



Black Dog
Institute

eFriend Evaluation

Phase I

Date 27.08.2020



Executive Summary

eFriend is a virtual platform that provides support and connection to people over the age of 18 who are feeling down, lonely, isolated, or worried, implemented by Independent Community Living Australia (ICLA). eFriend provides a minimum of three and maximum of fifteen peer support calls that participants can book online.

The Black Dog Institute agreed to conduct a two-phase process and outcome evaluation for the eFriend program. Phase I of the eFriend Program evaluation was to describe the scope of the program’s activities, and to produce learnings to improve the program implementation. The two domains of the data collection were participation and implementation. It was decided to also include some short-term outcome domains in Phase I of the evaluation.

The findings of the evaluation showed that participants in the eFriend program consisted of those aged 18 years and over that are lonely or feeling isolated. The program achieved high levels of satisfaction for participants. It performed well in client onboarding and the delivery of lived experience. The program did not perform as well in the areas of delivering peer sessions over video due to issues with technology and the processes around ending the peer relationship.

The Peer Support Workers (PSWs) reported a strong commitment to both participants and eFriend Program. PSWs developed deep, satisfying relationships with participants in the program based on their lived experience. They reported that they found it easy to develop these relationships and felt safe and empowered in their role as a PSW to do so.

Participants showed a high level of satisfaction of the program across all demographic categories. They expressed deep gratitude for the program and the hope that it was being promoted extensively so that other people facing challenges could access it. Participants felt they had been supported and listened to and valued having someone's lived experience being shared with them. Participants felt understood and that they had connected with someone.

PSWs were somewhat dissatisfied with the communication technology used by the program. The activities relating to professional development of PSWs and their ongoing supervision had mixed results. Some training was highly valued by the PSWs while other training seemed to be of poor quality or not relevant to the role. The ongoing supervision and support at the program level for PSWs was of mixed quality and consistency. PSWs indicated that organisational support provided by ICLA as inconsistent.

The program has made positive progress in developing the skills and confidence of the PSWs; increasing their knowledge of mental health and crisis resources; and increasing their confidence.

Positive short-term outcomes were evident for participants across all areas including feeling understood and connecting with someone. Findings also showed that participants felt more hopeful and optimistic; more confident to take positive action in their life; and more empowered to take charge of their life.

The evaluation made recommendations for the program in the areas of policy and practice; program monitoring and evaluation; and the training and support of PSWs.

Table of Contents

<p>_Toc80966891</p> <p>Executive Summary.....</p>	<p>2</p> <p>2</p>
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Evaluation Objectives and Design	4
Program Description	4
Purpose and Approach of Evaluation.....	4
Evaluation Questions	4
Methodology.....	5
Data Collection.....	5
Program Data	5
Participant Survey	6
Peer Support Worker Survey	6
Peer Support Worker Interviews	6
Data Analysis.....	6
Limitations	6
Findings.....	6
Participation.....	7
What are the characteristics of the participants of the eFriend Program?	7
To what extent does eFriend reach the intended participants?.....	8
Implementation	9
Key Learnings	22
Participation.....	22
Reaching those in need.....	22
Program utilisation.....	22
Implementation	22
Participants	22
Peer Support Workers.....	23
Recommendations	25
References	27
Annex 1 - Program Logic Model.....	28
Annex 2 - Data Collection Framework	29

Evaluation Objectives and Design

Program Description and Background

eFriend is a virtual platform that provides support and connection to people over the age of 18 who are feeling down, lonely, isolated, or worried, implemented by Independent Community Living Australia (ICLA). eFriend provides a minimum of three and maximum of fifteen peer support calls, either over the phone or on video call, that participants can book online.

Participants initiate the service, receive an introductory call, and then receive sessions once a week (or at a frequency determined with the eFriend Participant) where peer support workers (PSWs) share their lived experience and provide emotional support. PSW's may conduct risk assessments, safety plans, and referrals as needed. In addition to client-facing activities, ICLA provides support, supervision, and professional development to PSWs who deliver the eFriend service.

Participants are assigned the same PSW for the duration of the program. PSWs can debrief after every call if necessary and reflect and debrief as a team on a monthly basis.

The eFriend program was originally launched in June 2020 but adjustments were made to the original model, and the program was relaunched in July 2020. The program was in its early implementation phase during the COVID-19 global pandemic with lockdowns being experienced by both participants and PSWs at different times. eFriend was without a Program Manager for an extended period of time in early 2021 and ICLA senior management had to step in to manage the program. At the same time, ICLA was going through significant change with the recruitment of a new CEO.

Purpose and Approach of Evaluation

The Black Dog Institute agreed to conduct a two-phase process and outcome evaluation for the eFriend program. The purpose of Phase I of the evaluation was to describe the scope of the program's activities, and to produce learnings to improve the program implementation. The Phase I process evaluation sought to describe program processes and determine the quality of the program in relation to program participation and implementation.

The evaluation approach followed a participatory approach that promoted empowerment for both those that deliver and those that receive services. eFriend stakeholders were involved in the design, implementation and analysis of the evaluation through co-creating the program logic (see Annex 1) which guided and informed the evaluation; contributing to the design of the overall evaluation and the data collection instruments; and participating in the data analysis and review of recommendations.

Evaluation Questions

The questions that the evaluation sought to answer in Phase I were as follows:

1. Participation: How well did the program reach its intended participants?
 - a. What are the characteristics of clients and PSWs who participate in eFriend?
 - b. Are there differences in how different subgroups participate?
 - c. To what extent does eFriend reach the intended participants?
2. Implementation: How well has the program been implemented?
 - a. To what extent has the program been delivered as intended?
 - b. What were the facilitators and barriers to implementation?

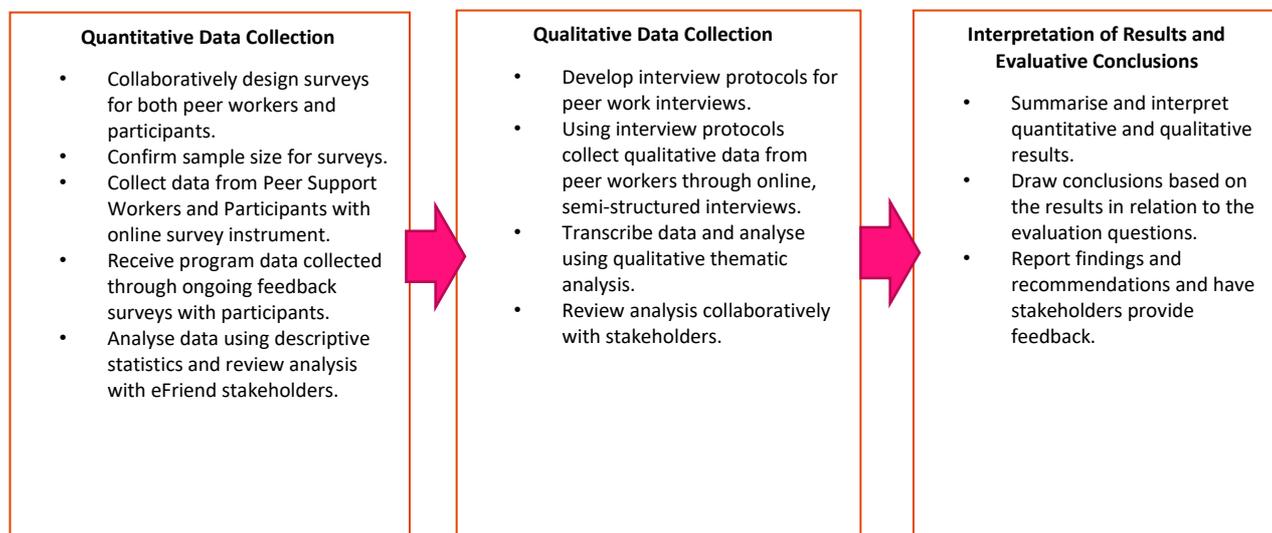
- c. To what extent are clients and PSWs satisfied with eFriend? Does it differ among subgroups?

