

TOPSIDE

Training Opportunities for Peer Supporters
with Intellectual Disabilities in Europe



Trainers Guidelines



www.peer-training.eu

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Throughout these guidelines we have inserted easy read statements and clips from portfolios to both make this more accessible and to illustrate that the people with intellectual disabilities are the most important people here!

Introduction

Training Opportunities for Peer Supporters with Intellectual Disabilities in Europe (TOPSIDE)

These guidelines should help you to provide the **TOPSIDE** training - TOPSIDE stands for Training Opportunities for Peer Supporters with Intellectual Disabilities in Europe. This training aims at teaching people with intellectual disabilities the skills they need to be Peer Supporters. It opens up opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to support each other to more inclusive lifestyles.

The **TOPSIDE** training was developed for and by people with intellectual disabilities. The training is designed to help them to become peer supporters. There are many different definitions of peer support.



Who are peer supporters?

Are you happy to help?
Do you like to help other people?
Do you like to learn to do new things?
Do you like to talk with other people?
Do you understand how other people feel?

...then, you could become a peer supporter!

Peer support is about an empathic understanding of another person's situation. This happens when people share or have shared similar experiences. When people connect with others they feel they are like them, they can use their own life-experience to support the other person. Everyone has personal life experience. Everyone has something to give that can help others. Together, people can be stronger. **TOPSIDE** training helps people with intellectual disabilities see what they can do for others.

TOPSIDE peer supporters from ENABLE, Scotland

Peer support is about different things.

- It is about being included in your community.
- It is about having a valued role in your community.
- It is about getting support from people you can trust.
- It is about getting support from people like you.
- It is about sharing your story with people who understand.
- They understand because they also get support.
- They understand because they also have an intellectual disability.

TOPSIDE training can mean a lot to people with intellectual disabilities. It can enable them to become peer supporters. With his training they will discover that their experiences and their knowledge are valued and useful. Instead of always being the person being supported, they get to offer support to someone else.

At the same time others can benefit from the experiences and the skills the peer supporters have learned. .People with intellectual disabilities in similar life situations can get inspired by peer supporters.

TOPSIDE training focuses on inclusion. Being part of society, (self-) advocacy, self determination and person-centred support are all issues that are discussed within this training. These issues are backed up with real life examples and experiences.

These experiences were gained in the testing phase of the **TOPSIDE** project in which 6 organisations, from 6 different countries, participated. In each country different trainers and different participants took part in this testing phase. Every trainer developed the training along these guidelines in a way that suited them and their circumstances. All of the pilot courses provided valuable results. In the appendix you can find out exactly which organisations participated in this project.

In these trainers guidelines we will explain all you need to know to deliver the TOPSIDE training in your own country or organisation. We hope these guidelines open up possibilities for training for people with intellectual disabilities so that their knowledge and experience in life is truly valued and is used productively to support others.

How to use the TOPSIDE Material

Four products are available to help you deliver the **TOPSIDE** training:

- The **TOPSIDE Methodological Guidelines for trainers**, which should guide you through the process of planning and preparing the training programme
- The **TOPSIDE Curriculum**, which is composed of a database of exercises to train people with intellectual disabilities to become peer supporters
- The **TOPSIDE Material for Peers**, which contains examples of portfolios and materials peers will keep to record and display their competences and to remind them what they have learned.
- The **TOPSIDE Guidelines for Mentors**, which should advise and direct the activities of the mentors to peer supporters, once those peer supporters have gone through the training programme.

All four elements are important to fully understand and utilise the **TOPSIDE** training.

We recommend that you start by reading the Methodological Guidelines to get acquainted with the training concepts.

The national reports of the pilot courses run by the project partners are available on the **TOPSIDE** website. They contain plenty of information that you may find useful to read and concrete examples of how a **TOPSIDE** training course can look.

I. Setting the scene: Peer support and Peer training

a) *The role of peer supporter*

The peer supporter is a lever for change for others with intellectual disabilities. A peer supporter relates experiences from his/her own life and from others to support peers to achieve their goals. People's goals will be about the life they want, about a real quality of life. For many people this

“Peer support is about listening and having good communication skills and been there for the people and you are not there to give advice we are there to give choices.”

Peer supporter from Scotland

means having a good life as part of the community, being as independent as possible, taking decisions and having choices, being valued for who they are and having a valued role in society.

Preferably, peer supporters are people with intellectual disabilities who have experiences of inclusion. Maybe they have a paid job, their own home in the community, or simply personal life situations, experiences and attitudes which can serve as a good example to others and allow them to benefit from this peer support.

The peer supporter:

- can show others how to get the right support in inclusive settings.
- can support someone to see how they can enjoy a good or better quality of life.
- can help others become more socially included.
- can support people who do not see these possibilities for themselves.
- can open other people's eyes to what is possible and can help to create new opportunities in the life of their peers.
- can have different roles in the life of the supported person

Furthermore, the peer supporter:

- does not propose solutions but experiences
- is independent from organisations providing services
- is not replacing social workers.
- should raise awareness about the rights a supported person has.
- contributes to society and the community, as a friend, a volunteer or as a worker.

Being a good peer supporter is not easy. To teach people the skills they need, the training for peers must stick close to real life and real issues and opportunities. As a trainer, you can choose different exercises, topics or methods after reading this manual. Whatever you do it is important to relate everything to the above role of the peer supporter. If not the training becomes a loose, unrelated set of exercises.

TIPS: Always keep the role of peer supporter as a guide throughout the training. Keep referring back to it. That way people understand why what they are doing is important.

Scotland: “What became clear was the need to constantly reiterate the principles of peer support. This served to inform the future workshops. This was quickly reduced to a simple mantra: listen carefully, ask to make sure you completely understand, work with the person to examine the possible solutions, do not direct or directly advise but just work to facilitate (help) their decision making”.



HELLO, I'M KERRY!

AND I'M A PEER SUPPORTER!

I have an intellectual disability.

I have learned a lot about supporting other people with intellectual disabilities.

This is called peer support.

My peers are other people with intellectual disabilities.

b) Ways to provide peer support

Peer support can be provided in a range of ways:

- Formal or informal
- One-to-one or in a group
- By volunteers or by paid staff
- Peer-led or facilitated by others
- In person, on the phone or via the internet
- Through workshops or social activities
- Once in a while or on-going

“You feel better if you can help others who need more support. We can help them.”

