

A peer recovery support for family members and carers of people with mental health challenges, including co-occurring alcohol and other drug issues

What have families and carers asked for?

A centre-based, drop-in space to engage informally with peers, plus a structured peer mentoring program and Warm Line.

The peer mentoring program allows people to be mentored by a peer who is skilled and trained, but is there mainly to offer support through shared lived experience. The Warm Line is a calm place to talk with a peer who understands.

Within these relationships family members and carers can explore their own recovery, and extra support options, including using the capacity within their existing networks.

ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS

I need access to be convenient and to be able to fit in with everything going on in my life, which might be overwhelming

- Convenient location, accessible (local community focused), child-friendly, home visits offered during school hours, and out of hours support available as well
- Warm Line offers peer support outside of centre hours

RECOVERY SUPPORTS

The context of my life needs to be understood, and my existing networks can be drawn upon for further support

It is especially important for me to feel heard and my experiences validated by peers – especially any difficulties I have faced navigating or feeling excluded from the mental health system

At times I need support just for me, that is separate from my caring responsibilities

I may be distressed and need recovery support too

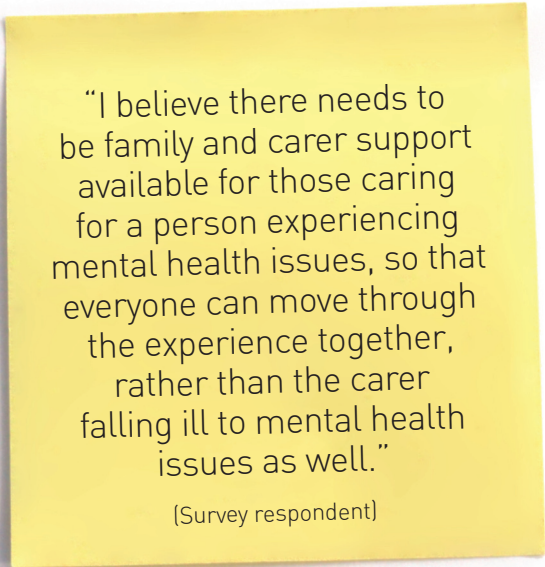
- A commitment from the service that no-one will fall through the cracks (ongoing, proactive and flexible engagement)
- Ecological approach – understanding the person's needs in context of the networks around them, their culture and other environmental factors
- The main intervention is deep, empathetic listening; the emphasis is on peers who can provide understanding
- Strengths-based approaches are used as they are validating and empowering
- Capacity building is offered including advocacy and peer support
- A formal aftercare plan is put in place – it includes information, advice and referrals to other services

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MODEL DEVELOPMENT – BRINGING IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

The role of family members and carers as supporters of consumers is recognised in many mental health services, and their vital role in supporting people's recovery is well evidenced.

Yet their own need for support is often overlooked or undervalued. The 10 Year Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan maps this as an area for much-needed investment, and highlights the need to expand carer and family information and flexible respite services, and better support children who have parents with mental health or alcohol and other drug challenges.



"I believe there needs to be family and carer support available for those caring for a person experiencing mental health issues, so that everyone can move through the experience together, rather than the carer falling ill to mental health issues as well."


(Survey respondent)

This model was co-designed at workshop 1 and 2, and informed by extensive survey input which provides grounding and confirmation for the model developed. As with most of the project models, the lived experience advisors themselves made a significant contribution.

Survey findings outlined the idea that existing family and carer supports tend to focus on the carer's role in supporting someone and allowing them to be involved in that recovery journey, but that supports for family members that focus on their own distress or recovery are more limited.

The co-design process found that peer mentoring or coaching is a strong theme with the main intervention being deep empathetic listening.

New models of peer-based and relational support are needed, to support understanding the person in their context and within their existing social and family network, and to build their own capacity, leadership and social and community connection.



"Mentoring comes down to peer support... more 'me too' and 'where to from here'... and sometimes all that's needed is a sounding board to bounce ideas off and gain confidence in using your own strengths."

(Co-design workshop)

The model called for community centre spaces, to support and enable community connection and the opportunity to speak and build relationships with people who have been through similar experiences. Staffed primarily by peers, the centres would provide opportunities for one-on-one support, informal connection, and group supports and learning.

"Feeling heard, accepted and included in the process, relates to a trauma-informed approach. This might mean staff have training in body language and micro expressions to help them work out the best way to engage with acceptance, empathy, validation and awareness of power imbalances." Co-design workshop

Proactive and flexible engagement is a clear focus with supportive peer workers that make family members and supporters feel welcome and seen.

Drop in, appointment, outreach and long opening hours are needed.

A warm line offers peer support outside centre hours (also described as a separate model in this project).