

# 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**

*"If it takes a village to raise a child, then it's important that the villagers are properly listened to, supported and assisted. The villagers / communities of both Mental Health Matters 2 and Families 4 Families WA have benefitted from that active listening, specialised support and practical assistance in many guises through the Pay It Forward grants program. The adept administration and individualised advice, flexibility and encouragement offered by ConnectGroups has helped us grow, shape and promote our current communities. The voices of the villagers have been strengthened by the development and promotion of resources which amplify their voices, which are often amongst the most unheard. We deeply appreciate the care, sustained good humour, patience and attention to detail which staff at ConnectGroups consistently offer and which facilitates both MHM2 and F4FWA to do the work we do. We appreciate that they do this while also helping other villages and villagers to grow too, thereby helping to create communities that care in WA."*



**Margaret Doherty**, convener, Mental Health Matters 2 | Families 4 Families

## Thank You

The Mental Health Commission's Sarah Green for her steadfast support.

### ConnectGroups Support Groups Association WA Inc.

Antonella Segre,  
Chief Executive Officer

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## Member:



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ConnectGroups is a  
Mental Health First Aid  
Gold Skilled Workplace.



## The Pay it Forward Plan

The Pay it Forward Plan (PIF) has been an effective ConnectGroups initiative supporting the sustainability and community-based mental health service provision of peer Support Groups in WA since 2011. In that time, over 220 projects have been awarded to over 140 Support Groups building capacity and strengthening service delivery.

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

PIF targets peer Support Groups with a mental health focus; projects needed to clearly:

1. Empower peer Support Groups to achieve positive mental health outcomes for their members
2. Contribute to the prevention of mental distress and/or illness, and the recovery of mental health for peer Support Group members, families and/or carers
3. Further peer Support Groups' mental health supports to their members
4. Promote good mental health
5. Encourage peer Support Groups' mission, governance, and sustainability

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

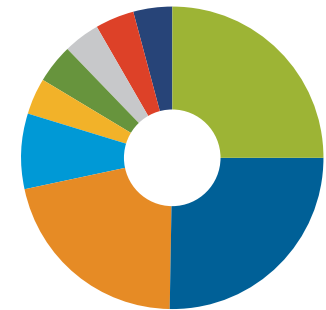
Each successful project was subject to impact evaluation and service outcome measurement through application of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) evaluation tool. RBA generated the metrics demonstrate the Pay it Forward Plan as evidence-based and a good practice model.



### Grants Awarded 2018-19

1. 32 submissions received across two funding rounds
2. 24 grants approved
3. \$203,437.00 total amount requested from 32 submissions
4. \$90,911.00 funds allocated to 24 grants
5. \$5,295.00 allocated to 5 Certificate IV in Mental Health scholarships

<b>Mental Illness/Recovery</b>	25%
<b>Other</b>	25%
<b>Carers</b>	20.83%
<b>Addiction</b>	8.33%
<b>Criminal Justice System</b>	4.17%
<b>LGBTIQ</b>	4.17%
<b>Mens Group</b>	4.17%
<b>Perinatal</b>	4.17%
<b>Victims of Trauma</b>	4.17%



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

These are some of their stories.

## Story 1

### Activate Mental Health

Activate Mental Health (formerly Perth Active Depression Support Group) is a dynamic social enterprise that aims to connect those who identify with a lived experience of mental health issues through engaging in social meetups. The group's mission is "Coming together through recreation" and has the values of acceptance, community and fun. Event organisers arrange meetups including walks, coffee and cards, breakfast clubs, mini-golf, origami, and other forms of recreational and social engagement opportunities.

**Pay it Forward** funded delivery of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to build the mental health literacy and capacity of Activate Mental Health. Mental Health First Aid builds knowledge and skills in the general community to offer support to someone in crisis. It contributes to reduced stigma around mental distress and encourages more community compassion.



*"I'm so grateful Activate Mental Health provide their hosts with the opportunity to receive Mental Health First Aid Training. The program is hugely beneficial to anyone working in the Mental Health field. I feel confident that I now can identify an individual in a mental health crisis and aid them in getting appropriate help. I am now a more confident host, prepared to encourage others in mental wellness."*



Participants gained the knowledge to know how to effectively deal with a situation if someone disclosed something negative about their mental health and wellbeing. By using the ALGEE acronym taught in the training, they could direct members to their GP or other appropriate referrals should a situation arise. This knowledge builds the group's capacity to support members of the community who engage with Activate Mental Health but who may struggle with anxiety and depression or who may experience a mental health crisis.

