
Peer Work
Policy

MEWA Health and Harm Reduction

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1.Responsibility for approval of policy	<i>CEO-MEWA</i>
2.Responsibility for implementation	<i>Abdalla Badhrus</i>
3.Responsibility for ensuring review	<i>Abdalla Badhrus</i>

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. *MEWA Health and Harm Reduction* views the skills and knowledge of service users as an important resource that can be engaged in a variety of peer work activities to assist other individuals or groups and provide valuable experience for peer workers themselves.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. This policy outlines how services users can be involved in service delivery through peer work.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to any service user who assists the service operations in a formal capacity through outreach, facilitation, mentoring or any other task which would be considered as voluntary work. For the purposes of this policy, service users operating in this context are called peer workers.
- 3.2. This policy does not cover any form of paid work, although volunteer peer workers may be paid expenses. If a peer worker goes on to paid employment their work will be governed by the relevant human resources policy portfolio.

4. Statement of Approach

- 4.1. *MEWA Health and Harm Reduction* supports the engagement of service users in service delivery. The philosophy behind peer work is that frequently 'people are more likely to listen to and act on information if it is presented to them by someone that they can identify with, respect and model behavior from.'¹
- 4.2. The service provides three levels of peer works, which are 1) outreach, 2) facilitation and 3) mentoring.

5. Glossary of Terms and Definitions

- 5.1. Outreach Peer Work: this will involve the service user distributing information to their peer group. This can be either accompanied by a staff member or may be unaccompanied.
- 5.2. Peer Facilitation: this will generally involve co-facilitation with a staff member, the peer can either be in the lead or support role depending on experience and content.
- 5.3. Mentoring: this involves providing one-to-one support to a peer, which is a role with significant responsibility.

6. Principles

- 6.1. Peer work is a valuable resource and one that should benefit both the individual peer worker and the organisation.
- 6.2. It is the organisations responsibility to ensure that the peer worker is appropriately supported; through training, supervision, information and debriefing opportunities, to perform their role in a way is beneficial to themselves as well as anyone they are working with.
- 6.3. Peer work should occur at no cost to the worker. In some cases, it may be useful for the organisation to review the costs involved and ensure these are covered by the organisation, costs may include: transport, childcare, food and other out of pocket expenses.

¹ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2003) Peer to Peer: Downloadable at http://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/handbook_peer_english.pdf

- 6.4. Peer workers should have the same degree of professionalism accorded them as any volunteer, although peer workers may require additional supports as compared to external volunteers.
- 6.5. If they wish, peer workers should be actively supported to progress through the opportunities offered by the organisation or into further appropriate training opportunities. In this regard it is important that the organisation is very clear about the possibilities that may arise from peer work in relation to progression into paid work, so that individuals do not develop unrealistic expectations. Services users should understand the educational specifications for paid work; if they are interested in progressing in this direction, they should be supported to access appropriate training.
- 6.6. Issues around confidentiality and managing peer relationships in relations to professional standards should be given special attention in all guidelines and training.
- 6.7. Programmes should endeavour to involve potential peer workers in planning phase.
- 6.8. All goals should be practical, clear and achievable. How the programme will be monitored and evaluated should be considered and planned from onset. This will enable all involved to see whether they have been successful in their role/s.
- 6.9. At all times peer workers should be instructed and supported to ensure their own wellbeing prior to the fulfilment of any aspects of the peer work. In all circumstances maintaining their own safety and/or recovery is of prime importance.
- 6.10. The service will endeavour to actively include peer workers in relevant decision-making structures of the organisation. The Service User Involvement Policy should be referred to in this instance.
- 6.11. Generally, individuals beginning peer work will do so either through outreach with appropriate supports or through some form of group work with a staff member present. Mentoring will only be offered as an option after some staff supported peer work has been successfully undertaken.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- 7.1. Management: It is the role of management to ensure that the organisation has the sufficient human resources to support all service users engaging in peer work through training, supervision, de-briefing sessions and staff supported monitoring and evaluation.
- 7.2. Peer workers: It is the responsibility of peer workers to work in the way described in this policy.

8. Peer Worker Qualities

- 8.1. While a number of the skills involved in peer work can be taught and learnt, there are a number of personal qualities which a peer worker should bring to the role, these include:
 - 8.1.1. a willingness to learn and be open to new ideas and ways of doing things.
 - 8.1.2. a general understanding about ground rules and the need for confidentiality.
 - 8.1.3. the capability to apply good listening skills.
 - 8.1.4. being capable of expressing themselves in a clear and non-confrontational manner.
 - 8.1.5. self-reflection.
 - 8.1.6. being able to be supervised and receive feedback and to improve themselves based on this;
 - 8.1.7. being non-judgmental.

9. Needs Assessment and Payment of Costs

- 9.1. Prior to any programme it will be agreed between management and staff as to how peer worker costs will be managed. This will be clearly noted and if costs are being re-implemented a clear process will be agreed.
- 9.2. Staff will undertake a needs assessment with peer workers to explore what information is required to support the peer work. This will be provided in hard copy and will also form part of the training.

