Identification of Best Practices in Peer Support: Executive Summary and Background Paper

Final

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .......................................................................................................................... 1

Introduction and Background ........................................................................................................ 3
  Role and Benefits of Peer Support ................................................................................................ 3
  Peer Program Structures ................................................................................................................ 5

Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 6

Findings .......................................................................................................................................... 7
  Adequate planning and preparation ............................................................................................... 7
  Clearly articulated polices ............................................................................................................. 8
  Systematic screening and defined selection criteria for peer supporters ...................................... 10
  Leveraging benefits from uniqueness of peer status .................................................................... 11
  Enabling continued learning ........................................................................................................ 12

Discussion of Actionable Options .................................................................................................. 13

Final Thoughts ............................................................................................................................... 19

Appendix A: List of Reviewed Peer-to-Peer Programs ................................................................. 20

Appendix B: Interview List ............................................................................................................. 21

Appendix C: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Draft Peer Support Competencies .................... 22

Appendix D: Peer-to-Peer Program Training Comparison ............................................................ 23

Appendix E: Peer-to-Peer Program Outcome Evaluations ............................................................. 25

Appendix F: Identified Components of Peer-to-Peer Programs .................................................. 26

Appendix G: Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 28

Appendix H: Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury
(DCoE) Resilience and Prevention (R&P) Team Addendum .......................................................... 35
  Addendum to DCoE report on “Identification of Best Practices in Peer Support: Executive
  Summary and Background Paper” ................................................................................................. 35
  References ....................................................................................................................................... 38

  Brief Summaries of Peer-to-Peer Programs Examined for “Identification of Best Practices
  in Peer Support Background Paper” ............................................................................................ 40
FIGURES

Figure 1. What Peer Support Can Do................................................................................................. 3
Figure 2. Interconnected Benefits Derived From Peer Support.......................................................... 4
Figure 3. Programs Reviewed ........................................................................................................... 6
Figure 4. Anonymity and Confidentiality Measures ........................................................................... 9
Figure 5. CDC DSRT Team Member Selection Criteria................................................................. 10
Figure 6. California National Guard Peer Support Persons Selection Criteria ............................... 10
Figure 7. Vet-to-Vet Peer Support Survey ...................................................................................... 13
Figure 8. Key Components for Peer Support .................................................................................. 13
Figure 9. Using Peers in Combating Operational Stress .............................................................. 15
Figure 10. Using Peers in Suicide Prevention ............................................................................... 16
Figure 11. Using Peers in Suicide Helplines .................................................................................. 17
Figure 12. Using Peers in Recovery .............................................................................................. 18

TABLES

Table 1. Peer-to-Peer Program Models............................................................................................ 5
Table 2. Needs and Potential Actionable Options for Peer Support to Address Full Spectrum
  Operational Stress......................................................................................................................... 15
Table 3. Needs and Potential Actionable Options for Peer Support to Aid in Suicide Prevention .... 17
Table 4. Needs and Potential Actionable Options for Peer Support to Aid in Recovery ............... 18
Identification of Best Practices in Peer Support: Executive Summary and Background Paper

Executive Summary

Background
As part of its ongoing mission, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) explored how to most effectively apply the model of peer support in the military environment. The military has cultivated a culture wherein service members take care of each other. The common experiences, particularly for those who have served in combat, bind individuals together. Shared experiences are the foundation for peer support, as they foster the initial trust and credibility necessary for developing relationships in which individuals are willing to speak openly about their problems despite concerns about stigma. Peer-to-peer programs facilitate opportunities for individuals to talk with trained peer supporters who can offer educational and social support and provide avenues for additional help if needed.

