

What are Consumer Workers and what do we do?

History:

The first consumer workers service in Australia began in 1993 from Rozelle Hospital with the employment of Helen Blum for 13 hours per week as Consumer Coordinator and 6 consumer workers who were employed for 3 hours per week initially. The initial role of consumer workers was to: provide advocacy and peer support, run groups, attend meetings and provide presentations to staff on what consumer workers did. This service was seen as successful

In 1995 Peter Schaecken was employed as Community Consumer Coordinator to run a peer counselling & advocacy service in the community. With 12 month's funding community consumer consultants were also employed and evaluations and reports done.

In May 1996, Peter was employed in a full-time capacity as Area Coordinator of Consumer Initiatives to oversee consumer participation in the community. Initially, Peter was involved in assisting other Area Health Service to employ consumer workers across the state. Peter also took over as chair of the three Community Consultative Committees to increase accountability and improve services for consumers.

In 2001, funding was provided for 3 community consumer workers including a coordinator for 20 hours per week and two 8 hour consumer workers.

In 2003, Community consumer consultants were made permanent and their hours increased.

In 2012, we now have Peter employed as District Coordinator of Consumer Initiatives, Phil Escott as Consumer Consultant Coordinator full time and Simon Moore 20 hours per week based at Croydon and Canterbury Mental Health Service and Sahra Dauncey 20 hours per week based at Croydon Health Centre. At Bankstown, Linda Blanchard is employed 8 hours per week and Stephen Hobbs 8 hours per week.

What do Consumer Workers do?

Peter oversees the consumer program and his duties include:
Chairing the Consumer Advisory Group, Deputy Chair of the NSW Mental Health Consumer Workers Committee.

Phil Escott supervises Simon and Sahra and provides regular debriefings and support.

Peter and Phil initiated an Anti-Stigma Project which initially targeted non-clinical staff at Concord Repatriation Hospital and involved one hour lectures

to administration staff, security staff, volunteers, kitchen hands and cleaning staff etc.

Peter and Phil comment and give considered feedback on local, state and National policies and documents.

Work closely with the NSW Consumer Advisory Group Inc.

Attend local and state & very occasionally national meetings.

Write an Annual Report on the achievements of the consumer programme

Run and coordinate consumer worker and consumer representative training programmes. A course has just finished February 2012 and included guest speakers and consumer workers speaking on: Systems Advocacy, Peer Support, Consumer Rights, History of the consumer movement, Recovery Orientated Services, Recovery, Working in Partnership, Consumer Activism, Using the Internet and email for consumer activism, Discussion of Issues,

Additionally, Peter and Phil between them have given over 1000 presentations to Mental Health staff, Drug & Alcohol staff, consumers, carers and community.

Peter also presents at conferences and Peter, Phil and other consumers speak regularly in the: Suicide workshop, Staff Orientation, Understanding Mental Illness workshop, Critical Incident Positive Outcome workshop and other courses.

Peter and Phil also annually with other staff run the Living in the community Forum which often attracts over 100 consumers, carers, staff and NGO's and focuses on recovery. Often there are keynote addresses by consumers in the morning with group work in the afternoon.

A Consumer Network was established in 1996 and is a consumer run social that meets at Petersham RSL Club.

Consumer forums are usually held twice a year and are for consumers to provide education, information, networking and socialising.

Youth forum was run previously for young consumers and their carers.

The Consumer Advisory Committee meets every second month and is a forum where consumer representatives/consumers can raise issues about the mental health service.

Additionally consumer worker contribute to policy and planning and attend various local and state wide meetings.

Public speaking workshops are run for consumers to encourage them to speak to audiences about their experiences of mental illnesses.

Groups

Hearing Voices network was established in 2011 by Simon and a mental health worker and runs weekly from Bridgewater Cottage.

The consumer run Depression Group is run by Simon and Sahra and operates weekly

8 week Recovery groups involving consumer workers run periodically.

Relapse Prevention Groups are also run by consumer workers periodically.

Creative writing groups are run by Phil Escott at Concord Centre for Mental Health

What is Peer support?

Peer support is consumers meeting other consumers often over a coffee to share experiences, provide empathy, support, non-judgemental and practical assistance about living with a mental illness and recovery. Consumer workers offer mentoring, a positive role model and expertise in navigating the mental health system. Consumer workers often know what it is like to be kept in seclusion, given forced treatment and have experience of hospitalisation in mental health facilities. We know about how distressing the other affects of medication can be and understand stigma and discrimination from health workers and the community. Consumer workers offer hope that everyone with a mental illness can recover.

Additionally, Simon, Phil & Sahra visit the inpatient units at Concord Centre for Mental Health and the Missenden Unit and provide 1 on 1 peer support, advocacy and complaints. Linda Blanchard from Bankstown regularly visits Banks House for peer support and advocacy.

For further information please contact:

Phil Escott Camperdown 9515 9000 or
Simon Moore Croydon 9378 1100 or
Sahra Dauncey Croydon 9378 1100 or
Linda Blanchard (Fridays) Bankstown 9780 2777 or
Stephen Hobbs Bankstown 9780 2777 or
Peter Schaecken Croydon 9378 1100