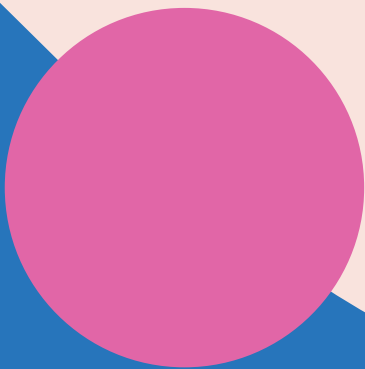


HCP-C

MODULE 6

Peer Support



INTRODUCTION

PEER SUPPORT IN COLLABORATIONS

[There is growing evidence of the positive impact peer support can have on young people accessing services.](#) Within collaborations, this relationship can optimize outcomes for both stakeholders: the young person and the agencies. The question of young adult inclusion within wellness-oriented program design is multi-faceted and delicate. Peer support within collaborations relies on (i) including and valuing the peer role at all stages and levels, (ii) the relationship between the peer and non-peer workers, and (iii) building capacity with peers and non-peers simultaneously. Some key points to keep in mind:

- 1. Each peer role is unique with its own primary focus, responsibilities and setting,** however it is not uncommon for some overlap in practice. Peers can be Navigators, Educators, Facilitators, Mentors or Specialists/Supervisors. As well, peer support may be front-line or back-end (e.g., administrative) depending on the demands of the role within a program framework. There are benefits at all levels for the inclusion of young adult peers within collaborations.
- 2. Build your peer role collaboratively with team members:** what is the role attempting to do and how can it be done? When considering the how of role development, assessing capacity is a necessary step toward understanding how buy-in, funding, existing staff and supervision may impact the process of hiring and implementing a peer role.
- 3. Integration must occur within power structures and is based on buy-in, rapport and structure.** Buy-in and rapport are centred on the interpersonal relationships between peers, non-peers and management while structure is centred on visibility in program development and implementation. Integration must also occur within administrative frameworks (organizational policy, protocol) and further extends to how these frameworks will promote and protect the rights of peers.
- 4. Considering the barriers to your hiring and implementation process (advertising, supervision, etc.) is an important step in your collaboration efforts.** Who qualifies to be a peer? How will they be interviewed? Does the supervisor understand their role in engaging with the hired peer(s)?
- 5. Consider the positive and negative conflicts that could occur for peers on the job and collaborate on a plan** either to reduce the likelihood of the issue occurring or to prevent it altogether.

WORKSHEET #1

Understanding the Peer Role

Peer Roles

Like any occupation, peer support is diverse and is made up of different areas of expertise. There are many types of peer roles. Below is a list of roles to consider for your program:

1. Navigator

Primary Focus: **Systems Navigation**

- Introduce and assist with navigating services within an organization and/or program (eg. Tour + explain programs)
- Answer questions and/or facilitate communication with other staff and sites about specific services offered and how to access them
- Help explain and fill out paperwork with young people accessing services
- Accompany people to appointments in the community (Legal aid, primary health, viewings etc.)
- Orient young people new to accessing services with managing expectations, understanding their rights, and complaint procedures

| Settings for this Role

Drop-In Center, Employment/Housing Services, “Front-of-house” at an organization, Residential Mentor

2. Mentor

Primary Focus: **Emotional Support, Wellness Groups, Goal-Setting**

- Provide support and strategies for young adults experiencing barriers
- Role model attitudes and behaviours that affirm experiences
- Co-facilitate groups, projects, activities etc.
- Provide 1:1 support when needed
- Encourage young people by participating alongside them

| Settings for this role:

Walk-in/drop-in spaces, counseling, case management, wellness groups, special projects

3. Educator

Primary Focus: **Presentations, Workshops and Educational Resources**

- Create accessible educational material on selected topics (Harm-Reduction, Anti-Oppression, Naloxone etc.)
- Audit tools and resources meant to serve young adults for concept and language
- Help develop and/or present knowledge of particular subject from the lens of lived experience

| Settings for this role:

Harm-Reduction workshops, building toolkits, community presentations, advisory

Spaces also exist for Peer Researchers, or those specializing in evidence-based findings and evaluation tools. Often people in these roles will conduct research interviews and help streamline the research-participant relationships.

