1. Introduction

Through the Rain was a partnership between New Horizons Borders and Scottish Recovery Network. The project was funded by the Scottish Government’s Self-Management Impact Fund and ran from January 2014 to the end of September 2015. The first four months of the project were focused on employing staff, raising awareness of the project and establishing relationships with local groups, organisations and services. The project started providing one-to-one support to individuals and offering self-management workshops in May 2014. This report explains why we established this peer support project; sets out what was achieved and considers how the use of peer workers contributed to the achievements.

To inform this report the following were used:

- Records of project activity and outputs;
- IROC\(^1\) (Individual Recovery Outcomes Counter); a validated tool which measures progress made or ‘distanced travelled’ by those being supported.
- An externally commissioned Appreciative Inquiry study\(^2\) which involved interviews with people supported; project staff and stakeholders.

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\(^1\) IROC and the associated toolkit was developed by Penumbra and used under license by the Through the Rain project. For more information go to IROC - Penumbra

2. **What is Through the Rain?**

Through the Rain was a peer support project which empowered people living with mental health challenges to take control of their recovery. It did this by employing peer workers who worked with individuals and groups to support them to find their own solutions to the challenges they faced; develop and use self-management strategies and make the connections needed to continue to manage their wellbeing and live a satisfying and fulfilling life. The peer workers provided one-to-one support and also designed and delivered a range of self-management and wellbeing workshops.

The intended outcomes for the project were:

- More people living with mental health problems will have the support they need to manage their wellbeing through self-management tools and approaches;

- People living with mental health problems will play and increased role in supporting each other to manage their wellbeing and taking control of their recovery;

- Fewer people living with mental health problems are admitted to hospital and more are accessing support in the community to manage and maintain their wellbeing;

- Services across different sectors and settings have an increased understanding of self-management and are able to effectively promote the use of self-management tools and approaches.

3. **Why peer support?**

For many years people who experience mental health problems have described the importance and value of support from others who have had similar experiences. They describe how it brings something different to what is found in traditional support relationships. Recovery focused services are all about involving people and using all available expertise, including lived experience, to ensure the help and support available best meets the needs of people to both lead their own recovery and develop the life they want. Peer support in all its forms is a key component of recovery focused services.
Peer support exists in many different forms in mental health. The informal sharing of experiences and knowledge between people using services is not new. Similarly peer support between people with shared experiences in self-help and mutual support groups and through mentoring approaches is well established. Through the Rain sought to build on this and also to further develop an emerging role in mental health services; that of the peer worker.

Peer workers are people who have personal experience of mental health problems who are trained and employed to work in a formalised role in support of others in recovery. Peer workers are willing and able to share their personal experiences on an equal level that supports, empowers and brings hope to the people they partner with. The peer worker role involves:

- Developing mutually empowering relationships;
- Sharing personal experiences in a way that inspires hope;
- Offering hope and support as an equal.

The peer relationship is one founded on shared experiences and learning together rather than one person in the helper role and the other on the receiving end. This mutual, empathetic relationship creates an environment that supports people to explore and identify what they find helpful and useful or not in their recovery journey. This is not a clinical relationship but neither is it just about being friends. It is an intentional relationship where the peer worker uses their lived experience intentionally to help another person to recognise their strengths, take control over their life and lead their own recovery.
4. The Through the Rain Approach

Through the Rain offered people experiencing mental health challenges the opportunity to form a mutual and empathetic relationship with someone who shared their experiences and to use this as a basis to develop the skills, confidence and social networks to take control of their life and lead their own recovery. The approach was informed by the peer working values set out by Scottish Recovery Network and was designed around the following principles:

| Strengths based | • Promoting hope and optimism – reality of recovery  
|                 | • Self-referral and based on what the person would like to achieve rather than their problems  
|                 | • Initial assessment identified strengths and capabilities as well as areas to work on  
|                 | • Self-management workshops to build on skills, capabilities and experience to help people find their own solutions  
| Mutual          | • Listening, hearing and validating experience  
|                 | • The peer worker ‘walks alongside’ the person using their experience to help them to identify their own goals and solutions  
|                 | • Focus on active listening and open questions rather than giving advice  
|                 | • The peer relationship is negotiated and both learn from it  
| Outcomes focused| • Use of IROC and the Hope Toolkit; a validated assessment and planning tool which places the control firmly in the hands of the person being supported  
|                 | • Each person supported to develop and own their action plan which sets out how they will achieve their goals  
|                 | • Action plans regularly reviewed and achievements recognised and celebrated  
| Empowering      | • Both the peer worker and person supported learns and grows in the relationship  
|                 | • Peer support promotes personal responsibility and supports people to make their own decisions and advocate for themselves  
|                 | • Support for positive, informed risk taking as trying new things is essential to personal growth and change  

5. **What we did**

Through the Rain started with the employment of four peer workers in January 2014. Initially the team focused on establishing the systems and procedures required by the service and raising awareness and establishing relationships with local groups, organisations and services across the Scottish Borders area. In March 2014 the project went ‘live’, taking referrals and planning the first set of self-management workshops. The project experienced a good level of self-referrals as people have found out about Through the Rain from a variety of sources.

