PEER SUPPORT

A **Discussion Paper** from The Centre for Welfare Reform published in association with Paradigm.

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THE CENTRE FOR WELFARE REFORM

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1. INTRODUCTION

As self-directed support develops in England we are learning from people, families and practitioners about the kinds of assistance people may require to really be in control and direct their own support. The Yorkshire and Humber region have worked hard to understand and develop thinking about a supportive system that that is empowering, useful to people and makes the best use of existing resources. This work has led to two key areas of development:

1. Understanding the new role for social work to support and enable self-directed support - Developing the New Script for Social Work
2. Understanding the wider universal support system offered in communities to assist people to direct their support - Community Brokerage

We have shared the learning to date in a variety of papers which discuss brokerage, social work and self-directed support in further detail (visit www. bit.ly/social-work-project).

This paper is one of a suite of papers which focuses on one element of the community brokerage model and its link to the New Script for Social Work. This discussion paper aims to explore and support the development of **Peer Support** as an intrinsic element of a community-based approach.

2. COMMUNITY BROKERAGE

Our alternative model of support brokerage is defined in our early papers as Community Brokerage, an approach that includes all people and organisational contributions, to ensure there is a range of supports available for local citizens.

Community Brokerage:

1. Starts by assuming and encouraging the capacity of citizens and families by enabling access to a wide information network
2. Facilitates the early use of Peer Support for everyone
3. Ensures access to community supports from organisations and associations within their community
4. Enables citizens to work with support services directly and to explore with them what options are available
5. Puts in place sufficient professional advisors, such as social workers or other specialists, so that everyone can get the help they need

The wider the sources of support we have in local communities the closer we will get to offering citizens a real choice about who they receive assistance from – the people and organisations that they believe can best understand them and their situation (see Figure 1).

If social workers adopt a facilitative approach and recognise the diverse range of potential community assistance then people themselves can decide which option is the right source of support for them.

Citizen, Family & Friends   1. Information Network   2. Peer Support   3. Community Supports   4. Support Services   5. Professional Advice

Figure 1. The community-based support system

Previous work undertaken across the Yorkshire and Humber region identified that most current assistance is given by social workers and that other community options are not often used. This may reflect the fact that self-directed support is still at an early stage of development rather, than any failure to develop these other options. However, if community brokerage is to be supported and developed, then the numbers of people utilising the various approaches must be more sensibly distributed across the range of options (see Figure 2).

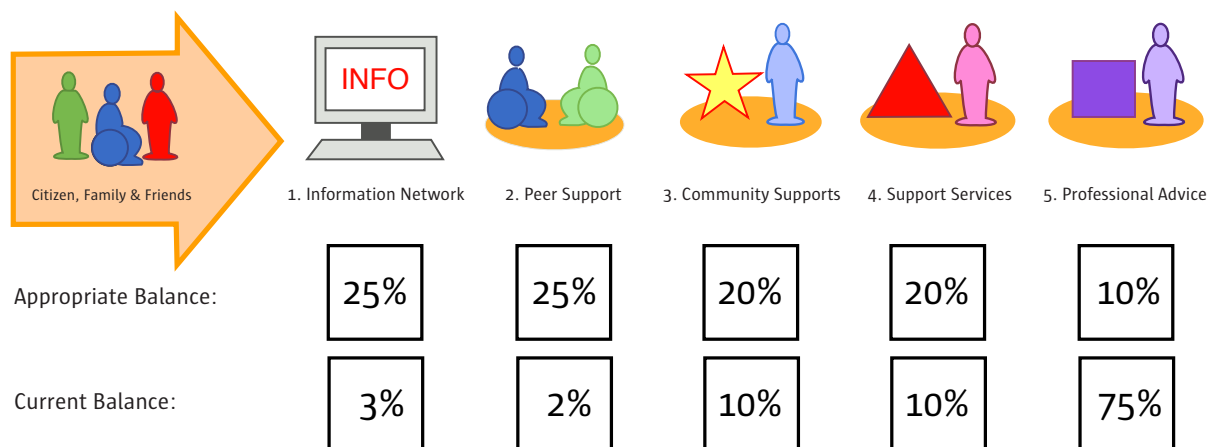|	INFO				
Citizen, Family & Friends	1. Information Network	2. Peer Support	3. Community Supports	4. Support Services	5. Professional Advice
Appropriate Balance:	25%	25%	20%	20%	10%
Current Balance:	3%	2%	10%	10%	75%

Figure 2. Numbers of people utilising the community-based support model

The full range of options in the model should be available to people from the outset, it is up to them (with support) to choose the form of assistance that they feel will best work for them. For this to be a reality local authorities must make sure that the full range of options are developed and available.

