

Peer support in Wales: Side by Side Cymru

Improving peer leader capacity to deliver
impactful support across Wales.



Funded by the Welsh Government under
its Section 64 grant scheme



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

 **Mind Cymru**
for better mental health
o blaid gwell iechyd meddwl

A man with a large tattoo on his left arm and a woman are smiling and working on a plant in a garden. The man is wearing a pink t-shirt and the woman is wearing a grey cardigan over a pink top. They are both looking down at a plant with red flowers. The background is a lush green garden.

Side by Side Cymru is a peer support programme in Wales.

An independent evaluation showed that:

- The programme helped 381 peer leaders develop peer support skills.
- 221 community-based organisations were provided with funding to help sustain peer support groups.
- Approximately 3,800 people were supported by Peer Leaders as a result of the programme.

See pages 5-6 for more information

About us

We're Mind Cymru, your go-to mental health partner. We bring focused mental health expertise to our partnerships and services.

Through our network of 20 local Minds in Wales, we help people enjoy better mental health and support people with mental health problems to live well in their communities and at work. Together we are Mind in Wales.

We are able to draw on the best of our learning, information, expertise and evidence-based practice across both Wales and England to strengthen our support and projects in Wales.

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Introduction

We believe that anyone who is experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems should be able to get the support they need. That's why we're working with communities to develop a peer support model in Wales.

One in four adults in England and Wales are likely to experience a mental health problem each year and it's estimated that this costs the economy £105.2 billion due to loss of earnings, treatment and welfare provision¹.

Being able to share experiences and have a support network can help people to stay well.

In 2019, we received funding from the Welsh Government's Section 64 grants scheme for a programme to develop impactful peer support in Wales.

Based on Mind's Side by Side programme, we worked with local Minds to improve

the capacity of those who deliver peer support to communities across Wales.

Our independent evaluation conducted by M.E.L Research, showed that the programme provided an effective model for peer support within communities in Wales. There was also evidence to support the need for ongoing peer support programmes in Wales.

This document explores the scope and impact of the Side by Side Cymru project and shares our key recommendations for similar future programmes in Wales.

What is Peer Support?

Peer support is understood in many different ways because it is created and owned by the people who take part. At its core, peer support is about the relationships that people build as they share their own experiences to help and support each other. Peer support can develop in any setting, as a structured activity or informally.

¹ Official data on Wales from Stats Wales (www.statswales.gov.uk). 2016.

About Side by side

The Side by Side Cymru programme is based on Side by Side, Mind's extensive community peer support programme.

Research¹ into the Side by Side programme identified a set of common values that underpin community-based peer support for mental health, as shown below. This work led to the development of a Peer Support Toolkit² which was used throughout Side by Side Cymru.

