

**Anxiety UK Research Fund –Expression of Interest**  
**Institute of Mental Health**

**Background/rationale for the project:**

Peer support is commonly defined as 'offering and receiving help, based on a shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations' (Mead et al., 2001). Benefits of peer support have included greater empowerment, confidence and self-esteem for those receiving the support (Davidson et al., 2012; Repper & Carter, 2010; Bradstreet, 2006) as well as for the peer supporters themselves (Ratzlaff et al., 2006; Salzer & Shear, 2002).

The IMH has an accredited course for peer supporters, which is commissioned by organisations, including NHS Trusts and voluntary sector agencies such as Self Help Services. The training team draw on their experience of national implementation from clinical, academic and personal perspectives. The training sessions are delivered to small cohorts of 16 learners in settings provided locally by the commissioning organisations.

The content of the course focusses on the topics of recovery and peer support, referencing the international literature and supporting learners to develop key skills such as active listening and problem solving. This is all underpinned within the context of a recovery or wellness plan to discuss topics such as triggers, early warning signs and strengths. The facilitators create a safe learning space for participants to share their experiences and develop their peer support skills. Participants describe the course as 'life-changing' with positive impacts on self-confidence and self-esteem as well as being a route back to work and helping others.

Further developments from this core offer have included additional accredited courses, such as working with groups, and short courses at awareness level. All have been delivered using the same fundamental values of co-production and co-learning, and are delivered in the same co-delivered manner to small groups of up to 16 people.

However, we are conscious that our modes of delivery, and other self-help groups, potentially exclude people with anxiety disorders that prevent them from attending group activities. Many people have anxieties that make it difficult for them to leave their house for training or support. Additionally, people with anxiety often dislike appointments such that the need for regular attendance can be problematic.

In addition, we are keen to explore the use of online peer support and feel this may be particularly relevant for people who experience anxiety. The development of online platforms is a growing area of interest with many complexities of risks and benefits. We have previously co-produced workshops drawing on the national work of Professor Neil Coulson (University of Nottingham), and would like to develop our understanding further in relation to peer support of people with anxiety.

**Aim**

The aim of this exploratory research project would be to further understand what peer support should look like for people who are unable to attend traditional face to face groups or training because of their anxiety. This would support our long term aim of partnership working with Anxiety UK and co-producing with people who access services.

## Method

### 1. Rapid Evidence Review

We will undertake a rapid evidence review of current knowledge about effective support and training methods for people who experience anxiety. Relevant academic, policy and grey literature will be identified through a number of databases (MEDLINE, PsycINFO, ISI Web of Science, Open Grey, and Google Scholar). Search terms will be developed which include the following subject headings and truncation: peer support, anxiety, support groups, training, online.

### 2. Online Survey

We will develop an online survey to gather a wide range of perspectives on the use of online peer support. Items for this survey will seek to gather information on, what people's experiences of online peer support have been, how important online peer support is to people, what training a formal peer support worker should have in order to facilitate online peer support. Before circulation, the final survey will be agreed with Anxiety UK. We will use survey monkey to host the survey, and participants will be invited to take part in the survey via email. The results of the survey will be analysed using descriptive statistics to examine frequencies and mean scores of the survey items. In addition, the results will be used to develop questions to be used in the interviews (see below).

### 3. Interviews

To explore in more depth the needs of people who experience anxiety, we propose to facilitate telephone, one-to-one or skype interviews with a maximum of 10 people who have responded to the online survey. Participants will be invited to express their interest in interviews at the end of the online survey and will be contacted via email. We are particularly interested in hearing from people who have previously felt unable to attend self-help groups due to their experiences of anxiety.

Interviews will explore perceptions of peer support, and any barriers and facilitators to its success and quality. The topic guide will be based on the findings of the survey and will be agreed beforehand, with all partners involved in the project, but specific questions are likely to include:

- What are their experiences of anxiety and how have these impacted on them attending groups and courses?
- What are their perceptions of the impact on those using peer support – how has it helped them? When is it most effective?
- What other ways could we support inclusion of people with anxiety?
- Are there any specific needs that differ across the range of anxiety issues?
- Is online peer support particularly relevant?
- Is attending a self-help group/training course an essential part of the recovery process?
- What are the facilitators / barriers to training?

Interviews will be audio-recorded with the consent of all participants and transcribed anonymously. Thematic analysis will be used to draw out the key themes.

Ethical approval will be sought through IMH/Nottinghamshire Healthcare's Research and

Development Department and further approval will be sought if this is advised.

### **Impact: What benefit will this research bring?**

- Partnership working between Anxiety UK and IMH bringing together national expertise around the range of anxieties and national expertise around peer support.
- Involvement of people with experience of anxieties to explore their needs
- Understanding of the training and support needs of people with anxieties with a view to improving outcomes
- Increased awareness of the implications of delivery method on people with anxieties
- Shared report highlighting recommendations to inform future work
- Publication and a foundation for further opportunities for larger scale research projects
- Dissemination at local and national level via a range of channels including service user organisations will raise awareness of the specific needs of this client group

### **Details of user involvement:**

We will engage with service users at all stages of this research project, to ensure that it benefits from the perspectives and experiences of service users. To enable this, we will seek to engage the perspectives of Anxiety UK stakeholders to guide and inform our approach, monitor the project progress and help us to develop meaningful outputs (see below).

In addition, user involvement will also be supported through:

- online survey to be accessed by Anxiety UK membership
- Interviews – maximum of 10 people with a broad range of experiences and perspectives of online peer support
- project team is made up of people with a range of clinical, academic and lived experiences

## Details of cost (up to £5,000 is available):

	Marissa Lambert £350	Karen Machin £250	Laurie Hare Duke £250
Steering Group meeting	1	1	
Literature search		2	
Set-up online survey		1	1
Phone / Skype interviews		2	1
Quantitative Analysis			2
Qualitative Analysis		3	
Report writing	0.5	1.5	0.5
Total Number of Days	1.5	10.5	4.5
Total cost	£525	£2,625	£1,125
<b>Total staff costs</b>	<b>£4,275</b>		
<b>Non-staff costs</b>			
Transcription	780		
Travel for steering group	100		
<b>Overall costs</b>	<b>£5,155</b>		

Transcription for interviews - 5 hours transcribing per interview @ £13 per hour (+VAT)

## Dissemination:

The output from this project will be a rapid evidence review and a research report which will summarise the findings from the project in relation to the key objectives.

In our team, we value opportunities for co-production of publications to share good practice and encourage conversations. This ensures that the research findings are meaningful and influence future practice. We will seek to develop publication, articles and conference presentations about the project findings, and actively engage service user and Anxiety UK representatives in these activities.