Peer Pathways

Elevate to Permanent Employment Project



TNG
Community Services

How is The Neighbourhood Group (TNG) utilizing peer work to support people with lived experience (PLE) find regular employment?

Final Report

Prepared by SN Management

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

- SN Management was contracted by TNG in November 2025 to carry out a study - "Peer Pathways: Elevate to Permanent Employment Project".
- The study was designed to help TNG better understand: a) how peer work can serve as a pathway to permanent employment and enhance the economic mobility of individuals with lived experiences of poverty, settlement, mental health challenges, and substance, b) how peer work can be universally legitimatized as a qualification for work, and c) the feasibility of establishing a digital learning hub.
- Nine focus groups and interviews with 55 current Peer Workers, Team Leads, Supervisors, Managers and Leadership Team members; 11 interviews with community partners and comparator organizations, and a survey completed by 130 current and former peers (collectively the project participants) were conducted by SN Management (see Appendix A and B).
- Key findings were reviewed with the Leadership Team and key opportunities identified by SN Management were prioritized.
- This Report presents the study findings, as well as a series of opportunities and recommendations for immediate and longer-term steps that TNG can pursue to achieve organizational goals related to its peer work programming.

THE VALUE OF PEER WORK PROGRAMMING

- Overwhelmingly, project participants - internal and external to TNG - express a high degree of satisfaction with TNG peer work programs, and perceive TNG to be a leader in peer work.
- In each of TNG's services areas: Urban Health and Homelessness Services (UHHS), Community Development Programs, Newcomer Settlement Services, and Child and Youth Services, TNG delivers peer work programs whereby those who have experienced or are currently experiencing poverty, homelessness, mental health, unemployment, social isolation, substance abuse, youth alienation, and newcomer settlement (collectively referred to as people with lived experience/PLWE) are offered peer work opportunities.
- This study finds that TNG's peer work programs, such as iPHARE, SafeSpot, Pregnant Women and New Mothers and Game Changers, are valuable, not only as work experiences, but as stabilizing forces that bring purpose, structure and confidence, and provide professional development and access to employment pathways for peer workers. At the same time, in their capacity as peer workers, peers help to create community and connect program participants with services they need.

WHAT WORKS - HOW TNG IS IMPROVING PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT/ECONOMIC MOBILITY FOR PEERS

- Removes barriers to employment.
- TNG does not require criminal record checks for most peer roles (except for peers working with
- children and seniors).
- HR developed a centralized equivalency framework or formula designed to ensure that lived experience is consistently recognized and valued as a formal professional qualification across departments.
- Maintains a strong internal culture of lived experience leadership. Many senior leaders, managers and supervisors were formerly peers themselves.
- Strong support and supervision. Peer workers experience a "collaborative" and non-punitive supervision style that understands the nuances of recovery.
- Tailors peer experiences and pathways to individual needs and journeys.
- Peer work programs do not offer a single pathway to regular employment. It is fundamentally understood that each peer worker's journey is unique. Some peers move on to regular employment at TNG, some pursue careers outside of social services, and others may step back,deciding that they are not ready for additional responsibility.
- Within UHHS there are a variety of different peer roles. Some are intentionally designed to provide high-support to peer workers while other are designed for peers who require lower levels of support and supervision. This tiered approach enables peer workers to progress and develop their capacity to assume increasing responsibility in a supportive environment.
- Cultivates external partnerships to provide peer workers with specialized training and diverse options for job progression. Peers in partnership programs (i.e., Emergency Department and Edward Village) have access to training that helps them to qualify for these positions and managers/supervisors actively assess progress and link peer workers who are ready for new opportunities. Pilots are underway to adapt this model to other TNG programs and other partners.
- Offers development opportunities and supports. The UHHS Peer Work Practice Manual specifies that peer workers develop employment and career goals at the start of their contract and track these over time. This allows peer workers to access training or TNG's Employment Services early on and get the support and encouragement they may need to advance if that is the goal they are pursuing.

WHAT TNG CAN DO TO IMPROVE PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY FOR PEERS

Quick Wins

- Further reduce administrative barriers/burden for peer workers. Either provide supports during onboarding or find alternatives to new hire documentation requirements (i.e., void cheques, SIN card, three professional references, etc.).
- Provide greater transparency about TNG's employment pathway and the steps that peer workers can take to move from casual to part-time peer to more regular employment at TNG.
- Standardize onboarding and training modules across departments, where applicable, to offer peer workers a consistent, high-quality experience and to leverage and strengthen the use of best practices across the organization.
- Give all peer workers access to TNG's Employment Centre. With access to professional employment services, ideally within the first weeks of their employment with TNG, peer workers will have consistent access to career development supports.

Longer Term Improvement Options

Peer Worker Development Program (see Appendix F)

- UHHS is large enough that it can create, scale and sustain a tiered peer worker development program (PWDP) that offer peer workers increased responsibility and decreased supervision in different roles over time (i.e., through its portfolio of 17 programs). TNG has an opportunity to determine whether the tiered development model should be formalized and expanded beyond UHHS, and to assess what would be required to implement it across its Community Development, Newcomer Settlement, and Children and Youth program areas.

Partnerships

- TNG can increase the number of peer work opportunities available to people with lived experience, within TNG programs and within the community by increasing and strengthening community partnerships. In particular, there is an opportunity for TNG to strengthen access to employment and employment pathways for a greater number of peer workers by creating a social enterprise - "peer employment placement agency" (i.e., for hospitals and shelters).

Credentials and Certification

- SN Management was asked to explore the value of formal peer worker credentials/qualifications, such as a Peer Worker Certification (see Appendix D). Study participants did see some value in increasing peer access to credentials, including formal peer worker certification. However, TNG could pursue several different approaches to achieve this.
    - TNG could formalize a TNG peer worker certification program and market it to peer workers and employers as a professionally recognized credential. Current TNG training materials already include population and program specific modules, as well as standardized competencies, and establishing a recognized in-house certification program can help reduce barriers to certification such as fees.
    - TNG could also work with academic institutions such as George Brown College or the Michener Institute to formalize and have its PWDP recognized as a credit toward a college diploma.
    - There is an opportunity for TNG to champion peer work and peer workers' access to credentials by engaging in or leading sector-wide advocacy with the aim of convincing funders that peer worker credentialing is a "treatment" cost or a "workforce outcome" worth investing in.

Digital Learning Hub

SN Management was also asked to explore the feasibility of a Peer Work Digital Learning Hub (see Appendix E). Feedback from participants suggests that there is value in a digital platform that provides access to peer work and development information, resources and training. However, there is concern that without clarity regarding purpose and scope for a "Hub", as well as strategies for ongoing operations and sustainability, the investment cost could outweigh the benefits.



RECOMMENDATIONS – SHORT TERM

1. Standardize the PWDP across the organization to ensure that all peer worker programs are working in alignment towards the organization's goals for peer work and are delivering peer worker programming (training, development and supports) using a consistent set of standards, policies and processes.
2. Review and update its policies and practices related to peer worker recruitment, on-boarding, training and supervision in order to increase equitable access to roles and establish a foundation for long-term success for peer workers across all departments.
3. Ensure that peer workers across all of TNG's programs are made aware of and are connected to TNG's employment services, ideally during the onboarding stage.
4. Provide consistent information to organizations that hire TNG's peer workers. Doing so will provide a high-quality experience for the peer workers as well as the hiring organization and strengthen TNG's reputation with current and potential partners.
5. Leverage TNG's data management systems to better understand the peer worker pathways, experiences and outcomes and identify and advance evidence-based improvement strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS, LONGER TERM

6. Establish an employment agency as social enterprise to match qualified peer workers to a roster of employers, increase the employment pipeline for people with lived experience, and generate revenues for reinvestment into its programming.
7. To maximize its leadership role, and scale up the social enterprise (see #6), it is recommended that TNG develop a central repository of information and roll out a strategy for exchanging knowledge with peer workers, employers, partners and other key stakeholders.
8. Develop and promote a TNG branded employment pathway for peer workers, including expanding peer work to new parts of TNG and to external employers.
9. Scale up the employment supports, including follow-up supports, provided to peer workers.
10. Strengthen pathways to education for TNG peer workers.

Project Background

PROJECT GOAL

- To better understand how peer work can serve as a pathway to permanent employment, enhancing the economic mobility of individuals with lived experiences of poverty, settlement, mental health challenges, and substance use.
- To describe how peer work can best prepare individuals for employment across various sectors, not exclusively social services.
- To explore how peer employment can be universally legitimized as a qualification for work.
- To explore the feasibility of a digital learning hub.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

- Conduct Comprehensive Internal Audit:
  - Develop audit framework and tools in collaboration with TNG project leads
  - Conduct interviews, focus groups, questionnaires with current and former peers
  - Facilitate focus groups/visioning sessions with senior leadership and program leads
  - Conduct data analysis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Conduct an External Review
  - Outreach to partners and counterpart organizations
  - Review Canadian peer certification standards and other relevant literature regarding peer worker credentialing
  - Conduct interviews/focus groups and/or send questionnaires to partners
  - Integrate findings, identify best practices, emerging programs
- Assess feasibility of a Learning Hub
  - Conduct stakeholder interviews (staff, other organizations, government)
  - Research existing e-learning platforms and digital content
  - Identify and connect with potential partners in technology delivery
  - Analyse feasibility: cost, demand, scalability
- Prepare a final report with findings and key recommendations

Almost 200 people, internal and external to TNG, provided their input as a part of the study.

55 Internal Interviews and Focus Groups

- Leadership Team Focus Group
- Team Leads – Community Programs Focus Group
- Team Leads – Urban Health and Homelessness (UHHS) Focus Group
- Supervisors and Managers – Community Programs Focus Group
- Supervisors and Managers – UHHS Focus Group
- UHHS Peers Focus Group
- Youth Peers Focus Group
- Women's Settlement Peers Focus Group
- Human Resources Interviews

11 External Community Interviews

- Toronto Shelter Network (TSN Sherbourne Health)
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – Haliburton County
- Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
- University Health Network (UHN)
- Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre
- Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS) – Harm Reduction Unit, Service User Advisory Group, Youth Equity and Violence Prevention
- Fred Victor
- Homes First

130 Survey Of Peers and Former Peers

- 71 (55%) respondents are currently Peer Workers
- 59 (45%) were formerly in peer roles
- 80 (62%) worked in Urban Health and Homelessness (UHHS)
- 10% Newcomer Services
- 10% Youth Services
- 12 (9%) Community Programs/Food Banks
- 56 (51%) identified as immigrants or refugees
- The largest age cohorts were 25–34 and 35–44, combined making up approximately 59% of the participants

See Appendix A for additional information about study participants; Appendix B for survey findings and Appendix C for comparator programs.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNG) is a social agency serving more than 45,000 low-income people and families in 30 locations across Toronto. With more than 1,000 staff and the support of over 700 volunteers, our free programs and services address the most pressing issues in our community: poverty, homelessness, mental health, unemployment, social isolation, substance abuse, conflict resolution, violence, youth alienation, and the settlement of newcomers.

Mission

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services works with people at every stage of their lives, providing access to innovative and effective programs, and collaboratively building and advocating for an equitable, just, and vibrant community.

Vision

A resilient, inclusive society in which opportunity, empowerment, and social and economic justice create a better quality of life for all.

- Peer roles began as volunteer roles, formalizing into paid roles over the last 10–25 years.
- Centred on the principle of "Doing with, not for", people with lived experience and peers co-design programs and services from ideation through implementation, while also increasing authenticity and trust with communities who distrust systems.
- Highlights in the evolution of peer roles at TNG:
    - 2015: surpassed 100 paid peers,
    - 2017: Peer Manual formalized structures around pay and expanded job descriptions
    - 2017: Conducted job evaluations to ensure equal pay for equal work; ongoing work to standardize onboarding/training and to formalize agency-wide peer policies
    - 2023-2028: Strategic plan target established - "1 in 5 hires are participants/ volunteers"
    - 2024: Target exceeded with ~55% of hires from participants/volunteers, reflecting organization-wide adoption of lived-experience hiring.

TNG's Strategic Plan 2023–2028 - "Rising Up" - identifies several ambitious goals and objectives that set the stage for the Peer Pathways:

- Objective 3: Maximize Our Organizational Strength:
    - Fill 20 percent of all open positions with current or former program participants. Be a sector leader in "decent work" by improving compensation and creating equitable pathways for staff mobility, ensuring peers do not remain stuck in entry-level roles. Peer Pathways Project is designed to strengthen pathways to employment and economic mobility.
- Objective 2: Lead the Way on Priority Issues:
    - Introduce skills certification programs (i.e., Early Childhood Education or Personal Support Work) to equip participants to work within TNGCS or the broader market.
- Objective 1: Tackle the Root Causes of Poverty:
    - Lift 10 percent of participants out of poverty over the course of the five-year plan.

KEY DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this project the following definitions are provided for clarity:

Person with Lived Experience (PLE)

- A person who has experienced poverty, homelessness, mental health challenges, substance use, or settlement issues.

Peer Worker

- A staff member with Lived Experience who is employed to support service users by drawing on their struggles and experience, acting as a mentor and advocate.