3. PEER SUPPORT IN PRACTICE

Peer Support has a rich history and it has been a feature of many successful human services - treating alcohol and drug dependency, providing peer to peer advice or enabling self help. It is widely accepted that someone who has been through a similar experience can offer invaluable support to another person embarking on their own journey. Peer Support offers a unique perspective and has long been advocated as a valued approach to support.

The independent living movement has long asserted the value of peer to peer support, insisting that disabled people are experts in the barriers which face them and how to tackle such barriers.
NCIL, 2008

Peer Support is an intrinsic element of universal Community Brokerage system. However our early findings suggest that, at present, few people are actually beenfit from it. This may be due to a number of factors, not least the lack of understanding about Peer Support in general.

Peer Support is often defined in relation to activities where *people provide emotional and practical help to each other*. However, the defining feature of Peer Support is that it refers to **relationships** and **interactions** between people who are peers, and *who are equal in ability, standing, rank, or value*.

This latter feature is important if we are to really understand the value of Peer Support and its potential contribution to people who are directing their own support. To focus simply on 'activities' tells only half the story – the nature of the relationship is crucial in really understanding Peer Support and its potential added benefits.

In a recent piece of research in Newcastle, families of disabled children discussed the value of Peer Support. Families were asked from whom they received the best information, advice and guidance and, overwhelmingly, families indicated that it was another family member, who had shared similar experiences, who was most valuable. They also told us that one of the reasons that peers prove to be so useful is that their assistance comes with an intrinsic understanding and experience of the need to build upon

your own and your families' emotional well being – they are not simply offering standard solutions.

Together (the national mental health support provider) in partnership with Nottingham University and National Survivor User Network recently supported the development of Peer2Peer, a network of peer led groups and organisations that were formed to share learning and develop training together. Their recent report provides further evidence of the unique assistance that can really only be offered by someone who has experienced a similar situation or context.

I am not a diagnosis, I am a human being and as such I am more important than my diagnosis. Peer Support sees the person first, understands their distress and can offer true solutions that the Supporting Peer has used themselves.
Peer2Peer member

In recent interviews with Peer Support orgnisations many of them identified four key benefit of using Peer Support:

1. increased self-esteem
2. increased in self-confidence
3. increased sense of belonging
4. improved motivation

As self-directed support has developed across the Yorkshire and Humber region Peer Support networks and organisations have sprung up offering many of the recognized support brokerage functions for self-directed support.

These functions include:

- **Informing and Connecting** – helping people by providing good information about local resources and entitlements, researching new possibilities, offering advice around self-directed support and helping people make helpful connections.
- **Guidance and planning** - helping people think through their needs and desired outcomes and helping people to develop their support plans.
- **Negotiating and advocating** - helping people negotiate contracts and agreements with others and to advocate their own needs when necessary.
- **Organising and setting up** – helping people organise their support systems, recruiting supporters and agreeing guidelines.
- **Managing and improving** – helping people manage their funding, their

supports and using expert advice to make improvements.

- **Reflecting and developing** – helping people to review their needs and their support arrangements and to initiate changes when necessary.
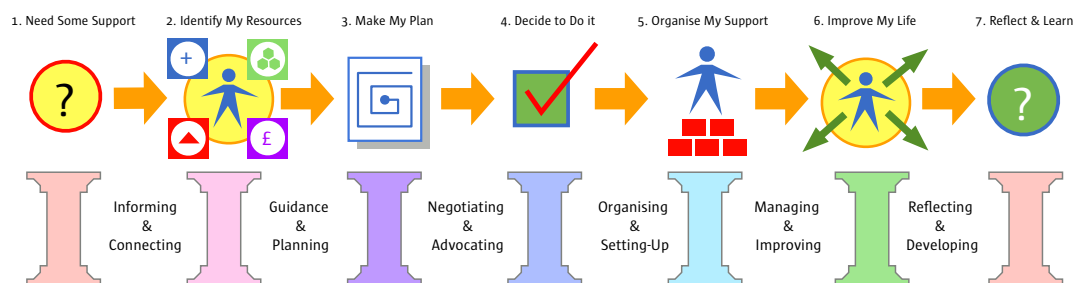

