

Peer Support Groups

Connecting polio survivors with each other

It is estimated that up to 70% of polio survivors may experience the disabling effects of post-polio syndrome 25 to 45 years after their initial infection with the polio virus. There are approximately 125,000 Canadian polio survivors. Many of these polio survivors are members of support groups, ready to share, answer your questions and help alleviate your concerns.

Why join a peer support group?

- To talk with other survivors about their stories
- Get emotional support from fellow survivors
- Participate in local meetings, activities and seminars
- Find tips on how to cope day-to-day
- Share personal experiences
- Exchange valuable information about living with disabilities
- Develop new skills
- Make new friends
- Gain an understanding of post polio syndrome and what to expect
- To provide a way to give back and volunteer



Peer support groups help polio survivors...

March of Dimes Canada investigated why people with disabilities believe that peer support groups are so important.¹ Below are some of the findings:

■ ***Gain a better understanding of the impact of their disease***

Many survivors find that they did not feel they understood what it meant to acquire a disability or how to live with their disability

■ ***Feel less isolated***

Feelings of isolation can be alleviated once people are connected with others in a similar situation.

'You find you're not alone. [The group] is an extended family who knows what you're going through.'

– Angela, peer support member, 11 years

■ **Overcome depression**

Many people who acquire disabilities experience depression. Support groups play a significant role in helping overcome depression.

'Being together with such a happy group who had disabilities too helped me keep my spirits up so I don't let myself get down.'

– Lena, 2 years, peer support member



■ **Relate to their peers**

Most survivors find that the experience of speaking with other survivors is vastly different from speaking with their family or friends. Groups provide an open and safe forum for survivors to voice concerns.

'The [other survivors] speak to me and then they'll really listen. Other people would say 'oh, I can't be bothered'. They are friends because they are always willing to help you.'

– Lillian, peer support member, 2 years

■ **Help others**

Often survivors express gratitude for the contributions their support group has brought to their lives and recovery. They are motivated to stay with the group to give back to others.

'[The group] gave me strength and I want to give it back. We've all been there, we all understand. We can talk, cry and laugh together --- that's what's important about the group.'

– Angela, Peer Support group member, 11 years

ⁱ March of Dimes Canada, *Health Recovery Social Networks: Exploring the experiences of participants in peer support groups*, 2009