

THE FULL STORY OF PEERZONE

What is PeerZone?

PeerZone is a series of three hour peer led workshops in mental health and addiction where people explore recovery and whole of life wellbeing.

We've developed twenty workshops within five themes:

- Understanding ourselves
- Empowering ourselves
- Working on our wellbeing
- Connecting to the world
- Exploring our unique identities

PeerZone works on three levels for participants:

- It invites them to rebuild a more positive story of their lives.
- It offers tools for whole of life wellbeing.
- It creates a community of mutual support.

PeerZone works on three levels for services:

- It's a service innovation for organisations that invest in it.
- It's a practice tool and support structure for workers with lived experience who facilitate it.
- It's a personal development opportunity for service users who participate in it.

PeerZone was developed by Mary O'Hagan, Sara McCook Weir and other peers in New Zealand. The PeerZone office does not deliver the workshops; we prepare and support peer facilitators to deliver them. PeerZone has been rolled out in New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

Why PeerZone?

PeerZone helps to solve a number of problems:

It enhances the wellbeing for people with mental distress and addiction

Mental health and addiction services face a real challenge in supporting people to live the lives they want. Too many people with mental distress or addiction are disempowered, isolated, unhealthy and poor. There is sound evidence that peer support and peer led recovery education increase wellbeing, reduce dependency on services and improve social connections without risking harm. However, we estimate that less than five percent of people with mental distress have access to them.

It provides professional development and support for the peer workforce

The peer workforce is the fastest growing occupational group in mental health today and has a long history in the addiction field. But many peer workers are under-utilised and under-supported. PeerZone offers a new and intentional practice tool for peer workers who can facilitate PeerZone as part of their work. A high percentage of the mental health and addiction workforce is also made up of people with lived experience. Some of them could also facilitate PeerZone as part of their work if they choose to openly identify as a peer. We also offer facilitation training to peers not employed by services who can contract with agencies to deliver it.

It is very cost-effective

PeerZone is a cost-effective solution from the point of view of participant outcomes and peer workforce development. We achieve better participant outcomes at less cost in three ways. Firstly, PeerZone is delivered in a group setting which makes it much cheaper to provide than the traditional one-to-one client-worker interaction. Secondly, PeerZone is much more intentional than some of the 'check in and chat' support relationships in mental health. Thirdly, we know that building a peer community of support reduces reliance on services. PeerZone also provides affordable professional development opportunities for peer workers and other support workers with experience of mental distress or addiction by training them to deliver workshops and offering them ongoing support.

Who can get involved?

As a participant

Anyone who self identifies as having experience of mental distress or addiction can participate in PeerZone workshops. We have designed the workshops primarily for people whose life difficulties has brought them into mental health and addiction services or into primary health services, such as the family doctor or a counsellor. PeerZone is designed for people in their late teens to old age and is free of charge for people who participate.

PeerZone could be easily adapted for other groups in the community who experience distress, disability or disadvantage.

As a facilitator

People need to meet the following criteria to become certified PeerZone facilitators:

- They have lived experience of mental distress and/or addiction.
- They are comfortable disclosing their lived experience in their work.
- They demonstrate an understanding or commitment to the PeerZone values.
- They have group facilitation experience.

People can become a facilitator through two routes. Most do through their employer and deliver PeerZone workshops as part of their work. Others do it independently and contract with agencies to deliver the PeerZone workshops.

As a service provider or funder

We are targeting agencies that fund or provide services for people with mental distress or addiction to add PeerZone to their menu of services. They pay a fee for us to prepare and support their workers with lived experience to facilitate PeerZone to people who use the service.

If agencies don't employ workers with lived experience they may be able to offer PeerZone workshops to the people who use the service if they make arrangements with PeerZone facilitators in their area.

The workshops

Topics

PeerZone consists of 20 three hour peer led workshops for small groups of people with mental distress or addiction. Workshop numbers may vary dependant on the countries delivering them. After groups have completed the workshops in the 'Understanding Ourselves' series they can pick and choose any or all of the optional workshops in the other series.

