



Crewe Peer Support Lounge

End of Project Report 2021



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Peer Support Lounge - End of Project Report

Foreword

My CWA is a service run by and for people with lived experience of domestic abuse. Our approach centres the voices of survivors of domestic abuse and our policy is to ensure that key roles within the organisation, from governance to service delivery roles, are staffed by people with lived experience of domestic abuse and ill mental health. All our work is guided and reviewed by survivors of domestic abuse and it is by listening to the voices of survivors that we are able to consistently develop and deliver innovative support to help people to recover from their experiences of domestic abuse and the complex issues that arise as a result of abuse.

In 2018 we conducted a survivor survey and spoke in person to over 300 survivors of domestic abuse to ask about their experiences, discuss the challenges they faced, and explore their priorities. A number of key issues emerged from this work:

- Ill mental health was identified as a significant factor making recovery more difficult for 87% of participants
- Isolation and loneliness were key challenges for recovery of mental and emotional wellbeing
- Services only being available in office hours was a key barrier to accessing support when, where and how it was needed

A survivor panel was formed to design a response to the issues identified and the Peer Support Lounge was conceived.

With generous support from the National Lottery Communities Fund we were able to open the Peer Support Lounge in 2019. The Peer Support Lounge offered an out of hours drop in over the weekend, opening from 7pm – midnight on a Friday and Saturday night. People could drop in, have food, watch a movie or play games, participate in a workshop or speak one to one with a specialist worker.

We could not have anticipated the pandemic and the impact of lockdown, not only on our project, but on the families and individuals we were supporting. Since April 2020 we have had to significantly adapt the way we work. Our team have been key workers throughout both lockdowns and demand for support has risen 40%. Nevertheless, we have seen remarkable progress and we have learnt new skills. I am proud of our achievements and the flexibility shown by our team.

Saskia Ritchie
CEO



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Summary

As it seems we are closer to an end to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also celebrating the year end of our ground-breaking Peer Support Lounge project in Crewe.

During this unprecedented time the team have had to make significant changes to the way we work with our client group and have grappled with new technology, isolating working practices and during lockdown, the complete closure of the physical lounge. Our absolutely fantastic teams have continued to work throughout this time and a face to face service has been available consistently for anyone who needed it. We have distributed over 400 care packages for adults and over 500 for children and young people. We also supported the community distribution of well over 20,000 meals and over 500 food parcels.

Our clients have been hit hard by the pandemic; financially, emotionally and in how safe they are. Suicidality has hugely increased with 82 adult clients and 15 young people reporting firm plans to end their lives. We have tragically lost two clients to death by suicide during this period of time which has a tremendous impact on other clients but also staff and volunteers.

Ill mental health continues to be a significant concern for our Peer Support Lounge clients and unsurprisingly the progress made in this area have been negatively impacted by the isolation of lockdown and the anxieties relating to the pandemic.

Despite these challenges our expert teams have supported 212 women in Crewe during the period of the grant.

Our client group score high on the Chaos Index (40%), face multiple barriers to participation and support (78%), are struggling with alcohol and substance misuse (33%) and have an average Adverse Childhood Experiences Score (ACES) of 6.

The challenges of supporting women with such co-morbid complexities and barriers require a creative approach. We tread a fine balance between developing relationships and rapport and avoiding dependence. This is an area of expertise for our Peer Support Lounge staff who are tenacious in working to engage women effectively and support them to make positive changes.



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Activities

Dedicated Peer Support Lounge	Crewe
Advice Clinic	✓
Police Clinic	✓
Legal Clinic	✓
Peer Support Group	✓
One to One Support	✓
Emotional Wellbeing Group	✓
Online Support Group	✓
Food Bank Parcel	✓
Sanitary Products	✓
Care Package	✓
Supermarket Voucher	✓
Crisis Grant (up to £200)	✓
24/7 Helpline	✓



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Delivery

The Peer Support Lounge in Crewe is well established and was running well when COVID-19 hit. Being forced to close the Lounge meant very quickly having to adapt to new ways of working. Very quickly we had adopted Zoom as a digital platform and adapted all workshop content to online delivery.

