

# Creating Hope With Peer Support

## Final reporting

### September 2025

Matter  
of Focus

Scottish  
Recovery  
Network



**A collaborative evaluation report with  
Matter of Focus created using Outnav**



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# Background

## About Creating Hope with Peer Support

### Introduction

Scottish Recovery Network is a national initiative promoting recovery approaches in mental health and the benefits of peer support. They offer free-to-access materials, training and development support for organisations and services, and connect people to share experiences and learning.

Following discussions with Scottish Government about the ways that peer support could contribute to the first 3-year Delivery Plan of Creating Hope Together, Scotland's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022-2032, the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project was designed to focus on building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention groups and organisations to provide peer support for those contemplating suicide or who have been affected or bereaved by suicide.

Creating Hope with Peer Support aligns with the vision, grounding principles and outcomes of Creating Hope Together by:

- Working with lived and living experience to ensure that communities are more aware of and responsive to suicidal behaviour and that there are supports available in their communities (whether of place or interest).
- Investing in community-based approaches to ensure that they can connect with others in the system and work together to prevent suicide and support those affected and bereaved by suicide.
- Investing in and developing an existing peer support approach or model in suicide prevention and support.

### Community-based peer support in suicide prevention

Scottish Recovery Network's ongoing work with people with lived experience has shown the demand for peer support to become a mainstream part of mental health services and supports. Peer support is generally understood to be a relationship of mutual support – people with similar life experiences offer each other support, particularly as they move through challenging or difficult experiences. Peer support exists in many different forms in mental health. The sharing of experiences and knowledge between people experiencing mental health challenges is not new and is increasingly well developed in self-help and mutual support groups.

There are a large number and wide range of groups supporting people experiencing mental health challenges across Scotland. A considerable number are founded in response to suicide and have a focus either on preventing suicide or providing support to those affected or bereaved by suicide. Many of these groups combine providing mutual or peer support with awareness-raising in their localities. These community-based groups provide a space for people to come together, share their experiences, explore wellbeing and work together to raise awareness of suicide prevention, wellbeing and recovery in their communities. Not all of these groups identify as peer support groups, but an increasing number do.

In the lead up to Creating Hope with Peer Support, various suicide prevention, support and awareness groups contacted Scottish Recovery Network for support and accessed their resources around peer support and recovery conversations. Based on this contact, Scottish Recovery Network estimated that there were then at least 80 community-based groups with a focus on suicide prevention and support in Scotland. The interest highlighted a desire from groups to improve and sustain the peer support they offered, as well as a need for more investment in learning and training for existing and new peer group facilitators to support people with conversations about suicide.

Through Creating Hope with Peer Support, Scottish Recovery Network has reached out to these community-based groups and worked to provide focused suicide prevention support. This has also deepened the Network's understanding of the range of groups active in communities, their activities, and the potential for further development and growth.

# Aims and objectives

Between 2022 and 2025, the Creating Hope with Peer Support project developed and delivered a structured programme to build peer support capacity among community-based suicide prevention groups.

The outcomes the project aimed to make a contribution towards were:

- Community-based suicide prevention and support groups provide available and sustainable peer support to communities of place and interest.
- The work of community-based suicide prevention and support groups is better understood, recognised and valued.
- Peer support groups and services are meaningfully involved in local decision making and better solutions are considered.

This was approached by co-designing a programme with community-based groups, to include the following elements:

- **Training and development opportunities** for existing and new community-based suicide prevention groups
- **The development of practical guides and materials** about peer support, peer group facilitation and recovery/lived experience story-sharing to support practice.
- **Networking events** to bring together community-based suicide prevention and support groups to share experiences and learning, exchange good practice and develop better connections.
- **Sharing learning** with Scottish Government and Suicide Prevention Leads in Health and Social Care Partnerships, seeking to build awareness of and confidence among mental health and other services in the capacity of community-based groups to provide appropriate and timely support for those contemplating suicide and affected or bereaved by suicide.

The pathways to impact laid out in this report track the development and impact of this work.

# Context for delivery

Understanding and working with context is key to delivering complex, people based initiatives, such as Creating Hope with Peer Support. At the beginning of the Creating Hope with Peer Support project, Scottish Recovery Network worked with Matter of Focus to conduct a context mapping exercise using the 'ISM' model. This was to help them understand the complexities of the environment in which this project would be working, which might influence the change it can make. They identified enablers of change and barriers to change, as laid out below, and developed the risks and project assumptions described in the next section for their awareness during project delivery.

The ISM is a tool developed by the Scottish Government, designed for policy makers and practitioners whose work ultimately aims to engage people and influence their behaviours in order to deliver improved outcomes. ISM is based on 'moving beyond the individual' to consider all the contexts that shape people's behaviours – the Individual, the Social and the Material. (More information is available at <https://www.matter-of-focus.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Matter-of-Focus-ISM-Guide.pdf>).

## Enablers of change

At the individual level, peer support groups are showing significant initiative, motivation and drive, with a huge depth and variety of collective knowledge and skills. There is significant emotional investment in the work from the leaders of the groups and organisations due to their lived experience. Scottish Recovery Network is also bringing the benefit of learning from experience from similar work (e.g., work with self-harm). We are not new to this; we are firm in our belief that peer support is fundamental. We are also confident and assertive in our ways of working and have good connections with a breadth of experience – we can reach across the sector and across national and local stakeholders.

At the social level, we know that there is trust in the Scottish Recovery Network as a conduit for the views of people with lived experience. There has been a gradual cultural shift in recent years, and peer support now feels safer for people to access as a stigma-free space. There are lots of partners involved with aligned visions. They may have different agendas, but compromise can be reached and the project can benefit from a range of opinions for how best to engage with organisations. We are able to point to other examples of where we have tailored our work to small, low-capacity organisations – e.g., recovery conversation cafes. As a result of the pandemic there has been significant third sector innovation and a shift towards digital peer support – we can respond to this to deliver change.

Materially, we are starting from a strong body of evidence which demonstrates the power of peer support and what works. Our peer values framework is established as a foundation, showing what peer support is and providing a set of guiding principles for peer support programmes. We are able to be less bureaucratic than other organisations working in the system, which enables us to act flexibly and deliver in

innovative ways. The groups we work with are also often funded by campaigning and fundraising activities, which means that they, too, have agency and control over how they are run. We benefit from having a communications lead, who can help us to share learning and showcase our work, acting as a catalyst for positive change.

## Barriers to change

As we work with individuals, we know we are starting from a place where peer support is under-valued and insufficiently recognised as a valid form of mental health support, and is sometimes perceived as an ‘airy fairy approach’. People may bring negative previous experiences of sharing mental health experiences; this or the widespread stigma around suicide and suicidal thoughts may prevent people from talking openly. This may be exacerbated by the misconception that suicide is somehow different or separate from mental health. In engaging with Scottish Recovery Network, people may also be suspicious of our funding from Scottish Government, and they may lack knowledge or trust in this.

Socially, we know that the medical model of health is dominant in guiding and structuring mental health support. Engagement with community groups is often viewed simplistically by statutory services as ‘people telling their story’. This also contributes to the perception of lived experience as being a ‘wildcard’ in professional contexts. In some health settings, peer support is perceived as unregulated and as a consequence is undervalued. The lack of trust in peer support within statutory services contributes to poor relationships across sectors.

