

Year Plan
MSU Training Resources Research Assistant
Shruti Ramesh
2016-2017

Introduction

The Training Resources Research Assistant (TRRA) is a new position within the MSU as of May 2016. The TRRA is primarily responsible for conducting research related to peer support, and other training matters relevant to the McMaster Students Union (MSU) and its services. In addition, the TRRA is required to work with the Peer Support department (i.e. the VP Administration, the Part-Time Managers (PTMs) of peer support services, etc) to design peer support training modules and other materials. The research gathered will be used to inform the development of training manuals, presentations, and inform policy.

This position was created partly in response to the MSU's 2016 Policy Paper on Peer Support. Mental health and the wellbeing of students is an iterated priority of the MSU, as evidenced by the number of general and identity-based peer support services available to students. Recommendations arising from this policy paper included easing access to training materials designed specifically for university peer support volunteers, and establishing clear minimum training standards for practicing peer support within the MSU and across the university. In addition, it was recommended that the MSU allocate funding specifically to support peer support endeavours, such as through creating a position responsible for overseeing and training and all of the peer support volunteer on campus. It is in this framework that the TRRA position was created.

As the TRRA position is new, the position presents unique obstacles. For instance, having no predecessor means there is no transition report, or guidelines for expectations from the position based on previous performance in the role. Furthermore, the scope of the responsibilities encapsulated by role was unclear at the start of the term. However, with these obstacles comes ample room for new opportunities. Lack of precedent means the ability for the TRRA to define the role and set their own precedent for future iterations of the position, should it continue beyond this year.

As the TRRA, I hope to make the most of the opportunity I've been given to make a meaningful change in the peer support landscape of the university. This year, I hope to develop a thorough and comprehensive training program grounded in evidence from the existing literature on the best practices in peer support. Through this training and subsequent skills assessments I hope to set a minimum standard for competency and skill for peer support volunteers. Where these standards are not met, volunteers will have access to additional 'training materials to help prepare themselves, and become comfortable with having difficult conversations surrounding mental health, handling sensitive disclosures, and conducting referrals where necessary. Ultimately, the goal of this training will be to ensure that campus peer support services are as effective and accessible as possible, ensuring that adequate support is available for any student who

may be seeking it, and that volunteers feel confident and equipped to provide support within their respective services.

Furthermore, I hope to complete a program evaluation of the peer support training modules, in order to evaluate the efficacy of this program in preparing volunteers to provide support within their services. Through this evaluation I hope to inform future iterations of the training, in order to continue to strive for excellence in the theoretical and practical aspects of peer support.

To conclude, I'm excited for what has been achieved with the position so far, and am looking forward to the year ahead!

Shruti

Goals

Objective 1	Peer Support Training Development
Description	Create training modules on: models of peer support, the process of providing support, resources and referrals, confidentiality, suicide awareness and prevention, de-escalation, and peer support skills practice (among other topics).
Benefits	Bridging the current gap in service training for peer support services, lessening the workload of individual part-time managers in terms of developing training for their service.
Difficulties	Creating training that is sufficiently specialized and effective for each service will be an ongoing and iterative process - it is unlikely that best practices will be achieved in the first year of running the training.
Long-term Implications	Including peer support as a core training component for services going forward will greatly enhance service volunteers' ability and comfort with providing support. In addition, students will be able to increasingly rely on accessing support through peer support services, which will help ameliorate the gap in mental health services available on campus.
How? (Implementation)	Conducting research on the principles of peer support, in addition to identifying best practices in training and implementation. This research will be used to develop evidence-informed training sessions to establish a common level of knowledge across peer supporters.
Partners	Campus Resources (e.g. SWC), Community Resources (St. Joes, Youth Wellness Centre, Aids Network, SACHA).

Objective 2	Supporting Peer Supporters
Description	Being a resource and point of referral for peer support volunteers when they are seeking support, or feel unequipped to provide support in the context of their work with an MSU service.
Benefits	Peer supporters will have options available to them if the support needed by an individual accessing a service is beyond what they can provide. In addition, they will have an avenue to address their own concerns about their peer support roles apart

	from their respective part-time managers.
Difficulties	Peer supporters face barriers to seeking support themselves that may be difficult to overcome. Potential difficulty for the TRRA to provide adequate support depending on context, but referrals can be made in such situations.
Long-term Implications	Ultimately work to lessen the stigma of peer support volunteers seeking support themselves. Encourage dialogue between volunteers and execs, PTMs, and the TRRA, especially in the event of concerns arising related to providing support.
How? (Implementation)	Ensure that channels of communication are open between TRRA and peer supporters (e.g. through verbalizing this through training sessions). Hold informal drop-in hours for volunteers to come in to discuss concerns if the need arises.
Partners	Peer support PTMs (WGEN, SHEC, QSCC, PSL, Maccess)

