"Panel Discussion: Peer support and fear"
Itico Spectre (moderator), Viola Mole, Pet Karu, Kip Yellowjacket,
Demelza McGinnis
Mental Health Symposium 2025
Thursday, May 15

[2025/05/15 12:34] Elektra Panthar: Hello everyone.
A little explanation about this service:
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Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.
The transcriptionists today are
Elektra Panthar,
Carolyn Carillon,
Shaerken Changeheart.
The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak:
IS: Itico Spectre,
VM: Viola Mole,
PK: Pet Karu,
KY: Kip Yellowjacket,
DM: Demelza McGinnis

[<>]

[2025/05/15 12:46] Itico Spectre: About 35 years ago I was introduced to this early technology called the Internet.
It did not take me long to find people who I connected with better than most of the people I met with where I actually lived at the time.
Despite being at a university full of young, mostly white men who superficially appeared to have a lot in common with me.
This sounds like a receipt for ultimate disaster, right?
Here is a young, naive man jumping into the modern Wild West that is the Internet.
Well, it could have been that way and on a few occasions it almost was.
However, I eventually found friends who supported me, accepted me for the quirky person I was.
In other words, I found a peer support group.
This group was not local to me, not all even shared the same country with me and some didn't even speak the same language as me.
We shared some interests though and some of the same troubles.
We shared enough in common that we could come together to form an informal support group who tried to help each other even though most of us never met.

We were not always harmonious.
There was often drama and sometimes even outright conflict but enough of us stuck together to remain mostly stable as a nearly cohesive group.
Since then, I have supported groups as much as they have helped me. I have attempted to help people through their fears and people have tried to help me through my own.
Over time I have gained an appreciation for support groups and the people who try and make them work.
Which is why I wanted to gather a panel of support group members and leaders for this year's symposium.
Panelists, please introduce yourselves.

[2025/05/15 12:50] Demelza McGinnis: hi
I am a retired RN
Registered Nurse

[2025/05/15 12:52] Viola Mole: Hello and thank you for inviting me here today! I am hoping to learn some new things today!

[2025/05/15 12:52] Kip Yellowjacket: ✅ Who am I? / What is Virtlantis?
Kip Yellowjacket is an experienced online English trainer specializing in IT and business retraining programs, and academic exam preparation for native German speakers. He is the founder of Virtlantis (since 2006), a pioneering virtual world language learning platform and community of practice. → https://my.visualcv.com/englischtraineronline/

[2025/05/15 12:52] Carolyn Carillon: PK: Hello everyone
My name is Lady Tigress Bonded, or Pet Karu
I've been leading groups for God knows how long! (laughs)
I enjoy learning from them and sharing knowledge
Thanks for having me here

[2025/05/15 12:53] Itico Spectre: Q. There are two basic types of support groups I would like to call "organized" or "ad-hoc". In your opinion, can one group style help people relieve anxiety and fear more than another?

[2025/05/15 12:55] Carolyn Carillon: PK: that's me
Concerning organized or ad-hoc groups
People have different learning styles
What works for one doesn't work for another
That's why we have two types
So they can find the right fit

[2025/05/15 12:56] Elektra Panthar: KY: having ad hoc spaces leads to the need of having organization
So need for administrative stuff
But 'casual' spaces are also good

[2025/05/15 12:56] Demelza McGinnis: I have been a member but never a leader of a group.

[2025/05/15 12:56] Viola Mole: I think that depends on the circumstances however it is important to have organised groups with some sort of structure and aim.
Non - organised support groups can be found in various ways. Trusted friends, functional families, empathetic work colleagues, caring neighbours for example.
The most important thing is to find the right fit for you, whether it be something structured and organised or something less formal.

[2025/05/15 12:57] Itico (Itico Spectre): Okay, thank you all.
Q: What drives you to be involved with, or even lead, a peer support group?

[2025/05/15 12:58] Carolyn Carillon: PK: My answer is I'd say that I'm driven by nature
I like to see all people have an improved quality of life
And the human experience
We can't forget about trauma or drama
We can learn to control them

[2025/05/15 12:59] Elektra Panthar: KY: it's a long story, I started in 2006
The passion for teaching has brought me to SL and kept me here, SL is great for teachers and learners of language
It affords for so much creativity

[2025/05/15 13:00] Viola Mole: I think what has driven me to help others where I can, and encourage others to do the same, stems from times in my own life where when faced with fear and anxiety, no support was available to me.
This can make a very lonely situation almost unbearable and can increase our fear level more - taking our anxiety levels to almost unbearable heights.
I suppose once we have been through something like that, if we have an empathetic personality, we understand how difficult fear can be and will make an effort to give some support if we can, even if it is only some warm words of encouragement.

