

STORIES FROM THE

**PAY IT
FORWARD
PLAN**

**GIVING YOUR
SUPPORT GROUP A HAND
TO CONNECT TO BETTER MENTAL HEALTH**



ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals



**Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission**

"Setting up and running a support network involves juggling a lot of different things and everyone at ConnectGroups has made such a difference through their encouragement and support. The Pay it Forward Plan has made a difference in helping our participants have a sense of ownership and making the community more aware of us through signage. Our participants have also had the chance to try out new activities that can help them in their recovery and to become more involved in the community. Having our computer and TV screen on the wall has given us the opportunity to increase our learning experience through visual aids for professional talks and informational TED talks. We have also increased socialisation through movie nights and shared research. Thank you so much for helping us to build a better service for our community into the future."



Jo Brown, founder, Depression Support Network Albany

Thank You

The Mental Health Commission's Sarah Green and Anya Statham for their unflinching support.

ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.

Antonella Segre,
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Project Coordinator

Member:



WACOSS
WA COUNCIL OF
SOCIAL SERVICE
Ways to make
a difference



WAAMH
Western Australian Association
for Mental Health



Suicide Prevention
Australia



ConnectGroups is a
Mental Health First Aid
Gold Skilled Workplace.



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The Pay it Forward Plan

The Pay it Forward Plan (PIF) has been an effective ConnectGroups initiative supporting the sustainability and community-based mental health service provision of Self Help and peer Support Groups in WA since 2011. In that time, more than 170 projects have been awarded to over 120 Support Groups building capacity and strengthening service delivery.

Project planning and delivery is informed by 'The Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025', 'Suicide Prevention 2020', and 'Prevention First – A Prevention and Promotion Framework for Mental Health'.

PIF targeted Self Help and Support Groups (SHSG) with a focus on mental health; projects needed to clearly demonstrate:

1. Promotion of mental health, prevention of mental health problems and/or illness
2. A recovery approach
3. Increased awareness, learning and sustainability of mental health
4. Relationship building and community belonging

Continuous improvement and relationship building were critical components of the Pay it Forward Plan optimising stakeholder access to the program, articulating the value of the small grants program to the sustainability of peer Support Groups, creating confidence in the collaborative approach to the submission process, and encouraging projects to further the PIF Plan's goals to positively impact mental health across WA.

Each successful project was subject to impact evaluation and service outcome measurement through application of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) evaluation tool. RBA generated the metrics needed to demonstrate the Pay it Forward Plan as evidence-based and a good practice model.

The Pay it Forward Plan also prioritised a workforce development initiative. Providing scholarships toward a Certificate IV in Community Services qualification validated and enhanced the existing skillsets of Support Group leaders and facilitators. Data indicated that

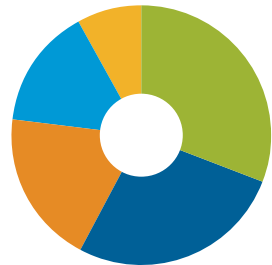


confidence within the cohort to support the mental health needs of their membership was significantly higher following participation in the program. A key outcome of the Cert IV scholarship program was increased workforce opportunities in the wider community services sector for peer Support Group leaders and facilitators.

Grants Awarded 2017-18

1. 52 submissions received across two funding rounds
2. 26 grants approved
3. \$376,553.26 total amount requested from 52 submissions
4. \$89,643.00 funds allocated to 26 grants
5. \$16,800.00 allocated to 10 Certificate IV scholarships

Marketing and Promotion	31%
Capacity Building and Sustainability	27%
Multiple Categories	19%
Customised Project	15%
Information Technology	8%



The Pay it Forward Plan is a unique opportunity for mental health-focused peer Support Groups to obtain small grants funding to ensure their long-term sustainability, to support the mental health journey of their members, and to upskill. By promoting best practice at every stage, the Pay it Forward Plan continued to demonstrate that limited funds can lead to exceptional outcomes.

These are some of their stories.

Story 1

ARMS WA - Association Representing Mothers Separated from Children by Adoption



Areas of Impact

- A recovery approach
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health

ARMS is a not-for-profit organisation formed in 1982 by a group of mothers who have lost their children to adoption. The organisation provides emotional support to mothers experiencing trauma and grief as a result of either forced or altruistic adoption. ARMS educates the public about the lifelong effects of adoption on the natural mother and advocates on behalf of those impacted by adoption. The Group provides monthly Support Group meetings and uses trauma-informed peer support to assist members' recovery.



“The workshop conducted on 26th May 2018 was very useful and well conducted. It gave suggestions and solutions to various situations where anger needs to be managed and how to be assertive when necessary. Attendees were asked to complete exercises in which they learned how to identify the difference between assertive and aggressive behaviour and by so doing were given useful life skills on how to express themselves assertively when necessary.”