In communities, groups often portray themselves as focused on suicide prevention or awareness-raising without highlighting the peer support aspects. Others do not recognise what they are doing as constituting suicide prevention. Messages around peer support and mental health risk being diluted by a focus on activities. E.g., football groups, art clubs. The language around recovery and suicide is used differently and can cause misunderstandings. Services are also often insufficiently people-focused, which hinders the delivery of meaningful values-based peer support.

There are inherent risk factors associated with working in suicide prevention – a culture of blame creates a fear of responsibility. The default escalation for suicide risk is to the police, which is not always the best support for the individual and can create problems in their relationship with services. This is a complex, multifaceted problem to tackle. There is a cultural desire for ‘quick fixes’ to complex problems which extends to mental health and recovery.

In material terms, community groups are often in challenging situations. There is often a lack of staff capacity in teams and across third sector organisations, and staff are not always given sufficient time and space for reflective practice. A disparity in resource allocation exists between local and national organisations. ‘Big players’ get far higher levels of funding, whilst smaller groups often don’t have the time or resources to access higher levels of funding. The funding landscape favours short-term work and often restricts funding to a specific activity. It is harder to demonstrate the impact of this complex work over a short time period and this hinders innovation. Organisational policies often dictate that a person must be

referred to another service if they talk about suicide – this can disrupt the development of meaningful relationships between services and individuals.

For Scottish Recovery Network itself, the varying structures of groups, organisations, and structures in different local areas can be challenging and time-consuming to navigate. There can be additional barriers to working with remote and rural communities, e.g., digital exclusion and transport. We have better networks where we have staff, and we can build on this. Inadequate data and information sharing means that there can be a lack of valuable data. Organisations also do not always know about Scottish Recovery Network, especially small, low-capacity organisations.

The ways in which these contextual factors may shape and influence the work of Creating Hope with Peer Support has been captured in the Risks and Assumptions underpinning the evaluation of the programme, outlined in a later section of this report.

# Approach to this work

Scottish Recovery Network commissioned Matter of Focus in 2023 to support the evaluation of the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project. The Matter of Focus approach is a theory-based method for outcome monitoring, evaluation, learning, and improvement, drawing on contribution analysis. This approach uses a logical and collaborative process, starting with participatory workshops and conversations to develop an outcome map (or theory of change).

The outcome map sets out how the CHPS project works, who it works with, the changes it expects to see, and the wider outcomes it aims to influence. It also captures the context in which the project operates and the conditions required for change. This process included:

1. Identifying key change mechanisms (shown as pathways) that explain how the project makes a difference.
2. Developing a data collection plan that draws on existing information and captures new data for evaluation.
3. Reviewing and analysing evidence systematically against each stage of the outcome map.
4. Summarising key findings to build a credible contribution story.

Two primary change mechanisms emerged: **building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention and support groups**, enabling communities to provide sustainable, confident peer support based on shared values and understanding; and **raising the profile of peer support and influencing the system**, working to increase awareness, confidence, and recognition of peer support so it becomes integral to suicide prevention planning, funding, and delivery.

# Methodology and about this report

This evaluation was a hybrid collaboration between Scottish Recovery Network and Matter of Focus. As the outcome map and pathways were developed, the Scottish Recovery team began using OutNav – Matter of Focus’s software for outcome evaluation – to embed the approach in their own practice. Matter of Focus provided additional support with data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The report draws on embedded evaluation work undertaken by the CHPS team, including activity data, stakeholder engagement information, and feedback. Matter of Focus complemented this by collecting primary data, facilitating a collective analysis session with the Scottish Recovery Network, and applying an external evaluator perspective based on wider experience of similar initiatives.

## Data Collection

Matter of Focus carried out 15 qualitative interviews across four stakeholder groups:

1. Cohort 1: Participants involved in resource co-design (3 interviews)
2. Cohort 2: Attendees of CHPS workshops (5 interviews)
3. Cohort 3: Peer and support workers attending local and national learning and networking events (3 interviews)
4. Cohort 4: Stakeholders engaged in suicide prevention action planning at local and national levels (4 interviews)

Interview transcripts were thematically analysed to assess progress towards outcomes and system change. A facilitated collective analysis session with project staff gathered experiential evidence and views, with pathway progress colour-coded collectively by Scottish Recovery Network and Matter of Focus team members.

Finally, this report was produced in OutNav, synthesising Scottish Recovery Network’s embedded evaluation findings and adding independent insights from Matter of Focus as evaluators experienced in supporting similar organisations and initiatives.

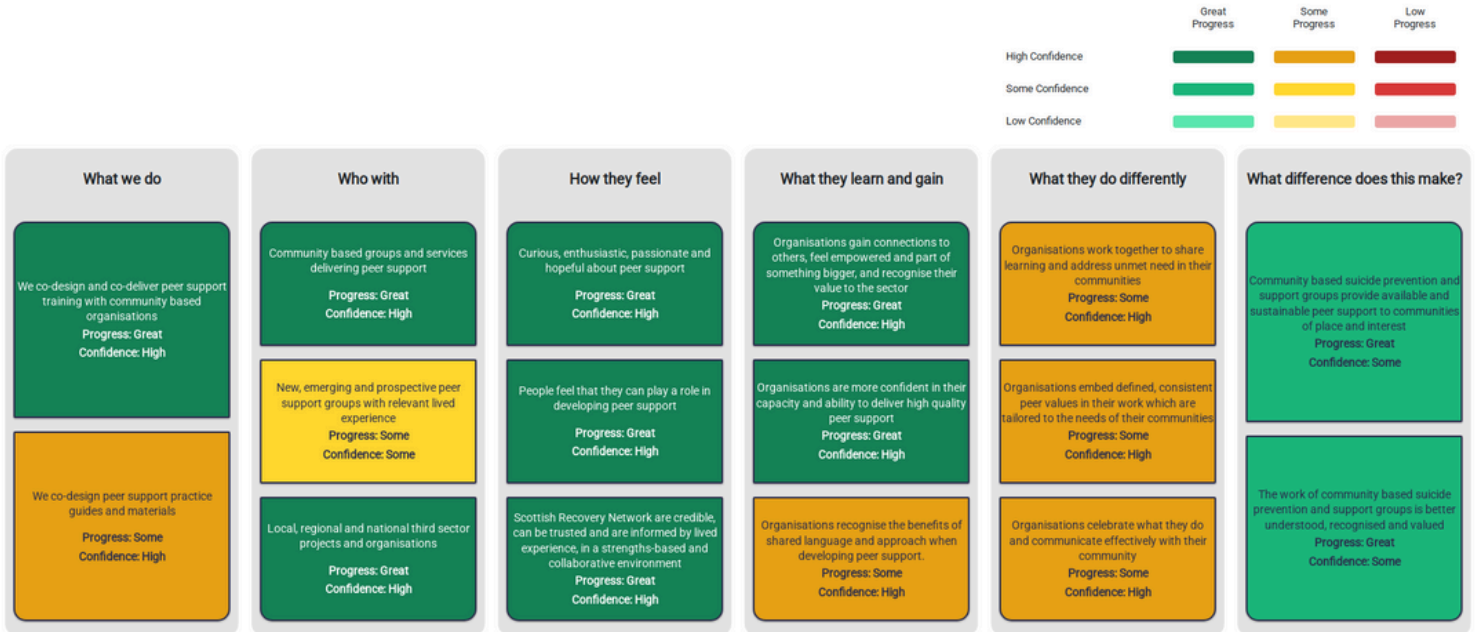
# Our pathways

The work of Creating Hope with Peer Support has two different evaluation pathways.