Pathway

- A clear or structured plan for supporting the learning and development of Peer Workers as they advance to different paid/ employment roles.

PEER LANDSCAPE AT TNG

Urban Health and Homelessness Services

Program	Current Number of Peers	Typical Contract Duration
Cystal Meth Project	13	6 Months
IPHARE (Integrated Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative)	17	6 Months
SafeSpot	14	6 Months
Peer and Park Outreach	6	6 Months
Peers at Edward Village	6	6 Months
Peer Training and Development/ Peer Leadership Centre	10	6 Months
Mobile Shelter Support Porgram (MSSP)	22	6 Months
REACT	8	6 Months
HIV	2	6 Months
Stabilization and Connection Center	8	6 Months
PEACH	2	6 Months
CAP (Client Accompaniment)	4	6 Months
Next Chapter	3	6 Months
(ED) Emergency Department Peers	8	6 Mo. to 1 year
CAMH Peer in the ED	2	6 Mo. to 1 year
SunnyBrooke Peers in the ED	2	6 Mo. to 1 year

Community Development Programs

Program	Current Number of Peers	Typical Contract Duration
Food Security	4	1 year
Social Action - Members Advocacy Group	10	ongoing

Newcomer Settlement Services

Program	Current Number of Peers	Typical Contract Duration
Rainbow Connect	2	1 year
Pregnant Women and New Mothers	8	1 year
Woman's Settlement Program	5	1 year

Children and Youth Services

Program	Current Number of Peers	Typical Contract Duration
Game Changers Restorative Justice	24	1 year
North York Youth Drop-in	2	1 year
Youth Arcade Drop-In	2	1 year
Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre	1	1 year

Current State and SWOT Assessment

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

This section presents a summary of peer work at TNG, including strengths and limitations as well as environmental opportunities or threats, relative to the key study question:

> **We have the solution to the HR crisis, and that is being open to hiring and supporting our participants and volunteers to work."**

How is TNG utilizing peer work to support people with lived experience (PLE) find permanent employment?

Internal Assessment

STRENGTHS



What TNG does well – and should keep doing

WEAKNESSES



What TNG could develop/strengthen

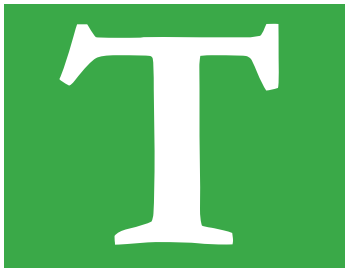
Environmental Scan

OPPORTUNITIES



Areas for TNG to pursue for growth

THREATS



Areas that may impact TNG's future impact or sustainability

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STRENGTHS

ASSESSMENT – STRENGTHS

Participant/Peer Satisfaction

- Internal participants across all levels – including peers, team leads, and management – express a high degree of satisfaction with peer work programs , and many participants agree that TNG's peer work programs provide valuable preparation, teaching practical and transferable skills such as boundaries, work-life balance, accountability, and communication.
- Management and leads are satisfied with the program because it makes service delivery more "genuine" and effective.
- How peers bridge the power imbalance between traditional institutions and marginalized clients is recognized and valued.

"TNG is well respected and people love us... get to talk to people and relate to others; gaining their trust"

Impact on Peer Wellbeing

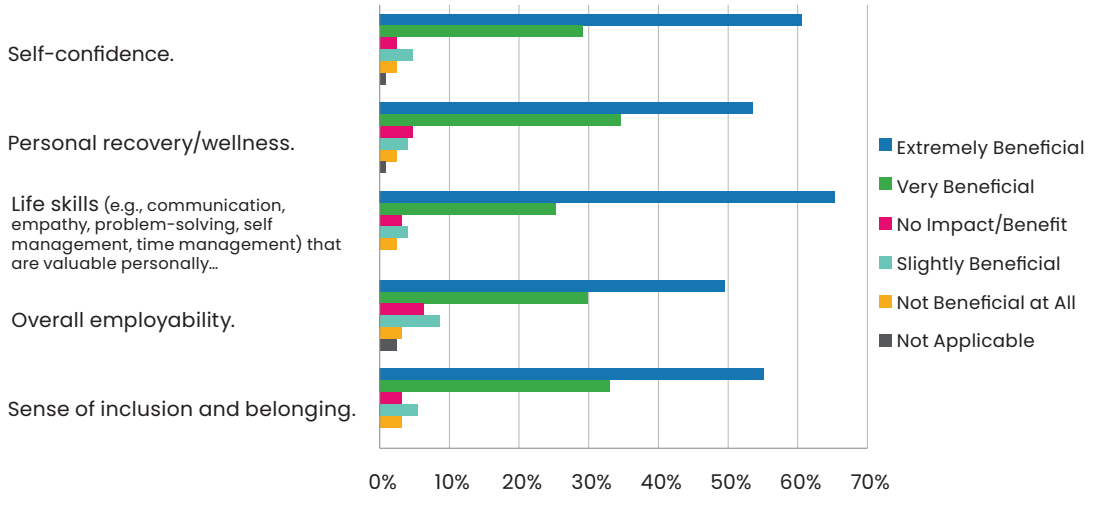
- Peer programs contribute to positive stabilization outcomes for clients. These include:
  - Help to create community
  - Provide daily purpose
  - Reduce emergency department use for some peer workers
  - Improve life stability.
- The peer worker roles help are seen to help individual peers because they build routine, reinforce accountability, and provide the confidence to pursue other career paths.

High internal client satisfaction with strong stabilization outcomes

Over 80% of survey respondents rated TNGCS peer work extremely beneficial or very beneficial to their:

- **Self-confidence**
- **Personal recovery/ wellness**
- **Life skills, and**
- **Sense of**

Please describe the benefit of being a TNGCS Peer Worker on your life by completing the scale below:



TNG Community Services

Supportive and Collaborative Mentorship and Supervision

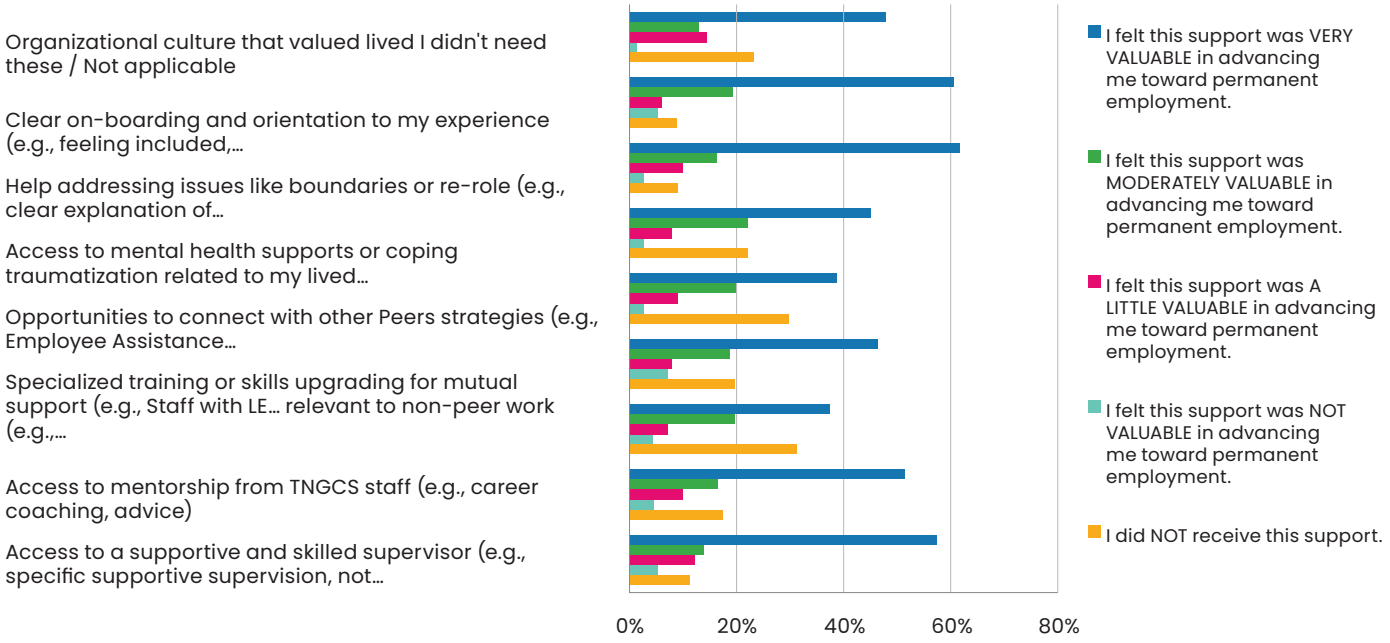
- A major highlight for supervisors and peers is the "collaborative" rather than punitive management style.
- Many managers and supervisors were formerly peers themselves, leading to a non-punitive, "collaborative" supervision style that understands the nuances of recovery and provides relapse-responsive supports.
- Comparator Insight: During initial peer worker recruitment efforts, the comparator learned that not providing an appropriate level of support to a peer worker in recovery can inadvertently be destabilizing.

> **"My role as a team lead. I tried to mirror what happened to me with my team leader. He was very supportive... he gave me a lot of guidance."**

Survey Snapshot

- 62% reported that onboarding and orientation was clear and very valuable (+16% moderately valuable)
- 57% reported that it was very valuable to have access to a supportive and skilled supervisor (+14% moderately valuable)
- 51% reported that it was very valuable to receive mentorship from TNG staff (+17% moderately valuable)

Which of the following supports did you/have you received as a Peer Worker at TNGCS?



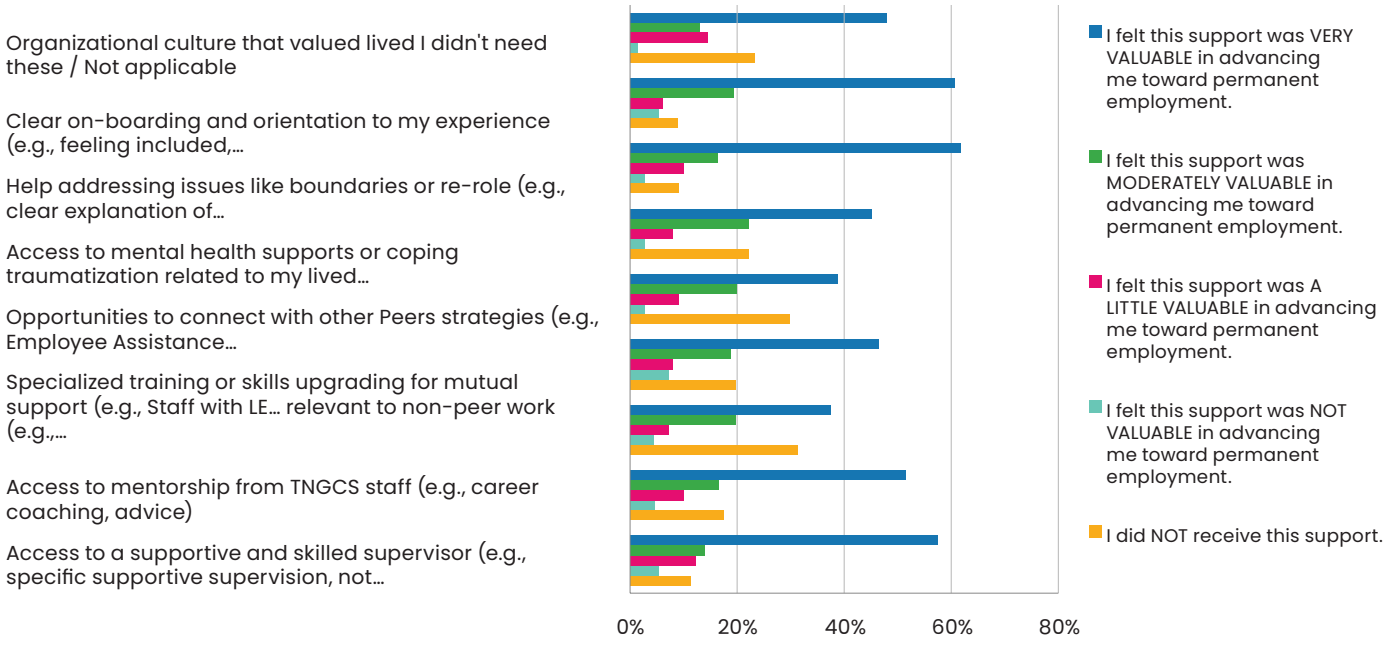
- **Over 70% rated these supports as very or moderately valuable in advancing Peer Workers toward permanent/ regular employment: Clear on-boarding and orientation, Culture that values lived experience, and Access to a supportive supervisor**
- **67% rated 'access to mentorship from TNGCS staff' as very or moderately valuable**

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STRENGTHS

Internal Career Development and Mobility

- TNG has a strong internal culture of lived-experience leadership, with many senior leaders and managers having started their journeys as peers.
- Most peers appreciate that TNG "walks the talk" – it provides tangible pathways to regular employment: Examples include:
    - Peers can start in roles where they receive high support but have lower responsibility (e.g. iPHARE, Safe Spot) and can move to lower support and high-responsibility hospital positions (UHN ED Peers).
    - TNG has achieved a 55% internal hire rate, exceeding its 20% strategic goal.
- There is no single or right pathway. Programs are flexible and responsive to peers' needs and goals. Some peers may move to higher positions at TNG, while others may pursue careers outside of social services (i.e., returning to law or nursing).

