

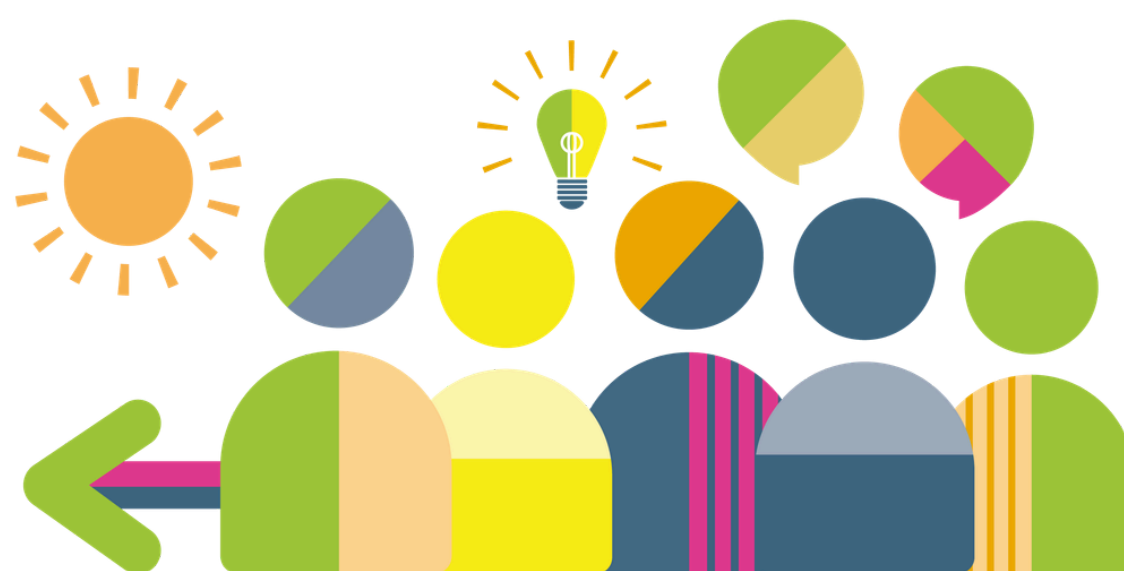
# Putting the Pieces Together

**A Framework for  
Mental Health Peer  
Support in Scotland**



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## Thanks

A special thanks to the Core Working Group who guided the development of this Framework for Peer Support in Scotland. This group of organisations and lived experience leaders generously contributed their knowledge, experience and insight and continue to champion and lead this work across the country.

We really appreciate your contributions: Sue Lyons - The Discovery College, Paul Byrne - Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action (DVVA), Kathryn Thompson and Gillian Funai - NHS Tayside, Mary Twaddle - NHS Lothian, Maja Mitchell-Grigorjeva and Shona MacColl-Mooney - Bipolar Scotland, Kerry Girdwood - Health in Mind, Heidi Tweedie - Moray Wellbeing Hub, Kelly Gilmour - Mindspace, Mandy Williams and Becky Choat - SWAN Scotland and Caroline Brocklehurst.

**Together we're building a recovery-focused mental health system for Scotland, powered by lived experience and strengthened by peer support.**

# 1. Peer support in Scotland

This framework is for people involved in introducing new or developing existing peer support roles and services, including policy makers and commissioners. It's also for people delivering peer support who are looking to enhance and sustain their practice.

Peer support has been growing in Scotland and there are many examples of innovation and peer expertise across the country. Peer support takes many forms – group spaces, one-to-one support from peer workers, peer-led learning, social activity and online or text-based support.

We know from The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey (2025) that peer support is diverse and adaptable, supporting different communities and experiences, including gender based, carers, LGBTQIA+ people, minority ethnic communities, and people affected by trauma, poverty, disability and long-term conditions.

Much of this is led by the third sector though there are some roles and services within the statutory sector. This creates a varied and evolving landscape with real opportunity for peer support and the peer workforce to grow.

## Peer support, recovery and the system

Peer support is widely recognised as integral to a recovery-promoting mental health system. It is inherently relational and non-clinical, creating space for conversations that are led by what matters to the person rather than by assessment or treatment requirements.

Mental health recovery is about people being able to live a good life, as they define it, with or without ongoing symptoms. Recovery-focused approaches start with the person and their life, not diagnosis or deficit, and are grounded in learning from lived experience. Relationships are central to recovery: being understood, believed in and respected helps people sustain hope and reconnect with a sense of belonging and possibility.

