

## The **power** of peer support

**One of our peer support staff reveals why peer support means so much to her, while one of the people using our services tells how peer support has given her the hope she's been desperate to find.**

“For the uninitiated, a peer support worker is someone who has progressed in their own recovery, who identifies themselves as a peer and is willing to support other people with their mental health problems.

For me my recovery, my hope, came initially, not from the medical support I received – far from it – it came instead through a friendship with someone who had had similar experiences to me.

I was massively inspired by her and how she lived her life. When I suffered with mental health difficulties a few years after meeting her, she became a constant visitor to me in the hospital I had chosen to go into.

### **My newfound friend**

I was told in this institution that I would probably have a very restricted life. Despite having been a straight A student, my life aspirations were written off. I had dreamt of working in children's television but was told pressured work would be out of bounds. I was told I may always have to be on the

medication I had been given and I knew that would prevent me from having children. My newfound friend helped me to challenge these assumptions and helped me find a new and meaningful life for myself. I went on to achieve all the things I was told I couldn't.

Now I work for Second Step as a peer support worker dealing with mental health issues on a daily basis – not mine, but those of my clients. My supervision with our Peer Support Officer helps me to troubleshoot issues that can arise when I'm working with complex boundaries, revealing parts of my story to help others deal with theirs.

### **Tackling stigma**



It also helps me to tackle any discrimination I might encounter. It's not always easy to declare yourself openly as having lived experience, but for me it's worth it for the difference I can make to people's lives.”

> **Rosie pictured**

(This is an edited version of Rosie's blog which was published in Community Care magazine to mark Time to Change Day on 5 February – the campaign to end the stigma and discrimination experienced by people with mental health problems).

## **Why peer support works for me**

Julia (not her real name) uses Second Step services and has been working with her peer support worker for some time.

“I really feel like my peer support worker truly listens to my story, without any judgement. When she shares parts of her story with me, I no longer feel alone. It is a different kind of relationship. Some people may just ask questions, with my peer support assistant, I feel she really does want to know the answers.

She understands why truly listening to me, is so important. Because, when someone really listens and supports without judgement, it is truly healing. When I reflect on this listening, I realise I can change things - sometimes the listening and support is like a mirror for me. For me, the peer support relationship is so natural. The bond is formed very quickly because you know they've been through something similar to you. Working with a peer support worker has given me the best example I can have that there is hope and that I can recover.”

# Hello and Welcome



Welcome to the first Second Step News of 2015. This issue is focusing on peer support – what it is and what it means for one of our peer support workers, and for someone who has been receiving regular peer support for some time.

Second Step has pioneered peer support, being one of the first mental health organisations to integrate paid peer staff into the organisation, offering people who use our services the opportunity to work with someone who has had their own experiences of mental health services and mental health problems.

Read here about Rosie's experiences of being a peer support worker and also hear from one of the people she supports. Powerful stuff – so much so that the online magazine for 300,000 plus social care professionals, Community Care, published Rosie's blog. You can read it in full on their website at [www.communitycare.co.uk](http://www.communitycare.co.uk)

In other news, this is Bristol's Homelessness Awareness Week where organisations including Second Step are working together to raise awareness of this worrying problem. Look out for one of our volunteers, Barry Double, who is supported by our floating support team in South Gloucestershire. He is sharing his story through the media to try and persuade others to reach out for help. Emotive and inspiring in equal measure.

Do get in touch if you would like to share your story or your experience with others at Second Step. We'd love to hear from you.

**Jane Edmonds**  
PR & Communications Manager

[jane.edmonds@second-step.co.uk](mailto:jane.edmonds@second-step.co.uk)  
07841 777401

## Making your experience count

**Barry Double**, who is supported by staff in our South Gloucestershire Floating Support team, is helping fight the problem of homelessness in Bristol by taking part in an awareness campaign organised by Bristol City Council. Barry is determined to use his experiences of homelessness, alcohol dependency and post traumatic stress disorder to help others. Watch out for the film during Homelessness Awareness Week starting on February 23.

### Sleeping out

The rise in homelessness has resulted in around 400 households being in temporary accommodation in Bristol on 31st December 2014. This increase has occurred despite many organisations working in partnership in the city to prevent homelessness. The Homelessness Awareness Week (February 23rd-27th), which culminates in the annual Sleep Out on February 27th, aims to raise awareness about the issue of homelessness and the services currently available.

The city council and our partners are running a week long campaign to raise awareness that:

- Homelessness can affect anyone
- There are a large number of 'hidden homeless' people in the city that we want to access our services and let them know how to access these services
- In 2014/15 the Mayor's Fund is supporting homelessness charities with grants to assist work with homeless people or people at risk of becoming homeless
- The Mayor will also be joining Sleep Out 15 which has been arranged by the Bristol Christian Action Network (BCAN), the Julian Trust and other partners.