## Story 2

### Be My Koorda

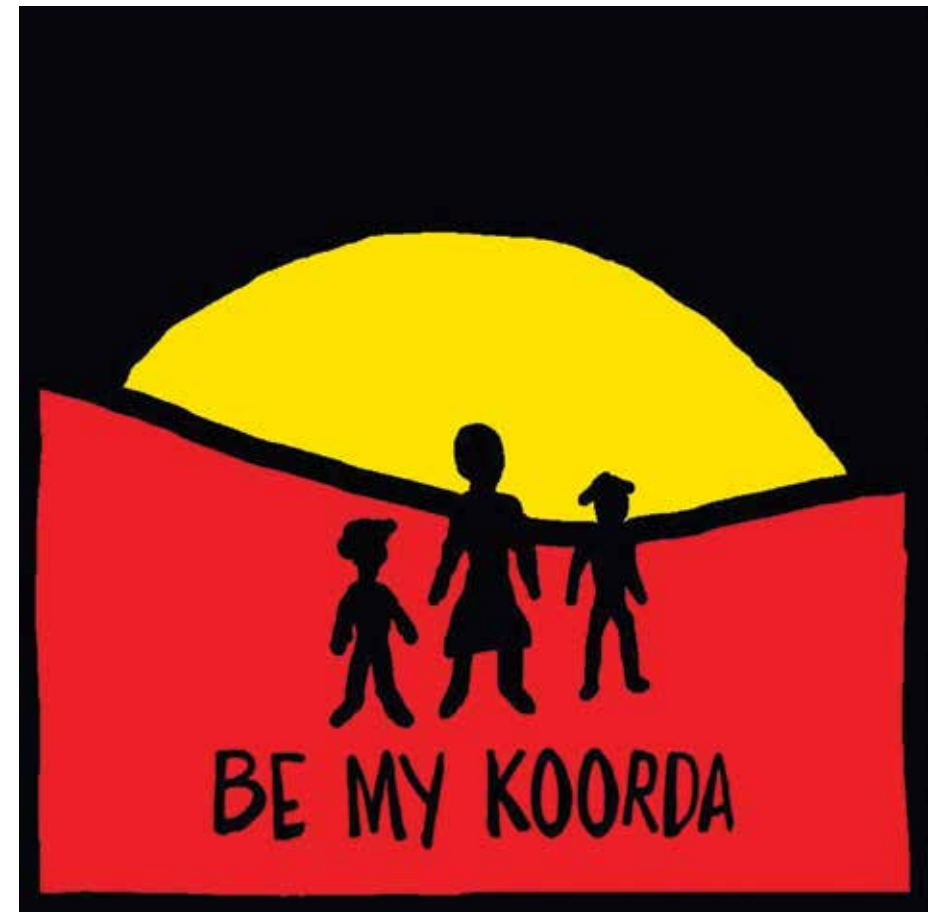
Be My Koorda is a parent-based Support Group for Aboriginal children with Autism and other disabilities and their families, underpinned with knowledge and lived experience, and providing culturally secure support to other parents in similar situations. The group provides networking, advocacy and information for members, reducing the isolation experienced by parents and carers, encouraging community engagement and befriending. Access to the group is open to any



*"I believe that having the stickers on the bus now has made an impact as when we drive around people are looking at the bus and who we are. It has made a difference to the new carers who see that we do have transportation."*

family in the Perth Metro area, however the majority of families live in the Kelmscott, Armadale and Gosnells area.

**Pay it Forward** supported Be My Koorda's strategic direction by funding marketing materials to encourage more families to participate and access support, to increase awareness for the group when working in community, and to raise awareness within mainstream



services of the group and the needs of Aboriginal children and families. Pay it Forward also funded public liability insurance to increase Be My Koorda's capacity to offer activities and services.

Funding resulted in improved branding and visual recognition of Be My Koorda, additional engagement opportunities being offered to the community, support, and social inclusion for an increased number of members, and more families participated and accessed Be My Koorda support. Securing public liability insurance was a key benefit for Be My Koorda and has enabled them to source volunteers to increase and enhance their administration and the activities they can offer to families enhancing support and inclusion.

## Story 3

### Blackwood Parent Support Group



The Blackwood Parent Support Group (BPSG) is based in Bridgetown in the South-West of WA and supports parents and carers of children with disability/special needs – ranging from physical disability and disease, genetic conditions like Down Syndrome and neurological conditions such as autism and ADHD. Mental health and well-being of members and parent-to-parent peer support is a major focus for the BPSG, as evidence shows that being the parent of a disabled child or a child with a chronic lifelong health condition can increase the risk of family relationship problems, stress, and depression.

**Pay it Forward** funded the BPSG Wellness Program, a series of targeted and inclusive workshops providing a range of activities addressing various aspects of members' mental health and wellbeing, aimed at boosting self-esteem, social inclusion and addressing specific health issues. The workshops addressed understanding family strengths, deep relaxation, and breathing techniques to reduce anxiety, self-care for parents, and building self-esteem and resilience.