We know that recovery is best supported by approaches which focus on the whole person, are relational and where lived experience is embedded, such as by having peer workers or facilitating access to peer support opportunities. Evidence shows us that embedding peer support is a practical way to shift systems towards more human, rights-based and person-centred practice. It can play a significant role in improving people's access to, experience of, and positive outcomes from mental health support whilst transforming culture and practice in mental health services.

Peer support aligns strongly with the CHIME framework for personal recovery (Leamy et al, 2011), supporting Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment.

**On the next page you'll find a CHIME poster that you can print out.**





## Connections

- Good relationships
- Peer support
- Community involvement



## Hope

- Belief in recovery
- Motivation to change
- Goals and dreams



## Identity

- Positive sense of self
- Overcoming stigma
- Person not diagnosis



## Meaning

- Purpose in life
- Feeling valued
- Contributing to society



## Empowerment

- Focus on strengths
- Personal responsibility
- Self-management



# Why a framework for peer support in Scotland?

Through extensive research and engagement, we can see growing momentum behind peer support and the opportunity for it to embed more deeply across our mental health system. Peer support is also a much more recognised part of the policy agenda, aligning with calls for prevention and early intervention supports, a mental health system led by lived experience and community-based, recovery-focused whole person services. Scottish Government and COSLA's:

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (published 2023) outlines a commitment to championing peer support (Strategic Aim 2.3).



Creating Hope Together: Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022-2032) recognises the vital role of peer support as a way of giving people the time, space and compassion needed to support their wellbeing and mental health recovery.

Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework (2025- 2035) sets out a plan for a shift to prevention and early intervention and delivering care and support that is 'people-led and value based'.

Peer support is an early intervention and prevention support mechanism that if funded appropriately could save millions on unnecessary escalation of support required from statutory bodies at higher and more acute levels.

-The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey (Stevenson 2025)



## Peer Support in Scotland

The first in a series of four, this Insight Report explores what peer support is (and isn't), why it matters for recovery, and what peer support activity and workforces look like across Scotland today.



## Peer Support in Prevention and Early Intervention

Insight Report 2, sets out the role, impact and opportunities of embedding peer support in mental health services and supports.



This framework supports the growth of mental health peer support by grounding development and delivery in a series of core values. This ensures peer support stays true to its roots as it strengthens and flourishes across Scotland. It has been co-developed and brings together shared learning and experiences from across Scotland and further afield. It aims to:



Improve recognition and understanding of peer support values, practice and impact among those developing and delivering peer support, policy makers and service commissioners.



Develop a shared understanding of peer support whilst allowing the flexibility needed by those developing and delivering peer support.



Establish a flexible framework that supports organisations and / or areas to develop individual or localised approaches to peer support.

## Navigating the framework

We have structured this guide using four key sections. The first takes a look at peer support in Scotland, the second builds a shared understanding of peer support. The third illustrates how peer values are put into practice and the fourth section explores key building blocks needed to develop and deliver peer support.

This framework sits alongside other Scottish Recovery Network resources. Each section includes links to tools and learning to support your practice. We've also added additional resources in section five along with details of how to get in touch with us. All of our tools and resources are open access and copyright free, meaning you are welcome to adapt them to your own context.

We have included illustrative examples in each section under the heading 'What this could look like...'. They are composites drawn from evidence and learning across peer support practice. Like composite characters in a film, they represent real patterns, challenges and successes we've witnessed emerging repeatedly. They're built from what we know works; the barriers people face and how organisations have navigated them. Use them to help you imagine how these aspects of the section might show up in your own context.



## 2. What is peer support?

The growth of peer support in Scotland means that clarity and intentionality on what we mean by peer support and why it matters is important. This section builds a shared understanding of peer support by exploring its foundation, what makes it distinctive, and the lived experience at its heart. We'll explore four core components that help to define peer support and hear directly from people across Scotland about what it means to them.

When we're clear about what peer support is, we create the conditions for it to be delivered authentically and to have real impact. This shared understanding becomes the basis on which we build everything that follows - how we embody peer values in practice (section 3), and how we create the organisational conditions for peer support to thrive (section 4).

