

St Giles Peer Advisor Network Interim Report December 2021



About St Giles

St Giles is an award-winning charity helping people facing severe disadvantage to find jobs, homes and the right support they need to build a more positive future. We deliver over 70 projects in communities and prisons across England and Wales, helping 25,000 people a year to have a better future. We believe everyone has the power to turn their life around, no matter what their situation. Nearly 40% of St Giles staff have been in similar situations to the people we work with and use their past experiences to inspire and support those living through it right now.

St Giles

Turning a past into a future



25,000

people helped a year
towards better futures



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About Revolving Doors Agency

Revolving Doors Agency is a national charity that aims to change systems and improve services for people 'in the revolving door' – people who come into repeat contact with the criminal justice system because of traumatic life events, persistent poverty, and multiple unmet needs such as mental ill-health, homelessness and substance use. We work to create a smarter criminal justice system that makes the revolving door avoidable and escapable, resulting in safer communities. We do this by working alongside national and local decision-makers. We combine lived experience insight, robust research and system knowledge to create policy and practice solutions that work.

Summary

This report presents the findings from the two-year independent evaluation of the St Giles Peer Advisor Network (PAN). It builds on the interim report published at the start of 2021. The data included was collected in two waves. The first was between April 2019-December 2020 and the second was between June and November 2021.

We found that St Giles have successfully identified and engaged Peer Advisors, and that participation in the programme has had a positive impact on many peers' lives –such as learning new skills and improving their employability, and by changing thoughts and feelings such as improved confidence (Outcome 1). Peer Advisors have then gone on to support many people, both practically and emotionally, who had a range of complex needs (Outcome 4). We found examples of support from Peer Advisors helping with people's mental health, recovery from substance dependency and finances.

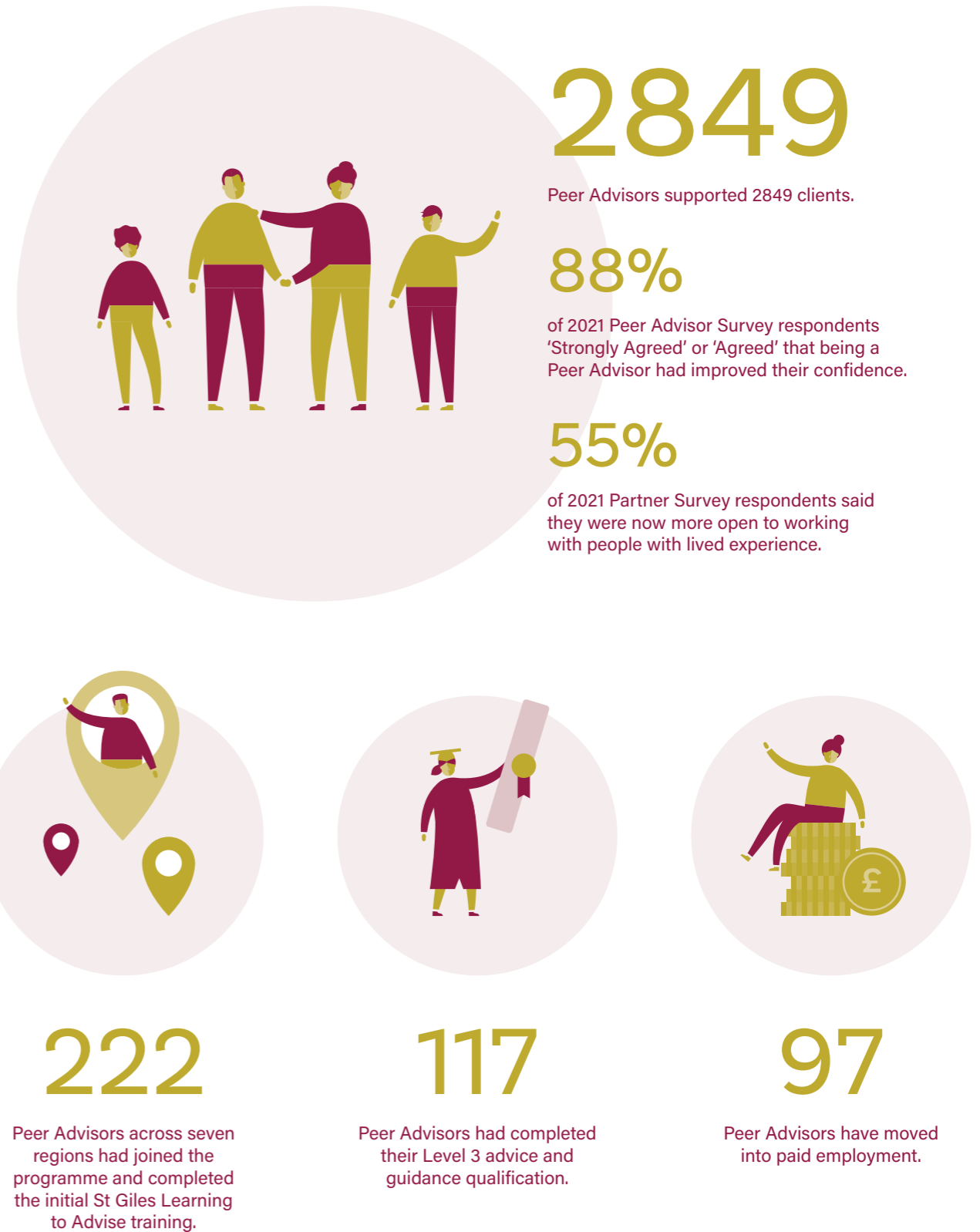
Covid-19 made identifying placements for peers more difficult because organisations closed, moved to remote support and/or delayed recruiting new volunteers (Outcome 2). However, there was consensus that more volunteering opportunities would be created going forward. Partners were largely positive about their experience of hosting Peer Advisors and working with St Giles. Reasons for this included that they acknowledged the benefits of having skilled volunteers, who were receiving accredited training and good relationships with St Giles staff.

There was less evidence of the programme creating systems change (Outcome 3). Although this is to be somewhat expected as systems change is a lengthy process; creating partnerships with organisations that do not have experience of working with people with lived experience as well as taking a leadership role to promote the benefits of lived experience involvement and share learning about how this can be done successfully would support greater progress towards this objective.



Key highlights

Between April 2019 and November 2021:



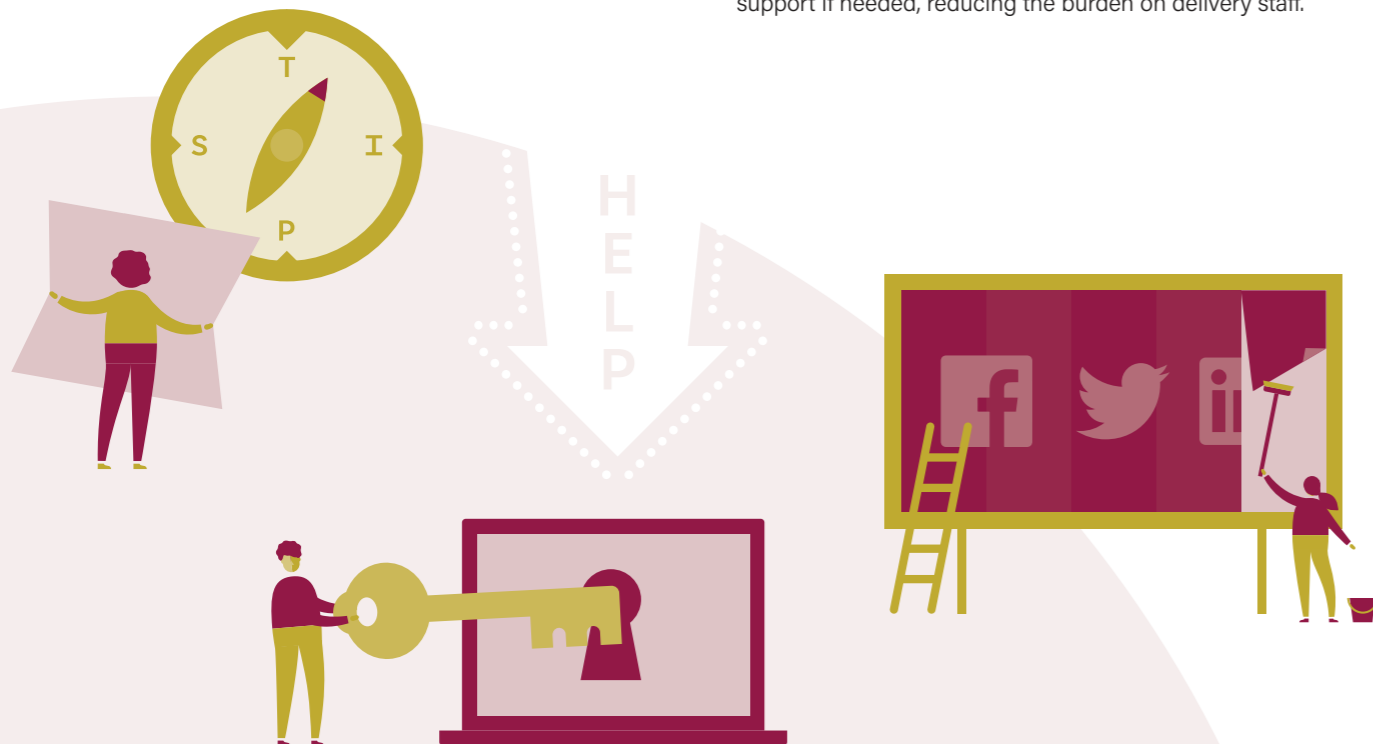
Recommendations

Raising awareness and marketing the Peer Advisor Network

- The work on branding and publicity should consider how the Peer Advisor Network purpose and approach can be clearly communicated to different target audiences. It will be important for individuals and organisations to be able to easily understand what a Peer Advisor is, how St Giles define lived experience and what is unique about the training offer and overall programme to support effective engagement.
- Further work could be done to raise the profile of Peer Advisors in local communities and increase understanding of the different benefits that involving people with lived experience in the design and delivery of services can have – in terms of organisational capacity, understanding and engagement. Building on the learning from Covid-19 (e.g. around the benefits of person-centred support and collaboration) and thinking about how peers can play a role in addressing the myriad of issues exacerbated by the pandemic (e.g. mental health, social isolation) could be a useful way to frame such conversations. Events to celebrate success and raise awareness of the programme would help with this. St Giles could also try and identify local organisations and thought-leaders promoting community-led and/or asset-based approaches to partner with to further this agenda.

Supporting Peer Advisors succeed

- St Giles should ensure that new cohorts of learners are regularly made aware of the Digital Coach and wider help available so those who would benefit from further IT or mental health support can access this and feel able to be part of PAN. It would also be worth thinking about whether IT skills can be incorporated into the existing training offer, as this is often required by employers and would aid engagement with online delivery.
- There would be merit in St Giles having conversations with partners and peers about what additional skills would be useful for Peer Advisors to gain upon completion of the programme, and to link up further training with skills gaps and labour market demand, to support peers to enter, stay and progress in employment, education or training. Improved understanding of local labour markets, the training provider landscape and skills gaps would also strengthen efforts to obtain funding to deliver further training to Peer Advisors.
- St Giles should take a coordinated approach to supporting Peer Advisors identify work and/or training opportunities that they could enter upon completion of the programme. For example, by developing consistent guides with advice about how they can sign up to job alerts and find out about local courses and sharing case studies to show what roles Peer Advisors have entered. This would help potential peers learn more about where participation could take them and provide existing peers with a goal to aim towards. Brokering relationships with recruiters and local employment support providers would also enable peers to access additional support if needed, reducing the burden on delivery staff.



Supporting staff deliver an effective programme

- Staff would also benefit from access to assured courses and wider training delivered as part of the programme to be able to further develop soft skills (such as conflict management) and to support job satisfaction.
- The steering group and programme managers should prioritise developing the overall strategy for long-term sustainability, and what practical steps can be taken to achieve this. This will help give local areas focus and support them to balance income generation activity with delivering the grant requirements. This strategy should also include guidance for exit-planning.

Where next for the Peer Advisor Network?

- Going forward, it appears that combining online and in-person training would be best. Having some online delivery would help the course to be flexible around caring and health needs and would enable people from different areas to participate together. Programme wide guidance should be developed that outlines a minimum amount of in person training and any activities that should occur in person. Local areas can then tailor their offer based on the cohort of learners starting the programme and their preferences/circumstances, and they should be encouraged to test different methods and share learning. There would be benefit in co-producing this guidance with Peer Advisors and Trainer-Assessors to incorporate their experiences.
- There would be benefit in creating spaces for partners to learn and share from each other as well as regional St Giles teams. For example, through webinars and/or participation at programme events such as the upcoming PAN conference. This would also support the wider systems change ambitions by supporting St Giles to develop the evidence base on lived experience involvement and establish themselves as a key influencer in this area.
- St Giles should consider playing a leadership and convening role to develop a Community of Practice bringing together those leading on lived experience involvement across the voluntary and public sector, including PAN managers, to further develop the evidence base and raise awareness of the Peer Advisor Network programme. Potential attendees could include representatives from the new government funded Changing Futures Programme, where all delivery areas are involving people with lived experience, as well as NHS England and probation services – who have committed to doing more to diversify their workforce. Linked to this, there would also be benefit in ensuring that programme staff are part of local networks that currently exist.
- As previously recommended, going forward, it will be important for St Giles to create an environment where local delivery areas are supported to share learning and good practice with one another. This could include through informal online channels that celebrate success and can be used for troubleshooting as well as more structured workshops and/or thematic learning events. Upcoming events in 2022 would be a good place to do this.