Peer support core values

1. Experience in common

Peers share similar backgrounds, experiences, interests and goals

2. Safety

Peer Support has structures in place to ensure emotional safety

3. Choice and control

Peers have choice and control in how they are involved in their peer support

4. Two-way interactions

Peers give and receive support

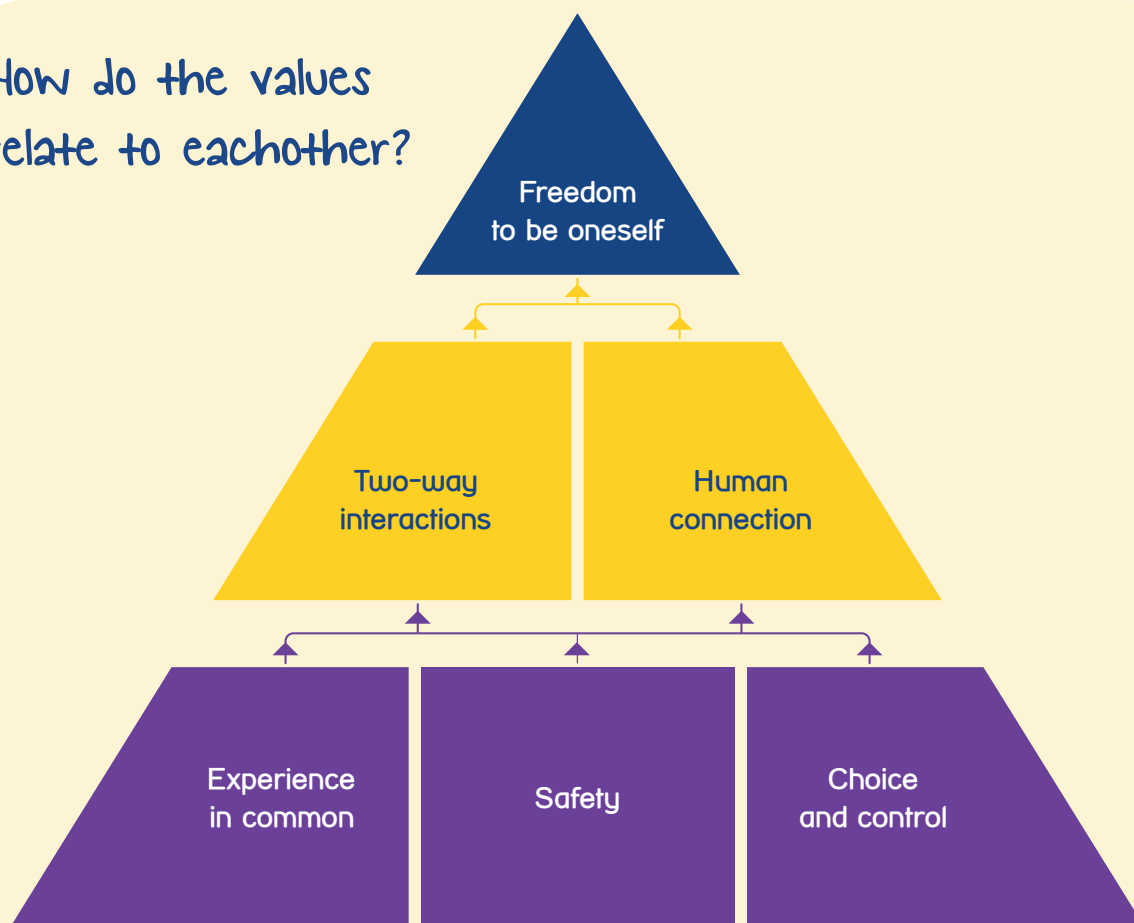
5. Human connections

Peers develop meaningful connections with each other

6. Freedom to be oneself

Peers feel able to express themselves and be themselves

How do the values relate to each other?



¹ St George's, University of London and McPin Foundation. Evaluating the Side by Side Peer Support Programme. 2017.

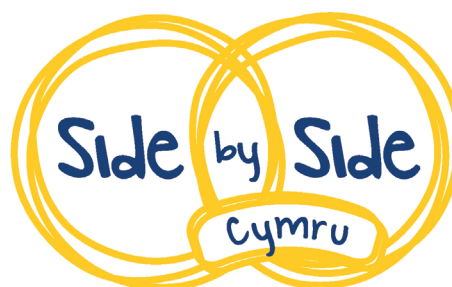
² Side by Side Research Consortium. Developing peer support in the community: a toolkit. London: Mind. 2017.

The Side by Side Cymru programme

In 2019, Mind Cymru received funding from the Welsh Government's Section 64 grants scheme to deliver impactful peer support in Wales.

The programme aimed to:

1. Strengthen local networks and improve the evidence base in Wales.
2. Improve the capacity of community-based organisations and individuals to lead impactful peer support activities.
3. Understand the use and improve upon the peer support toolkit.

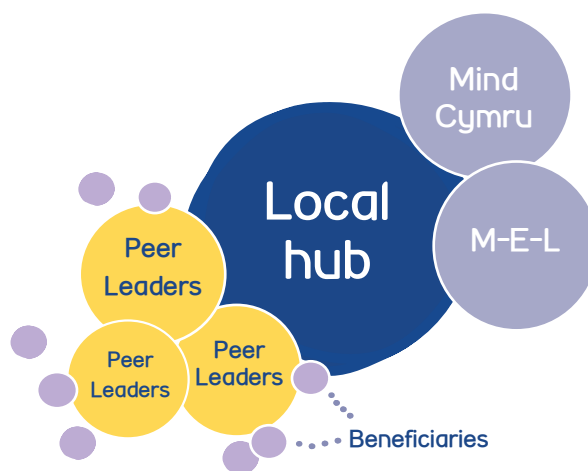


Peer support in your community
Cymorth gan gymheiriaid yn eich cymuned

A Peer Support Hub model

Side by Side Cymru was delivered by local Minds through four regional Peer Support Hubs. The Hubs offered both a physical and virtual space working in association with Peer Leaders and community-based organisations. The Hub's role was to build capacity to deliver effective peer support. They provided training, networking and shared learning events, and small community grant funding up to £250. The Hubs supported groups in the following areas:

- Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire - led by Mind Aberystwyth
- Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend - led by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Mind (formally known as Merthyr and the Valleys Mind)
- Mid and North Powys – led by Mid and North Powys Mind
- Newport and Monmouthshire – led by Newport Mind



Programme activities delivered by Side by Side Cymru

27

networking
events



35

training
sessions



41

one-to-one
sessions



5

shared learning
events



A positive impact

We commissioned an independent evaluation to help us understand the impact of the programme.

