

People's views on health related peer support groups

A report of the Healthwatch Bolton Open Forum

March 2017

Background

The neighbourhood engagement work in Bolton (February 2017) explored different kinds of clinical and non-clinical support people might like to see attached to their GP/primary care services. One of the findings of the report suggested that certain kinds of support may be best answered by 'group consultation' or 'peer to peer type of support'.

As a result of this finding, Healthwatch Bolton (HWB) decided to explore further people's views of health related peer support type activity. We decided to call a forum on this subject inviting some local organisations and groups who use this model to share their knowledge and experiences of these kinds of approaches. We also explored forum participants views on peer support using a table top facilitated discussion activity.

Who was involved in the work

The session took the form of a dedicated forum
42 people attended the session

Many (but not all participants were or have previously been involved in peer support groups)

Speakers included group leaders and participants from;

Mhist Women's Mental Health peer support group

St Georges Day Centre

Caribbean Elders Group

Diabetes UK Bolton branch

Jigsaw, Stroke Support Group

Bolton Cardiac Support Group



August 2017

KEY FINDINGS 1

Participants had overwhelmingly positive views about, and experiences of, peer support group.

Participants articulated the benefits of peer support groups as follows;

Peer support groups...

- ...keep us connected with others, create a sense of community and reduce social isolation
- ...are positive and life enhancing
- ...give us a sense of perspective and hope
- ...encourage us to engage in purposeful activity
- ...allow us to make a contribution, give something back and help others
- ...build our confidence and self-esteem
- ...give us support and encouragement
- ...enhance wellbeing, help recovery, improve our mental health and help us to self-care
- ... allow us to share insight and experiences
- ...help us to access to information, knowledge and advice

A few people identified barriers to joining peer support activities

KEY FINDINGS 2

People consider peer support groups to be both valuable and cost effective

People have very clear ideas about what makes a good peer support group.

People running groups are very willing to share experiences and work together.

There were a number of clear and cost effective suggestions from groups as to what support they needed to enhance their offer. As follows;

- Support with improving referrals
- Support with outreach
- Support with exploring online options
- Support with securing venues
- Support with publicity and marketing
- Support for facilitators

Recommendations

There are four clear recommendations from this piece of work.

- 1) **All system** players consider the benefits of peer support groups and recognise them as a valuable asset in achieving holistic support, wellbeing and sustained recovery
- 2) **The CCG** insist that all primary and secondary care providers make referrals to relevant peer support groups where they exist (the mechanism for this may well be the social prescribing programme but providers should be prevailed upon to take the initiative).
- 3) The **Primary Care Transformation Programme** should make provision for community rooms to be made available for peer support groups to access in health sites, at neighbourhood level.
- 4) **The CCG** should finance Bolton Council for Voluntary Service (**CVS**) to facilitate a development programme for health related peer support groups

The Evidence

People had overwhelmingly positive views about, and experiences of, peer support groups.

Peer support groups keep us connected with others, create a sense of community and reduce social isolation

- 
- *Getting together*
 - *Meet new people*
 - *It's mutual, you give something and gain something*
 - *It's social – addresses social isolation*
 - *Sense of a shared enterprise*
 - *Not just about a meeting it's about people*
 - *Friendship*
 - *Gives people a sense of connection*
 - *Encourage people to connect*
 - *You're not alone*
 - *Help relieve isolation*
 - *Camaraderie*
 - *With people who understand you*
 - *You can make friends – good for people who are isolated, friends that understand*
 - *Prevents loneliness, depression*
 - *Feeling normal, friendship, acceptance, other people's experiences*
 - *Friendship*

- *Being able to come together*
- *Isolation*
- *Friendship*
- *Combats isolation*
- *Interaction*
- *Interaction*
- *Community family*
- *Companionship/friendship*
- *Integration*
- *Combats loneliness*
- *Meet lovely people*
- *Large group, but also committee is very useful*
- *Stops isolation – people don't always want to talk about it – sometimes family and friends don't come around*
- *You are not on your own*
- *Reduction of isolation*
- *Friendship*
- *dealing with social isolation*
- *Social isolation*

Peer support groups
are ...positive and life
enhancing

- *Have a giggle*
- *Need to turn something negative into something positive*
- *Enjoy and help others, like to see each other*
- *Gives people a new lease of life*
- *We have developed a survivors mentality – we see ourselves as survivors*
- *To get a buzz*
- *Takes mind off daily routine*
- *Definite pick-me-up*
- *helps with your own well-being*
- *Needs to be positive*
- *Feel safe*
- *Normal feeling (depression)*
- *Makes me feel normal*

