LEADING THRIVING PEER ORGANISATIONS EVENT 12/09/2024 - EMPLOYABILITY

Background

In June we gathered peer workers and volunteers together and discussed employability practices; feedback from the peer community raised a number of questions such as what an ideal work environment would consist of, Peers were looking for an environment that they could thrive, develop and feel safe to share their recovery stories.

Themes

- Peers wanted their leaders to hear about mental health peer work, what is it and how it differs from other roles such as support work and clinical roles.
- Peers wanted to continue sharing mental health stories in organisations with leaders advocating for peer working and where peers felt valued and supported. Trauma responsive practice is a priority area for the NHS and our government at the moment and we wanted to explore what this might look like for managers supporting peer workers who may be re-traumatized as part of their job roles.

We offered leaders the opportunity to discuss the themes that peers raised and consider practical ways trauma responsive practices could be achieved within their organisations including encouraging staff organisationally wide to have open and honest conversations about mental health. Other themes included peer development, promotion and progression routes.

Introduction to the event:

- Summary of the themes discussed by peers at the last event.
- Into Work, a supported employment charity and employer of peer workers and volunteers, presented what was available to support peers in a work environment.

Round Table Discussions

We gathered around tables and offered peer leaders an opportunity to feed back about areas related to the following questions based on themes frequently discussed within the Peer Community.

Round Table Discussion Topics

We asked:

How would you describe a peer worker to your colleagues?

How do you promote the idea of peer working to senior managers and funders, to people out with your organisation?

How do you value peer work

- Boundaries are different, peer work opens new pathways.
- Bipolar 'I get it' a lot of stigma. Value = common denominator, same underlying headspace.
- Power balance huge difference 'my circumstances are different, get tired of explaining.'
- Instilling hope = 'if I can do it, you can do it.'
- Tackles isolation in MH struggles and not just limited to work.
- Some examples and learning received differently.
- Elevating peer support so it stands alone.
- Feedback from people receiving support is really positive.
- Sharing of the recovery story.
- Value when peers are part of service design – relevant & meaningful services.
- Peers have an understanding or what it's like to try to access services.

How would you promote peer work to colleagues and other organisations

- Outcomes through e.g. IROCs can be used to show value.
- Promote within policies/procedures in organisations to make it a place peers want to stay.
- Qualitative data, case studies & stories.
- Do people keep accessing services after peer support, how do you value effectiveness.
- Lack of understanding.
- Quite simple, just different.
- Leaders noted a resistance to change.

How would you describe a peer worker

Utilise Scottish Recovery Network information.

Someone with lived experience of journey.

Someone who can share their self-management tools.

Use experience intentionally, within boundaries & professionally.

What support do you need from the PCOP to continue supporting and promoting peer work?

- Cost effective solution – peer worker sometimes more effective than other professionals. Advocating for peer work.
- Speak to all our boards, managers & funders.
- Feel expertise levels/lack of strategy is a challenge in MH at a strategic/funder level.
- Longer funding contracts for greater security.
- Promote peer into the community, reach out to places that don't currently have peer workers.
- Realistic expectations, how can we expand & value.
- Successes measured; Share this with PCOP, bot etc asking for outcomes, from employers' private sector, not partners, feedback forms.
- HOPE Tool; home opportunity, people, empowering.
- Continue the conversation, sharing learning.
- Educating other statutory services.
- Recognition/celebration events, could raise profile of peers, celebrate peers, invite funders, press, raise profile of peer outwith 3rd sector.
- Training for peer line managers; specific peer leadership training as opposes to just management training.
- Qualification/registration of peers to build non-peer management confidence.
- Promote the PDA; a longer version of the PDA or a specific SQA peer leadership equivalent of the PDA.
- Progression pathways for peers.

- A concise 1-page document around the value of peer work that can be shared with busy people who need to know about peer work.
- Go to other 3rd sector forums etc to promote this.
- A more relaxed informal space for peer leaders. Could be themed, but still open, drop-in; online or hybrid, sometimes in person.
- More social spaces for peers, not in the peer forum, could be an open/non-structured space.
- Reflective practice sessions for peers.
- Offering more structured spaces/more formal, facilitated spaces factoring discussions/networking to PCOP events.
- Sharing and shadowing between organisations.
- Peers meeting peers in other organisational spaces.

How can we structure recruitment processes for peer workers?