Systems change

- To be able to have greater influence in the local areas where PAN is operating, there would be benefit in staff undertaking mapping work to identify local organisations and decision-makers that the programme is trying to influence and tracking success of this. The new St Giles Regional Development Managers would be well placed to lead this, and they could build on work already completed by St Giles to identify national stakeholders.
- Linked to this, as previously suggested, the programme steering group and central managers should support local areas to continue to or begin to focus on identifying organisations where Peer Advisors could add value, but which have little or no lived experience involvement to achieve long-term systematic change. This includes statutory services such as Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and Housing Associations, where lived experience involvement is less common.

Income generation

- St Giles should consider the role of Peer Advisors in developing the paid for training offer. As the Peer Advisor Network recognises, peers have valuable lived and professional experience. Therefore, co-producing training offers with Peer Advisors will ensure that the training reflects learning and good practice on the programme. It would also help the training offer stand apart, as it incorporates the lived experience voice.
- Work with potential and existing PAN partners should build on St Giles' experience in recruiting and supporting staff with lived experience, to develop tools and specific guidance so that organisations can support people with lived experience to enter and succeed in the workplace. This could also support income generation activity.



This section provides an overview of the evaluation and the approach we took to address the different research questions.

Background

01

The Peer Advisor Network

The Peer Advisor Network is a National Lottery Community Fund project that, through the St Giles Peer Advisor Programme, supports people with lived experience to gain the skills and qualifications they need to help others make positive progress.

The Network operates in seven regions across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and different areas began delivering at different points in time. In Scotland and Northern Ireland there is a floating delivery model, with a coordinator leading partnership working and training delivery agencies for Peer Advisors to achieve the qualification. Whereas in England and Wales there are 'Hubs' in each area and St Giles staff deliver the training and qualification.

Peer Advisors receive training and support to work towards a qualification¹ whilst they undertake supported voluntary work placements internally at St Giles or with other local organisations. As they approach completion of the programme Peer Advisors are supported to find employment. This project builds on St Giles' well-evidenced Peer Advisor Programme that offers people in prison and the community a structured package of training and voluntary work placements. There are four main outcomes as part of the funding agreement, and this report will go through each one to explore progress against indicators of success and different types of impact.



The evaluation

Revolving Doors was commissioned by St Giles to conduct an independent two-year evaluation of the Peer Advisor Network in December 2019. The evaluation has aimed to explore the extent to which the Network has been able to achieve its intended outcomes and have a positive impact on Peer Advisors and the people they support, as well as partner organisations and the wider system to date.

The evaluation has sought to identify good practice and innovation as well as delivery challenges and potential improvements to support ongoing delivery. Importantly, the evaluation has intended to support the future sustainability of the programme through sharing key learning and contributing to an evidence base about how services for the most socially excluded are delivered, and the role of well-trained people with lived experience.

¹ City & Guilds Level 3 Advice and Guidance in England, SQV Level 3 Advice and Guidance in Scotland and OCN Level 4 Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland

Our approach

This was a mixed methods evaluation. A range of different research methods were used to address the research questions, including one to one interviews, focus groups, surveys and workshops. We also implemented an action research approach so that we could provide regular feedback on the project findings to St Giles and practical input to the development of the programme.

A key part of the evaluation involved working with a team of peer researchers to design and deliver the research so that the evaluation was both meaningful and accessible to a range of audiences. Eight individuals (some with experience of working for or volunteering at St Giles, all with lived experience of overcoming disadvantage) participated in peer research training in the Summer 2020². This involved participating in six online training sessions that covered topics such as different types of research, conducting research safely and ethically and data protection. The Peer Research Team then supported the design and delivery of the research. This included activities such as:

- Reviewing the draft surveys to ensure the structure and language was appropriate and the questions asked were relevant.
- Developing the topic guides and research materials for the Peer Advisor interviews and focus group, and the client interviews.
- Co-facilitating focus groups and interviews with Peer Advisors, clients, staff and partners.
- Reviewing interview transcripts and participating in online co-analysis sessions to discuss positive and negative feedback, and points of interest.
- Participating in a co-production workshop before the first and second interim reports were finalised to test and confirm the findings and think about future programme communications.

“Sometimes there isn't the opportunity to openly share lived experience in the early stages of finding employment, having the Peer researcher role on my CV and in applications made it easier to be open about the subject.”

Peer researcher



The research has benefited from a peer research approach as we have been able to incorporate a range of perspectives into the research design, develop research materials that would obtain detailed and appropriate responses and build on the team's understanding of services and different local contexts. Peer researchers also recognised that their involvement was key in encouraging engagement in the evaluation:

“Doing the peer research was particularly enlightening when clients from a different area were able to relate to me, and candidly talked and partook in the evaluation, which they said they would not have felt comfortable otherwise talking with ‘professionals.’ It truly highlighted the importance of peer research.” Peer researcher

Furthermore, several members of the peer research team found work and/or progression opportunities whilst participating in the evaluation. A member of the team explained that having the role ‘peer researcher’ on her CV helped her to talk about her lived experience with prospective employers.

The peer research will continue as the evaluation progresses, into the third and final year of programme delivery.

Who we heard from

The qualitative research in this report focuses on the experiences of St Giles staff, Peer Advisors and their clients and partner organisations who ‘host’ peer advisors in volunteering placements. It also includes the views and learning from wider stakeholders, not involved in programme delivery, but working in relevant sectors and/or with expertise around lived experience involvement

In the first year of the evaluation, we focused on the experiences at three Peer Hubs: in the Midlands, Yorkshire and North Wales. We also held a focus group with Peer Advisors in London.

In the second year of the evaluation, we have focused on the experiences at two other delivery locations: Scotland and London. We also conducted research with organisations with expertise in topics including peer support, lived experience involvement and

systems change - that were not part of PAN (hereafter referred to as stakeholders), and obtained feedback from clients who received support in Yorkshire, London, Scotland and North Wales.

In addition, we ran three separate surveys for Peer Advisors, St Giles staff and partner organisations at two points in time, in Summer 2020 and Summer 2021, and reviewed key statistics from data about programme progress and outcomes and incorporated key statistics into the findings. This data was triangulated with the qualitative data to provide a greater understanding of responses and different experiences.

Lastly, we held two co-production workshops where key findings were tested and validated by a group of Peer Advisors and peer researchers prior to each interim report being finalised. More detail on the evaluation methodology can be found in Appendix 1.



Wider context: Covid-19

It is important to note that this evaluation was conducted in the context of Covid-19, which disrupted both planned research activity and programme development (especially in 2020 and early 2021). For example, the start of delivery for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and East of England was slightly delayed due to the pandemic. Programme targets were adjusted to reflect the disruption caused by the lockdown(s) and the measures St Giles took to address this. Nonetheless, the programme adapted and continued to grow, resulting in confidence that the overall ambitions of the programme will be achieved over the four-year funding period.

This report

The remainder of the report brings together the different types of data collected to explore progress made against the four main outcomes, and the indicators used to measure success, which were agreed as part of the funding agreement.

It will highlight what is going well, where there have been challenges and how these have been overcome (where relevant).

⁰² Peer Researchers gained OCN accreditation in peer research with Revolving Doors Agency.

This section discusses progress against National Lottery Community Fund Outcome 1, which is about the identification, training and progression of Peer Advisors.

Creating Peer Advisors

02

02. Creating Peer Advisors

NCLF Outcome

1

To create (320) new Peer Advisors who will provide their local voluntary sector and other agencies with a pool of potential skilled labour with lived experience backgrounds.

Indicators of success

- Peer Advisors recruited and complete Learning to Advise.
- Peer Advisors achieve qualification (e.g. Level 3 Certificate in Advice & Guidance).
- Peer Advisors demonstrate greater self-confidence, resilience and employability.
- Peer Advisors find secure employment

Recruiting Peer Advisors

As of November 2021, 222 Peer Advisors across seven regions had joined the programme and completed the initial St Giles Learning to Advise training.

We found different localised approaches to identifying and engaging peers. For example, in Scotland the St Giles staff member had existing relationships with several local organisations that had volunteers with lived experience, which was particularly beneficial when recruiting peers. In contrast, when staff came from different sectors and roles, they had to spend a lot of time identifying recruitment pathways and networking with local organisations.

"I have an existing network that spans addiction, recovery, criminal justice and a few other things. It was quite easy to get in touch with those people and say I'm doing this I think you might be interested." Staff member

Where St Giles had existing provision in a local area this also helped to identify potential peers, as there were several examples of people being referred to the programme after approaching and/or being supported by staff/volunteers working on other St Giles programmes.

Many Peer Advisors who participated in the research found out about the programme through an organisation that they were either being supported by or which they were volunteering at. For example, in the 2021 Peer Advisor survey, 69% of respondents had found out about the programme this way, compared to 50% of respondents in the 2020 Peer Advisor survey. This highlights the importance of raising awareness of the programme and creating partnerships with local organisations to create a pool of potential Peer Advisors, as well as placement opportunities.

Furthermore, several peers felt that it was important to find out about opportunities through someone you trusted, as this was more 'credible.'

"There's so many gimmicks out there, there's so much nonsense...so yeah I think when someone, it doesn't matter what organisation it is, if you are part of an organisation and that organisation says to you, we would like you to do this, it could be really good for you then I'm much more likely to go oh, yeah, I'll do that." (Peer Advisor)

Factors that made the Peer Advisor Network (PAN) attractive to potential participants included:

- The opportunity to gain an accredited qualification, free of charge.
- The opportunity to try something new.
- St Giles' reputation. Some peers had personally been supported by St Giles or knew others that had which created an element of initial trust. Linked to this, some people we spoke to knew that St Giles had staff with lived experience, which was favourable.
- The fact that the programme was targeted towards people with lived experience.

222

As of November 2021, 222 Peer Advisors across seven regions had joined the programme and completed the initial St Giles Learning to Advise training.



02. Creating Peer Advisors

"It's a chance that a lot of people don't get. It's giving people that chance. I was 48 when I found out about it. I never thought I'd be able to change the course of my working life."

Staff member and previous Peer Advisor

Across each of the delivery areas, identifying Peer Advisors was felt to be going well especially as word of mouth about the programme spread over time. For example:

- All staff that responded to the Year Two survey believed their area was either doing 'Very Well' or 'Well' with progress towards Outcome 1.
- 93% of staff thought that progress to identify and engage Peer Advisors was going 'Very Well' or 'Well'.

"There is huge demand...it's like a tap, a minute I turn the tap on the applications flood in...we've got 35 people who are waiting, we cannot take anymore." *Staff member*

In 2021, staff were more positive about their area's ability to recruit Peer Advisors that represented people with lived experience in their region. 93% of staff survey respondents thought that their area has been able to identify and recruit a diverse group of Peer Advisors: 18 percentage points higher than in 2020.

We did not come across specific reasons for this change in the qualitative research, but it was evident that awareness of the programme has increased over time. Additionally, in 2020, delivery staff had many ideas about who they wanted to target and involve in PAN, so both could be reasons for a more diverse group of peers being involved in the programme now. More recently, the London Hub have been having discussions about involving more carers in PAN and had reached out to local carers organisations to try and do this, whilst in Scotland, the lead is targeting migrant communities in Glasgow and was keen to work with young people in contact with the criminal justice system.

One challenge with recruitment highlighted was that the pandemic has resulted in more urgency to enter employment amongst potential Peer Advisors. So, some individuals on the waiting list were prioritising finding paid work over starting the course and finding a volunteering role. This was also thought to have impacted completed NVQ qualifications, as when people entered paid work they left the programme or prioritised this over completing the training, causing delays.

"I think another thing that has been challenging is that because things have been so difficult with the pandemic, people's priority is work at the moment – so that's impacted it [recruitment]." *Staff member*

Another challenge was delays to some people starting the programme. This was because of the smaller class sizes, to make online delivery suitable and/or to account for social distancing measures required for in person lessons, and because of challenges in identifying placements (discussed more below). This created frustration and led to some people accessing different opportunities instead.

"Many people are sitting waiting; some people get fed up and go and do other things." *Staff member*

Hence, programme staff appear key in encouraging and maintaining engagement with people waiting to join PAN, and those on the programme. For example, they work with peers to make sure they have completed the necessary paperwork and can attend the training.



"She [staff member] kind of made me get off my backside and fill the forms in and get things done, I really appreciated her help, support and guidance." *Peer Advisor, London*

"My job is to convince them and encourage them that they can do this [course]." *Staff member*

Furthermore, across both waves of research it was apparent that the wider support available to peers enabled them to address pressing concerns which meant that they could focus on completing their qualification. Peers interviewed gave examples of St Giles helping them to access IT equipment, foodbank vouchers, covering travel costs and providing money for interview and/or work clothes, because of additional funding obtained. A NLCF 'top-up fund' for Covid-19 responses enabled peers to access laptops, IT support and increased mental health and wellbeing support. This was particularly important at a time when such individuals were often socially isolated.

