

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**



"The Pay it Forward Plan provides an opportunity for Groups to access funds that previously have not been available. Funds facilitate the growth and sustainability of Groups, and the development of unique communities for people who have similar experiences. Communities build on connections and encourage mental health recovery and wellness in coming together to draw on each other's strengths, and strategies to manage their own meaningful life. The model eliminates the need to focus on the financial strain of making that happen. In paying it forward to a

Group, the Plan touches the lives of many individuals, their families and the wider community." **Mauz Kay** - Recovery Rocks Community Inc

Kudos: ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc. was a finalist in the WACOSS 2016 Community Services Excellence Awards for its small grants programs: Pay it Forward, Dream it Forward, and Live it Forward together.



Thank You:

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ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.
Antonella Segre, Chief Executive Officer
Christine Hendricks, Project Coordinator
Danielle Kroonenburg, Outreach Project Support Officer



ConnectGroups is a Mental Health First Aid Gold Skilled Workplace.

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Introduction to the Pay it Forward Plan

The Pay it Forward Plan (PIF) has been an effective ConnectGroups initiative supporting the sustainability of Self Help and Support Groups in WA since 2011. In 2014-15, the Pay it Forward Plan shifted its alignment to State policy directions including embedding the concepts of the Mental Health Commission's Quality Management Framework, and its Community Outcomes Statements relating to quality of life for mental health consumers.

Project planning and delivery was further 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'.

The Plan targeted Self Help and Support Groups (SHSG) with a focus on mental health. Project proposals needed to clearly demonstrate:

1. Prevention and early intervention of mental distress, and a recovery approach methodology;
2. Increased awareness, learning and sustainability of mental health;
3. Relationship building and community belonging.

Relationship building was a critical component to stakeholder engagement within the Pay it Forward Plan optimising SHSG access to the program, creating confidence in the collaborative approach to the submission process, and encouraging projects to further the PIF Plan's goals.

Improving mental health literacy was also a key priority. Skilling and empowering Groups acts as a community protective factor, and builds capacity to both positively impact mental health in the community and resilience in the individual.

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

For the last three years, the Pay it Forward Plan has also prioritised a workforce development initiative to capacity build the sector. As part of the 2014-15 PIF awards round, ConnectGroups again partnered with the North Metropolitan TAFE (prev. Central Institute of Technology), to grant six (6) scholarships to Self Help or Support Group facilitators toward earning six units of attainment in a Cert IV - Community Services.

In May 2016, ConnectGroups launched a pilot initiative to support the mental health and wellbeing of Self Help and Support Group facilitators and leaders. Response to the one-day healing retreat was overwhelmingly positive and will become a regular service offering to successful PIF grant recipients.

Grants Awarded 2014-15 and completed in 2016

1. 25 submissions received in one funding round
2. 17 grants approved
3. \$255,007 total amount requested from 25 submissions
4. \$ 90,182 funds allocated to grants
5. \$ 5,273 allocated to 6 Cert IV scholarships
6. \$ 4,000 to the mental health retreat

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

The projects reflected in the following pages represent those awarded during the 2014-15 year and completed in 2016.

These are some of their stories.

Story 1

Abortion Grief Australia

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

Founded in 1984 by a registered nurse, Abortion Grief Australia Inc. (AGA) is the leading national authority on abortion-related trauma and mental distress. From its inception, AGA has focused on community awareness and professional development as integral in supporting healing and mental illness prevention. Often presenting with self-destructive behaviours, relationship problems and replacement pregnancies, abortion grief can contribute to mental health issues that are exacerbated by the lack of acknowledgement and professional help available. Mothers can struggle with unresolved anger, can be emotionally unavailable for their children and can display maladaptive coping mechanisms such as distractive and addictive behaviours.



Pay it Forward provided support to engage part-time administrative support to oversee the improvement of existing service structures, and to support AGA volunteers with the full implementation of new initiatives. Activities included oversight of the crisis line, initiatives addressing male trauma/grief, coordination of the bi-monthly volunteer in-service program, volunteer recruitment and retention, and building networks and relationships with community service providers and partners.



Founded as a Support Group for women who suffered abortion-related mental distress, AGA remains person-centred through its national 24-hour crisis line and ongoing interaction with the community and community service providers. AGA facilitates ongoing training programs and continues to interact closely with service providers to mitigate the isolation and secrecy typically surrounding abortion trauma/grief, and to build education and community awareness about the risk of abortion-related mental distress.



AGA was the recipient of ConnectGroups' Community and Support Tribute (C.A.S.T.) Awards 2015 "Pay it Forward – Best Practice".