Figure 3. Support brokerage functions

EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE

Lives Unlimited

Lives Unlimited is a community group of disabled people and their families based in York who all have a wide range of experience of: self-directed support, personal budgets, support planning, putting plans into action, independent living, recruiting and employing Personal Assistants (PAs) and training and supervising PAs.

They share experiences within the group and more widely through organising workshops, events and by speaking at other organisations' events. For example recently they ran an event for PAs and their employers called *Dream PAs: How to be one, how to find one*. Now a group of PAs and employers are starting to meet informally as a direct result of this event.

Lives Unlimited has also been involved with school leavers and their families offering, assistance with support planning. The success of Lives Unlimited lies in sharing their personal experiences and their detailed knowledge of self-directed support, housing and support options and personal budgets; that comes from having 'been there'. Lives Unlimitied has made itself available to share these personal experiences with other people who want to make real changes in their own lives.

www.livesunlimited.org.uk

Free to Live (Leeds)

The Free to Live Personal Budget Peer Support Network is a group of older people living in the Leeds area who have experience of using a personal budget or direct payment. Free to Live offer informal advice and support which is free, impartial and confidential via a website, helpline, face to face meetings and a monthly gathering. This is focused around assisting people who are considering directing their support and managing their support. Free to Live offers people with experience of directing their own support the option of sharing their experiences and assisting other people.

www.freetoliveleeds.org/home

The Personalisation Forum Group (Doncaster)

The Personalisation Forum Group is made up of around 60 Doncaster citizens who experience mental ill health. The group is inclusive and also has members who have physical health problems, learning disabilities and autism. The group meets weekly focusing on supporting each other, requesting their statutory rights to be upheld and developing Peer Support opportunities to improve their own wellbeing and their community. The group applies a 'common sense' approach to supporting each other, focusing on practical assistance to achieve improved personal outcomes.

The group also provides a 'buddy system' where they can both give and receive time to support each other: attend appointments with each other, help with tasks in the home, socialise and provide someone to talk to. For example one member was recently admitted to hospital following a decline in her mental health. Group members contributed financially to ensure that there were sufficient bus fares to allow one member of the group to visit her each day. This provided the strength for her to get well and resulted in one of her shortest hospital admissions, just three weeks, when previous admissions had run into months.

www.bit.ly/Personalisation-Forum-Group

West Lancs Peer Support Group (WLPS)

WLPS is an organisation led by disabled people and their families providing assistance to people who are looking to direct and manage their support via a direct payment or personal budget: *WLPS exists to provide disabled people with access to information and support in order that they can make informed choices and be in control of their lives.*

WLPS offer information, advice and guidance around getting and managing a direct payment and or Personal Budget; recruiting and managing a PA; managing funds and payroll services; and supporting people to voice their views on local service developments. WLPS have developed a model of Peer Support that offers a sustained and viable long term approach. WLPS also currently supports other organisations nationally to explore this approach to further develop the concept of Peer Support.

www.ukpar.org/about_us_1.html

4. THE NEW SCRIPT

The New Script for Social Work outlines a clear model of care management that is able to support Personalisation and people directing their own support. The model ensures that people who access care management can quickly and easily access community support brokerage, including Peer Support. The New Script aims to include the option of Peer Support as routine practice in care management where this is appropriate by aiming to link people up with a local peer who may be able to help them (see Figure 4).

This approach aims to:

1. Re-script **social work** - get back to basics and free professionals from unnecessary bureaucracy
2. Tap into **community** - connect people to existing community organisations and networks who can assist
3. Strengthen **peer** support - give people access to the most important support possible early on
4. Use **services** appropriately - use the energy and skill of service providers who want to personalise support
5. Give people **information** - ensure people have the tools they need to make their own decision

In practice this approach aims to ensure that in the initial meetings of determining eligibility, capacity and establishing an indicative budget, the care manager can link people with a Peer Supporter to advise and offer assistance, should the person wish to pursue this option.

