

Families as peer workers in early childhood intervention: At a glance

This project researched, documented, and developed resources which support the introduction of families as peer workers in early childhood intervention organisations.

The use of peer work in early childhood intervention is not widely prevalent, and this project is based on the two-year experience of Plumtree Children's Services, Inc. with employing a paid peer workforce to complement its service delivery options to families.

The project draws on the extensive experience and evidence relating to the implementation of peer workforces in the mental health sector, as well as on Plumtree's experiences. Early findings suggest that benefits, challenges and barriers are similar across the sectors.

When peer work is done well, it has the potential to create a mindset shift through the sharing of personal experiences and perspectives, and is complementary to existing family-centred services available to children with disability and developmental delay and their families.

This project presents peer work as a new and untapped workforce in early childhood intervention and presents an argument for greater use of this workforce in the disability sector generally.



As result of the project, the following resources are now available:





Professional training



The key research messages of the project are:



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Plumtree's experiences with introducing peer work parallel those in the mental health sector, which therefore have direct relevance to ECI.

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Peer workers offer unique benefits to families of young children with disability and developmental delay that are not available through existing early childhood intervention (ECI) organisations but which are complementary to them; these benefits also impact positively on the peer workers themselves, and are vital and should be explored and developed further.

The implementation of peer workforce models faces challenges and barriers but these can be mitigated by rigorous and pre-emptive organisational action, sector development, and education of the community on the benefits of peer work.

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For more information and to view the deliverables, please see <https://plumtree.org.au/research-on-peer-work-in-eci/>, or contact Dr Melanie Heyworth, project manager and peer worker, Plumtree, mheyworth@plumtree.org.au (02) 9572 8840.

This resource is supported by a grant offered under the Innovative Workforce Fund, administered by National Disability Services (NDS) with funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The opinions or analysis expressed in this document are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department, the Minister for Social Services or NDS, and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy. © Plumtree Children's Services, Inc. 2018.