1. Building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention and support groups
2. Raising the profile of peer support and influencing the system



# Building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention and support groups - pathway progress



# Building the capacity of community-based suicide prevention and support groups - summary findings

## What we do



As described in the introduction, groups supporting mental health recovery and providing support to people affected by suicide were actively seeking capacity building support at the beginning of the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project. To respond to this, Scottish Recovery Network drew on its existing relationships with established suicide prevention peer support groups and co-designed the Creating Hope with Peer Support resource. This was published, and has since been delivered as a series of workshops for and in partnership with various local community groups, organisations and services to develop their understanding and their capacity to provide peer support to people affected by suicide.

The initial co-design process for the resource and training began with an online information session for interested groups, and developed through regional focus groups, pilot training, and then co-delivered training with Man On! Inverclyde and Neil's Hugs Foundation. Each stage involved groups and organisations already delivering peer support for people affected by suicide. The process enabled the CHPS project team to build their understanding of what was important to community peer support groups, the approaches they used, and the support they wanted to see developed. Discussions highlighted the importance of making peer support easily accessible; self-care and boundaries for peer supporters; and an interest in guidance on creating safe spaces and facilitating groups. It also clearly showed the importance of a relational way of working. As well as informing the development of the resource, the co-design process began facilitating new connections and strengthening networks. The resource was first published in 2024, and then reviewed with feedback from the co-design stakeholders in 2025.

The impact interviews conducted by Matter of Focus found that those who were involved in the co-design stage felt that the CHPS resource reflected the language, flexibility and collaborative ethos of the input from people with lived experience to a degree that other approaches and resources do not. They were confident that the CHPS resource provided a practical way for people in peer support roles to build confidence and skill in talking about suicide in a way that aligns with peer values. They saw CHPS as a project that is empowering people to act, not just observe, and to better understand a role for non-professionals in crisis support. There was some reflection from this group and from an impact interviewee in a national strategic role that they would have liked more time and input into the review of the resource, which led to significant changes, and that one group would have valued the opportunity to write their case study example in their own words.

The CHPS resource is publicly available to access. The project team has co-delivered workshops with 18 groups across Scotland, reaching more than 320 people who have received the training resource. Over 130 of these individuals have actively taken part in the workshops. Additional workshops have already been confirmed, with more in the planning stages at the time of writing. The impact interviews with workshop participants found that they appreciated Scottish Recovery Network's facilitation of these workshops for its welcoming, informal, conversational style that encouraged participation and learning from each other.



**Actually that group that day, like I came away feeling totally like it was such a success. It was great. It was was everything I wanted it to be. It was so good**

Peer support group member and CHPS workshop participant

In feedback to the CHPS team, one co-delivery partner reflected:



**"[The workshop process] was a really good experience and I feel was a hands on way to learn for both my self and volunteers attending. I feel the co-delivery method works well as it allows trainers to support each other well and also brings in new perspectives to how you could delivery the training when you are planning it."**

Creating Hope with Peer Support Co-delivery Partner

Originally, there was a plan to provide online check-in sessions for people using the CHPS resource to deliver their own training sessions. However, having found it difficult to establish who was running training among the people who have downloaded the resource, the project plan was adapted to include open online events similar to learning and networking events to reach people across Scotland. Several people

mentioned an interest in follow-up sessions during the impact interviews, so it may be that there is greater appetite for this in future among people who have attended the workshops rather than those who have downloaded the resource online.

Alongside the training resource, the CHPS project had also planned to develop practice guides showing the variety of good practice approaches to suicide prevention to support others with new ideas. These have taken longer to develop than first planned, with the first one on 'Creating Safe Spaces' reaching the design stage in April 2025 and recently published, and another two in progress. CHPS plans to publish these across 2025 in connection with peer support events, which will help them reach their audience and provide an opportunity to gather initial feedback.

In summary, the CHPS activities to build the capacity of community-based suicide prevention and support groups have been delivered flexibly in response to the changing context. The project has co-produced a high-quality training resource, and tested its use in practice through a series of workshops that have been delivered in line with Scottish Recovery Network's approach and values. This will be further supported by the publication of the practice guides through 2025.

## Who with

In their engagement around Creating Hope With Peer Support (CHPS), the project team has been intentional about ensuring events and workshop opportunities are not tied to Scotland's Central Belt, but are accessible to groups delivering peer support across the whole of Scotland. More than 320 people have been sent the training resource and over 130 have taken part in the workshops. The team have tracked events, workshops, and contacts by geography, and have reached 16 of the 32 local authority areas across 18 workshops. They reflected positively on this as a worthy proportion given the size of their team and the time to deliver so far.

Through CHPS, Scottish Recovery Network has also built relationships with local Suicide Prevention Leads, Third Sector Interfaces, and local and national peer groups and services, and has been contacted by 20 different groups for support to deliver the CHPS workshop. Co-delivering the workshops brought local peer support groups together and has enabled the CHPS project to reach community-based groups that were not previously connected to Scottish Recovery Network. One interviewee described how the workshop had brought three local groups together into what has become a supportive local network, saying:



"It was quite exciting because it was like it felt like it was one of the first peer support things that had happened in West Lothian that we were aware of."

Peer support group member and workshop co-organiser

For the stakeholder group of new and prospective peer support groups - a priority for Suicide Prevention Scotland and its focus on inequalities - CHPS was able to make the most of being located with Scottish Recovery Network by connecting new and prospective peer support groups to its wider resources, events and development support. While CHPS's main objective is focused on established peer support groups, the project also provided new individuals or burgeoning groups support through CHPS Learning and Networking event and workshop opportunities. CHPS engaged with fewer 'new' groups, hence the acknowledgement of 'some' progress, but in fact, many of the participating groups can be described as emerging or developing groups. One impact interviewee talked about how the CHPS workshops had provided the momentum for her group to formalise, start to seek funding, and create a constitution.

'New' groups may be those that are new to peer support, or who have not defined themselves as a peer support group before despite doing the work in some form, or have not focused specifically on suicide prevention. For example, the project team reflections highlighted examples of how people working in drug and alcohol support initially viewed themselves as unable to work with suicidality, thinking they needed to escalate it to health professionals. However, after engaging with the CHPS, they later felt able to engage support people with suicidality using peer approaches.

Overall, CHPS has received excellent engagement, and has been proactive in reaching out and building connections across a diverse range of groups and geographical areas. The CHPS team were clear that their approach has intentionally not been about creating large numbers of new groups, more about connecting and building overall capacity. In this, they have succeeded well in the time available, having taken time for high-quality co-design, which has meant that workshops have only been running since March 2024.

