

# Peer Support Case Studies

## Canerows Peer Support



NSUN undertook to produce a number of case studies in collaboration with support from national Mind, to demonstrate the potential role and value of user-led organisations working at the interface with statutory services.

Case studies written by Alison Faulkner.

# Canerows Peer Support

## **Canerows** for BAME mental health

Canerows peer support is based within the charity Sound Minds in South London ([www.soundminds.co.uk](http://www.soundminds.co.uk)). Sound Minds is a user-led charity seeking to transform the lives of people experiencing mental ill health through music, film and art. They describe themselves as 'a thriving community bound together by creativity and a shared belief in mutual learning and peer support'.

### ***History***

Canerows was founded in 2007 by three service users at Sound Minds (Devon Marston, Coral Hinds and James Braithwaite), who were motivated by their own experiences to improve the experience of BAME people on inpatient wards. Given the over-representation of some minority ethnic groups on inpatient wards and higher levels of control and restraint, particularly for African and African Caribbean men, they wanted to change the ward culture towards one of greater humanity and care. They established a ward visiting service, with the aim of providing patients with support from people who have faced similar challenges in their lives.

It took some time to establish the project, partly due to the resistance and constant turnover of NHS staff, but also a lack of understanding of peer support. Canerows represented something of a challenge to NHS culture, which was hard for the service to accept at first. The team encountered many occasions when they were unable to gain entry to the wards in the early days, despite having an agreement in place. However, they have established a good relationship with staff over time and are now able to raise concerns with them whenever the need arises.

### ***Sound Minds***

One of the reasons for the success of Canerows is its firm foundation in the 'community within the community' (a term coined by Devon Marston) of Sound Minds. The organisation originated 26 years ago with a strong 'user-led' ethos, run and delivered by people who have lived experience of mental health problems. It is based in a basement beneath a church in Battersea, where they have a fully equipped music studio and arts rooms. They are open to anyone who wants to take part, and take a holistic and collaborative approach to their work.

Paul Brewer describes the success of Sound Minds as standing:

'...on the quality of our relationships and particularly the enabling and levelling effect brought about by sharing skills in music and the arts'. (Brewer, 2019, p.188)

The majority of Sounds Minds' members are from BAME backgrounds, reflecting their over-representation in hospitals and the local community. The ethos of humanity, food and music runs through the work of both Sound Minds and Canerows.

### ***The Ward Visiting Service***

Canerows has a team of around 18 people with lived experience visiting six acute mental health wards across Queen Mary's and Springfield Hospital. Mia Morris is the peer support coordinator; she works three days a week and supports and coordinates the work of the ward visitors. Each ward visitor makes one or two visits per week, with the aim simply of talking to patients. Some take a pack of cards as a way of beginning a conversation; they will make people a cup of tea, perhaps read with people and generally find ways to connect. There is also a post-discharge peer supporter working on one of the wards, who is able to meet up with people after they leave hospital.

Ward visitors are no longer paid for each visit: most are now volunteers, although they would like to return to paying people now that they have more funding.

At the end of each visit, the ward visitor will provide feedback about who they have spoken to and any issues or problems arising: a 'talkback' session. On one of the wards, there is a Meaningful Day folder on which visitors can put their initials against the people they have visited and give feedback. Mostly feedback tends to be about someone not receiving the right support, and sometimes they feed back to managers about poor staff attitudes.

### ***Other services and activities***

Once a week, Sound Minds runs a user-led drop-in called Mama Low's Kitchen, from 10-2.30pm in a local community centre. This is a free and open resource, with lunch charged at £2.50. There are some laptops to use, teas and coffees, support, pool and monthly activities such as Saffron's Street Jazz Dance, and outings.

They have also run a welfare benefits session for people in response to demand, and offer food bank vouchers to anyone who needs them.

A Recovery group for women meets weekly for an hour on Rose Ward and is facilitated by one of their most experienced ward visitors. Service users discuss their hopes and dreams on the road to recovery in a supportive environment.

### ***Training and support***

All ward visitors undergo training before they start out on the wards. The training covers: the role of a ward visitor, boundaries and confidentiality, culture, role play to handling difficult situations, and thinking about your own story and what you are prepared to share. The Trust also runs training for the ward visitors; this covers de-escalation and breakaway techniques, which help people to know how to keep themselves safe. (Once on the wards, ward visitors will have a bleeper with them). After the training, ward visitors shadow an experienced visitor for a couple of sessions before taking on the role.

