

Designing a Peer Mentoring Program for Students with Mental Health Issues

Dr. Mike Condra

Principal Investigator

Director (Health, Counselling,
and Disabilities Services)

Mira Dineen

Program Coordinator

M² Peer Mentoring Program



PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

Agenda



- Why Peer Mentoring?
- Program Design and Structure
- Philosophy and Framework
- Recruitment
- Training
- Evaluation
- Surprises and Key Lessons
- Program Resource Manual

Background



- Pilot program and research study funded by the *Mental Health Innovation Fund* (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities)
- Led by Dr. Mike Condra (Director of HCDS)
- **Project Goals:**
 - To Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate**
a peer mentoring program for students with
mental health problems
- Overall deliverable is to share evaluation findings and all program resources with colleges and universities in 2015

Queen's Context



- Established peer programming across campus
 - Health Promotion, Learning Strategies, Writing Centre, Career Services, first-year transition, first-year retention
- Established general peer mentoring program
- Culture of mental health advocacy, peer support



Why Peer Mentoring?



- College/university students at increased risk of mental health issues.
- Students with mental health issues often feel more comfortable talking to a peer (fellow student).
- Peers have “currency” that professional resources lack:
 - i) Credibility
 - ii) Ability to offer meaningful experience of acceptance.

Value of Peer Education



Peer education is economical because it gives a high return on investment ... not because it doesn't require investment.



Program Participants



Mentor

- Upper year undergraduate student (peer)
- Offers personal support, empathy, and practical strategies (learning strategies, healthy lifestyle strategies) through weekly one-on-one meetings with a mentee

Mentee

- Undergraduate student, any year of study
- Primary problem is **mental health** (not learning disability, ADHD, physical disability, or social adjustment)
- Mood, anxiety, or eating disorder

Impact of Peer Mentoring



Program Design Process



Methodical, resource-intensive process

Identified overall outcomes for Mentees:

- ↑ resilience and self-efficacy (managing mental health)
- ↓ self-stigma
- Sense of belonging, acceptance, connection with a peer
- Improved organizational skills, goal-setting and problem-solving skills, and health habits

Translated into Key Competency Areas for Peer Mentors:

Communication skills, Emotional intelligence, Mental Health Literacy, Practical strategies (academic & health)...

Mentor Recruitment



- Written application and individual interview
- Selection rubrics to assess key competency areas
- Received 135 applications
- Hired 18 peer mentors

Looking for...

- Prior experience in a helping role (mental health or vulnerable population preferred)
- Emotional intelligence and communication skills
- Evidence of resilience, maturity, self-reflection
- Not required to have personal lived experience

Mentee Recruitment



Mentee Referral Process

- Referred to the program in Fall 2014 from Queen's Counsellors and Disability Advisors
- Helps Peer Mentors to differentiate their role, make referrals

Looking for...

- Mood, anxiety, or eating disorder
- Diagnosis not required
- Students who are likely to benefit from the program (interested in mentoring, able to attend weekly meetings)

Intake questionnaire and meeting with Program Coordinator

Wise Choices (“On Course” program)

- Model for identifying goals and solving problems
- Desired Outcomes and Desired Experiences (“How do I want to perform? How do I want to feel?”)
- Creator Perspective (positive self-talk)

Student Wellness Assessment

- Self-assessment of wellness + academic skills
- Mentees set goals using Wise Choices Model
- Mentors coach and suggest practical strategies
- Framework for the mentoring relationship

Peer Mentor Training Topics



Translated Key Competency Areas into Curricular Areas & Learning Outcomes

Training Included:

- Communication Skills
- Emotional Intelligence
- Mental Health Education
- Coaching Health and Wellness
- Learning Strategies
- Coping Strategies
- Boundaries
- Confidentiality
- Responding to a Crisis

Peer Mentor Training Delivery



Delivery

- Summer homework (readings, independent learning activities)
- In-person training - 3.5 days in September
 - “Flipped classroom” model with guest presenters, activities, partner role-play
- Ongoing training sessions throughout the year
- Video-taped Skills Development Sessions
www.GoReact.com

Program Supervision



Mentoring Meeting Logs

- Summary of meeting, referrals, mentor's next steps, mentee's next steps

Individual Supervision Meetings

- After first three mentoring meetings, then as needed

Small Group Meetings

- Cohorts of 5-7 Peer Mentors, once a month

Clinical Supervision (Psychologist – Dr. Mike Condra)

Program Evaluation - Mentees



Mentee Outcomes

- Resilience
- Self-efficacy for i) managing academic expectations, ii) managing mental health and wellness
- Self-stigma

Assessment Tools

- Pre/Post Questionnaire (validated scales)
- Written Reflection
- Exit Interview

Program Evaluation - Mentors



Mentor Outcomes

- Develop peer helping skills
- Increased self-efficacy for supporting someone with a mental health issue
- Personal growth, development of new skills

Assessment Tools

- Pre/Post Questionnaire
- Training Evaluation
- Written Reflection
- Exit Interview
- Focus Group

Key Considerations



- Select competent peer mentors with strong emotional intelligence, resilience, and maturity.
- Provide comprehensive training.
- Focus on boundaries. Equip Peer Mentors with the knowledge, strategies, and confidence to build a *mentoring* relationship (not friendship, not counselling).
- Professional oversight and connections are crucial (mentee referrals and screening; program supervision).
- Must intentionally build community in volunteer team.

Questions?



Stay in Touch!

Research Report & Program Resource Manual coming
Summer 2015, publicly available to all institutions

Contact Mira Dineen

mira.dineen@queensu.ca