# Let's Develop Peer Roles

# Contents

❝ We walk alongside you.
We're not here to fix anything..
but to relate and empathise
with you on a shared journey.

If you need this resource in a different format, please get in touch.

# Welcome!

It's an exciting time for peer support in Scotland and indeed, internationally. The landscape for peer support is becoming much more varied and vibrant. This in turn is creating more diverse opportunities for people to access mental health support that meets their needs.

Valuing and providing opportunities for people to intentionally use their lived experience to help others can transform how organisations deliver mental health support. Whether you're a small community-based group, a national organisation or an NHS service, this toolkit will help you to introduce, manage and sustain peer support roles.

This resource will continue to grow and change as we share our experiences and insights with each other. We hope that you stay connected with Scottish Recovery Network as we would love to hear any ideas and feedback that you have. We look forward to finding out how you use this toolkit and to collaborating with you to champion the power of peer support roles in Scotland!

## Scottish Recovery Network team

## A bit about this toolkit

We have created this toolkit to guide rather than dictate your approach. It outlines what peer support is and brings together learning around peer roles from our work with partners across the country and beyond. These partners include organisations who have introduced peer support work; individuals delivering on the ground and/or online as well as people accessing peer support. We hope that these shared experiences give you the confidence to introduce peer roles where you are.

The focus of this toolkit is on formalised peer support roles where people are employed (paid and/or volunteer), trained and supported to provide peer support. The good news is there will be elements of peer support already happening within your organisation, you are just not necessarily calling it that! We can confidently say this because peer support is about human connection, conversations, and relationships!

We know that developing new roles comes with enthusiasm and energy yet also brings questions and challenges. Initial questions you might have include:

- **Funding** – how do we afford new roles?

- **Evidence** – does peer support work?

- **Embedding a new role** – what's important?

- **Support** - how to provide support for the people in the roles?

- **Training** – what type of training is useful?

This toolkit identifies ways to answer these questions and to overcome common barriers to developing peer roles. It includes tools to support you in your planning process and provides details of additional help that you can tap into along the way. Learning from this toolkit will enable you to put structures in place to make peer support a mutual, empowering, and safe environment.



Find free practical downloads when you see this image



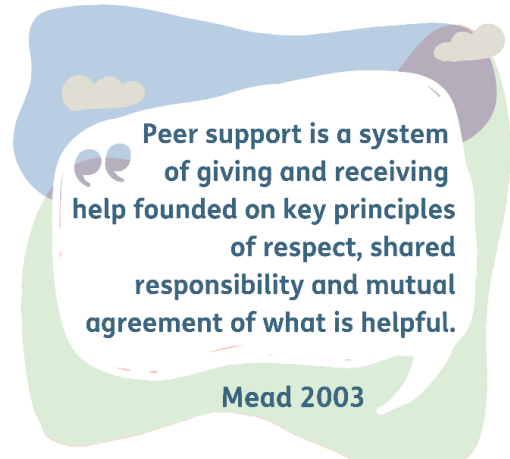We have provided space for your notes and reflections



Watch out for top tips when you see this symbol

# What is peer support?

The organisations we collaborate with tell us it is important to take time when developing peer support roles to explore what peer support is and how it can work for your organisation.

It's important not to lose the core/essence of peer support, especially as you are often taking something that happens naturally between people and formalising it.

Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what is helpful.

Mead 2003

## What makes peer support unique?

In 2020 we asked you what it is that makes peer support unique in Scotland? This short animation shares what you said:



🧩 Download the transcript for the animation

This research also highlighted that a combination of four key elements makes peer support different to other types of support and relationships.



## A supportive relationship

A peer support relationship is a "healthy" and "positive" relationship with "somebody who's got your back."

An intentional friendship where there is trust and respect providing a safe space to share without judgement.

## Shared lived experience

In a peer support relationship, both parties have relevant "lived experience" relating to their mental health which means that "everybody in the room has some commonality in their experience" which "connects them."

It can be a similar but not identical experience that enables a building of trust, where you have something in common that leads to people feeling understood and less isolated.

Let's Develop Peer Roles | Scottish Recovery Network | March 2023

## A relationship of equals

The peer support relationship is a relationship with "no hierarchy" where everyone involved holds an "equal role" and is "on the same level as the person you are talking to." There is an awareness of power dynamics and seek ways to minimise.

## An intentional space

The peer support environment is planned, set up and conducted in a "robust" and "purposeful" way which ensures that all parties "feel safe and confident" to participate. It is a welcoming environment where intentional structured relationships happen with clear boundaries.

Overall peer support was described as a 'journey together' rather than an intervention.

## Informal to formal peer support

Peer support has been happening naturally between people from as far back as history can recall. Connecting with people who have shared experiences and backgrounds - supporting each other through similar experiences, sharing with and learning from each other.

In mental health communities, people began to organise themselves informally to provide peer support for each other. They spoke of the benefits and sense of empowerment they experienced and began to formally organise around community spaces, support groups and collective advocacy. The peer support approach is - and continues to be - an incredibly important way for people to help each other.

The growth of more formalised peer roles and approaches began as the impact and evidence of peer support enabling people's wellbeing and

recovery from mental health problems became better known and understood. This led to the creation/establishment and growth in volunteer and paid roles.

