



Baptist Care (SA) Inc



mifSA

MENTAL
ILLNESS
FELLOWSHIP
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Employer Tool-Kit



***Employing Peer Workers
in your Organisation***

***"Catch a man a fish, feed him for a day.
Teach him how to fish and feed him for a lifetime".***
- Author Unknown

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INTRODUCTION

"When I have been truly searching for my treasure, every day has been luminous, because I've known that every hour was a part of the dream that I would find it. When I have been truly searching for my treasure, I've discovered things along the way that I never would have seen had I not had the courage to try things that seemed impossible for a shepherd to achieve".

©Paulo Coelho, 'The Alchemist' 1998

The Peer Work Project believes in the treasure of having a lived experience of mental illness and support Peer Workers to use this. They are valuable in making a difference to the lives of other consumers. We aim to support organisations that share this belief and who wish to employ Peer Workers.

In Chapter 1, we provide information about the contributions a Peer Worker can offer an organisation. To implement Peer Work successfully, we emphasise a three-step process – Prepare, Train and Support. The importance of preparing the organisation is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 outlines the Training Model we have developed in order to provide the Peer Workers with the tools they may require on the job.

In Chapter 4, we look at the workplace mentoring that the Peer Work Project offers Peer Workers which helps them to establish the position and maintain their own health.

The final section provides a summary of the assistance the Peer Work Project can offer you in the employment of Peer Workers. We hope to provide you with enough tools to make this process smooth for both the organisation and the Peer Worker.

There is more than one way to establish Peer Work within your organisation and however you choose to do it; we look forward to sharing the journey with you.

The Peer Work Project Team, 2009

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CHAPTER 1

PEER WORK: AN OVERVIEW

Who is this Tool-Kit Designed For?

- For both Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGO's)
- For organisations thinking about employing Peer Workers
- For organisations who have decided to employ Peer Workers and would like to know how to introduce them successfully into the workplace
- For organisations who have already introduced Peer Workers into their workplace

What is a Peer Worker?

The 'Recovery Approach' has been embraced by the State Government in South Australia. A recovery-oriented system:

- ❖ Focuses on people rather than services
- ❖ Monitors outcomes rather than performance
- ❖ Emphasizes strengths rather than dysfunction
- ❖ Educates people who provide services and the public to combat stigma
- ❖ Fosters collaboration as an alternative to coercion
- ❖ Promotes autonomy and decreases reliance on professionals

From the Mental Health Coalition of SA Inc. brochure, "What is RECOVERY?"

Peer support has proven to be tremendously important in the recovery process. The idea of someone being a Peer Worker is not new. It is believed to have originated in the 1930's when Alcoholics Anonymous was formed; people who had recovered from alcohol-related issues were of great assistance to others in their recovery. Since then, the concept of 'peers' ('equals') as support workers has been utilised by many disciplines and industries world wide, including mental health.

Peers can be effective as they can offer a different degree of empathy, having experienced mental illness themselves - they are also often experienced in using the mental health system. Peer Workers are living proof to clients and existing staff that recovery is possible, which supports the previously mentioned 'Recovery Approach' that has been adopted by mental health providers in South Australia.

**“If I had met a Peer Worker
in the early days of my diagnosis,
ten years of my life
may not have been lost”.**

- 'Introduction to Peer Work' Course Participant, 2006

Shery Mead (2003) defines peer support as “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. It is about understanding another’s situation empathically through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain.” Orwin (2008) also emphasises the sharing of experiences. “The relationship is mutual, reciprocal and equal and can promote relationships that foster responsibility and critical self-awareness. It assumes no medical model of mental illness challenges the traditional deficit-based approaches to mental illness and asks service users to reflect critically and move on with their lives.”

The Peer Work Project has defined a Peer Worker in the mental health field as “A person living well with a mental illness, who is employed to share their lived experience of mental illness to assist other people in their recovery. A Peer Worker helps others with a mental illness discover their own strength and resilience, supporting them in achieving their goals and developing autonomy and independence”.

Principles/Values of Peer Work

In identifying the critical elements of peer support, Solomon (2004) reminds us that “Consumer provided services need to remain true to themselves and not take on the characteristics of traditional mental health services”. These unique elements are:

Hope – People who experience mental health difficulties get well, stay well and go on to meet their life dreams and goals.

Personal Responsibility – It’s up to you, with the assistance of others, to take action and do what needs to be done to keep yourself well.

Education – Learning all you can about what you are experiencing so you can make good decisions about all aspects of your life.

Self Advocacy – Effectively reaching out to others so that you can get what it is that you need and want to support your wellness and recovery.

Mutual Support – While working towards your own wellness is up to you, receiving support from others and giving support to others, will help you feel better and enhance the quality of your life.

There are many strategies that can be adopted in order to maintain this integrity, as outlined in the table below:

Factor Affecting Integrity	Strategies to Maintain Integrity of Peer Support
Tokenism	Peer support team leader should be a peer. Peer support should be operationally independent.
Leadership	Explicit support for Peer Work from all levels of leadership. Training of all managers, from chief executive to line managers, in peer support.
Systems	Clear understanding of the role of Peer Work. Peer Work clearly differentiated from other support roles. Policies and procedures adapted to support development of Peer Workers.
Supervision	Skilled, knowledgeable supervisors help Peer Workers to “stay peer”. Active development of peer supervision capacity.
Funders and outcomes	Understand that Peer Work is different from other forms of support. Look for qualitative measures that can capture the impact on lives.

Strategies to maintain the integrity of peer support (Mind & Body, 2008):

In other places (e.g. New Zealand), Peer Work is developed as an ‘independent’ alternative for mainstream services.¹ In South Australia, it is based on an ‘integrated model’, which means that peer support is integrated within the traditional mental health services within Government and non-Government organisations. Helen Glover (2005) believes in the synthesis of professional and lived experience as a knowledge base for recovery-focussed services. “Recovery based practice is the synthesis of professional and lived experience knowledge bases, and is not simply an additional aspect to the way we already deliver services. If recovery based practice knowledge is to be authentically developed then it will require constant attention to the synthesising of professional and lived experience knowledges, ultimately fusing into a shared knowledge base.”

Benefits for Your Organisation

Several studies have provided evidence that Peer Work has a positive impact on consumers, Peer Workers as well as the organisation.

Felton et al (1995) examined whether employing mental health consumers as Peer Specialists in case management could enhance outcomes for clients with serious mental illnesses. The result: clients served by mental health teams that include Peer Specialists demonstrated greater progress in terms of quality of life and an overall reduction in the

¹ There are pro’s and con’s for both systems. For Peer Workers it is easier to work in an independent organisation, because it can be challenging to work with other staff in an organisation where there is the division in service users and service deliverers. It is assumed that peer workers can easier keep their identity in an independent consumer-run organisation. On the other hand, research has shown that peer work enhances outcomes when they work within a team with other professionals, see Felton.

number of major life problems experienced. They also reported more frequent contact with their case managers.

An overview of the benefits of peer support has been outlined by Solomon (2004). Peer work has resulted in benefits not only to consumers, but to the peer workers and mental health services also.

Positive outcomes for **consumers** and **Peer Workers** include:

- reduced use of hospital and/or crisis services
- improved social functioning
- improved quality of life
- improved self-esteem
- more social support

Additional positive outcomes for **Peer Workers** are a sense of empowerment, hope and professional growth.

**"When I started working within mental health, I felt great,
because I thought I don't have to be ill for the rest of my life.
It gave me purpose to say that I actually went to work for the day."**

- Peer Worker, 2007

There are many benefits for **organisations**:

- potential cost-saving for mental health services resulting from decreased hospitalisation rates and shortened lengths of stay in hospital
- provides a mechanism for serving individuals who are in need of services but who are alienated from the traditional mental health system
- evidence has shown outcomes for consumers are enhanced and the services are more effective
- enhances the ability of organisations to meet the needs of the community
- Peer Workers have an impact on altering the negative attitudes of mental health providers – they give other staff the opportunity to see consumers successfully functioning in productive social roles (evidence of recovery process)

"It is important to employ peers because there is a big gap in current mental health services between what mental health workers can provide and how they relate to consumers.

They have many constraints on what they do and how they relate to consumers and this creates an imbalance in the relationship which often further stigmatises consumers and makes them more dependent.

As a Peer Worker, I believe my relationship with other consumers is a more open and equal - one that acknowledges consumers' personal strengths."

- Peer Worker, 2007

Implementing Peer Work in Your Organisation

The Peer Work Project has identified three key steps to the successful implementation of Peer Workers. The South Australian Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) evaluated the Peer Work Project. The 2008 End Report focuses on the integration of peer work into organisations and teams, what factors drive this integration, and highlights examples of success. These findings acknowledge the importance of our key steps for implementing Peer Work in organisations:

✓ **Prepare:**

It is important to prepare the organisation for the new position. This includes educating and involving current staff, offering clear guidelines about the role and function the Peer Workers will have, and developing good HR instruments to select the best people for the job.

✓ **Train:**

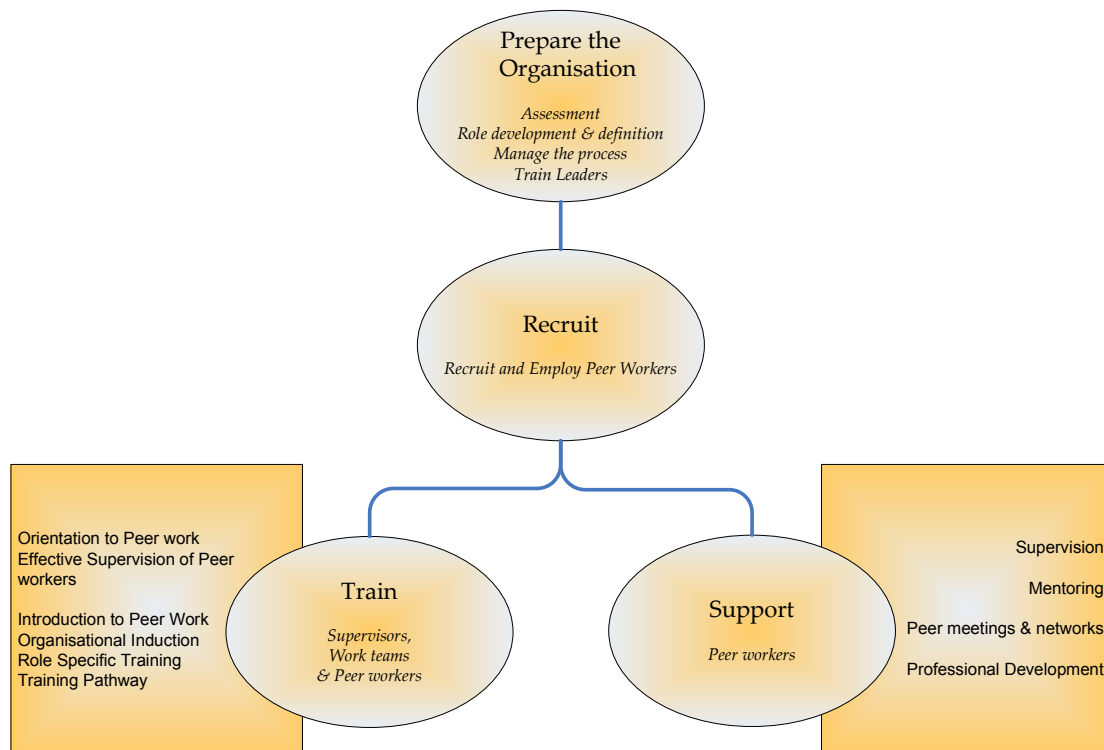
Adequate preparation of the new Peer Workers is equally as important. Before they begin, offer them training and investigate possibilities such as Traineeships to better educate them in the nature of their work and to provide them with relevant qualifications.

✓ **Support:**

Once the Peer Workers have commenced, create a support structure and safety net in order to make the position successful. Supervision and mentoring are vital. 'Intervision' is an easy to organise and cost effective method that can be used to support them on the job.

A model for implementation, created by the Baptist Care (SA) Inc. and MIFSA Peer Work Project appears on the following page. We will outline the steps, 'Prepare, Train and Support' in further detail in the chapter that follows.

Implementation Model
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Peer Work Project, 2009



CHAPTER 2

PREPARING YOUR ORGANISATION

Changes are not always simple or smooth to implement and we need various strategies in place to support the process. There are a number of ways to initiate and sustain a change process. A spirit of fear, uncertainty and pressure is not a good environment for introducing new innovations.

In this chapter, we look at how to prepare your organisation to address barriers to the employment of Peer Workers. We will discuss:

- ***Process Management***
- ***Assessment of the Organisation***
- ***Developing and Defining the Role***
- ***Recruitment***

Process Management

This is often referred to as 'Change Management'. For Peer Workers, a smooth transition and acceptance by the organisation as a whole is vital to the role's success.

Examples of barriers to implementation of Peer Work are:

- Lack of funding for the new positions - financial disincentive
- Lack of time to implement the new positions in the organisation - organisational constraints
- Perceived risks of introducing consumers with sometimes limited professional training in the organisation - perception of liability
- Peer Work is still a relatively new concept in Mental Health in South Australia
- Research shows mainly positive outcomes but there is not enough research to prove how it should work to have successful outcomes
- Some clinicians, nurses and other staff can feel threatened or uncomfortable with consumers coming in the service - sense of competence / self confidence in skills

Context	Barriers	Strategies
Organizational Context:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial disincentives• Organisational constraints• Perception of liability – risks	<i>Inform staff about the process and resources</i>
Social Context:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standards of practice• Opinion leaders	<i>Involve stakeholders in the development of the position</i>
Professional Context (knowledge / attitudes):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clinical uncertainty – uncertain about outcomes• Self-confidence in skills	<i>Coach staff – discuss barriers and issues</i> <i>Develop policies and procedures for the Peer Worker role</i>

Strategies to Manage the Innovation Process:

Inform Staff about the Process

It is crucial to inform staff about the implementation process. This ensures that they understand the roles and the benefits the Peer Workers offer the organisation, the clients and the person performing the role. It is important to listen to any worries staff have and it may be good to evaluate the Peer Work positions after twelve months, inviting feedback from the original staff members as to how the roles have complemented or hindered their own work.

Involve Stakeholders in the Development of the Position

A supportive environment, where employers and co-workers are aware of the personally lived mental health issues overtly used by the Peer Worker in their work, is a key factor to carrying out the role successfully. Involving staff in the development of the role of the Peer Workers helps to create an inclusive work environment.

The organisation's service users/consumers and Consumers Consultants engaged in the development of the role can inform the definition of the role, with the position shaped to their expressed needs, providing a foundation for success. Including Carers, Carer Consultants and other Community stakeholders (e.g. organisational partners or associated programs) defines a position that meets the requirements of the organisation's unique environment and place in service provision.

Workplace changes, including the introduction of new Peer Work roles, occur more smoothly when there is contribution and commitment across the entire organisation.

Coach Staff - Discuss Barriers and Manage Issues

Carlson et al (2001) have identified three major concerns, which parallel issues we have encountered. The three concerns identified are:

- Dual Relationship
- Role Conflict
- Confidentiality

Dual Relationship

Dual relationships are a concern when a consumer is hired as a provider who is currently, or has in the past been, a client of the same agency. Another concern is the Peer worker's relationship with other consumers. Consumers often know each other and have developed friendships. Carlson et al (2001) suggest that organisations:

- require that Peer Workers obtain their mental health care from another provider
- ensure supervision and other organisational matters are conducted by persons with whom the Peer Worker doesn't have a dual relationship
- monitor, during supervision, issues that might arise in regards to dual relationships of the Peer Worker with other consumers.

Role Conflict

Related to the concern of dual relationships is the existence of role confusion between Peer Workers and other staff. Consumers and staff may experience difficulty making a transition. Peer Workers are challenged to balance their consumer and provider entities (Salzer, 2002).

One solution is the clear specification of roles and responsibilities. This will assist the Peer Worker in clearly understanding their role and duties and highlight to other staff that the Peer Worker role is an integral and valued part of the service being provided.

"My supervisors and mentors help me along the way when I struggle. Whether it be problems with interacting with the team, like feeling that some nurses or doctors are being a bit stand offish or not valuing my input. Or feeling pressures of situations you hear about and not being able to do anything about it. Sometimes you would like to offer advice or fix people's problems. But we are only there to assist someone's journey and empower them to make better lives for themselves."

- Peer Worker, 2007

Confidentiality

Confidentiality issues include:

- ***Disclosure of personal information about a Peer Worker to colleagues***
Peer Workers are vulnerable because the sharing of their experiences is done within the context of their position to help others. Peer Workers should not be forced to disclose personal information to others and such information, if shared with a supervisor or colleague, should not be freely disclosed to others. Such discretion is important in any employee-employer relationship.
- ***The Peer Worker breaching a consumer's confidentiality***
Staff sometime have concerns about this issue due to the dual relationships Peer Workers might have with other consumers. Peer Workers should be able to maintain boundaries between work and peers. It is important to develop clear policies and procedures and provide appropriate training for the Peer Workers. In addition, the importance of maintaining confidentiality should be openly and frequently discussed between Peer Workers and supervisors.

Assessment of the Organisation

To prepare your workplace it is important to assess your organisation, which can identify the specific organisational barriers and possible solutions. Factors that can impact on the innovation process are:

- Leadership
- Commitment
- Culture – consumer involvement
- Organisational benefits

Leadership

- **Is management committed to the introduction of the new role?**
- **Is there leadership to support the process of change?**
- **Is there ongoing commitment to manage the new positions?**

The most important factor that influences the success of the integration of Peer Work is whether or not there is genuine organisational leadership on the issue. This impacts on almost all factors influencing the integration of Peer Work - such as whether or not staff are accepting, and whether or not Peer Workers receive appropriate support in setting up and developing their role through what is potentially a very significant period of change both personally and for the workforce. (SACHRU, 2008)

Commitment – resources

- **Are resources available for the implementation of Peer Work?**
- **Who can lead/coordinate the process of implementation?**
- **Who can support the Peer Workers?**

Resources are needed for:

- Coordination of the implementation process
 - preparing the organisation
 - liaising with staff and other stakeholders
 - developing a Job and Person Specification
 - coordinating the recruitment process
 - addressing issues of the process with management
- Payment for the Peer Workers / funding to employ Peer Workers
- Recruitment of the Peer Workers
- Training Peer Workers
- Support for the Peer Workers

Culture – consumer involvement

- **What is the organisational culture with regards to consumer involvement?**
- **What policies and procedures are in place to support this culture?**

For some organisations it is a significant change to employ Peer Workers, while for others it is just a small step. It is closely linked with the organisational culture in terms of consumer involvement and whether or not the organisation is well prepared culturally and practically for the introduction of Peer Work.

Organisational Assessment Tool - Consumer Involvement:

(please tick and provide further information where necessary)

Consumers/Participants are currently involved in:

- ☐ Volunteering positions
- ☐ Evaluation and Planning of Service delivery/Program development
- ☐ Consumer/Participant Advisory Group
- ☐ Planning, organisation and management of special occasions / events
- ☐ Focus Groups in addressing specific issues or topics
- ☐ Contributing to newsletter, notice-boards, online or other communication mediums
- ☐ Suggestion box, message book or other means of communicating indirectly to staff
- ☐ Participant initiated self-help group/s
- ☐ The role of trained Peer Worker working one-on-one with other consumers
- ☐ The role of trained Consumer Consultant, representing participant perspective
- ☐ Other *(please specify)* _____

Organisational Benefits

- **How can Peer Workers be beneficial for the organisation?**
- **How can Peer Workers be beneficial for the consumers?**
- **What can Peer Workers contribute?**

Organisational Assessment Tool – Organisational Benefits:

BENEFITS TO THE ORGANISATION

(write brief comments under each heading – which points are the most important?)

Improved service delivery because of consumer/participant input:

More staff / volunteers to do the work:

Involve more consumers/participants:

Improved liaison between Participants and Staff:

Other *(specify)*:

BENEFITS TO THE CONSUMERS/PARTICIPANTS

Consumers/participants perspective represented:

Positive Role modelling - Hope:

Trust – Someone to relate to:

Peer Education - Information:

Other *(specify)*:

Develop and Define the Role

When the organisation has decided to employ Peer Workers, it is essential to develop clear ideas about what duties they will perform within the organisation. Developing a Job and Person Specification, based on the needs of your organisation, is a valuable exercise.

What title will you give the role?

On the next page, you can find examples of titles and primary roles that have been used by other organisations. Other job titles are Peer Support Worker, Consumer Advocate, Peer Mentor, and Community Peer Worker.

The following are extracts from actual Job and Person Specification / Position Description documents, for positions advertised in Adelaide, South Australia. All documentation was publicly available on the web.

- | |
|--|
| 1. The Peer Specialists will be employed to run educational and support groups on the ward as well as perform one on one consultation with people whilst they are inpatients. Peer Specialists will be at the first point of contact with newly diagnosed clients and will be available to consumers for discussion about their experience of illness. The introduction of the Peer Specialist role aims to help consumers to see first hand that recovery is a real possibility. |
| 2. The Peer Support Worker works as a member of the community mental health team to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- contribute to increasing community awareness- assist the client in identification of their goals- provide advice to the organisation on specific consumer issues- act as a role model towards recovery for consumers, their support networks and staff |
| 3. The Consumer Consultant participates in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Induction of new staff- Evaluation of Mental Health Services- Mental Health promotion |
| 4. The tasks of the Peer Educator are to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co facilitate training• Present at workshops, conferences etc. |

What knowledge/skills/experience is required for the position?

Peer support is a challenging job. Mind and Body (a peer-led Company in New Zealand) suggests Peer Workers need five qualities to be effective. They should:

1. have integrated their experiences of mental illness into their lives so they see value in their experiences and do not feel ashamed
2. be able to think critically and reflect on what they do and why they do it, and be capable of making judgements based on reasons

-
3. have values consistent with the peer support service for which they work
 4. have a good understanding of marginalisation issues, stigma and discrimination
 5. be emotionally mature and objective.

Below are examples of experience/knowledge/skills requirements as advertised by organisations.

1. **Peer Specialist – Inpatient Unit**

Qualifications - NIL

Knowledge

- Personal experience of using strategies to commence recovery from mental illness and incorporating resilience to protect and inform against deterioration of mental health.
- Understanding the philosophy of rehabilitation and recovery.

Experience

Experience in working with a wide range of people and working effectively with people with mental health issues.

Personal Abilities / Aptitudes

- High standard of written and verbal communication skills.
- A capacity to provide education and training
- Demonstrated ability to work as a team member, across service components and to continuously strive for service improved consumer outcomes.

2. **Peer Support Worker**

Qualifications

Completion of the Introduction to Peer Work Course

Knowledge / Experience

- Experience in working with people with Mental Health Issues
- Experience in community liaison
- Knowledge of a range of strategies to maintain good health
- Knowledge of rights and responsibilities of mental health consumers
- Knowledge of a wide range of local community services and how to access them

Personal Abilities / Aptitudes

- Ability to monitor own needs
- Ability to work independently in a community setting
- Ability to work collaboratively within a team
- Ability to build rapport with a range of people from a variety of backgrounds and belief systems
- Good communication skills

3. **Consumer Consultant**

Qualifications

Degree or Diploma in Human Services OR
Community Services Certificate III (mental health, disability or aged care) OR
Considerable relevant experience in a paid or voluntary capacity requiring a similar range of skills

Skills / Knowledge / Experience

- Good problem-solving skills
- Experience in working in human service settings (desirable)

Personal Abilities / Aptitudes

- Ability to work collaboratively with a range of people with multiple and complex needs, and sensitivity to the needs of people with a mental health disability

4. **Peer Educator**

Qualifications

Qualification in Human Resources, Health, Community Services or Education or training related to Peer Work or recovery based practices are an advantage

Essential Experience

- Significant experience as a Peer Worker
- Insight in own strengths and developmental areas

Desired Experience

Previous experience in supporting or supervising human service workers; coaching, teaching

What is the Peer Worker accountable for?

Role Development Tool – PEER WORKERS ACCOUNTABILITY

DEFINE THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF

Contact / Interaction with Consumers / Participants:

Contact / Interaction with Staff:

Contribution to activities and groups:

Contribution to improvement of service delivery:

Contribution in team meetings:

Contribution to decision-making:

Line management and supervision: what is fair salary in relation to the expectations?

Recruiting Peer Workers

Advertising the "lived experience" position

It is important to emphasise that people with a mental illness should apply. State this very clearly in the job advertisement as Peer Work is still a relatively new concept. People with mental health issues often try to hide their illness from potential employers for fear of being excluded from consideration. People are not yet accustomed to being professionally valued for that experience and this step in personal growth comes with education and support.

The Peer Work Project team can assist in the recruitment process by advertising your position on our website and send out the job opportunity to our pool of trained Peer Workers.

Interviewing potential Peer Workers

Most people are nervous when attending an interview. For potential Peer Workers it can be even more difficult due to:

- the nature of their illness (anxiety or thought disorder)
- great length of time since last interview or job
- distress brought on by the anticipation of discussing their own personal experiences with the interview panel

There are strategies that organisations can adopt to make candidates more relaxed:

- give applicants the opportunity to arrive ten minutes prior to the interview, in order to read the questions and prepare their answers
- ask a Peer Worker to welcome the applicants and answer their questions
- create a relaxed atmosphere



"He's threatened to continue singing until we hire him."

CHAPTER 3

TRAINING PEER WORKERS

***"You tell me, and I forget.
You teach me, and I remember.
You involve me, and I learn".***

- Benjamin Franklin

This Chapter discusses the following aspects of training Peer Workers:

- The Introduction to Peer Work Course
- Who Conducts the Course?
- Transfer of Learning – knowledge and skills gained through the training

The Introduction to Peer Work Course

What is the Course About?

The Introduction to Peer Work Course is currently the only Peer Work specific course in South Australia. The course was developed by the Peer Work Project, with input from stakeholders (employers, NGO's and Government Organisations, consumers) and is designed as an *introduction* to the nature of Peer Work. Purely for consumers who are living well with a mental illness, the training provides them with the opportunity to decide whether becoming a Peer Worker is the next step for them and helps them to identify the type of Peer Work they would like to pursue (community-based, forensic, hospital etc).

Who can do the Introduction to Peer Work Course?

As mentioned, the course is designed for consumers who are living well with a mental illness. In order to do the training, applicants must meet the selection criteria, which include:

- Living well with mental illness
- Desire to share lived experience to offer hope to others / assist them in facilitating their recovery
- Ready to job search and work at conclusion of the training
- Ready and willing to share story of personal illness and recovery journey
- Committed to attending every session of the training
- Willingness to actively participate in activities during training

We take names as registrations of interest and contact these people when an Information Session is near, aiming for 30 attendees. The session allows us to present an overview of the course and post-training support to potential applicants, followed by a 'Meet and

Greet' time when attendees hand in their completed Application Forms and the team members meet them one on one. It is also a valuable session for people who are still not certain whether Peer Work is the right role for them.

Once the Information Session is over, team members spend time discussing all applications and selecting 12 course participants, based on the selection criteria. All applicants are then notified by mail. It normally occurs that some applicants are not living well or are not ready to undertake a course that leads to employment. In these instances, the Peer Work Project team endeavour to refer the applicant on to other options that may be more suitable for their current needs.

What do Participants Learn in the Course?

The course has been designed around the Recovery Approach and reflects many of the key skills and knowledge that employing organisations have expressed are fundamental in a Peer Worker. Although non-accredited, it offers a basic introduction to the nature of the Peer Work role and provides a solid foundation that organisational or other specialist training can build on (eg. Certificate IV in Community Services - Mental Health, non-clinical). We have received positive feedback about our training, from both Peer Workers organisations. Topics in the training include:

- Recovery Principles
- Types of Peer Work
- Understanding Mental Illness
- Workplace Communication and Culture
- Conducting a Presentation
- Working with Small Groups
- Looking After Your Health
- Self-Management
- Goal Setting
- The Peer Worker/Consumer Relationship
- Stigma
- Sharing Your Experience Safely
- Share Your Experience (trainees present their journey to the group)
- Mental Health Services-Acronyms, Jargon and Resources
- Debriefing

"Then I did a couple of courses, one of which was the Introduction to Peer Work Course. What I learnt from the course was that we were going to be part of the multi disciplinary team. We might not have the qualifications or the years of schooling but we are just as important on the personal journey of someone's acceptance of their illness and their wellbeing. The Intro to Peer Work course taught me how to interact in a professional manner to workers and consumers and how we can make a difference with our lived experience. This course also helped me gain employment as a Peer Specialist."

- Peer Worker, 2007

Who Conducts the Introduction to Peer Work Course?

In the Adelaide metropolitan area, the Peer Work Project coordinates and conducts all aspects of the course.

For organisations in who are planning to implement Peer Work within their workplace, the Peer Work Project offer an Organisation Training Session which covers many of the items in this Tool-Kit and provides valuable question and answer time, with sharing of ideas. Once the organisation has progressed to the stage where they are looking to recruit, or they have recruited and are looking to train, we are able to conduct the Introduction to Peer Work course within metropolitan Adelaide. Regional organisations are able to negotiate to purchase our Training Package – in these instances, we conduct a Facilitator Training Session.

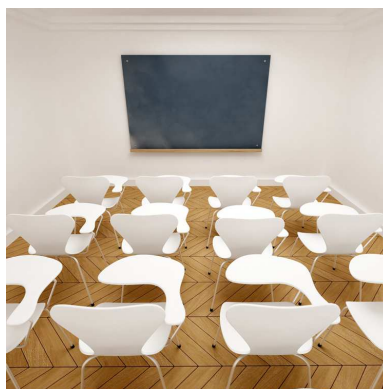
Facilitator Training Session

Facilitators from the organisation are invited to attend a 2-3 hour session in Adelaide, where the Training Coordinator presents information that includes:

- Background to the project
- Training Consumers
- Adult Learning Principles
- Group Dynamics and Norms
- Effective Facilitation
- The Course (Training Package walk-through)
- Training Support

The information in this session is drawn from experience in conducting the Introduction to Peer Work Course and also based on popular, up-to-date adult learning theories and methodologies. These organisations are then able to access ongoing support from the Training Coordinator to conduct the Introduction to Peer Work Course in their areas.

If attending a session is logistically difficult, the Training Coordinator is also able to deliver the session via teleconference.



Transfer of Learning - knowledge and skills gained through the training

	Knowledge Requirements Post-Training:	Skill Requirements Post-Training:
Worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights, social inclusion and stigma • Recovery-based principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with stigma/discrimination • Researching
Mental Health (Services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health services, resources and terminology • Understanding of illnesses other than own experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting • Using resources for the benefit of consumers
Personal and Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising own triggers, warning signs and symptoms • Issues and barriers in the communication process • Knowledge about setting SMART goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-management skills and strategies for maintaining own wellness • Active listening and communication skills • Setting goals for professional self development
Peer Worker Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role definition of a Peer Worker, importance in Mental Health, various roles and titles • Ability to recognize stigma and discrimination • Debriefing and it's role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting consumers in goal setting - reviewing and reprioritising goals • Sharing own experience SAFELY and maintaining focus on consumer not self and partnering with others to self manage • Dealing with the challenges of the peer worker role: dealing with crisis, dealing with stigma/discrimination
Working within an Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding issues in workplace culture and workplace communication (case notes) • Issues of confidentiality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working/participating in a team or group • Setting boundaries and adhering to ethical guidelines

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Peer Worker Personal Attributes

Self confidence, self esteem and self pride, motivation and enthusiasm, acceptance and understanding of own illness, interpersonal/relationship/social skills, ambition, decision making ability, leadership qualities, observation skills, open-mindedness, impartiality (non-judgemental), patience, empathy, commitment, flexibility and adaptability, punctuality, acceptance of constructive advice and personal happiness.

CHAPTER 4

WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Organisational Support

Support is imperative when the Peer Worker role is incorporated into an organisation, preventing or reducing the incidence of difficulties and enabling the Peer Worker to work effectively. The Peer Work position relies on the Peer Worker sharing their own lived experience of mental illness to aid in the recovery of others who are unwell. While choosing to apply their life qualification, this can still be demanding. Particularly stressful for those new to the role, it may even trigger the illness ('re-traumatisation') for some. The distress and disruption caused by such setbacks can be minimised with open, honest preventative strategies.

Peer Workers are engaging in workplace culture, relationships and procedures often with little or no recent experience. On a steep learning curve, it is important that they do not become overwhelmed while building on their skills and acclimatising themselves to the organisational environment. Sometimes Peer Workers need to reframe relationships, e.g. new colleagues who have previously been their service provider or with consumers they know personally. These dual roles and any adjustments required must be addressed with sensitivity as well as clear organisational direction.

The new and unique position of the Peer Worker can present challenges not previously encountered, by the individual nor the organisation. A supportive organisation can reduce the risk of negative impact experienced by the Peer Worker and create a foundation for a cooperative and productive team incorporating the role.

Organisations can set their Peer Workers up for success in a number of ways:

- Thorough orientation and induction procedures
- Adaptable and responsive workforce structuring
 - Substitute workers
 - Part-time hours
 - Flexible working arrangements or job sharing are strategies that are effective methods of support
- Equitable access to resources and information ensure that the Peer Worker is actively included as a team member. Policies and procedures need to be accessible, transparent and easily understood
- Decisions regarding sensitive matters (e.g. access to confidential records) must be made openly and according to organisational policy. When policy doesn't include the Peer Work role, this needs to be addressed in consultation with relevant parties and ratified
- Involvement in decision-making. Just as the rest of the team was involved in the creation of the Peer Work position, it is crucial that the Peer Worker be engaged in other workplace decisions. Peer Workers' unique position may provide invaluable insight regarding the needs of consumers.

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- An approachable manager who possesses excellent communication skills (so that the Peer Worker feels confident enough to raise his or her concerns: things such as asking for unpaid leave days due to illness, flexible conditions for difficult times or for appointments with their own health service providers)
 - Supervision within the organisation
 - Using a job-coach or mentor from (from outside or within the organisation) is helpful in some circumstances
 - Career development and professional training opportunities

Being made aware of every available type of support is of the utmost importance to Peer Workers. A supportive and thoroughly prepared work environment can greatly alleviate the distress the Peer Worker may experience.

Some will have had a sporadic employment history or no previous employment at all. And many will have no previous professional experience in the mental health sector. This could be the first paid role they have ever had, or had since their diagnosis. It will take some time to get into the routine of working and developing a solid work ethic.

Some have no experience of team work, particularly working with health professionals. This can be an intimidating prospect. New recruits will need to develop team skills such as giving and receiving feedback, setting boundaries and exploring their own qualities and strengths.

The experience of the health care system as a consumer is vastly different than that of a health care worker! Such a dramatic role change may present many challenges, such as working alongside health professionals who treated them when they were unwell, or working with consumers they know personally. The position relies on the Peer Worker sharing their own lived experience of mental illness to aid in the recovery of others who are unwell. This can be a daunting and new experience and may cause stress, or trigger their illness ('re-traumatisation').

Organisational Orientation and Induction

Clear and timely information regarding the Peer Worker role and the role within the context of the organisation are crucial for the success of the new role. Initiating a Peer Work position can be a culture shock for the new employee and colleagues. Peer Work can also be a novel concept for the organisation to embrace and practice. A thoroughly prepared introduction to the new work environment greatly alleviates the disorientation a new Peer Worker may experience, contributing to the successful and smooth implementation of the position. Because of the special position Peer Workers hold, organisations need to have a comprehensive orientation program, which encompasses:

- Extensive information about the role: discuss the job description, explain clearly what is expected and what is part of the role / what is not
- Policies, practices and strategies regarding the establishment and maintenance of professional boundaries addressing the specific conditions of the organisation and the role of the Peer Worker.

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- Information about the agency: expectations, missions and values, resources, policies, procedures and processes (patterns and routes)
 - Skill development: communication, active listening, teamwork, other relevant training
 - Administration requirements: timesheets, case noting, confidentiality and legalities
 - Support the organisation will provide: supervision, team meetings, staff development, education, conflict management, grievance procedures, mentoring and debriefing



Completion of the orientation process should equip the Peer Worker to work effectively within the organisation, knowing how to access information, resources and support as needed. A supervision schedule, staff communications, accountability information and identification of the manager are vital resources for the inductee, as person-to-person support is crucial for the management of the Peer Workers role and tasks.

The Peer Worker's wellbeing

Peer Workers use their lived experience of mental illness in order to facilitate and support the recovery of other consumers. Peer Workers continually make choices about sharing their lived experience of mental illness; what's appropriate, how much information, when and where etc. This is important to maintain their personal integrity while looking after their own wellness. Peer Workers who have undertaken the Introduction to Peer Work course have been trained in telling their story and maintaining their own health. It can be confronting sharing their lived experience in the workplace.

There are times that a Peer Worker may become unwell, just like any other staff member. Peer Workers are well on their Recovery Journey and can be expected to have insight in their own illness, their triggers and early warning signs.

Triggers and Early Warning Signs

Triggers are factors, events or conditions that may contribute to the person becoming unwell. Triggers may be locations, sensory stimuli, social interactions, anniversary dates, seasons, expectation overload, isolation, damaging communication and/or behaviours – anything at all that pushes the 'start' button. Becoming unwell is not inevitable. Aware of triggers, many Peer Workers have strategies in place to avoid, reduce or remove the impact of their personal triggers. The organisation can support the Peer Worker's managing triggers e.g. scheduling leave dates, having an 'escape (and return) plan', ensuring the Workplace is psychologically safe for all.

The transition from well to unwell (particularly acutely unwell) is usually signposted by Early Warning Signs, that are uniquely to the individual. They may include reduced personal care, dietary changes, negative social interactions, mood instability, unusual speech or mannerisms or physiological aches and pains. They may be obvious and alert others who know their patterns. Early Warning Signs are crucial indicators for the person to introduce or modify their treatment and immediately step up their management strategies. Early Warning Signs do not indicate that incapacity is unavoidable. Recognition and timely appropriate action can stop escalation. Response to Early Warning Signs is a significant component of Recovery, a skill that Peer Workers can model and encourage in others.

Prevention and Early Intervention is highly preferable to becoming seriously unwell. Understanding triggers and Early Warning Signs and responding appropriately is the key to relapse prevention. Employers can contribute positively to the Peer Worker's management of their mental illness.

Ulysses Agreement

When a Peer Worker becomes unwell, a Ulysses Agreement can be helpful. A Ulysses Agreement is not a new idea in health and is used in many different areas such as asthma management, pain management, aged care and mental health. It is sometimes known as an 'Advanced Directive', and is an agreement between a Peer Worker and their employer. The Ulysses Agreement is specific to the individual and pertains to the Peer Worker's personal recovery journey, their insight, their values and their health management. Self-awareness, empowerment and choice (including 'dignity of risk') are important factors in Recovery.

The Ulysses Agreement is a valuable tool facilitating the Peer Worker's self-management of their mental illness. This voluntary agreement, between a Peer Worker and their employer, informs the actions to be taken should the Peer Worker become unwell at work. Prepared in consultation with relevant parties (treating healthcare professionals, family, friends) while the Peer Worker is well, the Ulysses Agreement details their health management tools and expressed wishes and strategies should others need to act on their behalf. The steps outlined in the agreement aim to assist the Peer Worker's swift recovery and return to duties.

Some of the things current Peer Workers have considered when creating their Ulysses Agreements are:

- Who should get copies of the agreement
- Where copies are to be kept / filed in the workplace
- Triggers which may set off the symptoms of the illness
- Early Warning Signs
- The steps the Peer Worker would like to take or have carried out on his/her behalf
- Names and contact details of relevant support persons (e.g. partner, psychiatrist, friend)
- Anything else determined to be important by the Peer Worker

Once the agreement has been drafted and completed, in consultation with the employer and treating health care professional, copies can be distributed and held by those people the Peer Worker has elected (employer, GP, crisis team, family, etc).

THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM, 'ULYSSES AGREEMENT'

Ulysses was warned of the dangers of singing creatures (Sirens), who lured men to their death with their song. He was advised to avoid hearing them – he and his men should have their ears blocked with wax. Ulysses was a man of great curiosity and this warning made him all the more determined to hear the song of the Sirens! He made an agreement with his men: when nearing the Sirens, he should be tied to the mast of his ship so that he could not be lured away yet still hear their song. The agreement he had with his men is where the term 'Ulysses Agreement' came from.



Adapted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odysseus>

Mentoring

In order to assist both employee and organisation it is valuable to organise mentoring. Mentoring benefits both people in the relationship as well as the organisation.

Benefits to Mentors

- Enhances the leadership, teaching, and coaching skills of mentors and encourages them to become more reflective practitioners
- Creates new support networks with other professionals in the field and promotes greater collaboration among professionals within and across organisations
- Helping an emerging professional develop to his/her potential feels good!
- Demonstrates professionalism and a commitment to personal and professional development of self and colleagues

Benefits to Mentees

- Promotes a professional relationship that fosters guidance and support during the mentee's development
- May increase the self-confidence as he/she becomes familiar with a new role, increased responsibilities, or a new organizational culture
- Challenges mentees to go further, take risks, set new goals, and achieve at higher personal and/or professional standards

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- Matches a new professional with an experienced professional in the field and promotes networking and visibility
 - Provides role modelling for professional leadership and facilitates the development of increased competencies and stronger interpersonal skills
 - Reflects the mentee's commitment to personal and professional growth

Benefits to Organisations

- Contributes to a positive organisational climate and promotes a more clear understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations
- May increase employee satisfaction and retention by reducing a new employee's sense of isolation
- May result in improved employee job performance, contribute to faster learning curves, and result in a better trained staff
- Reflects an investment in employee development and may increase employee commitment and loyalty

www.coe.uga.edu/chds/mentoring

In a Mentoring Partnership it is important to discuss goals, expectations of the mentor, the time span and frequency that mentoring will be available. This can be formalised in a document such as a Mentoring Plan.

Goals

For the Peer Worker, it is important to set a small number of achievable goals. These can relate to skill development, gaining knowledge or attitude change. They can be work related or reflect personal objectives.

Expectations of the Mentoring

What support does the Peer Worker expect from the mentor to achieve these goals? Does the Peer Worker want a listener, a sounding board or someone who provides more structure and teaching?

The Partnership

Explore what the Mentor has to offer in regards to the expectations of the Peer Worker. Discuss the learning and communication styles of both partners.

The mentoring conversation aims at facilitating self-development.

It is based on four questions:

- **Where are you now?**
- **Where do you want to be?**
- **How do you get there?**
- **How are you doing?**

Issues for Peer Workers

Questions that can help to identify issues for Peer Workers:

Self Awareness

- What do you value about your role? What inspires you?
- What concerns do you have? What helps you? What has helped you in the past?
- What can you especially bring to this role?

Using Your Lived Experience

- How can you use your personal experiences within this role?
- How can staff best utilise your role?
- How can you educate staff/consumers about your role?
- How do you feel about using your lived experience?

Working With Consumers

- How do consumers benefit from your role?
- What are the challenges for you in working with consumers?

Promoting Useful Structure

- What organisation skills do you have?
- What tools do you use? (eg diary, timetable)
- How do you keep good records?
- How do you structure activities to fit in with the timetable?

Team Work

- What is the culture like? Do you feel comfortable working in that culture?
- Do you feel part of the team? Do you feel valued?
- How do you work with other staff?

Building Skills And Knowledge

- What areas would you like to develop?
- What training/conferences/seminars would you like to attend, relevant to your role?



EMPLOYER'S CHECKLIST

PRE-EMPLOYMENT / ENGAGEMENT OF PEER WORKER

- ☐ Has the existing staff been involved in the planning process?
- ☐ Is the staff aware of issues that Consumers in the workplace may face?
- ☐ Do they understand the Peer Workers' role and Peer Worker models of practice?
- ☐ Are the staff comfortable with having a Peer Worker in their team?
- ☐ Will the workspace accommodate a new member in the team?
- ☐ Have access to resources, building spaces and communications been set up?
- ☐ Has the Peer Worker's role been defined by research and needs analysis?
- ☐ Are there required / desired Person Specifications that will inform or determine the selection process? If so, what?
- ☐ Is the Job Specification realistic – regarding organisational needs and Peer Worker capacity?
- ☐ Is there one or more Peer Work position(s)?
- ☐ Is the recruitment process prepared?

RECRUITMENT

- ☐ Does the advertising target the appropriate consumers for the position?
- ☐ Who is involved in the selection process?
- ☐ Is there consumer representation on the interview panel?
- ☐ Are candidates given enough time to apply?
- ☐ Is there an accessible confidential venue to conduct interviews?

A PEER WORKER STARTS WORK IN YOUR ORGANISATION

- ☐ Who is responsible for 1st day orientation and completion of HR processes?
- ☐ Are they familiar with / have access to organisational policies and procedures?
- ☐ Is there a realistic task schedule and timeline to reduce the Peer Worker's stress?
- ☐ Who is the Peer Worker's supervisor?
- ☐ How is the Peer Worker going to be introduced to the Participant Consumers?
- ☐ Are security and emergency procedures explained and practiced with support?
- ☐ Are there planned opportunities for the Peer Worker to ask questions, seek clarification and/or debrief within the first fortnight?

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

The Peer Work Project offers the following support for organisations:

- **Advice** to prepare your organisation for the implementation process
- **Introduction to Peer Work course** can be run for Peer Workers employed by your organisation. For regional organisations, you can attend the Facilitator Training Session and conduct the Introduction to Peer Work Course in your area
- **Professional development** training and workshops for Peer Workers, based on the workplace requirements.
- **Tailored training and workshops** for your organisation support implementation of peer work - for example, training other staff about the Peer Worker role, or training managers in how to create a support structure for Peer Workers
- Individual or group **mentoring** is offered to Peer Workers by experienced Peer Mentors
- **Recruitment:** The Peer Work website advertises jobs, supports Peer Workers in finding employment and matches organisations and workers

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www.peerwork.org.au

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