The following outcome questions were included in Phase I of the evaluation in the data collection:

1. To what extent do PSWs report increases in knowledge about crisis and mental health resources?
2. To what extent do PSWs report increases in skills?
3. To what extent do participants report improvements in:
 - a. confidence, feelings of empowerment, feeling understood and hopefulness
4. To what extent do participants report decrease in loneliness?
5. To what extent do PSWs report increase in confidence?

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed for the evaluation involving the collection of both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative data (interviews). The diagram below outlines the steps taken for the collection of this data.



Data for the current evaluation was collected between July 2020 and March 2021 according to the data collection framework (See Annex 2) with additional questions relating to the program logic model.

Data Collection

Program Data

Participation data and data on other program indicators (see Appendix 2 for full list of program indicators) were collected from eFriend's Salesforce platform which were used to determine participation in the program. Data from a feedback survey which was sent to participants at four time points throughout the program was used to measure overall mental health rating of participants.

Participant Survey

A participant survey was developed collaboratively with the eFriend team, based on the program logic model. The survey consisted of 24 questions, which were mix of 5-point 'Likert' scale and open-ended items.

The survey was emailed to the 83 participants in the eFriend Program who were active between July 2020 and March 2021 and were willing to be contacted via email. There were 34 completed surveys, which is a response rate of 41%. The survey was sent to participants on 1 July with a follow-up reminder email on 12 July. The survey closed on 16 July.

Peer Support Worker Survey

A PSW survey was developed collaboratively with the eFriend team based on the logic model. The survey was sent to nine current PSWs in the eFriend Program. There were seven responses which is a response rate of 78%. The survey was sent on 30 June and the survey closed on 16 July.

Peer Support Worker Interviews

PSWs were invited to be part of interviews at the end of the survey. Five PSWs indicated via email they wanted to be involved and three were interviewed.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using Excel and SPSS generating descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions and qualitative data were analysed using general inductive approach whereby key themes were developed which were then tested in relation to the evaluation questions and program logic model. Findings from the primary data collection instruments were displayed in a presentation and given to eFriend stakeholders for consultation and feedback.

Survey data was triangulated with data from interviews and program documents to answer each evaluation question (Creswell et al., 2011). All data was synthesised into a 'data story', to understand the big picture of that the data was telling us, rather than looking at each analysis independently.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the study and the data collected. Firstly, the participant survey was sent to eFriend participants who had engaged in a minimum of three sessions. Data was not collected on participants who engaged in an introduction call and then did not continue to engage in peer sessions. Future evaluations could explore this cohort and the reasons they had for not joining the program.

. Data from the program surveys could not be tracked or analysed at the level of the individual. Some interesting analysis of data at the group level was done but there are limitations to this due to differences in sample size and the possibility of different participant cohorts responding to the survey. Improvement in the way this data is collected and analysed could improve the use of this data in the future.

Only three of the nine PSWs participated in the interviews. Qualitative data from the peer survey was triangulated with the qualitative data from the interviews to ensure there was consistency in the findings.

Findings

The following are detailed descriptions of the program in relation to the two measures of participation and implementation.

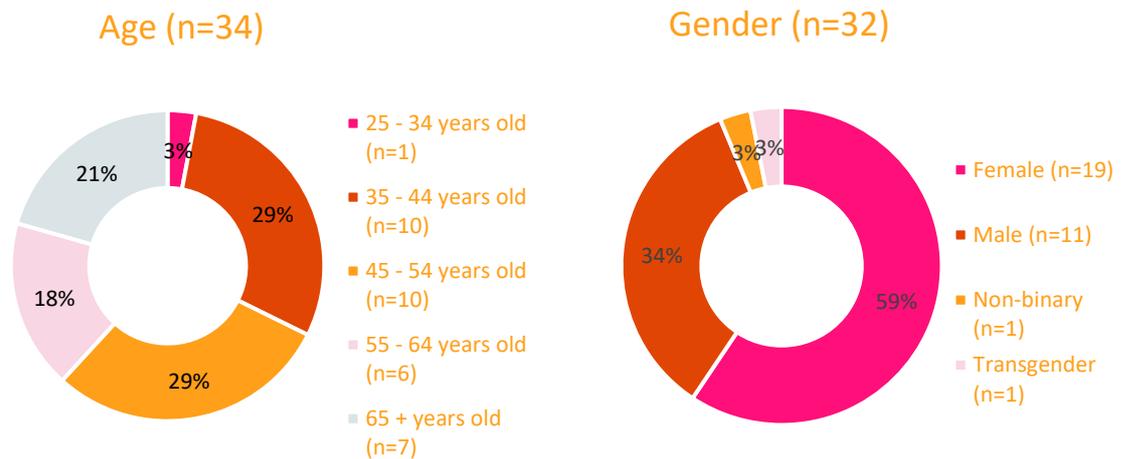
Participation

What are the characteristics of the participants of the eFriend Program?

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the program were taken from the participant survey (n=34). Respondents were all participants who had engaged in a minimum of three peer sessions.

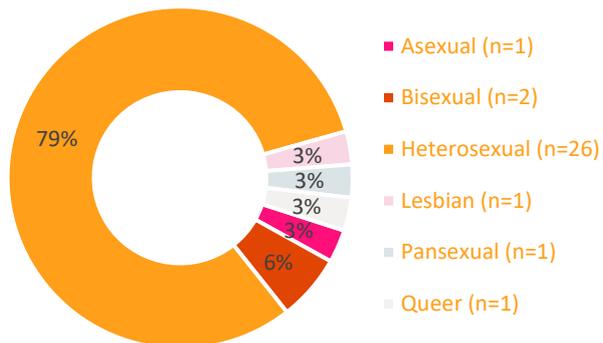
The 'Age' graph below shows participants evenly spread in the 25 - 44-year age group and the 45 - 54-year age group with both segments representing 29% of the cohort each. The 55 - 64-year age group and the 65 + year group had similar numbers with 18% and 21% of the cohort respectively.

When asked to select their gender 59% stated female and 34% male with non-binary and transgender each 3%. See 'Gender' graph below.

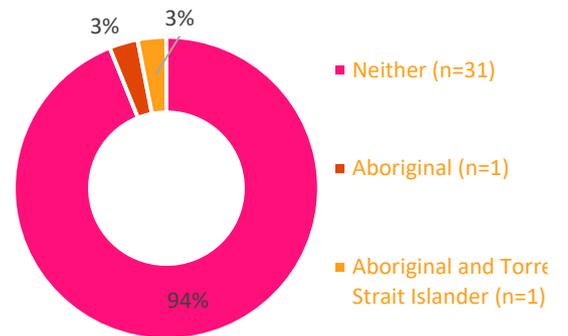


Of the participants surveyed, 79% identified as heterosexual with bisexual being the next largest category with 6% (see 'Sexuality' graph below) and no one identifying themselves as homosexual. In terms of indigenous status only 3% identified as Aboriginal and 3% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (See graph below titled 'Indigenous Status').

Sexuality (n=33)

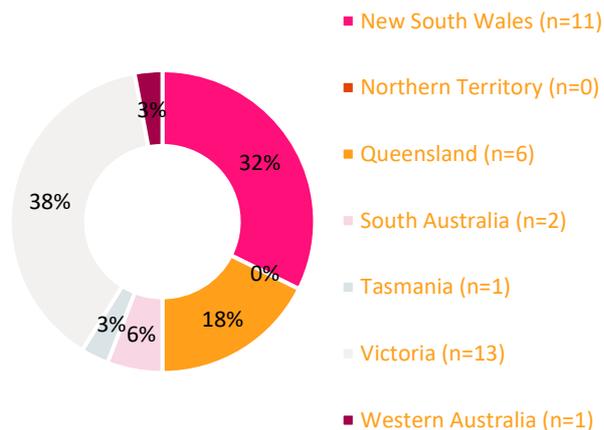


Indigenous Status (n=33)

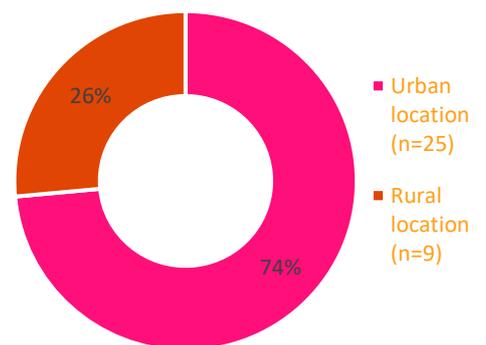


In terms of location where participants reside, the majority were from Victoria (38%) followed by NSW (32%) with Queensland 18% of the cohort (see 'Location by State' graph below). Almost three quarters of the cohort were from urban areas (74%; see 'Location by Area' graph below).