Methodology
We compiled information using a literature review, Internet-based research and peer support stakeholder interviews. Empirical research about peer support for our target population — active duty service members — is limited, and therefore, we have focused on programs whose target populations have similar cultural characteristics to the military, including those that address law enforcement, first responders and veterans. Further, the notion of supporting others is often organically ingrained in an organization’s operations and mission. To try to isolate findings on peer support, we narrowed the scope of our review to formalized programs in which peer supporters receive training and resources specifically for their role of supporting others. Oftentimes, these peer support roles are a component of a larger intervention or treatment program. As part of a larger whole, a common limitation in the research is the ability to deduce the effectiveness of programmatic elements of that component versus the impacts of the rest of a program. By aligning the literature-based peer support elements with the methods from existing programs that address issues and audiences similar to the military, we were able to isolate the findings on peer support.

Findings
Based on an analysis of the collected information, we found the following five elements essential to a successful peer-to-peer program:

1. **Adequate planning and preparation**, including identifying needs of the target population and aligning program goals to meet those needs.
2. **Clearly articulated policies to avoid confusion**, especially around role boundaries and confidentiality.
3. **Systematic screening with defined selection criteria for peer supporters**, such as communication skills, leadership ability, character, previous experience or training and individuals who can serve as positive role models.
4. **Leverage benefits from “peer” status**, such as experiential learning, social support and self-empowerment.

5. **Enable continued learning through structured training**, by providing an atmosphere for peer supporters to support each other.

### Actionable Options

Building on our research on essential elements, we outlined potential options for further applying peer support in the military environment. Each of these options is structured around a goal that meets a military need, to provide both the frame of reference and examples of applicability. Full spectrum operational stress, suicide prevention and recovery-related issues are the three military needs we use to illustrate actionable options for how peer support could be applied in the military environment.

1. **Peer support to address full spectrum operational stress** could include:
   - The establishment of a peer supporter role within a unit to provide a relationship-based support role throughout the deployment life cycle.
   - The service member acting as peer supporter could serve as liaison to chaplains, leadership and military medical community.
   - Additional resources could be made available as needed — for example, hotlines in theater for those who seek peer support beyond their own unit.

2. **Peer support to address suicide prevention** could include:
   - Further integrating and highlighting the benefits of peer support in suicide prevention programs to bolster these efforts throughout the military community.
   - Using peers as the first point of contact because those with similar experiences may be able to better relate to a service member who is seeking help, which may compel the individual to listen and trust the peer supporter’s guidance at a particularly critical time.

3. **Peer support to address recovery-related issues** could include:
   - The use of trained patient volunteers (or hiring former patients) at military treatment facilities to act as peer supporters.
   - Peer supporters could provide an example of how to overcome injuries and offer support as someone who has “been there.”

### Final Thoughts

To verify applicability of the peer support actionable options in the military setting, a working group of experts could explore considerations such as how peer-to-peer support would accommodate the diverse nature of the military, including varied ranks, gender and job requirements. The working group could comprise representatives from across the services and ranks to further refine the peer support options and develop an implementation strategy specific, if necessary, to each of the services.
Introduction and Background

The Identification of Best Practices in Peer Support: Executive Summary and Background Paper seeks to identify the various elements associated with success in peer support program models as they might relate to the active duty military environment. Peer support is assistance provided by a person with direct experience in a situation, familiarity with a particular stressor, or shared characteristics of the targeted population (WHO 2007). Currently, peer support is widely used in formal and informal programs to have a positive impact on individuals with shared diseases, conditions or situations (Solomon 2004). Potential positive outcomes from the use of peer support are listed in Figure 1. For the purposes of this paper, the population under consideration is active duty service members, with the understanding that within that population are many subset cultures and needs.

Due to the stressful nature of the work of service members, particularly those who have seen combat, the military has cultivated a culture wherein service members take care of each other. This mentality easily lends itself to an environment where service members rely on the natural support of their colleagues to cope with stress. In a recent behavioral health survey of more than 28,000 active duty military personnel, talking with friends and family was the second most common coping strategy for dealing with stress with 73 percent responding to using that strategy frequently or sometimes (Bray, Pemberton, Hourani, et al 2008). Strong social support networks have been linked to resilience, which is a fundamental component of successfully managing stress (Groh 2008, Meichenbaum 2005).