Pay It Forward funded the Group to deliver two workshops through Relationships Australia tailored to ARMS members. The first workshop, 'Understanding Anger and Assertiveness', helped participants deal with daily living difficulties and recognise post-traumatic stress symptoms, triggers and management strategies. The second workshop, 'Healthy Boundaries and Managing Conflict', supported participants to recognise different types of emotions and how to assertively express themselves when needed as well as provided general coping skills.

The workshops supported members to bond through shared experiences and learn strategies to help them deal with their exposure to trauma. Workshops were attended by adopted adults as well as mothers of adopted children, promoting the opportunity for discussion from different viewpoints. Participants reported a sense of empowerment and felt supported and better directed on their recovery journey.

Story 2

Be My Koorda

Areas of Impact

- **Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness**
- **Promotion of mental health**
- **Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health**
- **Relationship building and community belonging**



Be My Koorda is a peer Support Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers of children with autism and other disabilities. The Group provides networking, advocacy and information for members, and operates to reduce the

isolation experienced by parents and carers, encouraging community engagement and befriending. Be My Koorda, meaning 'Be my Friend' in Noongar language, is based in the southeast metro area and conducts activities for children, peer support, and respite for parents and carers. Be My Koorda advocates for planning and inclusion in disability services at a local, state, and national level on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Pay it Forward funded a respite trip for mothers and carers of children with disabilities to promote culturally-safe spiritual healing, connection and self-care, to strengthen their relationship with South West Aboriginal Medical Service (SWAMS) carers, to share experiences of their journey, and to provide peer support through women's business. Thirty (30) women participated in the respite and engaged in activities including mindfulness, breathing techniques and meditation, art therapy, traditional basket weaving techniques and language teachings. The respite trip allowed participants a break from their caring role and gave them strengthened insight into managing their mental wellbeing. The basket weaving, a traditional women's business activity, got the

"I recently had the chance to attend a weekend camp with Be My Koorda. I have an amazing 18 year old daughter with Cerebral Palsy. During the years, I have never used respite for me or for her, her support and care needs are very high and I don't feel comfortable handing her to people we don't know to look after her. When I heard about the camp I said to Evelyn that I couldn't go as I couldn't leave Lisa, and Evelyn's response was "bring her!" This is why we need more Aboriginal disability services, that level of flexibility and catering for individual families and needs is so important and can mean we can participate in support services. I was able to bring both my daughters. We all got to do the activities and when we needed to go back to the room and either rest or provide care for Lisa, we could. Whatever we needed as a family was supported. The other women were so kind and inclusive of us and our needs, and it felt like it should feel, that we belonged. Thank you so much to Evelyn and her helpers, you were amazing and we had a great time."

Tania Harris



women talking and working together. Participants reported an increased perception of their value and worth to themselves, to their children, and to their community.



Keeping Ngunjar Language alive



Story 3

Blackwood Parent Support Group

Areas of Impact

- **Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness**
- **Promotion of mental health**
- **Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health**
- **Relationship building and community belonging**

The Blackwood Parent Support Group is a network of parents of children coping with issues including disability, mental illness, social anxiety and depression in the Blackwood region of South West WA. The Group's objective is to support and sustain good mental health management for families by providing peer support, community, and recreational activities. Offering education through workshops and self-help programs together with mindfulness and social activities, the group uses innovative strategies to keep their members in the best mental health possible.

Pay It Forward funded the 'Therapy Place' anxiety awareness and prevention program through two workshops focused on parents and carers, and their children. The first workshop, aimed at parents and carers, shared knowledge, awareness and recognition of good mental health through identifying triggers, and implementing coping strategies including aromatherapy, art therapy, yoga and mindfulness.

The second workshop involved effective communication strategies between children and their parents or carers, sharing techniques that children could understand and relate to.

"I have a child who has special needs and didn't necessarily see that we were experiencing much anxiety in our household. After 1 hour of the workshop my opinion and knowledge of this has changed."



The workshops provided positive tools for maintenance of good mental health to the local community where opportunity for information and services is limited, and isolation is common. Participants were able to connect with each other in a supportive environment and were grateful to have the service available locally. The Blackwood Parent Support Group increased their membership through the workshops helping to reduce stigma around help-seeking behaviours in the community.

“To have this in my local town was fantastic and eased my general burden of always needing to travel to further my knowledge and attend appointments in relation to my child which in itself has caused much stress in the past”

Story 4

Blepharospasm Australia Inc.



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- A recovery approach
- Promotion of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Blepharospasm Australia Inc. is a charity established to support sufferers of a rare condition, Benign Essential Blepharospasm (BEB). BEB is a debilitating condition whereby the muscles controlling the eyelids malfunction causing the sufferer to become effectively blind. This condition is not widely known among medical practitioners and can take years for diagnosis and effective treatment. Prior to diagnosis, many sufferers experience depression and anxiety struggling to manage daily activities. Blepharospasm Australia Inc. provides ongoing support to those living with BEB with regular meetings providing education and peer support.