4. *Facilitator*

Primary Focus: **Workshops, Projects, Group Support**

- Lead groups of young people in project development and creation process of new tools
- Create wellness group activities for specific topics to do with young people
- Co-design activities, programs and processes with non-peer staff
- Facilitate meaningful dialogue with other young people (focus groups, knowledge mobilization etc.)

| **Settings for this role:**

Specialized project work, focus groups, wellness groups

5. *Specialist (including Peer Supervisors)*

Primary Focus: **Administrative/Management Support, Supervision, Project-Focused Work, Training, Case Management, Advocacy**

- Provide support to other peers in the workplace
- May assist with more administrative duties (note-taking, community research, reporting, planning etc.)
- Role model peer values
- Presentation and speaking engagements
- Engage with all aspect of peer-programming
- Design and lead youth engagement projects
- Provide 1:1 support when needed including supervision
- Develop and facilitate training for other peer workers

| **Settings for this role:**

Research and engagement projects, clinical setting, case management, group facilitation, conferences



Consider this:

When thinking about the peer role, try to use a strengths-based approach. This is particularly important when looking at upward mobility for peers within your organization and beyond. Some young adults will make peer work their careers while others will move on to other sectors that may or may not use and understand jargon in an anti-oppressive frame.

Consider framing roles with the specialty before the lived experience if possible. (Housing Worker with Peer Specialty)

WORKSHEET 2

Valuing the Peer Role

Valuing the Peer Role in Action

Before engaging with peer support, it is fundamental to understand its value to your program or organization. Further, what is the value to your stakeholders (ie. Clients, donors) and the peer themselves?



HOP-C CASE EXAMPLE

Peer engagement

There are several examples of consistent and meaningful peer engagement within the HOP-C intervention. The entire team (including peers) extensively discussed how to optimize peer engagement as it became apparent that there were certain problem-areas to resolve. Although accessing young adult peers was a voluntary aspect of the wrap-around approach, peers were involved at every level in communication, engagement and planning elements of the program. This included:

- Early engagement and outreach to supportive housing and youth shelters to promote the program ie. Youth endorsement within outreach efforts
- 1-1 peer support (in person, text, call)
- Planning and facilitation of social outings (movies, board game coffee shops, picnics etc.)
- Co-participation in mental health group
- Participatory action projects (“[MY](#)”, “Dream Home”)
- Plan and run drop-in
- Participate in weekly team meetings with peer-specific updates as a standing agenda item, group and individual supervision and engage in peer-peer planning sessions
- Inviting peers to co-produce HOP-C academic and communication outputs
- Payment for their time

Below is a list of examples of the way peer support can be valued at all levels.

Organization + Management

- Shows you value the wisdom of experience as a tool for engagement
- Affects existing power structures and challenges them to be more informed and inclusive
- Direct stakeholder feedback allows upper management to stay grounded in the day-to-day experiences of its clients and employees
- Builds trust and encourages accountability within the service or project
- Use alternative processes to achieve program outcomes

Peer Worker

- Engage with recovery in other contexts
- Compensation and/or recognition while building transferable workplace skills
- Understanding of internal organizational/program processes
- Can embody being a service user and service provider simultaneously
- Exposure to alternative routes of recovery and wellness
- A chance to impact design and process meant for youth engagement

Clients

- Experience positive role-modeling from a person with similar experience
- Non-clinical emotional support and validation
- Personal empowerment through alternative non-clinical experience and learning
- Engaging with programming in a more meaningful way
- Increased level of comfort within the organization and/or group/project

Donors + Funders

- Hear authentic voices which have been affected by or benefitted by programs and services
- Shows examples of other programs to support with funding

WORKSHEET 3

Role-Mapping and Assessing Capacity

How do we create a role from scratch? Which role is best suited to the project or program?
How do I begin to write a job description?

Building your Job Description

Questions to ask as a team:

1. *What role do we want for this peer position?*
2. *Why this role? This project needs this role because.... (List some reasons collectively)*
3. *What will this role entail?*
 - Job Description/duties
 - What is expected of this person?

Assessing Capacity

What is our current capacity in terms of...

1. *Existing Staff*
 - Name staff (peer/non-peer) who will be working closely with the peer
 - Who will supervise the peer?
2. *Funding*
 - How much funding is there for this position?
 - Is the wage fair for the expectation? If not, how can we remedy this?
 - Is funding embedded or grant-sponsored?
 - What is the maximum hours a peer can work within the funding?
3. *Supervision*
 - How often and by whom will the peer be supervised by?
 - Will there be external peer supervision, or will the peer join group supervision?
4. *Buy-In*
 - Who are the power players and do they support these roles?
 - Do non-peer staff understand how to be inclusive with young adult peers?
 - How can we build buy-in and capacity as a team/organization?
5. *Barriers*
 - How do we adjust or create policy that will remove barriers to ethical peer work?
 - Is the working culture/environment conducive to including peers?
 - Are there specific items or programs (eg. Pirouette) peers will need access to in order to perform their job effectively?
6. *Other current gaps*