Between May 2014 and the end of September 2015 Through the Rain provided one-to-one peer support to 72 people; designed and delivered a range of self-management workshops and worked with Penumbra Borders Youth Project to develop and deliver a series of mental health and wellbeing workshops in secondary schools across the area. The project staff also continued to develop relationships locally and to improve understanding of peer support and the important role it plays in recovery.

5.1 **One-to-one support**

During the project 80 people sought one-to-one support from Through the Rain and 72 engaged with the project and received support. Most people saw their Peer Worker weekly but the approach taken was flexible so as to meet their needs and aspirations at different points in their journey. Some started off meeting less frequently as they liked to take their time getting used to new things before increasing the frequency of meetings with their Peer Worker. For others support moved from weekly to fortnightly or monthly as they achieved their goals and began to prepare to move on.

People found out about Through the Rain from a variety of sources indicating that a range of practitioners and organisations were aware of the project:

- 25 through New Horizons and their drop-ins
- 17 through Social Work services
- 15 through other local organisations including, Red Cross, Penumbra Momentum, CAB and the local college
- 11 through family, friends and local publicity
12 through NHS services (CPN, GP, hospital and rehabilitation services)

Those receiving support came from all five areas within the Borders:

- 20 from Berwickshire
- 10 from Cheviot
- 32 from Eildon
- 13 from Teviot & Liddesdale
- 3 from Tweeddale

This was facilitated by the Peer Workers making contact with local organisations and practitioners in their area and having a presence at New Horizons Borders’ drop-ins.

5.2 Mental health and wellbeing workshops

Through the Rain have designed and delivered a range of workshops aimed at increasing understanding of and confidence in self-management tools and techniques.

In summer 2014 Through the Rain worked in partnership with Borders Recovery Network to deliver a programme of three self-management workshops in three locations; Galashiels, Eyemouth and Hawick. These workshops attended by 25 people focused on:

- What is recovery?
- Achieving personal goals and problem solving.
- Embracing change.

The workshops involved a person in recovery telling their own story of recovery and provided an opportunity for participants to share from their own experiences and explore how this can be used to support their wellbeing and recovery. The design of the workshops was informed by positive psychology and as such assisted participants to switch attention from what is difficult and unpleasant in life to identify hope, motivation and personal strengths.
Positive feedback from these sessions resulted in Through the Rain developing bespoke workshops for small groups in an outdoor setting which were delivered in August 2014 and again in spring and summer 2015. The workshops provided those participating with an opportunity to:

- Explore long held beliefs and concerns that may be barriers to recovery;
- Identify and understand their triggers;
- Start to set short and longer term goals for their wellbeing and recovery.

In developing these workshops the Through the Rain staff used a combination of PATH (individualised recovery planning), WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning), the sharing of personal experiences and the beauty of the natural environment to discuss, illustrate and normalise concerns whilst exploring long held but not voiced dreams and nightmares. Through this participants were able to explore and make sense of barriers to embracing recovery and personal responsibility. This was then followed up with an indoor session where participants were able to develop their plans for the future and work on specific issues such as assertiveness and self-management tools and techniques.

A total of 26 people attended three outdoor self-management workshops and the follow up sessions in 2015. All of those attending reported that they felt more confident about managing their wellbeing and planned to use some of the approaches they learned about at the workshop.

In the first few months of 2015 Through the Rain worked with Penumbra Borders Youth Project to develop and deliver a series of mental health and wellbeing workshops in secondary schools across the area. These were initially delivered in four secondary schools across the area (Galashiels, Berwickshire, Jedburgh and Hawick) and were part of a wider programme being delivered in schools which included sessions on drugs and alcohol, money matters and road safety. A total of 234 S4 to S6 students attended the workshops.

6. What we achieved

We used a range of methods to record and measure the impacts of the Through the Rain project. This included:

- A project database which recorded destinations of those supported;
- Regularly collecting feedback from people supported through the project and local stakeholders;
Through the Rain has received excellent feedback from both those accessing support on a one-to-one basis and participating in groups as well as from other services and organisations in the area. The Peer Workers report seeing positivity and hope returning to people who had very little to start with and there have been tangible results with people returning to work, enrolling in College courses, setting up self-help groups and volunteering in other organisations. This section outlines the results gathered using the methods outlined above.