Location by State (n=34)



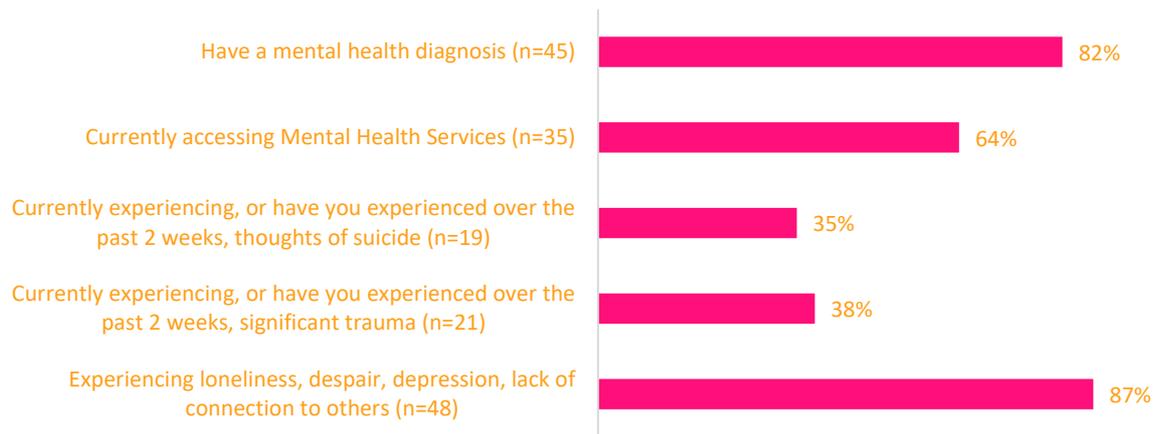
Location by Area (n=34)



To what extent does eFriend reach the intended participants?

The following graph titled 'Mental Health Status' shows the status of participants mental health prior to accessing the program. The data was collected from participants when they first enrolled in the program (n = 55, which is 15% response rate for those enrolled).

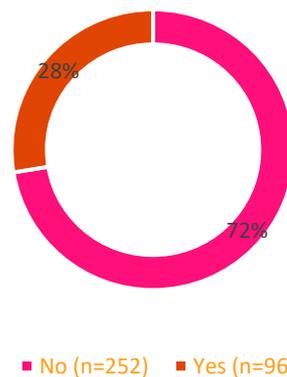
Mental Health Status (n=55)



The graph shows that almost 90% of enrolled participants in the program were feeling lonely, depressed, or lacked connection with other before signing up to the program. Over 80% already had a mental health diagnosis and over 60% were currently accessing mental health services.

All participants who sign up for the program have a high-risk screening for suicide and trauma. The graph below shows that almost 75% were not deemed as high-risk before commencing the program.

High Risk (n=348)



Implementation

The second measure for the evaluation was implementation.

To what extent are activities delivered as intended?

The 'Participation Data' table below shows data relating to program enrolments, program participation and call numbers during the specified period of the evaluation.

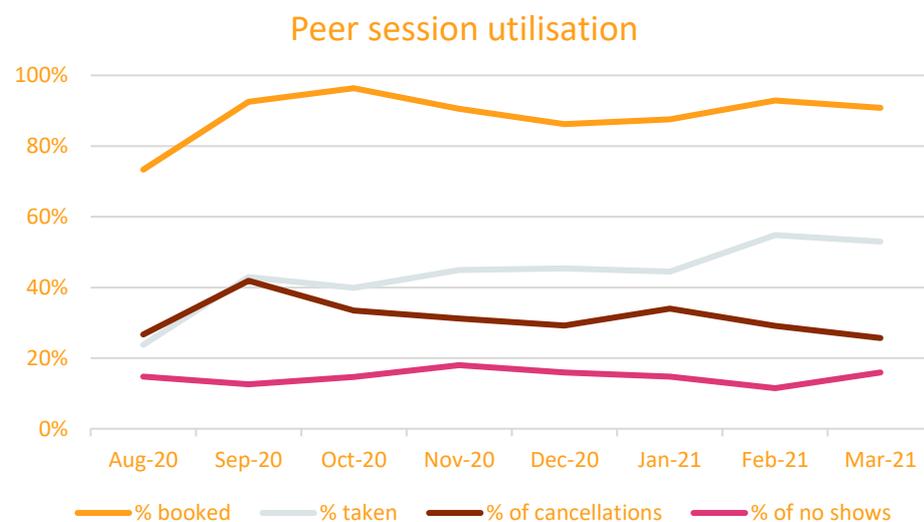
Participation Data	
Program Activity	n
Participant enrolments	353
Introduction calls	221
Peer support sessions	718
Participants completed the program	107

There were 353 participant enrolments in the program. These were participants that signed up to the eFriend program. There were 221 introduction calls, which are the number of calls the program participants received after they have been assessed as eligible for the program.

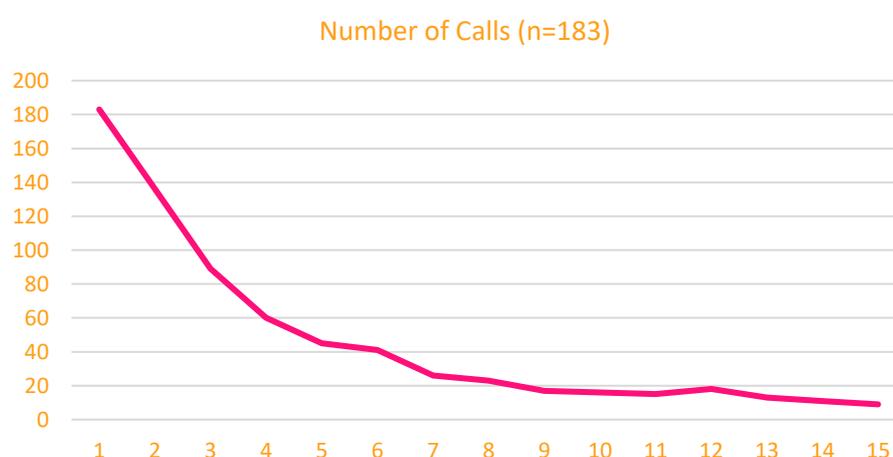
There were 718 peer support sessions, which are the calls between an eFriend program participant and a PSW following the initial introduction call. The number of participants who completed the program (n = 107) is the total number of participants who received at least three calls and up to 15 calls. Of the 353 individuals who enrolled in the program, just over 60% went on to engage in an introduction call and 30% completed the program.

On average each month, there were 255 peer support sessions available to be booked. On average each month, 89% of these sessions were booked and 44% of the sessions were actually taken. On average each month, 31% of the sessions were cancelled and 15% were no-shows.

The 'Peer session utilisation' graph below plots the percentage of available calls booked (% booked), the percentage of available calls taken (% taken), the percentage cancelled (% cancelled), and the percentage of no-shows (% no-shows).



The 'number of calls' graph below shows the total number of calls for the first, second, third call through to the fifteenth call for all participants over the period of the evaluation. The graph shows that there were over 180 first calls made to participants which drops to 89 calls by the third call. This would be considered the end of the program if three calls are completed. The median number of calls was two calls. The median number of calls of the participants who responded to the survey is between 7 and 8.



What are the facilitators to implementation?

There were three facilitators to program implementation which were mentioned by the peer workers. These were the **great team culture** of the peer workers; the **excellent rapport** developed with program participants; and **specific training programs** that were useful to the skills needed to perform the role of peer worker.

Great team culture

Peer workers in the program remarked on the strength they drew from the great team culture and the strong system of support that existed between the PSWs. PSWs stated that they felt safe and secure within the team and consequently the team environment was a caring and trusting one where team members looked out for each other. PSWs talked about the benefits of being able to openly share challenges and communicate freely in such a supportive environment.

