



ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals

stories from our **PAY IT FORWARD PLAN** 2014



Having a positive impact on the mental health of our Self Help & Support Group families in WA
Kindly supported by Mental Health Commission



Government of Western Australia
Mental Health Commission

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Thank You

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Introduction to The Pay It Forward Plan

The Pay It Forward Plan was innovative from the start. A partnership and financial support from the Mental Health Commission turned a 2011 ConnectGroups initiated conversations into reality. The Commissions trust saw ConnectGroups engage in a brokerage role as a means of addressing the recognised 10% attrition rate of its Self Help and Support Group members. Providing goods and services to support the capacity building and long term viability of its member groups has proven to be a very successful project. In just 2 years, these grants have supported individual groups to provide a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of their group and its individual members.

The project also explored how relatively modest sums could be used more strategically if they integrated the flexibility of a community-informed response with government accountability. Sometimes small items and services have greater long-term impact if applied at just the right time. *The Pay It Forward Plan* is a hybrid model that is able to identify needs in sometimes hard to reach and vulnerable communities. The flexibility of choosing where and when to apply funding can be more effective than larger programs that are not equipped to deal with diversity and change. If the label 'start-up' can be applied to the Self Help and Support Group sector, then *The Pay It Forward Plan* became just that – a start-up engine with gusto.

A wide variety of submissions were approved for funding to cover the costs of goods and services such as: room hire; professional assistance with strategic planning and incorporation; recovery workshops; promotional items and logo designs; assistance with workshops and facilitation and admin and IT equipment. ConnectGroups made new friends and learnt just what is possible when people and sectors come together to support a great idea.

SUMMARY

1. **53 submissions** received across two rounds
2. **32 grants** approved
3. **\$105,014.51** total amount requested in the original submissions
4. **\$65,420.44** funds allocated
5. **14 mental health specific** Self Help and Support Groups received funding
6. **7 Rural Self Help** and Support Groups received funding
7. Grant Allocation:
 - Marketing & Events 44%
 - Capital & Resources 31%
 - Start Up Assistance 3%
 - Administrative Assistance 22%

All grant requests needed to achieve specific mental health outcomes, as reflected in the Mental Health 2020 Strategic Policy's 3 Key Directions:

1. Person Centred Support & Services

Provide support to those with mental health problems and/or mental illness; increase the choice, flexibility and control of the services they receive; emphasise the important role of family, carers and friends in supporting people.

2. A Connected Approach

Between public and private mental health services and the range of formal and informal supports, services, and community organisations to ensure better support for people.

3. A Balanced Investment

Across the mental health system to increasingly provide a full range of support and services from promotion, prevention and early intervention to treatment and recovery.

ConnectGroups worked diligently in partnership with the Mental Health Commission in developing *The Pay It Forward Plan's* policies and procedures to ensure that its service delivery model would achieve measurable mental health outcomes; including prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery.

The mental health benefits to Self Help and Support Groups centred around:

- Providing an opportunity for all Self Help and Support Groups, incorporated and not incorporated, to access funding.
- Ensuring that funds were accessible to Regional and Rural Self Help and Support Groups.
- Addressing the 10% attrition rate of Self Help and Support Groups identified by ConnectGroups
- Self Help and Support Groups and their members being provided the opportunity to focus on their recovery and/or early intervention/prevention strategies; on recovery vs. sustainability and viability; and on increasing the mental wellbeing of members.

The 2013/2014 Pay It Forward Plan has assisted Self Help and Support Groups across Western Australia to receive goods and services that will ensure the delivery of support services, which in turn will have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of their members.

These are just some of their stories:

Story 1

PIF70 Two Rocks Yanchep Assisted Cancer Travels (TRYACT)

Impact: Access, Gaps, Multiple Needs, Self-Care, Recovery, Looking Forward, Person-Centred, Connected Approaches, Good Planning, Sustainability.

Established in 2013, TRYACT Inc. is a not for profit organisation which assists community residents diagnosed with cancer with transport to the many medical, diagnostic and treatment appointments critical to their health. Adequate travel to treatment centres is costly, transit times for patients is lengthy, and the side-effects resulting from chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments can make driving long distances very difficult. Two Rocks and Yanchep fall outside of eligibility criteria for existing travel services so TRYACT Inc. identified a gap in service that needed to be urgently filled.

TRYACT Inc. have also established the Yanchep Two Rocks Cancer Support Group. The aim of this group is to reduce the impact of a cancer diagnosis on patients, their families and friends by providing them with information and emotional support to enhance their quality of life.

The Pay It Forward Plan grant began with TRYACT's initial request for funding to pay for a taxi service. However, discussions that followed saw the need for more sustainable forward planning options. After looking at many ideas, the need for a vehicle that could provide continuity for a service with a subsequent volunteer-based drivers' program being developed at a community level resulted in our eventual grant application.

