

Peer Connects: In Conversation with...

Resilience Collective Singapore

Film information

Giving an international perspective on peer support we're delighted to share this film which features Justin Loo, Head of Programmes, at the Resilience Collective, a mental health charity in Singapore, powered by peers, for peers. Recorded at one of our Peer Connects events, Justin speaks to our Operations Manager Holly Hendry about their Circles of Resilience peer support groups. He explains how the groups use the CHIME (Connectedness, Hope and Optimism, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment) framework to guide session topics. Justin also talks about their 4Rs approach (Ready, Receive, Relying and Rally) to how their peer support groups are facilitated.

Find out more about Resilience Collective on their website

<https://www.resilience.org.sg>

Conversation starts

Justin 00:00:05:

So, for us, it's been a journey of figuring out how to do peer support in Singapore and, you know, being able to meet with different people who practice that and have gone through the different experiences, learning through challenges. That's been really helpful for us as we try to look into our programme and how to refine it. So thank you everyone for having us

here and thank you in advance for all the things we're going to learn from today.

Holly 00:00:28:

Yeah, not at all Justin. And yeah, it's so great. And I think just that opportunity for shared learning and connection is so important and hearing different ways of doing things. And I guess for this conversation, maybe we could just start off hearing a bit more about, you know, Resilience Collective and really the context that you're working in, the organisation, some of that kind of stuff to start us off.

Justin 00:00:53:

Sure. So Resilience Collective, or we'll call it RC for short, we are a fairly young agency in Singapore. We were established in 2018. And in the past the work was largely scattered, so we did a bit of online peer support programmes. A large portion of our programmes were then a bit more mental health awareness. We ran workshops, we went to events as such. But since 2022, I think we kind of diverted a bit of our services to be more targeted at peer support itself as a core programme.

So we started this programme called the Circles of Resilience, which we'll share a bit more in detail later. And the team is a pretty small team as well. Nine people within the team and some of them are in the programmes team itself. So Rachel that's on the call as well, she's our Executive Director, but she's also heading up engagements within the company.

So in terms of what we do, or maybe why we do it, RC exists largely to fill the gap that we felt, or we identified within the Singapore's mental health landscape. A lot of the services here, if you speak to professionals, you speak to the guy on the road, a lot of them when you talk about mental health services, it's going to be about seeing Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Counsellors, and those are utterly necessary because I myself, I see a Psychiatrist as well. I'm a peer myself.

But we thought that there was something a bit missing. We really wanted to be able to have a programme that builds community or peers as they go through recovery together. And also a programme that actively empowers the peer to take ownership, to own the sense of the experience, to own where they've come, efforts they've gone through, even to go to the next step of using their lived experience to support other people. So I think that's largely what drove us to conceptualise the Circles of Resilience. And that's what drives the team right now, to be able to take on that strength approach towards working and serving the peers in Singapore.

Holly 00:02:58:

Thanks Justin. It's really, really interesting to hear that bit of context and just how you kind of identified the space for the organisation within what else is offered in Singapore.

So, you know, it is largely about psychiatry and seeing Psychologists, and there is a role for that, absolutely. But actually what you've shared is that you could see that gap in, you know, bringing people together to build a sense of community. You know, having intentional opportunities to use

the experience and it's really inspiring to hear the role that lived experience plays throughout the organisation that you speak about being like truly peer-run and I think that and just hearing you talk about some of the values that drive you. Thank you.

Out of interest, you know, as a sector, a lot of us work in a sort of Charity Sector, the Third Sector, NGOs. Is that a big sector within Singapore, where you sit, or what does that look like?

Justin 00:04:03:

Yeah, there are quite a number of Social, so in Singapore we call them Social Service Agencies. So there are quite a number of Social Service Agencies in Singapore serving different needs. And there are also quite a number of SSAs, Social Service Agencies, that are serving specifically the mental health needs. A lot of them, I think similar to the landscape we shared a bit earlier, a lot of them are doing individualised casework. Also there's a huge number of them that are working towards more awareness of mental wellness in general.