10. Outreach Peer Work

- 10.1. Peer outreach will have the following characteristics, the details of which will be determined by the specific project group:
 - 10.1.1. Clear and achievable aims.
 - 10.1.2. Clear guidance as to who the target group is and where and when outreach will take place.
 - 10.1.3. The peer workers will receive appropriate training in (harm reduction/other). Training will be run over a series of sessions to ensure retention of important information. Training will also explore, among other factors:
 - 10.1.3.1. how to deal with difficult questions and situations
 - 10.1.3.2. appropriate boundaries
 - 10.1.3.3. confidentiality and maintaining this in practice.
 - 10.1.4. Outreach will take place: 1) with a staff member, 2) in pairs, 3) individually as part of a service users normal peer engagement.
 - 10.1.5. A system for de-briefing will be agreed
 - 10.1.6. Peer workers will have formal supervision at agreed intervals and staff support as requested.
 - 10.1.7. A simple monitoring and feedback system which will feed into an evaluation.

11. Peer Facilitation

- 11.1. Peer facilitation is a role that will be open to service users who are undertaking some specific form of training.
- 11.2. Peer facilitators will undertake training, which will include:
 - 11.2.1. general facilitation skills
 - 11.2.2. how to co-facilitate in the context of the specific group
 - 11.2.3. how to deal with difficult dynamics and situations
 - 11.2.4. appropriate boundaries
 - 11.2.5. Confidentiality and maintaining this in practice.
- 11.3. Peer facilitators will always work with a member of staff, or in the case of experienced peer workers two peer workers may facilitate together.
- 11.4. Pre-session planning time and post session de-briefing will be built into the schedule.
- 11.5. Regular supervision will be provided.

12. Peer Mentoring / Buddy Systems in the Drug Free Rehabilitation Context

- 12.1. Peer mentoring or 'buddying' is a role that will be open to any service users or ex service users who have been drug free for over a certain length of time with urinalysis results to verify this and or who have participated in certain programmes etc). The role of mentoring or buddying is to provide informal rehabilitation support as such there is a need for the individual to remain on a similar rehabilitation pathway in order for supports to be appropriate and positive.
- 12.2. A project outline should be developed in consultation with potential peer mentors. This will include details on:

- 12.2.1. The goals of peer mentoring.
- 12.2.2. The principles of peer mentoring, such as honesty, non-judgemental attitudes etc.
- 12.2.3. When and how often peer mentors will meet with their assigned person.
- 12.2.4. The limits and boundaries of supports, including details on; night time phone calls, lending of money, personal relationships.
- 12.2.5. What happens in the case of a relapse for either the mentor or recipient.
- 12.2.6. What staff supports are available, including supervision, peer support groups, de-briefing and supports in regard to any practical issues presenting.
- 12.2.7. Whether there will be urinalysis requested as part of the programme, or whether stability is judged based on presentation.
- 12.2.8. How will mentors know when the job has been done well, what information will be kept supporting evaluation.
- 12.2.9. How will peers manage issues in relation to their buddy or another mentor on the programme.
- 12.3. Peer mentors will be bound by the same code of conduct as paid staff and should sign a contract following completion of the training to say that agree to operate in the way described in the guidelines and the service's code of conduct.
- 12.4. Training will be conducted in house and must be completed prior to peer mentoring beginning; this will include although will not be restricted to:
 - 12.4.1. active listening and communication skills
 - 12.4.2. dealing with difficult scenarios
 - 12.4.3. boundaries and confidentiality
 - 12.4.4. basic child protection
 - 12.4.5. code of conduct
 - 12.4.6. confidentiality.
- 12.5. Attendance at regular supervision sessions / peer support groups is an integral part of being a mentor. If these meetings are not attended the mentoring role may be stopped.
- 12.6. There will be regular opportunities for all involved in this programme to review the process and advise any changes to its operations.

13. Other considerations

- 13.1. Peer workers should have individual care planning should this be required, particularly in relation to future training and employment options.
- 13.2. If the service has a number of peer roles it will be important to be clear about the open competition recruitment process and any relevant person specifications as well as for any paid roles that arise in the organisation. In all cases peer workers who wish to progress into professional paid work within the sector should be encouraged and supported to access appropriate mainstream training.
- 13.3. The peer worker induction process should ensure clarity about progression routes into employment, i.e. what is the person spec for jobs within the organisation, does the organisation support access to further training etc.
- 13.4. If a peer worker relapses and is no longer able to occupy this role, all efforts should be made to support the individual and contextualise their break from peer work in terms of success rather than failure.
- 13.5. Peer workers who do not adhere to the organisation's rules or who fail to perform their assignments satisfactorily may be removed from the responsibility of peer work. If there is an incident of gross misconduct the individual will be removed from the position immediately. If conduct is minor, then the incident will be dealt with

by the supervisor. Continuous minor misconduct will be seen as grounds to remove the individual from the position. Supervisors should be aware that peer workers are also clients and should be supported in all situations.

- 13.6. Peer workers must seek prior approval from their supervisor before undertaking anything which might significantly affect the organisation. This includes, but is not limited to, statements to the press and agreements involving contractual or financial obligations.
- 13.7. If a peer worker feels they are being unfairly treated, they have the right to proceed with a grievance in line with the organisations grievance policy.
- 13.8. Peer workers will be included in any general staff team building / planning / social events etc.