Which of the following supports did you/have you received as a Peer Worker at TNGCS?

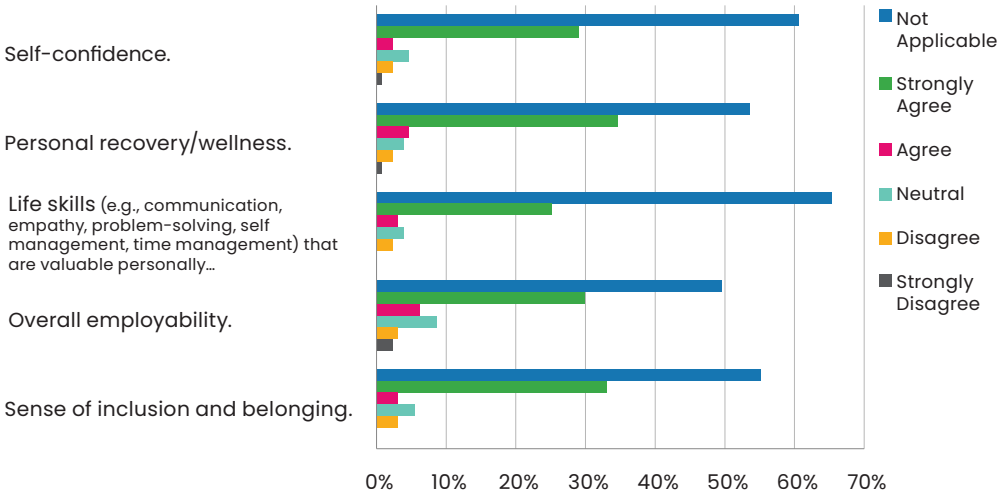


- **Over 70% rated these supports as very or moderately valuable in advancing Peer Workers toward permanent/ regular employment: Clear on-boarding and orientation, Culture that values lived experience, and Access to a supportive supervisor**
- **67% rated 'access to mentorship from TNGCS staff' as very or moderately valuable**

Over 70% of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the training they received as a peer:

- Helped them to prepare for future employment; or
- Helped them identify skills that are transferable to sectors outside of social services

Please describe the benefit of being a TNGCS Peer Worker on your life by completing the scale below:



> **We're doing a good job at compensating them and understanding the importance of compensation and how meaningful it is."**

Standard HR Structures

- HR developed a formula to ensure lived experience is consistently recognized and valued as a formal professional qualification across TNG. The framework allows candidates to meet basic role requirements through a combination of formal education, work experience and direct lived experience.
- Peers and leadership generally felt TNG does a good job of compensating peer workers at rates higher than minimum wage. However, long-term financial stability remains precarious due to the temporary nature of peer work.

Partnerships

- The number of peer placements/partnerships/ pilots with hospitals and community agencies (e.g., food bank peer program with curriculum and job descriptions) is growing.
- Some peers reported that some partner agencies do not understand peer worker roles or lived experience. In some settings, peers need to "do double the work" to be recognized and respected due to cross-organizational communication gaps, stigma and lack of understanding of peer work.
- There is strong opportunity for TNG to increase partnerships and create a strong employment pathway from TNG to roles in the community (see Opportunities section).



ASSESSMENT – IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

TNG Peer Worker Development Program (PWDP)

- From leadership's perspective, TNG's peer work program model is designed to be short term so that as many participants as possible can be exposed to a peer work experience. However, many peers suggested extending 6-month contracts and formalizing a 12-month peer work experience to allow for deeper skill acquisition, and some peers argued that peer worker assignments should be long-term (i.e., permanent) for those who find them meaningful.
- Overall, an organization wide peer worker program (vision, policies, practices) and theory of change for peer work (short-, medium- and long-term outcomes) at TNG has not been rolled out. As such, despite strategic commitments to peer work, there are departments at TNG (employment, seniors) that have not engaged with the model.
- Establishing a consistent understanding of and approach to peer work training and development across TNG, for example, by scaling the UHHS model to the Youth, Women's and Community departments, and eventually scaling to other departments, will help to unite the organization around shared goals, promote cross department learning and sharing, and provide a consistent, high-quality experience for peer workers.
- Please refer to Appendix F for an example Peer Worker Development Model.

Work Requirements

- Peers submit the same paperwork required for a regular, full-time staff role. However, providing a void cheque or SIN card poses barriers for peers living in a shelter or encampment; providing three professional references is difficult for youth who have faced long-term instability or over-policing, or for those who has experienced long-term homelessness or active addiction.
- Youth who are balancing school and peer work struggle with the time required to get to placements by public transit and some are concerned about travelling to or through "conflict zones" to get to placements.
- Fear of missing out on valuable work experience sometimes prevents youth peers from expressing these challenges to supervisors.

> **"Sometimes we become the barrier to employment for the peers... when we do require them an onerous amount of documentation and make them jump to a bunch of hoops, sometimes vulnerable populations just give up on the process."**

Onboarding and Training

- Peer worker training varies between departments. UHHS peers receive an intense 8-hour onboarding that some find "overwhelming". In Community and Women's programs, peers receive minimal orientation that feels "disjointed".
- UHHS peers report uneven access to core skills development training (first aid, de-escalation, customer service). They suggested practice manuals, job evaluations/levels, and standardized training.
- Youth are seeking enhanced support with resume development, interview skills, and career planning, especially for peers who are new immigrants or unfamiliar with Canadian workforce practices.

Survey Snapshot

- 31% reported they did not receive specialized training or skills upgrading relevant to non-peer work
- 30% noted they did not receive access to mental health supports or coping strategies
- 88% reported it would be very valuable to have a mentorship network in diverse sectors

Barriers to Non-Peer Work Roles

- Through focus group feedback and survey responses, peers reported that the process for moving from a part-time peer worker contract to a regular unionized position at TNG is not clear or transparent. They noted that internal champions or personal advocacy are required to be considered for non-peer roles and suggested that internal "roadmaps" be more visible.

> **"It's like once this is done, what's the next step? Do I still get hired on the next grant or not?... you don't really have like a solid position."**

Survey Snapshot

- 40% cited the lack of a clear internal pathway for Peer Workers to advance into permanent roles at TNG as a barrier
- 22% struggled because they did not have formal qualifications or credentials recognized by employers
- 16% lacked necessary work experience unrelated to their lived experience
- 16% faced barriers related to criminal records or the risk of losing OW/ODSP benefits
- Only 21% reported having successfully transitioned to a permanent role

DEDICATED RECOVERY/STABILITY SUPPORTS

- Supervisors emphasize that peer work is "heavy" and can be triggering. They identify a need for formal "Safety Plans" and recovery check-ins to prevent relapse on the job.
- In open-ended peer worker survey feedback, a respondent suggested TNG provide additional support with "hard" challenges like housing for peers, the cost of record pardons and/or legal help/immigration support.



Human Resources Information Management

- TNG's current HR systems do not effectively track a peer worker's training or a peer's employment progression (i.e., from participant to regular staff). Lack of robust data hinders TNG's ability to prove that peer roles are linked to long-term economic mobility. Indicators that TNG could monitor include: program attendance and satisfaction; stabilization outcomes; movement from peer worker to union/management roles; training completion; reduced ED utilization where relevant, etc.

> **"I really do wish that... there was a little bit more support with your recovery... The worst thing I've seen before is someone come in really new on their recovery... work in the shelters, and then relapse."**

Integrate Employment Services and Academic Bridging into the Development Model

- Supervisors provide coaching throughout a peer placement; however, they are not professional employment counsellors. Some, but not all peer positions have access to dedicated support through TNG's Employment Services. It was suggested that all peers be connected with Employment Services during the first week of a peer's contract (rather than at the end) to support goal setting and resume building. Additionally, newcomer peers struggle with language barriers and lack of Canadian work experience and could benefit from resume/interview preparation. Caution was expressed about Employment Services' focus on immediate outcomes (i.e., securing employment) and lack of capacity to invest in individualized career development with peers.
- There was also a suggestion that TNG partner with community colleges to ensure internal TNG training counts as a credit toward college diplomas (e.g., Social Service Worker), recognizing that diplomas make a peer more competitive for "regular" (permanent) roles.

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OPPORTUNITIES

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - OPPORTUNITIES

Leverage Industry Leader Position

- External stakeholders agree that TNG is the gold standard in peer programming and view TNG as the "expert" in meaningful peer engagement.
- In addition to championing the value of lived experience and peer work, TNG has an opportunity to advance "Peer Rights" including standardized training, roles and pay scales.
- TNG is well respected and positioned to advocate for long-term funding to replace precarious short-term grants.

Pipeline to Employment

- Organizations do not hire peers for a variety of reasons – rigid HR requirements, lack of understanding about the value of lived experience, or lack of capacity to train or support peers.
- Partners who recruit their peers from UHHS value the preparation peers receive at TNG prior to placement in their organizations. For example, University Health Network (UHN) requires peers to have worked professionally with TNG for at least a year (through a peer training program or a prior peer role) to ensure they have the stability and technical skills needed before they can be placed in high-responsibility peer roles (i.e., in the ED).
- TNG could provide a placement pipeline to an external employer network. For example, TNG could function as a "placement agency" for partner hospitals and shelters whereby TNG "graduates" are flowed to partners to fill roles or vacancies.

Credentials and Certification

- Many peer workers believe a formal "piece of paper" provides the legitimacy needed to apply for jobs outside the social service sector.
- Few community organizations had knowledge of peer work certification programs and do not require certification for advancement.
- Partners such as UHN and Fred Victor tend not to require third-party peer worker certification because they trust TNG's standards (i.e., training and supervision). Further, if TNG has recommended a trained peer for a role at a partner site, that recommendation carries significant weight.
- Because TNG has developed peer work training and practice standards, and learning modules customized to specific employer contexts (i.e., shelter, emergency dept.), there is an opportunity for TNG to brand and market a "Peer Worker Certification Program" to employers that is on par if not better aligned with employer needs.
- TNG can pursue partnerships with, or advocate to, academic institutions to have the PWDP count towards a college diploma or credits.
- In addition, there is an opportunity for TNG, given its leadership role, to champion peer work and peer workers access to credentials through formal and informal training, work experience and certification.

OPPORTUNITIES

Digital Knowledge Exchange

- Partners expressed a strong interest in having access to a digital repository of peer worker related information, tools, resources and practices (i.e., HR policies, program modules/"Working Alongside Peers").
- There is an opportunity for TNG to share its own tools and resources, and/or collect and share tools and resources from other organizations.
- Doing so can help expand access to peer worker roles and increase acceptance of peer work as well as peer work as a qualification for non-peer roles.

TNG can help to collect and share effective peer practices:

- TNG - How to avoiding barriers due to HR requirements (i.e., three-reference checks) that cause vulnerable candidates to "give up" on the process.
- Parkdale Queen West CHC – How to change a peer's employment status (i.e., from "client" to "staff") without causing them to lose vital access to health care, creating a disincentive for professional advancement
- Sherbourne Health – How to avoid triggering and destabilizing peers by placing them in "high-barrier" clinical settings too early or without support.
- Access Alliance – How to create a pool of Community Health Ambassadors through a "purchase of service" arrangement to provide low-barrier opportunities for peers not



ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - RISKS

The following are factors in the environment that impact economic mobility regardless of TNG's peer programming strengths.

Stigma and Discrimination

- UHHS peer workers and leads reported that external employers and some partner agencies hold biases against those with lived experience of homelessness or substance use (i.e., view peers as clients rather than professionals). This same bias was not reported by community program peer workers and leads.
- Peer workers reported that stigma and discrimination impact employment (i.e., Canadian work experience requirement, selection of candidates, interview process).
- Stigma intersects with various forms of discrimination
  - Intersection of racism and substance use
  - Stigma and discrimination intersect for Black and/or LGBTQ+ peers
  - Stigma attached to neighbourhood (e.g., youth from certain areas are perceived negatively).

Economic Barriers

- Despite being a goal for many peer workers, advancing into full-time employment poses a financial threat. Referred to by some as the "benefits cliff", peer workers risk losing subsidized/rent-geared-to-income housing or health benefits (ODSP/OW) as their income increases, potentially leaving them financially worse off despite higher wage earnings.

Academic Barriers

- Youth peer workers reported that mainstream institutions often require a formal degree which prevents them from qualifying for roles even if they have practical experience and skills. The primary barrier to post-secondary education is the high cost of tuition and living expenses. Many youth can only afford education costs if they work full-time which conflicts with being in school full time.

Grant/Short Term Funding

- TNG's peer work program struggle to secure sustainable funding.
- The reliance on annual or short-term grants, especially in Youth and Community programs, prevents the creation of stable, long-term career pathways. This "revolving door" of funding leads to

Legitimizing Peer Work

DEFINITIONS

- This section provides information regarding various credentialing and certification options for advancing or legitimizing peer work, as well as the perceived benefits or limitations of credentialing and certification based on feedback from study participants (see Appendix C for additional information).
- While credentials focus on the individual peer worker, certification is about the profession of peer work:
    - **Credential**: An umbrella term that encompasses all qualifications (formal education, training, work experience, life experience) establishing an individual's credibility and competency.
    - **Certification**: A specific, often voluntary designation awarded by an industry-standard professional society or organization. Certification involves obtaining credentials from bodies such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). The goal of certifying bodies, such as the MHCC is to legitimize peer work as a valid and respected profession by promoting consistent and high-quality service delivery across Canada.

