

# INTRODUCING PEER SUPPORT

*Findings from two improvement projects which have introduced peer support roles into existing clinical services*

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## The challenge

At the Health Foundation, we want a more person-centred healthcare system, where people are supported to make informed decisions about, and to successfully manage, their own health and care, and choose when to invite others to act on their behalf.

We want healthcare services to understand and deliver care responsive to people's individual abilities, preferences, lifestyles and goals.

## The response

The Health Foundation programme Closing the Gap through Changing Relationships supported seven improvement projects to improve person-centred care. Two of these projects introduced new roles into existing services based on the model of peer support. Peer Support workers (with experience of using mental health services) were introduced into a mental health trust and Care Navigators (with experience of homelessness) were introduced into an acute trust. The projects focussed on learning how to implement these new roles which had been described in the literature, but little tested in practice.

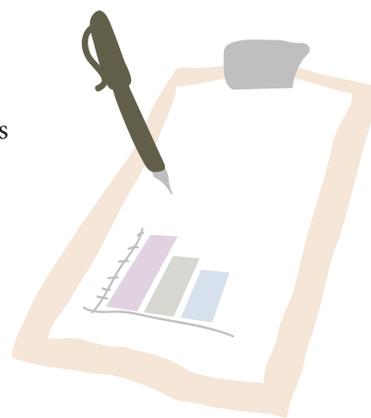
## Methods

The two improvement projects utilised recognised improvement methodologies, which included measurement activity to demonstrate whether changes they were making were resulting in improvement (or unanticipated effects). In addition, each conducted a self-evaluation

supported by external evaluators who also undertook a programme-level evaluation using a realistic evaluation approach.

## Results

To varying extents, both projects can evidence improvements in patient or service user experience. Their work suggests, for instance, that the mere realisation that a member of the service team has 'been where you're sitting' can have a transformative effect, with patients and service users seemingly more able to feel comfortable around workers who have similar experiences to their own. Staff attitudes and behaviours have been influenced, as peer workers model both positive attitudes towards patients and service users, and demonstrate that recovery and positive outcomes can be a reality.



## Message for frontline improvers

If you are introducing similar roles in your local context, you may want to consider:

- Developing and providing appropriate training for people in peer support roles
- Making appropriate adaptations to your usual employment processes, such as investing more time in working with applicants to the role, and sensitive handling of references
- Providing support to peer workers as they are in roles which can be emotionally demanding
- Guarding against potentially negative effects, such as using the peer support role as a tool to persuade a patient or service user to accept a particular treatment.



## Find out more

Visit our website, [www.health.org.uk](http://www.health.org.uk), for more information about the projects, and the local teams whose projects these are.

## The project teams

The Institute of Mental Health is a partnership between Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust and the University of Nottingham. They worked in partnership with Making Waves, Advocacy Alliance and Nottingham City Council.

Pathway is a charity working to transform healthcare for homeless people. They worked in partnership with University College London Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Barts Health NHS Trust, Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust, Royal Free NHS Foundation Trust, and TB Find and Treat.