## Bringing peer support to life!

Our partnership work has highlighted how useful it is to hear directly from people involved in peer support. People interested in developing roles have said that whilst reading about or being told about peer support was useful, what really brought it to life was hearing from peer supporters talking about their role.
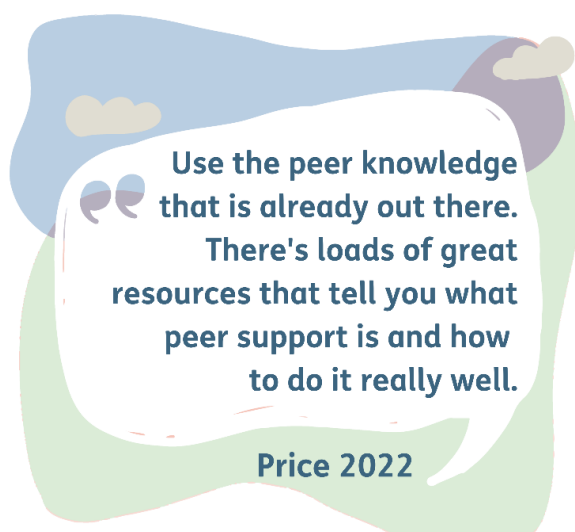
In this short animation Hollie, a Peer Worker with Penumbra, tells us what peer support means to her (1 min, 48 secs).

Or take a couple of minutes to watch this animation and find out what peer support means to Mental Health Campaigner and Peer Worker Scott (1 min, 56 secs).



Want more? Scottish Recovery Network are continually adding to the [Peer support and me](#) series with blogs, vlogs, and audio contributions. Or why not check out these films from Edinburgh Peer Community. Side by Side: [The Power of Peer Support](#)



> **Use the peer knowledge that is already out there. There's loads of great resources that tell you what peer support is and how to do it really well.**
>
> **Price 2022**

# A values framework for peer working

Scottish Recovery Network co-designed a [Values Framework](#) for Peer Working with people involved in peer support across Scotland. Organisations and peer supporters have found the framework useful in enabling them to:

- Describe and define the peer supporter role

- Ensure peer supporters maintain the integrity of peer support

- Develop an evaluation/evidence base (see Evaluate on page 47)



The Values Framework for Peer Working describes 6 peer support values (HEAR ME - outlined in the image above), an explanation of each value and what this could look like in practice.

## What peer support isn't

People told us that when they are developing peer support roles it was useful to know what peer support is but also what it isn't.

| Peer support work is | Peer support work isn't |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>A person in recovery</li><li>Sharing lived experience in an intentional and purposeful way</li><li>A relational practice that requires unique skills, abilities, and knowledge</li><li>An interaction not an intervention</li><li>Strengths-based</li><li>Rights-based and trauma informed</li><li>Non-coercive</li><li>Grounded in lived experience knowledge and expertise</li></ul> | <ul><li>People only sharing their experience/story</li><li>Delivering a clinical programme or therapy</li><li>Any worker who shares their lived experience in their role</li><li>A way to get people to conform to treatment plans</li></ul> |

## Space for notes

Take time to think about what peer support means to you and how it could fit within your organisation.

## Why develop peer support?

Because we know it works! People highlight the value of being able to meet with people who they feel really get it because they have been there. Peer support can be a way of unlocking the potential in people that have been struggling with their mental health.

A natural progression for any organisation that values lived experience is to look for ways to develop opportunities for people to become involved. Taking involvement and participation a stage further to create peer support roles is one way of doing so.

In this short animation Jasmail tells us about her experience of bereavement and how peer support has positively impacted both her personal and professional life (1 min, 58 secs).

# Benefits of developing peer support roles

There are multiple benefits to developing peer support roles within your organisation, these will include:

| For | Example benefits |
|---|---|
| People accessing services | • Increased sense of hope and positive sense of self<br>• Improved sense of wellbeing<br>• Increased sense of empowerment<br>• Reduced need for clinical support<br>• Better integration within local communities<br>• Increased access to and sustainability in education, training, and employment |
| Peer Workers | • Employment – meaningful role, pay, sense of self<br>• Opportunity to contribute to others recovery<br>• Turning a difficult experience into something purposeful and positive<br>• Creating a career path with opportunities to share learning and training |
| Organisations and services | • Putting your values into practice<br>• Improved services for people and communities that you support<br>• Enabling a more needs responsive service<br>• Opportunity to have a more diverse workforce<br>• Greater reputation for innovation<br>• Wider reach<br>• Opportunity for funding/partnerships<br>• Reduce stigmatising and discriminatory practices |

## Peer support enhances what you are already doing

At its core, mental health peer support is a relational approach that is grounded in people sharing their lived experience to enable others to build on their recovery and mental wellbeing. This is often referred to as experiential knowledge - where what we have learned from what we have gone through becomes a powerful form of knowledge creation.

The beauty of peer support is that it fits well as a complement to other types of support. It can be found in many different settings. The roles and activities of peer support workers vary and can include one or more of the following:

- Activities that support wellbeing

- Working one to one with people

- Facilitating support groups

- Supporting people to use self-management tools

- Being part of social prescribing or community links initiatives that help people access local activities to support wellbeing

- Supporting people through transitions such as from hospital to home, moving from secondary mental health services to community-based supports and into employment

# Space for notes

# Are you peer ready?

## Developing the why?

Developing the **why** is essential for groups, organisations and services seeking to develop peer roles. Knowing why you want to develop something and what you hope to achieve provides the building blocks to successful and sustainable peer support role development.

