



Psychiatric Disability Services
of Victoria (VICSERV)

So you want to be **a peer worker?**

This paper outlines important knowledge, skills and experience required to become a mental health peer worker.

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What knowledge, skills and experience do I need to become a peer worker?

Personal recovery and ability to support other consumers

As a consumer you would have experience in your personal journey of mental illness, the mental health system and recovery. You will be able to reflect on this experience and use this in supporting other consumers through their personal recovery journey.

- JOB READINESS SKILLS
- PREVIOUS STUDIES
- CONSUMER AND CARER RUN PROGRAMS

Lived experience of caring and ability to support other carers

As a carer you would have a lived experience of caring and the mental health service system. You will be able to reflect on this experience and use this in supporting other carers through their experience and journey.

- LIFE SKILLS
- VOLUNTEERING
- PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

WHICH LEADS TO

Consumer or carer peer worker role(s)

Choose to expand your knowledge, skills and experience as an existing peer worker

Undertake the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work (CHC43515) qualification

Personal recovery and ability to support others

Life skills

Life skills are usually associated with managing and living a better quality of life. They help us to accomplish our ambitions and live to our full potential. Life skills can include literacy and numeracy, study skills, negotiation skills, employability skills, time management and organising skills, conflict resolution, stress management and problem solving skills. Life skills are not always taught directly but often learned indirectly through experience and practice.

"I had never been very good at navigating all the things people do on a day to day basis, but when I became unwell I felt incapable of completing daily tasks. My Support Worker assisted me to find a routine I was able to maintain. Now I believe my life skills are more efficient than ever. I am volunteering in a peer role and pride myself in being able to assist others who are experiencing difficulties in these areas".

PEER WORKER

Job readiness skills

To be job-ready you will need to have the foundation knowledge and skills to be able to undertake the role of peer work. These can include reading, writing, mathematics, computer skills, problem solving, relationship building, critical thinking, reflective practice, history of peer work, recovery principles, cooperation and workplace discipline.

"I think what helped me gain employment in this role was my insight into my own experiences. I emphasised my volunteer experiences, part time work and university study, relating this to the Key Selection Criteria and I focused on how my own approach to keeping well is related to the recovery model."

PEER WORKER

Lived experience of caring and ability to support other carers

Previous studies

You may have undergone previous studies in the University and/or Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors. These will provide you with valuable knowledge, skills and experience that you may use to move into mental health peer work. Employers may expect that peer workers have attained a minimum level of formal education.

"Re-entering the workforce after a long period of caring was a challenge even though I had really useful skills and knowledge from my previous employment and experiences. I think I just lacked confidence. My previous study and experience was invaluable in helping me gain confidence for my new role. I now have become more effective in my peer worker role and learned how to use my lived experience to better support carers and families."

PEER WORKER

Continued overleaf 

Personal recovery and ability to support others

Lived experience of caring and ability to support other carers

Volunteering

Volunteering provides you the opportunity to gain practical experience in the workplace. It may be related to mental health peer work and it will provide you the opportunity to increase your confidence in moving back into work.

"I volunteered at several 'organisations', within pre-existing Art programs, as a participant and this led to me being a co-facilitator of these groups. When I felt in myself that I was ready to branch out further to increase my experiences, I joined a Community Advisory Group (specific to my interests) at a local hospital. Throughout these experiences, which included meeting and working with others from a variety of backgrounds, I found that my self-esteem and confidence grew. I feel that it was not just one thing that I worked on which assisted me in gaining employment. It was a number of factors."

MICHELLE – CONSUMER CONSULTANT

Previous work experience

Your previous work in the mental health and community sectors and other industries will give you valuable work and life experience to help you undertake the role of mental health peer work.

"I began my journey to peer work through a disability employment agency who introduced the idea of going back to study. The worker was very supportive and encouraging. This led to volunteering for a community based mental health service. I finally got a paid part time position in the service I volunteered for. I then asked my line manager if they would consider allowing me to intentionally use my personal experience and become an 'official' peer worker. This was accepted and I am now 'out and proud' and learning many new ways of walking alongside a person on their journey of recovery."

PEER WORKER

Consumer and carer run programs

You may be involved in consumer or carer peer run programs as a volunteer or paid worker. This may include one-to-one peer work, facilitating groups or advocacy. These programs may be in the program that you attended as a mental health consumer or carer.

"The training opportunity has been great. Training has also given me the opportunity to network, to be more confident, to share and gain a greater sense of value in what can be very challenging work. Now I can deliver peer work with confidence, and plan programs and assist with policies and processes that will really support meaningful change for carers and families accessing my organisation."

CARER CONSULTANT

To find out more:

To help explore your readiness to move into peer work, talk to your case manager, support worker, employment provider or supervisor.

To find out more about the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work (CHC43515), visit www.vicserv.org.au



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