

Being In and Of the System: Managing the Tension as a Peer Worker in the Mental Health System

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OCSWSSW

Agenda

- Peer support worker – what does that mean?
 - Some personal reflections, experience, and research
- What is the tension ?
 - Why does this matter?
- What do we do?
 - Should we do anything?

What is Peer Support

...it as any organized support provided by and for people with mental health problems or illnesses.

(Making the case for peer support. MHCC ,2nd Edition 2016)

What is Peer Support?

“ Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on the key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what is helpful”

(Defining Peer Support: Mead, S. 2003 –
www.mhepinc.org)

What is Peer Support?

Individuals that share a life experience coming together to provide support, share resources and to share information

Examples: A.A. , N.A. Bereaved Families of Ontario, Cancer support groups, etc.



A Peer Worker is ...

Someone whose principal function is to use their lived experience as the lens for their interactions with clients when providing services and supports

What does that mean?



What is known

- Challenges for peer workers – lack of clarity in their role, boundaries, fear from others, supervision and mentoring
- Challenges for others with peer workers – lack of clarity about roles, how is peer work different, boundaries

What is known

- Supervision is seen as important but:
 - No clear definition of what supervision is
 - No understanding of who is the ideal person to provide supervision
 - Don't know if supervision is effective

What is known

- Concern that peer workers will get “co-opted”, meaning that they will lose the unique perspective that they bring

Being in but not of the system



The tension

- How does a peer worker make use of their lived experience in a way that does not “do harm” to themselves or others
- What “hat” does a peer worker wear at any particular time while providing support

Question

- How does the College, the social work and social service work professions support its members that are peer workers?

Comments/Questions?