Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force

PEER MANUAL

A guide for peer workers and agencies

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Peer work is about improving your understanding of drug use, extending that knowledge back out into the community and using your past experiences in a positive, pro-active way.

~Valerie

Introduction

This guide is for drug users, peer workers and the agency workers who serve and/or employ them. It was conceived and has been researched, written, edited, designed and produced by drug users, ex-users, and harm reduction advocates. Because new concepts and experiences are emerging constantly this guide cannot be considered exhaustive. However it will challenge current conceptions, clarify ideas about peer work, and encourage the further development of harm reduction peer programs. Since this is a "work in progress," we look forward to feedback and suggestions (please see the evaluation form at the end of the manual) for inclusion in a future updated edition of this guide.

Peer programs may be relatively new, but the thinking behind them has been around for quite a while. In essence, peer programs are modelled on the more established "self help" concept. Peer programs and self-help groups share the premise that *"the wisdom of the community will always exceed the knowledge of the expert"* (John McKnight). The development of peer programs began with this realization.

In 1999, the Ontario Health Determinants Partnership highlighted the fact that social support is a key determinant of health. Like self-help groups, 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.

According to "Peer Resources"*[1], peer helping is ideally characterized by the following components:

- Peers are self-nominated or selected by members of their peer group(s)
- Peers are volunteers, but may receive some type of compensation for their involvement
- Peers receive need-based, goal-directed and experiential skill training from a qualified peer trainer

[1] For more information on peer work, please go to www.mentors.ca

- Peers are supervised on a regular basis
- The more experience the peers have, the more they are involved in the selection, training, and supervision of other peers.

Some examples of the peer model include:

- Experienced employees show new employees "the ropes"
- Students tutor other students
- Seniors help each other with loneliness and grief
- Experienced parents support new parents
- People who have overcome illness or adversity help others to do the same

Peer work can be called many different things; "peer" is a generic term which includes: peer tutoring, peer support, peer facilitation, peer mediation, peer conflict resolution, peer counselling, peer education, peer health workers, peer ambassadors, and peer leaders. For the purpose of this manual, we will be referring to peers as drug users and ex-drug users who are interested in or are doing harm reduction work.

> There are many good reasons why the employees of agencies such as Black CAP (Black Community AIDS Project) are Black, and that the outreach workers with G-Men are gay men. For years, research, common sense and front-line experience have shown that peer education works best and that peers should be included in every aspect of design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of all projects and initiatives.
>
> ~Walter

Many components are needed to make a Peer Program work. These will be explored in more detail throughout this guide.

Respect: Sometimes people reject services because they feel that they are being judged by the "official helpers". It is paramount that peer workers, clients and staff give and receive respect from one another, accept one another, and refrain from making judgments about one another. Everyone wants to be treated with dignity.

Confidentiality: It is imperative that peers, clients and staff know that they can trust one another. Building trust will take time, but the program will fail without the sure knowledge that confidentiality will be maintained. Everyone wants to know that their privacy will be protected.

A positive focus: While most peer programs are developed in response to a need or problem, programs that work best build on the strengths of both peer workers and the agency's clients. Everyone prefers to do what they do well.

Clarity about services offered: No one program can be all things to all people. An effective peer program is designed to meet specific goals for a specific group of peers/clients

Relevance: Peer programs are designed to meet the needs of those who are marginalized, vulnerable or at risk. For harm reduction programs this should not only include the design of programs but also the way in which service is delivered, that is, where people are using drugs. Effective work with peers will not be contingent on abstinence.

Flexibility: Agencies must be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of clients. Likewise, they must be adaptable in finding and creating ways to recruit, encourage, support and reward peer workers.

Benefits: Peer workers should be able to provide services that offer benefits and are seen by users as valuable. The peer workers themselves also need to realize some benefits from these programs. Peer work must be designed in ways that can help peers develop transferable skills, increase self-esteem, self-efficacy and gain work experience.

Training: It is essential that agencies recognize that, like staff, peer workers need not only initial work orientation but also ongoing training, education and supervision/support if they are to realize their potential in their work. A quick "orientation" and review of the agency's Policy & Procedures manual is not enough.

Long-term planning: Too often, peer programs fold because passion and/or funding dry up. On-going planning, commitment and funding are needed for any program to continue and thrive. It is up to the agency to take responsibility for involving peer workers in initial and ongoing planning and implementation. This may necessitate development of new ways of working including innovative ways of service delivery and/or partnering with other agencies to increase or maximize service options.

In short, peer workers are the "bridge" or conduit between service users (or potential users) and the agency. Like any structure, the "bridge" must be built according to a plan, and will require regularly scheduled maintenance to ensure its ability to support the load safely and reliably.

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> ***While scholars are comparing and contrasting theories, debating intellectual questions, and dividing humankind into categories, the world is changed by persons with faith, spirit, emotion, compassion, intuition, and irrational thinking.***
> ***~Grey Owl***

The Basics

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is "a policy or program directed towards decreasing the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of drug use without requiring abstinence from drug use." ~ Riley et al

If you are reading this, then chances are you are hiring or considering working as a peer in an agency that works within the social health care service sector. You may also work in an agency that is considering starting a peer program. That being the case, you will have to know what harm reduction is. Harm reduction (HR) is a philosophy and a practice that seeks to reduce the physical, mental, emotional, financial, or social harm to individuals and communities that can be caused by drug use, without requiring abstinence.

Harm reduction works not only on a personal level but also with a broader scope. An individual may make personal choices that will reduce the harm that could be caused by their drug use, such as not drinking and driving, or not smoking marijuana before showing up for work.

The best thing about peer programs is the opportunity they provide to show the drug using community that we are serious about working with them to further harm reduction strategies.

Lorie

Educated choices have an impact on the individual, their friends, or their neighborhoods in tangible, real ways. As individuals, peers may also strive within an agency to broaden harm reduction practices and philosophy.

Essentially what harm reduction means to me is, to make sure that substance use is re-defined in people's thoughts as a public health issue and not a criminal justice one
~ Russell

Harm reduction rests on several basic assumptions. A basic tenet of harm reduction is that there has never been, is not now, and never will be a drug-free society.

- A harm reduction strategy seeks pragmatic solutions to the harms that drugs and drug policies cause. It has been said that harm reduction is not what's nice, it's what works.

- A harm reduction approach acknowledges that there is no ultimate solution to the problem of drugs in a free society, and that many different interventions may work. Those interventions should be based on science, public health, common sense and human rights.

- A harm reduction strategy demands new outcome measurements. Whereas the success of current drug policies is primarily measured by the change in use rates, the success of a harm reduction strategy is measured by the change in rates of death, disease, crime and suffering.

- Because incarceration does little to reduce the harms that ever-present drugs cause to our society, a harm reduction approach favors treatment of drug addiction by health care professionals over incarceration in the penal system.

- Because some drugs, such as marijuana, have proven medicinal uses, a harm reduction strategy not only seeks to reduce the harm that drugs cause, but also to maximize their potential benefits.

- Harm reduction seeks to reduce the harms of drug policies dependent on an over-emphasis on interdiction, such as arrest, incarceration, establishment of a felony record, lack of treatment, lack of adequate information about drugs, the expansion of military source control intervention efforts in other countries, and intrusion on personal freedoms.

- Harm reduction also seeks to reduce the harms caused by an over-emphasis on prohibition, such as increased purity, black market adulterants, black market sale to minors, and black market crime.

(the Drug Policy Alliance: www.lindsmith.org/reducingharm)

On a broader level, an agency, organization or government may implement harm reduction policies or legislation. This may take the form of outreach programs or clear organizational policies that encourage peer programs. It could also include design and implementation of city-wide approaches such as the "Four Pillars" policy document in Vancouver (for details please see www.city.vancouver.bc.ca). It can also include advocacy regarding legislation such as marijuana laws and policies that can have a very broad impact, affecting the lives of a lot of people.

Harm Reduction - a pragmatic, expert-driven, community based approach to dealing with problems resulting from drug use and distribution, occurring at the confluence of the principles of public health and social justice, fired by hope and informed with respect and love. In the case of harm reduction, the pragmatic is also political ~ Walter

Harm reduction begins by accepting that people have always done risky things, and always will. Some people have always used drugs and always will. There's not much point in denying this. Harm reduction means anything that manages, minimizes or diminishes risks or harms associated with those behaviours.

> In the harm reduction approach, the reduction of drug-related harm is both a goal of harm reduction programming and a philosophy which underpins service delivery. From the vantage point of each of these, the person's use of drugs is accepted as fact. Where it is being implemented honourably, and not merely nominally, harm reduction is succeeding in improving the health and safety of individuals, families, and communities. - *Walter*

Harm reduction is about mitigating the risks associated with drug use to both users and the communities where they live without requiring abstinence. It's a continuum:

- ID clinics so people can qualify for social assistance help reduce crime;
- Meal programs help ensure that users aren't malnourished;
- Detox/treatment centres should be available on demand;
- Access to condoms, syringes and pipes helps prevent the spread of diseases;
- Safer use sites where users can get clean works and medical care reduce overdoses and provide a conduit to other services such as counselling;
- Street nurses who meet clients "where they're at" provide basic health care to marginalized clients;
- "Wet" shelters reduce ambulance calls and the number of people who die in the street after consuming "aqua velva";

All of these are forms of harm reduction practice, and all of them *save lives and money* – public healthcare dollars. In a way, peer work itself is harm reduction, because it helps reach those that agencies cannot.

> It is estimated that for every dollar spent on harm reduction programs, governments save seven dollars. Crime, disease and death have dropped dramatically in all cities that have implemented real harm reduction programs
>
> Together, we can break the back of international traffickers growing rich on the misery that drugs cause. The users are victims just like the communities in which they live
>
> -Vancouver Area Drug Users Network www.vandu.org

Peers & Agencies

> Peer Support Workers should be members of the community of concern who have credibility and respect within that community, are committed to working for positive change, support the principles of harm reduction and possess the requisite personal skills to carry out the job.
>
> ~Walter

What is a peer?

The dictionary says one definition of peer is, 'belonging to one element of society'. Within the harm reduction context, a peer is a person who has experienced situations similar to those faced by the clients an agency serves. This means a peer worker may be hired because of his/her present or past street involvement, age, sexual identity, life-situation, even specific type of substance use (just to name a few). Generally, a peer has some kind of 'inside knowledge' through his/her 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."

What attracts current or past drug users to peer work?

There are many reasons someone might want to become a peer worker: the desire to use their knowledge and experiences in positive ways or the need to be taken seriously and be accepted into society. They could be seeking experiences that contribute to personal empowerment. The opportunity to hone or develop skills is also important to peer workers. Empowerment can be obtained through opportunities to express their needs, to affect social change in their communities and to reclaim personal history that may have been viewed negatively. Drug users may want to be in a supportive environment while adjusting to social and/or economic changes or challenges. They may have a desire to help those in their personal networks, i.e. friends, family and community connections. Part-time work provides peer workers with opportunities to get current job experience, a good reference contact, and the opportunity to learn about

> The best thing about working with peers is the enthusiasm and passion they often bring to the experience. Also they help you see different perspectives and often remind you to think outside of the box!
>
> Deborah

health care and community work. They may want to avoid the isolation that comes to so many on the street. Peers may be motivated by altruism and/or by financial compensation for their work.

Benefits for peer workers should include training and skills development opportunities, including a chance to "try on" the role of service provider. It should also include some kind of payment for the work done. Whatever the nature of the duties performed by the peer, or the recognized rewards of the position, peers, agencies, and ultimately, clients, benefit from peer programs.

> I have evolved from being a peer to being a peer supervisor and can look back and see how being a peer opened so many doors for me. I strive to continue to grow. I like to look forward, taking with me all that made today possible.
>
> Heidi

What is an agency?

There are a variety of agencies that may be considering developing or may have a peer program, and are looking for peer workers. Some of these may be involved in health care, like community health centres (CHC's), or housing agencies such as Fife House. Some may be daytime drop-in agencies, like The Meeting Place, or St. Stephen's Corner Drop-In. Some other agencies may be involved in advocacy and changing the system. The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC), by advocating for an affordable housing solution, is one example. After all, it could be argued that a primary harm reduction strategy might be access to affordable housing. The Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force who coordinated this manual, is another example of an advocacy agency. Many types of agencies can provide meaningful work for peers.

Since harm reduction is a continuum, many models and policies exist within the harm reduction framework. So a potential peer needs to get to know what kind of agency he/she may be working for.

What is a 'Mission Statement'?

Most agencies or organizations have one. This is, in a nutshell, what the agency stands for, and the type of philosophy it means to promote in the community. It is usually a short paragraph that describes what an agency does and how they aim to do it. A mission statement is a public document and is available to anyone who asks. When interested in an agency it's a good idea to read its mission statement, and any other information available about it (see appendix A). Because the mission statement only outlines the broad goals and vision of the agency, a potential peer may want to also talk to other people in the community, and learn of their opinions and experiences with that particular agency. When it comes to harm reduction, it is important that the agency views substance use as a health issue, not a criminal one.

…one of the reasons for low HIV rates among drug users is the practice of some Toronto Outreach Programs to use Peer Support Workers in all aspects of service delivery…

~ Walter

Why do agencies involve peer workers?