### Roots, relationships and relevance

Peer support is a relational approach based on shared lived experience. It brings people together through connection, understanding and the intentional use of personal experience to create trust, empathy and possibility. At its heart, peer support is about walking alongside someone in their mental health recovery journey, it offers time, space, and compassion for people to explore their experiences, make sense of what matters to them and identify their own strengths, needs and aspirations. Rather than focusing on diagnosis or problems to be fixed, peer support centres the person and creates a space where people feel understood, respected and free from judgement.

Peer support is both culturally and contextually relevant which makes it a vital source of support for people across their mental health recovery. By understanding the flexibility needed in support, peer groups and services offer accessible and immediate support options which are built on equality and shared power by emphasising the active role that people have in their own and others' recovery journey.

Peer support has a long history, with its roots embedded in rights-based, social justice movements. Peer support offers new ways to understand experiences outside of the dominant biomedical model. As peer support grows across different contexts, it is important that we remain mindful of its foundations, upholding its roots in mutuality, lived experience and social justice.



## Four key components

We spoke to a wide range of people across Scotland, involved in peer support, to find out what they think makes peer support unique. They told us that peer support is grounded in four key components:



- Shared lived experiences used intentionally to build trust, empathy and connection. Peer support is a whole person approach based on the person and their life experiences.
- A mutual relationship of equals where people walk alongside one another rather than fix. This strengths-based approach explicitly values lived experience and brings learning, insight and recovery for both or all involved.
- A supportive relationship based on hope and belief. Peer workers embody the reality of recovery and offers hope while recognising there is no one path to recovery.
- An intentional space where people explore together and move towards recovery in a way that feels meaningful to them. The sharing of experiences means that people can feel inspired and learn from one another.

These four components are what make peer support distinctive. When any of them are absent, peer support risks being misunderstood or diluted, reducing its effectiveness and impact. When they are present, peer support offers a relational and human approach creating space for connection, empowerment and recovery rooted in lived experience.

As peer support continues to develop across Scotland's mental health system, maintaining clarity about these core components is essential. They help ensure that peer support is implemented in ways that remain true to its values and maximise its potential to support mental health recovery.



The four key components of peer support, together with the values that underpin them, are what make peer support most powerful and effective. They help to articulate the unique support that comes from shared experience, benefitting both those who receive support and those who provide it.

-Paul Byrne, Peer Recovery Development Worker, Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action (DVVA).



## Peer worker roles

Peer working is a highly skilled and nuanced practice that involves intentional sharing of lived experiences. It centres on supportive and collaborative one-to-one and group relationships.

Peer support is practiced by trained peer workers, both paid and voluntary, in a wide range of settings across Scotland. These include community multidisciplinary teams, GP practices, community-based groups, mental health organisations, recovery colleges and in-patient services. Peer workers contribute to a wide range of services and experiences, from forensics to recovery education and suicide prevention. What remains consistent is its focus on mutuality, hope and recovery as defined by the individual.

Peer worker roles shouldn't sit in isolation. It's important that they sit as a wider commitment to co-production and embedding lived experience across services and systems. Alongside peer workers, other lived experience roles play an important part in shaping service design, delivery and leadership.

At present, most paid peer support roles are positioned at entry level. In many cases, peer workers are supervised by individuals who are not peers themselves, and there are fewer development and progression opportunities compared to other parts of the workforce.

Establishing dedicated leadership roles for peer workers — where lived experience is recognised as a distinct and valuable expertise, rather than being absorbed into other professions — can help address this imbalance.

Ensuring that these roles carry equal decision-making authority is an important step towards achieving true equity and recognition for peer support within the wider system.

-Kathryn Thompson, Peer Recovery Worker,  
CMHT Dundee East, NHS Tayside.



# Peer leadership

Peer leadership exists within the Scottish mental health system but it's informal. Some peer workers have such depth of experience and capability that they naturally become leaders and shape how things develop. It's present despite the system, not because the system has invested in it or created formal structures.

Peer leaders are driving innovation, shaping how peer support develops, supporting and influencing other staff and showing what's possible. Peer workers should have clear progression routes like any other area of work. They should be able to move into positions of influence and decision-making while keeping what makes them effective as peers. Investing in peer leadership positions can help make your peer support offer more effective, values-led and sustainable.



## Embedding a Peer Workforce

Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust's Peer and Lived Experience Workforce has over 150 roles and growing. In this film we chat to Fran Lepori, Head of Lived Experience Workforce.