We have created a template to support you to think about how peer support roles will make a difference in your organisation. It can be helpful to think about how peer support roles can benefit:

- The people accessing your services
- Peer support workers
- The organisation

Download the [Developing your why](#) template

## Start from a strong foundation

We have learned from organisations developing peer support roles the importance of creating a strong foundation. Investing the time in preparation will make every aspect of introducing and embedding peer support roles easier.

We know from people's experiences that peer support roles work well in environments where the focus is on health and wellbeing, particularly improving mental health as a key aim.

In Scotland, and elsewhere, there is a wide range of organisations that have made the decision to develop peer support roles. From small community led groups and organisations to NHS services. What links these organisations is their common goal to improve the wellbeing of the communities they work within. When considering whether your organisation is 'peer ready' consider:

- How does peer support fit with your organisation's aims and values?
- Is your organisation recovery focused?
- Who would benefit from peer support – this may be the existing people that you work with or a new group of people you are hoping to work with?
- Do you have any links with existing partners in the community that are either doing this or may be interested in doing this?

# Developing the peer support role

Developing any new role involves a process - peer support roles are no different. Organisations want to 'get it right.' It can be daunting thinking you are walking into unknown territory when developing something as relatively new and innovative as peer support. It doesn't have to be!

Those who have developed peer support roles emphasise the value of taking the time to invest in the planning process. Whether you are a small community group or large organisation, you don't have to do this on your own. Others are doing this too!

We have identified four key areas for consideration when developing peer support roles: Plan, Recruit, Support and Evaluate. They are discussed in more detail throughout this toolkit.

# Plan

Organisations say that it is easier than you think to develop peer support roles, but it does take time and commitment to ensure your planning is thorough. Here are some things to think about that will help you plan, develop, and sustain peer support roles.

## What kind of peer support?

A good starting point is identifying what is currently available and where the gaps are. It can be useful to discuss this with your wider community and involve people who access your services, family and carers, staff members and where relevant local funders and commissioners. The [Recovery Conversation Café](#) approach can be an effective way to bring people together to do this. Other things to consider include:

- Is the role volunteer or paid?
- Do you want to develop group peer support, one to one peer support or both?
- Is the support delivered face to face, telephone and/or digitally?

## Getting buy in

Getting buy in from key people is an important part of the development process. It ensures stakeholders/partners understand the value peer support will bring to the service and are on board to help you develop these types of roles. Involve them in discussions around how peer support roles will be of benefit to them and what concerns they have.

The amount of buy in you will need will vary depending on the size and scope of your organisation and how much focus and recognition is given to peer support. The Evaluate section (page 47) of this toolkit will provide you with ways to evidence the positive impact of peer support roles.

**Top tip!** Use case studies from organisations and personal stories from Peer Workers to highlight the power of peer support!

## Involve people

It can be helpful to bring together a few people to work with you when developing peer support roles. Include people with lived experience where possible and ideally involve existing peer workers. Learning from other people's experiences is mutual support in action!

Talk with those who have walked this path before you - they have insights to share. Talk to other groups/organisations that have peer roles – use social media, contact your local Third Sector Interface (TSI)

to see what other organisations are currently employing peer supporters, whether as volunteers or paid.

## Embedding peer support roles within your team

When peer supporters are joining established teams, spending time with the team in preparation of introducing peer support roles can be invaluable. This gives team members the opportunity to become informed about the principles of peer support; the value of lived experience and how it will contribute to a more recovery focused service. It will provide the team the opportunity to ask questions, clarify assumptions, challenge stigmatising attitudes, and enable them to develop their own responses to the challenges they identify. This results in your team feeling valued and included in the process.

> Download an example [team preparation session plan](#)

## Networking

As part of your process, it is good to reach out to others who are already developing peer roles and learning from their experiences. Scottish Recovery Network can support you to link with others – so please do [get in touch](#)!

Joining in with events and opportunities that we offer is another way for you to connect, learn from and share with others. Find out about forth-coming opportunities by signing up to the Scottish Recovery Network [newsletter](#)

## The Peer Recovery Hub

Scottish Recovery Network's [The Peer Recovery Hub](#) includes information, experiences and learning resources that are freely available to use as fits your need. You can also contact us for guidance as we are on hand to support you through the development process.

## The Peer Chat podcast



Take time out to watch or listen to our [Peer Chat podcast series](#) where people involved in developing peer roles share their knowledge and experience.

> The first thing is don't re-invent the wheel. There are already people out there who are doing this fantastically. Often, they're user-led organisations, but they're already doing it.
>
> A lot of stuff that I was seeing when I was working with peer support in the NHS was people trying to create something for peers, when there were already some good examples of that.
>
> **Vikki Price, Peer Hub**

# Funding

From our experience and work with partners, what we are clear on, is that peer support approaches provide value for money. Developing peer roles should not be seen as the cheap option. It is a different option and one that complements other support and services.

Investing in any role asks that you consider the overall cost of developing it. Deciding to develop volunteer or paid peer support roles is not about saying one is better than the other. They are different and fulfil different situations and needs.

