Peer Support Models for Chronic Conditions in Primary Care Settings

The aim of this study was to develop a model of peer support in a community health setting that could be used to assist community members who have a chronic condition. This study was undertaken during 2010 using the opportunity provided by a small development grant called the “Frances Baum Fellowship.” The authors had a background in community development and volunteering programs and were interested to explore how their understanding of these approaches could be applied to a peer support model.

**CONCLUSION**

This study recommends that primary health settings consider implementing a model that incorporates a community participation approach using peers as volunteers to work with the community to prevent chronic conditions and delay their progression. A community participation approach to peer support expands the potential outcomes of peer support from just being an effective self-management option to one that plays an equally valuable role in community building. Using peer support to build relationships in community, helps communities to understand and deal with health issues in the social contexts in which they live.

“If you really need help here you can get it without the stigma of getting help – it’s not shoved down your throat”

(Comment regarding the Men’s Shed program)

**REFERENCES**


**INTRODUCTION**

Initially a literature review was undertaken which included a comparison of three methods of enlisting community members. The following are the definitions of each adopted for this study.

**Community Participation**

"Participation is a concept that describes the attempts to bring different stakeholders together around problem-posing, problem-solving and decision-making, while working across boundaries, self-interests and power differences.”

**Volunteering**

"Formal volunteering is an activity that takes place in not for profit organizations or projects and is of benefit to the community and undertaken of the volunteer’s own free will and without coercion for no financial payment and in designated volunteer positions only.”

**Peer Support**

“Peer support is defined as support from a person who has experienced knowledge of a specific behaviour or stressor and similar characteristics as the target population.”

**METHOD**

The method for the study included developing a comprehensive project logic that included;

- a review of the literature relating to peer support, volunteering and community participation
- development of a peer support questionnaire that was informed the Chronic Illness Alliance Inc, Chronic Illness Peer Support, Best Practice Framework
- completion of interviews with leaders of eight peer support programs (both external and internal to Banyule Community Health)
- identification of peer support program models
- intensive evaluation of a community participation model of peer support
- consideration of potential models of peer support for chronic conditions in a primary care setting.

**RESULTS**

The eight peer support programs that the questionnaire was applied to are divided into the categories described previously. From the answers given further description of these categories are provided.

**DISCUSSION**

The Peer Partnership category seemed to be the category most suited for primary care settings. The Peer Led Models are reliant on a peer being available and skilled enough to lead a peer support intervention. Peer Employee model would require a primary care setting to make a clear ongoing commitment to this form of peer inclusion. The peer partnership category use the experience of the peer and combine it with the learnt knowledge and skill of the professional. The diagram below expands an understanding of peer partnership style programs. It places on a continuum a participation approach to peer support with the learnt knowledge and skill of the professional.

**Things of note from the evaluation were**

- Initial consultation with the local community to identify a need and to problem solve a solution and the development of a Men’s Shed program operating five days a week was the result
- The diverse health challenges the men experience have had these needs met successfully in a variety of ways
- The Shed model relies on peer support and does so in conjunction with a relatively subtle but powerful therapeutic environment
- The Shed has had a very consultative mode of operation, with the men consulted on all matters concerning the Shed’s development and operations
- High levels of skill and broad therapeutic and community development experience is needed in coordinating staff
- Patience and working creatively with institutional resistance - tolerating ambiguity and patience - allowing time for things to happen have been important elements of the Shed’s development.

**PEER PARTNERSHIP CONTINUUM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Participation</th>
<th>Chronic Disease Group</th>
<th>Chronic Disease Self Management Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Partnership</td>
<td>Group sessions outlined with capacity to change with group input</td>
<td>Program set for whole course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fixed commitment</td>
<td>Fixed commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader training completed</td>
<td>Both peer and/or practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Long term / Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Requires staff with community development experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Peers**

- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Walk With Wheels
- Diabetes Support Group
- Peer Connection
- Peer Support Support

- Diabetes Group (BCH)
- On-line Diabetes (Type 1 Diabetes Network)
- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Definied by program parameters
- Requires high level organisational commitment to peer contribution
- Range in commitment depending on program type and peer availability
- Development of formal structure, policies and procedures
- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Depends on program & peer availability
- Depends on peer initiative if they retain control or not
-界方 involvement of additional peers to share load
- Pre-determined sometimes if using evidence based course outline
- Boundary issue between peer and professional
- Requires staff with Community affiliation as program develops
- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Needs organisation affiliation as program develops
- Boundary issue between peer and professional
- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee

- Requires staff with Community affiliation as program develops
- Boundary issue between peer and professional
- Peer Led
- Peer Partnership
- Peer Employee