## How they feel

The way that people feel about Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS), as a community development initiative aiming to build confidence, connections and capacity, is central to the project's ability to achieve its aims. The project team has found that feedback from people participating in CHPS workshops has been consistently positive, and demonstrates that people are seeing how peer support can play a part in suicide prevention. The workshop delivery style is helping people to recognise the knowledge and expertise they already have:

- "[I feel] energised, enthusiastic, confident. The content of the facilitation of the course was amazing – facilitators managed the balance between being laid back and authoritative, knowledgeable and valuing the knowledge in the room."
- "I feel uplifted and validated. I feel proud to be a peer support worker and appreciated the opportunity to meet other peer support workers especially because I am new at the NHS."
- "I found the day very informative and I learned a lot from the other attendees contributions, sharing their experience and hope. It reinforced for me a lot of the

knowledge around peer support that I already possess but also taught me new skills/strategies."

This was reinforced by the impact interviews with workshop participants conducted by Matter of Focus, which reflected curiosity, passion and hope around peer support. Participants described their groups coming away with more confidence in their abilities to support people in conversations around suicide where they might previously have felt the need to hold back, and more enthused for their group's development and activities.

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**"Everybody has walked away with a little bit more confidence in how we can support people for sure...people can think 'I know the wording to use and the behaviours to project to make somebody feel comfortable to have these discussions.'"**

Peer support group member and workshop participant

**"Before, I just felt on my own in the group kind of going 'peer support, peer support, peer support'. [This has brought us to] the others kind of getting on board... It was like it sparked other people into action."**

Peer support group member and workshop co-organiser

It was less clear from the interviews that people felt they could play a role in shaping the wider peer support landscape, despite a range of offers to host and facilitate training to reach a wider audience. However, the project team reflected on a sense of something having changed since the start of the project, with people increasingly identifying peer support as a collective endeavour and feeling part of something bigger.

The credibility of the CHPS project with peer support groups in their local areas is shown by the project's success in engaging with so many, particularly in bringing together the co-design group of organisations with existing expertise in suicide prevention. They valued the range of perspectives at the table and the way that Scottish Recovery Network drew on their collective knowledge to create something that they felt could affect change. One participant in the co-design sessions, interviewed by Matter of Focus, said,

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**"[Scottish Recovery Network] take a very human approach and they understand what peer work is at their core. I just felt very welcome. Like, ok this is a space we can work from. We can actually make change."**

Peer support group member participant in resource co-design

The Creating Hope with Peer Support project's approach to engagement is focused on respect, validation and celebration, and convening and sharing learning from multiple

perspectives and expertise. This approach underpins how activities with groups and services are facilitated. Evidence from the CHPS project team's reflections, the project's collated data and evidence, and from the stakeholders interviewed by Matter of Focus all suggest the project's success in this approach, contributing to stakeholders feeling curious and enthusiastic, recognising their role, and trusting Scottish Recovery Network.

## What they learn and gain

From the perspective of the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project team, the two main takeaways expressed by people who attended the workshops and networking events were new connections and increased confidence. This was supported by the feedback they gathered: many participants spoke about meeting groups they were not previously aware existed, and some reported back their new connections and collaborations following the events.

Local Suicide Prevention Leads have also shared with the CHPS team that services and groups have reached out to them expressing interest in being a part of the local suicide prevention steering groups. This can be interpreted as people gaining a sense of empowerment from their participation in the CHPS workshops and events and the desire to be a part of something bigger, with confidence in what they have to offer in such roles. During the impact interviews with the Matter of Focus team, participants referred to CHPS events as opportunities for practicing and building their skills through peer learning. The project team suggested that this confidence includes the capacity to talk about peer support as a skilled, structured, values-based practice.



"I have a bit more confidence now that if there's a peer support group set up then it will have thought about the safeguarding procedure and the governance and things like that, which I might have previously had concerns about, and that there is support for them if things are proving difficult for that group."

Member of the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective

Interviewees at a strategic level within Suicide Prevention Delivery Collective also highlighted the project's role in bolstering the capacity of peer support groups, particularly in supporting them to develop with regards to governance and safeguarding, which is leading to greater credibility in their engagement with statutory services:

The project team noted some progress around organisations recognising the benefits of a shared language and approach in relation to peer support, highlighting "small but significant changes in language and emphasis when discussing peer support". One workshop participant interviewed by Matter of Focus, who came from a community support background and had discovered peer support picked this out as one of her key learnings:



**"Now, instead of saying 'we're helping them' or 'we're doing things for them' they mention peer support. It's a different language...[it's] important because we're using the language that's in [the training and resources], it means when you're using that language, you're using that to somebody else, and they'll use that to somebody else, so we're all speaking the same language."**

Peer support group member and workshop participant

However, this has not come through across the board. From an evaluation perspective, this outcome is likely to take more time to show strong progress. Achieving a 'great' rating will depend on evidencing this change across a wider population, as changes in language - and the adoption of a shared language and approach - are key indicators of broader cultural change.

## What they do differently

Both the Matter of Focus fieldwork and the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project team identified examples of organisations working together to share learning and address unmet need in their communities since taking part in the project. For example, in West Lothian, Scottish Recovery Network co-facilitated a session for a support group that was part of the Domestic Abuse and Violence service alongside Neil's Hugs Foundation. Neil's Hugs Foundation's support for the workshop enabled smaller groups and services to participate and benefit; some are now working through further peer training.

The impact interviewees found clear evidence that people who engaged with CHPS at all levels valued the new connections and range of perspectives. There were some examples of groups signposting to each other's support or joining together in fundraising activities and community events, but in the main, these new connections had not yet developed into collaborative working. The project team reflected that this initial phase of CHPS has set the foundation for what happens next. It has created the opportunity for new relationships to be built across a geographically dispersed sector of small groups and organisations. To have confidently made 'some' progress in this area is a significant achievement, and there is ambition within Scottish Recovery Network to continue to develop this.



**"It totally changed the way I deliver my support and it's working...if you walk alongside them and they're doing it, they will feel that empowerment that they weren't feeling before, so from that it creates strength."**

Peer support group member and workshop participant

Impact interviews with workshop participants also found that local groups were delivering peer support differently as a result of their learning. One group specifically highlighted the development of their understanding of peer support from "tea and a chat" with a "fixing role" towards supporting people on their own journey, which demonstrates that the design of the resource and workshops can successfully support people to make this shift:

The interview participants reported that they are personally more comfortable to speak with people who are struggling, and they see evidence of other members of their groups being more willing to do the same. The project team are finding that the groups they connect with are more willing to identify as 'peer support groups' and are getting better at articulating peer values. However, embedding this change in ways of working will take time. At this stage, we are seeing the evidence that this approach can work to create the change, and learning about how this is happening, rather than being able to assess the extent to which it is working across the board.

The way that organisations celebrate and communicate about what they do was considered one of the most challenging things to evidence by the project team. Impact interviews found some evidence of workshop participants thinking more about how they communicate with the community and where they can reach people with different activities, but this was not systematic or consistent. Given the strong evidence that people are growing in confidence talking about peer support as a valuable, non-medical source of support for people, it follows that over time, awareness in local communities will build.

### **What difference does this make?**

Overall, the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) capacity-building work has made good progress towards both of the outcomes it was designed to influence. In their reflective discussion, the project team was clear about situating this as the short- to medium-term impact of work that is aiming to create a long-term shift in language and perceptions around peer support. Through the CHPS project, the team has delivered activities and is seeing change that felt ambitious at the time of planning three years ago. Without the CHPS capacity-building work, they felt that there would still be many groups doing good work, but it would not be unified into a change process.

