

# Safe Spaces: a 'warm' alternative

## What's a Safe Space?

Safe Space is an umbrella term referring to non-clinical, peer-led supports for people in suicidal crisis. These spaces aim to provide a genuine alternative to conventional mental health and hospital services, and are usually operated by peer workers with a lived experience of suicide.

Advocates for Safe Spaces recognise that lived experience is a unique form of expertise and that the practical insights of people who have 'walked the walk' should guide the design and delivery of these supports. There is an emerging evidence base for their therapeutic value in promoting hope, healing and recovery.

We hope to achieve a mix of Safe Space supports for our region. These supports will be operated by peer workers with a lived experience of suicidal distress who can offer emotional support and the mutual understanding that comes with common experience.

*"Our lived experience members say that one of the most therapeutic things they've ever done is having their voices heard and respected."*  
- Alex

### Peer support groups

Regular groups open to anyone with a lived experience of suicidal distress.



### Warm line

An alternative to traditional crisis lines where peers provide emotional support and information about local supports.



Spaces open extended hours to provide a genuine alternative to ED. People can chat with a peer worker or just take some time out for themselves.



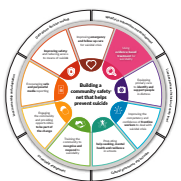
### Drop in spaces

Residential spaces where people in crisis can stay for up to a week in a warm, welcoming environment.



### Peer Respite

# for people in crisis



## How's the Collaborative involved in the development of Safe Spaces?

We supported our lived experience members to establish a working group to develop a proposal for Safe Spaces in our region. They consulted with the Western Massachusetts Recovery Learning Community – a lived experience collective who have led the way in the global peer respite movement. Other Collaborative members are also contributing to the conversation, sharing their wisdom about some of the challenges in providing services to people in social and emotional distress.

Driving the Safe Space initiative has given our lived experience members confidence in their own expertise. They are now contributing to system change in other ways, and spreading the collaborative way of working to their growing lived experience networks, both locally and at a national level.



A good example of this is their participation in the NSW Mental Health Commission's mid-term review of **Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014-2024**. The local Safe Space initiative was showcased at the Commission's regional consultation forum and in a video produced by the Commission to illustrate the power of meaningful lived experience inclusion in design and delivery of supports. As Carrie, one of our lived experience members interviewed for the video put it: "Lived experience needs to be 'baked into the cake' of the mental health system and of mental health reform in Australia."

There are now exciting funding and partnership opportunities for Safe Spaces on the horizon and we anticipate the peer support group being up and running very soon.