What we have learned from people developing peer support roles is to factor in costs for the following:

| Volunteer roles | Paid roles |
|---|---|
| <br>• Training and development<br>• Support - one to one and group<br>• Disclosure Scotland fees<br>• Indemnity insurance<br>• Access to technology – phone, computer and/or internet<br>• If online, access to Wi-Fi/data<br>• Expenses – travel, food and caring | • Recruitment<br>• Pay including insurance, National Insurance, and pension costs<br>• Management costs<br>• Travel expenses<br>• Disclosure Scotland (Protection of vulnerable adults' scheme, where required) fees<br>• Training – including cost of course and time factor |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Expenses to cover involvement in local and national peer opportunities/networks<br>• Cost of recruiting role to support peer volunteers<br>• Volunteer Development role<br>• Evaluation and/or review processes<br>• Celebration events | • Support and supervision<br>• Time away from delivering direct service for learning and connecting with wider peer groups and opportunities<br>• Involvement in local and national peer networks<br>• Phone and IT access/equipment<br>• Evaluation and/or review processes<br>• Promotional and celebrational events |

## Take a different route to funding

A challenge (dance) for organisations who want to develop peer support roles has been balancing what the local community say they find helpful, having the capacity to try innovative ideas and delivering what fits with current local strategies and funding opportunities.

We know that introducing a new role within your organisation can be a challenge in the current funding climate, so we suggest getting a little bit creative! There is nothing wrong with applying for different pots of funding as peer support brings benefits to a wide range of settings and themes. For example, community focused funding, employability,

wellbeing, organisational development, and more are ways to build your peer support activity and create a portfolio of evidence.

## Small steps

Some projects and organisations access funding related to employment and skills development. For example, they encourage people using an existing peer group/service to get more actively involved step by step. This could be anything from facilitating the group, welcoming people, being a buddy or responsibility for refreshments. This enables people to gain confidence and develop skills. Moving towards creating volunteer roles provides an opportunity to try things out while exploring the different avenues of funding to tie in with. Tap into small pockets of funding and gather peer support role evidence along the way.

## Volunteer roles

Consider initially bringing in peer roles on a voluntary basis and apply for volunteer related funding. Doing this could allow you to:

- Introduce and embed peer roles gradually - this could give greater confidence to the wider team and people accessing support
- Demonstrate the effectiveness and value of peer support, which should make the decision about a salaried role easier
- Gauge what sort of demand there would be

## Paid roles

Testing out what works and developing (and sharing) evidence can then influence local strategies/service design. It will also pave the way to approach grant funders for greater amounts of money for bigger projects or longer-term salaries.

When developing paid peer roles, some organisations take the opportunity when commissions are being retendered to offer peer support roles as an example of something different that works. Building on their success they then go on to create more roles as funding opportunities arise. The good news is more funders are recognising the value of lived experience and are awarding grants to try new approaches. This is an opportunity for you to test out what works for your organisation and the people you support.

**Top tip!** Partner with other groups or organisations to share skills, costs of training and funding insights.

Remember to share your learning about the impact of peer support so others can use it to!

## Evidence

People have also fed back to us that local decision makers cite a lack of evidence despite the growing evidence base for peer approaches. See page 47 for more information on how to evaluate your peer support roles.

## Contacts

Across Scotland your local TSIs provide funding, resources, and support. They may also hold valuable information on who else is developing peer roles in your area. They have a role in representing the third sector within local health and social care partnerships and can signpost to contacts and opportunities.

Scottish Council for the Voluntary Sector (SCVO) also provide a Guide to finding funding and the Funding Scotland search engine.
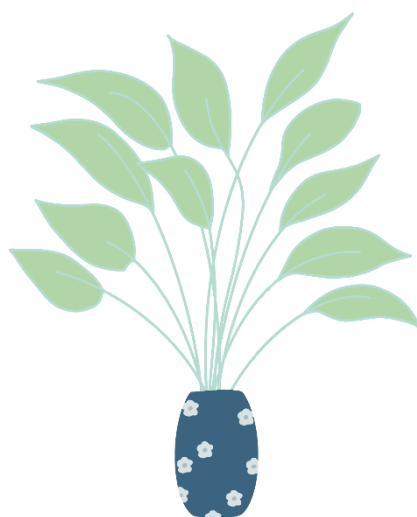
# Space for notes

# Recruit

You have developed your plan and are looking to recruit your peer support workers. Whether this role will be voluntary or paid will influence how you develop your recruitment process.

Being a peer supporter requires a certain set of skills, knowledge, and experience. Unlike any other form of support, peer support requires a person to draw on their lived experience to help another person.

Paid roles will be employees and covered by your organisation's human resource policies and procedures. For volunteer roles, a volunteer policy, although not a statutory requirement, is good practice and sets out a statement of your commitment to your volunteers and your expectations of them.

**Top tip!** Guidance and support can be accessed through your local TSIs, where available Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Scotland

Your recruitment process may need adaptations to get the best out of your potential peer support role applicants. This could be as simple as changing the way you write job descriptions and conduct the interview process. The key to both is to place more value on the skills of utilising lived experience over qualifications. Plan your recruitment strategy creatively!

## Job descriptions: one size does not fit all

As with any position recruiting the right people is a key factor to the success of peer support roles. It is important to ensure that all peer support workers, whether volunteer or paid, have a clear job description that sets out their role, responsibilities, and key relationships.

We have learned that looking at things through a peer lens will enable you to frame the role and tasks involved. Using the HEAR ME peer values can be a good starting point. Each of the six themes can stimulate your thinking about what it is you need from a peer supporter to carry out the role you are creating.

A well-crafted job description with relevant details is essential to enable an effective recruitment and selection process as well as ensuring clarity of the goals and activities of the role.

**Top tip!** Have a clear role description and support for volunteers, especially where people are stepping into a clearly defined role from accessing the service/participating in peer support.

