

Drug n. *A chemical substance, that affects the central nervous system, causing changes in behaviour and often addiction.*

Recovery n. *The act of obtaining usable substance from unusable sources.*

Peer v.t. *To be, or to assume to be, equal.*

Fit adj. *Suitable by nature, qualified, worthy.*

Flipside mag.

*The Association of Participating Service Users
Summer Newsletter. Edition #23*

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Peers in the Alcohol and other Drug sector - missing in action

WHEN CONSIDERING CHANGING OR CEASING DRUG TAKING ACTIVITIES WE CONFRONT A CONFOUNDING SITUATION. WE GRADUALLY REALISE WE MUST REMOVE OURSELVES FROM OUR PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO FACILITATE RECOVERY.

However, we soon become aware we have no new community to enter. Society rejects us as "bad/freaks" but our old alcohol and other drug using community is not appropriate or healthy. Interacting with peers that have been through what we have been through, and are at a similar turning point is the perfect foil for these dilemmas. Peers as a community of people barely have to think when presented with a common problem to do with addiction, but simply respond to any questions with the immediacy of someone who has lived the answer. This is so simple, yet somewhat absent from the Alcohol and Other Drugs sector.

ONCE A GROUP OF PEOPLE COME TOGETHER WITH THE COMMON GOAL OF RECOVERY, EXCUSES AND JUSTIFICATIONS DON'T QUITE WORK LIKE THEY DO WITH OTHERS. PEERS PROMOTE A CULTURE OF HONESTY AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. Kelly

A UK study successfully harnessed respected peers to prevent smoking. The 12-13-year-olds simply exerted their influence in normal social interactions with same-age school mates.

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APSU have developed the **FIT Peer Model** as a means to increasing Alcohol and other Drug service users' participation in their own health care. The **Fit Peer model** consists of 3 separate programs.

1. Peer Helper Training

a short course of 40 hours incl:

- peer helping
- communication skills
- stages of change
- self-care
- boundaries
- relapse prevention
- the AOD service system

The development of these sound strategies are built upon what is already used as the participants put into action their need for change. 12 hours of peer helping follows the 40 hours of peer helper training where the participants volunteer at an agency of their choice.



because you've walked the walk
you are **FIT** for it

The FIT Peer Helper Training Course
is commencing soon.....

Applications until: Wed Feb 25th 2009.
Start date: Wed Mar 4th, 2009
Time: 10.00am - 2.00pm (lunch provided)
Address: 140 Grange Rd. Carnegie VIC
PH: (03) 9573 1710 or (03) 9573 1736
Mobile: 0400 278 495 or 0403 451 421
Email: mmpcheat@sharc.org.au

2. Experts by Experience

a series of workshops incl:

- participation and groups
- the AOD Service System and Policy
- lobbying for change
- meetings and change

designed to facilitate peers' participating in the Alcohol and Other Drug sector.

3. The Speaker Bureau

a database of AOD service users prepared to share their expertise and/or their stories and assist the wider community by participating in meetings at for example:

- support groups/meetings
- schools
- agencies
- conferences/Forums

we envision a world where all people affected by the impact of addiction can proudly and openly seek help, help each other and demonstrate the living proof that recovery is possible.

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I do not feel like a freak

I DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN I JOINED THE PEER HELPER PROGRAM.

I SUFFERED FAMILIAR ANXIETY FROM THE TIME I ENROLLED UNTIL I WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR ON THAT FIRST WEDNESDAY.

My anxiety stemmed from my self talk i.e.; I'm too old, too addicted, too shy, etc, etc. I almost talked myself into not going.

How sad that would have been, as already my life is more enriched by the experience of being part of the program. If I had allowed my self-doubt to win, I would not have met the wonderful people in the sessions; nor would I have had the opportunity to share in the laughter, tears and learning that I am experiencing.

Addiction has held me back from far too much in life. The Peer Helper Program gives me hope of

living a purposeful life, knowing others share similar fears and insecurities.

I trust the people in my group. In the short time I have known them, I feel connected and supported.

I look forward to seeing their friendly faces and sharing knowledge and experiences that only those who have ever suffered substance abuse could ever understand.

I do not feel like a freak around these people.

I feel like a worthwhile human being.

Jan (Current Peer Helper)

From the Peer Helper Participants.....