Peer supporter from Spain

Before you start planning your training, think carefully about what you want peer supporters to do once they have finished. This will influence what you will do in the training. It is also good to plan the activities *before* the training that will take place *after* the training. That way, people can start performing their role straight away after, or even during the training. The quicker they can start the better!

Peer supporters can act in very different contexts:

As employees or volunteers.

In NGOs supporting people with intellectual disabilities.

In self-advocacy organisations to provide support in decision-making for other members of that organisation.

In counselling services accessible to people with intellectual disabilities.

In organisations of (legal) guardians / supporters to complement the support provided by the guardian from a peer perspective, or as evaluators of quality of life, both to evaluate services or evaluate policy implementation or impact.

Think about how **TOPSIDE** peer support might be most meaningful in your own context.

TIP: When planning this training be clear about what you expect people to do afterwards. Also, the quicker people can start offering peer support the better!

Finland: “It will be important when inviting participants to the training to consider beforehand the possible places and environments where they might in the future offer peer support. Due to some difficulties with the schedule we only did this at the end of the test phase and we met with some problems. If we had been able to fully consider how the peer support was going to be offered we would have been able to tailor the peer support training more exactly beforehand.

Czech Republic: “In March 2013 we opened two new peer support groups with our peer supporters. These are groups of people who can become friends, meet up, spend free time together and offer natural support to each other with the help and support of supporters, who passed the course as well as volunteers.”

Also “three of our peer-supporters are in a circle of support for people with learning disabilities, one is a member of a self advocacy group, and one is working at the advisory centre, helping people to deal with life experiences.”

PEER SUPPORTERS- who can you trust?



I learned that being a peer supporter is an important job!

I learned that it is important not to tell people what I think they should do.

I learned that it is my job to help them think of all the options.

Options are the different choices you have when you decide to do something!

I learned that what people tell you is private.

c) The training: inclusive, inspiring and practical

“The life stories, they were really interesting. I will take them with me”
Peer supporter from the Netherlands

We have developed a training programme in which everyone can participate. It is flexible for trainers and adaptable for any participants. It is based on ideas from the Index for Inclusion¹. This index describes how to make learning accessible to everyone. The main idea is that it is easier to learn

from real life situations. When we developed the training, we created a set of skills which peer supporters will need to perform their role. To teach these skills we decided to use life topics. For example leisure time, home and support. Examples that are relevant for the participants at that moment can be chosen, again, for example topics such as relationships or social inclusion.

The curriculum is not linear. There is no one way of doing it. As a trainer it means you have to decide with support from your co-trainer what to do based on your knowledge of your own group, your own culture and the opportunities in your direct environment.

The underpinning value of this training is inclusion. This means that:

- Everyone can participate
- Everyone can be part of peer support
- Everyone has gifts to bring, ideas to share and can be an example
- Everyone has his or her own value as a person
- Everyone means everyone!

Throughout the course it is good to use real life examples. People with intellectual disabilities who are an image of inclusion. People who are in socially valued roles in spite of their perceived disabilities. People who live independently or with support in their own home or people in paid employment for example. Or simply people with a rich life experience or a ‘can do’ attitude. These should be positive examples of people with intellectual disabilities which other people can relate to. These examples will be different in each country or culture. The aim is to inspire people to think about their own situation. They might start dreaming about what life could be like. The examples can also help them see different possibilities. This can be especially valuable when supporting other people to aspire to a greater quality of life.

Whichever exercises or topics you choose, it is important to **do** things, rather than just talking about them. This way you can involve people with more severe disabilities. Make the training as active as possible. Go out if you can. Use the opportunities around you. While developing this training we have created many exercises you can use. We have created a framework for the training. The actual content is up to you.

TIP: When preparing for this training it is good to think about:

- *Which topics are most relevant to the participants?*
- *Which people can be cited as relevant examples during the training?*
- *How can you adjust the training to suit the needs and abilities of your group?*
- *How you will do things around peer support, rather than just talking about it?*

¹ *Index for Inclusion*, Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow, CSIE Ld, Bristol, Revised edition, 2002
ISBN: 1 872001 1 81



Detail of material on inclusion, San Tomas, Spain



Peer supporter during a training session on diversity, San Tomas, Spain.

Spain: “We had big discussions about what topic (work, housing, health, social relations...) would be most meaningful to select as a focus for the peer supporter. We thought that focussing on 1 single topic would make it easier for participants to understand and learn. The topic we chose was leisure time and social networks since many of our participants have expressed a need for support to extend their social network and to participate in worthwhile leisure activities.

Netherlands: “We choose to discuss a different topic each session. This gave us a chance to share relevant, good examples of inclusion each time. Under the topic Work, we met with a person with a severe disability who has her own catering company. This inspired many people to think with more imagination about what people can do, even if others think this is impossible.”



I learned that people should get support to have the same rights as everybody else

I learned that people with a learning disability can help other people in the community.

I learned that people with a learning disability have a lot to offer to other people.

I learned that people with a learning disability can make other peoples lives better as well as their own.

I learned that everbody should be a part of their community.

I learned that everyone should get support to be a part of their community.

II. Key roles

a) *The participants*

Everyone can participate in this training. You can adapt the programme to suit your group. Think about what you want people to do after the training. This question can often help you define the criteria you may have for your participants.

There are however in our experience some general criteria:

- People who are motivated to do the course
- People who are interested in supporting others
- People who have the courage to learn new things
- People who have the life experience that enables them to be an example to others
- People who are personally in a good enough situation themselves to allow them to help others

“For me supporting others means helping myself to get better every day”.

Peer supporter from Spain

Other criteria, especially for more formal peer support, could be:

- Good communication skills
- The courage to speak in front of others
- The ability to self-reflect.
- The ability to focus and listen
- Empathic skills
- The ability to let go of his/her own problems and to listen to others
- Some degree of cognitive skills, and the ability to understand or demonstrate concepts such as inclusion, rights, person-centred approaches and peer support. (Please note that many people will simply demonstrate this by their own attitudes and behaviours - it is not vital to be able to describe these concepts)

A large variety of participants have now done this course. All have learnt from it. All have benefited. Not all will be formal peer supporters although all may still help others informally.

It is not always possible to know all participants well enough in advance. Having some form of selection does help. You can check people's motivation to become peer supporters.. Also, you can adjust your training to their needs.

