

Mandy, CAPITAL Peer Support Worker Meadowfield Hospital

What is your name and what is your role at CAPITAL?

My name's Mandy and I'm a peer support worker at Meadowfield Hospital in Worthing and in November I would have been here 15 years and I am ward based on a ward called Rowan. So my job as a peer support worker is to work alongside our patients in a very different role to the medical staff and the reason it's different is we offer lived experience in a way that our patients can relate to us. We're a safe person for them to speak to because they know that we don't have access to their medical records.

What is unique about CAPITAL Peer Support?

The thing that is really quite unique is with our lived experience we're able to give that empathy, build a trust with them and them liking the fact that we relate to them, we understand them, we know exactly what they're going through. We're there really. The most important thing is to give them hope and show them that look you too can get through this, you can recover from this, we're an example of that.

What do you enjoy about Peer Support?

Well for me I think about it as a vocation not a job. For me it's how rewarding it is. I had a very high powered career before I became ill 15 years ago, 16 years ago and I used to think that was rewarding because I reached my budgets but coming here it's a completely different thing.

When you have worked with somebody for weeks or months, somebody that had no hope, somebody that was completely suicidal, that leaves the hospital well, comes up to you and says you've changed my life, you've saved my life, you've given me hope and for the first time in a long time I feel that there is a future. That is all that we can ask for. The other thing I really enjoy is that we work very closely alongside the hospital team and it's very rewarding when you come into work and they say to us we're unable to engage with this patient, they've come in there really poorly, we think that they'd really benefit from talking to you and then I go and see them and they engage with me.

How does the uncertainty of Peer Support make you feel?

So there is no doubt that we play an absolutely vital role here and the NHS staff give us so much respect and make us feel very valued as do our patients. So from a personal point of view this job plays a huge part in my own recovery journey and with exception to when my dad passed away I've been well for quite a few years. So from a personal point of view my biggest concern is the negative impact that's going to have on me because that feeling of worthlessness that I had before I started this job, that lack of hope for the future that I had before I had this job, it could be taken away from me and I literally can't imagine doing anything else and you know literally devastation at the thought of losing this role just because it's such a huge part of my life.

What will the impact be in losing the Peer Support service?

So obviously the unique thing about what we do is the fact that we are service users ourselves, we have lived experience, that's the biggest thing, we are able to reach out to patients in a way that perhaps the medical staff can't. It is a unique relationship and the fact that you've been through it yourself and that they can relate to you is the biggest thing. The moment they can relate they then open up and if you think about it all of the team play a huge important role in this person's recovery but what we do is far more personal and it's them seeing us do this job and we're on our own recovery journey but look this is what they can do.

When they leave we spend time going through coping strategies with them, they have their own little private individual coping strategies that we write down and go through with them on a personal nature, we signpost them, we send them away as equipped as we can in the hope that they don't return. And it's something that isn't offered anywhere else only through the peer support workers so I again feel there would be quite devastation not having us all based and most certainly the feedback from our NHS colleagues is exactly the same. Everybody is just so shocked, we can't believe that this role could be overlooked when it is so vital.

What would you like to say to Commissioners?

Firstly I would say you need to come here, you need to sit and talk to us, you then need to sit with us and see the job that we do, you need to talk to the teams on the wards and ask them how much they value us and what an impact we make to their patients and you need to really have a clear understanding of this vitally important role that we do and I'm shocked and disgusted that you haven't taken the time out to come and meet us because if you met us and you talked to us and you watched us and you spoke to patients and you spoke to staff I am convinced that you would have a completely different opinion.

How does Lived Experience make a difference in Peer Support?

I think I always say to people it's a bit like you have a midwife but she's never had a baby, I always use that analogy. I think it's the lived experience gives us that empathy and that understanding and that complete connection, that unique connection that we can have with the patients that we're on their level, we're equal to them, we're not medical, we're not going to report them, we're not going to write on their notes, we're not going to give them medication, they are going to talk to us exactly how they are feeling and we are going to, if they ask us to, share our own lived experience in the hope that we build that trusting relationship which I would say 100% of the time that we do and I can't stress enough how unique what we do is and how much hope that we give people and that's very clear on the positive feedback that we receive and we strive for that.

With most of our patients we give a feedback form and the statistics don't lie therefore all I can say is what we offer is a unique thing that's on the same level as a patient with understanding, with empathy and to give hope.