"[Staff member] happened to ask me if I was coping okay and I said to her that I was struggling a little bit with my finances just because of the situation and straightaway they got me vouchers to cover me for food. She went above and beyond that day and that was brilliant... I can't actually believe that she did that and then again, when I got offered the job...well the Jobcentres weren't open, so I was told I couldn't have my month's free bus pass, due to Covid and then once again St Giles stepped up and gave me vouchers for back to work clothes and they supported me with a month's bus pass." *Peer Advisor*

In the first wave of research, we identified different local approaches to accepting people with more complex needs onto the programme. St Giles have since developed further guidance to support the recruitment and assessment process for local areas to help staff make decisions about this, and there appeared to be less confusion about recruiting peers in the second wave of research. However, throughout the evaluation, some peers raised concerns about not everyone in the class participating and/or other learners 'playing around', which caused frustration.

02. Creating Peer Advisors

In addition, some stakeholders suggested greater clarity around what St Giles mean by lived experience and peer support as the term is used and understood differently across different sectors. These stakeholders understood peer support as traditionally involving people with direct experience of the things that the people they are helping are going through. However, in some cases Peer Advisors have different lived experience to their clients, or will have supported family members through difficult times, rather than have been directly affected.

"It becomes little bit more of a generic peer support, that's not necessarily a criticism, it's a slight difference, I know what it's like to go through difficult times, I know what it's like in services and things like I know what it's like not to be listened to. But not I've been through exactly the same experience as you. Not some of the stuff we expect from the criminal justice system or substance misuse which is very specific...I'm not showing preference for one type of peer support or another, but they have got to be really clear what is it they are doing...it sounds like they could be drifting to stuff which is just support work." *Stakeholder*

"I'm not saying what they are doing is, negative or wrong, it's different, but if they want to make an impact within the pathways that I'm involved with, I think to not promote people who have experiences of accessing the criminal justice system, for me, dilutes the notion that they are a Peer." *Stakeholder*

Recommendation: 1

St Giles should ensure that the work on branding and publicity considers how the Peer Advisor Network purpose and approach can be clearly communicated to different target audiences. It will be important for individuals and organisations to be able to easily understand what a Peer Advisor is, how St Giles define lived experience and what is unique about the overall programme and qualification offer to support effective engagement.

Training Peer Advisors

As of November 2021, 117 Peer Advisors had completed their Level 3 advice and guidance qualification and 98% of 2021 Peer Advisor survey respondents felt that they were progressing 'Very Well' or 'Well' with their qualification.

Overall, staff and Peer Advisors were very positive about the training that has been delivered. 94% of Peer Advisor survey respondents who received the online training said this was 'Very Good' or 'Good' and 97% who received training in person said this was 'Very Good' or 'Good'. Peer Advisors interviewed spoke highly of the trainer's delivering the course, they were found to be approachable and supportive staff members who were knowledgeable and could explain the course content clearly.

"The quality of the teaching has been great. The trainers are very well grounded. There are adequate resources, and we get sent further reading." *Peer Advisor*

Peers also liked that the training included a range of topics, which meant that they learnt various new skills that they could apply in their volunteering placements and more generally.

"When I was then sitting around the clients and stuff was being said, and when we were having staff meetings and we were discussing stuff, safeguarding, stuff we did around confidentiality was popping up, stuff we were doing around boundaries was popping up and I didn't even remember I knew that. It was amazing...You remember more than you think you do, and I think that's the benefit of working alongside what you are learning." *Peer Advisor*



02. Creating Peer Advisors

Staff were positive about how the programme was able to shift to a remote delivery model in response to Covid-19, and the different funding streams utilised to provide peers with laptops and tablets was considered key in this.

The Connectr platform was introduced to enable communication between Peer Advisors and their Trainer-Assessors as part of the development of a remote delivery model. This was not referenced by any Peer Advisor in the first or second wave of interviews, but the 2021 Peer Advisor Survey found that of those who had used Connectr, just over three quarters (77%) had found this 'Very Useful' or 'Useful'. Staff that were not delivering the training also expressed frustration that they could not use this to contact peers*.

A suggested improvement was for there to be more IT support included in the training. Some Peer Advisors were not confident using IT and most 2021 Staff Survey respondents (80%) felt that Peers' limited IT skills made contact with Peer Advisors more challenging.

"Some of the group are not particularly IT literate or IT confident. So, if you were to ask me what we could do to the Learning to Advise that could help people, I would bolt on some kind of IT support for them." Staff member

St Giles obtained additional National Lottery Community Fund income for a Digital Coach during the lockdowns, which was found to be valuable. This influenced the decision to create an organisational-wide Digital Coach who can support people on St Giles different programmes. In addition, St Giles have since included a budget allocation for laptops as a standard feature to ensure all Peer Advisors have equal digital access going forward.

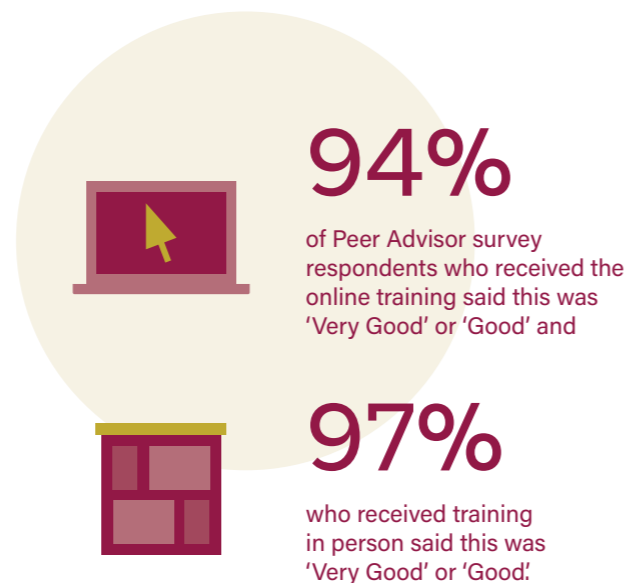
Recommendation: 2

St Giles should ensure that new cohorts of learners are regularly made aware of the Digital Coach and wider help available so those who would benefit from further IT or mental health support can access this and feel able to be part of PAN. It would also be worth thinking about whether IT skills can be incorporated into the existing training offer, as this is often required by employers and would aid engagement with online delivery.

The 2021 Peer Advisor survey showed that peers were interested in taking part in wider learning opportunities with St Giles, who currently deliver a range of courses across their different programmes. Where peers had been invited along to additional learning sessions, on topics such as Universal Credit, gender diversity and disclosure, they found this useful and thought their classmates would benefit from this.

In addition, a partner suggested that more training around trauma informed practice would be helpful for people on the programme.

*This has since been addressed.



"Being informed about trauma. There has to be more training about that...if it's the addiction field, if it's criminal justice, if it's violence prevention, whatever the kind of arena is... working around a bit if adversity in childhood and how that can play out because I guarantee the majority of the mentors, regardless of what field they will be in, that will underpin everything but it's also for their own growth and their own journey." Partner

Linked to this, a staff member suggested that ongoing wider training opportunities could be useful for peers who had entered employment as a form of in-work support, to enable them to develop their skills further, and more than half of staff who responded to the 2021 PAN staff survey (53%) felt that more training and development opportunities would increase their job satisfaction.

St Giles are currently seeking funding to be able to deliver basic and digital skills courses upfront and are exploring other progression routes for Peer Advisors through assured courses.

Recommendations: 3 and 4

There would be merit in St Giles having conversations with partners and peers about what additional skills would be useful for Peer Advisors to gain upon completion of the programme, and to link up further training with skills gaps and labour market demand, to support peers to enter, stay and progress in employment, education or training. Improved understanding of local labour markets, the training provider landscape and skills gaps would also strengthen efforts to obtain funding to deliver further training to Peer Advisors.

Staff would also benefit from access to assured courses and wider training delivered as part of the programme to be able to further develop soft skills (such as conflict management) and to support job satisfaction.

02. Creating Peer Advisors

Views were mixed about how training should be delivered going forward – most people who took part in the research felt that there needed to be some sort of in person training.

"Most of the course I was on ended up being on Zoom, and it's not as good, it's not as interactive. When we finally did get the chance to go into the classroom it was much better..."

Peer Advisor

However, several benefits of online delivery were identified. For example, this enabled people from a wide geography to participate, which was particularly important in delivery areas such as North Wales and Scotland. This also enabled flexible delivery which people could fit learning around childcare and other commitments.

Consequently:

- 60% of staff survey respondents and 44% of Peer Advisor survey respondents desired a blended delivery model with a mixture of live online and in person training.
- 33% of staff survey respondents and 47% of Peer Advisor survey respondents felt that all training should be face to face.
- 7% of staff survey respondents and 9% of Peer Advisors survey respondents said all training should be online.

It was possible to identify areas that were thought to work better in person or online. Some observations for the vocational qualification happened online because of the Covid-19 restrictions, but it is now mandatory for these to be conducted in person. This is unlikely to be an issue as Peer Advisors and staff both highlighted the benefits of in person meetings when completing observations to help with engagement and getting the paperwork completed. The communication module was also felt to be important to complete in person where possible. In contrast, many staff and Peer Advisors thought that induction activity worked well online.

Recommendation: 5

Going forward, it appears that combining online and in-person training would be best. Having some online delivery would help the course to be flexible around caring and health needs and would enable people from different areas to participate together. Programme wide guidance should be developed that outlines a minimum amount of in person training and any activities that should occur in person. Local areas can then tailor their offer based on the cohort of learners starting the programme and their preferences/circumstances, and they should be encouraged to test different methods and share learning. There would be benefit in co-producing this guidance with Peer Advisors and Trainer-Assessors to incorporate their experiences.

"It was just the element of people who had been able to use their lived experience and gain a qualification through that, that's exactly where lived experience needs to move to."

Partner

Host organisations and wider stakeholders were positive about the programme including an accredited qualification for peers.

"It was just the element of people who had been able to use their lived experience and gain a qualification through that, that's exactly where lived experience needs to move to."

Partner

"The accredited qualification, that's like an aspiration for us... so we are looking at getting recognised training, it's a really similar idea to what you have got...so that kind of learning is really, really exciting." Stakeholder

This also reflects a survey about volunteering as a service-user in the UK, which found that people were positive about training when this led to a qualification because this gave people hope for the future and their job prospects³.

The training was also considered important in supporting people to use their lived experience safely and professionally and to help them move forward from their past difficulties.

"That's the one thing I love about it is it professionalises people's experience...people are far more than their past... people like to take them and put them on stages and applaud their horrific stories and their adversity and they think that's all they are...where a bit of training and a bit of guidance and they can actually start helping people with adversity and start properly supporting folk in a way that's controlled and safe as well because you cannot just take somebody through then madness and just park them into a community and expect them to support somebody, they are still in that madness, they need that training." Partner

Lastly, where stakeholders from other organisations had provided training for people with lived experience, they similarly noticed the beneficial impact that this had.

"The training for our members has made a huge difference because I think the way that they hold themselves then in meetings, has shifted...they have got a level of conduct and professionalism about them that makes people sit up...and like really listen to them." Stakeholder

03. Webster R. (2021). *Volunteering as a service-user in the UK: Findings from a cross-sector survey*, Russell Webster and Revolving Doors Agency

02. Creating Peer Advisors

Peer Advisor outcomes

Peer Advisors who took part in the research were largely positive about the impact of participation in the programme. For example, 81% of 2021 Peer Advisor survey respondents felt that being a Peer Advisor exceeded their expectations – 13 percentage points higher than in 2020.

96% of 2021 Peer Advisor survey respondents said they would recommend being a Peer Advisor to others with lived experience (the same percentage as in 2020). For example, respondents commented that:

“I feel that it is really important to have lived experience to be able to support those who need it.” Peer Advisor

“It’s given me the opportunity to use my life experiences to help others.” Peer Advisor

As 30% of 2021 Peer Advisor survey respondents felt that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on their progress on the programme, it is likely that the pandemic has prevented more outcomes from being achieved. Another factor that partners and peers felt hindered progress was staff turnover, because this sometimes led to delays and caused frustration when peers had to build a relationship and get used to the approach of another staff member.

Nonetheless, most Peer Advisors could also recognise the benefits of taking part in improving their circumstances and thoughts and feelings. **In feedback to St Giles, 181 Peer Advisors reported greater self-confidence, resilience and employability.**

Improved confidence

Similarly, 88% of 2021 Peer Advisor Survey respondents ‘Strongly Agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that being a Peer Advisor had improved their confidence, and many Peer Advisors interviewed throughout the evaluation discussed feeling more confident.

“It has improved my outlook and given me more confidence.” Peer Advisor

There were many reasons for this. As well as feeling more skilled because of their new qualification and work experience, peers also discussed the benefits of meeting new people through the course and their placement, which gave them confidence in social situations and when interacting with clients. Some peers, particularly those who were not already volunteering, had newfound appreciation for their lived experience as they had used this in a positive way to help people.

“Your life experience is valued – it can be of use to people.” Peer Advisor

Partners across different regions also recognised improvements in confidence amongst volunteers on the programme. This included in how they communicated with their clients and colleagues, as well as having greater belief in their actions. For example, a partner reflected that a Peer Advisor was now more aware of their capabilities because the course had provided them with the time to reflect on their experiences and knowledge.

“It’s really through their practice they are actually getting it right, they are actually dealing with things right and I know that’s through the support of us and IAG. It’s building their confidence, because until I think they have reflected on their practices they didn’t realise how well they were actually doing, they just got on with it, whatever comes through the door they support our service users with it but actually that time to reflect has actually really helped them.” Partner

Entering work

97 Peer Advisors have moved into paid employment between April 2019 and November 2021 and in the 2021 Peer Advisor survey, 82% Strongly Agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ a Peer Advisor has improved their chances of finding paid work – nine percentage points higher than in the 2020 survey. A main reason for this was the skills and information that people had learnt through taking part in the training, which they felt made them more employable.