As with any role, developing the job description follows on from deciding on **Why** you want to develop the role, **What** outcomes you are looking to achieve and **How** it will fit within your organisation. There will be core elements as well as tailored aspects depending on the focus of the role. For example, a peer support worker facilitating peer groups will have different tasks to a peer supporter whose role is to enable people to become more connected within their community. Therefore, it can be

unwise to pick a job description off the shelf and try and shoehorn it into your organisation. Better to define a job description that fits with your organisation and meets the needs of the people accessing the service.

## Things to consider

Decide what hours of work will be involved in line with how you want to develop peer roles. Be clear about what you want the peer supporters to do and any funding parameters. Is the role voluntary, part time (can be useful to check the Government's permitted work fact sheet) or full time?

**Top Tip!** Think about the personal qualities, wider skills, and experience that you would want a peer supporter to have. Do not assume that having lived experience of mental health challenges is enough.

People tell us it is also helpful to be clear on what you mean by 'lived experience.' Roles may only require lived experience of mental health problems and recovery, others are more targeted towards a specific demographic i.e., self-harm, eating disorder, LGBTQI+ or carer.

Where this type of role is new to an organisation it can be useful to develop more than one role so that the peer supporters can also provide mutual support for each other.

We have collected examples of information you may wish to consider adding to your job description to get you started.

🧩 Download [Job description through a peer lens](#)

The recruitment process is a chance to build on your strategic vision for peer support. Use this opportunity to spark conversations about how peer support might look in practice.

Involve the team managers/supervisors who will be managing peer support workers in writing job descriptions, person specifications and interviews. Talk to people using your service about what they would value from peer support.

## Promoting your roles

People who have already been through the process told us that it is important to think about where you advertise your roles and how you communicate with potential applicants. Information about the role and application processes should be fully accessible.

**Top tip!** A great idea is to offer an information session to prospective or shortlisted applicants. This could be online or in person.

Use local newsletters and promote in places where people with lived experience are known to belong/are visible in addition to your usual approaches. Be clear in your promotion on application processes and timelines and at what points applicants can expect to be

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communicated with. Provide enough time from advertisement of the role to closing (suggested 3-4 weeks). Have a named contact for people to contact to ask questions about the role and recruitment process.

It is important to make the whole recruitment process accessible. Make it clear across all promotion that people can request information in different formats. Provide different ways for people to contact you. Make sure you ask if people have any accessibility or communication needs that would help them be part of the recruitment process e.g., BSL interpreters.

## Interviews

Interviews can be an intimidating experience. Think about ways to show you are welcoming of the applicant and make the process as smooth as possible. Be mindful that this may be the first time in a while that someone has applied for a role. When aiming to draw out the best from people, look for ways to reduce anxiety provoking situations.

Suggestions from people applying for peer roles include:

- Ask about reasonable adjustments e.g., more time to answer questions due to anxiety, physical accessibility and any tech support required
- Think about creating a space that is intentionally informal
- Provide the interview questions beforehand
- Give detailed information of how to get to the interview, who will greet them and who participates in their interview
- Remember applicants are also appraising you and deciding if this is somewhere they want to work!

## Questions, questions, questions

So, you have everything set up, the process agreed and now you need to decide on how to conduct the interviews. Get creative! Think about what you ask and use scenario-based questions. This gives interviewees the opportunity to offer their personal experiences in their responses. Use your job description as a guide. Suggestions include:

- What has drawn you to this role?
- What does peer support mean to you?
- Tell us about a time you used your lived experience to support another person. How did you make the difference?
- How did you decide what to share of your personal experience?
- Tell us about a situation when you were supporting someone else, and it didn't go well. What did you learn from the experience? What will you do differently?

## The job offers

Think about how you will inform interviewees on whether they have been offered the post or not. Be clear with information, timelines and provide a named contact. For those not successful this time, offer feedback and suggestions of how they could meet the requirements for a future application i.e., understanding of recovery and peer support, communication skills, I.T skills, learning and/or volunteer possibilities.

# Space for notes

# Support

Whether you are developing volunteer or paid roles, it is important to give time and consideration to how the worker will be supported within the workplace. Peer support work includes emotional work where people are asked to draw on their own lived experiences and at times witness/hear of experiences which they may find triggering. Good training, support and reflective practice will enable peer support workers to carry out their role well. You may want to consider any adjustments that could support the individual doing the role, this could include flexibility in working hours.

# Induction

How peer support workers are welcomed into and prepared to carry out their role is fundamental. Our partners tell us that having a comprehensive induction programme makes all the difference for them, the team they will be joining and the whole organisation. People have told us that they value:

- Having a named contact for the first few days/weeks
- Being able to shadow someone already in the role
- Discussion of what is expected of them
- Having the necessary IT equipment to conduct their role
- Being clear on relevant policies and procedures
- Teams that are prepared for them joining
- Having a supervisor in place and named person for daily contact

## Supervision is essential

Peer support work often involves both engaging with people going through difficult, challenging experiences, and drawing on your own experiences of illness and trauma. Supporting peer supporters in their role is an essential element especially in ensuring that they provide a safe and quality service whilst thriving themselves.

In workplaces this is often known as supervision. Supervision provides a protected space for peer supporters to reflect on their work, explore what is going well, discuss challenges and ways of navigating them. The supervisory relationship also provides space to explore developmental and training opportunities as well as check in with how the work is impacting personally and exploring what would help.

