

PeerWorks



2022-2023
Annual Report

Message from PeerWorks Director

Dear PeerWorks community,

As I reflect on the past year, it is with gratitude and a sense of shared accomplishment that I address each of you. Since its inception, our organization has continued to evolve and adapt in response to the ever-changing landscape of peer support and mental health and addiction advocacy. To that end, let us start with one of our biggest accomplishments in the past year: we rebranded from OPDI to PeerWorks. Our name change reflects and recognizes the success of CSIs and PSOs as becoming a part of Ontario healthcare framework.

There were also extensive changes within the PeerWorks team. Laura Pearson stepped down as Executive Director. Kiki Chang transitioned from her role as an Education Coordinator to consulting for PeerWorks. Mina Zahine joined us as a part-time Communications and Outreach Coordinator.

Though our name change symbolizes a new era for peer support in Ontario, we are still as committed to our mission, which is to strengthen and promote diverse peer voices in Ontario, through community building, information-sharing, collaboration, advocacy, and education.

In the past year, we have made great strides in developing a position statement on the scope of practice for peer support. We engaged in regular advisory committee meetings throughout the year, conducted surveys, and held focus groups. We will continue to finalize the position statement in FY2023/2024 and look forward to sharing it with you when it is completed.

Our commitment to peer support and advocacy was further highlighted through the successful hosting of the virtual Annual Conference, "Gathering Together, Dreaming Together, Transforming Together," in October. This format allowed individuals to participate within their work schedules, ensuring broader accessibility.

However, we decided to transition our annual conference to an in-person event in May (Q1) of the 2023/24 fiscal year. This change aligns with our mission to support our members in their professional development and create networking opportunities essential for their growth.

Throughout this year, we continued to offer professional development opportunities, including webinars, community of practice gatherings, and leadership forums. These offerings will evolve in response to your feedback and needs.

PeerWorks remains dedicated to uplifting the voices of those with lived experience in developing healthcare systems. We did this during FY2022/2023 through raising awareness about peer support at the government level. We have actively engaged various stakeholders, including government officials, and members of parliament.

We also sent a 2022/2023 pre-budget submission letter to Queen's Park, which is discussed in this report. The purpose of this letter was to emphasize the need for adequate funding for the peer support sector. Though our first Queen's Park Education Day was held in the following fiscal year, we completing all of the planning in conjunction with Stosic & Associates in this fiscal year.

I want to express my gratitude to each of you for your unwavering support and dedication to PeerWorks. Together, we have navigated a year marked by change and adaptation. Your voices and experiences continue to be our guiding light, and I look forward to our community's continued growth and impact in the coming year.

With warmth and appreciation,

Allyson Theodorou
Operations Director

OUR MISSION:

PeerWorks' mission is to strengthen and promote diverse peer voices in Ontario, through community building, information-sharing, collaboration, advocacy, and education.

OUR 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.

OUR VALUES:

Hope and Wellness/Recovery

PeerWorks 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

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

Diversity as Strength

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

Lived Experience and Experiential Knowledge

PeerWorks 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, and Honesty

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

Innovation through Partnership and Collaboration

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

Communication Highlights

This year, we reached our vibrant community in the following ways:



45 editions of NewstoGo



35 member communiques



97 Tweets and reposts



78 Facebook posts



30 LinkedIn posts

PeerWorks Advocacy Efforts

Committee Involvement

PeerWorks continues to highlight the importance of peer support and brings the voice of lived experience to the committees that it is a part of. These committees include, the Correction Reformation Coalition, Provincial Human Service Justice Coordinating Committee, and EE Net Advisory Committee.

Planning for Queen's Park Education Day

Though the first Queen's Park Education Day was held in the following fiscal year, the majority of the planning was completed in FY2022/2023.

Government Engagement Initiatives

This year, PeerWorks intensified its efforts to emphasize the vital role of peer support in the mental health and addictions sector. We engaged directly with Minister Sylvia Jones and Associate Minister Michael Tibollo's offices to bring awareness to the importance of community-based peer and family support organizations in Ontario. The objective of these meetings was to secure increased funding and stronger backing for PSOs and CSIs, emphasizing their indispensable impact on our communities.