We've also provided a booklet exploring some of the key enablers that provide the infrastructure for different lived experience roles to flourish



## Let's Develop Peer Roles

This toolkit shares knowledge from people both delivering and accessing peer support. It provides tools and guidance on recruitment.



## What this could look like...



A third sector organisation had some peer roles, but it really wasn't clear to anyone on the team what made them different from support workers.

Peer workers felt unable to use their lived experience intentionally, with some feeling tokenised. People the organisation supported did not understand the roles of the peer workers leading to a lack of uptake. The peer service was calling itself peer-led but the structures were not in place for it to truly be peer-led. The confusion was creating tension between peer workers and the rest of the team, so the real value of peer support was getting lost. To amend this, they brought peer workers and other staff together to answer:

### What does peer support look like in our context?



They mapped where shared lived experience was being used intentionally and where it wasn't.



They created a simple one-page guide explaining peer support to people using their services, new staff and referrers.



They made an introduction to peer support a part of inductions.



They collectively created a new job role - Peer Lead, which meant that the peer workers had a voice at the leadership level of the organisation. One of the experienced peers moved into this role, their first progression in several years.

Staff began to understand the unique value peer workers brought and stopped expecting them to fit into non-peer moulds. Peer workers felt recognised and valued for their peer expertise. More referrals came in and uptake improved because people understood what peer support was. With the confusion lifted, the team was more efficient and connected, allowing them to provide the best possible support for the people they work with.



### 3. Peer support values into practice

Understanding what peer support is provides a foundation for effective practice. However, peer support is most effective when its development and delivery are guided by clear values.

Peer support values emerged from lived experience and are rooted in the survivor and social justice movements. They shape how peer support is developed, guide how it is delivered, and help ensure it remains true to its origins. These values are central to peer practice, keeping relationships grounded in shared lived experience, mutuality, and respect.

Peer values help to differentiate peer support from other kinds of support. They anchor both development and delivery by shaping the why, the what and the how. They help to focus service development on recovery principles and prioritise the role of lived experience. In delivery, they guide the interactions between people to ensure they are mutual, relational, and intentional.

In Scotland, Scottish Recovery Network collaborated with peer workers to develop the HEAR ME peer values. This identifies six core values that underpin peer support practice: Hope, Experience, Authenticity, Responsibility, Mutuality, and Empowerment.

In this section, we explore each of these values through examples shared by the Core Working Group involved in developing this framework and from our wider peer support networks. These examples illustrate how the values influence the development and delivery of services and supports, bringing them to life in everyday practice and supporting their application in peer support work.



# Hope

## The belief that mental health recovery is possible for everyone

Through shared experiences and mutual connection, peer relationships offer hope and optimism. Peer workers carry visible proof that recovery is possible and help to create conditions for change.

### Developing peer support

Centre peer leadership as a powerful way to demonstrate and sustain hope. Make sure that people with lived experience are visible in leadership, decision-making and day-to-day work. Seeing people with shared experiences who are leading, contributing and thriving is a powerful message that change is possible.

Co-produce your purpose and define the difference you are trying to make. Develop the purpose and aims of your service or activities with the people who will benefit and those that are involved in delivering them. This will help create buy-in and a sense of connection.

Develop a shared understanding of recovery throughout the group / service / organisation. Take time to understand what recovery means to your setting. Developing a shared understanding will help create a recovery-focused culture.

### Delivering peer support

Model recovery in your practice by sharing experiences intentionally. Show that recovery is real and ongoing by thoughtfully sharing your experiences. What do you do today to support your recovery? How have you overcome hurdles and setbacks? This can help to build trust.

Recognise and affirm each person's strengths, values and aspirations. Notice and reflect on what people share with you. This might be things that they don't notice in themselves and can help to reconnect someone with their sense of identity and purpose.

Be strengths-based and use language that focuses on possibility and future. Language is powerful and can be the difference between empowerment and disempowerment. Focus on strengths, interests and encourage progress.

Value shared learning that gives space for your own development too. Acknowledge when a conversation, shared experiences or different perspective has had an impact on you. Be open to the learning and growth you will gain from the peer relationship.



# Experience

## Recovery is a personal and shared experience

Lived experience offers a depth of understanding that comes from having navigated challenges, change and growth. It brings insight into what recovery feels like and the possibilities. The sharing of experiences can be a powerful catalyst for change. Peer support adapts to cultural values, language and community-specific needs. In peer relationships we are all experts of our own experiences.

