



Ontario Peer  
Development Initiative

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# ANNUAL REPORT

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## 2021/2022



Ontario Peer  
Development Initiative

# 30 YEARS STRONG

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Dear Members,

In last year's greeting from our formidable Executive Director, Laura Pearson, she spoke to the curveballs that our sector continuously and successfully rose to meet head-on.

This year, I'm honoured to be delivering the Annual Message on behalf of the whole OPDI team, as not only our sector but our own organization, continued to experience considerable change. We're also stepping outside of the usual reporting timelines, as this message is written months after our official Year-End. And within that time period, we bid farewell to Laura, and OPDI's small but mighty cadre went through a significant period of transition.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Laura for her invaluable vision that furthered our professionalism goals as a sector, and raising the Peer Support brand and value with government officials and sector partners.

Our Board was committed to ensuring that OPDI's work continued uninterrupted, putting your needs as our membership as a top priority. So we were delighted that Allyson Theodorou, known to all of us as the steady and trusted force behind decades of OPDI's work, agreed to act as our Interim, Managing Director! Allyson has more than ably stepped in to guide our team through this period of change, and support OPDI's direction for our coming year.

This year was also my first as Chair of the Board, as we all celebrated 30 Years of Peer Support. I'm proud that we were able to enhance our efforts as the recognized provincial voice of the peer support sector. We became an even more vocal advocate for the vital work that our +50 PSOs/CSIs deliver in local communities, and across our healthcare framework.

I encourage you to read OPDI's 2022 Pre-Budget Submission, that highlights the need for more collaboration, data and funding to continue

integrating the peer support value proposition into Ontario's healthcare framework.

We also continued our research work on behalf of our sector, and increased our core training offerings to meet a very high-volume of demand. Realistically, with the transitional phase that OPDI is in, we had to reprioritize certain initiatives, like our Anthology project, so that we were allocating our resources to serve you.

I would like to take this time to pause and reflect on all of the Peer Support professionals who showed up, supported, and did the incredible! What an unbelievably busy year it was!

It is with enormous gratitude that I acknowledge my Board colleagues. Their guidance, collaborative efforts, vision for our sector: all made my new leadership role much easier to navigate. Our Board showed true commitment to governance best practices through this era, as we strengthened our skills matrix nominations process and struck a much-needed Anti-Black Racism Accountability and Action Board Committee.

OPDI's 2020-2023 Strategic Direction is still our guiding light, while we build a more cohesive and diverse team, aligned with our mission and values.

With the demand for peer support rapidly increasing, I anticipate even more great things happening at our organizational level, with our member organizations and across the mental health sector. May we continue to celebrate together, and I look forward to sharing our collective successes for the 2022/23 year, in the next Annual Report.

Respectfully,

Andrea Schaefer  
President/Chair of the Board  
Ontario Peer Development Initiative

## MISSION:

The Ontario Peer Development Initiative's mission is to strengthen and promote diverse peer voices in Ontario through community building, information-sharing, collaboration, advocacy and education

## VISION:

A world in which lived experience is valued, peer autonomy and peer culture are protected, diversity is respected, and peer support is available to all.

# 2020-2023

## STRATEGIC VALUES & STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR



### OUR VALUES

#### LIVED EXPERIENCE/EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

OPDI values lived experience and the skills and knowledge gained through experiencing mental health and/or substance use concerns, and navigating systems and related systemic barriers, stigma, and discrimination.



#### INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY & HONESTY

OPDI acts with integrity, transparency, and honesty in all its relationships and partnerships.



#### DIVERSITY AS STRENGTH

OPDI advocates for social justice, equity, anti-oppression, anti-racism, and inclusion. We respect and value all people's race, religion, spirituality, ethnicity, gender identity, age, class, income, sexual identity, disability, geographic location, and unique life experiences.



#### HOPE, WELLNESS & RECOVERY

OPDI believes in the right of each individual to self determine their own approach to wellness/recovery and to learn from their peers.