The geographic isolation and lack of access to treatments for a life-threatening illness was clearly distressing to many patients. High levels of stress and anxiety were evident and they reported this being exacerbated with financial burden. The grant provided the opportunity for a skilled professional to write a grant application to Lottery West to purchase a vehicle on our behalf. This will provide the long-term sustainability for TRYACT Inc to provide transport to treatment for people undergoing treatment for cancer. Through both the transport to treatment service and the Cancer Support Group, TRYACT Inc. endeavours to provide an holistic approach through a happy and caring network to assist those who require a little bit of TLC!

"My name is Mandy I'm 50 years old and 1 week before Christmas last year I was diagnosed with stage 3 bowel cancer. When I was diagnosed we faced many problems, especially financial as the cost of going down to Joondalup for chemo was weighing on me amongst everything else that comes with raising two teenagers and an 11 year old. I was extremely stressed and did not know how we could afford to pay for everything. I met the wonderful volunteers at TRYACT who have people who volunteer on a roster basis to take those in need to get to their chemo appointments. TRYACT has literally been a life saviour."

Mandy King, Cancer patient and TRYACT member



Story 2

PIF55 Chittering Cancer Support Group

Impact: Regional, Gaps, Multiple Needs, Recovery, Self Care, Looking Forward, Person Centred, Connected Approaches, Access, Reduce Stigma.

Chittering Cancer Support Group was formed in October 2012 by Marilyn Morrice. She started the group following her own diagnosis and having identified a real need for health and support services in Chittering for people living with the condition. After attending the Cancer Council facilitators' workshop she decided to start a Self Help Group. She had identified that the long distance between the health and support resources in Perth were both physically and mentally demanding on people living with cancer. The group was formed to support people to support each other overcome these hardships and with the intent of addressing isolation in regional areas. 8 people attended the first meeting and it currently has 11 active members and it continues to grow.

In time the founding members became aware that persons with cancer living in both Chittering and nearby towns were sometimes reticent about going to a Support Group. To overcome the Chittering Support Group decided to develop a social program of outings to attract these people. Social life in regional areas performs a crucial support, networking, community education health management role that goes beyond just 'socialising' for its own sake. However, they also realised that they needed public liability to move out among and beyond their local community. The Pay It Forward Grant directly addressed this need which will allow for future social outings will involve events big and small that provide a setting for people to come together.

"I have had cancer now for 8 years and in that time I have had great support from my family and friends. But it has been the monthly get together with fellow cancer sufferers that has helped me through my treatment. As the other group members have had the same disease they understand better what I am going through and I am able to discuss personal things with them. Also having a specialist speaker coming to our meetings every couple of months has been a great help. By having the meetings in Bindoon I am able to go to most of them as I don't travel too far."

Helen Manning, Bindoon



Story 3

PIF64 Older Women's Network Theatre Group

Impact: Self Care, Recovery, Looking Forward, Self-Care, Person-Centred, Gaps, Connected Approaches, Access, Arts, Creativity.

A love of singing has and expresses a positive image of ageing which helps the members of Older Women's Network Theatre Group to support each other's' recovery from health and mental health issues.

They meet each week to practice singing and to discuss issues such as social isolation and depression which bring these women together. A buddy system works to make sure everyone is looked after. At meetings each member brings a plate of food to share and this often helps to break the ice and get people talking.

The Pay It Forward Plan grant helped them to hire space at The Don Russell performing arts centre and a bus to transport members to the venue safely from their homes. The project worked toward a public performance which was highly successful and gave each member a validation of their unique voice, and the knowledge that they can entertain people while creating a picture of positive aging.

As a peer-base support group the project has significantly helped Older Women's Network Theatre Group reduce their members' isolation and depression and improve their own personal value of themselves as older women. The power of music, and singing in public, has become a focus for these women who use arts to build a supportive community network that empowers, educates and strengthens recovery.



Story 4

PIF68 June O'Connor Centre Wellness & Recovery Centre (JOC) & Self Harmers Support Group

Impact: Self-Care, Recovery, Person-Centred, Reduce Stigma, Connected Approaches, Good Planning.

The (JOC) Wellness and Recovery centre believe people experiencing mental illness have a right to choose their own recovery journey and their role is to work alongside them and to support their choices. Their recovery focus supports people with mental illness so that they can realise their potential and flourish in their community. With practical daily living support and by promoting healthy living, JOC's mission is to help people with mental illness to grow in positive directions and thrive in the communities of their choice.

They understand the benefit of partnerships and recognise the unique experience of Peer Led Support Workers and value their understanding of lived experience. Peer led or co facilitated activities actively promote client empowerment, allowing individuals to feel valued, develop positive self-worth, share their skills and develop new skills. JOC has partnered with the Self Harmers Group whose aim is to:

- minimise episodes/ severity of self-harm or where possible discontinue
- identify and practice more adaptive coping strategies
- understand behaviours and triggers to self-harm
- understand impulse control
- make use of Sensory Modulation items

Pay It Forward Plan Funds have been used to improve and complement the group's journey from self harm to self care. It has helped group members to increase their independence and to take personal responsibility for any superficial injuries, and decreasing the need for visits to the hospital where further distress is often felt when there is a lack of understanding from some health professionals. To meet this need, the group created self care medical boxes so members can learn to categorise: appropriate dressings, cleansing materials, wound closure, and specific items for care for burn wounds.

