Establishing a telephone-based peer support service for Tasmanians

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Epilepsy Connect is an innovative community-based program delivered in partnership with Epilepsy Tasmania and generously funded by the Tasmanian Community Fund.
What is Epilepsy Connect?

- Epilepsy Connect is a telephone-based peer support service for Tasmanians living with or affected by epilepsy.
- It aims to reduce the burden of epilepsy in Tasmania by providing equitable access to peer support.
Why Epilepsy Connect?

• 1 in every 100 Australians will have epilepsy at any given time

• The burden of epilepsy is much more than just the seizure

• People with epilepsy report increased levels of anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem.

• Managing epilepsy can be challenging
Why telephone-based peer support?

- Peer-support has been shown to improve mental health, wellbeing and self-management for a range of conditions.
- Peer support for epilepsy is only available through face-to-face groups in Hobart, Launceston, Burnie and Devonport.
- Perceived need
# What was the plan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Milestone</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finalise contract with University of Tasmania</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obtain University ethics approval</td>
<td>August 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop evaluation plan</td>
<td>July - October 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community consultation in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie</td>
<td>August - September 2015</td>
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<td>Develop training package</td>
<td>September - December 2015</td>
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<td>Establish supervision/support model for volunteers</td>
<td>October - December 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit and train volunteers</td>
<td>January - February 2016</td>
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<td><strong>Launch Program Epilepsy Awareness Month</strong></td>
<td>March 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training update and peer-support network meeting</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling/psychology support for volunteers</td>
<td>March - December 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>September - <strong>December 2016</strong></td>
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1. Funding
2. Consultation
3. Ethics
4. Recruitment
5. Training
6. Promotion
Who is using Epilepsy Connect?

- 10 clients to date (1 male)
- Aged 27-59 years
- 4 identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- 4 were from interstate
- 3 Inner Regional, 5 Outer Regional, 2 unknown
Valuable lessons

- Volunteers are rare jewels
- Ethics approval takes a long time
- Hiccups are inevitable
- Stakeholder buy-in is essential
- Technology isn’t fool proof
- Evaluation should be simple
What next?

- Continue to promote the service
- Continue evaluation
- Expand volunteer base
- Develop national service
Acknowledgements

- Katie Dineen, Volunteer
- Liz Lee, Volunteer
- Heather McCallum, Volunteer
- Danielle Schramm, Volunteer
- Wendy Groot, CEO, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Rebecca Wylie, Administration Manager, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Shirley Poetschka, Education & Training Coordinator, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Joanne Parr, Education & Training Coordinator, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Phil Baker, former CEO, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Bronwyn Stirkul, former Education & Training Coordinator, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Sharon Murcott, former Education & Training Coordinator, Epilepsy Tasmania
- Dr Heather Bridgman, Lecturer in Rural Mental Health, Centre for Rural Health
- Kay Elphinstone, Registered Nurse, Tasmanian Health Service
- Claire Burnet, Public Relations, 147 East