



# REPORT

*From the...*

## Training & Resources RA

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TO: Executive Board  
FROM: Merima Menzildzic  
SUBJECT: EB Report #1  
DATE: September 29, 2017

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Since early July start date, there has been a consistently increasing demand for more training and resources for various MSU peer support services, and has since expanded to encompass and include other MSU services that, as part of their mandate, reach out to, and engage with McMaster community students. Outlined below, is a monthly overview of some major projects, challenges, and developments with the role, including some feedback. It includes relevant information and explanation as to why some components of my role have changed. If you would like to see a quick overview of major projects, and a summarized list of changes, challenges and recommendations moving forward, please view this at the end of the report.

### Month - Month Project Overviews & Comments

#### July

The first few weeks included largely roundtable meetings with all peer support services to discuss hiring, and training timelines. This month, I established the peer support training weekend dates, locations, and rough outline for content. At this stage, both MSU Maccess, QSCC, SHEC, and WGEN were scheduled to receive training the weekend of September 16-17. As per extensive research in both fields of peer support (offering support/ supporting post-secondary students in particular) and including research done analyzing the various intersects of each services mandate, it is within my opinion, **mandatory** and non-negotiable, to offer catered, extensive training in the area of inclusive space maintenance, peer support mechanisms, mental illness/health, sexual violence and elaborative anti-oppressive practices training for **every** single peer support service volunteer. As such, the structure of the weekend at this stage would reflect a long two day weekend, that centered around rotating situational rooms, and would include take-away materials for students to be covering and engaging with after the weekend is over.

Likewise, it is my understanding that training students extensively for a weekend is rather taxing, and inaccessible, so it was at this stage that I decided to offer and schedule in, biweekly supplemental trainings to be held throughout term one and term two, in order to allow peer support volunteers to strengthen, or further explore more nuances within those topics listed above, in a timeline that appreciates the nature of the conversations, and their personal well-being.

July was also the month of the Horizons conference; where both training and support for the PTM and exec during conference became encompassed within my role. After planning and offering training in the areas of peer support, mental health/illness, and sexual violence, I provided volunteers with feedback forms, and have since taken feedback to inform the capacities in which I choose to present training slides - in particular, shifting the attention away from information/lecture styled presentations, and focusing on always relating the content back to their roles, or to the spaces they occupy.

### **August**

The month of August saw a quick transition from supporting peer support staff, to consulting on, creating and providing numerous welcome week training modules for various campus partners. During this month, I was asked to help inform the new Mental Health campaign, alongside Sutina (MSU SHEC PTM). Likewise, I offered several hours of support and research to aiding the SWELL educational coordinator, Taryn, with the creation of Mental Health training for Welcome Week Residence Rep/Maroons/Faculty Reps. Out of this came a broader conversation about providing feedback on “More Feet on the Ground”, a mental health campaign for post-secondary students. Further conversations surrounding this topic will be held in early October.

During this month, I assisted the Sexual Violence Response Coordinator with the administration of Sexual Violence training and assisted in the provision of Inclusive Space training alongside the Diversity Services Part Time Manager, for a wide range of Welcome Week reps.

August was also a time where I expanded quite heavily on the “Resource Hub” for peer support staff and volunteers. This hub contains over 25 modules & information packets about various different identity-based support mechanisms, option exploration, and a master resource file, that Shruti began last year, and I have since expanded and filled in additional gaps for. Please see an overview of the hub below, as it is one that is quite elaborative.

August served as mainly the time to finalize peer support training weekend content and confirm services. Unfortunately, as the month progressed, communication from peer support staff to me was insufficient. As such, hiring timelines for WGEN were pushed a few weeks later, giving me and the PTM insufficient time to view the hired volunteers, and assure that content was catered to their knowledge gaps. The QSCC and Maccess at no point communicated their hiring timelines - despite consistent communication with me in terms of training weekend information, and content. By the end of August, I had created over 25 rotational presentations, booked out 2 speakers, and created a take-away pamphlet that students could work on and access during the weekend. Within the first week of September however, I was informed that two out of the four services (QSCC and Maccess) would not be able to attend the weekend, and WGEN had not yet hired volunteers fully, so I had insufficient time to assure that training presentations/modules took into account specific volunteer skills, and gaps.

## September

I was informed September 6, of Maccess and QSCC's hiring timelines. As a result, I had a little over a week to recreate, rebook and redesign training weekend for SHEC and WGEN, with very little insight from WGEN in terms of what they feel is necessary considering their volunteers are for the large part, new to peer support and to these conversations.