Objective 3	Supporting PTMs in Skills Assessment and Retraining
Description	Aiding the managers of peer support services in assessing their volunteers' understanding and retention of training content, in addition to using this assessment to inform future iterations of peer support training.
Benefits	Conducting skills assessments and retraining sessions will function to establish a minimum level of competency and comfort in providing support for volunteers. Having a minimum skill level will also provide criteria to consider for hiring returning volunteers, as experience alone does not necessitate skill.
Difficulties	Self reports of comfort and competency are highly subjective and may not be reliable indicators of an individual's ability to provide support.
Long-term Implications	Developing standardized expectations for peer support volunteers across the MSU services, as well as having instruments in place to ensure these expectations are met by individuals work with peer support services.
How? (Implementation)	Holding sessions for skills assessment and additional training sessions beyond the training weekend in September; tentatively, skills assessments would take place throughout first term, with retraining to take place January 2017 based on the results of

	these assessments.
Partners	Peer support PTMs (WGEN, SHEC, QSCC,

Objective 4	Review of Literature and Resources
Description	A summary of the current knowledge, substantive findings, as well as the theoretical and methodological contributions to the topics of training and peer support. Particular focuses will be best practices in peer support training, and exploring the use of theater-based protocols in training peer support volunteers.
Benefits	Having a literature review as part of the TRRA transition report will ensure the individual coming into the position or taking on its responsibilities will have a guaranteed minimum level of knowledge on the relevant subjects coming into the position. In addition this literature review can serve to be a resource for the greater McMaster community to access as an MSU document.
Difficulties	Conducting literature reviews tends to be time-consuming, but this time has been accounted for in planning for the position.
Long-term Implications	The literature review can serve as a starting point for developing a resource hub for peer support services that can continue to develop beyond the 2016-2017 year.
How? (Implementation)	Reading relevant literature, synthesizing findings relevant to the university context, consulting with relevant community partners on resources to review.
Partners	Fiona Wilson (St. Joe's - Peer Support Practice Lead)

Objective 5	Program Evaluation of Peer Support Training
Description	Throughout the year, the skills assessments and feedback received from individuals participating in the training will be used to evaluate the efficacy of the peer support training program.
Benefits	Conducting a program evaluation will give all relevant stakeholders an idea of how effective the peer support training was for volunteers, in addition to identifying gaps in the training to be addressed in future sessions.

Difficulties	Getting an adequate sample of feedback to evaluate the training may be difficult, but this in part can be remedied by the feedback sessions that have been integrated into the training weekends themselves.
Long-term Implications	The completed report will be an important transition piece for future individuals responsible for training to consider in their own training development.
How? (Implementation)	Program evaluation will take place through collecting feedback via surveys, a focus group following training weekend, and giving volunteers the option to sign up for informal interviews to discuss their experiences in the training, and as a peer support volunteer more generally.
Partners	Peer support PTMs (WGEN, SHEC, QSCC, Maccess, PSL) Vice President Administration

Objective 6	Emphasis on intersectionality in training modules
Description	Through the peer support training, providing an insight to how an individual's lived experiences and intersecting identities impact their mental health and experiences with mental illness.
Benefits	Taking an intersectional approach will ensure that the support provided by volunteers is nuanced and tailored to the individuals they are supporting. Such an approach is a necessity in creating safe(r)/positive spaces.
Difficulties	As many of the peer support services (with the exception of SHEC and PSL) are <i>identity-based</i> , it can become easy to lose sight of intersectionality when providing support.
Long-term Implications	Ensuring training takes an intersectional approach this year will provide a framework for how to do so in future iterations of the training.
How? (Implementation)	Being involved in developing both the AOP and peer support training will enable the TRRA to ensure the training sessions avoid overlap, and have complementary content that takes an intersectional approach.
Partners	Diversity Services PTM (Ryan Deshpande) Peer Support PTMs (SHEC, WGEN, PSL, Maccess, QSCC)

Goals to Strive for

- a) List 5 things you would like prepared for the beginning of September
 - 1. Complete all summer training/consolidate feedback
 - 2. Develop peer support training modules
 - 3. Prepare relevant part-time staff to facilitate training
 - 4. Complete framework for literature review
 - 5. Coordinate logistics for term 1 training sessions

