Webinar 9: Building a Workplace Peer Support Program

Thrive in your Workplace | 2019
Agenda

I. Objectives

II. Overview of Social Support and Mental Health

III. Peer Support Programs

IV. Wrapping Up
Objectives

By the end of this webinar, participants will be able to:

• Understand the importance of social support for mental health

• Describe different types of peer support programs in the workplace

• Access tools and templates to get started
“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”
– Helen Keller
Social support and mental health

• Relationships are a key part of maintaining both mental and physical health

• Social support gives us the feeling of being loved, cared for, respected, and belonging to a group

• A strong social support system can improve or protect mental health and decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety
How does social support strengthen the workplace?

Social connections between colleagues can:

• Create a sense of purpose and well being
• Reduce symptoms of burnout
• Increase collaboration and innovation
There are 3 commonly used social support programs for the workplace:

- Employee champions
- Employee resource groups
- Peer navigators
Peer support program 1: Employee champions

Employee champions promote mental health at work by:
• Modeling positive behaviors
• Addressing stigma against mental illness
• Promoting workplace wellness events

In selecting Employee Champions, a good candidate is:
• Respected by both workers and management
• Has a passion for mental health
• Willing to be the 'face' of the system
What do Employee champions actually do?

Champions often work as multidisciplinary teams to identify goals and activities, such as:

- Holding events
- Supporting social media campaigns
- Writing blog posts about mental health
- Speaking about personal experience
- Sharing educational resources
Two examples of Employee champion programs

Google’s Blue Dot Program
- Employees become champions by volunteering to complete 30 minute training (400+ trained to date)
- Identified by a blue dot on their name badge
- Provide peer support by practicing “compassionate listening”

Accenture Mental health Allies
- Volunteers who provide mental health support and information
- Participate in a 3-hour training (1300+ trained to date)
- Aim to normalize and de-stigmatize mental health
Best practices for introducing Employee champions

- Ensure supervisors support employee champions by providing dedicated resources and time for participation
- Celebrate and reward champions’ efforts
- Provide recognition and share success stories
- Communicate regularly and often
- Offer opportunities to collaborate with leadership and HR on organizational goals
Peer support program 2: Employee resource groups (ERGs)

ERGs often serve as a source of internal support for employees and symbolize a commitment to certain values. ERGs:

• Represent groups of employees who share concerns about a common topic, such as mental health, gender identity and others
• Support the recruitment and retention of diverse employees
• Facilitate culturally sensitive product development and processes
• Build an inclusive and engaged workforce
What do mental health ERGs actually do?

Collaborate with HR to:
• Standardize policies about accommodations and that promote positive mental health
• Educate staff about available resources

Launch stigma-reducing activities:
• Encourage leaders to communicate about mental health
• Normalize talking about mental health at work

Coordinate and conduct trainings:
• Hold Mental Health First Aid training
• Develop other educational materials
Best practices for introducing Employee resource groups

Ensure alignment with legal and HR departments:
• All employees should be invited to voluntarily participate
• Use positive language to frame the opportunity

Integrate the ERG’s practices into organizational priorities
• Co-develop objectives and goals between leadership and ERGs
• Design ERG activities to support business goals
• Provide executive support to ERGs
Peer support program 3: Peer navigators

Peer navigator programs employ people with lived experience of mental illness or substance misuse to model recovery in the workplace. They differ from employee champions in that their *lived experience* is a crucial part of the role.

Peer navigators are typically used in healthcare or social service settings, however many other types of organizations are starting to explore the role of peers in the workplace.
Example of a Peer navigator program

**Howie the Harp**
- A national model for peer advocacy
- Trains individuals with lived experience to provide effective peer support services in Human Services
- Program includes classroom training, internship placement, and job search support
- Over 1,000 peers trained
What do peer navigators do?

Key elements of peer navigator support include:
• Shared experience
• Empathy
• Hope
• Role modeling recovery
• Active listening
• Motivational interviewing
• Constructive disclosure

Peer support programs have been shown to decrease rates of hospitalization and self-stigma, while increasing quality of life, satisfaction, empowerment and hope.
### Best practices for introducing Peer navigators

- Generate a clear and consistent vision of peer work as it relates to your organization.
- Adjust existing practices and policies to accept the nuances and experiences of this new population of employees.
- Make the peer staff experience consistent with all other staff’s experience.
- Coordinate regular supervision for peers in a manner consistent with the organization’s existing supervision structure.
- Offer accommodations when necessary to support peers at work.
Get started launching a Peer navigator program

1. Communicate a clear commitment to the importance of lived experience from leadership
2. Identify funding for a peer support program
3. Provide educational training to staff about peer support and elicit feedback
4. Establish a volunteer advisory council to partner on program development
5. Decide whether or not to hire peers from inside the organization
6. Recruit peer specialists from a pool of candidates generated by a certification program
7. Train supervisors how to collaborate with peer staff
"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."
– Coretta Scott King
Webinar 1: Building the Business Case
Webinar 2: The Model for Improvement
Webinar 3: Evaluating your Mental Health Initiative
Webinar 4: Workplace Diversity and Mental Health
Webinar 5: Accommodations, Risk & Compliance
Webinar 6: Offering High Quality Benefits
Webinar 7: Supportive Management Practices
Webinar 8: Addressing Burnout in the Workplace
Webinar 9: Building a Peer Support Program
Webinar 10: Creating a Vicarious Trauma Informed Workplace

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Tools & Resources

• **Mind Share Partners** offers a free toolkit about mental health ERGs and advising services to create a safe, compliant, and productive forum for continuing the mental health conversation.

• **Mental Health America Center for Peer Support** offers a variety of resources about integrating mental health peers into the workforce, including peer certification training programs, research and resources to guide implementation.

• **NYC Peer and Community Health Workforce Consortium** created an online toolkit to help organizations support and integrate peers and community health workers.

• **Time to Change** is a UK based social movement focused on mental health that utilizes employee champions within organizations.
References


References