Sessions continued to run without a break but the additional challenges presented by a digital group took place quickly. For those with children the digital groups were a mixed blessing. No childcare was required but the freedom to discuss issues was curbed. Parents began to join online later in the evening so that they could get children into bed

To supplement the online live group we set up a private facebook group. This is moderated by a staff member and by two of the members and a communication plan for content is delivered at regular intervals to go with the workshop content delivered over Zoom.

During this last year we have also developed our accredited training for Peer Support Mentors. We will be going live with this training in October 2021. This was initially scheduled for 2020 but the delays caused by the pandemic have left us on catch up for some areas of work.

We received a generous COVID grant from NLCF which allowed us to develop additional refuge space for clients with mental health issues and this has really enhanced the support we offered during this period.



Participants
212



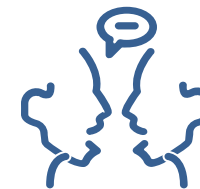
Helpline
485



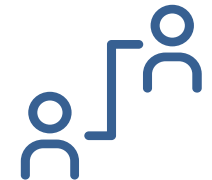
Crisis Grant
£26,800



Online Support Group
124



Advice Clinics
70

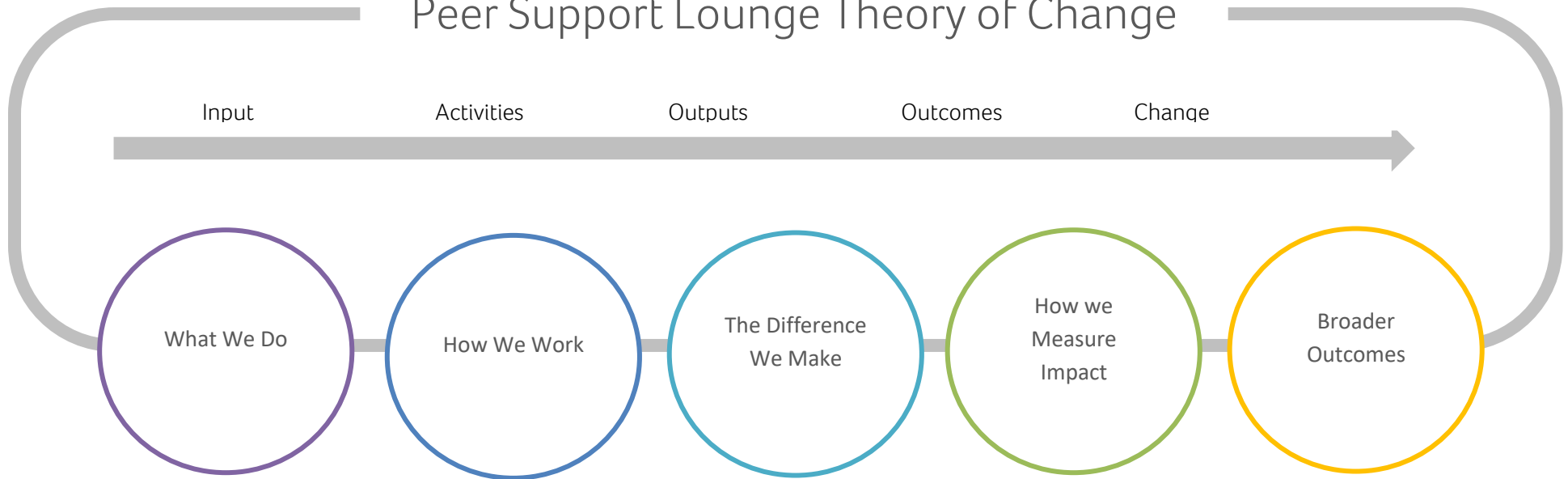


Intensive Support
23

It's literally a life saver for me. I wouldn't be here without it
PSL Client

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Peer Support Lounge Theory of Change



Input

Activities

Outputs

Outcomes

Change

What We Do

How We Work

The Difference We Make

How we Measure Impact

Broader Outcomes

- Community outreach services – face to face and remote access
- Advice Clinics – housing, money, mental health, domestic abuse, police, legal
- Peer support groups for emotional and social wellbeing
- Personalised assessment and support plan (IDVA, Housing and MHFA)
- Unpaid work & volunteering
- Liaison and referral