Tip: Think about how you select participants on the basis of what you want them to do/what they want to do after the training.

Romania: “For us it was important to choose the right people. The selection consisted of two phases: 1. Various exercises to evaluate certain skills in communication, respect to others and an open attitude and 2. An interview, talking about the persons motivation to become a peer supporter”

Czech Republic: “We think that everyone can be in this course. However, we wanted people to become active as peer supporters in other support groups later. To be able to do this they needed a certain disposition. Things that were important for us in choosing participants were: motivation, communication skills, courage to speak in front of others and to learn new things, self-reflection, focus on others, listening skills, empathy and personal experience, mainly around life in the community.”

b) The Trainer

The trainer leads and develops the training programme, using this material and , where appropriate, their own material and experience. They will work and prepare the training sessions with the co-trainer. The trainer will also evaluate the session with him or her and give him feedback about his/her work.

The trainer may need to share some experiences with other trainers or through supervision or coaching, if they encounter difficulties.



Trainer and co-trainer from San Tomas, Spain during a radio interview



Co-trainer speaking about his role, Inclusion Czech Republic.

c) the Co-trainer

We believe it is extremely important to involve a person with an intellectual disability as a trainer. This 'co-trainer' should be involved in the whole preparation of the course. Good preparation is the key to the value of the co-trainer. This helps him/her to understand the content and the methods used. This also offers both trainers the opportunity to get used to your respective roles.

The advantages of a well prepared co-trainer with an intellectual disability are many. Here are just a few. He or she:

- brings natural topics and examples from his/her own life-experience
- can help the trainer to understand opinions or points of views from participants
- can help to keep the training at an understandable level
- can try exercises in advance to see if they are effective
- can ensure that any texts are easy to read
- acts as an example to the participants

Respecting the co-trainer in their role is very important. He or she is a trainer, not a participant. You should treat them that way. Involving them in the preparations and the decisions in advance is a great way to get to know each other and to establish who can do what.

As with all people, some people with intellectual disabilities are naturally better trainers than others. Try to find someone who:

- isn't afraid to speak in front of others, and be assertive
- can speak about their own experiences, at appropriate times,
- is able to understand what inclusion is and why it is important,
- is able to understand what peer support and why it is important
- is able to relate their own life experience to that of others without taking over a conversation,
- also shares ALL the criteria described above for *participants*.

N.B.: (These same criteria are important for ALL trainers, not just those with intellectual disabilities)

If someone has never facilitated any training before, they will need more preparation and they will need time to get used to their new role. This role will need to be clearly outlined for them. In some countries people with a lot of experience may, however, be easier to find. It's clear then that some people may need more guidance and support than others. With the right preparation and support however we believe emphatically that people with intellectual disabilities can be very good trainers.

There are many reasons why a co-trainer nevertheless might revert to their old role and simply become another participant. For example, if their qualities are not utilised, if they are not clear of their role or what they are meant to be doing or they are simply used as participants whenever that seems handy, etc. It is therefore vitally important to make the role of co-trainer a clear role understood and remembered by both the trainer and the co-trainer. This can be supported by doing the following:

If the trainer sets up the beamer, tables, or other equipment before the meeting, the co-trainer does so too.

If the trainer is at the head of the table, the co-trainer should be there too.

If anything needs to be discussed or decided, the co-trainer is there too.

Just like the trainer, the co-trainer presents some exercises independently, explains to participants what to do, and can lead the discussion while the trainer leaves the group.

These things make it clear that the co-trainer is a trainer. Not a participant. At the same time it is important for the co-trainer to understand that he/she is not an 'expert', superior to any of the participants and isn't always right!

With any co-trainer it is good to work together in the preparation. It's also good to prepare before each session, and to evaluate after each session. Rehearsing the programme helps to get it right on the day. In an ideal situation the trainers would test all the parts of the training with other people before the actual training takes place.

Having more than one co-trainer is possible. In that case more people means more preparation. Due to the personal nature of the training it is best if all trainers are present at all training sessions.

TIP: There should be a trainer with an intellectual disability. This person should be valued as a trainer. He or she should be involved in the preparations before the entire training, the preparation before each session and the evaluation after each training.

Scotland: John Feehan, ENABLE Scotlands participation officer and a man with an intellectual disability has been supported to lead part of the workshop. He was able to do this as we practiced. He did, however, find it difficult to deal with the responses from the participants in the workshop. It was as if he thought he had to have a set of standard responses rather than just going along with the conversation as an individual. We discussed this later. We agreed to work on this in the future.

Czech Republic: "We have good experience with repeated tasks for co-trainers. For example each lesson was opened by a co-trainer who had tasks to welcome participants and lead them to repeat the last lesson. They asked participants what they remembered, possibly about their homework. It helped them to start in the right role and they improved rapidly in these concrete tasks.

We started slowly with each co-trainer. First he had only one task, usually. And when he managed it, he did more and more. It was initially, for example, too difficult for him to monitor both the training times while also helping to ensure that all participants were involved at the same time.

d) The Mentor

The Mentor's role is described more in details in the document called Guidelines for Mentors. After the period of training, trainees will be able to offer peer support to other people with an intellectual disability.

Like all of us the peer supporter may encounter problems or dilemmas they hadn't considered or met before when they begin to offer peer support to someone. It will be important as they embark on that process that they are able to turn to a mentor.

The mentor is a person who can give a facilitative support to the peer supporter should they require this or should they feel that they need it simply to have their learning endorsed by someone they trust and respect.

It is important to have someone to ask for advice, or help. A Mentor for peer supporters can react and can help when needed. (See the [TOPSIDE document called "Guidelines for Mentors"](#))

It is therefore important to think beforehand about who might be able to offer support as a mentor, when planning the activities after the training.



Support group run by peer supporters, Inclusion Czech Republic



Well, not quite!

I learned that people can contact me if they would like some peer support.

I learned that I will get support from a mentor if I need it.

I learned that this mentor will just help me think about how I should offer my support to my peer.

I learned that the mentor won't tell me what to do.

I learned that the mentor will just help me think about my choices.

I learned that this will help me make sure I don't tell my peer what to do. I learned that this will help me just support my peer to think about their choices!