There are many reasons why community organizations and service agencies put peer programs to work in their communities. By involving peers in working with the client group, organizations can gain a greater understanding of the communities they service.

Peer programs work because people like to learn from others who are like them. No one wants to be lectured at or told what to do. Peers know what it is like to go through difficult times and they know that moralizing doesn't help. They can talk from their own experiences and be supportive. ~Sarah

Whether a peer is helping with day-to-day tasks at the agency like answering the phone or organizing and tracking harm reduction supplies, or doing a street outreach, peer workers provide valuable services to an organization. Making and maintaining contact with socially isolated people can be difficult. Peer programs are an effective way to reach these people and provide them with information about the agency, its goals in the community and the programs it provides. An agency with a peer in the house has someone with an intimate understanding of the community that the agency wants to reach. Peers have 'insider knowledge' that no amount of observation or formal education can master. Peers can walk the walk, and talk the talk; this can and will help develop the trusting relationship necessary for the most comprehensive service delivery. Contact with a peer may eventually enable a good agency to help someone who may have in the past had bad and painful experiences with agencies less suited to deal with their specific needs.

Peers can also be a connection to socially isolated communities. Through the peers' knowledge of and intimacy with those communities, agency staff can increase their knowledge and better serve their clients. Peers are likely to have better information about the current issues in different drug using communities and have practical ideas to address those issues

> Peer workers will greatly speed up identifying drug users and advocating for the credibility of a new outreach program. Their relationship with the outreach worker will convince users of the safety and confidentiality of the program, as well as offer them hope that one day they also could land a similar job. Finally, peer workers will greatly enhance the safety and accountability of the program.
>
> ~Walter

Peers can promote services and provide written and verbal information on health and safer drug using practices to clients Properly trained, they can also provide basic counselling, conflict resolution and service referrals. (see also Orientation & Training p. 30). The peer position should be an education tool for all involved -- the peer workers, the clients, the organization and the community.

Some basic steps

1. Building trust and respect

Having peers in the organization can be a challenge for both the agency and the peer. If an agency has no experience supervising peers there can be significant barriers to establishing a trusting relationship. Having preconceived notions of how peers with street experience are going conduct themselves in any given situation or how an agency is going to deal with any problems that arise can make building trust a real challenge. It is important that both the agency and the peer have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities in this relationship.

It is often the peer's job to reach out to those who don't visit the host agency. Sharing similar experiences with someone from the street community can make it easier for clients to relate to peer workers than regular service providers. However, the agency must help understand and develop firm boundaries regarding work and "play" (see also boundaries, p.35).

A contract for peer services should describe the details of peers' duties and responsibilities (see Appendix B). However, it is important that the agency take the initiative and make sure that peers are aware of the organization's role in the community and the rules that govern how people conduct themselves when representing the organization to members of the community.

2. Training

Agencies should take a systematic approach to supervising and training peers (see also Orientation and Training p. 30). A weekly work review and problem solving meeting during an initial probationary period might be used to help determine where the challenges are for the peer and what skills they might need to upgrade. Job duties must be clearly defined and set up in a manner that fulfills the agency's need and provides work related supports. These jobs must also have enough challenges built into them for peers to develop new skills. Goal setting and training within the agency can range from learning how to use the special features of the photocopier to learning more complex tasks such as maintaining a database of outreach statistics or, crisis intervention.

Typically, peers will need training or skills enhancement in communication skills, work related limits and personal boundaries, conflict resolution, specific job requirements, basic counselling, and HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, T.B., and STI education to effectively deliver services. In many cases, agencies receive funding to pay peer workers to do specific tasks; but not all are funded to pay peers to attend training sessions outside the agency. This is unfortunate because there are many free, appropriate training opportunities for peers and staff available (see examples p. 32). Agencies should identify paid training time in proposals to help funders understand how important training is for peers. Skills development and capacity building are big parts of any peer program -- restricting peers' participation in free training is counterproductive to these goals.

Peers should be encouraged to learn about blood borne and sexually transmitted diseases, and methods of harm reduction they may not be fully familiar with. Getting familiar with other agencies working in harm reduction, whether right in the neighborhood, nationally or even worldwide, will give a peer an edge. Listen and learn! Peers have a wealth of experience, and by actively seeking out more and more info about safer sex, safer use or disease prevention, a peer can only become a more effective peer worker, and a tremendous asset to an agency.

3. Intensive agency support and supervision

Supervising harm reduction peers can be a particular challenge for an agency, and they should be prepared to support peers through whatever difficulties arise. A worker supervising peers should be someone who is capable of recognizing, guiding and recording a peer's progress in their position at the agency. A supervisor should be able to understand how a person comes to be a peer in the first place and the special concerns that can arise because of this. Part of the lifestyle of substance use can be like riding an emotional roller coaster. Agencies should be prepared to support a peer whenever they say, "I'm feeling triggered or vulnerable." A (temporary) reassignment of duties or a few days off, or just letting the peer know that this is "normal" may help. While an agency might be concerned with supporting the emotional needs of its clients, it may not see staff, volunteers and contract workers as needing such services, and there may be little support for these people in an agency mandate. Peers occupy a special position at the agency and as such should be afforded opportunities for discussing personal problems as they arise. Those who supervisor peers, too, need to be wary of burn-out; they often need additional support, too. Supervising peer workers can be demanding sometimes.

> The biggest challenge about running a peer program is incorporating peers into agencies that are often not designed to meet the needs of peer workers. Often work environments are too professionalized and peer workers are not taken seriously, may be tokenized and taken for granted.
> ~Lorie

Peers play interpretive roles both in the agency and on the street. In a harm reduction model, their job is to attempt (with support and resources) to bridge or connect the social/health agency with the underground drug using world. Peer workers are often under a lot of pressure adjusting to agencies policies and procedures, while continuing to relate to their using networks. Peers need opportunities to discuss their activities and feelings as soon as possible after each shift to emphasize the necessity of being able to express the difficulties in dealing with their dual position. This is known as debriefing. Peer support workers should feel comfortable speaking their minds and be encouraged to speak honestly without fearing judgement or repercussions.

The Nitty Gritty

> Peer volunteering forced me to develop my social skills quickly. There was work to be done so there was no time to be shy or nervous around people. It's amazing how working with peers can throw you into a social situation. ~ Corinne

Getting Started

Both agencies and potential peers must do a lot of work before the program can even start. A peer must decide whether they are ready for the commitment of a job, what kind of work they would like to do, and what type of agency they would like to work for. Agency staff must decide whether a peer program is the best way to address needs in the community, how much time and energy they are willing to put in to a peer program, how peers are going to be compensated, what work needs to be done by peers, and much more. This section will try to raise some of these issues and point the way to some responses.

What does it take to be a peer worker?

For peers, acceptance of drug-using history and/or knowledge is necessary for becoming involved in peer work. Many peers believe that understanding substance use requires peer workers to have lost and gained control of their drug use a number of times. Most peers have experienced the isolation that comes with fighting cravings, the relief of giving in and the frustration of letting themselves down. This understanding of what can motivate using patterns is experience-based, and many drug users believe this cannot be understood by theory or observation alone.

Being a drug user or even being suspected of having involvement with the drug trade is culturally considered a low class "position," particularly if one is poor, injecting or using crack. The social stigma of being a user often creates even more economic and philosophical barriers to stopping harmful behaviours. Having or having had this position in society is considered vital to understanding the personal limitations brought about by social marginalization and chemical dependency. This is the foundation of a peer's expertise. They can be drug users that consider themselves specialists in the community.

> Clients appreciate receiving services from people whose experience and knowledge they value, people who not merely *have been* there but actually *are still* there.
> ~Walter

Learning about an agency

Talk, talk, talk, read, read, read, learn, learn, learn! The clearer peers are with the agency, hopefully, the clearer they will be with peers. Lots of mistrust, or just plain bad feelings, occur because a peer may not know where the agency is coming from, and the agency doesn't know where peers are coming from. It's like the movie 'The Odd Couple'. Each are coming from two very different places; but the more they communicate, agency to peer, peer to agency, the better the relationship will be.

Peers need to benefit from the job, and the agency has the responsibility not only to ensure that services are delivered responsibly but to make sure that the peer is 'gaining' from the experience. Remember that the experience a peer brings is a valuable asset to the agency, and in turn, the agency has the responsibility to ensure that peers get regular support and encouragement. Let's face it, jumping in from the street to a 'professional' environment can require lots of support. Supervision and debriefing (see also Supervision p. 43) is as important for the agency as it is for you. Language and specific terms will come up: 'mandate', 'procedures', 'confidentiality protocols', 'reporting hierarchy' and may need to be explained.

AGENCIES: Educate your staff and peers! Man-date might translate as "john" to someone who never worked in a professional environment before. The more the peer understands the agency, the more valuable his/her work is to clients. Agencies must include peers in staff meetings. At these meetings it is critical to explain clinical jargon and to educate staff about street terms and realities. If the agency is health-care oriented, one suggestion is breaking the staff meeting down to two sections; one for agency business, and the other for confidential clinical information about patients.

Finally, there is the issue of trust. Agencies have to trust the peers they hire, and show that trust. Remember if your agency deals with, let's say, street-involved illegal drug users, these folks may have been constantly abused by cops, private guards, professionals, and sometimes even by their own peers. By including them at staff meetings or at an agency social event, an agency can go a long way to building that trust.

People are more important than projects. ~Russell

Goals of a peer program

An agency must be clear about what they expect from their peer program. Some examples might be to have a peer who is reliable and can relate to clients, to have a program that employs people to have a positive influence on the community, clients, and the agency, or to provide enhanced services to their clients. It should be as much a benefit to the agency to have the peer, as for the peer to have the position. Good training should enable peers to combine old skills with newly acquired ones. This facilitates the process of self-acceptance and the confidence to find employment elsewhere if this is one of the peer's goals.

Adopting a harm reduction based philosophy to service delivery can require the agency to set a new agenda of goals. Harm reduction programming requires staff education and training, new funding directions and language, some restructuring of administrative procedures and appropriate space and access to basic office supports. Many harm reduction agencies engage in the role of "advocate" in addition to providing direct service. This serves to promote harm reduction in the realms of public education and peer program advancement. This is a practical and natural extension of the agency's role or responsibility to the peer and to the success of the peer program.

How agencies can support peers

In order to provide a beneficial peer program the peers' expertise must be valued. A program must prove that they value the peer position by providing skills training in a practical working environment. Agency staff must also be aware of the unique pressures that peers must learn to cope with in a work environment. Creating systems such as regular check-ins prior to and debriefings following each shift, in addition to regular supervision sessions to deal with potential challenges will help reinforce what is expected of peers and how agencies can support them.

> On the whole I would say that mentoring peers was very rewarding and I felt that I grew from the experience as much if not more than they did. Their passion can be contagious and their questions often help you evaluate and re-evaluate what you are doing and how you are doing it. ~ Deborah

Troubleshooting: potential peer-related issues

Drug users' history

Agencies should be aware of the benefits and potential stumbling blocks of hiring or having peers participate in the delivery of their programs. A peer's drug history can have an impact on their effectiveness. Are peers occasional users, regular users or past users? Someone who has not been using drugs in a while may have information that is out of date. New trends in drugs and new methods of use could mean that a former user is unaware of current issues. This certainly does not mean that this peer would not be an effective worker but that he/she would have to learn about current trends and methods of use. However, witnessing active drug use can trigger a less active peer. They may need increased support. Some drug users have refused peer outreach work because they were currently abstaining from their drug of choice and are afraid of being triggered. A peer program must ensure that peer workers, too, practise harm reduction personally as well as in their work.

Staff from drug using backgrounds are expected to reflect during the interview process on their capacity to manage their drug use…. The aim is to sustain an open dialogue that provides a supportive environment to staff but equally reinforces their responsibility to be effective in their work role. ~ Mat Southwell

A peer's reputation on the street may also become an issue. A person who has fostered distrust within the drug using community, through bad deals, not paying for drugs, or being a snitch, can negatively impact the success of a project. Peers and agencies must be aware of how a drug user's history can affect the work.

Peer/drug user stigma

Quite often there is a preconceived notion of what a peer is, or the peer may think there is that notion. And often it has a stigma attached. For example, the admission of current or past involvement with illegal substances or prostitution, or a preconceived image of the 'life-style' associated with such conditions, like being a criminal, a 'ho', a 'con', a user, can cause others to view that person in a negative way.

This is a very valid concern, and how peers feel about it could affect how they are able to do their job. But an agency can alleviate this stigma by talking openly about the possibility, providing support and showing how much the peers and the program are valued. Peer programs must be valued equally with other agency programs and services. Peers must be respected within the agency and as role models for those the agency serves. Agencies that recognize that peers are a valuable resource for clients, having 'been there, done that', will be able to foster a successful program. The success of the peers becomes an example to the clients. When an agency trusts a peer, faith in the agency is earned.

Many peers in harm reduction based programs feel the stigma attached to the term "peer" because of negative connotations surrounding drug use. This is where agency staff can do some excellent advocacy and capacity building work, by focussing on a peer's strengths, not on their past or current drug use. In our society, we often tend to define people by what we see as their weaknesses. Someone who uses drugs, therefore, becomes known as a drug user, a crack head, a junkie, rather than, say, someone with writing skills, a good listener, a problem-solver. By working with peers as individuals who possess wonderful gifts and a diverse range of skills and qualities, agency staff can help alleviate some of the stigma attached to using drugs, and contribute to peers' sense of self-worth.