### Developing peer support

Design and deliver services where equity, accessibility and inclusion are central. Create services where staff and those accessing them feel welcomed and a sense of belonging. This means thinking about how to create safe, inclusive and respectful spaces while considering practical things like location, venue, digital access, travel and timings.

Position lived experience at the heart of service design and delivery. Move beyond asking for feedback. Involve people with lived experience in shaping and delivering what you do. Their insights and experience will help shape compassionate and relevant opportunities.

Create systems and processes that capture, reflect on and learn from people's experiences. Gather feedback regularly from peer workers and the people you support, not just numbers from spreadsheets. Use what you learn to change practice and shape the service. Without this, you end up with a service that worked once but isn't sustainable.

### Delivering peer support

Centre the person as the expert in their own experiences by listening with curiosity, openness and respecting their insights and choices. Put assumptions aside, ask open questions and respect the person's perspectives even if they differ from yours.

Support people to shape their own recovery story, direction and goals. Encourage the person / people you're supporting to define their recovery and what matters to them. Walk alongside them and guide discussion that explores their next steps and aspirations.

Acknowledge that there are many roads of recovery and celebrate the small steps. Recognise and celebrate progress in all its forms. This might be attending an appointment, getting on public transport, going along to a group, reconnecting with others, having a conversation that feels uncomfortable.



# Authenticity

## Being authentic is about being true to ourselves

Peer relationships are built on trust, openness and shared humanity. Authenticity means showing up as a real person, not as a role, a script or a set of techniques. When peer supporters are able to be genuine, relationships feel safer and more equal. Authenticity creates space for honesty, vulnerability and growth.

### Developing peer support

Create a culture and environment where authenticity is valued and staff bring their true selves. Work together to shape what the culture will look like, feel like and then what actions need to be taken to develop it.

Design roles and systems that deepen relational connection. Build processes and space into your setting that nurture communication, reflection and collaboration. What will be your commitment to bringing the team together? How will you balance service priorities and relationship building? What role will reflective practice play?

Lead with transparency and ensure that communication, changes and decision-making are carried out with integrity. Be clear and honest, explaining reasons behind decisions and involve people where possible. By being open, this can create trust and support people to feel respected and included, even in more challenging times.



We have endless examples of the amazing work of peers, the impact it has not just on participants but of those providing it – it's a win-win.

-The Big Scottish Peer Support Survey (Stevenson 2025)

### Delivering peer support

Share with integrity and in a way that feels purposeful. Think about the purpose when you share experiences and share when you know it will benefit the person you are supporting and yourself.



Create spaces where people feel safe to be themselves, avoid judgement and validate their feelings and experiences. Peer workers have described six elements in creating safe and nurturing spaces that build trust and facilitate recovery. These are: respect, confidentiality, open communication, boundaries, empathetic listening and accessibility.

Practice self-awareness and self-compassion, recognising that authentic connection begins with knowing and caring for yourself. Take time to reflect on your own feelings, strengths and limits. Give yourself the compassion you show others.

Build trust by showing up as yourself, being open and honest. By being genuine in your interactions, approachable and consistent, this will help deepen connections and trust.

## Responsibility

### **Mental health, wellbeing and recovery involves taking responsibility**

Peer support is rooted in 'being with' a person rather than 'doing for'. This approach supports people to strengthen their agency, choice and ownership of their recovery. Responsibility is mutual, it includes caring for yourself and the peer relationship by upholding the integrity of peer values in practice.

#### Developing peer support

Prioritise outcomes for people rather than service outcomes. Work with peer workers and the people you support to decide what outcomes matter and what data you need to collect. Be honest about where your system's existing metrics don't fit.

Values aren't something you speak about once, keep the conversation live. Create environments where the peer values are embedded and nurtured. Think about how you might embed peer values into the everyday planning and delivery of what you do. How about using them to frame debriefs or support and supervision?

Create ongoing opportunities for peer workers to learn. The chance to strengthen and grow their practice. This might be training, peer reflection, autonomy and responsibility, opportunities to connect with others in similar roles.

Provide reflective, peer-informed supervision that strengthens peer identity and values-led practice. Focus on the emotional and relational aspects of the role, not just tasks. This will help peer workers to grow in their role identity and connection to peer values.