#### INDEPENDENT PEER VOICE

OPDI is member-driven and rooted in and accountable to the history of the Consumer/Survivor movement and sustaining an independent, peer voice.



#### INNOVATION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

OPDI is committed to building and fostering an innovative peer community through partnership and collaboration. We are stronger together than alone.



### OUR DIRECTION

#### HOPE, WELLNESS & RECOVERY

OPDI believes in the right of each individual to self determine their own approach to wellness/recovery and to learn from their peers.



#### FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

- Develop consistent reliable income source
- Develop additional funding sources
- Develop a fundraising program



#### OPERATING PERSPECTIVE

- OPDI has a strong community profile
- OPDI is recognized as a leader in quality improvement
- Ensure OPDI is a preferred workplace



#### INNOVATION & LEARNING

- Expand partnership
- Strengthen the autonomy of independent Consumer Survivor Initiatives and peer support organizations
- Operationalize anti-racism and anti-oppression principles



[WWW.OPDI.ORG](http://WWW.OPDI.ORG)

## 2021 AGM AND AWARDS PRESENTATION: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS STRONG

At the Ontario Peer Development Initiative's 2021 Conference, AGM & Awards Night, we were so excited to celebrate "30 Years Strong"!

Our peer support philosophy has flourished over the last three decades, through the vital peer services that you, our members, provide to local communities and our collective grassroots advocacy. In celebrating 30 years of Peer Support, we recognized our rich history, significant accomplishments, and collaborative efforts throughout the conference.

The pandemic realities only served to highlight our work as being essential to the healthcare delivery that Ontarians deserve.



**At our Annual General Meeting we were pleased to introduce our newest Directors: Rachel Bromberg and Susan Palijan! These talented peer leaders joined our returning board members Alise De Bie, Tina Behdinan, Marina Mikhail, Andrea Schaefer, Percy D'Souza, Tyrone Gamble, and Calvin Prowse to help OPDI strengthen its continued governance work.**

“ **It is Not Too Late to Build  
a Better World!**  
~ David Reville ~

As a psychiatric survivor, and a community activist that has advocated for mental health issues for over 50 years, David Reville kicked off the 2021 Annual Conference with an inspiring keynote address.

We were also honoured to have greetings delivered from Ontario's Associate Minister of Mental Health & Addictions, Michael Tibollo, reinforcing the critical importance of Peer Support in our unpredictable times & for Ontarians' inclusive needs & diverse populations.



Attendees were able to learn and engage over sessions about: *Becoming Effective Allies to Those Struggling Against Oppression and Discrimination* Peer Support for Young Caregivers in Ontario: *One Size Doesn't Fit All* - Safer Use Peer Support Line - Peers as Responders in Opioid Overdose/Poisoning, topped off with a keynote theatrical performance by Victoria Maxwell, 'That's Just Crazy Talk', rated one of the top anti-stigma interventions in the country!



## 2021 AGM AND AWARDS PRESENTATION: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS STRONG

OPDI's Annual 2021 Conference was topped off with an emotional and celebratory virtual Awards Night, to honour our inspiring 12th Annual Lighthouse Award winners.

The Annual Lighthouse Awards consist of five awards, in both individual and organization categories:

- Peer of the Year Award for excellence in peer support
- Unsung Hero Award for someone whose contribution to mental health/addiction work has not been recognized at a provincial level
- Pay it Forward Award for someone who has grappled with significant challenges or barriers in life and used their experience to advocate for change.
- Innovators Award for organizations, whether peer-run or clinical, that implement innovative practices or ideas to serve peers with mental health/addiction issues
- Community Builders Award for organizations, media outlets, or public figures who contribute to the mental health/addiction peer support community through their work.