- Values based – Trust, Respect, Courage
- Gender responsive
- Trauma informed
- Safe physical and virtual spaces
- Consistent and clear boundaries and respectful relationships
- Focus on personal responsibility, confidence building and independence

We amplify women's voices to influence policy and legislative change both locally and nationally

- Reduced re-offending
- Improved mental health resilience
- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Increased critical thinking skills and decision making
- Stronger support networks
- Improved citizenship
- Safer families
- Entry into employment and education
- Access to specialist services

- Data on use of support services
- Warwick and Edinburgh Mental and Emotional Wellbeing Scale
- Monitoring levels of risk and need
- Use of Chaos Index to assess complex needs
- Pre and post outcomes assessment
- Criminal Justice data
- Case studies and qualitative interviews
- Client feedback
- Professional feedback

- Improved quality of life years
- Reduced re-offending
- Improved citizenship
- NHS mission avoidance
- Reduced public spending

Independently verified return on investment model indicates over £6 savings to the public purse against every £1 invested.

University of Liverpool 2016.
Cost of service My CWA 2020

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Barriers to Accessing Support

The women we are supporting through the Peer Support Lounge's are the least likely to reach out to support services (Women and Mental Health Strategy 2018). Feedback from clients indicates that the less institutional environment and the holistic approach to support are important.

The headline data is the significant increase in suicidal ideation, with over 80 women expressing thoughts of suicide. We lost two Peer Support Lounge clients to suicide and eleven have made serious attempts to die by suicide. The response of mental health services has been inconsistent.

Accommodation issues have been a challenge for 16 women, each of whom required a move for safety but is unwilling to move to another area. Over the course of the year we have accommodated 4 in our new accommodation but local services in other areas have not always had space or been able to accommodate the level of presenting need.

We have supported 13 women who had previously been in care; 3 who are carers and at least 18 who experience technology poverty and needed a phone, tablet and data in order to access the services.

Throughout the year we have distributed over 400 care packages. We also provide food, we have distributed around 550 food parcels and 80% of the grants distributed were food related.



Criminal Justice Links

25%

"I feel like I have a big sign on my head saying Criminal"



Lockdown with Perpetrator

22%

"I can't call or text"



Ill Mental Health

87%

82 women with suicidal ideation. Eleven attempts to die.



Accommodation

7%

No refuge available in area for the level of complexity



Substance Misuse

33%

Support to access specialist services

"I love volunteering at PSL. I feel like I'm part of the team. They really helped me and now I'm helping out"

