

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
22 March 2023

PE1942: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

Lodged on 27 June 2022

Petitioner Fiona MacAulay

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as TRIM and STRAW in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1942>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [26 October 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to stakeholder organisations including the Mental Health Foundation, Scottish Association for Mental Health, Samaritans, the Scottish Recovery Network and the Laura Hyde Foundation.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Scottish Recovery Network and the Samaritans, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1942: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

Petitioner

Fiona MacAulay

Date lodged

27 June 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as TRIM and STRAW in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health.

Previous action

I have spoken to Edward Mountain MSP who is backing the petition. I have also lodged a petition with over 400 signatures.

Background information

TRIM is a trauma-focused peer support system designed to support the mental health of employees

STRAW is a Sustaining Resilience at Work peer support system which is designed to detect and prevent occupational mental health issues and boost an organisation's psychological resilience. STRAW is based on up-to-date scientific research.

TRIM and STRAW practitioners could help create psychological safety at work by encouraging employees to complete an incident report when they experience or witness any behaviour(s) that may affect the mental health of employees. The TRIM and STRAW processes do not interfere with any formal investigations.

The Laura Hyde Foundation has reported that 226 nurses across all settings had attempted suicide between 1 April 2020 and 31 April 2021. Furthermore, it was reported in the Nursing Times in June 2021 that in

just 6 years between 2011 and 2017, at least 307 NHS nurses took their own lives (figures released by the ONS);

Mental health problems are a major contributor to absences from work, poorer productivity with huge financial and health consequences, both to the employee and the employer.

Early intervention could reduce suffering and costs to organisations and help create a safer more positive culture.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1942 on 26 October 2022

The Convener: PE1942, on encouraging peer support programmes in public sector organisations, was lodged by Fiona MacAulay. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as trauma risk management, or TRIM, and sustaining resilience at work, or STRAW, in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health.

The petitioner has told us that use of the TRIM and STRAW processes could help to create psychological safety at work by encouraging employees to complete an incident report when they experience or witness behaviours that might affect employees' mental health. She has also suggested that early intervention could help to reduce the number of employees experiencing mental health problems and contribute to a safer and more positive workplace culture.

In responding to the petition's aims, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has provided information on a range of actions that are being taken to promote mentally healthy workplaces, including a mental health transition and recovery plan, funding for a national trauma training programme, and the establishment of a peer recovery hub by the Scottish Recovery Network.

Do members have any suggestions or comments with regard to further action?

David Torrance: I wonder whether we can keep the petition open so that we can get more information. We could write to relevant stakeholder organisations, including the Mental Health Foundation, the Scottish Association for Mental Health, the Samaritans, the Scottish Recovery Network and the Laura Hyde Foundation, to seek their views on the value of, and the need for, the provision of peer support programmes in workplaces across Scotland.

The Convener: Thank you, Mr Torrance. If colleagues have nothing to add, are members content to keep the petition open and to write to the organisations that Mr Torrance has suggested?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C

Scottish Recovery Network submission of 1 November 2022

PE1942/D: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

Scottish Recovery Network is a small national initiative which promotes recovery in mental health. We work with people, services and organisations to create a mental health system, powered by lived experience which supports people at every stage of their recovery journey. More information about us and our work can be found at www.scottishrecovery.net.

Scottish Recovery Network has a strong track record of promoting and supporting the development of peer support in communities, services and organisations. Our engagement with lived experience and our knowledge of mental health recovery in Scotland and elsewhere highlights the benefits of peer support in people's recovery journey. Our work includes providing a range of resources to support the development of peer support and peer volunteer and worker roles such as [Peer2Peer](#), a free to access, adaptable peer support training resource.

Our main focus has been on working with people with lived experience and practitioners who want to develop peer support in their communities, services and organisations. We have some awareness of TRIM and STRAW and the private sector psychological consultancy company that delivers them but have no experience of these models or products in practice. While we would support the development of peer support approaches in workplaces as a way to support good mental health and wellbeing we cannot comment on the suitability of these particular products.

