

Chloe Russell's Peer Support Graduation Speech

As a first year Peer Supporter, this time last year I was thinking about my application. Although I thought the scheme would involve marketing events, as well as a small element of team work, I didn't really have many expectations of what the role would involve nor the value of the work that Peer Supporters undertake. I have been pleasantly surprised this year.

I have developed so much as a person since participating in the Peer Support scheme. Of course, I have developed numerous skills such as event planning, time management, social media and communication. However, I don't want the short time I have to just read out my CV.

Most importantly, the countless interactions I have had as a Peer Supporter in addition to the, well quite frankly, amazing friendships I have made have led me to become a much more open, honest, empathetic and pragmatic person. It has been a pleasure to be a part of the 2016-2017 Peer Support team.

A particular highlight of my year was the training period at the beginning of the Michaelmas term. From a group of people who didn't know each other, we quickly become to know each other extremely well. Honestly, I found the listening exercises quite awkward at first. Being encouraged to share things about my life, which I hadn't done so in any capacity, never mind at the LSE certainly pushed my boundaries. However, the more listening exercises we did, the more my confidence and trust would grow. Eventually, 10 minutes would absolutely fly by.

As well as feeling exhausted, when training was complete (who knew listening could be so tiring), I also felt a better sense of myself. One of the things I enjoyed in particular, as a self-proclaimed people pleaser is that it is so important to have boundaries – I had to develop the confidence to say no. This was difficult for me but it was important to know that before I could be a true and effective Peer Supporter, I had to know myself very well. Trust me, it's more difficult that it seems! My confidence has grown considerably; during my first year, I made many friends but was overwhelmed by such a prestigious institution.

That's not to say that I have been alone in my Peer Supporting role this year. A question I have often been asked is: well, who supports the Peer Supporters? In particular, I have taken a lot of inspiration from the Carr Saunders community. In particular, the halls committee have taken opportunity they could to work with us. Our Carr Saunders self care workshop- thanks to Grace's amazing direction on this- wouldn't have been the same without the committee's support. Our weekly fruit stall just couldn't have been feasible without the support of Minaxi, the Front of House Manager nor Aggie on reception. Most significantly, our fantastic warden, Julia Biggane has been tremendously attentive to anything that Grace, Allan or I wanted to carry out. She is just wonderful.

Also in answer to the question: who supports the Peer Supporters? Of course, is that we support each other. The Carr Saunders team made up of Grace, Allan and myself have- if I say so myself- been the dream team. Whether it was handing out fruit and coffee every

Tuesday morning, writing over 120 Christmas cards for every single resident of Carr Saunders or working together to increase the Peer Support Twitter's outreach, we have stuck together. Aside from the practical, our weekly meetings have been so valuable for me to get things off my chest, in the often stressful environment of the LSE.

Moreover, the most rewarding thing about this year has been informal Peer Supporting. Using my listening skills has now become second nature to me, around Carr Saunders, on wellbeing stalls, as well as on the desk in my role at LSE Careers. Even outside of the LSE, with friends and family, they are quick to update me that I'm switching into 'Peer Support' when I ask how they are feeling today.

Finally, this year has been great but we still have more work to do to make sure every LSE student is aware of the scheme but I am sure our outreach will grow as the scheme gets older. I have discovered, this year, that listening is the greatest gift you could give to someone. Therefore, I am extremely positive about the future of LSE Peer Support.

Chloe Russell
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