- Videos of what peer roles look like people can understand, video response interviews - could help with applications from more diverse groups such as dyslexic people.
- Meet the team before people have a formal interview, give opportunities for them to know the service and ask questions about the service so they can understand more about what the role involves and if it's to their taste.
- Raise the profile of a peer worker, Peers or supported people interview panels. Emphasis openness as a skill.
- Job descriptions: more accessible, add a "day in the life of" a peer worker, explain what eligibility criteria is.
- Give questions before interview to reduce stress, application tips and prompts.
- Reviewing questions to get the best out of peers, Setting expectations.
- Peer Community of Practice peer training as part of induction for peer workers as standard.
- Stigma/counter culture to talk about your mental health; being clearer in the process about that being ok.
- Open days & job fairs – in community centres, accessible venues to talk about what peer roles involve.
- Ask peers what's put them off job adverts.

WORKSHOPS

We asked people to consider the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: *A peer has not been able to work/volunteer for over 6 months because of experiencing high anxiety and depression. The workplace environment and nature of sharing their mental health story has triggered the peer. This condition has been disclosed to the organisation and their team leader has been regularly checking in with the peer. The peer would like to rejoin the organisation on a phased return basis.*

How can we be trauma responsive as managers of peer workers?

How do your staff approach you? What kind of language do you use, adjustments you could provide?

- Ask, get to know a person's triggers, has something specific happened, what support do they need.
- What does the person think? What do you think will help? What can we do? What kind of reasonable adjustments do they suggest.
- What are the peer's boundaries? What have they been sharing, what do they feel comfortable sharing? Are peers clear they don't have to share everything or anything if they don't want to.
- Sharing their story, is it how they've done this, do they need more training. Is it centred on recovery and their condition.
- What are their boundaries, how have they prepared for sharing their story, do they have a roadmap about how to do this safely.
- Keeping in touch days, consider venue, could go for a coffee. Flexible working with emphasis on recovery & consideration of the nature of casework.
- Return to work on their terms; Reintroduce to role if helpful including an element of choice as much as possible.
- Peer reflective practice groups.

What ways do we support staff organisationally wide to talk openly about their mental health? Are there any policies and procedures that can support staff?

- Filling out a MIND wellness action plan (WAP) focused on wellbeing, support planning and assessment. This could be completed as soon as the peer starts the role then refreshed at 6 monthly periods.
- Setting expectations with manager – 'lets catch up at
- X time.'
- Occupational health appointment & return to work plans.
- Access to Work & employment assistance programs.
- Making clear to service users what peer work role is, setting expectations of peer workers.
- Importance of de-brief spaces.
- Making clear in meetings ect about how your staff can approach you and taking time to build a relationship.
- Open to honest communication, starting conversations.
- Foreground learning, admitting mistakes.
- Conversations about if peer work is right for them beyond limitations of adjustments.
- Relationships with colleagues, fear of judgement.
- Whole organisation needs to be trained in trauma skilled and informed at least.
- Penumbra noted they are considering mental health days.

Scenario 2: A peer worker has been employed for a year sharing lived experience. This is focused around having lived experience of an eating disorder. This peer role is the first job they've had intentionally telling their story of recovery.   They would like to develop and progress to other areas of the organisation.

How would you as their manager make sure this peer is still developing in addition to sharing their lived experience?

- Looking at peoples training and development needs, training and development policies, exploring options.
- Sharing information on peer support, sharing their skills and experience from a peer perspective that can bring value to others in non-peer services.
- Identifying goals and ambitions, ideas for development and progression.
- Supporting managers to make or find opportunities.
- Give opportunities for taster – secondments, shadowing, placements between organisations and within organisations. Job rotations.
- Mentoring schemes.
- Peer support for peer support, more senior people.
- Encouraging volunteering in other places or joining a board.
- As a manager, having open conversations, being realistic that you know not everyone will be at one organisation forever.
- Transparency.

Can you think of any challenges a peer worker may face when moving job roles?

- Often have to move from peer roles to other roles – could be a challenge if not encouraged to share.
- Boundaries and expectations are different, adaption time is needed.
- Not as much support/understanding of person's mental health when moving away from peer roles.

- Additional responsibility/change can decentralise or affect people's health/mental health.
- Peer volunteers moving to peer roles – more responsibility, different boundaries, e.g. Workers have work phones, volunteers don't.
- Peer managers not feeling confident to support people, know the choices or what to do.

Evaluations

Following the event, people fed back that they:

- Appreciated the opportunity to discuss employment scenarios with other leaders and discover what the vision was for peer workers.
- Enjoyed spending time with other professionals and thinking about practical solutions.
- Having space to reflect and generate ideas with others.