Foundation workshops	
Understanding ourselves series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding our distress • Understanding our alcohol and drug use • Leading our recovery • Exploring our stories
Optional workshops	
Empowering ourselves series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing to self-stigma • Finding our voices • Empowering ourselves in services – mental health • Empowering ourselves in services – alcohol and drug • Dealing with crisis
Working on our wellbeing series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with stress • Understanding trauma • Minding our lifestyle • Enhancing our relationships
Connecting with the world series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising our income • Finding and keeping a home • Finding and keeping work
Exploring our unique identities series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing for young people • Wellbeing for men • Toku Oranga (Wellbeing for Maori) • Wellbeing for Pacific People (Part 1 and 2)

Go to www.peerzone.info/summary-workshops to see a summary of all the workshops.

Structure

The workshops are interactive with much group discussion, activities and creative activities. They all have a similar structure:

Item	Time
A sharing round	20 mins
A wellbeing tool presented by a participant	10 mins
Delivery and discussion on the topic for the day	1.5 hrs
Reflection on the topic through creative work on our stories or life planning	20 mins
A sharing round reflecting on the workshop	20 mins

Scheduling

Facilitators can be flexible in how they schedule the workshops. Workshops can be run as 3 hour or 1.5 hour sessions. The foundation workshops work well as a two day intensive. We recommend that workshops are no more than two weeks apart. They need to be scheduled at times and places that are accessible to participants.

Ground rules

The ground rules for the workshops are as follows:

- I choose how much or little to take part.
- We all have something to give and receive.
- Most of the knowledge is within the group.
- We don't interrupt while people are sharing.
- We keep all personal sharing within the group.
- We don't judge other people's realities.
- We are all equals.

Facilitator orientation and support

PeerZone works on a train the trainer and licensing model. We offer training and support services for workshop facilitators and participants for an affordable fee within New Zealand and Australia. A similar license, training and support model is offered by the PeerZone coordinator in Ontario, Canada.

We aim to make the facilitator's job as easy as possible by taking them through a facilitator orientation course and a high level of support services. We also keep managers in the loop. Our support services are designed to maximise the delivery of workshops and the return on investment made by organisations.

Facilitator orientation course

The PeerZone principal facilitator delivers a four day facilitator orientation course to a group of six to ten people to become certified PeerZone facilitators in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The training:

- Introduces them to the philosophy and vision of PeerZone.
- Takes people through the 'understanding ourselves' workshops as participants.
- Gets people to deliver and receive feedback on sample exercises from the other workshops.
- Familiarises them with the workshops, website, their responsibilities and the facilitator support services.

Support services for facilitators and participants

The PeerZone office provides:

- A well maintained website.
- A facilitator manual, workshop slides with instructions and workshop materials.
- On-demand advice for facilitators via phone, email or text.
- Monthly telephone group support for facilitators starting within one month of certification.
- Electronic and paper-based promotional materials such as posters and postcards.
- Login access to facilitators.
- Folders for participants.
- Invitations to private Facebook pages to facilitators and participants.
- Facilitator and participant certificates.
- Analysis of the workshop evaluations and feedback to the facilitator and their agency.

Support for managers

We also work with managers of employees who become facilitators to ensure everyone is on the same page and to optimise the smooth delivery of the workshops. We provide managers with:

- General information on PeerZone.
- Advice on how organisations can assist with the workshops.
- The license agreement.
- A follow up phone call after the facilitator orientation course.
- Analyses of evaluations of workshops facilitated by their employee.
- An email and phone number to ring if they have any concerns.

The license fee

The fee pays for much more than orientation and support services for facilitators; it pays for the use of a service innovation and gives you a whole new program to offer people who use services.

The fee for the first year pays for:

- Four days training and certification
- One year of support services
- One year of monthly telephone group support meetings
- Annual license

The fee for subsequent years is less and pays for:

- One year of support services
- One year of monthly telephone group support meetings (optional)
- Annual license

Our values and principles

The five PeerZone values

Self-determination. PeerZone is open to anyone with experience of mental distress and/or addiction who wants to try it. Participants are free to decide which workshops they attend or don't attend. People self-select whether to participate or not participate in PeerZone.