Pay It Forward funded Blepharospasm Australia Inc. for marketing materials to raise awareness of BEB amongst GPs, opticians, optometrists, and pharmacists to help to shorten the diagnosis period and promote access and referrals to the Support Group. Venue hire was also funded for guest speakers to educate Support Group members on developments in condition treatment, as well as banners for health and mental health promotion at events and information sessions.



“When this debilitating condition we now know as Blepharospasm (BEB) strikes it’s like the curtain coming down on your life. When the medical professionals that you go and see don’t know what it is and can’t go past the common dry eye problem that most older people have, there is a desperation that sets in depression and despair close in which effects not only you but your partner and other family members. Because the diagnosis period for me was more than two years this mental stress just escalated till I was able to get some initial treatment, even then, lack of experience on behalf of the specialist didn’t fix the problem and another 6 month’s passed before I finally received the sanity-saving injections. During that period I read a press article by Leslie Reynolds the founder of the Blepharospasm support group, who invited me to a meeting to meet other sufferers. For me that was the turning point when I realized that other people suffer too and we are not insane. I’m now a regular participant in all their events and activities which help keep me sane. My story is quite common amongst the sufferers we meet and they all say that the biggest step back to mental health is getting an accurate diagnosis and knowing where to go for effective treatment. The work that the support group does is invaluable, saved my life and helps me live a normal existence.”

Jan Henderson

The goal of the marketing campaign was to shorten the diagnosis period of BEB. After diagnosis, sufferers of BEB experience reduced stress levels and mental health risk by accessing treatment options and learning to manage their condition. Over 600 medical professionals in WA were contacted as part of the marketing campaign resulting in increased traffic to the Blepharospasm Australia Inc. website and an increase in Support Group membership.

Story 5

Depression Support Network Albany



Areas of Impact

- A recovery approach
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Depression Support Network Albany (DSN) is a peer Support organisation in Albany in the Great Southern region of WA, advocating, supporting, and educating people to manage and recover from depression and suicidality. The Group promotes awareness of mental health in the community and provides support to members through peer groups, peer counselling and phone support, meals, group activities and social events.

Pay It Forward funded signage for the Depression Support Network building to better promote the Group's location and raise awareness and visual recognition of DSN to the wider community. The signage also gave members a sense of stability and permanence in the location of the Group. This greater sense of permanence has contributed to a feeling of belonging and ownership and has made people feel more optimistic and safe in their use of the Group.

"Our newest participant stated that he had given up hope and was planning to commit suicide when he was on his way home from a funeral. He was driving around in our area and saw the sign. He decided to give life another chance and come in to see us. He is now planning to attend regularly and says he feels safe and comfortable with us. He commented on how friendly our people all are and that he feels cared for and protected by our staff. We continue to work with him and feel positive about working with him on an ongoing basis."



DEPRESSION SUPPORT

Network Albany Inc.

TUES-THURS 10AM-3PM

If you are interested in joining our group please call:

08 9842 1439 or 0428 289 578

dsnalbany.com.au



Since installing the new sign, membership has risen and attendance at Group meetings and activities has increased. Increased participation indicates that the Depression Support Network has been successful in reaching more of the at-risk Albany and wider community. Hospital and Community Mental Health referrals are more consistently making contact with DSN because of the clear signage. Creating a more positive sense of ownership and wellbeing has supported peer facilitators to talk safely with participants about working together on their recovery journey, educating their friends and families, and people in the community who might not otherwise understand depression.

Story 6

Doors Wide Open



Areas of Impact

- A recovery approach
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging



Doors Wide Open is a grassroots organisation providing support, crisis care, advocacy and information to family and friends of methamphetamine addicts, filling a gap between when a family or person struggling with addiction is wanting help and when they are actually able to receive help. Based in Bunbury in the South West of WA,

"I came to DWO with my son after he had spent time in detox and rehab. We came in to the centre not really knowing what to expect, but we were trying to seek as much help as possible. We were warmly welcomed by the 3 ladies with no judgement and open ears and hearts. As a mother of a recovering drug addict sometimes the attention and need can be for the addict, but that extends much more to the parents and family with DWO. I have found a place where I can be myself, be accepted, encouraged, supported and loved. The existence of DWO is an organisation that is much needed in our community and in our homes. Without them I would feel isolated and without comfort and support. They have given my son and I purpose, focus and a vision for our future." E.L.



the Group works closely with drug recovery support services in the region including GP's, counsellors, psychologists, youth workers, social workers, Child Protective Services, and rehabilitation centres building referral pathways to ensure a family or addict is able to receive the professional help and peer support needed to rebuild their physical and mental health.

Pay It Forward funded promotional materials including D/L flyers, roadside banners and T-shirts for their volunteers to raise awareness of Doors Wide Open and their service provision. As part of the marketing campaign, 10,000 flyers were strategically distributed throughout the South West to GP's offices, hospitals, government agencies and community organisations.

Doors Wide Open have increased their membership and referrals by 40% since the campaign, and community awareness and recognition of the organisation grew rapidly. This response has allowed Doors Wide Open to reach more people dealing with addiction in the community, and assist them and their families to receive peer support, care and information. By reaching out to the families and friends, Doors Wide Open is also able to share knowledge and understanding of addiction cycles and support families to positively handle their relationship with an addict, improving outcomes for both.

