



Peer Support Strong Conference Agenda



Growing Together: The Expanding Role of Peer Support Across Diverse Communities

9:00 - 9:15 AM: Zoom room opens

9:15 - 9:30 AM: Land Acknowledgement and Opening Remarks

9:30-10:15 AM: Building Bridges: Empowering Newcomers through Peer Support

10:15 - 10:30 AM: Self-care Break

10:30 - 11: 15 AM: Claiming "Peer": What's in a Word?

11:15 - 11: 30 AM: Self-care Break

11:30 AM - 12:15 PM: Exploring the Intersectionality of Peer Support in Addressing Mental Health, Social Justice, and Community Resilience

12:15 - 1:00 PM: Lunch Break

1:00 -1:45 PM: Creating Inclusive Spaces: Neurodivergence in Peer Support Work

1:45 - 2:00 PM: Self-care Break

2:00 - 2:45 PM: Professional Peers, Co-learning and Community

2:45 - 3:00 PM: Self-care Break

3:00 - 3:45 PM: A Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Story from the African/Caribbean/Black Community

3:45-4:00 PM: Closing Remarks

Growing Together: The Expanding Role of Peer Support Across Diverse Communities

9:30 - 10:15 AM: Building Bridges: Empowering Newcomers through Peer Support

Description: The Newcomers Warm Line and Peer Crisis Support Service at Krasman Centre was launched in March 2024 and provides non-crisis and crisis support to newcomers from a recovery and informed perspective through lived experiences; the NCWLPCSS embodies the values of peer support and strength-based and recovery-orientated approaches to support newcomers to build:

- Strong peer support mechanisms to develop new relationships, increased resiliency, sense of belonging, and social inclusion.
- To empower & promote newcomer integration through lived experience
- Promote positive self-esteem empathy and support psychological barriers to adjustment
- Acts as a buffer against acculturative stress, isolation and the development of depressive symptoms.

The NCWLPCSS volunteers self-identify as having lived experience as Newcomers and strive to assist others with the mental health challenges associated with being a Newcomer and the migration process. The NCWLPCSS provides support through telephone services and online chat; the program recognises that newcomers face multiple barriers when accessing services, the NCWLPCSS offers:

- Cultural sensitive support
- 24/7 mental health/peer support
- Linguistic services through translation services and devices

The NCWLPCSS peer support program offers diverse, inclusive and equity services that foster and support marginalised populations within the newcomer community.

The NCWLPCSS anchors the theme of “Growing Together” The newcomer’s community faces multifaceted system and human rights barriers, and peer support offers a uniquely sustainable approach that addresses such barriers and promotes DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion).

The NCWLPCSS provides newcomers in Canada with free, accessible mental health peer support, fostering growth and connection in the spirit of “Growing Together”. This service is a valuable resource in helping people settle into a new country and culture, showing them that they are not alone in their journey. By connecting with others who have faced similar challenges, newcomers can gain emotional support through peer connections. The NCWLPCSS exemplifies the spirit of collective growth and resilience.

Presenter: Kenyatta Barnaby

Kenyatta, Newcomers Warmline and Peer Crisis Support Services Coordinator at Krasman Centre, is an experienced project and program manager with a strong foundation in social services. He is dedicated to empowering individuals and strengthening communities. He co-authored the 2022 article, Nothing for Us Without Us: An Evaluation of Patient Engagement in HIV Care Improvement Collaborative in the Caribbean, which highlights his commitment to patient-centred approaches in healthcare. Driven by a commitment to social justice and equity, Kenyatta focuses on empowering marginalized groups, educating healthcare providers, and providing critical peer support. His expertise is deeply enriched by his lived experience with a mental health diagnosis, giving him a unique perspective that fuels his passion for inclusive, accessible services that foster well-being and resilience for all.

10:30 - 11:15 AM: Claiming “Peer”: What’s in a Word?

Description: What does it mean to claim “peerness”? The way we define “peer” has direct implications for how peer support and peer work are practiced, as well as how the field itself is structured. This presentation will explore the different ways the language of peerness is taken up: as an identity term signifying lived experience; a disciplinary term identifying a particular way of knowing; and a generative relational framework which allows us to identify with those we support across differences. This presentation will explore the impact of language on practice, as well as who is left out from dominant definitions of peerness. Lastly, it will outline how nurturing an expansive politics of peerness can enable peer support futures characterized by renewed solidarity and collaboration amongst a diverse range of peer sectors.



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Presenter: Calvin Prowse

Calvin Prowse (they/them) is a peer futurist, researcher, and creative based in Hamilton, Ontario, and the Team Lead of the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice (YAIJ) peer support program.

