

**St. Stephen's
Community House**

Learning By Doing

Peer Project How-To Manual

March 2017

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ABOUT ST. STEPHEN'S

St. Stephens Community (SSCH) is a vibrant community-based non-profit that has been offering a diversity of programs and services in nine locations throughout West Toronto since 1962.

We are dedicated to making our communities stronger, happier and healthier. With more than 100 staff and the support of almost 550 volunteers, our nine locations offer services for more than 25,200 people a year. We address the most pressing issues in our community: hunger, homelessness, unemployment, isolation, conflict, violence, HIV and AIDS, youth alienation and integration of immigrants.

Motto

Creating Opportunities. Strengthening Communities.

Vision

St. Stephen's envisions an inclusive community in which harmony, empowerment and opportunity create social and economic justice and a better quality of life for all.

The Peer Worker Program

SSCH is known for its commitment to community development principles and its focus on innovation. One area where our commitment is clearly seen is in our Peer Worker Program (PWP). The PWP started with small amounts of project funding over 15 years ago for a few peer workers in identified programs. Today, there are over 129 peer positions across four different programs, including the Youth Services, Housing and Homeless Services, Newcomer Services and Employment Services. The PWP is a significant aspect of our identity and expression of our values. It is also critical to the achievement of our organizational mission. Over time, we have become well-known for our commitment to peer programming. We get regular requests from partners for best practice information, as well as requests to either replicate the PWP or to second/job-share peer workers.

Acknowledgements

St. Stephens Community House would like to thank the Learning by Doing Project Advisory Committee, who supported the development of this manual. We also want to thank Nayar Consulting for their critical work on this project. Most importantly, we want to thank our peers, who are our strength, our inspiration and our future.

We always want to hear from you. Please call Bridget Sinclair at 416-925-2103 x2232 to get advice about your program, or to offer ideas about what to include in this manual in future editions!

INTRODUCTION

In the last 15 years, there has been a significant amount of work done in the area of peer programming in the non-profit sector. This makes sense – peer programming has been shown to produce important positive outcomes for peers, participants¹ and organizations. Both service providers and funders are realizing more and more that peer programming can be a critical way to achieve impact and to make long-lasting changes in our communities. We see more peer programming than ever, offered in incredibly diverse and unique ways.

So, where do you start if you want to launch a peer program? Or how do you grow a program you have started into something bigger and better for your organization? This manual offers easy-to-use information to help you to answer those questions. Read on to learn more...

Who The Manual is for

This manual is offered by SSCH as a way to share our learnings and best practices in our Peer Worker Program (PWP) to date. It offers useful and accessible information, tips and tools. It is designed for peers, program managers who work with peers and senior leaders. It targets:

- Any non-profit wanting to start up a peer programming in their organization;
- Any non-profit wanting to expand an existing peer program across multiple programs in their organization;
- Any organizations who are interested in partnering with each other on developing peer programming.

This manual targets both organizational development and program development. Appendix A offers a listing of additional resources, including for those that want to start a peer program for targeted populations (e.g., participants needing mental health supports or participants living with HIV/AIDS).

How to Use the Manual

The manual is meant to fast track you to increased capacity to develop and implement a peer program across your organization. Each section will offer information on best practices, and peer programming tips, techniques and tools. You can:

- Read through to get immersed in the topic;
- Jump to the section that is of most interest right now;
- Use the manual in a step-by-step way as you develop your peer programming;
- Share it as a professional development tool.

¹ The term “participants” here refers to clients, service users, and/or others accessing programs and services in an organization.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Benefits of Peer Programming

The value of peer programming is undeniable. It has been shown to produce positive outcomes in many ways across individuals, programs, organizations and communities. Peer support can be defined as:

“A naturally occurring, mutually beneficial support process, where people who share a common experience meet as equals, sharing skills, strengths and hope, allowing people to learn ways of coping from each other. Formalized peer support begins when persons with lived experience, who have received specialized training, assume unique designated roles...to support an individual’s expressed wishes”.

- Ontario Peer Development Initiative

SSCH’s PWP engages “...high-risk community participants and provides opportunities within a safe and supportive setting to gain transformative learning through on the job skill development, leadership development, conflict resolution, anti-oppression, health and safety, team building, communication and interpersonal skill building, problem solving, and goal setting.”

Potential benefits of peer programming are provided in the table on the next pages. What other benefits can you think of? Brainstorm any ideas you can – they will come in handy later!