“It [the programme] empowers them to move forward into employability.” Partner

“It [the programme] really helped me get my job. I’m now working because of the things that I learnt, I can take that knowledge, I’ve got lived experience, but you still need knowledge!” Peer Advisor

Furthermore, having a qualification and recently taking part in training and a placement made peers more confident to apply for jobs.

“I’m excited to begin my journey if finding employment in this sector and support those who need it. I feel I will do really well in this sector.” Peer Advisor

Delivery staff provided employability support to Peer Advisors including guidance around their CV and job applications and mock interviews as well as encouragement to apply for roles – and peers recognised this as key in them successfully entering work.

“Having the confidence to go for so many different jobs and interviews. I wasn’t bothering at first because I thought I didn’t have a hope because I didn’t have enough experience...but it was the encouragement I received from [staff] they kept telling me that they thought I was really driven and would do well in the sector.” Peer Advisor

02. Creating Peer Advisors

97

Peer Advisors have moved into paid employment between April 2019 and November 2021.



However, some peers and partners wondered whether there was anything else St Giles staff could do to help Peer Advisors to identify relevant employment opportunities when their placement was coming to an end. Some Peer Advisors struggled to find jobs to apply for that matched their experience and interests.

“Once they are trained up, it’s getting them into employment, utilise their skills, their training...what if I am putting somebody through St Giles I’m thinking when they qualify whether they go on with this because I don’t want it to be wasted... so that’s always my – I don’t know if it’s a concern, but it is just something I’m aware of when outing them through their training, figure out what’s next for them...” Partner

“Some people I know are struggling to get employment and those opportunities so if there was a more structured avenue into even part time employment that would be a good thing.” Peer Advisor

Recommendation: 6

St Giles should take a coordinated approach to supporting Peer Advisors identify work and/or training opportunities that they could enter upon completion of the programme. For example, by developing consistent guides with advice about how they can sign up to job alerts and find out about local courses and sharing case studies to show what roles Peer Advisors have entered.

This would help potential peers learn more about where participation could take them and provide existing peers with a goal to aim towards. Brokering relationships with recruiters and local employment support providers would also enable peers to access additional support if needed, reducing the burden on delivery staff.

Wider impacts

It was also possible to identify wider impacts of taking part in the programme on Peer Advisors lives. Helping other people gave Peer Advisors joy and satisfaction.

“Helping others has a positive impact on my life.” Peer Advisor

“When I see others achieving their wish, they’re happy – this makes me feel happy.” Peer Advisor

More generally, for some, the programme had given them a sense of purpose and helped them to find a career path that they were passionate about.

“I’ve certainly seen that change within him, I think he found that passion and I think he enjoyed learning, the stuff that he did learn.” Partner

“It gave me that purpose in life, for me it’s about social justice...it shows people that there is hope – there is a future.” Peer Advisor

We also uncovered wider impacts on Peer Advisors’ families because of their improved confidence and new knowledge. This included peer feeling better able to support and/or advocate for family members with additional needs such as mental health issues and learning disabilities. It was also considered important that participating in the programme helped individuals to be positive role models amongst their family and friends.

“Some of them have never had a Certificate in their life, so it goes along way, I suppose returning people to their self... two in there are parents, I mean they have got something to show their kids for what they are doing on a daily basis other than scars or criminal records, it’s massive...” Partner

In addition, 86% of 2021 Peer Advisor Survey respondents ‘Strongly Agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ that becoming a Peer Advisor meant they were more able to deal with challenging situations. For example, a Peer Advisor from London was currently in the process of taking legal action against their landlord, with the support of the local authority after becoming more aware of their rights and more knowledgeable about ‘the system’ and different processes through the course.

“When I see others achieving their wish, they’re happy – this makes me feel happy.”

Peer Advisor

This section focuses on National Lottery Community Fund Outcome 2 and the experiences of organisations that have hosted Peer Advisors.

Creating environments for people with lived experience to thrive as volunteers and employees

03. Creating environments for people with lived experience to thrive as volunteers and employees

NCLF Outcome

2

Voluntary and other agencies have improved their connection with local communities as well as their working environment, enabling more people with lived experience to thrive as volunteers and employees.

Indicators of success

- New voluntary and other agencies hosting placements.
- Agencies report greater proportion of staff and volunteers better reflect their local communities/service users.
- Agencies demonstrate improved workplace culture promoting professional volunteering and enabling people with lived experience to develop their skills.
- Agencies demonstrate improved quality and range of placements available to volunteers with lived experience, including face to face client support work.

Partnership working

105 organisations across seven regions have hosted placements between April 2019 and November 2021.

This included organisations that Peer Advisors had an existing volunteer role with, that they continued when they joined the programme, as well as those which staff engaged and matched Peer Advisors to. In addition, some peers completed their placement at St Giles.

There were also instances where Peer Advisors had found out about the programme independently and then let the organisation that they were volunteering with know about this, which created further interest in referring volunteers to participate in the training and/or hosting placements.

“It was good to know that someone who went through the programme was working with us so what they do has benefited someone who has found employment providing advice.” Partner

This demonstrates the benefits of having different routes to identifying and engaging partners. Further efforts to identify large-scale partners that could offer placements across different Peer Advisor Network (PAN) areas, would add to and strengthen this breadth of options.

A range of organisations hosted placements including community centres and foodbanks, drug and alcohol services and organisations supporting people in recovery, youth organisations, organisations supporting people upon release from prison and organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness. Across both waves of research, staff in different delivery areas expressed a desire to create partnerships with women's organisations.

Key reasons why partners were attracted to the programme included that their service relied on staff and volunteers delivering good quality advice and guidance and/or because they had a similar ambitions around supporting clients and volunteers/staff with lived experience and upskilling local people: which are things that PAN enabled.

Covid-19 and the lockdowns created a significant barrier in sourcing volunteering placements. Experiences differed across areas, depending on national restrictions and local context. For example, at the time of writing, there were still restrictions on indoor gatherings in Northern Ireland.

Covid-19 related challenges to identifying placements included that:

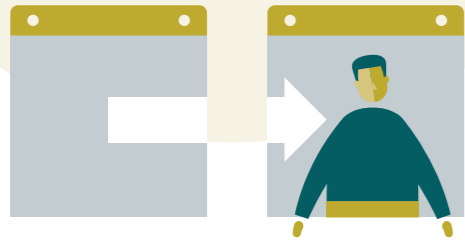
- many potential and existing host organisations were forced to close for extended periods,
- it was not always possible for peers in existing placements to deliver support remotely,
- when organisations reopened the focus was on core staff and existing volunteers, rather than integrating new volunteers and,
- several organisations are going through restructures in response to the pandemic, which led to delays in recruiting new staff and volunteers.

105

organisations across seven regions have hosted placements between April 2019 and November 2021.



03. Creating environments for people with lived experience to thrive as volunteers and employees



94%

Most 2021 Partner Survey respondents (94%) said they would be open to hosting future Peer Advisors

"I think the main barrier has been organisations, and the lack of volunteering going on. We're seeing it change a bit now, but everyone is being cautious to take on new volunteers, they just want to get in the old ones." Staff member

This also reflects wider research that has demonstrated the decline in people formally volunteering. For example, in the Community Life Survey 2021, 17% of respondents reported formally volunteering at least once a month, which is the lowest recorded participation rate since data collection in the survey began.⁴

However, there were several examples of peers being able to complete their placements remotely and **partners and staff did think capacity and opportunities for volunteers would improve going forward.** For example, partners agreed that capacity, time and resources to host volunteers would improve in the future, and that partnership working would improve going forward. 67% of 2021 Staff Survey respondents thought it would be 'Much easier' or 'A bit easier' to source placements as the year progressed.

Organisations who hosted peers reported positive experiences of this. Most 2021 Partner Survey respondents (94%) said they would be open to hosting future Peer Advisors and 94% said that they had a 'Excellent' or 'Good' relationship with their local Hub/area. In the interviews with partners, it was clear that relationships with staff delivering the programme were key in positive impressions of the programme and good ongoing experiences.

"[Staff member] being the way he is, he's got an understanding, he really has and his manner... he's a good guy...and for us that was a factor, you know because of we had never heard of St Giles before, so you are kind of buying into [staff member] in many ways." Partner

"[St Giles staff member] was the diamond that really made it, not only explained the project but almost lived the project with what she was saying as well, you could tell that, I wanted to send my customers to places where I felt sure they wouldn't be judged, that all the small successes would be celebrated, they would be treated well and she 100% gave me every confidence that that would happen." Partner

Regular communication also helped partners have positive experiences, as it meant that they were aware of what was required from them and how their volunteers were progressing with the training.

"The relationship is fantastic. There is consistent communication and with that comes additional support." Partner

Processes such as the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) were highlighted as supporting joint working as these helped to clarify different roles and responsibilities in the partnership. It was also found to be beneficial that St Giles staff had knowledge of different procedures such as risk assessments, which helped to address safeguarding concerns when these existed.

In contrast, the amount of paperwork was a challenge raised by partners and staff. For example, a partner described PAN as 'paperwork heavy', and it was often found to be time consuming for partners to complete the documentation required. For some partners this also caused some apprehension before signing up. A stakeholder suggested ensuring that learning is shared with partners and creating space for reflection about the data collected could help gain buy-in with monitoring processes.

"So rather than asking people to fill in forms which then St Giles collect and interpret, how can they create shared reflective spaces with the different partners to go okay, here's the data we have got, what shared sense do we make of that...you create a shared sense of knowledge and also you dig into not just what data we are able to capture but what does it mean." Stakeholder

Recommendation: 7

There would be benefit in creating spaces for partner to learn and share from each other as well as regional St Giles teams. For example, through webinars and/or participation at programme events such as the upcoming PAN conference. This would also support the wider systems change ambitions by supporting St Giles to develop the evidence base on lived experience involvement and establish themselves as a key influencer in this area.

Another suggestion from partners was about whether they could have more detailed information about the course content and topics that Peer Advisors are learning about. Partners interviewed explained that this would enable them to match Peer Advisors to certain activities so they could apply what they were learning, whilst also helping them to decide whether other volunteers would benefit from joining the programme.

"It would be good to know about the things they study on the course and what the accreditation is at the end of it." Partner

03. Creating environments for people with lived experience to thrive as volunteers and employees

Partner outcomes

55% of 2021 Partner Survey respondents said they were now more open to working with people with lived experience. Of those who said they were now more open to working with people with lived experience:

- 78% said they would look to recruit more volunteers and paid staff with lived experience.
- More than half (56%) said they would review their recruitment processes.

For example, a partner in London wanted to diversify their workforce and ensure that their volunteers were representative of the local community that they support. Therefore, creating links with the programme and hosting a placement had helped them to do this.

"The peer lived experience approach for us was quite good because a lot of our volunteers come from quite good backgrounds... they're in a position to give back...where you've got an organisation training people to do this and support other people it makes sense because there is an understanding on a deeper level what somebody is going through, which was attractive to us." Partner

Similarly, a partner in Scotland explained putting people through the programme meant that they were able to implement roles for people with lived experience in local projects supporting socially excluded groups, which improved the support offer.

"You will never be able to prove a concept better than seeing this, here's a young person, he's navigated exactly what you have navigated, he comes from the same community as you, look what he's done, and it becomes more possible for the people along the way and relatable so that's why we have took on four." Partner

The programme and training offer provided a means for organisations to upskill their volunteers and people with lived experience more generally, which is something that they were keen to do, but did not have capacity for. So, PAN had supported workforce development and provided a means for organisations to work towards their wider strategy.

"We have got a small team for a start...so for us to take on something like this isn't practical. We have mentioned it before with mentoring college, we have always had that thought but never taken it any further because of capacity, or where do we start, so partnerships are a break for us... we need partners because we can't just do it ourselves..." Partner

The research also identified examples of volunteers being able to take on more responsibility at local organisations because of their involvement in the programme. This meant that peers could meet the requirements of the qualification because the partner organisations were supported by St Giles to develop good quality roles. Peer Advisors who were volunteering before they joined the programme, also recognised that they were now delivering better quality support to clients because of the training. Likewise, partners discussed peers' improved skills and the benefit to clients of this.

"We use it [the training] on a daily basis...before it was just a general, hi, are you okay, now it's more, we are going everything more in depth to get more out of the client to see what we can help them with, what they are struggling with and then advising them from there, this is what we can do, this is who else is out there, you know, it's being able to do that, it's been fantastic."

Peer Advisor

"There is a huge difference between [Peer Advisor] and somebody who is a regular volunteer, or who hasn't been with us that long. There is a greater level of commitment, a lot more confidence, a lot more professionalism...definitely a better knowledge of how to do appointments, take notes and communicate effectively" Partner

Furthermore, upskilling peers had benefits for the organisations that they were volunteering at because they could share their learning to improve processes. For example, a partner in Scotland explained that, because of some of their volunteers taking part in the PAN training, they had improved their safeguarding and data protection processes. They introduced a consent process to get permission for assessment information to be shared with partners and before sharing pictures of staff, volunteers and clients on social media after Peer Advisors suggested this.

