

Peer treatment support - Peers with lived experience that leads to change in CYF engagements its history, importance and impacts

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Background – Since the early 1980s, peer-based drug user organisations in the ACT have been working to support and advocate for mothers who use drugs and ATOD services. From the very beginning, key issues were identified in this area:

- stigma and discrimination faced by parents who use drugs;
- widespread assumptions that drug use equates to poor parenting;
- lack of CYF awareness that parent's health and wellbeing have consequences on the wellbeing of the child.

These issues show a gap in CYF harm reduction service provision, which CAHMA successfully fills through peer work. CAHMA fills this gap by focusing on the health and wellbeing of parents, recognising that supporting parents leads to better outcomes for the children and entire family. CAHMA does this through its Peer Treatment Support Service by providing one-on-one support to parents and helping them navigate and engage with CYF. Our PTS workers have played a vital role in identifying recurring barriers and addressing unmet need in this space.

Here are some of the key interventions that CAHMA undertook to initiate this process and provide harm reduction services in this area:

- **Community consultations** to understand and respond to the needs of parents interacting with CYF;
- **The WSP project**, provision of individual peer support for mothers and/or fathers and the Women's Support Group;
- **Building partnerships** and strengthening collaboration with CYF and other relevant services to ensure more informed, compassionate, and effective support for families.

In this presentation I will be explaining how our lived experience brings empathy, hope, insight and first-hand knowledge of working with CYF services to increase the restoration of families. This approach helps individual clients to build collaborative relationships, influences systemic change and fights stigma, discrimination and stereotypes about people who use drugs.

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