

Walking Peer Support Groups for Mental Health

Funded by: City of Toronto, Community Recreation Grant

What is this project about?

This project will:

1. develop training materials for workshops on starting, leading, and maintaining walking peer support groups
2. train peer support group leaders to facilitate walking peer support groups.

Why is this project important?

Exercise promotes mental health and recovery from mental health issues/illnesses. People with mental health issues/illnesses are often isolated with limited social support networks, and struggle with motivation to leave their homes and exercise. Walking peer support groups provide numerous incentives to participate in exercise: a scheduled time commitment; encouragement of peers; commitment to peers; and social support. Social support also promotes mental health and recovery from mental health issues/illnesses.

How is this project community-based?

Peer support is provided by peers for peers. It involves getting help, giving help and learning to help oneself as well as sharing knowledge and experience. Peer support groups are run by and for their participants. This project includes an advisory committee that brings together peers (people with lived experience of mental health issues), service providers, trainers, and researchers. Many individual members represent more than one of those identities.

The project starts with a needs assessment to learn about training needs from: service providers coordinating walking peer support groups, people with experience leading walking peer support groups, walking peer support group participants, and potential walking peer support group participants. The project will also evaluate its process and outcomes to learn as much as possible from people involved in the training.

Who is conducting the project?

The project was designed by Farah N. Mawani, based on research combined with her personal experience of prolonged complex trauma and recovery. The project is a partnership of **Farahway Global**, the **Self-Help Resource Centre (SHRC)**, **Houselink**, and **Regent Park Neighbourhood Initiative (RPNI)**. **Farahway Global** engages the global public in action for human rights and mental health. **SHRC** is a charitable organization, established in 1987, to strengthen communities across Ontario by promoting peer support groups. **Houselink** is a charitable agency that provides supportive housing to people with mental illness across Toronto, through 42 properties. An additional 100 members participate in their programs, including social recreation. **RPNI**, founded in 2002 by residents, works to ensure Regent Park is a healthy and vibrant community where everyone belongs, is heard and celebrated.