INTERNAL PERCEPTIONS

- Many of the study participants see some value in increasing peers' access to qualifications/credentials, recognizing that in doing so peers' overall employment prospects are enhanced. However, there are a range of perspectives regarding the value of formal certification.
    - Senior Leadership worries that formal certification could become a redundant and expensive barrier to advancement and employment for peers. However, they do see the value in professionalizing peer work.
    - Many peers desire official recognition to prove their legitimacy to the world through credentialing and/or certification, however, the cost of certification is seen as prohibitive.
    - Youth leaders argue that mandatory certification would "steer high schoolers away" from the
    - program by creating too many hoops to jump through.
    - HR has already integrated a "combined equivalent" formula (education + work experience + lived experience) into TNG job descriptions, and external certification is not currently a requirement for advancing into regular TNG roles.

EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS

- Few organizations had detailed knowledge of formal peer worker certification, and no partner interviewed had required formal peer work certification for peer roles or advancement to other roles. External partners widely view TNG as a "de facto credentialer" for the sector.
    - **TNG Standards:** Partners like UHN and Fred Victor do not require third-party credentials for peer work or formal peer worker certification because they trust TNG's internal vetting, training and supervision.
    - **TNG Brand:** If TNG has trained and recommended a peer worker for a role at a partner site (i.e., hospital emergency department), that recommendation carries weight.
    - **TNG Vetting:** UHN requires that a peer worker be employed at TNG professionally for 12 months as a "vetting period" to ensure stability/readiness before they are placed in high-responsibility hospital roles.
- Several partners described opportunities for strengthening peer workers' credentials by bridging peers into the formal education system through college-based programs. Some examples include:
    - **TSN Pipeline Project:** This initiative has developed a curriculum of nine core competencies (e.g., first aid, CPI, de-escalation), and is working to have the curriculum recognized as a formal college diploma program, thereby removing costs for people on Ontario Works or ODSP.
    - **College Partnerships:** Partners also noted specialized certifications at Seneca College Homelessness Certification) and George Brown College (Pathways to Post-Secondary), which help "equalize" a peer's footing with other job seekers who hold traditional degrees.
    - **Michener Institute:** The Community Health Worker (CHW) certificate program through the Michener Institute is a highly regarded pathway. It has been supported by bursaries (e.g., from United Way) to help peers transition into permanent roles within hospital systems.
- See the Addendum for a summary of national, regional and organizational programs that offer certification, certificates or training designed for, or which may be of interest to peers, people with lived experience and other training providers.

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

- Many of the study participants see value in increasing access to credentials and potentially peer work certification.
- There is an opportunity for TNG to leverage the reputation it has established as a legitimate peer worker training body by creating, branding and marketing its "in-house" peer worker program (i.e., PWDP) to employers/partners. Because TNG has defined training and practice standards, it can position itself as an industry leader with employers.
- Over time, TNG can introduce a peer worker certification component to its model, thereby reducing or eliminating the fees imposed by other certification bodies while advancing peer work as a legitimate profession.
- TNG could work with academic institutions such as George Brown College or the Michener Institute to have the TNG PWTDP recognized as a credit toward a college diploma.
- In addition, there is an opportunity for TNG, given its leadership role, to advance sector-wide advocacy to legitimize the peer worker profession. For example, TNG can draw upon data and evidence to build a business case for funders demonstrating that investments in peer worker training, development and credentialing can drive employment an/or health outcomes.

Knowledge Exchange and Digital Learning

DIGITAL LEARNING AUDIENCES

- This section provides information regarding the feasibility of TNG establishing a digital learning platform (hub and repository also used throughout this section) dedicated to peer work, including information about comparator digital hubs as well as feedback from study participants.
- Refer to the appendices for a scan of eLearning and Digital Content Hubs.
- There are three potential audiences that would benefit from a digital learning hub and knowledge exchange:
    - TNG's peer workers, current and/or former
    - TNG as an organization, in particular managers across all departments and human resources
    - External organizations with an interest in peer work (i.e., delivering peer worker training or hire peer workers into roles).

THE CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL LEARNING

- Historically, information (i.e., policy, training materials) about peer work has been generated and held by different TNG departments. Peer worker training tends to be in person, and paper-based training resources are utilized. An agency wide repository of information is not available to peer workers or other TNG staff, and overall, information sharing and communications regarding peer work across departments at TNG is described as being "disjointed". For example:
    - **UHHS:** Relies on a 30-page Peer Practice Manual (June 2025 version), WhatsApp groups for rapid communication, and intensive, one-day 8-hour in-person onboarding sessions.
    - **Community Programs:** Information is typically shared via email threads, shared folders and informal word of mouth.
    - **General:** TNG uses SharePoint and an internal system called iLearn, however, access for non- unionized peers who lack TNG emails is a significant barrier.
- As previously mentioned, peer-specific HR data is not consistently tracked or available.

BENEFITS AND INSIGHTS

- One of the potential audiences that could benefit from a digital hub is TNG's peer workers.
- Peers were in strong agreement regarding the need for accessible, practical, self-paced, and mobile-friendly tools, information and resources.
    - Core Learning Modules: Crisis intervention, harm reduction (e.g., oxygen use), professional
    - boundaries, and "Workplace 101" (timecards, payroll).
    - Career Development Tools: Mapping transferable skills (e.g., turning lived experience into
    - "Community Health Worker" qualifications),

translating lived experience to sectors like finance or mechanics, resume and interview support.
    - Specialized/Technical Resources: Training modules tailored to specific settings, such as medical terminology for hospitals and tools to build computer fluency (e.g., EPIC systems).
    - Accessibility: Multilingual modules (e.g., Bengali, Pashto) and low-literacy options such as videos instead of heavy text.
    - Centralized Repository: A single access to point to all internal TNG policies, manuals, and upcoming job postings
- Of note, youth peers prefer in-person learning to "step out of their comfort zone" but see a digital platform as a valuable "backup" for reviewing materials later.

TNG managers and staff also see value in establishing a digital hub that can enable TNG to strengthen, scale and standardize peer work programming across TNG.

- UHHS managers strongly advocate for an internal repository to centralize the Peer Practice Manual and onboarding materials and create a standard approach to peer worker training and development (as well as recruitment, onboarding) across TNG.
- Similarly, TNG leadership expressed interest in the hub as a way to standardize best practices across TNG, however, they expressed concern regarding the financial burden of maintenance.
- Others cautioned that digital training and development cannot/should not be used to replace in person engagement with peers.
- There is an opportunity for TNG to invest in technology, potentially as a feature of the hub that will enable it to better monitor/track TNG course completions by peers and provide guidance to peers as they pursue their credentialling goals.
- Partners/External Stakeholders: Envision the hub as a way to advance peer work and "universalize" the high standard of peer worker engagement TNG has established.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

- There are a number of implementation challenges that TNG will need to address if it determines that the hub could be a valuable resource to peers or external stakeholders/organizations. These include:
    - Peer access to hardware, data, and email: Peers in shelters frequently have phones stolen and many lack laptops or stable data plans. Peers often do not have TNG-issued emails, which currently prevents them from accessing internal SharePoint sites or the existing iLearn system.
    - Sustainability: Concerns that a digital platform will have a "shelf life" if the content and the technology is not constantly curated and updated. As a result, there are up-front and long-term costs and quality control considerations.
    - Limitations of online learning: Some partners, particularly at UHN, worry that online learning cannot replace the "personal connection" and mentorship provided through in-person training.
    - Content: The hub can provide access to TNG's repository of peer work related policies, tools and resources and help other agencies build peer work programs, thereby strengthening opportunities and employment pathways beyond TNG. At the same time, TNG has invested considerably in developing its peer work programs and may need to determine what is proprietary, what it will not share and what it will share, either for free (Open Access) or for a fee.

Recommendations and Conclusion

RECOMMENDATIONS

- SN Management reviewed the study findings with TNG's leadership team in order to identify and assess strategies that can help TNG to enhance the economic mobility of individuals with lived experience by strengthening pathways to permanent employment within and beyond the social services sector for peer workers and prepare people with lived experience for employment.
- This section presents recommendations for short- and longer-term strategies that TNG can advance over the coming years, listing key steps for each recommendation.

RECOMMENDATIONS – QUICK WINS

1. Create a cohesive peer development program for TNG

- It is recommended that TNG clarify the purpose of its peer work programs and standardize a PWDP across the organization to ensure that all programs are working in alignment towards the organization's goals for peer work and are delivering peer work programs and peer worker development (training, development and supports) using a consistent set of standards, policies and processes.
  Key steps:
  - Clarify the vision and outcomes for TNG's peer work program with all departments/ staff, ideally be using a collaborative process to develop a theory of change (TOC) and logic model (LM) to ground TNG's peer related efforts.
  - Use the UHHS peer worker processes as a baseline for scaling up a standardized PWDP across all TNG's current peer worker programs.
  - Finalize and roll out the PWDP Manual across TNG's current peer worker programs.

2. Strengthen recrutiment, onboarding, training and supervision

- It is recommended that TNG review and update its policies and practices related to peer worker recruitment, on-boarding, training and supervision in order to increase equitable access to roles and establish a foundation for long-term success for peer workers across all departments.
  Key steps:
  - Review and tailor TNG's hiring and on-boarding practices to better support peer workers to be successful in their roles, for example, supplement interviews and or probationary periods with "trial periods" and include job shadowing as a regular component of onboarding and trail periods.
  - Establish TNG peer worker orientation and onboarding videos for use with TNG staff and peer workers.
  - Roll out a standard set of trainings for all peers, including first aid, de-escalation, and customer service, and where possible provide access to formal certificates or credentials for completed training (First Aid, CPR, and Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NVCI) certifications).
  - Have the Peer JJE Committee identify and address priority issues, including wage harmonization
  - Strengthen the training/coaching/support available to manager or supervisors of peer workers; build their capacity to establish supportive supervisory relationships and manage performance.

3. Strengthen peer worker access to employment supports

- It is recommended that all peer workers across all of TNG's programs are made aware of and connected or have the opportunity to be connected to TNG's employment services, ideally during the onboarding stage.
  Key steps:
  - Include information about TNG's employment services in on-boarding materials.
  - Intentionally connect all peer workers with employment services during the on-boarding stage.
  - Ensure supervisors have the capacity to leverage TNG's employment services to help peer workers meet their employment needs (i.e., as part of goals setting and ongoing supervision). This includes supervisors working collaboratively with TNG's employment services to provide early employment planning support and ongoing guidance as peer workers move towards employment.

4. Strengthen partnerships

- It is recommended that TNG provide consistent information to organizations that hire the peer workers that it has trained or is developing. Doing so will provide a high-quality experience for the peer workers as well as the hiring organization and strengthen TNG's reputation with current and potential partners.
- Key steps:
  - Map out the agencies that frequently hire TNG peers.
  - Develop a recruitment package for agencies that hire TNG peers which outlines the peer program, peer worker capabilities and the kinds of supports available to peer workers as well the hiring agency.

5. Improve information management

- It is recommended the TNG leverage its data management systems to better understand the peer worker pathways, experiences and outcomes, and identify and advance evidence-based improvement strategies.
- Key steps:
  - Review data collection and reporting capacity.
  - Identify and create priority reports for all peer worker programs (i.e., referral pathway to TNG; employment pathway/outcomes from/after TNG, etc.).

RECOMMENDATIONS – LONGER TERM

6. Estabish an employment agency as a social enterprise

- It is recommended that TNG establish itself as an employment agency. By matching qualified peer workers to a roster of employers, TNG can increase the employment pipeline for people with lived experience and at the same time generate revenues for reinvestment into its programming.
  Key Steps:
  - Develop a business model for the employment agency, identifying customers/employer partners, types of peer worker services, revenue model/structure, HR, marketing and infrastructure requirements.
  - Add a dedicated page on the TNG website dedicated to employers to showcase and advertise TNG's peer worker programs and the offerings available to employers.
  - Outreach to potential employers to raise awareness about the value of peer worker roles and the supports offered through TNG's program model.
  - Consider the feasibility of monetizing mentorship or coaching services provided to employers and partners seeking support with their peer worker programs
  - Systematically map out potential employment partners and develop a roster of employment partners.
  - Develop clear referral pathways to roles with employment partners.
  - Pilot test and refine the employment agency initiative over time beginning with preferred partners.

