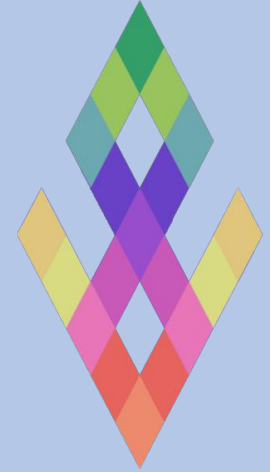


Stability in peer support: Experiences and ideas

Emmi Varis

Autscape 2019

Autistic Spectrum Finland



- A national association led by autistic adults
- Purpose: reduce marginalization and promote social inclusion and opportunities for independent life for people on the autism spectrum
- Minimum of half board members have to be autistic
- Started in 2005
- Over 200 members

Stability in Peer Support

- 3-year project 2018 – 2020
- Aims to support and improve associations peer groups and activities
- Aims to support peer group leaders
- Will produce a handbook for autistic peer group leaders and others interested
- Will produce a model of autistic peer groups and activities

Finding out how to support and improve

- Group discussions with both participants and leaders of peer groups and activities
- Survey for participants and leaders (20 participants, 5 leaders)
- Observation by participating in groups
- Informal discussions

- Group discussions more effective than survey

What participants want?

- Most important things in peer groups: Meeting people and having conversations
- Main reasons for coming to groups the first time: Wanting to meet new people, share experiences
- Most popular groups are discussion based, both free and structured
- Themes for new groups: Interpersonal relationships, self-expression, psychology, nature, society

Challenges participants face and possible solutions

- Being too fatigued to attend groups -> Run open groups that don't require participation every time
- Demands of personal life preventing participation
- Locations hard to find -> Instructions, maps, photos
- Sensory overload -> Make premises autism-friendly
- Quieter people don't get to speak -> Ask them their opinions, use time-limits, do an introduction round

The least difficult things for group leaders

- Coming up with themes
- Creating a good atmosphere
- Meeting people

Challenges group leaders face and possible solutions

- Making sure every participant gets an equal amount of attention -> Ask quieter ones questions, use time-limits, do an introduction round
- Getting new people to the group -> Advertising, giving enough information beforehand
- Introducing a theme and initiating conversation -> Keeping the introduction short, asking opinions and experiences of the theme
- Not recognising if trying to do too much -> Accepting it's ok to take a break from leading a group

Support needed from project workers

- Mainly with things that are not related to interpersonal relationships: advertising, informing group participants, getting coffee and snacks, statistics for the funding body, booking premises
- Rarely there are conflicts in groups, project workers can be mediators

Discussion

- 1) What kinds of groups and activities would you attend? Why?
- 2) What challenges do you face when attending / leading peer groups? What would help you?