The impact interviews conducted by Matter of Focus discussed experiences of that change process with members of just four of the groups that have participated in CHPS workshops. Within those examples, there was evidence of community-based suicide prevention and support groups making their peer support offer more available and sustainable for the communities around them. One group has been prompted and supported to formalise, creating a constitution and a governance structure so they can seek funding and grow their work, following the enthusiasm and engagement prompted by their involvement in CHPS. Another has thought about its practice and is developing its model away from 'fixing' things for people in a way that takes away their choice and control, and places unsustainable demands on peer supporters' energies and sense of responsibility. The other two are using the

connections with other groups made through the workshops to host community events and enhance their community signposting for people.

Similarly, these interviews contained evidence of the work of community-based suicide prevention and support groups being better understood, recognised and valued. One group who took part in the workshops have found that naming themselves as a peer support group has led to them being taken more seriously by formal services; they are now able to make and receive referrals in a way they could not do before. Another has the local football club actively integrating mental health support into its activities and hosting regular mental health groups influenced by peer support training. The interviewee, who had helped organise it, believed that this had encouraged more open and empathetic community responses around mental health and suicide, with people less likely to take a "not my problem" attitude. The range of people joining the CHPS learning and networking groups has also included significant numbers of attendees from the public sector, who, in their feedback, have valued the range of perspectives and approaches.

One of the interviewees called out the impact for them and their group explicitly:



**"[Without CHPS] I would have been chasing my tail a wee bit...Would the group be as powerful as where it is now? No. Could I be as happy with what I'm delivering? No, I don't think so."**

Peer support group member and workshop participant

Given that only a small proportion of CHPS participants have been interviewed in depth, it is logical to conclude that there will be other examples of similar impact that has strengthened the community around peer support. The progress made validates the project's original assumption that there is significant initiative, motivation and drive from peer support groups in this area, with depth and variety of collective knowledge and skills to share.

# Raising the profile of peer support and influencing the system - pathway progress



# Raising the profile of peer support and influencing the system - summary findings

## What we do

In a context in which peer support is often undervalued, has low visibility, or is insufficiently recognised as a valid form of suicide prevention work or mental health support, Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) has been an important initiative that has worked to raise its local and national profile. It has focused on three 'impact levers': sharing what's possible, supportive localised facilitation, and intentional network building. These levers helped to ensure Creating Hope with Peer Support's efforts remained grounded in local realities while contributing to a broader, strategic movement for change across Scotland.

**Local events:** A key element of the Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) project has been to provide inclusive, welcoming spaces where individuals, services, and organisations can come together to connect, learn, and reflect on suicide prevention. These events have placed a strong emphasis on the voices of people with lived and living experience of suicide, recognising their insights as central to shaping better support.

Over the past year, CHPS hosted a series of regional networking and learning events across a diverse range of Scottish communities in rural, remote, and urban contexts. Each event was delivered in partnership with local organisations, community groups, and suicide prevention leads, ensuring that learning and connections were relevant and responsive to local needs. The events helped surface local strengths, support network building, and encouraged conversations about how peer support can make a meaningful difference in suicide prevention efforts.

Scottish Recovery Network also regularly participates in events hosted by other networks and organisations to raise the profile and build understanding of peer support, including collaborating with Penumbra and Sam's Café Fife to showcase peer support in services and community settings.

**National events and awareness raising:** To promote peer support and its role in suicide prevention at a national level, Scottish Recovery Network have:

- Co-delivered a national event, 'The Power of Lived Experience' with the Suicide Prevention Scotland Lived Experience Panel and members of the United to Prevent Suicide Movement members (Autumn 2023).
- Delivered a workshop at the Time, Space, Compassion and Mental Health Unscheduled Care event,
- Contributed to several editions of the Suicide Prevention Scotland newsletter and the Creating Hope podcast.

- Leading a session at the Creating Hope Together Conference 2025, focused on challenging the misconceptions of peer support drawing on recurring themes from the CHPS workshops.
- 



- Featured in a published article in The Scotsman: “Peer support has a vital role to play in suicide prevention, but misconceptions are getting in the way.
- Been featured on the Happy n Healthy CamGlen Radio Show discussing the Creating Hope with Peer Support project

A highlight was the Ministerial visit from Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, who met with peer support workers as part of the project. She heard first-hand how people use their lived experience to support others in recovery from suicidal crisis, highlighting peer support as a practice grounded in mutual understanding and connection. The visit received national media coverage, including on STV news.

All of these events and engagements are taken as opportunities to showcase and celebrate peer support in practice, demonstrating the range of groups and organisations that are using this approach. Scottish Recovery Network have highlighted stories of successful peer support from groups like Living Warriors, Neil's Hugs, Hope Point and Andy's Man Club throughout their communication and engagement.

Through this work, Creating Hope with Peer Support is building momentum and connections, creating the opportunity for organisations to work more closely together or form joint projects in their local areas. The impact interviews conducted by Matter of Focus showed an appreciation among participants of learning and networking events of the Scottish Recovery Network team's approach and skill in facilitating this space. The format was understood to be helpful in mixing people up and creating an informal space of open conversation, enabling people to make new connections and discover new groups and perspectives they may not have been aware of, creating a sense of being part of something bigger. An interviewee who attended a learning and networking event commended the way the event was designed and run, which made it possible for people with lived experience to share freely, including where their perspectives might be challenging or uncomfortable:



"I felt there was a freshness about it. I thought it was just going to be bringing people together...[but] there was a kind of process we were engaged in when I walked into the room...I was really pleased that the first communication after it was to say 'We're taking stock of what we heard...I thought it was a really good holding ground for people to share and see what the needs are.'

Participant in a learning and networking event

The Scottish Recovery Network team have received positive feedback from the leaders of well-established peer support groups about the tone of the events, which feel like they always have meaningful purpose, even if it is just to connect. A member of the Scottish Recovery Network team reflected on a recent success from an open workshop in Aberdeen, where three participants connected and expressed interest in collaborating together further in the local area.

CHPS's activities have exceeded the project team's expectations and extended beyond the scope of the original project plan. They have successfully delivered the planned events and engagement activities and gone beyond to reach a wider audience. This has included the local and national groups across the public and third sector that they aimed to reach, as well as a public audience through national media. For example, CHPS helped Suicide Prevention Scotland to connect with peer services and to produce a short film featuring people with lived experience of suicide as part of the new national campaign, 'What if'. The focus of the film is to encourage and normalise talking about suicide.

Overall, the CHPS project has delivered a range of network-building and influencing activities to a high standard, taking an intentional community development approach to the way it works with people. This is well-evidenced and has laid strong foundations for future work in this area.

## Who with

One of the aims of Creating Hope with Peer Support (CHPS) is for the work of community-based suicide prevention and support groups to be better understood, recognised and valued. For this to be possible, engaging with a broad range of people at every level has been essential.



