

The Power of Peer Support

Hannah Short - Public Health Improvement Coordinator

What is Peer Support?

Peer Support is when people use their own experiences and knowledge to help one another. The support comes from other people in similar circumstances – rather than a healthcare professional or coach – so it's a less formal way to cope with chronic health conditions. Everyone in the group is seen as an expert of their own health and wellbeing, and everyone's views and experiences are treated equally. And because peer support involves getting together as a group, it can help people to feel less isolated, too.

Be Well Doncaster groups

Be Well runs 20 Peer Support across the city of Doncaster for people living with long term health conditions, as Peer Support can improve long term health outcomes (Fisher et al., 2018). The groups meet once a month for about an hour in community venues. It's up to the group to decide what they'd like to talk about and how they want to structure the sessions. Groups can invite guest speakers, like local GPs or pharmacists, or organise sessions of yoga, tai chi, mindfulness, art therapy, or anything else they think would be helpful. And sometimes, they might just have a cup of tea and a chat. Every session is free, residents simply turn up, and there's no pressure to contribute – some people choose to just turn up and spend time with people who understand and share their situation.

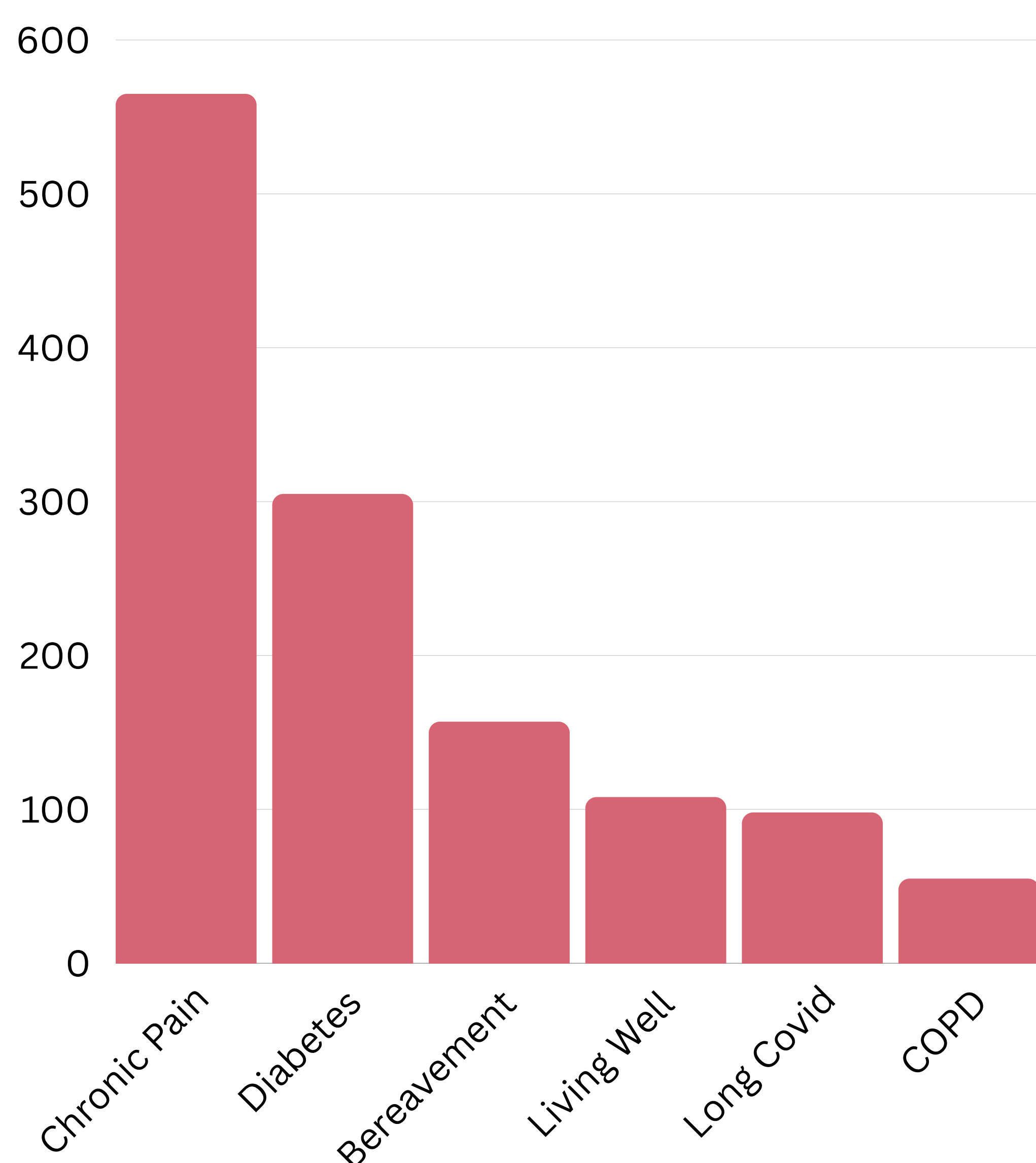
Sheffield Hallam Evaluation

Sheffield Hallam Focus groups were held with 9 staff who facilitate the peer group and 23 residents who attend various groups. The aim of the evaluation was to explore the perceived impact of the groups and what features people value. Findings showed the groups could have a positive impact on the lives of those who engage with them. Residents particularly valued the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from others, and found the information and education provided by facilitators and/or external speakers and experts incredibly useful. The reported impacts of attending groups included social (e.g. new friendships, reduced social isolation and loneliness) and psychological/emotional health benefits (e.g. feeling accepted and understood). Residents also discussed how the peer support groups had developed their understanding of how they can manage their condition.

"Whereas an expert, even a doctor may not understand the condition. They've read the book, they've done the training course but they haven't got the condition. This has helped. This has helped me hugely."

"Most of the groups give you alternative ways of thinking about your condition or what you can do about it."

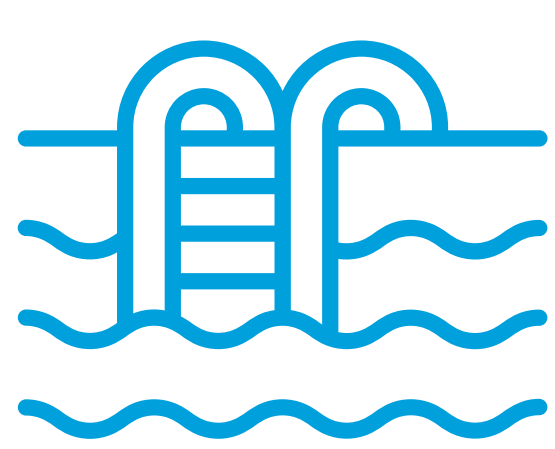
Number of attendees at Peer Support Groups
March 2023- September 2024



 Four women living with chronic pain all separately referred to Chronic Pain Peer Support Group

 Found comfort in sharing their experience of living with pain. Helped them to feel less lonely and isolated.

 The women have all made lasting friendships and meet up regularly outside the group

 They heard in a peer support group that Aqua Fit can help manage pain - so started attending regularly

 They are being supported by CWB to set up a Community Interest Company

 They can support more people living with pain to access Aqua Fit