

Mel

CAPITAL Peer Support Worker

What is your name and what did you do at CAPITAL?

My name is Mel and for the past seven years I've worked as peer support on Larch Ward, which is the older adults ward at Meadowfield Hospital in Worthing.

What makes CAPITAL unique?

I've actually never encountered an organisation like Capital before. I had lived experience of mental health issues and when I discovered Capital that wasn't an issue.

I was welcomed, it's a very supportive environment, it enabled me to find employment using my actual lived experience as my unique selling point and using that experience allowed me to be on a better road for recovery for my own mental health. Capital is an environment where you can exchange ideas and information with anybody in the organisation and you'll always feel supported and understood.

What do you enjoy about CAPITAL?

I enjoyed being able to be myself in Capital and the, in inverted commas, interesting mental health history that I'd had was an asset and it's never been that before.

It's helped me to make peace with what happened in the past and to learn more about myself and to additionally help other people in ways I wasn't I was going to be able to help them. So that's good about Capital.

What will the impact be in losing CAPITAL Peer Support?

The impact of losing the peer support service will be felt on three fronts, I would say. On one part, obviously the patients will be lacking an extra body around the ward, just someone that can have a quiet chat with or play a game or you know, just a friendly presence.

For the staff, I think the lack of peer support person on the ward, they'll be missing a friendly support. They've got quite used to us being around and we work in and around them, with them at times to support the patients.

The impact of losing peer support on the peer support workers themselves, it'll be a big hole in their lives because working in the hospital gives them a sense of well-being, of self-confidence, of positivity and that not being there will make a huge difference in their lives, even if it's only a day a week, which is what I was doing. But yeah, it will be missed.

What would you like to say to Commissioners?

To the commissioners, I'd like to say it was a shame that you didn't come down and see us while we were in situ in the wards, because I think experiencing peer support at first-hand level, you would see what benefits people got from that.

Decisions have been made regarding peer support and the commissioning of that service. I would say take stock of the situation in about three months and if things are not going the way that you'd like them to be going, given the new situation, be open to the possibility of getting capital back into the situation, because I know the people who've worked there would still go and willingly work in those locations.

How does lived experience make a difference?

Lived experience makes a difference in peer support because you're essentially drawing on your own real-life situations, things which affected you hugely emotionally and psychologically in the past.

Those things, although you wouldn't have experienced it at the time, have a real tangible value to other people who are now experiencing similar conditions. So, lived experience allows the patients to identify with the people offering peer support and it also allows the peer support person to delve into their past and draw upon things which will have been difficult to deal with at the time, but are actually of benefit to people now and that helps with everyone's recovery.

What feedback have you had from NHS staff on the wards?

I was pleasantly surprised by how much care was offered as we were leaving. They gave all of us at Meadowfield a gift basket full of a few goodies to kind of ease the situation a little bit, but it was very kind of them to do that. They didn't have to and people on the wards, the staff, were very vocal about feeling how sorry they were to see us go.

Mel's Poems on Peer Support

'Work'

I've worked this job for seven years.

It's the best I've ever done.

A mental health ward, one of the peers, but now the job has gone.

It has been given me immense joy to be in Capital's employ.

I'm using lived experience to further patient relevance.

I'm living proof of recovery and what can be achieved.

I foster self-discovery, how not to be deceived.

It has given me immense joy to be in Capital's employ.

I'm using lived experience to smooth the path ahead.

My own trauma was an ordeal, a dark period I enjoyed, an experience I may conceal now encourages reward.

It has given me immense joy to be in Capital's employ.

I'm using lived experience to help the peers to grow.

'Hidden'

What you're happy to reveal can be brave or quite reserved.

You may be keen to share life's path, whether winding, straight or curved.

What you've chosen to conceal, and whatever that may be, is what you hide away from folk, whether friends or family.

The choice is yours and may change with time.

We do as we are bidden.

A story shared by those we know, or a tale remaining hidden.

'My work'

I qualified from what I've lived, the traumas through the years.

I grasped the worst, till fit to burst, to help others through their fears.

A compact group, we've time to talk.

They rightly call us peers.

We've lived on wards, locked from the hordes, worried, scared in tears.

Angry too, deprived of world, and facing scary thoughts, wild images, racing mind and irrational fears.

We gently probe in calm exchange and interest in the peer.

Refocus thoughts, unwind the brain, be positive, bring cheer.