Story 7

Epilepsy WA



Areas of Impact

- **Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness**
- **A recovery approach**
- **Relationship building and community belonging**

Epilepsy WA was established in 1963 to support people living with epilepsy in Western Australia. The Group works to raise awareness of epilepsy in the community helping to reduce stigma of the condition, and provides information, advocacy and support to people living with epilepsy, and their carers through peer Support Groups and other mediums. Epilepsy WA is rolling out peer Support Groups across regional WA to expand their service provision to people living with epilepsy and their families.

As a point of early intervention, Epilepsy WA supports people in crisis, impacting the depression and social isolation experienced by people newly on their epilepsy journey. Having a network of peer Support Groups increases the opportunity for meaningful connection with others living with epilepsy. Peer Support is critical for people living with epilepsy; early intervention and support mitigates associated mental health issues.





“It was wonderful to see the relief come into my granddaughter’s eyes at finding support and understanding in the group. The groups are well structured and encouraging for all. The group facilitator had an intuitive feel for what she (my granddaughter), and the group, needed. There was a purpose and it was so lovely.”

Pay It Forward funded a targeted marketing campaign to redesign and distribute Epilepsy WA’s information brochures to Medical Centres across Western Australia. The Group engaged Tonic Health Media, Australia’s largest health and wellbeing network, to distribute and continually restock the new brochures to over 260 Medical Centres for one year to drive traffic to the Epilepsy WA website, social media, and to help expand the EWA peer Support Group network.

Epilepsy WA has experienced significant growth in the past year, since the marketing campaign began, with a 100% increase in paid memberships, an increase in attendance at all Support Group meetings including a 150% increase in attendance at the Joondalup group. Epilepsy WA has also been able to establish three new monthly Support Groups in regional areas of Manjimup, Rockingham and Bunbury.

Story 8

Henri Nouwen House

Areas of Impact

- **Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness**
- **A recovery approach**
- **Promotion of mental health**
- **Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health**
- **Relationship building and community belonging**



Henri Nouwen House is a not-for-profit organisation based in Bridgetown in the South West of WA providing recovery-oriented programs and services to people with mental health and AOD-related issues. Henri Nouwen House provides ongoing education, support, inspiration, encouragement and counselling to help people in crisis make the changes needed to become healthy, functioning family and community members. Weekly peer Support Group meetings provide information through a structured program with fourteen (14) rotating themes including family dynamics, boundaries, chemical dependency, denial, caretaking, detachment, grief and loss, self-responsibility, powerlessness, and self-esteem. Participants are often empowered to assume group facilitation to help others through the program.



Pay It Forward funded graphic design for rebranding the organisation to increase visual recognition in the wider community, website refresh and hosting, and promotional materials. New marketing collateral, respecting twenty-five years of history delivering services in the Bridgetown region, allowed Henri Nouwen House to reach broadly into the community as well as target service providers including General Practices, justice services, mental health agencies, family centres and schools increasing awareness of the local support available.

Henri Nouwen House has experienced an increase in membership since the project was implemented. The rebrand, website refresh, and promotional materials have increased knowledge of the organisation, and its programs and services leading to increased group participation and better community mental health and AOD outcomes.



"I never knew what Henri Nouwen House was all about or who Henri Nouwen was. But reading all the info on your website I now know more about it and have met someone connected. I know if I, or someone I knew was in distress, I could at least ring and know I could find help."

Story 9

ADHD Western Australia Inc (formerly Learning and Attentional Disorders Society of WA)



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- A recovery approach
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

ADHD Western Australia Inc. (ADHD WA) is a support, information and advocacy service for people affected with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and associated conditions. Since 1993, ADHD WA has been providing support to the community through a free helpline, low-fee psychological counselling, and Support Groups for parents of children with ADHD, and adults living with the condition.

Pay It Forward funded the Group to implement improvements to service delivery, and increase the rate of participation amongst members. The project identified more structured formats for Support Groups with content provided from those with a lived experience. Information packs were developed to provide members with control techniques to reduce anxiety and impulsivity, and provide guidance about how to participate more effectively. Marketing materials were funded to enhance community awareness of ADHD as a neurological condition with

associated mental health disorders including anxiety, dyslexia, depression and autism.

This project resulted in increased confidence amongst ADHD WA members by enhancing strategies and tools for living with ADHD. A positive and proactive image of

“Before accessing ADHD WA services I was not hopeful about managing my ADHD. Now I am optimistic and positive about the future.” Greg



“More people need to know about ADHD WA. You can't underestimate how important it is to feel understood and a sense of belonging, its like finding your tribe.”

Georgia

living with ADHD was promoted helping to reduce stigma and increase awareness of ADHD and its challenges in the wider community.

