

## Amanda.m4a

**Speaker 1** [00:00:02] Okay, Well, welcome to another episode of Recovery Stories where we're finding out about peer support services in Aberdeenshire, what they involve and what that address. It's the 23rd of December, two days from Christmas today. So it's a beautiful day up here in Fraserburgh or the Broch as it is known and I'm here with Amanda Stephen who's the lead practitioner for Fraserburgh Turning Point Scotland. So welcome, Amanda. It's nice to see you again.

**Speaker 2** [00:00:34] Thank you for having me.

**Speaker 1** [00:00:35] Thanks for inviting me up. Yeah. So it'd be good to hear about your perspective on peer support services and I suppose your journey to them. So could you tell me a bit about that, like your professional role and how you ended up in that professional role?

**Speaker 2** [00:00:56] So my professional role is a lead practitioner with a peer support service here in Fraserburgh and how I ended up here let me take you on a little journey. So I first was made aware of Turning Point as a service when I was in my active addiction. I'm an addict and recovery myself. And so I first was made aware that I could come here in this building and get help for my substance abuse. And I didn't really ken much about the actual peer support service whilst I was still using drugs, and because, quite frankly, I was not interested, I was here to to hopefully manipulate, to get something that I needed to keep going with my addiction. And and then I came into recovery and I was at a place in my recovery. I had been off of medication all illegal drugs for a number of months, but I was kind of like in a place far I was bored and I knew that I needed to be involved with something that was going to keep me occupied so that I would not go back on drugs. And and I came in here and I had a meeting wi one of the women, and she referred me to the peer support service. So at was when it wisnae actually my first meeting with Tracey. My first meeting with Tracey was when I was using and I was hungry and she gave me a food parcel, but in recovery it was my first real meeting with Tracey that I can remember and she. So it was this time last year actually, and she had encouraged me to I had a conversation wi her on the phone and I can remember she was just ask me like fit do you want? And I noticed it was about me. It wasn't about anything else it was about fit my needs were at that time. And I just explained to her that I was clean and and that I just was looking for a bit of extra support to get back involved with the community and for myself. So I started coming to the groups that we offer here in Fraserburgh As a community member. Started coming in aboot and seeing fit was going on and I can remember being really nervous. I had been in isolation for a long time, didn't really mix wi anybody unless it was in a drug setting and and I was very lonely and I can remember coming in and coming in to this building. There are was all these strangers looking at me. I just remember feeling really welcome. And again, I had said it to you before about how for me, I was a bit like, why are these people being so nice to me? Fit is their motives? Because it was not how I was used to. I was used to surrounding myself with people like myself, that the motives are for other things. Coming in and these people didn't want anything from me. They just wanted to give me a cup of tea and something to eat and to hear about my day, to hear about me. And so I continued going to the groups and I made it like a weekly thing I was showing up, I was turning it up and em. And then the opportunity I went through the, the peer support training, because I knew that this is what I wanted to do with my life, I thought, right, I'm going to use my experience of being an addict, being in recovery to support other people.

**Speaker 1** [00:04:50] And did you see like coming as a community member to the peer support service? Precisely how you could do that?

**Speaker 2** [00:04:58] Yeah, it was very. I've seen other people around about me. So it was Tracey Tracey really like encouraged me. And to go ahead with it and to go and do training. So I did the ten week course, the peer sport training course. I loved it. I was very aware that everything that was covered in that course, was things that I knew I could offer somebody else.

**Speaker 1** [00:05:25] What kind of things did it cover?

**Speaker 2** [00:05:26] So it covered how you can best support somebody that's coming in to a service, as a peer. Em so nae as a member of staff. So it covered like boundaries we covered em just how how you can use your personal experience fit you've been through to help somebody else. And it all comes basically down to listening. Being able to sit with somebody and listen to them and support them and encourage them. And be a little cheerleader that's like, you can do it. Kind of thing. So I did that for the ten weeks. And then I started like volunteering every week at the cleaning in Fraserburgh. And then the opportunity of a job came up and to be to be completely honest, for a year I was like: I'm nae ready for it. I was like, I don't think I think it was like a negative self-talk nae seeing the value in myself that I had to offer other people. I was quite happy doing it as voluntary, but as a member of staff I was a little bit like I, I dinnae have nothing to offer here. And it's the lies that you can tell yourself to kind of keep yourself down and underneath the radar kind of thing.