III. Before the training

Again, the most important thing to think about is what you want people to do once they have done the course. Do you want them to use the skills informally, with their own friends or colleagues? Or do you want to set up a formal peer support system? In that case you should think about how you will run this system. How will it be supported and by whom?

Timing

The timing of the training is important. It can be done in many ways. In our testing phase some people had short sessions every week. Others had a few quite long sessions sometimes over a full weekend. Both have their pros and cons as detailed below.

	Weekly sessions	Weekends or full day meetings
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-More concentrated participants-More time to think about and speak about what has been learnt-More opportunities for reflection-Allows working on actual topics from life experience over a longer period of time-Often suits rhythm of participants-Allows you to meet at different locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Allows people from a large geographical area to come-People can keep their normal day to day routine, this is added on.-easier to evaluate-Lunch time or evenings spent together bring opportunities to get to know each other. - Friendships may occur more freely.
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-People who have to travel far are less likely to come-Some lessons can be too short for certain activities-People forget what they did last time, and need refreshing every time. Refreshing and evaluating takes more time on the whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Full days are very long for some participants-Costly in terms of food and accommodation.

Location

The location is also part of the preparations. The location should of course be accessible. It should also have space for exercises. Many of them involve walking around in the room. Ideally a location should be comfortable with little distractions. Try to find locations where people can practice. People learn best by actually using their skills.

If possible, parts of lessons, or entire lessons can also be outside the training room. The effect on the participants is wonderful to watch. People learn so much from the learning by doing, meeting real people, and being in real situations.

It is important to check if everyone can organise their own transport and can arrive and get home safely from the training venue.

Breaks

It is necessary to have enough breaks or informal time during the training. We suggest that a break should occur at least every 90 minutes but this should be tailored to the needs of your group. This free time can also be used by people to get to know each other better. It also offers people the opportunity for more casual peer discussion, reflection and informal questioning.

Tips:

If you want to have a formal Peer Support system, think about how this will work and how it will be supported before you prepare the rest of the training.

Think about what timing works best for you and the participants.

Make sure you have a spacious, accessible location.

Give people enough time to get to know each other, to reflect and to informally ask questions

The Netherlands: “We worked with people who had never met each other before. During this course very personal information is sometimes discussed (never forced!). It was very important for the participants to bond as a group. As we got together for full weekends we had opportunities in the evening to do something fun. This way, participants got to know each other quickly. When outsiders met the group the second time we got together, they thought the participants had known each other for a long time before the training!”

Romania: “Most of our training sessions were held in a meeting room. This room had to be comfortable and without too many distractions. That way the participants could focus. We also had one session at the seaside, one in the mall, one in the park and one at the horse-riding centre. There participants could practice some of the skills learnt.”



Training session in the Netherlands by Perspectief.



This is what I learned here.

I learned to look at different problems people might have.

I learned to think about what support I would give them if I was their peer supporter.

I learned to always remember to listen carefully.

I learned to always remember to ask the person questions.

I learned that this would help me understand what they were really saying.

I learned again to help the person I'm supporting to think about all the possible choices they had.

I learned again to make sure I wasn't telling the person which choice to make.

I learned again that the person must be able to make their own decision.

III. The Training Programme

a) Skills and Topics

“ I found it important to learn how to communicate with the person, how to treat him. That it is important to respect him, to listen to him. How to understand his problem and how to give him enough confidence so that he can handle what was bothering him.”

Co-trainer, Czech Republic

Together the people developing **TOPSIDE** thought about what skills a peer supporter should have or develop. When doing the training people should become aware of the following attitudes to other people:

- Respect for the person and his/her environment is important
- Open, not judging anyone
- Respect decisions others' make, not manipulating their decision-making.
- Equal relation: not “showing off“ or imposing their views or attitudes on their peer.
- Acting as a „guest“ in the life of another person

- Ability to relate different experiences of their own to the person and their situation.
- Trustworthy (able to respect confidentiality and privacy)
- Having an inclusive attitude

The **TOPSIDE** training is a skill-oriented curriculum. It helps trainees to learn how to support their peers. However, to be accessible the training is based on real life situations, called topics.

Topics

The training is shaped so that peer supporters can be taught how to support their peers using real life situations. The topics we identified as being most important and relevant to people's daily life are:

- Support/Network
- Work
- Leisure
- Home
- Relationships
- Health and well-being
- Education and learning
- Citizenship

In each topic, several transversal themes will be repeated: ‘my rights’, ‘how can I contribute to society’, ‘how to prevent abuse’ and ‘how to feel and be safe’.

Skills and Knowledge

The skills can be taught using a variety of topics. Repetition is also good to remember skills learnt. Skills should be tied to peer support situations. That way people will understand why the skill is important and what they can use it for in their role as peer supporter.

The skills we identified during development can be divided in three categories:

1. Peer to Peer Skills: these are about communication, reaction and empathy in a face to face or group exchange.
2. Inclusive Skills: these are about inclusion, person centred thinking, valued social roles, and about the importance being a citizen in your community
3. Pragmatic skills: these are about relating experiences from different areas of their and others life to the inclusion agenda. It's about being able to use real life examples to support others.

Peer to Peer Skills

Understanding role of peer supporter, as an equal person

Understanding this is an evolving role

Giving meaning to life stories

Empathy: Recognising, articulating, identifying and understanding emotions

Communicating: Understanding, repeating, listening, reacting, talking, clarifying, asking questions, replying to people

Identifying another person's situation (fear, help, need)

Positive reframing

Confidentiality, public versus private information

Identify support

Inclusive Values and Skills

Open attitude to diversity

Understanding people learn differently

Understanding that each person has their own rhythm

Understanding power imbalance

Knowing rights and obligations

Understanding the importance of socially valued role

Understanding the importance of taking part

Understanding inclusion in different situations

Person-Centred Planning tools, e.g. passion audit, relationship maps

Understanding the values behind person-centred thinking

Pragmatic Skills

Understanding different types of support

Understanding the importance of informed decision making and how people can be supported to make decisions

Understanding the importance of the power to choose and make your own decisions

Understanding good and bad decisions and learning from both types of decisions

Knowing where to ask for help when making decisions

Knowing where to take someone to show other possibilities

Knowing where inclusive situations can be found

Knowing how to support someone

Knowing how and when to get help

TIP:

Peer supporters need skills to work with other people (Peer to Peer Skills) they need to learn about inclusive values to support others to live a good quality life (Inclusive Skills) and they need to know how to relate their own and other people's experiences and use these to support others (Pragmatic Skills)

The topics from daily life give the skills a foundation. It makes the training more accessible.

