

SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE Australia Mental Health Meet-Up

Date: 22/04/2021

Topic: Finding good support professionals for you

Description: It's important to find mental health care that takes into account your needs in order for your mental health to be as best supported as possible. Based upon lived experience, in this discussion we will talk together about navigating the mental health care system to find professionals who work well with you

HappyCastle(PSW)

Welcome everyone to today's Peer Group Chat talking about Finding Good Support Professionals For You. This is a new peer support service we are trialling. Because of this, we really value your thoughts on how it goes, so we will send a link to a short survey at the end of this event for you to complete. While this survey is optional, it is a chance to provide feedback for us to improve our services. In case you might need to leave part way through the event, you can find the survey here now: https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW

Tonight, peer support workers @HappyCastle and @girasole will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of finding good support professionals for you. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both, these are important to understand and talk about. We'll be moving through a number of discussion questions tonight, and it's entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation may be heavy in nature as we talk about mental health struggles. @basil who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together and expand our ideas of responding well to early warning signs in order to look after ourselves. We will be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join :)

Girasole (Peer Worker)

Welcome @Kimberley_cpsd! It's nice to see you here :)

Kimberley_cpsd

Thanks, nice to be here :)

HappyCastle (PSW)

Hi everyone. I will be leading us in a conversation around professional support this evening. So happy to have you with us!

HappyCastle (PSW)

What professional care and support are you currently receiving and what has the journey looked like to get where you are today?

Eth

Hi @HappyCastle @Girasole and anyone else here

Eth

Hi @Kimberley_cpsd

Girasole (Peer Worker)

Hi @Eth! Great to see you here :)

Kimberley_cpsd

I talk with a psychologist on betterhelp once a week for about an hour and then we usually message back two or three times during the week about how things are going during my week. So its all online, which I don't mind because of my social anxiety

Girasole (Peer Worker)	I currently see a mental health social worker; before that I saw a clinical psychologist; and before that I saw a GP trained in CBT and mental health. Reflecting now, I can see that over time I've chosen supports who are more and more specialised; who have more expertise in what I'm wanting support for; and who are better suited to my needs.
Eth	psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor, 2 support workers and a coordinator of supports and plan manager (I have NDIS)
Eth	plus some family nearby who support me at times
Kimberley_cptsd	my housemates support me and a few friends who have been through mental health experiences themselves and understand how to help
HappyCastle (PSW)	It sounds like everyone has some good supports in place, I'm wondering would you like more supports or different support?
Eth	it took me 18 months of hard slog to get NDIS during which my sister-in-law became my carer and all my mainstream medical team wrote reports (more than one each over time) plus an extensive OT report was needed

Eth I've now had NDIS for nearly 3 years and having support workers a few times a week has really changed my life

Kimberley_cptsd hmm. at the moment i feel like im getting the support i really need. But my immediate family don't really understand. it would be nice if they did. but they have unresolved mental health issues themselves. so they cant really support me if they havent faced their own stuff.

Kimberley_cptsd i accept that now

Eth I'd like to have one more support worker on my team but recently had some dreadful experiences that resulted in me only hiring one more instead of two which had been my goal. Just prior to that I lost one support worker suddenly when she developed MS.

HappyCastle (PSW) @Kimberley_ctpsd thank you for sharing, it can be really hard when the people around us don't understand and @eth, that would have been really hard I'm sure

Eth One made a really inappropriate comment about bipolar and another froze on her first shift and if I hadn't had my long-term sw with me I would have been stranded in the carpark of the supermarket.

Eth	I've been using Hireup to find sw's for over 2 years. Never had a complaint or problem prior to this recent experience.
HappyCastle (PSW)	What are some of your needs you need to consider when you are finding a mental health professional? For example, financial limitations, availability, expertise, competence in working with particular communities you are a part of such as CALD, LGBTIQA+, Disability?
Girasole (Peer Worker)	It's important to me that my mental health care is affordable; I've been fortunate so far that every clinician I've seen has been free. I want for clinicians to have expertise in recovery from what's relevant to me; to be trauma-informed; and to ideally also be part of the LGBTIAQ+ community, because I know I'll likely feel the most safe, understood, and respected with them :)
Eth	I require them to have at least a cert 3 or 4 in disability or mental health support, plus experience as a support worker, preferably experience with CPTSD and Bipolar. Without NDIS funding I wouldn't be able to have anyone except my family, for whom the level of support I need is not sustainable.