"I had been suffering from various mental health issues, such as; depression, anxiety, rage, violent outbursts, self-hatred, self-harming tendencies, and when I had children, difficulty bonding/mothering. Doctors, counsellors and psychologists had tried to help me address these problems over the years, but none of us knew the cause. In fact it was my mum who eventually guessed, and found Rachel's Vineyard (an AGA initiative) for me. Rachel's Vineyard allowed me to both realise the problem, and begin to process and work through my grief and trauma. It also provided the chance to hear from and share with others who had been through the same thing in a loving and supportive environment, and allowed me to honour the baby I lost. It was a painful experience, both during and after, but the relief of beginning to acknowledge and express emotions I had suppressed for almost 13 years has been huge. I am mentally healthier due to Rachel's Vineyard and AGA, and that is good for me AND my family!"

Eleanor

Story 2

angelhands

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

angelhands works with victims of violent crime, including secondary victims of homicide and serious violence. They facilitate recovery from extreme and complex trauma through recovery workshops, Support Groups, befriending, and retreats.

Pay it Forward funded delivery of angelhands' LIFE (Living in Freedom Forever) program to women in domestic violence shelters and other crisis services, who had recently left a violent relationship. The women who participated in the program had been assessed as at-risk of re-victimisation through the continuation of unhealthy relationships and/or coping mechanisms. The LIFE program breaks this cycle by teaching participants about trauma recovery, the impact of domestic and family violence on children, strategies to avoid re-victimisation, and how to engage in healthy relationships. The program was facilitated by trained support workers including child advocates and legal experts.



The LIFE program is a person-centred approach to prevention and recovery from trauma and mental health risk through building peer support networks between participants, and providing a whole-of-family solution addressing the impact of family and domestic violence on children.

The principal goal of the LIFE program is to increase and develop stronger emotional resilience in participants and empower them to recognise the signs and indicators of abuse in future relationships. The LIFE program also aims to contribute to lowering the recidivism and re-victimisation rates in WA through the provision of effective support mechanisms and life skills. These tools facilitate recovery from the effects of violence (including PTSD and other related disorders) whilst also preventing future violence through education and awareness.



Story 3

ARMS WA – Association Representing Mothers Separated from Children by Adoption

Impact:

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

ARMS provide a first point of contact for people confronted with a reunion or with an acknowledgement of the level of trauma sustained as a result of either forced or altruistic adoption. The Group has been in existence for almost 30 years, supports their membership through monthly meetings, and uses trauma-informed peer support to assist each other on their recovery journeys from trauma and PTSD.

ARMS also provides an advocacy voice for its membership, contributing submissions to government and service providers, and educates the community about the lifelong effects of adoption. Many women find connection in the knowledge that they are one of a quarter of a million other women in Australia affected by adoption.



As a mother affected by forced adoption Sue McDonald, and other ARMS members with MP David Templeman MLA, fought to gain the first apology for forced adoption, anywhere in the world. The WA Parliament apologised on the 19th October 2010. This apology led to a federal senate inquiry and formal federal apology by PM Julia Gillard on the 21st March, 2013 and State by State apologies thereafter.



Pay it Forward funded ARMS with the practical support needed to further the governance and sustainability of the Group, including the building of a webpage to better promote their existence, their priorities, and their support.

ARMS provides a safe space for members who are often in great distress. Members are encouraged to recognise that Mother's Day, their child's birthday and other life events can trigger an extreme reaction, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD. With peer support, mothers build resilience to cope with these responses to external events. The work of ARMS facilitates an awareness that the severe trauma of past events also impacts the family of origin, the adoptee, and any children born after the adoption. The initial adoption impacts many, and cannot be ignored as the situation never goes away, but ARMS works to build a realistic compromise about expectations, and to create healthy attitudes and coping skills.

"I'd like to thank the association for the new and more structured meetings. I'm looking forward to the Therapeutic workshops. I would like to express my gratitude to the new member who has been instrumental in advertising, and presentations towards the current success, in the winning of a Grant offered by the Federal Govt. I have felt a renewal of our members' participation and look forward to connecting with our new members."

Helen



Story 4

Connect2Heal

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

Connect2Heal launched in 2014 as a phone and online peer Support Group (via both public and by-invite only Facebook pages) for secondary survivors of victims of child sex abuse. Members are the non-offending parents, families and friends, and meet bi-monthly.

Group members assist each other in a confidential space where they can foster friendships, share information and coping strategies to help journey through a devastating event, while supporting victims (survivors). Additionally, the Group provides referrals to a wide range of professional services, organisations, and agencies.