The group promotes an environment where clients speak freely and share their feelings and thoughts in a non-judgmental and compassionate setting. This encourages a supportive and caring atmosphere for nurturing each other and improving self worth and confidence. The grant has also allowed for one group member to attend an introductory course with SAFE in OZ (Self Abuse Finally Ends) this will allow her to confidently take her place as another support person for her peers.

"I think the group is brilliant, the medical boxes were a great idea. I am excited about my training in the future" – SM



Story 5

PIF 56 Crohn's & Colitis Australia (CCA) – Can't Wait Card WA Program

Impact: Access, Innovation, Partnership, Prevention, Gaps, Recovery, Looking Forward, Self Care.

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis (collectively known as inflammatory bowel disease – IBD) are chronic and largely hidden autoimmune diseases that affect more than 75,000 Australians. Crohn's can involve any part of the gastrointestinal tract from the mouth to the anus but most commonly affects the small intestine and/or the colon. Ulcerative colitis only occurs in the large intestines and usually begins at the rectum and extends up the colon. The nature of these conditions is that sometimes there is a sudden and extremely urgent need to use a toilet. Not being able to access a toilet facility can result in physical pain and embarrassment.

The Can't Wait Card initiative grew out of this need. It is issued to members of Crohn's & Colitis Australia (CCA) who have been formally diagnosed with an inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) to help them gain access to a toilet in times of emergency. Retailers, business owners and venue operators show their support for people with IBD by displaying a window sticker recognising the Can't Wait Card in their store, and allowing people with IBD to access their toilets in times of need.

Clinical Psychologist Jeremy Cass notes: "Societal attitudes preclude people from openly discussing bowel problems. This usually compounds people's sense of isolation and willingness to disclose their condition to friends, family and work colleagues." Some people with Crohn's disease or colitis are effectively housebound for days, weeks or even months at a time when their disease is active due to their need to be close to a toilet. Many frequently base some of their decisions, including where they visit, on feeling confident they will have access to toilets if required.

CCA's Can't Wait Card program is a campaign to improve recognition of IBD and reduce this sense of isolation and stress. CCA applied for a Pay It Forward Plan grant to expand the Can't Wait program in Western Australia. It has increased the opportunity for people with IBD to undertake normal day-to-day activities with confidence.

The grant has already had a positive effect, with a Western Australian store manager arranging for the Can't Wait Card to be recognised, not only in his store but throughout the entire network of more than 450 Reece Plumbing stores nationally!



Story 6

PIF57 Duchenne Foundation

Impact: Self Care, Good Planning, Specific Populations, Multiple Needs, Connected Approaches, Recovery, Looking Forward, Person Centred, Sustainability.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD) is the most common muscle pathology of childhood. 1 in 3,500 live born males in all races live with Duchenne. Founded by parents over 11 years ago, Duchenne Foundation WA is part of a National not for profit charity specifically for boys, young men rare females and their families with DMD.

“Muscular Dystrophy” is a broad term used to label genetic disorders that affect muscles throughout the body. There are more than 50 disorders considered to be muscular dystrophy, but DMD is the most common and most severe form of Muscular Dystrophy and, with no cure, is 100% fatal. Young men with DMD have a life expectancy in their mid-20s.

Diagnosis is common at ages 5-7 years when the onset of physical symptoms become more noticeable compared with their peers. DMD is a progressive condition so the boys slowly lose their ability to walk at around 10-13 years of age and require an electric wheelchair. After the age of 14 the boys slowly lose the strength in their arms and they may experience skeletal muscle problems. Heart and respiratory muscles are also affected and can become life-threatening.

The Pay It Forward Plan grant helped Duchenne Foundation at a crucial time of transition caused by the emotional burnout of its members who must care daily for their children and support each other while trying to remain viable and sustainable. The emotional struggle that Duchenne Foundation's members were facing with the ever increasing workload led to the recruitment of additional professional Board members. The grant paid for a consultant to help the new Board review its constitution and governance to remain a viable group through good planning to support the sustainability and resilience of the group. This process is supporting the self-care of parents and volunteers by allowing them to continue the challenge of supporting their DMD children as a consultant develops new strategies for them to grow.

“Duchenne Foundation is so grateful for the ongoing support of Connect Groups. These decisions leading to transition and growth are difficult and extremely stressful when you are not equipped with business skills necessary to make the strategic decisions to move Duchenne Foundation to the next level. Approaching corporations for funding in a difficult financial climate was holding us back. Connect Groups' support has afforded us the skills to grow. To recognize our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Thank you.

Klair Bayley Chairperson



Story 7

PIF58 Esperance Care Services

Impact: Regional, Person Centred, Connected Approaches, Access, Recovery, Looking Forward, Self Care, Whole of Government.

ReJener8 means to reignite people's inner strengths and talents, so that they can go confidently and purposefully forward, and by doing so generate hope in themselves and in others. Esperance Care Services and ConnectGroups have joined forces in a partnership to provide encouragement and skills for women who are looking at wanting to take "the next step" in their lives, whether looking to re enter the work force, take up volunteering or study opportunities.

