

Core Values of Peer Support

Peer support is defined as a helping relationship between two individuals (peers) who share some form of lived experience with mental health challenges, issues, concerns, or illness. Peers help us understand and interpret our experiences. They aid us in recognizing our strengths, and support us as we venture to find our own meaning in life. At NISA this support can come in the form of friendships, formal one-on-one support, or group sharing and learning activities.

As members of a peer/consumer-led organization, we acknowledge and recognize that for a long time people living with mental health challenges were the subject of stigmatization, discrimination, and social injustice. NISA and its members are indebted to those who fought for the civil rights of 'psychiatric patients' in the institutions, and in the community after deinstitutionalization. Peer Support and recovery in mental health was made possible by those brave individuals who resisted and brought about change in our communities.

The core values contained in this document reflect our commitment to maintaining a peer-support relationship consistent with the self-worth and dignity that we deserve. These values include: Self-Determination & Personal Strength, Mutuality, Hope, Recovery, Health & Well-being, Honest & Transparent Relationships, Personal Integrity & Trust, Dignity & Respect, and Lifelong learning & Personal Growth.

Self-Determination & Personal Strength

- We support an individual's autonomy and ability to make their own decisions, determine their own goals and aspirations, and live as they choose to
- We actively support people to find and use their own voice
- We believe that each individual is capable and has their own inner strength and wisdom
- Individuals have the right to guide the services they receive
- We honour an individual's right to take risks as part of their personal growth

Quotes from our peers:

"Knowing I have choices makes me feel empowered"

Mutuality

- As peers we are of equal standing with each other
- We value the understanding that comes from our similar lived experience
- We are equals in a supportive relationship and can each learn and grow as a result
- We strive to maintain a power balance where no one is superior

Quotes from our peers:

"...feelings back and forth", "...we get nourishment from each other", "...process of give and take"

Hope

- We are holders of hope and communicate positive expectations
- We express our confidence in others to be successful in their own journey of recovery
- We support individuals to discover their own strength and resilience, and to act on their own behalf to effect positive change in their lives
- We inspire mutual sharing of hopes, dreams, and possibilities

Quotes from our peers:

“...something to look forward to; moving towards a goal”, “Hope is motivator to get us there”, “Having something to look forward to gives hope”, “...the belief that something better can be there”

Recovery, Health & Well-being

- We believe that recovery and well-being is possible for everyone
- We support individuals to take personal responsibility and be active in their own recovery
- We embrace the uniqueness of each individual and their ability to create a life of meaning and purpose, as they define it for themselves
- We understand that, in addition to a person’s mental health status and diagnosis, there are many factors – social, economic, environmental, etc. – that impact one’s recovery journey, and we will strive to provide support to address those factors

Quotes from our peers:

“Being productive helps my self-esteem and my wellness”

Honest & Transparent Relationships

- We value authentic relationships and can share our lived experience and insights
- We form connections with empathy and compassion
- We approach individuals with openness, curiosity, and interest in their experience, stories, and perspectives
- We are transparent and explain what can and cannot be expected of the peer support relationship

Quotes from our peers:

“Empathy and compassion gets you connected to each other”, “A real person, who understands”, “Being real, not fake”, “Transparency is ‘I’m a human too”

Personal Integrity & Trust

- We act ethically and with integrity at all times, with an individual’s well-being as priority
- We protect and maintain confidentiality
- We are trustworthy and accountable for our actions

Quotes from our peers:

“I want to know I will not be judged, that I can trust this person with my information”

Dignity & Respect

- We are intentional with our language, using person-first language that supports the idea that the individual is a whole person, separate from whatever labels may have followed them

- We understand that we live in a world where some of us experience racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, historical-based trauma, ageism, linguistic, class-based discrimination, and discrimination based on our religious beliefs and spiritual practices. We recognize our diversity and honour our various and often interconnected struggles with oppression

Quotes from our peers:

“I want to be respected and have my dignity”, “You have to respect people and their space”, “Honour and respect [the] intrinsic worth of all individuals”

Lifelong learning & Personal Growth

- We participate in continuing education and personal development to remain current in the field of peer support and enhance our skills and abilities
- Recovery is not linear, and we view ups and downs as part of the journey and an opportunity for insight and growth
- We acknowledge the value of learning, changing, and developing new perspectives for all individuals

Quotes from our peers:

“We are all learning all the time, it is important to keep always learning”, “Every time someone shares with me, I learn something new”

Developed by NISA members with adaptations from:

Mental Health Commission of Canada

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Western Mass Recovery Learning Community

Intentional Peer Support by Shery Mead

SAMHSA/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Mead, S., Hilton, D. & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer Support: A Theoretical Perspective.