"They're now coming in and practicing their advice and guidance. They're challenging me on our assessment paperwork. We don't have a bit on consent for information to be shared... so we added that in. It is working!" Partner

The evaluation findings reflect feedback collected by St Giles as part of their quarterly reporting to NLCF. For example, hosts commented that being part of PAN had enabled them to deliver high-quality support to more people and ensure their organisation is delivery services in culturally competent way.

"It has allowed us to offer trained and qualified peers to support those who are suffering. It also allows us to provide a more personal and comprehensive service where previously we may have been limited due to staffing levels and the volume of clients we need to support." Partner

"[Having a peer advisor benefited us through] different cultural origins, language and personal experiences related to the neighbourhood, community groups, schools. All of this contributes to our clients feeling better represented and having confidence in our organisation." Partner

To have greater impact when working with partners, local areas should be ambitious about organisations that they could partner with, and target those where lived experience involvement is less common. This will be important in opening up more opportunities to a diverse and representative workforce across the different local areas.

55%

of 2021 Partner Survey respondents said they were now more open to working with people with lived experience

The following section explores who Peer Advisors have been working with, how they have supported clients and the difference that this has made, to evaluate progress against National Lottery Community Fund Outcome 4.

Improving the support available to people with multiple needs

04

04. Improving the support available to people with multiple needs

NCLF Outcome

4

More vulnerable people within local communities are engaged and provided with support delivering greater impact thanks to input from volunteers with lived experience.

Indicators of success

- Increased number of clients are given support by volunteers with lived experience.
- Increased number of clients report improvement in their personal circumstances thanks to input from volunteers with lived experience.
- Increased number of clients report improved intermediate outcomes such as access to secure housing, paid employment or training, improved family relationships and reduced levels of offending.

Client needs

Peer Advisors supported 2849 clients between April 2019 and November 2021. Clients' circumstances and support needs differed depending on the type of organisation that the peer was volunteering at.

Nonetheless, the research completed demonstrated the range of complex and interrelated needs that people Peer Advisors supported had. For example, we spoke to one client in London who was experiencing a combination of food poverty and financial worries, mental health issues and problems with drinking. Another client in London also had financial worries, was concerned about their partner's mental and physical health, desired further advice about caring for her child with learning difficulties and wanted help to find work.

Furthermore, it was evident that Covid-19 had exacerbated clients' needs. All 2021 Partner Survey respondents felt that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on their clients' mental health. 87% of respondents thought that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on clients' physical health and a negative impact on social connections/support networks.

The level of need that clients faced, was a key reason why partners desired a workforce who were skilled in providing good quality information, advice and guidance.

"Our clients are extremely complex, they have multi-layers of dysfunction, and they have multiple complex needs that need to be addressed and I think it's imperative that our staff members and volunteers understand the concept of advising clients and guiding them with external services or with other providers, it's so important that we advocate." Partner

The difference that Peer Advisors make

When comparing clients' journey maps and feedback about being supported by Peer Advisors – a pattern identified was that many spoke about their Peer Advisor 'going above and beyond' or doing more than expected. This helped to develop trust and positive relationships, whilst enabling clients to address their needs.

Peer Advisors provided a range of practical support to clients, both in person and remotely. This included:

- Support to fill out forms, for example to apply for welfare benefits.
- Making people aware of what benefits they would be eligible for (e.g. Carers Allowance)
- Employability support, such as help with their CV and helping clients look for jobs.
- Signposting to different opportunities, including volunteering roles and ESOL classes.
- Signposting to wider support to address needs from suitable local charities.
- Helping to translate documents when peers were multilingual.
- Advice around money management.

As a result of the practical support received clients reported changes such as getting a council tax reduction, now being in receipt of Universal Credit, getting access to maternity and baby items, addressing debt issues, accessing legal support and beginning courses.

04. Improving the support available to people with multiple needs

"I am now learning to spread my money out and how important it is to pay my bills and debts without burying my head in the sand." Client, North Wales

There was also a Peer Advisor in Scotland who helped to teach young people to cook at a local youth club, and as a result one of the young people supported had signed up to a college course in catering and hospitality because of her experiences.

In addition, because peers often passed on their knowledge about local services and opportunities, several clients explained that they were now more aware of where they could access further support to meet their needs and ambitions.

"I'm now aware of more organisations that assist the homeless. They [Peer Advisor] have lot of understanding." Client

Peer Advisors also regularly provided emotional support to help clients stay motivated and resilient, such as:

- Being someone that they can talk to, including about their worries.
- Encouraging clients to continue to try and reach their goals.
- Inspiring clients by showing that challenges can be overcome and lived experience can be used in a positive and meaningful way.

Words such as 'calm', 'patient' and 'friendly' were often used to describe peers – which meant that clients felt able to talk to them about their worries as well as more general subjects.

"He was so patient with me. I felt like no one could help initially." Client

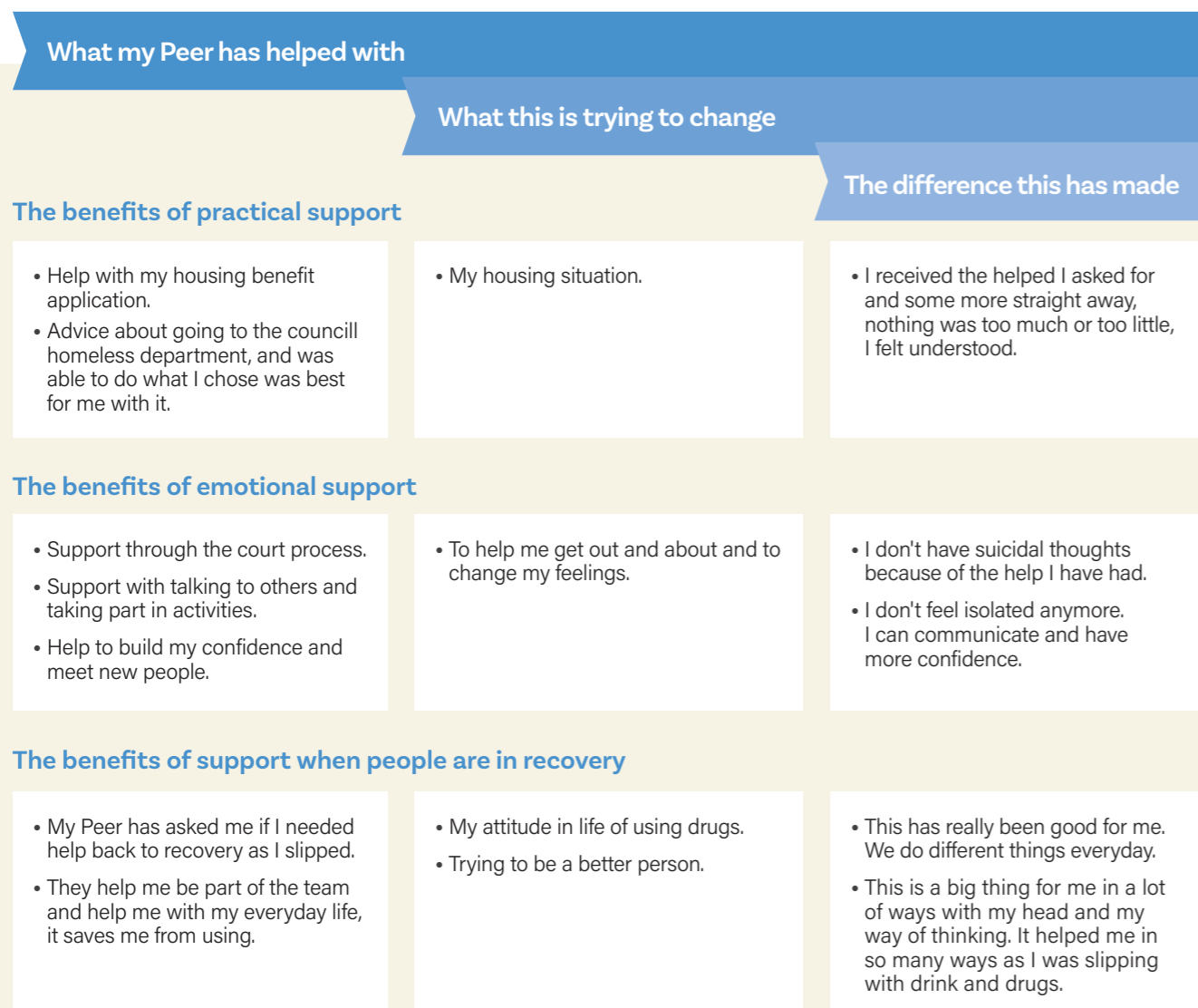
"He doesn't just tell me what to do, I can have a conversation with him... he's funny" Client

This appeared particularly important for clients who were going through recovery, as the client journey map below demonstrates.

Clients also reported feeling more confident to try new things. For example, a client who was interviewed by a male peer researcher, and she explained that this was the first time she had been alone in a room with a man in many years. She felt that this was possible because of the support she had received from her Peer Advisor and their host organisation.

"You are actually the first male I've sat in a room with and talked to. This is all because of the help from [peer] and support through [partner organisation]." Client, Scotland

Clients journey map



04. Improving the support available to people with multiple needs

Several clients also reported feeling more confident to do things independently, after their peer advisors had advised about this.

"She helped me to draft my CV. I am more confident to apply for jobs now" Client

Furthermore, the practical and emotional support provided by Peer Advisors had a positive impact on clients' mental health. As described in more detail in the case study below.

Case study – Aakash*

Aakash* met his Peer Advisor at an adult further education centre in London that his GP had signposted them to.

One of the main things that his Peer Advisor has done for Aakash was tell him about a local foodbank and get him vouchers for this, because he was struggling with money. His Peer Advisor was also helping him to apply for Personal Independent Payments because he has had three heart attacks and was suffering with depression. He was previously unclear about what benefits he would be entitled to and struggled with reading the forms.

"I am surviving because what she [Peer Advisor] is giving me"

In addition, his Peer Advisor and the manager at the centre had let him know about a volunteering opportunity where he could teach basic drawing, which has allowed him to build on his passion for art. This also reduced the social isolation Aakash previously faced, as he was now interacting with different people from his local area and 'making them laugh'.

"I am here to teach...it's given me mental strength, I am happy"

The happiness that this volunteering opportunity had given him meant that he felt better able to cope day to day and look after himself. For example, he explained that after going to the centre he washed his dishes for the first time in three months.

Furthermore, by having conversations with his Peer Advisor and others at the centre, Aakash felt that his English was improving as he had many chances to practice.

"My English is getting better, that is a good thing for me. I can explain things."

Aakash was grateful for the support he had received from his Peer Advisor who he found to be friendly and funny.

"She's very friendly, I'm always joking with her, she's a very nice lady."

Something that became apparent when speaking to clients was that they usually did not see the person that was supporting them as their Peer Advisor. Instead, they just knew them as someone from the partner organisation that had or

was supporting them. Consequently, some clients struggled to distinguish their Peer Advisor from other volunteers and staff working at the partner organisation.

"I don't know who my Peer Advisor is." Client

There was also an instance where the client did not realise that their Peer Advisor had received formal training and would be able to help with some of the issues that they wanted support with.

As a Peer Researcher highlighted, it is credit to Peer Advisors and partner organisations that peers are embedded and seen as part of the team, rather than something separate. However, this raises a question about the programme brand and whether St Giles want to raise awareness of the programme amongst clients. For example, this could be a useful way to recruit new cohorts.

However, many clients were aware that their Peer Advisor had lived experience of overcoming challenges, and this was considered helpful in building a trusting relationship, providing motivation and being able to learn from someone else's experiences, as Josh's story below shows.

Case study – Josh*

Josh* had been struggling with addiction for 27 years when he first interacted with his Peer Advisor on an online Narcotics Anonymous forum. After staying in touch, his Peer Advisor suggested that he entered a treatment programme at the supported accommodation where he was currently volunteering in Yorkshire. Josh* explained that he completed the programme, which he was proud of.

"I've never completed anything in my life, the only thing is a prison sentence. Not school, courses or training"

He did not think he would have been able to do this with his Peer Advisor's support.

"I don't think I would have made it through the programme without him. He was my sponsor which made it easier...he spurred me on and inspired me- I wanted recovery and I wanted to sort my life out."

Josh explained that knowing that his Peer Advisor had been through recovery 'made it easier' – he felt understood.

"It makes a big difference, had he been someone with no experience of addiction I'd become on guard with them – how can they tell me how to live my life? They won't fully understand what you're saying or going through."

Josh felt that entering the treatment programme with his Peer Advisor's support saved his life.

"I owe him my life – the way he never gave up and introduced me to that place, if I didn't go I would have died. I would have ended up overdosing."

This section considers the programme's systems change ambitions and enablers and barriers to changing attitudes, practice and policy in relation to lived experience involvement in services, as outlined in National Lottery Community Fund Outcome 3.

Providing the foundations for systems change

05

05. Providing the foundations for systems change

NCLF Outcome

3

There is a strong robust evidence base which provides the foundations for system change in the way that services to the most socially excluded are delivered across the sector.

Indicators of success

- Evidence base presents case for benefits and impact of employing well trained people with lived experience.
- Local communities recognise Peer Advisors as best practice for developing community assets and agents of change.
- St Giles QA framework has credibility and expertise to provide necessary support for local agencies to make changes to their local practices.

Systems are made up of multiple different types of interdependent and connected components. Some are tangible, such as, people, resources and services, and others are vaguer, like relationships, values, and perceptions⁵. As Demos explain, when talking about a system, this could already exist, but in the social sector systems are also ways of thinking about complex problems, and people with different perspectives will define the system differently⁶.