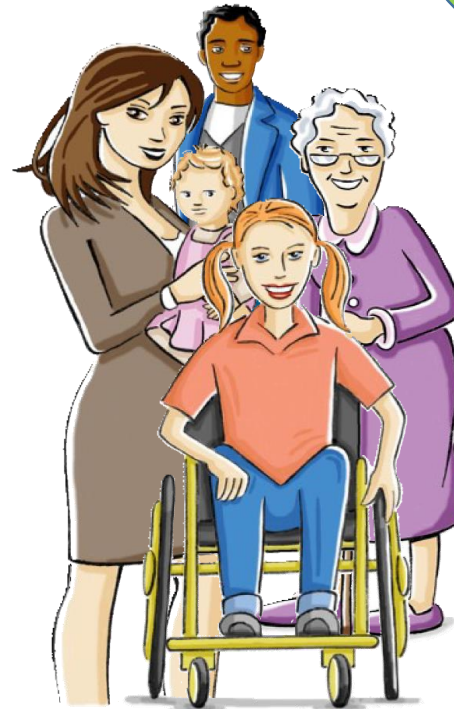


....give us a sense
of perspective and
hope

- *Not only are you not the only one but you also identify people who are dealing with issues harder than your own*
- *May see people worse than you – coping better than you*
- *Give people hope for the future with positivity*
- *There is a future*
- *Give hope that things might be ok*
- *Gives people hope*

Peer support groups ...
encourage us to engage in
purposeful activity

- *Positive benefit of exercise*
- *Gives people a purpose*
- *Encourages people to take part/try new things*
- *We are productive - we do stuff together (we do crafts, art, writing, cooking and have a reminiscence project which we share with other groups)*
- *Realisation that you have a sense of purpose*
- *We take the benefits home – we carry on with our activities and our social contact outside of the group meetings*
- *We take the discussions home with us*
- *personal growth/development*
- *Self-satisfaction*

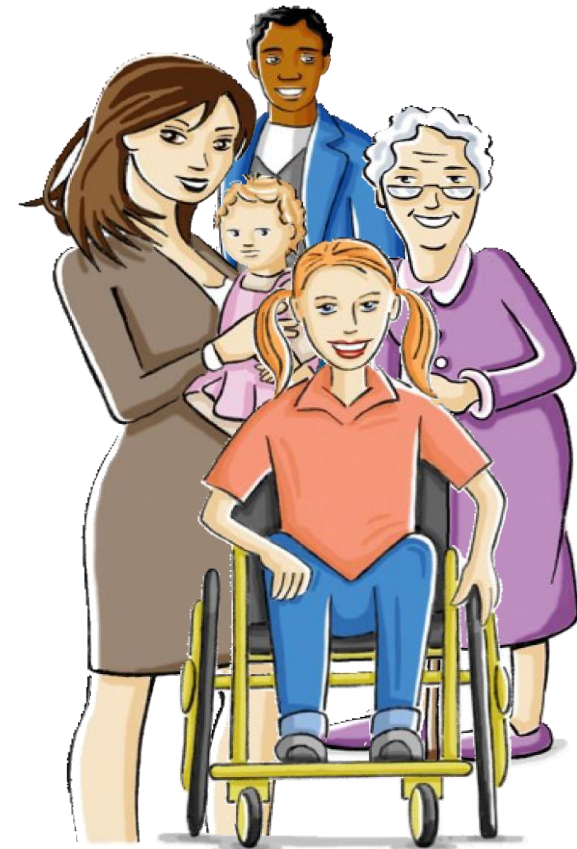


...allow us to make a
contribution, give
something back and
help others

- *Giving something back*
- *Benefit to other people*
- *Trying to help others*

Peer support groups build our
confidence and self-esteem

- *Provides positive role models*
- *Promotes self-esteem*
- *Encourages people to carry on*
- *Some people go on to become facilitators and get real satisfaction and confidence from it – go on to do other things*
- *Motivation*
- *Empowering*
- *It motivates you and builds confidence*
- *Empowering*
- *It makes you feel that you matter and have worth*
- *Stops you from feeling stupid*
- *Makes you feel more capable*
- *Feel you matter – self worth*
- *Confidence*
- *Confidence, self-esteem, emotional, depression*
- *Build own confidence*
- *Gives you confidence and positivity,*
- *Something to offer someone else*
- *Making you feel valued*
- *Confidence meeting new people*
- *confidence/self-esteem*
- *Feeling valued*



Peer support groups
....give us support and
encouragement

- *Listen*
- *Support*
- *Helps people emotionally and in a practical way*
- *Listen and talk*
- *Emotional support*
- *Emotional support*
- *Providing understanding*
- *Go to peer support for support*
- *To support other people*
- *Support*
- *Support*
- *Support*
- *Someone on the end of the phone*
- *Personal development sympathetic ear*
- *Talking to understanding person (personal experience)*
- *Support from people who can empathise with whatever you are going through*

