

# The Joys and Challenges of Working with Peers

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Vertaistuen voimaa



# OSIS, WORKING TO DEVELOP PEER ACTIVITY

*A peer is a person who has experienced situations similar to drug users. A peer has “inside knowledge” through his/her experience that can have a positive result in providing services.*

*In addition to experiential knowledge, peers can bring credibility and trust to an agency in ways that regular service providers may find difficult because users may distrust and avoid contact with “official helpers”.*

- Osis is a project running from 2011 until 2014, working to develop and strengthen peer activity, and to develop new methods and models for the cooperation of peers and professionals in order to improve the inclusion and well-being of marginalized populations.

- Osis is a joint venture of two Finnish organizations: The A-clinic Foundation and The Family Related Drug Rehabilitation Association (OHT).



# OSIS, WORKING TO DEVELOP PEER ACTIVITY

- The project's goal is to bolster peer work and peer support as a more extensive and well-defined part of the social and health services, giving the clients' and peers' own expertise its due credit.
- Peers are involved in all aspects of the project's planning and execution, working alongside the professionals to build new models and practices of peer-work in accordance with the principles of inclusion and involving.
- Inclusion provides a better quality of life. It is important for everyone to be a part of "a bigger picture", have meaningful tasks and feel themselves valued.



# WE NEED ALL KINDS OF PEERS

- The active use of legal or illegal intoxicants in free time is not an obstacle to becoming a peer. When working, however, one must be sober and functional.
- Each peer's working contribution is based strictly on his/her personal wishes and resources. Personal well-being comes first.
- Some sort of education or training can be provided but it is not necessary.
- A professional has to take care of peers well-being. Motivating, professional guidance and support, peer support of their own and compensation in money are some ways to do that.



# MANY ROLES OF PEERS

- A finder of people in need
- An enabler and facilitator at meetings and appointments
- A bridge-builder
- A provider of information
- A provider of support for the client
- A provider of support for the professional, a mirror
- An interpreter between the client and the public authorities
- A guide and companion when visiting service providers
- A listener
- A bodyguard
- An educator



# TWO KINDS OF PEERS

**CLOSE/CONNECTED PEER;** active in peer work for a longer time, e.g. at a needle exchange program.

- Has clear roles and responsibilities when accompanying the professional worker on a house-call.
- Can work independently with clients, e.g. accompanying people to services and reminding over the phone about appointments.
- Can act as “mirrors” for the professionals, and aid them in reflecting on what is being done.
- Is often in an opioid substitution program.

**DISTANT/REMOTE PEER;** is often deeply involved in the drug-using subculture.

- Is first client in the Street Clinic and then becomes a peer.
- Acts within his/her own networks and is a useful facilitator in creating new contacts.



**"Almost impossible to reach"**  
Never come to services in any circumstances.

**"Hard to reach"**  
Use services occasionally

**"Easy to reach"**  
Use services regularly

PROFESSIONALS

CONNECTED PEERS

REMOTE PEERS



## WHO CAN BE REACHED?

- People with heavy drug use who for some reason or other are not using the social and health services that they are entitled to.
- People who don't even use the services provided by needle-exchange programs.
- People with a multitude of problems in all areas of life.
- People with mistrust of professionals and the official system of service delivery.
- Women, men, girls, boys. Both the young and the old.





# SOME OBSERVATIONS ON WORKING WITH PEERS

- Different peers reach different clients!
- The importance of clear roles, careful planning, looking after the well-being of the peers, regular team meetings, full-day workshops, support and counseling, training of peers
- Both a colleague and a client and not really either – a line drawn in water, which makes it of paramount importance to think and talk everyone's roles carefully through.
- Each peer's life situation and circumstances are different; tasks and responsibilities have to be tailored to suit people with different amounts of strength and resources. The professional has a responsibility to evaluate such matters.



# THE CHALLENGES OF A PEER WORK

- The work requires courage in professional, in political and in society level.
- Drug addicts are incoherent and a diverse part of population.
- It is persistent and challenging work and it needs to be developed all the time.
- Including of a drug addicts does not happen in a void.
- The problem of including is that it is often provided from a professional's point of view and by problem-solving techniques provided by professionals.



# CHALLENGES CONTINUES

Challenges of a professional:

Employment relationship, therapeutic relationship, client or all of the above?

What can you talk about?

What can you expect?

How you can comment?

What are the criterias of recruiting?

Facing illegality

Challenges of a peer :

Prejudice  
partner?

Different attitudes

How to work with a professional as a

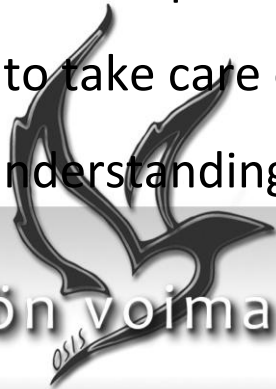
Trust issues in the field – one might be labeled as a cop, a snitch ect.

Clients might be unpredictable; safety

Remember to take care of yourself – when to say no?

Being stuck in being peer?

Conflicts; understanding same time a client and a professionals points of views.



Thank You!

[www.osis.fi](http://www.osis.fi)



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