



Peer Support Centre Annual Report

2015-2016

Prepared in April 2016



Letter from the Vice-President

Dear friend,

2015-2016 was a watershed moment for the University Students' Council's Peer Support Centre.

This year represented the culmination of a year's worth of preparation and research. We piloted a program that, over the course of many months, had been rebuilt from the ground up, taking into consideration national best practices for peer support services and years of input, feedback, and criticism.

While it will take many years to measure the true impact of this undertaking, one thing is already apparent: with the support of countless student staff and volunteers, Western University administration, and a generous donor, we have come an unimaginable long way.

This publicly available annual report - hopefully the first of many - will detail significant improvements that have been made to the Peer Support Centre's service delivery model, outreach program, volunteer recruitment and training regimen, data tracking efforts, and visitor experience. I hope you will be as satisfied with the numbers as I am.

However, in spite of our successes, we still have a ways to go. Awareness is still in its early days; visitor numbers are much higher than they were in the past, but not as high as they could be.

Future years will change the Centre, as this year has. Moving forward, I hope our community can encourage it to grow and adapt to future challenges as well as it has to past ones.

Sincerely,

Alex Benac
Vice-President Internal
University Students' Council



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Overview

Mandate

As per the Peer Support Centre and Program Policy adopted by the University Students' Council (USC) on October 28th, 2015, the Peer Support Centre (PSC) shall:

- Be a Western-centric program that conforms wherever possible to the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) guidelines for best practice in peer support,
- Act as a provider of both formalized/intentional and workplace peer support (as defined by the MHCC), in both individuals and group contexts,
- Seek to foster an environment that is welcoming and safer for individuals of any identity or lived experience, and
- Strive to provide service in a manner that celebrates diversity in all its forms.

Listen, Affirm, Refer

The Peer Support Centre is also mandated to uphold a minimum standard of care following a **listen, affirm, refer framework for action**. Visitors can expect to be listened to non-judgementally, have their lived experiences affirmed, and be given a referral to a service beyond the USC for further or ongoing support.

What Is Offered?

The Peer Support Centre offers the following to all visitors:

- Confidential peer-to-peer support with a sincere, empathic volunteer well-equipped to serve in a helping role
- A central place to access information and resources,
- A safe, non-threatening, and comfortable environment in which to decompress or have a conversation,
- Timely access to support,
- Student-driven programs that address a myriad of topics, including LGBTQ+, eating disorders, and positive mental health,
- A partner in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, and
- Access to a fully catalogued library of 140+ health and wellness resources offered in multiple languages.



Fact Sheet

Location:

- University Community Centre, Rooms 256 & 258

Operating Hours:

- 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (first term)
- 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (second term)

Team Make-up:

- 1 executive director (VP/SPO, USC)
- Training Coordinator & Practice Supervisor (SDC)
- Centre Coordinator (USC)
- AVP Peer Support (USC)
- Peer Support Assistant (SDC)
- 35 volunteers (USC/SDC)
- Various staff supporting communications, assessment, and advisory functions (USC/SDC)

External Facilitators:

- Connect for Mental Health
- Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
- Hope's Garden
- St. John's Ambulance
- Stephanie Hull Art Therapy

Program Enhancements



Highlights

- Professional, comprehensive training - including SafeTalk - provided for all volunteers
- Year-long support for volunteers from an accredited Student Development Centre psychotherapist
- Implemented assessment measures to track volunteer participation rates and foot traffic
- Centre moved to a bright new space on the second level of the University Community Centre
- Extensive partnership with Western allowed for rapid program growth and development
- New and innovative programming planned by students, for students piloted throughout the year
- Centre operating at full capacity as of Tuesday, September 8th, months earlier than previous years
- Compiled and catalogued a resource library that includes over 140 texts in many languages, including French, Mandarin, Korean, Urdu, and Woodland Cree.

Student Programs & Outreach

The Peer Support Centre continued to offer tried and true workshops, such as LGBTQ+ Discussion Groups, Art Therapy, and Eating Disorders Discussion Groups, and piloted new ones, such as after-hours Mental Health Groups.

The Centre participated in over a dozen open houses and UCC atrium days, and worked with the USC's Health and Wellness Support Service to offer exam care packages, cookies and coffee on Bell Let's Talk day, and therapy dogs.

And for the first time ever, the PSC had a strong presence in Orientation Week, with each incoming first year receiving Centre literature. The USC also hosted a Rest Station for sophs in the PSC, which was supported by volunteers and a certified counsellor offered by the Student Development Centre.

Measuring Progress

Previous years saw the PSC collect virtually no data to measure program success. As part of program redevelopment, we implemented an assessment protocol that saw each one-on-one session with a visitor documented, which summarize the interaction had with a volunteer.

Successful September

In past years, volunteer recruitment and training occurred in the fall, making the PSC inoperable for 25% of the academic year. In 2015, we moved the recruitment and training timeline up so volunteers were selected and trained prior to Orientation Week, meaning the Centre was open and welcoming students two days prior to the start of classes. In the future, a near-identical timeline will be adhered to in order to ensure that the PSC is operating at full capacity for the entirety of the academic year.

Volunteer Development



150+

Applications to
volunteer

35

Volunteers
recruited

1200+

Hours of volunteer
time logged

Recruitment & Training

This year's cohort of 35 volunteers was drawn from the most competitive recruitment period in the program's history, with over 150 individuals applying. Interviews were conducted via an online e-interviewing platform.