To tie everything together it is important to remind people why the learnt skill is important for peer supporters.

The Netherlands: "There are so many important skills, and we only had 40 hours! We linked everything to topics, to make learning easier. One of the topics was relations and network. We made exercises, many of which linked to various skills at the same time. For instance we filled in a relationship map and presented it to the others. In doing so, we practiced person centred thinking and tools, communication skills and, in many instances, we used a practical example of a person we had worked with to illustrate how someone could increase his or her network."



I learned that if I tell people about my mistakes in my life that it can help them decide the best thing to do.



I learned that peer support is all about people helping each other.

I learned that if I can tell people what I know it can help them decide what to do.

I learned that only people with learning disabilities know what it feels like to have a learning disability.

I learned that helping other people with a learning disability is what peer support is all about.

b) Methods

*“A good peer supporter
needs experience”*
Peer supporter from Spain

Here we have gathered a list of methods and a description of the methods used in the pilot sessions we completed in the various test countries. A mix of everything works really well. Use as large a variety as you can. Not every method will suit all participants; however, through variation you can make the training attractive and meaningful overall to all participants.

Open discussion

- This is an easy and natural way for people to speak about their opinions and to get to understand a topic. It also trains their communication skills. It is important that the topic relates to the real life experiences of the participants. The (co-)trainer can ask about the topics to help people to say what they think. The (co-)trainer should let participants speak freely. He or she should intervene as little as possible.

Recording video

- Using a camera to make a video of people in the group can be used for feedback on communication skills and the co-operation of people in the group. It is best to have the camera on a tripod to allow people to relax and forget about it. That way the participants can act naturally. The video can be quite long sometimes, so it is important to prepare the feedback well for the next session. Only choose and show the relevant and important moments.

Brainstorming

- This can be a good method to explore the meaning of certain words or concepts. The (co-) trainer poses the questions and participants say what comes to mind when they think of that. For some people with intellectual disabilities this can however be difficult at first. It can help then if:
 - The (co-) trainer has some examples prepared.
 - You start off with a simple example, like associating on the word ‘holiday’ to show what the group should be doing.
 - You use pictures that relate the question to real life, and which can give people things to see and recognise.

Role play

- When using role plays it is important to make it very clear that the roles have changed, for instance by changing clothes, or putting on a hat. Especially when the scene is about problematic communication or if either of the players is being particularly difficult or unpleasant on purpose in the example. It is fun to ask the participants to then act out how the scene could have improved. Keep in mind that in most groups not everyone will want to do this. This method can however be great when used for participants to prepare them for real action and real peer support!. This way they can imagine, in a safe environment, how they might deal with certain situations in terms of offering that real peer support.

Examples from the co-trainer

- The co-trainer can use his/her life experience to make the link to real life. This example can make material that is hard to understand more concrete and natural. It also helps if both trainers use their own life experiences and examples to explain exercises, such as a

relationship map or a life path. The co-trainer can have this prepared and ready in advance.

Example of an external person

- Using concrete examples of people who are doing very well on specific topics makes it real for participants. Examples from other people with intellectual disabilities can be very inspiring. Using pictures of those people in their role, house, work, etc. will help to make the example more appealing.

○

Dreaming

- Dreaming helps participants imagine their wishes for the future. This in combination with the life experiences of others opens up new possibilities that they might not have thought about before.

Using imagery

- Many people watch television. Well watched soaps provide a way to open up discussions about complex real life situations.
- Pictures from magazines and advertisements used creatively can also help participants to understand things like emotions, role modelling etc.

Use of flipcharts or large sheets of paper

- Making as much as possible visible can be an important part in supporting the participants understanding of the discussion.

Going out

- If possible, it is great to support participants out to locations that can inspire them or that allow them to practice the skills they have learnt.

Informal Talk

- When participants have time to talk about themselves informally they can open up a natural discussion using their own life experiences and reacting to others. This can take place for instance at the start of the session or during a (lunch) break. Sometimes topics come up which participants would not start discussing alone, such as infringements of his or her right. Informal talk also opens up opportunities to provide peer support to each other on issues that are important in a person's life at that moment.

Ice-breakers

- It is very important to start off with some easy ice breakers to get to know each other well. During this training participants may want to talk a lot about personal experiences and the lessons they have learnt in life. To do this the trainer and co-trainer have to make sure everyone feels comfortable. Ice breakers help.

Personal Experience

- At certain times during the training it is important for the trainers to share personal experiences as well. This creates more confidence in the group that what is said in the group stays in the group. Off course this has to be managed. The training should first and foremost however be about the experiences of the participants.

Energisers

- It can be hard to keep the energy levels up, especially after lunch for instance. It is good to use a quick energiser if you or the co-trainer notice a decline in attention levels.

TIPS: Use as much variation in exercises as you can. Each person learns in a different way. It is impossible to make every exercise suit every participant but the variety we suggest should make it possible to keep most people engaged!

Czech Republic: “Together with the co-trainer we created and tested the exercises that were useful for this course. This was very inspiring. It helped to describe what skills peer supported need and what skills can be difficult to acquire. We looked at which skills we thought were most important to focus on. It was interesting to see what other ideas came from the other countries involved in the TOPSIDE project. So many possibilities!”

Spain: “The course made use of an active methodology, the starting point being the idea that for learning to be significant, the person concerned needs to be the protagonist of their own learning, while the trainer acts as a facilitator of this process. The activities were based on the principles of person centred planning, which understands that the person, with their preferences and values, needs to be at the centre of any process if a better quality of life is to be attained”

Romania: “Abinel loves short activities, like question-answer. He does not participate in role plays. Alexandra and Laurentiu prefer role plays. Loanda does not understand the rules of role play.”



An example of the use of Person Centred Planning (relationship map), Sant Tomas, Spain

c) Programming, planning and sequencing of the training

To create the programme you should work together with all trainers, including those with intellectual disabilities.

It is good to know the participants at least a little. Then you can choose a topic that is relevant to them. Find out what their interests and strengths are. Also find out what their needs are in terms of the exercises, space and support.

