

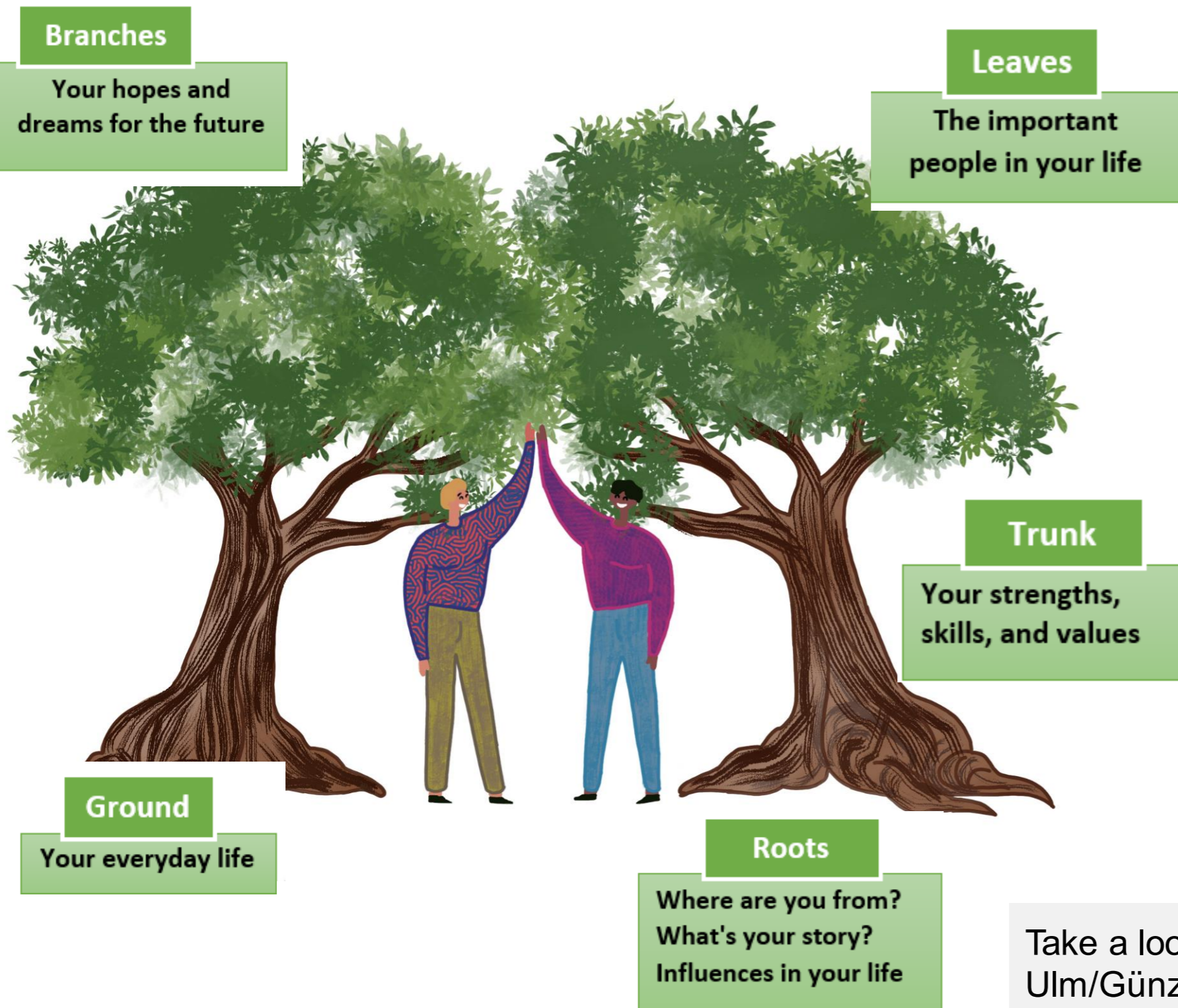
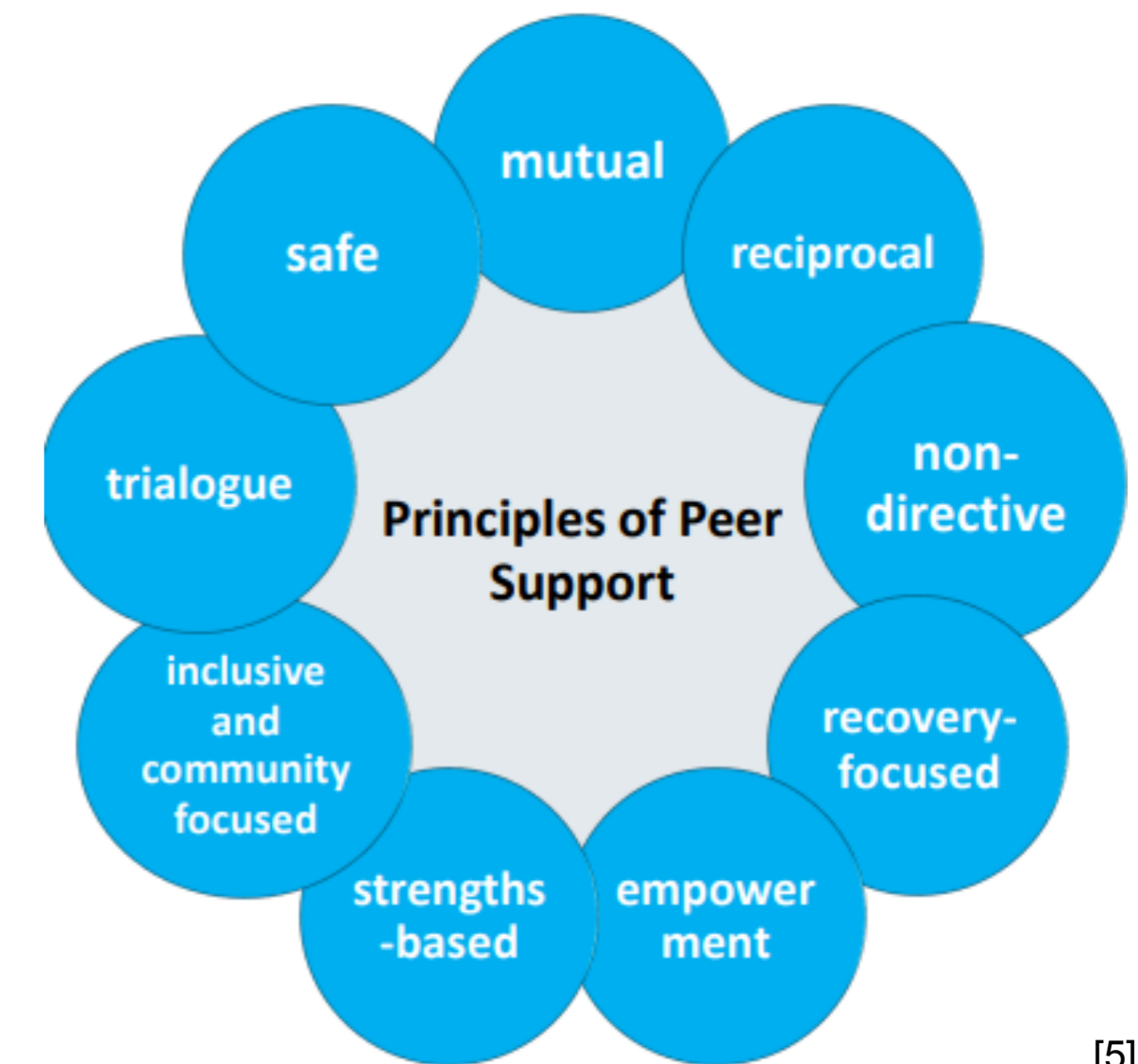
Peer support in the UPSIDES study: peer support workers' perspective