Members were positive about the workshops and expressed confidence that they were realistic and able to be implemented in their own lives. The workshops were very much focused on the family



as a unit and therefore, they were encouraged and inspired to take the concepts they had learned away to discuss with friends, families, and support services. Participants experienced important attitudinal shifts in their thinking about their own self-care and building strength within their families. Many also highlighted the importance of getting access to such a quality workshop close to home.

*“As a group, we understand that taking care of ourselves and doing so in a manner that helps to prevent mental distress in our lives, is key to being able to better care for others, and to lead a quality, engaging and fulfilling life.”*

## Story 4

### Bisexual+ Community Perth

Bisexual+ Community Perth is the only group in WA offering a safe place for bi+ people of all genders to engage in discussion and form community. The Support Group represents over 1,000 people and holds monthly events for members. Mental health outcomes for bisexual/non-binary people are particularly poor in comparison to lesbian and gay people and are misunderstood by mainstream society, and often invisible in the broader LGBTIQ+ discourse. Double discrimination contributes significantly to the higher rates of health disparities experienced by bisexual/non-binary people in comparison to their peers.

**Pay it Forward** funded the design and delivery of eight “Binary Busting” workshops and associated resources to increase visibility and build awareness of the unique issues faced by bisexual /non-binary people among mental health service providers, students, and LGBTIQ+ organisations. Building community awareness builds more inclusive spaces for members. Workshops were delivered at PICYS, WA Aids Council, Anglicare, Lifeline, Curtin University Health Sciences, YACWA, Royal Perth Bentley Group, and Carers WA.



*“The examples provided (including the lived experience of the presenters) helped to explain scenarios and support the need for creating inclusive spaces.”*

Participants were made more aware of the peer Support Groups available for bisexual/non-binary people and can now refer clients, family and friends. This will create an opportunity for them to become more connected to each other and to their community, to have enhanced wellbeing and resilience, and to participate more fully in their community.

*“The statistics on psychological distress experienced by different cohorts was insightful. It showed me that people in the LGBTIQ+ community feel differing distress.”*

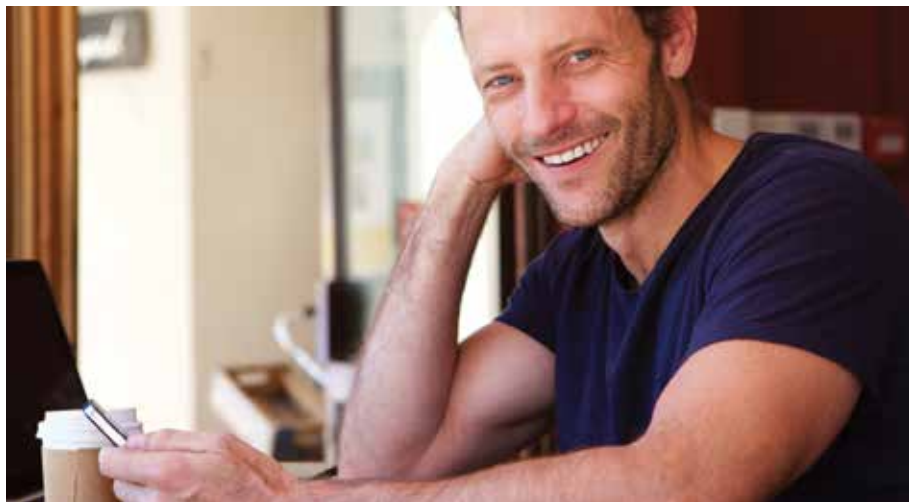
*“Finally, a workshop that speaks to bisexual/non-binary experiences! My colleagues now have less excuses for the heteronormative treatment of others.”*

## Story 5

### Dads in Distress

Dads in Distress (DIDs) Support Groups are a frontline service offered by Parents Beyond Breakup operating nationally with one group in WA (East Perth) and mentors (for 1 to 1 support) in several locations across the state. DIDs Support Groups are specifically for Dads who have been separated from their children, usually following a relationship breakdown. Groups offer evidence-based, peer-support that is particularly effective when working with men. The shared experience within DIDs Groups helps to normalise overwhelming feelings, provides emotional supports, and helps participants make positive choices to achieve the best outcomes for themselves, their children, and former partners.

**Pay it Forward** funded DIDs to build community awareness in WA about their support services, including a National Helpline, to explore potential to launch new groups and mentors, and to encourage and facilitate leadership in the existing group. Funding allowed the organisation to develop marketing materials, conduct radio and online advertising, and for the CEO to liaise with group members and future leaders and build volunteer support.



*"It was great to have the opportunity to meet with Pete while he was in WA back in June. I think this really helped me to engage with DIDs/ PBB and although I am not currently able to lead a group, I am really pleased to be able to promote the fantastic support services that the organisation offers for Dads in Distress."*

The opportunity for the CEO to work with members resulted in an increased volunteer commitment to promote the group, its objectives, and its model into the wider community. Broader marketing will drive increased participation to existing groups, build leadership opportunities, and encourage the emergence of other groups and mentors across metro Perth.