Pay it Forward funded Connect2Heal with the practical support necessary to build recognition and community awareness including web hosting and domain name registration, logo design, and marketing materials development.

Connect2Heal's support systems help parents, families and friends with peer and emotional support that is vital for many whose loved ones have been abused. The Group helps people understand that child sex abuse is too common and that they are not alone in their recovery journey but connected to others navigating a similar path.

"I'm so glad I've come here and found you and can just cry. I can't do that in front of my children and I have no-one to cry with."

Connect2Heal's long-term mission is to provide peer support by phone, Facebook, their website, and through Group meetings. The Group also plans to build social connections with events for families, abuse survivors and their supporters, and to create community awareness and education about the issue in order to remove the stigma and shame that victims and their families feel. Connect2Heal are in partnership with ISA (Incest Survivors Association) who support their growth and provide access to counsellors.



Connect2Heal was the recipient of ConnectGroups' Community and Support Tribute (C.A.S.T.) Awards 2015 "Most Innovative Self Help and Support Group".

Story 5

Fibromyalgia Support Network WA

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 Fibromyalgia Support Network of Western Australia Inc. (FSNWA) is a support network for people diagnosed with the condition.

Fibromyalgia is described as a sensitisation of the central nervous system resulting in multiple symptoms mainly muscle and joint pain, fatigue, insomnia and cognitive disability. The Group provides support and education for people diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, and works to increase community awareness, including the mental health impact of the condition. The FSNWA holds monthly educational meetings, Coffee Catch Ups in several locations between Geraldton and Esperance, and participates in multiple community and professional awareness raising activities.

Pay it Forward funded FSNWA to develop their marketing materials to continue their awareness-raising campaigns. Approximately 9,000 marketing leaflets were distributed via their membership network to



highlights that individuals with musculoskeletal chronic pain have increased risk of poor mental health including depression and anxiety, and a diminished quality of life. Fibromyalgia is also associated with several characteristics that are linked to an increased risk of suicidal behaviours and suicide ideation.

The FSNWA, although not a referral or counselling service, provide early mental illness intervention by offering a social and supportive environment where others understand their pain and mental distress.



local GPs, other allied health professionals, and country health centres. FSNWA has seen their membership steadily increase as a result.

The mental health impact of living with a multiple needs syndrome and chronic pain is significant and well documented. Recent research

Story 6

GenWHY? Support Group

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

GenWHY? is the only organisation in Western Australia offering peer support aimed at suicide/harm prevention and fostering positive mental health specifically to those over 25 struggling with depression and anxiety. The GenWHY? Support Group was founded in Perth in 2009 and a second Group was launched in 2015 in Fremantle. The Groups are facilitated by a registered psychologist to assure the structure and safety of the Group and its members, and to ensure the therapeutic

benefit associated with non-directed therapy.

Pay it Forward provided support to engage part-time administrative support to build service structures and further the activities required to enhance GenWHY?'s prevention work. Activities included development of marketing and public relation systems, improved consumer engagement, an expansion of networks and partnerships with GPs, mental health professionals and community organisations to further referral pathways, and volunteer engagement and retention.

"I cannot emphasise enough how important on-going psychology, especially in a group setting like GenWHY? has been in keeping me focused and ensuring my recovery journey continues to progress, in the right direction. I have found the GenWHY? Support Group, a very profound and significant influence on shaping me as an individual and providing me with a true identity, in coming to know myself better and also a very important avenue for acceptance and self-belief"

Male, 33 years



The suicide rate in WA is double the road toll, and GenWHY? delivers a unique connected approach to preventing people with mental illness from becoming another statistic. The program of fortnightly facilitated Support Groups, networking events, wellbeing workshops, social activities, and family and carer

engagement, ensure that members receive the holistic support and coping tools necessary for mental health recovery and quality of life.

GenWHY? provides a safe place for members to share and learn from peers as well as gain professional advice and support, and is also an active member of Act Belong Commit promoting community awareness on the issues of depression and anxiety, and providing information on being mentally healthy and engaged in the community.



GenWHY? was the recipient of ConnectGroups' 2013 "Good Practice" Award.

Story 7

Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA

Impact:

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

Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA Inc. (GRGWA) is a Support Group representing 86 members with primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren. The average age of the grandparent is 64.7 years. Approximately 70% of their membership are classed as “informal caregivers”, meaning that no federal government support is received to raise their grandchildren.