The structure of your supervision will depend on whether the role is voluntary or paid, the type of peer support and whether it is part time or full time. Options include one to one and/or group and often a mix of both is highly valued.

Peer support workers told us they value support and supervision that is:

- Regular and planned
- Focused
- Strengths based and solution focused
- Supportive
- Reflective
- Shared learning
- Focused on workplace wellbeing
- Values the whole person

**Top tip!** A manager made the point that supervision can sound formal and clinical – has a vibe about it. It doesn't have to be. A more informal approach tends to work better.

Here are example informal questions to help you get the conversation going:

- How are you?
- What's going well?
- Is there anything you are struggling with?
- Anything in your personal life that is impacting you just now?

These discussions will often highlight gold dust moments where you can clearly see the positive impact of peer support and how it is changing people's lives. Capture and celebrate those moments!

## Reflective practice

Opportunities for peer support workers to engage in reflective practice are important. They provide space to discuss their work and share their learning and challenges through a peer support lens. This can be within the supervisory relationship or when peer supporters support one another and/or in group reflective practice sessions which can be invaluable.

> **I find meeting regularly with people who really 'get' peer to be invaluable; it's not always the same people due to other commitments so the group dynamic is different every session. We really challenge and encourage each other through sharing our highs and lows and just being peers to one another.**
>
> **Fife Peer Support Network**

Group reflective practice provides an opportunity for peer support workers to connect with each other, have open discussions, share practice, and support each other. There is also the added benefit of encouraging and developing the peer support role. Small organisations can look for ways to partner with others to offer this to their peer support workers. There is strength in connection and collectiveness. As one Peer Support Manager put it "We learn from experience."

The [Values Framework](#) for Peer Working can be a useful tool and is one that many organisations use. Using the HEAR ME acronym invites the peer supporter to discuss what they did, why and what they have learned using the values of the peer support relationship. In groups, the values make for great discussion themes.
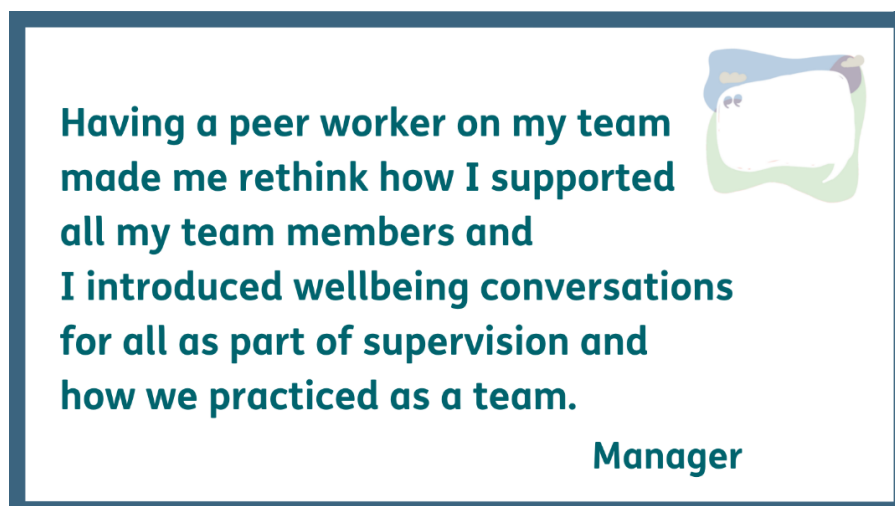


## Wellness at work

Having an open dialogue about wellbeing in the workplace ensures support to enable ongoing recovery is in place. Be flexible so that peer supporters can attend any groups or therapy that are part of their support network. Discuss triggers and warning signs. Create plans for what to do if there are setbacks.

Peer supporters lived experience brings a passion and motivation for their work. However, this can create a risk of burnout. Support the peer supporter to establish a work-life balance. Many have found Wellness Action Plans a good starting point in supporting their own mental health in the workplace. Several organisations use or adapt [Mind's Wellness Action Plan](#) - peer support workers have highlighted how this is useful in:

- Providing an opportunity to reflect on how their role and how the workplace can impact on their wellness

- Exploring what supports them in their role and identifying challenges and how to work with them

- Reflecting on their own support system both inside and out of the workplace

- Discussing relevant areas as part of their support and supervision

- Identifying any reasonable adjustments, they would find useful

**Note:** Completing and sharing a Wellness at Work plan should be a choice and not a requirement. Requiring any one person or group of workers to complete as part of their role could be interpreted as discrimination. Equality Act (2010).

Having a peer worker on my team made me rethink how I supported all my team members and I introduced wellbeing conversations for all as part of supervision and how we practiced as a team.

**Manager**

Outside of the supervisory role, peer support workers value the opportunity to debrief with a colleague at the end of session/day and times that they find emotionally challenging.

It is worth being aware of wider resources that peer support workers can tap into, if needed. Many organisations now provide Employee Assistant Programmes. For those that don't, Healthy Working Lives: supporting a mentally healthy workplace provides information and resources to organisations.

[Access to Work](#) is a service which provides personalised support for people with disabilities to access and remain in work. This is separate to reasonable adjustments that are the responsibility of the employer.