Samaritans submission of 13 January 2023

PE1942/E: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

Peer Support can play a vital role in supporting mental wellbeing and helping develop a network of support. We know that peer support services are key to fostering connection and providing meaningful activities for people to take part in. However, too often peer support isn't accessible as and when people need it. Our research into loneliness has found that many respondents, and especially young people, reported peer and community support not being available to them when they need it.¹

In our report, *Hidden Too Long*, respondents with lived experience of self-harm highlighted the positive role that support from the community, including colleagues and peers, could play in reducing isolation and providing emotional support. In particular, peer-to-peer support was identified as a positive model for reducing stigma, sharing real experiences and encouraging help-seeking.² Among respondents with lived experience of self-harm in the UK & ROI, 8% had sought support from some type of group activity following their most recent experience of self-harm, while nearly 1 in 10 (9%) sought community support in the form of peer support, a helpline or text support, online support groups and online therapy.³

Across all sectors, there was a strong sense that community services like peer support groups, helplines, and third sector initiatives play an important role in supporting people in connection with self-harm specifically or by addressing the underlying causes of emotional distress. Stakeholders highlighted the role national and local policy could play in elevating and investing in community services to ensure that they are sustainable, and supporting community services to work in conjunction with other sources of support.⁴

¹ Loneliness, Suicide and Young People: <https://media.samaritans.org/documents/loneliness-suicide-young-people-jan-2019.pdf>

² Hidden Too Long: https://media.samaritans.org/documents/HiddenTooLong_uncoveringself-harminScotland.pdf

³ Hidden Too Long

⁴ Hidden Too Long

Discussions with stakeholders working with at-risk adult groups highlighted the positive role of community services, particularly those involving peer support. Engagement with stakeholders highlighted the importance of ensuring community support met the needs and experiences of different demographic groups – men, women, young people, LGBTQI communities, BAME communities – recognising where tailored approaches may be beneficial in addressing specific challenges and barriers faced by those groups.⁵

Our *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* research focussed on the experiences of less well-off middle-aged men. The men who participated in the research reported wanting to feel like they had something in common with others, whether that be shared experiences, or shared enjoyment of certain activities. Men found it easier to deal with the issues that they were facing when they knew that there were other people experiencing similar things. They liked knowing they weren't alone in their struggles.⁶

Some found it useful to discuss their experiences and strategies for coping directly, whereas for others, it was enough to know that the people around them had their own issues, without directly talking about them. Many of the men built up relationships with other attendees and started looking out for each other. The men appreciated it when people noticed that they were not there. A lot of men talked about dropping out of services and then being drawn back in because someone noticed and sought them out.⁷

The services that were most successful at engaging men over a longer period of time were usually initiatives that had appeared organically within the community. They were often developed and run by community members who had similar needs and experienced a gap in services. This meant that the initiatives were often built around the culture of that community and used language and concepts that were familiar to that community. By using familiar language and concepts, the men said they were more likely to engage because the initiatives felt less intimidating.⁸

⁵ Hidden Too Long

⁶ Out of Sight, Out of Mind: https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_-_out_of_sight_out_of_mind_2020.pdf

⁷ Out of Sight, Out of Mind

⁸ Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Alongside peer support, employers have a role to play in ensuring the conditions of the workplace support mental wellbeing. Suicide is complex and is rarely caused by one thing. However, there is strong evidence of associations between financial difficulties, mental health and suicide.⁹ Evidence on the association between working conditions, debt and suicide suggests that increased, involuntary part-time work, job insecurity and workplace downsizing are important risk factors for suicidal behaviour.¹⁰

Peer support programmes in public sector workplaces are welcome as part of a wider network of support. Alongside continued investment in peer support, Scottish Government should ensure sustainable investment in talking therapies and wider third sector community support to enable greater direct access and options for referral for those who are struggling but may not need tier 3 or 4 services. To ensure people have support as and when they need it more sustainable investment is required to promote and deliver 24-hour open access crisis support for those in distress and crisis.

⁹ Dying from Inequality: https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Samaritans_Dying_from_inequality_report_-_summary.pdf

¹⁰ Dying from Inequality