Agencies could help to reduce the stigma of the term "peer" by clearly defining what is expected out of peers' work. In the proper setting a peer should not fear being referred to as a current or former drug user. The term peer should be well defined and the individual respected as a specialist in service provision to his/her community.

Peer outreach workers and community members have to EARN RESPECT from professionals. Likewise service providers must EARN RESPECT from peers/drug users.

What kinds of work are best suited to peer workers and why?

Peer positions must be created out of community need. Agencies can discover this need through their own efforts (surveys, client interviews, etc.), or through spontaneous feedback or criticism from clients and/or the community. Agencies have employed peers in a wide variety of capacities. Needle exchange programs can offer peer positions both in the needle exchange office and by extending services through community outreach and support programs. Other examples of outreach and support programs are drop in programs, homeless outreach services, housing access and support services, I.D. clinics, and dedicated case management services. There are work opportunities for peers in all of these.

It's especially important for peer workers to experience at least small successes when starting a new job, and people prefer to do things they're good at. A skills assessment tool can be helpful in determining what kinds of work peers are best suited to, and what skills or experience they are interested in developing (see appendix C).

Peers have the capacity to listen and provide feedback, counsel, mediate, educate, make referrals, advocate, plan, develop and evaluate tools and programs, facilitate focus groups, do research and administrative tasks, coordinate events…the list is endless and is definitely not limited to street outreach or condom distribution.

By offering a range of peer-supported services, agencies can help develop a network of community members capable of much more than just distributing health information and basic medical supplies to active drug users, in effect, a broad resource base for healthful change.

Creating a peer program: Some things to consider

Compensation

Peer work is different from a regular job. Because of this, agencies sometimes compensate peers by honorarium, which is very similar to being paid as a contractor. Honoraria (plural of honorarium) can be used by non-profit organizations to pay for one-time, part-time or short-term work. The amount of honorarium is set out in the contract with the peer. There is usually no overtime available. Honoraria are usually cash payments with no deductions and no GST or PST charges or benefit payments or deductions. There are some legal restrictions about how much people can be paid by honoraria, and peers who receive compensation this way have to report it (see appendix D).

Unlike being paid a wage, with honoraria there are no taxes deducted at source. So when peers are told they will be paid $15 an hour, they receive $15/hour - no deductions. However, this income will not be counted towards Canadian Pension Plan, and people will not be eligible for Employment Insurance against what they receive for peer work.

Agencies using cash honoraria to compensate peers should check with Canada Customs and Revenue as well as the Ontario Labour Standards Branch to ensure that they are not in contravention of any regulations or laws.

Peers are responsible for reporting earnings or honoraria received in their yearly income tax statement. As well, if peers are receiving any form of government assistance, they will have to report this income to the appropriate authority.

The work of peers is usually done over a period of time because clients need to be familiar with peers in order to build trust with them. Agencies should schedule regular dates to pay peers and these should be set out in the contract; otherwise hours worked can become confused. Furthermore, an agency's failure to stick to the agreed upon schedule is disrespectful and trivializes peers' work. Whether an agency pays peers by cheque or cash honoraria, they must also supply the peer with a statement or receipt for the money they receive. Most agencies recognize that often peers don't have bank accounts or that banks "hold" cheques on their accounts. Cash wages or honoraria are therefore very appropriate in some peer programs.

When creating a peer program, an agency must also decide what tasks the peer worker will be compensated for. This should be stated clearly in the contract. Will they receive money only for outreach or drop in duty or also for training, staff meetings, supervision time, or extra work in the community? Many peers do peer work because they are committed and dedicated to it. But whether or not they are being compensated can affect participation. Agencies should look at how regular staff are paid. Are they paid for overtime, professional development, evening meetings? Peers' time is valuable too, and they should be compensated in a similar way.

Reporting money received to income maintenance programs

When creating a peer program, the agency will want to create a system of compensating peer workers that does not ultimately penalize them. Honoraria or wages affect the three most common types of government income maintenance assistance: Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Employment Insurance (EI). All of these forms of benefits let clients keep some income on top of their regular assistance. Peer workers should be advised to speak to their caseworker before receiving their first honorarium or wages. It is the only way to make sure they can continue to receive assistance while participating in a peer program (see appendix D).

Keeping track of hours and work accomplished

To get paid for work, whether by honoraria or hourly wage, it is necessary to prove that you worked. This is true for everybody: peers, professionals, labourers and CEOs. The most common way this is accomplished is by keeping a record of time spent at work (see appendix E)

By keeping a record of hours, people have proof that they have worked. Every agency will have it's own way of keeping track of hours. It is important to understand how the agency wants this done, but also to keep a personal record – in a daytimer, calendar, diary or just in a notebook. Agencies are busy, even hectic places, and sometimes dealing with what can feel like a constant state of emergency means little things like getting time cards signed can get lost in the fray. If there is a dispute about who worked when, a written record can save an awful lot of argument.

Another benefit to keeping records of the time spent on work is to provide an awareness that peers are achieving something. Sometimes time slips by one day to the next. When peers and their supervisors go back and start counting the hours spent on a project, they can develop a sense that what is being accomplished is extremely important. Both agencies and peers need to recognize that peer work is real work. Peer experience can help people start building a resume. By keeping a record of hours worked and tasks completed, peers can show the value of their work to themselves and the agency. Keep track of all the hours peers work including training courses/workshops even if the latter are voluntary. In this way, it will be easy to show funders how much training time is really needed for peer workers.

The agency benefits in many different ways when peers keep track of their hours. First and foremost this lets them provide accurate reports to funders. Social service agencies have to show funders exactly what they do with the money. This may help the agency get more money for more peer projects. By creating a list of all the hours worked and tasks accomplished by peer workers, the agency can show potential funders and donors that it is responsible. It also allows the agency to compile statistics proving that peer work is a valuable tool in helping at-risk populations by bringing services and information to users and by giving peers the opportunity to have meaningful work experiences.

The Job Description

For peers, it is a great idea to have a copy of the job description or job posting before going in for the interview so they can prepare to show why they are the best person for the job (see

Appendix F). The job posting should include any of the requirements the agency has for peer workers. It may be just a guideline, as most good peer programs have some flexibility to them, but it will give an idea what's offered to and expected of peers.

An agency creating a peer job description will need to consider what's needed in the community that a peer can deliver, how and how much peers will be compensated, how many hours they will work, who will supervise them, etc. The job posting should be easy to read, clear and descriptive of the role the peers will be expected to fulfill. Be sure potential peers know what is required to apply (e.g. letter, resume, in person inquiry, etc.) and when the deadline is.

The job description itself is also important; it describes the peers' job in detail. Peers need to know what's in the job description because the position might actually be something very different than expected – well below their qualifications or involving something they don't think they're remotely qualified or interested in doing. On the other hand, it never hurts to consider new opportunities; sometimes people find they really do like doing something they'd never thought of before. Peer work isn't for everyone, and agencies that run these programs must be aware of that. If peers change their mind after accepting a job, or if it just doesn't work out, no harm done. But peers and agencies might be in for a pleasant surprise!

Recruitment

> **We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as unsolvable problems**
>
> **John Gardner**

How can I get a job as a peer?

How do I apply?

Well the best way is to do some homework. Word of mouth is one way to find out. What do people say about the agency? If an agency is of particular interest, find out more about them through their mission statement or website. Find out if they have a peer program, or if they know of other similar agencies that provide peer programs. Try volunteering for a while to get the feel for what they do and how they operate. Those who are interested in peer work might even send a letter of inquiry to agencies they are interested in working for before a job posting goes out. This lets the agency know that they're serious about a peer position – even if there's nothing available at the time, an inquiry may get a referral to another agency that *is* hiring.

Peer opportunities are often advertised via the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force and the Canadian Harm Reduction Network websites, too (see appendix G), and on bulletin boards in drop-in centres and other user-friendly places.

Peer applicants may have a resume, or may not. There are a number of places in and around the city where people can get help putting a resume together (see appendix H). Often agencies are only looking for a simple letter of introduction, because let's face it, a lot of people may have difficulty putting together a resume. A letter of introduction should have the applicant's name, where and how (s)he can be reached, and just a little bit about the person such as why they think they would make a good peer. Getting someone to help write the letter might be an option. Or arranging a meeting with the person who will be coordinating the peer program might also suffice.

Agencies should understand that an inconsistent work history or literacy issues may make resume writing difficult for some people. The process of applying for a peer position should be made as easy as possible while still seeing to it that the agency gets the information it requires. Attending workshops or conferences and meetings such as the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force speakers series, and the City of Toronto Alternative Housing & Services Committee meetings can also be good places to learn about agencies with peer programs (see Free Training below).

Where do I look for Peer workers? How do I recruit them?

Agencies that are already working with their clients have a pool of potential peers waiting for them. Talk to clients who show some of the qualities you are looking for in a peer worker and ask if they would be interested in the peer work. Talk to other professionals who may know potential peer workers. Putting job postings up in places where potential peers spend time, such as drop-in centres, community centres, street corners, etc., ensures that lots of different people will see it. Drug users tend to have excellent networks. If your agency does street outreach, have workers hand out mini versions of a job posting. Advertise peer job opportunities on the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force website or through the Canadian Harm Reduction Network website (see Appendix G). Ask your clients and colleagues to recommend potential peers. Telling a couple of people that your agency is starting this program and asking them to spread the word may be the most effective way of advertising.

The Job Interview

Most people get nervous about interviews. This can be especially true for those who haven't had very many, or have never had an interview before. Try to relax. Even if it's your first interview ever, remember that you'll never have to go on your very first interview again! Peers aren't going to need to dress up or anything like that but should be clean and presentable. Knowing the job description and knowing a little something about the agency will be a great help. Hopefully, interviewer will be the supervisor/program coordinator. Applicants may be interviewing for a program already in place. The coordinator of the program would then be already experienced in working with peers, and should be very supportive and helpful during the interview.

Remember, too, that peers' life experience is one of the big things the agency is going to value. But peers' 'language' may be much different from that of the 'professional' agency. Because of this, some of the interviewer's questions may be difficult to understand. Applicants shouldn't be afraid to ask questions, or for clarification. To make it easier, try to imagine the interviewer alone on the street, never having heard terms like 'jonesing', 'getting vic-ed', 'keeping a six', or any of the other terms that professionals sure didn't learn in a classroom! The 'p', or the 'bitch', or the 'bling' is something peer workers understand, but the agency worker might not have a clue what this means! Peer applicants may not know everything that the agency is going to require them to. Maybe terms like viral load, or mucosal resistance, often used in the professional circles when talking about HIV 'infectivity', seem strange. Once hired, the agency should try to educate peers on many of the things they may not know a lot about, including "jargon." Peer workers are there partially to bridge the gap between the street and the agency.

Their street experience is important, but they aren't doing the job unless they can learn to bridge that gap.

The Agency's Questions

This is not going to be a cheat sheet! Having said that, and even though every agency is different, many agencies are probably going to ask very similar questions.

- Why do you want to be a peer?
- What does harm reduction mean to you?
- What would you need to do this job?
- What qualities do you bring to the agency?
- Scenarios! The interviewer will probably have a couple of situations written down that could happen on an outreach shift, and ask you how you would respond in those circumstances. Try to be honest, and remember that if hired as a peer, you will be representing the agency on the street.

It is also important to remember that the interviewer is probably not a professional interviewer, or 'Human Resource Specialist'. The interviewer may be as nervous as the peer applicant. Unfortunately, interviewers sometimes ask inappropriate questions. Questions related to things like age or sexual orientation* are illegal. Although the questions shouldn't be asked in the first place, they sometimes may be. Applicants can tell the interviewer that the question makes them uncomfortable and they would prefer not to answer. Next to personal information, the most important additional factor will probably be dependability, and whether or not the peer can be reached easily. Peers without a regular place or phone can try offering a cell phone or pager number as a means of contact.

***agencies that are funded only to serve youth 16-24 or adults over 18, only women *or* men *or* transgendered persons or only or the LGB community may require that peers be a member of these communities.**

Questions the Peer Might Ask the Agency

Peer applicants should feel free to ask anything that may not be completely clear on the job posting, or job description. They may ask how they are going to be paid, whether on the payroll, or through honoraria, or whether they are going to be eligible for benefits, like life insurance, eye-glasses, or a dental plan. Ask about other benefits as well, like whether or not training will be provided and whether training time is paid time. Ask what the possibilities might be in the future with that particular agency, and what can be done to make those possibilities a reality. Make sure the agency's definition of a peer and what they expect from peers is clear. The whole process must be very transparent, both to peer applicants and to the agency. No surprises! The more detailed the interview, the clearer you will both be on what to. Be honest – don't just smile and nod and agree to things you don't "get." If there are literacy issues, peers shouldn't agree to "read this over" while the interviewer goes off to do something else. Part of the interviewer/supervisor's job is to be non-judgemental and make sure peers understand the *whole* process.