## Role drift

Like any role, there will be challenges for peer support workers. One is role drift. Peer support workers talk about the challenge, at times, of a lack of understanding around their role from others, leading them to find it difficult to remain true to the ethos of peer support. People told us it helps:

- Having a clear job description - using the Values Framework as a basis for developing the peer role
- Preparing the organisation/team for peer support roles
- Having regular support and supervision by someone who understands and champions the role
- Peer group reflective practice
- Being connected with peer workers within the wider organisation/community

Callum Ross from Habitus Collective talks about peer drift in episode three of the Peer Chat podcast.

🧩 Download the [podcast transcript](#)



Peer Chat With
Callum Ross
An international perspective

## Training

Training and learning opportunities are important for any worker in enabling them to carry out and develop in their role. [The Peer Recovery Hub](#) has a wealth of learning resources that you can freely use and adapt. [Let's do Peer2Peer](#) provides a thorough basis for all peer working roles and is useful if you are developing training in-house.

You might also be interested in our resources [Let's do Peer Group Facilitation](#) and [Empowering Connections](#) (taking peer support groups online).

Peer2Peer courses may also be available through other resources in your local community, and it may be worth checking with your local TSI or contacting Scottish Recovery Network.

The [PDA Mental Health Peer Support](#) (level 7) is an SQA accredited qualification. This is an advanced course and is currently offered by: [Mindspace Recovery College](#) (Perth), University of the [Highlands and Islands](#) and [Edinburgh Peer Community](#)

## Collaboration

Different areas of Scotland are developing partnership working approaches to create shared resources for peer support work. There is a growing realisation that to enable organisations, especially smaller ones, to develop peer roles they also need to provide training and opportunities to connect, network and share learning. There is value in collaborating to create shared resources. This could include enhanced recovery learning, knowledge of different peer training approaches and

spaces for group reflective practice. Here are examples from across Scotland of what is possible.
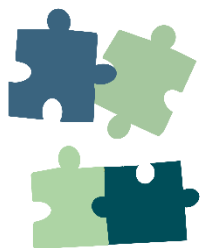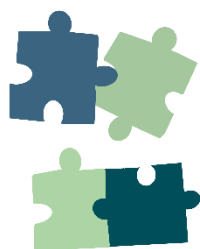
## Fife Mental Health Peer Support Network

Developed a peer pathway of training for people interested in recovery and peer support which had the option of then training as a peer supporter.

## Edinburgh Peer Community

Provide peer support courses, learning and networking opportunities for peer supporters.

## North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery College

Provides recovery learning opportunities and a pathway of training for peer volunteers and workers.

## Making Recovery Real in Dundee

Provides a network for people interested in recovery and peer support including Peer2Peer training.

# Evaluate

Evaluation is a powerful tool to understanding the impact of peer support and helps you demonstrate the value of peer support. Research shows that peer support can improve people lives in a range of different ways. Being able to evidence the impact of what you do will help you make improvements, share your successes, and justify further investment.

Evaluation is beneficial to different stakeholder groups. The table below summarises the importance of **Why** evaluate?

| Key stakeholder | Rational |
| --- | --- |
| Services | • Ensure the peer support service is delivering what you had hoped<br>• Ensure peer support is reaching the people that you expected it to reach<br>• Identify in what ways peer support is improving people's lives<br>• Identify ways in which peer support could improve |
| Staff team | • Reassuring to teams that they are delivering the best service possible<br>• Re-enforces standards to help support people in their roles<br>• Encourages ongoing learning and development |
| Participants | • Demonstrates to people that their views and experiences are welcome and valued |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Shows that the organisation is committed to learning and developing from the lived experience perspective<br><br>• Ensures that people receive a service that meets their needs |
| Organisations | • Improves your reputation and standing in the field that you are in<br><br>• Gives you tangible evidence for partners, stakeholders, and the communities that you are doing what you set out to do<br><br>• Highlights improvement in the areas that need it<br><br>• Shows that you listen to and actively encourage feedback |
| Partners/funders | • Evidence that you are delivering on the outcomes that you have set out to achieve<br><br>• Shows robust process in place to monitor and improve on those outcomes<br><br>• Helps strengthen existing partnerships that you have worked hard to establish<br><br>• Gives you the confidence to develop new partnerships that will benefit your organisational ambitions<br><br>• All the above leading to improving the services that you deliver |

## How to evaluate peer support

Peer support is a different way of doing things and to ensure future development and funding investment, it is important to identify in what ways peer support makes a difference.

Evaluation doesn't have to be difficult. Taking the time to develop an evaluation plan helps you to focus on your intention and processes. Learning from the Side by Side Research Programme has resulted in a useful toolkit [Developing peer support in the community](#) (Mind, McPin Foundation, St George's University London). It suggests 5 key evaluation stages:

- Define what you are trying to achieve?

- Identify what tools will you use?

- Decide how will you collect information?

- Plan for how will you interpret what you have found?

- Decide on how you will share your learning with others?

## What are you trying to achieve?

This means, what difference would you like your peer support activity to make? Think back to your planning! Here you will have been thinking about.

- **Outputs**– what are the activities that you will do?
- **Outcomes** – what do you expect to change because of peer support? The focus here is the difference peer support has made.

(Be mindful – to measure absolutely everything is asking too much! Identify the key elements and focus your time on these).

As part of your evaluation process, it is useful to evidence the change in people's lives by looking at **What** has changed? And **How** this change has been made possible?