7. Strengthen information sharing and knowledge exchange

- Over the years, TNG's different peer work programs have generated a wealth of policy, procedure and process documents, training tools and resources, and best practice materials. To maximize its leadership role, and scale up the social enterprise (see #6), it is recommended that TNG develop a central repository of information and roll out a strategy for exchanging knowledge with peer workers, employers, partners and other key stakeholders.
  Key steps
  - Identify a platform, ideally already being operated by TNG that has the functionality to support an information repository (i.e., accessible to staff and peers, affordable, easy to set up and maintain, etc.).
  - Form a cross TNG committee to:
    - Set up the organizing framework for the repository;
    - Oversee the migration of materials to the repository;
    - Scale up the repository to make particular materials available to partners and/or the public – for free or for a fee, and
    - Determine a sustainability plan (including fee generation).
  - Plan and host an annual forum or conference that brings together TNG and its partners to share information and tools and develop their collective capacity regarding peer work.

8. Develop and brand the tng employment pathway for people with lived experience

- Once the TOC and LM for TNG's peer work program is in place, it is recommended that TNG develop a TNG branded employment pathway for peer workers, including expanding peer work to new parts of TNG and to external employers.
  Key steps:
  - Develop a strategy to roll out peer work programs and the PWDP to new departments at TNG.
  - Map the peer worker employment pathway, describing key milestones (i.e., recruitment, onboarding, training, life-skills supports, employment/career counselling, credentialling), and progression to new roles/roles of greater responsibility within and beyond TNG.
  - Brand/trademark the employment pathway.
  - Conduct marketing and promotional activities, leveraging the employment pathway/brand to secure funding and donations from current and new donors.
  - Over time, TNG may consider review the feasibility of establishing a formal TNG Peer Worker Certification Program, as an additional strategy for strengthening peer workers' credentials and pathways to employment.

9. Scale up employment supports

- Once access to employment supports is integrated with the peer worker training and development process, it is recommended that TNG scale up the employment supports provided to peer workers.
  Key steps:
    - Introducing dedicated employment support positions to help peer workers explore career options and provide advice with labour market navigation; help peer workers translate their qualifications to other opportunities – within and beyond TNG and the social services sector, and conduct follow-up and support (e.g. 3-month check ins) for people who leave TNG for new roles.
    - Implement a 3-month post-employment survey to track the successes and barriers, including employment outcomes experienced by TNG peer workers.
    - Facilitate "Job or Employment Clubs" as a venue for peer workers who have shared employment goals come together for mutual/peer support.

10. Strengthen access to education and credentials

- There are peer workers who have a strong interest in building up their qualification and securing employment in the broader social services. It is recommended that TNG strengthen pathways to education for its peer workers.
  Key steps:
    - Drawing on information provided by peers identify higher education goals (key college or university programs and institutions).
    - Approach select educational institutions to identify collaboration opportunities, for example, streamlined access or pre-qualification for select academic programs (i.e., early childhood education, youth worker, social service worker) , based on TNG Peer Worker certification/credentials.

CONCLUSION

- Overall, this study found that TNG is highly respected by its partners, comparator organizations and its peer workers, current and former. Over the past two decades TNG has employed and developed hundreds of people with lived experience as peer workers, and today its peer training and development program and the peer workers are considered "best in class".
- The study also identified numerous opportunities that TNG can pursue to strengthen pathways to employment for individuals with lived experiences of poverty, settlement, mental health challenges, and substance use through peer work. Internally, these include articulating an agency-wide vision and model for peer work; rolling out standard policies, procedures and processes, and improving the internal employment pathway for TNG peer workers, drawing on recognized best practices and data.
- TNG can also take steps to strengthen external pathways to employment by matching qualified peers to peer work roles with employers in the community, eventually establishing an employment service as a social enterprise. Similarly, partnerships with academic institutions can streamline pathways to academic credentials, further opening up opportunities for peer workers.
- By strategically branding its peer work model and PWDP, and sharing its knowledge, TNG can help to legitimize peer work and help open up economic possibilities for people with lived experience.



Appendices

A. STUDY PARTICIPANTS

TNG Leadership Team (5 participants)

- Bill Sinclair, Lori Steer, Serena Nudel, Florencia Leston, Amber Kellen

TNG Team Leads (9 participants)

- Community Programs - Shahanara Khandaker (Team Leader for Women's Settlement Program), Aida Omar (Program Coordinator for Community Peers Program), Nana Shamba (Manager of Food Security Programs and Community Support Worker), Anneka Lynch (Team Lead/Participant)
- UHHS - Armin Nemati Mood (Shift Lead for Mobile Support Services Program (MSSB)), Naomi Njenga (Team Lead for Safe Spot), Julie-Claire (JC) O'Boyle (Team Lead for Safe Spot), Kirsty (Team Lead for BLC/Safe Spot winter location)

TNG Supervisors and Managers (9 participants)

- Community Programs - Gavin Brissett (Senior Manager of Children, Youth, and Justice Services), Nadia Wali (Senior Manager of Peer Programs), Pamela Gawn (Senior Manager of Community Development and Women's Programs), Mussarat Ejaz (Musa) (Manager of Population Health and Wellness), Michaela Allen (Department Expert), Caitlin Higgins (HR Generalist supporting Urban Health peers)
- UHHS - Masha Warari (Supervisor for React Program), Jess Gebremedhin (Manager for Community Health and Services), Tomas Mirabelli (Manager for Community Health Services)

TNG Peers (30 participants)

- UHHS - Shawn, Isaac, Ongarde, Sandi, Quaqhu, Rosile, Zion, Stephen, Alex, and Rashida
- Youth - Samya, Marcus, Maureen Jerell, Pauline (Duleen), Tim, Maleka, and Ruth
- Women's Settlement - Khalida, Felista, Vincentia, Fatima, Fathima, Abida, Citlalli, Shamim, Renu, Rehel, and Hasina

TNG Human Resources (2 participants)

- Peter (Human Resources / Manager of Conflict Resolution Service), Caitlin Higgins (HR Generalist, UHHS)

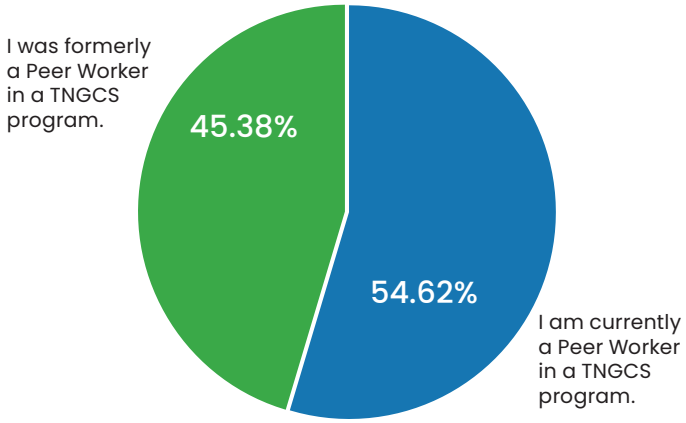
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA): Haliburton County - John Marris: Consultant and Evaluator (tracking the cohort of peer workers for the CMHA Substance Use & Addictions Pilot)
- Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services - Rejwan Karim: (Lead contact for the Peer Outreach Program and research initiatives)
- University Health Network (UHN): Social Medicine - Sarah Coyle: Senior Manager for Program Operations (Care Delivery and Operations) for Social Medicine
- Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre - Gab Laurence: Director of Harm Reduction
- Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS): Harm Reduction Unit - Karen Tizzard: Manager (formerly Harm Reduction Program Coordinator)
- Fred Victor - Kate Burrows: Senior Manager, Training and Capacity, Andrew Legatto: (Management representative from the 24-hour department/shelters), Sylvia Braithwaite: (Management representative involved in championing TSN projects and diverse employment pathways)
- Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS): Service User Advisory Group - Adwoa Afful: (Lead for the design and launch phase of the Service User Advisory Group)

- Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS): Youth Equity and Violence Prevention - Annakim Ffrench: (Supervisor overseeing work done by youth peers in the Community Healing Project)
- Homes First - Jaskaran Singh: Supervisor of Harm Reduction

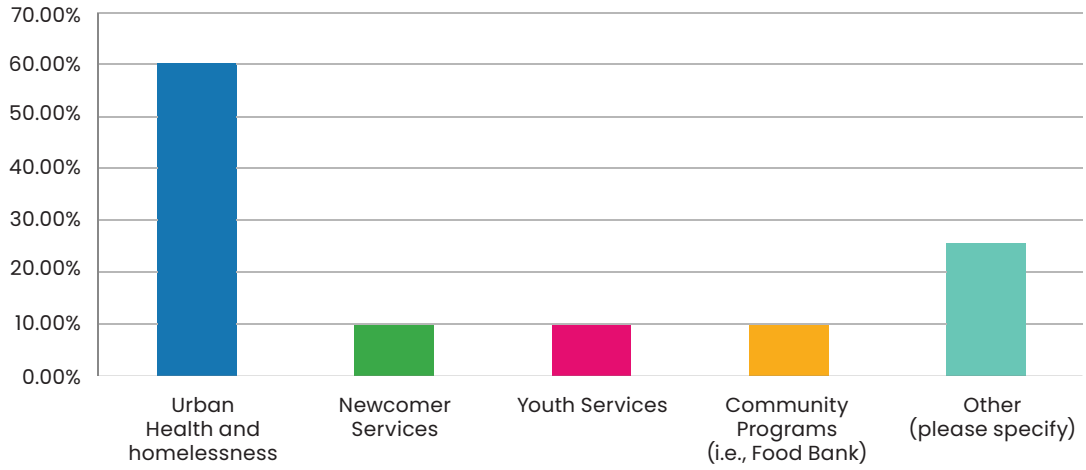
B. RAW SURVEY RESULTS

- 55% of survey participants are a current TNGCS Peer Worker and 45% are former TNGCS Peer Workers.
- The majority of the respondents were from Urban Health and Homelessness (UHHS) programs at 62%, followed by, Newcomer Services (10%), Youth Services (10%) and lastly Community Programs/ Food Banks (9%).
-

What best describes your experience with TNGCS peer programs?

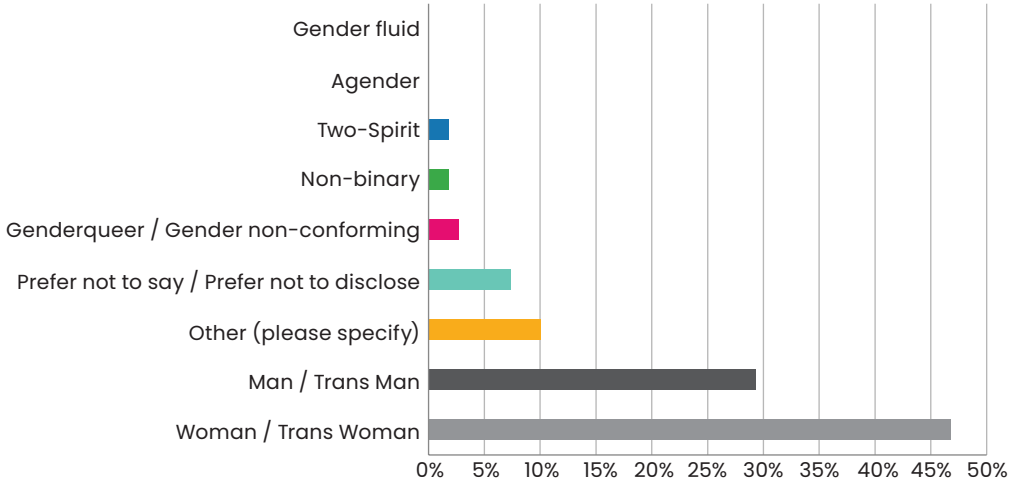


Which TNGCS departments have you worked in as a peer worker?

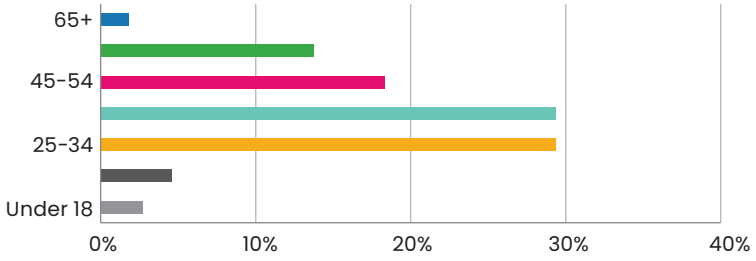


- The majority (~60%) of survey respondents were adults between 25 and 44 years of age.
- Most of the respondents identified as female (~48%).
- Half of respondents were immigrants or refugees

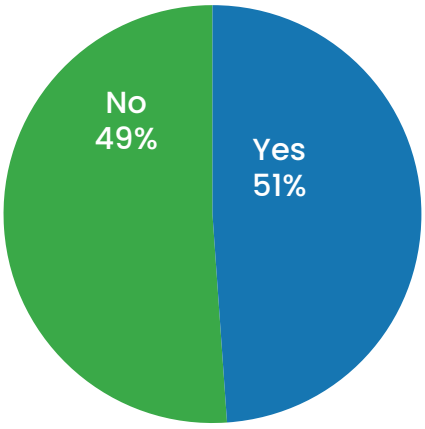
Gender: how do you identify?



What is your age?



