

Mutual Support: - the first FPP regional group meeting

by Melanie



FPP often receives queries asking where is my nearest support group, where can I meet others with complex dissociation? We know there is very little available and starting regional mutual support groups has always been something FPP has hoped to do. The time feels right now for many reasons so **our first, introductory regional group meeting is in**

This first meeting will explore what all those who are interested in forming this group want from it and how this can be achieved safely. Some of the things we will consider is venue, times and frequency of meetings, cost, can others join the group once it is established, may I bring a support person; do I feel having attended the first meeting that I am in a place to do this or is it not the right time for me? There are so many things to consider and then of course it might just not be right for you. ***Being in therapy or with a very good external support system is essential as these meetings will inevitably bring up issues that need a safe place outside the meeting.*** The ground-rules for the group will be based on those we use at FPP Members' Open Meetings, amended to meet this group's needs.

I (as an individual, not on behalf of FPP) have personally started and been a member of two groups in Norwich; the first ran for two years and the second for four. They were very different, the first was a closed group after the initial meeting, there were five members and we met fortnightly. This group was a life saver at times for me and was given precedence over any other commitments. The second group was an open group, people were able to join at any time and we had a male member; again it worked well. We met monthly and it was important to me but I was in a very different place by this time. We managed to make the groups a safe place for people to be by being very clear what we felt was appropriate and what was unlikely to be helpful.

I intend starting this first FPP regional group based on what I have learnt appreciating that it will evolve to suit the needs of its members. The new group will not be facilitated; this was an extremely important part of why most of those who attended the Norwich groups got a lot from them. It was empowering to feel as an individual responsible for my own safety and to achieve this I could chose not to attend if I was not in a good enough place, I could also leave at any-time as long as I told someone if I was not coming back that time. I could respectfully say if I felt someone was not following the ground-rules, maybe talking too explicitly. I also had to assess whether it was my perception so I needed to take time out or if this was the reality of that situation. It was a place of sharing, challenge, change and growth.

Neither group was for people in a major crisis, everyone needed to be in therapy or have good support and an understanding of how they managed their life/lives. We definitely were not a therapy group. We did not have themed meetings; we went with what people wanted to talk about each time. This could feel quite difficult sometimes but staying with it allowed us each to be responsible for the meeting building up a sense of being part of something in a safe and healthy way. It was for adult parts or those who were managing every-day living. This was important to make sure that the meetings stayed as safe as possible for the whole of each of us. The idea was we would share how we manage in the present knowing that each of us there was DID/DDNOS. Being with others who understand what it is like living with being dissociative was so validating, we never had to justify ourselves, the deep, unspoken knowing shared by others was very powerful, for me it removed the feelings of shame about the complexity of my everyday life in the present. The meetings did evolve, people did feel free to challenge respectfully. An important aspect was nobody was responsible for anyone else; this became an appropriate place to be with others who understood, to share and sustain self-responsibility. It helped to give me confidence.

Whether FPP regional mutual support groups can and will work remains to be seen; but the time does feel right to give it a go knowing we need to take it very slowly with a lot of reflection and honesty. I am excited as well as apprehensive about this next step in FPP's development.

Other FPP regional mutual support groups may be developed in the future but this can only happen where there is a local person(s) willing to be the instigator and contact – not facilitator, not lead – just someone who is willing to be the voluntary organiser for the first meeting in the locality, including finding a venue. Is that you? Contact us.