11:30 AM - 12: 15 PM: Exploring the Intersectionality of Peer Support in Addressing Mental Health, Social Justice, and Community Resilience

Description: I would like to speak about how peer support can be a great unifier of people. It doesn't matter what your background or your privilege is; you can be born with and/or develop mental health concerns. We know that bigotry is best dispelled by familiarity, ie, the ability to see a reflection of yourself in others. Peer Support is never more successful than when it is able to spark that recognition in each other.

That recognition is like a bridge between countries because it is not possible to extricate whatever produces that spark from the larger whole of the complex, intersectional individual who sparks it. Peer support principles can be (and have been) exported to inform best practices in mental health, equity, and community resilience, to name a few areas.

We are more than our diagnoses and our intersectional locations, but engaging with a person one intersectional element at a time is a form of oppression. To illustrate my point, I offer my own positionality: a transgender, pansexual, polyamorous, neurodiverse individual with diagnoses of autism, ADHD, borderline personality disorder, and a sneaking suspicion that C-PTSD is present. When I engage in behaviour such as endlessly fidgeting, is that me stimming as an autistic person, being unable to concentrate as a person with ADHD, expressing the anxiety associated with my borderline, or demonstrating the adverse effects of my trauma? The answer is that the question is nonsensical. All of those labels are inextricable from one another and must be interacted with as a coherent whole.

So what does that mean for Peer support delivery? As with most of our efforts towards recovery, being mindful and aware of what we're trying to do informs our efforts to actually do it, while validating that those efforts will always be a work in progress.

Presenter: Zoe Carey

Zoe Carey is a neurodiverse peer support professional at Trillium Health Partners in Mississauga, where she has worked for 7 years. Prior to that, Zoe volunteered with Support House's Checkpoints group for 2 years. Zoe first received peer support training through Peer Works in 2015.

Working in peer support gives Zoe the privilege and opportunity to help others empower themselves in their recoveries. She likes to joke that her own recovery is not only wellness-promoting but also professional development. Zoe advocates (perhaps too fiercely) for the better integration of peer support in interdisciplinary environments, supporting the shift towards more person-centred healthcare.

In addition to being a peer support professional, Zoe received a certification in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion from UBC in 2024, a degree in English and Philosophy from Trent University, and boasts significant lived experience watching YouTube cat videos. She also volunteers with pflag Halton as a community organizer and advocates for 2SLGBTQ+ and transgender rights. Zoe stays busy as a mom of 2 kids, but back when she had free time she trained as an instructor in both Japanese Jiu Jitsu and Advanced Medical First Response.



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1:00 - 1:45 PM: Creating Inclusive Spaces: Neurodivergence in Peer Support Work

Description: The purpose of my presentation is to discuss with the growing awareness of neurodivergence how we can support peers who are neurodivergent to access peer support resources and to be peer support workers.

My presentation relates to the theme of Growing Together because it provides an opportunity for education on how peer support workers can better serve a community that historically has faced barriers to accessing those supports. Attendees will benefit from hearing the lived experience of someone who has engaged in both roles and walk away with growing awareness and strategies to implement.

Presenter: Sarah Walker

Sarah Walker is a queer, disabled student in their final year in the Education program at Nipissing University. She has worked on campus providing peer-to-peer support through her lived experience to her community through Residence and The Equity Centre.

2:00 - 2:45 PM: Professional Peers, Co-learning and Community

Description: CMHA HKPR's Trans Peer Outreach program is excited to discuss "Professional Peers, Co-learning and Community". Peer Support is one of the most powerful mechanisms of healing, especially for marginalized communities. One such community that requires some special consideration is the Trans Community.

We will begin our presentation by discussing our Peer Support Model that is tailored to supporting Trans folks through Trans Peers. We will outline what the program is, how it functions, and present testimonials from program participants. We have multiple successful Case Studies of trans joy and success being the result of our program techniques, that we will be highlighting throughout the presentation. Peer Support for trans individuals by trans individuals is a unique and powerful tool that works to create many positives for both the peer being supported, and the peer doing the supporting. Some unique benefits of Trans Peer Support include sharing the unique knowledge that comes from lived experience, the development of community, resiliency, and coping, and lastly creating space for social justice to begin, and all will be discussed in depth during the presentation.