6.1 One-to-one support

Through the Rain used a variety of methods to assess the impact of the one-to-one peer support provided. This included the use of IROC (Individual Recovery Outcomes Counter) a validated tool which measures progress made or ‘distance travelled’ by those receiving one-to-one support. This was used alongside the Hope Toolkit to support people to assess their current situation, set goals and review their progress. Results from the use of the IROC tool were recorded for just under 40 percent of those receiving one-to-one support.

IROC is based on 12 questions focused in on four key areas of life:

Each question is scored out of a maximum of six giving a potential maximum score of 18 for each area. During the project 28 people completed an initial IROC and 13 have completed a review IROC; usually undertaken after three to six months support. The table below sets out the average scores for each area of life:
The approach taken by Through the Rain was to work with people receiving one-to-one support to support them to reflect on where they are in life and to identify areas that they want to work on. From this they set their own goals and produced a plan which they then monitored and revised in discussion with their Peer Worker as required. The peer workers have highlighted that most of those receiving one-to-one support wanted to improve their social and support networks and to take more control over their life.

The average review IROC scores show evidence of progress in key life areas. Anecdotal feedback from people receiving one-to-one peer support is that it enabled them to increase their self-esteem and develop their personal and social networks. Examples include:

*I can leave the house and look people in the eye; this is a big step forward*

*Days are still difficult but I can cope better and have hope for the future.*

*I am now working, have got ways to cope that work for me and have a reason to get up every day!*

This reflects the primary reason people have for seeking support from Through the Rain as most say that they want to be less isolated and get involved in more activities when discussing this with staff.

Many of those contacting Through the Rain for support were looking to build their confidence and meet new people by getting involved in more local activities. The peer workers support people to do this in a number of ways including assisting them to access services, activities and opportunities in the area. As a result, of the 72 people who received one-to-one support:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IROC area</th>
<th>Initial IROC scores</th>
<th>Review IROC scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• 36 have attended one or more self-management workshop run by Through The Rain;

• 24 subsequently attended New Horizons Borders Drop-Ins;

• 30 are accessing other services including those provided by Addaction, Momentum, Borders Asperger’s and Autism Group and the NHS;

• 29 have got involved in a range of social and community activities such as night classes, camera club, aqua aerobics, self-help groups and church activities;

• 17 subsequently volunteered in a range of roles including setting up a self-help group; establishing a local drop-in; tutoring at a knitting group; volunteering at the local secondary school and membership of the Borders General Hospital Steering Group;

• 8 have been helped to get into or stay in employment.

6.2 Self-management workshops

Feedback from the self-management workshops has been extremely positive and has also helped to inform the development of future workshops. Of the 36 people who have participated in the various self-management workshops held:

• 32 reported that they were more confident about managing their wellbeing;

• 31 reported that they will use some of the self-management approaches they learned at the workshop;

• 27 were interested in learning more about self-management approaches, tools and techniques.

The feedback also highlighted that, while many were nervous about participating, the workshops provided a positive group experience where people could share with and learn from others.

*Emotional but good session*

*Group meetings have helped. It’s good to share and discuss*
It was great to talk about some of my experiences instead of being the listener all the time

I am feeling more confident and contented

The mental health and wellbeing workshops delivered in partnership with Penumbra Youth Project in four secondary schools also received positive feedback from the 234 S4 to S6 pupils attending:

- 80% said the workshops were useful;
- 34% said they had learned loads and a further 57% said they had learned a little;
- 57% said that the workshops had helped to influence how they would react to situations.

Following from these initial sessions Through the Rain and Penumbra Youth project were invited back by the schools to deliver more in-depth workshops for S6 students. These also focused on mental health and wellbeing but looked at recovery and self-management strategies and approaches. These have been very well received with teachers and students finding them insightful and helpful in how they manage their own and help others to manage their mental wellbeing.

7. The role of peer working

To complement the data collected by the project an independent study was commissioned. The study used an Appreciative Inquiry approach to increase our understanding of what was considered to have worked best. During the research 13 in-depth interviews using previously developed topic guides were undertaken and themes identified. More information on this Appreciative Inquiry is contained in Annex A. This section sets out the findings of this component of the evaluation and seeks to explain how the use of peer workers in Through the Rain played a central role in its success. Unless otherwise indicated the quotations used are from people supported by Through the Rain peer workers.
A clear theme emerging from the Appreciative Inquiry, particularly the feedback from the three local stakeholders, was that Through the Rain was seen as providing a different type of support to that available from other local services.

