

UBCM Strengthening Communities' Services

Peer Ambassador Program: Quarterly Report

Proposed Outcomes:

By expanding on the outstanding work that has been taking place by local non-profits, we will enhance the services and interactions that take place between those who are sheltering outside at all times of day, address concerns about public health and safety that have been raised, and identify those who are most at risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19. We will achieve this by engaging our persons with lived experience to team up with existing services to help mediate interactions and spread awareness, understanding and education to other front line services and the rest of the community.

Participant and Stakeholder Focus:

The focus in the perspective is whether program recipients and the community as a whole benefit from the services that are delivered and whether they are delivered in a manner that meets their needs and expectations. It answers the questions "are our services meeting the recipients and stakeholders expectations in term of satisfaction? Are they responsive and well delivered? Are we making a difference?"

- a) Describe a success story or a fail forward lesson that occurred this period.

Please see [page 7](#) for one of our success stories for November.

- b) Describe feedback and engagement with businesses and neighbouring community.

During this quarter, 17 local businesses were engaged. When the new shelter location was announced there were many concerns with surrounding businesses and the impacts this would have for them. Business owners, such as Byland Nursery, were concerned about garbage, theft, sharps being discarded, etc. Peer Ambassadors have been engaging with Byland and other businesses to introduce themselves, explain their purpose in an effort to establish and foster a positive, working relationship so that during and after the transition the business owners would feel heard and their needs addressed. In the next quarter the West Kelowna Shelter will have transitioned to their new location on Bartley Road and we will be able to provide an update on the transition and the support provided.

As the Peer Ambassadors have been working on a weekly basis, business owners have been taking note and will often come up to Peer Ambassadors and thank them for all their hard work. Businesses have expressed appreciation for their contributions to keeping their community safe, and clean.

Peer Ambassadors check in with local churches to ensure that those unsheltered are okay to seek daytime shelter/safety within their grounds. Some churches have a higher volume of unsheltered community members as a result of the community supports they provide throughout the day. We have continual communication with community churches around safety and cleanliness, as well as informing them of services and supports that we may be able to provide.

c) Describe feedback and engagement with unsheltered populations.

Peer Ambassadors have been working very hard to build healthy working relationships with unsheltered populations and have been actively engaging by providing community resources (relevant to each community member's needs), snacks, water, hand warmers, and most importantly, mentorship. We have wonderful stories of Peer Ambassadors supporting community members in general as well. For example, a visually impaired community member was supported as they were lost trying to make their way to their doctor's office. On another occasion, a new immigrant was supported as they were lost as well.

Feedback from the Peer Ambassadors themselves has been positive and enlightening. Individuals enter the program for a myriad of reasons, such as: developing new skill sets, establishing a new routine, or decreasing social isolation. The Peer Ambassador program is a place where community members can interact, develop skills, and enhance their self-esteem/self-worth. In addition to the immeasurable benefits, a significant draw to the program is meaningful work for real pay. Participants have been excited to work on essential and soft skills such as cultural awareness, LGBTQ+, effective workplace behavior, and social engagement.

d) Describe partnerships/networks that have been developed during this reporting period.

Dolicious Donuts in West Kelowna has welcomed Peer Ambassadors to engage with other Peers/Turning Points outreach workers during a weekly lunch provided by Turning Points so that we continue to connect, build rapport, and provide resources/services available to unsheltered community members in a consistent, efficient manner.

The Central Okanagan Community Food Bank - West Kelowna has been very appreciative of the clean-up around their business area and often come out to thank the Peer Ambassadors for their continued efforts.

We will continue to target the private businesses and area around the West Kelowna Shelter over the next quarter to contribute to a smooth transition. Building on our existing networks and relationships, Peer Ambassadors will work with the West Kelowna business community in an effort to strengthen community relations through conversations that contribute to destigmatizing mental health/addictions/homelessness.

e) BYLAW ONLY: describe process on map creations, usage & challenges

Internal Process Focus,

This area focuses on the efficiency and timelines of service delivery processes. It answers the questions, “did we use our resources efficiently (funding, training, personnel)?” This is usually measured unit of services delivered (input to output).