The Benefits of Peer Programming

Possible Benefits of Peer Programming (not that italicized outcomes are often considered priorities for organizations)	What Other Benefits Can You Think of Particular to Your Peers, Participants, Organization and Community?
INDIVIDUAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers feel valued for their knowledge, experience and their impact on the lives of participants • Peers learn new, transferable skills and knowledge through work experience and training opportunities • Peers are bridged to other employment, education/training or community engagement opportunities through working at an organization • Peers feel a sense of hopefulness about their future and their next steps in terms of employment, education/training and/or community engagement • People form new relationships that build connection and an increased sense of belonging • Peers experience increased self-esteem and confidence • Peers are less reliant on services • Peers are able to access and apply income earned to independently meet needs and achieve goals in their lives • Peers learn to self-advocate as they navigate services and systems • Peers learn how to advocate at a systems level 	

Possible Benefits of Peer Programming (not that italicized outcomes are often considered priorities for organizations)

What Other Benefits Can You Think of Particular to Your Peers, Participants, Organization and Community?

PROGRAM

- Participants have increased access to relevant and meaningful information, and knowledge
- Participants increase their social network
- Participants feel that the staff can better relate to their experiences, and can represent those experiences in the organization’s planning and evaluation activities
- Participants feel more understood and valued
- Participants feel more trusting of services Participants experience increased hope, confidence and motivation

ORGANIZATIONAL

- Programs remain current and relevant; programs reach new service communities
- Non-peer staff learn about marginalized communities; develop increased empathy
- Non-peer staff learn new skills and knowledge
- Staff have increased opportunities for participants to grow and develop in programs.
- Percentage of core dollars allocated to peer programming grows
- More peers in non-casual positions
- The number of partnerships dedicated to peer engagement grows

Possible Benefits of Peer Programming (not that italicized outcomes are often considered priorities for organizations)

What Other Benefits Can You Think of Particular to Your Peers, Participants, Organization and Community?

COMMUNITY

- Peers are engaged in community building work
- Peers make deputations on issues of interest to the organization and the wider community
- Supports are present and active in the community where agencies are not present/services not available (increased capacity)
- The organization participates in building a local inclusive economy

Who is a Peer and Who Isn't?

At a high-level, a peer can be defined as someone who has:

- Lived experience that is relevant to the program being offered;
- Some aspect of shared identity or shared experience with relevant participants (e.g., race, culture, ethnicity, newcomer status, age, sexual identity, shared experiences of issues such as homelessness, substance use, mental illness);
- The experience of seeking services at the organization (currently or at some point in recent history);
- Been currently experiencing barriers to gaining skills and knowledge that support achievement of employment, educational or other community engagement goals.

Different types of peer roles include:

- **Peer support workers** who provide support for personal and social recovery to people with mental health problems, including in acute mental health services, housing, supported employment, community support, etc.
- **Peer advocates** who empower individuals or groups of people with mental health problems to advocate for their rights and needs on a range of issues in a variety of settings
- **Peer educators** who provide education from a lived experience perspective for other peers, mental health workers or community participants
- **Peer navigators** who assist people to find, choose and gain access to a full range of community resources, networks and services
- **Peer advisors** who work in partnership with mental health service providers to give consumer perspectives at all levels of planning, implementation and evaluation, and provide feedback to participants
- **Peer researchers and evaluators** who use lived experience knowledge and participatory processes to inform their work
- **Peer managers** who lead services

So how do you decide what kind of peer roles your organization needs? Use the following question guide to help your team to make decisions about which type of peer roles make the most sense for you to pursue.

What Kind of Peer Roles Do We Need?

Key Question	Notes
Which of your programs serve people who have experienced marginalization and/or systemic oppression?	
Which programs are targeted for growth in your organization?	
Which programs have the potential to grow funding?	
What are the community needs that are most pressing for you to respond to and what does the evidence say are the best ways to address those needs (i.e., education, support to community participants, social justice support)	
Where have you used volunteers that could eventually evolve into peer roles?	
What strategic directions would be best realized through the engagement of peers?	

Building a Peer-Valuing Culture at Your Organization

Valuing peer programming at your organization means building the resources, systems, processes and supports over time that enhance the sustainability of the program and its ability to demonstrate impact against your vision and mission.

Building that culture starts with exploring your organizational values, and understanding how they relate to the values inherent in peer programming.

