



Ontario Peer Development Initiative

OPDI preparing to launch Peer Support Core Skills training across province.

Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI) is gearing up to train another 172 peer supporters from among its member consumer/survivor initiatives across the province over the coming spring and summer months, as part of an Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) funded project to create a common peer support training toolkit and certification program for Ontario's mental health and addiction system.

The first 28 trainees received the Core Skills program from project consultants Christine Gayler & Associates (CG&A) in two four-day sessions held in Toronto in January and February.

"The training experience was phenomenal" said one participant. "I feel I have been given an added dimension to my skills and my understanding of what formalized peer support is all about." "Absolutely the best I have been involved in," said another.

Those 28 individuals are currently working to earn their Core Skills certificates by completing 50-hour internships. They are providing peer support in a number of settings, including their home CSI's, community mental health agencies, mental health centres, hospital emergency departments and community housing programs. Their experiences in some of the non-CSI settings will be invaluable in helping OPDI to identify opportunities to partner for the creation of future specialty modules to add to the set of core skills.

"We are very proud of these first 28 trainees" says OPDI President Joel Johnson, "and of our member organizations who participated in the many surveys, interviews, conference workshops, focus groups and regional piloting that this training program grew out of. The end product is truly a collaborative effort that reflects the Peer Support Training needs and wishes of the CSI's of Ontario. Our first 28 identified to the Board that they wish to form an association in order to give each other support and encouragement, and share ideas going forward. Although this is not within the scope of the project funding, OPDI will find a way to support and facilitate this."

Last week, ten of the original 28 Core Skills trainees were back in the city for three-day Train the Trainer training. To earn their Trainer certificates, and to meet the requirements of the OTF funding, they will be providing the Core Skills training to representatives of each OPDI member consumer/survivor organization. Their first training offerings will be delivered with the support and supervision of the CG&A team.

"This first round of training will be free of charge to our members" says Deborah Sherman, OPDI's E.D. "We will be asking each of our member organizations to send three individuals to the nearest of ten training courses across the province. Training schedules and dates will be worked out over the next few weeks through negotiation between our trainers, the CG&A team, and OPDI. We will need our members' help to identify comfortable and free or inexpensive training venues they may know about in their regions." As venues and schedules begin to solidify, OPDI member organizations will receive calls to submit applicants.

“The Core Skills training is an intensive and highly interactive program” says Christine Gayler. “As well as highlighting the knowledge and skills essential in establishing and growing a peer/peer supporter relationship, there is an emphasis on the participant’s personal growth and development. The training work includes individual reflections, skills practices and group exercises. The internship creates the opportunity for the participant to apply the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom in real experiences in real settings. We are seeking individuals who are or are aspiring to be Peer Supporters, who are prepared to participate fully, who are open to learning and growing , and who have the energy and stamina to go the distance. Participants can anticipate a six month commitment.”

"The [training] experience allowed me to take some time to reflect on my role as a peer supporter and honour my strengths and challenges in this often demanding role” said one trainee. “I have renewed passion for my job”.

Peer support as a career choice is something OPDI is passionate about too. The organization has engaged intellectual property counsel to develop licenses for trainers that will be renewable, revocable, and tied to ongoing membership in an OPDI member organization. “We are quite serious about ensuring that our training becomes recognized for ongoing, sustainable quality and authenticity,” says Sherman. “We are already working with other partners and potential funders to create specialty “modules” to add to the core skills training... the possibilities for peer support roles are endless, and we want to explore them.”

For more information, contact:

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or

Visit www.opdi.org frequently for updates and information about the project or to inquire about training availability for mainstream mental health and addictions organizations.

and

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The Ontario Trillium Foundation is an agency of the Government of Ontario. For 25 years, the Foundation has supported the growth and vitality of communities across the province. OTF continues to strengthen the capacity of the volunteer sector through investments in community-based initiatives. For more information, please visit www.trilliumfoundation.org