You can then create a programme teaching the skills needed to support peers, based on the topics. Use exercises from the database, or exercises you know yourself. You can then link these to the topics you have chosen. In doing so, keep the following in mind:

- Variety: It helps everyone if there is a lot of variety in the course. I.e. try not to do two similar exercises in one session: one case study, one active exercise, one discussion, etc.
- Not too long: one exercise can only last so long before people lose interest.
- After Lunch Dip: try to do something more active after lunch.
- Active: being active is important in any case. It helps people stay focussed.
- Examples: Use many examples of real people to inspire participants.
- How are you? It is good to start each session with a short round in which you can ask questions such as, how are you today and what do you remember most from last time?
- It is good to close of with an evaluation. This can also be the time to update the portfolios.

Using post-its with the titles of potential exercises, with the type of activity written on them too, can help to put in order interesting exercises and match them to topics. This also creates the opportunity to involve the co-trainer in the programming phase.

During the pilot, all programmes were based on a target of 40 hours in total. The best laid plans however often go astray! This is a flexible target and you should adapt it to the needs of your group and your participants. For example, an exercise that took us 1.5 hours might only take you 15 minutes with your group. Always have a few possible time fillers up your sleeve at any given time and be flexible!

You can create a schedule for each session like this one:

Session 1: Topic Work

Time	Exercise	Needed	Who
10:00 - 10:15	Opening Round	Opening questions	Co-trainer
10:15 - 11:15	What would you like to do?	Posters, pens, flip chart	Co-trainer (trainer fills in when needed)
11:15 - 11:30	Example of John	PowerPoint - Photos	Trainer

Etc.

Of course you should design your own schedule. This is just an example. If you create it together with your co-trainer it can be designed overall to suit everyone. The 'who' question is very important

in the schedule. As part of your preparations your co-trainer can learn to lead certain exercises. He or she can indicate which ones he or she might enjoy. Work to facilitate the co-trainer doing as much as possible before and during the training.

Also, as many of the exercises involve discussing personal things from people's own life-experience it is very important to get off on a good start with a few ice-breakers. Make sure people have a chance to get to know each other first; nothing too difficult or too personal to begin with! Having fun together is a great way to start conversations.

We found it impossible to make every exercise suit everyone. Variety in your programme makes sure however that there is something for everyone and that the training should have an overall appeal.

From our experience the number of participants can vary from 4 to 8. 4 is the least, we found. This will however allow you to go into the materials in some depth. 8 is a good maximum. If you have more participants, you will struggle to let everyone speak and be heard. If everyone tells their own stories, for example, all the others will simply be listening. There is only so much listening anyone can do! And finally, we found that due to the nature of many of the exercises an even number of participants is more practical.

TIPS:

Create the programme to teach skills, using topics and exercises.

Create the programme together with the co-trainers, discussing who does what.

Make sure you have something extra in case an exercise goes too fast. Think about what to leave out if time goes too fast.

Make sure you give people time to get to know each other at the start

Keep the following in mind:

- *variety,*
- *not too long,*
- *make it active (especially after lunch),*
- *use many examples from real life,*
- *make sure you open and finish in a good way*

4 is a minimum in terms of participants while 8 is a good maximum!

Czech Republic: "In the first phase of the project the trainer and co-trainer started to prepare the syllabus of the training course for peer supporters. First we talked about the role of peer supporter and what this means. Then we were looking for the main situations in which people need support. From here we identified the topics. For this part, the co-trainer was particularly helpful, as she brought many topics which are typical, very common and specific for the life of people with intellectual disabilities. After that we matched up the exercises."

Scotland: "In the reflection on Day 1 it became clear that although the folk in the group were ,generally speaking , known to each other, they hadn't spent much time together. Like any group is was going to take a little time to facilitate some relationship building in order to achieve the best outcomes for everyone concerned"

"Day three began with a recap of day two. People did not quickly recall what we had done. Once we got talking about it, it quickly came flooding back. This led to an obvious conclusion. That we should always ensure that any learning or practice was reiterated in as much detail as was required to make sure we had re-established our foundation before continuing with the workshop programme"

d) The TOPSIDE Curriculum: Database of exercises

We want to make it as easy as possible to put this training together. For that purpose we have gathered all the exercises we have used. Together, the exercises cover each skill that a peer supporter should have. Some exercises can be used with any topic. Others are more specific to one topic.

In the database (www.peer-training.eu) you can find these exercises. You can search for any skill and find all exercises related to that skill. You can also search by topic.

To search in the database you can use any skill or topic as keywords or view all the exercises available by skill or by topic. The exercises are presented in a simple format to help you to understand in the faster way what it is about - you will find a brief description of the objective within each one. Because every partner shared a selection of tested exercises, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, English, Finnish, Romanian and Spanish are the languages of the exercises. Each language contains both the exercises in its own language and those of the other countries involved. Each exercise page contains the objective of the exercise, the method, the materials needed, the time it takes, and tips from trainers who have done the exercise before. With these ingredients it is easy to use the exercises from this database to make a full programme. Of course we are interested to hear about your experiences with these exercises, and to get any exercises from you that you have thought of yourself. That way your exercises will help other trainers in their programming. The data-base will allow you to rate the exercises on a scale from 1 to 5.

All of the exercises in the database have been tried and tested in different European countries. They worked for us and our participants. The exercises were thought up and created together with people with intellectual disabilities. That way we made sure they are relevant and useful. You can search for exercises together with your co-trainer. You can then check what (s)he finds easier to understand and what (s)he would like to do.

TIP: We have created a database with exercises so that you don't have to come up with them yourself.

Each exercise contains the objective, method, materials, time taken and tips from other trainers.

All exercises have been tested in various countries.

Choosing the exercises is a great thing to do together with the co-trainer.

Finland: “The course days included exercises which were related to the theme of each day. The exercises were chosen together with the co-trainer. Part of the exercises were tried and tested, used in different projects and courses, collected from colleagues and part was new and self-made. We also used exercises that were 'borrowed' from the repertoire of other participating countries. We made sure the exercises all together covered all the skills needed by peer supporters”

e) Evaluating

“Fun to participate. It has given me many tools, much that I can show others. I want to use this at my work. I want to stimulate people to look at their own life, improve their situation so that they have a better time”

A participant from the Netherlands

Evaluating is important during and after the training. It allows you to adapt so that the training is as effective as it can be for the participants. It will help to see where improvement or change is needed. Evaluating with your co-trainer on your co-operation together is also very important.