## Delivering peer support

'Be with' by listening curiously, asking open questions to explore situations further, validating feelings and encouraging small, meaningful steps forward. Walk alongside the person you're supporting and step back from directing or wanting to 'fix' a situation.

Challenge deficit-based assumptions with curiosity, openness and reflection. Take time to notice any assumptions, interpretations, or judgements you are holding and how they might shape your responses and the way you approach the relationship.

Constructively challenge non recovery-focused, stigmatising and discriminatory practices. Challenge attitudes, language, perspectives that undermine the peer values and recovery-focused ways of working.

Be accountable for your own self development, self-care and recovery. Recognise the importance of your own recovery, learning and growth. This might include reflecting on your practice, seeking support, maintaining healthy boundaries and accessing learning and development opportunities.

## Mutuality

### **The peer relationship is two-way, both people learn, grow, and benefit**

Mutuality sits at the heart of peer support and recognises that everyone in the peer relationship brings knowledge, strengths and insight. It is a collaborative relationship built through dialogue, shared experience and trust.

## Developing peer support

Embed lived experience at every level of service design, delivery and review. Create spaces for shared learning and reflection across your group, team or organisation. Come together, connect and share learning. Create a commitment and structure to ensure this happens and becomes embedded.

Acknowledge and actively address issues relating to power. Recognise and name where power lies. Think about who's in the room? Whose voices are being listened too? What does power mean in your setting?

In mixed role teams or partnership settings, position peer roles as distinct yet equal contributors. Peer workers bring skill, expertise and a distinct approach.



## Delivering peer support

Stay aware of power dynamics and actively work to create balance through open dialogue, joint decision-making and mutual reflection. Think about approaches that will help you do this. For example, regular check-ins on how the relationship is feeling, being transparent on boundaries, being open to challenge or disagreement, using co-developed group agreements, using reflective practice to explore power and assumptions.

Approach the peer relationship as a shared journey of learning and growing together. Acknowledge when someone has shaped your thinking or helped you understand something differently.

Promote transparency and collaboration around decision making, boundaries and goals to ensure that these are jointly created rather than imposed by the needs of the service. Open up space for conversations on whether the support is working, what other options would be supportive, be open about roles and responsibilities.

## Empowerment

**Power is shared and people are supported to make decisions that feel right for them**

Within peer support, empowerment is grounded in a belief in recovery and that each person has control over their own journey. It's about experiencing and reclaiming personal power. Peer support creates space to explore and rediscover this.

## Developing peer support

Design services around recovery and autonomy. Recovery-focused services recognise that people benefit from choice and flexibility. The culture sees individuals as experts in their own experiences and services acting as facilitators that reconnect a person to a sense of hope, meaning and identity.

Develop policies and structures that share power and enable shared decision-making at every level of the organisation. Build approaches that prioritise lived experience and collaboration in shaping services, planning and evaluation processes.

Ensure information is inclusive, accessible and promotes informed decision making. Provide information in clear, understandable ways so people can make informed decisions that feel right for them. We know that considering communication needs, literacy, culture, language and format can help people understand their options and have control over decisions that affect them.



## Delivering peer support

Encourage people to make informed choices and set their own goals, supporting them to source the information they need. The role of a peer worker isn't to tell someone what to do but to help them explore options, access relevant information and be informed and confident in making meaningful decisions.

Reframe setbacks as part of personal growth and create space to reflect and learn from them. Model through sharing your own experiences a way of thinking about challenges, setbacks as part of a recovery journey and not as a failure. Create space to reflect and learn from these as this will encourage growth, self-compassion and hope for the future.

Encourage personal growth through connection to other opportunities and the wider community. Together, look beyond the peer relationship at opportunities that match a person's interests, strengths and goals. This might be connection to a particular community, group or activity, education or employment.



### Peer2Peer learning and development

Peer2Peer helps you to deliver peer training for your service or organisation. It's adaptable and flexible and can be tailored to suit your needs.



### Creating Hope with Peer Support

This resource and accompanying series of four practice guides are designed to help build confidence and skills in offering peer support to people affected by mental health challenges and suicide. The series includes:

- Creating Safe Spaces
- Navigating Discomfort in the Peer Relationship
- Supporting People Experiencing Distress
- Exploring Safety and Risk



## What this could look like...

A mental health service had identified their values but delivery was inconsistent. Some peer workers found it easy to embody values but they felt it came from their own personal initiative. Others were slipping into support worker mode. They were stuck in a rut of problem-solving and advising rather than walking alongside. Without clear guidance on what the values meant to the service, peer workers were struggling and the service wasn't living up to what it promised.