Sometimes it can be difficult to gather the confidence and knowledge to take even the first step to toward a new goal. The ReJener8 course assists women to identify their strengths and skills, to build self confidence and provide support for their first steps of connecting into the community, and to ultimately achieve their long term goals.

Born out of the fortnightly 'Morning Coffee Support Group' at ECS (where between 20 - 30 young mums and their families met to connect and be encouraged) it was identified that some more formal training would be valued.

The first ReJener8 course funded by the Department for Local Government and Communities (Women's Interests) was held in August 2013 and received extremely positive feedback and outcomes. Some of the past participants of ReJener8 have said about the training:

*"Transformation – we don't have to live in the same mind-set",
"Challenge for the brain",
"Enabled me to dare to dream",
"We do have a voice, and can step outside ourselves",
"I have a whole new outlook on life"*

By the completion of ReJener8 each participant had identified dreams and goals and a plan to make them a reality. Many of the participants have gone on to engage in further training and study, three have commenced volunteering in the community and two women have re entered the workforce successfully.

Due to the success of this course many requests have been made to deliver further courses in the Esperance community. Because of the partnership between ECS and ConnectGroups, and *The Pay It Forward Plan* grant they will be able to offer its second ReJener8 course which will provide the opportunity for more women to be encouraged to dream, plan and find hope for a future they can now imagine.



Story 8

PIFF59 Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH) Family Support Group of WA

Impact: Self Care, Prevention, Multiple Needs, Recovery, Looking Forward, Connected Approaches.

Familial Hypercholesterolaemia (FH) means 'families with high cholesterol'. People with FH have high cholesterol because of a genetic problem and not because of their lifestyle. They have high cholesterol from birth. This causes narrowing of the arteries (heart disease) which starts in childhood and can cause heart attacks and even death at a young age. 'FH is a common disease but it is an uncommon diagnosis'. At least 1 in 500 people, including children, have FH. 80% of people are currently undiagnosed; that is around 5,000 people in Western Australia.

Diagnosed people also experienced mental health issues around feelings of isolation because of the genetic, rather than lifestyle, cause of their problem. Promoting a healthier lifestyle involves overcoming these barriers as well as educating the public about FH.

The FH Family Support Group of WA's mission is to improve information, communication and support services for families with FH in Western Australia and help prevent early deaths by raising awareness of FH.

The Pay It Forward Plan grant was used to design and print three promotional banners. This mobile information display has been used in various locations including medical conferences (to raise awareness among doctors), health expos, hospitals (public and private), government departments and shopping centres to raise awareness of FH in the community. The goal of the awareness program is to diagnose some of the 5,000 people with FH who are currently undiagnosed, to help them avoid heart disease and therefore any associated issues.

If diagnosed and treated early, they will have, and their families will have, better mental, health and economic outcomes in life.

If you think you might have FH, speak to your doctor.

If you are diagnosed with FH, all your family will need to be tested, including children. The earlier you and your family get treatment, the better.



Do you have high cholesterol?

Do other members of your family have high cholesterol or early heart disease?



Story 9

PIF66 Pulmonary Hypertension WA (PHWA)

Impact: Self-Care, Person-Centred, Multiple Needs, Connected Approaches, Recovery, Looking Forward, Good Planning.

Pulmonary Hypertension WA Support & Information Team (PHWA) is a patient run group devoted exclusively to improving the lives of individuals living with Pulmonary Hypertension (PH). Pulmonary hypertension (PH) is an increase of blood pressure in the pulmonary artery, pulmonary vein, or pulmonary capillaries, together known as the lung vasculature, leading to shortness of breath, dizziness, fainting, leg swelling and other symptoms. It can be a severe disease with a markedly decreased exercise tolerance and heart failure.

PHWA educates and supports individuals and their families while referring them to appropriate medical teams and treatments. The group helps people to overcome those identified gaps when identifying and diagnosing the disease. PHWA also tries to locate individuals living with PH so they can participate in activities and become better informed self advocates on their recovery journey. They have also partnered up with various sister groups to help get the word out such as Lung Foundation Australia. The effects of living with a chronic and often terminal disease such as PH is often devastating to people's mental health and PHWA tries many different solutions to reduce their anxiety and distress including regular meetings, guest-speakers, research and a newsletter.

In 2013 Pulmonary Hypertension WA Support & Information Team (PHWA) was successful in securing a grant from *The Pay It Forward Plan*. As the group is run solely by volunteers largely made up from patients, their carers, friends and family; it needed to become both independent and portable. Patients and carers report that it is a huge relief for them to finally have somewhere to go and meet with other people who are going through the same struggles they are.

A grant of IT equipment enabled PHWA to develop their first website, much needed computer training, an improved quarterly publication, a logo and written materials to sustain the group long-term. The Coordinator, who is quite advanced in PH, needed to hand over a system for other members to keep the group running smoothly.

"This extremely rare disease is still little known both in the general community and the medical profession. The equipment we purchased has enabled us to run the day to day operations with ease and most importantly to produce our presentations, aide in our support groups and guest speakers and publish much needed written materials raising the profile and understanding of PH. PHWA was formed by a small group of patients independent of any other organisation or medical institute and is run by patients. The grant reinvigorated the team because we felt so supported through the process."

