

Peer workers to boost mental health services in Wide Bay

Mental health services in the Wide bay have received a boost with the addition of 11 fully qualified peer workers providing lived experience counselling across Hervey Bay and Bundaberg.

Carey Thomson, who has been a mental health peer worker for the Community Care Unit in Bundaberg since 2015 said that her journey and past mental health struggles had inspired her to help others in the community.

“For me it was really the idea that a person’s lived experience, of having a mental illness and being able to live a successful life could be shared with others, to help them support their own life with mental illness,” she said.

“My own experience with recovery, and an intentional understanding of how mental illness has impacted on my life is part of that experience that I share with others to help them in their own recovery.”

“That is where peer work is so effective because it helps dispel the misunderstanding of what a mental illness is and challenges the isolation and stigma that impacts individuals and families of those experiencing mental illness.”

Michelle McAllister, Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN’s Senior Manager for Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs said the training would provide a professional framework to build a discipline that focuses on the power of experience to help others.

“Lived experience offers people a tangible proof of recovery and goes beyond compassionate understanding towards true empathy.

“By being guided by lived experience, we can work to build a system that is focused on recovery and living a meaningful life,” she said.

Deb Friel, Manager of the Centre for Professional Development at CQUniversity congratulated the graduates on their hard work over the past 18 months.

“Each of the graduates have been either working or volunteering in the mental health sector throughout their studies and many have embraced online learning for the first time.

“We are providing a Nationally Recognised Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work which reinforces a discipline that works alongside allied health and clinical frameworks to help people recover from mental illness.

“It is great to see a range of organisations working together to train and support a peer workforce across our region.

“We wouldn’t have been able to run such a successful course without the support of the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences who will be running the course into the future,” Ms Friel said.

Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN and the Wide Bay Mental Health Unit funded the training, as a pilot program delivered by CQUniversity’s Centre for Professional Development.

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For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Matt Norman with the Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN via mnorman@ourphn.org.au or 0434 849 878