*It’s a very, very different type of support so for me, it’s about something you can’t learn......It was really about that level of peer support, that non-clinical side of things, about normalising behaviours, seeing a recovery focus and really looking at something that’s specific to that young person, that’s not necessarily an intervention, which is what we tend to do.......It was very much around assisting that person on their recovery journeys, using their own life experience.*

*Service provider*

‘*Through the Rain has enabled people experiencing some sort of emotional strain in their lives to get support from someone who understands.*’

*Service Provider*

The local service providers who were interviewed also noted that Through the Rain could support people who might not easily access other services and also offered early intervention, avoiding a situation where people fell through the net because they did not (yet) meet referral thresholds.

*This offers a very low level, very personal support, and I have seen huge benefits from the peer workers engaging with my clients in particular, because the effect of that has helped them manage more of their life.*

*Service provider*

*...support from Through the Rain might be enough just to see them through that difficult time they’re having.*

*Service provider*

*It’s more of a low level type of support, which is essential to prevent people getting to higher level needs, because if you don’t fix it at a lower level it becomes a higher level priority.*

*Service provider*

So what was it about this different type of support that was considered to be effective? The people interviewed during the research consistently identified a number of key themes when explaining what they valued about Through the Rain and why the support received had been beneficial. These related to:

- The characteristics of the peer relationship
- The emphasis on encouraging empowerment
• The focus on recovery and hope in all aspects of the project

Many of these positive attributes were considered to arise as direct consequences of peer workers’ lived experience of mental health. They are also strongly reflected in the Peer Values Framework developed by SRN which informed the design and delivery of this service. The remainder of this section considers each of these themes in turn drawing on the final report from the evaluation and using the words of the people supported, peer workers and stakeholders interviewed to illustrate the findings.

7.1 The peer relationship

When talking about the peer relationship at the centre of the project people said that it was informal, mutual, non-judgemental and genuine.

Those receiving support highly valued the informality and ‘genuineness’ of the support that they received from peer workers. This was not only reflected in the approach of the peer workers themselves but in the way the project engaged with people on a one-to-one basis and in the self-management group activities.

*Very honest. Very open. Just very lifelike. Nothing put on. Professional to a degree*

*It was a very informal relationship which made me feel a lot more comfortable, like we would go for coffee or go on walks and things, and it was like a thing I would do with a friend, so it felt more comfortable than being in an office type situation, in a more formal environment*

*..with some of the days out you got a chance to talk in a group, just to experience what it was like, with no pressure involved. They put you at ease*

People reflected that they were able to talk on a one-to-one basis about ‘daily things’ with the peer workers were seen as ‘easy to speak to’ and non-directive. However it is clear from the research interviews that the peer workers were also clear about their role and the distinction between being friendly and being friends was one that was very clear in both the minds of those supported and of peer workers.

The relationships that developed between people supported and peer workers were talked about in an extremely positive manner. People talked of feeling
accepted and not judged and attributed this to the peer workers themselves having lived experience of mental health and being willing to share this. It is clear that this mutual sharing of experiences between peer workers and people supported created relationships that were trusting and equal rather than hierarchical.

I just feel that with the support worker, because they’ve had their own issues and mental health issues, I feel they have a better understanding of where you’re coming from. ... I really think the sharing bit, and I think that helped to build up trust as well. It made me feel like a person rather than some sort of patient

I think because I as the peer worker show a level of vulnerability in sharing some of my own experiences. It puts myself and the person I’m working with on a more even footing, and so I think people feel more able to make themselves vulnerable ... it establishes trust quite quickly, and it means that it’s not a kind of ‘I am the person who knows it all and I’m going to tell you what to do’, it’s much more of an even relationship right from the start

Peer worker

Feeling that they were not being judged was also personally affirming for people.

You start talking about different stuff, I think it’s only natural that you start feeling, you know - here’s somebody who knows what I’m talking about, they’ve experienced much the same thing, they’re trusting their feelings. Maybe I should trust mine

Hearing the peer workers talk of their personal experiences clearly engendered a sense of normalisation for people.

The personal approach, non-judgemental approach just made you feel like a human being, you know?

In comparison to someone who hasn’t been there trying to understand, because the experience that that they have helps, and it makes you feel that you’re not the only one.

It normalises some of the behaviours that actually they’re doing ok

Service provider

This created a situation where people relaxed as they believed that they were being understood and not judged and this in turn and gave them the confidence to talk openly about themselves.
It enabled me to talk about things I wouldn’t normally have brought up with my friends, but I brought up with them because I knew they had been through it themselves and I knew I was talking to somebody that had been there

Peer workers and service providers also highlighted that peer workers sharing their lived experiences helped people to feel that they are understood and not alone in the feelings that they have, and that they can be open about how they are feeling.

