

Peer Support: getting started

In conversation with Nic, Living Warriors Project

Information

This short film focuses on exploring the foundations of peer support. Nic, Founder and Co-organiser of [Living Warriors Project](#), shares her experiences of setting up and facilitating a community-based peer support group for survivors of attempted suicide.

Eilidh 00:05:

Hello, thank you for joining me Nic to talk about your experience of co-organising a grassroots peer support group, Living Warriors. Could you start off by telling us a little bit about Living Warriors? Who is it for? Where do you meet? What are some of the practical details around it?

Nic 00:30:

So Living Warriors is a peer support project, but I suppose in this case it's a peer support group, for survivors of attempted suicide. The only requirement is that you're an adult who is a survivor of attempted suicide, so 18+. We meet in Edinburgh city centre one Thursday every month. We don't give out the exact location because we like to get people to register first and then we can sort of go through all that, tell them when they register and go through additional details and stuff. It's just like a security measure and safety for us.

Eilidh 01:07

And what is it that inspired you to start Living Warriors?

Nic 01:16:

Okay, so the backstory is I started it in 2017. I had the idea in 2016 that actually came from a conversation that I had with a friend. So I'd attempted in 2014 and the sort of support, or lack of really, that I got afterwards was minimal. So I kind of just had to like find my own way through it. And actually it was like peer support that was like the thing that got me through the initial stages of this. That I had, kind of like, broken through my own, suppose start of my healing journey really and like tried lots of different things and wanted that to go somewhere.

And in this conversation that I had with my friend, she could only relate so far and I'm so grateful that she said it. She was like, I can't fully relate to your experience in your story because I haven't got to that place in that point. And that kind of like hit me because I was like, yeah, okay, there's like nowhere that I have really been able to speak about this experience, especially in like different services that I've used within the mental health system. It was always like, oh, we don't talk about that here, like, well, that's for somebody else. So there's nowhere that I could actually like, put it.

And I think I was just like looking for, it was like a two-handed thing. So one was like wanting to speak to other survivors and have, I suppose, my experience validated, but also to like speak to other people about what

their process was. And then on the other hand was that I didn't want anybody to go through, I had very lofty ambitions, I didn't want anybody to go through what I had gone through post-attempts and I was like, I'm going to make, we're gonna change the world, we're gonna change the system.

So I was like, what will I start with, I'll start with a peer support group. At that point I didn't know it was peer support, I just called it a support group. So you had this idea, you felt isolated in your experience and you wanted to connect with other people and you had this idea that you wanted to change the system and do something that helped other people not feel so alone.

Eilidh 03:46:

What were the next steps that you took to bring Living Warriors to life?

Nic 03:48:

So the first thing was actually really coming up with a clear idea as to, so I had to have clarity in my mind as to one, why I was doing this? Who was I doing it for? What was the purpose of it? And how did I want to, what were my values that went into this and how can I bring them to life?

And the next steps were, like, trying to work out how frequent I would want that, like, what the times would be, thinking about, you know, people's work schedules, like would it be afternoon or would it be evening,

what were the best evenings that would suit my schedule? But also like other people's.

And then I sort of made a whole list of places in Edinburgh that were open in the evening and kind of rang all of them to find out what their, like, not accommodation, what their rooms were, what their capacity was, what time were they open until? Did they have availability, what was the cost? That was a significant one. And yeah, just kind of like, went for it.

And then I went and put flyers like around town and email with like people and stuff like that. Oh, making a poster as well. I did that by hand. Anything else?

Eilidh 05:04:

So you've talked about values and the practical sort of side of things in terms of like venue. Do you want to talk a little bit about other people that you worked alongside in establishing the group or that you run the group with? And maybe a little bit about the money side of things, you know. How do you pay for the space and the facilities that you use?

Nic 05:31:

So when I first started it, it was just me and I was paying for stuff out of my own pocket, like I didn't have any funding. And I had my own things that were going on in my life and my personal life that actually ended up like, so I say that it blurred the boundaries, it didn't blur the boundaries, it's just that my, I didn't have the capacity to like have it firm and be fully

present with things just because my life was just chaotic. And it was really hard to like separate myself, which I'd had a really distinct boundary between this is Living Warriors and that's, you know, my stuff, even though there's like some fluidity between that. But I knew my role and then I had to take a break.

I had to put it on pause for a few years and then I had a discussion with a friend about meaning and what were meaningful things in my life. And actually it was like, in reflection, it was Living Warriors that gave me meaning and purpose. And then I was like, because I think I've been like, oh, I can't bring it back or I don't know how to bring it back or something. I had all these doubts and questions and stuff, just because of where I was at in my mental health. I just kind of decided, no, it's going to be good. I think people still want it and, but it needs to be different this time and it needs to be sustainable. And how it can be sustainable is through not just being myself.

So I went on, I wrote out a thing. I don't know, like a 'call out' to, it was through... Health and Mind have like their, kind of like, peer events. And there was one that we went to, I went to and I put it out there. And then Iona came like running over and was like, I want to be involved. And I was like, excellent, this is brilliant.

We applied for funding, so we became a constituted group. So there's like, if you want to like apply for funding, sometimes you need like bureaucratic stuff and like official documents, but Iona was really good and found stuff and then typed it up and like did things so it became a

constituted group. So that means we could apply for funding. And we applied for the Edinburgh Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. And we applied for a thousand pounds in our first year and we got that and then we've just been sort of renewing it every year just because that covers the basic costs of like room hire, like craft things, teas, coffees. We really like to have a lot of snacks, snacks, and different kinds of teas because it's important to, I don't know, it's just like a really nice bonding thing and we sometimes bring like some cakes and if we have, you know, certain celebratory events, then we'll bring some more stuff in.

Eilidh 08:32:

Oh, remind me, how long has Living Warriors been established for? So from your very first meeting, how long has that been?

Nic 08:39:

So it's 2017, I think it was like, maybe like January 2017? Eight years, yeah. eight years, yeah.

Eilidh 08:47:

So Nic, in your eight years of being part of Living Warriors, I was wondering if you have any learnings or insights or stuff that you've learned along the way, basically, that you think would be useful to share with people who might be at the very beginning of their peer support journey?

Nic 09:15:

Find your niche. Find your niche. Find how you want to run your sessions and be open to adapting them. So we've always had open discussion and creativity. That's always been a thing that we have. But I actually think that, because we do tend to forget this as facilitators and as people that are in a specific role, is that you're a peer as well, like it's your group too. And if you're having, maybe like a wobbly day or something like that, just be honest. You don't have to, like we're not perfect. And we went into this with a reason, you know, we're there as peers as well. We have the lived experience and having that authenticity is going to be helpful for other people in the group as well. Like you can still facilitate, but also still be somebody that is going through stuff.

And just experiment and explore how you want to do things. Like it's, you know, just because you have a peer support group, doesn't mean that you have to do the same thing every single time. Like you can be as creative as you want, you can mix and match your sessions and just find how you want to do them. So yeah, if there's something that you want to, if you have an idea, just go for it. Just do it.

Eilidh 10:30:

It's been really great chatting to you, Nic. Thank you so much for taking the time to share a little bit about your experience co-organising a peer support group. If you are watching this video and you would like to learn a little bit more about peer support, there's lots of free resources and more information available on the Scottish Recovery Network's 'Peer Recovery

Hub', which you can check out at PeerRecoveryHub.Net and once again, thanks to Nic.

Get in touch

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