“I attended the “Kids & Anxiety” and “Bouncing Back” and IT seminars, mainly to learn how to deal with my 13 year-old grandson, who is very anxious and has lots of issues because of his post-traumatic stress caused by being abandoned by his parents, who are both drug addicts.

I found the seminars very helpful and have used strategies learnt with him. I honestly feel that our relationship has improved because of these seminars. We are much closer and he confides with me a lot more now. I feel I understand him more and he is responding to me in a more positive manner.” Kaye

Circumstances vary as to why grandchildren enter full time grandparent care, but they all come from situations of parental discord resulting in displacement, anxiety and trauma of different types and levels. Grandchildren come into care with high levels of anger and anxiety, and many grandparents feel ill-equipped to deal with both their own mental health, and raising these at-risk children in the highly technical world of the 21st century.



Pay it Forward provided support for GRGWA's membership's mental health and wellbeing by funding training/upskilling opportunities around building resilience in children, strategies for managing anxiety and depression, and IT training workshops to promote improved technical interaction with their grandchildren.

The Support Group organises monthly membership meetings, morning teas, and respite activities. Positive long-term mental health outcomes for both grandparents, and the grandchildren in their care, leads to a stronger community. The services delivered by GRGWA provide relief from social isolation, and strategies to better understand, identify, and manage the mental health issues of at-risk children and equally at-risk grandparent-carers.



Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren was the recipient of ConnectGroups' 2013 “Pay it Forward Plan Award”.

Story 8

H.O.P.E.S. – Helping Other People who have Experienced Suicide Loss

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

H.O.P.E.S. is a Support Group founded and facilitated by six women with a lived experience of loss to suicide. The Group provides peer support to those bereaved by suicide, to help them feel understood, to be companions in their grief, and to offer their own life stories as hope for the future. Founding members have been trained by ARBOR (Active Response Bereavement Outreach). H.O.P.E.S. fills a gap in post-vention service provision by delivering on-going peer support.

Trauma to survivors of suicide leaves them highly vulnerable to the onset or exacerbation of mental health problems and can lead to suicidal ideation. H.O.P.E.S reduces the risks to survivors by helping identify

and understand the event and its effects including: abandonment, guilt, fear and betrayal.

Pay it Forward funded H.O.P.E.S. with the practical support needed to advance the governance and sustainability of the Group, including building a webpage, the development of marketing materials to better promote their existence, and public liability insurance to conduct their activities.



H.O.P.E.S. focuses on a recovery approach through a framework of lived experience on which the recovering bereaved can lean. The Group provides a safe and continuous place of comfort and belonging. Survivors' isolation is decreased by being understood and supported by others who have learned to live new and fulfilling lives after a suicide loss. Through their lived experience, H.O.P.E.S. offers 'small steps' ideas for learning to live without the loved one, steps that are proven and safe. Recovery is a re-build for survivors as they cannot go back, only by identifying new ground and new ways of being, can they learn a new normal.



Story 9

The Lorikeet Centre

Impact:

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

The Lorikeet Centre is a service of the Mental Illness Fellowship of WA (MIFWA). The Centre is a psychosocial rehabilitation centre that supports people to set their own recovery goals. They have over 600 members, most living with severe mental illness including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

By engaging in meaningful activities, members gain more independence and self-esteem. Members and staff work side by side to manage all operations of the Centre, providing an opportunity to contribute in significant and meaningful ways. This model seeks to demonstrate that people with a mental illness can successfully live productive lives and work in the community, regardless of the nature or severity of their mental illness.

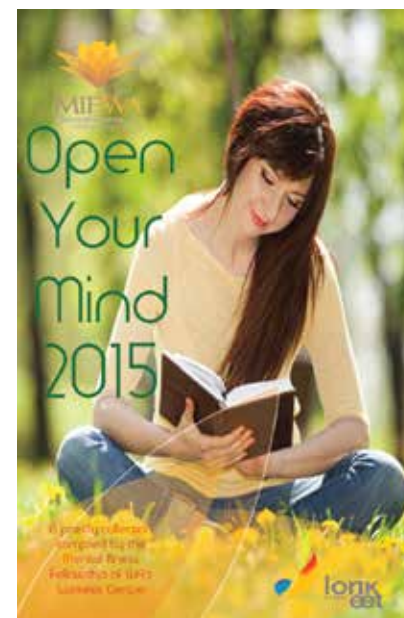
Pay it Forward funded, for a third time, publishing of the Centre's inspiring and empowering "Open Your Mind" book of poetry. The poems were all original works by people living in Western Australia with a mental illness, or by a carer, and were composed within the



last 12 months. The subject was based on the theme used during Mental Health Week 2014 "Making a Move Towards Better Mental Health", and over 100 poems were received for consideration from Derby to Esperance. The final book of 82 poems was launched during Schizophrenia Awareness Week, and several authors were given the opportunity to read their poems in community settings.

