The problem was that one of the speakers expressed herself in a somewhat transphobic manner. I didn't want to confront her personally, I wasn't ready for that, but I didn't want to just let it go as well. So, I asked my mentor for a consultation. We connected online. I described the situation to him from my perspective. He said he didn't notice it at first, but that my point of view made sense. My mentor let me talk about the situation, he let me vent my emotions, and in the end, he said that he would try to be more sensitive to manifestations of transphobia in the counselling centre. I was satisfied with the result, because increasing sensitivity to manifestations of transphobia or any queerphobia, even in an organization working with queer people, is very important in my opinion."*

# Teamwork

It has its many advantages when support is provided by a team of mentors instead of just one person. For example, at the sbarvouven.cz peer to peer online counselling centre there is a team of three expert mentors and their structure is non-hierarchical. It's not quite common and it has its advantages and disadvantages. Every decision must be made together, there is no one whose opinion has more weight than the opinion of others. This has the consequence that every decision must be reached through mutual communication.

Each mentor is offering individual support to a third of the counselling centre's volunteer group. The mentoring team consult about everything together; they organise training for volunteers from the counselling centre, do the evaluations, planning events, exchange information on a regular basis, etc. It is very important that the team of mentors work well together so that's why there is also a strong emphasis on the ability to work in a team when a new mentor is being hired.

# Persons Providing Support

The ability of creating a safe, trusting environment, actively listening, and offering non-judgmental support is essential here.

Persons providing support to peer educators should have at least a basic knowledge of psychology and/or have experience in providing (psychological) counselling, psychotherapy and/or crisis intervention. They should be LGBTQ themselves or allies, they should have at least a basic knowledge of LGBTQ topics, be aware of intersectionality, and they know and use LGBTQ sensitive terminology. They should also regularly educate themself on LGBTQ topics even if they are queer themselves.

Persons providing support to peer educators should also have the ability to empathise, to understand peer educators' situation and the emotions that they are going through, in order to provide the best support. Patience and good listening skills are also needed to help peer educators talk about the issues that are not so easy to discuss.

> *Experience from the sbarvouven.cz counselling centre:*
>
> *The knowledge of queer topics is essential, but being queer is not necessary. Only one of the mentors from our counselling centre is queer, another has a queer family member, and the third is an ally. However, they must be willing to constantly educate themselves on queer topics. They must also be capable of self-reflection and, if possible, have no prejudice against queer people. This should be obvious, but many queer people still have prejudices against other queer people.*

**Overview of the basic minimum for support workers working with young queer peer educators in the field of education, personal qualities and abilities:**

## Education of Support Workers

- Basic terminology, statistics, and demographic data;

- The specifics of people of different queer identities;

- Queer history and traditions, customs;

- Social stress, queerphobias, discrimination of LGBTQ persons and their communities;

- Legislation and social policies focused on LGBTQ persons;

- A map of LGBTQ local and (inter)national organisations;

- Experience in working with the target group.

## Personal Qualities of Support Workers

- **Empathy** - the ability to identify with and understand another person's situation and the emotions that they are going through, in order to provide comfort and be supportive;

- **Open-mindedness and cultural sensitivity** - respecting different beliefs and practices is essential for an inclusive environment. It helps to build effective relationships and understanding.

- **Social perceptiveness** - good listening skills, being able to read between the lines to help peer educators talk about the issues that are not so easy to discuss, interpreting body language, etc.;

- **Patience** - especially with complex cases that involve various people and differing goals. It also takes some time to build up

trust between support providers and peer educators. Progress may not always be immediate, but witnessing even small positive impacts is rewarding;

- **Dependability** - a key indicator of trust;

- **Objectiveness** - personal feelings can't get in the way of what's best for the peer educators;

- **Resilience** - be there as much as they can for supporting peer educators, but know and guard their boundaries and mental health as well.

## Abilities of Support Workers

- Support workers are able to create safe and respectful environment for queer peer educators;

- They are able to ask/communicate about gender, sexual and relationship diversity in a sensitive and respectful manner; strong communication skills help to engage with young people, convey information clearly, offer guidance, or facilitate discussions on sensitive topics.