"The new social involvement is important.... When you get clean you want to distance yourself from problematic users and then you find out all of your friends are problematic users." Toni

"I feel we are basically told by the AOD sector that our brains don't work as well.... I found out I still had brain capability. I just need to exercise my brain and it works better." Frank

"Ex- Addicts think they can't do stuff and need these experiences to show them they can." Ben

"It's a great stepping stone, a taste of things to come." Sharon

"I feel the Peer Helper training is an important part of my own recovery." John

"The Peer Helper Training gave me faith in myself." Kevin

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It was dog eat dog....

EVERYBODY HAS HEARD THE TERM 'YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE'. I CONSIDERED MYSELF AN EXCEPTION TO THAT RULE FOR MOST OF MY LIFE WHEN USING DRUGS.

I needed no one but myself. Loyalty and friendship were more of a concept than a reality, although a night on the piss together on another bloke's dole day and I'm sure I could convince anyone otherwise.

I had the attitude of 'dog eat dog'. The only reason I had anyone around was if they had something I wanted or I had something they wanted. I was like a parasite walking around with a giant novelty straw, waiting to suck the life force and cash out of whoever was around

Misery loves company and I was pretty miserable. So I always had people around, but the truth is they were all backstabbing snakes in the grass, just like me. Everyone was only looking out for themselves.

I put down the substances and was faced with the reality of life without drugs. My "everyman for himself" attitude ensured the transition into normality (including trust and companionship) was a slow and arduous journey.

At age 19 I had the choice of going to jail or rehab and I chose rehab. It was there where I first truly understood the concept of mateship and 'peer support'. I still remain in contact

with the one friend that is still alive from that time and I still consider him to be one of my dearest friends, as does he of me.

As the years have progressed, I have found myself around other people who are on a similar path to mine: trying to live one day at a time, without using substances.

I have found that the support of fellow recovering addicts has been of the most benefit to me in staying clean.

I have been on every anti-depressant and tranquilliser on the market. I have had counselling, been hypnotized and undergone psychotherapy. I have been confined to youth institutions and organisations that focus on harm reduction.

None have worked.

A scoutmaster couldn't possibly understand the trauma of the front line war veteran, even if he bears a piece of paper telling you he can!

The ear of at least one other person who deeply understands the affliction I possess is without parallel and essential to my well being and ability to go on remaining abstinent from drugs.

A quote from Abraham Lincoln really sums it up for me (as any good quote usually does): "Listen not to the teaching of speculators whom first haven't been confirmed by experience".

Wolfgang

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PEERING INTO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

A visit to Windana Peer Support group
by Kerry Trask

THIS PAST MONTH I HAD THE PLEASURE OF ATTENDING THE PEER SUPPORT GROUP AT WINDANA ON A LOVELY WARM ST KILDA EVENING. I HAD BEEN HEARING LOTS OF GOOD THINGS ABOUT THE GROUP SO I WAS EAGER TO SEE WHAT ALL THE FUSS WAS ABOUT.

(Windana Peer Support Group: Ph Mark Goodvac on 9529-7955)

We sat around a small cosy room in beanbags as a friendly dog did the rounds for the obligatory pat. Meanwhile people bared their souls in an amazingly honest way. One by one members spoke of the past week and anything that may have caused them concern over that time. The other members then commented on the situation and offered advice in a friendly and structured manner. Don't get me wrong, there were no kid gloves applied.

People then gave their true opinions on what had been stated. If someone had been a fool they would tell them in the kindest possible way. The feeling in the room was very safe and comfortable. You could contribute as little or as much as you wanted.

Most seemed eager to speak and I could totally understand why. The advice that was being passed around was priceless real nuggets of pure gold, the sort of advice and information that you only get from ones that truly know. The group members quoted past advice from Mark Goodvac (group co-ordinator) to each other and it was obvious that they hold him in great esteem. The thing that really impressed me though was the way these people were so ready to give of themselves, even

to someone who was there for the first time. And I don't mean only advice. Several times when group members talked about busting, more than one person would state, "why didn't you ring me, you have my number?"

They have developed a network that goes well beyond the group setting on Tuesday nights. I witnessed at least two regular group members pass their phone numbers on to newer members who did not have as strong support network as these guys have built. Phone numbers are just the beginning; they questioned each other on what other support they had in place and advised that people hook up with as much support as possible. When I had a chance to address the group, I felt very nervous. I told them about the work I am doing at APSU presenting The FIT Peer Helper as a means of consumer participation to our service providers. Never had I felt more nervous than speaking to this support group. **I was well aware that they are my real true Peers.** This group is special; attend and you too will see why. I can only hope that all over Melbourne the same sort of support is being offered. **Keep up the good work Windana; this is consumer participation as it should be!!!!**



The Quarterly APSU Standout Achievement Award is given to a service that has contributed greatly to the advancement of service user participation.

This quarter, the award goes to **DE PAUL HOUSE** for its continued support of the Peer Helpers completing their 12 hours of Peer Helping.

DEPAUL HOUSE has supported an average of 2 Peer Helpers for every single Peer Helper Training Course. One of these Peer Helpers continued on with the voluntary placement for a year and went on to be a member of a Community Network Committee.

DE PAUL HOUSE have shown an openness and willingness that is second to none in the pursuit of Service User Participation.

APSU congratulate DePaul House on this outstanding achievement.

THE COCOON: A NEW PEER GROUP

Hello everyone my name is Diane and I'm an ex-herion user. I'm about to start a group because I feel there's a need for one that helps people that have struggled with addiction and would like a support network. The aim of the group will be to help ex-users value life experience; after-all look what you've survived.

To share the resources and information we all have there'll be guest speakers from a broad range of areas doing workshops helping to educate us on health: hep C, depression and life after drug use. These will include Regina the manager from A.P.S.U, Dr Sherman, The Hep C Council, Michelle a Chinese Medicine Practitioner and Duncan, a Naturopath both from Windana. Vito, a Naturopath and Pharmacist will be present from day one. There will be free coffee and tea.

Time: 1pm on Friday, March 6th 2009 for one hour.

Place: the Uniting Church on the cnr of Chapel st and Carlisle st in St Kilda East (next door to the community centre, opposite Chapel gate pharmacy)

I want to keep it light and preferably fun, It's about creating an R.S.L of sorts for us so we feel a part of something. Hope to see you there, Diane.....

Peers by Moi *I wouldn't be alive without them.*

Not only have they literally resuscitated me, they've helped me through some very dark places and emerged with me to laugh and smile again. My peers understand me in ways that no professional can. We may all be from the same planet, but we are not all from the same worlds. My peers speak the same language. *We 'get' each other and I don't have to explain, convince or translate to them because they know, they understand, they've been there or are there, or know someone who has.* We laugh at things so-called normal people are shocked by. We appreciate little everyday things because we've been to hell and back and know the value of a cup of tea, kinship and sharing, washing the dishes and cleaning our teeth etc. We share our joy when we kick a goal, and lots of us have turned our using experience into a positive by gaining qualifications and working in the AOD sector. Other peers have and are achieving their goals in other fields. All of us have turned a liability into an asset, and are thriving and growing in amazing ways. My peers make me laugh at myself, hand me tissues when I'm crying and share the magical and the mundane moments with me. Together we can draw a circle of light and community around us, and when enough of us join hands, we will turn the tide and overcome stigma and discrimination. We are holding heaven in our hands when together we support each other.

You've had all the professional help there is..... Now What?

When we are looking for help in the recovery from drugs and alcohol misuse, we first look to the professionals. When the professionals are gone; when the pharmacotherapy side used to treat withdrawal is gone, what helps to keep people clean and sober? One word enters my head: "Peers". What is a peer? I hear you ask? **A PEER IS A PERSON OF LIKE EXPERIENCE WHO WE RELATE TO EQUALLY. IT'S SOMEONE WHO, FIRST HAND, HAS EXPERIENCE OF A SIMILAR JOURNEY TO OUR OWN.** Peers have a wealth of knowledge that has come by lived experience. Peers have skills that differ from that of the professionals. A peer is not a counsellor, or a support worker. They are a person like you and I that has "Walked the Walk". **THEIR "LIVED EXPERIENCE" PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY, TRUST, BELIEF AND HOPE. THESE ARE THE THINGS WE LOSE IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS WHEN OUR LIVES BECOME CONSUMED WITH ADDICTION.** Peers provide empathy not sympathy, hope to hopelessness, understanding not judgment, belief that recovery is possible and the living proof that it is possible to lead a satisfying, contributing and meaningful life. Peers offer so much for so little in return. When you hear those words "I know" it gives solace in the fact that you are not the only one. That takes the shame and stigma away in an instant. When I went through treatment for Hep C, every week my peers and I would meet up to discuss what we were going through, and all the shitty side effects that went along with the treatment. Sometimes