Number of times community clean up were completed:	27
Number of engagements with local businesses:	17
Number of unique engagements (trauma informed) with unsheltered populations:	70
Number of individuals connected to resources:	7
Number of positive health outcomes (Harm Reduction, First Aid, EMS):	2
Number of educational/anti stigmatic engagements with the public:	10
Number of times Harm reduction supplies received:	4
Number of times Overdose Prevention/Naloxone administered:	0
BYLAW: number of calls diverted	
BYLAW: number of community forums attended	

Learning and Growth Focus

This area focuses on ensuring that we are proactively managing our human resources – the most important and critical resource we have available to impact change. We will ask our Peer Ambassadors to join a collective of their peers to ensure we have the most accurate and relevant information to adhere to best practices and tap into new and innovative ideas.

a) Number of training completed:

6 Peer Ambassadors have completed the in-house training this quarter, and 4 have successfully completed their First Aid certification.

b) Describe which training has been completed:

- At program implementation, Piers provides intake, assessment and in-house training services (see below). Upon completion of their on-boarding and training, the City of West Kelowna Bylaw Community Support Officer, Danica Floto, and the (former) City of West Kelowna Community Support Specialist, Jenn Kanter, welcomed the crew and spoke to job duties. A question and answer period followed.
- All Peer Ambassadors completed Piers foundational training series, which included the following subjects:
 - Cultural Awareness,
 - LGBTQ+,
 - Social Engagement, and
 - Workplace Behaviour.

- As Peer Ambassadors progress in the program, participant-specific workshops and training modules are offered based on individual needs. Unpacking Biases, Understanding Boundaries, Trauma-informed Care, Harm Reduction, and other topics to support personal development, such as Building Self-Esteem, Decreasing Social Isolation, etc. are a small sampling of workshops offered to program participants.
- We now have 4 Peer Ambassadors with their First Aid certification.

c) Describe the learning and achievements for this reporting period:

Participants are motivated to support and encourage their friends/fellow unsheltered community members who are also struggling with poverty, homelessness, and mental health and addictions. Peer Ambassadors have been actively attending and participating. Piers provides both a printed schedule, and whenever possible, a reminder call to support regular attendance. Piers provide basic training for handling harm reduction supplies, such as sharps. Discussions with Peer Ambassadors around WFN land, business property, private property - and providing clarity around where it is permissible to access for clean-up and where one cannot or would require permission to do so, was found to be a critical area of learning. With our initial round of funding First Aid training for our Peer Ambassadors, attendance was nil, regardless of providing multiple reminders. In determining best practises, we ascertained that scheduling courses on Monday's are unsuccessful and moved to scheduling certificate training mid-week so that we can provide additional reminders. Additionally, Piers staff provided transportation, in-person support for 6 hours of training, lunch and wages to ensure success. As a result of these adjustments/best practises, all 4 Peer Ambassadors scheduled successfully completed their First Aid training.

d) Describe involvement of Peer Ambassadors in peer collectives:

As identified previously, Delicious Donuts in West Kelowna has welcomed Peer Ambassadors to engage with other Peers/unsheltered community members/Turning Points Outreach Workers during a weekly lunch provided by Turning Points so that we continue to connect, build rapport, and provide resources/services available to unsheltered community members in a consistent, efficient manner.

The Westside Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) Steering Committee was put on temporary pause due to a position being vacant. This committee is looking to restart in the new year and once a new Community Support Specialist is hired, Peer Ambassadors will be participating in the consultation around supporting the Unique Identifier Count/Housing Needs Assessment Project.

We have been encouraging Peer Ambassadors to participate in a project the Province is working on. Through the Homelessness Strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in B.C., Casey van Wensem, Policy Analyst, Homelessness Policy and Partnerships Branch, Office of Housing and Construction Standards, Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing, is seeking to connect with Peers who have lived experience with homelessness and are currently working in a support or advocacy role for others who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.

In the new year there will be further opportunity for the Peer Ambassadors, through training offered by the Community Action Network from BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, providing capacity building training for people with lived experience to get involved in their communities for more organized, systematic change.

We continually endeavour to look for opportunities for Peers that will support their growth as a peer worker.

e) Describe challenges in executing the program:

The original work plan intended for Peer Ambassadors to work with the City of West Kelowna Bylaw Community Support Officer 5 days per week. With the increase in demands/needs of the West Kelowna Bylaw Community Support Officer, it has become increasingly difficult to manage the combination of supervising the Peer Ambassadors, and the myriad of daily community needs. As of November, at the request of the City of West Kelowna Community Support Officer, Piers' Peer Employment Coordinator/Outreach Worker will be assuming the responsibility for supervision of bi-weekly outreach shifts with the Peer Ambassadors. This provides the Bylaw Community Support Officer sufficient time to address other community needs, and position demands.

Between Covid-19 and the 2021 wildfire season, attendance was sporadic, as some Peer Ambassadors were required to be evacuated, while others were quarantined due to potential Covid-19 exposures.

Program Accountability/Safety Focus

This area focuses on ensuring that we manage the day to day operations to our program and services in a manner that is accountable to funders and ensures the safety of the program participants and the public. This will also address risk management.