So that's also therefore the gap that we saw that we wanted to come into, to really bring peer support into the sense of understanding of what a mental health service can provide holistically, beyond just a typical talk therapy or at least in combination with talk therapy.

Holly 00:04:56:

Yeah, amazing. Thank you. So I think that will have given people a bit of a sense of the organisation, kind of what it looks like and where you sit within the Singaporean context.

Justin 00:05:13:

The Circles of Resilience is a version of a peer support group programme that I think we scrapped together from different research and conversations with people here and there.

Essentially they are monthly peer support groups that run and how we have kind of structured, so, operationally how we've done it is we break them up into the first and foremost different age groups. So we have CRs that are catering to peers that are from 18 to 24 years old. And then there are other CRs that cater to peers that go from 25 onwards, right? So different life stages, different experiences that they might go through that they hopefully can find relevant for each other.

And within the CRs themselves, right now, when we first started, in fact, when we first started out, a large portion of it was staff driven. So it's facilitated by staff. And when the members meet, they go up to a total capacity of 25 members per Circle of Resilience. And for each group that we establish, once it hits that max capacity, it becomes a closed group.

OK, something different that we're trying, and we wouldn't honestly dare to say that it's sustainable or is the right way to do it per se, but something we're trying essentially is that the sessions run perpetually. So the groups, there isn't a start and end to a group, so maybe in comparison to a group that's largely existing for psychoeducation, they have big sessions, like one to eight sessions. Ours run perpetually and the idea was that we wanted to establish small communities of peers to build relationships, to build familiarity and safe spaces with.

So they meet once a month and the session topics that they discuss are guided by the CHIME framework. So within each component: Connectedness, Hope, Optimism, Identity, Meaning, Empowerment. So for example, Connectedness, for four months, all the topics for the four months will be on relationships and social support. Similarly for the next four months, every so on, we break it up that way. And what happens is for every CR session we have, we are guided by something that we kind of came up with. Once again, we don't know whether it's going to be the perfect system, but what guides us, at least on our side, is what we call the 4Rs.

So the first R is 'Ready'. Ready happens before the CR session even begins, right? This is when we send, so each of them have telegram group where they all connect online and every time before the session, we would send topics for the group to select and vote on which topic would you like to talk about at the upcoming session. And it also already, it also means that we meet together for dinner before the CR session itself. So we have some members who have time to come after work or after school, will join just to connect casually, informally, before the session starts.

So after 'Ready' we go into 'Receive'. So this is typically the first half an hour of the session. And Receive is where we sit down, we do what we call a mental health check. Right, check in. So we have a board and there are different categories, whether you're doing great, all the way down to you are really not in a good space and you need support. So each member takes a magnet, and they are to paste it, paste their name on where they

are and share what kind of state they're coming into the programme and to the group.

Then we go into the third 'R', which is 'Relying'. So this is the main segment of the group where we rely on each other's sharings and support. We talk about the topic that was chosen by the group of the day, and this is facilitated by either the staff or Volunteer Peer Support Facilitators.

And then the last five or 10 minutes we go into the last 'R', which is 'Rally'. That's where we share certain successes. It could be certain volunteers that shared their lived experience over social media, or they participated in certain events. We would share these up on the screen so that we can all celebrate together.

So these four 'R's basically guide what every peer would receive and go through for each CR session.

Holly 00:09:22:

I love that, Justin. I love the structure. Well, the first thing I wanted to pick up, I was scribbling notes just then, and the first thing I picked up on was how CHIME is embedded. And I think many of the participants here today will be familiar with CHIME and oh Rally, fab.

Yeah, so many of the participants here will be familiar with CHIME. And at Scottish Recovery Network, we use it a lot. And it's really interesting to see how that is totally embedded in the kind of framing of the Circles of Resilience and how you approach it.