The Contract:

Definition and reasons

At the most basic level, a contract is an understanding between people. A written contract takes this understanding and turns it into a formal, binding agreement. In peer work, the contract is an important tool to keep things running smoothly.

> *Peer workers must be given clear written descriptions of what is expected of them and provided with code of conduct which respects simultaneously their position as a member of the community…and their responsibility to do the job which they have agreed to do. ~ Walter*

A contract between an agency and peer worker should include:

- what the hours of work will be and how and when schedules will be made up and posted;
- how much compensation the peer will receive; how payment will be made, and when wages/honoraria will be available;
- when the contract begins, and when it will end
- a code of conduct for peer workers that lets peers know what kind of behaviour the agency expects from them
- an agenda for orientation, probation, training, supervision, evaluation and how discipline is handled
- the agency's mandate and mission statement and reporting hierarchy

- a job description outlining what tasks and duties the peer worker will be responsible for
- the name and position of the person responsible for supervising peer workers

Every agency should use a contract or similar tool (see appendix B). The new peer and the coordinator should sit down together to go over the contract to make sure both parties understand it fully. It should be signed by both the peer and the coordinator and both should get a signed copy to keep. Agencies should consider providing peers with a private, secure place to keep work related documents on site as things like this can be hard to keep track of for people whose housing situation is unstable.

The contract is used to make sure both the peer and the agency understand each other and can work together. Writing down the duties of the peer and the obligations of the agency on paper, is an important tool for settling any problems or misunderstandings that may happen between peers and agencies. It also shows that the agency takes their position seriously and expects a certain level of responsibility from peers.

A contract protects peers and agencies from abuses and can help resolve misunderstandings. It gives peer workers a clear definition of what they must do to satisfy the agency. If a task is not in the contract, then chances are peers are not supposed to do that task. The contract also protects the agency from anything improper a peer might do.

Some scenerios:

Sandy has been working with a street outreach agency for a little over a month. Terry has been a peer at this agency for almost a year. According to last week's schedule, Terry failed to show up for the outreach shift on Saturday but showed up on Sunday instead when Sandy was scheduled to work. On Monday at the peer team meeting it was revealed that Terry had asked Sandy to switch weekend shifts; Sandy had misunderstood, thinking only the Sunday shift was to be changed. The peer contract states that no shift switches are allowed unless the peer coordinator initials these on the schedule. Unfortunately, Sandy and Terry didn't ask permission to switch shifts so both had to assume responsibility for a missed shift. The good news is that this situation gave the peer coordinator a chance to show the peers why this rule is so important.

Kim is the peer coordinator at a youth agency. Due to a staff shortage, she was required to work at a different site quite suddenly one afternoon. A couple of hours later, Mike and Dan, two peer workers, arrived at the agency but were advised that their shifts had been cancelled due to Kim's absence. The peer workers asked another staff person to initial their time cards to prove they'd showed up for work, but the staff person was reluctant to do so. Mike showed the staff member his contract which clarified that peers are to be paid for 4 hours work for shifts cancelled on less than 4 hours notice. Mike and Dan got their time cards initialed. The good news here was that Mike and Dan were able to prove their point and that the agency lived up to it's obligation to pay them.

Not all differences or conflicts will be resolved as easily as in these examples, but it's obvious how the contract can lay out the "ground rules" and protect both peers and agencies.

Orientation and Training

Once a peer worker has been interviewed and hired for a position, they will be faced with many choices. For some individuals this could be the first time they have had an orderly routine in many years. Chaotic lifestyles can interfere with the ability to conform to set routines. Peers should be careful that they understand what is expected of them in their role at the agency and they have the ability to conform to the rules and schedule of the agency. Once a peer has been hired, the coordinator or supervisor and the peer should sit down together and go over the contract to ensure that both understand everything about it. This is part one of "orientation" which is really just a formal introduction to the agency and the job. Part two could include a tour of the agency, introduction to other staff, placement students and volunteers and their roles, and going over the agency's policies and procedures. But training doesn't end there….

What does a Peer need to know?

It is up to an agency to ensure that their staff, including peers, have and/or have opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge required to do their job safely and effectively. It is never enough to simply explain the bare requirements of the job. Peers who have had little formal job experience will need training in boundaries and expectations. Many will benefit from training in effective communication and conflict resolution, both for themselves and for others. At the very least, peer training should include:

- Boundaries
- Communication
- Conflict Resolution
- Harm Reduction
- Anti-discrimination
- Safety protocols
- Specific job-related tasks

Coordinators should be prepared to explain and peer workers prepared to ask specifically about things like:

- ❖ *All* the programs and services the agency offers, even if these don't seem to apply directly to the job
- ❖ How those within the agency communicate with each other: is there a central log or report book? or is information updated verbally at staff or team meetings?
- ❖ Are there places or things within the agency that are off limits to peer workers? (e.g. certain computers or offices)
- ❖ Is there an internal referral system (e.g. a form to fill out to refer a client to the housing or employment worker etc.)?
- ❖ Reporting hierarchy: "what if I have to call in sick and the peer coordinator is unavailable?"
- ❖ Confidentiality: "what if a client I know comes into the agency?"
- ❖ Right to Refuse: "what if I just don't feel I can or should do something that's asked of me, or if a situation makes me feel unsafe?"
- ❖ Discipline: "what will happen if I miss a shift and don't call in?"
- ❖ Are clients ever "banned" from this agency? When/how/why?
- ❖ What about personal phone calls during working hours?

Again, the above are only guidelines, meant to draw out questions…. Agency staff/volunteers can also act as resources, training peers in their areas of expertise. However it is done, training is essential for peer workers to be successful and safe and for peer programs to be effective.

Too often, agencies that employ peer workers don't include training in their plan and/or don't have any budget for outside training opportunities, even though many great workshops are available free of charge. It is important that peers are paid at their regular rate for time spent at workshops etc. – nobody would expect staff to attend training sessions but not be paid for this. If an agency doesn't need or want an inservice for all staff, volunteers and peers, call those who offer training and see if peer workers can participate in a scheduled free workshop being offered at another agency or school.

FREE TRAINING & NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES!

This is certainly not an exhaustive list but gives some ideas about what is available.

Alcohol Policy Network is a good source of information for upcoming workshops and seminars on **substance use**: www.apolnet.org

Safer Crack Use Committee: offers training sessions from time to time on **safer crack use** and harm reduction: 416-921-8668 ext. 232

Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force offers monthly front line workers' support meetings and speakers series presentations on **harm reduction** related topics and networking opportunities: 647-222-4420 www.torontoharmreduction.org

Toronto Public Health Department offers "Train the Trainer" workshops on **HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, T.B., harm reduction and sexual health** at various times and locations. 416-338-7600 www.toronto.ca/health

Alternative Housing & Services Committee meets monthly offering information and updates about services and programs for **homeless/underhoused** people and related issues, and networking opportunities: (facilitated by the City of Toronto, Shelter Housing and Support Division adegiro@toronto.ca www.toronto.ca)

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) has workshops and educational material available on **housing issues**: 416-944-0087 www.equalityrights.org/cera

John Howard Society of Toronto offers workshops on reintegrating **offenders** upon release: 416-925-4386 www.johnhowardtor.on.ca

Central Toronto Community Health Centres offer workshops and training sessions on **mental health issues, sexually transmitted diseases, blood borne illnesses** and other topics at various times and locations. 416-703-8482

People With Aids Foundation (PWA) offers education and training on **HIV/AIDS** and related issues: 416-506-1400 www.pwatoronto.org

HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO) offers seminars and educational literature on **legal issues**: 416-340-7790 www.halco.org

519 Church Community Centre has workshops on **transgender issues** available: 416-392-6874 www.the519.org

Fred Victor Centre, Employment Resource Centre offers interactive **computer and internet workshops**: 416-364-8986 www.fredvictor.org

Frontier College – Beat the Street has a **computer lab and literacy tutoring**: 416-979-3361 www.beat-the-street.org

A Peer's plan

A peer may also have idea of what he or she would like to get out of the job. The supervisor and peer should sit down together to make a plan reflecting what the peer is going to get out of this and what peer work might lead to (see appendix I). This is also a good time to confirm what the project or agency can and cannot offer a peer. Peers may not have had an opportunity to think about any next steps in their lives. This is a good opportunity for them to do so. It also reinforces the supportive relationship the supervisor can have with a peer during and after the work contract.

Peers as agency representatives

Peer support workers and the agencies they work with and represent should have similar points of view regarding harm reduction, client needs, and service delivery. It shouldn't be assumed that this is so, however. It's imperative that staff and peers communicate about this. It must be very clear to peer workers how the agency expects them to act in this role, from behaviour in the agency or during street outreach to attending meetings or workshops as part of the job.

A “do” and “don’t” list is impractical because individual agencies have different expectations and rules, but following are some examples that are pretty universal:

Peer workers should never speak for the agency unless specifically directed to do so (e.g. peer workers who are trained to do presentations for an agency’s speakers’ bureau). Every agency has a protocol about who is responsible for representing the agency to the media, funders, government and so on. This is usually the Director or someone even further up the ladder.

Don’t complain about the agency or it’s workers in public. It’s a smaller world than you might think, and this kind of thing has a way of both being taken out of context, and getting back to people. In either case, it will ultimately bring you more grief than ranting does relief!

Peers should be encouraged to take initiative but reminded to discuss ideas with the supervisor before acting. It’s impossible to know when something might inadvertently be seen as “stepping on somebody’s toes” – all agencies and even workers have both formal and not-so-formal partnerships and “understandings”, and peers can’t be expected to know about all of these.

Never argue with the coordinator, any staff, volunteers or other peers in front of clients. If a staff member, placement student or volunteer starts an argument with you in say, the drop in, ask him/her to come with you to a place where you can “discuss” things privately.

Don’t talk to clients about other clients, and don’t side with one client against another. This *will* backfire. Not only would this be a breach of confidentiality, in can place you in a conflict situation. This is why agencies often assign clients who are related or are a “couple” to different workers (see Appendix J).

Peers have the capability to be role models or even mentors to other drug users isolated from mainstream services. They can represent someone who has obtained or is in the process of obtaining better control over maintaining personal stability.

I've encountered many defeats. Without defeats, how do you really know who the hell you are? If you never had to stand up to something, to get up, to be knocked down, to get up again, life can walk over you wearing football cleats. But each time you do get up, you're bigger, taller, finer, more beautiful, more kind, more understanding, more loving. Each time you get up, you're more inclusive. More people can stand under your umbrella. ~ Maya Angelou

In the working world it goes without saying that it is unacceptable to use alcohol or other drugs while on the job. Peers who are still using substances should arrange their using times so as not to interfere with their ability to carryout their peer duties. If a peer is involved in any kind of support program while engaged as a peer it is a good idea to let the supervisor know this. Having the support of people who understand the situation can make it easier to deal with problems when they arise.

The issue of Peers' using or not using drugs is one which continues to come up. Peers are Peers because they are (or have been) using drugs. Their work as Peer Support Workers should not be contingent on their abstaining from the use of drugs. On the other hand, they also have a job to do. The expectation is that they will report for work capable of doing their contracted job and carry out their job in an effective and responsible manner. ~ *Walter*

Boundaries & Confidentiality

We hear a lot about "boundaries" and "boundary issues" in any kind of work that involves helping others. Boundaries are hard to define or explain. They are like limits or margins, and they are definitely one of the biggest challenges faced by peer workers, because in this role they walk the finest line between "helper" and "client."

The most basic element of peer work is that peer workers are members of the community they serve. What they are asked to do in this role is to be both insider and outsider -- at the same time! They are supposed to relate to clients because they've "been there" or are "there", and also act as a representative of an agency. Peers are meant to connect with clients in a way that professionals cannot, yet maintain a certain distance. In this respect, it can be much more difficult for peer workers to set and maintain boundaries than it is for other workers to do so. It is very important to realize that setting boundaries is not a one-time thing. There isn't a checklist. This is an ongoing process, a way of thinking, a means of understanding the dynamics among people – coworkers, neighbours, anybody – and all of the potential outcomes.

> A peer worker does not automatically understand the supervisor/worker relationship and may look to their supervisor as their counsellor or case manager.
> It is important to set up good boundaries with staff from the outset of the working relationship.
>
> -
>
> ~Lorie

Dynamic means something is always changing, and that's exactly what happens in all human interactions and relationships. We all have personal boundaries. We just don't think about them a lot because usually these are "second nature." We don't greet everyone we pass on the street, or introduce ourselves to the driver and passengers whenever we get on a streetcar. People tend to back away if somebody gets "in their face". People are generally more comfortable telling "personal stuff" to friends than to strangers.

When we want to work to help others, we have to develop "professional" boundaries, too. Boundaries help protect us and the people we serve. Without them, it is impossible to be objective or respectful. In the extreme, a lack of strong boundaries is a sure recipe for stress and burnout.

People who need services have to disclose a lot of personal information to strangers, sometimes over and over again. Many have had so many intake interviews they cannot remember them all. Constant disclosure and forming intense relationships with new people all the time can quickly become "normal" for them. Sometimes, this can make it seem as if they don't have any personal space – physically or emotionally. Sometimes they have stopped bothering with "boundaries." The bottom line is that peers and workers have to be the ones responsible for keeping tabs and keeping interactions appropriate.

Why? Well, since the goal is to reduce harm, nobody wants to do anything that might potentially harm those they're trying to help. Clients are vulnerable and workers/peers have power because they have something clients need or want – clean needles, someone to talk to, condoms, food, tokens, whatever. The first imperative of harm reduction is to be non-judgmental, to provide whatever help or service we can, regardless of race, religion, drug use, gender, sexual orientation and so on. Requiring abstinence, or anything else that is or could be a way of controlling others, at the moment of contact or in the long term, is exploitation. Power, control, it's all the same thing, and it's unfair. It is not fair to clients, and it is not fair to workers/peers, either.

Good boundaries are one way of trying to make sure that the power imbalance is recognized and understood and doesn't turn into exploitation.

Boundaries are really just about exercising good judgment and setting limits. Good judgment grows out of experience – good experiences, and painful ones.

We've all heard that "rules are there for a reason" and that "rules are made to be broken." It all depends on the circumstances – which is why good judgment is critical.

The primary concern in establishing and managing boundaries with each individual client must be the best interests of the client. Except for behaviours of a sexual nature or obvious conflict of interest activity, boundary considerations often are not clear-cut matters of right and wrong. Rather, they are dependent upon many factors and require careful thinking through of all the issues, always keeping in mind the best interests of the client.

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This boundaries thing can be really hard to grasp, so some situational examples might help:

Situation 1: Money

Jamie has been a peer worker with a street outreach agency for about 4 months. There is an agency rule that says you are not to lend money to clients under any circumstances. One evening during her shift, Jamie runs into Chris who is a client. Jamie and Chris have really connected because they are both from the east coast. Chris asks Jamie for a personal loan of $20. Jamie knows that this is against agency policy, but can't see the harm in it, and so agrees to lend Chris the money for a couple of days until welfare cheques come out. Three weeks later, Chris is avoiding not only Jamie but everybody from the agency because she feels badly that she cannot repay the loan.

Jamie is really concerned that Chris may not be getting clean works because she cannot reach her.

What went right?

Jamie knew the agency rule about lending money to clients

What went wrong?

The reason for this policy wasn't explained to Jamie

Chris ends up feeling indebted to Jamie and cuts off contact with the agency/service

Jamie ends up feeling guilty for breaking the rule and losing contact with the client

Chris may be at higher risk because she is reluctant to accept services from the agency

Situation 2: Confidentiality & Trust

Dave has been working as a peer with an agency that serves the LGBT community for a number of weeks. One night, Dave is out walking down Yonge Street with some friends. He sees Guy, a client, coming toward them. Guy also appears to be with a friend. Dave cannot tell whether Guy has noticed him, so as they pass, he averts his gaze. Guy passes without speaking to Dave. Guy does not want to have to introduce his brother or explain how he knows Dave. Dave doesn't feel slighted because he knows it is up to Guy to decide whether he wants to recognize him or not, and that his client probably has a good reason not to say "hello" under the circumstances. Guy comes into the agency the next day to apologize to Dave for ignoring him the night before. Dave explains that he gave Guy the option to say "hi" or not, and why, and that he is not bothered by what happened.

What went right?

Dave gave his client the choice of whether to acknowledge him or not

Dave did not take Guy's lack of greeting personally

Guy addressed the situation and he and Dave discussed what had happened

Guy's trust in Dave has increased.

Situation 3: Identifying with a client

Pat is a single mom. She has worked for an agency that serves young mothers who are dealing with substance use for over a year. One of her clients is a young woman, Jackie, who reminds Pat of herself. Pat has gone out of her way to see Jackie whenever she shows up, even if they don't have an appointment. Sometimes Jackie arrives just as Pat is leaving for lunch and Pat takes her out for a bite. Jackie regularly shows up just as Pat's shift is finishing and Pat always stays late to talk with her. Occasionally, Pat has given Jackie special consideration, slipping her an extra food voucher or box of diapers. Recently, Jackie asked Pat to babysit her 2 year old daughter for the weekend so she could go away with her new boyfriend. Pat had to say no to this request. A week later, Jackie left a voice mail message for Pat asking her to close her file. Now Pat is very concerned about Jackie, and feels guilty for refusing her request to babysit. Jackie misses Pat's attention and support. Jackie is feeling very isolated is and having trouble taking care of herself and her child.

What went right?

Pat recognized that agreeing to babysit Jackie's child would be crossing a boundary; if she had agreed to do this she could have jeopardized the agency in any number of ways, and put herself and her own children at risk.

What went wrong?

Pat didn't address the fact that Jackie reminded her of herself

Pat failed to set sufficient boundaries with Jackie

Jackie was encouraged to develop unrealistic expectations about how much Pat could help her

Pat felt so badly about refusing Jackie's request that she neglected to refer her to a respite care program for young moms

Pat and Jackie have lost the trust they'd developed; Pat feels guilty and Jackie feels abandoned

Jackie and her child may be at greater risk because Jackie has cut off contact with Pat and the agency.

Situation 4: Cultural differences

Carlos is a peer settlement worker. The agency he works with helps new immigrants get housing, training, childcare and jobs. Carlos helped a refugee family find an apartment, introduced them to a neighbourhood parenting centre, and assisted them to enrol in ESL. On a recent home visit, Carlos arrived to find that the family had prepared a special meal to honour him. Although the agency does not permit workers, peers or volunteers to accept gifts from clients, Carlos realized that if he refused to share this meal with his clients they would be confused and offended. He recognized that although this family was on welfare and had limited resources, it was an important part of their culture to share a meal with him as a way of thanking him for his help. He discussed all this with his clients, and as soon as he returned to the agency made a point of speaking to his supervisor who agreed that he had done the right thing under the circumstances.

What went right?

Carlos knew and understood the reason for the agency's policy
Carlos assessed and discussed the situation with his clients
Carlos reported the situation and his reaction to his supervisor without delay

Ask yourself:

What is the agency's policy? Why does the agency have this rule or policy?
Is this in my client's best interest? Whose needs are being served?
What is the impact on the service I am delivering? How could this backfire?
Should I consult with a colleague?
Am I treating this client differently? Does (s)he mean something special to me?
If I give a client special consideration, will it look as though I am playing favourites to my other clients? Or will my client feel indebted to me?
If I accept a gift from my client, am I leading him to expect special consideration from me later? Or will I feel indebted to this client?

Boundaries have to be flexible and realistic. We are talking about working with *people*, and the cookie cutter approach won't work. There will always be clients any worker is more drawn to than others, and peers are working with clients who they probably identify strongly with. Crossing boundaries from time to time is inevitable. Sometimes it's okay to do so—if you do so consciously, having thought it through and determined that it is the best thing to do in a specific situation. Sometimes, though, we cross boundaries without realizing it at the time. In any case, the best thing to do if you're not sure about where the line is, or you think you've crossed it, on purpose or by mistake, is to talk to your supervisor or coworkers.

Remember: boundaries protect workers, clients and their relationship with each other. Without them, people don't know what to expect, and there would be no limits as to what workers have to do. "Just this once" can easily become common practice and believe it or not, it is possible to "kill with kindness." Helping others is hard work. If you lose your objectivity you won't be helping others, and you might well hurt yourself in the bargain.

As harm reduction advocates, peers are expected to *accept* clients' drug use, to assist clients in their choices, and to suggest safer alternatives of which the user may not be aware. Sharing a meal is very different than using drugs with clients.

Client wants…	**Boundary crossing**	**Appropriate response**
a place to stay	take client home with you	refer/accompany client to shelter
money	lend/give client money	refer/accompany client to social services
drugs	score drugs for/share drugs with client	listen; explain limits of your job;educate about safer use

What is Confidentiality?

Agencies that hire peers often have to provide peers with services for personal needs as well as employment and related education. This means both the peer and the agency will be "wearing different hats" at one time or another. Each hat requires a different set of guidelines or boundaries for the agency. Therefore, confidentiality should be a major concern for both the agency employee and the peer support worker. A confidentiality protocol can help clarify this often misunderstood issue. (see appendix J).

Different groups and agencies can have different expectations around confidentiality. There are times when professionals can confuse boundaries and breach confidentiality. How much more confusing for the peer who is sometimes working with friends or even relatives as clients. Outlining clear expectations and using concrete examples will help reduce incidences of breaches in confidentiality.

To illustrate:

1) Lisa is a peer worker at an agency that serves young women who have recently been released from jail; Penny is a client of this agency. She has confided in Lisa that she has already used drugs several times since her release and did a couple of petty thefts over the weekend. Lisa feels frustrated because Penny doesn't seem to be listening to her advice. Over lunch, Lisa tells her friend Marlene all about Penny and her behaviour. The next day, Penny comes into the office demanding to speak to the supervisor because as she puts it, her "life story is now common knowledge." Lisa had breached Penny's confidentiality.

2) Doug is a peer worker with an HIV/AIDS prevention agency. One night during outreach he runs into Paul who is dealing crack near "Boys Town." Paul is the son of Doug's mother's best friend. Doug knows that Paul recognizes him and he quietly assures Paul that he won't "out" him because he has promised to respect clients' confidentiality. Eventually, Paul realizes that Doug is not going to tell anyone that he's seen him on outreach and this persuades him to come into the agency for service. Doug's respect for his confidentiality helps gain Paul's trust.

Supervision

> The hard part about supervising youth peer workers is that sometimes you forget that even though they are "trained" support workers, they are just teens too! You always need to remember, that your peer workers are sometimes (still) going through the stuff that they are trying to support others through --- and that they need a lot of support too. It's also tough because youth have lots of competing priorities in their lives and it is sometimes frustrating when you fall to the bottom of that list. But when it works, it is amazing!
>
> ~Sarah

What is Supervision?

The agency values peers' life experiences. It also needs to make sure that the agency's goals are met. They need to have a strong relationship with peer workers. To do this, most agencies designate a staff member to coordinate/supervise peers. This coordinator is responsible for peer workers at his/her agency. He or she sets boundaries for the peers and supervises their work. The coordinator keeps track of all the peer workers and reports back to his/her own supervisor. The coordinator can help guide peers to use their skills and develop new ones, if this is the peer's goal. The coordinator provides direction and makes sure the agency's goals are being met by the peer worker; that is, that the peer is meeting the requirements of the job description. The coordinator gives peers a task or tasks to accomplish and then checks to see how and when tasks have been performed.

Without a coordinator, the agency would have no way of keeping peer work on track. Without supervision, the agency would have difficulty ensuring the quality of peer work and supporting peers within the agency and providing proper reports to funders. The peer supervisor or peer coordinator is an extremely important position in peer work.

The most important thing for peers is to communicate with the coordinator regularly. This communication goes both ways. In an outreach program, for example, the coordinator provides information that is needed for peer work, and the peer provides

Sometimes peers can have low expectations from agencies and supervisors because they have faced numerous forms of discrimination and they are happy to 'just have a job'. A good supervisor needs to advocate for their peer workers. I learned that in order to do this I had to examine my own beliefs and values, particularly around professionalism.

~Lorie

the coordinator with knowledge of the scene: there is a sharing of expertise. The coordinator provides feedback on peer work. Peer workers should listen and learn from the coordinator—he or she has a wealth of information and experience and it is in a peer's best interest to heed their advice, just like it is in the coordinator's best interest to hear what peers have to say.

Peer work isn't like other work where you punch a clock. To keep tabs on things, the agency needs to create a structured time where the peer and the coordinator can hook up and check in with each other. This time should work for both the coordinator and the peer. The purpose of the time together should be explained in detail and evaluated regularly to make sure it is working. If it's not, peers and their coordinator should work together to make changes.

Supervising peer workers has helped me develop patience, care, empathy, and organizational skills. ~Sarah

The coordinator should be much more than just a boss. The coordinator should be a caring, experienced person who has a genuine understanding of marginalized communities. Because of this, the coordinator can also act as a valuable resource. If any personal problems start to interfere with the peer work, peers should let the coordinator know. Maybe being around familiar places is driving peers to resume or do more drugs. Peer workers should not be afraid of mentioning this to the coordinator—he or she can help. But remember, the coordinator is responsible to the agency and if he or she senses that something is wrong, they have to ask the peer what is happening, and attempt to work with the peer to find mutually acceptable solutions. The coordinator is accountable for peer work. The coordinator is not judging the peer's personal life. Don't hide problems—that only leads to more problems.

Some keys to good communication

Sometimes what we think we're saying isn't what the listener is hearing at all. And sometimes we don't "hear" what others are saying, even when we are listening hard. Language is complex (if you don't believe this, just think about trying to learn a different language), in fact all communication is complex.

Communicating well is central to providing any kind of service. And in fact, good communication is key to teaching, learning and especially getting along with others in a workplace. Having good communication skills means more than not interrupting others when they're speaking. This is important, but effective communicating also includes the following:

Body Language:

Try to remain calm and keep your facial features neutral. Maintain eye contact.

Don't back away, avert your eyes or cross your arms in front of you.

Try to be on the same level as the speaker – stand up or sit down.

Don't make sudden broad gestures (e.g. sweeping arms, getting up or turning away suddenly).

Nod: this says "I'm listening" – but mean it!

Ask clarifying questions:

Open ended questions work best: "How do you feel?" rather than "Are you mad?"