- They are able to recognise the manifestations of internalised queer phobias in themselves and uses supervision sessions or they will look for another support system suitable for them where they could resolve anything that may arise when working with queer peer educators;

- They are able to maintain confidentiality and do not pass on the information provided to third parties;
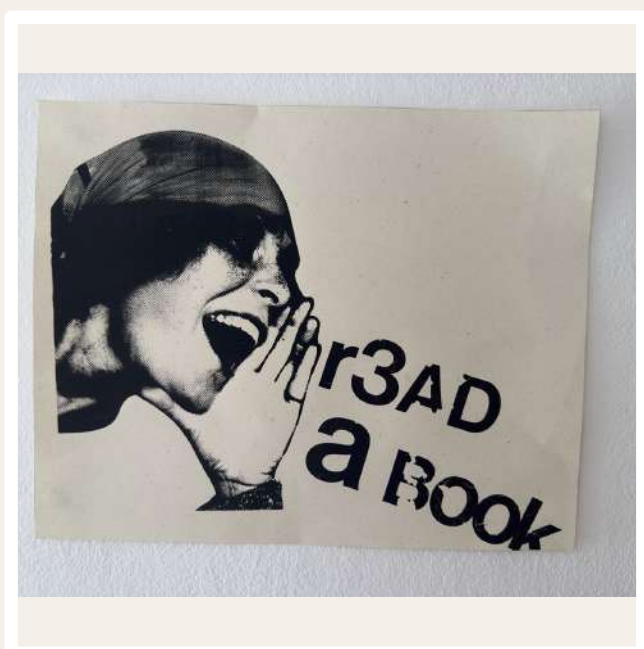
- Regularly educate themself on LGBTQ topics.
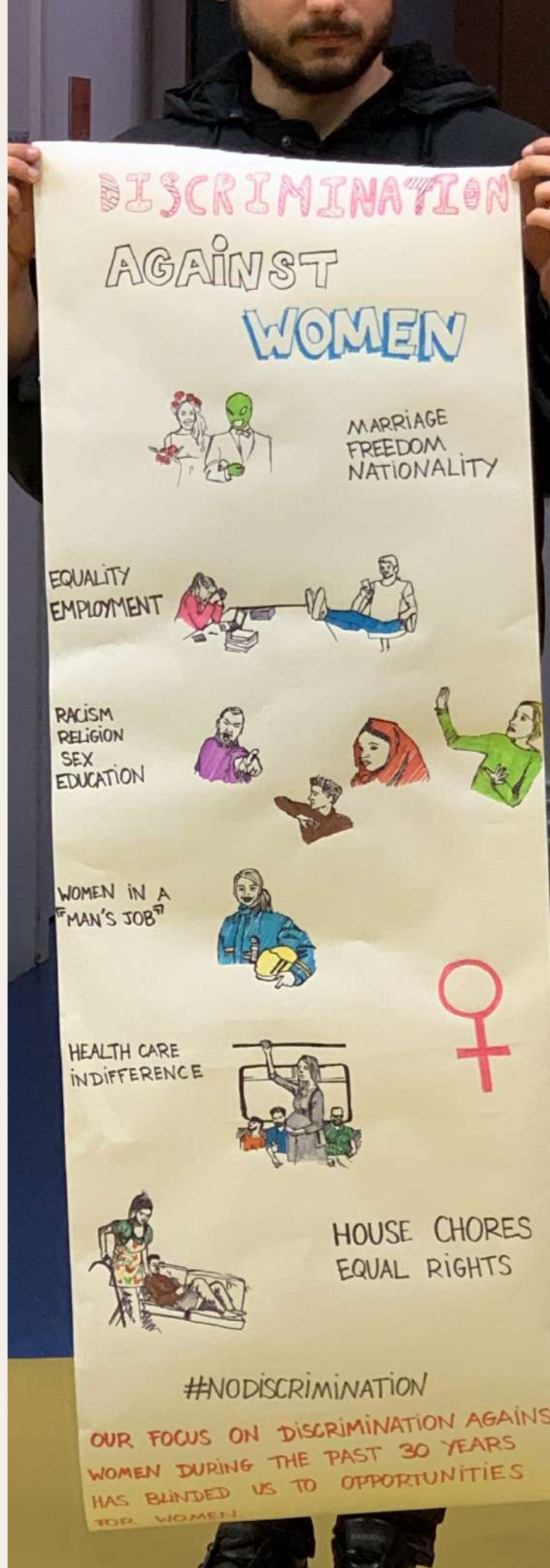
# Material and Financial Support

It's good to keep in mind that getting quality support is usually not for free. A room must be provided for educational events, and a place for consultations if they are not online. A place for face-to-face consultations should have some privacy to be considered safe enough, so it is not a very good idea to arrange consultations somewhere in a cafe, for example. If support is provided through professional psychologists or supervisors, they should be paid for their work.

