Critical issues in family peer support in a youth mental health service

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June 2, 2023

Abstract

Background: Family peer workers form connections with family/carers and can offer emotional support, psychoeducation and referrals based on their own lived experience. Although an increasing number of family peer support programs exist in the youth mental health sector, they are rarely described or reported on. There is a need for greater documentation of the experiences of family peer workers operating in the healthcare sector, in order to raise awareness of issues currently facing the workforce and support organisations to make positive changes. Methods: We present a detailed description of the family peer support program at Orygen in Victoria, Australia. In doing so, we highlight factors that impact effective program implementation and delivery from the perspectives of four family peer workers and two supervisors. Findings/Conclusions: Organisations should encourage self-care and social connections between family peer workers to reduce impacts of ongoing mental-ill health and workplace burnout and isolation. Staff should be educated about the field of family peer support to improve role clarity and foster a positive team environment. It is vital to develop a comprehensive position description, training program, and onboarding procedures to ensure new employees are adequately equipped. To improve staff retention and compensate those with further education, experience and skills, organisations may consider offering increased remuneration, negotiate longer-term contracts with a potential for a greater number of workdays, and should promote/hire senior lived experience positions. Further research is needed to formally investigate barriers and facilitating factors of program implementation in mental health settings.

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