



**lumenus**  
Community Services

# Best Practices of Peer Work

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For Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario



# Land Acknowledgement

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# Agenda

- **Who, What, Why of Peer Work**
- **How do I employ peers the best way I can?**
- **Accessibility**
- **Support, Understanding, and Boundaries**
- **Diversity and Meaningful Inclusion**

# Check-In



# Who, What, Why

- Who are Peer Workers?
  - A individual with a similar lived experience to the community they work for.
- What do they do?
  - Just about anything! Peers have and can be employed in front line service, outreach, policy and program development, community engagement, research, advocacy, management, and more.
- Why should agencies employ peers?
  - The meaningful employment of people with lived experience improves service quality through more relevant, accessible services informed by those who may access them.

# How do I employ peers the best way I can?

1. Engage with the community/ies your agency serves
2. Determine what peer work will look like at your agency
3. Build staff capacity around how to work with peer workers
4. Review existing policies and make amendments as necessary
5. Ensure that accessibility is always top of mind

# Key Questions

## To ask ourselves:

- Why are we hiring peers?
- How will their work be used?
- How much disclosure will be required?
- What supports will be offered to peers? Will they differ from supports offered to other (non-peer) employees?

## To ask community:

- How do they envision peer roles within your hub?
- If they were hired as peers, what supports would they want or need?
- What kinds of informal peer-to-peer support already exist within the community/hub?

# Peer Work **vs** Youth Engagement

While peer work among young people is always youth engagement, youth engagement is not always peer work.

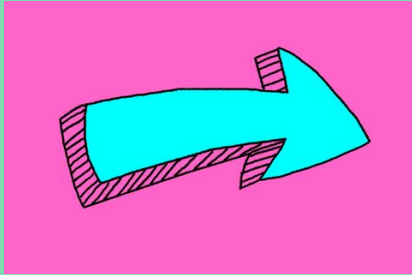
## **Peer Work is:**

Intentional recruitment of individuals with a specific lived experience with the expectation being that the peer worker is comfortable drawing from these lived experiences in their work either directly or indirectly.

## **Youth Engagement is:**

No expectation that lived experiences are disclosed or drawn from, instead they are providing a unique perspective and expertise based on their age and/or life stage.





# Tenets of Peer Work

1. **Accessibility**
2. **Flexibility and Understanding**
3. **Compensation**
4. **Meaningful Inclusion**
5. **Diversity in Lived Experience**
6. **Considerations of Blurred Boundaries**

# Accessibility: Hiring Process

- Avoid jargon
- Be clear about roles, responsibilities and payment
- Advertise broadly
- Offer support with the application process.
- Create space for flexible application of hiring procedures

# Accessibility: Interviews

- Highlight qualities over “formal” experience or education
- Ask questions that can be answered in both personal and professional contexts
  - What does harm reduction mean to you?
  - What are some ways that individuals and/or organizations can challenge stigmatized beliefs about people who use drugs?
  - Describe a time where you have supported someone experiencing distress.
  - Share how you would respond to the following scenario.. {insert scenario here}

# Accessibility: On the Job

- Ensure orientation is as low-barrier and engaging as possible
- Familiarize peers with other staff and the space
- Address technological and physical barriers
- Check-in regularly
- Consider offering multiple methods of compensation (e.g. cash, payroll, non-monetary)
- Above all: **remain flexible**



# Peer Training

- Peer workers will (ideally) have a variety of lived/living experiences and while their current knowledge is the reason they are hired, they still may benefit from additional training
- Training topics should be determined by the type of work expected of the peers at your hub
- Offering opportunities for ongoing skill development and training is not only helpful for their employment, but also an additional way to compensate peers for their emotional labour

# Support, Understanding, and Boundaries

- Offer to support peer workers outside of the workplace
- Assist in finding alternative community supports
- Lean on community partners
- Acknowledge that client-staff personal relationships exist and provide guidance around navigating these relationships
- Consider making amendments and/or developing new policies to accommodate for peer workers

# Diversity

Diversity knows that:

- Lived/living experience is inherently unique to the individual and their own intersectional identity/ies.
- It is important to seek out peers that are representative of the diverse communities they work with.
- Diversity is essential in responding to community needs.

# Meaningful Inclusion

- Actively engage peer workers through their work within your agency/hub.
- Avoid tokenism.
- More than just an end-stage consult- involve peers in the process from beginning to end.
- Yes, this takes more time (and money) and yes, it is definitely worth it!





# Key Takeaways

- Hiring process should be as accessible and low-barrier as possible
- Consider what supports will be needed to ensure successful integration of your peers
- Diversity and representation is key
- Meaningful inclusion takes time, thoughtful consideration and intentionality
- “Nothing about us without us”

*Any questions?*

# Please complete the evaluation!

[www.surveymonkey.com  
/r/ywhowebinar4](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ywhowebinar4)

## Next Steps:

- Site-specific consultations
- Assessing site's capacity and support needs
- Deciding on a capacity building model for your site

# Thank you!

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