Ask the speaker to tell you more about his concerns or expectations

Ask "what do you mean when you say…?"

Repeat what you heard in your own words:

"So it upsets you when …."

"So I understand that you think...."

Use "I" messages:

Instead of "you demand too much" try "when you ask me to do that I feel overwhelmed"

Instead of "you are too picky" try "I don't remember details as well as you do"

Instead of raising your voice, try “I feel threatened when you shout”

Be direct without blaming the other person;

Don’t accuse (“you always…” or “you never...”) or threaten the other person (“you better…” or “you better not…” or “if you….”)

Don’t call others names or generalize (“everybody knows you’re a stupid cow”) or be sarcastic (“well you’re just doing your job”) or be judgmental (“you should be…”) or patronizing (“you poor thing…”)

If something somebody does or says bothers or concerns you, and you want to talk to them about it, try to do so right away. Make sure you talk to the person him/herself, privately. Like any wound, it’s better to clean it up because it’ll only get much worse if you ignore it and let it fester. If you’re not going to talk to the person about it, let it go, or tell it to your counsellor, but don’t add it to a mental “simmering pot” or complain to everyone but the other person involved (remember boundaries?).

And if someone does or says something that you think is terrific, make sure you tell him/her that, too, and why you think it was a good thing to do or say. We all need feedback, good and not so good.

In either case:

- be specific and give examples of what was said or done
- say why you think it’s important to talk about this
- say how their words or behaviour affects you and the agency
- give the other person a chance to respond, and listen to what they say
- thank the other person for hearing you out

If someone approaches you with feedback or criticism:

Remember that this works both ways – you’re probably nervous confronting others and they are probably a little tense about approaching you, too. But it is really important to give and receive feedback (hint: sometimes it’s easier to solicit feedback than to wait for someone to approach you).

Try to remain calm, don't get defensive, practice good listening skills and ask questions. This is an opportunity to find out what you're doing right, how others perceive what you say and do, and what you need to work on to become even better at your job!

The above are guidelines – agencies would do well to offer communication training to peers as there would be a huge pay off for doing so.

How can agencies support peers as they make changes in their lives?

Success can be measured in ways that are considered reasonable to the individual. This requires staff and management to project a judgment-neutral attitude. A staff person's view of success may be quite different than a peer's. In supervision and through discussion, the coordinator can learn what the peer wants to get out of the job or program and help set up ways to work towards those goals.

For many drug users the need for change is often motivated by an equally demanding need to avoid harm and/or isolation. The most troubling dilemma for maintaining control over substance use is balancing internal needs with external pressures. Peers must be given the opportunities, training and support to effectively advocate first for themselves and then for others.

Marginalized people have the need to be taken seriously and be accepted into society. A peer should be an integral part of a working program. The difference between written policy and practical application of services is often disconnected. Peer coordinators and agencies as a whole need to give this special attention as peers may tend to take neglect or apparent lack of consideration personally. This also speaks to the necessity to provide positive feedback whenever it is deserved.

> It is worth noting that exposure to drugs may trigger, in a Peer Worker, increased or chaotic use of drugs. It is the obligation of [the agency] to be helpful and supportive of Peer Workers in dealing with their drug use.
>
> ~Walter

> **Empowerment is gained through being valued for your experience and given access to realistic or acceptable opportunities including opportunities to learn new skills and better ways to use old ones. Peers should be encouraged to have goals they want to realize through peer work.** ***~Valerie***

How peer supervision differs from the supervision of professionals

In the social service field "supervision" really means making and taking time to support workers, including peer workers, one-on-one. Supervision meetings are peers' regularly scheduled chance to have the peer coordinator's undivided attention, to find out how they're doing, to raise any concerns they might have and to get and give feedback. Because one of the greatest assets that peer have is their personal history and experience as a user, and because every user's experience is different, supporting or supervising peers is going to vary from peer to peer. A coordinator must have clear expectations for the peer worker but remain flexible. One peer worker may need a lot of personal support that includes reminders of when his/her shift is, may seek a lot of feedback on how they are doing, or need letters or other advocacy. Another may simply need to check-in, find out their schedule for the week, in short, know that the coordinator is there and cares how things are going. Some examples of different levels of support may help.

Jane:

Jane is a 32 year old woman with a long history of homelessness and drug use. However, she has decided to make changes in her life and finding employment was one of her goals. She was a client of an agency's outreach services for years, is well known by the outreach staff, and is keen to "give back" to her community. However, when she begins work, her housing is unstable and her landlord threatens to evict her because he suspects she is a drug user. She has not paid her phone bill and her phone is disconnected. She cuts down on her drug use when she gets hired but still finds herself going on "runs" or binges and has forgotten about a couple of shifts she was supposed to work. She and the peer supervisor sit down and carefully outline a plan to support Jane. They decide together that keeping her apartment is Jane's main concern. Jane agrees that having many drug using friends over to her place is no longer a good idea, as their parties is what makes the landlord angry. She agrees that as part of her personal harm reduction practice, she will only use with one or two good friends in her apartment and try not to use outside those times. The supervisor agrees to write a letter for Jane to show to her landlord to prove she has started work. In order for Jane to be able to attend her shifts, Jane and her supervisor agree to get her a voice mail box through the program so the supervisor can leave messages for Jane reminding her of when she is working. The supervisor also purchases a phone card for Jane so she can use a payphone to check her messages.

Malika:

Malika is an 18 year old woman who was homeless for a year. She has been sharing an apartment with her boyfriend for year and a half. Malika was a heroin user for five years but has not used for three months, although she still smokes pot regularly. Malika has started applying to college to obtain a Human Services diploma and wants some work experience before she goes back to school. In their initial meeting, Malika lets her supervisor know that she will need letters of support from her for her college applications. She is also a bit concerned that, in doing outreach, she will run in to old friends from when she was on the street and it will be hard for her to interact with them professionally. The supervisor agrees to write letters of support for Malika. They also agree to debrief after each outreach shift to see how Malika is doing about seeing old friends. The supervisor makes a careful effort to answer all Malika's questions during their training on boundaries and keeps a close eye on her during her training shifts, giving her constructive feedback whenever possible

These two examples demonstrate the differing needs of peer workers. A supervisor must have good boundaries in order to be clear with peer workers what they can and cannot do. There will be times when a peer needs more support than a supervisor can offer. Solid referrals to other professionals who can offer a deeper level of support to the peer should then be made.

Debriefing: what is it? who, how, when and why?

One way the coordinator can track the progress of peer workers and create better strategies for the peer program is through debriefing. This is not meant to measure the peer worker so much as to find out what (s)he has seen and done. Sometimes we only see what we want to see. A debriefing helps people go beyond our own prejudices and report more than we thought we knew. A debriefing can catch little issues before they become big problems.

Debriefings ideally occur right at the end of a shift. This way the information is fresh in everyone's mind and easier to get. Sometimes time does not allow this and debriefing will have to happen later, preferably before the next shift. A good idea is to write notes about your shift right after it ends, regardless of when the next debriefing is scheduled. The person coordinating the peer program can create a system to make sure this happens. A team logbook for example, can be a good way to capture what happens on a shift so others can be aware of what happens on other shifts. Debriefing should never occur less often than once a week.

Another good reason for debriefing is to make sure peer workers are "okay." Like other staff, peer workers often witness disturbing things, or have distressing interactions with the people they're trying to help. Like other staff, peers, too, sometimes need some reassurance after a shift and this is one way agencies can provide some support. It's well known that one way to help "get over" something is to talk it out. That's debriefing, too. If peers remember something they should have mentioned before, they can just let the coordinator know they'd like to add some additional information. It's that easy. It is imperative to inform supervisors of crises or disturbing situations so that debriefing can be set up right away. Often, agencies also have particular requirements that peers/workers fill in an "incident report" or other documentation in certain circumstances, so reporting these without delay is important.

Evaluation

While debriefings and supervision meetings are verbal interviews between the peer and the coordinator, written communication may also be important and in some cases, necessary. This can mean keeping notes in a "progress journal" or similar format which may ultimately help in writing peers' formal evaluations. Part of the coordinator's role is to provide feedback to peers on their work. This feedback can come in two forms –verbal and written.

We all use verbal feedback - whether it is to tell someone they smell funny or someone telling you they like your shirt. It's all feedback. Because verbal feedback is everywhere, regular, written communication may help to keep things organized between the peer, the coordinator and the agency. Written records can serve as a record of a peer worker's performance that stays at the agency. Staff come and go. If peers need a reference for another job two years from now, they'll be able to get one if the coordinator has left written documentation about their performance.

A formal evaluation compares what peers are doing and how they are doing it with the expectations in the job description. It is a way for the coordinator to report to the agency about how well a peer worker is meeting the program goals and to let the peer know how well he or she thinks the peer is performing his/her duties. It is not just a recording of strengths and weaknesses. It isn't like a school report card, because peers must get to have some direct input into the evaluation. A good evaluation process involves discussion between the supervisor and the peer worker, and allows both to examine and reflect on both strengths and areas where peers have opportunities to develop more skills or develop better work practices. This is a great way for the coordinator to offer suggestions that will improve the peer's job skills. The formal evaluation can help make a good peer a great peer.

Formal evaluations do not happen often, perhaps only once or twice during a peer's contract. To help write formal evaluations, the coordinator needs to gather as much information on peers' work as possible. One way a coordinator can do this by looking at a progress journal, progress reports and/or supervision notes. Documenting progress might take the form of a check-list of what peers have accomplished, along with comments.

If a form to help guide supervision meetings is used to help the supervisor keep track of a peer's work and remind the peer what is expected of them, peers should know its content. Peers should be allowed access to notes made about them during supervision. It's a good idea for peers to sign any progress or evaluation form that's used to show they have seen and understand it. A supervisor can also look back through these notes to find any patterns in the peer's work. Are they always missing work on Monday? Does this mean their drug use is escalating over the weekend? Have communication skills improved since you agreed to work on this?

Progress or supervision notes, like the formal evaluation, are not just about the bad, but the good as well. If you don't not know what is wrong you can't fix it. There should be no fear of repercussion if both peers and coordinators are open and honest with each other.

Peers are often an agency's eyes and ears - coordinators and peer workers need to let each other know what is happening. Fully disclosing information is more important to a coordinator than a happy, fun progress report. Life can't always be good. Progress reports need to reflect reality, not fantasy. The more complete the supervision or progress notes, the easier it will be to write formal evaluations.

When things go wrong

What if a peer can't fulfil their obligations?

In a perfect world, everything goes as we like it. But life isn't always perfect. As mentioned earlier, social service agencies can seem pretty chaotic a lot of the time. Being short staffed due to one workers' illness can throw an entire agency's schedule off on a moment's notice. Peer workers, too, will have to cope with illness or personal situations. It is in everyone's best interests to be understanding and flexible, to make the program as a whole work as well as it possibly can.

> Becoming a Peer Support Worker may enhance their vulnerability, destabilize their lives, distance them from some of their community supports, frustrate them.
> ~Walter

When something happens to affect peers' ability to work they should let the supervisor know as soon as possible. A peer may be sick or delayed or unable to work for whatever reason. All they have to do is call as soon as possible, before the shift starts. Most agencies realize sometimes peer workers cannot get to a phone right away. That is okay too. As long the peer contacts the coordinator as soon as possible, a missed shift is not the end of the world. However if a peer regularly books off shifts or doesn't check in on time, or repeatedly fails to meet the terms of the contract the coordinator will have to look at the peer's commitment.

The same way the agency can be flexible, peers have to be flexible. Sometimes a shift has to be cancelled or rescheduled. There are a lot of unknowns in this sort of work—things happen that the agency has no control over. If a peer gets a call from the coordinator or shows up and is told that the shift has been cancelled (s)he should take a breath and ask why. If it has nothing to do with the peer then no worries. Find out if and when the shift has been rescheduled.

If a shift is cancelled because of concerns over peer work, this has to be discussed. The peer should talk to the coordinator or someone else at the agency. The calmer the peer and coordinator are, the more likely that they'll be able to resolve the situation.

Sometimes it helps if to speak with a friend first and "vent" any negative feelings when you have a problem with someone or something. This is a great way of reducing friction in work situations. Sometimes a sympathetic ear is all it takes to understand a problem. If peers can talk to someone unconnected to the agency and vent their feelings, they and their supervisors will be able to deal with the issues in a cool and calm manner. However, be aware of confidentiality issues. Choose a "sympathetic ear" with care and make sure this person won't talk about this with others. And show some respect for the agency you work for. Telling everyone in sight that the program or agency stinks in a moment of anger could cause a lot of problems down the road when everyone has cooled off and gone back to work.

Peers are more flexible problem solvers than I, and more apt to take risks – I have been surprised by what we were providing in the way of service.
~Raffi

Consequences

Unfortunately, sometimes people screw up. Sometimes they know it and admit it, sometimes they don't. But it is up to the peer supervisor to ensure their program runs smoothly. This means they will sometimes have to impose consequences, or disciplinary actions, on those they supervise. As with everything else, disciplinary actions should be clearly spelled out for peer workers. Orientation to the job or program should include discussion of expectations and the consequences for failing to meet those expectations. There should be a range of disciplinary action a supervisor can make use of, and he/she should always include clear explanations of why an action is being taken. But a meeting with a peer to discuss unacceptable behaviour should also be a problem-solving meeting. Remember, many peers are going to need more support than a regular staff person. A meeting to discuss unacceptable behaviour can also be a form of support.