But then that very specific structure that you go through within a session, I think, yeah, there's just something about it that's very powerful. And I think it gives like a real sort of consistency and I think, you know, a real sense of kind of understanding of, you know, what's going to happen, what the structure is, what the approach is. And I love that, you know, you're very open about the fact that you're trying new things, you know, we're going to give this a go. We're not sure if it's the right way or if it's a sustainable way, but we want to try it.

And I think that kind of approach is really important within developing peer approaches is if we don't try, we shy away from trying things and they don't happen. So yeah, wonderful. That's really, really great to hear.

Holly 00:10:46:

I was interested in, you know, you spoke a bit about the facilitation, and you said earlier the Circles of Resilience were facilitated by staff. But my understanding also is that staff, you know, they would still be peer-led as staff, it's a lived experience organisation. And I guess I'd be interested to hear more about, you know, the Facilitators, what the roles are, how they are supported, that kind of stuff.

Justin 00:11:15:

Yeah, sure. And back to the part about trying new things, we have a saying in the team, which is essentially we're constantly building the aeroplane as we're flying it. So yeah, it's a risk. But we're learning a lot from the process.

Back to the Facilitators. So I think this is one of the things that we are learning. We tried, I think the initial portion when we first conceptualised the programme, it was meant to be, as much as possible, close to peer-driven and peer-led. So the initial conceptualisation of it, we saw it as training and equipping CR members themselves to step up and volunteer and then they lead their CRs eventually. And I think to a portion, that has come true, right. We have your members who have stepped up and decided that, hey, I want to do a bit more, and we've trained them through a particular training course that we have.

But it's also something that we found that over time, so we've been running this for about a year and a half, slightly a bit more, it's not as quick and as seamless as we hoped it would be. So I think some of the challenges that we face are, of course, the pace of people volunteering, the comfort level that they would have. And also then because being peers and recovery not being linear, there are times where, as Facilitators, they would go through a spiral or they would go through a difficult time, and they would have to drop off for a period of time. So operationally takes a bit of planning.

So our volunteer pool of Facilitators now, a mix of them, are CR members themselves and peers. We also have volunteers that are externally, that are from external recruitments. So we put out the word through social media and they will sign up for an opportunity to be trained as Facilitators. Training per se, it's fairly straightforward I would say. The training takes place over a day over the weekend, typically on Saturday. So it focuses on what the CR is essentially, what are the principles that

guide peer support within the peer support group? What are some of the community agreements that we have in CR? What are the 4Rs?

Operational details like that.

We also devote quite a bit of time for role-play because this was based on feedback from past cohorts that said that, you know, it's a bit hard. I mean, a lot of them are on the receiving end of peer support, all this one group. So it's a bit hard to visualise what it means to actually facilitate. So a good half of the day is spent on role-playing.

But beyond the training itself, so one thing that we were quite intentional to do was not to assess competency after one day of training. I think we felt that we wanted to give time for, especially for peers, time to kind of gradually, progressively, and incrementally build the group, fill the role itself, get a sense of it and build a competency over time.

So we have practice sessions, they will go back to the groups and between three to five times they can have practice sessions for up to five sessions and they would co-facilitate with the staff. And after every session like that there will be a debrief where the staff will go through with them, share something back with them, how they can improve, what they did well. And eventually, when they are ready, they will let us know when they would like to be assessed to be competent and once they are competent, then they can be deployed individually and independently to facilitate the groups.

So that's typically what a volunteer will go through, if they did volunteer to be a Facilitator for the CR.

Holly 00:14:46:

Yeah, it sounds like a really supportive process that, you know, there's some of the training and then there is working with someone else and there's the debriefs and sort of, you know, a bit of reflection, reflective practice and really to build up. I can totally see that, you know, when you're switching roles, you know, it takes a different way of thinking about things and understanding the dynamics. Yeah, great. Thank you for sharing that.

Conversation ends

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