'We're lucky to have a really good team culture, where we are very open and communicative with each other.' Peer Worker

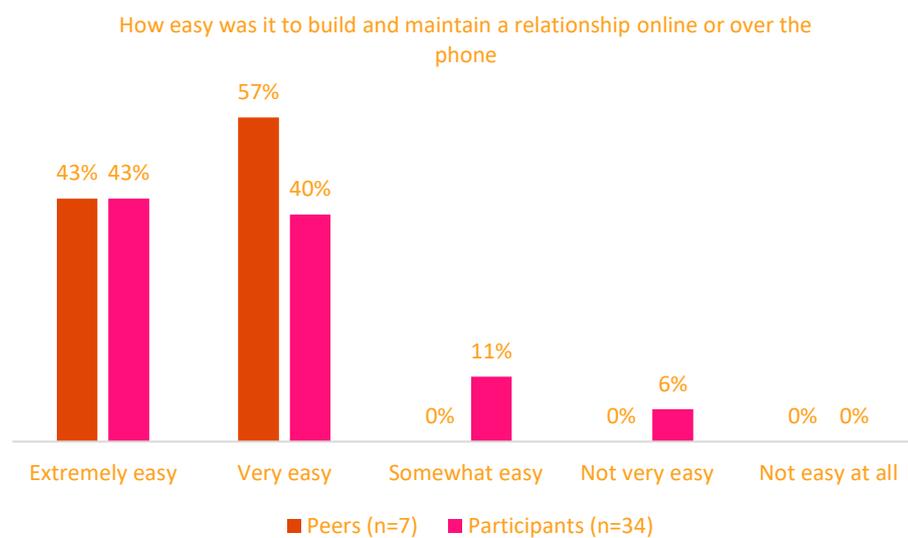
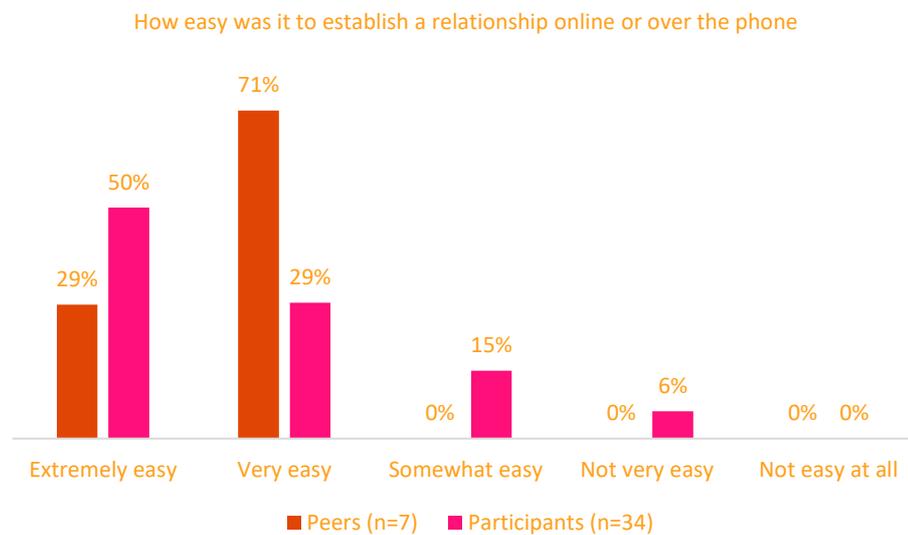
'Within our team we are very close, we have a lot of trust and support.' Peer Worker

Excellent rapport with participants

PSWs talked about the ease with which they were able to establish meaningful relationships with participants and build on these relationships. According to the program theory, a key activity in the eFriend program is building an ongoing relationship with participants which leads to changes in behaviour and attitudes in the participants. PSWs regarded the establishment and ongoing building of these relationships as relatively easy as participants are looking to reach out to someone and to form a connection.

'Typically, it's not too difficult to build rapport with people, I think, for a lot of people who are calling they're really looking to connect with someone.' Peer Worker

The perception that the peer relationship was easily established was consistent with how participants viewed the relationship. The graph below shows both peer and participant response to the question about how easy it was to establish a relationship online or over the phone.

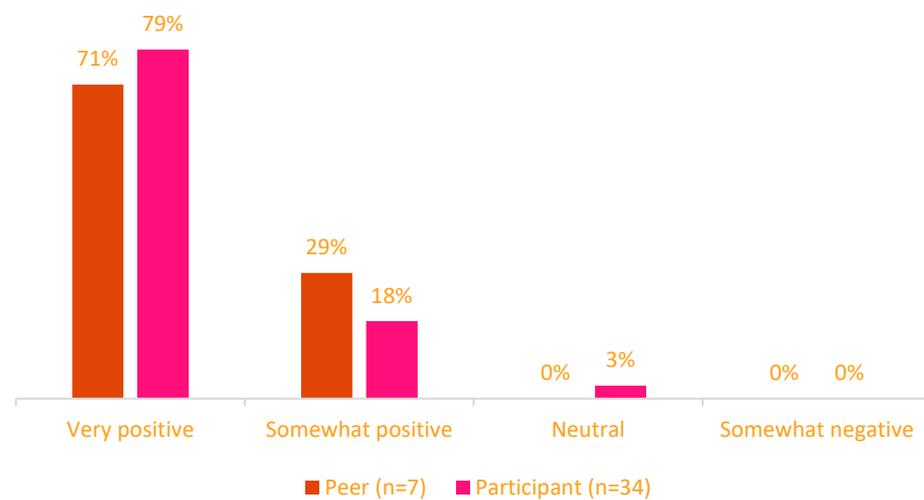


PSWs felt relationships with participants were easy to establish when employing good listening skills, sharing lived experience and validating participants experiences.

'I think the most important thing is just listening to them and hearing them and validating them, not invalidating their feelings, even if they're feeling something that someone may think is over the top.' Peer Worker

Overall, the PSWs rated their relationships with participants very highly with almost all saying it was a positive relationship. This was consistent with the view of the participants who also rated their relationships with PSWs very positively.

Overall, how would you rate the quality of your interaction with your Peer/Participant



PSWs linked the depth of the relationships they were able to form with participants to the skill of sharing lived experience.

'I've had some really profound relationships with people where they've felt loved and cared for, for the first time, and they've been able to say 'I'm gonna be ok'' Participant in eFriend Program

Relevant training

While the implementation of, and access to, training programs appeared to have been ad hoc between PSWs, some training programs were consistently rated as extremely useful in performing the peer role.

The training programs that directly supported the PSWs in the development of skills needed for the role had the greatest impact on PSWs. One such training was the **safe storytelling training**. This training enabled PSWs to learn to tell their story in a safe way that did not traumatise them or the participants. This was important for PSWs in delivering lived experience in the peer relationship.

'Safe story telling training was great - how to share your own experience of trauma. And the intentional peer support training we did was great as well.' Peer Worker

Another useful aspect of one of the training programs identified by PSWs was the **mode of delivery**. Face-to-face training over an extended number of days proved to develop and foster team cohesiveness the effects of which still permeate the team culture.

'The Open Dialogue training was 6 days face-to-face, and it was an outstanding experience' Peer Worker

What are the barriers to implementation?

There were three barriers to program implementation which were stated by the peer workers in the survey and interviews. These were the **inconsistent quality of the communication technology**; the **variable support** provided by ICLA; and the **lack of professional supervision** in the form of a trained psychologist.

Inconsistent quality of communication technology

Two main areas were highlighted with the inconsistency of the quality of the communication technology. Firstly, PSWs and participants identified difficulties with the video calls. Issues with the video link were highlighted including the link not working at all; the link breaking after connection had been made with the participant; and the inability to reuse the video link once it had been broken. These issues were time consuming for PSWs, taking valuable time away from the short session, and required IT support from outside the team, which was not always available.

'The video is definitely an issue. I feel like not every time but almost every time we have an issue with the link. And when you open the link, you can only open it once. And if you refresh the page that breaks the link.' Peer Support Worker.

PSWs and participants reported that this was unsettling for the participants, especially those who relied on human connection through seeing another person.

'On several occasions the video link would not work which was frustrating as seeing a human face when living alone helps' Participant in eFriend Program

The second issue raised by the PSWs with technology was the inability to hear participants due to the quality of the headsets used; the inadequate soundproofing in the room where PSWs spoke to participants; and the number of PSWs working together in a small space at any one time.