The project has partnered with and highlighted a range of peer-led services across Scotland, such as Mindspace, Mikeysline, Hope Point, Families in Trauma, and SWAN Scotland, among many others, to demonstrate the flexibility of peer support and its value across different communities – particularly those at higher risk of suicide. The CHPS team has met with the Scottish Refugee Council and the Mental Health Foundation to explore how peer support can be effectively tailored to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. These discussions are ongoing.

CHPS's engagement with and contributions to the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective were particularly noted in the preparations for the national conference, with a key aim of increasing its inclusivity and interactivity. The project suggested alternatives to traditional presentations, such as speed presentations, to ensure greater participation from people with lived experience, and the Creating Hope with Peer Support session on peer support within the LGBTQIA+ community was well-attended. The CHPS project team and the Scottish Recovery Network's Director have been invited to speak at local Suicide Prevention Steering Groups, the national Building Connections meetings, and the National Suicide Prevention Network meetings. CHPS also engaged with nine Local Suicide Prevention Leads, from the Scottish Borders to Shetland, as part of coordinating and delivering regional learning and networking events.

The CHPS project team is proud of the range of individuals and organisations they have collaborated with so far and is committed to building on this work in the year ahead. Priorities for third sector projects and organisations in 2025 include:

- National mental health service providers
- Services that currently do not offer peer support for people affected by suicide
- Community groups and services working with high-risk populations
- Ongoing engagement with the Lived and Living Experience Panel

In the collective evaluation session facilitated by Matter of Focus, project staff described engagement with key stakeholder groups positively. Across the work, the team have observed good levels of engagement, including proactive contact from groups wanting to participate, and a general willingness to contribute to the various learning and sharing events. Attendance rates have exceeded expectations, especially for free, informal events. Engagement from local suicide prevention leads

has also been better than the team anticipated, suggesting good alignment in strategic aims and objectives.

A reflection from the CHPS team was that taking an appreciative, strengths-based approach to their influencing engagements across the system was working well, noting:



" [Our] approach of showcasing those engaged in peer support to support clear messages and a focus on what's possible, rather than what's wrong, has helped us start to carve a space in the [Suicide Prevention Scotland] Delivery Collective and policy landscape".

Creating Hope with Peer Support project team member

In reaching out to stakeholders to invite them to participate in the evaluative interviews, Matter of Focus received warm responses from across the various groups, which in itself suggests that engagement has been working well. This was particularly true for the stakeholders engaged in suicide prevention action planning in national and local strategic roles. The proportion of people at this level willing to prioritise time for the interview was a positive reflection on their investment in the Creating Hope with Peer Support project and its involvement in the national strategic efforts. One of these strategic stakeholders described the CHPS project as "popping up all over the place". She felt the engagement has struck the right balance of being present and approachable, adding:



"They seem to be doing an excellent job in being present, but not in a pushy way - 'we're here if you want us'."

CEO of a national charity providing peer support

Matter of Focus did not interview any of the local suicide prevention leads, but one of the strategic stakeholders reflected that the local suicide prevention landscape can be difficult to navigate because areas operate so differently. She praised CHPS for the way it has reached out, and suggested that CHPS might be able to access more national-level support to help broker more of these relationships in the future.

CHPS is able to show that it has engaged successfully with people across local areas, regions, and nationally to raise the profile of peer support. It has stepped into a connecting role that is bringing together people engaged in and interested in peer support. While this has been important in consolidating the existing community, the project team reflected an awareness that to reach a point where peer support is integrated into mainstream support services, they will need to reach wider still with their partnership working to reach the minds they need to change, and avoid speaking only to their own 'echo chamber'. The work to build the community around

peer support for suicide prevention will be important in beginning to influence this wider audience.

## How they feel

Building community around peer support for suicide prevention requires more than making connections; the way that people engage with CHPS is essential to its success in building partnership, credibility and influence.

As part of the collective evaluation session facilitated by Matter of Focus, the CHPS project team reflected their observation of a growing recognition of peer support, its value and its potential impact in relation to suicide prevention. Participants of the project's workshops and events often feedback that they feel more hopeful, energised, and confident afterwards, with many going on to say they now know they are not alone in how they view peer support's role and value.

Feedback from the Matter of Focus interviews with stakeholders supports the team's impressions. There was a strong sense from interviewees that they view Scottish Recovery Network as playing a key role in this space and stepping into what would otherwise be a gap in support, connection and expertise. Stakeholders across the system, from local group leaders to national policy leads, thought that CHPS collaborated and built partnership well, and organised events that enabled participants to speak honestly and reflect as deeply as they felt comfortable to. These open, inclusive spaces also helped build trust in Scottish Recovery Network. For example, as one interviewee described her experience of a CHPS learning and sharing event, she explained how she felt the event environment supported strengths-based, collaborative conversations to emerge more naturally amongst attendees.



**"Everybody has got a story and something to say and thoughts and opinions. The fact that that was incorporated [into the event] allows that to come out because...when things are more rigid, you don't feel that you're able to voice what you're thinking at the same time."**

Participant in a learning and networking event

Because Creating Hope with Peer Support clearly and visibly prioritised lived and living experience across its engagements and events, attendees trusted that it could provide inclusive spaces for people with lived experience and that lived experience was foundational. Among the interviewees representing the local groups attending the workshops and learning and networking events, there was clear appetite for more events, more training, more depth. They were happy to acknowledge that engaging with CHPS is helping them do their work.

Interviewees who participated from a national perspective also took a positive view of CHPS and the way that the project team are working as part of the Creating Hope

Together Delivery Collective. One stakeholder, in a lead strategic role in Suicide Prevention Scotland, felt that Scottish Recovery Network, as a whole and including its director, is a trusted voice for lived experience and peer support, with a grounding in both the research and experience. They referenced other areas of Scottish Recovery Network's work, saying that as a whole:

"[They] do a great job of bringing in the voice of lived experience [or] questioning why that voice isn't in the room...it's never challenge for the sake of [it], it's always challenge from a well-informed [place]...constructive challenge."

Member of the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective

This was a general perspective on Scottish Recovery Network, but inclusive of CHPS, and shows that Scottish Recovery Network have brought their existing credibility in peer support into the suicide prevention world.

"You had a real sense that they've got a plan and they're delivering it. There was a confidence there - without arrogance - that these guys know what they're about."

CEO of a national charity providing peer support

Another interviewee in a decision-making role at a national organisation underlined the trust built up by the CHPS project:

While people's responses to their engagement with CHPS was generally positive and constructive, CHPS project team reflections also highlighted that significant work is still needed to challenge systemic pressures and assumptions that undervalue lived experience and peer support. The project is offering a focused programme of activities that clearly demonstrated how peer support works and provides stakeholders with opportunities to be visibly engaging with and valuing lived experience. However, continued progress depends on building stakeholders' ongoing trust in the CHPS work of the Scottish Recovery Network and helping them see how peer support can benefit their own work.

## What they learn and gain

For participants in the local and regional learning and networking groups, the greatest gain was new connections across geographies and sectors, in a non-hierarchical environment, which introduced them to new perspectives on peer support. These events were seen as one of the few opportunities for people across

geographies to meet, with many local areas not having a strong network of their own for peer support. The stakeholders gained a sense of community and an increased awareness of the power and growing profile of peer support, building confidence in the work that they do, and this is reflected in the event feedback that the CHPS project team have gathered over the course of the last two years.