Melissa Dumitru - Coordinator Pulmonary Hypertension WA.



Story 10

PIF53 CARIADS (Welsh for 'love')

Impact: Recovery, Looking Forward, Self Care, Regional, Partnership, Prevention, Gaps, Connected Approaches.

The Carers of family members or friends of loved ones with the lived experience of mental distress in the Esperance region have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in the Well Ways education programs. Contributing to Well Ways program effectiveness is that sessions are peer-led, but Carers expressed that the education and support developed through these sessions needed to be ongoing.

Cariads has been developed to provide a peer-led support group to discuss the unique concerns of MH (mental health) Carers in an informal atmosphere using their accumulated understandings to support each other and to build their capacity to cope with their role.

Anecdotal evidence and research indicates that as a result of their role Carers have reduced incomes, and reduced physical and mental health. Many self-stigmatize and do not seek support until a crisis situation occurs.

MH Carers' lives can be particularly stressful. Carers speak of 'suicide watches', accessing clinical and non-clinical services, and managing the effects of mental illness/distress on all nuclear and extended family members, while trying to maintain a balanced life, but without MH Carers the whole community would be adversely affected.

An important first step towards empowering MH Carers to develop their own positive solutions, and constructive building of personal resilience and self-efficacy was to increase their self-advocacy skills.

The Pay it Forward program has enabled Cariads members to participate in self-advocacy training with a skilled facilitator to understand the value of self-advocacy, how mental health self-advocacy is different because of barriers to effectiveness, the centrality of their own self-care, building the necessary skills and understanding how to reframe their personal stories to gain strategic changes.

Self-advocacy training for the Cariads support group has the potential to directly improve MH Carer wellbeing, break down the barriers of stigma, provide hope and support MH Carers (who support their whole family) towards recovering their own life and that of the family member they support.

Building the capacity of Esperance's Mental Health Carers through a peer-led support group and self-advocacy training is an innovative and cost-effective approach in this region to the provision of peer-networking, acknowledgement of their collective, acquired skills that are worth sharing, and an opportunity to develop their own outcomes in a supportive environment. These initiatives will assist MH Carers to recognize and address their own needs thus increasing their effectiveness as Carers for the whole family.



Story 11

PIFF61: The Lorikeet Centre: Open Your Mind poetry book

Impact: Recovery, Arts, Creativity, Self Care, Person-Centred, Connected Approaches, Access, Arts, Creativity.

The Lorikeet Centre is a service of the mental illness Fellowship of WA (MIFWA). The Centre is a psychosocial rehabilitation Centre that helps people set their own recovery goals. They have 600 members, most with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bi polar.

This is the second year the Lorikeet Centre has received a grant from ConnectGroups to publish their poetry book Open Your Mind. Their second edition received 70 short poems, 20 more than their first book. In both years three winning poets received certificates and prizes and all poets received a copy of the book on a special day held at the Centre during Mental Health Week in October, where they enjoyed reading out their poems. The books also went to mental health hospitals, other mental health organisations and members of parliament.

Lorikeet's members say that having their poems published give them a sense of achievement and acknowledged their creative talents. They also say that writing a poem makes them feel better about themselves and allows them to express their feelings, especially those who had never written poetry before. Some continue to write poetry and all poems are displayed on the Centre's walls.

Lorikeet's Pay It Forward Plan grant supported the publication of both editions. The themes are based on positive themes such as: celebrating, connecting, growing, 'my wellbeing' or an activity that has had a positive effect on their mental health. When asked about the effect that writing poetry has on them, they responded strongly.



- "Writing poetry relieves my stress"
- "It deepens my understanding of my life and my mental illness"
- "I enjoy the challenge and the companionship of others in the writing group".
- "It lets me explore my feelings and gain insight into myself"
- "I'm not that good at writing poetry but I feel so much better afterwards"
- "When I write I start remembering good things about my childhood and how happy I was."

The winning poem by Brian:

Bout twice each week I see her, she just sits in her chair
She drifts away quite often, most times she's unaware
That I've arrived to see her, but every now and then
She talks of things of things from long ago, and sadly tells me when
She had a family, she recalls, those many years ago
A sweet and lovely daughter who died from polio;
The other kid she hasn't seen, for twenty years or more
He disappeared from her life, she'd like to know what for
She doesn't know her neighbours, she can't recall the date
I don't think she's eating, she's lost a lot of weight
She asks me what my name is, and why it is I've come
And why I cry and hold her close, and why I call her Mumm.



Story 12

PIF 72 Wongan Community Care Inc. – Wongan Hills Therapy Group

Impact: Regional, Specific Populations, Person-Centred, Gaps, Self-Care, Looking Forward, Recovery, Connected Approaches.

