

Implementing a Peer Support Program in Outreach

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Executive summary

In our shelter, we often hear the residents describe how unhappy they are, and how desperate they are to find housing; but as time goes on, we notice that these same residents stop engaging with case management (if they were at all), or that they're not following through with the case plan that will get them out of the shelter. We often see residents lose hope, lose trust in the system, and become entrenched in the lifestyle that comes along with shelter life.

SPDAT scores consistently show that women accessing shelter services have increased experience with trauma and have decreased familial and social supports. Even homelessness itself is perceived as more acceptable for men than it is for women. There is a clear need for an increase in trauma informed care. Becoming trauma informed means recognizing that people often have many different types of trauma in their lives and need specialized support and understanding from those around them. Peer support ties in with trauma informed care as it inspires hope, focuses on resilience, mutual support, empowerment, and a collaborative approach to healing. A peer support worker is somebody who has gone through the homeless system/is working on recovery from their addiction/is functioning within their mental illness, etc. and is ready to use their lived experience to help others.

The goal of implementing a peer support program is to increase engagement and positive outcomes. A peer support program will help us engage with the clients that do not have trust in our services, and will provide a type of support that we aren't currently offering. It will help us identify those who are episodically homeless and connect them with case management even though they may not be consistently accessing services at the shelter.

In the following pages, you will find information about what peer support is, and how we plan on putting the program in place, including how we will recruit peer support workers, what the job application will look like, what the interview process will be, and some of the challenges we may face.



What is a peer?

Myriam Webster dictionary defines peer as “one belonging to the same societal group especially based on age, grade, or status”.

In the context of our shelter, a peer is a person who has experienced situations similar to those faced by the residents of Outreach.

“Peer workers may be hired because of their present or past street involvement, age, sexual identity, life situations, even specific type of substance use, etc... Generally, peers have some kind of inside knowledge through their experience that can have a positive result in providing services to a particular group. In addition to experiential knowledge, peers can bring credibility and trust to an agency in ways that regular service providers may find difficult because users may distrust and avoid contact with official helpers”

-Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force, 2013

What is peer support work and why do we need it?

There are many different definitions of peer support, depending on the goals of the organization.

Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. It commonly refers to an initiative consisting of trained supporters (although it can be provided by **peers** without training), and can take a number of forms such as **peer** mentoring, listening, or counseling.

-Wikipedia

Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful. **Peer support** is not based on psychiatric models and diagnostic criteria.

-Mental Health Commission of Canada

A peer program is similar to a self-help group. Peer programs address the issue of social support by providing opportunities for those who are at risk to benefit from the cumulative wisdom of their peers.

-NESI Program Peer Manual

Peer supports are not new –

Larry Davidson, Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, tracks the beginnings of peer support to a psychiatric hospital in late 18th century France. The governor of Bicêtre Hospital in Paris, Jean Baptiste Pussin, recognized the value of employing recovered patients as hospital staff. The chief physician at the hospital, Philippe Pinel, praised these peer staff for being “gentle, honest, and humane”, “averse from active cruelty”, and “disposed to kindness”. Hiring former patients marked a shift in the philosophy of mental health care that ushered in the “moral treatment” era. Pussin’s practice wasn’t just an isolated case either – Davidson found peer staff popping up periodically in several other inpatient settings as well.

Peer support surfaced again in the 1960s with the efforts of Robert Carkhoff and Charles Truax, in which counselors, trained with specific skills, were successful in helping mentally ill patients in hospital settings. Professionals in community mental health were among the first to advocate for the integration of peers into primary care settings. In 1967, Emory Cowen proposed a model of community mental health care that requires the employment of nonprofessional peers in the development, implementation, and evaluation of community interventions. In contrast to the system of care provided in big state hospitals, community mental health emphasized a) primary care, b) matching the needs of the population, and c) employing “indigenous non-professionals”, or peers, in the development, implementation, and evaluation of intervention programs¹

Fast forward to the 1970’s, a social movement known as the mental health consumer movement or the psychiatric survivors movement, former (and active) mental health service users become empowered to help others receiving treatment. Peer support found applications in chronic disease management, screening and prevention, and even maternal and child health (breastfeeding, postpartum depression, etc.)

Other examples of peer support may include:

- Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other similar 12 step programs.
- Tutoring groups
- Unions
- Support Groups
- Student advocates
- Mentoring programs, etc

Peer support regularly exists in schools and workplaces without anyone realizing it exists.

What attracts people to peer work - what qualities are we looking for?

¹ Cowen EL, Gardner EA, and Zax, M. (1967). Emergent approaches to mental health problems. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

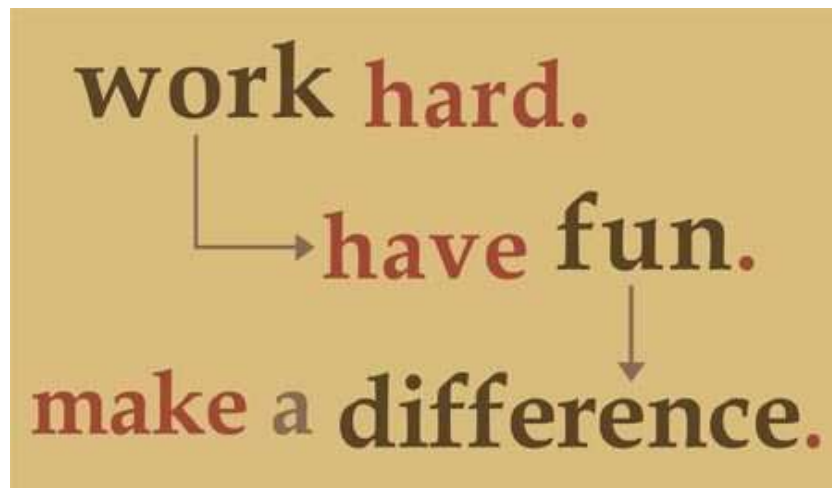
There are countless reasons why a person might want to become a peer worker. The desire to use their knowledge and experience in positive ways is a common reason. Peers may be seeking experiences that contribute to personal empowerment. Peer work involves supporting others in a community of equals who share similar histories and life circumstances in an effort to promote strength and healing. It is a strengths based practice that will fit well into the values of Shepherds of Good Hope.

Peer support can also be a source of meaningful employment for those who may not be in a position to work a traditional job. For those in receipt of OW or ODSP, it can supplement their income to a more livable wage; for those who want to look for full time employment, peer support work will add solid experience to their resume, and, depending on funding, may turn in to a full time job.

Shepherds of Good Hope is looking for peer workers who:

- Have personal experience with homelessness/mental health/addictions/ sex work.
- Knowledge of, and are comfortable with people who use drugs, are homeless, experiencing mental health issues, involved with the sex trade, and/or LGBTTQ.
- Have a non-judgemental attitude towards people with different beliefs and values.
- Are able to make a time commitment of at least 2 hours a week.
- Are punctual and reliable.
- Are interested in ongoing training.
- Are open and comfortable making suggestions and receiving feedback.

At this time, early in the program, we are looking to hire past clients and/or people who are housed. We are not opposed to hiring individuals who currently access shelter services, but for the sake of keeping things simple, our first round of hires will be individuals not living within the shelter.



Other organizations in Ottawa that provide peer support

In researching for our peer support program, I looked at the other organizations that provide peer support. Below is a brief description of each organization:

- **Psychiatric Survivors of Ottawa** – A community of peers using lived experiences with the mental health system to support one another in moving towards their full potential. Peers at PSO assist in wellness recovery workshops, drop-ins, family support groups, connect with people in hospital, run mindfulness/yoga workshops, and run group outings.
- **Ottawa Inner City Health** - All of the peer workers started off part time, and worked their way up to full time employment with Ottawa ICH. Peer workers provide one-on-one client support, appointment accompaniment, group facilitation, etc.
- **Somerset West Community Health Centre** – Peers at SWCHC are able to work two shifts a month, receiving an honorarium of \$20/shift. Peers assist with drop-in upkeep, outreach, and preparing harm reduction kits.
- **Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre** - Peer Support volunteers provide support to women who have been in an abusive relationship. A variety of Peer Support volunteer roles are available in the community and within Chrysalis_House, a shelter for women and their dependants experiencing abuse in the home. Some of the peer volunteer tasks include accompaniment to legal, medical and counselling appointments; supporting individual women through regular contact; assistance in the child and youth program; respite childcare; assistance with household maintenance, organizing of donations, etc.
- **Community Addictions Peer Support Association** - A weekly run peer recovery group is for individuals affected by addiction to share their experiences about what has helped them on their journey, and provide a safe and aware environment for those seeking help to ask questions, free from stigma or discrimination.
- **Ottawa Independent Living Resource Centre** - The Peer Support program provides services and resources to people with a variety of disabilities in the Ottawa area. In accordance with the Independent Living philosophy, OILRC provides opportunities to consumers working towards gaining self-confidence, independence, increased skill development and knowledge of community services. Consumers can achieve and improve their skills by attending existing workshops, information sessions, and social outings.

Shepherds of Good Hope peer workers

With the money allocated from the Ontario Trillium Grant through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, we are looking to hire a pool of 4-6 peer workers, and will be able to pay a total of 40 hours of peer support a week. The peer workers will receive living wages (\$15/hr). This can be distributed equally among all peer workers, or divided based on certain peer workers working more hours.

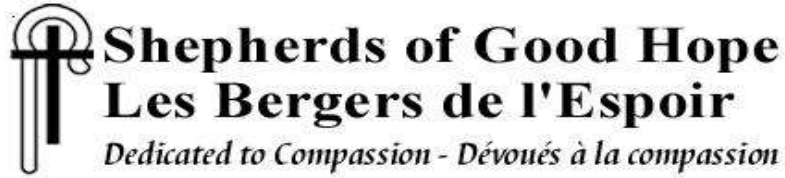
We expect to have some turnover in peer workers and will re-post as needed. One way to avoid re-posting the position repeatedly would be to keep a waitlist of individuals who interviewed previously but did not make the first round of hires.

Job postings

On the next page, you will see an example of a job posting for a Shepherds of Good Hope peer support worker; the posting is simple and straightforward. The idea is to share the posting with as many organizations as possible, as we do not know what the level of interest will be.

On the bottom of the job posting, in the “how to apply” section, the phone number and the email for the coordinator have been included. For those potential applications who may not have consistent access to a telephone or computer, the applications can also be dropped off in person. Assuming the liaising organizations are agreeable, copies of the application will be left with the posting or with a staff member so that they can be easily accessed. If the applicant would like to submit a resume, they are welcome to do so as well, but this is not a requirement.

Finally, if special provisions need to be made for somebody with literacy challenges, applicants are welcome to see the coordinator in person to fill out the application together. Basic ability to read and write will be a requirement of the position.



Job Posting

Job Title	Peer Support Worker – Women’s Shelter
Type of Position	Contract – contingent on funding
Hours	Flexible, based on availability
Hours and Compensation	\$15/hr
Closing Date	April 30 th , 2017

Job Summary

Peer Support is a naturally occurring, mutually beneficial support process, where people who share a common experience meet as equals. By sharing skills, strengths and hope, we will facilitate learning from each other on how to cope, thrive and flourish. The Peer Support Worker will work as a member of a diverse team to facilitate and support Outreach clients in achieving their goals. As a peer worker, you will utilize lived experience with mental health/addictions/homelessness as you support clients. You may be connecting with clients on an individual or group basis and will be expected to contribute to program development, research and life skills programming. You will report to the Coordinator of Women’s Services and will need to provide services reflective of the diverse needs of the clients accessing Outreach. Some evening and/or weekend hours may be required.

- Duties and Responsibilities**
- Complete required training (provided by Shepherds of Good Hope) including NVCI, First Aid, etc.
 - Develop a work plan with your coordinator
 - Connect with clients who are new to the shelter, as well as clients who have longer shelter stays
 - Support clients in attending appointments
 - Crisis intervention
 - Facilitate group activities in the program as well as outings in the community
 - Document interactions with clients in a clear, concise manner.

- Qualifications**
- Personal experience with homelessness and/or mental health and/or addictions
 - Knowledge of, and comfortable with people who use drugs, are homeless, experiencing mental health issues, involved with sex trade, and/or LGBTTQ
 - Non-judgemental attitude towards people with different beliefs and values
 - Punctual and dependable
 - Interested in training opportunities

How To Apply

Applications can be found with the staff at this organization, or underneath this posting. Alternatively, you may submit a resume, though this is not necessary. Please submit applications/resumes to Leigh Stratton, Women’s Services Coordinator at Shepherds of Good Hope in person Monday – Friday between 9am and 3pm at 256 King Edward (3rd floor), by email (lstratton@shepherdsogoodhope.com), or by fax at 613-789-0888. Please include a fax cover stating that the application is to be directed to Leigh Stratton.

The application

On the next two pages, you will find a copy of the application; it is easy to read, and simple to complete. There is a section for pertinent personal information, as well as blank spaces for the applicant to fill in as much or little as they would like. Providing applicants with an application rather than asking for a resume will take the pressure off of having previous employment and will prompt applicants to fill in the sort of information that we are looking for.

It is noted on the top of the application that all fields do not need to be completed. It is also noted that, due to some of the private content, all applications will remain confidential (only those doing the hiring will have access).





Peer Support Worker – Job Application

***please fill out only the fields that are applicable to you (i.e. if you don't have a phone, it's okay to leave that field blank)

Full Name:			
Date of Birth:			
Gender (please circle):	Male	Female	Other
Phone:			
Email Address:			
Languages Spoken:			
Mailing Address			
Do you have a SIN number (please circle):	Yes	No	
working on it			

Do you have lived experience with (please circle all that apply):

- Homelessness
- Sex work
- Substance use or addiction
- Mental Health

1. Why are you interested in becoming a peer worker? *(use another page if more space is required)*

2. Where did you hear about this job? *(use another page if more space is required)*

3. Do you have any related experience? *(use another page if more space is required)*

4. What is your availability? *(use another page if more space is required)*

5. Other comments: *(use another page if more space is required)*

This application will remain confidential – please submit this in person to Leigh Stratton at 256 King Edward, 3rd Floor, by email to lstratton@shepherdsofgoodhope.com or by fax at 613-789-0888. If faxing, please include a cover page indicating that it is going to Leigh Stratton.

How will we recruit?

The coordinator will connect with staff at organizations that our current and previous clients frequent to explain the job and ask if we can post within their centre. If the organization is agreeable, we will leave copies of the application form with a staff member or with the posting. Some of the potential organizations we could liaise with include (but are not limited to):

- St Joe's Women's Centre
- The Well
- Centre 454
- Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
- Somerset West Community Health Centre
- Dual
- Daisy's Drop-in

How will people get in contact?

Taking into consideration that some of our applicants may not have a telephone, I have included on the posting that applicants can stop by the program to connect and fill out an application in person. I have also included my telephone number, email, and fax if people choose to apply in that manner. I would like to ensure that special care is put in place for applicants who struggle with literacy or have a disability that may prevent them in applying.

The interview

It is understood that interviews can be an intimidating process, so making the interview as relaxed as possible will be a priority. We will offer refreshments and conduct the interviews in a relaxed and informal manner.

Sample Interview Questions:

Below are some potential interview questions and scenarios:

- *What characteristics do you have that would make you a good fit for a peer work position?*
- *What are some of your strongest qualities? Weakest?*
- *Can you give some examples of what peer support workers do?*
- *This position requires you to do a range of things in different environments and may require prioritizing. Can you tell us about a time that you had to balance several tasks and how you did it?*
- *What do boundaries mean to you and why are they important?*
- *What is your understanding of confidentiality and how it will relate to peer work here at SOGH?*
- *What kind of disagreements are you able to handle easily? What are examples of conflicts that you find difficult?*
- *What is your personal support network like? After a hard day, how do you debrief? How do you deal with triggering encounters?*

Scenario questions will also be helpful to show critical thinking:

Ex. You are on your way home from your shift at Shepherds of Good Hope. You run into a buddy who is angrily looking for Sarah who owes your buddy some money. You happened to see Sarah during your shift in Outreach today, and you know that Sarah just got paid. Your buddy asks if you know where Sarah is – what do you tell them?

Ex. You run into a distraught outreach resident – she is inconsolable due to a personal event that is very triggering to you. You are uncomfortable, feeling anxious, and do not know what to say to this person because it's bringing up your own personal stuff – what do you do?

Ex. You are standing outside of Shepherds of Good Hope talking to a client when a community member walks past and makes a rude comment loud enough for everyone to hear. A verbal altercation breaks out which seems to be escalating towards a physical fight – what do you do?

Hiring

During the interview, we will ask about availability, ideal hours, tasks that the applicant is comfortable with or not comfortable with and the preferred method of contact. Once we have a pool of potential hires, the successful candidates will be contacted and invited in to sign a contract and to discuss scheduling.

As the peer workers will be non-unionized employees, we will create a contract specific to their position in collaboration with the HR Department. Each peer worker will be expected to have a police records check for service with the vulnerable sector. As with all Shepherds employees, a record will not disqualify the individual from getting hired – rather, each individual will be considered on a case by case basis depending on the record. It is expected that some of our applicants will have charges related to drug possession, etc. but applicants with serious violent crimes will be disqualified.

Peer workers will be paid through Shepherds of Good Hope payroll and will need a bank account. If the individual requires support in obtaining a bank account, the coordinator can provide help as needed.

Individual work plans can be made with each peer worker based on their interests, availability, and level of responsibility.

Rather than receiving their own set of keys, the peer worker will be able to sign keys out for their shift. The keys will remain in the coordinator's office and will be a way of supervising the worker's hours and provide an opportunity to check in/out for each shift. Peer support workers will receive a Shepherds name tag in an alternate colour, much like the internal RHEP employees.

Training

Shepherds of Good Hope peer workers will receive a wide range of training including First Aid, NVCI, mental health first aid, ASIST, as well as training specific to Shepherds of Good Hope. We have discussed collaborative training with the peer workers at Somerset West Community Health Centre and in conversations with the peer workers of Ottawa Inner City Health, they have offered to allow our workers to shadow them for on-the-job experience.

The coordinator will put together the basic training package for Shepherds of Good Hope and the additional formal trainings will be offered as they become available. This means that we will likely have peer workers working without all of the trainings complete. This is another reason why staff at SOGH need to be as accommodating and supportive as possible to our peer workers.

Some training that we can create unique to SOGH may include:

- Interpersonal communication
- Building supportive relationships
- The process of recovery and change
- Building resilience through self-care and wellness plans
- Limits and boundaries
- Resources in the community
- Confidentiality

Additional training will be facilitated by evaluators on the project, the basic ethics and confidentiality.

What will the peers do?

As the program is still being developed (phase 1), the work plan of our peer workers greatly depends on the applicants - what the individuals are comfortable with and the level of responsibility that they show.

Some of the peer responsibilities will include:

- Assisting staff in doing increased dorm checks/grounds checks during cheque time to support clients who may need to be monitored due to increased substances use
- Assisting volunteers in facilitating activities
- Engaging clients in card games, coffee shop activities, board games, etc.
- Assist the LPRF research assistants in facilitating surveys and interviews
- Accompanying clients to events in the community (ex. Canada day festivities)
- Accompanying clients to their appointments – *depending on peer worker showing responsibility*
- Teaching life skills programs (budgeting on OW/ODSP, cooking on a budget, etc) –*year 2/3*
- Running groups in the program such as Seeking Safety. –*year 2/3*
- Crisis intervention –*year 2/3*
- SO MUCH MORE!



How will we support our peer workers?

As this position is brand new to our organization, we do not have a proven formula of how we will support the peer support workers. In the early days of the program, we will look at voluntary bi-weekly group debrief as well as regular one-on-one check-ins during each shift. Some peer workers may be very comfortable and confident in their new positions, while others may express the need for extra support.

Other ways we can support our workers:

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

We are all affected by our environment, especially our work environment. The stress of working in an uncomfortable, unhealthy, or unsafe space can not only make peer work less productive, but also leave peer workers feeling as though their wellbeing is not important and they're not part of the Shepherds team. We must remember that peer workers are being hired into the organization in a non-traditional manner and this may come with insecurities. Ensuring that the peer workers have a place to store their coats & belongings, a place to store

their lunch, and a private space to interact with clients will make our peer workers feel welcomed as staff here. Our peer workers will have access to the coordinators office to store their coats and belongings, as well as any meals that they have brought.

SUPPORT THE WORK ITSELF

We need to show our peer workers that we support them in their tasks. For instance, involving the peer workers in decisions that affect them will help foster a sense of ownership that will enhance their connection to the work and to the organization. Even little steps like matching people with tasks that relate to their interests will make a positive impression and make it clear that they are cared for.

SUPPORT THE PERSON DOING THE WORK

People enjoy feedback and it won't take much time to praise the peer workers for something they did well or to offer help if they're struggling. Making sure that we remain approachable and available to listen to personal problems as well as work-related problems will add an additional level of comfort.

A little bit of acknowledgement or a quick thank-you goes a long way.

To summarize, basic support is imperative to

- Maintain morale
- Prevent burnout
- Show appreciation
- Keep the lines of communication open
- Make Shepherds of Good Hope appealing to potential new applicants
- Maintain the quality of peer workers, which will in turn maintain the quality of the services we can provide.

Interactions with other Shepherds staff members

Before the program becomes active, the coordinator will be connecting with all staff to educate everyone on the new positions and to answer any questions.

During a discussion had with one of the Inner City peer workers, this individual relayed that the peer workers are regularly asked by staff to complete tasks that aren't within their job descriptions. While this specific peer worker is comfortable enough to say no and explain why, we cannot assume that other peer workers will have this same level of confidence, especially in

a new position. By ensuring that staff understand the peer worker position, we may be able to prevent this from happening. As this program begins to roll out, the coordinator will do presentations in the TSS meeting, the CST meeting, the MTM meeting as well as to individual staff on each shift to ensure that everyone is reached. The goal is to implement things as smoothly as possible.



Recommended reading:

- Mental Health Commission of Canada's "Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support"
http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/peer_support_guidelines.pdf.pdf
- <http://peersforprogress.org/take-action/start-a-program/>
- <http://mypeer.org.au/>
- <http://www.opdi.org/index.php#.WOeNDGkrLIU>
- <http://healthydebate.ca/2016/02/topic/peer-support-workers>
- Best Practices in Harm Reduction Peer Projects, Kate Mason 2006
- Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force Peer Information Guide For Peer Workers and Agencies, 2013
www.TOharmreduction.org