They addressed these challenges by introducing peer-led supervision specifically focused on reflecting on values in practice. Peer workers brought real examples from their work and explored where values were present and where they missed them. It was also an open space to explore aspects of the service design which made it difficult to embody specific values. These barriers were addressed proactively, including changing assessment forms to be more strength based and recovery-focused. The supervision coordinator kept track of common themes about where the team was struggling to live out particular values and brought these into peer worker reflective circles so the whole team could learn together. They built a culture where it was safe to challenge non-values-aligned practice when they saw it happening.

Practice became more consistent across the team. The service design became more rooted in peer support values. Peer workers felt supported to be themselves rather than fitting into a mould. The culture of the service became centred in peer values, meaning that they could provide the best service for the people they worked with.



## 4. Embedding and growing peer support

Values guide what we do. However, embedding peer support in organisations also requires creating the right conditions: the culture, structures and support systems where peer support can flourish. This section outlines three important questions that organisations should consider when developing and embedding peer roles:



Are you recovery ready?



Is the organisation recruiting with intention?



How will you sustain and strengthen the roles?

Use these stages as a starting point and they will guide you as you grow a recovery-focused approach that fits your context.

### Are you recovery ready?

Embedding peer support requires shifting organisational attitudes to fully embrace recovery approaches and recognise the value of lived experience and peer leadership. This means creating a culture that understands and respects lived experience.

Alongside financial resourcing, one of the best investments you can make is time. Time and space for dialogue, reflection and development. This includes time to build your shared understanding of peer support, peer worker roles and develop a clear sense of purpose - your why. Embedding peer support will challenge existing power dynamics, risk management frameworks, ideas and expertise. Welcome this and lead the process with peer values in mind.



When asked for their top tips on being recovery ready peer leaders said:



Commit to genuine co-production where peers are fully involved in designing policy, service delivery and developing roles, to maintain authenticity and fidelity.



Provide training across teams, ensuring clear policies and guidelines that support the meaningful integration of peer workers.



Evaluation planning should start at the beginning, not as an afterthought. Use tools such as the Adaptable Outcome Map (see page 24) to help guide this process.

## Recruiting with intention

Recruiting peer workers is a commitment to doing things differently. It's about being intentional on how roles are defined, who's recruited and the kind of environment the roles are part of. Peer workers need clear distinct job descriptions that celebrate the relational expertise that comes from lived experience and the skill required to use this intentionally. Without this clarity, roles risk becoming diluted and losing the value they are intended to bring.

Before posts are filled, the foundations need to be in place. This means establishing a recovery-focused culture and creating support structures so peer workers can grow and thrive. This includes identifying or recruiting a Peer Lead to drive implementation, supervise peer workers and work with them to develop and share understanding of the role, its practice and impacts. This means:

- Prioritising support and supervision
- Creating reflective practice spaces grounded in peer values
- Identifying networks, peer support training and development opportunities

Setting these foundations helps to shape more than the peer worker role but contributes to the integrity, impact and outcomes of the whole organisation or service.



Peer workers need professional supervision and support structures to thrive, especially because they are often working on their own in teams that may not fully understand peer support.

- Fran Lepori, Trust Head of Lived Experience Workforce,  
Central North West London NHS Foundation Trust.



## Sustaining and strengthening

Peer support works relationally and often in ways that don't fit neatly in simple service metrics and short-term outcomes. Its impact is found in connection, hope and mutual growth. These things tend not to be captured through traditional measures.

Think long term. The impact of peer support is not always immediate but when embedded and nurtured it leads to deeper and more meaningful change. If you're developing paid roles, short-term contracts can undermine the stability of the workforce. Aim for long-term positions with pay that reflects the value of lived experience.

Plan progression pathways. Peer roles should be dynamic, with opportunities for role progression. Progression means both adjusting to what the service needs and peer workers having real opportunities to grow, take on more responsibility, or develop new expertise.