Peer Support Training Weekend as such was insufficient in preparing volunteers for their roles (at least on the part of WGEN). However, this insufficiency is a larger reflection of both administrative and interpersonal communication failures between myself and the WGEN PTM, but also from the PTMs of both QSCC and Maccess to myself. Moving forward, I expect a certain degree of communication if I am expected to contribute to and develop training for all peer support volunteers. I think its imperative that all services have the same baseline training, but also have tailed and service specific training that appreciates not only knowledge, but also direct applicable, tangible recommendations for using that knowledge within a support setting. Training like that takes time - and is doable, as highlighted by my experience training Peer Support Line, MSU Spark, etc, -- but requires apt communication and advance timelines.

As the training weekend finished for MSU SHEC & WGEN, the following weekend involved providing Peer Support Line with over 5 hours of comprehensive training in the areas of peer support, sexual violence, and mental health/illness. This time, because Lucia and myself had frequent and clean communication the training was seamless, and volunteers took very much to the information presented.

The past week, in light of Maccess and the QSCC expediting their hiring processes, has been overwhelmingly busy - developing over 5 hours of training for their volunteers.

## Overview of Projects

### Resource Hub

The concept of the hub originated from my experience engaged in peer support for over two years. The purpose of the hub is to ensure that support volunteers not only have apt knowledge in not only the scope of their mandate, but can appreciate nuances as a result of intersecting identities and other individual, lived experience related details.

The hub contains three parts:

- **Knowledge Translation**: currently sits at over 25 knowledge pdfs/modules that overview topics such as mental health, sexual violence, gender based violence, racism etc
  - July: Development of skeleton to the way in which this component would be presented, and relevant ways in which peer support mechanisms will be integrated into the translation of this knowledge - a take away from this, was to include a specific and comprehensive "Inclusive Spaces" training separate from "Peer Support Mechanism" training during the weekend

- August: continued development
  - September: continued development of basics – additional content will be added as topics come into relevance
- **Option Exploration:** provides volunteers with templates to either give to students they are supporting, or help utilize components of the template, during support sessions. Examples include templates to SAS coordinators, professors, TAs, medication trackers (refills/prescription dosage tracker), calendars, course template outlines all of which can be loaded into either OneNote or Google Calendar should the student choose. Includes an academic planner, which has a master list of faculty/program contacts from each faculty and program within the university (especially important for the new programs that are emerging over the last two years)
  - July: Development of specific components
  - August: Academic planner planning and research took most of the month
  - September: templates for calendars, trackers, and emails all developed and finalized
- **Resource List:** Developed off of Shruti's resource list
  - July: Added more resources from the Hamilton community and new resources from the GTA (Brampton, Mississauga, Toronto) for commuter students
  - August: Added sections to explain limits to confidentiality, scope of practice, and wait times \*added links to self referral forms where applicable
  - September: used the resource hub, cleaned up any logistical bumps with accessing the hub

## Training Modules

### Welcome Week Training

- Provided training for Welcome Week Reps, supporting the Diversity Services Director
- Consulted and developed a training for the new mental health initiative
- Developed training for SWELL volunteers and provided training for them

### Peer Support Training Weekend

- Planned, and developed over the summer, however had to be redone within the last week before the scheduled weekend, because of insufficient communication from several support services
- Modules included tailored information for inclusive spaces, peer support mechanisms, sexual violence, and mental health/illness
- Tangible pamphlets made available online
- Development of modules (online recordings) to be provided

### Maccess & QSCC Training

- Developed a 4-hour training series, catered specifically for the two services
- Developed additional online modules via OpenLearning that include quizzes and knowledge case studies

### Year Long Training

- In appreciation of the fact that one weekend is just not sufficient to cover everything and make everyone confident
- These additional trainings are mandatory (certain ones) for peer support volunteers, but open to all MSU service volunteers, such as Spark TLs
- Three trainings will be offered in October - the modules already developed with Meaghan Ross, CAMH/SWELL consultants, and feedback from Part Time Managers
- Three trainings will be offered in November
- Term 2 trainings will be set by December

### Supporting Part Time Managers

- Regular meetings - especially now that spaces are up and running, weekly meetings to debrief times of challenge etc
- Regular on call hours starting October - especially important when we understand that currently, volunteers have very baseline training, and any more nuanced/serious conversations get delegated to me

### Coming Up

Over the rest of the term, the focus will be on offering additional trainings for peer support services, developing online modules, and launching the MSU Peer Support tab on the MSU website, where the resource hub will be housed. Likewise, there will be an emphasis placed on running community needs assessments, and developing suicide intervention protocols and policies for MSU peer support services, in collaboration and consultation with Case Management, and Peer Support PTMs.

### Closing Remarks

Thank you so much for your patience and attention - while the past few months have been a time of transition and development, I'm more than excited to be working with a team of dedicated, and informed individuals. I'm looking forward to developing, expanding, and improving upon the way the MSU does peer support - ensuring that we remain true to the intersectional, and supportive mandates we consistently promote.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding,

- Merima Menzildzic