

**PEER SUPPORT AS PART OF VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**  
**10MSP OF THE MBT, VA PARALLEL PROGRAMME**  
**GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

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*By Bekele Gonfa and Jesus Martinez*

**Overview:**

Peer support is a basic but very useful type of victim assistance activity which works towards the empowerment of survivors/victims. It is effective because a person who has been injured by mines, cluster munitions or other explosive remnants of war usually experiences shock and is highly traumatized because of the sudden loss of limbs or other injury to parts of his/her body due to these devastating weapons. It is difficult to recover from the trauma. The affected person suffers not only from physical trauma, but also from intense emotional, psychological and social difficulties. This is why a fellow survivor can better communicate challenges with other landmine/cluster munitions survivors and people with disabilities than can doctors, family and friends.<sup>1</sup> So, the best solution is to receive support from someone who has gone through similar trauma and has recovered and rehabilitated. Such support is called peer-to-peer support or simply “peer support”.

Peer support is a kind of positive activity whereby an individual who has something in common with the peer support receiver shares their experience. This also means that the receiver of peer support has to be encouraged by the success that the peer support provider has her/himself accomplished personally, but that the receiver of peer support has not yet experienced. Peer support can also be done through referral, by helping the person to join with others who have already recovered from “victimhood” and formed their own social support group.

The peer support approach enables the person receiving support to come out of the trauma and become an active and productive member of society. Peer support promotes personal growth and self-confidence. Peer support doesn't

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in Dr. Ken Ruthford's peer-to-peer support presentations at various meetings.

require professionals, just a person who has recovered from a similar situation; it is cost effective and simple to conduct.

**To conduct peer support there should be:**

- A person who has experienced trauma.
- A peer support worker.
- Kits for peer support education (if available).
- Available psychological support (to enhance recovery).
- Means of obtaining physical rehabilitation.
- Economic reintegration opportunities (TVT, skill development training, formal employment etc.).
- Laws and policies.

**Things to consider during peer support:**

- Start by introducing yourself;
- Listen to the history of the traumatized person;
- Do not immediately start with the peer education; start with something entertaining;
- The words and speech to be used should be selected with sensitivity (to avoid causing offense);
- Explanations should be made simple;
- Examples provided should be both educational and interesting;
- Look smart and keep a good appearance (as much as possible);
- Do not give too much in one go...
- Make repeated visits.
- Both the receiver and the provider should be of the same gender (as possible);
- The type of the injury or trauma experienced by both receiver and provider should be similar, or the support workers' be worse;
- Both should be as close as possible in age.