

Peer Programs' 2019 - 2020 AGM Report

The beginning of this fiscal year started out promising. The number of referrals to all three peer services had shown a steady increase, and the client load reached a point where a wait-list or triaging would be necessary. However rather than to take that route the staff and the program committee opted to increase the number of volunteer trainings. The first of two planned 55 hour Emotional Support Volunteer courses ended in the middle of January. The Japanese Cultural Centre had requested that JSA services provide a 16 hour Friendly Visitor training for their volunteers. This very successful endeavour had just been completed when due to the Pandemic Covid-19 the Province pretty well shut down. One service goal for 2020 was to provide training for care-givers from diverse ethnic/cultural groups, but because of the social distance regulations and other safety precautions there was no other choice but to rethink not only Program goals but also the service delivery. In the middle of March all face-to-face contacts were put on hold and any interactions with clients and volunteers were done by telephone or some form of digital technology.

In order to curb the virus, residents in long term care and assisted living facilities were no longer able to meet with their loved ones, and those who lived independently were bound to social distance and other safety restrictions. As a lack of human contact and social isolation may lead to depression Peer services' staff and volunteers tripled their phone contacts with clients. It is only recently that some volunteers have been able to meet with clients in outdoor settings while at the time strictly adhering to the safety guidelines set out by the Ministry of Health.

All Peer services are volunteer driven; thus it would be impossible to provide any of the services without the help of volunteers. Volunteer services however must be meaningful to the volunteer if it is not they will leave. Aside from this crucial factor, regular development opportunities, easy access to staff and interactions with other volunteers are also vital components. Pre-Covid regular volunteer meetings were held every five to six weeks, this has now changed to zoom meetings every three weeks. Volunteers have the option to zoom into either am or pm meetings. Those who do not have access to zoom required technology can access the meeting by telephone. The attendance rate at these zoom sessions were astounding; it seems that zoom had the ability to lessens feelings of isolation. These meetings gave the volunteers the opportunity to voice any concerns and successes they have encountered in their volunteer work and gave them the feeling of being part of a team. Due to actions taken by staff the volunteer attrition rate remained steady and showed no marked differences when compared to previous years.

For the past six months, Grace Hann has been involved in the weekly Webinars facilitated by Michael Lee (MLA for Vancouver Langara Constituency) and the South Vancouver Seniors' network. As a co-host her role is to bring to light issues of concerns for older adults and to keep them informed about available services and how these can be accessed. On several occasions she has been joined by Peer services' volunteers who themselves are seniors and as an older adult perspective they can relate their personal stories and how they have been adapting during these difficult and unusual times.

This past year cannot be compared to any previous service year. Staff has had to continuously readjust themselves and the service provision, they have had to rely on their innovative skills and to charter new territories. Last month a second Friendly Visitor training was completed. All sessions were on zoom and taught to a mixed group of English and Spanish speaking volunteers, and in order to maximise access a Spanish speaking interpreter was available. As this report is presented the Peer services' two staff members and 70 volunteers are providing services to 112 clients and their families. Last month Peer Program Services' welcomed Margot Beauchamp to the team. She comes highly recommended and has extensive experience in the social service fields. Her role on the team is to fine-tune existing Quality Assurance measurements and to assist Program staff with the development, implementation and collection of the data which will clearly demonstrate service delivery and effectiveness.

Last but not least I would like to express our sincere gratitude to those who have supported Peer Program Services in so many different ways. Thank you to the volunteers who so freely give their time an expertise; without you we would not be able to exist. Kudos to the Program's staff Grace Hann and Charles Leibovich who without hesitation and fanfare ensure that the services run professionally, smoothly and effectively. Much gratitude to the Jewish Seniors' Alliance Board of Directors who quietly and efficiently govern all aspects of the Organization. A sincere thank you for their financial support goes to: all levels of Government, the Jewish Federation of Grater Vancouver, corporate and the private donors. You make the world a better place. Lastly, much appreciation and good thoughts go to Pam Ottem who served as the Peer Program services Chair for many years. Without her thoughtful guidance and expertise the Peer Program services would not be as successful as they are today. We miss you and your chair is waiting.

Respectfully submitted:

Rita Roling
Peer Services, Chair