I’ve had appointments where I’ve gone and I’ve not been feeling very well, and you don’t put on a big smile and say you’re feeling great, you be true and you say ‘Well today actually I’m feeling a bit shit’, and you’re not looking for support, you’re just being human and being yourself, and that allows them, hopefully, to see that it’s ok to not feel well on a day

Peer worker

This mutual sharing of experiences was seen as bringing authenticity to the relationship. As a result, these relationships were felt to be closer and more conducive to sharing than had been the case in people’s prior experiences of other therapeutic services.

The empathetic nature of the relationship was also emphasised with people identifying their experiences of peer workers remembering, and picking up on previous conversations, as a further indication of them having a genuine and caring interest in them as individuals.

And whatever you sort of mentioned, it would be followed up. It was just an excellent service. I can’t commend it enough

Yes, and the fact that he remembers...he’ll bring up a subject that you maybe spoke about a few weeks ago, you know.... and that’s nice, because it makes you know that he is paying attention to what you’re saying, which is very important when you’ve been in a black hole and are trying to get out ....

Underpinning all of this is the way in which peer workers share and use their lived experience in the support relationship. This different type of support meant that people related to them and viewed the peer workers input as credible, relevant to their own position and meaningful.

It was also really helpful to have someone that understood what I was going through .....it was helpful because I felt more comfortable in telling them about it and also they understood more what I was trying
to say, and it felt like it was easier for them to give me solutions that would help because they would tell me things that had worked for them and I was able to try them

They [peer workers] understand fully how it can feel, and they have been through it and in some of the cases, obviously not everything is the same but they have a better understanding of how it feels to try and cope with it and what is actually going to help

7.2 Empowerment

In promoting and supporting people in their recovery journey, the peer workers sought to help people to take control of their lives and make decisions that worked for them. People supported emphasised that rather than advising or telling them what to do the peer workers shone a light on their lives, encouraged them to reflect on their thoughts and behaviours, and supported them in formulating a positive way forward, and then taking appropriate steps in that direction.

XXX [peer worker] was keen to know what I thought would help me

He was a great support and steered me in the right direction. He encouraged me. XXX was just, I can’t explain how much of a help, without lecturing. Oh, he made comments, don’t get me wrong - but they were never taken wrong and they were always put to me in the right way, encouraging me

There is a huge deal of support for my clients in regards to them having some type of emotional support, having a mentor that will help them to discuss things, talk through things, and that in essence allows them to begin to feel supported to make better decisions in their lives, whether that regards their health or their future or the choices that they’re making, that they feel supported within that

Service provider

Thus people described peer worker support as supporting them in taking positive steps for themselves. This, therefore, was in contrast to becoming reliant on the peer workers to do things, or indeed to think for them.

I mean they can make all the suggestions that they want, but it’s me that’s got to kind of put in all the hard work to better my life. But just
getting the confidence from XXX [the peer worker] is probably half the battle

...always having in your mind this may well end and this person is going to move on, you want them to move on, you need to make sure that what you’re doing is going to be right for them long term

Peer worker

Indeed, the entire ethos of Through the Rain was viewed as one that was empowering; beginning with the point of initial contact with the service and then running as a theme throughout all the support.

Rather than being told ‘I’m going to refer you’, it’s about ‘I’ll give you this information here and this is about this service and you can fill this in and refer yourself or you can phone this number, or you can email’, you know? There’s several different ways that they can do that, and it just empowers that person to take control of that themselves

Service provider

We have a chat around the service user’s basic needs and what it is they’re looking for out of the service. We have first contact forms which the service users all fill in and it gives us a general idea of what they’re hoping to get out of the experience, and we work towards aiming to fulfil these hopes and dreams for the future... the service users need to work it out for themselves, we’re not there to tell them what to do

Peer worker

Saying ‘Ok, so why are you feeling like this? Why are you not doing that? How can I support you to take steps that you want to make but don’t know how to?’ That’s been positive

Peer worker

7.3 A focus on recovery and hope

Intrinsic to Through the Rain was a belief that recovery is a reality for all and that to promote and support recovery there needs to be a focus on what the person feels will help not just the illness or problems they are experiencing. The peer workers emphasised that they focused on people as individuals, and that the support that they provided was very much led by the hopes expressed by the people they supported.