## Story 6

### DISCHARGED Support Group

DISCHARGED is an organisation driven by lived experience that specialises in running peer support groups for people with personal experience of suicidal thoughts, feelings, or actions. The groups create space for people to come together and talk about suicide without being judged or put through a risk assessment. The Support Groups focus on self-help and attendees mindfully listen to each other's stories, rather than trying to 'fix' or diagnose problems. Their facilitators are highly trained in the 'Alternatives to Suicide' approach and are experienced in providing compassionate and non-judgemental support, that recognises each individual's autonomy and expertise.

**Pay it Forward** funded DISCHARGED to partner with Curtin University to complete an evaluation of Alternatives to Suicide groups. The study aimed to investigate people's experiences of the groups, establish the impact of suicide peer Support Groups and how or if they differ from participants' previous experiences in the mental health system.

*"I really do value the way that this group is run, the principles behind it and the principles of just peer work in general."*

*"I can openly express myself here. There's not really those awkward questions, like you don't have to try to make others believe what you are ... when you're in a room full of people like you."*

Participants were interviewed in focus groups conducted by lived experience researchers (LERs) supported and trained by Curtin University.

A comprehensive report was produced featuring the results of the user-based evaluation. Importantly, the research demonstrates the needs of people in suicidal distress and the benefit of a peer approach. Principle findings include that the non-clinical safe space provided by DISCHARGED groups creates the conditions for people to change their relationship with



*"I think because I'm thinking through it more. I'm thinking through okay, what's causing this emotion, what's causing it, causing me to think about committing suicide. What's the situation, what's going on – thinking through it ... and all that. I think that's why it's taking me longer to reach, you know, "Okay, let's do it", type thing. Since I used to not think about it, I would just act if I could."*

suicidal ideation. This impacts on people's ability to stop, reflect, and think through what they do next; meaning they feel more in control, and less likely to act without thinking about the feelings and what they represent. These findings are novel and have significant implications for the utilisation of peer approaches in addressing suicidal distress. This project was critical in providing the beginnings of an evidence base for the Alternatives to Suicide approach, and in creating sustainable growth for DISCHARGED.



## Story 7

### Families 4 Families WA



Families 4 Families WA (F4FWA) is a peer-based, wellbeing-focussed, support and education group for families and supporters of individuals who experience multiple, unmet needs which generally include ongoing mental distress, alcohol and other drug use and criminal justice involvement. This is a group of individuals and families whose perspectives are generally not well heard and integrated into service planning, design, delivery and review but who are often highly dependent on a range of services. F4FWA was launched in 2011 by Mental Health Matters 2 (MHM2), a volunteer community action and advocacy group. In 2012 MHM2 partnered with Cyrenian House, an alcohol and other drug agency, to provide a peer support plus model.

**Pay it Forward** funded the co-design of two resources relating to family rights concerning Treatment, Support and Discharge Plans (TSDP) under the Mental Health Act 2014 ('the Act'). The project aimed to familiarise families/carers/supporters of individuals with



multiple unmet needs with specific sections of the MHA14 of particular relevance to them and empower them to exercise their rights specifically in reference to treatment, support and discharge planning under the Act. (These resources are now freely available at [www.mentalhealthmatters2.com.au/resources](http://www.mentalhealthmatters2.com.au/resources)).

*“Just been meaning to drop you a line or two to let you know how awesome this group is and the networking I have done and still doing on your behalf with the brochure and the booklet Family and Carer Rights... I am very passionate, this document can make a huge difference to a Carer and good to educate staff as well. So again well done you all are amazing”.*

## Story 8

### Foster Families South West

Foster Families South West support approximately 100 general carer families in the South West. Members are registered carers with the Department for Child Protection and Family Services (CPFS) Bunbury, Busselton or Collie, and the network provides a forum for foster families to give mutual support, access to resources, training opportunities and to promote child-focused activities. Carers are often coping with children with difficult behaviours as all of their children in care are impacted by trauma.

**Pay it Forward** funded training for approximately 50 children in care with Life Lessons Australia to improve children's self-esteem and self-regulation. Reducing difficult behavior in children in care minimises the potential for placement breakdown. The training delivered strategies to build each student's self-esteem and provided the children with techniques to manage and reduce anxiety in order to promote feelings of calm and focus. Children were taught to 'focus on themselves' (be independent of the negative opinions of others), and learned of the tendency of the human mind to focus on unpleasant



situations from the past or negative scenarios that may happen in the future, and how to interrupt that pattern of thought.

