

Designing Peer-Led Strategies Meeting the Needs of People With Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders

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TABLE 2.
Main thematic areas of the benefits of peer support

Theme	Peer support worker quotations	Service recipient quotations
Value of shared experiences	"Having the knowledge of life, you know, having that lived experience, being able to be compassionate and understanding and to help others find a voice and use their voice and manage to navigate, you know, through broken systems."	"There's something about a [peer support worker], when we meet that really makes me feel valued as a person. And that hasn't happened for quite a long time for me. Having somebody to relate to makes me feel worthy as a person and worthwhile, and not like I'm worthless. I feel like I'm actually somebody [who's] worth spending time with and worth taking the time out of their day to be with."
	"You do have to be very cautious when sharing your own experiences because, first of all, you don't wan[t to] overshare, and sometimes sharing without being asked, can be a no-no in this field – as well as you have to, kind of, know where the person's at in their own recovery. So you're not giving them triggering information. I think those are two big keys when sharing."	"... it sounds like [a peer support worker] has been through the system in many ways, too, and is able to help me kind of almost skip steps so that I don't have to go through every single hoop that [the peer support worker] did. You know, and if things don't work out or whatever, then there's always, plan B or [the peer support worker] lets me know there is always another plan, something like that."

Theme	Peer support worker quotations	Service recipient quotations
<p>Building capacity, social connections and self-determination</p>	<p>"I have one peer who I've been working with since I began here almost two years ago. [The peer] suffers from bipolar as well as a few other illnesses. And a big win for us is that we were able to sit down with the doctor virtually, after having drawn up a whole slew of questions for the doctor. And [the peer] was able to, with my support, ask the doctor questions. So, I should say [the peer] has severe anxiety. [The peer] was able to actually ask questions [of] the doctor on their own, like self-advocate. Which was amazing to see because up until that point, we've done a lot of outings in the community together and you can see that [the peer]'s anxiety was quite crippling. Um, but [the peer] needed to self advocate because the medications were not serving [the peer] very well and was actually showing far more negative, symptomatic issues than positive ones. So that was really good."</p>	<p>"[The peer support worker] is really supportive of me doing better for myself. You know what I mean? Like when I first met [the peer support worker], I was definitely not doing good. I was living on the street, using, and [the peer support worker]'s just been really supportive of that, you know? So I'm doing significantly better than what I was and a lot of it is thanks to [the peer support worker] ... pushing me to stay focused."</p>
<p>Re-establishing routine and maintaining balance</p>	<p>"I had a peer who was calling me two, three times a week when I first started engaging with him because his whole thing was, he was isolated and lonely, and had no one to talk to. And over months of us talking and going out and meeting out in the public and, and other stuff, he became more social. And like it might seem like not a big thing, but now we only need to talk a couple times a month."</p>	<p>"So [the peer support worker] really helped out with those initial steps, and you know, getting back on my feet, getting [me] back into like society. I am pretty stable now since I've been living here. I think I see my workers a lot less because I just do my own thing now. I see them when I need to vent and stuff sometimes. I go when I need to now. I'm just doing my own thing. Like I go less and need less stuff because I just, kind of, have a life now; before I didn't really have much of a life."</p>
	<p>"The job has since proven to be a lot more community-based and embedded in social needs. So, for example, I'm working with one client right now on sourcing food banks and getting food for him on a regular basis. Another one is housing, which is a brutal, and a hard thing to do at the moment because rents are so high and it's just so hard ... it's insane. I'm also working with a guy from the homeless community who needs identification and he has no identification whatsoever, but needs it in order to get a bank account."</p>	<p>"I've been a drug addict all my life and I'm still using drugs, but not as much as I was, and I've been housed and my rents [are] paid on time and if it wasn't for the peer support workers, I probably wouldn't be able to do that. Like they keep me off the street, help with my housing, keep clothes on my back and [I] have food in my fridge and stuff like that. And they check up on me at least once a week. They make sure I'm doing okay."</p>
	<p>"I've been through Suntrac and treatment court and treatment centres myself. So, I think I can offer support to people in similar situations. Like, if they're at the early stage of recovery, the chances are, they're not go[ing to] take the help because where they're at is they need other people to be able to come meet them there too."</p>	<p>"Peer support really helped me get my life back on track. Every aspect of my well-being improved. Without CHMA stepping in and all that, I would have no place to live ... they helped me, they stepped in and found me this place. I'm really happy about it. I've been here for almost two years now and I'm really happy to be here."</p>
<p>Instilling hope for recovery</p>	<p>"One appeared with an addiction issue, found out that was my background as well. They've, kind of, asked me what steps I took to get clean. And I've shared with them, the places I've gone to and the people I've spoke with. And they asked me for all that information to be able to seek the same resources. I've passed along things that have helped me in the past to try and help other individuals [who] are going through what I did years ago."</p>	<p>"If you have an addictions problem, which I do have, they're great support for [you], and they don't judge you ... they don't judge what you do. They don't judge you as a person, but they help you by giving you different outlooks in life; like, when you try it like this, or instead [of] trying to quit, want[ing] to cut back [on] cold turkey, you try it like this ... [They] make really good suggestions on different things in life."</p>
	<p>"So the crowd that I work with, it's like I ... need to be able to go and meet them, and work on their terms. And once they see people caring and trying and stuff, then they sort of open up to try to do different things and come out of their comfort zone sort of thing"</p>	<p>"I would not be where I am today without peer support. I feel like I would've relapsed. I know that's, kind of, like a harsh truth even for myself to accept, but I definitely would not be where I am without that support."</p>