Common Values Guiding Peer Programming^{2,3}

At the heart of peer programming are key values that come from the outcomes peers, participants and organizations can experience. These values include:

- **Valuing lived experience:** Lived experience as a “powerful portal” to engage participants from the beginning to the end of their experience with an organization. Lived experience as a key qualification of a worker is also seen as a way to achieve program and organizational goals;
- **Being asset-based:** Capitalizing on the key assets of individuals to support the best achievement of outcomes at all levels of the organization;
- **Equitable access:** Equitable access to opportunities within the organization (e.g., both as staff in different areas of the organization and in decision-making processes used for ongoing operations and governance) and access to opportunities to develop skills and knowledge;
- **A fair living wage:** A fair living wage as an anti-poverty tactic, to be applied to any and all paid positions in an organization;
- **Advocacy and Social Justice:** Engaging peers and supporting them to develop skills in advocacy, system navigation, and community development in order to spark social justice actions that are core to making the kind of change that the organization want to see in the world (e.g., in areas such as precarious employment, affordable housing, anti-stigma and anti-discrimination).

“Being able to [understand] that lived experience deeply helps us understand how our programs need to change and evolve. It is different than asking participants to share that with us, because participants have the need to navigate what they share, how they share, etc. differently.”

² Partly adapted from the Homeless Hub.

³ All quotes come from SSCH peer and non-peer staff.

The Homeless Hub has developed seven principles guiding first voice inclusion called “nothing about us without us”⁴. These principles also lay a strong foundation for building a peer-valuing culture in your organization. No matter how far along you are in developing and implementing your peer programming, try some of these tips to promote positive culture change at your organization.

Principle/Value ⁵	Tips on How to Live it
Bring the perspective of lived experience to the forefront through peer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that peers are always involved in any of your social justice or awareness raising efforts. Plan for their involvement and make it high-profile. Explore who needs to be included and why. • Ensure that your organization’s communications, fundraising, research, and programs do not reinforce the misconceptions that lived experience is caused by individual problems, or can be solved by charity. • Dedicate time and resources to advocacy, and support grassroots social change efforts.
Consider the voices of people with lived experience at all levels of the organization through peer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider hiring peers in positions at all levels – front-line, administration, and management. • Explore how the voice of peers can be included at the governance level. • Explore how lived experience can be included as a dimension in your organization’s access and equity policies. • Highlight lived experience as a desired qualification • Work towards sustainability and advancement for peer positions, so that those interested in doing so can advance to permanent positions based on ability and interest.
Value the time of peers and provide appropriate supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate the compensation and supports that will be required to properly include peers in funding applications, and then include peer work in those applications! • Compensate peers well for the time spent if they offer their advice and suggestions for developing your peer program, not only with token gift cards or minimal honorariums. • Build in the opportunity for peers to receive benefits whenever appropriate and possible. • Ensure that HR policies can be applied in a flexible way to peer programming • Prioritize training and professional development for peers

⁴ The term “nothing about us without us” had its roots in the disability rights and disability justice movements in the 1990s. Since then, it has also been used by HIV/AIDS advocates and in social justice movements related to substance abuse and mental illness.

⁵ Principles have been adapted from the Homeless Hub.

Principle/Value ⁵	Tips on How to Live it
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a welcoming environment in which it is safe to express emotions. • Develop new ways of doing business - long meetings and bureaucratic procedures can be very draining and alienating for everyone!
Challenge stigma, confront oppression and promote dignity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a shared foundation for the work by providing Anti- Oppression 101 training to participants, volunteers, all front-line staff and management. • Educate around intersectionality – that is, the ways that oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism and ableism work together and reinforce each other. • Review organizational policies and practices to ensure they promote equity, dignity, and rights of people with lived experience. • Share information and best practices across programs; encourage peers to share strategies to be successful in the workplace with each other
Recognize expertise and engage peers in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve peers in strategic planning processes • Explore other processes and systems whereby peers can participate in decision-making about various aspects of programming and operations.
Work together towards equitable representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include equitable representation as a goal in the organization’s strategic planning process. • Identify other organizations that have successfully implemented equitable representation, and get their advice and mentorship. • Seek the feedback of peers in terms of the peer programming being offered.
Build authentic relationships between peers and non-peer staff and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate an environment of caring, acceptance and openness where everyone’s contribution is acknowledged. • Have organization-wide peer appreciation events.

How to Incorporate Peer Programming Into Your Strategic Directions, Funding Proposals and Annual Budgets

A major challenge for organizations is finding the resources for peer programming that can be sustained over time. Following are some key tips to help build your resource capacity for peer programming. Remember that making this commitment takes time, both from the point of view of internal change and getting external (i.e., funding) support.

Strategic Planning

- Ensure that an equity framework is used when determining key strategic planning activities and questions.
- Consider a goal related to equity and engagement of marginalized populations when doing strategic planning.
- Have peer participate in planning processes.

Funding Proposals

- Any time you apply for a new project or program, include a line item for some aspect of peer work, no matter how small.
- Where possible and relevant to do so, indicate that a priority for the staff being hired for new projects will be to hire peers.

Annual Budgets

- Include regular line items for peer training
- Annual budgets: Include a global budget for training of peers in the annual budget

Getting Your Union Onside for Peer Hiring

- Provide information to the union on the benefits of peer support models
- Work collaboratively to ensure support for peer work positions or short contracts

Are You Ready for a Peer Program?⁶

Organizational readiness is an important first step in peer program development or enhancement. If an organization is not prepared to support a peer program, the likelihood of success is minimal. Therefore, organizations should conduct an assessment of both their capacity to build a peer program and their ability to initially sustain the program beyond development. This means that the organization needs to value the concept of peer support in order to provide the necessary resources for that program. Resources might include: the support of key organization decision-makers; the use of available dollars; systems for peer support; and focused efforts on creating a multidisciplinary team. When considering your readiness, there are three phases to assess:

- Conceptualization of a Peer Program
- Gathering Information
- Program Development

Use the guiding questions on the following pages to assess your readiness to start or grow a peer program!

⁶ Adapted from Building Blocks to Peer Program Success.

Assessing your Organizational Readiness: Part 1

Conceptualization of a Peer Program

1. Why is having or enhancing a peer program important to your organization?
2. How does this peer program fit the organization's mission and existing services?
3. What are the overarching goals or expected outcomes of a peer program? What does that mean for the length of time any given peer should work in the organization? Are jobs for individual peers time limited or ongoing and why?
4. What will the program look like when these goals are being met?
5. Who needs to be involved in the peer program and at what phases in the process?
6. What are the funding options for a peer program?

Gathering Information

1. How might having peers enhance or challenge the jobs of current staff?
2. How do existing staff feel about having peers as part of the organization?
3. What will the impact on the organization/staff be if or when peers become paid professionals vs. volunteers (particularly if they were/are participants)?
4. What are some of the challenges that might emerge in the non-peer/peer relationship?
5. What is the Board's role in working with peers?
6. Who else at your organization needs to have buy-in to support the development/further enhancement of your peer program?
7. How do you ensure peers have their needs protected as a consumer of services?
8. In what way is the leadership at your organization ready to accept and support a peer program?
9. Will peers have a role in decision making and what will that role be? At what level?
10. How will your organization provide training for peers?
11. What role will your organization play in advocating for peer inclusion in the provider community?
12. What supervision (administrative and supportive) systems do you currently have in place to support peers? How could supervisors of peers be supported in your organization?

Program Development

1. What is your core concept for your program? What are the intended outcomes?
2. What are the goals of the program?
3. What are your key activities?
4. What measures of success do you want to have (i.e., outcomes and indicators)?

Assessing your Organizational Readiness: Part 2

Considering your answers to the questions in Part 1, what are the top three capacity needs of your organization?

- Gaining organizational buy in (staff and/or Board)
- Making sure we are clear on the broad outcomes we want for our peer programming
- Developing the necessary policies and procedures in the right way
- Addressing our own unique HR and finance issues
- Knowing how and where to recruit peers
- Funding/resource development so we can grow and sustain our peer programming
- Ensuring we have the right peer training
- Ensuring that non-peer staff know how to supervise and support peers, and have the time to do it well
- Understanding how to evaluate our peer program
- Other: _____

What are the top two things you will do to begin to address your three priority needs?

Priority Need	Our Solutions

DESIGNING YOUR PEER PROGRAM: BUILDING ON YOUR ASSETS

Bringing Peers On

The next three sections describe the core elements of a peer program, and offer tips and tools for developing those core elements. Taken together, they offer a simple framework for developing a peer program (See Appendix B). While structure is critical to supporting the best outcomes for peer programming, it must be balanced with flexibility and openness. Specifically, this means openness on the part of all staff in terms of solving issues. It also means flexibility in terms of the employment journey of a peer and changing the ways things are being done to accommodate needs and ensure that values and principles are adhered to on the ground.

Job Qualifications

Beyond the actual role that you have decided you want peers to play, it is important for you to give some thought to the job qualifications you want to list in your job posting. Unlike positions with strict educational requirements, peer roles usually draw on a wider variety of assets.⁷ Consider the following list to see which ones work best for the position you are hiring for:

Qualification	Relevant to the role we are hiring for
Lived experience dealing with one or more challenges faced by the participant population (ie unstable housing, substance abuse, domestic violence)	✓
Fluency in a specified language	
Ability to support people to start conversations	
Willingness to voice opinions and share personal stories with others	
Local resident or familiarity with the community	
Ability to reflect on and apply life experience	
Good communication skills	
Open-minded (non-judgmental)	
Committed to working with others to improve individual's and communities' lives	
Takes initiative	
Outgoing, fun and energetic	
Flexible, available, reliable and punctual	

⁷ http://cahpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/5_RecruitingHiringAndOrientingPeersComplete.pdf

Be ready to post the job in a diversity of places! This includes list serves, flyer-ing in your local neighbourhood, through email and through asking for names of potential candidates that you can reach out to so they apply. Remember that not everyone has easy access to the internet. Also remember that not everyone will have a resume, so ask for a resume **OR** a write-up of why someone wants to apply for the job.

Hiring

When hiring, try to hold interviews in central locations, at accessible times of day. Provide the questions to the interviewee ahead of time and at the interview itself. Below you will find an example of a set of interview questions for a peer worker for a Community Addictions Team Peer Program/Drop-In Support Worker, as well as the rating system used to score the interview.

Interview Questions

1. What is it about the Peer Program that interested you?
2. Can you think of three skills that you feel will contribute to your participation in this program?
3. What are some goals you are hoping to accomplish in the near future?
4. Tell us about a time you had a conflict. How did you deal with it and what did you learn?
5. What does harm reduction mean to you?
6. What are the benefits of using harm reduction when working with other people?
7. Please describe how you personally have used harm reduction strategies in your life?
8. What are some challenges that you feel may come up for you in this position and what supports would you find helpful?
9. Toronto Community Addictions Team/Corner Drop In is a harm reduction based program that works with people who are in different stages of their substance use. Tell us about harm reduction and how you would work with someone who is still actively using.
10. If it is observed that your performance can be improved, how would you respond to feedback?

Scenario Questions

1. You are accompanying someone to the local food bank, when you return to their apartment they offer you drugs or alcohol to thank you. How would you deal with this situation?
2. You are scheduled to take someone to a doctor's appointment for 1 pm. You meet them at noon, they take half an hour to get ready and then want to stop and grab a king can (beer) on the way. Knowing that the stop will make you late and you are already running behind schedule, what would you do?

Interview Scoring

Category	Score
Self-Awareness/Reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of self and potential challenges • Able to address challenges • Helping people in different stages of use 	/5
Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution • Receiving feedback • Boundaries 	/3
Harm Reduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Openness to concepts of HR • What is HR? 	/5
Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they have goals • Do goals relate to the program? 	/3
Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resume/letter of intent • Leading up to the interview • Interview 	/3
Scenario <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundaries • Conflict resolution • Challenges 	/3
Value Alignment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share values of St. Stephen's • Non-judgmental • Open to learning • Participant centered • Anti-oppressive 	/5
Total Score	/27

Special considerations when hiring peers include:

- Informing peers of the wage during the interview, in order to allow them to research any impact on income entitlements they may be receiving.
- Informing peers if the position is time-limited (contract), from the point of posting the job right through to selection and contract.
- Needing to potentially waive police checks with peers who may have had criminal activity in their past if the program supports participants who may have criminal histories.

Initial Orientation/Training and Developing Individual Goal Plans with Peers

Once your peers are hired, getting them oriented and off to a positive start is important. Orientation should include the relevant information about the organization, including a review of critical policies. It should also include program-specific information. A best practice is to have all peers attend a general orientation together that is co-facilitated by a more experienced peer, and then break off into program orientation. This allows new peers to meet right away and to start to build relationships with each other. It is further suggested that peers job shadow other peers or an identified non-peer staff person as an integral part of orientation, to support their transition into their work duties. To the right is a sample table of contents from SSCH's PWP that also forms the basis of an orientation training agenda that you can adapt for your use.

Welcome
Overview of St. Stephen's Community House
Mission Statement
Vision and Guiding Principles
Our Dream
Action Statement
Working as a Peer in the Housing and Homeless Department
General Information
Hiring Process
Supervision
Rights
Responsibilities
Recognition
Participant Expectations
Participation
Absenteeism
Dismissal
Serious Occurrence Reports
St. Stephen's Community House Policies
Code of Conduct
Confidentiality/Disclosures and Ethics
Equity Policy
Lone Worker Policy
Social Media Policy
Check-in/out Procedures
Working for an External Agency
Ending Your Peer Commitment
Emergency Information

In addition to thorough orientation, developing individualized goals plans with new peers will support the achievement of outcomes for both the peers and the organization within timeframes as identified by the peer, program and/or organization. Remember that this ties back to the broader outcomes your organization is seeking having peer programming, and the decisions you made as a result about the length of time peers should stay in different jobs/roles. A sample goal plan is seen below:

Peer Leader Personal Development Plan

For _____ Position _____

From _____ To _____

Date	
What skills do you need to develop?	
How will you develop them?	
By when?	
Update	

Job Descriptions

A clear job description sets peers up for success. Good job descriptions should outline the organizational duties, program specific duties, and qualifications. Following is an example of a job description from SSCH's Youth Department:

St Stephens Community House Job Description

POSITION TITLE: Peer Leader	STATUS: Casual
DEPARTMENT: Youth Services	HRS/WEEK: 4
REPORT TO: Coordinator, Youth Drug Strategy	Salary: \$ 16.12 (Schedule C)

POSITION SUMMARY:

The peer work is a temporary paid employment opportunity that are only offered to participants, who are in or have recently been participants in specific St. Stephen's Community House programs. The employment is meant to support the services a person receives to increase their employability, support their recovery, build work related skills and leadership, and/or reduce the impact of poverty.

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Assist in the development and delivery of peer support for youth in high schools, community centres and group homes and provide peer support and guidance to youth participants
2. Conduct outreach presentations and assist with all outreach activities
3. Prepare support session materials and assist in the development and evaluation of Project Manual

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Adhere to all SSCH policies and procedures
2. Attend supervision meetings and other SSCH activities
3. Cooperate and participate with health and safety legislation and AODA, and instructions for a safe and healthy workspace; fill out and submit time cards (time sheets) on time

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Some education or experience in social work, community work, education, sociology or other relevant field (*preferable*)
- Committed to supporting young people by discussing and sharing personal experiences and stories
- Lived experience growing up with a parent/guardian or family participant with an addiction (*required*)
- Between 18 and 25 years old
- Able to read, write and follow basic English instructions and able to do presentations
- Familiarity with relevant youth and community-based resources

Keeping Peers On

Ongoing Support and Supervision

Perhaps the most important part of working with peers is providing them the support and supervision they need to succeed. Providing services as a peer is not always easy, and navigating the issues and challenges that come up deserve support from the organization in order to help the peer stay on and do their best work.

Particular needs for support in peer programming relate to:

- Managing ongoing boundaries between peers and participants.
- Providing support if peers are having any challenges that require self-care, while maintaining their position as a peer in the organization.
- Ensuring that enough time is provided to discuss issues in the workplace in order to help with successful performance.

It is a best practice to ensure that peers have informal opportunities to debrief and/or check-in regularly. This can be done through a “buddy”, a peer mentor, the supervisor or an assigned non-peer staff. Anyone checking in with the peer should have training on how to provide support, including when to refer issues to the peer’s supervisor.

“The investment of time needs to be higher for many peers in terms of their need for support. That means more check-ins, more ‘were you triggered’, and more support. Peers bring a lived experience but that means they can bring vulnerability too, especially as they have been identified first and foremost through that lived experience, whereas staff who are here with lived experience but are not a peer can keep that more private if they want.”

Beyond informal check-ins, there are 2 types of supervision to offer peers:

Type of Supervision	Key Points
Administrative Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support to ensure that timesheets, payroll information, service paperwork, peer participant loads, referral information, number of participants seen, holidays, sick days and any other administrative reporting or tasks are being completed on time and accurately• Should be reviewed monthly, or as per contract• Can assign a peer mentor or a “buddy” to work with peers that need added support in this area
Supportive Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support in terms of the services being provided, including problem solving, exploring how to address complex participant needs, processing if and how relationships with participants (who were and are friends as well) can change, support to work with other peers and non-peer staff, need for additional training or mentoring• Should be explored monthly or as needed

Below is a sample monthly supervision form which can be used when working with peers.

Monthly Supervision Form

For _____ Project _____

From _____ To _____

Review of work since last supervision
Discuss any challenges you or your supervisor have come across and discuss actions taken to resolve?
What areas of your role have went well?
What areas of your role have not gone so well / any concerns?
Discuss areas of your work / development for the next month.