The poetry books were distributed to local, state and federal governments, hospitals, allied health providers, libraries, and local Councils. The book is an important tool to de-stigmatise mental illness, and presented an opportunity to connect consumers with community.

"I really enjoy writing poetry and seeing my poems in the "Open Your Mind" poetry book. I first started writing poems when I was told about the book and I am now doing creative writing. When I am bored or feeling depressed I write poems."



Story 10

Mental Health Matters 2/Families 4 Families WA

Impact:

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

Families 4 Families WA (F4FWA) is a peer-based, recovery-focused, support and educational group for families and supporters of individuals who experience multiple, unmet needs which include ongoing mental distress, problematic alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, and criminal justice involvement.

Family members from Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2), a volunteer community action and advocacy group, reported experiencing stigma, discrimination and lack of understanding in mainstream Support Groups. They found that these Support Groups tended to support those families where there was one dominant issue (mental health or alcohol and other drugs) but not when there was a co-occurring issue which sometimes included criminal justice involvement. In response to this unmet need, F4FWA was launched in 2011 by MHM2. In 2012, MHM2, in partnership with Cyrenian House drug and alcohol agency, developed and expanded the Support Group to a peer support-plus model to meet bi-monthly and better meet the needs of this target population.

Pay it Forward funded MHM2 to capacity build F4FWA by engaging a consultant to develop an incorporation and business plan to explore expansion of the model across Perth and WA. The plan also positioned

F4FWA as a pipeline for the development of a qualified family peer workforce – peers who are knowledgeable about managing both mental health and co-occurring alcohol and other drug issues. Funding was also allocated to optimise social media to promote F4FWA and increase its reach.



F4FWA is a dedicated family/supporter space that meets fortnightly and discussion is facilitated to allow this voice to be heard while still providing clinical support and debrief where required. The Group raises awareness, from the lived experience perspective, of the issues involved 'at the pointy end', in a respectful, recovery-focused and strengths-based approach.

MHM2 was the recipient of the Mental Health Commission's 2015 Mental Health Good Outcomes Award in the category of "Equal Opportunity Commission Award for human rights, equity and diversity in mental health"

At Families 4 Families, nobody judges us as parents or what our kids have done. Everyone has their own story and their own way of getting through it. I've learned a lot from hearing how other families cope with really difficult things that happen. It might sound a bit bizarre but we have a lot of laughs and share humour about things that would curl other people's hair! I love going there for the people and the warmth, acceptance and mutual support."

Patricia (2016)



F4FWA was the recipient of the 2014 Alcohol and Other Drug Excellence Awards (Families).

Story 11

Northcliffe Self Help Group

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

"I found it deeply nurturing, respectful, calming and fun. I know it might sound silly but I really enjoy having a meal with others, as I live alone and don't cook much so it is nice to get variety. It is good to have something that brings me out from isolation, and I think it is really valuable to interconnect at lunch time. The workshop gave me a lot of hope, like the dream book; and the questionnaires were personal, but also made links to the greater community. I thought the questionnaires were really helpful and helped me to reflect. You could take the questionnaires as lightly or as in depth as you wanted and they weren't confronting. I'd love to have Sarah back again and to continue to do the yoga."

Lizzie, Staying Calm series



The Northcliffe Family and Community Centre supports the needs of their mental health Self Help, and Carers Groups. One of the most important initiatives of the Centre is delivery of family support workshops for the whole community on personal growth and mental health and wellbeing. In 2015, Northcliffe was declared a natural disaster area following a massive bushfire, and the mental health of the community was deeply impacted.

Pay it Forward funded capacity building for the Centre, through professional development and supervision, to launch and sustain a new Carers Group, and a "Staying Calm" Group. The Carers Group meet monthly



and has been successful in engaging participants from the region. The "Staying Calm" Group has supported the wellbeing needs of the community through regular yoga sessions and coffee mornings.

Funding was also allocated to run regular community outreach workshops to promote positive mental health and self-care, to raise community awareness, and dispel myths about mental health issues particularly in the aftermath of the fire.

The community workshops were attended by people living with or supporting someone with a mental illness, and explored the range of emotions that occurred as a result of unexpected crisis and disruptive life events. Participants were encouraged to develop strategies and goals to move forward positively and regain control in their lives. These workshops operated as a community protection and early intervention initiative against mental distress by connecting members of the community following a traumatic event.

