Peer Support Event: 8th February 2023, 2.00 – 4.00pm

1. Introduction

The Scottish Community Link Worker Network recently hosted an online CLW peer support event, attended by 41 community link workers from across Scotland. There were short introductions from two community link worker programmes on peer support before the group divided into smaller breakout rooms to allow more in-depth discussions around some suggested questions. Below follows a summary of the key talking points from the event.

2. Community Link Workers' Voices

Community Link Workers from two programmes - Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Forth Valley opened the session by talking about how peer support has helped them in their roles. Donna Laidlaw, a CLW in Denny, spoke about how peer support, clinical supervision and 1-1 sessions with a counsellor every 6-8 weeks had helped her and her colleagues. Although she was initially wary of how beneficial this support would be, she has seen how it can help her and would recommend that CLWs are open to support offered to them.

Chris Flynn and Melanie McIntosh from Greater Glasgow and Clyde spoke about their locality forums which have been running in Glasgow City since December 2021. Topics covered in the forums over the past year have included staff wellbeing, gaps/challenges in services and emerging areas of discussion from local CLW teams. The forums are facilitated by Health Improvement staff from the programme and are specifically for CLWs, rather than programme leads. CLWs are able to spend time with colleagues across organisations, sharing knowledge and resources as well as having a chance to discuss challenges and successes, all in a supportive environment. There is both formal and informal discussion with the focus placed on opportunities to network with colleagues outside of the day-to-day work environment.

3. Breakout Discussions

Breakout Discussion One: What support is currently available to you in your role to help your wellbeing? • What works for you? • How does peer support assist you?

Most CLW programmes rely on some kind of model of peer support to help CLWs in their roles. However there is no 'one size fits all' approach and the type and level of support for CLWs varies across programmes. Some teams benefit from clinical supervision (either online or face-to-face). This can be with someone external or from the clinical team within their workplaces. There can be challenges around where this support is offered if availability of space is an issue in practices, as well as the challenge of some CLWs still working from home. CLWs spoke about trying to meet each other outside the working day including lunchtime walks and catch ups. The importance of regular one-to-one and monthly team meetings was emphasised by many CLWs in the breakout groups. A number of CLW programmes use

WhatsApp groups for peer-to-peer support, to keep in touch, especially as the role can be quite a solitary one, if a CLW is working regularly from home.

Edinburgh CLWs benefit from access to both psychological and peer support as well as regular team meetings and optional manager support. There are two psychologists available to their CLWs and reflective practice for 1.5 hours a month gives them the opportunity to discuss complex cases as well as their own emotions. These discussions are done in the same groups, made up of 8 or 9 CLWs. Another CLW programme uses the NHS Wellbeing Line as a means of sharing resources and reflective practice while programme benefits from being in a hub set-up which means CLWs have regular contact with the clinical staff team and can reach out to them if needed. Other support mentioned included using an employer-funded counselling service, which can provide a limited number of sessions either online or face-to-face, expert bereavement support and organisations' employee assistance programmes. Other points made include the importance of a good work/life balance as well as opportunities to socialise with peers which shouldn't just be reserved for special occasions or times of year, e.g. Christmas.

Breakout Discussion Two: What do you think is best practice when it comes to peer support? • In your experience, what impact have Covid restrictions had on peer support? • Is there other support you would like you that you don't currently receive?

Peer support is valued across CLW programmes and CLWs welcome events like this one from the Network which enables CLWs to chat to their peers from other parts of Scotland and share experiences and good practice. Some programmes have met up online independently to share good practice.

In terms of the impact of Covid on peer support and support more generally, some CLWs remarked that counselling sessions ground to a halt during the Covid lockdown and haven't been re-established to the same levels as pre-pandemic. This has made CLWs feel more isolated, particularly when working from home.

The benefits of continuous personal development and mental health support including suicidal awareness and mental health first aid were referenced. Some CLW programmes are fortunate to be able to avail of in-house training resources and designated training programmes which support them in their work and contribute to their continuous professional development.

Peer support in action was demonstrated in one of the breakout groups where CLWs from one of the more recently established CLW programmes asked for advice about how to get GPs to engage more with their service, particularly when the CLW is working from home and not regularly based in the practice. Some rural practices are having to rely on locum GPs which affects the CLWs' ability to build a relationship with the GP. Their more experienced peers were able to provide some ideas including presenting at GP team meetings and providing examples of case studies to make the CLW service and its benefits more relevant to GPs. Another CLW commented that if CLWs and GPs have access to the same referral system it can help with mutual understanding and awareness.

4. Recommendations

- To have a minimum standard for peer support across Community Link Worker programmes
- To explore designated psychological support being made available to all CLW programmes across Scotland.