'I can't really hear when there are multiple people talking in the room' Peer Support Worker

Variable ICLA Support

High staff turnover and, at times, lack of access to management, were cited as factors that generated feelings of isolation for the eFriend team within the wider organisation. PSWs felt that ICLA management was often short-staffed, over worked, and time poor resulting in a lack of access for PSWs and feelings of being unsupported.

Individual PSWs cited examples of certain needs going unmet which led them to feeling undervalued. PSWs reported an expectation that their work should be appreciated and valued by the organisation due to the excellent service they provide, which was not forthcoming.

PSWs associated these issues with poor quality technology with a lack of available funds. The PSWs showed creativity and resourcefulness in making do with what they have, but again felt that the lack of management response to this issue contributed to the general lack of care and support they felt in addressing their concerns.

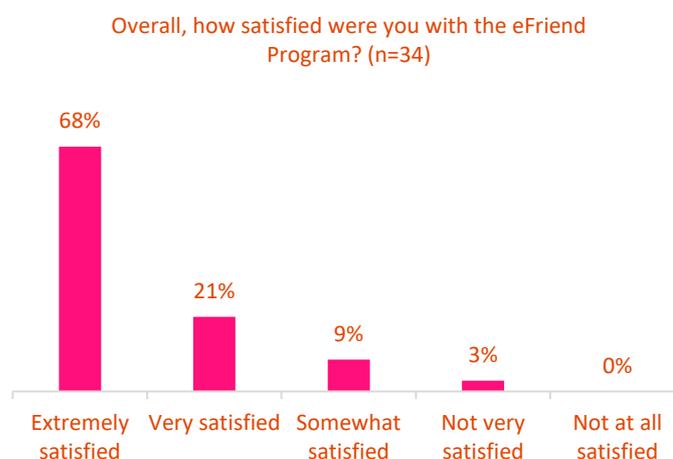
Lack of professional supervision

PSWs viewed the lack of a trained psychologist in the organisation to perform the dual role of supporting PSWs and escalating crisis situations, should the need arise as a shortcoming of the program. While PSWs have access to a psychologist once a month on a group basis at the team meeting for an hour and half, it was felt that this limited access was insufficient and took a long time to put in place.

PSWs felt that one of the managers in the organisation, either at the program or executive level, should be a clinical psychologist. They felt that this would provide PSWs with the necessary safety and security to perform their role and allow them to debrief with a trained psychologist to adequately address any issues that have arisen in a session with a participant.

To what extent are participants satisfied with eFriend?

When asked how satisfied they were with the eFriend program, over 85% of participants surveyed said they were either extremely or very satisfied with the program. See graph below.



According to gender, 68% of females were extremely satisfied and 55% of males were extremely satisfied. According to location, 72% of those living in an urban location were extremely satisfied and 55% of those living in a rural location were extremely satisfied. Using a standard t-test these differences were not statistically significant.

When asked whether they have further comments about the eFriend program, 68% of respondents to the survey left a comment and of those 70% gave comments of praise and gratitude and expressed the wish that more people could access such a peer program.

'I believe this service is incredibly valuable and I have referred other people to it after having such a positive experience myself.' Participant in eFriend Program

'Just to say a heartfelt than you for the service.' Participant in eFriend Program

'It's a great program! I hope more people are informed about this service.' Participant in eFriend Program

In outlining what they found most helpful about the eFriend program, participants identified two main themes: **feelings of having been heard** and **feelings of having a connection with someone**. Eighty-four percent of responses related to these two themes.

Participants stated that they felt that their peer worker heard them and understood them. They felt that they had been listened to and acknowledged.

'I felt supported and listened to' Participant in eFriend Program

'I felt cared about and heard' Participant in eFriend Program

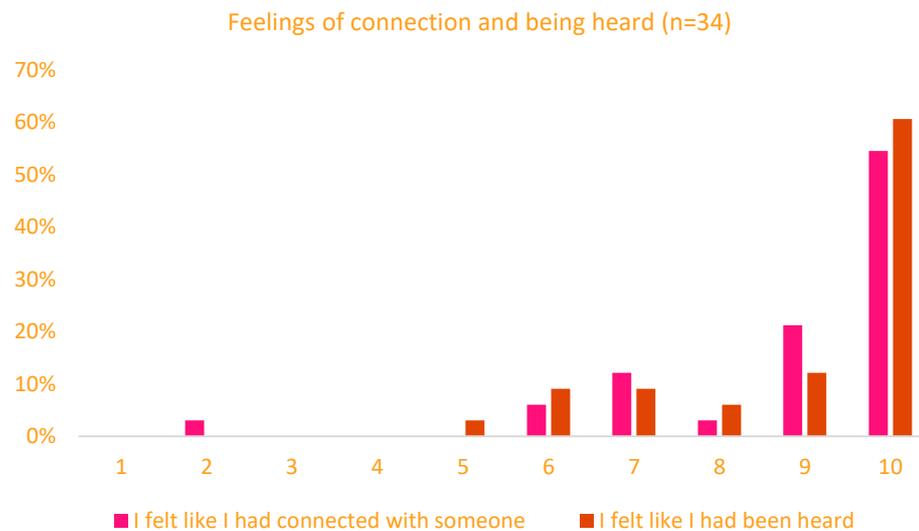
This is consistent with responses that participants gave about whether they felt like they had been heard in the eFriend program. On a scale of 1 to 10 participants were asked if they felt like they had been heard with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely. Over 70% of respondents gave a rating of 9 or 10.

Participants also stated that they felt like they had connected with the peer worker.

'I felt connected like it was a real friend.' Participant in eFriend Program

'Having someone to talk to when I was feeling down at that point in time.' Participant in eFriend Program

This is consistent with responses that participants gave about whether they felt like they had connected with someone. On a scale of 1 to 10 participants were asked if they felt like they had connected with someone with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely. Over 75% of respondents gave a rating of 9 or 10. See graph below 'Feelings of connection and being heard'.

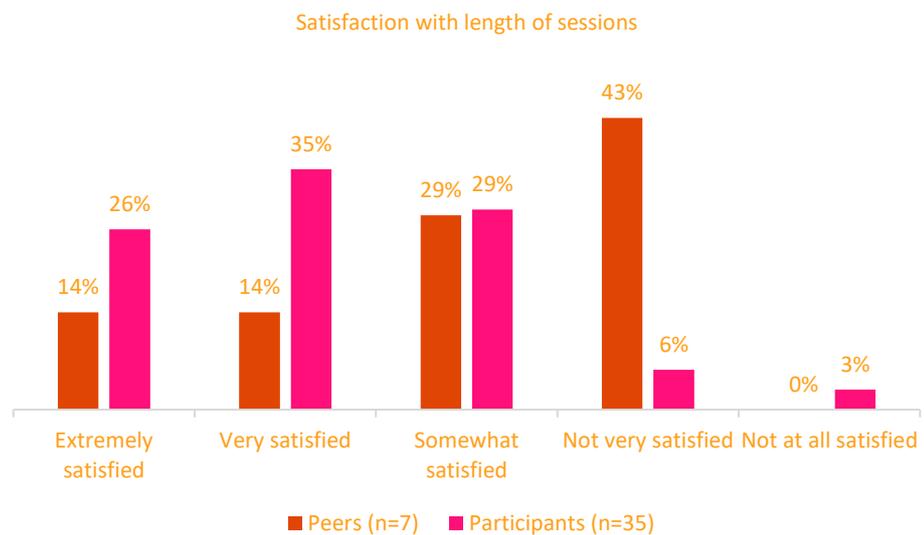
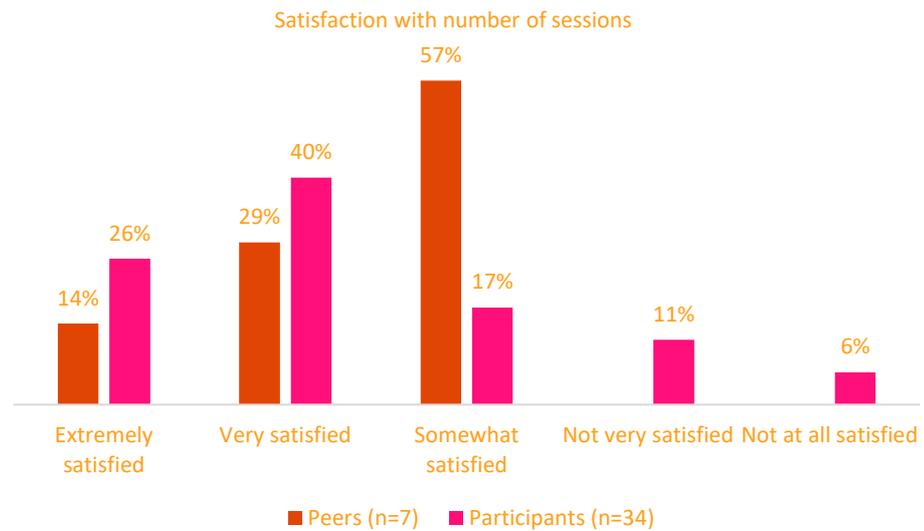


Other minor yet notable themes that emerged were the **ease of access to the service**; the **provision of useful information** from their PSWs; **receiving stories of lived experience** from PSWs; and **ending the peer relationship**.

