

A young person's reflection on doing child and family partnership work

"I am the child of a parent with mental illness. I first heard of COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness) in 2014 and contacted them to enquire about the possibility of volunteering with them. I received a positive response with numerous options about how I could be involved. I joined a team of COPMI staff, other children with lived experience, and design professionals to produce the ['About Mental Illness'](#) video series in 2015.

"Collaborating with COPMI gave me a sense of space and place. Space to reflect on my experiences, and a place to contribute my experiences towards useful, publicly accessible resources. The process of working with COPMI has been professionally rewarding, and personally difficult. Rewarding because from the outset, COPMI have been flexible, respectful, and engaged. Working with COPMI staff who understand the complexities of having a parent with a mental illness, and who respected my privacy in each conversation, gave me confidence in collaborating with them. From practical issues, such as compensation, to actively listening and engaging with my feedback, COPMI demonstrated their commitment to producing effective resources for families with parental mental illness.

"COPMI's knowledge, that lived experience is valuable from concept to post-implementation, enriches resources and services and ensures relevance. Combined with their operational execution, it enables the organisation to better serve the community. Importantly, fair compensation for my time and travel costs made it possible for me to contribute my expertise.

"My satisfying working relationship with COPMI balanced the personal difficulties that arose as I examined my lived experience. Difficulties such as the endless battle between owning my story and respecting my parent's privacy were always present, and still exist today. Working with COPMI has not provided a personal epiphany or a cathartic release, as is sometimes popularised in mainstream media. Rather, the collaboration has been a way for me to positively contribute to the resources available to children of parents with mental illness, as well as to my ongoing personal processes.

"Please be aware that sharing lived experience details, for many (including myself) was and is daunting. I was used to my experiences being ignored, discounted or dismissed. Establishing respectful relationships; providing space for truth-sharing; and placing value on people's experiences is invaluable for people with lived experience of illnesses.

"COPMI's ability to produce a variety of useful resources for families with parental mental illness stems largely from their inclusive approach. I was initially taken aback by COPMI's openness to my suggestions. However, I have come to realise that such contributions – from lived experience partners and professionals – is what makes their work relevant and accessible to a broad audience. Therefore, I encourage anyone interested in working with people with lived experience to use COPMI (now Emerging Minds)'s framework to develop respectful relationships and embed lived experience as a core tenet to achieve their goals."

Note: The above article was originally written in 2015 for a COPMI report and has been updated in 2020 for inclusion in the [Child and Family Partnerships Toolkit](#). Emerging Minds would like to thank the author for her reflection.