Systems change involves implementing processes and purposeful interventions that are designed to alter the status quo by shifting the functions or structures that make an identified system work in a certain way⁷.

In this case, the Peer Advisor Network (PAN) has been implemented in different areas of the United Kingdom to try and increase the number of people with lived experience involved in service delivery, and for the benefits of this to be widely recognised – amongst delivery organisations, funders and commissioners as well as people with lived experience and the clients they support. To do this, the programme is trying to change elements such as recruitment policies and organisational hierarchies and values to open opportunities for people with lived experience in a range of different organisations and roles: with the expectation that this will have a positive impact on Peer Advisors, the people they are supporting and the services that they are volunteering in. As such, the programme is aiming to achieve long-lasting change to ensure people with lived experience are at the heart of local services and society.

Developing the evidence base

Those involved in programme delivery and wider stakeholders all acknowledged the growing recognition of the benefits of lived experience involvement in the design and delivery of services for excluded groups.

"There's a national push around those lived experience people and the value of lived experience and the value of peer support..." Stakeholder

This was reflected in the survey results. All 2021 Partner Survey respondents either 'Strongly agreed' or 'Agreed' that it is important for organisations like their own to provide opportunities for people with lived experience to develop their skills and create positive change. All respondents also 'Strongly Agreed' or 'Agreed' that it was important to involve people with lived experience in designing services. Similarly, nearly three quarters of 2021 Peer Advisor Survey respondents (72%) believed that staff and volunteers at other local organisations feel 'Very positive' or 'Quite positive' about working with people with lived experience of disadvantage and overcoming challenges.

However, it was also felt that there was still more to be done to change attitudes and practice beyond the voluntary sector and to ensure that lived experience involvement was high quality, possible at all levels of organisations and happening across all stages of delivery.

"I definitely think there's been a positive shift towards the involvement of lived experience but do still think that there is an awful long way to go... there is some push back in professional circles [with] historical practices." Stakeholder

"Some people don't want to get promoted necessarily, yet at the same time, that's also a bit of stereotype of support, people with lived experience, oh people with lived experience, you are all about face-to-face engagement..." Stakeholder

05. Abercrombie et al. (2015), *Systems Change: A guide to what it is and how to do it*, NPC and Lankelly Chase

06. Chapman, J. (2004) *System failure: Why governments must learn to think differently*, Demos.

07. Foster-Fishman, P. (2002), *How to create systems change*, Lansing

05. Providing the foundations for systems change

One barrier discussed was HR processes. Application processes and job descriptions were often found to be inaccessible and intimidating, whilst perceptions of risk amongst HR staff sometimes prevented further progress being made with placements. This also demonstrates the challenges with partner engagement, as one staff member valuing the programme and wanting to work with the Peer Advisor Network is often not enough to guarantee opportunities and joint-working; you need buy-in from senior staff and the HR lead/team.

Recommendation 8

67% of staff that responded to the PAN 2021 survey considered themselves to have lived experience. Work with potential and existing PAN partners should build on this organisational experience, to develop tools and specific guidance so that other organisations can support people with lived experience to enter and succeed in the workplace. This could also support income generation activity.

A challenge stakeholders referenced was that often staff leading on lived experience involvement activity worked in isolation, and there were limited spaces, such as local forums or national networks, to share learning and information about existing practice.

“When I first started, the Co-Production Lead or the Service User Involvement Lead works on their own. There's one person that does that and that's it which means that learning around good co-production is really slow because everybody is trying to figure it out for themselves, and they haven't got an automatic space to share.” Stakeholder

Similarly, the evaluation of the Birmingham Changing Futures Together programme identified the need for conversations and awareness raising activity amongst involvement leads, as information about the local experts by experience service was not currently reaching the right people⁸.

08. Revolving Doors Agency (July 2021), *Birmingham Changing Futures Together Evaluation: Every Step of the Way research findings*

09. Duvnjak et al., (2021), *How does Lived Experience of Incarceration Impact Upon the Helping Process in Social Work Practice?: A Scoping Review*, *The British Journal of Social Work*

10. Sells et al., 2020; *The Social Innovation Partnership*, 2012; *Frontier Economics*, 2009

11. Buck, G., Lawrence, A., & Ragonese, E. (2017), *Exploring peer mentoring as a form of innovative practice with young people at risk of child sexual exploitation*, *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(6).

12. Kidd, M. (2011), *A first-hand account of service user groups in the United Kingdom: An evaluation of their purpose, effectiveness, and place within the recovery movement*, *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*, 6(1-2)

13. Buck, 2020; Duvnjak et al., 2021

14. Barker S. and Maguire N. (2017), *Experts by Experience: Peer Support and its Use with the Homeless*, *Community Mental Health Journal*, 53, pp.598-612.

15. Repper J and Carter T. (2011), *A review of the literature on peer support in mental health services*, *Journal of Mental Health*

16. NEF Consulting (2020), *Impact of the Lead Worker Peer Mentor Service*, Birmingham Changing Futures Together

Recommendation 9

St Giles should consider playing a leadership and convening role to develop a Community of Practice bringing together those leading on lived experience involvement across the voluntary and public sector, including PAN managers, to further develop the evidence base and raise awareness of the Peer Advisor Network. Potential attendants could include representatives from the new government funded Changing Futures Programme, where all delivery areas are involving people with lived experience, as well as NHS England and probation services – who have committed to doing more to diversify their workforce. Linked to this, there would also be benefit in ensuring that programme staff are part of local networks that currently exist.

This evaluation has shown the benefits and impact of the peer support model for the different individuals and organisations involved, adding to the existing literature on peer support approaches, from the UK and abroad. This includes:

- A recent study which found that staff with lived experience draw on their experiences and knowledge to create more equal power dynamics and higher levels of trust and openness, which helps to connect people to wider support services⁹.
- Studies that have indicated that peer mentoring can reduce reoffending¹⁰.
- Research which has shown that mentors can inspire people¹¹ and help them to believe that personal change is possible and desirable¹².
- Evidence that peer mentors working in the criminal justice sector demonstrate the positive potential of people with offending backgrounds, which creates a stronger sense of hope amongst colleagues and sometimes challenges stereotypes and fears held by society¹³.
- Evidence that peer support can have a significant impact on the quality of life for people experiencing homelessness, their drug and/or alcohol use and their social support, because peers have shared experiences and can be role models¹⁴.
- Evidence that peer support is associated with improved social and health outcomes for people with mental health issues, such as increased hope, self-esteem and confidence¹⁵.
- Findings from the Birmingham Lead Worker Peer mentor programme, which showed that compared to clients that had a support worker without lived experience, clients that worked with a Peer Mentor - engaged with the service for more time, reduced their use of crisis services at a higher rate, saw a greater increase with their use of planned services and saw a greater improvement of their wellbeing assessments¹⁶.

05. Providing the foundations for systems change

Ongoing programme evaluation activity (both independent research and internal monitoring) will continue to play an important role in St Giles being successful in progressing towards this outcome.

“The more evidence that could be generated in an around this to actually sort of like create that tipping point to say look, there's so much evidence now that says this is a good idea, you literally would be stupid not to do it.” Stakeholder

Furthermore, partners hoped that as evidence about the benefits of peer support approaches grew, this would help influence local and national practices (as discussed in more detail below).

“Hopefully we could role model, so the things that we do whether it's the café, whether it's the trainee mentoring, see people want to replicate that across the country, that's a good result for us, you know.” Partner

Lastly, stakeholders with expertise in systems change approaches and evaluation emphasised the need to create a learning culture and regular dialogue amongst those involved in delivery, to increase understanding of what is enabling and preventing significant progress.

“So much of what we do in trying to create systems change is create spaces for learning. Sometimes figures are helpful and it can tell you who you have engaged with and whether there are any gaps but actually it's, getting practitioners together, reflecting on what's working, what's not, what changes are we seeing...Those kinds of shared learning those kinds of spaces and then how can you feed those insights up to senior management to say well actually we need to spend more of our time on this rather than this and we need the flexibility to spend resource on this...” Stakeholder

Staff will likely be receptive to this, considering that, nearly half of 2021 Staff Survey Respondents (47%) said that having more opportunities to share learning would increase their job satisfaction. Furthermore, where staff were delivering the programme alone in an area, they reported feeling isolated and desired more opportunities to visit other delivery areas and meet colleagues.

Recommendation: 10

As previously recommended, going forward, it will be important for St Giles to create an environment where local delivery areas are supported to share learning and good practice with one another. This could include through informal online channels that celebrate success and can be used for troubleshooting as well as more structured workshops and/or thematic learning events. Upcoming events in 2022 would be a good place to do this.

“The more evidence that could be generated in an around this to actually sort of like create that tipping point to say look, there's so much evidence now that says this is a good idea, you literally would be stupid not to do it.”

“” Stakeholder



05. Providing the foundations for systems change

The role of Peer Advisors in local communities

St Giles have started to try and influence stakeholders in strategic roles in public services, including commissioners and funders. As this develops, there would be benefit in highlighting the learning from Covid-19 about service delivery, and how Peer Advisors can be an asset to their local community.

For example, staff saw a wide-ranging role for Peer Advisors in supporting local communities to respond and recover from Covid-19 in the coming year. This included making the case for the importance of lived experience in community projects and services and using their skills/experience to delivery community projects and activities.

Research with partners demonstrated the increased demand on services; Covid-19 exacerbated issues that socially excluded groups were facing; and most 2021 staff survey respondents (93%) thought that Peer Advisors could volunteer to help organisations meet increased demand.

As Nesta has outlined, initial responses to Covid-19 showed the benefits of local authorities sharing power with those who have the practical skills and first-hand knowledge to provide suitable support¹⁷. Some stakeholders also discussed how the pandemic had created a desire amongst some local authorities to improve links with residents and improve collaboration between different sectors, which is something that Peer Advisors can play an important role in supporting.

“There is an increase in focus among Councils on kind of, how do we get close to our communities, how do we work in a more place-based way, how do we create community hubs etc.” Stakeholder



The pandemic, and implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act, (which created focus on how support is delivered) was felt to have demonstrated the importance of communication skills and empathy amongst public facing staff, which is a strength of Peer Advisors.

“I’ve had anecdotes from a few places that Councils are realising their staff need a different skillset because of Covid, so you kind of put staff onto emergency ‘phone lines to support people who are shielding, and they just don’t have the basic capabilities to speak to people who are in a vulnerable situation in a kind of human way. There are instances where that has been flagged as a real gap in the capabilities...” Stakeholder

It was felt that organisations were more receptive to creating or increasing roles for individuals with lived experience when they saw how this could help them to overcome difficulties they were facing.

“If they trust in you, if they believe in you, in what you are trying to do and if you can articulate it in a way where they can see how it makes a positive difference to the challenges that they have, then they are going to say okay well let’s give it a go...” Stakeholder

Linked to this, a recent NPC blog highlighted how influencing public discourse can change policy through creating new frames that steer people’s attention to systems and to context, and ‘show why an issue matters, creating space for new conversations and subsequently policy change.’¹⁸

Recommendation 11

Further work could be done to raise the profile of Peer Advisors in local communities and increase understanding of the different benefits that involving people with lived experience in the design and delivery of services can have – in terms of organisational capacity, understanding and engagement. Building on the learning from Covid-19 (e.g. around the benefits of person-centred support and collaboration) and thinking about how peers can play a role in addressing the myriad of issues exacerbated by the pandemic (e.g. mental health, social isolation) could be a useful way to frame such conversations. Events to celebrate success and raise awareness of the programme would help with this. St Giles could also try and identify local organisations and thought-leaders promoting community-led and/or asset-based approaches to partner with to further this agenda.

17. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/change-in-local-government-learning-from-covid-19/>

18. <https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/how-i-learned-that-narrative-change-can-bring-about-social-change/>

05. Providing the foundations for systems change

Changing local practices

It was harder to find evidence of how the programme has influenced wider policy and practices in the areas in which it operates (beyond partner organisations that hosted peers), but this is not surprising considering that it takes time to create wider, larger-scale change. Furthermore, many systems change perspectives explicitly recognise social systems as complex and argue that the relationship between an intervention and an outcome is fairly unpredictable¹⁹.

However, now the programme is embedded across seven regions, steps can be taken to further this systems change objective. For example, there is an argument within the literature that establishing boundaries is a critical first step for effective systems change – as this enables you to decide who and what are involved in the problem and the solution²⁰. Reflecting this, a stakeholder suggested that St Giles could be more specific about what their system change ambitions and indicators of success are for the programme – building on the initial overarching programme outcomes developed; which links back to previous suggestions around being clear on what St Giles are referring to when they discuss lived experience, what the programme offer is and why this is unique.

“On the systems change side, it’s a really emerging field. No one knows what the right practices are, but we are increasingly looking at what are the system conditions that indicate that we are developing practices that make better outcomes more likely long term. So, whether it’s a no more shared vision among different partners, whether its shifting power to people with lived experience, they have more say in how the local system works for them and whether it’s you know changes in workforce skills, in attitudes...”

“” Stakeholder



As previously found, many organisations that hosted placements had shared values with St Giles and were passionate about increasing the lived experience workforce, which enabled positive partnerships and experiences for peers. However, those involved in delivery continued to acknowledge that it will be important to get organisations who did not have experience of having volunteers and staff with lived experience to host placements for the programme to have a wider impact.