Participation. PeerZone has been developed by people with experience of mental distress and addiction with and for their peers. The workshops are fully interactive; participants are encouraged to share as equals and take some responsibility for the wellbeing of the group.

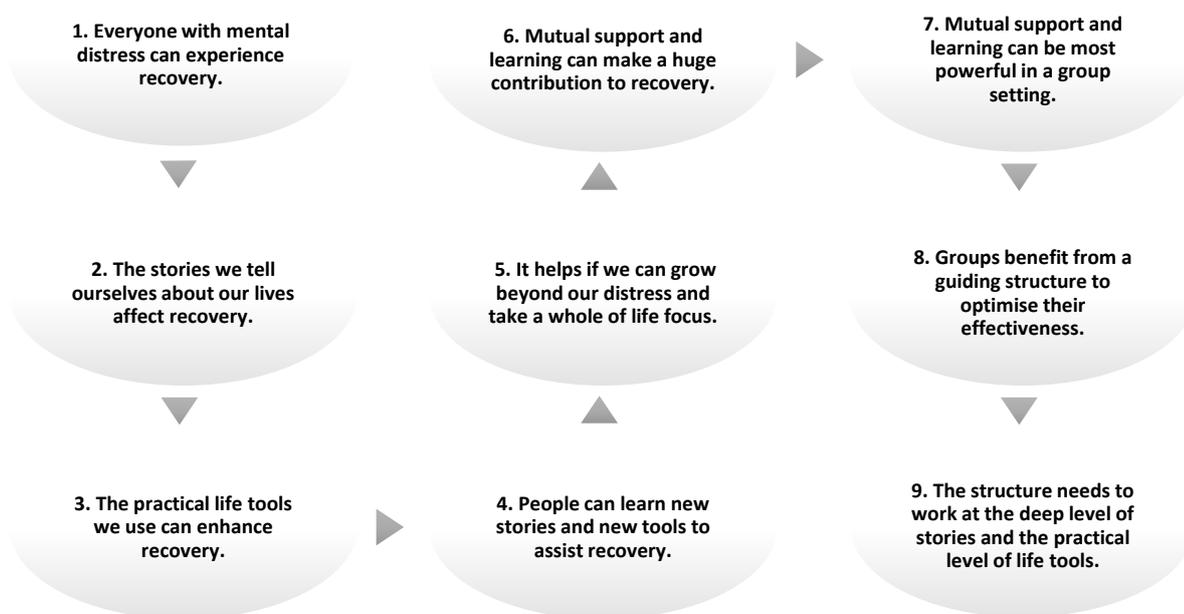
Mutuality. The PeerZone workshops facilitate mutual support and shared learning between participants, in other words genuine two-way helping relationships. The 'kinship of common experience' in a positive support and learning context helps people to feel connected, validated and motivated.

Lived experience knowledge base. PeerZone used lived experience knowledge in its development and the workshops are designed to elevate the status of this knowledge through inviting people to share their own successes, challenges and solutions with each other.

Hope. PeerZone offers hope to people that they can recover and achieve the lives they want through offering a whole of life focus, a positive learning structure, a supportive group, the opportunity to reframe their life narrative and the sharing of practical tools for wellbeing.

The nine PeerZone principles

The following principles or assumptions guided the development of PeerZone (please follow the numbers and arrows):



Quality and safety

The main methods we use to ensure ongoing quality are:

- Requiring that people who train as facilitators have proven facilitation experience.
- Providing support services for facilitators.
- Analysing all the workshop evaluations, to feed back to facilitators and to inform improvements to the workshops.
- Following up participants who drop out of the workshops to seek their feedback.

PeerZone is structured to encourage positive thinking and interactions. The ground rules were developed to promote safety and equality within the groups. People are free to disclose or participate as much or as little as they want and the whole group is encouraged to share some responsibility for ensuring everyone is respected and supported. If participants are 'triggered' by the group discussions the facilitator is available after the workshops to listen and give support. At the end of each workshop the facilitator asks participants if any of them want to 'buddy up' to support each other or socialise outside the workshops.

