

Lived Experience Leading The Way

Peer Support in Mental Health



‘Peer Support sees the person first, understands their distress and can offer true solutions that the Supporting Peer has used themselves.’

Peer Support Worker, Peer2Peer member

Together is a national charity working alongside people with mental health issues so that they can lead fulfilling, independent lives. Together is trusted for its expertise in service user involvement, empowerment and leadership that promote wellbeing.

We have joined forces with the University of Nottingham and National Survivor User Network (NSUN) to research into Peer Support, its many advantages and Return on Investment (ROI) potential. This leaflet summarises the full report *Lived Experience Leading the Way - Peer Support in Mental Health*.

Support through shared experience

We believe that one of the most powerful ways to help is through Peer Support. It's about people with lived experience supporting each other in their wellbeing journey through similar experiences and insight. Such a system of mutually giving and receiving help is founded on respect and shared responsibility.

Peer Support can be on a formal or voluntary basis, as an initiative or project, and led by peers or professionals. It develops and delivers meaningful, effective services for people in many ways. For example, within an NHS Trust, crisis centre, day centre or as a 24-hour service.

Together works directly with people who support peers, run Peer Support programmes and works in partnership

with user led organisations and other key stakeholders. Our Peer2Peer initiative provides a forum for supporting and developing successful Peer Support models.

How Peer Support helps

Receiving Peer Support leads to increased self esteem and self confidence, a sense of belonging, and motivation to learn new skills. For many, being part of a user group provides a safety net. Some have even used peer support to overcome problems that traditional services have not helped with.

'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with a psychologist had previously failed even to get me to walk down my road alone. However with the motivation and support from [my peers] other CAPITAL members, gradually my confidence grew so that I could make increasingly complicated journeys alone. Within two or three years, travelling had ceased to be a problem for me.' Ockwell (2010)

Providing Peer Support leads to workers becoming involved in meaningful work and acquiring a sense of purpose. They can become accepted as people instead of just a diagnosis.

Principals of Peer Support:

- Mutuality
- Solidarity
- Synergy
- Sharing with safety and trust
- Companionship
- Hopefulness
- Focus on strengths and potential
- Equality and empowerment
- Being yourself
- Independence
- Reduction of stigma
- Respect and inclusiveness

'Peer Support has a long and honourable history in mental health. Fellow patients and service users have always provided invaluable support to each other, both informally and through self-help and activist groups.' Jackson (2010)



Positive outcomes

The success of Peer Support has been proven by many organisations, such as the AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

Mental health problems cost England over £77 billion p.a.

through care, economic losses and premature death. Improved wellbeing through Peer Support leads to a reduced use of treatment services and medication - with considerable savings. A Peer Support service in Australia, providing hospital avoidance and early discharge support, saved 300 bed days in the first three months alone. A USA outpatient programme reduced re-hospitalisations by 50% compared with traditional care.

An estimated £26.1 billion is lost in the UK as many people diagnosed with a mental health problem are unable to work. Peer Support can facilitate involvement in education and progression to employment.

Peer Support services are also proven to be extremely cost-efficient. For example, the Leeds Survivor-Led Crisis Service successfully supports people at £180 per day per person while a stay at an acute hospital as an inpatient is £259 per day, providing a saving of £28,000 each year.

Looking to the future

'Studies have shown that peer support can lead to increased community integration for people with lived experience as well as increased quality of life in relation to daily living activities, social relations and a significantly greater involvement in work or participation in education'. Nelson et al 2007, Forchuk et al 2005

Peer Support can play a crucial role in supporting mental wellbeing, fulfilling core policy objectives and developing quality and cost-efficient services that deliver positive outcomes and enable people to direct their own care.

But for Peer Support to become more widespread, there are challenges to overcome. For people with lived experience and peer run groups, these include being seen as credible and having respected opinions, avoiding red tape and maintaining independence. For peer support workers working within mental health services, there's the need to strengthen their position through increased awareness, better engagement and support by staff, improved training, and increased supervision.

It's also important to explore the Return On Investment (ROI) compared to current services and promote the importance of service user knowledge/ expertise and service user-led organisations.



Together we're better

Peer Support works best when there's a spirit of true collaboration and partnership. Through cooperation between service user groups, voluntary organisations, other statutory service providers and commissioners, we aim to turn a shared vision into concrete, effective practice.

If you are interested in working with us, or would like more information about our Peer Support services, please visit www.together-uk.org. Or contact:

Elina Stamou, Peer Support Development Manager
Phone: 0207 780 7358
Email: elina-stamou@together-uk.org



The partnership behind the report

This leaflet is a summary of key messages from the *Peer Support – Lived Experience Leading the Way* report, which you can read at www.together-uk.org.

'Together have made an enormously valuable contribution in the mental health arena. This is an important document that should be essential reading both for those of us with mental health problems who are rebuilding our lives and all who aspire to be our allies and support us in our journey.'

Rachel E. Perkins OBE, Mind Champion of the Year 2010



Together supports people on their own journey towards mental wellbeing – helping them with aspects of life such as getting a place to live, finding work, making friends, building self esteem and playing an active role in their community.



The University of
Nottingham

The University of Nottingham, with user-led Making Waves, developed and runs an accredited training programme for peer support workers. In working with the local NHS Trust, they are part of a UK-wide network of NHS Trusts employing peer support workers in mental health services.



NSUN is committed to promoting and developing Peer Support across England at a local, regional and national level. It aims to facilitate links between user groups and individuals, broker access to service users by policy-makers, and provide training in leadership, organisational skills and campaigning.

Together, 12 Old Street, London EC1V 9BE
Tel: 020 7780 7300 Web: www.together-uk.org

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