## CHIME

Using the [CHIME framework](#) (Mary Leamy et al.) and it's five themes is a useful way to identifying changes in people's lives and their recovery process.
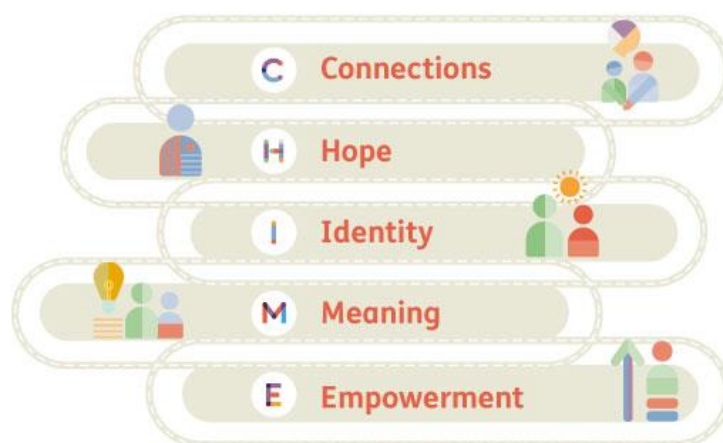


🧩 Download examples of using [CHIME to show change](#)

## HEAR ME

Using the HEAR ME values framework enables you to focus on what it is about peer support that has enabled the person to make changes and highlight the power of peer support.

🧩 Download [HEAR ME evaluation ideas](#) for peer support

# What tools will you use to collect information?

Identifying your outputs and outcomes will lead to you deciding what is the best way to measure and collate evidence. It is good to have a mix of quantitative (e.g., numbers, data) and qualitative (e.g., feedback, stories, interviews, quotes) information. Building in qualitative tools will give you the opportunity to explore in a bit more detail, give more depth to the data and bring to life by illustrating with people's experiences. There are a range of ways to do this, and the reality is that you will use more than one method.

Examples include:

| Tool | Purpose |
| --- | --- |
| Rating scales | Develop your own to measure (use CHIME). Useful for measuring change over a period of time i.e., at the start, middle and end of a series of sessions.<br><br>Paper-based isn't your only option, there are online tools that also collate information for you. This is an effective way to collect statistical data. |
| Questionnaire | Useful to ask the same set of questions to a group of people. This allows you to get a broad perspective over specific themes.<br><br>You can ask questions face to face, through a paper based or online survey, individually or within a group. |

| Personal stories | Asking people to share their experience of peer support has an impact as people connect emotionally with the person/people sharing. This can be a powerful way of illustrating change in people's lives. |
|---|---|
| Focus groups/feedback sessions | This is a fantastic way to get a sense of people's experience of peer support as well as changes in how they are feeling.<br><br>The [Recovery Conversation Café](#) toolkit is a useful framework - focus on asking two or three pertinent and open-ended questions. |
| One to one interview | A great way to find out rich detailed information. To be used wisely as time heavy. |
| Reflective notes | Where peer supporters are writing reflective notes of their interactions and activities, drawing key themes from their notes can highlight what is making the difference, what they are learning and where they are making changes. |

You can find more information about evaluation tools at [Evaluation Support Scotland](#)

## What have you learned?

Now that you have collected your information, the next stage is to make sense of what it is telling you. This means taking the time to analyse what you have collected and look for the patterns. Are there

key themes? What is working well, what is not? What do we identify as making the difference? We have learned from others that it doesn't have to be difficult but that it does take time. This time should be built into your planning process to ensure it is given the attention it deserves and enables you to produce the evidence you need.

## Share the learning

Having collated your evidence, how you share this will depend on who your audience(s) are and how they engage/connect with you.

Bring your reports to life with quotes to back up the statements you make. Include personal stories of change to illustrate the differences people have made in their lives due to peer support. Be creative and use animation, photographs, art, poetry, and other mediums to add that personal touch that enables people to connect to the humanity in us all. Positive stories and showing your impact will not only help you get investment and recognition, but it will also attract interest from potential future participants of your peer support services.
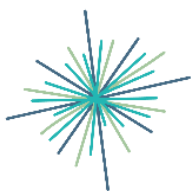
**Top tip!** Tell us about your experiences and the impact you have made. We would love to shout about all you have achieved and encourage others to get involved.

We know peer support roles work. Let's continue to build the evidence, share the impact, and build a movement to make sure peer support opportunities are available in communities, organisations, and services across Scotland's mental health system.

## Get in touch

At Scottish Recovery Network we are always happy to have a chat about your ideas and answer any questions. We would love to hear you feedback and ideas for this toolkit which will change and grow over time. We can also connect you with other people developing peer roles. Please do get in touch.
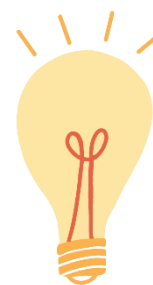
- 0300 323 9956 – ContactScotlandBSL
- info@scottishrecovery.net
- www.scottishrecovery.net

You can also join in on social media using **#PeerSupportScot**

## Huge thanks to...

Everyone who was involved in the What makes peer support unique? project. Also to, Hollie, Scott, Jasmail, Peer Hub, Habitus Collective, Edinburgh Peer Community, Penumbra, Mind, McPin Foundation, St Georges University London, Fife Mental Health Peer Support Network, Mindspace, University of the Highlands and Islands, Making Recovery Real in Dundee, North Ayrshire Wellbeing and Recovery College, Mary Leamy et al, Shery Mead, Evaluation Support Scotland, SQA, GOV.UK, Access to Work, Healthy Working Lives, Voluntary Scotland, SCVO, TSI Scotland Network and all the fabulous people, organisations and services championing peer support roles.