Although unique and powerful, Peer Support in marginalized communities' results in complex dual relationships, that we have come to refer to as being a "Professional Peer". We will conclude our presentation by discussing the needed Adaptations to current Peer Support Frameworks that focus on the complexities of being a professional peer. We will discuss the positives of the relationship, such as improved learning, the impact of intersectionality, passion, and healing, as well as the negatives that are associated with being a 'Professional Peer' and the struggles of navigating dual relationships. We will offer our suggestions regarding the ethics and boundaries of dual relationships within trans peer work, through testimonials of peer workers and our own lived experience within our program.

Presenters: Alex Bruneau and Lindsay Young

Alex (she/her) is a white settler, disabled trans femme who has worked in community building and collective care for young trans folks in the Toronto/Tkaronto area since 2006. She is currently a Bachelor of Social Work candidate at Trent University, working in placement with Trans Peer Outreach. Having grown up in and around trans peer groups, Alex strives to bring a recognition of the inherent knowledge and wisdom of the lived experiences in the community into her professional efforts in and around Social Work.

Lindsay (they/he) is a white settler, non-binary trans masculine person who has been working in community care for 2 years. They completed their BSc in Psychology at Trent University in 2023, with a focus on transgender relationships and their connection to transgender individuals' wellbeing. He has been working with the CMHA HKPR's Trans Peer Outreach program since July of 2023 to continue to grow and expand what the program is and can be to improve the trans community in Peterborough ON.



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3:00 - 3:45 PM: A Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Story from the African/Caribbean/Black community

Description: Adapting Peer Support frameworks to meet the unique needs of different cultural and social groups. A Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support story from the African/Caribbean/Black community.

The adaptation of Peer Support frameworks is vital to cultural responsiveness, to ensure we are authentically meeting the needs of different cultural groups. Often, traditional frameworks speak to cultural competence, rather than cultural humility, and solely a biomedical paradigm of healthcare services. The lack of curiosity for a client's heritage, genetics, culture and social experiences, translates as a lost opportunity for learning and development. We then, ultimately, succumb to our unconscious biases. Curiosity and humility are fundamental to attaining what is truly needed and desired for any one person or group of people. One tool or strategy is not always effective or valued the same amongst varying groups and the blind "saviour complex" saves no one.

Tokenism can sometimes be masked as accredited representation when marginalized people are appointed to the upper echelons of an organization, but not involved in any of the decision-making. Prescribed modes of healing can be heavily Euro-centric and may not appeal to or work for clients of African Heritage, for example. Evaluations and assessments seldom account for various cultural and religious beliefs and values. Epigenetics and other contributing factors play a key role in comprehending how and why the physiology of one group of people may be affected differently than another.

Decolonizing our approach to care can benefit the client and cultivate space for professional growth. This may look like reevaluating Westernized modes of care and embracing more Indigenous customs. When we consider barriers like stigma and shame, these only add to the obstacles one must navigate when seeking Mental Health Peer Support. It is also worth noting that social determinants of health are not the sole and common barrier for all marginalized peoples.

We cannot encourage vulnerability without trust, and we cannot build trust without transparency, empathy and understanding. This comes from a sincere position of cultural humility, and lived experience, as well as an adaptation and ongoing evaluation of our current frameworks. It is only then, that a sense of belonging develops for the client, and a connection is established between themselves and the Peer Supporter. That connection, social connection, is at the core of healing and Peer Support.

I look forward to sharing personal stories and impactful testimonies that highlight the success of adapting our frameworks to meet the needs of diverse communities.

Presenter: Kristy Anthony

Kristy Anthony is the Coordinator for the Perinatal Mental Health of Black Families program at Families Matter in Calgary, Alberta. Kristy is also a Peer Support Worker, Group Facilitator and leads a cohort of Black Perinatal Mental Health Peer Supporters for this program. Kristy and the Peer Support Team all have some form of Lived Experience with Perinatal Mood Disorder (PMD), whether it be postpartum anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or feeling overwhelmed during a challenging time in their lives. Kristy and her team can speak to the stigma and barriers of struggling with PMD in the African/Caribbean/Black community. They also inspire other parents with their stories of success and hope, in having journeyed to the other side. In addition to Peer Support, this program offers the following virtual sessions: Melanin Mama Circle and Black Couples Connection.

Kristy is originally from the island of Grenada in the Caribbean and grew up mostly in Canada. She understands the bicultural life of an immigrant and celebrates both cultures while exploring the challenges of conflicting values, racism and unconscious biases. Kristy is an artist by nature and her first passion is dance. She continues to explore various cultural modalities of healing, bringing together the worlds of Mental Health and the Arts. She provides educational presentations for both Professionals and Families, as well as Community Events. Kristy is motivated to affect change through community connection and spreading awareness via inspired educational sessions and engaging events.