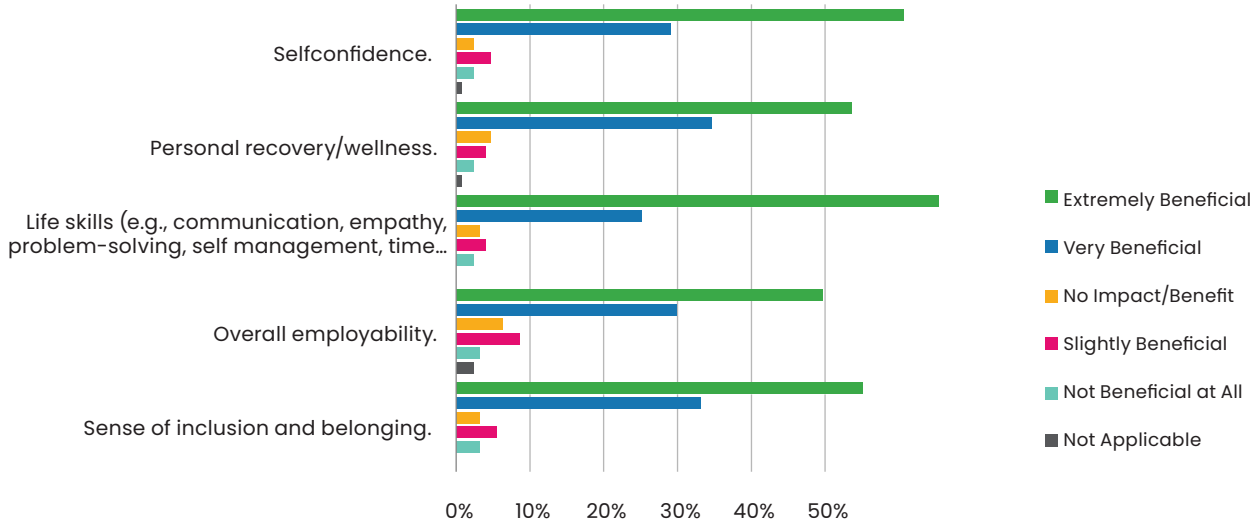
Are you an immigrant/refugee to Canada?



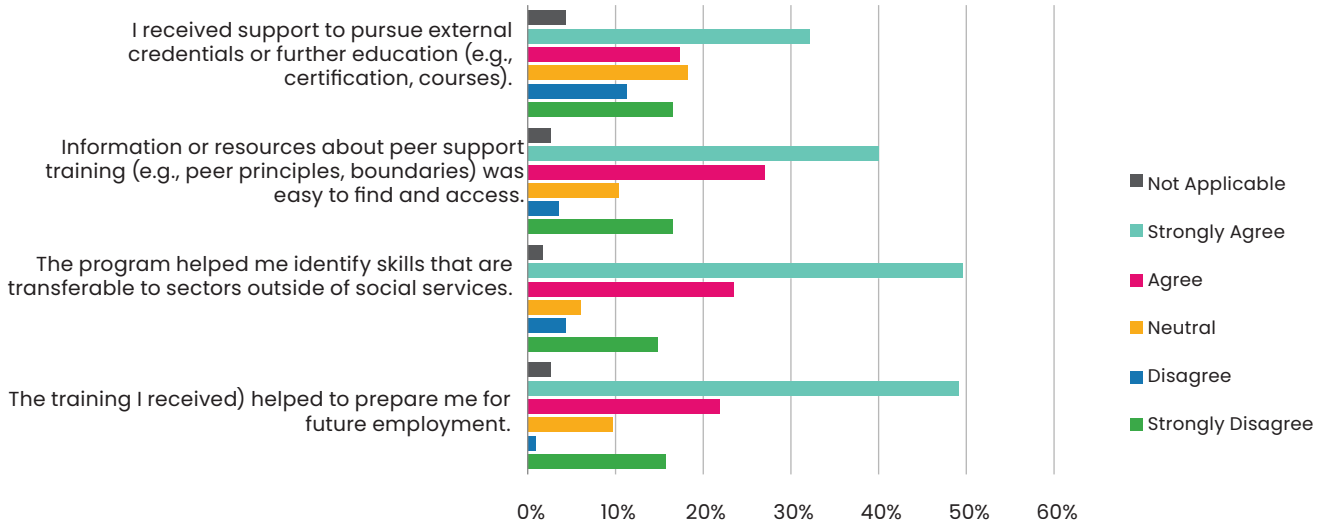
45.38%

- Over 80% of survey respondents rated TNG peer work extremely beneficial or very beneficial to their self-confidence, personal recovery/wellness, life skills, and sense of belonging.
- Over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that training and skills received in peer work programs helped them prepare for future work or identify skills transferable to sectors outside of social services.

Please describe the benefit of being a tngcs peer worker on your life:

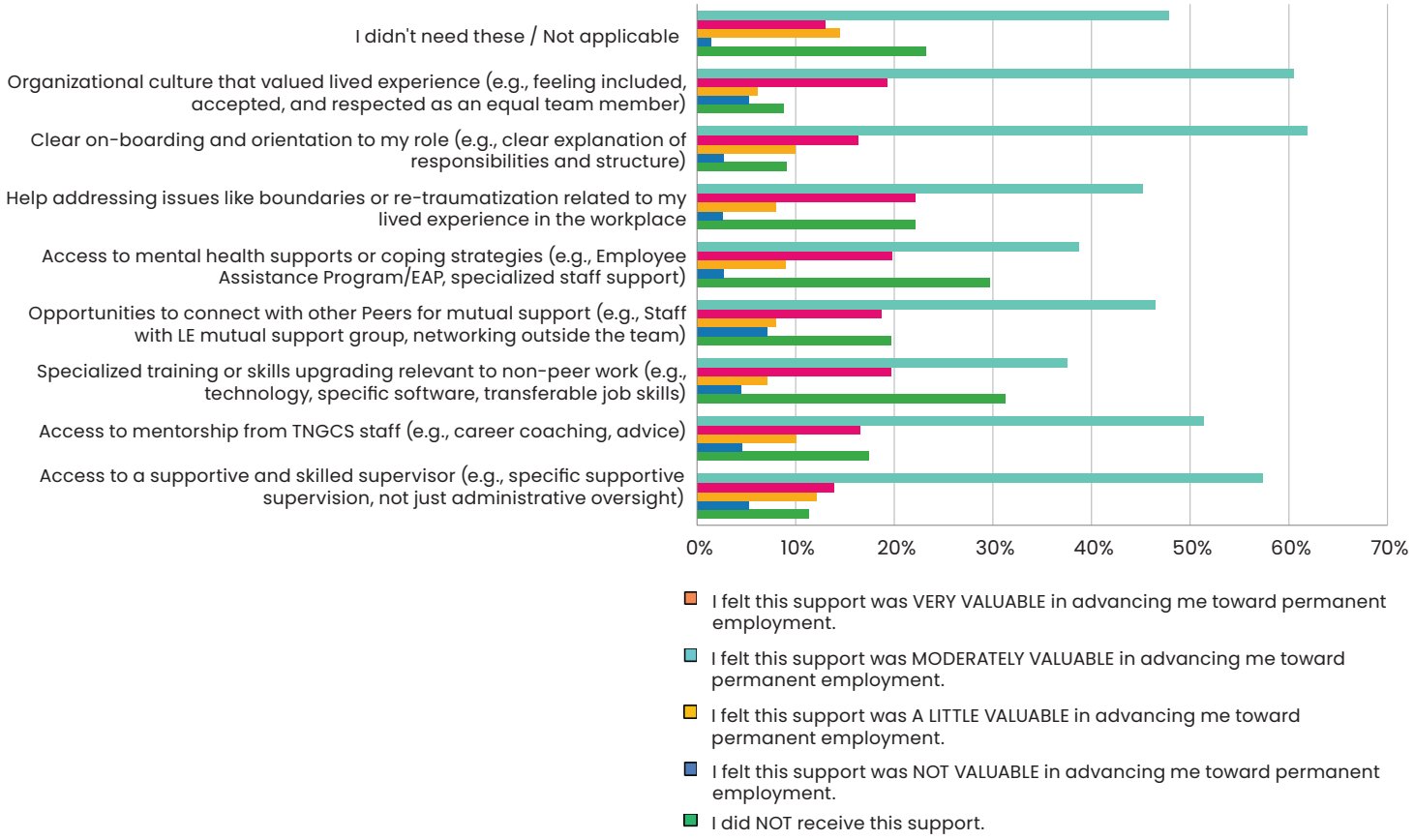


Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements regarding the training and skills you received in the peer program:



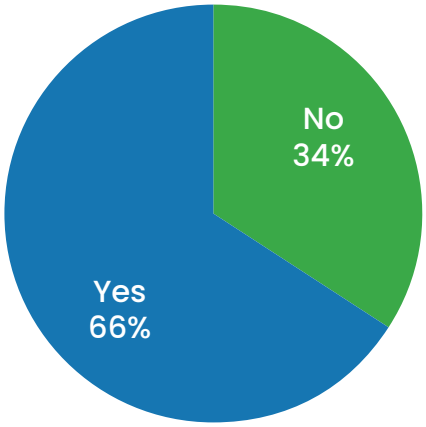
- Over 70% of survey respondents felt the clear onboarding and orientation to their roles, TNG's organizational culture that values life experiences, and their access to a supportive and skilled supervisor were moderately to very valuable in advancing them towards permanent employment.

Which of the following supports did you/have you received as a peer worker at TNGCS?

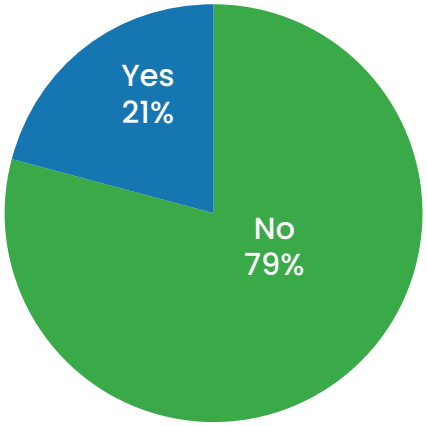


- ixty-six percent (66%) of survey respondents have tried to seek permanent employment at TNG or elsewhere, while only 21% of those who tried to seek employment reported experiencing success in transitioning.

Since your time as a peer worker at TNGCS, have you tried to transition to permanent employment – at tngcs or elsewhere?

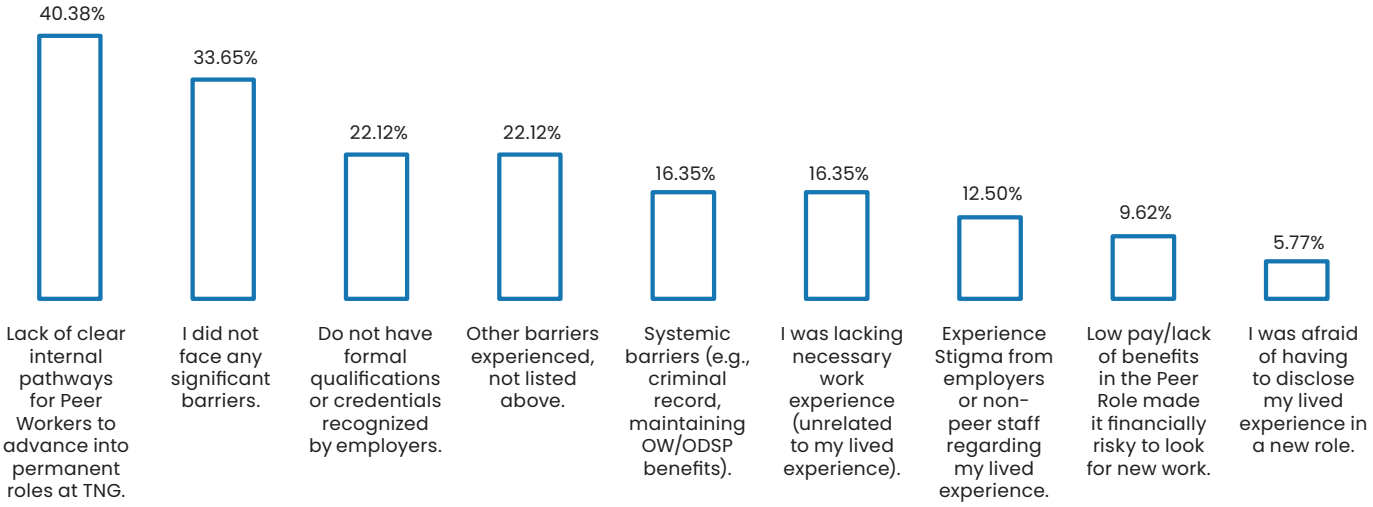


Have you experienced success transitioning from a peer role to permanent employment, at tngcs or elsewhere?



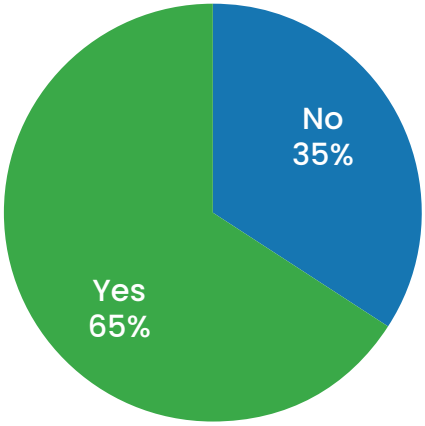
- The largest barrier reported by survey respondents to transitioning from a peer role to permanent/ regular employment, was a lack of a clear internal pathways for Peer Workers to advance into permanent roles at TNG at 23%.