**"To empower other organisations who have the knowledge and experience to know that they can actually do it themselves...it's just about them...getting past their fear about how to do it..."**

**...I had never [before] thought, 'wait a minute, I'm CEO of this organisation, and that [in government working groups] actually is where I can have an even stronger voice."**

CEO of a peer-led organisation

One of the impact interviewees, who is the Chief Executive of a peer-led organisation, described the CHPS events as a tool for empowerment, helping people overcome fear and the perceived complexity of promoting peer support. She confirmed the impact of the learning and networking events on her own thinking, having realised following her conversations there that she could take a role in being a voice for peer support.



**"On reflection, it's actually quite a big thing to have done...I forget that these are big people who are actually listening. And she did listen, which was the most important part, she did seem to care."**

Peer support worker

The CHPS project team reflected on their sense that the Ministerial visit was a "pivot point" for the people who were involved; people saw themselves differently after that, becoming spokespeople for peer support. This is supported by one of the impact interviewees who took part in the discussion with Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing Maree Todd, who said,

The networking events also included people in local connecting and public sector roles, who gained an understanding of the range and depth of peer support available. In Annan, the Scottish Recovery Network are aware of multiple attendees reaching out to the services that were showcased to see how they can more effectively signpost people to the support available. This was also raised in the interviews with Matter of Focus, where a Community Link Worker credited the event with her much stronger knowledge of local community-based services, which she has been signposting people towards.

Reflections from the Creating Hope with Peer Support project team also underlined the progress made in increasing the profile and recognition of peer support by decision-makers at local and national levels. This was particularly around creating a

more visible link between peer support and suicide prevention, and challenging misconceptions, such as peer support being too high risk. Both CHPS staff and impact interviewees at the strategic level perceived subtle changes in language and the conversations that are taking place. One interviewee suggested that local suicide prevention leads are becoming more aware of where peer support can fit in and how to advocate for it, and that there may also be a sense of relief that, in CHPS, there is a source of expert advice in this area that they can refer to.

However, this learning is cumulative and difficult to firmly evidence. Local areas are all at different stages in their suicide prevention work, and some are likely to have a higher awareness of peer support than others. Impact interviewees within the Suicide Prevention Delivery Collective were divided on the extent to which there is a culture shift at a national level. One interviewee suggested there was excellent buy-in to peer support approaches, with everyone understanding the benefit and impact, where another acknowledged a gap in strategic connection between the isolation and loneliness they are seeking to tackle and building community support via peer models.



**"There's lots of stuff that I feel like peer support could tick the box for but we don't talk about it much."**

Member of the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective

CHPS is playing a vital role in elevating the credibility and perceived value of peer support in Scotland. At local level, CHPS has made critical progress in increasing peer support groups' confidence and visibility, justifying the assessment of positive progress. At national level, there is early evidence of a shift in from peer support being perceived as informal or supplementary to being recognised as integral to person-centred care and support. However, more time will be needed to consolidate and further embed this learning, and be fully confident of its effect.

## What they do differently

There is some evidence that local decision makers and leads are progressively becoming more engaged with co-ordinating peer support and involving peer support groups in local work. Feedback from the learning and networking sessions about what participants plan to do differently suggests the intentions are there to make these links, although it was not possible to assess how many had translated into tangible actions.

- "Thanks for yesterday, [it] was great being in a room with a lot of like-minded people. We have already looked to invite one of the organisations who were present yesterday in for a chat to see what we can do together."
- "Ensure we build on this event in our local delivery plan – strengthen our community in Dundee around support and suicide prevention."

- “Taking back to clinical colleagues and rethink how we can collaborate with peer support and statutory services.”
- “Connecting with partners to develop peer recovery provision.”
- “Thinking about and implement changes to commissioning activity underway.”
- "I had a couple of people contact me at the end to say they would like to be involved in the local SP group so that was good and making local connections was good."

The CHPS project team plan to draw on their growing connections and relationships with local suicide prevention leads to follow up and build the evidence base in this area.

There is also an impact of the increased confidence and awareness within local groups that they are seeking local or national decision-making involvement to a greater degree. Local suicide prevention leads have shared with the CHPS team that people are starting to reach out asking to be on suicide prevention steering groups. The peer support CEO mentioned in the previous section had registered for some government working groups to promote lived experience involvement and peer support since her realisation that this could be where she could help make a change.

“Every local area has a suicide prevention action plan and I suspect that if you were to do a comparison between 5 years ago and now you would see peer support coming up more frequently...and I think that’s an interesting marker.”

Member of the Suicide Prevention Delivery Collective

Peer support is now mentioned in various local suicide prevention action plans - Dundee, Perth and Kinross, Fife are examples. An impact interviewee in a strategic role, who engages with local leads said,

CHPS has been able to build constructive relationships with some local suicide prevention leads through the planning of the learning and networking events. For example, in Edinburgh, the project team worked with the local lead to include a 'newsflash' activity to gather people's wishes for peer support 10 years into the future and the steps needed to get there, to help inform the local suicide prevention delivery plan.

'Newsflash' of how peer supporters visualise peer support in 10 years' time. However, different areas are at different stages in this process. The strategic impact interviewee who works on these local connections felt that there was a drive across the board to have more people with lived experience involved. As local suicide prevention steering groups come to review their membership, she saw a trend towards asking peer support groups to provide this, with about a third of the groups she was aware of now having some sort of peer support champion. However, she reflected how challenging it can be to navigate because each local area operates in a different way, with peer support often not part of the core multi-agency groups around suicide prevention. The CHPS reflective discussion similarly suggested

increasing interest from NHS teams in peer workers and lived experience, but ongoing difficulty to yet make that a reality.

There is some indicative evidence relating to decision-makers' changes in practice from the stakeholder interviews conducted by Matter of Focus. The project's visibility and advocacy efforts were thought to be helping to bring peer support more in focus in policy and funding conversations at strategic levels, helping to 'pin' peer-informed approaches more firmly into national conversations about support and suicide prevention. However, this is the outcome area with the least robust evidence. This is to be expected given the short time the project has been running, with a longer lead time needed to see the longer term contributory impact of efforts towards influencing and decision-making.

## What difference does this make?

There is clear early progress toward the work of community-based suicide prevention and support groups being better understood, recognised and valued across the time that the CHPS project has been working.

“

It is such a privilege to hear from Peer Supporters - who are making 'time, space, compassion' real every day. They do powerful work. There's nothing more hopeful when you're in despair than finding folk who've walked in your shoes & are now in a different place."

Public comment from Maree Todd, MSP  
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Peer support has a growing profile in local areas, national policy and decision-making, and has reached a public audience. As a CHPS team member reflected, having a prominent member of Scottish Parliament publicly referencing peer support as 'powerful work' is a significant move away from it being seen as a 'tea and a chat'. In their reflective discussion, the project team were confident that they are seeing increased capacity and willingness to talk about peer support as a structured, values-based, skilled practice, with small but significant changes in language and emphasis when discussing peer support. Both within the Creating Hope Together Delivery Collective and other policy areas, Scottish Recovery Network is now at the table in strategic discussions, such as the Director's participation in the review of mental health nursing.

This is supported by the Matter of Focus impact interviews, in which people working at local and national levels expressed the view that the profile of peer support as a valid part of suicide prevention is being raised by CHPS.

