

# Peer Support Case Studies

## ReCoCo - Recovery College Collective



NSUN undertook to produce five 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.

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# ReCoCo - Recovery College Collective, Newcastle



ReCoCo is a user-led collaboration between service users and the voluntary and statutory sectors. ReCoCo brought together Newcastle Gateshead Recovery College (formerly hosted by Cumbria, Northumbria Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust) and the user-led organisation Launchpad into a new organisation, the Recovery College Collective (ReCoCo). It started out with few resources five years ago: two days in a room and two determined individuals, Angela Glascott (Recovery College Coordinator with the Trust) and Alisdair Cameron from Launchpad, a service user led organisation in Newcastle (<https://launchpadncl.org.uk/>). ReCoCo has now been running for five years, and in 2019 achieved funding of £400k. They won 1st Place for service improvement at the Bright Ideas in Health Awards 2018.

Alongside Angela and Alisdair, ReCoCo also has a full time peer support worker, and an administrator. Recently the CCG has agreed more money to fund two more staff: a systems manager and volunteer coordinator, so ReCoCo will be employing people directly for the first time. They also have five paid roles for Therapeutic Enablers, who coordinate some of the courses, such as the Train the Trainers and WRAP.

## ***Values and ethos***

At the core of ReCoCo is user-led peer support. Although it began as a recovery college and retains many features of this way of working, the focus is on finding ways of encouraging and enabling people to utilise their lived experience for the benefit of others and to empower themselves in doing so. Their roots are in community development and the grassroots and civil rights movements. Building on this has meant a different ethos, which can be challenging to their NHS partners at times.

ReCoCo operates rather differently from most recovery colleges, because it is entirely user-led and operates an 'open-source' or non-proprietary way of working across organisations in the locality. They operate an open access approach, with a broad understanding of mental distress in those who enroll as students as well as the organisations with whom they share their space, rooms and resources.

### ***How it works***

ReCoCo in Newcastle is open to anyone in the region. People begin by enrolling as students and, with an existing peer supporter, they fill in the *Empower Flower* which they have developed themselves (see below). ReCoCo find this to be a useful way of opening up the conversation with a new student: a start to connecting with others, and an introduction to the ethos of peer support.

ReCoCo do not turn anyone away, although they do prefer that people choose to come (as against being sent or persuaded by referrers). GPs refer people as do mental health services. They accept people who have been banned from other services, and, although they might occasionally ask someone to stay away for a while in some circumstances, their ethos is to hold a space and hope for people.

Courses include: Train the Trainers, DBT skills, Reducing the rage and Formulation, creative courses and sensory strategies, self-care and self-soothing. The aim throughout is to enable people to take responsibility for themselves. There is a pick and mix approach, with no formal pathway through the courses; it is for people to choose their own path.

### ***Wellbeing and Transformation programme***

The Wellbeing and Transformation programme is for people currently supported by the community mental health team and is held at the Gateshead location. The programme starts with people learning about containment skills then the exploration and formulation, moving towards the aspirational question: '*now what are you going to do with these super powers you realise you have?*'. A formal evaluation is being carried out by Northumbria University.

### ***Peer Support Development Programme***

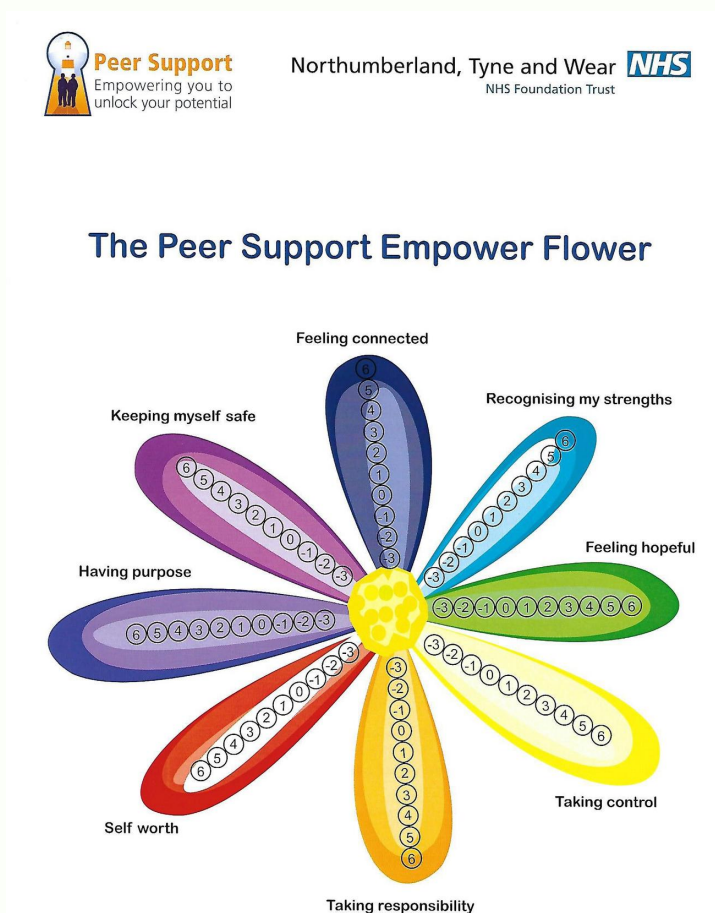
People can move on to the Peer Support Development Programme, which is 12 weeks long, based on good practice, and drawing on a number of peer support sources. It aims to be values based and practical. Each student has their own folder, and they are encouraged to reflect each week and do a presentation at the end: their shared experience, using anything they have learnt from the 12 weeks. Students fill in evaluation forms at the start and end of course, to enable ReCoCo to monitor its impact.

