PEER SUPPORT
CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT
A MANUAL FOR AGENCY WORKERS
IN THE ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS SECTOR
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overview</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Peer Support?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Group Objectives</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to Expect</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management/Policy and Procedure</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Training</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sessions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be the Group’s Champion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARC Peer Support Network</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Next?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peer support services are designed and delivered by people who have lived experience of both substance abuse and recovery, both from an individual perspective and as an impacted family member. The intent of a peer support Group is to make sure support for recovery extends beyond the treatment setting and into the community where people live. Peer support combines a powerful message of hope, and a wealth of lived experience and knowledge.

The Victorian Government have recognised the value of peer support as a valuable adjunct to alcohol and drug treatment and have encouraged agencies state wide to build capacity for peer support in their catchment. SHARC are delighted to collaborate with your organisation to establish or enhance a peer support program that will best complement your existing services.

Peer support Groups, facilitated by trained volunteer Peer Leaders, provide Group members with mutual support, connection and keep participants engaged in the treatment process. Often peer support gets confused with consumer participation. Both play important, but very different roles and require a different approach.

Consumer participation models generally incorporate varying degrees of involvement in service planning and delivery. It is a process in which consumers are engaged in the decision making activities of a service. Peer support is an informal system in which people find an affiliation with others that have similar lived experience. This connection fosters mutual support in the process of recovery.

The role of a peer support Group is different to that of twelve step fellowships, therapeutic community or other professionally facilitated Groups. The role of the peer support Group is to complement and extend the support provided in clinical AOD settings, not duplicate existing services.

Use this resource, but add your own organisational wisdom to it as your peer support activity develops. The unique qualities of your organisation and its clients will help formulate the best way forward.
AN OVERVIEW

If you’re reading this document chances are you’ve been allocated the task of establishing or strengthening a peer support Group within your organisation or as an adjunct to your existing services.

So what next?

Whether you have had previous experience in setting up Groups or are new to the implementation of peer support activities, this resource kit is designed to help make the process easy and successful for you and your Group.

This manual covers:

• Identifying the Group objectives;
• What your role and responsibilities are as a staff member engaged with a peer support Group;
• Suggestions on risk management, policies and procedures;
• Advice on championing the cause of peer support in your agency and supporting your Peer Leaders;
• A framework for ongoing training and supervision for Peer Leaders.

The accompanying kit includes manuals for Family and Service User Peer Leaders. This resource is designed to guide Peer Leaders in the establishment, facilitation and enhancement of Groups and provides training, mentorship and supervision hosted by SHARC.

Whilst the scope and focus of your support Group will be dictated by the needs of your organisation, much of the work has been done. SHARC will walk you and your Peer Leaders through the process and continue to mentor and consult with your organisation as your peer support activity develops.

We look forward to working with you in building a peer support resource for your agency and its clients.
WHY PEER SUPPORT?

What’s in it for peers?

- A safe place to socialise;
- A place to share collective wisdom;
- A place to strengthen each other’s recovery, or desired change;
- A place to practice new skills and develop leadership capabilities;
- A place to rediscover personal resources and opportunities;
- A place to receive and give hope, inspiration and empowerment for positive change and recovery;
- Opportunities to establish pathways for further education and employment.

Primarily the Group exists to give and receive mutual aid that can only be sourced from others with shared lived experience. Whilst peer leaders will receive training on facilitating the Group, they are first and foremost a Group member.

What’s in it for your organisation?

- Opportunities to create relationships with peers in a new way that supports and promotes growth, positive change and wellbeing;
- A trained and professionally supported volunteer peer workforce;
- A valuable extension of your existing treatment streams with opportunities for clients to increase their engagement in positive change activities post treatment;
- A committed Group of willing advocates;
- The opportunity to extend family inclusive practice by providing a framework for quality support and education to impacted family members whether their loved one is in treatment or not.

You also have the chance to engage with the SHARC Peer Support Network, connecting you with other AOD workers engaged in peer support activities around Victoria.
IDENTIFYING THE OBJECTIVES

You may have already done some work identifying the type of peer support Group needed to meet your organisation’s needs, or you may be transitioning an existing Group. It is SHARC’s experience that a blend of topic based discussion followed by time for sharing is the most effective model for peers, giving the Group structure and diversity.