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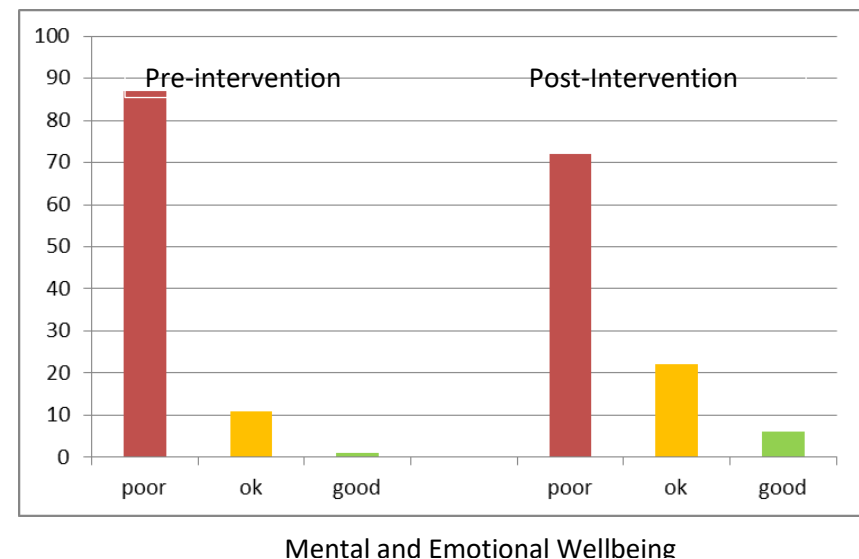
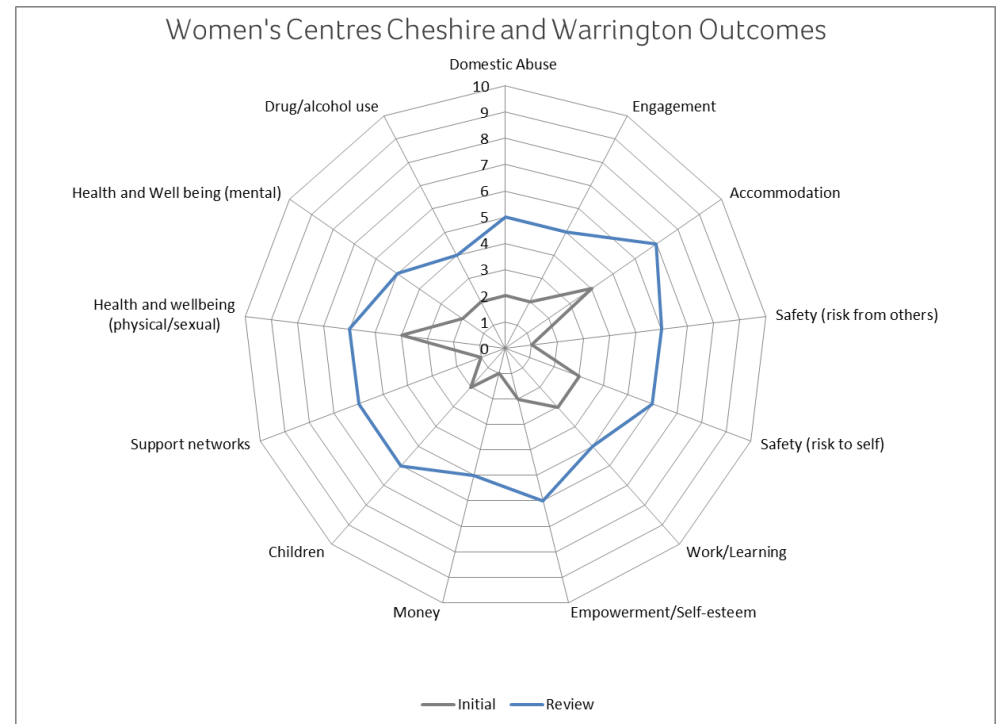
Outcomes

A key aim of the project is to improve emotional resilience to manage ill mental health. Under the circumstances of the pandemic it is impossible to properly understand the impact of the service as circumstances are complicated by additional isolation and anxiety.

The year presented real challenges for everyone of our clients in this project and we have been increasingly asked by parents to support their children.

Despite the significant issues we have seen a solid and consistent level of progress across most areas of the outcomes framework for the 212 women who have completed both a pre-intervention assessment and at least one interim or post-intervention outcomes assessment. The least progress has been made around finances, work and learning, and substance misuse. Given what we know of how the pandemic has affected people, these should come as no surprise as areas that our clients have found particularly challenging.

Using the Warwick and Edinburgh Emotional Wellbeing Scale we can see that 87% of our clients experienced ill mental health on entry to the project. The number of people whose mental health was OK doubled as a result of the intervention and there was an increase in those reporting as good. Based on client feedback one of the strengths of the work undertaken was in supporting people to manage their emotional wellbeing wherever they were at and in supporting women to cope with mental health crisis i.e. not escalating into significant self-harm or suicidality.



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Engagement

We know that justice-linked women face multiple barriers to engagement and that engagement strategies need to be persistent, creative and effective in order to work.

At My CWA our team are experts in engagement, developing creative responses to overcome the barriers affecting our clients. Our no further action (NFA) policy is to spend at least four weeks trying to reach each client. This four week period will include at least weekly communication with the referrer and at least 3 times per week reaching out to the client at different times of day, evening and weekend and using different methods.

