



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada

Peer Project Forum & Special Event Held in October 2011

The Peer Project team of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) hosted a series of meetings in Ottawa from October 4th to 6th with a special event held at noon on October 5th. The meetings took place during *Mental Illness Awareness Week* and marked a significant turning point in the evolution of the project.

Concurrently on October 5th a special event in Alberta was held where a new initiative, the *Lieutenant Governor's Circle on Mental Health and Addiction* was launched by the Honourable Donald S. Ethell, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. A renowned guest speaker at that event was **Senator Roméo Dallaire**, a devotee of and strong believer in peer support. He emphasized that families need to be part of the solution in addressing mental health problems and illnesses, and he said the solution is fundamentally based on peer support. View Senator Roméo Dallaire's video here <http://youtu.be/6REW4QQWoxg>

The first series of the Peer Project meetings began on October 4th with representatives from organizations in different sectors in Canada, i.e., the private and government sectors, law enforcement, education, health care and social services. The participating organizations were those where management had expressed an interest in being a demonstration site to pilot peer support.

The purpose of the two day demonstration sites meeting was to: (i) provide a platform for knowledge exchange between all sites and set the conditions to initiate a community of practice among participating organizations (ii) identify the activities needed to implement the pilots and discuss sequencing, timelines and challenges (iii) examine the importance of workplace readiness to implement peer support and discuss the feasibility of adhering to organizational requirements.

At the special event held on October 5th, the **President & CEO of the MHCC, Louise Bradley** spoke about the Commission's role as a catalyst to put mental health, and in particular mental health in the workplace, "at the front of the agenda." View Louise Bradley's video here : <http://youtu.be/29yaYmMbyXQ>

In a separate meeting, as part of the same forum, executives from the various organizations interested in participating in a pilot joined in a panel discussion centered on organizational realities and challenges in developing and implementing peer support in workplaces. The discussion was facilitated by Mary Ann Baynton, a member of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's Workforce Advisory Committee and Program Director for the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace.

Stéphane Grenier, the Peer Project Team Leader spoke about the importance of keeping peer support simple and the necessity to preserve its grass-roots authenticity, regardless of the setting in which peer support takes place. Keeping peer support organic and natural is crucial to its continuing success as a non-clinical mental health intervention. View Stéphane Grenier's video here <http://youtu.be/qec6FnBd528>



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The other series of meetings that commenced October 5th involved regional peer support leaders from across Canada. For information concerning the selection of peer leaders, please see the September 2011 update posted on the MHCC's Peer Project homepage.

The inaugural meeting with regional peer support leaders represented a critical milestone for the project. The goals of this initial meeting were primarily to: begin the development of a network of peer support leaders across Canada; discuss how participants see their roles as part of a Canadian peer support leadership network; determine peer leaders' needs in relation to helping advance the aims of the project; and to discuss how certification and nationally recognized credentials can assist peer support workers.

A key speaker at the October 5th event was the **Chair of the Mental Health Commission, the honourable Michael Kirby** who had highly motivating words for the noontime audience. He spoke to the importance of peer support and the importance of peer support in the Mental Health Strategy for Canada. View Michael Kirby's video here <http://youtu.be/b-fONsTXkik>.

The two day regional peer leaders meeting resulted in a consensus regarding the way forward. The role and responsibilities of the regional peer leaders, who are currently referred to as the National Peer Support Leadership Group, will be defined and 3 sub-committees of peer leaders will be established to work in the following areas of endeavour: (i) steering the project forward as an independent organization is created to administer the certification process; (ii) review the final draft Standards of Practice, and (iii) stakeholder relations, which is central to increasing the legitimacy of peer support throughout Canada.

A speaker who addressed the audience at the special event on October 5th reminded everyone why peer support workers are so dedicated to the work that they do. At the end of her talk on lived experience **Karen Liberman** received a standing ovation. To see and listen to her inspirational talk, click here <http://youtu.be/letJoWkvi64> Ms. Liberman is the former Executive Director of the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario and although she is now retired she remains active in the field of mental health.

Peer support workers who had asked to be kept informed about the project will receive an invitation to participate in an upcoming webinar to be presented by Stéphane Grenier, the Team Leader of the Peer Project. The webinar is intended to provide more detail about the October meeting that took place with peer leaders; information about next steps in the project, and Stéphane will also answer questions "live" from the listening audience.