Members reported a significant noticeable change in their child's attitude after attending the workshops. They identified that they had not expected such immediate and positive outcomes. Their children are using the skills given to them in their daily lives making their inclusion in the wider community possible. Teachers have also noticed the positive effects from the children and many schools have also shown their support by facilitating the learnings at their school. No other course, counselling or psychologist appointments have achieved such positive and practical results for these families.

*"Hello I have just been meaning to drop you a line or two to let you know how awesome this group is and the networking I have done and still doing on your behalf using the brochure and the booklet on Family and Carer Rights."*



## Story 9

### Glaucoma Support WA

Glaucoma Support WA provides support and community to people living with the condition of glaucoma; a group of eye diseases where vision is lost due to damage to the optic nerve, and the leading cause of irreversible and preventable blindness worldwide. The group has been operating in WA for over 20 years reducing the health burden on people living with the disease.

**Pay it Forward** funded delivery of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to the group to build resilience and allow members to support one another by developing mental health literacy within the membership to cope with the distress of the condition of glaucoma. The threat of blindness is distressing from the diagnosis of glaucoma through treatment. Upskilling members to recognise the signs of distress in others builds capacity within the group to support the wellbeing of their members through the different stages of the disease.

Members are now able to better communicate using the language of good mental health, and their improved mental health literacy



is impacting stigma and has encouraged members to talk and to seek help when needed. Their increased awareness and understanding of mental health can be shared in the wider community as members have the confidence to offer assistance and to seek appropriate support for anyone experiencing mental health issues or crisis.

*“I have just completed my accreditation and passed with 100%!! Many thanks for gaining the grant and organising the course for us. Much appreciated. I feel empowered.”*

## Story 10

### Harmonee House Men's Group

Harmonee House Men's Group overseen by Bay of Isles Outreach (BOICO) in Esperance is a recovery-focused, community peer Support Group for men in the region which collaborates with multiple services in the area to build social capital for its members and address the high rates of self-harm, suicide and AOD abuse impacting men in Esperance.

*"I feel that the programme has a chain effect of educating participants to be able to ask tough questions, and to help others who are going through bad times, and to increase awareness of men's mental health issues."*

**Pay it Forward** supported the early efforts of the group to achieve traction and sustainability funding venue hire, guest speakers, and promotional materials to market the group to the community. The group facilitated workshops providing information covering mindfulness, identification of destructive behaviours, and tools to help identify and manage stress and other situations.



The group was established as a support network and shares information about hobbies, activities and other services within the community. Many of the men considered engagement with volunteering, sport or with community organisations including fire brigades, SES, and Mens Sheds. Evaluation indicated the majority of men identified that their participation and the knowledge gained from the group greatly improved their lives and gave them the confidence to support their families and friends. The group encouraged an awareness and attitude in participants of that it is ok as a man to seek help, and that it is not weak to talk about the contemporary issues men face.

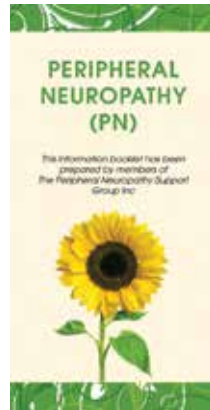


## Story 11

### Peripheral Neuropathy Support Group

Peripheral Neuropathy Support Group WA supports people living with this progressive and degenerative condition which results in pain and reduced mobility. The group provides understanding and mutual support by sharing experiences in the practical management of daily living with Peripheral Neuropathy (PN) and engages guest speakers at meetings to inform members of emerging and best practice management of the condition. The group works toward building greater awareness among medical professionals, sufferers, and the wider community about PN.

**Pay it Forward** funded the printing of an information booklet produced by the group and approved by a leading neurologist which documents, in plain language, information about PN including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and causes. It includes practical help for daily living. The booklet was distributed to group members, and they further promoted the book with their GPs and other allied health professionals to build awareness about the condition and pathways into the Support Group.



The booklet provides the group with a productive and helpful tool to engage members in the wider community who may be experiencing symptoms or have been recently diagnosed into the Support Group where they receive understanding and shared experience. Knowledge of PN and receiving the benefit of others' lived experiences optimises people's comfort, capacity, and opportunity to live with this chronic condition.



*“Thank you for replying to my queries... my Corrigin Doctor told me there really isn't much else for nerve pain. Thank you again. It is good to talk to someone who understands how awful PN is. Your group is a lifeline and I need to contact and to hear about what people are trying.”*



## Story 12

### Solace Grief Support Group WA Inc.

Solace Grief Support Group WA is a peer led organisation that provides a safe and secure place for those who have lost their spouse or partner. Solace WA provides a caring environment where people are welcomed and invited to share their story and receive support. When one's partner dies, normal life as we knew it ceases in an instant. Solace WA facilitates healthy grieving under the guidance of support workers who have a lived experience of grief and loss.