The New Script for Social Work has been piloted in two sites in the Yorkshire and Humber region, York and North East Lincolnshire, further details about this work can be found at The Centre for Welfare Reform (visit www.bit.ly/social-work-project).
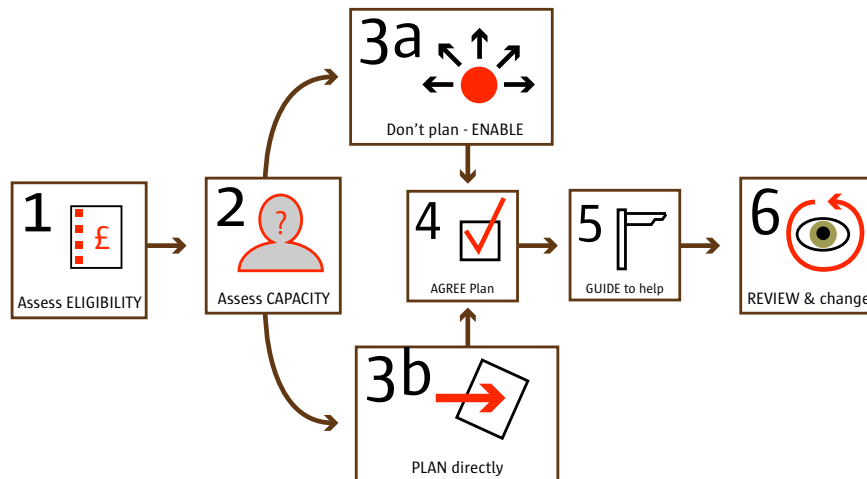
Figure 4. New Script for Social Work

In York there were a range of approaches to connecting people to peers. Initially, the process of understanding what Peer Support organisations and networks (in their widest form) were already available was the key to developing the local community brokerage network. The community brokerage network that came together for the pilot, shared and developed their learning around self-directed support and the New Script for Social Work, exploring and understanding their potential contribution.

Each organisation within the network described their offer of assistance in a way that could be passed on to people looking to direct their own support. York agreed to equip the social workers involved in the pilot with an information pack that outlined the organisations taking part. For example York Independent Living Network (YILN) are a network of Peer Supporters and advisors with experience of directing their support and a willingness to assist others. As York Care Management Teams developed and piloted the New Script, it was YILN who acted as the point of reference for connections to potential Peer Supporters. So everyone involved in the New Script pilot was offered the contact details of YILN and the option to connect with a peer immediately (visit www.yiln.org.uk).

In order to support and develop a long term sustainable network of interested Peer Supporters and to offer everyone the opportunity to assist another person, York are looking to ask everyone who has experience of directing their support if they are willing to assist one other person and be included on a register of Peer Support contacts. It is envisaged that people will be asked about this at their review, when they are reflecting upon their experiences, as this seems an appropriate time to explore any potential contributions to assist others.

5. DEVELOPING PEER SUPPORT

If Peer Support is to be an approach that is widely available we need to consider how we move forward in developing a local infrastructure so that we genuinely respect and value the approach. There are some key concepts that are helping us to understand and develop Peer Support. These include:

1. EXPECT MORE

We need to acknowledging and respecting people's ability to do more for themselves and to contribute to others. Many of our existing systems and processes rely on professional intervention and leadership and less on people's own contribution and knowledge. The community model requires a significant change in our thinking – almost turning our approach inside out – beginning with the assumption that people can do more for themselves.

In our early experiences of including Peer Support in care management and community assistance this assumption is often lacking. It is vital that we begin to question all of our interventions and practice, challenging current approaches to ensure we are respecting and providing opportunities for people to help themselves and help others.

2. WELCOME IT

We need to understand, acknowledge and celebrate Peer Support as an essential source of support. There are many examples of Peer Support in existence in local communities, however the less formal they are, the less likely they are to be recognised and valued by professionals. We must expand our understanding of what exactly constitutes Peer Support, as we are in danger of overlooking a rich network of assistance. To develop trust and respect in people's ability to support others, it is essential that positive examples are shared and learning from them applied in order to improve practice.