An independent partner, M.E.L Research, led the programme evaluation to understand the impact of Side by Side Cymru both on Peer Leaders and those they went on to support, and to collect and process learning about how best to deliver similar projects in the future. They used a mixed methods approach including surveys and interviews to engage with local Mind Hub project workers, Peer Leaders and peer support recipients. An academic report¹ detailing the research method, outcomes and findings in full is available alongside this impact summary.

Key outcomes

1. Peer Leaders and community-based organisations were able to deliver improved peer support.
2. Peer Leaders increased their **confidence and knowledge** to deliver peer support.
3. Peer Leaders increased their **understanding** of peer support and the **value** that it provides.
4. Peer Leaders reported that the **quality** of the peer support they delivered had increased. This included making sure the location is accessible, private and meet the needs of the group, and making sure there are opportunities for people to share their thoughts and be listened to.
5. Peer Leaders said the programme would have a **long-term impact** from sharing what they had learnt with others and from helping them to reach more people with peer support.
7. Peer Leaders and community-based organisations who were new to peer support and who felt less confident in their approach at the beginning gained the **most benefits**.
8. The programme was **well received** by beneficiaries who appreciated the opportunity to share ideas and connect with others with similar experiences.
9. The grants awarded through the programme helped **sustain and improve effectiveness** of peer support activity by allowing groups to pay for venue hire, one-off events and materials. The funding also helped newly formed groups start up, helping to increase the number of peer support activities being offered in the community.
10. There was an **improved understanding** of peer support provision and the programme's activities with statutory service providers and commissioners.
11. There is evidence of **sustainability** in providing increased levels of knowledge of a more structured form of peer support, alongside the value of networking activities that will outlast the programme.
12. Peer Support hubs are an **effective approach** to support knowledge of a more structured form of peer support, alongside its value and networking activities that will outlast the programme.

¹ The academic report can be accessed here: <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/5568/side-by-side-cymru-final-report.pdf>

The programme in numbers

The main findings of the independent evaluation can be found below.

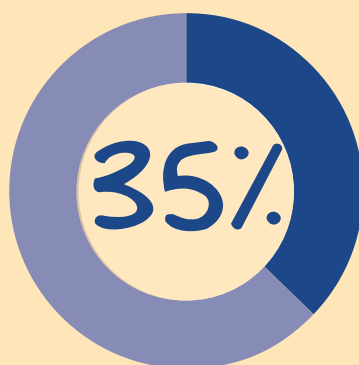
Reaching diverse communities across Wales

Our independent evaluation showed that the programme exceeded the number of people it set out to engage with.



381

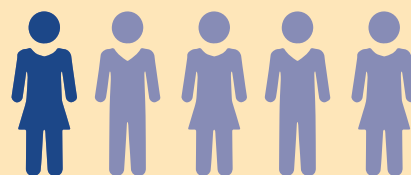
Peer Leaders were engaged through training and events across four areas in Wales



of peer leaders spoke **Welsh** as a first language.

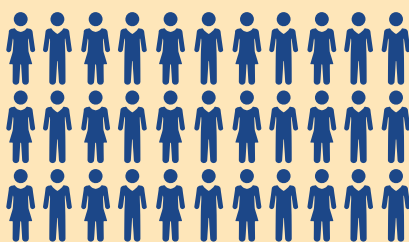
1 in 5

peer leaders had a **mental health condition** and more than 1 in 5 had a **physical health condition**.



3,800

people were supported by Peer Leaders as a result of the programme.



221

community-based organisations were helped to sustain peer supports groups with Mind Cymru grants totalling £50,000.

Developing peer support skills in Peer Leaders across Wales

9 out of 10

Peer Leaders reported an increase in confidence to deliver support.

80%

of Peer Leaders said they would **share** what they have learnt, and that attending the programme would help them **reach more people**.

Participant experiences

As well as the positive impact on peer support capacity in Wales, participants also reported having a very positive perception of the programme.

Julie's experience as a Peer Leader

When Julie joined the group, she was feeling isolated as a new parent. She now runs the group and has gained a range of benefits that she was able to pass on to her group:

- Knowledge of other support services through networking events
- Ideas to improve the group - space for 1:1 support and establishing ground rules
- Increased confidence as a facilitator
- Grant funding to help the group continue

I was very isolated with my first child, I realised how important support like this is.