Pre-Budget Submission 2022/2023

In a letter addressed to the Ontario Minister of Health, Hon. Sylvia Jones, and the Associate Minister of Mental Health & Addictions, Hon. Michael Tibollo, PeerWorks outlined critical requests concerning the funding and support of Consumer Survivor Initiatives (CSIs) and Peer Support Organizations (PSOs).

The first pressing concern highlighted in the letter was the urgent need for an immediate increase in PeerWorks' Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA) with the Mental Health & Addiction Centre of Excellence. The second crucial request emphasized the necessity of standardizing and centralizing the funding model for CSIs and PSOs.

Professional Development

This year, we advanced peer support development in Ontario in the following ways:



5 Peer Support Core Essentials Trainings



7 Webinars and Educational Events



50 Communities of Practice and Leadership Calls

Peer Support Strong Conference: L.E.A.Ding the Way

On February 7th, 2023, PeerWorks and LERN co-hosted the third annual Peer Support Strong Conference. This year's theme was L.E.A.Ding (Listening, Empowering, Advocating, and Defining) the Way. The conference underscored the significance of peer support, innovative virtual spaces, lived experience leadership, and self-care strategies in the field of mental health and addictions support.

The day began with a session on Progress Place, Canada's First Warm Line, a vital support system available by phone and online for 28 years. Attendees learned about its origins, growth, and impact on individuals struggling with mental illness and addiction. They explored virtual peer support groups through a presentation by Support House's Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. Participants gained insights into creating innovative online support spaces and received valuable resources for implementing virtual programs effectively.

In the afternoon, attendees learned about the transformational impact of lived experience leadership in the mental health system. They heard about Yale University's Lived Experience Transformational Leadership Academy LET(s)Lead program in partnership with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, designed to facilitate personal and professional growth.

Lastly, attendees were given an introductory lesson on mindfulness meditation. The session emphasized the significance of moment-by-moment awareness, providing practical guidance on integrating mindfulness practices into their lives.



2022 Annual Conference & AGM

PeerWorks hosted its 2022 Annual Conference, "**Gathering Together, Dreaming Together, Transforming Together,**" from October 3-7 via Zoom. The attendees had the opportunities to explore these themes through networking sessions throughout the conference.

The conference kicked off with a welcome session, setting the tone for the week of collaboration. One highlight was **Simon Coulombe's** presentation on the **POWeR study**, a pioneering investigation into mental health and addiction peer support in Ontario. **Tanya Shute** offered valuable insights into evidence-based practices. **Bryanna Kelly** and **Sarah Cantin** also shared a compelling tale about creating **Nipissing University's Peer Support Program**.

Participants delved into the crucial subject of Menopause Peer Support, guided by **Alyssa Blais**. The session underscored the significance of emotional support during menopause, challenging societal taboos and spotlighting a tailored peer support initiative designed to empower individuals navigating this transitional phase.

PeerWorks Board Member **Tyrone Gamble** gave an impactful presentation highlighting culturally appropriate methods to assist Indigenous peers. The workshop explored distinctive alternatives, choices, and opportunities, promoting a deeper connection to identity and heritage in the context of mental health and substance use health. The conference concluded on a positive note, featuring a presentation by **Elizabeth Tremblay** and **Mardi Daley** that delved into peer leadership within the mental health movement.

On October 6th, we held our AGM and 13th annual Lighthouse Awards ceremony. LERN's Regional Director **Kari Sterling** received the Unsung Hero award. **David Cowherd** was the Pay it Forward award winner. **Keeping Six Hamilton** received the Community Builders award. The keynote speech delivered by **Asante Haughton** added a heartfelt dimension to the conference.

Throughout the conference, a spirit of unity and transformation permeated the atmosphere. Attendees came together to share dreams and explore practical routes for change. This collective effort marked the 2022 Annual Conference as a symbol of hope and progress in the field of peer support.



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