WORKSHEET 4

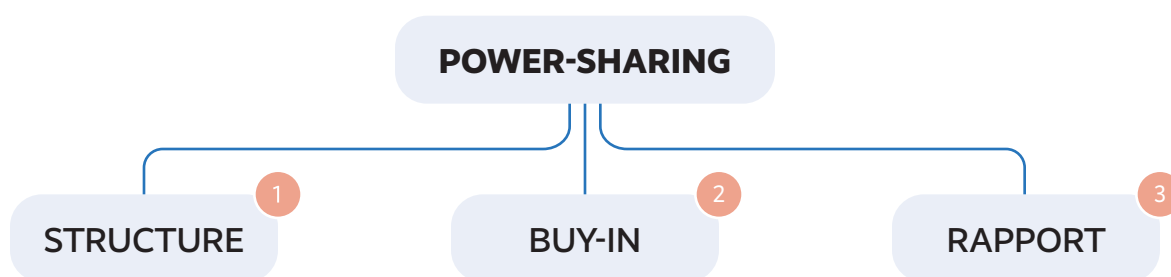
Integration Part One: Building Buy-In & Structure

Successful integration of young adult peers influences power-sharing and the peers' perception of power within the program/staffing structure. Efforts to integrate peers into the workplace as contributing staff members will support the long-term trajectory of the peer's working relationship with the organization/program.

Buy-in and rapport are centred on the interpersonal relationships between peers, non-peers and management while structure is centered on visibility in program development and implementation.

Arms of Power-Sharing

There are different activities and job responsibilities in each arm of power-sharing. Below you will find key questions and recommended roles within each structure. This will help you create a job description for peer roles and understand how to better integrate them into your team.



1 Structure

Structure in the frame of “integration” asks: how will peers be transitioned into the existing program structure and where will they impact?

Service Delivery

- Navigator, Mentor, Specialist role
- Usually front-line oriented (meet clients, support groups, navigate services etc.)
- **How can we create space for peer contributions in this structure?**
 - Audit information/environment on youth-friendliness
 - Contribute or design infographics, playbooks, brochures
 - Create, lead or support groups
 - Counseling/mentoring role, one-on-one

Leadership + Planning

- Educator, Facilitator, Specialist
- Can exist in front-line and back-end roles (ie. Administrative)
- **How can we create space for peer contributions in this structure?**
 - Contributions to curriculum,
 - Policy,
 - Participating at board or community advisory meetings,
 - Planning/leading evaluation or focus groups,
 - Program development,
 - Grant ideation,
 - Research activities

2 Buy-In

If staff do not buy-in to peer support in the fullest sense (appropriate language, inclusion at development phases etc.) peers do not feel like they are staff or able to contribute in a way that will be taken seriously.

3 Rapport-Building

Rapport is essential to creating space where power can be shared between peer and non-peer staff.

Ask yourself:

1. *Are there opportunities for intentional team building on or off-site during or after working hours?*
2. *How can we promote teamwork within the peer team?*
3. *Are there ways we can remove barriers and create a more horizontal environment with peers able to contribute and feel heard at every level?*



HOP-C CASE EXAMPLE

Peer engagement

How do we best address one-to-one peer engagement?

Contributing Factors:

1. Boundaries with participants were initially unclear with respect to communication (particularly over text and in the community)
2. Lack of initial safety protocols in the community eg. Communication of risk, availability of emergency contact for back-up

Solution:

New participants were invited to a program introduction in either the mental health group or with case managers present to promote safety.

WORKSHEET 5

Integration Part Two: Policy, Protocol and Professionalism

Integrating peers goes beyond power-sharing. Integration must also occur in administration frameworks. In action, this means addressing organizational policy and protocol. We have added professionalism because as with non-peer employees, standards must be in place around conduct in the workplace and with community stakeholders.

Context

Context always matters when implementing a peer role. For this worksheet, context implies which work environment the peer will be employed within as each has its own unique set of rules;

Example: hospitals, corrections, government, community agency, employment program

Policy + Protocol

When thinking about policy, remember that peers are employees (typically under different contract terms) who represent the organization/project in the community, and as such should avoid situations which may harm the peer or the employer. Are there daily tasks the peer must perform when they come to work?

Hiring:

Is there an interview structure? How does it account for lived experience expertise?

Compensation

What is the baseline for peer positions? Is it reflective of the responsibilities and/or emotional labour being assigned? Are wages livable? Are peers given the same upward mobility opportunities as non-peer staff? Are there caps on how much a peer can make within a certain position or contract?