Pay It Forward further funded ADHD WA for development of webinars and online resources. The webinars were developed from information delivered by a diverse group of specialists at Support Group meetings designed around the mental health issues associated with ADHD. This project was funded over two (2) years and included technology to record speakers, and software programs to host and edit webinars, and integrate them onto the ADHD WA website for wider availability. The webinars increased access to information and are a resource for parents, carers, teachers, partners and others who live with, teach, treat or work with people living with ADHD.



“ADHD WA had a big impact on me. It saved my life.” Carol

Story 10

ManKind Project Western Australia Inc.



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

ManKind Project Western Australia (MKP WA) is a not-for-profit volunteer organisation, and part of a larger network of men's peer Support Groups operating in Australia and globally. MKP WA has been operating since 2006, empowering and supporting men at all stages of life in their growth as a man, and their wellbeing. MKP WA has several I-Groups in WA meeting on a weekly basis to provide peer support in a healthy and supportive environment. MKP WA offers 2 education and training weekends for men throughout the year, mentoring and supporting men to develop their emotional wellbeing and lead purposeful lives.

"The I-groups have provided excellent follow up, with good ongoing support. No heavy sell."

Lyndon E.

Pay It Forward funded venue hire for MKP WA's leadership training, and promotional materials to build community awareness. The leadership training was conducted over a weekend in Serpentine as an intensive course, upskilling 18 men specifically in the facilitation of MKP WA Support Groups, improving their capacity and knowledge. Promotional materials included brochures and banners to promote MKP WA in the community, encouraging membership and participation in the I-Groups.

"This is a great initiative, other things I have done don't seem to have the follow up to support..."

Anthony



The leadership training explored how and where a man's victim/perpetrator can impact the needs of the I-Groups they lead. Men were able to safely share their experiences and discuss how they have dealt with these challenges in their lives. The most significant change following the training was the improved capacity of group leaders to facilitate, and the increased knowledge and skills they can share with other members of their groups. Since the promotion, MKP WA observed an increased number of younger men attending I-Groups, and represent an increasing attendee demographic.

Story 11

Mental Health Matters 2



Areas of Impact

- A recovery approach
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Mental Health Matters 2 is a volunteer community group which advocates for and supports individuals, families and supporters where there are experiences of mental distress, often co-occurring with alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and who may be involved with the criminal justice system. The group was formed in 2010 as a response from community members concerned about individuals with mental distress and AOD use who were falling through siloed service gaps and into the criminal justice system. MHM2 supports people by phone, through community discussion evenings and via its wellbeing and education-focussed bi-monthly Families 4 Families WA peer Support Group which runs in partnership with Cyrenian House drug and alcohol agency.

Pay It Forward funded MHM2 to conduct national research to develop an evidence-based report on existing strategies and initiatives for engaging with individuals, families and supporters with multiple, unmet needs. MHM2 describes this engagement as 'foundational' and had

“Many thanks ConnectGroups for funding this fine project. The result emphasises what is at the heart of collaboration and co-design ie: the need to identify and include those with the living experience of serious mental ill health, their families and supporters. Include them, sincerely. This is now known to be best practice but is still not embedded within the sector May all those working within the sector be heartened and supported to continue with determination having read “Foundational Engagement” We can make a difference together.”

Bridget Silvestri



identified the need for services to more effectively engage with these individuals and families to ensure that their voices were being effectively sought and heard in engagement strategies at service and systemic levels. Development of the resource promoted more targeted and diverse consumer participation, capacity-building and successful engagement particularly in mental health and AOD services and sectors.

The Foundational Engagement resource supported awareness-raising and development of strategies by services to more effectively engage with a broader group of individuals, families and supporters and in particular those who are marginalised. It identified and highlighted examples of initiatives, assessed through the lens of lived experience. It positions lived/living experience as a valid and valuable expertise and identifies barriers and facilitators to ensure it is effectively used in service and sector design, development, delivery and evaluation.



Story 12

Northcliffe Connect



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Northcliffe Connect emerged in 2016 as a Self Help Group following targeted community engagement by the Northcliffe Family and Community Centre. Residents had demonstrated

a desire to stay connected as a result of the trauma and anxiety experienced after the bushfires of 2015. Being geographically isolated in the lower South West of WA, factors including few available services and low average income compounds stress for families and individuals.

Pay It Forward funded Community Wellness Workshops and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. The workshops were aimed at

connecting parents to discuss wellbeing and self-care. The MHFA training provided strategies to individuals in order to check their own mental health and recognise others in need of mental health support, specifically around the early intervention of unaddressed distress.

The workshops were particularly helpful for vulnerable individuals to connect and become part of the wider support network in the community. The MHFA training

“Gave me the space (and the challenge) to do something I’ve wanted to do for a while.”

“I found the Mental Health First Aid training so helpful. It changed my perception of a number of “what to do” scenarios where someone is presenting with suicidal/depressive thoughts. I really appreciated that the training was local, as my home commitments don’t allow me to travel for these opportunities.”



was well attended by a range of different people in the Northcliffe community and aimed to prevent mental illness by empowering the community with early intervention tools in order to provide support

and appropriate referrals.

