

PEER SUPPORT

ISSUE: There is a need to have recognized and understood that mutual aid and peer support is the fundamental resource/philosophy of organizations run by individuals who are living with, through and beyond a mental illness and that this approach is a necessary and complimentary alternative to the formal mental health system.

What is Peer Support: Peer support is the foundation upon which consumer run organizations or independent and unfunded groups base their work and effort. It is the pillar of self-help and the recovery process. It is the process by which like-minded individuals with similar experiences – who have traveled or are traveling the road – encourage and assist each other to continue the healing. Those who have experienced the illness, the system, the clinical process, the drugs and the obstacles are in the best position to pass on knowledge gained by lived experience.

Rationale: Peer Support allows an outlet for an individual living with a mental illness to openly and honestly express the pain, suffering and frustration that the illness has caused. It creates an atmosphere of trust between peers and knowledge that the person offering peer support will be non-judgmental. Peer Support permits exploration of one's inner self to discover previously unknown strengths that will aid the individual on their journey to recovery. Most importantly, Peer Support recognizes the immense power of experiential knowledge. This is a knowledge that can never be learned in a classroom or from a book. It is a knowledge that allows one to say, "I have been where you are now and I'm here for you!"

Recommendations:

- 1 That member organizations of CCAMHR make Peer Support a core service of their organization.
- 2 That the Research Committee of CCAMHR compile a database of Peer Support training available in Canada for it's member organizations.
- 3 That CCAMHR develop a Peer Support training program for its member organizations.

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