Prioritise learning and growth. Embed co-production and centre evaluation so you can evolve and grow meaningfully. Peer support is not a fixed model, allow the organisation to develop and adapt. Standard mental health metrics often won't capture what peer support does. Common peer support outcomes are people feeling less isolated or gaining confidence to make decisions for themselves. But these things don't always show up in your existing data systems. So, it is important to keep peer support values in mind when designing evaluation.

Peer support isn't something you set up once and leave as is. Your understanding can change and communities' needs might shift. Importantly, peer workers themselves can identify what's working and what isn't. Therefore, it is key to use evaluation for learning, growth and reflection, not just quality assurance. You might need to measure differently for peer support than other services. Figure out what data collection works in your context and use what you learn to change practice and shape the service. By investing in these stages, peer support can remain authentic, grow in impact and play a meaningful role in shaping a more human, recovery-focused mental health system.



### Let's Evaluate Peer Support - [Adaptable Outcome Map](#)

The Adaptable Outcome Map has been co-created to help people and organisations involved in mental health peer support evaluate their work in ways that feel meaningful, creative and true to peer support values.



## What this could look like...

An NHS mental health service wanted to move from pilots to sustained peer roles but wasn't sure how to do it well. They risked bringing people into a culture that wasn't ready, which would be setting them up for failure. They knew from experience that recruiting someone into a non-peer-focused environment would be challenging for everyone involved.



Therefore, instead of rushing into peer roles, they began the process by having honest conversations about what culture change was needed. They invested in staff learning focused on peer support values and what they meant for their team and the wider mental health system. They created open reflective practice spaces so people could explore their own assumptions about lived experience and recovery.

With this foundation in place, they hired their first peer worker. They paired them with a supervisor who had a strong understanding of how to supervise peer-led work and understood the difference between clinical and peer approaches. As the culture continued to shift and staff became more comfortable with peer-led approaches, they added a second role. Then they introduced peer-led supervision between the two peer workers, so they could reflect on values and practice together. They wanted to gather feedback from the start but it was hard to get feedback forms approved. Therefore, they added anonymous feedback cards into the waiting room.

Both peer workers stayed in post. Being a truly valued part of the team structure, they were paid fairly, had clear progression, proper supervision and development space.

The anonymous feedback cards gave useful data about how people were experiencing their sessions with the peer workers. Positive feedback validated the peer work, whilst constructive feedback was openly addressed where possible.

Over time, they deepened their practice, took on more responsibility and became trusted voices in how the service worked. They mentored new staff and shaped how the service approached peer-led approaches. Other teams in the NHS saw what they'd built and started replicating it. The peer workforce grew from those two roles, spreading the care and approach across the wider service.



## 5. Resources

### Catalysts for Change

Over the next ten years, we have an opportunity to reshape Scotland's mental health system.

- [10-year strategic plan](#)



### Peer Recovery Hub

Looking to develop and champion peer support for mental health recovery? Check out the Peer Recovery Hub, it's full of free tools, events and learning to inspire and support you!

- [PeerRecoveryHub.Net](#)



### Stay in the know

Get updates, resources and learning from across Scotland's mental health peer support community.

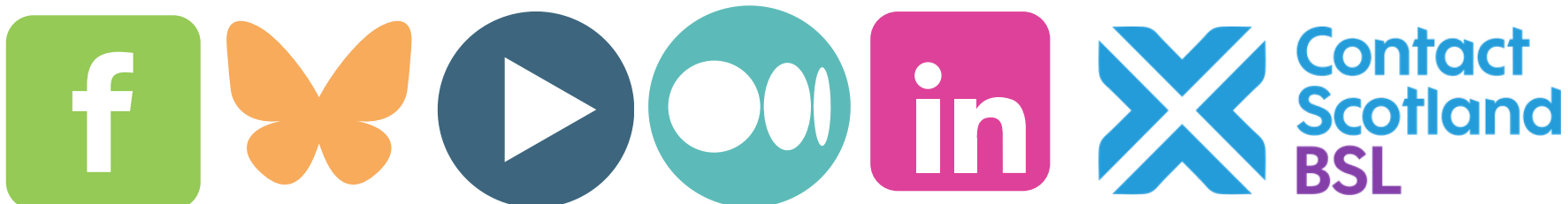
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## Get in touch

Tel: 0300 323 9956

Email: [info@scottishrecovery.net](mailto:info@scottishrecovery.net) | [www.PeerRecoveryHub.Net](http://www.PeerRecoveryHub.Net)



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If you need this information in a different format, please contact us.