Kimberley_cptsd Definitely something affordable for me was important, also i am stranded overseas during covid so I wanted to talk with someone online, with video chat or voice call in realtime obviously. i also wanted someone with experience dealing with childhood trauma and PTSD who could help me. I read some reviews of a few psychologists as well before i made my choice. and they needed to be available at a time suitable for my time zone.

Kimberley_cptsd and I wanted a woman psychologist. i felt like i would feel more comfortable with a woman

Girasole (Peer Worker) @Kimberley_cptsd I'm curious where you find reviews to read about psychologists? I'm really interested to know! :)

Eth The above was what I look for in a support worker. My psychologist gets paid either thru' MHCP or NDIS and my psychiatrist is expensive but necessary. I'm on a pension so that plus all my meds, some not on the PBS, really stretch my budget.

Eth Always females for me, both doctors and support people.

Eth Trauma informed is essential too.

Kimberley_cptsd @girasole i just google their names hehe

Eth @HappyCastle you can google a lot of psychologists and there's a site that comes up with reviews of them when I've done it

Kimberley_cptsd yeah its fantastic

Eth But then I always ring to talk to them to see if they have expertise in the areas I need.

Girasole (Peer Worker) That's really good to know @Eth & @Kimberley_cptsd, I learned something new! :)

Eth It's very time consuming plus you have to be able to advocate for yourself with these things, which a lot of people (including me at times) are not able to do.

HappyCastle (PSW) How do you go about finding out what professional support options there are out there for you?

Kimberley_cptsd i look on the internet mainly. thats how i found sane australia and this group chat as well

Eth	googling, asking my doctor, word of mouth - I'm in a disability alliance organisation where we really help each other with recommendations.
HappyCastle (PSW)	For me, I like to seek referrals/suggestions from other people with lived experience
Eth	Plus NDIS has lists of providers too
Girasole (Peer Worker)	@Eth I agree that these things have been time consuming for me too, doing the research beforehand to find someone appropriate. But I've really found that time to be an investment, because it means I ultimately end up with someone much better suited to support me.
Kimberley_cptsd	yes that to @happycastle. my psychologist was recommended to me buy someone and thats why i went with this particular one.
Eth	I agree @Girasole
HappyCastle (PSW)	In the past it has also been helpful for me to reach out to peer support workers as well as sometimes they know about organisations that might not be as well known

Eth	Yes I also see the costs involved as an investment in myself, but go without a lot so I can afford them
HappyCastle (PSW)	I really like the concept of an investment in yourself
Eth	the disability alliance has peer mentors who really network with each other - if they don't know something they try to find out
Eth	Where do you find your peer support workers @Girasole?
Girasole (Peer Worker)	I like hearing word-of-mouth from other people if they've had good experiences working with certain clinicians. Particularly within the LGBTIAQ+ community, it's important to know who will be safe and competent to support you
Kimberley_cptsd	when i first had my breakdown i wasnt strong enough to find any professional support to, so my housemate helped me do the research.
HappyCastle (PSW)	@eth there are a few different places, including our forums. I'll pop some organisation into the resources at the end of the chat if that would be helpful :)

Kimberley_cptsd she was instrumental in helping me find the right psychologist, psychaiatrist and even a few online forums so i could connect with people going through similar things to me.

Eth I totally agree @Girasole. My adult child is transgender and it's really important for them to feel 'safe' and accepted by whoever they work with. They are neurodiverse with autism and adhd and physical disabilities and legally blind so it's pretty complex and online communities have been invaluable in recommendations

Eth @HappyCastle can you put them on a thread in the forums and tag me? That way it will be easier to find them in future.

Eth that's great @Kimberley_cptsd

HappyCastle (PSW) What are some of the qualities of good, supportive professionals who've been effective for you?

Girasole (Peer Worker)	A great quality of my current therapist is how person-centred they are; they make no assumptions on what will be best for me. I really appreciate that; it's a nice change from more paternalistic models of care. I also really appreciate therapists who are reflective; who check in with you to make that sure that you're actually getting what you want out of the sessions; and who can accept criticism, apologise if they make mistakes, and grow
Eth	compassionate, good listeners, alert to my potential triggers, able to gently help me with graded exposure, trauma informed and non-judgmental
Eth	I agree @Girasole
Kimberley_cptsd	they listen, validate what i say and take it all into account. they dont rush me. they take time to explain things to me. its also great if they have been through mental health things to. like when i started taking antipsych meds, my psychologist encouraged me to drink more water than normal to help with the brain tissue and she said thats also advice from her own experience taking antipsych meds. so someone we can relate to is great.
HappyCastle (PSW)	I agree with what you were saying before about creating a sense of safety. So professionals who have been able to create that have been wonderful

Kimberley_cptsd	it helps when they become your friend..and view you as a person rather than just a patient
Eth	I feel differently about the friend side of things @Kimberley_cptsd. For me I need them to have some boundaries around really being there for me and not over-sharing about their own lives or e.g. other client's problems (I've had this happen). But each to their own.
Eth	Ultimately we employ them so we have to feel comfortable with their approach.
Bpdsurvivor	Effective supports know me as an individual, not a number
HappyCastle (PSW)	@bpdsurvior welcome!
Eth	Hi @Bpdsurvivor
Bpdsurvivor	So so so happy to be here! Thank you immensely for the constant reminders! I've rushed back from work to join.

