



strategic plan 2016-2020

“We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better.” - J.K. Rowling

We often hear that change is inevitable. We hear that with change comes opportunity. Both of these things are certainly true. In a quest for a positive outlook on life, we do not always talk about how change impacts people, how with growth comes grief, and how with transition comes resilience. The Self-Help Resource Centre (SHRC) is in the business of change. We help people through major life transitions and challenges on a path to improved health and happiness. We do that through the power of peer support, and capacity building: of people, of organizations, and of communities. As an organization we also experience change, opportunity, grief, and resilience. As facilitators we learn about self-awareness, mindfulness and self-care. We know that understanding ourselves makes us better able to support others, and is true of us as peers and as an organization.

The social service and charitable sector is under a lot of pressure. Money is hard to come by: the individual donor dollar has to stretch further, funding programs are more competitive than they have ever been, and there is a trend away from core funding for necessities like rent and salaries towards pure program funding. Yet the needs of community continue to grow in scope and complexity; persistent poverty, employment precarity, and feeling overwhelmed are some of the key challenges in people’s lives. In order to meet the needs of our communities, social service agencies are asked to be nimble and creative in how they fund their services, to be more efficient than ever before, and to aggressively and thoroughly gather statistics to demonstrate their impact. We continue to work with our funders, partners, and members to ensure we remain a vibrant and effective agency. Fortunately, peer support is one of the most accessible, practical, and efficient ways to make long-lasting positive change in people’s lives.

Our strategic plan is about dreaming big and starting small. As capacity builders we know how to lay solid foundations to build a strong home. We consulted with volunteers, staff, the board of directors, funders, and partners; we reviewed our statistics, participant feedback, and sector research, so we could build this foundation - a strategic plan that will see us move beyond 2020. With 28 years of organizational knowledge and history we are excited to bring the learnings from decades of peer support and wellness practice to the people who need it most, delivered by the people who have been there before.

~The SHRC Team

Mission, Vision & Values

Mission

The Self-Help Resource Centre leads peer support initiatives in communities, focusing on those facing multiple social and systemic barriers. We increase access by building the capacity of individuals and organizations in collaboration with dedicated staff, volunteers, partners and community members through outreach, networking, training, consultation, resource development, and knowledge exchange.

Vision

We envision a world where we come together to connect meaningfully and share knowledge, where we see strength in every person and their lived experience, and where we grow change by listening to all voices, particularly those most marginalized, in order to build empathy and create universal access to better systems.

Values

- We believe in the power of individuals coming together around a common issue or goal to promote mental health and wellbeing
- We believe that every person has a right to be met with compassion, accepted in a non-judgmental way, and treated with respect, and we support an environment of mutual respect
- We value experiential knowledge, and the strengths and assets that individuals, organizations and communities bring
- We nurture the development of individual potential by providing an environment that promotes self-determination, and encourages learning and personal development
- We believe that each of us is enriched when we are able to work collaboratively with one another to share experiences, perspectives, information, knowledge and supports
- We embrace diversity, and support non-discriminatory policies and practices. Diversity refers to different racial and cultural backgrounds, age, gender, sexual orientation, and visible and invisible challenges
- We support our community by providing a variety of flexible and responsive programs and services designed to build capacities in individuals and communities that have faced barriers to accessing services
- We are committed to ensuring the provision of high quality, comprehensive services from well-informed, well-qualified staff.

Programs & Services

SHRC defines peer support as a process of sharing common experiences, situations and challenges; peer support is an exchange of getting and giving support. It involves the practice of self-care and sharing what works. Peer support is not based on medical models of illness and disorder; rather it is the provision of emotional, practical and informational supports by people with lived experiences, to cultivate mutual empowerment. Peer support initiatives are run by and for the participants.

Our programs and services work on a spectrum of wellness. We have a multi-faceted approach to capacity-building focusing on four main areas:

Community

Marginalized populations, service users, people experiencing barriers to accessing services.

