



Peer Mentoring: Women Survivors of domestic violence

Beverley Gilbert, Cohort 4 UK and Elaine Compagno, SOAR Malta

Introductions

Beverley Gilbert

Founding Director, Operations & Risk Manager

Cohort 4, Peer mentoring & support organisation for women in North Warwickshire

Senior Lecturer Violence Prevention, Domestic & Sexual Violence, University of Worcester

2 year, EU funded, multi agency GBV/DV, risk assessment & risk management trainer - 700+ professionals in Malta

Consultant & Trainer. Peer Mentoring, domestic violence, gender based violence, domestic violence, DASH (2009) risk checklist

PhD Student Examining Peer Mentoring with women who have multiple and complex needs, Anglia Ruskin, Cambridge, UK

Elaine Compagno

Founding Member, Service Coordinator: SOAR,

St Jeanne Antide Foundation. Peer mentoring, support and advocacy for women in Malta.

Trainer: Domestic Violence, Dating Violence (with Youth), Survivor's Perspectives

Author/ Editor:

Caterpillar in a Jar – a book for teens on IPV; Phoenix Rising – Starting over after domestic violence. Insider research on survivors' experiences of revictimisation by the system when trying to rebuild their lives.

Feminist history of women supporting women

- Domestic violence (DV) support for women survivors has had a proud, grass roots, community based tradition.
- Many practitioners of the first services and refuges had lived experience of DV themselves.
- They had ‘walked in the same shoes’ of the women they sought to support.
- That shared lived experience is relevant and powerful when reinforcing the survival and capacity to thrive after experience of DV.
- A history of what could be described as ‘peer support’ within the women’s movement has been documented since the first refuges and support groups were formed relating to those escaping abusive relationships (Doerner and Lab, 2017: 18).

Peer Mentoring

‘Someone with the same shared experience providing knowledge, experience, or emotional, social or practical help.’

(CLINKS 2017)



The Concept: What is Peer Mentoring?

- Peer mentoring within the DV sector is a mentoring relationship between recovered women with lived experience and women seeking support.
- Peer mentoring draws upon strengths of the 'wounded healer', such as authentic empathy, and positive models of survival and resilience.
- Considers survivors experts by experience, recognising the strengths that women with lived experience bring with them.
- An individual with some shared, lived experience, providing one to one practical guidance and support to another individual. The shared, lived experience should relate to experience rather than simply being of the same sex. It might be a shared history of surviving domestic abuse, of experiencing mental ill health or addiction. It could be of being criminalised, of being isolated or excluded from sections of society.
- Highly motivational to see another woman with similar experiences thriving.

- Based on their own lived experiences, peer mentors are considered to have a high credibility regarding the empathy afforded to their mentees (White, 2000; Jackson, 2001)
- Peer mentoring is a slowly growing area of practice with a range of population groups that are considered vulnerable or stigmatised.
(Buck 2017)
- There is little written that evaluates the process of peer mentoring, that examines whether, or indeed if it is effective for women with multiple and complex needs
- Peer mentoring differs from peer support. More personal, an allocation of one woman to undertake the role 1:1 with another

PhD research examining peer mentoring with women who have multiple and complex needs

The research objectives of this study are to:

- Examine the current use of peer mentoring with women with multiple and complex needs in England.
- To use feminist narrative research to consider what works for women mentors and mentees and also to consider where there are areas of difficulty in using peer mentoring with this group of women.
- To advance the stories of women participating in peer mentoring, creating a space where they can give voice to their own experiences.
- To inform policy and practice in the field of what works with women who have multiple and complex needs.

Two EU Peer Mentoring organisations link up: Cohort 4 & SOAR

- Coming together to empower each other after two founders met during training in Malta.
- Finding commonality of practice in peer mentoring approaches.
- Practical exchange of knowledge within EU funded visit to UK by SOAR (OCN Level 3 Peer Mentoring programme, DASH (2009)).
- Mutual support and exchange of ideas through joint work, sharing good practice and working through issues.
- Consideration of what works? For women surviving DV in the long term in our specific communities.

SOAR – Who do we work with?

- Women who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV)
- In Malta 1 in 4 women experience IPV. 75% of femicides are directly linked to domestic violence.
- Statutory specialist services focus on crisis intervention, protection and management of risk. Survivors often feel misunderstood, lost and afraid, the justice system often revictimises them.
- Survivors experience years of difficulties and challenges that are directly and indirectly linked to having experienced domestic violence.
- SOAR was launched to fill a gap in the services, providing survivor-led flexible long-term support to survivors at medium and low risk, providing peer mentorship and group-based peer support to cope with and overcome these challenges.

Cohort 4 - Who do we work with?

- Women who have experienced abuse.
- In England alone there is over 1 million women who have experienced physical and sexual abuse in BOTH childhood and as adults (Scott & McManus, 2016) One in twenty women experience sexual and/or domestic abuse during their lives, equating to 1.2 million in England.
- Many of these experience multiple disadvantages and complex or additional needs e.g. mental ill health, addictions, disability, financial disadvantage, criminalization, homelessness.
- Many women are processed through systems and left isolated. Returning repeatedly to a range of individual issue services for time limited, one size fits all interventions.
- Cohort 4 women say that they are 'done to', rather than 'done with.'

Changes in service provision for those surviving DV

- Over decades support provision for survivors has largely developed into being led by significantly larger charity organisations in the UK and by statutory or social work organisations in Malta.
- The peer led community approach being subsumed by the professionalised, time limited, outcome and target driven services.
- Commissioned services demanding specific outcomes and measurements.
- Rationing of service provision and access to meet the demands of limited funding and heightened awareness and reporting of DV.

Cohort 4 & SOAR visited a large UK Support organisation November 2018

“You’ve highlighted something very important for us today. We’ve lost what you have.

We started off small, women centered, women led. Now we’re commissioned services. Our priorities have moved away to what our commissioners want, what outcomes they value and it’s not about our women anymore. Well, not as you are, where it’s all about your women and what they need.

That’s what money does. Wages, fund raising, salaries, commissioning. It’s taken something important from us.” CEO



Potential Benefits to Peer Mentoring within the DV sector

- Survivors report that it is easier for them to approach survivor-led services.
- Peer-mentors feel involved and valued, not only as victims or survivors.
- Mentees feel understood, inspired, motivated, believed and believed in.
- Mentees are supported to rebuild their sense of self-worth, self-confidence and start to trust themselves to make decisions to reach their own goals.

Challenges of Peer Mentoring

- **UK**

- Sustainability: funding streams, lack of core cost funding and/or repeat funding, commissioning processes
- Exclusion from statutory systems & from the larger funded services
- Reliance on volunteer Peer Mentors
- Lack of suitable Peer Mentors

- **Malta**

- Barriers: Obtaining 'legitimacy' from state agencies has been challenging
- Funding issues: For training and for service provision in DV area
- Limitations: Even recovered survivors' lives can become chaotic again years later
- Limitations: Peer-mentors may experience burn out, triggering or over-identification without adequate support.

Moving Forward - SOAR

- Access funding for CPD for peer mentors
- October 2019 DASH Train-the-Trainer
- Continue to strengthen our network in Malta and EU
- Set up Malta's first Survivor-run Hub



Social Enterprise Malta - Meraki Soaps

Meraki Soaps is a social enterprise in Malta led by survivors, for survivors

Artisan and Craft Group

- Meets once a week
- Informal and non formal adult learning
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurship
- Discussion
- Peer-Support

Bath and Body Products Manufacturing

- Sales create funding for SOAR
- Flexible employment for survivors
- Exposure to hands-on business operations through volunteering



Moving Forward - Cohort 4



- Continue to operate where women survivors choose what they need, how and when.
- Increase the legitimacy of Peer Mentoring as a concept in our field of work (PhD, research, testimonies, stories from women & peer led grassroots community work).
- Continue to bring women together to support other women in their own communities.
- Continue to develop our own income stream as well as seek grant funding.
- Develop accredited training arm for our women and as an income stream.

Social Enterprise UK – Cohort 4

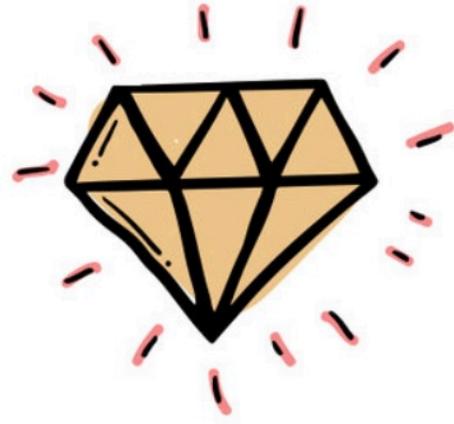
Trading: Training

Fabric items



Concluding comments...

- Small grass roots community women's groups can find it difficult in terms of sustainability.
- Some organisations are developing social enterprise trading space to create funds to improve their ability to survive in a financially difficult funding era.
- Peer mentoring offers potential to be able to offer longer term, individualized support that women with multiple needs may require within their own communities.
- There needs to be more research in this area to consider what is effective about peer mentoring as an approach and where there are significant challenges to safe practice.



women

**SUPPORTING
WOMEN**

References

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