Specific activities of the eFriend program that participants were satisfied with were the onboarding processes including signing up to the program, booking into the first call and receiving initial information about the program.

Over 80% of respondents found it extremely easy or very easy to use the booking platform. Almost 80% of respondents thought that the response rate to booking their first call was extremely or very quick. Participants almost unanimously thought there were enough time slots to arrange the first call which is supported by the program data on introduction calls. Over 80% of respondents felt that they were satisfied with the amount of information about the program before receiving their first call.

Responses to questions about number and length of sessions generated a more mixed response from participants. Over 50% of PSWs were somewhat satisfied with the number of sessions, see graphs below.



Length of sessions also showed slightly less satisfaction from both PSWs (over 40% not very satisfied) and participants (almost 30% somewhat satisfied). When asked what they would improve about the program participants raised the desire for more sessions and longer sessions.

Program documents suggest there has been a change at different times in the program to the maximum allowable number of sessions. There has also been some inconsistency with the flexibility around number of sessions.

Receiving stories of lived experience from PSWs was noted as a helpful part of the program for participants. When asked what was most helpful, participants stated:

'Talking to someone who has been through this'

and

'The lived experience of the Peer Worker'

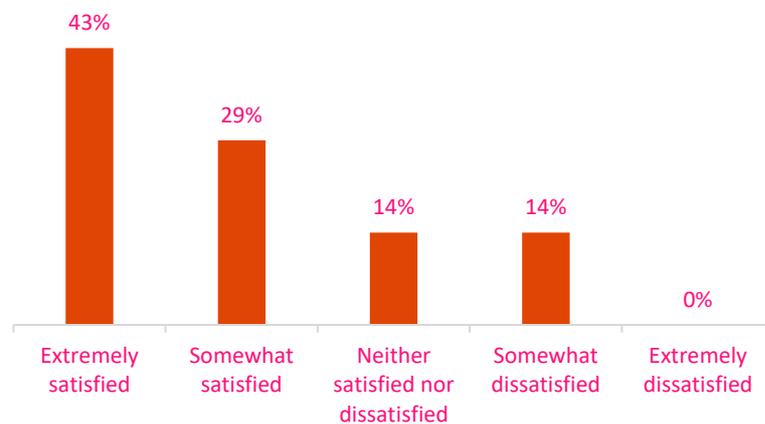
The lack of a clear discharge process and understanding when and how the peer relationship was coming to an end was a source of frustration for some.

'It would be good to know the sessions are coming to an end. I felt a bit like I'd been dropped when I just never heard from them again.' eFriend Participant.

To what extent are PSWs satisfied with eFriend?

Overall, PSWs showed a high degree of satisfaction with the program with almost 70% stating they were either extremely satisfied or somewhat satisfied.

Overall, how satisfied were you with the eFriend Program? (n=7)



High levels of satisfaction for PSWs were reflected in the qualitative data, specifically their **love of performing their peer support role** and the **need they see for this role in the community**.

'I really love the role and I want to see it continue. I just think we need these kinds of supports available to people experiencing mental health issues.' Peer Support Worker

'So, I just think stuff like eFriend, peer support, over the internet or phone just needs to continue. And if it doesn't it's really gonna cause a lot of stress for a lot of people.' Peer Support Worker

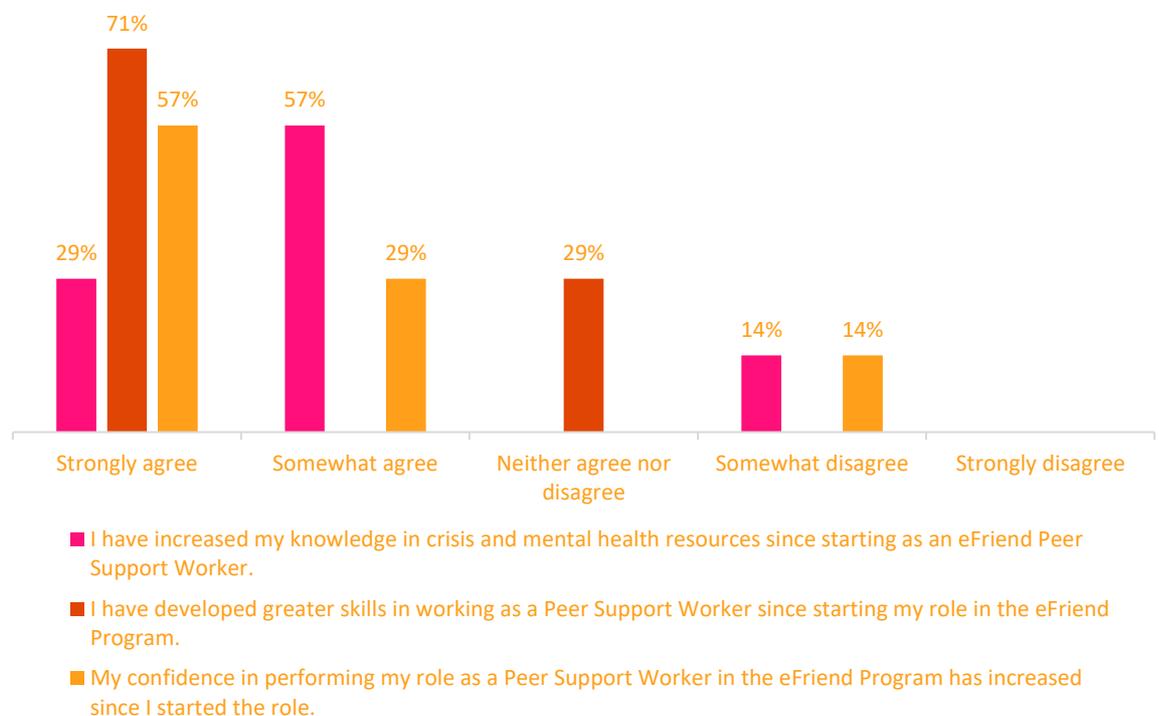
Despite the satisfaction they gain in providing a service that is needed in the community and the fulfillment they gain from performing the role, PSWs were of the mindset that the program itself needed improvements.

'The program is good. No, the program is great. It just needs some improvement.' Peer Support Worker

To what extent do peer support workers report increase in knowledge about crisis and mental health resources, increases in skills, and increases in confidence?

When asked about the knowledge, skills, and confidence they have gained in performing the peer role, between 70 and 80% of PSWs either strongly or somewhat agreed to having developed knowledge in mental health resources, greater skills, and confidence in performing the role (see graph below).

How much do you agree or disagree with the following? (n=7)



PSWs spoke about the **development of a shared database** which has been helpful in the increase of their knowledge of mental health resources for PSWs. This has been developed collaboratively by the team and is an important resource to them.

'We've had a good experience of using everyone's knowledge to bring together resources so we have a big database of different services that we can use as referrals for people.' Peer Support Worker

They spoke about **learning from each other** through listening to each other's calls and through discussions and sharing challenges.