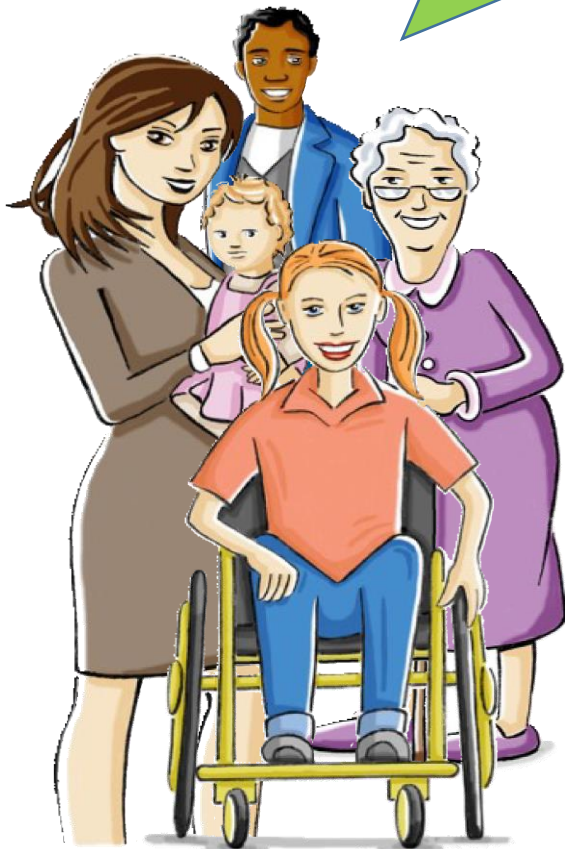


.... enhance our wellbeing,
help recovery, improve our
mental health and help us
to self-care

- *Promotes sustainable recovery*
- *Helps people come up with new ways of doing thing/new strategies*
- *Learn about self care*
- *Helps with recovery, people at different stages of their journey*
- *Therapeutic*
- *Helps with general health*
- *Other therapies offered*
- *Enhances wellbeing*
- *Mental health - gives you a lift*

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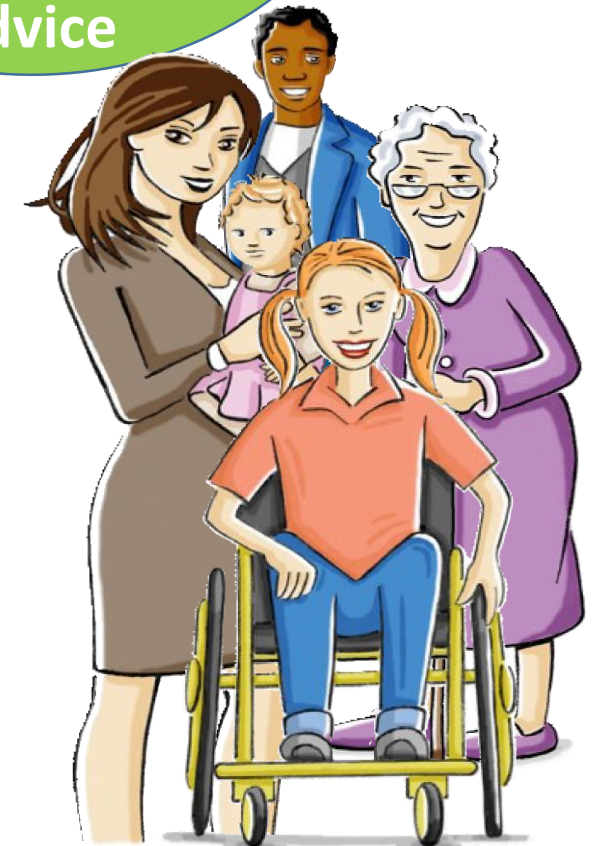
Peer support groups allow us to share insight and experiences



- *Understand each other can support each other normalises for people how they are feeling*
- *Share knowledge and insight/compare notes*
- *People with similar experiences*
- *Somewhere to share personal experiences*
- *Talk about stuff*
- *Learn things about ourselves*
- *To offload*
- *To open up i.e. I've had a shit week*
- *Having space to share things*
- *Sharing experience*
- *A sounding board*
- *Gives the time to have mutual focused attention*