A generous contribution from a donor allowed Western University to hire a Master's Level Therapist to work with the Centre as Training Coordinator & Practice Supervisor. This individual drew on national best practices in peer support to create the USC's first-ever comprehensive training program for volunteers. Training took place over three days in August 2015, with seven hours of workshops scheduled for each day. Training touched upon empathic communication, cultural competency, sensitive disclosures, boundaries and ethics, and included mandatory SafeTalk. Training was highly successful, with 90%+ of participants reporting feeling more equipped to do their job and familiar with the resources available on-campus. Volunteer retention for 2016-2017 is projected to be in excess of 33%.

Year-long support for volunteers was provided in the form of monthly group supervision sessions, at which volunteers would debrief challenging scenarios with the Training Coordinator and Practice Supervisor and discuss techniques for handling future scenarios. Throughout 2015-2016, a total of 23 group supervisions were held.

Coordinator Testimonial

"The Peer Support Centre is such an important on-campus resource and one that I could go on for days talking about. The volunteers in the space genuinely care about helping other students, and the training they have received makes me feel extremely confident that they are prepared to handle any situation that may come their way. I truly feel that the multitude of supports offered by our program (i.e. drop-in support for students, by students; a resource library; an array of evening programming) are simply unmatched by any other program on-campus."

Tamara Spencer
Peer Support Centre Coordinator 2015-2016

Visitors: By the Numbers



100+

Participants in after-hours groups

93

Visitor forms processed*

930%

Percentage increase in documented visits

235

Informal drop-ins throughout Fall 2015

10

Documented visits, 2014-15**

100%

Percentage of visitors given a referral to campus and community resources

Year-over-Year Improvement

Prior to 2015, limited data was available on how many visitors the Centre received annually, the reasons that compelled students to visit, and to what visitors were being referred. As of April 2016, we have a good indication of how each of these key indicators have developed.

While the classification of the Peer Support Centre as “below target” for utilization still stands, one thing is clear from this year’s data: usage has skyrocketed relative to 2014-15, with hundreds of unique visits to the space as noted in intake forms, volunteer logs, events, workshops, meetings, and group sessions. There was a 930% increase in the number of formal one-on-one sessions alone; that percentage would increase considerably when all other types of visits are included.

Common Themes

The most common reasons for visitors to drop into the Peer Support Centre include:

- Resource/information request
- Stress and/or anxiety
- General mental health concern
- Academic concern
- Difficulty adjusting to university

Services most frequently referred to were:

- Psychological Services
- Learning Skills Services
- Student Health Services

* As of April 4th, 2016.

** Based on volunteer testimonials from 2014-15; no data was collected prior to September 2015.

Partnership with Western

Student Experience

The change underpinning reforms to the Peer Support Centre's operations for 2015-2016 was undoubtedly the significant support received from Western's Student Experience division and a donor matched with that office by Western Alumni. Associate Vice-President (Student Experience) Jana Luker and her team, including Student Development Centre director Gail Hutchinson and Director of Administration Deborah Coward, have committed to working closely with the USC to continually develop and improve the Peer Support Centre in years to come. This partnership was solidified in September 2015, when USC President Sophie Helpard and Ms. Luker signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining each organization's responsibilities to embrace a campus culture of which peer support is a critical component.

As per the memorandum of understanding, which may be renewed upon written agreement from both parties, Western and the USC shall collaborate on: the recruitment and selection of volunteers; volunteer training and development; the creation of promotional materials and a communications plan; meetings with external donors; the establishment of assessment methods; and strategy.



Western has more than upheld its end of the bargain by partnering with the USC on items beyond the scope of the MOU, including mental health programming such as resource fairs and speaker events. In addition to funding half the salary for the PSC's Training Coordinator and Practice Supervisor, Student Experience's donor funds provided for \$2300 to be spent on the promotion and marketing of the Centre.

The establishment of sound assessment infrastructure was a key benchmark to meet for 2015-2016. Student Experience's Director of Research, Innovation, and Assessment supported the creation of quantitative and qualitative tools to set goals, track usage, and measure volunteer outcomes, and conducted pre- and post-training surveys for volunteers to gauge the effectiveness of training.

Future Growth

As with all great partnerships, our expectation is that ties with Western on the peer support file will deepen as time goes on. With many mental health-related progressions on the horizon, it is easy to identify areas for growth in our relationship with the University.

Moving forward, we will be carefully examining potential synergies between the new Wellness Education Centre and the Peer Support Centre, with special attention paid to ways in which both can work together to encourage help-seeking behaviours and direct students to the most appropriate resource. Furthermore, a pan-university mental health strategy is to be drafted in 2016. Our hope is that peer support programs and a cross-campus framework for their operation and use will be incorporated into that strategy, with greater intentionality than student-led peer programs have seen in the past.

Financials

Supported by the USC

- Salaries: \$14,333.33 (1/3 executive director's salary)
- Part-time wages/honoraria: \$6,000.00
- Occupancy: \$13,785.62 (approximate)
- Office expenses: \$230.54

Total Core Expenses: \$34,349.16

- Merchandise: \$299.00
- Promotional Material & Graphic Design: \$1,445.34
- Advertising: \$250.00
- Open Houses: \$765.26

Total Marketing & Promotions: \$2,759.60

- Recruitment Costs: \$542.43
- Training Days: \$1,046.13
- Appreciation: \$359.56

Total Volunteer Development: \$4,707.72

- Massage day: \$180.00
- Destressors: \$206.72
- LGBTQ+ Discussion Groups: \$1,600.00
- Grief counselling: \$394.36
- Art With Impact program: \$1,113.00
- Hope's Garden: \$975.00
- Art Therapy: \$750.00

Total Programming: \$5,219.08

Total PSC-related costs incurred, USC, 2015-2016: \$47,035.56

Supported by Western

- Training Coordinator and Practice Supervisor (donor funds)
- Promotion and Supplies (donor funds)

Total PSC-related costs incurred, Student Experience, 2015-2016: \$37,477.60



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