### 12TH ANNUAL OPDI LIGHTHOUSE AWARD WINNERS...

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF OUR DISTINGUISHED AWARDS RECIPIENTS!**

*Unsung Hero* - Susan Dobson, Executive Director - The Krasman Centre  
*Peer of the Year* - Arif Majeed, Program Manager - CMHA, NBD Peer Support  
*Pay it Forward* - Brenda McConnell, of the CSI, The Beehive  
*Community Builders* - True Self Debwewendizwin Program in Nipissing  
*OPDI Lighthouse Award* - Alise de Bie, OPDI Board of Directors



## MEMBER ENGAGEMENT: OPDI'S CONTINUED PRIORITY

The Ontario Peer Development Initiative is proudly a membership organization: the provincial voice of +50 Consumer Survivor Initiatives & Peer Support Organizations. Even through a year of considerable change, OPDI's first consideration during decision-making discussions has always been serving our members.

Engaging our members and member organizations through communities of practice, focus groups, webinars, stakeholder discussions and member surveys resulted in increased membership engagement opportunities in 2021/22! OPDI hosted 20 webinars & educational sessions, 40 communities of practice, including focused ones for those practicing in hospitals, and 20 leadership forums.



Ontario Peer Development Initiative

**Ethically Navigating Boundaries with People Engaging in Services**



**LIVE EVENT ONLY:**  
Thursday, September 23, 2021 1:00 - 2:00 p.m.

As part of our core values, OPDI is committed to building and fostering an innovative peer community through partnerships and collaboration. *We are stronger together than alone.*

This was most evident in the regular webinar offerings, with guest membership and sector partner participation: increased opportunities for members to engage with each other and other mental health leaders.



Ontario Peer Development Initiative

**Enjoy the Holiday Season Stress-Free!**

~ VASE members ~

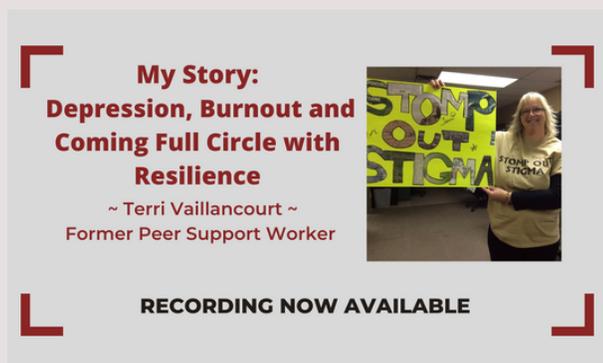


December 16, 2021  
12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.



**Cultural Humility:  
Stepping Stone to Cultural Safety**

JANUARY 13, 2022  
12:00 PM to 1:30 PM EST

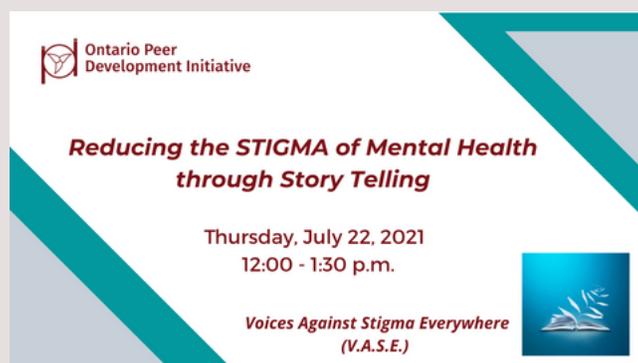



**My Story:  
Depression, Burnout and  
Coming Full Circle with  
Resilience**

~ Terri Vaillancourt ~  
Former Peer Support Worker



**RECORDING NOW AVAILABLE**



Ontario Peer Development Initiative

**Reducing the STIGMA of Mental Health  
through Story Telling**

Thursday, July 22, 2021  
12:00 - 1:30 p.m.

Voices Against Stigma Everywhere  
(V.A.S.E.)