Our services:

ODSP Peer Navigator Program, Peer Support Facilitator Training - Intro & Advanced, Community of Practice (CoP), Service Partnerships, groups database, phone referrals, advocacy

Supporters

People and organizations providing support services eg. social workers, counsellors, nurses, peer support workers, carers, teachers, etc.

Our services:

Wellness Tools & Resource workshops, Peer Support Programming, Peer Support Facilitator Training - Intro & Advanced, CoP

Workplace

High stress occupations eg. first responders, front-line workers, law, medicine, finance, etc.

Our services:

Wellness Tools & Resource workshops, Peer Support

Programming, Peer Support Facilitator Training - Intro & Advanced, CoP

Youth and Young Adults

Secondary and Post-Secondary school students & youth in the community aged 14 to 26, their teachers, mentors and parents.

Our services:

Youth WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning), MAC (Mindfulness Ambassadors Council), Peer Support Programming, Wellness Tools & Resource workshops

Programs & Services At-A-Glance

Mindfulness Ambassador Council (MAC)

MAC focuses on the social and emotional competencies youth need to regulate emotions, think critically, act compassionately and walk away with important life skills that will support them through all of life's challenges.

ODSP Peer Navigator Program

A peer support group and skills training program that trains people on Ontario Disability Support Program to be peer navigators leading support groups, as well as sharing information and resources on how to access critical supports available in the city.

Peer Support Facilitator Training - Intro & Advanced

A collaborative two-level training program for members of the community wishing to gain the skills of peer facilitation to create and sustain peer support groups that bring positive, transformative change to people's lives.

Peer Support Group Referrals

Connecting people with our database of over 800 peer support groups via online self-search, phone or in-person referral.

Peer Support Programming for Organizations

A collaborative program to design and implement peer initiatives into organizations to address challenges, create support networks and complement existing services.

Peer Worker Community-of-Practice

This ongoing monthly group is an opportunity for peer support group and one-on-one facilitators to get support from other peer facilitators, share valuable resources and experiences, and brainstorm solutions to challenges in the field.

Wellness Tools & Resource Workshops

Workshops to support people in a variety of challenges, including managing stress, working in groups, dealing with conflict, listening, communication, boundaries and assertiveness, self-talk and self-compassion, and creating a self-care practice.

Youth WRAP*

Youth WRAP program participants identify their personal resources and wellness tools and explore how they will use those tools in their daily lives to overcome potentially triggering or stressful situations.

*Based on Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan program.



Background & Context



We all live on a spectrum of wellness, each using our own tools to keep us feeling okay. We will all face a crisis at some point in our lives, and that crisis will look different for everyone. Some will be acute and immediate, others gradual or ongoing. Crisis can take many forms: losing a loved one, taking the subway, physical debilitation, addiction, dealing with conflict at work, hospitalization, cumulative stress, anger and irritation, or a relationship ending. To help us through these times, we need wellness tools, which could include things like group support, physical self-care, taking a walk, meditation, exercise, creative projects, therapy, hobbies, or talking to a friend. Some of us are born into a support structure that could include family, secure housing, access to education, job prospects, or personal connections. Some of us have never experienced or had access to those kinds of supports. When tools and supports are not available, it is harder to deal with challenges. Recognizing that we don't all start with the same blank canvas is a powerful way to acknowledge that there is not necessarily one cause or cure for challenges, but there can always be context and compassion.

We believe that knowing ourselves and which tools work best for us is part of maintaining the equilibrium of life, and is also one of the surest strategies for handling stress and challenges. The answers for how to manage life's challenges already exist within the lived experience of others. When we come together with common purpose and experience, we become stronger as individuals and as a society - we create movement and change. By creating safe spaces, harnessing the power in sharing and learning from peers, acknowledging context and social systems, and being mindful with language, we can all work together to eliminate the stigma around mental and physical health challenges and create a world where we all get to feel okay, even when we're not.

Making The Case For Peer Initiatives

Through consultation, research, literature review and program evaluation we learned the following about our overall work and the environment in which it exists.