Bpdsurvivor	Hi @eth!
HappyCastle (PSW)	This next question was asked by a member of our community: “How do you approach the topic of not feeling comfortable with the counsellor/psychologist you have been paired with? Particularly when you already struggle with confrontation”
Kimberley_cptsd	i use a psychologist on betterhelp at any time i can change the person and give feedback why. i dont need to confront the actual psychologist about it
Bpdsurvivor	Do you need to confront your therapist? If you don't make any more appointments, isn't that enough? I'm not sure
Eth	I use a 3 strikes policy after many years of pot luck with therapists. i.e. I'll give it 3 sessions as a trial and if I'm still uncomfortable I'll find someone else. Sounds a bit rigid perhaps but I'm 57 and have been having therapists on an off since my early 20s. Can't afford to keep seeing someone who is not a good fit.
HappyCastle (PSW)	In my experience, I like to be very clear with my boundaries. I know what support I am looking for and will ask if they are able to provide it.
Eth	Me too mostly @HappyCastle

Bpdsurvivor If there's a therapist I like and I don't need another appointment soon, I'd tell them I'm having a break and I'll be back. But if it's because things aren't working, I'd just not make any more appointments. I'm not sure they need an explanation

Bpdsurvivor @happy castle, I was looking for a suitable GP as part of my discharge from my area mental health team, and in retrospect, I literally interrogated a GP to make sure she was the right fit. I guess we have every right to do that.

Girasole (Peer Worker) Hi @Burie01, I can see you've recently joined us :)

Burie01 Sorry I am late!

Burie01 I am still commuting home

Girasole (Peer Worker) All good @Burie01! :)

Eth My approach is only possible because I now live somewhere where there are a lot of therapists to choose from. When I lived near Darwin I had to see whoever was available as there were hardly any mental health professionals up there outside acute mh hospital.

Burie01 I am recovering depression and social anxiety and I use a counsellor or psych when I feel overwhelmed

Bpdsurvivor Good pt @eth. The 3 strikes policy also makes sense

HappyCastle (PSW) **For those who may be living in regional or remote areas or have in the past, there may be limited access to mental health support professionals. How do you access your supports in these areas? For example, can you use Telehealth services? Are they any good for you?**

Eth We absolutely have that right @Bpdsurvivor

Eth Hi @Burie01

Girasole (Peer Worker)	I'm interested to hear peoples experiences trying to navigate good mental health care in regional, rural and remote areas. I grew up regionally but am now in a big city; I still have family who live regionally, though, who try to access good quality mental health care; I know that it's harder because most specialists aren't in regional areas. How do you manage?
Kimberley_cptsd	i use a psychologist online and its great. i think i feel more relaxed talking to someone from my home than going to a clinic with my social anxiety. it works for me :)
Bpdsurvivor	Although I live in Metro Melbourne, my regular psychologist appointment are via Tele health. I haven't seen my psychologist face-to-face for over a year because I can't fit it into my work schedule. It's better than having nothing.
Eth	I'm using telehealth currently but I think it's been announced that it will end at the end of June. It wasn't available in the Northern Territory (pre-covid)
HappyCastle (PSW)	@Bpdsurvivor that's great you have been able to find a support that works around your work schedule

Bpdsurvivor	If it wasn't for Tele health, I would not have support from the psychologist
Bpdsurvivor	@happy castle, yes, I squeeze my appointments in between I work
Eth	My psychiatrist does facetime on my phone and then I pay over the phone too.
Bpdsurvivor	Tele health takes time to get used to, but it works
Bpdsurvivor	And I guess it would make it more available to those in regional areas
HappyCastle (PSW)	Continuing the conversation around Telehealth and rural and remote - we have a question that was submitted by a member of our community: "Sometimes there isn't any choice, if you live regional or there is only community mental health, or you can't afford private options, how do you make 'the best' of incompatible supports?"