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The UPSIDES peer support worker

UPSIDES [1] peer support workers (PSWs) use their own lived experience to guide and help people with severe mental illness on their recovery journey. Thereby, they build a trusting, informal and empathic relationship with their clients on an equal footing [3]. Their knowledge, experience and training enable them to accompany and support other people in crises [2].

UPSIDES peer support is recovery-oriented, based on hope, self-determination, and opportunities. The intervention is guided by nine principles, which are listed in the figure on the right. It was developed to help with the day-to-day challenges that come with mental illness. The support can consist of accompanying clients to authorities, mediating between family and mental health staff, or help with planning their day.



In this [video](#), Manfred Lohner talks about his experiences as UPSIDES PSW in Günzburg.



The tree of life

The central principle of UPSIDES peer support is “mutuality”, i.e. it involves sharing experiences in a way that is helpful and inspiring to those being supported [4].

One of the tools to share personal stories is the tree of life. This is a useful method to identify strengths and values, and to explore how these are affected by the past. Thus, the tree of life helps to share stories in a recovery-focused way. Starting with the roots and ground, it grows upwards towards the sky – a symbol of hope and future opportunities [4].

During UPSIDES peer support, a client's unique recovery journey is explored based on the tree of life. It consists of different parts, which are presented in the picture on the left. One part is the trunk, which represents your strengths, skills and values. During peer support, the PSW and the client elaborate the client's strengths, skills and values. Possible strengths could be being tolerant, responsible, motivated, and/or diplomatic.

Take a look inside the PSW [office](#) in Ulm/Günzburg!



Fact check

6	PSWs are currently working in Ulm/Günzburg
45	clients have received UPSIDES peer support in Ulm/Günzburg so far
16	weeks is the average duration of UPSIDES peer support in Ulm/Günzburg
10	is the average number of meetings taking place during UPSIDES peer support in Ulm/Günzburg

The role of the PSW

Based on the nine principles of peer support, the role of the PSW is to:

- provide an open space for sharing experiences
- show empathy, authenticity and respect
- give and take – both sides benefit from the contact
- work out solutions together with their clients
- help their clients grow
- give hope, show possibilities and opportunities
- encourage and support their clients
- promote autonomy
- support to participate in and shape society
- include different perspectives and share knowledge
- facilitate inclusion of different perspectives and equal cooperation between clients, relatives, and health professionals
- maintain one's own boundaries and those of others

Common topics during peer support

- Networking within mental health support systems
- PSWs' own recovery story
- Rediscovering oneself
- Family relationships
- Dissatisfaction at work
- Finding balance in everyday life

Meet our team!



The PSWs in Günzburg work in a multi-professional team that thrives on mutual trust and support. Each member of the team is pictured on the right-hand side. Our team meets and exchanges experiences on a regular basis and each PSW is supervised additionally by a mental health professional.



Here Maria Wagner, PSW and UPSIDES trainer in Günzburg, explains what peer support means to her.



Sustainability

We are excited to report that peer support will be maintained in Ulm/Günzburg even beyond the durations of the UPSIDES study, as two UPSIDES PSWs have been hired by the hospital – and even more is planned!

Let us keep in touch and visit our website at www.upsides.org



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