Story 12

OCD Support Group

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

The OCD Support Group is a partnership between the Mental Illness Fellowship of WA (MIFWA) and ConnectGroups to meet the needs of people living with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). The Group runs fortnightly and is assisted by a professional peer facilitator. The Group focuses on activities and interactions to give best practice support to its members, as well as information sharing around coping and general life skills while living with the disorder. It is the only OCD Support Group in Australia.

Pay it Forward funded capacity building the OCD Group through branding, marketing and promotion in order to expand its reach and visibility, and supported its stable growth by engaging with a lived

experience recovery-focused peer facilitator.

Many people experiencing OCD distress are reluctant to seek professional help for various reasons including the nature of the intrusive thoughts and behaviours experienced. The OCD Support Group provides members the opportunity to safely share their struggles, feelings, and recovery. Discussions promote hope and optimism, and members have indicated that they are better connected and better able to cope as a result of their participation in



the Group. To have a sense of belonging is a key component to quality of life which in turn reduces their dependence on clinical services, family members and carers.

The Group's promotion and positive messages about the disorder have impacted the self-stigma and social isolation of those individuals living with OCD, and maximised their recovery outcomes.

"The OCD Support Group has provided me with the ambition to work towards having a significant influence on those people around me who are struggling with OCD by providing hope and reassurance that they can still lead rewarding and satisfying lives. I feel great in the knowledge that I now have goals, a purpose and a direction in life. All this would not have been possible without the OCD Support Group."



Story 13

PFLAG Perth

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

PFLAG Perth (Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a Support Group for those who need peer support to help come to terms with the news that their child is LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, intersex, questioning). For most, this comes as an emotional shock, and being with a group of people who have had the same experience is a great support. PFLAG holds bi-monthly meetings open to all parents, families and friends. Meetings often include guest speakers on topics that are helpful to parents and families. PFLAG also have a peer support and information helpline (0404 594 699) that is available 7 days a week.

Pay it Forward funded capacity-building of PFLAG Perth through the purchase of public liability insurance, re-design and development of a website and marketing

materials. The PIF grant also funded thirteen members of PFLAG to participate in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, an evidence-based first response to mental distress, and an important tool in suicide prevention. Additionally, PIF funded the engagement of a consultant to work with PFLAG Perth to develop a Lotterywest grant application in support of critical infrastructure needs.

PFLAG Perth operates in the early intervention space, delivering critical peer support to families. They interact with many allied organisations as part of a strong referral and resource network, and work closely with the Freedom Centre, and Living Proud. Additionally, PFLAG Perth advocates in the community for changing attitudes, removing LGBTIQ stigma, and creating an environment of understanding, respect, equality, and acceptance.



"The great thing getting help is that you also learn to assist others, and this was borne out with the excellent Mental Health First Aid course. Providing the tools to help in a mental emergency is invaluable, and we do hope that these initiatives continue. If we get to help just one person in difficulty, we have had a win. There are so many people that are afraid to seek help, and if you or your family is feeling lost and struggling with LGBTI issues, I would implore you to give PFLAG a chance. They have helped me so much, in so many ways."

Jaime

Story 14

Recovery Rocks Community

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

Recovery Rocks is a peer-led recovery-focused community with approximately 40 members and a steady outreach of 160. Members either have a lived experience of mental health distress, challenges and/or diagnosis or support persons who have a lived experience, including family members, children, mental health workers, and others who support people in their choice to live lives of recovery. Recovery Rocks members support each other through a strengths-based approach of sharing ideas, information, and learnings on the recovery journey. The Group supports members at various points on their recovery journey which may also include advocacy, and contact with family and or mental health services.



Recovery Rocks runs a weekly Recovery Support Group where members explore and learn helpful recovery coping strategies from peer facilitators. The Group also runs a monthly Community gathering to bring members together to connect, support each other, and share their recovery experiences. Both are informal environments that provide common ground, and enhance a sense of community, of being connected, and of belonging.



Pay it Forward supported capacity-building Recovery Rocks by funding a stable venue for both the Recovery Support Group, and the Community Gathering, as well as the purchase of public liability insurance while the Group worked toward developing sustainable governance strategies. The insurance along with the promotional material also provided by PIF, allowed the Group to do more mental health awareness-raising activities in the community.

Recovery Rocks operates from a person-centred approach, where each person has a right to choose services and supports that are helpful to their own recovery, and contributes to their sustained long-term mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, the Group builds relationships between the community, public, and private mental health services to ensure better support for people.