- *Share information*
- *Education*
- *Advice*
- *Learn things about our condition*
- *Learn about treatments*
- *Learn about what is available where*
- *Information*
- *Knowledge exchange*
- *Raising awareness of issues*
- *To expand understanding*
- *Hearing more about condition – building up skills*
- *To test and challenge belief, no understanding*
- *Somewhere you can go for advice especially re. benefits*
- *Communicating issues*
- *Keeps me up to date*
- *Knowledge/communication*
- *Information (not from formal organisation)*
- *Build own personal knowledge (not formal)*
- *Useful to see how others cope with condition you have can learn from others*
- *Support dealing with benefits/back to work*
- *Learning*
- *Dealing with practical problems*

Peer support groups help us to access to information, knowledge and advice



I might experience some
barriers to trying a peer support
group



- *Being able to afford to travel*
- *Motivation i.e.. Negative effect of depression*
- *Identity being based on illness*
- *Dependency/institutionalisation*
- *Time*
- *Pride*

People consider peer support groups to be both valuable and cost effective

People have very clear ideas about what makes a good peer support group.

People running these groups are very willing to share experiences and work together.

There were a number of clear and cost effective suggestions from groups as to what support they needed to enhance their offer

We think peer support groups are a cost effective way of organising holistic support for people with diagnosed physical and mental health conditions

- *Valued by people with problems and by carers*
- *relatively economical way of organising support*
- *good for saving the Local Authority and NHS money*



Good peer support groups need practical organisation

- *Facilitators*
- *Funding*
- *Refreshments*
- *DBS checks*
- *Insurance*
- *Refreshments*
- *Location*
- *More frequent meetings*
- *Programme of activity so you know what is coming up*

Good peer support groups need strong values and ways of working

- *Work on self-help*
- *Value the confidence building stuff*
- *Recognise that people may have fear and trepidation*
- *Consistency*
- *Be positive*
- *Create a buzz*
- *Have fun*
- *It's not just about a meeting it's about a community*
- *Welcoming and friendly*
- *Welcome people and support them to attend (phone support in advance)*
- *Different styles of working together – peer volunteers (facilitators, buddies, activity leader), friends, closed and open groups, sometimes with some therapeutic or clinical input or support*
- *Established peer support group has to be open and responsive to new ideas, possibility of testing things out*
- *Confidentiality*

We see the value of working together to support each other and enhance the peer support offer

- *Lots of value getting current groups together to raise awareness of peer support*
- *There are other conditions or situations where peer support may be helpful*
- *Groups need practical help with stuff like websites/referrals/accessibility stuff*

We would welcome some help with..



Support for our facilitators

- *Energising facilitators*
- *Groups can bring up things that need to be dealt with i.e.. Open up new problems/things never thought of. Can make people feel worse – so needs facilitators who can minimise any negative effects*

Support around venues

- *Venues in communal areas; libraries, hospital, out-patient area*
- *Venues in local established health centres*
- *Every medical centre/surgery (large practices) should have space to accommodate such groups on a regular or rolling programme*

We would welcome some help with..

peer Support



Referrals from the NHS

- *Where are new referrals going to come from?*
- *Started a group which was well attended but then how do you keep new referrals up?*
- *Health professionals need engaging and to renew knowledge and understanding of groups in their area*
- *Making more use of social prescribing*
- *How many GP's attend group? This is a question*
- *GP Surgeries should have info (about peer support groups)*
- *Hospitals – they should be funded (to run peer support groups/refer people?)*
- *Hospitals/Consultants/Specialist Nurses should publicise/refer patients to peer support groups*
- *Initial (offer of peer) support following a diagnosis, i.e.. Cancer, heart attack*
- *The Bolton CCG chairperson should be tackled about lack of local publicity of such groups*
- *GP's – they receive discharge notice from hospital and should be aware and give/send details of support groups*
- *GP referral*

Publicity and Advertising

- *Bolton Directory*
- *Advertising/surgeries*
- *Peer support directory for police, housing officer, teachers etc.*
- *More raising awareness i.e.. voting*
- *Website – website!! Publicity is key to success*
- *Local directory of support group needed (say via CVS)*

We would welcome some help with..

Developing our outreach

- *Timing/day/weekends*
- *Local groups*
- *Outreach groups to accommodate people who cannot afford to travel*
- *Active groups in the community*
- *Mobile volunteers from peer support groups that can go to peoples house*

Accessibility Issues

- *Accessibility/transport (Dial a Ride)*
- *Being able to cope with all disabilities and making reasonable adjustments in groups*
- *Individual needs met e.g. assisted hearing to different languages, physical disability*
- *Avoids jargon*
- *Speaking plain english – not in medical terms*



To explore on-line options

- *Peer support offered on the internet*
- *Online peer support*
- *Are people using internet rather than in person*
- *Can meet people online who you do eventually meet*
- *Engage with people who are based in their rooms on play stations*

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Recommendations

There are four clear recommendations from this piece of work.

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