Supervisor Signature _____

Signature _____

Ongoing Training and Information

Beyond required training (typically including health and safety training, CPR and First Aid, equity or anti-oppression training [including learning about the experiences of the organizations' priority populations], training on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, etc.), peer should have ongoing opportunities to access training. These trainings can be:

- Organization-wide trainings that peers are invited and encouraged to attend;
- Special peer forums within the organization that have a training element;
- Special peer training events and accreditation opportunities outside of the organization (e.g., certification through Peer Support and Accreditation and Certification Canada, www.psac-canada.com).

Training topics of interest may include:

- Job and Career Mobility – What's Involved? Looking for meaningful work in Toronto
- Understanding Post-Secondary and Continuing Education in Toronto – Opportunities and Information
- Dealing with Compassion Fatigue
- Understanding Peer-Participant Boundaries – How to Handle Complex Situations
- Conflict Resolution
- Privacy and Confidentiality (Advanced)
- Understanding a Harm Reduction Approach to work
- Population-specific training

Organizations must think clearly about what training peers will be paid for, what training they will receive and honorarium for and if any trainings being offered need to be taken on a volunteer basis. An annual training schedule should be developed that all peers get access to and can sign up for trainings as required/desired. In addition to training, ensuring that peer have regular access to information about organizational events and job opportunities is critically important. Information should be posted in a diversity of ways that all peers can access, including job boards, at trainings and events, through supervision and online/through email.

Creating a Peer Network

As the number of peers in your organization grows, there is an opportunity to support them to meet regularly and form a support network. This kind of network provides an opportunity for peers to meet, share stories, get new training, offer best practices, give mutual support and mobilize on issues of shared interest or concern (e.g., regular mini-conferences that can also support evaluation of the peer programming you offer). Peers should also be well supported to access external networks, peer events and training opportunities. Within this kind of network, both informal and more formal peer mentoring can develop, where more experienced peers can mentor other peers and can also role model peer leadership and advocacy (both within your organization for peer worker rights and outside in wider community).

Peers Moving On

When is it Time for Peers to Move On and How Can That Happen?

It is very important for organizations to be clear on what peer positions are short-term and what positions are long-term and why. When positions are time-limited (due to funding, the nature of the work or the outcomes an organization has for its peer programming), then peers should be made aware of that during the hiring process, and it should be explored if a short term employment contract would meet their broader goals. If it does and they are hired, the personalised work plan that is developed with the peer (see page 23) should indicate what other opportunities that meet life goals will be explored during the length of employment (e.g., attending job fairs, exploring education and learning opportunities, considering other aspects of community engagement of interest such as volunteering). Good peer programs always consider the needs of the peer and the organization together, and the needs of participants first and foremost.

When peers do leave, conducting an exit interview is an important way to get feedback on the peer program, learn where improvements can be made and offer closure for both the peer and the remaining staff. The next page contains an example of exit interview questions:

Exit Interview Questions

Employee Name _____

Position/title _____

Supervisor _____ Date _____

What did you like best about this position?
What part of the work did you find most interesting?
What areas would have benefitted from more training or support?
What did you feel you contributed to the project?
What skills or knowledge did you gain? What do you think you will use or bring with you in your future career or education?
As demonstrated in this position, what do you feel are your areas for improvement?
Please add any comments.

Supervisor Signature _____

Employee Signature _____

A Special Section on HR and Finance

Of perhaps all the aspects of running a peer program in large organizations with multiple services and funding sources, the HR and finance complexities can be greatest. This is primarily because by virtue of their legislative and accountability requirements both functions have a significant amount of required structure, which can be in contrast to the flexibility in terms of HR and finances that can often be required with peer programming.

Special HR and finance challenges could include the following:

- All new peer hires may be required to provide basic information for HR and Finance (e.g., banking information, resume, photo identification). However, many peers may not have all the necessary documents, or may not provide them;
- Variability in attendance at work prompts manual tracking processes for payroll that take significant time to complete;
- Different peer workers may need to be hired at different rates due to available funding (which can create tracking issues from the point of view of finance and internal HR employment equity);
- If organizations have different peer roles, there is a need to be clear about job mobility between roles;
- If peers work for a short time and do not return to work, required paper work can get delayed, or can get issued and then processing starts again if a peer returns to work, which can be a significant drain on the time of HR and finance staff; and
- Existing and required training opportunities need to be made accessible (e.g., for those requiring literacy support).

“[You] need to ensure flexibility where [you] need it, and standardization where [you] need it, especially from an HR and Finance point of view.”