## SHARING KNOWLEDGE & FURTHERING OUR PROFESSION



**OPDI Peer Support**  
CORE ESSENTIALS™ PROGRAM

2021/22 was a pivotal year for OPDI's education mandate. We piloted and launched a more comprehensive and accessible version of the OPDI Peer Support Core Essentials™ Program: a solid foundational training for peer supporters..

This program has always been focused on strengthening and nurturing what is at the core of Peer Support: the Peer Supporter.

The latest iteration of this offering involves 17 two-hour live webinars led by PSC certified trainers. These interactive sessions include individual exercises, group exercises, trainer-led discussion, and role playing.

As growing evidence supports the importance of peer support in the larger mental healthcare framework, proving to be extremely effective in terms of outcomes and return on investment, so has the increased demand for education to support our profession.

OPDI hasn't been able to keep up with the demand, but was able to offer **four** 17-hour sessions through this foundational year, and customized education in partnership with Nipissing University and Franklin University.

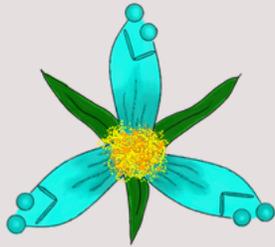
For 2022/23, we not only hope to find innovative ways to meet the strong demand for this program, but find the right mix of peer support trainers to support OPDI's longterm educational visions of accessibility and consistency in professionalism.

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*Revitalizing OPDI's training program has been such an incredible experience. We have transformed the program into a more accessible and affordable online model, while maintaining the feeling of intimacy and community within the participant group. The two-hour synchronous sessions provide our trainees with the opportunity to develop practical peer support skills, while learning from the knowledge and experience of our Peer Support Canada certified trainers.*

~ Nevena Martinovic  
Education Coordinator ~





# PEER SUPPORT STRONG: CELEBRATING THE POWER OF PEER SUPPORT

## 2ND ANNUAL PEER SUPPORT STRONG CONFERENCE

The OPDI team was excited to partner again with the Lived Experience & Recovery Network (LERN) and CMHA North Bay and District to launch the 2nd Annual Peer Support Strong Conference.

It truly was a full day celebration of the power of Peer Support, with the theme being "Celebrating Peers and Your Achievements". Not only was it successful from a diverse programming perspective, but it reinforced how collaborative and engaged the Peer Support sector truly is!

The day was kicked off with a greeting from Ontario's Minister of Health, the Honourable Christine Elliott, followed by sessions that included insightful topics with knowledgeable speakers, such as: *Virtual Peer-Led Programs: An Innovative Approach to MH&A Support* and *Peer Support in COVID Times for Families with Missing Persons*.



# YOUR PROVINCIAL VOICE: ADVOCATING FOR PEER SUPPORT

## Partnering & Working with Government:

OPDI has strengthened its provincial advocacy efforts on your behalf, by bringing the voice of our members' lived and living experience, and a deeper understanding of the role of peers in our Province's healthcare framework to Government Officials, Key Sector Stakeholders and Funders.

From the onset of the 2021/22 cycle, OPDI was already engaged with Ontario's new Associate Minister of Mental Health & Addictions, the Honourable Michael Tibollo, which resulted in public recognition for the foundational role that our CSIs/PSOs play in the provincial mental health and addictions infrastructure.

We also worked with our member organizations to raise awareness of peer support successes in MPP's local communities, like touring the Krasman Centre with MPP, Daisy Wai.

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Organizations like the OPDI and the many peer support service providers across the province provide a critical, foundational piece to our mental health and addictions infrastructure. We will continue to work with the OPDI as we implement the *Roadmap to Wellness* - our action-oriented plan to build a connected and comprehensive mental health and addictions system where every Ontarian can be fully supported in their journey towards mental wellness.