"Certainly the [national] conversations that I'm in now peer support is often assumed to be part of the mix...alongside other more traditional services, but it's really seen as part of the solution."

Alongside this, there was recognition that it is challenging to bring anything outside clinical service into mental health support. There was little evidence from the interviews of the peer support groups that were engaged through the capacity-building pathway being involved in local decision making or making the case for peer support at local level. Many of these groups were too small or too new, and it will be some time before they join more established groups in advocating for peer support. One interviewee who had highly valued the networking events supported the CHPS team's view that this sense of movement around peer support is gaining momentum but is not yet self-sustaining:

**"I'm glad they [CHPS] are there because you need that...organisation to be that voice. And without it, everybody's working on their own. Whereas, this [CHPS and its events, but also SRN] creates a more cohesive way of working, and of going to the government and making sure we're represented in different ways to try and get funding."**

CEO of a peer-led organisation

With acknowledgement of the significant progress made and early impact evidenced through this report, this does not yet constitute the significant change in perspective and approach to peer support for suicide prevention that Scottish Recovery Network aim to see in the longer term. While local suicide prevention leads have been part of planning and hosting CHPS learning and networking events, there has been varying levels of engagement between the project and their suicide prevention delivery plans, which are at different stages of development and delivery. CHPS are planning a review of local suicide prevention delivery plans to understand more fully where and how peer support has been incorporated. However, opportunities for longer-term engagement and input in local decision making is currently restricted to joining local suicide prevention steering groups, which, while important, will take significant time to build influence and create change.

The project team were intentional about their low progress and confidence rating for meaningful involvement of peer support groups and services in local decision making, because this emphasises the need for more work in this area, both from the Scottish Recovery Network, but also from government and the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective as the Creating Hope Together strategy progresses.



# Conclusions

## Learning, Improvement Opportunities, and Next Steps

Creating Hope with Peer Support was designed as a starting point to build the capacity, community and profile of peer support for suicide prevention. The project team note that the intention was always to review the activities at the end of this initial 2-3 years. They plan to step back, review the progress made, and consider how they can build on this in the next phase of their work.

As discussed throughout the report, Creating Hope with Peer Support has made meaningful progress towards the outcomes it was designed to contribute to. A review will ensure that these are still the right ones, and are sufficiently ambitious in reflecting the project's role and contribution to making community-based high quality peer support available in all communities of place and interest. It also provides an opportunity to gather the learning from this first phase of the work and consider what this means for the project going forward.

Considerations may include:

### **Building on the strengths of the approach so far:**

Both the reflections of the project team and the perspectives of those involved across CHPS activities show that much of the progress has stemmed from the way that the project has worked with those who deliver peer support and enabled them to champion what they do. This voice should grow stronger as the local groups that have taken part in the workshop continue to grow and connect. Changing attitudes, practices, and culture takes time and requires a phased approach. As the CHPS project proceeds, it should continue to prioritise its appreciative, strength-based approach to work with local groups, and seek to maintain its role as a facilitator, connector, and convenor of knowledge and experience. This enables the project to demonstrate what's possible, celebrate peer support's power and offer constructive critique of other approaches.

### **Thinking strategically about who the project's influence needs to reach, and how to influence mainstream services and national decision-making:**

This report has shown how important engagement with local areas has been in building the community around peer support, and this will continue to be the case to strengthen peer support groups' credibility and connections with local mental health services. The CHPS team reflected on the need to ensure that at future networking and learning events, they save space for work with local Suicide Prevention Leads around local delivery plans.

However, there was also a question about the potential to overemphasise local suicide prevention work. The strength of CHPS, through Scottish Recovery Network as a national initiative, is its ability to bring people together and create space for national focus on peer support, its values and the ongoing learning. Reflections from the project team included the challenge of how Scottish Recovery Network can use

the resource they have strategically to best achieve their outcomes. There is so much that could be done; the challenge now is for the project to avoid operating within its own “echo chamber”, even as it seeks to build the community around peer support. It needs to be able to speak to and involve those may currently not see peer support as an appropriate or worthwhile approach to suicide prevention, especially where they may be in decision-making roles nationally and within the local public sector.

Discussions highlighted the potential to build on the approach to the Ministerial visit, looking for ways to take traditional influencing activities and deliver them in a way that aligns with peer values and ways of working.

### **Building on existing partnership with the Suicide Prevention Scotland Delivery Collective:**

In this, Scottish Recovery Network can draw on the support of the Suicide Prevention Delivery Collective. This evaluation found evidence of strong buy-in to peer support approaches and interest in developing this further. CHPS was considered one of the key successes of the Creating Hope Together strategy so far, and Delivery Collective colleagues were keen to build on this. Those in connecting roles offered to help broker and strengthen relationships with local areas and collaborate more. Strategic leads suggested opportunities for peer support approaches to connect to different areas of the work, from engagement with children and young people, to actions around isolation and loneliness. These may represent opportunities to embed peer approaches holistically in national suicide prevention work.

### **Further developing and strengthening the support offered to those working in suicide prevention roles:**

Across the different sources of perspectives, there was a common thread of feedback suggesting that CHPS should go further in its specific focus on suicide prevention. Some participants in the workshops and learning and networking events felt that specific techniques for suicide prevention, and the nuances of taking an approach that builds on lived experience to talk about suicide, could have been addressed more “head-on”. Within the co-design feedback, there was a sense that the CHPS was mostly for people new to peer support and was building foundational skills. While important, this might not meet the needs of groups focused wholly on working with survivors of suicide attempts, or of peer supporters working in rural areas without other services available to hand over to in cases of crisis or emergency. Interviewees generally compared CHPS favourably with ASIST or SafeTalk training because it keeps the focus on the person and does not become formulaic or directive. However, alongside this, there was a suggestion that CHPS could provide more on how to respond to people in crisis.

The tension between keeping CHPS accessible and relevant to those delivering broad peer support yet speaking directly to suicide prevention was also recognised in the project team’s reflective discussions. They too felt that although the CHPS provides a strong foundation, people using peer support approaches in crisis settings need something more detailed. Developing something that responds to this need will be an important step if Scottish Recovery Network seek to build a full peer-based alternative to existing suicide prevention approaches. Initial suggestions included the

development of a practice learning community and looking for ways for people within the current network to share their expertise and upskill others.

## Conclusions

This report shows the value of the asset-based, community development approach that Scottish Recovery Network have taken to Creating Hope with Peer Support. Working alongside peer support groups and organisations in their network, the project team have offered a high quality programme of support, taking on a critical role as facilitators, connectors and convenors of knowledge and experience.

This project aimed to build the capacity for peer support, not to transform the system. Along with the rest of the work involved in the Creating Hope Together Suicide Prevention Strategy, this has been a first phase, with the impact anticipated to grow over time. It has clearly succeeded on these terms, having delivered a huge amount of well-received, high-quality work, and shown early impact in building a network of organisations with expertise in providing peers support for and with people affected by suicide. Over three years, it has laid the foundations linking peer support to suicide prevention so that people can see its successes and ongoing potential. This can now be the springboard for further policy and influencing work at local and national levels, towards the goal of developing peer support as a valued part of mainstream mental health services.

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