For example, a supervisor could ask to meet with a peer to discuss a recent string of missed shifts. Is there something going on in the peer's life that is making it difficult for her/him to meet their commitments? Is there something the supervisor can do to help the peer meet their commitments? In the end the supervisor and peer might agree that the peer should book off for a week and be referred to a counsellor to talk about some issues in greater depth. However, other solutions should be available, since the loss of income during such a period could be devastating for the peer.

Another example of disciplinary action/problem solving could be using the peer's services in a different way, i.e. in the office under direct supervision instead of street outreach. The supervisor must keep in mind the many goals of the project, one of which is most likely creating opportunities for empowerment among a marginalized population. Using discipline and consequences as a tool to improve a peer's performance, rather than as punishment for bad behaviour, is the ultimate goal. In any case, discipline should never come as a surprise if peers and their coordinator have been meeting regularly and talking openly and respectfully and honestly.

Leaving the Agency

What's an exit interview?

At the end of the contract or if the peer and/or coordinator decide to terminate the contract early, there should be an exit interview. An exit interview is like a debriefing except it gives both parties the chance to speak freely and criticize (constructively, of course) all aspects of his or her experience. It also the time for the coordinator to give the peer a letter of reference, certificates for any training taken, and any other material that can help the peer in the future.

It is great for the peer because the peer can let the agency know what he or she found to be good and awful about his or her experience as a peer. The peer can ask questions about why something was done and also explain why (s)he thought something was wrong. Because the peer is leaving he or she has the freedom to speak in a way that may not have been possible when under contract. Exit interviews are an excellent way for the coordinator and the agency to figure out how they can improve their services. If they don't know what is wrong in their approach, they cannot fix it. The peer's free and full criticism is a good thing for everyone, just as the coordinator's final remarks can help the peer succeed in future endeavours.

In a way, the exit interview gives peers and agencies a way to end the working relationship with a little bit of closure, and, hopefully, let the relationship continue on other terms.

Post-contract support: what should agencies be prepared to provide/what should peers expect?

Regardless whether a peer's experience was positive or negative (probably a bit of both as most jobs are) the agency is dedicated to serving the user community. Retired peers should always be welcome at the agency. If there are problems, these need to be addressed and worked out. It is as important to former peers as it is to the agency to maintain a good relationship.

Former peers can still be ambassadors for the agency. If the agency has a "speakers bureau" retired peers may make excellent presenters. They may be able to help train or mentor new peers.

Just as the transition from client to peer requires special consideration, if peers are to become clients of the agency post-contract, both the individual and the agency will have to communicate and agree on what that will mean.

Engaging drug users is about securing and enhancing an open and reflective culture at all levels within drug services. It is vital that user involvement is adequately resourced, but equally that it is underpinned by best practice. There is also a need to expand the research base in this complex and potentially rewarding specialist area of the drug field.
~ Mat Southwell

Conclusion

This guide or manual is just a first step toward building capacity around harm reduction practice by enhancing and expanding the roles of peers.

Throughout this project the level of interest and commitment from peers, community members and agencies has been consistent and inspiring. The manual itself is the result of many hours of discussion, listening and learning, negotiation, compromise, drafts and more drafts, and further consultation. Although this guide is hardly the last word on this subject, the process alone has been well worth all the hard work.

We all learned so much from working together: the importance of collaborating toward a common objective; the value of respecting others' experience and opinions no matter how they might differ from our own, as well as the value of our own life and work experiences; that we have more in common than seemed possible…; the wisdom of learning to suspend judgement; how much weight one word or sentence can carry; how to convey ideas clearly and build consensus; and that we all have something to contribute. The experience of pulling together to realize this goal will serve us well in future endeavours.

Over the coming year, the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force plans to foster the development of a peer network, designed, implemented and evaluated by peers for peers. It is expected that this next step will go a long way toward empowering community members and will become a valuable resource for peers and agencies, and ultimately the people they serve.

Over the longer term, we seek to build a self-sustaining peer alliance that will include a speakers bureau, design and deliver comprehensive harm reduction and related training programs for peer workers, and assist and support agencies in creating opportunities for peers.

The need is clear; the life experts are ready and waiting…

APPENDICES

A) Mission Statement

B) Sample Agreement or Contract

C) Sample Skills Assessment Tool

D) Income Maintenance Reporting

E) Sample Time Card

F) Sample Job Posting & Job Description

G) Related Websites

H) Sample Resume & Resume Writing Resources

I) Sample Goal Planning Worksheet

J) Sample Confidentiality Protocol

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENT OR MANDATE

Fred Victor Centre is a multi-service organization committed to working in partnership with women and men living in poverty to address their needs and hopes and to build a more just society.

Since 1894, Fred Victor Centre has been dedicated to working in partnership with women and men living in poverty in downtown Toronto. Throughout its 100 year history, situated at the corner of Queen and Jarvis Streets, the direction of Fred Victor Centre has evolved from its original focus as an outreach mission, dedicated to charitable works, to its present goal, that of helping to create a more just and caring society which values and includes all people, no matter what their background or situation.

Fred Victor Centre is an integrated multi-service organization with many different programs and a wide range of facilities. These have been developed to increase the options and resources available to people in our community with a focus on housing, employment and individual assistance, in addition to providing options for people with substance use issues. Fred Victor Centre supports community members through a co-ordinated continuum of services to respond to the multi-faceted needs of each individual.

Through the programs and facilities of Fred Victor Centre, people are able to address their essential needs for food, shelter, and social contact - the basic requirements for survival. When these needs are met, they can begin to focus on their hopes and dreams for a better future. Men and women are able to rebuild their lives by having meaningful involvement and purpose, as well as the opportunity to develop their skills and capacity. Community members are actively involved in the design and delivery of programs and are included in decision-making.

Courtesy Fred Victor Centre www.fredvictor.org

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE AGREEMENT OR CONTRACT

Date:___________________ This contract is from_________ to __________ for ______________
date date Peer's name

1) Peer Educators are hired by the Peer Coordinator for a four month period to work a maximum of 20 hours during the first month at the rate of $10. per hour and 40 hours per month thereafter at the same rate of pay.
2) Peer Educators will arrive on time for their scheduled shifts and will be paid in cash at the end of their last shift of each week. The week runs from Monday morning to Sunday night.
3) Missed shifts will not be paid for.
4) The agency will provide one to two months of training in order to prepared the Peer Educators for their work. Training time will be paid at the rate of $10. per hour.
5) Peer educators are responsible for providing education to young people about issues connected to street life including: HIV/AIDS prevention, peaceful conflict resolution, street youth resources and agencies, harm reduction and anti-oppression information.
6) Peer educators must be flexible in their availability. Work shifts will vary in length. All work shifts will be scheduled in advance and posted in the agency.
7) Peer Educators will treat all clients, staff, placement students, volunteers, other Peer Educators and clients with respect. Peer Educators will refrain from using racist, sexist or homophobic language. Two warnings about such behaviour will be given and recorded before dismissal.
8) Use of threats or physical violence will result in immediate dismissal.
9) The Peer Coordinator is your supervisor and a support person. If you have any questions about your work, ask the Coordinator. If you are having personal problems which are interfering with your ability to work, let the Coordinator know.
10) TTC tokens will be supplied to Peer Educators only for transportation to presentations.
11) Peer Educators will always represent themselves on behalf of the agency in accordance with agency policy.

____
Peer Education Coordinator

____
Peer Educator

Courtesy of Youthlink Inner City

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE SKILLS INVENTORY/ASSESSMENT TOOL

Following is a list of some of the skills required for different kinds of work. You may have gained some of these skills at school, through a job or volunteer work, or through life experience. Please check off the boxes beside any of the skills or tasks listed below that you have experience with.

LEADERSHIP:
[ ] planning or organizing activities or meetings etc.
[ ] encouraging people to get involved in activities
[ ] child care or babysitting
[ ] caring for the elderly or sick
[ ] teaching or coaching
[ ] playing a team sport
[ ] training or supervising others in a workplace

ADVOCACY:
[ ] taking responsibility for finding resources for yourself or others (e.g. food, health care, welfare)
[ ] finding out about people's rights
[ ] resolving conflicts between others
[ ] speaking on behalf of others
[ ] taking the initiative to change something
[ ] negotiating (e.g. for a better price, more time, a promotion etc.)

COMMUNICATION:
[ ] writing
[ ] ability to speak other languages (please specify)_______________
[ ] speaking to a group
[ ] answering a business telephone line
[ ] providing information or directing calls to other staff

SERVICE:
[ ] greeting customers
[ ] taking or filling orders (including serving food/beverages)
[ ] assisting customers
[ ] receiving shipments, storing/pricing merchandise or supplies
[ ] inventory control, merchandise display
[ ] preparing bills/accepting payments/reconciling receipts

FOOD:
[ ] shopped, prepared food for self or family
[ ] commercial food preparation
[ ] participation in a "community kitchen" program
[ ] food preparation or cooking course or class
[ ] "Smart Serve" or other certification (please specify __________)

OFFICE:
[ ] keyboarding
[ ] photocopying
[ ] filing
[ ] computer programs (please specify _________________________)
[ ] faxing
[ ] internet applications including email

"HOUSEKEEPING":
[ ] Budgeting money/paying bills
[ ] Prioritizing, organizing and accomplishing chores or duties
[ ] Accessing community resources (e.g. food bank)
[ ] Cleaning (commercial or household)
[ ] Laundry (commercial or household)
[ ] Grounds maintenance (commercial or household)
[ ] Maintenance (commercial or household; e.g. small repairs to appliances, painting etc.)

OTHER:
(e.g. First Aid/CPR "Smart Serve" certification; please specify):_______________________

Transferable skills (check as many as apply):

Accepts feedback [ ] Cooperative [ ] Creative [ ] Detail oriented [ ]

[ ] Eager [ ] Enthusiastic [ ] Experience with homeless population [ ] Familiar with illicit drugs/drug use [ ] Flexible [ ] Friendly [ ]

Hard worker [ ] Helpful [ ] Innovative [ ] Knowledge of street life [ ] Motivated [ ] Non-judgmental [ ] Organized [ ] Outgoing [ ] Patient [ ] Pleasant [ ] Polite [ ] Positive attitude [ ] Punctual [ ]

Reasonable [ ] Reliable [ ] Responsible [ ] Resourceful [ ] Sense of humour [ ] Takes direction [ ]

Team player [ ] Tolerant [ ] Willing to learn [ ]

APPENDIX D: INCOME MAINTENANCE REPORTING

Peer Workers who Receive Government Assistance:

- **Ontario Works (OW)**

Ontario Works lets clients keep some income on top regular OW amount if they meet certain criteria. They must report income on monthly IRS statements. This is a monthly self-report which must be submitted by the 15th of each month. Some OW clients will also be required to submit a letter from the agency stating when they started work, how much money they receive monthly, and what skills development opportunities the program provides.

To keep part of your honorarium or pay you must first fit into one of two categories. If you do not fit in these categories then your honoraria or earnings are deducted from your OW check. Even if you do not immediately meet the criteria, don't worry you still may be able to keep some of your extra money eventually.

To keep part of your honorarium or earnings you must have either served a Qualifying Period or meet Grace Period requirements. The Qualifying Period means you have been receiving assistance for 3 (three) continuous months of either OW or ODSP (including under the old FBA system). If this is not your case, then you may also qualify under the Grace Period criteria.

To meet the Grace Period criteria, you must have been on assistance for three continuous months, or have left OW to earn a wage, a training wage, or training allowance and have reapplied within six months of your last assistance payment. If you are confused, call your caseworker for clarification of your status.

Example A: You have been receiving OW for the past 6 months. You qualify to keep some of your wage or honorarium under the Qualifying Period criteria.

Example B: You have been receiving OW for two months. During your first month of peer work, all of your wage or honorarium will be deducted from your OW check. But after your third month of receiving OW, you will then be able to keep some of your honorarium or pay - so hang in there. It's coming!

Example C: You were on OW for a year but left OW five months ago to take a job as receptionist. The job didn't work out so last week you re-applied for OW. You qualify under the Grace Period.

Once the criteria have been met then it's time to calculate just how much you can keep, over and above your OW assistance. Ontario Works does this by giving you exemptions. An exemption is a way of saying that OW will ignore some of the other money you receive. In effect it reduces what OW considers to be extra income.

Ontario Works calculates how much is exempted in two ways. First OW gives you a Basic Exemption. The Basic Exemption is a flat rate that depends on your situation. It then adds a Variable Exemption, which is an exemption that may change from month to month, to the Basic Exemption, further reducing the amount OW considers to be extra income.

The amount of the Basic Exemption is fixed according to whether you are living as a single adult, living as a couple, including "common law", or have children living with you. A single adult has a Basic Exemption of $143. This means you can earn $143 per month without OW taking any money out of your cheque. The Basic Exemption for two adults is $249. For single parents or couples with dependents the Basic Exemption depends on how many children you have living with you.

