

The Significance of the Peer Workforce

Most Significant Change Project - Summary



What Was This About?

Led by Recovery Cymru and funded by the Cardiff and Vale Area Planning Board, this project used the **Most Significant Change** (MSC) technique to gather peer-led stories from people delivering peer support, paid and voluntary, across services and the community. We set out to explore and celebrate the impact of peer support across Cardiff and the Vale, from the perspective of those who live and breathe it.

We wanted to:

1. Support the people doing the work - people offering peer support.
2. Protect what makes peer support unique and to recognise it as a specialism in it's own right
3. Capture learning across services
4. Challenge stigma

Recovery Cymru's Main Messages

- The peer workforce is growing and brings something unique to recovery support.
- We must protect what is special about peer support and support our peers in their own recovery.
- Training, supervision, clarity and development are essential to the quality and sustainability of peer roles.
- Peer support does not look the same everywhere, and that is okay. Shared principles still matter.
- Peer support and co-production are not the same. Both are important and should be understood in their own right.
- We want to coordinate a stronger local approach, build shared infrastructure and protect areas of specialism.
- Independent recovery communities like ours play a vital role and deserve recognition. We want to champion ours.

What we did...



22 stories gathered, analysed and published in digital format

10 stories selected for deeper reflection, creating our Storybook

1 Panel attended by 13 people, peers, decision makers, academics

3 trial co-reflection sessions, attended by 30 individuals

1 regional event, 'The Significance of the Peer Workforce.' Attend by 33 people

62 participants across roles and services, contributing to one or more of these activities

What We Learned - a snapshot

- **Peer support is a specialism**, not an add-on. It's not the same as therapy or friendship. It needs to be understood and protected.
- **Boundaries, trust, belief, and visibility** emerged as central themes.
- **Infrastructure matters**—peer support needs spaces like co-reflection, good supervision, and clear roles to thrive.
- **Stigma is still a barrier**, especially around addiction. Peer support plays a key role in challenging this.
- **Mutual growth is real**—offering support helps peer workers, too.
- **Co-reflection for peers is powerful** - people offering peer support in different specialisms can learn from and support one another, preventing burn out and increasing skills.
- **We have amazing peer offers in Cardiff & Vale** - but there is work to do!

The work confirmed that lived experience is powerful, but it needs to be supported, heard, and embedded meaningfully.

Please read our 'Voices From Peer Support' (22 Stories from the peer workforce), 'This is what Recovery looks like' Storybook (10 recovery stories - local people, local stories' and our Co-reflection findings here:
<https://www.recoverycymru.org.uk/stories/>



What's Next

This project was just the beginning. The stories, learning, and energy that emerged have opened doors, and we're ready to walk through them. Here's what we hope is next for the peer workforce in Cardiff and the Vale.

1. Make co-reflection a permanent offer

The trial sessions showed just how needed these spaces are.

We want to embed regular peer-led co-reflection into local systems across services, roles and sectors.

We're asking for support to fund and sustain this as essential infrastructure for the peer workforce.

2. Deepen the learning from the stories

We're undertaking further thematic analysis of all 22 stories to draw out learning for workforce development, service design and strategy.

Once complete, we'll be looking for help to apply and share that learning across the system so it informs real change.

3. Launch Most Significant Change Phase Two

We're asking for support for Most Significant Change Phase 2— focused on capturing the impact of peer support from the perspectives of the people receiving it. We'll be asking for support to develop this next phase, which will build on everything we've learned so far—same model, deeper reach.

We're seeking support to co-design, fund and deliver this next phase so we can capture the full picture of impact.

4. Champion, protect and fund the independent peer recovery community

Independent recovery communities bring something vital to the local landscape. We're asking partners and decision makers to recognise and support the independent recovery community - both for the 'services' we offer within the treatment system and for the role it plays in the community - assisting people to sustain change long term as part of a recovery focussed system.



Thank You

This project wouldn't have been possible without the people who shared their stories, the peers who showed up for co-reflection, the partners who took part in panel conversations, and the many voices who helped shape what you've read here.

Huge thanks to everyone who has been part of this journey, and to the Cardiff and Vale Area Planning Board for funding and supporting this work.



For more information:

Phone

07944 851050

029 2022 7019

Email

sarahvaile@recoverycymru.org.uk

Website

www.recoverycymru.org.uk