[2025/05/15 13:00] Demelza McGinnis: The need to have everyone working toward the same goal. Nurses should present the same type of goals to the patients and to each other. This gives a feeling of unity for the group since we all work different shifts and may only see each other for short periods of time at work
This reduces the fear that we work at cross purposes for the patients.

[2025/05/15 13:01] Itico Spectre: Q: What do you see as a risk of joining a peer support group?

[2025/05/15 13:02] Carolyn Carillon: PK: one of the risks is having this big paralyzing force of fear hanging over you
It can range from the anxiety of fearing what others think of you to others judging you
The first step is the hardest
I've found that peer groups or even a friend, can help alleviate it
Usually you're met with encouragement rather than condemnation

[2025/05/15 13:03] Elektra Panthar: KY: when it comes to language learning is the inability to express yourself in the foreign language, lack of facial expression and body language in this case
Adding to the other setbacks it can be quite intimidating for people

[2025/05/15 13:04] Viola Mole: The hope is that people will support each other but if is not a good fit there should be no commitment to have to remain in that group.
Perhaps there is a small risk of us becoming too involved with other peoples needs and therefore possibly increasing our own burden - but each person does really need to assess that and decide what is best for them. After all, we should put our own selves first when dealing with anxiety and fear to ensure that when helping others we can give of our best.

[2025/05/15 13:05] Demelza McGinnis: Some people may attend to learn, or feel too much in the spotlight to speak their questions. Afraid to feel judged. Fear of others thinking their questions are too dumb. Nursing has a history of devouring our young, as in the more experienced treating the newer staff as lesser instead of equals.

[2025/05/15 13:06] Elektra Panthar: IS: unfortunately the same thing happens in a lot of professions because of competition

[2025/05/15 13:06] Itico Spectre: Q: What might be the biggest fear of someone who joins a peer support group?

[2025/05/15 13:07] Carolyn Carillon: PK: yes there are several
The biggest fear is knowing the need for help
Whether it's imposed on you
Or not
It's not until the individual recognizes their own need
They won't get the help
They won't buy into it if they don't see that they have a problem
When they recognize it, it can be daunting
What if I'm the only ethnic person there??
What if? what if?
It can cloud their mind
Taking that first step is important

[2025/05/15 13:09] Elektra Panthar: KY: when it comes to communication the problem can be fear of being misunderstood or misunderstand others
There's a dimension of worry for language learners
We constantly face this challenge when we speak a foreign language

[2025/05/15 13:10] Viola Mole: Perhaps the biggest fear is having to be open about their problems. Anyone supporting someone else should respect this and let people know they are ready to listen when the person needing help is ready, and not before.
Someone could also have a fear of not fitting in with the rest of the group. A good group will make allowances for that and give a new person time and space to feel comfortable and to gain trust.

[2025/05/15 13:10] Elektra Panthar: IS: I run a literacy group and I see that too, fear of being misunderstood is strong

[2025/05/15 13:11] Demelza McGinnis: They get tangled in their fear and just are unable to speak about those fears to others. They might have found the exact help they need but miss the chance to elicit it.

[2025/05/15 13:11] Itico Spectre: Q: As a member or leader of a support group, what is your biggest fear related to that group?
[2025/05/15 13:12] Elektra Panthar: IS: pick a group (any group)

[2025/05/15 13:12] Carolyn Carillon: PK: I'm going to take you back in time when I was first hand picked to be a facilitator of a group at work
I was told we'd have groups coming in over 2 years
I was to be the instructor
There was 700 men
In a municipality that maybe had 100 women?
We definitely did not want to be in charge
My biggest fear is that it was a population of white males
And I'm not a white male
Would they listen to me?
I solved the problem by wearing a baseball hat that had a HUGE daisy on the front
I introduced myself and said
No matter what you take away from this, whether you learn or not, you will always remember this hat
From then on I had their attention
It wasn't about the hat
It was about me introducing them to the hard concept of change
They weren't ready for that
So my job was to introduce them to how the organization was going to change and how they could handle it
Over those 2 years, I got all those men "trained" (laughs)
After the first year, I trained other people to facilitate
For some reason, my style was apparent
They wanted that to be a model
The model was to listen to what they're saying or not, and how they're saying it
Validate it, ask questions for clarity, and go deeper
You need to hear their side completely
Your role is to guide
To help uncover a path they can use
That they can own
So they can come out victorious

[2025/05/15 13:16] Elektra Panthar: KY: I can use Virtlantis for it, we did experience it
We have lots of activities , we are a bit anomalous
My fear was lack of engagement, lack of communication, lack of interest in learning
We grew as our activities grew
We encouraged people to organize activities
It was great to see how it evolved, how it changed according to the person organizing the activity
Getting off track but yes biggest fear is lack of engagement, also in conversation

[2025/05/15 13:19] Viola Mole: If a support group, whether it be organized or casual, is functional and helps both the people in it and new people joining it - my biggest fear would that the situation would change and people would loose the feeling of belonging and support they have found.

