

# YOUTH PEER WORKFORCE PROJECT



## WHAT IS IT?

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is delivering a peer work project specifically tailored for young people aged 12-25. It is about young people with lived experience of mental illness helping other young people going through something similar.

The project involves the development and delivery of a Youth Peer Workforce Implementation Plan, aligned to the Tasmanian Peer Workforce Development Strategy. The Implementation Plan includes training and ongoing support for Youth Peer Workers (YPW) so that they can provide non-clinical mental health support, encouragement and information to young people to complement clinical services.

A Youth Peer Worker is someone 'that gets it', who demonstrates the ability to recover/improve, and can walk alongside the young person through their journey of mental illness, treatment and recovery, overcoming obstacles and helping to clear the path ahead.

## WHY?

Youth Peer Work is unique in that a Youth Peer Worker brings their contemporary understanding, experiences and challenges that young people are facing alongside their lived experiences of mental health challenges. Young people supporting each other is already common practice. Youth mental health charity batyr have found that on average, every week, young people help each other with their mental health for 3.5 hours. This demonstrates that young people are turning to their peers who have lived experience of mental ill-health challenges and can provide assurance and support that compliments clinical mental health services.

The MHCT Youth Peer Workforce Project is creating the resources, opportunities and ongoing support necessary for mental health and youth organisations to introduce paid youth peer worker roles into their service. These roles will provide opportunities for young people to turn their existing strengths, skills and passions into a paid job and/or a career pathway.

## BENEFITS OF YOUTH PEER WORK

This project is helping to improve the experience of young people experiences accessing mental health services

1. Developing a Youth Peer Workforce will enable greater support for young people at a self-management level through community youth spaces, as well as providing continuity of care while easing referral pathways for young people in community and clinical mental health service settings.  
This aims to address the growing concern of young people falling through the cracks between services, an increase in complexity of young people presenting to mild-moderate mental health services, and lengthy waitlists.
2. Youth Peer Workers are expected to ease the workforce retention and recruitment issues being experienced. By engaging with young people who are passionate about mental health at the earliest opportunity and highlighting the opportunities available to them for meaningful and successful careers in the mental health sector, the hope and expectation will be that more young people apply for jobs in the sector.
3. Young people have shown significant enthusiasm for the introduction of Youth Peer Workers. Young Tasmanians see Youth Peer Workers as someone they will be able to easily relate to, feel safe and comfortable with and feel supported by as they seek out and/or continue to access mental health supports. Young people see YPWs as someone who through their own lived experience, will offer them understanding, respect and a sense of confidence to advocate for themselves throughout their engagement with mental health services.

## FUTURE GOALS

Our goal is that within the next three years, YPWs should be a clearly established role across community youth services and mental health services with job opportunities being promoted to young people. Several career pathways should be clear and available to young people, with incentives for further study and career progression becoming standard practice. Communities of Practice (CoPs) for Youth Peer Workers should be available across the state and be engaging with the broader Lived Experience CoPs for mentoring opportunities.

In five years' time, MHCT hopes to see Youth Peer Workers as an integral part of clinical mental health services that engage with young people and become more commonplace across the associated sectors including housing, alcohol and other drugs and family violence.

## PROGRESS TO DATE

- ▶ Extensive consultation and co-design with young people across the state.
- ▶ Consultation with mental health service providers to learn about their interest in youth peer workers and how they see them improving their services for young people.
- ▶ Consultations collated to inform the Youth Peer Work Implementation Plan created with goals for the 3-year period to June 2025 outlined.
- ▶ Co-design of youth peer work models that support young people at every stage of their mental health journey from prevention/early intervention, mild-moderate and high intensity. These models are a key resource for organisations to reference when applying for funding to create the roles in their organisation.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

### In 2024, MHCT aims to have:

- ▶ The first Youth Peer Workers trained through the Lived Experience Training Hub.
- ▶ Organisations equipped and confident to employ YPWs.
- ▶ Opportunities identified to introduce youth peer work to the Tasmanian mental health sector, as well as promoting the overarching themes of lived experience.

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