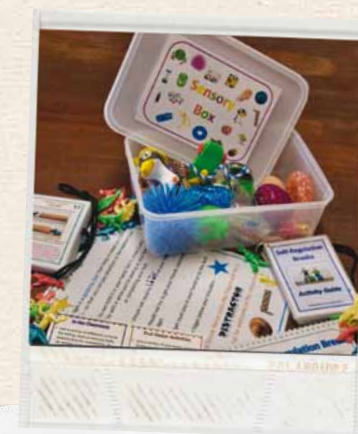
The Wongan Hills Therapy Group is a community support group that was formed in 2012 by a group of concerned parents who have children with various disabilities. The formation of the group was initially in response to the lack of specialist therapy services available locally and members have since dedicated themselves to finding innovative solutions to a difficult problem.

The group spent time researching various therapy programs that were available and that could be run by a family in their home or in a small-group setting with a leader. Australian music therapy program, *You Gotta Get Up*, was identified, which incorporated elements of speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, kinesiology and psychology into a music program.

Funding was gained from a like-minded local community organisation to bring the trainer to Wongan Hills to train teachers, education assistants, health professionals, parents and community volunteers. Following the training, a group leader and community volunteers were found and the music therapy program began in March 2013, open to all children with special needs from ages 2-12. Children who attend now come from Kondut and Ballidu; smaller surrounding towns, and other schools in the district have expressed interest in accessing the program. The program is now into its second year, with overwhelming support from the community, school staff and health professionals.



The Pay It Forward Plan grant was used to fund a Sensory Processing Workshop presented by a specialist Occupational Therapist based in Perth. The group also researched, compiled and produced 20 Self Regulation manuals and an assortment of self-regulation tools in kits used to create a practical and hands on session for teachers, educational assistants, parents/grandparents of children with special needs and community volunteers working in this field. The analogy of the engine was used to teach self regulation (changing how alert we feel so that our brain and body are in the right state for learning) and how to expand these strategies at school and home into an optimal state for learning, playing or interacting with their friends, family and peers.



"The Sensory Processing Workshop was fantastic. I have two young boys, both aged at the end of their year group who struggle with staying focused on educational tasks in the class room for an extended period. I have already started implementing the training that was given in our own home environment, which will have a direct impact on how my boys cope in the class room. Thank you to Heydi and Lorraine for giving us country mums some quality education to help our kids with the challenge of sitting/listening/processing/focusing/responding, all in the confined space of the classroom setting."

Karen Box – Parent & Former School Chaplain

Story 13

PIF50 Mental Health Matters2 (MHM2) – Families4Families WA

Impact: Connected Approaches, Gaps, Access, Looking Forward, Good Planning, Sustainability, Self Care, Recovery, Person-Centred, Person-Centred, Multiple Needs,

Families4Families WA was founded by Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2) in 2010 in response to a gap in support services for families in WA. Mental Health Matters 2 is an unfunded voluntary group of people who through much dedication have earned the respect of the mental health arena in Western Australia and are seen as the only peak family organisation specialising in co-occurring and criminal justice issues.

Uniquely, this support group is the first peer-led group established in WA for families at this very difficult end of the mental health spectrum. They advocate and provide support for those families and individuals experiencing multiple issues which may include chronic ongoing mental ill-health, alcohol and other drug use and involvement in the criminal justice system. Families4FamiliesWA is a peer-based, monthly, recovery, education and support group for families dealing with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues. 'Families' is defined as families and supporters. Families are able to share the collective wisdom of peers and gain new information to aid their family's wellbeing. Their membership is unique as it comprises people with a lived experience of mental ill-health, their families and supporters as well as individuals who provide services to people with mental ill-health in public, private and community-managed organisations.

As winners of numerous awards for their outstanding contribution to consumers and their families at the pointy end of the mental health spectrum, MHM2 are committed to working according to their 5 values of being **Gracious; Resolute; Just; Hopeful** and **Informed**.

Their *Pay It Forward Plan* grant came at a time when MHM2 were experiencing rapid growth in their membership and participation at the Families4FamiliesWA Group. Through a partnership with Cyrenian House, they now provide clinical support at the Families4Families WA Meetings. *Pay It Forward* assisted MHM2 to redevelop their website and an attached database to sustain their groups viability and plan forward. They are now more efficient and effective at communicating with their membership and assisting them to be connected to this group and the wider mental health community. Given that this group identified significant gaps in services this platform is particularly important.

"Families4Families has given me a family of people who understand what it's like to have co-occurring mental health, drug and criminal justice experiences in your family. It's not an easy road but this group is like a life line to our family. We're amongst people who get it and we get great advice from peers who've been there. There's really no where else to go for families like ours."

Trudi Pollard



Story 14

PIF 60 Friends of L'Arche-Perth

Impact: Self Care, Person-Centred, Connected Approaches, Recovery, Arts, Access.

L'Arche is an international federation of faith communities where people with and without an intellectual disability share life together. L'Arche, a French word for the Ark, seeks to create communities where people live a simple life of work, care, prayer and celebration. They are a very diverse group from all walks of life, some of their disabilities are obvious, some are hidden but all of them share in the mission of L'Arche, of changing the world *one heart at a time*.

In Australia, L'Arche is an ecumenical, Christian organization which is not aligned to any one church. All people are welcomed with the right to their own personal belief system. They believe that people with a disability can feel isolated and marginalized in a society that over values achievement, success and physical beauty.