Various things can change situations and relationships. Financial, political, personal and/or generally something going wrong. If something is providing a positive input to peoples lives it is always a pity to see that change.

However, as the saying goes "the only constant in life is change". Nothing remains the same forever.

In the end, everything does eventually change, we need to enjoy the good times, enjoy those around us who help with our fear and anxiety and try to be aware that we have enough strength within us to navigate changes and hopefully pass on the things we have learned to others, in a positive way.

[2025/05/15 13:19] Elektra Panthar: KY: when we see signs of people not communicating the whole structure suffers

[2025/05/15 13:20] Demelza McGinnis: I always feared it would attenuate and just fade away as groups tend to do. Our Managers tried various means of keeping the group integrated but it seemed the same people turned up for the team building experiences. I was in the same unit for 13 years, saw many come an go. There was a core group that seemed to show up for the meeting and activities. But more that just grew away from attending. We missed them.

[2025/05/15 13:21] Itico Spectre: Q: How do you deal with support group members' fears?

[2025/05/15 13:21] Carolyn Carillon: PK: I deal with a lot of them!
First of all I let them know this is a safe space
I lead a discussion group
In that group, it's about empowering relationships
People come with fears and anxieties of relationships that have gone sour
Or ones they want to improve
I let them know this space is safe
There's no judgment from anyone here
We want to listen and understand your perspective
We will encourage and edify you
But know that what you say here, stays here
We won't betray you because you're trusting us with your heart
I don't know how that works but it puts people at ease
And they'll open up and share their secrets and traumas
Their heartaches
We meet it with gratitude for their sharing

[2025/05/15 13:24] Elektra Panthar: KY: when it comes to understanding fears, personally I want to become better at it
One of the things is onboarding experience, spending time with new users, giving them info and getting info anonymously to get o know what people need from the group
Also address needs as they arise, provide support and customize the learning experience
Thinking of previous activities and consciously improve them, try to make everyone feel welcome and not pressured

[2025/05/15 13:26] Viola Mole: I will address this final question specifically to Second Life experiences. We have a team of Second Life Mentors, some who do a lot of helping others, others do less, as they can.

One of the overriding feelings I get from group members is the feeling of belonging. They enjoy belonging in a group of helpful, patient, supportive people.

This is important for the volunteers. Perhaps the feeling of belonging with such a group of people turns the group into a peer support group itself - for its own members.

In turn it is hoped (and actually expected) that the Second Life Mentors also help and support others, specifically newcomers.

Of course, some of the mentors have their own fears and I am sure they include "Will I fit in?": "Will I know the right answers to questions?": What if someone asks me about subjects in Second Life that I am not comfortable talking about?".

I always offer them support and help and they can get support and help from other group members as well.

[2025/05/15 13:28] Demelza McGinnis: We tried to deal one on one, the "old" nurses teaching the "new" nurses about the things they never learned in school. No one can improve in a vacuum. They need a place that is secure for them. Also, they need help learning how to relate to families who are having "the worst day of their lives" including the ability to emphasize without losing their ability to do the necessary procedures to help the patient and family.

[2025/05/15 13:29] Elektra Panthar: IS: Thank you everyone, I appreciate all of you and this panel

[2025/05/15 13:29] Lady Tigress Bonded (pet Karu): thank you for having me
[2025/05/15 13:29] Viola Mole: Thank you for inviting us.
[2025/05/15 13:29] Gentle Heron: Thanks to all peer support leaders, including the ones in the audience, for the support you provide to so many of us. It's important to the quality of our lives.
[2025/05/15 13:29] Demelza McGinnis: Thank you for dealing with my lack of speech today
[2025/05/15 13:29] Kip Yellowjacket: ty
[2025/05/15 13:29] Rhiannon Chatnoir: fantastic!
[2025/05/15 13:29] Lorin Tone: Fantastic panel discussion, thank you all!
[2025/05/15 13:29] Sheila Yoshikawa: Thank you for your insights!
[2025/05/15 13:29] Tricia Funizza: Everyone...thank you
[2025/05/15 13:29] Lissena Wisdomseeker (Lissena Resident): very interesting
[2025/05/15 13:29] Wүŋtεr Sεrεŋadε (Wynter Serenade): Great job all :)
[2025/05/15 13:29] Sylph (Sylph Falconvale): thank you ♥
[2025/05/15 13:29] Viola Mole: Have a great rest of the day everyone. ♥
/me waves

[2025/05/15 13:29] Elektra Panthar: IS: Thank you for listening - we don't quite have time for questions but we are all in SL regularly so feel free to reach out

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