Key Themes

Poverty and precarious employment are persistent problems:

- 1 in 5 adults, or 374,530 Torontonians, live in poverty.¹
- 62% of Toronto residents living in poverty are racialized.²
- Those with the lowest socio-economic status are 1.4 times more likely to have a chronic disease, and 1.9 times more likely to be hospitalized for care of that disease.³
- People in households with insecure employment and low income are less likely than other groups to report having a close friend to talk to.⁴

Health systems and service providers are overwhelmed:

- Mental health challenges cost Canada's economy \$50 billion a year due to absenteeism, lower productivity, disability claims and medical services expenses.⁵
- One in seven charities (14%) are under high stress and one in three (34%) are under some stress.⁶
- Among 208 agencies providing details about key programs with increased service demands, 48% of these agencies were unable to respond to the increased demand for service in these key program areas.⁷

Mental health is something to which we all must tend:

- One Canadian in five experiences a mental health challenge in any given year.⁸
- 70% of adults who suffer from mental health challenges experienced the first signs before the age of 18.⁹
- Every week, 500,000 Canadians miss work due to mental health challenges.¹⁰

Peer support is becoming a priority:

- Peer support has become formally enshrined in health policy at national, provincial and city levels as a key component to an effective health system and poverty reduction strategy
- 5% of people who were identified with a mental health challenge or substance dependence sought help from a self-help group, with telephone hot line or internet support group each being used by 2 % of people.¹¹
- The development of personal resourcefulness and self-belief, which is the foundation of peer support, can not only improve people's lives but can also reduce the use of formal mental health, medical and social services.¹²

Peer support is underfunded:

- Peer support is underfunded and peer work is underpaid.¹³
- Successful peer support programs need organizational commitment and intentional integration.¹⁴
- In 2015, SHRC program participants rated 95% overall satisfaction; however program demand is very high with a 3-4 month waiting list.

SHRC supports and promotes over 800 peer support groups, connecting over 12,000 people in the Greater Toronto Area.

Strategic Directions 2016-2020

Change More Lives

We will reach more people with peer services that make long-lasting and positive change in their lives.

Objectives

- Focus on high-need populations facing poverty and feeling overwhelmed
- Decrease isolation and overwhelm by providing networks for people, and increasing community engagement and participation
- Build the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities using strengths-based and self-care approaches, taking into consideration the Social Determinants of Health
- Increase capacity of, and empower, youth and young adults

Actions

- Provide programs and services with a focus on marginalized communities and people facing multiple barriers to accessing services
- Work with the staff and volunteers of service delivery organizations to ensure they have a sustainable self-care practice as supporters of their clients
- Develop peer initiatives online as a forum for support and learning
- Work with youth and young adults to build skills for employability & long-term self-care

Be A Leader

We will be a leader in community- and sector-building, bringing accessible, practical, and efficient approaches to persisting issues.

Objectives

- Bridge the gap between grassroots services and traditional services
- Work in partnership for every program and service we deliver
- Create pathways from volunteer to paid peer work
- Increase our collaboration and share

our expertise widely

- Advocate for systemic change, utilizing an anti-oppression and anti-discrimination framework

Actions

- Work with partner service-delivery organizations to integrate peer initiatives into their programs and services, e.g. peer support waitlist services
- Increase partnerships with peer organizations to create resilient programs and pool resources
- Increase involvement of our funders as partners to build better access to our programs and evaluate our impact in the sector
- Build more diverse and targeted communication channels to share outcomes, learnings and resources
- Participate in change-making advisory groups and sector initiatives

Know Our Impact

We will better measure and assess our impact to inform strategic decisions about the organization and its programs.

Objectives

- Enhance research efforts in focus areas
- Standardize evaluation across all programs and services
- Increase efficient data-gathering opportunities through our programs and services
- Introduce longer term after-service evaluation systems to measure impact over time
- Engage third-party evaluation partners for data gathering, where possible
- Partner with community to design programs and services from a people-centred approach

Actions

- Build a research and development strategy to align with strategic directions
- Build an engaged research team
- Introduce standardized evaluation across all programs, including measurement of key

indicators, e.g. motivation to practice self-care and pursue goals, sense of hope, positive life changes, social advocacy.