I laughed, and at times I cried. Not many people knew that I had Hep C. Family and friends at times struggled to understand. My peers didn't. I hung in there, and successfully completed treatment. My peers made those twelve long months manageable. Without them, I very much doubt that I would have started, let alone completed treatment. Medical support through doctors is no where near the same. Peers provide true understanding, empathy and hope. **NOTHING COMPARES TO THAT FEELING YOU GET WHEN SOMEONE LOOKS YOU IN THE EYES AND SAYS "I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH" AND THEY DO, BECAUSE THEY HAVE.** Natasha – Peer Graduate

Heather Pickard - The new CEO of SHARC

5 quick questions for the new CEO of SHARC: Heather Pickard.

1. What's your first recollection of SHARC?

It was 15 years ago and was called "The Us Society". They provided supported accommodation for adults personally impacted by addiction.

2. What was your first job?

As a student nurse in mental health at the Childrens Cottages of Kew. It gave me an interest in worker self care and led to me founding a program that assists nurses in areas of self care called the Victorian Nurses Health Program.

3. What's the best concert you've been to?

The Rolling Stones in New York 23 years ago. It was an awesome, musically powerful concert. I danced all night.

4. What makes you happy?

Dance. Music. The mountains. Good food. Good friends and family. It's important for me to be passionate about my work. I refuse to work in a job I don't love and feel passion for. I feel that passion for SHARC.

5. What do peers mean to you?

I have peers in all areas of my life. They assist me to get connected with the fact that I'm not alone. They're stories represent hope for me, shared experience and wisdom.



A study published in the Lancet by D. Spiegel of Stanford University:

Women with mastitic inoperable breast cancer were randomly split into two groups. One group met for 1.5 hours a week in a peer support group to talk about living with breast cancer. The other group didn't. The group that had met for peer support ended up living twice as long as the other group.

Peer Help - Family Members Stories

Jenny's story

THROUGHOUT THE CHAOTIC PERIODS THAT AFFECTED ME AND MY FAMILY I ALWAYS COMFORTED MYSELF WITH THE DETERMINATION OF 'GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY' WHEN THINGS HAD SETTLED DOWN.

I held onto that thought for years as the chaos of having a loved one with an addiction seemed to have me feeling ok one day, and in the pits of despair the next.

Why did it affect me so much? I felt so powerless to save my child, who I was observing spiraling downhill, and there wasn't a damned thing I could do.

My son Luke didn't want my help and whenever I rang to try and get help for him, I was told that Luke had to make the contact and it had to be his decision, not mine. I'd get off the phone so disheartened and not knowing where to turn – no one was offering me a lifeline. Isn't it a parent's role to protect your child?

Society made its own judgments when our 'family secret' was discovered.

THERE WERE PEOPLE I THOUGHT WERE FRIENDS WHO NO LONGER WANTED TO MIX WITH US OR JUST KEPT AWAY AS IF THIS HIDEOUS DISEASE OF ADDICTION WAS CONTAGIOUS.

My other children were branded by a teacher 'Oh you're Luke's brother; we'll have to watch you won't we'.

My other children had their own reactions to their sibling with one taking on a protector role and another a smothering role. Consequently no one in our family was living the role they had before Luke's addiction including Luke.

Chaos was a word that dominated our household.

I even played around with the word to try and get 'the message' through to Luke.

Can't He Abstain Or Stop?

One night I saw an ad in the local paper asking for people with experience of a loved one's drug and or alcohol addiction to work on a Helpline. Wow, this was unbelievable, a place that was there for families.

I applied, was interviewed and asked some difficult questions, but they were questions of understanding. I was concerned about how much I was expected to relate to other volunteers about the affects of drugs on my family, but quickly became at ease once involved in the training because we traveled the same journey of pain, shame and guilt.

