

Impact Report

CAPITAL Peer Support in West Sussex NHS Inpatient Mental Health Services

April 2025

Prepared for: Sussex Partnership NHS Trust

Executive Summary

This report presents evidence on the impact of CAPITAL Peers teams across inpatient mental health services in West Sussex, focusing on Langley Green, Meadowfield, and Oaklands Hospitals.

Drawing from patient testimonials, NHS staff feedback, and strategic alignment with NHS priorities, it underscores the transformative power of independent peer support rooted in lived experience. CAPITAL's model also delivers consistent value for money in comparison with other peer roles.

Key findings demonstrate that CAPITAL Peers:

- Foster trust and recovery through shared lived experiences
- Enhance patient engagement and emotional well-being
- Alleviate pressures on NHS staff by providing complementary support
- Ensure continuity of care from hospital to community
- Align with NHS priorities, including addressing health inequalities and facilitating effective patient discharge

1. Background and Context

CAPITAL is a member-led, user-driven mental health charity established in 1997. The organisation is dedicated to effecting change by promoting lived experience.

All peer support workers have personal histories of mental health challenges, enabling them to offer compassionate, confidential, and empowering support to inpatients, thereby enhancing therapeutic outcomes beyond clinical interventions.

Since 2010, CAPITAL has been providing consistent peer support in NHS mental health wards across West Sussex, at Meadowfield, Langley Green and Oaklands.

CAPITAL Peers complement NHS clinical teams, providing emotional and relational support.

The service is independent, flexible, trauma-informed, and co-produced, embedding hope, safety, and empowerment into everyday ward life.

We are currently facing challenges to keep the service in hospital settings because:

- A budget cut of **£27k on Pathfinder contract** from April 2025
- Current re -procurement of Mental Health Support Services (West Sussex) 2025 **does not include** hospital peer support meaning service will cease from 1 October 2025

2. The Power of Lived Experience in Peer Support

CAPITAL's approach is grounded in the belief that those who have navigated their own mental health journeys are uniquely positioned to support others facing similar challenges.

"As peer supporters at CAPITAL, we use our training, lived experience and our own mental health journey to support people who have been hospitalised because of their mental health." CAPITAL Peer

"When I was in hospital, peer support was not available... I would have benefitted from details of their own experience... how they got past the obstacles." CAPITAL Peer

"They can see and understand that while they are currently in a 'bad place,' recovery is possible... returning to their old life is a real possibility." Ward staff

This model fosters authentic connections, instills hope, and demonstrates the possibility of recovery, making it an invaluable component of mental health care.

"It gave me hope that I could work again." CAPITAL Peer

Their presence is non-clinical, non-judgemental, and valued by patients who may distrust formal services.

3. Alignment with NHS Priorities

CAPITAL's peer support model closely aligns with several core NHS strategic objectives:

- Enhancing inpatient culture through dignity, trust and connection
- Supporting discharge and reducing readmissions
- Addressing health inequalities and reaching disengaged patients
- Strengthening links between hospitals and the community

4. Impact on Patients

Based on 1,911 patient evaluations:

- 95% found peer conversations helpful or very helpful
- 94% felt supported and listened to
- 79% would find post-discharge contact helpful or very helpful

From the 760 peer support sessions recorded across the three sites, 97% of individuals said they would like to meet again.

“They actually listen and let you finish.” Inpatient

“Seeing a familiar face meant I didn’t have to explain everything again.” Inpatient

“... helped me feel centred and calm—it’s more effective than any medication I’ve had here.” Inpatient

These testimonials confirm peer support fosters trust, eases distress, and supports recovery.

Patients often ask to maintain contact post-discharge and become involved in CAPITAL hubs, groups or coproduction activities.

“Each person I encounter... I can become a familiar face... offer a confidential ear—for some who have no visitors, it is a valuable exchange.” CAPITAL Peer

“Over time, I can see changes in the individual, and am happy to witness their growth in confidence.” CAPITAL Peer

“..peers have offered opportunities to knit, colour, play board games or simply relieve the pressure of ward life.” CAPITAL Coordinator

5. Impact on NHS Services and Staff Feedback

Peer workers are praised by NHS staff as essential contributors to care quality and team cohesion.

“Over the past 8 years of working at Meadowfield... I’ve seen the positive impact first-hand.”

“As much as clinicians try to instill hope, seeing someone like xxxx recover and thrive is inspiring.”

“If my loved one were struggling, I’d want them to speak to someone like xxxx.”

“Losing peer support would be absolutely detrimental to the ward.”

“xxxx has become integral to the ward... she reaches patients others can’t.”

“Peer workers take pressure off our clinical staff.”

“They’re an emotional anchor for people going through a crisis.”

Peer workers reduce staff pressure and are embraced as part of the team—contributing to multidisciplinary care, ward meetings, and OT sessions.

Peer interventions are seen as essential in helping create a holistic, rights-based care environment.

6. Peer Support Engagement Activities

CAPITAL peers also offer:

- Peer-led yoga and breathing sessions (highly praised for supporting PTSD recovery)
- Discharge packs and check-ins
- Informal social and group activities – peer engagement tools (games, art, crafts)
- Emotional support that is confidential, culturally sensitive, and community-connected

These initiatives reinforce emotional and social recovery in inpatient care.

“We are not just doing colouring on the ward but bringing different activities, including cooking as ways to build rapport and trust.” CAPITAL Peer

7. Cost and Value for Money

CAPITAL delivers inpatient peer support with 12 trained peer workers providing 5-10 hours each per week, coordinated and managed for £75,000 per year.

- Cost per hospital: £25,000/year (£2,083/month)
- Includes salaries, training, management, and supervision

This is less than the cost of one part-time NHS Band 3 support worker per site.

Avoiding a single readmission (£13,000) offsets the majority of cost per site.

Peer support adds emotional, relational, and social recovery layers clinical care cannot replicate.

8. Risk of Service Loss

Withdrawing this service would result in:

- Increased patient isolation and disengagement
- Greater staff workload
- Higher demand on already stretched NHS clinical teams
- Lost continuity between hospital and community
- Reduced therapeutic engagement
- Reduced discharge readiness and continuity
- Loss of co-produced and recovery-focused care

"If no peer support exists in the future, inpatient life will lose some of its richness... peer workers offer great value for money." Ward Staff

"My fear is that by withdrawing Capital Support Workers... a chance to build rapport and signpost will be missed." Ward Staff

"The NHS staff are excellent, but their time is limited. Peer support workers offer friendship, understanding, and hope." Inpatient

9. Recommendations

1. Explore options to secure ongoing funding for CAPITAL peer support services – ensure continuity across Meadowfield, Langley Green and Oaklands
2. Integrate peer support into discharge and aftercare pathways - leverage CAPITAL's follow-up support and community hubs to bridge the inpatient-to-home transition
3. Expand Peer-Led Initiatives - replicate peer activities - yoga therapy, recovery groups, wellness packs, and arts-based sessions across all wards
4. Track impact through engagement, readmission and satisfaction data – detailing readmission rates, patient satisfaction, and staff wellbeing to evidence long-term value
5. Expand peer-led activities and co-production across sites - support peer-led leadership, further independent peer roles into NHS ward teams
6. Recognise CAPITAL's skills and role & create partnerships to develop independent peer leadership and coproduction across inpatient services

10. Peer Support Evaluation Summary

