

## What the research says about the importance of training peer supporters

There is a growing body of research that highlight the importance of training peer supporters before they begin intervening (see Charles et al., 2021; Kahan et al., 2020; Repper & Watson, 2012; Wogrin et al., 2021). Below are the main arguments as to why training is important:

1. Safe and accessible support, supervision and training had a significant impact on volunteers' experiences, assisting them to grow confidence in their abilities and contributing to an ongoing feeling of being supported and valued within the organization (Biggs et al., 2019)
2. Peer supporters who had little training were shocked at the levels of disturbance in some clients, some wanted to separate themselves from the people they worked with; some did not feel able to admit their feelings to the staff team; some found it hard to work out what they were supposed to do (Repper & Carter, 2011)
3. There are potential risks for peer supporters, including being overwhelmed by, engaging with, and feeling responsible for resolving relationally and structurally complex problems, which warrant considerable supervision. To support this cadre critical elements are needed: a clearly defined scope for the manageable provision of mental health support; a strong triage and referral system for complex cases; mechanisms to support the inclusion of caregivers; and sustained investment in training and ongoing supervision (Wogrin et al., 2021)
4. There was a crucial need for clear guidelines on the management of trauma disclosures (Kahan et al. 2020).
5. Training allows for evaluations of the peer supporters before they begin intervening with their peers. They can be assessed for their practical, written and conceptual skills and the training increases their competence, confidence and team working skills (Repper & Carter, 2011).
6. A peer support worker who understands the impacts of trauma and uses trauma-informed practices will be less likely to unintentionally re-traumatize a peer and more likely to support healing. They are more likely to provide a safe opportunity for a peer to talk about what happened to them, rather than what is wrong with them. It can also help to ensure that causes of psychological distress are not overlooked (Sunderland & Mishin, 2014).
7. Training offers opportunities to practice, which enhances confidence. The participatory approach to training, in which learners are directly engaged in their own learning, is more empowering and has the best results (Sunderland & Mishin, 2014).



8. Initial training is essential for the mental health peer support worker role. Across 20 studies, there was a strong consensus about the high importance of five topics to include in the training (Charles et al., 2021):

- 1) why lived experience is an asset,
- 2) ethics (e.g., confidentiality, boundaries)
- 3) Importance of the peer supporters' well-being/self-care
- 4) What is the peer supporters' role
- 5) Communication skills (e.g., how to communicate effectively, active listening)