“Start breaking down those barriers where statutory services say we can’t have people with lived experience...if we want to deliver systems change through the deployment of lived experience, that’s how we do it – there is no point putting more lived experience where there is already lived experience, although there is nothing wrong with that we need to get those places where you haven’t got your impact.” Staff member

St Giles are currently developing resources to support staff to target new organisations in a systematic, yet tailored way.

Recommendations: 12 and 13

To be able to have greater influence in the local areas where PAN is operating, there would be benefit in staff undertaking mapping work to identify local organisations and decision-makers that the programme is trying to influence and tracking success of this. The new St Giles Regional Development Managers would be well placed to lead this, and they could build on work already completed by St Giles to identify national stakeholders.

Linked to this, as previously suggested, the programme steering group and central managers should support local areas to continue to or begin to focus on identifying organisations where Peer Advisors could add value, but which have little or no lived experience involvement to achieve long-term systematic change. This includes statutory services such as Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and Housing Associations, where lived experience involvement is less common.

19. Senge, P. (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*, Doubleday.

20. Midgley, G. (2000), *Systemic intervention: Philosophy, methodology and practice*, Kluwer

Finally, we discuss programme sustainability, and summarise what is going well and what challenges remain around long-term impact and delivery beyond the funding period.

Market testing and programme sustainability

06. Key learning about programme impact and outcomes

St Giles have developed a Sustainability Action Plan to support the long-term impact and sustainability of the programme beyond the funding period. As part of this, a costing model has been created to support local delivery areas to implement a paid-for training offer and at the beginning of Year 3, delivery areas were given an income generation target (which was a proportion of their delivery budget). The Sustainability Action Plan also includes activities across workstreams including branding, publicity and marketing, and different delivery models will begin to be tested in the final years of delivery.

A communications consultancy was also commissioned to develop the programme brand and marketing strategies.

What is going well

Local areas have begun making progress towards their income targets, and the programme leads have identified many national and regional opportunities to support income generation. The market testing process is also progressing well, materials have been drafted and St Giles are aiming to hold influencing events throughout 2022, in conjunction with the 60th anniversary of St Giles.

The below case study is an example of how the paid for training offer can be of value to public sector organisations.

Case study: experiences of the paid for training offer

In Scotland, a public sector organisation paid for staff to receive a tailored training package through the PAN programme. The training offer appealed to them because they thought that the training could help to change workplace culture and make staff more aware of the circumstances that people they supervise are in, and the challenges they face (which links to Outcome 2).

"I was particularly looking to change the culture of staff who supervise community payback unpaid work, which was my specific interest. It was a bit of workforce culture change as I say specifically around a particular area that attracted me to it as part of a kind of training package for staff and helping them understand the more holistic person rather than just supervising them and escort a placement to go out and pick up litter. It is more about understanding that you know offending is driven by underlying needs." Partner

Communications about the paid for training offer stood out because it related to what this organisation was looking for.

"Because it was a wee bit more unique to fit the purpose I was looking for, it was what made me open the email if you like." Partner

It was also highlighted that order to implement the training, and get this funded, having someone champion this and its benefits was key.

"The reason it was funded really was because I championed it...I sold it to that group to fund it, so you need somebody championing your training to the right groups, to get the funding and that's unfortunately just the way it works." Partner

Feedback from staff who had participated in the training was positive, they found the online sessions enjoyable and the course content applicable to their role.

"The feedback we got generally, just the kind of ad hoc feedback I got from the service managers, was that the staff really enjoyed it. They found it really valuable. They could see how they could use it, do you know, so yeah we have got some really - that was really positive." Partner

Furthermore, because St Giles were flexible and acted quickly to deliver a suitable version of the course within the necessary timescale, this left a positive lasting impression.

"They do it so quickly as well, to meet our needs and match timescale that we did have, kind of highlights, for me it highlighted their expertise in the area, do you know, they were able to take something that they do, adapt it for a different audience, really quickly and get some positive feedback from it you know." Partner

06. Market testing and programme sustainability

Challenges

There were mixed views amongst staff survey respondents about each local area's ability to achieve the income target set. A third (33%) were 'Very confident' or 'Confident', whilst a third (33%) were 'Not confident' and a third (33%) were 'Not sure'. Conversations with staff found concerns about capacity to deliver market testing and income generation activity alongside other responsibilities. Across both waves of research, staff were focused on identifying and supporting Peer Advisors - sustainability and income generation was not a priority. Several staff also highlighted that they did not have expertise in this area, and that they did not expect their job role to involve income generation and market testing activity.

St Giles are seeking consultancy support to aid business development around options that could increase income-generation activity whilst supporting the continuation and expansion of the Peer Advisor Network. Sessional trainer-assessors have also been introduced to be able to respond to demand for training. These additional skills and capacity appear particularly important in supporting long-term delivery beyond the funding period.

Getting a balance between achieving charitable objectives and generating income was also considered difficult. Some stakeholders reflected that income generation targets shift objectives towards 'traditional incentives' rather than systems change. This reflects an NPC report which states that it is essential that systems interventions remain rooted in action and do not become removed from the people in society they are designed to help²¹.

"It's just like working out what exactly are the incentives, so if you were a member of staff in different parts of the organisation or the team, what are the incentives that drive you and if it becomes a commercial income generation for businesses, is that overarching pressure you feel day to day then actually the systems change bit might go out the window..." Stakeholder

"Potentially the benefit of the IAG might not be the actual IAG training, it's the fact that it's training on how to speak to people and reflect with people and give people a space to talk... Lots of people miss out or don't get that and a lot of local authorities have done a lot of work on that...they have had to re-train a lot of staff and much more focus on those person skills, rather than technical skills around the law."

Stakeholder

Therefore, it would be helpful to explicitly align the underlying principles of PAN to market testing activity. For example, by finding out what skills staff supporting socially excluded groups want and thinking about how St Giles can support this through the training offer and making sure there is a lived experience voice in the training provided (discussed more below). Linked to this St Giles should invest time in helping staff to understand the role of income generation in supporting programme development and the systems change objectives, to increase buy-in with this approach.

Stakeholders and staff also identified challenges around commissioning processes, which will make it more difficult for organisations to fund additional training. For example, 86% of 2021 Staff Survey respondents thought that funding cuts would impact sustainability objectives. Similarly, stakeholders highlighted that there are many competing priorities within organisations, at a time of significant funding cuts. A stakeholder from a public sector organisation also explained how funding decisions were largely shaped by national policy and city-wide strategies, which sometimes made it more difficult to respond to emerging and more local level training needs.

Delivering staff training was also considered to be a crowded market by some stakeholders and staff, and we came across examples of larger organisations that have an interest in peer support and/or lived experience involvement already having established providers in place to deliver training. For example, healthcare professionals at an NHS Trust got free training on similar topics, which is funded by Health Education England.



06. Market testing and programme sustainability

Where next

Market engagement

Stakeholders suggested that raising awareness of the training offer to umbrella bodies that had influence and relationships with local organisations could be a helpful way to implement the training in multiple organisations and/or areas. Similarly, staff felt that more partnerships with national organisations would help create placement opportunities across different local areas.

It was also suggested that St Giles should consider targeting organisations towards the end of the financial year, when they may have underspend that could help pay for the training, if relevant.

Stakeholders also questioned what made the paid-for training offer unique, compared to other Information, Advice and Guidance courses available through alternative training providers. Therefore, they suggested building on St Giles expertise in working with socially excluded groups when marketing the offer and emphasising the importance of staff being able to communicate with (vulnerable) people effectively.

"Would they be offering anything different with it, would it be IAG with a kind of twist or would it just be the standard course? Would they be say, pitching to a Local Authority in a kind of, you know the people you find it really hard to work with...so I suppose my question back would be how is it bespoke, it's probably the branding bit, how is it different from your standard IAG course." Stakeholder

"Potentially the benefit of the IAG might not be the actual IAG training, it's the fact that its training on how to speak to people and reflect with people and give people a space to talk...Lots of people miss out or don't get that and a lot of local authorities have done a lot of work on that...they have had to re-train a lot of staff and much more focus on those person skills, rather than technical skills around the law." Stakeholder

Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter 5, St Giles have a large lived experience workforce, and this should be emphasised to show that there is a wealth of organisational knowledge and experience behind the training offer.

Co-producing the training offer

Linked to the above, some stakeholders asked about whether people with lived experience are involved in designing or delivering the paid for training offer and examples were given of where lived experience involvement in training packages had improved this.

"The richness of the training could not have happened without the perspective of people who, you know, walk the walk." Stakeholder

Hence, it is evident that Peer Advisors can play an important role in shaping the training, building on their experiences – of learning, and of accessing and delivering support.



Recommendation: 14

St Giles should consider the role of Peer Advisors in developing the paid for training offer. As the Peer Advisor Network recognises, peers have valuable lived and professional experience. Therefore, co-producing training offers with Peer Advisors will ensure that the training reflects learning and good practice on the programme. It would also help the training offer stand apart, as it incorporates the lived experience voice.

Data collection

Data collection has been a challenge throughout the delivery period, and it has taken time to refine and build buy-in with many different processes in place.

Less paperwork was regularly suggested by different groups involved in programme delivery, so St Giles should continue to explore how the necessary data can be collected in an efficient way that is useful for all involved. For example, the programme team are currently reviewing whether online forms can be created which automatically populate spreadsheets, and the intention to be able to collate programme data in one place will make a positive difference. To assess the economic value of the programme, complete and consistent data will be required.

Efforts should also continue to collect and monitor demographic information of peers, to be able to learn where particular groups are under-represented on the programme, and act on this where necessary. St Giles are currently recruiting for a data and administration support role through the government Kickstart scheme, and this additional resource could help to do this.

06. Market testing and programme sustainability

Future delivery models

Staffing

Relationships have been key to the success of the programme – both between delivery staff and the Peer Advisors and between delivery staff and partner organisations. For example, the research has shown that individuals on the programme had a range of wider support needs and sometimes lacked confidence and motivation. Hence, support from staff helped them to overcome challenges and achieve positive outcomes. Alongside this, staff efforts to get to know a partner and their needs enabled positive engagement. In contrast, where potential partners had shown an interest in the programme and hosting peers, but had not yet done so, limited direct communication with programme staff had impacted this.

“We mainly have contact through our volunteer...it would be great to hear about whether people doing the course fit within the requirements we are looking for; it would be good to stay in touch.” Partner

There was also concern about workload amongst current staff, who sometimes struggled with their different responsibilities. Hence, as the programme grew there was worry about ‘burnout’ and effectively supporting everyone involved, especially if new starters increased without the equivalent number of people completing the programme.

Therefore, going forward it will be important that there is adequate staffing to support the delivery and progress of the Peer Advisor Network, that staff continue to be supported to prioritise and manage their workload, and that Peer Advisors are able to complete the programme so that numbers are manageable. This should involve local areas considering how best to prioritise the combination of completions new starters, and waiting lists at different times.

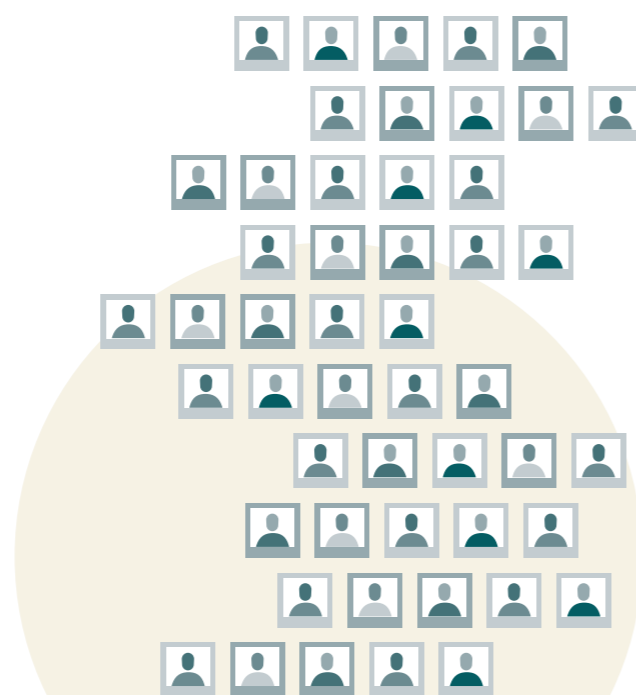
As local areas look to engage organisations who do not have a track record of working with people with lived experience, staff will need the capacity to deliver the required support around this, so it is a positive experience for all involved, whilst also providing wider support for peers so the programme can continue to enable people who have been or are facing multiple disadvantage to become Peer Advisors.

Programme sustainability

However, we also recognise that the programme has a limited funding period and that for the programme to continue beyond this, local areas need to be supported to focus on long-term sustainability. Staff also need sufficient time to plan for when the grant ends so that staff teams, partners and Peer Advisors and the clients they support, do not face a cliff edge.

Recommendation

The steering group and programme managers should prioritise developing the overall strategy for long-term sustainability, and what practical steps can be taken to achieve this. This will help give local areas focus and support them to balance income generation activity with delivering the grant requirements. This strategy should also include guidance for exit-planning.



“By the end of the year we’re probably have 50 people on our books, and that’s 50 people who I’ll have to support, and that will be really challenging, so for me that’s a concern.”

“” Staff member

This section brings together our recommendations that build on the learning from the evaluation to suggest actions that could support the Peer Advisor Network achieve further success and greater impact.