Funding for support workers can be obtained through a combination of different methods. It could be, for example, personal or company fundraising, an occasional donation event for this project, etc. If possible, it may be beneficial to agree on cooperation with a friendly organisation and use their support based on an agreement or in exchange for something you can provide for them. One of the forms of donation can also be, for example, education for peer educators.



# Ethical Topics, Conflicts of Interest



Organisations using peer education should be also aware of the ethical topics that may be associated with it. The ideal situation is when the organisation has a code of ethics and uses it for the necessities of peer education as well.

It is particularly important for people providing support to keep ethical principles and behaviour in their minds, to maintain their boundaries, and to not establish romantic relationships with peer educators.

It is also important to mention that certain facts regarding peer educators often need to be kept confidential. Even if we assume that they are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, this does not mean that we will communicate this information to third parties without their permission.

# Preparation Tips

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## Questions for Reflection

- How do you think young queer people in your country or local community feel about presenting themselves to the world? Do they feel pressure to conform to straight/cis norms? Are they supported in exploring their feelings about themselves?

- Is there a safe environment in your country or local community where young queer people can address stigma and discrimination?

- Do young queer people in your country or local community have sufficient opportunities to develop a positive sense of identity through meeting others?

- Do they have access to enough positive and relatable role models?

- How can you ensure that young queer people are treated with dignity and respect within your organisation or project?

- What knowledge, skills, and values are necessary to underpin effective support work with LGBTQ young people?

- What resources, initiatives, and networks exist in your community that can support your work with young queer people?

## How to Use These Reflections

Answering these questions can help you:

1. Identify potential barriers or gaps that might impact the group's engagement.

2. Develop strategies to create a safer and more inclusive environment, such as setting group agreements or discussing boundaries during your first meeting.

3. Tailor your approach to address the unique needs of the group, whether it involves additional training, community partnerships, or offering emotional support.

4. Equip yourself with knowledge and resources to respond effectively to challenges that may arise during the peer education process.

By reflecting on these questions and using the insights gained to shape your preparation, you will be better equipped to provide meaningful and effective support to the peer educators in your group.

# Resources

Included here is additional information we believe to be important and relevant, such as other resources developed within the framework of the 'Rainbow Peer Forces' project and LGBTIQ+ terminology from trusted sources.
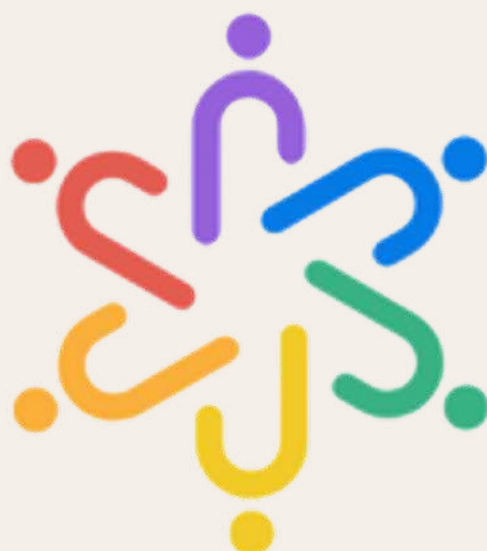
## Research Summary

## Mentoring Scheme

## Terminology

# Rainbow
# Peer Forces

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**Each author brought their unique expertise, experiences, and perspectives to this project, reflecting the diverse and inclusive spirit of peer education.**

This manual is a collaborative effort to provide organisations, educators, and peer leaders with a comprehensive guide for developing and implementing effective peer education programs. Peer education is a transformative approach for fostering inclusive communities, encouraging leadership, and promoting mutual support. By sharing experiences and engaging in reciprocal learning, peer educators create safe spaces where empowerment and growth can thrive.

Within these pages, you will find valuable insights from diverse organisations, highlighting best practices, addressing challenges, and providing practical strategies to ensure sustainable and impactful interventions. Whether you're embarking on your first peer education initiative or looking to enhance an existing program, this manual will help you cultivate resilient, empowered communities.

We invite you to explore and adapt the ideas in this manual to your unique context, working together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all. Thank you for being a part of this journey toward change.

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