We will always respond to any requests for practical support as this often creates a link that can become a meaningful engagement. Our team will also offer joint sessions with the referrer, appointments in GP surgeries, coffee shops and local community spaces.

Each communication with a client will be used, where possible, to undertake partial assessment and identify needs. In this way we can undertake some basic support planning and introductory work as well as building rapport.

Our approach to engagement is a critical element of the Peer Support Lounges work and offers a unique opportunity to tackle embedded issues, remove barriers to participation and ensure that each woman is getting the best help possible.



Case Study KP – 8 hours of worker time over seven weeks

Referral in but could not get through to client. Worked with PO to call when perpetrator not there.

I managed to get in touch – client did not want support – offered a break of contact for two weeks and then a check in to see if she changed her mind.

No answer for next couple of weeks – called in the evening and client answered. There had been an incident and the client was in supported accommodation in Ellesmere Port. Client thought she was pregnant and had no food. She had given Ex-partner her food parcel as she felt as though she needed to be on good terms if she was pregnant. I had a food parcel delivered and also a pregnancy test.

Client is not pregnant and very relieved she now has food. Client safe at refuge but again did not answer for a while. We offered a face to face appointment but client did not attend.

Communication with linked professionals indicates that this client does not engage with any of her support services. I have organised a professionals meeting (MARAC Plus) with IDVA, Refuge and PO to develop a shared safety and engagement plan. This will be the start of our work based on the needs identified in the informal communications with the client and in the multi-agency meeting.

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Working with Resistance



Case Study ST- 6 months of high intensity support

Our client was referred by Cheshire Probation after serving 16 weeks of a 6 month sentence for assaulting a police officer.

During her custodial time her children were placed with their father and on her release a public case was made for the ICO to be made permanent.

Client struggled to focus on anything beyond the case and her engagement was sporadic. The client attended the first three sessions of Evolve (female behaviour change) and disengaged. The Women's Centre worker for CWaC was persistent and creative in communicating, offering support through a number of mental health crisis linked to the court case. The client did not engage with the second opportunity for Evolve as she perceived the court case was going badly and this affected her relationships with all professionals. With support from the worker she attended two sessions of the third programme before disengaging again.

Our policy is that three disengagements from a programme put you back to the end of the waiting list but the worker felt strongly that the client had built a good relationship with them and advocated to deliver Evolve as part of a one to one support plan.

At this point the children were on a full lives with order with their father and the client could only have supervised contact. She then became pregnant with a new partner and a CP case was opened for the unborn baby.

The PSL worker delivered a 16 week support plan covering critical thinking skills, behaviour change and emotional regulation, significant work on the impact of domestic abuse on children, parental responsibility, parenting after abuse and Flourish (capacity to protect).

The client now has unsupervised contact with her children at her home. Her unborn baby is no longer subject to child protection measures.

"Before this I was in my own little bubble and didn't realise the impact of the domestic stuff, then I started to really work with you and it opened my eyes. It's been really good and has helped me or my future. I will continue to learn from my experience of the work"

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Looking Ahead

Crewe Peer Support Lounges has been successful in receiving funding from Cheshire CCG to extend and deliver the service to March 2023

A new Lounge is opening in Macclesfield in October and the Crewe Lounge will re-open fully in September 2021.

We have recently undertaken a survey and consultation with clients about how the Peer Support Lounge will operate post COVID. Most people want to see a mix of how the Lounge ran pre-COVID, alongside keeping some of the changes made during the pandemic. We will run an out of hours Lounge once a week in Crewe and Macclesfield and run Zoom workshops each week as well.

We will also provide a weekly face to face Peer Support Lounge in school hours for parents with school age children

Feedback is that the closed Facebook group is effective so we will retain that part of the work.

Following the demand for support for children and young people we are developing a resource 'Best of Me' around healthy relationships and emotional wellbeing



Learning from other people in the group is great. I've picked up a lot from listening to others. Self-soothing box!

Sometimes I just come and colour in, I don't really feel like doing the workshop... other times I'm really ready for it. I like having the options

Where else can you get Pizza, relax and chat, knowing everyone understands?

When life is hard, PSL is safe and calm. When life is OK we have a laugh. It's like family

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Supported by