“The conversations made me feel optimistic about the connections within our community.”

Participants were primarily from front-line services that might be inadvertently the best people to respond to someone in crisis.

Pay It Forward also funded a series of workshops to provide

local residents with a Self Help workshop series. Workshops included self-care, music therapy, meditation, yoga, and nature therapy. A crèche was provided during workshops to support wider engagement. All the workshops were run by local providers from the community, and participants were able to continue with an activity which they enjoyed.

Participants were able to connect with others with similar interests through the workshops and were encouraged to stay connected. Having a crèche available allowed mothers to focus on their own self-care and gave them skills to practice mindfulness with their children present. The workshops provided opportunities for members to build relationships and social connectivity, an important protective factor in positive mental health.

“A great energy with [these] beautiful community ladies.”

Story 13

Sirens of Silence



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- A recovery approach
- Promotion of mental health
- Increased awareness and sustainability of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Sirens of Silence Charity was founded in 2015 to raise awareness of Anxiety, Depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicide prevention for people working in frontline emergency services. Sirens

of Silence supports members to manage their mental health which can often be compromised due to continual exposure to traumatic events witnessed in their work.

“This is the first course I have been involved in outside of the Police Force where I had an opportunity to learn transferrable and accredited skills to administer MHFA.”

Pay It Forward funded Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training for Sirens members to support their mental wellbeing, to upskill them to support others experiencing

mental health problems, and to build capacity in those supporting the wellbeing of emergency service workers. The training aligned with multiple strategies



“In the first two weeks after the course my new skills were put to use and I was not only able to identify the warning signs of someone in crisis but I was able to more confidently manage my role as a Police Officer and Mental Health First-Aider.”



implemented by the WA Police, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and St Johns Ambulance to better support the wellbeing of emergency services staff and volunteers. Participants of MHFA training are better equipped to identify the symptoms, functional impacts and recommended interventions for common mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, psychosis, and substance misuse. The training also demonstrated how to best assist a person in crisis.

Participants of the training were able to learn skills to put into practise in the community, with themselves, and with their peers. Participants felt better informed about the impact of mental distress, increased their mental health literacy, and valued the shared experience and recognition that they do not have to feel isolated and unsupported. Many felt encouraged to seek further education relevant to their own situation, and felt optimistic about a mental health recovery.

“Supplemented by my new skills was the myriad of support services I could offer the Person At Risk to get assistance, feeling happier in my knowledge of their services after I had established professional contacts of like-minded Mental Health Professionals, Support Workers and Carers.”

Story 14

Speak Easy Association of WA



Areas of Impact

- Promotion of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

Speak Easy Association of WA is the peak body in Western Australia representing the 1% of West Australians who stutter. Speak Easy run three Support Groups offering information, peer support and coaching for people. Many people who stutter suffer from anxiety, social avoidance, and experience bullying and other unfair treatment.

“Being involved in speakeasy activities since late 1998 as a 19 year old where I was very shy and closed in and had troubles communicating, speakeasy has provided a place where I can come out of my shell and interact with other people who stutter. Share stories, practice and feel a lot more confident in overall outlook towards life. Learn new skills including leadership, raising awareness and team work. Speakeasy has also helped with not being so afraid of doing speeches and interacting at university, at work and in social situations.”

Social anxiety is a hidden element of stuttering and many people hide their anxiety and survive through situational avoidance. The organisation provides peer support in a safe environment, connects new members with Speech Pathologists for treatment, and advocates and promotes the issue of stuttering into the wider community.

Pay It Forward funded new marketing and promotional materials for promoting the Speak Easy Association of

“Speakeasy has been a place where I have been able to practice the speech and fluency techniques in a supportive environment.”



WA at Support Group meetings, information sessions, educational opportunities, and regular speech pathology lectures and stuttering clinics at Curtin and ECU Universities. The resources were made available for members, new enquiries, schools and medical professionals to share information about stuttering and how to seek help; and better supports Speak Easy to improve the wellbeing of people who stutter.

The information brochures and banners had a significant impact with over 100 people attending the organisation's convention in Perth. Members were encouraged to speak about their experiences while others discussed self-acceptance and improved quality of life. The project created a greater connectedness with members and a renewed energy in the Support Groups.

“Speakeasy support group has also been very important at raising awareness of the issues and experience people who stutter have every day. The group raises awareness with schools, in the media and sharing stories with the student speech pathologists at Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities who both support the groups.”

Peter Stevenson

Story 15

Tiny Sparks WA



Areas of Impact

- **Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness**
- **A recovery approach**
- **Promotion of mental health**
- **Relationship building and community belonging**

Tiny Sparks WA Inc. is a not-for-profit organisation supporting the health and wellbeing of Western Australian families experiencing high-risk pregnancy and/or infants requiring neonatal unit care and associated childhood impacts. The Group hosts allied health workshops, provides care packages to those in need, supports families through peer support, and hosts online Support Groups along with providing a Developmental Playgroup. Tiny Sparks supports more than 3000 people each year through their Facebook page and distribution of 700 care packages to those on long-term bedrest or those with babies admitted to the neonatal unit with a long-term stay outlook.