'Having discussions with colleagues is amazing, on any given issue, like you ask each different person in the team, and you get all this different information.' Peer Support Worker

PSWs mentioned three areas in which they have gained skills: **listening skills, empathy skills and self-awareness.**

'I think the real word is empathy. And I know people think it's not a learned skill, but I believe it is. Because a lot of the time we'll just jump to solutions based and be like, oh, what about this? Have you tried this? Or what about right? when someone's in distress. It's about getting down someone's level and just listening and being there is what's most important, and I feel like I didn't have that skill before.' Peer Support Worker

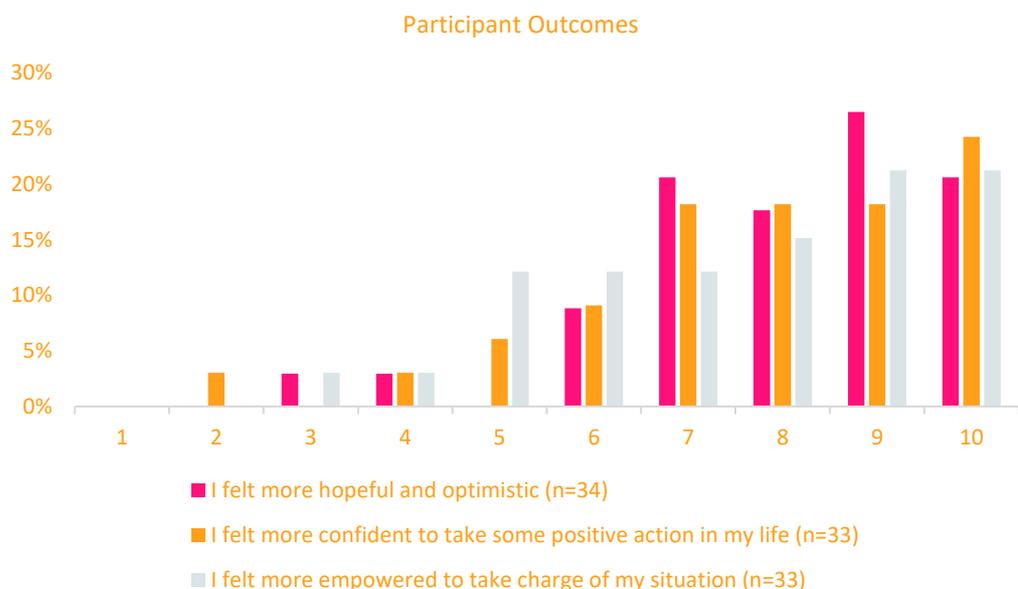
'It's about having a level of self-awareness, so that like, your kind of not just like saying things off the top of your head and just like anything's coming out, like, be a bit judicious about what you are or aren't saying.' Peer Support Worker

To what extent do participants report feelings of confidence, empowerment, hopefulness, and self-concept?

On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely) participants were asked if they felt more hopeful and optimistic after the eFriend program; if they felt more confident to take positive actions in their lives; and if they felt empowered to take charge of their situation.

- Eighty-five percent of responses were between 7 and 10 for feeling more hopeful and optimistic;
- 79% were between 7 and 10 for feeling more confident; and
- 70% were between 7 and 10 for feeling more empowered.

The graph below shows responses to all three questions.



The graph below shows participants responses to questions about their perceived changes in knowledge about where to find resources, and confidence about where to seek further support. To the former question, 76% of responses were between 7 and 10, and to the latter 79% between 7 and 10.

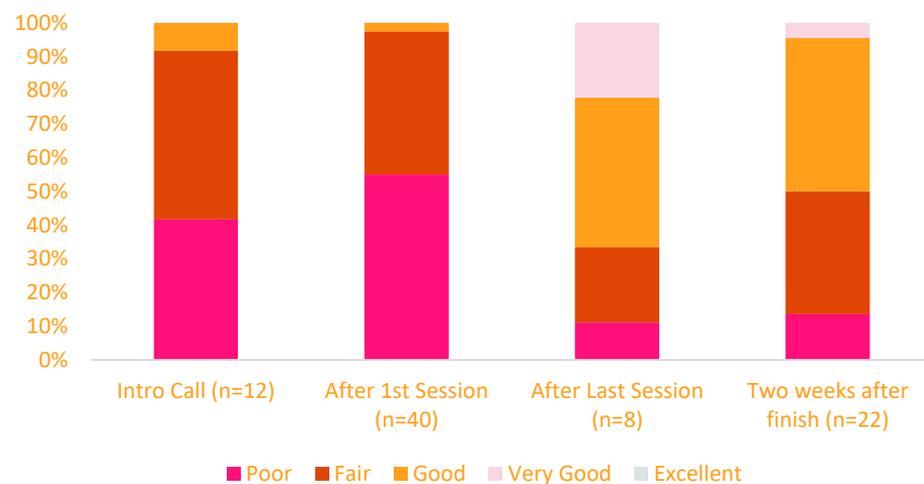
Participant changes in confidence and knowledge



The program survey asked participants to rate their overall mental health after the introduction call (n=12), after the first session (n=40), after the last session (n=8) and two weeks after their last session (n=22).

The graph below shows at least 40% of respondents rated their mental health as 'poor' after their introduction call while just over 10% rated their mental health as 'poor' two weeks after their last session. Less than 10% of participants rated their mental health as 'good' after the introduction call while 45% rated their mental health as 'good' two weeks after their last session.

How would you rate your mental health over the last two weeks



Key Learnings

The second objective of the evaluation is to produce learnings based on the findings to improve the implementation of the program. The following is what was learnt under the measurements of participation and implementation.

Participation

In terms of program participation, the following has been learnt from the above findings.

Reaching those in need

The eFriend program reached individuals over the age of 18 that are lonely or feeling isolated indicating the program was reaching the intended audience. While individuals fitting this category were enrolled into the program, they did not continue to participate in the same numbers, nor did they complete the program in the same numbers. Participation numbers were not uniform between enrolment, program participation, and program completion.

Program utilisation

The findings indicated that the program was not utilised to its full capacity. Initial bookings averaged around 80% of capacity while the average of calls taken was closer to 45%. With an average of 31% of calls being cancelled and 15% being no shows the challenge is to manage cancellations in such a way as to increase the utilisation of the available peer sessions.

Implementation

Using the program logic model and the literature on peer work, the following has been learnt from the above findings in terms of how well the program is being implemented.

Participants

The program achieved high levels of satisfaction for participants. It performed well in all activities, particularly client onboarding and the delivery of lived experience. The program did not perform as well in the areas of delivering peer sessions over video due to issues with technology and the processes around ending the peer relationship.

Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with both PSWs and the eFriend program overall. Participants expressed deep gratitude for both the program and their PSWs. There were no differences in satisfaction levels based on participant demographics. Participants found that they easily formed a connection with their PSWs and maintained a strong connection with them throughout their time in the program, based on the delivery of lived experience.

Participants looked forward to their weekly connection with their PSW, felt like they had been listened to, and that someone was caring for them. This is consistent with literature that states that peer workers are effective in building trusting relationships (Reper and Carter, 2011) and empathising directly and immediately with participants (Davidson et al, 2012).

Participants and PSWs expressed a desire for an increase in the number of sessions and length of sessions. With a median number of 7 to 8 sessions per participant it is clear that some participants are not utilising their full number of sessions (15) or are unaware that they can take more sessions. The lack of information and warning that the peer relationship was coming to an end was a source of discontent for some participants. The participants felt that the relationship had ended abruptly and would have preferred more warning. This process of developing a discharge plan of ending the peer relationship does not currently feature in the logic model.

Peer Support Workers

The PSWs reported a strong commitment to both participants and eFriend Program. PSWs developed deep, satisfying relationships with participants in the program based on their lived experience and validating the participant's life experiences. They reported that they found it easy to develop these relationships and felt safe and empowered in their role as a PSW to do so.

PSWs felt a dedication and loyalty to the program and believed in the power of sharing of lived experience with the participants, despite acknowledging the shortcomings they perceive in the program, and the lack of appreciation they sometimes feel from the broader organisation. The literature identifies benefits of peer work for PSWs includes development of identity as a peer worker and feelings of empowerment (Moran et al, 2012).

