

# Parent and Family Peer Support and Advocacy Service

## END OF YEAR REPORT 2022

Presented to the FISH AGM , 9 December 2022



### THE TEAM

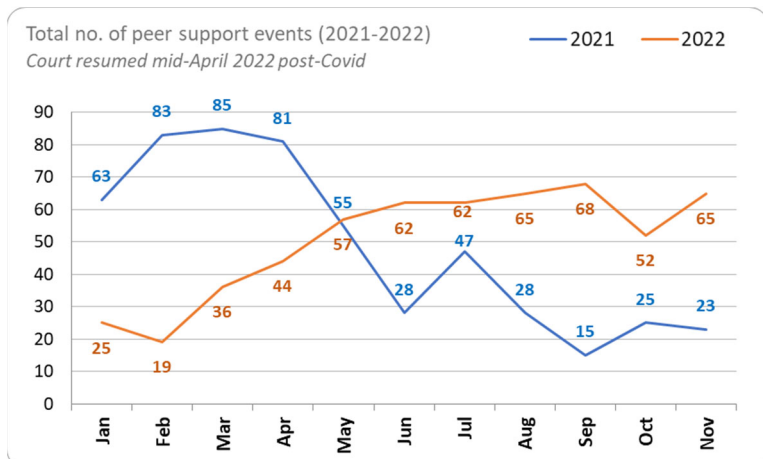
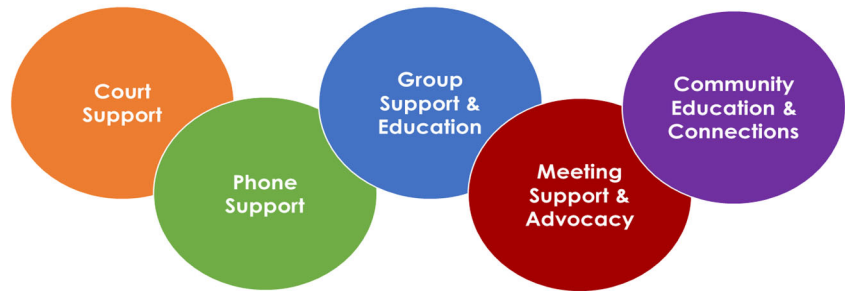


We recruited four more peer workers this year. We **currently have a team of six peer workers**. We are about to interview another potential new peer worker and will be looking for more, especially Aboriginal peer workers, in 2023. We had **four student social worker team members** from The University of Newcastle (UoN) this year; two third years (Feb to Jun) and two fourth years (Jul to Oct). We worked with four wonderful students – Stella, Sequoia, Jess and Kelli – who respected peers and made great

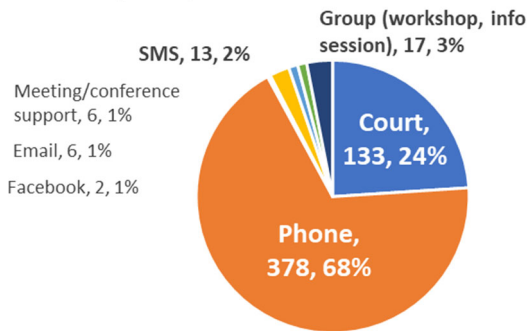
contributions to their development and support and the service. We did this as a trial to see how student team members would work for our peer team. We got favourable feedback and look forward to continuing our trial in 2023. The challenge in a **FISH placement** is that students do not work directly with parents and families, which is done by FISH peer workers and parent leaders. However, there are expansive opportunities because student social workers learn about broad forms of advocacy across levels, the value of lived experience and related evidence for practice, writing and reviewing policies, procedures and applications, and the role of education, support and development initiatives as core elements of social work.

### SUPPORT & ADVOCACY EVENTS

At 30 Nov 2022, peer workers provided a total of **555 support events** (individual, 538); 68% were phone support. This data includes repeat support events with the same individual or couple. The majority of people supported continue to be mothers (75%), with some changes and increases in support with fathers (9%) and couples (7%); in addition to more fathers and couples in group support at the restoration workshop (see below). The numbers for 2021 and 2022 show a steady increase in support and advocacy events this year after we were affected by Covid early in 2021, including court closures.



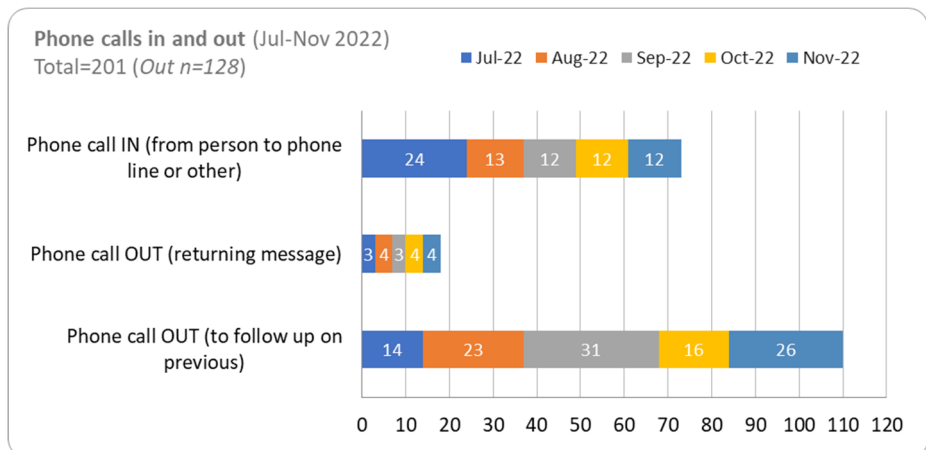
FISH Peer Support & Advocacy Events  
(Jan-Nov 2022, N=555)



The number of **court support events** has been very slow to increase since court re-opened mid-April 2022. While the weekly average for court listings for care and protection matters at Broadmeadow Children’s Court is 15-20 families, an average of only four (22%) have attended each week since resuming. We have encouraged parents to attend via follow up calls and Facebook messages. We will also communicate with lawyers and

caseworkers to see if they can encourage attendance. It is challenging to find the best way to explain the importance of court attendance to parents. This can be extra challenging because a lot of parents who would attend court have not yet met our peer workers, so finding them is hard.

The number of **phone support events** has increased with the introduction of **follow up phone support** in April 2022. This meant more phone calls *out* by peer workers (55% of phone total) compared to calls *in*. If a parent gives permission and contact details, peer workers (rotating) call the parent every 1-6 weeks. Parents can always request not to be called again. Recently, we introduced a standard follow up for parents who meet peer workers at Broadmeadow Court on Thursdays; a peer worker calls them the next Monday or Tuesday to see how they are travelling post-court then they stay on our follow up list for regular calls if they want. Parents involved in our other peer services are also included on the follow up list, such as those contacted or waiting for workshop attendance.



Introduction of **meeting support and advocacy** via pilots continues to move very slowly. We had some challenges with the first two pilots with DCJ due to staffing and office changes. We are currently in discussions with another DCJ team and will start a pilot with a funded service provider/NGO in early 2023. Given those challenges, we offered one pilot meeting support to each parent who did the restoration workshop and each parent who participated in the listening campaign. Four of those were recently supported at a meeting, including one observed by a new peer worker for professional development. The pilot includes pre- and post-evaluation surveys for the three main participants – parent, worker, peer worker – to help improve meeting support and advocacy before full implementation. Meeting support is very resource-intensive and needs to be considered alongside other peer services.

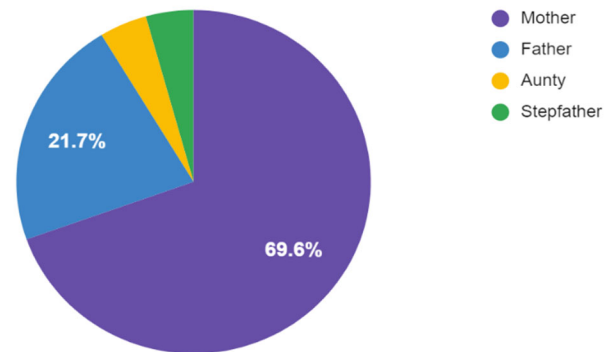
The peer worker was able to support mum in remaining calm and appeared to help her refrain from swearing and raising her voice at staff. (worker, post-meeting, 2022)

Having [peer worker] supporting me was invaluable! I was nervous and anxious and I did not feel that I was listened to by DCJ but having [peer worker] debrief afterwards really helped (mother, post-meeting, 2022)

In terms of **group support and education**, we ended our **fortnightly morning teas** in March 2022 due to limited attendance every time. Beforehand, peer workers tried different strategies, including changing times, venues, and advertising. They decided to look for other ways to bring together groups of parents and families to support each other. One of the challenges for group events is the worries that parents have about meeting others, including the stigma and shame of having children removed or at risk. This is completely understandable, but, of course, meeting others in the same situation can be a great help. It is also difficult for peer workers to get direct access to parents in the system. They often rely on workers to inform parents about FISH.

We re-introduced our **two-day restoration workshop** for parents in May this year and the sixth and final one for 2022 is in December. Two peer workers co-facilitate the workshop which encourages parents to be proactive in planning, decision making, and activities for their child's safety and wellbeing, while thinking about how they might achieve the safe return of their children home. Between May and November 2022, 49 parents registered and 23 parents participated across five workshops (including two couples) with another eight allocated for December. The significant value of this workshop is that the educators are parents with lived experience of the system whose children

FISH Restoration Workshop: Participants (completed) Relationship to child (N=23)



**Parent participant comments after restoration workshop:**

“Overall [I learned] how to communicate better with DOCS [DCJ] to address concerns and have better outcomes related to your child.”

“Just hearing everyone's personal experiences along their journey of restoration. Getting insight that your road may feel like you're facing a constant brick wall/getting nowhere. But, the person next to you may still be walking their road 2 x more years later and still pushing.”

returned home and remain there. The peer team will conduct the first-ever review of the workshop package (facilitator guide, parent resources, slides, etc) in December 2022.



We have done a variety of things this year in **community education and connections**.

Peer workers assisted with coordination and running of the **first-ever FISH Listening Campaign** in October 2022. Several parents and peer workers told their stories to **senior managers from DCJ and funded service providers**. Groups considered two big questions related to knowledge and skills of people in the system, and what bigger system changes could be made. The

outcomes of

the listening will inform FISH actions in the coming year. Peer workers experienced a **more intensive peer support experience**, e.g., supporting parents through the process, helping them to prepare their stories, sitting with and supporting them through the event, and debriefing and follow up on the experience. Parents and peers are also involved in follow up activities from the day. This includes collating and



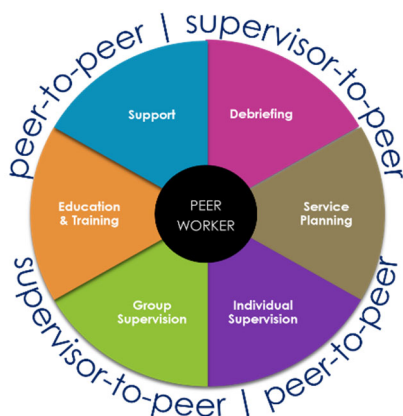
**Thank you to all the parents who participated in the listening campaign and shared parts of their big stories.**

analysing notes and reflections from the day and deciding on some initial actions to kick off. The listening campaign and what came from the day will be covered in a report that will be circulated to parents, carers, workers and agencies. The peer team conducted eight **agency visits** this year after Covid restrictions changed. They talk about FISH broadly, the peer

service, and then discuss how FISH and the other agency might connect around families. We also re-started the **FISH workshop for carers and workers** – *Building Better Relationships: Introduction to Family Inclusion*. Run twice, it was co-facilitated by a peer worker and the service manager. They were very small groups but big learning because worker participants did some great work thinking about how to improve their family inclusive practice. The team attended **Hunter Homeless Connect Day** in August. This was the first time FISH participated in the day. It was a great opportunity for the peer workers to connect with other workers in the sector and to spread the word about the great work they are doing.



## PEER WORKER SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT



Strong support, supervision and development is key to good work by the peer support and advocacy team. This year we strengthened our approach to a multi-part, integrated approach to supporting and developing our team.

**Skills workshops** are held each month, facilitated by the manager, student social workers, or a peer worker. They combine information and skills practice. 2022 topics included:

trauma and the brain; systems; strengths perspective; interpersonal skills; power and authority; reflective practice; role and process; and, being child-focused

A DCJ manager presented on case management activities during early court processes. We developed and trialled a **new 2-day induction workshop** in July and August, with existing peer workers presenting/co-facilitating some sessions to develop group skills. **Monthly team meetings** are where the team decides what services to provide and how. **Monthly individual and group supervision** focus on peer worker reflections on their experiences and the impact of lived experience as the central platform of practice. We are introducing **coordinator roles** for peer workers to develop skills and inform service design. Peer-to-peer support and debriefing continues and is crucial for peer worker development.

## PLANS FOR 2023

We will continue to work on our **existing 2022-23 plan**. Our **Planning and Big Ideas Day** in December 2022 will give the team opportunity to talk about other activities and events for our service.

### Examples in current planning:

- Completing meeting support pilots to fully implement
- Creating an orientation program for parents new to systems
- Starting court support at East Maitland Children's Court
- Recruiting more peer workers, esp. Aboriginal peer workers
- Conducting outreach groups/ info sessions, e.g., drug rehabs, corrections, other locations areas.