Pay It Forward funded Tiny Sparks for development of a resource for women experiencing high-risk pregnancy. A high-risk pregnancy can render a woman on bedrest for weeks or months; the experience can be overwhelming and it is important to connect with others with a similar history to reduce the long-term trauma of the experience. The resource provides stories and counsel from other women,

offers reassurance and compassion, and a connection with others who truly understand. The Group was also funded for marketing materials targeted at





medical professionals to increase awareness of the Support Groups and their service provision.

This project has helped to raise awareness of Tiny Sparks where stigma is still attached to post-natal depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in relation to childbirth and the neonatal unit experience. Members accessing their services were hopeful and optimistic about

their mental health knowing that they were not alone, having a safe place to communicate their own experience with others who had a lived experience. The Group experienced an increase in membership and participation in their online Support Groups as well as an increase in referrals from medical professionals and high-risk women earlier in a family's journey.

Story 16

Wongan Hills Therapy Group



Areas of Impact

- Prevention/early intervention of mental health problems and/or illness
- Promotion of mental health
- Relationship building and community belonging

The Wongan Hills Therapy Group was formed in 2012 by two mothers of children with special needs to provide support and services to families living in the Wheatbelt region. The Group operates a Parent Support Group, and a separate Therapy Group to assist parents to teach their children skills used in early intervention therapy including self-regulation, sensory stimulation, yoga, emotional development,



social thinking skills as well as rotations involving speech and language, numeracy, physiotherapy, and fine and gross motor skills. The Group has developed a Special Needs Resource Library with therapy and educational resources that

Gianna is a 4 year old girl from Walebing who has Down's syndrome. Her parents learned about the Therapy Group two years ago and since then have been active supporters, even though they live an hour away from Wongan Hills. Her mother, Catherine, reports:

"Gianna has also benefited from the resource library where we are able to borrow equipment that promotes the development of specific skills. As Gianna's skills develop, we are able to keep her stimulated with different items that suit her particular needs. We simply couldn't afford to have purchased all of these items ourselves and that would have been to Gianna's detriment."



can be used to support the development and learning of children with special needs and disabilities. It is the only one of its kind in rural WA.

Pay it Forward funded an online catalogue for the Special Needs Resource Library which included software and support to transfer the print catalogue onto the Wongan Hills Therapy Group website. Having access to view the full range of resources available online, therapists, parents and schools can optimise their use of the resources. Capacity to access resources to support children with special needs in a regional area benefits parents and children by reducing the need to travel long distances to Perth to purchase or borrow these materials. Wongan Hills Therapy Group hopes that by identifying the resources needed online, parents will save time at the resource library and engage instead in the networking space available during the library's opening hours.

The online catalogue has increased membership in the Wongan Hills Therapy Group and their capacity to respond to members' needs. The library has provided opportunities for people to build stronger social networks leading to better mental health supports.

Beyond the Stories - Investing In Our Members Strengths

ConnectGroups is committed to demonstrating best practice and continuous improvement in order to best serve its members and ensure that PIF remains responsive, relevant, and effective. Innovative approaches to identified needs and mental health promotion remain key PIF objectives.



The following initiatives represent strengths-based approaches that positively impact good mental health in peer Support Groups, their members, their facilitators/leaders, and the wider community.

Workforce Development/Cert IV in Community Services

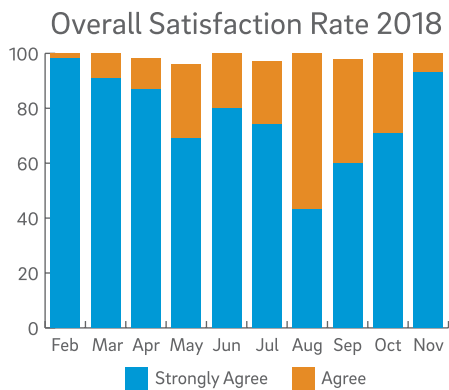
ConnectGroups funds a scholarship program toward a Certificate IV in Community Services as a workforce development initiative to capacity build the sector. Providing scholarships validates and enhances Group leaders' existing skillsets and strengths.

The initiative launched in 2012, and more than sixty (60) participants have benefited from the training. In February 2018, ConnectGroups launched its sixth cycle with ten (10) students receiving scholarships.

Data indicated that confidence within the cohort to support the mental health needs of their membership was significantly higher following participation in the program with confidence levels increased across all measured indicators. The satisfaction metric demonstrated a high degree of overall participant benefit.

An outcome of the Cert IV scholarship program is its contribution to workforce development for peer Support Group leaders and facilitators by increasing their capacity within the wider community and human





services sectors. ConnectGroups recognised the value in supporting the upskilling of Group facilitators and leaders, both to build leadership, and to contribute to meaningful workforce opportunities.