Eth	It's tricky to do EMDR with my psychologist when we're doing telehealth on my laptop. We still do it but I think it was more effective when we did it in person. Some therapies are better suited to telehealth than others I think.
Girasole (Peer Worker)	It really does @BPDSurvivor! I was surprised myself to reflect that it's worked fine for me when I was doing sessions via zoom for a while (I do generally prefer face-to-face)
Burie01	I'm going to rejoin on my laptop brb
Bpdsurvivor	@girasole - necessity is the mother of invention - that's why we have Tele health
HappyCastle (PSW)	Perhaps if the more readily accessible supports aren't compatible, reaching out to other supports such as helplines or peer support lines could be useful
Girasole (Peer Worker)	And maybe drawing on personal supports too :)

Eth @HappyCastle that's a hard one. I have been in that situation. All I could do was try to get what I needed and grit my teeth, breath and get through it. It was several years on what turned out to not be a good balance of meds for me, but I only know that retrospectively. I've always been compliant with instructions though, but am grateful not to be in that situation any more.

Bpdsurvivor I think making the best out of in compatible supports requires very clear and open communication. Put everything out on the table and I guess it's about working with what you have. Take what works, and leave what doesn't.

HappyCastle (PSW) @bpdsurvivor I really like that - taking what works and leaving what doesn't

Girasole (Peer Worker) I second that @BPDSurvivor! Very clear and open communication helps in so many domains of life, including this

HappyCastle (PSW) There can often be long wait periods between appointments to see psychologists or psychiatrists if they don't have a lot of availability. How do you manage to get through these times in between appointments? Do you have people or helplines or services or self-care you draw upon? What does this look like for you?

Eth the forums were invaluable to me when I lived remotely and was isolated from all supports.

Girasole (Peer Worker)

I tend to reach out to my partner or close friends for support. My partner and I are very open about our mental health, so we can draw upon each other for support if we need it :)

Kimberley_cptsd

i dont have this problem but my mum did and she ended up going to hospital emergency and the CATT team came and helped her earlier than she could see a psychaiatrist to adjust her medication urgently after something triggered her.

Eth

I see my GP more often when unable to see pDocs. But also spend more time on the forums and these days I'm able to reach out to a couple of family members and a few friends. There were many years when I had neither.

HappyCastle (PSW)

Reaching out to my family has always been helpful to me. But also having a safety/well-being plan that I can draw on helps

Eth

Yes @HappyCastle I also have a WRAP since 2013 and can refer to my toolbox in there when I'm not travelling so well and have nowhere to reach out to.

Bpdsurvivor To mitigate this issue, as I have mentioned in the forms, I make multiple appointments at a time. At this point of time, I have for appointments scheduled two or three weeks apart, and this takes me through to June. Each time I have an appointment, I make another appointment for a few months down the track. It is easier to cancel an appointment then to make an appointment. I hope this makes sense.

Eth I make sure anyone who supports me knows where to find it too.

Bpdsurvivor * I mean I have 4 appointments already scheduled ahead of time

HappyCastle (PSW) That seems like a great way to have your supports in place and planned @bpdsurvivor. I might have to try that!

Eth Yes @Bpdsurvivor I do the same thing. Because I've been with my psychologist and psychiatrist for over 3 years at this stage they keep a regular time slot for me which my support worker roster works around.

Girasole (Peer Worker)	Speaking of wellbeing plans from what @HappyCastle said, here's our last Peer Group Chat's transcript for some reading later (if you're interested) about Wellness Recovery Action Plans :) https://www.sane.org/images/peer-support/chat-transcripts/20210408-sane-peer-group-chat--early-warning-signs.pdf
Bpdsurvivor	That's fantastic @eth and @girasole
Bpdsurvivor	Thank you @girasole
HappyCastle (PSW)	„Äç Is anyone here currently accessing peer support? Has this been beneficial for you?
Bpdsurvivor	Yes, I have a Peer support worker as well is a psychosocial support worker
Girasole (Peer Worker)	I'm so interested in looking for peer support myself! I think it's something that I would have benefited from immensely if it was an option when I first started seeking mental health help about a decade ago. I think it would complement my other professional care really well. There's something so amazing about the power of connecting with others and sharing lived experience, giving hope towards recovery. It's really special.

Eth Yes I do. Not in a formal way but I'm part of a community disability alliance in my region that does fabulous work, and also means I've made some 'freely given friendships' with really experienced and knowledgeable peers. I also had a peer mentor a couple of years ago for a couple of months.

Burie01 I really want to become a peer support or mental health worker one day. I am volunteering soon to help facilitate a group to support people who hear voices

Burie01 Voices*

HappyCastle (PSW) @Burie01 wow that's great!