AT THE TIME I WORKED IN A PROFESSIONAL FIELD WHERE ABSOLUTELY NO ONE KNEW OF MY PAIN, SHAME AND GUILT ABOUT THE AFFECTS ON OUR FAMILY.

So many times on a week-end I was called up to 'rescue' Luke from a situation or hospital. You learn techniques to overcome difficult questions and mine were to answer a question with another question. When I started working as a volunteer on the Helpline, I was amazed at how 'safe' and friendly the environment was and I was so relaxed because I didn't have to try and think ahead of what to say to protect my family.

WORKING WITH PEERS IS SUCH A DELIGHT IN THAT WE SHARE SIMILAR ISSUES AND THERE'S AN UNSPOKEN UNDERSTANDING.

We are very sensitive to each others needs and support each other, a real camaraderie. Most of all, the callers that we assist really benefit from our understanding because 'we've been there' and we care.

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AnNe's Story

MY 18 YEAR OLD SON SLUMPED ACROSS HIS CAR ONE SUNNY SEP-

TEMBER MORNING. AS I ASKED HIM TO MOVE IT SO I COULD LEAVE FOR WORK, HE TOLD ME THAT HE WAS ADDICTED TO HEROIN.

I WAS IN SHOCK, NUMB WITH DISBELIEF. SURELY I WOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THIS WAS THE CASE.

I knew he smoked fairly high quantities of dope, but this was different. He was pale, skeletally thin, shaking and sweating.

What was going on?

Fear raged through my body. I needed to know what to do, how to handle this. He had changed from the bright, blue eyed, outgoing young teenager of a few years before.

Relationships with all members of the family were tense and fractured. The relationship between my husband and I was very fragile. He accused me of being too soft and unyieldingly gullible towards our son. I accused him of being too hard, judgemental and not understanding. We both held our posts with white knuckled determination, accusing the other of being wrong. Our family life suffered in every way.

Our son's journey continued to living on the streets, stealing and going to jail. He was the only person I knew that had been to jail.

We were too ashamed and felt too much guilt to share this with other family members, or friends. No one else seemed to have this problem in their family.

My husband was of a European background and this type of problem was very humiliating for his culture. My family made sly jokes and put downs regarding our son, which increased my isolation and shame.

I was very resistant to support groups.

I imagined that it would entail sitting together, with a whole lot of other people in my position, whingeing about how hardly done by we were to have these addicted people in our lives, then re-hash all the drama and devastation that had occurred. So I remained isolated and just did counselling for some time. However, the isolation, shame and guilt continued. Finally I put aside all my preconceived ideas and decided to go to a support group and find out for myself. **What I found were kind, understanding, accepting loving people who completely understood me and where I had been.** There was no judgement or criticism of me. All the other people in my life kept telling me that I needed to do something to help my son, make him stop, help him find help, give him money and send him to relatives in the country or overseas.

However, the support group did exactly what they said they would do, they supported ME. I became educated about how others had dealt with exactly the same problems. I learned the ability to try new strategies. I received information about how drugs had affected my son.

The best thing I learnt was how to love him with no judgement, not to impose my views on him and allow him to journey his way through life in the way that he needed. I was not to be taken advantage of and to set boundaries with him. The understanding and love we have for each actually grew and he learnt to grow within himself...and so did I. **It was not easy, I had to change a lot, but it was all worth it. I gained from support groups what I couldn't get anywhere else: peer based understanding, love and acceptance.** It was a very important part of MY recovery. Free, ongoing and very worthwhile.

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Oddly enough, due to the media hype, the only ones eligible to serve on the addict's case were a jury of his peers



“I believe, if we take habitual drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class. There seems ever to have been a proneness in the brilliant and warm-blooded to fall into this vice.”

– Abraham Lincoln

Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)

APSU believe that individuals who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by people who use or have used services, for people who use or have used services.

We invite you to join us in having a say. If you would like to become a member, (at no cost), please fill out the form below.



**If you have walked the walk...
You are FIT for it**
(suitable by nature, qualified, worthy)

Membership Application

I wish to become a member of APSU and receive the free quarterly FLIPSIDE newsletter

Name

Address

Phone

Email

Signature Date.

Language spoken at home Disability

Are you: service provider service user family member other ?

Mail to: **APSU 140 Grange Road, Carnegie 3163**

or go to our website: **www.apsuonline.org.au**

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