



**Shared
Health
Foundation.**

Reducing the Impact
of Poverty on Health.

Developing Peer Support Group Programmes for Homeless Families : A Consultation Summary



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Introduction to the Project

In England, over 80,000 families with children are living in temporary accommodation because they don't have access to secure housing. Families can become homeless for many reasons, like money problems, unsafe homes, or having to leave their country because of war.

Temporary accommodation (TA) is meant to be a short place to stay while waiting for a secure home. TA can be hostels, hotels, B&Bs, or shared houses. While these places give families somewhere to live, they can also be difficult. Families may have to share kitchens or bathrooms, deal with damp or mould, or be moved far away from their friends and schools. Some places don't let families have visitors, which can make them feel lonely.

Children need safe and steady homes to grow well, and poor TA can make this harder.

Because of these challenges, peer support groups can help families, including pregnant people, to feel less alone. This project wanted to find out if families would like these groups and what they would want them to be like.

This document shares what we learned from talking with them.



Acknowledgements

This summary was made by Trainee Clinical Psychologists at Lancaster University. They worked together with homeless families and The Shared Health Foundation (SHF).

SHF is a group that helps people in Greater Manchester by looking at how poverty affects their health.

We want to thank SHF for letting us work with their service, their amazing staff, and the inspiring families they support.

We hope this summary shows the hard work of the staff and the strength, kindness, and courage of the families that we were lucky enough to meet.

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Project Vision and Mission



Our Vision

We want a future where homeless families, including people who are pregnant, don't feel alone. We hope this can happen by giving them access to peer support groups that everyone can join and feel welcome in.

Our Mission

Working with homeless families, this summary gives clear ideas for creating peer support groups.

We hope it will help shape local and national plans to better support families experiencing homelessness.

About this Consultation Summary

How was it made?

Between September and December 2025, six trainee clinical psychologists worked with SHF to run two focus groups. Nine families in Greater Manchester who were experiencing homelessness took part. Some of these people had been pregnant whilst homeless.

Families talked about their experiences of community and connection while being homeless. They also shared their thoughts on peer support groups, including what might make it easier or harder for them to take part.

This summary also includes ideas from other people and organisations that help families locally and nationally.

Who is it for?



This document is for people who are:

- Planning to start peer support groups for families and pregnant people who are homeless,
- Running or taking part in peer support groups for homeless families,
- Helping to fund or organise these groups.

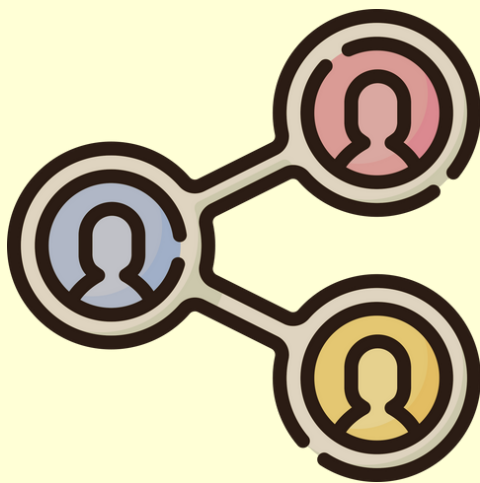
The families we spoke to were mothers in Greater Manchester. They shared challenges that might be unique to them. **Before starting a group in another area, it's important to talk with local families about their experiences and needs.**

What is Peer Support?



What is Peer Support?

Peer support is when people with similar experiences meet to listen, help, and share skills with each other. The families in this consultation were 'peers' because they had all been homeless whilst pregnant or raising children. Peers might also have other things in common, like hobbies, culture, or what country they are from.

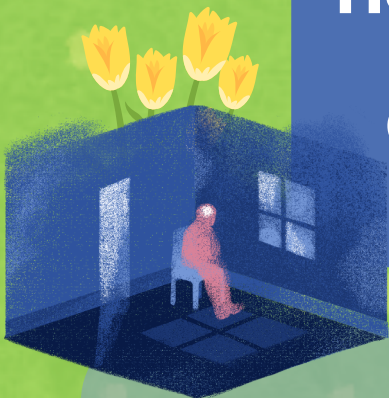


Peer Support Groups

Peer support groups have three or more people coming together. How the group works should be decided by what the members want and need. For example, a trained peer or staff member could run it, or it could be a more casual meeting.