Employment Standards:

Think about developing HR policies for peers. Consider including them in this process asking which things they should be accountable to. It is also important because it helps peers understand the boundaries and limitations of their role and its place within the organization.

- Which behaviours should peers avoid on the job or in the community?
- What are peers entitled to in terms of protections and supports?
- What might the reasons be for corrective action, and what is the process of reporting?

Conduct

What are the professional expectations of conduct in/out of the office?

- Eg. Tardiness, professional use of communication platforms, meeting clients, confidentiality, dress code, inclusive language, leave of absence
- Are there processes the peer must follow in case of crisis or emergency?

Personal Challenges

What is the process to take a leave of absence? How soon before a shift can a peer cancel or change call-in? How many times may a peer be late or absent before there is a conversation about expectations and goal-setting?

Orientation

How will you orient the peers to communication/reporting structure in the organization/project? What is the minimum training a peer will be given upon attaining their position? How will you integrate them with other team members?

**This worksheet does not take account of [supervision](#)*



HOP-C CASE EXAMPLE

Peer engagement

How do we bring peers in as full team members?

Contributing Factors:

1. Peers missed several meetings in the early months of the project feeling that their presence was not needed in research and intervention discussions
2. Organization bureaucratic processes (e.g., paperwork, delays in cash reimbursement) was found frustrating by peers at times.
3. It took several months for peers to recognize their role as co-creators and contributors within the team
4. Early on, the specific role of peers in HOP-C were less clear than other service providers

Solution:

Over time, team members began to intentionally engage peers more in meetings as supervision feedback highlighted the lack of role clarity peers felt. As well, roles were re-articulated over time at team meetings particularly as new peers were brought on.

WORKSHEET 6:

Hiring, On-boarding and Maintaining Peers Roles

Implementing a peer role means bringing the person on as an employee. As with other jobs, it is necessary to interview for the position. Additionally, your team should think about how to address barriers to engagement within the hiring process (eg. Where the job is posted).

HIRING – where do we find our peers?

Advertising

Think about where you want to hire your peers from. Do you want to advertise internal or external of the organization? Will you post on public job boards, online or both?

Example: newsletter, word of mouth, job board, charityvillage etc.

Barriers

What are the potential barriers in your hiring process?

Is the role in an office, hospital, community space etc.? Do you require a cover letter, application or resume? Does the candidate need references? If so, who qualifies to be a reference? Is this job entry-level or does it require previous experience/training in the sector? Does the position work directly with clients/participants, or is it advisory-oriented? How will we account for diversity and representation? Are there ways we can make this a “safe” job to apply to? (ie. do the conditions of this job exacerbate and/or tokenize lived experience?)

Hiring Criteria

Things to consider as a supervisor of young adult peers:

- **Qualities of job readiness** (ability to communicate in a timely manner, reliability, informal leadership qualities etc.)
Simplified: Is the person able/ready to work? Are they willing to engage (with stakeholders, other staff, clients)? Can the person communicate in a desired fashion? (by-phone, e-mail, interpersonal etc.)
- **Supervision** (when, who, how often, record-keeping etc.)
- **Engagement** (are there opportunities to contribute to youth engagement/youth voice?)
- **Flexibility** (what areas of job performance can be improved? Are there policies specific to young adult peers, or are all policies under one umbrella? What are the boundaries for communication between peer: supervisor, peer: client etc. What is the plan if the person needs to step back from their role?)

Interviews

Interviews for young adults with lived experience can be modeled slightly differently than other positions. The interview should gauge the peers’ understanding and adherence to peer values (eg. Modeling hope and resilience) and the person’s soft skills.

Interview Scope:

- Self-efficacy
- Former workplace experience
- Boundaries and transference
- Adaptability
- Problem-solving
- Empathy
- Forward-thinking
- Communication

The interview can be broken down into the following **themes:**

- 1.** Introduction and Baseline Skills Assessment
 - a. Who is the person applying for the job?
 - b. Describe relevant job history
 - c. Awareness of strengths and weaknesses
- 2.** Situational Reflection and Projection
 - a. Can this person story-tell relevant situations in a considerate professional manner?
 - b. Can this person anticipate their reaction/plan for unexpected situations?
- 3.** Industry Awareness
 - a. Does the person have an understanding of industry jargon/can they apply relevant peer concepts to the role?
 - b. Is the person aware of their bias and comfort level with certain types of clients/communities?
- 4.** Job applicability to personal goals
 - a. Has this person considered how this job will assist their personal goals?
 - b. Is the person applying with intentionality?

Other Considerations

What is the style of the interview? Is there a peer on the interview or application review panel? Do we or should we prep peers for their interview? What are the capacities we are looking for and how can we draw them out?

ON-BOARDING – How do we include and welcome our peers?

What are the potential barriers of your on-boarding process? Is there an onboarding process for peers?

- How have you taken the young-adult context into account?
- Is there a minimum amount of non-peer training peers can access to better transition into their role?
- How has the non-peer team been trained to work alongside young adult peers?
- Will you be providing (additional) supervision while on-boarding?
- How have you accounted for team cohesion and consistent definitions for peer roles?
- Do you have an informal or formal communication policy? Will this impact peer engagement?

MAINTAINING – How do we sustain the peer role?

Maintaining a peer role can rest of several factors such as funding, availability of relevant work and the peer's own personal life. It also extends to giving the peer a sense of community.

It is crucial to **communicate** with your peers about potential funding additions, cuts and opportunities. Transparency will allow the peer to prepare if the role will not be continued.

Supervision is a valuable resource for maintaining the peer role as it provides a platform with which to communicate challenges, barriers and successes. It will help the peer and supervisor manage expectations for the role while building rapport, a key indicator of whether or not the peer will continue in the role.

The **personal life** of young adult peers may affect the maintenance of the role. For example, if a peer decides to attend school or engages with an employment program while working, they may decide to step back from the role. Similarly, a peer may be experiencing difficulties at home which cause them to miss numerous shifts and they may decide to quit instead of putting their role on hold. Other times, a peer's interests and goals may change altogether and they may wish to change paths. In all of these cases, the supervisor is the key to maintaining the role and communicating and managing expectations on all sides.

A key to peers experiencing difficulty's job maintenance is **creating self-care and safety plans** for when circumstances are challenging in order to curb burnout. This should be done during the on-boarding process.

Lastly, maintaining a peer role can also extend to **promotions**. Is the peer looking for more challenges and meeting the capacities of community workers? Can a new position be created that embodies the peer's specialization?

Should a peer decide to leave, it is helpful to conduct an exit interview to evaluate the challenges, successes and next steps for the young person. These questions can also be adapted for various types of check-ins. See an example below:

Exit Interview Questions Sample

- How was your overall experience as a peer?
- What was most satisfying about your position?
- What was least satisfying?
- What would you change to help future peers?
- What did you like most about working with this organization?
- What did you like least about working with this organization?
- What would you improve to make our workplace better?
- Did your duties turn out to be as you expected?
- Did this role help you to fulfill your employment goals?
- Do you feel you had the resources and support necessary? What was missing?
- How was your relationship with your supervisor?
- Did you receive enough training to do your role effectively?
- Did you receive adequate feedback about your performance day-to-day and in the performance development planning process?
- What is your experience of employee morale and motivation in the company?
- Would you consider working for this organization in the future?

WORKSHEET 7

Troubleshooting

Trouble-shooting is your opportunity to grow from mistakes which may have occurred or unexpected learnings and outcomes. Not every trouble-shooting experience will be based on negative happenings; a positive trouble-shooting experience may be that your peer excels quicker than initially expected and is looking for more involvement in the collaboration.

The first step to trouble-shooting is gauging potential problem areas. What types of conflicts could occur in the workplace and are there specific processes in place to resolve or prevent them.

Below are some examples of problem areas in peer support:

- Burnout or overload
- Hospitalization
- Over-qualified or excelled quickly
- Electronic communication
- Scheduling
- Returning to school
- Relapse
- Family/housing instability
- Transportation/mobility
- Avoiding tokenism
- Visibility in the community
- Self-doubt/self-esteem issues
- Peer: peer conflict
- Peer: non-peer conflict
- Peer: client conflict
- Safety in the community
- Interpersonal communication
- Teamwork
- Managing expectations

Q: How often will you check-in with peers to gauge these problem-areas?

Every ____ days/weeks/months (circle one)



HOP-C CASE EXAMPLE

Peer engagement

Attending to changing engagement needs in the case of switching from an informal drop-in to project-based participatory action engagement

Contributing Factors:

1. Peer feedback reported that the informal drop-in was too difficult to plan while simultaneously attendance was poor and inconsistent.
2. There was peer interest in creating impact for research participants beyond the wrap-around approach through a tangible experience (ie. Participating in the research project for the benefit of other young-people)
3. Re-allocation of funding as it became available in order to pay participants for their time (honoraria) and project expenses.

Solution:

Through structured curriculum and workshops, peers took on individual project-based participatory-action projects which aligned with their diverse strengths and interests. The projects became platforms for peer engagement in addition to the mental health group where at least one peer was present each week with the team psychologist. These actions created a safer environment for all stakeholders involved in the group environment.

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