The training has helped me understand that it is okay not to provide a solution, you can just be there for them.

Audrey's improvement to wellbeing

Audrey joined a weekly craft group because she wanted to feel more self-confident, learn something new and make friends.

Over time, Audrey gained wellbeing benefits including feeling more confident and closer to the others from taking part in the activities.

My confidence is improving and I feel better about myself.

Barbara's new found motivation

Barbara started attending an informal fortnightly group that enjoyed chatting while having tea and biscuits together. She describes the group as a friendly, happy meeting place where she feels included.

I originally went with my mother. She doesn't go anymore, but I get such a good feeling that I continue to go.

The networking group enabled me to access other services that I wasn't aware of, some of which helped a lady in my group.

I feel more informed and can bring some of the information to the group.

It validated the work that they [Peer Leaders] were undertaking and helped them to feel more valued in the work they are doing supporting others within the group.

The grant will help with the longevity of the group.

It has given me perspective.

This has given me more knowledge in running a support group.

A group for parents and children with additional needs

Parents who attend the group appreciate the support from others with similar experiences and the break the group gives them. The main benefit from their Peer Leader taking part in the programme, was a grant that paid for their venue, freeing up funds to reach more parents and children.

The grant will enable us to provide activities for more children and a safe, welcoming environment.

A library-based knitting group

Members have developed important friendships from attending. They find knitting to be a mindful activity and it gives them a sense of purpose. They received a grant which meant their Peer Leader could buy more materials for their group.

I've made friends. I only knew one person but now we're asking 'who is missing' and we check in on people if we haven't heard from them.

Towards better peer support

We've developed a versatile community-based model that is helping develop peer support in Wales.

Through this project, we've made a significant and much-needed contribution towards improved peer support networks.


Developing sustainable peer support networks

Side by Side Cymru's peer support model has engaged with 381 Peer Leaders and 221 community-based organisations across Wales, providing them with the skills and funds to reach more people.

Together, they have supported over 3,800 people and this number will continue to grow.

Improving wellbeing

Our aim is to help people live well, whatever that means for them. Both Peer Leaders and beneficiaries were positive about the effect it had on them as individuals, giving examples of how their new skills and friends had improved their lives.



**I am thankful that
the Peer Support
Network is there
now.**

**I have somewhere
to go to.**

Recommendations for the future

As part of the independent evaluation of the Side by Side Cymru programme, a number of key learning points will help us improve the delivery of peer support activities in the future.

Key recommendations

1. Future programmes should commit to **co-production** so people with lived experience lead and shape the programme from the start. Sufficient time for meaningful co-production should be built into the design and implementation phase.
2. Recognition that new peer support groups and more established groups have **different needs** and require different approaches to networking and training.
3. Establish regional **Steering Groups** in the areas the hubs operate bringing together Peer Leaders, organisations and local stakeholders who are committed to peer support in their communities. This would help to create 'scaffolding' for connections to continue after the programme finishes.
4. Future programmes that involve statutory services and commissioners should take into account the **skills, time and resources** required to build meaningful relationships with these stakeholders.
5. Demonstrating the wider **cost benefit** of the programme can help with engagement and support from commissioners and statutory service providers.
6. Allow for sufficient resource and time to evaluate the impact of peer support on **peer support beneficiaries**.
7. Considering utilising **place-based methods** early on, such as World Café style discussions, to capture the views and experiences of recipients.
8. Another approach would be to host an **online discussion** page where questions and topics can be discussed over the duration of the programme.
9. Using **incentives** would encourage people to take part.
10. Extending the length of the evaluation will help **capture the impact** as peer support groups develop as a result of the programme.

Our additional thoughts:

1. **Continuous funding** is important, as peer support work is impactful.
2. **Roll-out to other areas** in Wales would be beneficial.
3. Peer Support will have an even more important role to play in **reconnecting communities** in the recovery phase of the coronavirus pandemic.
4. Building alliances with more **BAME groups** would result in better reach and impact on minority-led peer support groups.

Thank you.

We would like to thank the local Mind Hub project workers for their time and effort in collecting the information required for this evaluation, Peer Leaders and community-based organisations for taking part in the surveys and interviews, peer support recipients for their insights, and to M.E.L Research for leading the programme evaluation.



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Work with us

If you'd like to partner with Mind Cymru, or find out more about any of our projects in Wales, please contact us:

T 029 2039 5123

W [Mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru/side-by-side-cymru](https://www.mind.org.uk/about-us/mind-cymru/side-by-side-cymru)

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