Scottish Recovery Network

Press release – 10 December 2020

Positive impact of third sector highlighted in new peer support research

Meaningful connections - new research published by the Scottish Recovery Network, outlines how peer support in Scotland has adapted to a digital world during Covid-19.

The report is based on engagement with 170 different peer support services and 110 participants from across the country. It highlights the benefits, as well as the challenges, of taking peer support into the digital space at a time when continuing to provide mental health support and maintaining relationships is more important than ever.

Key learning from the research includes:

- **The important role of the third sector.** As many services were stopping, the third sector and grassroots peer support groups were trying out new ways of working. 85% of remote peer support groups or services were provided by third sector organisations.

- **Flexibility was key to success.** Providers of peer support adapted quickly. 43% of providers had set up remote peer support straight away and 90% within a month. The third sector were particularly responsive and adaptable compared to other sectors and providers who perhaps have less flexibility.

- **The digital divide was a challenge.** Lack of access to technology was cited as a barrier to engagement with remote peer support. 91% experienced at least one challenge and 71% said not everyone understood the technology. However, 71% found that everyone had the right technology.

- **Peer support facilitators need support to make this approach work.** Interviews with peer support providers highlighted that to ensure facilitators can confidently provide an excellent experience they need to be supported to develop appropriate skills around engaging with participants, managing difficult conversations, safeguarding, and using the technology.

- **Remote peer support worked for a lot of people.** 81% of participants told us that they had felt better after accessing remote peer support. Nine in ten providers (91%) and eight in ten participants (81%) agreed that providing peer support remotely is a flexible way to work. It also opened peer support to people who found it difficult to engage in more traditional forms of support.

Scottish Recovery Network's Acting Director, Louise Christie commented:

The ability of peer support to adapt and change during Covid-19 lockdown should be celebrated and built on. The Meaningful connections research again shines a light on the essential role of the third sector in providing accessible mental health support that reflects the needs of the community.

Digital is seen not as a replacement for face-to-face peer support but as an additional approach that can provide additional access, choice, and meaningful connections.

A peer support provider commented:

The people that come responded really positively, they seem to appreciate it and feel that sense of connection with people. I had an assumption people weren't feeling as connected, but they said they had, and it had been good.

A peer support participant commented:

I could do it from home which was really convenient because I am a single parent on a low income and driving into town is a tenner in fuel.

A peer support provider commented:

They've said nothing beats face-to-face but this is something they would like to continue maybe once a month. They'd like a blended approach.

- [Download the Meaningful connections report](#)
- [Watch the BSL version of the Meaningful connections report](#)

Press enquiries

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