## Beating the blues on Blue Monday

Pollsters call it the most depressing day of the year – calculated on it being three weeks after the Christmas festivities, a week before payday for most people and on one of the coldest days of the year. This year, it fell on Monday 19th January. Seizing the opportunity to fight back against the winter blues, voluntary sector organisations across Bristol came together for the Blue Monday event at the Galleries Shopping Centre, getting support, information and volunteering opportunities out to the public.



It was an early start for Second Step staff, but we had a full rota of people to help on our stall, which also allowed people to network with other agencies and make productive use of their shifts. We were located next to Bristol Mind and Rethink, which was useful in creating a corridor of mental health charities within the many stalls set up across the ground floor level. Many people came to speak to us about the work of the organisation, to sign up for further information, and to collect leaflets and literature. A good number of people said that they had heard of Second Step, and wanted to learn more.

## New horizons

A new Peer Mentoring Project is starting for people who use our services in North Somerset. Our mentors will be people who have used services (run by Support Alliance) in the past and feel ready to help others achieve their goals. All our mentors will receive training and support themselves to enable them to support people currently using services.

The new project builds on the success of Horizons, a mentoring project that has been working in Bristol for 15 years.

Mick Mullarkey, Senior Volunteer Coordinator, said “The long term benefits of peer mentoring are well documented in both the voluntary and commercial sectors for both mentors and mentees alike. Mentoring enables people to increase their community networks, build their confidence and self-esteem and helps to reduce social isolation”.



Photo: Peer support training in action - helping people understand the role of peer support at Second Step

# Currently 60%

of Second Step volunteers are peer volunteers.

The project is currently recruiting 15 volunteer mentors and our first mentoring training is set for 25 and 26 February 2015. If you would like to train to be a mentor, please get in touch. Information can be found on our website at [www.second-step.co.uk/volunteering-opportunities/](http://www.second-step.co.uk/volunteering-opportunities/) Alternatively, contact Mick Mullarkey, Senior Volunteer Coordinator for North Somerset on 01934 645999.

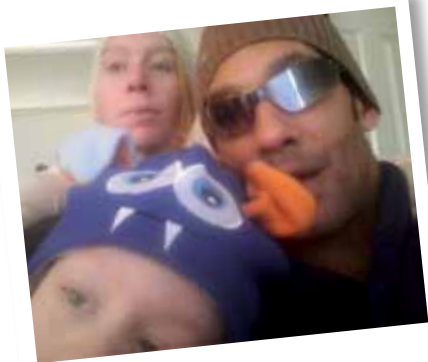
## Second Step's Impact Report



Second Step's Impact Report is now out giving you the highlights of the work we did in 2014 focusing on some of the people who used our services and some of the work being done across the organisation. It is a useful tool to help inform others about the work we do. Please do take a copy from reception.

## Putting a hat on for the homeless

IF Group Bristol, the advisory group for the Big Lottery funded Golden Key Programme, supported Woolly Hat Day – a homelessness awareness campaign led by homeless charity St Mungo's Broadway.



Woolly Hat Day took place on Friday 30th January and members of the IF Group were encouraged to take selfies for their own social media accounts and for the IF Group's own website, as well as their Twitter and FaceBook pages.

Photo: IF Group member Jason, his partner Liana, and his son Josh put on their hats to raise awareness of the problems of homelessness in Bristol.

## Job opportunities at Second Step

The changes taking place in Bristol's mental health services have resulted in new ways of working including the introduction of a new role of recovery navigator. Many of the voluntary sector organisations involved in delivering new services under the banner of Bristol Mental Health are still recruiting for recovery navigators – including Second Step. We are also working with AWP and Missing Link to set up a new Community Rehabilitation Service for the city and are currently recruiting to new roles in this service as well.

Please go to:

[www.second-step.uk/jobs](http://www.second-step.uk/jobs)



Here are some of our first recovery navigators – please come and join them and be part of a truly innovative team.”



## How can we improve the quality of our services ?

The members of our two service user groups – the Stepping Forward Group (SFG) and the Service Improvement Group (SIG) – looked at this question as part of their contribution to the recently held Quality Day for support staff at Second Step.



The presentation prepared by representatives of both groups - Justine and Paul from SFG and David and Pearl from SIG - was the highlight of the day offering an insight into what a good service is from the point of view of people using the service.

Justine, Paul and David who presented on the day asked everyone to take away three messages about the importance of:

- 1 working together and moving past an us and them ethos
- 2 involving people who use our services and really valuing the skills and knowledge that they have
- 3 focusing on recovery so that the organisation and the people using services progress together

SecondStep  
9 Brunswick Square  
Bristol BS2 8PE

T: 0117 909 6630  
E: [admin@second-step.co.uk](mailto:admin@second-step.co.uk)  
[www.second-step.co.uk](http://www.second-step.co.uk)

To receive future newsletters via email, please let us know by emailing [jane.edmonds@second-step.co.uk](mailto:jane.edmonds@second-step.co.uk)