Peer Support Report
March 2018

Introduction

Health and Care Research Wales’ vision is for Wales to be internationally recognised for our excellent health and social care research that has a positive impact on the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the people in Wales. In order to achieve this vision and aim we need to ensure public involvement and engagement is central to what we do and visible in all elements of it.

Background

The Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre Delivery Plan 2016-2021 includes the key priority: ‘Explore the possibility of providing mechanisms for peer support for Involving People Network members’. Peer support is generally defined as a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful. Emma Langley, Public Involvement and Engagement Coordinator, has lead on this project.

Since 2006, Involving People Network Members have been supported by the then Involving People team and more recently by the Public Involvement and Engagement team. In order to meet the above priority, in February 2016 a ‘Peer Support Needs’ workshop was established. The aim of the workshop was to identify and prioritise peer support needs for Involving People Network members and researchers in order to meet Health and Care Research Wales’ aims and vision.

The workshop was facilitated by Barbara Moore, Public Involvement and Engagement Senior Manager, and Emma Langley, Public Involvement and Engagement Coordinator. The delegates were members of the Involving People Network, researchers and other stakeholders with an interest in health and social care research.

Facilitators gave an overview of what the aims and objectives of the workshop were along with an explanation of peer support. The delegates were then asked to consider and discuss the following:

1) What are your peer support needs?
2) What would be useful to help you in your role?

Delegates discussed what they felt peer support meant to them and how this could be best supported. Flipcharts were used to record their thoughts and delegates were asked to prioritise what was most important to them from all the suggestions.
Discussion

Following the workshop the comments and suggestions were reviewed and a discussion took place amongst the Public Involvement and Engagement team in relation to categorising all the comments. The following themes were identified:

1) Social media as a peer support tool
2) Face-to-face peer support (opportunities to meet peers in person to discuss shared interests and issues)
3) Stratification of peer support (age/needs/conditions-specific needs)
4) Peer support in conjunction with other opportunities (e.g. combined with training events)
5) Delivery and oversight of a peer support system

The team reviewed the frequency of the comments and found that face-to-face was the most common. The stratification of peer support was the least common theme. There was varying degrees of support for the other three themes.

After looking at the themes and discussing the various comments, the team were able to draw some firm conclusions of what was needed in terms of a future peer support model, which will be taken forward when developing a pilot model.

Given its popularity as a theme, the team recommend that face-to-face peer support should be piloted. However the team recognise that whilst network members may have more time to attend meetings with their peer members through the day, it was agreed that this might be more difficult for researchers. The team felt that one potential solution for researchers would be provision of peer support at the end of an existing training day within the Health and Care Research Wales training programme.

Additionally, the workshop participants also discussed the process underpinning delivery, monitoring and set up of Peer Support. It was agreed that these functions could be reviewed and considered whilst developing the process so that support is tailored for both network members and researchers.

One of the recommendations was for Emma Langley, Public Involvement and Engagement Coordinator, to attend a course on how to develop and manage a peer support system. A two day training course was identified and Emma attended the Setting up and managing a mentoring or befriending programme on 7 and 8 September at the National Council for Voluntary Organisation (NCVO) in London. This gave a useful insight into how we should go about developing the system.

In October 2016 an Involving People Network review survey was circulated for all stakeholders to take part in. The survey included a question about peer support and workshops also took place. Comments from the survey, workshops and recommendations from the review were considered along with the comments from the workshop at the 2016 Annual Meeting.

A peer support pilot meeting was held at the Health and Care Research Wales Support and Delivery Centre in November 2017, allowing the Public Involvement and Engagement team to meet with network members and begin to explore avenues for developing a pilot peer support system. The meeting was attended by long standing and new network members which allowed for a broader selection of ideas and responses, along with each member of the Public Involvement and Engagement team.
Discussions were had in relation to what is meant by the term peer support, thus allowing network members and the Public Involvement and Engagement team to openly deliberate what they thought it was, and what it wasn’t. The final consensus was that peer support is used to develop skills, build confidence and increase social networks for those people who feel isolated.

Further conversations were had about the various face-to-face models of peer support that could be provided to the network. These were one-to-one, one-to-many and groups. Discussions were held around how each one could be an advantage and disadvantage to the people requiring peer support. However, there were discussions within this topic area that needed to be looked at in more depth. Some members felt that there would be a need to ‘pick or identify’ a person that they may feel comfortable being supported by, and needing a mechanism for doing this on the website with a picture and short biography of the person. However, after approaching the Information Governance Lead at the Support and Delivery Centre, it was found that this was not an option due to data protection.

Conclusion

After reviewing all of the information gathered at the various workshops, meetings and consultations that have taken place over the last two years, the project has concluded, and it has been decided that it is not necessary to have a rigid peer support system in place for the Involving People Network.

There are various reasons to support this conclusion, however looking into the feedback that has been received from the peer support pilot meeting, it was clear that people didn’t want it to feel forced, be paired with a person they did not feel comfortable with and there are barriers to matching people. The comments from this day aligned with comments from the Involving People Network review consultation.

As a result of these discussions, contact cards have been developed for network members to share their details with each other to actively provide and promote peer support without pressure. New members of the network will now be given contact cards in their welcome pack explaining their purpose. Additionally at the Involving People Network Annual Meeting 2018 we created a network members’ area to allow all members attending to sit, chat and support other network members if required.

In conclusion, whilst a rigid peer support system for the network will not be a part of the day-to-day running of the network, there will be a self-managed system, encouraging network members to approach or reach out to others and to share knowledge and experiences.