An important step to take as soon as possible after starting to develop peer programming is to have a special meeting managers of programs that will work with peers, senior leaders and HR and finance staff. The purpose of the meeting is to review all HR and finance policies and explore together where and how flexibility in the application of those policies needs to occur for the peer program, and how that flexibility will occur on the ground. The priority for this kind of review should be the recruitment and selection policies as they relate to peers (including job postings, interview questions, including peers on all hiring committees, selection decision-making frameworks and engagement of the HR Department). Don't forget to engage the peers in your organization in terms of how HR and finance issues can be addressed!

Case scenarios are a highly effective way to move through these kinds of discussions. Adapt the case scenario below to meet your needs.

Case Scenario:

Rhonda has been hired to be a casual peer worker in the mental health and addictions program in your organization. Previously Rhonda was a participant and had been provided support within a harm reduction model in terms of her substance use. Due to multiple factors Rhonda's attendance at work has been quite variable as of late. She also has not always been filling out her time sheets when she has been able to attend work. She has had to change who she does her banking with, and has also expressed concern that a past abusive partner may have found out where she works and may come around while she is on shift.

Case Scenario Questions:

1. What are the key HR and finance issues in Rhonda's situation?
2. What are the priority needs to address?
3. What are the things that HR and finance can be flexible on? What must remain structured in order to be compliant with legislation? What are the consequences, if any, of HR and finance decisions that get made (for Rhonda and for the organization)?

CONCLUSION

Starting peer programming is hard work. There is a need to be flexible and yet structured, to make sure there is accessibility in a complex environment, and to be values-driven within limited sectoral resources. Despite all this, it may be the most rewarding thing you do as an organization. Peer programming is known to be a powerful intervention in the lives of people who seek out non-profit services. Developing and implementing peer programming will drive you to your vision and mission in a high-impact way that strengthen the communities you serve.

APPENDIX A: Additional Resources

The Provider’s Handbook on Developing & Implementing Peer Roles

By Lyn Legere of Lyn Legere Consulting with contributions from the Western Mass Peer Network & Sera Davidow of the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community

<http://www.psresources.info/peer-roles-handbook>

Best Practices in Peer Support 2014 Final Report

By Ethan Mings – The Desk Consulting Group Inc. and Janis Cramp – Addictions and Mental Health Ontario

<http://eenet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Best-Practices-PeerSupport-Final-Report-2014.pdf>

Development of a Peer Support Strategy for the South West LHIN (SWLHIN)

By Tazim Virani & Associates April 6, 2015

<http://www.southwestlhin.on.ca/goalsandachievements/Programs/MentalHealthAddictions.aspx>

Briefing Paper: Peer Support Workers: Theory and Practice (2013)

A joint initiative of Implementing Recovery through Organizational Change (IMROC), Centre for Mental Health and Mental Health Network NHS Confederation

By Julie Repper with contributions from Becky Aldridge, Sharon Gilfoyle, Steve Gillard, Rachel Perkins and Jane Rennison

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.688.7633&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

How to Support and Facilitate Peer Engagement in Service Provision Roles

Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN), Rapid Review #76: December 2013

By Sanjana Mitra and Jason Globerman

<http://www.ohtn.on.ca/Pages/Knowledge-Exchange/Rapid-Responses/Documents/RR76.pdf>

Authentic Peer Support Work: Challenges and Opportunities for an Evolving Occupation

By Karen L. Rebeiro Gruhl, Sara LaCarte & Shana Calixte

Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research, Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada and Northern Initiative for Social Action, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Pages 78-86 | Published online: 23 Sep 2015

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26397981>

Peer Support in Adult Mental Health Services: A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Findings

Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal 2013

By Gill Walker and Wendy Bryant

Introducing New Peer Worker Roles into Mental Health Services in England: Comparative Case Study Research across a Range of Organizational Contexts.

Adm Policy Mental Health 2015. By Steve Gillard, Jess Holley, Sarah Gibson, John Larsen, Mike Lucock, Eiver Oborn, Miles Rinaldi and Elina Stamou.

Breaking Ground: Peer Support for Congregate Living Settings (May 2010)

By the Wellesley Institute

<http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/publications/breaking-ground-exploring-the-role-of-peer-support-in-supportive-housing/>

Peer Workforce & Capacity Building: Common Needs for a Fragmented Workforce Peers for Progress Peer Support around the World

A program of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation 2013

http://peersforprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/20130827_peer_workforce_capacity_building.pdf

APPENDIX B: A Framework for Developing Peer Programming Models