Funds are allocated from the Pay it Forward Plan, which supports the Mental Health 2020 reform to build a sustainable workforce, and is aligned to the recently published “The Peer Workforce Report”¹

Regional Communities Forum

In September 2017, representation from regional peer Support Groups and community leaders participated in a Perth-based half-day community engagement Forum facilitated by ConnectGroups to identify both successes and challenges experienced in the regions across WA. The Forum provided the opportunity for regional leaders who are providing needed services and addressing service delivery gaps in their communities to lend their voices to a Blueprint entitled “Recognising the Regions: From Purpose to Impact”.

The regions have unique requirements, but are generally impacted by a lack of cohesive service delivery, geographical distance, and limited resources and opportunity for skills development or real capacity-building. Regional representation hailed from the Kimberley, the Great Southern, the South West, the Wheatbelt, and the Goldfields.

¹ The Peer Workforce Report – Mental health and alcohol and other drug services. WAPSN: WA Peer Supporters Network 2018

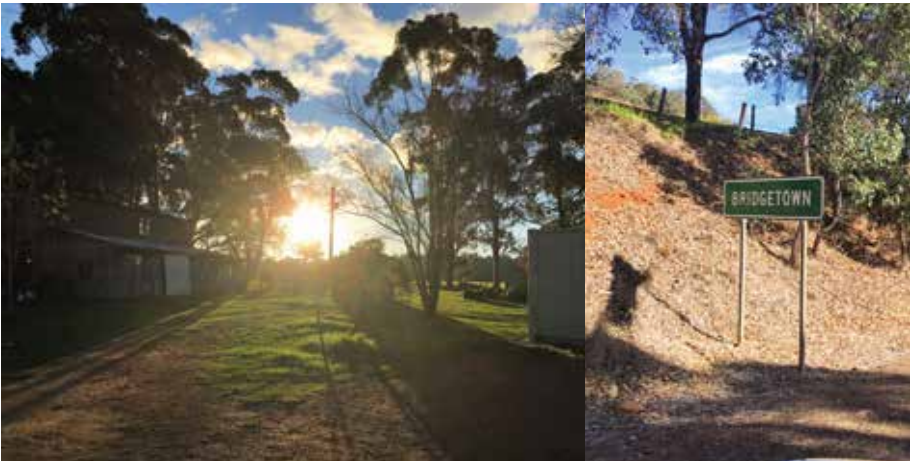
Road Tour Down South 2018

ConnectGroups conducted a two-day stakeholder engagement tour of the Great Southern and South West in May 2018 to strengthen the relationships built with stakeholders over the last three years. The team had the privilege of engaging with peer Support Group and community leaders in Tambellup, Albany, Northcliffe, and Bridgetown.



It was a valuable and heartening experience to meet over a cuppa with the Depression Support Network at their HQ in Albany, Northcliffe Connect at the Northcliffe Family and Community Centre, and with Henry Nouwen House and the Blackwood Parent Support Group founders in Bridgetown.

The trip clearly highlighted the challenges of distance and isolation experienced by many peer Support Groups and their members living in the regions as articulated in the Blueprint "Recognising the Regions: From Purpose to Impact", and the imperative of their service provision to community.





Australian Senate Inquiry Into the Accessibility and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia



In the first half of 2018, the Australian Government announced a Senate Inquiry into the Accessibility and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia, and invited submissions. ConnectGroups filed a submission based on the “Recognising the Regions: From Purpose to Impact” Blueprint. The submission was accepted and published by the Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee. It was gratifying to have the voice of regional and remote members heard, and to advocate their experiences to the Inquiry.

ConnectGroups was further invited to give testimony at the WA public hearing in Albany with other WA-based Peak bodies. ConnectGroups member, Jo Brown, from the Albany Depression Support Network was also invited, as a local service provider, to provide evidence.

Mental Health Week 2018

On 11 October 2018, ConnectGroups marked Mental Health Week with a Forum discussing the positive impact of peer support and social connection on mental health and wellbeing.



"Let's Talk About It!" featured guest panellists: Amanda Stephenson founder of Bluebird Mental Health, Margaret Doust co-founder of H.O.P.E.S – Helping Other People Who Have Experienced Suicide Loss, Rahul Seth founder of Perth Active Depression Support Group, and Kath Budzinska from The WA Grief Centre. Facilitator Louise Howe, Consumer Advisor from the Mental Health Commission led the panel in sharing their stories and experiences with attendees on a beautiful Spring morning under the trees at Piney Lakes.

Representing the Support Group sector and the wider community, participants engaged in a 90-minute Panel discussion and Q&A session, and enjoyed further networking opportunities with the panellists during morning tea. Participants commented frequently about their enjoyment of experiencing an event outdoors in nature. They also experienced renewed motivation and encouragement to continue the work leading their peer Support Group, to progress their

personal recoveries, and the importance of connection.





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ConnectGroups acknowledges the Whadjuk Nyoongar people as the traditional carers of the land on which our offices stand today and pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

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