Which barriers, if any, did you experience when you tried to transition from a peer role to permanent employment:

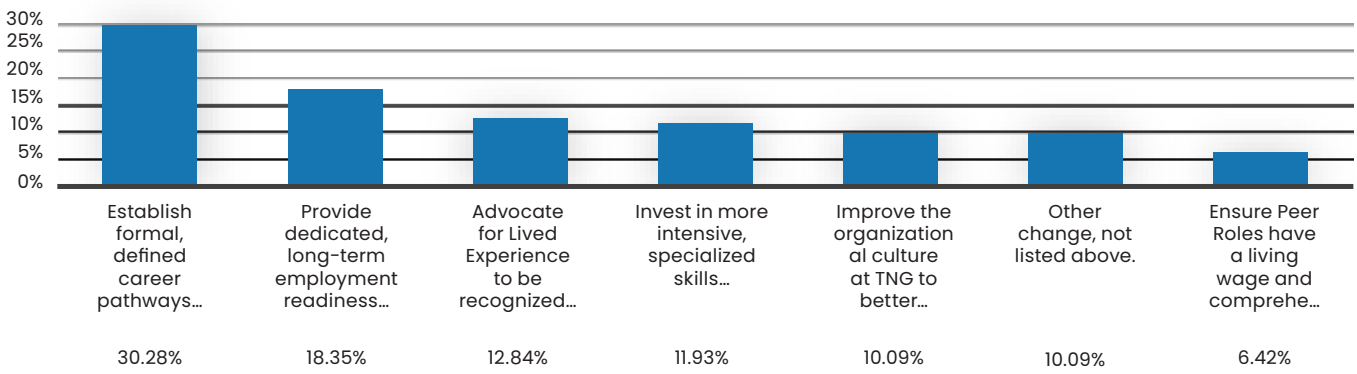


- Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents reported that they felt TNG supports or creates clear pathways for peer workers to move into permanent roles.
- The largest one change TNG could implement to help peer workers advance to permanent employment outside of peer work, according tor survey respondents at 30%, is establish formal, defined career pathways.

Do you feel that TNG actively supports or creates clear pathways for peer workers to move into permanent roles?

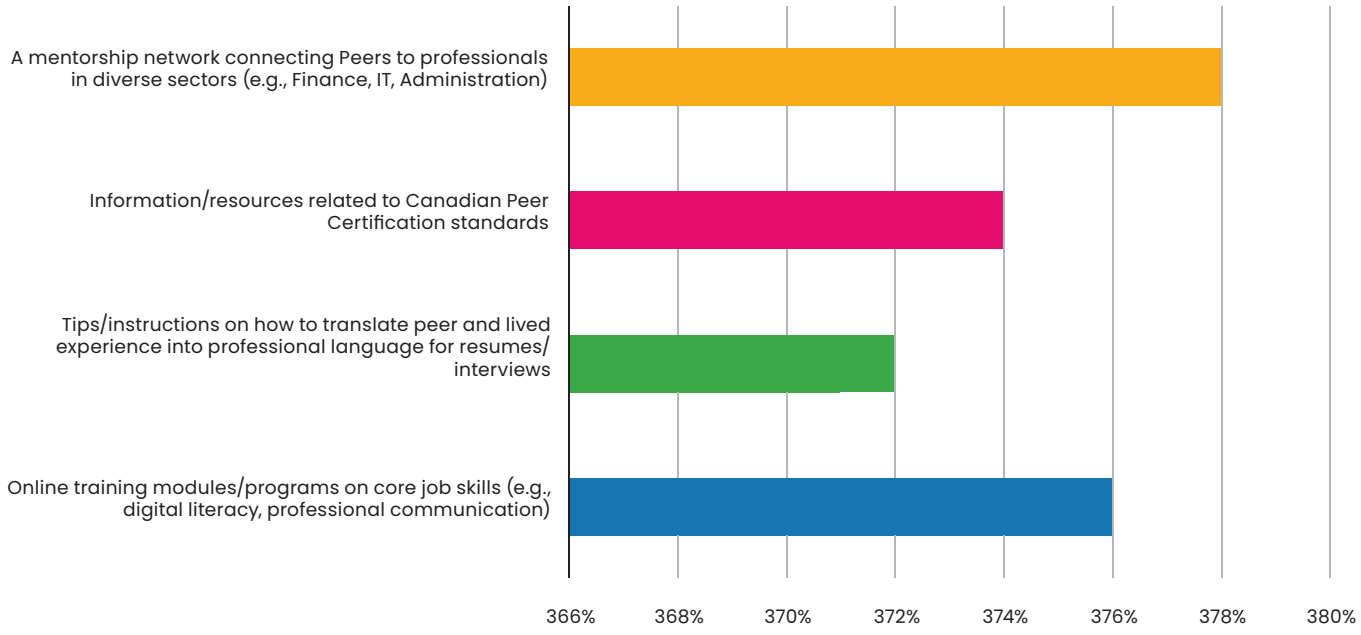


If TNG could implement one change to help peer workers advance to permanent employment outside of peer work, what should it prioritize?(select one)



- Using the hub as a platform for mentorship and networking was identified as most valuable by survey respondents, followed by using the hub as a platform for online training.

TNG is thinking about creating a resource hub (e-learning platform) to share best practices regarding peer work. How valuable would the following resources be to peer workers seeking employment advancement?



C. SCAN OF PEER PROGRAMMING

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services	Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) - Haliburton County	Fred Victor Centre
• Peer Outreach Program: Training and work experience for newcomer women to Canada. • Community Health Ambassador (CHA) Model: A flexible "purchase of service" pool for community engagement. • Peer Researcher Project: Training and work experience for internationally trained professionals (funding recently ended). • Immigrant Scholar Program: A historical program focused on researchers.	• Substance Use and Addictions Pilot: Employs peers in a rural community to support those with mental health and addiction challenges. • "The Road Ahead": A mobile mental-health and addictions service for rural and remote communities, is exploring the embedding of peers in phone-based discharge support.	• Fred Victor Peer Program: Long-standing program focused on community support and capacity building. • Community Advocacy Program: Focused on community engagement and advocacy out of Regent Park. • Peer-led Community Safety Team: An entirely peer-led team providing overdose support and public education. • TNG Peer Partnership: Peer roles (Safe Spot and iPHARE) are provided by TNG.
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre	**Sherbourne Health**	**Toronto Shelter Network (TSN)**
• Harm Reduction Peer Outreach: Peers walk the neighborhood providing supplies and connections to care. • Four Winds Indigenous Wellness Program: Peers participate in specialized cultural programming activities. • Trip Youth Program: Peers support outreach for young people in the local party scene. • Client Advisory Committee: Peers provide insight to improve health service access.	• Harm Reduction Peer Navigator Program: Peers support clients in accessing high-barrier clinical and social services. • Health Bus Roles: Peers provide lived expertise on Sherbourne's mobile health unit. • Supporting Our Youth (SOY): Operates peer-leadership and peer-support training for 2SLGBTQ+ youth, including a supervised practicum, honoraria and peer-led sessions.	• The Pipeline Project: A specialized initiative focused on bridging peers into long-term, stable positions through a standardized curriculum and champion employers. Bridges peers directly into permanent social service roles.

City of Toronto Shelter and Support Services (TSSS)	University Health Network (UHN)	Homes First
• Harm Reduction Peer Advisory Committee: Members consult on shelter policies, drug strategies, and service frameworks. • Community Healing Project (Youth Equity & Violence Prevention): A 12-week certification program for youth peers focused on trauma, conflict resolution, and career pathways. • Service User Advisory Group: Currently in the design phase to establish formal roles for individuals with lived experience	• Emergency Department (ED) Peers: Peers are integrated into the hospital care team to provide relational care and de-escalation. • Stabilization and Connection Centre (SCC): Peers support individuals who have used substances and were brought in by ambulance. • Winter Support Service: Peers provide engagement and connection to shelter for individuals discharged from the hospital at night. • Dunn House: Peers support individuals with contingency management plans. *Note: All peers in UHN programs are currently contracted through TNG.*	• Homes First, manages its own caseworkers and Personal Support Workers (PSWs) but chooses to "outsource" its peer support needs directly through TNG. • TNG Community Support Workers (CSW) maintain a permanent onsite presence at Homes First with their own dedicated office space, fostering seamless daily collaboration.

D. CERTIFICATION AND CREDENTIALS

TNG Credentials

- TNG operates its own internal Peer Training and Development Program (PTDP), which serves as a vital first step for many participants.
- Participant Value: Many peers place high sentimental and professional value on TNG's internal certificates; graduation ceremonies are described as significant life milestones for those who did not finish high school.
- Practical Value: Internal managers often prioritize TNG's own vetting and "the push" (personal recommendations) for internal hiring over external certifications.
- Recommendations: Settlement peers suggested that TNG provide a more formal internal certificate that explicitly details the duration of service and specific skills learned to help them land their next job.
- Unique Perspectives: Youth peers expressed a strong, unified opposition against making certification a requirement. High school youth are not typically seeking certificates; they're seeking first work experience. Adding a formal certification as a "job requirement would be a barrier", especially for youth from marginalized communities.
- Over-professionalizing the peer role might "exclude the very youth" the program is trying to support.

Academic Pathways to Credentials

- Moving beyond peer-specific work into specialized professional roles often involves distinct academic pathways.
- Michener Institute: The Community Health Worker (CHW) certificate program, supported by bursaries from donors like United Way, is seen as a bridge to permanent roles within the hospital system.
- Seneca College: Some peers pursue specialized homelessness certifications to enhance their professional standing in the shelter sector.
- George Brown College: The "pathways to post-secondary" programs are noted as essential for youth peers transitioning into social service worker diplomas.
- Leadership Vision: The Senior Leadership Team at TNG has emphasized the importance of working with these institutions to ensure they accept peer experience as an "equivalency" for academic credits or program entry.

Scan of Certifications

	Certified Peer Supporter (CPS) Peer Support Canada (PSC)	Canadian Certified Peer Support Specialist (CCPSS) Canadian Addiction Counsellors Certification Federation (CACCF)	PeerWorks Certified Peer Supporter PeerWorks
Target Audience	Mental health and/or substance use	Mental health and/or substance use	Individuals with mental health lived experience
Prerequisites	Lived experience; 200 hours of for-mal peer support experience	500 hours of peer work experi-ence; completion of pre-approved training; 2 years recovery	Lived experience
Duration	10–15 hours over 3–4 months	Self-paced; on-line	17 two-hour webinars + 50 hour monitored internship
Cost	$1,200	$199	$500
Competencies	Recovery paradigm, self-determination, trauma-informed care, and 11 core competencies	Shared understanding, mutual empowerment, and adherence to a strict Ethical Code	Wellness dimensions, social de-terminants, boundaries, and group facilitation
Credential Earned	National Professional Certification	National Professional Certification	PeerWorks Certified Peer Sup-porter Certificate (Ontario)
Career Path-way/Designed For	Professional peer supporter in community, clinical, or workplace settings	Addiction Specialist: Leadership roles in addiction recovery services	Formalized Peer Supporter - Unique designated roles within the mental health system

Scan of Certificate Programs Programs

	Peer Recovery Education Program (PREP) Krasman Centre	Toward the Heart (BC Peer Training)
Target Audience	Low-income individuals	Peer workers in BC with lived experience of substance use
Prerequisites	Lived experience; residency in York Region or North Toronto.	
Duration	Hybrid Model: 10-month training + 60-hour paid internship.	8 online modules
Cost	FREE; funded via United Way bursaries	FREE online resources and certificate download.
Competencies	Recovery concepts, peer support skills, and employment preparation	Leadership, communication, and counselling
Credential Earned	Program Certificate	Program Certificate
Career Pathway/Designed For	Entry into peer, mental health, or social services workforce.	BC-based workers seeking a standardized, evidence-based curriculum to inform their practice

Scan of Certificate Programs Programs

Community Health and Social Medicine Worker (CHASM) The Michener Institute (UHN)	Social Service Worker (SSW) Seneca Polytechnic	Mental Health Intervention (MHI) Seneca Polytechnic
• Target Audience: Community-facing care workers focused on equity. • Prerequisites: Must be currently working/volunteering in a community role; trusted/rooted in their community. • Credential Earned: Ontario College Certificate. • Duration and Model: Full-Time Academic Study: 1 year (In-person). • Cost and Financial Aid: Fully funded via tuition bursaries for the first cohort. • Suggested Career Destination: System Navigator: Health and social service roles bridging hospitals and community. • Summary of Learning: Mental health foundations, Indigenous health, crisis intervention, and system navigation.	• Target Audience: Individuals seeking to enter the human services field. • Prerequisites: Standard Ontario College admission requirements. • Credential Earned: Ontario College Diploma (Regulated). • Duration and Model: Full-Time/ Part-Time Academic Study: 2 years (4 semesters). • Cost and Financial Aid: Standard tuition; eligible for OSAP, scholarships, and bur-saries. • Suggested Career Destination: Regulated Professional: SSW roles in shelters, schools, and the justice system. • Summary of Learning: Supportive coun-seling, group facilitation, case manage-ment, and social justice advocacy.	• Target Audience: Graduates seeking specialized mental health skills. • Prerequisites: Previous degree or diploma required (Graduate Certificate level). • Credential Earned: Ontario College Diploma • Duration and Model: Full-Time Academic Study: 8 months (2 semesters). • Cost and Financial Aid: Standard tuition; eligible for Seneca scholarships. • Suggested Career Destination: Graduates are eligible to apply for registration with OCSWSSW. • Summary of Learning: Trauma practice, crisis counseling, understanding addiction, and psychosocial health.

Scan of Other Peer Based Training Programs

These are training programs that are not based on national standards and do not lead to a certification.

Social Service Training and Employment Program (SSTEP) and Community Services Peer Training Program (CSPT) Fred Victor	Peer Support and Trauma Response SickKids	Campus Peer Support Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH
• Purpose: support employment re-entry • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: People with lived experience of homelessness (SSTEP) or accessing community supports (CSPT) • Duration and Model: SSTEP: Training and paid work opportunities; CSPT: Short-term case management training • Cost and Financial Aid: FREE; offers honoraria and paid work opportunities • Best Suited For: Individuals seeking to re-enter the workforce or gain initial social service work experience	• Purpose: in-house peer-based response to incidences of trauma • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: clinical or non clinical staff Duration and Model: Core Courses: 1-day skills development; 1- or 2-day CISM certification • Cost and Financial Aid: Consultation-based for organizations; includes a development toolkit • Best Suited For: Organizations wanting to build internal teams to support staff wellness and manage critical incidents	• Purpose: on-campus peer-based support for students • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: Post-secondary students and staff coping with mental health or addiction challenges on campus. • Duration and Model: Standard: 4 days; Intensive: 2 days. Features facilitator guides and slide decks. • Cost and Financial Aid: FREE curriculum and training resources. • Best Suited For: Colleges and Universities looking to implement peer support programs for their student body

Scan of Other Peer Based Training Programs

These are training programs that are not based on national standards and do not lead to a certification.

Hope + Me Mood Disorder Association (MDA) Ontario	Wounded Warriors Canada	Peer House Toronto
• Type of Program: Volunteer Training and Apprenticeship • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: Individuals (and families) with lived experience of mood disorders • Duration and Model: Level One Training: 5 modules over 4 full days or 8 half days. • Cost and Financial Aid: FREE for volunteers who register with the program. • Best Suited For: Individuals who want to become trained volunteers to provide support within the Hope + Me network	• Type of Program: Occupational Stress and Resiliency Training • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: Trauma Exposed Professionals (TExPs), first responders, and military members. • Duration and Model: In-person, group-based experiential learning. • Cost and Financial Aid: Procured by organizations for small or large groups. • Best Suited For: First Responders who want to recognize and respond to signs of stress and trauma in their colleagues	• Type of Program: Resource and Directory Hub • Target Audience and Lived Experience Focus: Individuals with lived experience in Toronto seeking recovery or employment • Duration and Model: Directory connecting users to various programs (e.g., culinary, tech, advocacy) • Cost and Financial Aid: Directory of mostly free or subsidized community programs for low-income individuals • Best Suited For: Individuals looking for a centralized directory of diverse training and peer support groups in Toronto

E. SCAN OF ELEARNING AND DIGITAL CONTENT HUBS

Based on the environmental scan of the provided sources, there are three primary types of eLearning and digital content hubs:

1. Dedicated Digital Learning Platforms (LMS): These platforms are interactive systems designed for structured, digital-first education, including self-paced modules, facilitated sessions, and detailed learner tracking.
2. Knowledge Hubs and Resource Repositories: These hubs serve as centralized digital libraries for information sharing, advocacy, and sector-specific toolkits rather than interactive training modules.
3. Educational Portals for In-Person or Hybrid Learning: These sites act as digital "front doors" or catalogs for formal academic programs and training that are primarily delivered physically or through a hybrid model.

Dedicated Digital Learning Platform (LMS)

How They Are Used: These are interactive platforms designed for end-to-end education. Include self-directed modules, facilitated cohorts, and progress tracking.

Organization	Purpose	Unique Features
Litmos (Commercial)	Used by corporations for high-scale compli-ance, onboarding, and sales training.	Features an AI Assistant, drag-and-drop content authoring, and gamified learn-ing.
alphabeePRO (Commercial with public sector focus)	Used by AlphaBee to provide online training for front line workers, professionals and caregivers in behavioural health, education, and community support.	Includes on-line, group and customized training and a video section where pre-senters share real-world challenges and practical cases.
OCASI LearnAt-Work (Non-Profit)	Used to provide professional development for the Canadian settlement sector.	Built to WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards and offers multilingual sup-port (English/French).

Knowledge Hubs and Resource Repositories

How They Are Used: These serve as centralized "libraries" of information. They host research, toolkits, and curated lists of external training resources.

Organization	Purpose	Unique Features
Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Ser-vices	• Remote Interpretation Ontario/ RIO: A re-pository for translated materials and multi-lingual websites tailored to community health. • Arts for Family Health: Shares knowledge on arts-based mental health interventions for newcomers.	RIO: Utilizes a tiered access model with specialized login portals for RIO clients and guest service providers, alongside a dedicated feature allowing individuals to search the guest library in their preferred language.
North York Women's Cen-tre (NYWC)	Provides a glossary of terms and resource navigation for women and gender-diverse people.	Includes a "Quick Exit" safety button for users who may need to hide their brows-ing for privacy or safety.
Peer House Toronto	Acts as a community-recommended navigation hub for peer support services across the city.	Member Login portal to access exclusive webinars and advocacy statements.

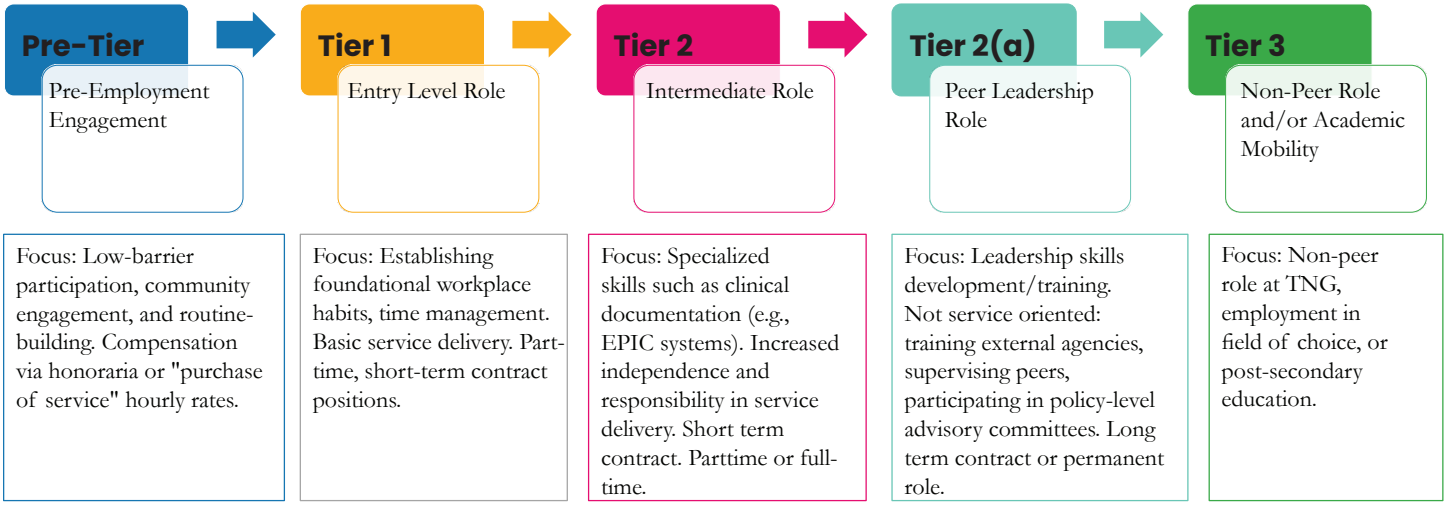
Education Portals: In-Person or Hybrid Learning

How They Are Used: These serve as digital "front doors" for traditional academic programs, managing applications and providing detailed curriculum overviews for physical training.

Organization	Purpose	Unique Features
The Michener Institute	Hosts information for a 1-year, full-time, in-person community health worker certifi-cate. i.e. Community Health and Social Medicine (CHASM)	Direct integration with OCAS (Ontario Col-lege Application Service) and detailed navi-gation for donor-funded bursaries.
Mentor/ Mentee Canada	Offers foundational training and facilitated workshops for peer supporters in housing and healthcare.	Focuses on a "Tenant Toolbox" specifically designed for those living in supportive housing.
Kras-man Centre's (PREP)	Comprehensive training and employment preparation for individuals with lived expe-rience to support personal recovery and help them enter/advance in the profes-sional peer support, mental health, and so-cial services workforce.	Paid 60-hour internship conducted within a supportive community or partner organiza-tion, and the entire program is offered free of charge to eligible participants through bursaries awarded by the United Way.

F. POTENTIAL PEER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

For individuals who are focused on establishing stability with the eventual goal of employment, there is opportunity to formally define a pathway for peers. In this pathway, peers start with low barrier employment coupled with higher levels of supervisory support and coaching, and they progress into employment opportunities with less supervision and increased levels of responsibility. Based on the long-term goals of the peer, the pathway could end in a regular/full-time role in social services, on an academic pathway to transition beyond social services, or their own unique journey into regular/full-time employment. The following tiers are defined based on current UHHS programs with the understanding that each individual journey is unique, and full-time employment may not be appropriate for everyone.



Pre-Tier: Pre- Employment

HR	Training and Service Focus	TNG Examples	Comparators
• Not on payroll • Part time and short-term contracts • Flexibility hours; high support/ supervision provided	• Develop basic workplace skills • Engage with community • Build up routine • Low responsibility service delivery	• iPHARE • Crystal Meth Project Peer Training • Peer Training and Development Program (PTDP)	• Access Alliance: Community Health Ambassador (CHA) Pool • Sherbourne Health: Kit Packing Group—a 2-hour volunteer opportunity provided for an honorarium • TSSS: Harm Reduction members—paid honoraria for attending policy consultations

Tier 1: Entry Level Role

HR	Training and Service Focus	TNG Examples	Comparators
• Not on payroll • Part time and short-term contracts • Flexibility hours; high support/ supervision provided	• Establish foundational workplace habits and time management • Provide basic services • Low level of responsibility	• SafeSpot • iPHARE • Corner Drop-in • PEACH, • Encampment Outreach • Food Bank Peer Pilot • TNG Youth Drop-in Peers	• TSSS (Youth): Community Healing Project (CHP)—a 12-week workshop-based certification focusing on trauma and conflict resolution • Fred Victor: Drop-in Harm Reduction Peers providing basic support for guests

Tier 2: Intermediate Role

HR	Training and Service Focus	TNG Examples	Comparators
• Short term contract • Part-time or full-time • Flexible hours • High support/ supervision provided	• Specialized skills development such as clinical documentation (e.g., EPIC systems) • Increased independence and responsibility in service delivery • Partner facing	• Mobile Shelter Support Program (MSSP), • Stabilization and Connection Centre (SCC), Peers in Emergency Departments (ED), Edward Village, and The Next Chapter	• Access Alliance: Peer Outreach Program—two-year unionized part-time contracts for newcomer women • Sherbourne Health: Harm Reduction Peer Navigators—0.65 FTE positions help clients access services • UHN: Winter Support Service and SCC Peers - (hired via TNG) • CMHA Haliburton: Substance Use Pilot Peers—run rural drop-in support four days • Fred Victor: Peer-led Community Safety Team— entirely peer-led team providing overdose support and public education

Tier 2a: Peer Leadership Role

HR	Training and Service Focus	TNG Examples	Comparators
• Long term contract or permanent/ regular role at TNG	• Leadership skill development/ training • Not service oriented training external agencies, supervising peers, participating in policy-level advisory committees	• Rapid Emergency Action & Community Training (REACT) • Peer Leaders in specialized training stream	• TSN/The Pipeline Project—intensive training and placements with "champion employers" • TSSS/Parkdale Queen West: Peer/Client Advisory Committees—using high-level expertise to shape city-wide shelter and drug strategy policies

Tier3: Non-Peer Role and/or Academic Mobility

HR	Training and Service Focus	TNG Examples	Comparators
• Permanent/ regular role	• Transition into regular, employment in field of choice (Case Managers, Outreach, etc.), or long-term post-secondary education	• "Regular" (permanent) staff roles. TNG currently hires 55% of its workforce from its participant and volunteer base. • TNG Youth: Progression into Post-Secondary Education (College/ University), with some returning as front-line staff	• TSN Pipeline Projects: Graduates hired as Case Managers, Mortgage Consultants, or Frontline Shelter Staff • Fred Victor: Internal mobility examples including transitions from peer roles into Financial Analyst or Project Coordinator positions • Academic Pathways: Enrollment in specialized diplomas such as Michener's (Community Health Worker) or George Brown's Pathways to Post-Secondary

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