Mia provides all of the ward visitors with regular support and supervision, which she regards as essential: a continuous thread running through their service. Everyone at Sound Minds regard celebration and care as crucial: Mia will send cards to people on their birthdays and if they are in hospital. People get together as a group for supervision on a fortnightly basis.

### ***Monitoring and evaluation***

Canerows ward visitors use feedback questionnaires which cover aspects of ward care as well as views about the ward visiting service. The results of the former are fed back to the Trust with the aim of improving care. They use a shorter version (eight questions) on a regular basis, but a longer one on occasions when they need more information.

In 2008, Patience Seebohm approached Sound Minds offering to carry out an evaluation as a doctorate project. She trained three service users as interviewers to conduct the evaluation with her, which made it a co-produced process in line with the ethos of the organisation. The report concluded that the ward visitors were making a positive impact (Reynolds and Seebohm, 2008), and was valuable for the project in seeking further funding.

More recently, Paul Brewer (CEO of Sound Minds) wrote a chapter on Canerows Peer Support Services for the book 'Inside Out, Outside In', edited by Harry Gijbels, Lydia Sapouna and Gary Sidley (PCCS Books, 2019).

### ***Working with/in the NHS***

The biggest *challenges* occurred in the beginning when staff did not understand the role of peer support and were resistant to the ward visitors. Time was taken to establish trust with one ward, including a formal written agreement about their respective responsibilities. Once this trust was established, the Canerows team were able to extend their service to other wards without the same formal agreement. It helped to have a consultant who championed their cause and supported their involvement.

One of the simple factors that helped them gain access and recognition on the wards, particularly given the rate of staff turnover, was to wear NHS identity badges. This can have its drawbacks though - as some new staff can mistake them for Health Care Assistants and expect them to be able to provide care or services that they cannot do. They tend to connect best with the Occupational Therapists on the wards - this is a natural 'home' for their presence on the wards.

Canerows has always sought to change the culture from the 'regimentality' of routines and rules on the wards to one that is more humane and caring. They feel that some progress has been made: the NHS has tried to improve things for people from BAME backgrounds. The contribution of Canerows ward visitors to the ward and the patients is appreciated now, although when the ward is under pressure, it can return to its regimental or rigid approach. Retaining their independence as an organisation with individuals going into the wards has been key to this - they retain their own culture from the solid base at Sound Minds. Mia Morris, the coordinator, described Canerows as follows:

'Our strength is that we have never been an angry storm that blows itself out but rather a persistent gentle breeze pushing things forward.' (quoted in Brewer, 2019, p. 195)

There are still challenges. Recently, Canerows withdrew from their attempts to introduce their service to forensic wards. Once again, staff turnover had a major impact on this along with the particular constraints of working in a forensic setting with a constant tension between care and custody. It took some time to establish the post-discharge service for some similar reasons, plus the fact that the teams they were trying to connect with (e.g. crisis and home treatment) were operating in an intense and short term manner. In the end, the best 'home' for peer support turned out to be the Early Intervention in Psychosis service, because they work in a more holistic way with people and for up to two year periods. This gives the Canerows peer worker more time to connect and build relationships with people.

### ***Learning from experience***

When asked what they had learnt over the years, the response was 'patience is a virtue', which reflects their persistence struggle against the dominant NHS culture. Establishing peer support within the NHS requires a cultural shift and needs both patience and determination. They are no longer met with blank faces when they try to talk about peer support. And they have some good solid relationships of trust within the Trust.

### **Resources**

- Brewer, P. (2019) 'Canerows Peer Support Services' Chapter 10 in the book 'Inside Out, Outside In', edited by Harry Gijbels, Lydia Sapouna and Gary Sidley. Monmouth: PCCS Books.
- Reynolds, D. (2010). Human kindness, compassion and love: the Ward Visiting Scheme designed and delivered by Canerows and Plaits. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 14: 3.
- Reynolds, D. and Seebohm, P. (2010) Canerows and Plaits Ward Visiting Service and Have Your Say Forum Evaluation. London: Canerows and Plaits. Available from [www.soundminds.co.uk](http://www.soundminds.co.uk).

### **Contact details:**

**Telephone: 02072071786**

**Email: [canerows@soundminds.co.uk](mailto:canerows@soundminds.co.uk)**

**Website: [canerows.co.uk](http://canerows.co.uk)**