The course begins with a day on WRAP and the aim is for people to potentially move on to become facilitators themselves. With this in mind, the 12 week course is followed by a Train the Trainers course which starts with a session on group work skills, followed by experience shadowing and mentoring other facilitators. This course has 15 places, from which ReCoCo might be able to recruit 5 new facilitators each time.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

From the start, ReCoCo have been careful to ensure that they monitor their own impact as well as the progress of their students, with an understanding of what the commissioners are looking for. They use a short version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale, the Dunbar scale and the Empower Flower, which they developed themselves. An evaluation in 2018, carried out by Northumbria University, found that students made a statistically significant increase in wellbeing as measured by the SWEMWEBS: over 82% of students reported an increase in their wellbeing.

The *Empower Flower* was developed as a more person-centred means of finding out how people are progressing individually, but also to provide evidence of impact to others. The elements of the *Empower Flower* are: Feeling connected; Recognising my strengths; Feeling hopeful; Taking control; Taking responsibility; Self-worth; Having purpose; Keeping myself safe. They plan to introduce a stem representing human rights.



### **What have you learnt from your experience at ReCoCo?**

They emphasised the ethos of sharing; they have found that if you trust people and share resources, you get repaid twice over - with both individuals and organisations. Sharing resources with others in the local area has helped build connections and capacity. As an example, they opened up their Train the Trainers course to local voluntary/third sector partners, 'because there is no money in the system'.

They have found that an ethos of acceptance and belonging is fundamental to the success and sustainability of ReCoCo.

*'It is not enough talking about mental health as a subject - what do we really mean? what is madness, what are the cultural mediators. We are aware of our own vulnerabilities, it gives it the human touch, we are not hiding anything. Self-acceptance is so important. How we present ourselves, we are not perfect, we are flawed but authentic. You find out that everyone else is winging it as well.'* - **Alisdair Cameron.**

### **Challenges**

There is a cultural divide between ReCoCo and their NHS partners; at times, the clinical influence can be destructive. Personally this can be challenging for Angela, who is employed by the Trust, so effectively has two managers: the NHS and the board of trustees at ReCoCo.

They talked of the importance of acknowledging that they are dealing with people with turbulent pasts; there are a lot of complex dynamics and difficulties with boundaries. This needs them to constantly talk things through, and to be honest and transparent. Angela and Alisdair have to maintain the organisational accountability, and act as mediators and a buffer between ReCoCo and the outside world. There can be pressures from above and below, with poor mental health in the mix. In managing these complex dynamics, they talked of the responsibility of maintaining connection with people, being honest, being prepared to call each other out, and not being underhand.

Recently, the organisation has had to become more corporate which has brought more challenges, and pushed them out of their comfort zones. With an increased budget, their roles have changed and they have needed to become business managers, estate managers, people managers. They need more protocols and procedures now and to institute closer financial controls to avoid problems later.

Once again, there is a cultural tension in this. The pressure to become more corporate goes against the community based and peer-led ethos. There is a pressure to develop corporate policies and language which they have to resist and find a different way of managing in order to retain their identity. As an example, they managed to resist the expectation to write a conventional business case for the CCG, instead remaining true to their ethos: 'We want to continue to disrupt these conventions but remain suitable for funding.'

*"ReCoCo speaks truth to power without being seduced by it, always staying true to the insight of the lived experience and the grassroots... Our mission and passion is to capture, convey and catalyse the lived experience: the good and the bad, the tragic and the comic, the browbeaten and the bolshie; to reflect mental health service users in all our glory and all our misery. Not merely to ensure that we are heard, but that we are respected and able to shape our own futures and services." - from theReCoCo website*



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