Helpful Tip: The families we spoke to liked the idea of people coming together to share experiences and skills, but some **didn't like the term "peer support"**. It can help if **the group chooses a name that feels right to them**, like "Social Circle" or "Get Together Group."



Homeless Families' Experiences of Community and Connection

Families told us that during their time with insecure housing, they experienced:

- **Problems making friends** because they were moved suddenly, were far from family, had language barriers, or weren't allowed visitors in temporary homes.
- Feeling **unable to talk to other families** in their temporary home.
- Feeling **scared or alone**, and sometimes **facing unkindness** from the public or professionals.
- Wanting to **stay in their temporary home as much as possible**, which sometimes made their health and wellbeing worse.
- Feeling sad about **losing their identity, roles, or dreams**, like not being able to find meaningful work.
- Struggling with **new and complicated systems** in the UK, like applying for asylum.



What Homeless Families would want Community and Connection to look like

Families told us they would like:

- To have **friends and social connections**.
- To feel **safe and cared for** so they can **ask questions and talk about problems**.
- To **be understood** by others who have also been homeless and are parents.
- More **chances for their children** to play, learn, and meet other children.
- To **help others and give back** to their community.



How Could Peer Support Groups 'Bridge the Gap?': Families' Recommendations for Setting Up Peer Support Groups

Content

Sharing helpful information (like learning English language and local classes)

Cooking or baking together

Going on trips as a group

Sharing hobbies and interests

Telling stories

Doing creative activities

Group Feeling

Comfortable

Friendly and non-judgmental

Safe

Knowing what to expect, like being in a familiar place

Who Can Attend

Groups should be open to families who are homeless or have been in the past

Have the option to bring children.

Other People Involved

Healthcare professionals (trained or training) should be regularly present so they and the group can learn from each other.

Accessibility

Hold the group on the same day and time each week.

Don't have rules that stop people joining, like being excluded if they miss a session.

Make the group easy to get to for families from different temporary homes.

Let families join or leave the group whenever they like.

Food

Families said they enjoy cooking and want to bring and share food.

Snacks and drinks should also be provided.

We could call it a '**Social Circle**' or a '**Get Together Group**'...



Things to Consider: Tips from Stakeholders

Remember, living in temporary accommodation is a unique experience. Families are the experts, and their ideas are the most important.

If you want to start a peer support group, you might face challenges and want to fix all the problems families have. That's normal, but your support, kindness, and knowledge are still very valuable.

We found it helpful to:

Get to know **families as people**, not just their problems. Ask about their **strengths and skills**.

Health professionals should follow what **group members want and need**, like what is shared and how involved they are.

Be **flexible** and ready to change things based on **what the families need**, like the time, place, or how you communicate.

Plan ahead for how the group will work and think about how to **handle problems**, like safety issues or disagreements.

Think about what **both parents and children** need, like toys and snacks.

Find ways to make the group **easier to join**, like helping with travel costs.



Our Reflections

We want to thank the families and the Shared Health Foundation for helping with this project. We hope this summary will help anyone who wants to start or join a peer support group.

We are grateful for the knowledge and skills we gained, like more confidence, a better understanding of health inequalities, and learning from the families' experiences.

The families were open, generous, and curious, even during a hard time in their lives, which was inspiring.

We encourage other professionals to work with and listen to families who are homeless, speak up for their needs, and make sure their voices are heard.



Helpful Links and Resources

This page has links to helpful support. There are **lots of resources to guide setting up peer support groups**, including examples of successful groups we can learn from.

Peer Support Toolkit:

Developing peer support in the community:

Gives clear instructions on how to set up peer support groups, check how well they are working, and solve problems that come up. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4247/peer-support-toolkit-final.pdf>

Existing Peer Support Groups:

Praxis UK: Brighter Futures:

Runs creative support groups led by peers for men, women, and young people who have moved to the UK. <https://www.brighterfutureslondon.co.uk/projects/zine-launch>

Circle of Parents (American website with helpful resources):

<http://circleofparents.org/>

<https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/circle-of-parents/detailed>

Services that Support People Experiencing Homelessness:

Shared

Health

Foundation:

<https://sharedhealthfoundation.org.uk/>

Shelter UK:

<https://www.shelter.org.uk/>



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