We evaluated our training in different ways in each country. Some trainers had questionnaires to fill in. With this they looked at each exercise. That way they now have a very clear idea on what worked and what didn't. Other trainers evaluated at the end of each session by asking some questions. That way as a trainer you get a global idea about what is going well and what is not.

All of us also evaluated separately with our co-trainers. This was very useful, as two people obviously notice more than one. It helps to do the training better together in the next session.

TIPS:

Evaluating throughout the training is very important. That way you can adjust the exercises during the training. Evaluating with the co-trainer helps to work better together. You will also both notice different things about how the sessions went.

Finland: “During the Finnish pilot course we collected feedback using many different methods. It was great to get a lot of feedback. Participants were able to tell us their opinions and feelings, both positive and negative. On feedback notes participants were able to write, draw and glue pictures and stickers. At the end of the course we got some oral feedback on video. It was fantastic to see that participants were confident enough to also give negative and critical feedback. That is a real achievement for a Finnish person with an intellectual disability!”

f) Lessons learnt: Difficulties that you may encounter

Most of the lessons learnt during the pilot sessions can be found throughout this training manual.

- For many people with intellectual disabilities this is the first time they will have had the opportunity to support others, rather than always being the person who gets the support. Some people can react to this by dealing with their peers as if they are not equal and the peer supporter is somehow superior. While we may understand this initial reaction it is nevertheless important to emphasise that a supporter is neither more or less than the person needing support and also worth pointing out that it is entirely possible that these roles can quickly change or reverse!
- People may attempt to facilitate solutions for other people that don't suit that person's situation and is not their preferred solution.. It is important to highlight that each person is different and that as a supporter you must let the person find his or her own solution
- People are often quite satisfied with their lifestyle, even if we might feel that they are a bit excluded or we might consider that that lifestyle is not suitable for them as an adult. The people who appear satisfied may not however have ever been encouraged to imagine or dream about new things they can try. It is not necessary to push them to change their life; however it is important to spent time to help them to imagine what other possibilities they might enjoy and to see what a more inclusive lifestyle might offer them.
- Some people have many problems of their own. They may have so much going on in their own lives that it is difficult to listen to other people let alone trying to support other people. It is important to recognise this and to raise this with the peer supporter involved to try and resolve this.
- We encountered a few participants with whom it was hard to tell what was true and what was not true. This lack of clarity makes it hard to fulfil the responsibilities of a peer supporter and needs to be addressed.
- The role of the co-trainer was not equally clear in every pilot. Some became more like participants; others were too involved with their own stories to listen to others. Especially non experienced co-trainers need support and guidance. This is an investment worth making. See the chapter on the co-trainer for advice.

Tips: During the many and various pilot training sessions we learnt a lot. A number of things could have been better. By reading these guidelines you can learn from our mistakes and our successes equally!

V. After the training

a) Portfolio

We decided it was important for people to be recognised for, and reminded of, all the skills they had learnt. Also we wanted them to be able to show other people all that they had achieved. We did this in many different ways. Here we want to give you examples to inspire you. You can find a way of creating a portfolio that suits opportunities in your country and the people you work with. In the portfolio you can also include any posters you used, stories of other people who served as examples, anything that will help the person in their role as peer supporter later on. You can find description and pictures of our portfolios under the [TOPSIDE Material for Peers](#).

During the training we all used certain tools. Tools for example related to elements of Person Centred Planning. For instance, we used posters to guide and reflect conversations and help participants ask questions. By using these posters within the group participants learn how to use them themselves. These posters became tools they could use in their role as Peer Supporters.

Giving participants blank posters in some kind of 'toolkit' gives them autonomy. It enables them to use these posters outside the course. It is something they can go back to. It helps them to remember what their role is and what they did in the training.

Another good thing for participants to have, which will help them be peer supporters, are any concrete examples of methods used during the training. If they were inspired by these examples themselves, they can use them to inspire others.

Some of us chose to make this 'toolkit' part of the portfolio. This enables participants to personalise their materials. Others made a separate, ready made file. Both worked to remind the participants of tools they could use when supporting someone.

TIPS: Create a way in which participants can remember what they learnt and show others. We call this a portfolio. Check our examples for inspiration in [TOPSIDE Material for Peers](#). Give participants the tools they used themselves during their own training. That way they can use them in their role as peer supporter.

Romania: "Portfolios enable trainees to show what they have learnt. Each trainee has a custom made portfolio that contains all activities performed together during the training. In their folders you can find materials that support their work, pictures taken during role plays, drawings and cuts from magazines. The portfolio also includes the support network. It is a rectangular cardboard with 3 phone numbers and contact names. They can call them in case of emergency or when they get lost in some unknown places."

The Netherlands: “Our portfolio has quite a lot of text. In the Netherlands we have an opportunity to get acknowledgement for acquired skills. This can help people on their CV, into work or into further education. Anyone seeing the portfolio will know exactly what the person has done. Also, personal comments by people involved about the strengths of that particular person can support the person in their future. We have noticed though, that this type of portfolio can be difficult to understand.”

Spain: “We used a relationship map to identify the most important people in the lives of the participants and why these relationships are important. We also used it to explain Social Network. The participants were very motivated by this activity. They were very excited to describe their relationship map to the rest of the group. The relationships map was put into their portfolio. That way they will remember that they can use it in their role as peer supporter.”



Portfolio from a peer supporter, San Tomas, Spain.

b) Certificate

All participants received a certificate of attendance. Having said that, formal recognition or qualification has not yet been possible in any of the participating countries. This is partly due to the limited time available to seek that recognition. However, this might be different in your own country. Please find out if there are any opportunities for formal accreditation of the **TOPSIDE** training programme.

It is important that people attend all of the courses. If not, you will often have to repeat things. Also people miss out on each other's experiences. By the end of the course people should have completed a certain minimum of training hours. We all created different course but they all lasted around 40 hours in total.. This can be flexible to the needs and ambitions of your participants but must be realistic and in line with the ideals of peer support. Participants should understand what it means to be a peer-supporter, what a peer-supporter does and what to do with skills learned in the training. Also they should have a realistic idea of ones' own strengths as a peer-supporter. Not all people can grasp all of this, even if they attend every bit of the training. The trainer should then focus on the positives of what they CAN do and support their ambition to offer that element of peer support.