As time goes on opportunities may arise to include activity based support Groups in the areas of art, music, meditation or skills development.

Before proceeding further there are a few questions you might want to examine that can assist in defining your objectives for peer support:

- What do we expect the Group to deliver in the first year? Education, mutual aid or a mix of both?
- Who will be assisted (family or service user Group)? How did we choose this Group?
- Have they been consulted?
- What will be our measure of success? What will be the measure of our sustainability?
- What obstacles exist?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- What is motivating volunteers to participate and how will your organisation support this?
- Who will be the Group’s primary support within the organisation?

Group objectives need to be clearly documented. A suggested statement of objectives and a worksheet to help explore these questions is included. Once complete, we recommend including this statement as part of your Peer Leader manual as a reference point.
WHAT TO EXPECT

Much of your Group’s success is contingent upon the quality of communication and relationship building between you and the Peer Leaders. Managing expectations is key to this process and over time you will find that if properly supported, your Peer Leaders will develop a skillset that will become a great asset to your organisation and a remarkable example to Group participants.

To be effective, each party needs to understand the purpose, boundaries and value of each other’s role. A clear statement of what is expected from the agency, from you and from your Peer Leaders sets up a framework that will ensure you remain free to guide rather than drive the Group. It will encourage independence for the Peer Leaders and Group members and allow you to act as Group champion and advocate.

The SHARC Peer Support Network provides additional scaffolding for you and your Peer Leaders to help manage this process as the Group develops.

A worksheet to assist in writing up these expectations is included as part of this toolkit and it is recommended that once complete, this document be included in your Peer Leaders Manual for future reference.
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While the Group is run by peers for peers, leaders and Group members will need some organisational support, particularly in the beginning. It is important to clearly define your responsibilities to the Group to avoid being seen as the ‘expert’ or facilitator.

In short, your job is to champion peer support in your organisation. A more detailed role description is included in the resource for your consideration. In general your responsibilities include:

- Acting as liaison for Peer Leaders and Group members;
- Guiding the Group in areas such as grant seeking and publicity;
- Facilitating access to training, supervision and administrative resources as agreed;
- Promoting the Group to stakeholders both within and outside the organisation;
- Ensuring the Group operates within the organisations policies and procedures.

In our experience, a time commitment of 2 hours per week would be sufficient to provide this level of support initially, decreasing as your Group becomes more independent. The Peer Leader manual and complementary resources provide advice on a variety of issues relevant to running the Group and your role will primarily be to support and clarify those activities.

A budget estimate worksheet to assist in estimating costs associated with supporting the Group is included in the resources.

It is recommended managing the Group be included in your position description. This will ensure the Groups’ sustainability is not dependant upon the enthusiasm of one individual and demonstrates the organisation’s commitment to peer support.
RISK MANAGEMENT, POLICIES and PROCEDURES

As in any new activity, risk management is important to ensure the wellbeing of the Group members and any staff present. The Group Agreement and Guidelines for Sharing should be read out at each meeting so members understand their responsibilities to themselves and each other and are comfortable in implementing them – in particular around substance affected members, difficult behaviour and general Group facilitation issues.

Peer Leader training provided by SHARC will cover much of this information however each organisation needs to properly induct their nominated Peer Leaders into their own OH&S and Risk Management procedures.

Policies and procedures around cash handling, security, privacy, communications and critical incident procedures for the Group should be developed and communicated to ensure the Group meets your organisation’s ethical and legal requirements.

RECRUITMENT and TRAINING

SHARC will work with you to help identify and recruit suitable Leaders for your Group. If appropriate, an interview process will be undertaken to assess the suitability and sustainability of these individuals.

It is desirable to have at least two Peer Leaders trained to lead the Group to allow for rotation of Group facilitation and appropriate backup should one person be unwell or away. As the Group develops, more members will be trained in leading the Group and will be encouraged to share the role of Peer Leader. If required, SHARC can recommend a paid Peer Mentor to co-facilitate and mentor the Group during its establishment phase.

