

Education Capsule #1 April 2023

Peering into Creativity by

Debbie Wiebe, *Peer Support Canada Certified Peer Supporter, International Leader, and Volunteer Mentor at Western Canada Peer Training Society – Calgary Region.* Debbie founded the Peer Options Program at Canadian Mental Health Association aimed at reducing isolation and increasing community connections for individuals seeking enhanced wellbeing. Debbie practices a recovery/wellness-oriented approach to facilitate self-discovery, self-awareness, confidence, and hope through authentic peer support connections guided by her lived-experience. Debbie identifies systemic stigma as the greatest barrier to wellbeing and has strived to increase community awareness through mentorship, networking, and education.

Peers – you identify your “lived-experience” through having personal experience of life-altering health condition(s) with considerable use of secondary health services, in which you have experienced significant power imbalances.

This Education capsule is designed to explore the possibility of a connection between peer support and creativity.

Learning objectives:

1. Discover our value-based expression of creativity through connection to self and to others.
2. Our creativity reveals personal strengths and limitations largely dependant on our values, systemic values, comfort (others’ approval/reactions) and our own integrity.
3. Creative expression builds confidence and increases capacity to reveal emotions so others can relate.
4. Peer support builds connection, validates uniqueness and promotes wellbeing in self and others.
5. Recognize your desire to reach out to others and connect with integrity.
6. Celebrate you giving yourself permission to live, learn and grow through connection.

Creativity is not just about **making art**, but also about **solving problems**, generating ideas, and expressing emotions. Peer support is relating emotionally. Expressing “what matters” not “what’s wrong”. Evoking hope, connection and belonging.

Creativity is learned and unlearned. Creativity is a muscle; the more we use it the stronger it gets. Expressive art lives inside each of us. It is our representation of the world around us, our experiences, knowledge, feelings and thoughts.

Each of us is a unique gift unto ourselves which we reveal to others. We interrelate through harmony and spirit sharing commonalities, disguising limitations and affirming differences.

Through shared stories of “lived-experience” we build connection. The relational power gained through a peer-support connection neutralizes authority, builds trust and provides leadership to heal wounds produced by our stigmatizing system.

What we express is value driven. We demonstrate what we believe to be real and wish others to feel and relate. These values are important in our lives – they are what we use as measures. Indicators of balance and fulfillment.

Peer support is also value driven grounded in what is important to the success of peer support .

Values Clarification

Your values are your ideas about what is important to you in your life – what you want to live by and live for. They are the silent forces behind many of your actions and decisions. The goal of value clarification is for you to explore and honestly value at this point in your life. You can be more self-directed and effective when you know which values you really choose to live by as an adult, and which values give priority over others.

First, identify 10 of your values and then rank the top 5.

Check the corresponding values that you wish to live by.

<input type="checkbox"/> Being with people	<input type="checkbox"/> Being physically active
<input type="checkbox"/> Having companionship	<input type="checkbox"/> Being healthy
<input type="checkbox"/> Taking care of others	<input type="checkbox"/> Being a creative person
<input type="checkbox"/> Having someone’s help	<input type="checkbox"/> Not getting take advantage of
<input type="checkbox"/> Being in control	<input type="checkbox"/> Being liked
<input type="checkbox"/> Depending on someone	<input type="checkbox"/> Being popular
<input type="checkbox"/> Having self acceptance	<input type="checkbox"/> Getting someone’s approval
<input type="checkbox"/> Having pride or dignity	<input type="checkbox"/> Being appreciated
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning new things	<input type="checkbox"/> Being treated fairly
<input type="checkbox"/> Making a contribution to the community	<input type="checkbox"/> Being independent
<input type="checkbox"/> Living ethically	<input type="checkbox"/> Taking risks
<input type="checkbox"/> Being a spiritual person	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining a budget
<input type="checkbox"/> Having peace and quiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Striving for perfection
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding boredom	<input type="checkbox"/> Holding on to what you have
<input type="checkbox"/> Having fun	<input type="checkbox"/> Having deep feelings
<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoying sensual pleasures	<input type="checkbox"/> Growing as a person
<input type="checkbox"/> Looking good	<input type="checkbox"/> “Smelling the flowers”
	<input type="checkbox"/> Having a purpose

Identify and rank your top five values.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Can you identify three others within your community with similar expectations?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Let's look at a collection of peer support values – Do they meld with yours?

Adapted from Prairies to Peaks, Mental Health Commission of Canada, North Vancouver Coastal Health, Wellness Action Plan, New Brunswick Specialized Peer training programs/documentation.

Integrity is the consistent (stable and predictable) of actions/behaviours across time and situation governed by strong values, beliefs, principles and morals.