As a trainer providing **TOPSIDE** you will also have a minimum requirement on compliance to bear in mind. You will have to make sure participants are taught on all the skills, not just a few of them. If the participants have done some of it before, it still pays to repeat or elaborate on their knowledge.

TIPS:

People really like to get a certificate at the end. They also deserve it! Make sure you focus on what people CAN do. At the same time, try to teach people all the skills needed to be a peer supporter.

The Netherlands: "We made sure that all participants had a lot to take home with them, to prove what they had done. Despite that the participants really wanted a certificate to put into their files."



Peer supporters from Pentru Voi, Romania

c) Next steps

Have you ever used the skills from the course in your life, for example among your friends?

I supported my room-mate for example. He told me about his problems at home with his parents, that they forbade him to have a girlfriend. I told him that I understood him and that I would tell my parents it was my right to live with somebody.

He decided to go and talk to his parents, but he had a dispute with them and he said they had threatened him.

He told me how it was and I complimented him anyway that he had a courage and tried it.

Co-trainer from the Czech Republic

When the training is finished some trainers may continue with the same group to support them in their role. Other trainers may delegate this job to other people. In both cases it is good to organise as much as possible for the participants in advance. We started these guidelines by thinking about what people will do after the training before we even started planning. The training is most effective when people move straight from the course into their new role. Trainers can continue to measure progress in skills by staying involved if that is what works best. You can use the same portfolio. If it is not the trainer continuing with the participants, good communication is needed to ensure that support workers or others know both what the participants have achieved and how this can be used to support their peers on into the future.

During our testing phase it was clear that peer supporters may have to deal with difficult situations. Where possible we advise you to look at a system where peer supporters can be offered the support of a mentor. This mentor should be a person who they are comfortable talking to and in whom they can confide.

You can read about this in the [TOPSIDE document called “Guidelines for Mentors”](#).

Volunteers can be another asset, as mentors within a group, or as mentors to individual Peer Supporters.

Tips: Going straight from the training into a peer supporter role is most efficient.

Think about how peer supporters can be mentored when this is needed.

Recruit and use volunteers when this is possible, especially as mentors.

Read the TOPSIDE document called “Guidelines for Mentors”.

Czech Republic: “Volunteers started to work within support groups which we have opened with the peer supporters from the TOPSIDE training. The trainer from the course was only at the first 6 meetings. This was made possible by volunteers. The trainer first showed these volunteers what the role of peer supporters was and what the role of the mentor was. In our experience the volunteers who act as mentors also need to be shown how to support people to give support amongst themselves and not act as assistants or take over.”

Moving Forward

These guidelines should help you to provide **TOPSIDE** - Training Opportunities for Peer Supporters with Intellectual Disabilities in Europe. This training will teach people with intellectual disabilities the skills they need to be good Peer Supporters. It will open up opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to support each other to more inclusive lifestyles.

We realise that we have not given you a straightforward curriculum but a flexible one which can be used in different ways and that you will need your own insight and creativity to create your own programme of **TOPSIDE** training. What we hope and believe however is that we provided you with a platform and a foundation for the facilitation of peer support. We also believe we have provided you with many ideas, exercises and a lot learned from our shared experiences. Finally, and most important of all, we hope that we have conveyed our collective belief in people with intellectual disabilities and their absolute right to be supported by their peers to achieve true citizenship and all that that means!. We are sure that you can find your way through the valuable lessons we have learnt and that you will yourself create the best possible training that suits the people you work with within your own cultural setting.

Please make use of the all material available at www.peer-training.eu and do not hesitate to share your experience with us!

From all the trainers and co-trainers who participated in this pilot we wish you all the best, a lot of fun and great training sessions. And great peer support!

And to the people who are going to be participants, we hope you get from this training what you need to use your own life experience to support other people. We hope you will be great peer supporters both now and on into the future. The future starts here! Good luck! Keep supporting each other!



Well done, Kerry!



Tips: Have fun and good luck! And keep supporting each other!

Appendix

In this appendix you will find a bit of information about each of the project partners who participated in the TOPSIDE Pilot.



ENABLE Scotland
Leading the way in learning disability

Country: Scotland
Organisation: Enable Scotland
Numbers: 8 participants
8 sessions - 7 hours each
9 different topics were used
Trainer: Hugh Savage
Co-trainer: John Feehan
For more info: www.enable.org.uk



Country: Romania
Organisation: Pentru Voi
Numbers: 7 participants
1 full day session
18 sessions - 2 hours each
The first session was a full day
9 different topics were used
Trainer: Cristina Burlacu
Co-trainer: Cristina Csizec
For more info: www.pentruvoi.ro



Kehitysvammaisten Tukiliitto ry

Country: Finland
Organisation: Inclusion Finland KVTL
Numbers: 6 participants
4 sessions - full weekends
9 different topics were used
Trainer: Taija Humisto
Co-trainer: Sinikka Haanpää
For more info: www.kvttl.fi



santtomàs

Country: Spain
Organisation: Associació Sant Tomàs
Numbers: 8 participants
12 sessions - 4 hours each
1 topic was used
Trainer: Ivana Vilademunt
Co-trainer: Antonio Garcia Torre
For more info: www.santtomàs.cat



Country: Czech Republic
Organisation: Společnost pro podporu lidí s mentálním postižením v České republice
Numbers: 6 participants
20 sessions - 1.5 hours each
3 topics proposed by the trainer 3 proposed by the participants
Trainer: Petra Nováková
Co-trainer: Gabriela Froňková
For more info: www.spmpcr.cz



PERSPECTIEF

Country: The Netherlands
Organisation: Stichting Perspectief
Numbers: 9 participants
6 sessions - 7 hours each
6 different topics were used
Trainer: Juultje Holla
Co-trainers: Alexander Boes
Ellis Jongerius
For more info: www.perspectief.org



Inclusion Europe

Camille Latimier and Luca Magri from Inclusion Europe coordinated this project.
For more info: www.inclusion-europe.org

The Quality Team

Jan Walmsley, Anna MacQuarrie and Tobias Buchner have supported the development of the **TOPSIDE** training material, by commenting and making suggestions to our work, as external evaluators.



Lifelong Learning

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For more info: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/grundtvig_en.htm



Inclusion Europe



Lifelong
Learning
Programme



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www.peer-training.eu