**Speaker 1** [00:06:47] To be fair, it's quite a big step though. [Yeah] And as you say you're still at a certain point in your recovery journey, so you can understand why that might be quite overwhelming.

**Speaker 2** [00:06:57] I think there was a lot of fear around about it. Oh this is quite a big step for me and it's nae like anything I'd ever done before. Like work wise. I had I trained to be a nurse when I was young and then it was always like care settings that I have worked in. And then I was my mum. So all that stuff like career wise was put on hold for, for being a mum. And then obviously my life took a detour in the worst possible way it could go and I lost that ambition of ever having a career or ever going back to do nursing or anything, like I was gone. And so it was kind of like if it was not for Tracey I don't think I would have took the step to even apply for the job.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:44] We have mentioned Tracey a couple of times. It's Tracey here from Fraserburgh. [Yes] Who's also a practitioner here.

**Speaker 2** [00:07:52] She is the service coordinator for the peer support service for Aberdeenshire.

**Speaker 1** [00:07:57] And Tracey's surname is?

**Speaker 2** [00:07:58] Duthie

**Speaker 1** [00:07:59] Okay so so we acknowledge. [Yeah]. Tracey Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:03] Ats Tracey So yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:04] So you're moving now into a professional role.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:06] Yes.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:07] Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:08] Which Yeah. So I applied for the job, got the job, in a relief position and just kinda started working my way through the training and gaining confidence within myself. Sometimes I would be like, do they really ken fit they've employed? Bu the good thing about it is I've always been very open and honest. I do. Pretty much everything that I've been through it is something that I speak about in now, using it in helping encourage and show other people that that you can do this too.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:44] Is that not the whole idea of lived experience is that you've got the foundation to relate.

**Speaker 2** [00:08:50] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:08:50] Okay. And so being honest and being pretty unfiltered. Did that help you build your confidence as an authentic practitioner in this space?

**Speaker 2** [00:09:01] Yes, it did. See, to begin with, it was something that I got quite caught up in and I would be like an over-sharer and I would speak a lot about things. And then through, I suppose, trial and error and learning. And learning that my job is to listen. My job is to sit down with people on a 1 to 1 basis or group setting. And and if somebody is going through something, they're having a hard day. It's to be trustworthy for them to sit and speak to you and ken that it's confidential, like nothing goes any further. And just to listen. Just to let them vent fitever is going on wi them they've got somebody, a safe person. I suppose that they can. They can vent til. And I never heard that. I didn't hae anybody to speak to, a these crazy conversations that I would hae would be in ma heid wi masel. That's nae a good place. It's sometimes it's like saying a problem shared is a problem halved cause you're just releasing through speech fitever is going on [that noise]. Aye. The noise in your heid.

**Speaker 1** [00:10:11] So you're transitioning into this professional role, and it sounds like some pretty sophisticated learning was going on there around boundaries and about how, where and with whom to share that lived experience. [Yeah]. So you're saying there was quite a lot of sharing maybe early on, but that changed.

**Speaker 2** [00:10:30] In the beginning. Yeah. And I think part of it was like em. I dinna ken if it was wanting to fit in or wanting to show that I ken fit I'm speaking about, you know kind of thing. And then through trial and error and through having opportunities to learn in the support aroon about me it's like I've been able to realise that sometimes I don't need to do the speaking and sometimes I can sit there and just listen and encourage in in hay at safe space, n at welcomin space far somebody can just sit there and be like, Oh, this is what's going on. But boundaries is important in this job, not just for me as a professional, but for the people that I'm supporting as well, is to have boundaries in place that they ken. And like I make at quite well known, at the beginning. It's like I keep fit I dee to person centred approach. So everybody is so different. Everybody is seen as an individual, everybody has got their own defects and assets and their own traits and all that kind of things. And it's looking at them as themselves. Ken what I mean supporting them fit it is best for them.

And I always mak a point of being like this fit do you want from me, fit do you want from the service and fit can I help you wi?

**Speaker 1** [00:11:55] Putting that focus on to them. And their needs

**Speaker 2** [00:11:56] It's about them. It's nae like one shoe fits all sizes. It's it's like thinking it for them and being strict with your boundaries in place as well.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:09] And what's that like for clients or community members coming to the service? When you see people sort of enter the service for the first time? Whats that like?

**Speaker 2** [00:12:19] So I have seen people come in to this service and usually they are so. Em, shut off. So boundaries are up, defence mechanisms are up.

**Speaker 1** [00:12:30] Okay.

**Speaker 2** [00:12:31] Nobody, like, closed off. Physically, you can see it in them in like body language, sit wi your arms crossed, you're not really wanting to engage with them. And then as they keep showing up and also we keep showing up and it's gaining at trust in one another, but especially for them and another human being. Because like I've said before, it's like the lives that a lot of these people come fae is nae good lives, and it's you've always had to protect yourself and defend yourself. So it's like slowly but surely the defences will come down and then you start to see the real person behind the defences. And then it's like even just like one thing that you can pick out that they like or that they're comfortable with and then you build on that and you start building a relationship wi them and it starts to open up and then you see people. The way that I see it is that they come back to life. You see them just starting to physically change, emotionally change, mentally change, and they're starting to be willing and they open up and then they'll start to give back. And you see within the service that they come in and they are so shut off and they dinnae really know fit to expect. And as they continue to grow, they get to a place where they're like, they want to help, they want to be able to use what they've been through to support other people.

**Speaker 1** [00:14:06] So the whole model of peer support is quite a sustainable one. [Yeah] where it's that self-transformation and then that transformation goes outside the self [Yep] and must .. going back to that first step over the threshold. You know, as you're saying these are folk coming from lives of serious difficulty. It must take quite a lot of courage to take that first step. What's that like as a practitioner on the other side and that initial trust and relationship?

**Speaker 2** [00:14:36] I think at's far like a lot of my job is like encouraging. So it's like encouraging them to take at first step. Being a little bit like a buddy system we do in some of the groups, hae like a body system, where if there's somebody new coming along somebody'll meet them at the door and introduce themselves and then like, escort them and into the group and introduce them to everybody in the group. And so at's a big step because a lot of them came from like isolated, their ain company or not so good company they've surrounded themselves wi. So if you're walking into a building and you dinna ken naebody and it's like it's like it's like you're fighting against your old self because you're like, No, no, I'll just bide in my ain heid, in my ain company instead of putting myself out there

**Speaker 1** [00:15:30] In that destructive comfort zone.

**Speaker 2** [00:15:31] Yeah, but if you've got some there, that's just like a gentle hand that's just like come, you can dee is. Yes. And come on, we'll dee is. And escort somebody to a group and then they'll come in and you just see like as the time goes on, it's nae something that happens straight awa and boom, it's like a confidence thing. But the biggest thing to take at first step is to hae the courage and to hae at support around about you. To get into the group ats far you get your support, its fan you start going and you build up that relationships and then then you've got your support network of people that are that are similar.

**Speaker 1** [00:16:09] Its amazing the services that you guys deliver. So then once someone's got over the threshold, it sounds like such a small thing to have a buddy to escort. But it's not the way you explain it. It's huge. I think the emotions and the words you described when we were chatting earlier, it was 'fearsome'. [Yeah], there's a huge amount of emotions and that struggle in your head, as you were saying. Once you've got over the threshold, what's it like staying in the group and coming back to the group on a regular? How do you support people with that?

**Speaker 2** [00:16:44] This is something that I'm quite passionate about, I suppose to ensure that the groups are a safe, welcoming and caring environment. So I mean, for anybody, nae just these people that are in early recovery or fitever they are going through. For anybody. You want to walk into a room and you want to see people smiling and you want to feel the energy in that room is is loving and it's welcoming but if you was to talk in and like everybody had faces on and it was negative, you're nae going to want to go back there. So we try to make in the groups that welcoming environment so that people, their first experience will see fit its about, they'll get a cup of tea, they'll get something to eat, they'll get a general yap, they'll get introduced to other members that come, and then they'll want to come. So that's where its so important is is making sure that the facilitators in the group, the people that attend the group, everybody is welcoming. And we're all aware that ok there's maybe someone new comin. It's the environment is like at so that they want to keep coming back.

**Speaker 1** [00:17:58] And having that awareness and sensitivity of someone new is comin that needs to be. So then in the groups, what do you do? What kind of activities that you do? Because I hear very clearly what you're saying about, you know, a welcoming, loving space of acceptance and compassion. But some point, presumably, you're talking about some pretty difficult [yeah] subject matter. So how's that managed?

**Speaker 2** [00:18:25] So our groups, em. Usually fit happens is you'll come in, you'll go and get a cup of tea or coffee. There's always some kinda food there so soup or sandwiches or something, you'll get something to eat and we will offer there's like different craft activities so recently it's been the build up to Christmas so they've been deein like wreaths and stuff or like little jars for your Christmas table em but we also dee like a check-in so what we've kind of started doing in the Fraserburgh een is that once everybody's had something to eat, em, we'll go around the table and we will just, everybody gets a chance to speak about fitever been's going on. So like I said to you ken that noisy head and just vocalising putting it into words like fits gan on, releasing at ken that it's a safe place to share is confidential everything that's said and in fact we've been kind of trying to do is to like look at the positives. So although negative things might be happening or you might feel feeling a bit doon or depressed or fitever, its like trying to pick things that you're grateful for and things that you're that you're happy for in your life. Em and it seems like to change pardon me, the atmosphere within the group and it's like an

attitude of gratitude, positivity. And that's fit we are wantin. We're wantin these environments to be full a positivity so that you want to come, want to come to the groups. Want to get a cup of tea and a chat and de a wreath if you want.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:05] I see what you mean.

**Speaker 2** [00:20:06] Aye.

**Speaker 1** [00:20:06] And what kind of benefits are you seeing then, as people are engaging, engaging authentically and consistently? What kind of yeah, what are people getting out of it?

**Speaker 2** [00:20:19] You see a lot of people growing individually, so their personal growth comes, it's like the first thing that I I love, I love seeing them come in. And they're, they're still like unsure and broken and and nae really sure about fits going on and then they start to grow as individuals. Confidence building is huge. Comin in to an environment like at, haing the courage to walk through the door is huge. You see a lot of resilience. You see a lot of people that are nae willing to give up on their recovery and their comin to that groups to build that strength and to to get at support network aroon about them. Community is another word I'm going to use for that because that's fit we are. We are a community that are there to love and support and care for each other. And I mean. I was speaking about this the other day, so this might be a little tangent, but it's coming, so I'm going on it.

**Speaker 1** [00:21:16] Tangents are good!

**Speaker 2** [00:21:19] Like society nowadays. We live in quite a selfish society you can see it. And the other day I saw it, I walked in a room and I was just getting a coffee, in a coffee shop, and every single person was on their phone. There's nae like at community integrating wi each other or haein a conversation with each other. And I like I like a yap, I speak to strangers in a bus stop, but that's because I was ignored for so many years. And it's like you come to our the peer support service and you're seeing a community, you're seeing people coming together in a group setting and and haein a chat over a cup of tea and a piece or a bowl of soup. Now it's it's really and I think it's really important because it's nae very friendly society outside, aye the world today.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:09] Especially if you're to a vulnerable point in your recovery.

**Speaker 2** [00:22:11] Aye. And I think it's so easy to get caught up in that. And I do it quite a lot just walking down the street and I'll just like look in everybody's in their own little bubble, theyre in their ain little world and I understand that but when you come in its like getting everybody thegither and showing kindness to other human beings and respect to people as individuals but also seeing that we're all human, but we've all got our flaws. We've got our own stuff going on. But we can help them, and we can love and we can support each other through fitever comes by havin that support network.

**Speaker 1** [00:22:47] Like you're saying, its about having those safe spaces where people can release and. Yeah. So is it fair to say the peer support services are a therapy or a solution to addiction?

**Speaker 2** [00:23:01] A solution. Em. Oh. A solution to addiction. I'm going to say. Partly. [Mm hmm maybe not that simple]. It's definitely nae that simple. Em, I think it's really hard to say that you're nae going to go to group and be like your problem is solved. Youre fixed

noo, if only that was reality. But these groups and the peer support service is for people to come in they have got at support. So for me, it's like like I said to you, I was isolated. I didn't really hae anybody, I never had family. I didn't have anybody. I was just really on my own. And it's like I started attending groups to kinda. I don't even ken if it was to get a support network in the beginning, it was just to feel part of, because I was just so sick of being lonely, so sick a deein the same things every single day ane nae feeling like my life mattered.

**Speaker 1** [00:24:17] So is a better description, maybe as a support to and part of recovery?

**Speaker 2** [00:24:23] Yeah. Its its. Yeah. Its getting people. Yeah I na ken how to word this, but it's it's making people feel like their life has meaning and they are part of something. Nobody has to be isolated and lonely these days and there's options out there that you dinna like. I'm a big believer that the opposite of addiction is connection. So being connected to other people and haein your support network aroon about you, which you could potentially meet by goin to this groups, but you need to make a decision to walk through the door first.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:02] And you're saying that's protective and preventative. It's amazing. So we're here in Fraserburgh and you've been based here for a while.

**Speaker 2** [00:25:14] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:25:14] I understand. What do you see as the need here? Do you see the situation as a, as a big need? As something that's changing and improving or getting worse? What's it like?

**Speaker 2** [00:25:26] My personal opinion on at is that there's a lot of stigma still attached to addiction and Fraserburgh. There's a lot a em I said it to you fan we was speaking earlier how it's like there's two different types a worlds in one place, and you can see that you've got like fit people would class as normal and then you've got the nae so normal. So like your mental health, your addiction and all that. And it's like saying that they canna be bothered but its like it's kinda ignored.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:03] It's like two worlds.

**Speaker 2** [00:26:04]. It is two worlds. And I've been a part of both of them worlds. And it's like. To get, to come out the other side and to be in recovery and now be in a position for working for this service, being able to support other people as they're going through their recovery. And it's like, in Fraserburgh itself there is a huge need in this area. And I see it a lot masel. And I see it changing quite a lot that. Nae just wi drugs, but wi mental health as well is that it's nae spoken about a lot. It's like.

**Speaker 1** [00:26:45] So still a lot of stigma and...?

**Speaker 2** [00:26:46] Yeah but in this area, everybody kens an addict or maybe nae everybody but it's like it's such a small place and everybody kens each other's business and it's like people are judged for fit they've done and how their life has become and it's trying to brak at. There is such a need in this area. Like I said to you, the the drugs are changing and it's the younger generation now that are being mare affected by different types of drugs. So it's, there is a need, there is a massive need in is area, especially

Fraserburgh to kinda, I da ken if it's ever going to be broken but to see to show that there's support there for if you da want live your life like at. Or if you need extra support to nae be isolated and to to get through fitever you're gan through and at's fit we offer. The need is huge.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:49] Yeah I can I can hear that loud and clear. And the stigma is a big, a big part of the battle isn't it? And like you're saying, drugs are changing

**Speaker 2** [00:27:58] Yeah.

**Speaker 1** [00:27:59] And those who are using drugs, if I am hearing you properly, are getting younger. [Mmm-hmmm] So not only is there stigma as a barrier to addressing it, the very problem itself is changing and morphing over time. So that's, so then considering the year you've had and I admire you very much for what you've achieved and what you're contributing to yourself and your community, it's amazing. Then how do you see the future? Where do things go from here?

**Speaker 2** [00:28:28] The future, I think. Today. We have got, we're in a position now with the peer support service that we could make significant changes in this area. I'm one of them that gets probably too excited and too carried awa wi myself. But I think it's just because I see the need. I see. I see it. I've like I've said, I've lived it baith life's. I've seen lived in my own little bubble far life was good. And then I've lived as a drug addict fan life was really difficult and for this service and fit we offer, we could have such an impact on baith sides, ken fit I mean. Nae like because addiction doesn't just affect the addict. It's like a ripple effect and it affects families. Em, and it's, we can offer some like some kinda I da ken fit the word is that I'm looking for my minds gone blank, but its like, we can offer

**Speaker 1** [00:29:44] Is it like, options, you know choices for people?

**Speaker 2** [00:29:47] Yeah. And support nae matter fit, support for for parents that could be gan through it wi kids like I ken my mom and dad [yeah yeah] they hid me and they did not really ken. They were very unaware [that ripple effect]. Yeah. And its like being able to offer a safe place for people to come that they can speak fits gone on and they can leave and then they can come back next week. And sometimes it's just like an offload, sometimes it's at 2 hours it's like.

**Speaker 1** [00:30:25] To just, Yeah, get the noise out of your head.

**Speaker 2** [00:30:28] Yeah, sure. Share your crazy thinking with another human being. But for the future, I think like I said it to you when we were speaking earlier, for me and what I see is the drugs are changing. The the people that are using the drugs are getting younger and younger. And it's getting to a place far we can go to schools. Get into schools speak to the kids as a true representation of fit happens when you about your life and you start taking drugs. And we spoke about it how it used to be the man with the briefcase and all the drugs and the briefcase and how he would point them ott and a it did was you was curious. But if you hid a human being that was willing to sit and share their true lived experience in going to some of the traumas that come with that life in the ways and means that you will go to, I think we could reach the addicts before they become addicts. We could be sitting there and like sow at little seed in their their their little adolescent heids in they might think, I dinna want to have a life like, that I dinna want to dee is to my family. I didn't want my mom and dad to feel how so and so's mom and dad felt. I dinna want to dee is.



**Speaker 1** [00:31:58] It sounds very sensible to me. And it's about I think, like we were saying earlier, about maybe getting over in an educational way, the reality of addiction, other than perhaps the display board of illicit substances coming out the briefcase.

**Speaker 2** [00:32:20] Yeah. Its speaking about the effects, the long term effects, the physical effects and mental effects, in the behaviours that come along and that ken. It's a lot of people had said to me how ken getting clean is easy, but biding clean is hard. And I believe that. I'm nae going to say that getting clean is easy because it truly nae. But once you are clean and then a these emotions and these feelings and all these things come back to you and they hit you and it's like takin bullets sometimes and. It's like learning how to deal with these emotions and these feelings that are so alien. But I think that's something that and I do think it's something that's happening in society these days is that people are getting more comfortable with emotions in their feelings and speaking about stuff. And like I would love for there to be like some kind of group far it is just like a check-in, a cup a tea, how are you doing and fits been going on for you. It doesn't matter if you've got in recovery or if you've got an addiction problem, if it's mental health, you just need it for normal folk as well, because everybody's got their own stuff. Everybody's got things that's going on.

**Speaker 1** [00:33:44] I think that's a really kind of powerful point to conclude on that what you've seen through your journey from having addiction problems still being on your recovery journey, but now being a professional practitioner, I can hear you saying you really see the potential of peer the peer support model within and beyond the drug and alcohol needs that are very real right here. Well, Amanda, thank you very much for your time thanks for sharing so much of your experience and expertise. It's been amazing to learn more about the service and massively admire what you and the group are doing. And wish you all the success in future and hopefully come back and find out how you're doing in the schools.

**Speaker 2** [00:34:34] Yeah, hopefully. Thank you.

**Speaker 1** [00:34:36] Okay. Thank you.