3. RESPECT IT

Recognise the added value of Peer Support, to relationships and its distinct difference to other forms of support. For people who choose to use Peer Support the added benefit of developing a relationship with someone who has a similar experience offers a unique insight and knowledge that the other options often fulfil. We need to understand that Peer Support offers a different perspective and approach to that of a 'professional advisor'.

We need to be mindful and guard against 'professionalised moulding'; creating a 'professional version' of Peer Support to fit with professional expectations, behaviours, rules and regulations. We are learning that assistance from a peer may look and feel different to that of a professional advisor, which is encouraging given that the community model is designed to offer a real range of assistance.

4. BUILD IT IN

Build Peer Support into the architecture for personalisation. There are many opportunities for Peer Support to be a fundamental part of the developing infrastructure designed to support personalisation. The New Script for Social Work and community brokerage provide clear avenues for Peer Support to develop. Many Peer Support organisations and networks have expressed their readiness to be involved in the future of personalisation, but often find they don't have access to the people who would benefit most from their assistance. The challenge is to include Peer Support throughout the whole personalisation journey.

5. MAKE IT ORDINARY

Support and develop long term sustainability. Developing routine opportunities for people to assist at least one other person in their area will influence the infrastructure of how we include and value people's contribution. This goes wider than just statutory services, there are many provider and community organisations who can also provide opportunities for people to offer assistance to others.
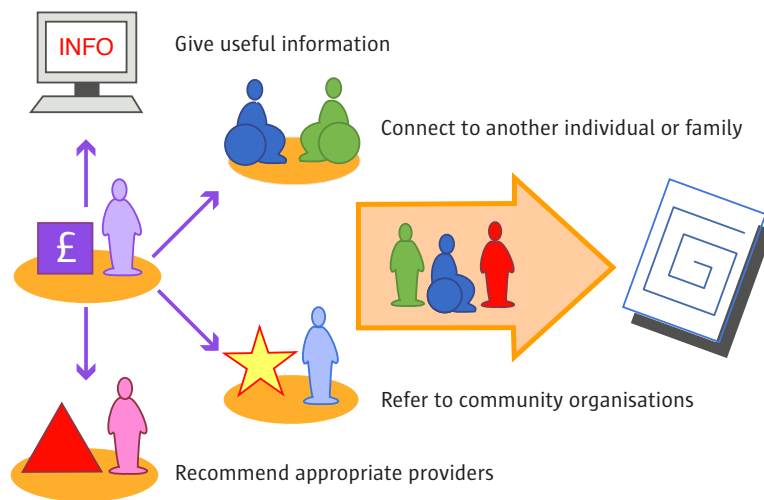
Figure 5. Community Brokerage

Whilst Peer Support can be less resource intensive than professional advisors it is important to understand that it may still need some investment. Some examples of Peer Support require low level funding and resources. As we promote and develop community brokerage it is likely that more people will choose assistance from Peer Supporters and resources should shift to grow and develop Peer Support.

6. CONCLUSION

Despite the often complicated and controversial systems developed in the name of personalisation, the value of self-directed support is based on the premise that **people** themselves are the **experts** in their **own lives**. They understand the kinds of support solutions that they think will work for them. There are many examples of people and their families who have explored and designed good support for themselves and, who when asked, are willing to share this experience with others.

Peer Support in its varied forms and approaches has been available for many years, providing support and assistance to people in a variety of situations. Clearly in developing brokerage and the rescripting the role of social work, Peer Support must be central to our thinking.

Personalisation demands a better response from all agencies involved in social care and requires both a shift in thinking and in practice in how we support people. The change that is required is more than a simple system adaptation; it requires a paradigm shift and a reorganisation of resources.

The New Script for Social Work provides the framework to utilize the widest range of community and professional support already available more successfully, in order to assist people to direct their own support and control their own lives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

It you are interested in the detailed thinking behind the ideas set out in this paper then the best report to read is *Architecture for Personalisation* by Duffy & Fulton available to download directly from The Centre for Welfare Reform website (www.centreforwelfarereform.org).

For a full reading list go to www.bit.ly/social-work-project.

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