Bpdsurvivor Having a peer support worker was fantastic when I was acutely unwell. Now, I feel a peer support worker and I am on the same page, hence, it has been less effective

Eth So I have both 'formal' and 'informal

Eth So I have both formal and informal supports.

HappyCastle (PSW)	That's an interesting perspective @Bpdsurvivor, I get that
HappyCastle (PSW)	@girasole I look back on my mental health recovery and think the same thing, I feel it would have benefited me a lot. Especially combined with clinical support
Eth	I really need the formal supports to have education as well as some of them lived experience whereas the informal supports are more equals, like @Bpdsurvivor said
Bpdsurvivor	Having a peer support worker gave me hope and confidence when I thought everything was hopeless.
Burie01	Wow
Burie01	That's special
HappyCastle (PSW)	That is really inspiring to hear
Eth	yes having peer contacts has really helped me too, especially with some things about NDIS - how to exercise choice and control

Girasole (Peer Worker)	That's amazing that peer support has been so important and helpful to you in your own recovery @BPDSurvivor, and now I see you provide such amazing peer support to others yourself on the forums :blush:
Bpdsurvivor	@eth, that's so true! Having somebody who has an understanding of NDIS makes the whole process less daunting
Bpdsurvivor	I'm grateful that people did not give up on me. I was not an easy case. That's why I don't want to give up on others.
Eth	Being a community guide on the LE forum i.e. being a peer support person in a way, was also extremely helpful for my recovery journey
HappyCastle (PSW)	I'm curious after this conversation, if you have learned anything helpful from others experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what did you learn?
HappyCastle (PSW)	For me, I feel inspired by everyone's experiences advocating for themselves in their journeys of finding support

Eth	Mainly I realise that there is no 'one size fits all' path to having the right balance of supports.
Bpdsurvivor	Very true @eth
Kimberley_cptsd	love the phrase "investing in ourselves"
Girasole (Peer Worker)	I learned that there are reviews of mental health clinicians online that you can read before choosing someone! I've also learned just how valuable peer support has been to others ' recovery journeys, both in being able to receive and give support :)
Kimberley_cptsd	:hugging:
Bpdsurvivor	I've realised that recovery is not just about receiving help but also being a support for others.
HappyCastle (PSW)	I love that @Bpdsurvivor sharing our lived experience is invaluable
HappyCastle (PSW)	Tonight's topic may have brought up some feelings as we talked about our mental health recovery journeys. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do?

Bpdsurvivor	I don't think I would be in my current state of recovery if I didn't have the opportunity to help others on the forums. It has been invaluable in my recovery.
Kimberley_cptsd	im eating something yummy and watching a tv series episode
Eth	toes up in front of the telly for me, maybe a snack
Girasole (Peer Worker)	I'm going to rest up and prioritise getting a good night's sleep :)
Bpdsurvivor	After rushing around all day, at the conclusion of our peer chat, I will be satisfied with simply being able to BREATHE!
Burie01	Pat my doggies
HappyCastle (PSW)	As we begin to wrap our discussion up for tonight, I want to say thank you to you all for not only attending, but for your generosity in sharing your stories and insights
Kimberley_cptsd	thanks all :D

Burie01	Thank you!
Bpdsurvivor	Thank you for the opportunity!
Eth	thanks to everyone from me too
HappyCastle (PSW)	We'd like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this Peer Group Chat. As we're trialling this service, we'd love to hear any feedback you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Please click this link: https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW
HappyCastle (PSW)	Here are some further resources that may be helpful after our discussion: Peer Support Services NEAMI: https://www.neaminational.org.au/contact-us Flourish: https://www.flourishaustralia.org.au/contact-us STRIDE: https://stride.com.au/contact-us/ Safe Haven NSW Health: https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/what-safehaven Talking to a professional: https://www.sane.org/information-stories/the-sane-blog/managing-symptoms/how-to-talk-to-your-gp-about-your-mental-health Finding a professional: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional
Eth	Personally Flourish was not a good experience for me

HappyCastle (PSW) Thank you for sharing that with us @Eth

HappyCastle (PSW) Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoyed the discussion. If you'd like to be informed when our next Peer Group Chat will be taking place, you can sign up to our mailing list here <https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up>

Eth Thanks @HappyCastle and @Girasole

Bpdsurvivor Thank you for everybody's time tonight. What a fantastic opportunity. Have a good evening!

Girasole (Peer Worker) Take care and have a good evening, everyone! :blush:

Girasole (Peer Worker) Hopefully see you next time :)

Bpdsurvivor 🙌🙌🙌

Eth :thumbsup: