



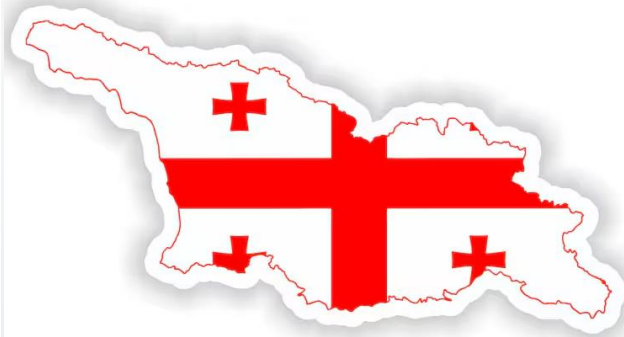
# **Georgia – Integration of Peer Support and a Recovery-Based Approach in Mental Health Services Amid Damaging Legal Reforms**

by Olga Kalina (7olga1kalina7@gmail.com)

22 May, 2026



# Introduction



Peer support in mental health is a well-known and well-established service in many countries around the world. However, for some European countries, this service is relatively new, and for others, it is practically non-existent.

Our national organization of persons with psychosocial disabilities together with allies, is introducing a peer support component in mental health services in Georgia, a small post Soviet country that, until recently, was mostly reliant on large and often dilapidated mental health hospitals.

In 2023, Georgia underwent its first review on the implementation of the UN CRPD by the State. In the Concluding Observations, the UN CRPD Committee mentioned peer support as a way of supporting persons with disabilities in general, not only within the mental health sector and called on the State to strengthen measures to develop such forms of community-based support and ensure even geographical coverage.

# Recent damaging reforms

- Until 2024 the country cooperated with civil society organizations, including organizations of person with disabilities
- We have been part of the consultative Committees on the implementation of the UN CRPD, at the intergovernmental level, and at the level of separate Ministries.
- The country had a committee which created the Mental Health Strategy 2022-2030 where introduction of formal Peer support was integral part of the strategy, as well as the use of crisis and recovery plans and human rights-based approach to the patients.
- However, starting from 2024 the government enacted several laws against civil society and media, effectively restricting freedom of association and expression and demanding from NGOs access to personal information of people involved in their projects without their prior consent.

# The laws on foreign influence

- According to the law on Transparency of foreign influence, adopted in 2024, organizations who received at least 20% of their funding from abroad had to register as organizations "bearing the interests of a foreign power".
- The law not only has been stigmatizing organizations in the eyes of society but also required sharing of sensitive information: like personal details of peer supporters, without their consent. In case of peer supporters, publication of the contracts saying everything about their personal information and the status of a peer supporter in mental health services meant also disclosure of information about their previous experience of mental health problems. The fact that organizations decided not to share these documents means a risk for the organizations themselves. We never know who and when is going to remember about us and our data. The fines are so big, that they exceed the annual budget of an organization.
- The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) already involves responsibilities of an individual, not only organizations to register as persons, acting in the interests of a foreign state. It also involves criminal responsibilities, including 5 years in prison for not sharing the required information.

# Other damaging reforms

- The government decided to adopt punishing approach to people with drug addiction. Non-state methadone programs were declared illegal and closed, with only part of the people transferred to state services.
- The restrictions related to medication, including painkillers and benzodiazepines became so severe, that people have problems with access to medication.
- Instead of 1 month or 2 months period, now people will have to go to outpatient facilities once in two weeks to take their dose of medication. Geographical accessibility was not taken into account. Therefore, many people will be left in the regions without access to medication.
- New registry of people with drug addiction, alcohol dependency and mental health problems came into force from May 1. Being in the registry will mean getting “red status” during processes like getting driver’s license, weapons permit or other (not specified).
- It highlights punishing, label-based approach taken by the government

# Peer support service: start

- In Georgia, the process of introducing a peer support component into mental health services began in 2022, before the damaging reforms. This initiative was led by the Czech organization Center for Mental Health Care Development (CMHCD).
- The project “Support of Peer Work in Georgia – First Step”, with financial support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic started in 2022 with trainings of peer supporters.
- Over the course of a year, 12 peer supporters completed training, provided by Czech professionals, including experienced peer supporters.
- Additionally, a peer support service standard was developed in collaboration with stakeholders and submitted to the Ministry.

# Peer support: internship and practice



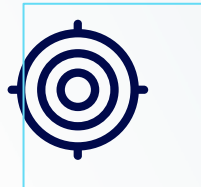
**Psychosocial  
rehabilitation  
center**



**Tbilisi  
assertive  
team**



**Rustavi MH  
center: mobile  
teams and  
hospital**



**Tbilisi  
hospital**

## Peer support service: continuation

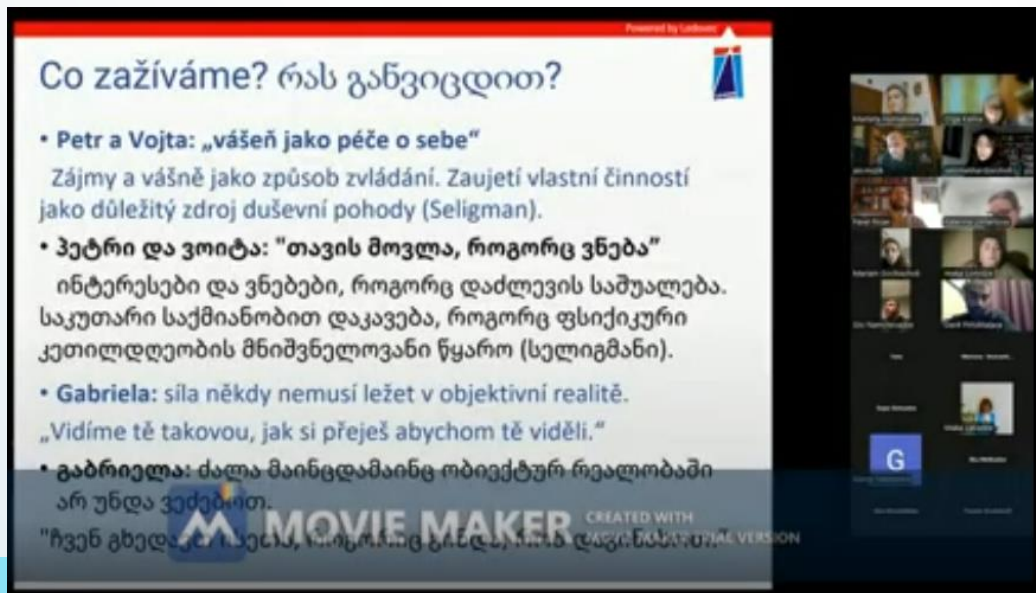
- In 2023-2024, another round of training was conducted with support from the same donors. In addition to persons with lived experience, professionals, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses and working peer supporters were also involved to gain experience as co-trainers.
- The curriculum for the training was provided to the Georgian organization by the Czech partners.

# Workshop for MH professionals and award of certificates at the Czech Embassy in Tbilisi, 11 April, 2025



# Webinar on Recovery, 24 January, 2025

Additional informational resources are still available for Georgian professionals and peer supporters.



The image shows a screenshot of a webinar presentation slide on the left and a video call interface on the right. The slide is titled "Co zažíváme? რას განვიცდით?" (What are we experiencing? What are we going through?). It lists three bullet points in both Czech and Georgian. The video call interface shows a grid of participants, with a 'G' logo in the bottom left corner.

**Co zažíváme? რას განვიცდით?**

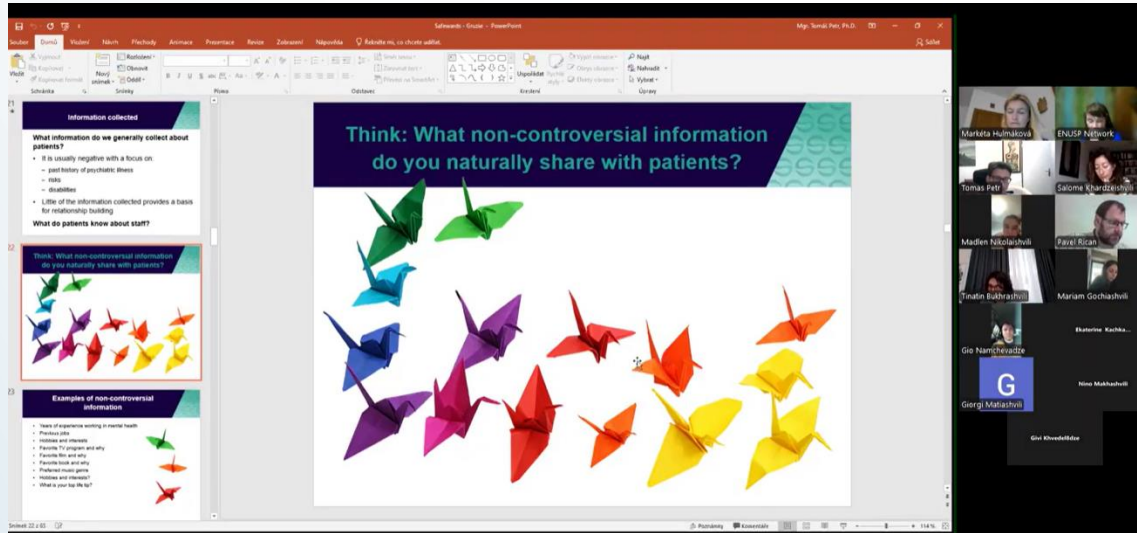
- **Petr a Vojta: „vášeň jako péče o sebe“**  
Zájem a vášně jako způsob zvládnání. Zaujetí vlastní činností jako důležitý zdroj duševní pohody (Seligman).
- **პეტრი და ვოიტა: "თავის მოვლა, როგორც ვნება"**  
ინტერესები და ვნებები, როგორც დაძლევის საშუალება. საკუთარი საქმიანობით დაკავება, როგორც ფსიქიკური კეთილდღეობის მნიშვნელოვანი წყარო (სელიგმანი).
- **Gabriela: síla někdy nemusí ležet v objektivní realitě.**  
„Vidíme tě takovou, jak si přeješ abychom tě viděli.“
- **გაბრიელა: ძალა მაინცდამაინც ობიექტურ რეალობაში არ უნდა ვეძებოთ.**  
"ჩვენ გხვდებით იმდენად, როგორც გინდა, ისინი დაგინდათ."

CREATED WITH MOVIE MAKER BASIC VERSION

-available in Czech and Georgian at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zAr-D-TZBa7eX6w4ynEme5sLUCO3VV22/view>

# Webinar about Safewards, 24 March 2025



The screenshot displays a Zoom meeting interface. The main window shows a PowerPoint slide with the following content:

**Information collected**

**What information do we generally collect about patients?**

- It is usually negative with a focus on:
  - past history of psychiatric illness
  - risks
  - disabilities
- Little of the information collected provides a basis for relationship building

**What do patients know about staff?**

**Think: What non-controversial information do you naturally share with patients?**

**Examples of non-controversial information**

- Name of responsible working in mental health
- Previous jobs
- Hobbies and interests
- Favorite TV program and why
- Favorite film and why
- Favorite book and why
- Favorite music genre
- Favorite sport/season
- "Where are you from, do you?"

The slide also features a graphic of colorful origami birds in shades of green, blue, purple, red, and yellow.

On the right side of the Zoom window, a grid of participants is visible, including:

- Marketa Hulmazova
- ENUSP Network
- Tomas Petr
- Saoma Ehardtashvili
- Madien Nikolashvili
- Pavel Rican
- Tinatin Babrashvili
- Mariam Gochashvili
- Ekaterine Kakhia
- Giorgi Mamashvili
- Giorgi Mamashvili
- Giorgi Mamashvili

-available in Czech and Georgian at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l8uqljQzhRGSdCIPxGv73XHD4Fth0jIE/view>



## Peer Support Work in community and services: Experiences and learnings.



(c) Photo by **Mila Elisabeth Larvoll**  
Documentation of the collective braiding workshop with **Marie Cole**: «Is Pleasure a Privilege?»

WAPR BULLETIN N° 54

### Integration of Peer support in Georgian mental health services, with the help of experienced colleagues from the Czech Republic

**Olga Kalina<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Chair of the Georgian and European Networks of (Ex-)Users and Survivors of Psychiatry, Georgia  
([7olga1kalina7@gmail.com](mailto:7olga1kalina7@gmail.com))

Peer support in mental health is a well-known and well established service in many countries around the world. However for some European countries, this service is relatively new, and for others, it is practically non-existent. This article describes the process of introducing a peer support component in mental health services in Georgia, a small post Soviet country that, until recent years, was mostly reliant on large and often dilapidated mental health hospitals.

# Peer support service: 2026

- In 2025-2026 the group of peer supporters was financially supported by the UNDP, with the aim to preserve the group activities, build knowledge and share information with others.
- For this purpose, a monthly online journal was created by peer supporters, featuring news from peer support services from abroad, local news, stories, anti-stigma messages and points to support recovery.
- 2 issues of the journal were published, 3 issues are agreed on with UNDP, but we hope to continue this practice even with minimum or no funding.

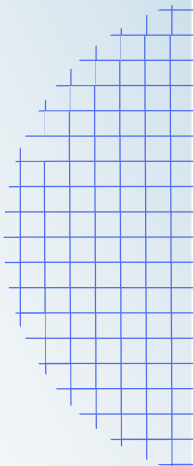
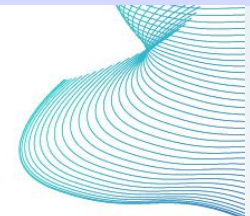
# ერთად

თანასწორმხარდამჭერთა ჟურნალი



## სარჩევი

- 04 შესავალი რედაქტორებისგან**
- 05 პირადი ისტორიები**  
-ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის სათემო სერვისების მნიშვნელობის შესახებ  
-თანასწორმხარდამჭერთა ტრენინგის მნიშვნელობის შესახებ
- 07 თვის თემატური სტატია**  
თანასწორთა მხარდაჭერის სერვისის საქართველოში
- 11 პრაქტიკული ხერხები**  
რა ეხმარება ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის და აქტიური ცხოვრების აღდგენას
- 14 ანტიستيგმა: მითები და რეალობა**  
-სტიგმისა და თვითსტიგმის დაძლევა  
-მითები და რეალობა ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის შესახებ
- 17 შემოქმედებითი კუთხე**
- 18 ინფორმაცია ცოდნის ასამალელებად**  
-ცხოვრებისეული გამოცდილება და მისი მნიშვნელობა  
-თანასწორმხარდამჭერთა როლი საზოგადოებასა და სერვისებში: გამოცდილება და სწავლება
- 23 სიახლეები**  
-ფსიქოტროპული ნაშლების გაცემის წესების ცვლილება
- 24 მოწვევა რუბრიკებში მონაწილეობის მისაღებად**





**Creative corner:  
things made by in-  
patients of Rustavi  
MH Center, group  
work with a peer  
supporter**



## Recovery tree in Rustavi MH Center, started in January, 2026



# Peer support training for parents of children with autism, 2026

- The training followed the curriculum, however it was more focused on autism related examples and on stigma parents face
- Parents had to submit a recovery story and a final test, containing 15 questions, on main points of recovery approach, peer supporter's role and strength- oriented language
- 16 parents managed to pass the test and spoke about their recovery story, with analysis of what helped and what was not helpful. Approximately 5 parents didn't pass the test (they were offered to take the course again).
- Next year we may continue training another group of parents with involvement of already trained parents as co-trainers (subject to funding, proposal is submitted by the organization Speak Up)



# Interaction with other organizations



## Theater

Performance with involvement of persons with disabilities and a follow up discussion on the effective involvement and barriers



## Antistigma activities

Initial meeting a year ago, now the follow up meeting on the anti-stigma plan



## Expertise France

A focus group that we organized ourselves on moderate and intensive support needs of persons with psychosocial disabilities



## UN Women Trainings

Trainings of UNDP on other topics, with involvement of peer supporters.



**10 October, 2025 World Mental Health Day.  
Meeting devoted to peer support  
service at the UNDP office.**



# Bonuses of peer support (apart from the direct effect on the clients)

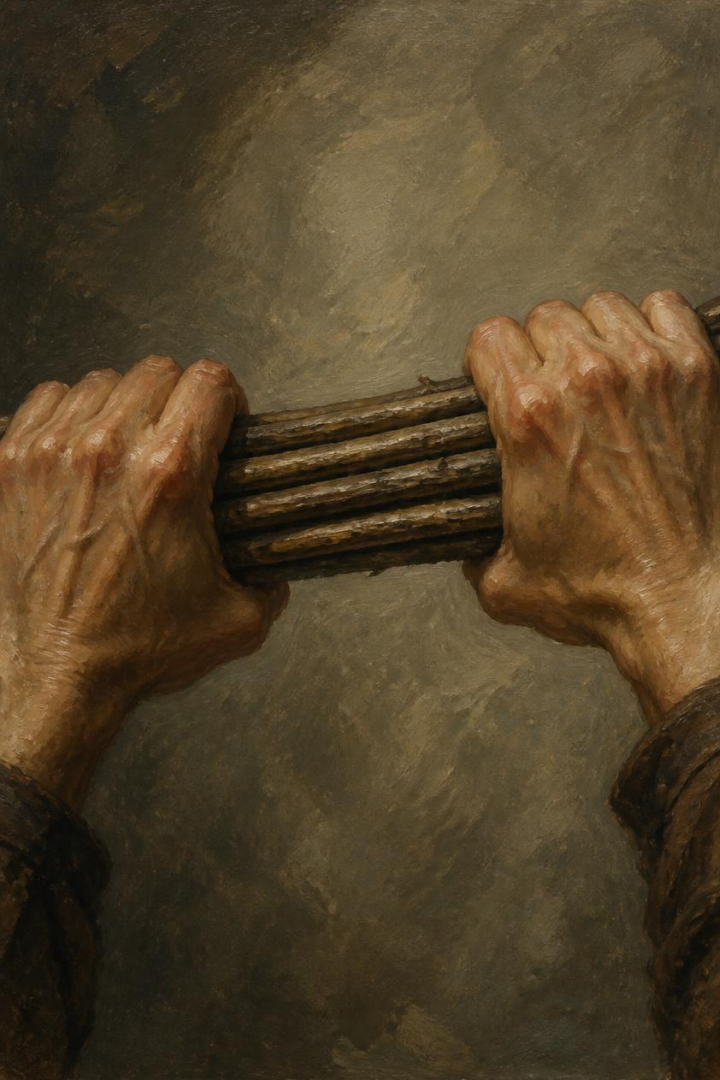


- Ø Better skills to self-present, better awareness of the meaning of the personal story
- Ø Positive influence on personal recovery of the peer supporters
- Ø Arguments to advocate for recovery-based approach
- Ø Better knowledge on stigma and ways to challenge it
- Ø Collected knowledge and examples on barriers people face in everyday life and possibility of communicating this information to achieve changes
- Ø Empowerment of peer supporters

## Plans for the future



- Continuation of awareness raising among Georgian service providers and population
  - Dissemination of the journal
  - Posting articles on social media
  - Making WHO Quality Rights training available in Georgian
- We may continue cooperation with parents and maybe even extend the principles of peer support to disability sector in general.
- We have influenced the standard on inclusive psychological support, highlighting peer support and will participate in the training of psychologists (not systematic unfortunately).
- Unfortunately, no communication with the State, and in general lack of sense of such communication

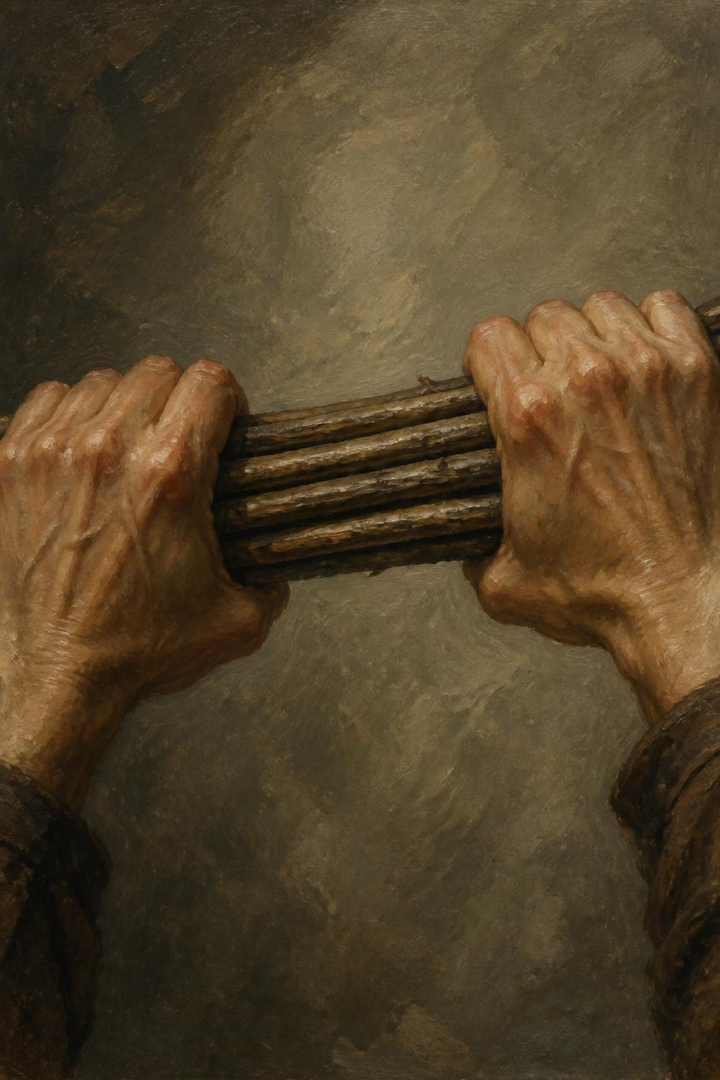


## What can support us

The official motto of Georgia is “Strength is in Unity”

International community of peer supporters and MH allied professionals provide not only the source of information about ways how to be more effective, but the sense of “shoulder” when you have to fight against biomedical approach and stigma.

The best feeling is when you feel that you are not alone.



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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**