Conclusion and recommendations



Conclusion

To date, the evaluation has found that St Giles have been able to successfully scale-up delivery of the Peer Advisor programme in communities across the UK. There is much evidence that the programme has had positive impacts on individuals who became Peer Advisors, the organisations that have hosted them and the clients that have been supported.

It has been harder to find examples of systems change stemming from the Peer Advisor Network, such as impacts on local communities that the programme is operating in, or wider policy reform. To an extent, this is to be expected as system change takes time. However, being more specific about the actors and structures that the programme is trying to influence, and tracking this, will help to progress and monitor this objective. Efforts should also be made to identify placement opportunities with organisations that have little or experience of having staff with lived experience, to achieve long-term change in attitudes, workplace cultures and recruitment processes.

Lastly, as outlined in this report there is potential for St Giles to take on more of a leadership role in promoting the benefits of lived experience involvement and peer support, through delivering training to other organisations through the market-testing activity, but also through collating learning and good practice about this and convening spaces to raise awareness of what works and how challenges can be overcome.

Recommendations

Raising awareness and marketing the Peer Advisor Network

- The work on branding and publicity should consider how the Peer Advisor Network purpose and approach can be clearly communicated to different target audiences. It will be important for individuals and organisations to be able to easily understand what a Peer Advisor is, how St Giles define lived experience and what is unique about the training offer and overall programme to support effective engagement.
- Further work could be done to raise the profile of Peer Advisors in local communities and increase understanding of the different benefits that involving people with lived experience in the design and delivery of services can have – in terms of organisational capacity, understanding and engagement. Building on the learning from Covid-19 (e.g. around the benefits of person-centred support and collaboration) and thinking about how peers can play a role in addressing the myriad of issues exacerbated by the pandemic (e.g. mental health, social isolation) could be a useful way to frame such conversations. Events to celebrate success and raise awareness of the programme would help with this. St Giles could also try and identify local organisations and thought-leaders promoting community-led and/or asset-based approaches to partner with to further this agenda.

Supporting Peer Advisors succeed

- St Giles should ensure that new cohorts of learners are regularly made aware of the Digital Coach and wider help available so those who would benefit from further IT or mental health support can access this and feel able to be part of PAN. It would also be worth thinking about whether IT skills can be incorporated into the existing training offer, as this is often required by employers and would aid engagement with online delivery.
- There would be merit in St Giles having conversations with partners and peers about what additional skills would be useful for Peer Advisors to gain upon completion of the programme, and to link up further training with skills gaps and labour market demand, to support peers to enter, stay and progress in employment, education or training. Improved understanding of local labour markets, the training provider landscape and skills gaps would also strengthen efforts to obtain funding to deliver further training to Peer Advisors.
- St Giles should take a coordinated approach to supporting Peer Advisors identify work and/or training opportunities that they could enter upon completion of the programme. For example, by developing consistent guides with advice about how they can sign up to job alerts and find out about local courses and sharing case studies to show what roles Peer Advisors have entered. This would help potential peers learn more about where participation could take them and provide existing peers with a goal to aim towards. Brokering relationships with recruiters and local employment support providers would also enable peers to access additional support if needed, reducing the burden on delivery staff.

Supporting staff deliver an effective programme

- Staff would also benefit from access to assured courses and wider training delivered as part of the programme to be able to further develop soft skills (such as conflict management) and to support job satisfaction.
- The steering group and programme managers should prioritise developing the overall strategy for long-term sustainability, and what practical steps can be taken to achieve this. This will help give local areas focus and support them to balance income generation activity with delivering the grant requirements. This strategy should also include guidance for exit-planning.

Where next for the Peer Advisor Network?

- Going forward, it appears that combining online and in-person training would be best. Having some online delivery would help the course to be flexible around caring and health needs and would enable people from different areas to participate together. Programme wide guidance should be developed that outlines a minimum amount of in person training and any activities that should occur in person. Local areas can then tailor their offer based on the cohort of learners starting the programme and their preferences/circumstances, and they should be encouraged to test different methods and share learning. There would be benefit in co-producing this guidance with Peer Advisors and Trainer-Assessors to incorporate their experiences.
- There would be benefit in creating spaces for partners to learn and share from each other as well as regional St Giles teams. For example, through webinars and/or participation at programme events such as the upcoming PAN conference. This would also support the wider systems change ambitions by supporting St Giles to develop the evidence base on lived experience involvement and establish themselves as a key influencer in this area.
- St Giles should consider playing a leadership and convening role to develop a Community of Practice bringing together those leading on lived experience involvement across the voluntary and public sector, including PAN managers, to further develop the evidence base and raise awareness of the Peer Advisor Network programme. Potential attendants could include representatives from the new government funded Changing Futures Programme, where all delivery areas are involving people with lived experience, as well as NHS England and probation services – who have committed to doing more to diversify their workforce. Linked to this, there would also be benefit in ensuring that programme staff are part of local networks that currently exist.

- As previously recommended, going forward, it will be important for St Giles to create an environment where local delivery areas are supported to share learning and good practice with one another. This could include through informal online channels that celebrate success and can be used for troubleshooting as well as more structured workshops and/or thematic learning events. The planned events in 2022 would be a good place to do this.

Systems change

- To be able to have greater influence in the local areas where PAN is operating, there would be benefit in staff undertaking mapping work to identify local organisations and decision-makers that the programme is trying to influence and tracking success of this. The new St Giles Regional Development Managers would be well placed to lead this, and they could build on work already completed by St Giles to identify national stakeholders.
- Linked to this, as previously suggested, the programme steering group and central managers should support local areas to continue to or begin to focus on identifying organisations where Peer Advisors could add value, but which have little or no lived experience involvement to achieve long-term systematic change. This includes statutory services such as Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and Housing Associations, where lived experience involvement is less common.

Income generation

- St Giles should consider the role of Peer Advisors in developing the paid for training offer. As the Peer Advisor Network recognises, peers have valuable lived and professional experience. Therefore, co-producing training offers with Peer Advisors will ensure that the training reflects learning and good practice on the programme. It would also help the training offer stand apart, as it incorporates the lived experience voice.
- Work with potential and existing PAN partners should build on St Giles' experience in recruiting and supporting staff with lived experience, to develop tools and specific guidance so that organisations can support people with lived experience to enter and succeed in the workplace. This could also support income generation activity.



Appendix

Methodology

In total, we conducted 50 different interviews with Peer Advisors, staff and partner organisations across the different Hub areas. We also received feedback from 15 clients who were supported by Peer Advisors, this was mostly through 1-1 and group interviews, but a couple of clients shared written feedback instead.

Table A1: Split of Peer Advisor, staff and partner interviews across different delivery areas

	Yorkshire	The Midlands	North Wales	London	Scotland	Total
Peer Advisors	4	4	4	4	7	23
Staff	3	3	2	4	2	14
Partner organisations	3	3	2	2	3	13

We also conducted a focus group with Peer Advisors from London in Year 1 and interviewed 11 stakeholders with expertise in areas such as peer support and/or lived experience involvement more generally, systems change and service delivery to socially excluded groups.

Interviews followed a semi-structured topic guide to address the research questions, whilst allowing for flexibility based on the respondent and the answers provided. The questions for Peer Advisors and clients were co-designed with some of the Peer Researchers. With permission, interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed for accuracy, and to obtain verbatim quotes. A coding framework was then developed based on emerging themes. This was applied to the different interview transcript, using NVivo software, to identify key findings against the research questions.

Table A2: Coding framework applied during the evaluation

Peer Advisor research nodes	St Giles staff research nodes	Partner nodes	Stakeholder nodes
Finding out about PAN	Progress with recruitment	Finding out about PAN	Marketing engagement
Reason for getting involved	Maintaining engagement - good practice	Reason for getting involved	Partnership working
Initial concern	Maintaining engagement - suggested improvements	Initial concern	System change
Joining PAN	Training - positive	Views of training	Tracking impact
Training - positive	Training - negative	Placements - good practice	Sharing learning
Training - negative	Training - outcomes	Placements - challenges	Potential partners
Training - suggested improvement	Raising awareness - good practice	Placements - suggested improvements	Positive views
Skills gained	Raising awareness - challenges	Initial views of LE involvement	Negative views
Placement - positive	Working with local organisations	Impact - views of LE	Suggested improvements
Placement - negative	Placements - outcomes	Impact - recruitment	Impact of COVID
Placement - suggested improvement	Programme management/monitoring - good practice	Impact - practice & processes	
Working with clients	Programme management/monitoring - suggested improvements	Impact - on clients	
Support received	Changing attitudes towards lived experience.	Impact - on peers	
Views of lived experience	Changing workplace culture/quality of volunteering	Enablers - joint working	
Changes to thoughts & feelings	Outcomes - enabling factor	Barriers - joint working	
Practical changes	Outcomes - barrier	Suggestions for raising awareness	
Wider impact	Hub sustainability	Suggestions for future partners	
Future ambitions	Impact of COVID	Impact of COVID	
Impact of COVID			

After each wave of research, we also held co-analysis sessions with Peer Researchers to discuss emerging points of interest and patterns in the data, followed by a co-production workshop to test and confirm the findings with Peer Advisors and peer researchers.

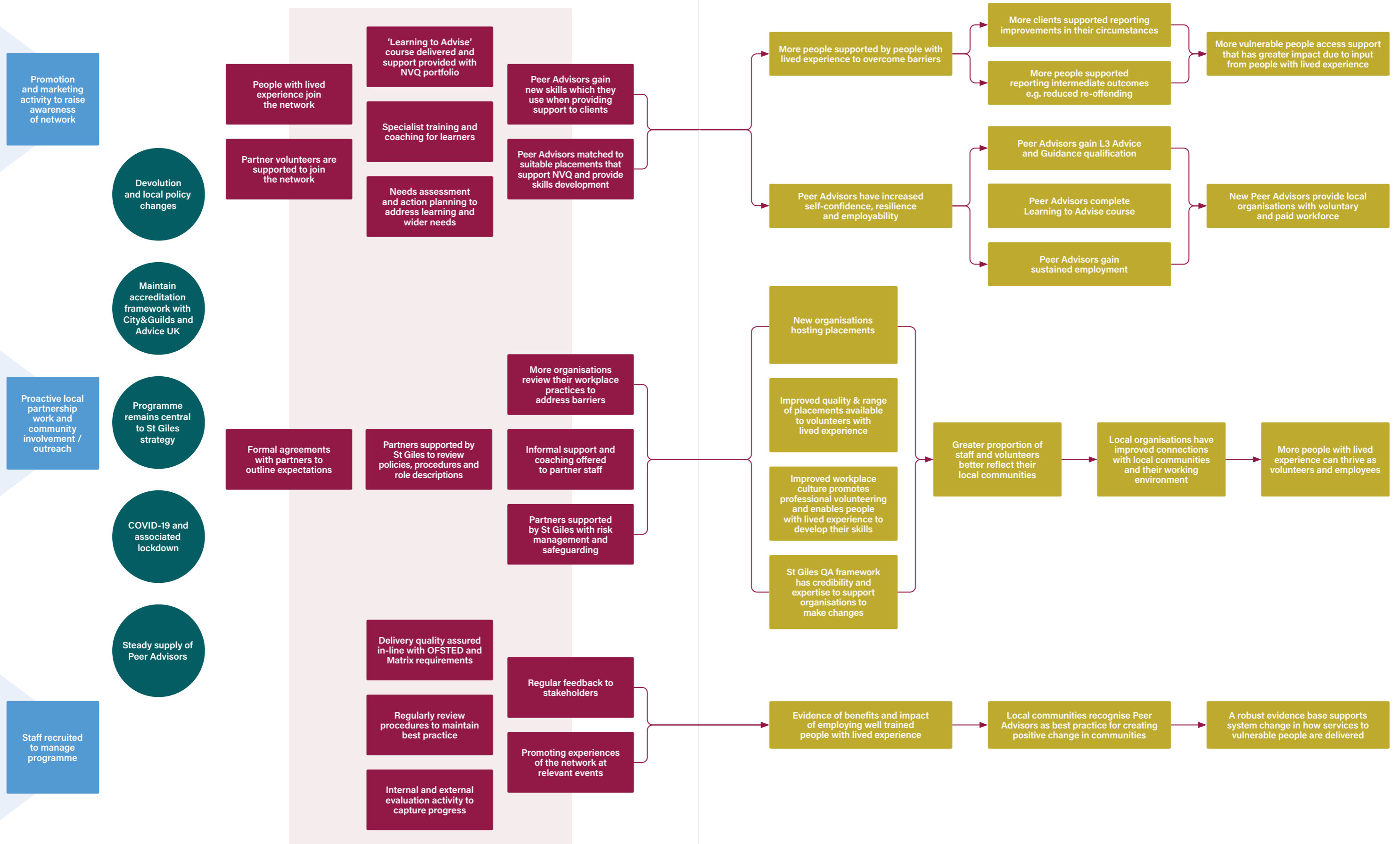
In wave one we had a total of 56 responses to the different online surveys with Peer Advisors, staff and partner organisations across the different areas that were delivering PAN. In wave two we had 97 responses; this increase partly reflects the beginning of delivery in three new areas. The breakdown of type of responses is included in Table A3 below.

The surveys were co-developed with the St Giles PAN management team and a few Peer Researchers.

Table A3: Split of survey responses across research waves and respondent type

	Wave one	Wave two	Total
Peer Advisors	27	58	85
Staff	12	17	29
Partner organisations	17	22	39

Peer Advisor Network Programme Theory of Change






Layout and illustration by
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