Single Parent + 1 Dependent = $275 Basic Exemption

+2 = $321

+3 = $372

+4 = $423

+5 = $468

an extra $38 for each additional dependent

i.e. 6 dependents = $506 [468 + 38] Basic Exemption

Couple with 1 Dependent = $295 Basic Exemption

+2 = $346

+3 = $397

+4 = $442

+5 = $480
an extra $38 for each additional dependent
i.e. 6 dependents = $518 (480 + 38) Basic Exemption.

Okay then, so now things get complicated (like it wasn't complicated enough already!). On top of the Basic Exemption, OW also allows you to increase your exemption based on a percentage of your wage or honorarium and the length of time you have ever received other income while receiving assistance. Ontario Works calls this the Variable Exemption. The Variable Exemption is anywhere from 25% to 0% of the honorarium.

You qualify for the additional 25% of your earnings or honorarium (on top of the Basic Exemption) if you have extra income for a period of 0 to 12 months while on assistance for any amount of time. In other words if you have been on OW for 6 years but have only received extra money for a total of 7 months of those 6 years, then a further 25% of the honorarium is added to your exemption. What matters in this case is not how long you have been on OW, but how long you have been getting extra money while being on OW. The percentage of the exemption then goes down 5% for every 12 months you have received extra income.

Number of Months of Extra Earnings/Honoraria: 0 - 12 = 25% Variable Exemption
13 - 24 Months = 20% Variable Exemption
25 - 36 Months = 15% Variable Exemption
37 - 48 Months = 10% Variable Exemption
49 - 60 Months = 5% Variable Exemption
greater than 60 months = 0% Variable Exemption.

Let's finally bring this all together with an example: Your pay or honorarium comes to $600 a month. You have been on OW for over a year and you are single with no dependents. Until now, you have never earned income while on OW.

Your Basic Exemption is $143. Your Variable Exemption is 25% of $600 = $150.
Your total exemption is then $143 + $150 = $293.

Ontario Works then calculates your extra income as \$600 - \$293 = \$307. If your OW payment is \$520 per month, OW then deducts \$307 from the \$520, sending you a cheque for \$213. When you add the \$213 to the \$600, you now have a monthly income of \$813 instead of \$520.

- **Ontario Disability Support Program**

ODSP lets you keep some of your earnings/honorarium while still receiving assistance. To be eligible you must report your income during the reporting period. Your reporting period runs between the 16th day of the previous month to the 15th day of the current month. They prefer if you report your earnings by the 22nd of the current month, but you can report the income by the end of the current month with no penalty.

However, if you do not report the income by the end of the month, ODSP will probably send you a Suspension Letter. This letter does not end your involvement with ODSP, but informs you that until you report your income, you will not be receiving any money from them. As soon as you give them your report, payment will resume - so get that report in early, by the 22nd, if you can.

ODSP gives you exemptions. An exemption is a way of saying that ODSP will ignore some of the income you've received. In effect it reduces what ODSP considers to be extra income. The ODSP exemption is calculated by adding a fixed amount to a variable amount based on a percentage of your pay or honoraria. If you are a Single person, your fixed exemption is \$160 and if you are Married or Single with Dependents your fixed exemption is \$235. Your variable exemption is 25% of your wage/honoraria.

Example: You are a married person with an ODSP payment of \$800 per month and your wage/honorarium is \$600. Your fixed exemption is \$235 and your variable exemption is \$150 (25% of \$600). Your total exemption is \$235 + \$150 = \$385. ODSP then calculates your extra income as \$600 - \$385 = \$215.

ODSP then deducts the \$215 from your \$800 and sends you a cheque for \$585. When you add the \$585 to the \$600 you now have an income of \$1185 instead of \$800.

- **Employment Insurance**

Employment insurance lets you keep some of your earnings/honoraria while still receiving benefits. You must report your other income on a weekly basis as income from other sources.

EI lets you keep a portion of your wages or honorarium by using Allowable Earnings. Allowable Earnings is a term used to describe how much money you can receive and still receive benefits from EI. It is calculated as 25% of your weekly benefit rate or $50, whichever is higher.

Example: Your EI Benefit is $250 a week. Your wage/honorarium is $150 weekly. Your Allowable Earnings per week are $250 + $62.50 (25% of $250) = $322.50.

When you submit your report, EI adds the $150 you receive for peer work to the $250 EI Benefit for a total of $400. It then subtracts the $322.50 from the $400 to get a difference of $77.50. Finally EI takes $77.50 from the $250 benefit and sends you $172.50 (minus taxes, etc). So instead of a weekly payment of $250, you now have a weekly income of $322.50 ($150 + 172.50). EI benefit payments have taxes taken off at source.

All of the above calculations are based on rates and regulations as of July, 2003 and are subject to change. Peer workers are encouraged to contact their income maintenance worker for current information

APPENDIX I: GOAL PLANNING

Sample guideline for discussion between peer worker and coordinator

Let's talk about some things you'd like to accomplish in the next few months…(health, employment, education, housing, relationships etc.)

List five goals:

Which of these goals is the most important to you right now?

Which do you think you can accomplish most easily?

What will you need to accomplish this?

How could participating in the peer program help you accomplish this?

What's your second most important goal....

Where would you like to be in 6 months? A year?

These notes should be kept in the peer's file and revisited during supervision meetings. This will help identify and define goals, and chart accomplishments.

Developed with assistance from Youth Skills Zone

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE TIME CARD

Peer Educator: *Jane* **Month of:** *January 2003*

Peer comments	Day/date	Time in	Time out	Total hours	Shift duty	Staff initial
arrived 10 min. early	Tues. Jan 12/03	3:50 pm.	11 pm.	7	outreach	JVC
totals shifts/hours						

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE JOB POSTING & JOB DESCRIPTION

PEER OPPORTUNITIES

Central Community Services is seeking Peer Outreach Workers to provide services to homeless people in downtown Toronto.

Peer Outreach Workers are required to work 20 hours per week, including weekends from 7 pm. to midnight.

Peer Outreach Workers work on the street along with regular staff in teams of two.

Peer Outreach Workers are eligible for honoraria of $15. per hour.

Duties:
providing needle exchange, condoms and safer drug use and sex education.

Qualifications:
some experience with people who are homeless, people who use drugs and/or people involved in the sex trade;
dependable and willing to work 4 times a week for 6 months;
non-judgmental attitude;
interested in getting training on Harm Reduction, HIV/AIDS, Hep-C, Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Central Community Services encourages drug users/ex-users and people who are homeless to apply.

DEADLINE: Thursday September 17th 2002

Please apply to John Smith, Outreach Coordinator.
You may send or drop off a letter or your resume any weekday between noon and 5 pm., fax or email any time, or call John on Mondays or Thursdays to arrange an appointment.

Central Community Services,
123 Elm Street,
Toronto, M1A 1M1
416-555-2121 (phone)
416-555-1221 (fax)
johnsmith@centralcommunityservices.org

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION

Peer Outreach Workers

- **Come to work on time as scheduled;**
- **Participate in 3 day paid agency orientation;**
- **Participate in ongoing training sessions at the agency and outside the agency;**
- **Accompany staff person on street outreach as scheduled (2-3 times per week);**
- **Provide condoms and drug use related harm reduction resources to clients during street outreach;**
- **Provide harm reduction strategies and education and referrals for other services in a non-judgmental way to clients during street outreach;**
- **Encourage clients to use the agency's services;**
- **Keep records (statistics) about services you provide during street outreach;**
- **Be a role model for clients by modeling appropriate behaviour;**
- **Share up to date information about drug use in the city with the agency as you become aware of issues or trends;**
- **Attend weekly peer team meetings with the supervisor;**
- **Participate in weekly individual supervision meetings with the supervisor;**
- **Attend weekly agency staff meetings (every Tuesday at 4 pm.);**
- **Accompany staff/senior peers to presentations about the agency/peer program;**
- **Help to keep the peer office and work stations clean and tidy;**
- **Specific projects as assigned by the supervisor (e.g. development of an educational brochure about injection drug use for clients/peers; organizing a focus group for drug users to discuss housing issues, etc.).**

APPENDIX G: Some Harm Reduction Related Websites

Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force
www.torontoharmreduction.org

Canadian Harm Reduction Network
www.canadianharmreduction.com

Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users
www.vandu.org

Canadian Drug Policy Alliance
www.drugpolicy.org

www.methadone.org

www.drugsense.org

www.mylifeboat.com

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE RESUME

Jane Smith
647-555-1212 (voice mail)

Objective: I am looking for a position as a peer educator with a social service agency that works with drug users.

Skills & Experience

- **resourceful and reliable;**
- **experience with homelessness and drug use;**
- **commitment to harm reduction;**
- **conflict resolution training;**
- **knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS prevention**

Work Experience

Telephone customer service representative:
ABC Construction, 123 Erie Street, Toronto, M1A 1A1
1999-2000
Responsibilities: answering and logging calls from customers and contractors; typing and filing contracts and correspondence.

Lifeguard:
1234567 Ontario Ltd. Condominiums, 456 Maple Ave., Toronto, M2B 2B2
summer 1998 (part-time)
Responsibilities: supervision of swimming pool; cleaning pool, changerooms, sauna; responding to residents and guests.

Volunteer Work
First Street Community Centre, 1 First St., Timmins, Ont.
1997-98
Responsibilities: teaching 6 and 7 year olds water safety; keeping track of volunteer teachers' schedules; promoting water safety to grades 1 and 2 at Timmins Public School

Special Training:
- **Red Cross Lifesaving Certificate**
- **St. John's First Aid and CPR Certificate**
- **Public Health Train the Trainer HIV/AIDS Certificate**

References are available upon request.

RESUME DEVELOPMENT: Where to get help with your resume

(these are just some examples; there are lots of other agencies that will help with resumes, too!)

Fred Victor Centre: Employment Resource Centre
416-364-8986

Human Resources Development Canada
Employment Resource Centres
(410 Sherbourne St., Dufferin Mall, Lawrence Square, Scarborough Town Centre, 811 Danforth)
www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca

Chesswood Employment Resource Centre
416-395-9559

Beat the Street
416-979-3361

Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Centre
416-656-8025

Etobicoke South Employment Resource Centre
416-231-2295

YMCA
416-928-9622 ext. 4207

Woodgreen Employment Resource Centre
416-462-3110 ext. 2220

Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment & Training
416-591-2310

John Howard Society of Toronto
416-925-4386

Streetlight Support Services
416-534-4572

St. Stephen's Community House
416-537-5477

APPENDIX J: Sample Agency Expectations & Confidentiality Agreement

Peer educators agree to act as representatives of the agency, to be open minded, to have empathy and compassion for the experiences of others no matter how different, to provide service, information and practical aide to clients, to take time to listen on the streets and in the agency.

Peer educators agree to be an example and role model to clients, to be respectful and calm when dealing with others, to show by their actions that there are ways to leave the streets and other options to living on the street, to resolve conflict peacefully and ask for help when needed.

Peer educators understand that they are encouraged to talk to the coordinator when things are tough.

Peer workers understand and agree that they are not to share any personal information about any other person, other than staff, that they learn while working as a peer educator and that breaching this agreement will result in disciplinary action, including possible dismissal.

____

Peer Educator

____

Peer Coordinator

Date:__________________

Courtesy of Youthlink Inner City

Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force

Peer Manual: EVALUATION: AGENCIES

We value your input and feedback! After you've had an opportunity to read the Peer Manual, please take a few minutes to complete the following evaluation form and return it to the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force by fax or mail. Thank you for your consideration.

1) The agency I represent employs [ ] does not employ [ ] peer workers.

2) The general nature of my agency's work is: _____________________________ (e.g. drop in program for people who are homeless; outreach program serving LGBT community etc.)

3) On a scale of 1 – 10 please rate the manual overall:

1……………………………5……………………………10

poor excellent

CLARITY _____ RELEVANCE _____ ENGAGES READER _____

CONTENT _____ READING LEVEL _____ BALANCE (peers/agencies) _____

4) What do you like best about the manual? ___________________________________

5) What do you like least, or what would you change? ___________________________

Please feel free to attach a separate sheet(s) if we haven't given you enough room for all your comments! Thank you for your time.

THRTF, 100 Lombard St., Ste. 205, Toronto, M5C 1M3
Facsimile: 416-364-7815 (no cover sheet required)

Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force

Peer Manual: EVALUATION: PEER WORKERS

We value your input and feedback! After you've had an opportunity to read the Peer Manual, please take a few minutes to complete the following evaluation form and return it to the Toronto Harm Reduction Task Force by fax or mail. Thank you for your consideration.

1) I have [ ] have not had [ ] experience working as a peer.

2) The nature of my peer work was/is: ____________________________ (e.g. drop in program for people who are homeless; outreach program serving LGBT community etc.)

3) On a scale of 1 – 10 please rate the manual overall:

1……………………….5…………………………10

poor excellent

CLARITY _____ RELEVANCE _____ ENGAGES READER _____

CONTENT _____ READING LEVEL _____ BALANCE (peers/agencies) _____

4) What do you like best about the manual? __________________________________

5) What do you like least, or what would you change? __________________________

Please feel free to attach a separate sheet(s) if we haven't given you enough room for all your comments! Thank you for your time.

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