The peer worker has the lived experience. They’re there to be led by the person they’re working alongside, they’re not there to put their
views onto it, they can give their experience but the choices that the individual makes are entirely up to them ... you’re doing it so that their progress is for them

Peer worker

This person-centred focus was described as being central to the Through the Rain approach and was highly valued by the people supported and local service providers. The flexibility of the support was welcomed. People were able to schedule a meet-up when they wanted/needed this and at a place that was convenient for them and were not constrained about what they needed to talk about at a given time.

If I wanted to talk about something specific then we would do that, and if I wasn’t able to do something then that was OK

...was a lot more tailored to what I thought would help me and what worked and what didn’t work. I thought it was a lot more flexible and a lot less kind of by the book, like not so many workbooks and things to complete and read

I would say that it’s very individualised. It very much depends on what that patient is looking for. I’ve had one gentleman, he prefers to go walking with his peer worker, he’s quite into keeping fit, and that’s how he gets his support. They go for a long walk. Another person prefers to meet them for a coffee and has a chat that way, and it’s just very individualised and up to that individual what they would like in the peer worker

Service provider

People appreciated that the peer workers would respond to their expressed needs and aspirations and were able to offer a diverse range of support from talking through worries and concerns to accompanying them to hospital appointments and assistance with practicalities such as dealing with bureaucracy.

so if I say I’ve got a problem or I need help with this or that, they instantly tap into whatever skills or qualities they’ve got in their job to almost know what to do, you know? So yeah, it’s something which I really appreciated to be honest

The peer workers worked with people as individuals and their input therefore was appreciated for very much accepting where people ‘were at’, ‘being realistic’ and supporting them at their own pace.

Well I think they just tried as much as they could to reinforce positive thinking. It was really all they could do at the time. I wasn’t able...
wasn’t easy to work with because I was very agitated and I couldn’t focus, and they just done their best to try and go with me rather than lay things on me, you know? They just really tried their best to take me as I was at that time.

It was really little goals because I was like...when I first started to see them I was very unwell and I couldn’t get out of bed and things, so we made little goals like to be able to get out of bed even just brush your teeth and everything, and then to reward yourself for that, and then work up to bigger things like being able to go out and meet someone and things like that...really big goals, so it was easier to complete them and feel good about that.

People also talked of the peer workers engendering hope and optimism for the future not only as a result of their way of working but because they were seen to model or embody recovery.

Yes, I think they made me feel a lot more positive about it, because they were obviously at a stage where they had been able to control it to the point where they can help other people. I think that was a really positive thing to look for, to see that there were people that had mental health problems who were living a normal life and who were able to control it without it causing any drawbacks, and it was a more positive thing to look for, to see that they could do it.

People also specifically highlighted peer worker’s contribution to their recovery. This contribution took a number of forms. This included simply sharing and discussing experiences but peer workers were also credited with challenging negative thoughts and for engendering hope and optimism – cornerstones of recovery.

I think it made a huge difference because I feel like it made my recovery seem like it was very fast in comparison to how it’s been going, like before when I was seeing the NHS, I kind of felt like it was a very slow recovery and I didn’t really feel like I was ever really moving forward very much, where now I feel like the help that I got this time kind of has made it possible to be recovered, and it’s made it seem like it went very fast.

He didn’t let me dwell on my own pessimism if you like, as I said he always seemed to be able to shine a torch and turn it around, which was a good thing.

One of the gentlemen that I was working with had had an alcohol problem, and had become quite depressed and suicidal... he had gotten
a lot of hope from his peer worker that things would get better and there was light at the end of the tunnel, and that was his story

Service provider

...help you to try and look at things a bit more positively, even when you feel at rock bottom, you know, the support there, it can give you reassurances to keep going, that you know you can and will improve

People also talked of peer workers encouraging and supporting them in taking steps to improve their lives and wellbeing. So, for example, this could take the form of practical suggestions and techniques, like going for walks or working one’s way through to do lists.

Going for walks is one that’s really helped me, and listening to music to block out the thoughts in your head were the ones that really helped me, and then I think one of my favourite ones that I used a lot is to live life slower and appreciating smaller things so that I’m not waiting any longer for something good to happen, you know, if it’s just like a nice day then I just appreciate that, if that makes sense?

Well believe it or not it was that (to-do) sheet that he suggested that I make up, because I made the sheet up with more than what he was asking. But it was sort of...’I’ve done that! Brilliant!’”, you know? Take another step and do something else, and just that - one more step at a time

Peer workers stressed that a critical part of the process was encouraging people to reflect on the steps that they have taken and then use these insights to decide on what would help their ongoing recovery.

This focus on recovery and the type of support provided had dramatic effects on people’s lives.

I was really quite poorly, I couldn’t find help very easily, in fact it was a lifeline in my case to have a support worker as I was in a very very poor state, and it was a definite lifeline to me. I’m not sure I would be here otherwise

Yes, one of the girls that I worked with has a whole raft of problems wrapped up in her life … she couldn’t cope... Through the engagement with the project (peer) worker she’s begun to look at herself and identified her own problems. She realised she was drinking too much, went to her GP, spoke to her GP. She’s actually managing her medication better because the drinking was hampering the medication with the alcohol - the combination wasn’t making the
medication effective, and she has that constant support there, and meets up with her and what a huge difference we saw in her

There were also indications that the positive changes that had been made were transformative in setting people on a recovery trajectory and thereby likely to lead to sustained improvements.

I have a lady who lost her XXXX to suicide and couldn’t get bereavement support but had had mental health issues off and on and also had her own health problems and she attends the women’s group ... but it was too much for her to attend a group, so she got a peer project worker who met with her out with for months for 2 or 3 months, and now because of that engagement she now feels able to go and join the women’s group, so there’s like a transition process

...Xxx (the peer worker) picked me up and dusted me off, put me back on my feet and said ‘Right come on, let’s go’, and just small steps at a time. He doesn’t realise what he’s unleashed, because a year ago if anybody had said I’d be chair of a particular group! but I’m doing it now and thoroughly enjoying it

7.4 Underpinning factors

Through the Rain was an innovative and ambitious project to establish a peer support service in a community based organisation that would offer a type of support not available locally. The independent evaluation offered some reflections on the factors which underpinned the establishment of peer relationships that were mutual; engendered hope and optimism and encouraged empowerment.

The design of the service was clearly very important. The employment of peer workers demonstrated not only the recovery focus of the project but also the value of lived experience. This was complimented by the commitment to strengths based, person centred and outcomes focused approaches which were operationalised in the way that people engaged with the service; considered their situation, set and reviewed their goals.

Tapping into existing resources such as the Scottish Recovery Network’s Peer Values Framework and the use of the IROC tool provided a structure for this.

The Peer Values Framework helped to clearly define the role of the peer worker and the focus of the service. This was used as a practical tool to help
the peer workers reflect on the peer relationships being developed and also in their contacts with other services.

*I think it all just comes to a clear understanding of what peer work is, and not getting caught up in anything over and above that, because people can try and...and have tried, to change what our service has been doing...So being strong in that and sticking to what we do, because if we’d done it differently and tried to be support workers or tried to be befrienders, or tried to be mental health specialists in a different capacity, it wouldn’t have worked*

  Peer worker

*Actually having sort of guidelines and boundaries set was kind of helpful to realise no, this is the direction we should be going*

  Peer worker

Being part of a team, meeting regularly to discuss work and practice and working collaboratively together helped the peer workers to reflect on the peer relationships being developed and to maintain mutuality and a focus on outcomes in their relationships.

*Well I’ve found the meetings a godsend because you can find out what’s happening and give each other ideas of how to best cope with certain situations...and if something is going wrong then we can turn to each other and talk about it*

  Peer worker

*There’s been times when other peer workers have struggled to make breakthroughs with people they have been supporting or it’s become stagnated or it’s become too emotionally draining on them... and so we’ve swapped and tried to make the transition as easy as possible... That’s been really helpful... Seeing them make progress is rewarding because you’re working as a team and you’re working for the good of other people, not for your own ego*

  Peer worker

These regular reflective discussions also enabled the peer workers to explore how they could maintain their wellbeing and continue their own recovery.

*... whilst I went into the role knowing that I could help people and wanting to help people, I didn’t know I could do it without it being bad for me, if you know what I mean? And it wasn’t, and that’s been really strong, because its given me more faith that I can have meaningful relationships with other people without it having a detrimental effect on myself, and that’s been great*
The experience of Through the Rain highlighted how peer workers can offer a type of support not always available in other services and one which promotes hope and recovery and encourages empowerment. Furthermore the experience of working as a peer has been a rewarding one for the people concerned and was viewed as helping them to maintain and move forward in their recovery journey.

8. Conclusions

Through the Rain successfully established itself as a positive addition to mental health recovery activity in the Scottish Borders. It raised awareness and understanding of peer support and showed the benefits that formal peer support, particularly peer working roles, can bring. These benefits are not only the positive outcomes for people living with mental health problems but also providing a new option for other organisations and services supporting people. They have demonstrated the particular role that formal peer support can play in assisting people through transitions and difficult times and enabling them to develop the confidence and skills to take control of their own recovery.

By adopting a strengths based approach from the beginning Through the Rain worked with people to support them to identify, articulate and work towards their goals using the skills and capabilities that they have, even if they have to rediscover them. The role of the peer worker is to listen and to use their experiences to model hope and support people to find their own goals and solutions. This mutual relationship based on the explicit acknowledgement that both worker and person being supported have much to offer as well as much to learn, creates the supported space for people to take more control over their lives.

During the period that Through the Rain operated there was considerable learning. Through the Rain was innovative and ambitious and while we did not achieve everything we hoped to, our initial expectations have been exceeded in some ways. We underestimated how much time it would take to get the project established and raise awareness of what we were trying to do locally. However this early, intensive work paid off with a high level of awareness of, and trust in the project resulting in steady demand for the one-to-one support and increasingly the self-management workshops.

The evidence shows that the support made a positive and tangible difference to the lives of many of the people supported. Feedback from people being supported was that the support they received was qualitatively different from
that offered by other services. They highlighted the informality of approach and the development of mutual relationships as central to the success of the relationships developed. Feeling understood and not judged enabled people to open up about their feelings and discuss and explore ways in which they could move forward in their recovery. The role of the peer worker as a model of recovery engendered hope and optimism for the future and inspired people to take steps to improve their wellbeing and take control of their recovery. Indeed a number people supported have gone on to get involved in community, social and recreational activities as a result of the peer support received.

The demand for one-to-one support was consistently high but as the project developed there was more interest in group activities. Many people, particularly those who had been isolated or felt disconnected, were initially nervous and cautious about taking part in group activities. As a result Through the Rain worked with people to develop group events which felt informal and fun but which enabled them to explore what mattered to them with others and experience the benefits of the peer group environment.

The experience of Through the Rain highlights the importance of relationship based support which works with people in a holistic way to enable them to find their own way forward and take control of their life and recovery. The role of the peer worker as a model of recovery and the mutual nature of the peer relationship offers a type of support which is different from, and compliments that offered by other services.
Through the Rain Peer Support Service: Findings from Appreciative Inquiry Interviews

In August 2015, New Horizons Borders commissioned Jacki Gordon + Associates to conduct an evaluation of the Through the Rain Peer Support Service which it ran in partnership with the Scottish Recovery Network. It was agreed that this evaluation would use an Appreciative Inquiry approach. Data were collected over the period August and September 2015 and a report produced in October 2015.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach that focuses on positive aspects of a service, programme, project or other area of enquiry. Typically, AI is characterised by four stages:

- Discovery - Appreciating and valuing the Best of What Is
- Dream – Envisioning What Might Be (i.e. aspirations for the future)
- Design – Determining What Should Be
- Delivery (or Destiny) – Innovating What Will Be

In part then, AI involves understanding what is working best, and understanding and analysing why this. In turn, this offers insights about strengths on which subsequent developments can build. AI also involves envisioning the ideal in order that subsequent planning can be aligned with this vision.

The commissioned Appreciative Inquiry of TTR

The aim of the commissioned AI was to explore the views and experiences of TTR for a range of people: beneficiaries, peer workers, and stakeholders in local services (i.e. service providers).

This AI was to focus (exclusively) on the first two AI phases – the discovery and dream stages. Accordingly, participants were to consider:

- What have they valued most in relation to their involvement with TTR?
- If they had three hopes for a future peer support service, what would these hopes be?
The outputs from this AI were to be: a short report of the findings; and the integration of these findings into a final report on Through the Rain to be produced by Scottish Recovery Network (this report).

**Scope and intended use**

In view of prior monitoring and evaluation conducted by and for the project, this work was commissioned to complement insights already gathered. Thus, it was *not* intended to be a full and comprehensive evaluation in itself.

It is intended that the results of the commissioned evaluation will be used by New Horizons Borders and Scottish Recovery Network to inform their on-going work and to promote and share the learning of the benefits of peer support and peer working in mental health.

**Methods**

The evaluation methods comprised:

- one-to-one telephone interviews with six beneficiaries, four female and two male
- one-to-one telephone interviews with all four of TTR’s peer workers [two male, two female]
- one-one-telephone interviews with three service providers with clients who have been supported by TTR peer workers

The beneficiary and service provider interviewees were recruited by TTR. As part of this, TTR obtained signed consent. The sample was a purposive one that involved selecting people likely to have positive views of Through the Rain. This was considered appropriate in view of AI’s focus and because finding from this piece of work provide just one part of a wider suite of Through the Rain’s monitoring and evaluation data.

The interviews were conducted by the commissioned researcher using previously developed topic guides. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and then fully transcribed.

To read the full report of the Appreciative Inquiry go to (awaiting hyperlink)