- b) List 5 things you would like prepared by the end of Term 1
 - 1. Execute September training sessions
 - 2. Collect training feedback on sessions to-date
 - 3. Recruit for participants for program evaluation
 - 4. Draft literature review
 - 5. Skills assessments to plan re-training

- c) List 5 things you would like prepared by the end of Term 2
 - 1. Staff retraining as necessary
 - 2. Top-up training on 'special topics' as necessary
 - 3. Complete literature review for transition report
 - 4. Complete program evaluation, create recommendations
 - 5. Position evaluation/transition\

Long-term Planning

Vision	Planning for the sustainability of the peer support training program
Description	Structurally evaluate the role of the TRRA within the MSU, and put forward recommendations for a) the incoming TRRA or b) the individual(s) responsible for internalizing the TRRA's responsibilities should the position not be renewed for the following year.
Benefits	Making tangible plans to ensure continuity of the peer support training program will ensure that the work completed by the TRRA this year can be carried into future years, regardless of if the position is renewed.
Year 1	Evaluate the needs of each service in terms of training (optionally specific to peer support), in addition to the needs of the MSU as per the recommendations outlined in the MSU's policy paper on peer support.
Year 2	If the TRRA position is eliminated, potentially expand the portfolio/scope of PTM positions to include a more active role in developing/implemented standardized training (i.e. training beyond 'service-specific' sessions).
Year 3	Explore the possibility of a permanent position for assisting with facilitating training to cope with the short turnover in part-time staff positions.
Partners	Vice President (Administration) PTMs of relevant services (WGEN, SHEC, QSCC, PSL, Maccess)

Vision	Becoming a Resource Hub for Peer Support Staff and Volunteers
Description	The TRRA has the potential to become an excellent resource for McMaster's peer-support community to learn about literature and issues related to peer support and mental health.
Benefits	Building the foundation for the TRRA to become a resource hub will create a space where students and staff alike can learn more about issues relating to training resources and mental health. These resources may prove invaluable in aiding training development beyond the realm of peer support services.
Year 1	Conduct literature review on training/peer support, in addition to collecting relevant resources. Compile a resource list in formats that are accessible to students. If possible, create a booklet with this literature review and relevant resources, to be made available online.

Year 2	Update the resource list as necessary, continue to review literature on topics relevant to the training priorities of the MSU.
Year 3	Update the resource list as necessary, continue to review literature on topics relevant to the training priorities of the MSU.
Partners	The Underground, Communications Officer

Vision	Developing a formalized system for consultation/community partners.
Description	Thus far, consulting with partners on and off campus have been invaluable to fulfilling the role of the TRRA. However, access to these resources has in part contingent on personal connections in the community, and cannot be depended on as a constant source of external support for the TRRA, or other positions involved with training. As such, a formalized system for continuing these relationships into future years should be developed.
Benefits	Having continuity in consultation relationships/community partnerships not only ensures continuity in terms of access to resources, but also promotes longevity of partnerships between McMaster and the community.
Year 1	Develop relationships with community partners at Hamilton services (e.g. SACHA, St. Joes, Youth Wellness Centre, etc).
Year 2	Facilitate connections between incoming staff and these resources through formalized introductions and discussing the continuity of the relationship
Year 3	Ultimately inform the creation of a contact list of individuals with the relevant expertise to contact for consultation/referral when necessary.
Partners	VP Administration Community Partners

Master Summary (calendar and checklist)

May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation with PTMs/Community partners - Review of Literature - Complete training for CLAY, collect/disseminate feedback
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of peer support binder/policy - Collect/Review former training + Feedback

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning for the year
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating training weekend logistics - Training module development - Complete training for Horizons, collect/disseminate feedback
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue training development/preparation - Briefing staff on training facilitation - Structure feedback/program evaluation process - Miscellaneous training sessions (e.g. Maroons)
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer support training weekend + additional training sessions (Spark, PSL, Trans 101) - Collecting training feedback from all participants - Recruit for program evaluation
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ASIST Training weekend - Continue literature review - Consolidate feedback; recruit for program evaluation
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program evaluation interviews - Skills assessment sessions to plan retraining
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consult with PTMs on training outlook - Develop January retraining sessions - Program evaluation interviews
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retraining sessions - Continue collecting feedback - Plan top-up training for late February (special topics)
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue literature review - Final interviews/feedback collection - Optional top-up training sessions for services
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish program evaluation of peer support training - Complete literature review for transition report
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work on transition report/recommendations for the following year (contingent on whether position is renewed)