Communication technology

PSWs were dissatisfied with the communication technology used by the program. PSWs reported that they have mentioned this in team meetings and feel that the ongoing issues are either a sign of a lack of adequate organisational resources or a lack of care taken by management. The issues with technology affected both PSWs and participants. Many participants value highly being able to see a face on a call, so the video technology working is paramount.

Professional development and ongoing supervision

The activities relating to professional development of PSWs and their ongoing supervision had mixed results. PSWs identified training as an important part of the role. Some training was highly valued by the PSWs while other training seemed to be of poor quality or not relevant to the role. Some PSWs struggled to access the training. Peer specific training programs can vary greatly in quality and availability (Repper, 2013), consistent with the results of this evaluation.

The ongoing supervision and support at the program level for PSWs was of mixed quality and consistency. There is great comradeship amongst PSWs and excellent peer-to-peer support; however, debrief sessions are not mandatory and PSWs felt like they need additional support from a clinical psychologist.

PSWs indicated that organisational support provided by ICLA as inconsistent. High staff turnover outside the eFriend program, but within the organisation, has caused instability for program staff and a feeling of insecurity in terms of support.

Strong team culture offering secure nurturing support

While not an explicitly identified outcome of the program, PSWs identified a highly valued, strong culture of support amongst themselves. Bonds formed between PSWs is an important aspect of peer work, particularly opportunities they provide for sharing experiences and giving and receiving support (Mead, Hilton and Curtis, 2001). eFriend PSWs learned from each other, shared resources, and supported each in their peer work.

Evidence of increases in skills and knowledge and changes in attitudes in PSWs

Phase I of the evaluation did not initially set out to measure short-term outcomes, however, efforts were made to start this process in the data collection. The program has made positive progress in developing the skills and confidence of the PSWs; increasing their knowledge of mental health and crisis resources; and increasing their confidence.

Positive signs of changes in attitudes of participants

Short-term outcomes for participants were also positive in that participants felt understood and that they had connected with someone. Other short-term outcomes measured included participants feeling more hopeful and optimistic; feeling more confident to take positive action in their life; and feeling more empowered to take charge of their life. The participants attributed these changes in attitudes to the program itself. Participants also felt more confident about where to find additional resources and where to seek further support.



Recommendations

The evaluation makes the following recommendations for the program.

- Policy and practice
 - Review program policies to include a statement about how the eFriend program fits within the larger ICLA program structure and how the ICLA peer leader reports to the management of the organisation. This should include regular, open, and strategic communication to ensure that the peer leader and team does not feel isolated from the rest of the organisation.
 - Ensure the policy includes the statement of purpose and that it explicitly states the peer work values that the program upholds. PSWs should be regularly acknowledged and rewarded for upholding these values.
 - Ensure that policies are regularly updated to confirm that they are flexible enough to meet the needs of the program and relevant to changing circumstances.
- Program Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
 - Develop a program monitoring and evaluation framework collaboratively with PSWs so they can be involved in setting program standards and appropriate indicators of success.
 - Create a participatory reflection plan as part of the framework to ensure that PSWs can reflect on a regular basis how the program is being implemented and that ICLA management are part of these reflection activities.
 - Continue collecting output data on number of enrolments and utilisation patterns of peer sessions and include targets.
 - Align participant surveys with program indicators and ensure ways of tracking data at the level of the individual participant along with more dependable ways of ensuring a higher participant response rate for example having PSWs ask participants to complete it as soon as the call is finished and provide them with a link.
 - Ensure that the current program logic model is updated to include discharge plans for participants as an activity.
- Training of PSWs
 - Audit current training modules that PSWs receive and determine which ones are useful for their role. Ensure that training modules include topics on sharing lived experience safely; active listening; and self-awareness and self-care at the minimum.
 - Ensure that all PSWs have access to training and that all PSWs complete the required training modules.
 - Include feedback on training in monitoring framework and appropriate indicators to ensure that training remains useful and relevant to PSWs
- Supporting PSWs

- Develop creative and cost-effective ways to address the issues around communication technology to the satisfaction of the PSWs. Ensure PSWs can reliably use the video link in a peer session and can talk to participants with minimal noise distraction.
- Find creative ways to support PSWs actively and meaningfully in their role so that they feel appreciated; continue to build skills and knowledge in their role; and thrive as peer support workers. For example, PSW monthly call-out for showing team values.
- Formalise the database of resources that the PSWs have developed so that it can be easily built on and accessed by PSWs.
- Develop more rigorous debriefing and consistent processes in the program to ensure that PSWs have an opportunity on a monthly basis to have a one-on-one session with team leader or manager which would include two-way feedback; PSW's wellbeing and safety; performance review; and opportunities for development.
- Link the PSWs to peer support networks or community of practice outside the organisation to allow them to find support outside the organisation.

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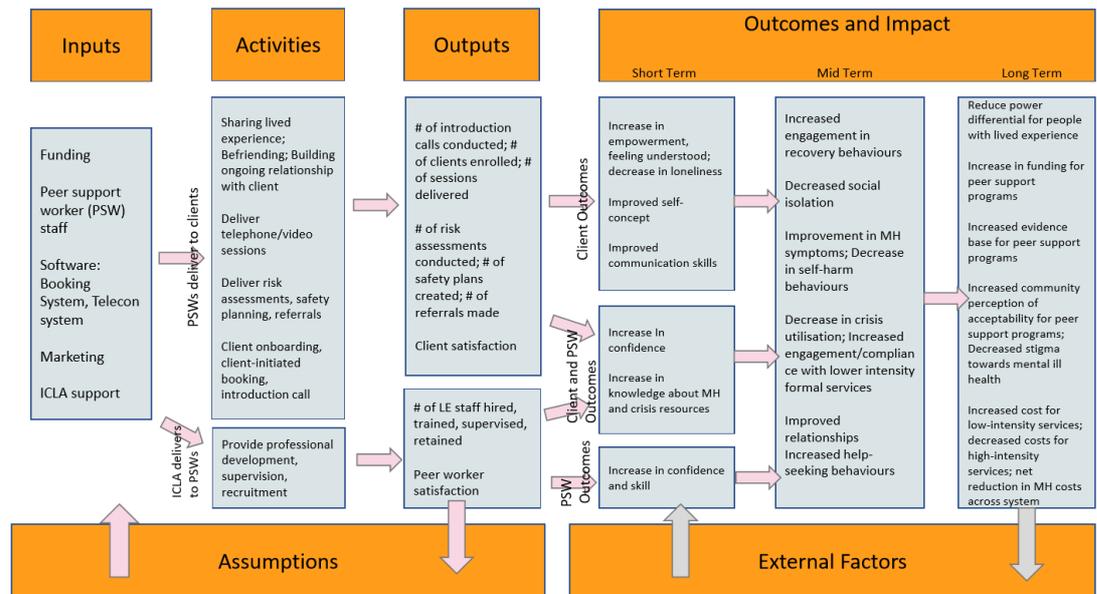
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Annex 1 - Program Logic Model



Assumptions

- Clients who would benefit from the service are able to navigate the required technology
- Clients have the cognitive capacity to engage
- “Lived Experience is lived experience” –we define LE and “professional” in specific ways
- Lived experience is of value and effective
- ICLA will continue to sufficiently fund eFriend
- The MH system outside of this program is sufficient and accessible
- Partnerships/relationships will continue to be leveraged to benefit eFriend

External Factors

- COVID-19 contributes to social isolation
- The impact of stigma on the self-efficacy and availability of the peer workforce
- The continuing evolution of online culture/social media and the program’s ability to adapt to changes
- Whether MH will continue to be an issue of concern or remain “in the spotlight”

Annex 2 - Data Collection Framework

Domain	Indicator	Data Source
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client and PSW demographics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Age range of participants ○ Gender of participants ○ Indigenous status of participants • Participant location (state/territory; urban/rural/remote) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client survey • PSW survey
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client risk level (as assessed by PSWs) • Client current and past involvement in MH or crisis services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program data • Client survey
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of client enrolments, information sessions, peer support sessions • # of risk assessments, safety plans, referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of professional development, supervision of PSWs • PSW turnover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program data
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client and PSW satisfaction with program • Facilitators and barriers to implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client survey • PSW survey • Peer worker interviews