**Pay it Forward** funded the design and development of marketing materials to promote and build awareness of Solace WA, and their community-based bereavement services including their Sharing and Caring Groups, Support Groups, and Cafe and Walking Groups into the wider community. Additionally, the marketing collateral provided Solace the opportunity to professionally present their services with organisations looking to offer allied support for those experiencing bereavement.

As a result of the group's marketing efforts, membership has increased significantly, allowing more people to receive bereavement support. Referrals from health professionals, work colleagues, family, and friends of people in distress also increased. The group is building their capacity to seek sponsors, community ambassadors, and community

links. Solace's marketing has expanded into use of social media, website development and the development and production of marketing materials in-house.



*"I lost the love of my life Angela, my wife of 34 years. I have never been so utterly bereft, devastated and without hope. I looked for help and answers via counselling provided by both Silver Chain and the Cancer Council, who provided professional help, but no real understanding. Then, by good fortune, I found Solace WA. At the first meeting that I attended I immediately felt that I was no longer alone in my loss, there were others who were suffering like me, who knew instinctively how I felt and could help me face the fear and uncertainty of the grief that was consuming me, strangers who understood me more than lifelong friends! I now had somewhere to turn.*

*I now attend monthly meetings of Solace, and feel that they are a vital part of helping me to grieve and understand my loss in the new, uncertain and frightening world that I find myself in. I, and others like me, need this group more than perhaps any other source of comfort available to us."*

*Alan (Angela 55 years old, metastatic breast cancer)*

## Story 13

### South West Women's Health and Information Centre (SWWHIC)

SWWHIC oversees two Mums and Bubs Support Groups in the South West Region in Bunbury and Busselton. The groups were formed as part of the recommendations of the Radiance South West



network which is a support network of many practitioners and organisations working collaboratively to foster the emotional well-being of parents in their journey of parenthood. Both Support Groups offer emotional and social support to mothers of babies or toddlers with opportunities for referral to other community groups and agencies where needed and act as an early intervention to mental health issues.



**Pay it Forwarded** funded facilitators to fully develop, facilitate, and capacity-build these emerging groups toward sustainability as well as Baby Nurture guest speakers to talk with the groups.

Increased capacity in members' parenting skills was a significant outcome. Through ongoing education, members became more self-confident and their self-esteem improved. Strong bonds were formed within the groups and friendships were forged providing mutual support outside of group time. Both groups were able to quickly transition to a digital meeting space, using Zoom to continue to support members during early pandemic lockdown ensuring ongoing connection to vulnerable mothers. The groups are essential in supporting the emotional wellbeing of parents and are safe, non-judgmental spaces, where members can speak honestly about how they are coping and know that they will be supported in their journey. They provide a social connection and an effective pathway to community support where needed.

*“My youngest daughter was about 8 months old when my mental health began deteriorating again. We sought support from my child health nurse who also became concerned for my mental wellbeing and she referred us to Radiance. I was scared, I had been to so many mothers groups and they were large, overwhelming and clicky. Radiance, however, was intimate, safe and supportive. I was paralysed with anxiety, yet I did not need to explain myself or keep up the facade that I had kept up for so long. It was a protected space and I could be as I was. The group having a facilitator is one of the reasons that it works so well. There is gentle structure to practice skills such as mindfulness and gratitude. If needed, the facilitator can connect mothers with other supports available.”*



## Story 14

### True Blue Support Group

True Blue are a peer Support Group for people with mental health issues and/or emotional distress and meet to “find and share hope, options and useful information and support each other in our recovery journey”. Originally founded within the Lorikeet Centre, the group has moved toward autonomy. As a regular activity, members set individual goals and support each other socially and practically to work towards them.

*“I enjoy going because it is very warm and friendly. I love catching up and listening to everyone’s stories. I get a lot from the practical sessions.”*

*“True Blue is inspiring and motivating. It was helpful when I especially needed it.”*

**Pay it Forward** supported the group to become autonomous and sustainable by funding venue hire at The Rise, facilitator mentoring, group upskilling, and marketing materials.

Outcomes of the project were positive, with members becoming comfortable facilitating group activities, using recovery language, and planning and actioning well-structured goals. True Blue is more cohesive as a group, the sharing is deeper, and the support offered is as requested rather than gratuitous. Group members took advantage of the opportunity to practice their skills, demonstrating



*“I struggle with feeling like I don’t belong anywhere, but in this group, I feel accepted as though I belong. I appreciate connecting with others, and the opportunity to feel relaxed in a group. This is the most worthwhile thing I’ve been to for years.”*

*“True Blue is a safe space to meet likeminded people. I enjoy being with everyone and participating in the activities.”*

increased confidence and willingness to step forward and take responsibility for the logistical and leadership actions required to run the group. Having a regular, safe space to share the tough times and be supported contributes to the prevention of difficult episodes. True Blue's focus is always on personal ideas of recovery and the importance of being responsible for building a purposeful life.