Participant, facilitator and manager experiences

Participants on the quality of the workshops

'PeerZone is awesome'

'Brilliant, beautiful, heaps of aroha'.

'A beautiful way of supporting others'.

'I loved the program and enjoyed the activities'.

*'It gives us a safe environment to do things'.
'The group openness and acceptance worked well'.
'We all have strong awesome communication'.
'There were some amazing stories of struggle and transcendence'.*

Participants on the impact of the workshops

*'I discovered so much about myself'.
'I have come a long way – so far the pain has gone'.
'I learnt some really good ways of breaking down change to do-able steps'.
'I learnt lots about options and thinking differently'.
'I am in charge of my life now and no-one speaks for me. I speak for myself'.
'My past is healed, I live in the present and look forward to the future'.
'I believe I can do stuff and that I matter more than when I came'.
'I thought PeerZone was wonderful – a few times I felt like shit but I always went away feeling good'.*

Facilitators on PeerZone and the orientation course

*PeerZone is a fantastic product – well designed and resourced.
Excellent facilitators, creative approach and intelligent treatment of the subject.
This has been a life changing opportunity for me as a peer and as a facilitator.
I can't wait to offer the PeerZone workshops.
Do it! Do it! Do it!
The best week ever!*

Managers endorsements of PeerZone

PeerZone is a wonderful resource and community of peers that provides space for conversations and mutual learning about mental health, well-being and living a full and productive life. The materials and framework for these conversations are outstanding and we will continue to provide PeerZone workshops as part of mental health services in the organization.

As a service provider, it's been really valuable to have a visible, structured programme that gives us the ability to articulate how we will incorporate peer support into our way of working.

PeerZone offers a recovery focus from many different angles. Our experience has been that it supports people in their ongoing learning and those who attended workshops reported to have discovered something new during every workshop.

The PeerZone training has given our facilitators a real boost of confidence. The material and workshop structure is top quality and participants have expressed a high regard for both the individual workshops and the total PeerZone concept.

The evidence

PeerZone is both a peer support and recovery education initiative with a solid evidence base. The results from the PeerZone pilots and the general evidence can give people confidence that PeerZone is very likely

to increase the wellbeing of participants and reduce their dependence on services. We are planning to complete a full evaluation of PeerZone to ensure it has a positive impact on participants' lives.

The PeerZone pilots

We completed three pilots for general adults, young people and Maori in Wellington, New Zealand. We received many comments on the quality of PeerZone and the positive impact it had on people in the workshop evaluations. Some participants made major life changes as a result of PeerZone, such as deciding to take up tertiary education.

Peer support evidence base

Peer support refers to services provided by and for people who have similar life experiences. Peer support work is the most rapidly growing workforce in the mental health and addiction world today. Peer support can take many forms, including support groups, one to one mentoring, crisis houses, support in employment and creative activities and so on. Peers can potentially provide any types of support services. It's not so much *what* peers provide that makes the difference, but *who* provides it and *how*. Peer support is unique in its ability to foster equality and mutuality, including the use of positive self-disclosure and role modelling to develop trust, express empathy and convey hope. Studies have shown that people who use peer support have similar or better outcomes to people who use traditional services only. Evidence for peer support in mental health has developed rapidly in the last decade. It shows high satisfaction from people who use all kinds of peer support as well as some positive outcomes:

- Reduced substance use.
- Reduced experiences of psychosis and depression.
- Reduced use of health services, including hospitals.
- Increased social support, networks and functioning.
- Increased ability to cope with stress.
- Increased quality of life.
- Increased ability to communicate with health professionals.

Recovery education evidence base

Recovery education is a supportive learning process that assists people to understand and manage their mental health problems, enhance their own wellbeing and to achieve the lives they want. Some recovery education programs emphasise illness self-management more than whole of life issues and vice versa. Recovery education is often delivered by peers; when this is the case it comes under the broad umbrella of peer support. Recovery education is also often delivered to groups but can be done by individuals. Evidence for recovery education is growing. It shows:

- Increased sense of hope.
- Increased sense of self-efficacy and empowerment.
- Increase in self-perceived recovery.
- Reduced experiences of psychosis and anxiety.

More information

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