Ongoing training of Peer Leaders will be provided by SHARC and can be supplemented by your organisation’s own training programs and opportunities identified by the SHARC Peer Support Capacity Building Project.
RECRUITMENT and TRAINING

- PEER LEADER 1/2 DAY TRAINING
- FIRST MEETING BRIEFING & CO-FACILITATION
- FOURTH MEETING CO-FACILITATION, REFLECTION & FEEDBACK
- PEER SUPPORT NETWORK TRAINING DAYS AT SHARC INCLUDING QUARTERLY GROUP SUPERVISION

MENTORSHIP & COUNSEL FROM SHARC AS REQUIRED

OUTSIDE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AS AVAILABLE
INFORMATION SESSION

Depending on the type of Group required and the needs of your organisation, it may be helpful to run an information session.

If you decide to proceed with this event it will need to be broadly promoted (refer to the promotion schedule in the resource), commencing 6 - 8 weeks prior to the event. It is recommended at least one potential Peer Leader has been identified and recruited prior to this – word of mouth will be one of your most valuable publicity tools.

The venue for the information session needs to be large enough to comfortably hold up to fifty people but not be so large that it looks empty if turnout is low. It needs to be clearly signposted and agency staff can be recruited to assist in welcoming attendees and encouraging them to fill in attendance forms. These staff must be fully briefed prior to the event so they can enthusiastically communicate the Group’s purpose to attendees.

A powerful presentation by guest speakers who have benefited from participating in a peer support Group will have the greatest impact. You may already have people associated with your agency willing to speak or may choose to contact SHARC for suggestions. It is recommended that the CEO make a short presentation to deliver the organisation’s mission and demonstrate how the Group will be integrated with existing services. A suggested order of proceedings is included in the toolkit.

At the close of the event, attendees should be reminded to fill in the contact information sheets and be invited to speak to presenters or to staff seated around the venue. The more contact attendees have with staff and peers and the more empathic your response to attendees questions, the more likely it is people will want to participate in the Group.

SHARC project workers are available to help oversee this event at your agency’s discretion.
The more people are informed on the progress and success of your Group, the more likely you are to receive ongoing support. Clear and frequent communication between your organisation, your Group and outside stakeholders will help establish it as a key extension of your treatment program.

As liaison between the Group and your organisation, the relationship you forge with Peer Leaders is critical. Practising principles such as timeliness, honesty, inclusiveness and respect will ensure the relationship becomes a successful partnership. To consolidate the work being undertaken in establishing the Group it is recommended the following be considered in your communication plan:

- Quarterly Activity Report (included in your resource);
- Organising peer presentations at your AGM and other relevant events;
- Peer presentations at community service Groups and events;
- Access to training opportunities for Peer Leaders and Group members;
- Peer presentations at other AOD agencies and relevant peak bodies where appropriate;
- Regular consultation with your Peer Leaders regarding the running of the Group, its administrative issues and needs.

Remember to share your Group’s successes and celebrate their achievements.
The SHARC Peer Support Network aims to provide both AOD workers engaged in peer activities, and Peer Leaders, access to a range of quality resources. The materials have been developed to allow Groups to explore and decide what works best for them and their objectives for peer support.

The aim of the Peer Support Capacity Building project is to encourage agencies to set up their own platforms for peer support. The materials contained in this manual and resource will allow you to strengthen this area without having to invent your own program. With your help and that of your Peer Leaders, these resources will be added to, evaluated and altered as the project develops.

In addition to the resources provided, SHARC are establishing a Peer Support Network for the AOD Sector. This will allow Peer Leaders and agency staff access to separate online forums hosted by SHARC, where they can share challenges and achievements with others around the State.

Further details will be provided as the Network is developed. We encourage you to participate in the forums and let us know of your progress.
This manual and accompanying toolkit is a suggested structure based on SHARC’s extensive experience, and generally accepted principles of peer support.

It is to be customised to the specific needs of your organisation and its clients. Once implemented, it can help your organisation grow and strengthen a volunteer workforce that can enhance the quality, impact and effectiveness of your organisation’s activities.

Healthy peer support activities will enrich your agency in ways that will reinforce the recovery and change process for your clients and their families. Participating in the project will help increase the opportunities for people to come together to share their personal journeys in a way that inspires hope, change and recovery.

Good luck and stay in touch. You are an important part of breaking new ground for peer support in Victoria’s AOD sector.