- a) Number of times connected with police: **2**
- b) Number of times connected with security: **0**
- c) Describe the progress achieved this period in meeting the needs of local businesses and neighbours?

Safety is an integral part of training Peer Ambassadors. To be successful, Peer Ambassadors need to feel confident, safe *and* supported in the work activities they are participating in. In order to ensure safety, Piers purchased gloves, safety vests with reflective strips, litter pickers, and acquired sharp boxes for safe disposal of sharps. Every group is equipped with a naloxone kit and in the next quarter Piers staff is arranging for all Peer Ambassadors willing to participate, to participate in naloxone training.

The McDougal Creek clean-up was a collaboration between the City of West Kelowna Community Support Officers, Piers, Peer Ambassadors, Turning Points Outreach Workers, and West Bank First Nations Outreach Workers. At the request of multiple community members, a mass clean-up along McDougal Creek was facilitated on November 9. Multiple organizations collaborated on this initiative, and completed the clean-up. Local businesses came out to thank the team for their efforts in restoring the location to a clean, and safe state.

a) Describe the progress achieved this period in meeting the needs of those who are unsheltered?

The Peer Ambassadors have been developing non-judgmental, caring relationships with the unsheltered through informal but purposeful conversations around how they are doing, what their needs are, and ensuring they are aware of what resources are available for them. Drinks, snacks, and hand warmers are provided to those that need them. Locations to access harm reduction and/or health clinics are shared. Information is provided around food accessibility/stability, such as the daily free lunch at Dolicious Donuts and dates for pick-up/location of the Central Okanagan Food Bank.

Peer Ambassadors share program information about the various community services in West Kelowna, including Piers services specific to supporting unsheltered residents of West Kelowna. These services include, Reaching Home housing placement services, BC Housing Temporary Subsidy Program, Third Party Administration of Benefits services, and the Piers for Peers Program where those at-risk of, or are experiencing absolute homelessness can participate in Peer opportunities either through our partnership with the City of West Kelowna, or with other like-minded community partners that are eager to provide a flexible and meaningful work experience to the unsheltered community members of West Kelowna.

November 2021

Mr. M is a 59-year-old male. He is a resident of the Okanagan, specifically West Kelowna. He entered the Peer Ambassador Program in June 2021 with ambitions to further develop employment skills and prepare to return to traditional employment. During the intake process, Mr. M spoke about daily struggles and barriers that he has faced which limited his ability to easily obtain/maintain traditional employment. He struggles with active alcohol addiction which can make maintaining a stable job difficult. As an older worker, he was unfamiliar with most of the job search tools available to the public. He is on limited income (Persons with Disabilities) and did not have the financial resources to return to school or acquire certifications for employment. Mr. M needed new glasses as the ones he had were scratched and made it difficult for him to see clearly. Prior to finding the Peer Ambassador Program, he was homeless and living in temporary bridge housing through Turning Points. He has a drivers license and can transport himself, however his vehicle is in need of repair and doesn't allow him to go far.

Mr. M first placement was with the City of West Kelowna as an outreach worker, working alongside the Bylaw Community Support Officer. Duties included collecting garbage, speaking with unsheltered community members, connecting with local businesses and handing out refreshments as they walked around the community. Mr. M took part in some skills training modules prior to starting his placement – Cultural Awareness, LGBTQ+, Effective Workplace Behavior and Social Engagement. He was attentive, asked questions and benefited from the in-house training. Additional on-the-job skills were taught by the Bylaw Community Support Officer while they were on shift, in the community. Mr. M showed up to every scheduled peer shift, he was dressed accordingly and was always ready to participate. Through Piers' Eye Care Program (in collaboration with Tutt Street Optometry), a direct referral and subsequent appointment was arranged for new glasses. Piers developed a resume and cover letter, and supported him in his work search through in-house training around job searching/using online job search engines. Mr. M was able to independently search for work after spending some time developing those skills and continues to attend interviews in his quest for employment. Training provided during his participation in the program included: Time Management (working a regular schedule), Maintaining Work Life Balance, Job Search Skills, Resume Building, and Social Engagement. Additionally, Mr. M obtained valuable work experiences on the job!

Mr. M has since decided to move forward with job searching independently. It takes extraordinary courage to take a step forward in the right direction after facing so many barriers. It takes even more courage to accept your vulnerabilities and ask for help. Mr. M has a bright future ahead of him in the workforce.

McDougal Creek Clean-Up



community partners
providing lifeskills,
advocacy and
employment services

Peer Ambassador Group:

Pre-shift photo of Peer Ambassadors as they prepare for their community engagement/clean-up shift.



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