Peer Support is integral when grounded in the following values:

Mutuality - empathic non-situational two-way connection through shared stories and similarity

Self-determination – support hinges on intrinsic self-worth, personal choice and self-direction

Continuous Learning – you don't know what you don't know, be curious and open

Honesty – be the change you want to see, accepting ups and downs

Credibility – walk what you talk, role model

Trust – be accountable and predictable; do what you say you will do

Hope – look for possibilities and hold the space for others

Dignity and respect – affirm connections, express compassion; accept imperfections; honour potential

Discretion and confidentiality – respect privacy; demonstrate boundaries and limits of the role

Authenticity – be true to who you are, mindful of your influence and biases

Social Inclusion and Social Justice – increase the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those marginalized on the basis of their identity in “the system”

Additional values to consider:

We prioritize our values ethically in the Peer Support Code of Conduct. This Code provides the formal structure to direct specific behaviours integral to Peer Support.

Peer Support Canada, Peer Supporter Code of Conduct:

I will act ethically, according to the values and principles of peer support

I will treat all people with respect and dignity

I will respect human diversity and will not engage in discriminatory activities

I will honour the rights, beliefs and personal values of individuals

I will behave with honesty and integrity in providing support to peers

I will respect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality within the limitations of program policies and the law e.g., potential harm to self or others

I will not knowingly expose a peer to harm

I will not take advantage of the peer relationship for personal benefit, material or financial gain

I will respect the boundaries of peer support work and will not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with the peers that I support

I will not provide peer support in a manner that negatively affects the public's confidence in peer support.

Quality Control

As a certified peer support Mentor and international peer leader I am asked consistently how to measure successful peer support practice. My reply is dedicated to a past creative process. For those of you who are not familiar, Peer Support Practice Principles were created over 10 years ago as result of several Provincial Project Leaders coming together and working to construct a document to reflect value-based knowledge, solidarity, expertise and quality.

This was not an easy task as the over-arching theme was, "Nothing about us without us." The "us" is us PEERS, those with personal experience of a life altering health condition(s) with considerable use of secondary health services, in which we experienced significant power imbalances. Having sustained the trauma of not fitting or belonging and receiving intervention strategies and treatments thought best for "us" by a medical model (system) of compliancy, control and symptom reduction. Quality peer support is aligned with the Standards of Practice,

Values and Code of Conduct developed and promoted through the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

I was a co-creator of the measures of quality peer support and believe it is time to revisit those Principles with you through this learning capsule. Let us revisit these and see how they apply to our peer support practice in Western Canada, are inclusive and reflect the intersectionality of culture and the social determinants of health. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage. Examples of these factors include:

Gender
Caste
Race
Ethnicity
Class

Sexuality
Religion
Ability and Diagnosis
Weight
Physical Appearance

*The term *intersectionality* was coined by Kimberle in 1989. Simply, it is interlocking systems of power that impact those who are most marginalized in society.

Revised Principles of Practice

The Principles of Practice embody the character of the relationship and the philosophy of the work. The Principles of Practice flow from the Core Values and will help to define the Standards for certification as a peer supporter.

Peer supporters:

- Recognize the importance of an individual approach to wellness.
- Support people in identifying their own needs, wants, and desires.
- Honour and respect where each individual is. Mindful it is their own unique journey of wellbeing recognizing that the focus is on the process and not a directed outcome.
- Facilitate the self-determination and the power of peers to take an active role in their wellbeing.
- Recognize that the values, and beliefs of their peers may not be the same as their own.
- Are collaborative in building equal, open, and trusting relationships with peers.
- Share their lived experiences in a manner that demonstrates compassionate understanding and inspires hope.
- Ensure that the knowledge gained from personal experience is used in a manner that contributes to the well-being of the peer and that the relationship is always peer-focused.
- Respect and maintain confidentiality honouring the dignity of risk and the importance of learning from mistakes.
- Maintain mutually agreed upon limits and boundaries in the peer support relationship.
- Respect external limits and boundaries within the context of their role as a peer supporter.
- Practice self-care, observe their own wellbeing and are aware of their own and others' needs for self-care, self-awareness and personal insight. Asking for support when wanted.

- Play an equal role in exploring options and connecting peers to other resources.
- Are collaborative with community partners, service providers and other stakeholders.
- Aspire to be current within their field of practice by remaining up-to-date regarding available resources, especially those that are locally available, and by engaging in continuous learning.

Revised to include this Harm Reduction Principle:

- Consider and explore options to reduce the potential self-identified harm associated with any activity or behaviour to bring about perceived wellness and/or peace of mind.

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The Western Canada Peer Training Society invites you to consider this Education Capsule:

#1 Peering into Creativity

And join us in an interactive discussion on the third Monday of each month 7-8:30pm.

We will continue to distribute monthly Education Capsules exploring aspects of integral peer support.

Please express your interest and availability to attend via Zoom on April 17. Upon confirmation you will be sent a Zoom link to attend.

Please direct your confirmation, discussion questions and comments to:

Debbie Wiebe at vicepres.wcpt@gmail.com or Text: (403) 862-4783

Thank you