**Honourable Michael Tibollo**  
**Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions**



The Krasman Centre is a wonderful asset to the City of Richmond Hill, and a shining example of the importance that peer support plays in transitioning those with mental health issues back into the workforce. I am honoured to recognize the work of the OPDI, the Krasman Centre and peer support organizations across the province that aren't only providing a safe environment for those with mental health afflictions, but also a valuable resource for empowerment through employment

**Daisy Wai, MPP - Richmond Hill**

## Taking a Balanced Approach:

As OPDI ensures that it is fully representing the needs of our members and the peer support movement, we have spent time building relationships with government officials at all levels and of all partisan stripes. Supporting NDP MPP Terence Kernaghan's Private Member's Bill was a great example of putting the issues ahead of politics, to improve access to mental health care in our Province.

Kernaghan's bill was inspired by research conducted by London health researchers that showed Ontarians with mental health needs demonstrated positive health outcomes once they had access to devices that support their treatment plan.

*Arming individuals with technological devices to support their mental health needs will significantly increase access to much-needed treatments and supports. Through the use of technology, individuals can better manage their own mental health – giving them greater independence and higher levels of community integration. The Ontario Peer Development Initiative applauds MPP Kernaghan for introducing this private member's bill that would allow for greater engagement in mental health services.*

~ Laura Pearson, Executive Director - OPDI ~

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## YOUR PROVINCIAL VOICE: 2022 PROVINCIAL PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

As a continuation of OPDI's ongoing strategic approach to working with government, we were delighted to have focused our efforts in making a formal submission to the Ontario government for their 2022 Budget considerations.

This submission thoroughly outlined the value that our +50 community-based peer and family support organizations in Ontario provide to their local communities, highlighted the unique way in which we interact with other stakeholders across our mental health and addictions system, and shared how we would collectively leverage funding to standardize care across the province and provide enhanced peer support services to Ontarians. We also highlighted the collaborative efforts that our sector already engages in, to find new ways to leverage our scarce yet valuably experienced and synergistic resources so that we could continue to enable vital peer support delivery, like through the 'Back Office Transformation Support - Business Case'.

OPDI's Pre-Budget Submission also illustrated the challenges that we collectively face in maintaining this network of vital "front-line" service providers given the current funding model.

This submission outlined three specific areas or "asks," where government can help increase capacity within our peer-support network in the short-term. We are framing these asks as an initial step to a longer-term, wholistic solution.

We are confident that OPDI's ongoing advocacy efforts will help further our sector's goals, starting with the government considering a strengthened partnership with community-based peer and family support, which we feel will ultimately help address challenges in the broader mental health and addictions system. As your provincial voice, we have committed to moving this strategic conversation along, so that government can help increase capacity within our peer-support network.



### **ONTARIO PEER DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

#### **PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION:**

**SUPPORT FOR ONTARIO "FRONT-LINE" PEER AND FAMILY SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND CONSUMER/SURVIVOR INITIATIVES (CSIs)**

ONTARIO BUDGET 2022

**December 2021**

## COMMUNICATING WITH YOU!

As OPDI continues its advocacy work across the sector, strengthens its strategic sectoral relationships and tries to make our communications more accessible through virtual offerings, our team increased our efforts to share knowledge with you and our wider sector.

This year we also launched OPDI's LinkedIn account, as an additional channel for us to exchange important sector-related news with each other!



**20**  
SESSIONS

**Membership  
Communiques**

**26**  
EDITIONS



**47**  
ISSUES



**138**  
POSTS ON EACH PLATFORM

# LET'S STAY CONNECTED

## NewsToGo

NewsToGo is an electronic newsletter which is focused on research, resources and policy information of relevance to consumer/survivor organizations and to broader stakeholders in the healthcare sector. You'll also find updates about OPDI, as well as relevant peer support job postings and community events & initiatives.

Contributions and comments are welcome. Please email us at [opdi@opdi.org](mailto:opdi@opdi.org), and include "News to Go" in the Subject line.

To sign-up for the newsletter, click [here](#).

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on social media for peer support community events, opportunities and updates!



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