"I have been coming to Recovery Rocks Community gatherings for over 3 years. I enjoy coming along to be with my precious friends as they have given me so much support." Liz

"Recovery Rocks for me is an invaluable social outreach support within the community. I have received advocacy, peer support (in and out of hospital) I have found in recovery rocks that I am more social and have made many close friends which will last a lifetime."

Helen

Story 15

Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Association of WA

Impact:

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

The Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Association support individuals with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, and their families/carers. The Association promotes and develops the care and welfare of persons suffering from the condition/s, and articulates a clear understanding of it, and the capabilities of people living with it. Additionally, the Association advocates on behalf of its individual members when needed; and encourages participation in group activities to provide ongoing peer support.

The Association identified their “fathers” cohort as being at risk of mental distress resulting from the challenges of being the principal family earner, and the father of a child with a significant disability; in many cases, they are also new fathers. Their stress is often suppressed and remains undetected until the point of crisis.

In the absence of supports for these fathers to address their mental health risk, and as an early intervention initiative, Pay it Forward funded a ‘Fathers Camp’ in South Yunderup. The theme of the weekend was “how to keep good mental health” and activities were designed around maintaining positive wellbeing. During the camp, the Men’s Resource Centre delivered a workshop on men’s health and wellbeing.

The camp raised awareness within the Association of the importance of fathers’ mental health, and provided participants with coping tools and peer support to recognise and manage the risks to their own wellbeing.

Rocky Bay Disability Services now provide the services delivered by the Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalous Association of WA

“We were very fortunate to have former pro-golfer and all round good guy Grant Westthorpe share some of his wisdom by leading a discussion on men’s ‘health issues’. I found this to be both informative and time very well spent. The feedback from the other Dads supports the idea for a guest speaker for next year are already being thrown about. It would be great to see more fathers take advantage of this opportunity to share some camaraderie and a well-earned break. Look forward to seeing you next year.”



Story 16

Tuart Place

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

Tuart Place is a participant-led organisation established by Forgotten Australians Coming Together Inc. (FACT) with a goal of support provision for people who experienced out-of-home care during childhood. Many members of Tuart Place live with depression, anxiety, PTSD, and social isolation. The Tuart Place service model is informed by principles of social and restorative justice, with a focus on person-centred, trauma-informed practice.

The service model also emphasises self-determination and encourages participants to become involved in peer support mentoring, and leadership roles. Tuart Place supports members with complex needs and depends on an active network of referral and liaison services to achieve positive outcomes for their participants.

Clinical and support services offered by Tuart Place to its members include counselling, psychosocial support, life-skills education, IT education, and supported referral and liaison. A number of visiting service providers support Tuart Place to provide psychological services, family tracing and connection, and most recently dental services.

“The new Tuart Place brochure is an invaluable tool to promote the services and support available to Forgotten Australians, former child migrants and members of the Stolen Generation, and to improve their outcomes in the community.”

Ron Love



Pay it Forward supported Tuart Place with marketing materials in order to increase awareness of the organisation as well as its reach. This marketing and promotion initiative enhanced their outreach and public speaking activities, and allowed members to build self-esteem and connect with other Forgotten Australians and the wider community by sharing their lived experience.

The service seeks to provide a place of safety where care leavers rebuild trust in themselves, in each other, in staff, and in organisations. This confidence extends outwards to facilitate a broader trust and acceptance within family and the community.



Tuart Place was the recipient of the Mental Health Commission's 2013 Mental Health Good Outcomes Award in the category of "Improved Outcomes in Seniors Mental Health"

Beyond the Stories – Investing In Our Members Strengths

ConnectGroups is committed to demonstrating best practice and continuous improvement in order to best serve our stakeholders and ensure that PIF remains relevant, effective, and evidence-based. Innovative approaches to specific needs and mental health promotion remain key PIF objectives.

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

Workforce Development/Cert IV in Community Services

In 2013, ConnectGroups partnered with the North Metropolitan TAFE (prev. Central Institute of Technology) and piloted an initiative to upskill up to 10 Self Help and Support Group facilitators per year by funding Scholarships toward earning six units of attainment in a Cert IV - Community Services through the Pay it Forward Plan.

Three years later, the initiative has experienced a 98% completion rate, and close to thirty (30) participants have participated in the training. The success rate is largely due to:

- A custom training model delivered by a dedicated lecturer with an understanding of mental health and the value of peer support
- A flexible and safe delivery model where assessments are conducted within the class
- Classes held once a month at ConnectGroups within a supportive environment
- A culture of support from both ConnectGroups and TAFE



ConnectGroups strongly endorses the value of this peer workforce development initiative as a means of empowering our Self Help and Support Groups, building and contributing to community belonging, and promoting the value of peer support.