Most importantly, L'Arche recognizes the toll taken by stress on family members living with disability so the focus of many of their gatherings is mutual support, families helping families and recognizing that we are all abled in different ways and all have gifts to share.

Their *Pay It Forward Plan* grant helped them to continue the group's work in responding to the distress of those who too often are rejected, and to give them a valid place in our society. L'Arche decided to appoint a coordinator who could ensure their viability and assist them with better planning, communicating with member and for education seminars and workshops. Having IT equipment was essential to creating this role so that members with lived experience of disability and mental health issues can remain connected. This will ensure the sustainability of L'Arche to continue to support its members.



Story 15

PIF65 Parkinsons WA

Impact: Looking Forward, Good Planning, Sustainability, Person-Centred, Multiple Needs, Self Care, Connected Approaches, Recovery

Parkinson's is a condition which produces three major symptoms: tremor, rigidity (stiffness of muscles) and akinesia (abnormal movement). In addition, because of postural instability, poor balance can be a feature. These symptoms are also associated with disturbance of gait (the manner of walking), particularly as Parkinson's progresses. It can also adversely affect speech, voice and swallowing. It is estimated that there are about 100,000 people living with Parkinson's in Australia.

Depression is very common in people with Parkinson's. It is related to many factors, and not simply to difficulties with movement. It is very important that depression is treated in its own right as it usually does not respond to treatment aimed at reversing the motor problems of Parkinson's. About 40% of people living with Parkinson's experience anxiety with or without panic attacks. If you are living with Parkinson's you may experience dizziness, shortness of breath and sweating as part of a panic attack.

Parkinson's Western Australia Inc. provides a Parkinson's Nurse Specialist Service; Support Networks for people with Parkinson's, their family and their carers; and educational resources and training. They have a large volunteering community with 22 individual support groups across WA, many with 15-20 active members that range from people experiencing Parkinson's to their partners/carers and family members.

Parkinson's WA's *Pay It Forward Plan* grant supported a one day workshops for their support group leaders across WA to look at leadership skills and succession planning. With most leaders also being unpaid volunteers, the workshop confirmed the value of the skills they use and importance of succession to ensure that groups remain strong and viable.

Parkinson's WA also realized that demands on their leaders would directly affect the viability of their 22 groups which provide essential support to people with Parkinson's, their families and carers in both metropolitan and regional areas. The success of the workshop was crucial for their forward planning. By using person-centred approaches to planning they are now in a better position to support their groups by ensuring their leadership remains flexible.



Story 16

PIF 73 Women's Health Resource Centre (WHRC) – Mums Matter

Impact: Self Care, Regional, Recovery, Looking Forward, Connected Approaches.

Mums Matter is a collaborative run program by Women's Health Resource Centre (WHRC) and Goldfields Mid-west Medicare Local (GMML) which provides support and psycho-education specifically to mothers. It is designed to support mothers on their parenting journey, promote social connections and learn self-help strategies using creative approaches.

To lighten the child minding stresses, the program includes a crèche and runs every Thursday morning from 9am to 1030am at the Centre. Each session at 'Mums Matter' focuses on a different topic around information for mothers to help improve their emotional and physical wellness.

The Pay It Forward Plan grant helped WHRC bring to their group the experience and skills of facilitators and art therapists to run the sessions based in Geraldton. The feedback from the women supported the decision of WHRC to use creativity as a learning pathway and the power of art and creativity in mental health recovery.

Each meeting included topics such as:

- Practical Parenting
- Caring for your physical and mental health
- Relationship rescue
- Exercising for physical and mental health
- Problem solving tool kit
- Art therapy
- Making healthy food choice – supermarket tour
- Self-nurture

Many participants have reported that they regularly use some of the strategies discussed or used in the group, such as mindfulness and thought diaries to help them cope with depression, anxiety and stress.



Story 17

PIF69 Neurological Council of WA (NCWA) – Wellness Project Support Group

Impact: Regional, Self Care, Multiple Needs, Recovery, Person Centred, Connected Approaches,

The Neurological Council of WA (NCWA) offers recreational and social support for people with neurological conditions and their carers through its network of support groups in the Perth, Bunbury, Albany and Geraldton areas.

After securing funding in 1995, NCWA expanded its services to provide needs assessment, social support, counselling, information and advocacy to people with neurological conditions and their carers in the Perth metropolitan area. In 2001, the Community Neurological Nurse service was inaugurated in the regional areas and this service now covers the Bunbury, Albany and Geraldton areas and their surrounds. Since Mid-2013 onwards, the NCWA has focused its metropolitan services around client counselling, information and advocacy services with a strong emphasis on the consumer perspective.

Their support focuses strongly on the mental health component of its peer support for people with neurological conditions and their carers.

This includes:

- focus on empowerment, not your diagnosis or condition;
- foster a wellness approach which promotes your independence;
- are self-driven - you tell us your interests, your focus, your needs; and
- are a great opportunity to socialise and have fun with other empathetic people.

Their *Pay It Forward Plan* grant supported them to purchase goods to add value to the Wellness Groups including yoga mats for comfort during meditation, a guided meditation and relaxation CD and balls for sports activities. These relaxation sessions have demonstrated outcomes such as improved sleep patterns, well-being, all-round self-care and a positive mental attitude towards their condition. These outcomes have continued to aid in their relaxation which has helped many of them to relax socially and lessen their isolation.



Where Are They Now?

Our 2013 PIF Alumni are going strong and continue to pay it forward to our community. Thank you.

Befriend

Befriend has continued to grow from strength to strength since receiving the support of the PIF grant. Their grant increased their capacity to respond to the queries of a growing member base. New people continue to join Befriend to meet new people and to develop a healthy social life that supports their recovery. They recently launched the Play Pass, a way to sweeten your social life with discounts on movies, entertainment, attractions, dining, wine & more, that can be used any time, all over Perth. They continue to work towards a brighter future, connecting more people with others.



Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA Inc

Things have improved since Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.) received a Pay It Forward Plan grant for 2013. The Support Group has continued to support grandparents who are raising their grandchildren on a full-time basis. Receiving the grant money for a laptop and printer has been an extra bonus for the Secretary, and more grandparents have been taking computer lessons and feel confident in accessing their e-mails. Their Monthly Meetings, Morning Teas, Picnics, and Bunnings days empower grandparents to keep going each day. Close friendships have formed between grandparents and grandchildren alike, creating a very close family networks.

"Our group will always be thankful to ConnectGroups and the Mental Health Commission for giving us the courage and confidence to keep this support group 'growing forward'."

Sharyne De Young, Secretary, Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Inc.)



Jigsaw and Social Media

Social Media is one way to reach more people to talk about Adoption and its consequences. Jigsaw used part of their Pay It Forward Plan grant to help them set it up and are now slowly building a community.

"We've gone from zero to 147 members in a few months and some of our posts have reached over 500 people. We now use Facebook to comment on everything from TV shows with an adoption theme such as Love Child to the National Apology for Forced Adoptions and of course discussion of many adoption issues. It's also one way for people to ask us questions."

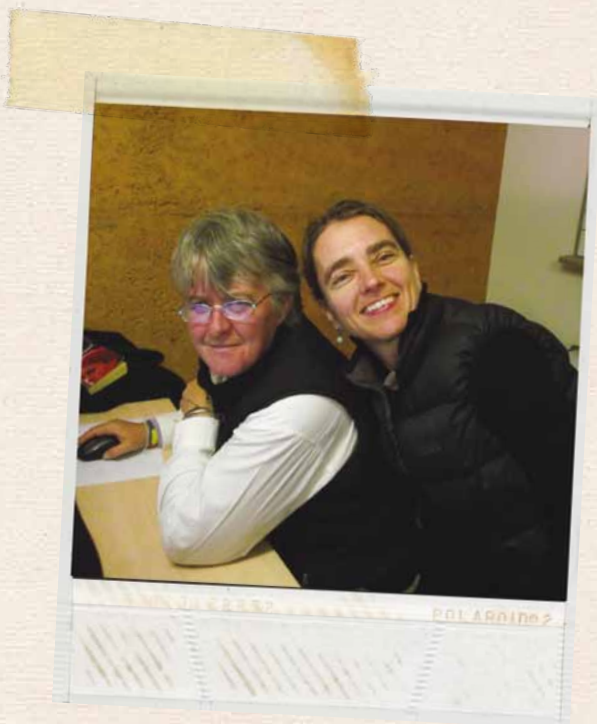
Isabel Andrews, Jigsaw.

Where Are They Now?

Our 2013 PIF Alumni are going strong and continue to pay it forward to our community. Thank you.

Northcliffe Family and Community Centre

"The individuals that benefitted from the workshops on personal growth and development have definitely got a big boost out of this experience. It has inspired new friendships and rekindled old ones. We have wanted to have another workshop with our much liked facilitator Gary Cooper. While indisposed due to illness, he is very keen to work with us again. In the meantime our Self Help group meets on a regular basis. We are planning to have a whole weekend seminar/workshop on personal growth, staying overnight at a venue nearby Northcliffe, cooking, chatting and working together, open to old and new participants." Marion Luderitz, Family Support Worker



GenWHY?

GenWHY? Support Group Inc needed new ways to reach out to people with mental health issues. The PIF grant enabled GenWHY? Support Group Inc to engage a marketing and branding specialist to analyse their current position in the marketplace and design a new fresh current logo and brand to take them forward. The new branding resonated with GenWHY? Support Group members and made them feel part of a strong, sustainable, dependable organisation that has a future.

"The market research that went into the branding was invaluable in giving GenWHY? Support Group a platform to move forward from and understanding of our competitors, customers and the marketplace. The new branding has enabled GenWHY? Support Group to increase attendance at its support group meetings. The PIF grant was instrumental in allowing GenWHY? Support Group to move forward as a professional organisation whose members experience a deeper sense of commitment and connectivity. Thank you Connect Groups and the Mental Health Commission!" Amanda Stephenson, CEO and Founder GenWHY? Support Group Inc.





ConnectGroups
helping support groups & individuals

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