

Co-designing peer support at Future Pathways

SUMMARY REPORT



Introduction

This short report summarises what we learned from a co-design project about developing peer support at Future Pathways.

Co-design is an approach to designing new services. It involves working alongside different groups of people, including people accessing support. In co-design projects, people with different perspectives are encouraged to take part, and everyone's skills and knowledge are seen as equally valuable. In this way, co-design helps create services that benefit people accessing support.

This co-design project was about developing peer support at Future Pathways.

Peer support is a relationship of mutual support between people with similar life experiences. Peer support can be very powerful, especially when people are going through difficult or challenging experiences. Peer support involves sharing experiences in an intentional way and focusing on solutions that will benefit the person.

Developing peer support in Scotland's services is a national priority. In their Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan, the Scottish Government highlight how important it is to design services alongside people with lived experience.



“Mental health policies, support, care, and treatment are better informed and shaped by people with lived experience of mental health issues and staff practitioners.”

(Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan 2023-25)

People with lived experience, in the context of Future Pathways, means people who have experienced abuse or neglect while in care in Scotland.

In this summary report, you can read about:

- The background of the project
- Who took part in the project
- What the project involved
- Our findings and next steps

Project background

Future Pathways has consistently received feedback that people seek more opportunities to engage with peers through Future Pathways in a wider variety of ways. In response to people's feedback, Future Pathways formed a co-design group to:

- explore the peer support opportunities that people seek.
- see what these opportunities could look like.
- develop ideas for Future Pathways to explore and test.

When someone registers with Future Pathways, they work with a Support Coordinator. Together with their Support Coordinator, people are supported in a relational way to surface and plan for their personal outcomes.

Outcomes are the areas of someone's life that matter the most to them and the changes they would like to make.

Support Coordinators facilitate access to a range of resources including:

- commissioned services provided by our network of Delivery Partners
- material support provided through a Discretionary Fund
- support to access and engage with existing services, such as statutory or third sector services.

Currently, if peer support is part of a person's support plan, Future Pathways can support in several ways. Support Coordinators can help connect people with existing peer support services. People can connect with peers by attending Future Pathways engagement events or by sharing their creative work or journeys in the newsletter and website. Future Pathways also has a lived experience group called Voices for a Better Future. You can read more about Voices for a Better Future on the next page.

Who took part in the project

The co-design project was a collaboration between four partners. These were:

Future Pathways

Future Pathways supports people who were abused or neglected as children while in care in Scotland. The service aims to make life better for people we support. Our work is about helping people we support to gain a sense of freedom, purpose, confidence and independence. You can [read more about Future Pathways here](#). Three staff members from Future Pathways contributed to the co-design project, offering evaluation expertise, safeguarding support, and a strategic overview of the service.

Iriss

Iriss is a charity that works with people, workers and organisations in social work and social care in Scotland to help them use knowledge and innovation to make positive change happen. You can [read more about Iriss here](#). Two members of staff from Iriss were involved in the project. They led the planning and delivery of co-design group meetings. They brought experience of leading co-design projects within this sector and a commitment to sharing learning with the wider sector.

Scottish Recovery Network

Scottish Recovery Network brings people, services and organisations across sectors together to create a mental health system powered by lived experience. You can [read more about the Scottish Recovery Network here](#). The Scottish Recovery Network provided guidance and support to help us understand more about peer support, including how to share lived experience intentionally and helpfully.

Voices for a Better Future

Voices for a Better Future is Future Pathways' lived experience group. The group is made up of people who have accessed support from Future Pathways. The group makes sure that the views of people supported by Future Pathways are heard and considered in all service decisions. You can read more about [Voices for a Better Future here](#). Nine members of the Voices for a Better Future group volunteered to participate in the co-design project. Members contributed their lived experience of accessing Future Pathways. Some members also had previous experiences of external peer support services.

What the project involved

Planning the project

We started by drawing together evidence about peer support, planning the project and recruiting people to take part in the co-design project. From the beginning of the project, we focused on taking a trauma informed approach.

‘Being Trauma Informed’ means being able to recognise when someone may be affected by trauma, collaboratively adjusting how we work to take this into account and responding in a way that supports recovery, does no harm, and recognises and supports people's resilience. (NHS Education)

The group met in venues which were accessible, and which felt safe for group members. We took the time to build trust as a group. One of the ways we did this was by creating a ‘Working Together’ agreement about how we would work together as a group. Participants could choose if and how they would take part in the group. We regularly checked in with members about their questions, hopes, concerns and communication preferences.

Exploring peer support

The group met several times in person and online. During meetings, we took part in relationship-building activities which were designed to encourage connection and trust within the group. Activities modelled the importance of listening, being heard and contributing. They prompted us to explore what sharing experiences with peers can feel like and what it can bring up.

Together, we thought about what peer support means and what it could look like at Future Pathways. During meetings, group members shared insights and ideas in small and large groups, and shared expertise in presentations and discussions.

Evaluating our progress

Throughout the project, we reflected on our learning, our outcomes and what we wanted to explore further. We evaluated our progress on an ongoing basis. This helped us consolidate our learning and reflect on our experience of the project. We shared feedback in a range of ways such as interviews with group members, discussions during meetings and a feedback form.

Our findings and next steps

Our findings

Through this co-design project, we learned that there is an appetite among people supported by Future Pathways for peer support. Specifically, we learned that people supported by Future Pathways seek more opportunities to:

- share and hear stories of recovery
- connect with others with lived experience
- use voices of lived experience to influence positive change



“It’s very powerful. It’s someone seeing someone who used to be where they are now.”

(Participant with lived experience)

We also learned more about how Future Pathways should approach developing peer supports. We learned that everyone has different needs and preferences for the supports they access. Therefore, keeping voices of lived experience at the heart of peer support is important. It is also vital that we make sure peer support is mutually helpful for people giving and accessing peer support. Sharing experiences intentionally is an important part of this.



“Different people need different types of support. What I need is different to other people’s needs. We should create different options. Everyone is different.”

(Participant with lived experience)


We learned that, for now, people supported by Future Pathways wish for peer support to be facilitated and supported by Future Pathways. But we must also continue to focus on empowering people with lived experience to take increased ownership of supports.

Through the project, we learned a lot about the co-design approach. People who participated in the project were deeply motivated help make changes that would benefit people supported by Future Pathways.



“Peer support really has a huge amount of potential. It could really be a gamechanger and become a new chapter for Future Pathways.”

(Participant with lived experience)



We discovered that choices about how we worked together - such as making sure that private spaces for reflection and support were available - had a big impact on people's experience of the project. In many ways, the project itself created opportunities for peer support because it involved sharing perspectives, connecting with others and influencing positive change.

Future Pathways' next steps

The peer support co-design project has now come to an end. Our next step is to make a plan to develop peer support at Future Pathways. The plan will be informed by what we learned through this co-design project. Future Pathways will continue to invite and hear perspectives from people supported by the service, from our staff and our partners.

We want to thank Iriss, Scottish Recovery Network and Voices for a Better Future for working with us to explore peer support at Future Pathways.