In December 2015, ConnectGroups graduated its 3rd class of students. In March 2016, ten (10) new Group facilitators and leaders were awarded Scholarships.

Funding the Scholarships builds capacity in the sector, and contributes to the workforce development of peer support workers. The initiative supports Action Area 8 of the Mental Health 2020 reform to build a sustainable workforce.

The initiative is also aligned to the “Plan” (**the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 – Better Choices. Better Lives.**) principles:

1. Keeping People Connected and Close to Home

Strategy: Promote the Expansion of Recovery-Focused Mental Health Community Support Services

2. System-Wide Reform

Strategy: System Integration and Navigation

Nationally, this initiative is also consistent with advocated reform as referenced in the **National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2011:**¹

Outcome Area 2

Building Capacity for workforce innovation and reform Objective 2.2

¹ Mental Health Workforce Advisory Committee, “National Mental Health Workforce Strategy”, May 2011, 13.



The Mental Health Healing Retreat

Self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch. -Parker J Palmer

Our Self Help and Support Group facilitators are some of the hardest working people. They are managing jobs, families, life obligations, and are committed to the complex role associated with managing or facilitating a Support Group. They look after many things....but who looks after them?

ConnectGroups recognised the role that Support Group facilitators, leaders and committee members play in managing activities and ensuring the sustainability of their Support Group, and in response launched a new initiative in 2016 for past and present Pay it Forward grant recipients – a one day complimentary healing retreat at the Canning River Eco Education Centre. This initiative was funded through the Pay it Forward Plan.

“Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to attend the one-day retreat. It was informative and enlightening. It has occurred to me since yesterday that at ConnectGroups I am with like-minded people, ie those who regularly give their time and knowledge to help others and who, like me, have probably done so in order to deal with extreme loss, grief and pain that has to be lived with on a daily basis. Being with other Support Group workers therefore becomes an affirmation that I am not alone in wanting to give something back to society by helping others who may also be suffering. Yesterday also gave me cause to reflect upon how many associates I have with whom I never discuss what I do because I know they would simply not understand. Thank you once again for allowing me a little more introspection about who I am and why I do what I do.”



The retreat was themed “Courage to Lead” and was facilitated by Anne Courtney and Michael Prince, experienced leadership coaches. Throughout the day, 20 participants explored their self-knowledge and inner wisdom, learned healthy ways to hold the tensions inherent in a life of service, and discovered ways to increase optimism around their physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

The retreat was extremely well-received and will become a regular service offering to our Pay it Forward grant recipients as part of ConnectGroups’ commitment to responsive continuous improvement to our stakeholders.

Courage
TO Lead®

Suicide Prevention Initiative: Delivery of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

Mental health literacy is defined as “knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention”.² It is a key component in reducing stigma and improving wider community attitudes around mental illness and evidence-based mental health care.

Within the Self Help and Support Group framework, good mental health literacy influences active self-management, willingness to access supports and services, and empowers and builds resilience in the individual.

Evidence indicates that major risk factors contributing to current rates of suicide include mental illness and interpersonal factors that diminish a person’s quality of life and societal connections. Self Help and Support Groups directly impact those risk factors, and represent priority at-risk populations as identified in Suicide Prevention 2020.³

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based intervention strategy, developed in Australia, which teaches individuals good mental health literacy, and how to render mental health first aid to a person developing mental health distress, or a mental health-related crisis until appropriate professional treatment can be sought or the crisis resolves.



In early 2016, ConnectGroups was successful in its application to the Mental Health Commission, under the Suicide Prevention Small Grants Scheme, for funding to provide MHFA to its members on a broad scale.

Three (3) rounds of MHFA will be delivered by accredited MHFA trainers to targeted Self Help and Support Group members throughout 2016-17.

2 Jorm, A. F., Korten, A. E., Jacomb, P. A., et al (1997a) 'Mental health literacy': a survey of the public's ability to recognise mental disorders and their beliefs about the effectiveness of treatment. Medical Journal of Australia, 166, 182 -186.

3 Mental Health Commission "Suicide Prevention 2020: Together We Can Save Lives", 36. 41



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ConnectGroups acknowledges the Bibbulmun people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our offices stand today and pays its respects to the Whadjuk people, and Elders both past and present.

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info@connectgroups.org.au
www.connectgroups.org.au

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Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission