

# Creating Connections

Impact Report 2014 - 2016



Mental Health  
Foundation



ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI  
LOTTERY FUNDED

**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families



creating  
connections  
a positive future for single parents

# Achievements



Between 2014 and 2016 Big Lottery Cymru invested £318,000 to the Mental Health Foundation and Gingerbread to develop a programme of self-management and peer support to single parents living in Cardiff and Newport. Here are some of their achievements:



# 206

single parents attended

# 21

self-management courses in Cardiff and Newport.

# 21

Single parents were recruited and trained as volunteers:

- Course Facilitators**
- Mindfulness Ambassadors**
- Event Organisers**
- Peer Support Leaders**
- Speakers/Presenters to other organisations**





# 12

Peer support groups were created made up of Friendship groups and closed social media groups.



# 250+

Single parents and their families attended 12 activities and events

# 1500+

Single parents and their families benefitted from community activities and projects organised by their peers.

The Creating Connections programme was focused around three overall outcomes; That single parents would:

1. Show improved mental wellbeing, increased confidence and self-esteem and would feel better able to meet the challenges they face in their lives.
2. Be able to make their own individual goal choices and develop the skills and tools needed to achieve their goals.
3. Widen their social networks and develop sustained friendships that would lead to feeling less socially isolated and lonely.

# Creating Connections Evaluation Findings



## We saw improvements on the three outcomes:

39 single parents completed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale at the start of the course and 6 months after.

The mean score showed a significant increase in wellbeing from baseline to six months after (42-48).

83% of single parents (33/40) surveyed achieved their primary goal\* within six months.

76% of single parents (30/40) surveyed achieved their second goal within six months.

Single parents who took part in the evaluation completed a 'Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile (HPLPII)' at the start of the course and six months after.

Overall health promoting lifestyle scores showed improvements including the subscales general health, exercise and nutrition on the HPLPII.

\*Most goals were related to employment, education and volunteering, followed by self-improvement and improving relationships. Parents also made goals about housing, finances and building confidence. Examples of goals are: learning to drive; applying to university; setting up a decorating business; losing weight; tackling phobias; better relationship with ex-partner.



“I was so down in my first session. I felt I had failed in many things. It gave me the opportunity to make new friends. I have no family here. I found myself quite lonely.”

### **Single parents are at a higher risk of experiencing mental ill-health.**

We know that people living in poverty, people who feel stigmatised and those who are isolated are at higher risk of developing mental health problems, and evidence shows that single parents are more likely to be exposed to these negative factors, as they are twice as likely to be living in poverty than coupled families,<sup>1</sup> experiencing isolation and feeling stigmatised.<sup>2,3</sup> Research has also consistently shown that single mothers have roughly three times the prevalence of depressive episodes compared with other groups.<sup>4</sup>

### **Single parents attended Creating Connections for a variety of reasons:**

- To build their skills and confidence
- They hoped the course would help with their depression and anxiety
- They hoped it would help with finding employment
- They felt isolated and wanted to meet other single parents
- They wanted to get support for issues and challenges in their lives such as relationship or parenting issues.

“Now I take more care of myself. I realise when you feel down, you are negative and it does not help you.”



**Single parents said that attending Creating Connections was of benefit to them:**

- The majority said that they gained confidence through taking part.
- Participants felt that it was helpful to focus on their own individual goals and reflect on what they wanted to achieve in their lives.
- They also learned new skills that enabled them to set and achieve goals – many still using goal setting long after completing the course.
- Creating Connections helped single parents to understand the importance of looking after their own health and wellbeing;
- And gave guidance and advice on where to get support and help locally.
- Parents valued sharing experiences and making friends so that they felt less lonely and isolated.
- Participants were able to appreciate the positive aspects of being a single parent and what they achieved in spite of the challenges they faced.



## **Key Messages that Single Parents who took part in Creating Connections want to share.**

### **1. Hope for the Future**

"I enjoyed the fact that some of the other people in the group had come through this and were OK. When I first came to the group I had felt that nothing was ever going to be OK again, but to see other people who had managed made me feel like 'I can do this too'."

### **2. Being more in control**

"I get a real sense of achievement when I tackle a problem and manage to sort it out myself..."

### **3. The importance and value of peer support and building positive relationships**

"I was having a problem with my ex and getting on with him. I knew how important it was that I managed to 'get on' with him for my son but I was finding it really difficult, as he was sometimes really challenging and I would rise to it.

Sharing this with the group helped me to get some ideas on how to deal with this problem and now I don't rise to him and take the upper hand. It has really helped us with our relationship, which I know is important to my son."

### **4. Looking after yourself and asking for help and support**

"(Before the training) it was always just about the children and I didn't care about looking after myself, but now I realise the importance of putting myself first."

"Accepting help is not an admission of not coping, it is actually a strength because it is saying I don't want to live like this so I am going to do something about it."

### **5. Take opportunities to learn new skills**

"I feel much more aware of my skills and increased my self-awareness. I am motivated and want to continue my connection with Gingerbread and am able to set goals to an attainable level."

"It is easy to get into a really negative rut, and think of only the negative things about my situation. The course helped me to think of all the positive things of being a single parent and to enjoy being more in control."

# Why Self-Management with Peer Support works



There are a variety of approaches to self-management which has predominantly been used to help people with severe and chronic health conditions to understand their condition better, make informed decisions about care, and engage in behaviours that maintain and improve their health.<sup>5</sup>

The core elements of the Mental Health Foundation approach to self-management with peer support can be summarised as:

**Control** – people should be in as much control of their lives as possible and able to make their own decisions and choices as far as possible.

## **Life orientated, not condition orientated**

– the focus is on people’s lives, minimising the negative impact that a condition/diagnosis may have on their lives.

**Asset/Strength based** - peoples’ experience can be turned into expertise. The facilitators share direct experience with the participants.

**Working Together to find solutions (peer support)** – recognising that we are all part of a community and relationships are a key element of everyone’s existence (peer support).

**Developing new skills:** building individuals’ capacity to manage and improve their lives through goal setting, action planning, problem solving.<sup>6</sup>

**Creating Connections was itself adapted from a previous peer-led self-management project working with people with severe and enduring mental health conditions.** Adaptation increases the possibility of extending self-management with peer support to other situations and community settings. Creating Connections has highlighted key factors for the success of this model including; the importance of co-production with participants, peer support as core to development and delivery, working from the strengths of the participants, compassionate facilitation and reflective practice.





## The Creating Connections Programme consisted of:

**Courses (one day a week over six weeks)** that offered skills training in goal setting, action planning and problem solving within a therapeutic peer group setting.

**Ongoing peer support** that provided shared experience and mutual support, access to speakers and visits to various agencies/activities.

Support in developing **individual and community goals**.

A range of other **training and volunteering opportunities**.

The courses were run within community settings and in order to minimise barriers to attendance; crèche/nursery places were paid for, transport costs were reimbursed and the programme was carried out from 10am to 2pm, to enable parents whose children were of school age to attend.

Creating Connections with:



Our own attitudes and behaviours so that we are better able to build satisfying lives

Other single parents who share similar experiences, for mutual support.

Organisations and agencies that can help us to meet the challenges life throws at us and achieve our goals

Our friends and families by strengthening our relationships and support networks

# Involving Single Parents in the Design and Delivery



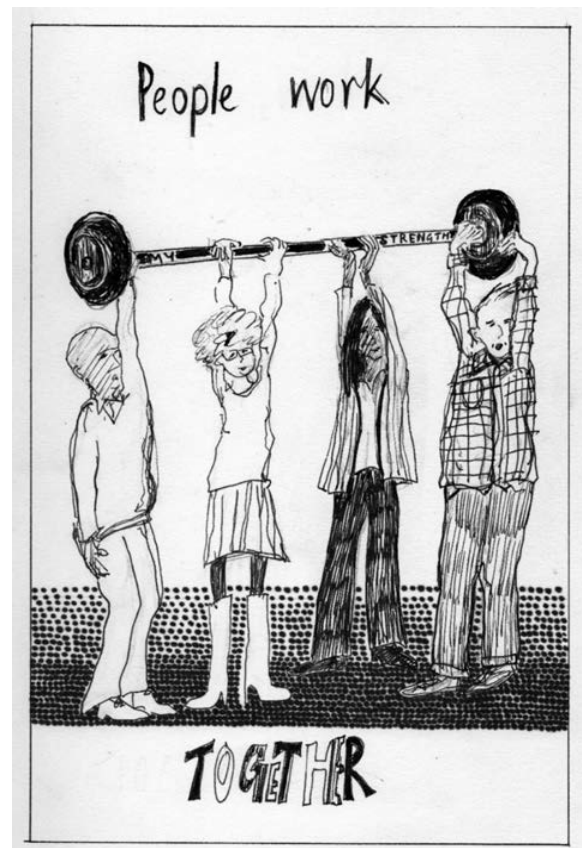
**40 single parents** were interviewed or attended focus groups to help the design of the project funding bid.

**2 single parent workshops** helped design the format, content and structure of the self-management course and workbook.

**Single parents volunteered** as co-facilitators, peer group leaders, event organisers, gave talks and presentations during the life of the project

Each course group was invited to complete a '**Community Goal**' which involved working together to bring benefit to other single parents and the wider community. This activity promoted single parent involvement in Creating Connections as each community goal was led and delivered by single parents with the support of the staff team.

In examining the levels of single parent involvement in Creating Connections it is fair to say there has been successful co-production in major areas of the programme. This could be an important



factor in achieving the desired outcomes of the project in terms of improved confidence and achievement of goals.

“Co-production is not just a word, it’s not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them.”<sup>7</sup>

# Sustaining the Work and Looking to the Future



There have been a number of developments from Creating Connections, some of them initiated by single parents themselves.

- A small group of single parents have established a Community Interest Company that works towards supporting single parents' health and wellbeing. 'Single Parents Wales' organises social events, has a monthly parents and kids rambling club, offers peer support through social media and hopes eventually, to establish a child-friendly café and training venue in Cardiff.
- The Mindfulness training has resulted in a small group of 'Mindfulness Ambassadors' trained to run brief mindfulness techniques that they can use with other parents in peer support groups.
- The Single Parents Choir still meets when it can and has performed at a number of events. There are plans to apply for further funding to develop it into a fully-fledged community choir.
- Public Health Wales commissioned a pilot project to run a self-management course with young parents in Barry. Cardiff University has conducted an evaluation to look at the feasibility of developing the programme.
- As a result of the participation of some single mother refugees in Creating Connections, the Mental Health Foundation is currently designing a peer-led self-management project aimed at supporting the mental health and wellbeing of women and girls seeking sanctuary in Wales.
- Gingerbread Friendship Groups have been established in Newport and Cardiff by single parent volunteers and supported by a Gingerbread project officer.



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