



Snapshot - HelpingMinds

HelpingMinds commenced as ARAFMI (the Association of Friends and Relatives of the Mentally Ill) in 1976. This was the start of a lived experience workforce, although voluntary, as all members had lived experience of mental health caring. The formal paid workforce at HelpingMinds commenced 2012, as Lived Experience (Peer) Workforce and is an integral part of the organisation. HelpingMinds continues to explore ways to expand this service. HelpingMinds has several LE (Peer) programs:

Family Carer Peer Support

Family Carer Peer workers promote choice and self-determination, hope for recovery of their loved one. Having walked a similar path, they emphasise the importance of maintaining health, coping skills and practical advice for caring for a person experiencing mental health issues.

"I chose peer support services because it is great to talk to someone who has been through it and who is doing well. It gives me hope that I can get through this."

Individual family carer services are offered via telephone, online as well as through group support meetings for family members and friends. The groups provide an opportunity for people to meet, share experiences, strategies and practical advice. This assists navigating mental health services and awaiting timely access to other family carer supports.

Recovery College Educators

Recovery College Educators co-design and co-facilitate educational courses for people living with a mental health and/or alcohol and other drug challenges, their family, friends, health professionals and the broader community. Coming from all walks of life, Recovery College Educators come together to co-develop courses, sharing wisdom gained from valuable life experience. While the courses offered are diverse, they all have the common goal of providing students with the knowledge and tools to find the most meaning, confidence and enjoyment in life.

The College is dedicated to continuing to centre and privilege the voices of those with lived experience and acknowledge their deep wisdom and expertise. It recognises 'recovery' as being full rights-based participation and belonging and that this involves personal healing and growth within the context of a person's life. This approach takes into account the role of injustice and systemic oppression in causing harm, experiences of distress and challenges in people's lives.

All courses at the College are co-produced by at least two educators who bring lived and living experience along with subject matter expertise. Co-production in practice becomes a 'way of being', a set of principles or values that guide how we are in relationship with each other. It also brings attention to power differentials, worldviews and becomes a mechanism for learning and developing knowledge.



Carer Peer Training and Community Engagement

Family Carer LE (Peer) workers have delivered carer engagement training in a variety of health settings. This training is part of wider system reform that includes consultations, working groups and public forums. These engagement activities aim to raise the profile of carer perspectives, leading to better carer experiences. Advocating for a strengthened family carer LE (Peer) workforce will improve outcomes for individuals, their families and the wider community.

“This training should be available to every staff member in the hospital.”

Embedding a LE (Peer) workforce includes understanding the uniqueness of the family carer LE (Peer) role, maintaining role integrity (and avoiding peer drift) and approaches to professional development. Engaging in external peer supervision, regular team meetings and networking with other family carer LE (Peer) workers ensures a well-connected and supported workforce.

HelpingMinds are committed to offering student work placements to develop an entry point for new LE (Peer) workers. HelpingMinds vision for the future includes expanding both LE (Peer) consumer and workforces, continuing to invest in Family Carer LE (Peer) workers and strengthening career pathways. Currently HelpingMinds are developing a Lived Experience Workforce Framework to progress this vision.