- Higher investment in evaluation components of programs to engage third party research partners
- Build stronger communication and data-gathering channels with peer support groups database
- Create a clear roadmap of where and how to position SHRC programs and services within focus areas

Stand Strong

We will build a strong and sustainable organization, with a primary focus on keeping our work alive and thriving.

Objectives

- Diversify revenue streams
- Increase organizational visibility
- Build partnerships
- Increase internal capacity

Actions

- Build a multi-year funding development strategy
- Continue to build our fee-for-service portfolio
- Increase donation opportunities by integrating an 'ask' through every channel
- Refresh brand and business case
- Continue building an effective community & stakeholder engagement plan
- Continue building a strategic partnership plan to increase reach, impact and pool resources, with both not-for-profit and for-profit organizations
- Build ongoing succession planning into staff and volunteer positions
- Recruit new expertise to the board of directors, board standing committees, and advisory committees
- Ensure sector-standard policies, procedures and practices are in place, created with a strength-based lens



SHRC in Action

We hold high the following guiding principles in everything we do:

STRENGTH-BASED

We strive to approach our work from a strength-based perspective. That means seeing strength in every person, valuing their lived experience, treating them with dignity and unconditional high regard, and being mindful of language. It means having systems in place that are empowering rather than diminishing. It means looking at the way things are done with a critical lens, and being open to change. It is about changing perceptions from those that limit our potential, demean, pathologize, and stigmatize, to ones that uplift, empower, and strengthen. It is about building hope and capacity.

VALUES-FIRST

We are guided by our values; they are the cornerstone of our work. They hold a safe space for those who connect with us, making it accessible for all. We place greater importance on aligning values with our staff, volunteers, and partners, than on other skills brought to the table. Shared values ensure the integrity of our work to create space for positive change.

PEER-LED

SHRC strives to engage people with lived experience of mental or physical health challenges in program delivery and decision-making, including leadership, governance, and evaluation.

EQUITY

SHRC is committed to fostering a positive and progressive working culture that is representative of Toronto's diverse population. We work to ensure leadership and thought-influencing positions are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, gender non-conforming, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) and visible minority group members.

ADVOCACY

We are committed to speaking up when we see injustice, recommending long-term changes to systems that are oppressive and overwhelmed, and working in partnership on sector-changing initiatives. We are committed to fostering self-advocacy by centring people in the design of programs and services created for them, and by listening to all voices, particularly those traditionally marginalized or silenced.

Photo Credit:
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Pg 5 - Ella Cooper
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¹ City of Toronto. TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy. 2015.

² Newcomer Women's Services Toronto, Social Planning Toronto, Toronto Women's City Alliance. The Economy and Resilience of Newcomers (EARN): Exploring Newcomer Entrepreneurship. 2014. Toronto

³ CIHI/CPHI (2012) Disparities in Primary Health Care Experiences Among Canadians with Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions.

⁴ Lewhuck W et al. It's More Than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Wellbeing. Hamilton (ON): Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario Research Group, 2013.

⁵ Mental Health Commission of Canada - 2015

⁶ Imagine Canada. Sector Monitor. Vol. 4 (1). Toronto. 2014.

⁷ Social Planning Network of Ontario: A Recovery-Free Zone. The Unyielding Impact of the Downturn on Nonprofit Community Social Services in Ontario. 2010. Toronto.

⁸ Mental Health Commission of Canada - 2015

⁹ Mental Health Commission of Canada - 2015

¹⁰ Mental Health Commission of Canada - 2015

¹¹ Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental Health and Well Being Report. Canada. 2002.

¹² Mental Health Commission of Canada. Making the Case for Peer Support: Report to the Mental Health Commission of Canada by the Mental Health Peer Support Project Committee. Canada. 2010

¹³ Ontario Peer Development Initiative and The Self-Help Alliance. Investigating the State of Peer Support Work in Ontario: Findings and Implications. Ontario. 2014

¹⁴ Ontario Peer Development Initiative and The Self-Help Alliance. Investigating the State of Peer Support Work in Ontario: Findings and Implications. Ontario. 2014

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