## Story 15

### The Grief Centre of WA



The Grief Centre of WA was founded to provide understanding, support and recovery to people experiencing grief. GCWA is committed to helping those suffering and advocating to change the way grief is viewed and responded to in the community. Services are available for adults, teenagers, and children who are grieving after the loss of a loved one or someone close to them. Unresolved grief often leads to poor mental, physical, financial, social wellbeing.

**Pay it Forward** funded the capacity building of the Grief Centre supporting a marketing strategy, an open space technology workshop, public liability insurance, and new technology for the organisation

*“The Open Space Community Consultation was my first interaction with the Grief Centre. I felt warmly welcomed by the volunteers and facilitator, and confident to participate in the rich and varied discussions.”*

to improve their administrative processes, governance, community engagement, and technical skillsets, and to increasing awareness of the GCWA through engagement with other mental health agencies and the wider community.

Subsequent to the project, the Grief Centre’s membership has doubled, and their day to day efficiencies have improved. The Open Space Community consultation resulted in new ideas, opportunities, and public interests with 33 people in attendance including representatives from mental health and community organisations. Private practitioners in the mental health



field, current and former clients of the Grief Centre and people with an interest in end-of-life support and decision-making. The event raised awareness of deep and protracted grief as a mental illness and the wide-ranging issues that can result from it being untreated. Insight was gained on gaps in the mental health sector as well as new ways and means of minimising grief.



## Story 16

### Turner Syndrome Association

Turner Syndrome Association was established in 1983 to provide support, advocacy and education to girls, women, and their families affected by the Syndrome (TS). The organisation operates a series of events each year to provide peer support to the cohort and encourage health and allied professionals to participate to gain a better understanding of the Syndrome from those directly impacted by it.

**Pay it Forward** funded a TS youth camp at Woodman Point for girls from across WA and designed as a peer based development initiative to take the girls out of their comfort zones and extend their development in areas of goal setting, execution, dealing with adversity, overcoming fear and anxiety, and to build coping skills to help them set and achieve life goals. These are essential resilience skillsets as the majority of girls have experienced varying levels of bullying in their lives.

*“My daughter (Abbey) loved the youth camp and particularly spending time with and meeting others living a similar experience. She came home really excited, made more friends and was more accepting and understanding of her Mosaic Turners.”*

A key outcome from the camp was the peer relationships the girls built with one another, and the recognition and acceptance that they are not alone in facing common issues. Mental health wellbeing has continued to be a major focus of the group over

recent years. Facilitators encouraged talking about their issues and experiences and helped guide the girls to the appropriate avenues of help in our community.

The girls felt empowered to implement strategies to better advocate for themselves with the appropriate authorities when feeling unsafe, bullied or distressed. New friendships were forged and a support network for the girls and their families strengthened.



*“This was my second camp and I enjoy catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. I would like to help with the younger girls so they have a friendship group that they can ask any questions without feeling silly or being treated badly.” Sarah*

*“It was great getting to meet new girls with TS. I love the way we all get along so well, knowing that we are all the same.” Grace*

*“I think camp is a good way to make friends who has the same or similar problems as the others. Jess is a great friend.” Sophie*

*“The Youth camp was amazing. I had never met another girl with TS and now I feel like I’m not alone, I have new friends who understand what I go through with family & peers.” Rebekkah*



## Beyond the Stories - Investing In Our Members Strengths

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

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

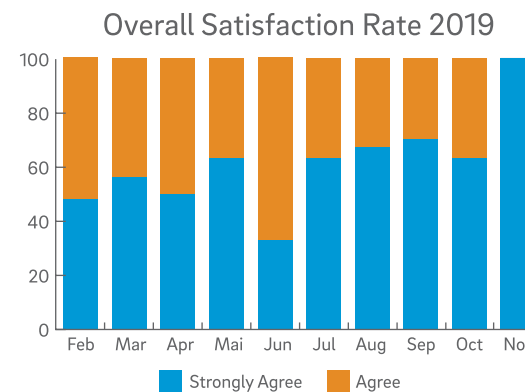


## Workforce Development/Cert IV in Community Services and Mental Health

In 2019, ConnectGroups funded two tertiary scholarship programs: a Certificate IV in Community Services qualification, and a trial of seven units of competency towards a Certificate IV in Mental Health in order to improve sector job readiness and employment pathways in the community services, mental health/AOD, disability services, aged care and allied health sectors with demand for services within these sectors expected to increase in Western Australia. The programs also validate

and upskill Support Group facilitators and leaders to effectively manage their groups. This tertiary training enhances group leaders' existing skillsets and strengths.

The initiative was launched in 2012 and more than eighty (80) participants have benefited from the





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

ConnectGroups' workforce development initiative supports the Mental Health 2020 reform to build a sustainable workforce and is aligned to the Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategic Framework<sup>1</sup>, The Peer Workforce Report<sup>2</sup>, and the Social Assistance and Allied Health Workforce Strategy<sup>3</sup>.

1 Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Workforce Strategic Framework, Mental Health Commission 2018

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

3 WA State Training Board 2019



## ConnectGroups Regional and Rural Strategy

### Partnerships and Collaboration

ConnectGroups' Regional and Rural Engagement Strategy has pivoted the organisation to prioritise responding to regional gaps in place-based service provision. The strategy identified significant unmet needs and opportunities for ConnectGroups as the Peak body to target sector development and support in the regions. The strategy broadens the reach and influence of core business, identifies existing and emerging peer Support Groups and services, addresses unmet community need, and builds awareness and access to the small grants. Engaging and supporting regional groups builds capacity in the Community Services and peer Support Group sectors to address the unique issues and circumstances outside of the metro area.



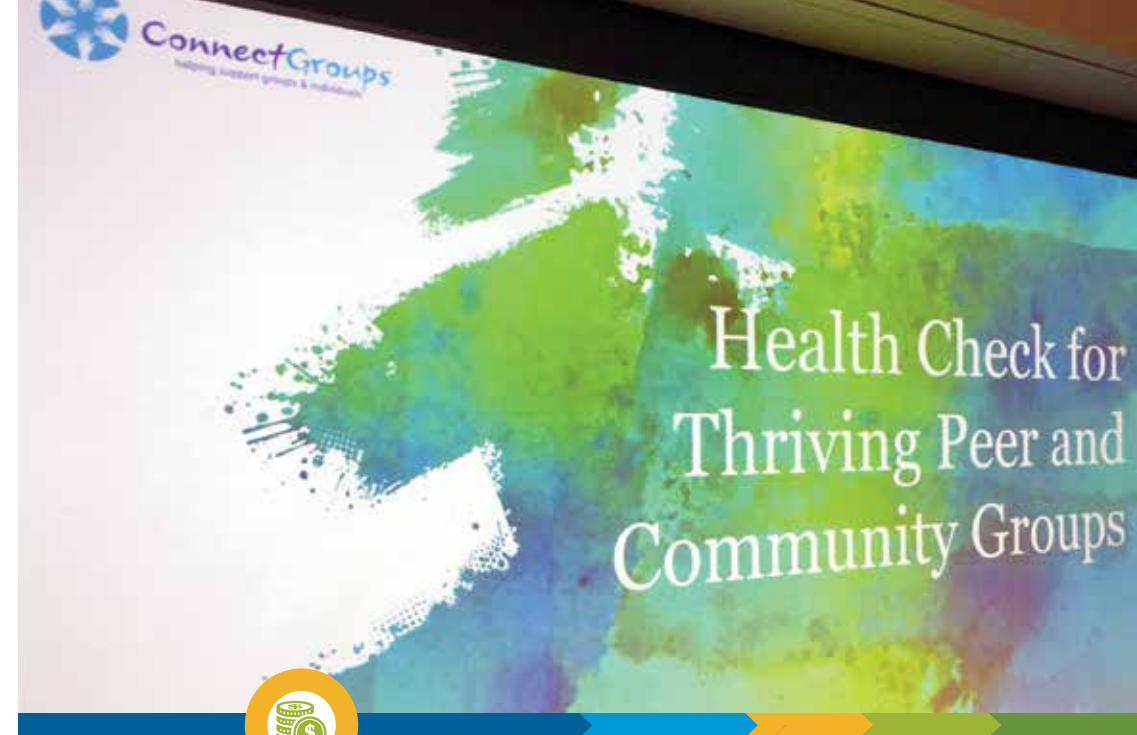


A key lever in the success of the regional and rural strategy is to achieve partnership with the relevant Shire or City as evidenced by the strong alliance ConnectGroups has forged with the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River. These regional partnerships act as “the eyes and ears on the ground” about new and emerging peer groups, networks, and services.

In 2019, ConnectGroups visited the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River twice to deliver sector development activities, to promote ConnectGroups as the Peak body, engage with community-based peer Support Groups, to promote the availability of resourcing and small grants, and to strengthen the alliance with the Shire Community Development team.

The team also stopped into Pinjarra to engage with the Pinjarra Men’s Shed who collaborated with the wider community to build Pinjarra’s first shed.

And the team visited the new Peel Health Hub in Mandurah conceived from an identified need for a one-stop shop involving a GP supported, integrated model of care to interrupt the escalation of health issues impacting youth in the Peel region. It offers a range of co-located services including mental health, drug and alcohol services, family violence and sexual assault support, homeless services, vocational services, and family support services.



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ConnectGroups acknowledges the traditional carers of country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders past, present, and emerging. ConnectGroups acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation as the Traditional Carers of the land on which our offices stand today.

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