Peer-to-peer programs are those that use peer support as a primary intervention for healthy to recently distressed adults. In a formalized peer-to-peer program, the peer providing the support has received some level of training and has access to more intensive support resources (Finn 1998). Though peer support discussions can facilitate the strengthening of an individual, a peer supporter is not a professional counselor, and some individuals may have needs that fall beyond the scope of a peer-to-peer program and require professional support. Providing peer support training to service members, many of whom are already providing informal social support, could serve to increase the effectiveness of the individual to provide support as well as increase his or her ability to identify a potential situation before a crisis event occurs (Grenier 2007).

There are various approaches to effectively implementing peer support. By examining these approaches, we isolated key elements that would be applicable in diverse military situations.

**ROLE AND BENEFITS OF PEER SUPPORT**

Peer support is an intervention that leverages shared experience to foster trust, decrease stigma and create a sustainable forum for seeking help and sharing information. Peer-to-peer programs can also promote awareness among the target population(s) and reduce stigma merely by providing a platform for discussion. Peer supporters “speak the same language” as a result of the shared experience, which

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**Figure 1. What Peer Support Can Do**

- Foster social networking
- Improve quality of life
- Promote wellness
- Improve coping skills
- Support acceptance of illness/situation
- Improve compliance (e.g., medication adherence)
- Reduce concerns
- Increase satisfaction with health status

fosters an environment of credibility and trust. Service members can have a greater willingness to share their feelings and concerns with someone who has had similar experiences, such as combat experience, than with someone who has not. Credibility and trust are integral for the beneficial relationships of peer support to develop and the helpful peer-to-peer interactions to occur. Figure 2 illustrates how peer support provides wide-ranging benefits by connecting individuals within an environment of credibility.

Figure 2. Interconnected Benefits Derived From Peer Support

Peer support provides benefits to the individual participant, the peer supporter, the health provider community and the surrounding community (Solomon 2004). For the individual, peer support increases social relationships and provides education to support positive coping behaviors and information on resources beyond the immediate peer supporter.1 Peer supporters, in turn, can experience a sense of empowerment by helping another peer and can build their own self-efficacy and strength (Hibbard 2002).

Peer supporters can also facilitate referrals of individuals who require professional assistance before a crisis event occurs. Through peer support options, the health provider community can reach individuals who may not be currently using their services (Solomon 2004). Peer supporters can also liaise between the individual and the psychological health professional to help them better understand the experience (e.g., military environment) and the needs of the individual requiring services (Grenier 2007).

Finally, the community — the military itself or an individual’s family or loved ones — benefits from the participation of the individual service member in peer support. Benefits include healthier relationships and empowered individuals who are better able to cope with their feelings and are more likely to be productive than if they were previously distracted by stress, or dealing with depression or substance abuse (Campbell, Leaver 2003).

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1 A note on terminology: The literature on peer support and the various peer-to-peer programs use numerous terms to refer to those participating in peer support. For the purposes of this paper, we use “peer supporter” as a general term to refer to the peer who has received training and is providing the support (e.g., mentor, leader, support technician, coordinator, etc.). We use “individual” or “participant” to refer to the peers (e.g., client, patient, etc.) who are receiving the support services from the peer supporter.
**Peer Program Structures**

We have focused on four models demonstrating how peer-to-peer programs can be structured (Table 1). These four models are: support group, peer mentor, community health worker and peer educator (Heisler 2006). Peer support can be delivered by multiple modes, including in-person, by phone or over the Internet. A peer-to-peer program can apply and pair the above models and modes in various ways, offering more than one option for participants.

Table 1. Peer-to-Peer Program Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support Group</strong></td>
<td>Multiple individuals meeting to share experiences</td>
<td>Opportunity to learn from others’ experiences and more opportunities to strengthen social network</td>
<td>Can be hard to start, requires administrative support and multiple individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Mentor</strong></td>
<td>Mentor meets with an individual one-on-one</td>
<td>Individual attention and advocacy</td>
<td>Dependent on the abilities of the peer supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Health Worker</strong></td>
<td>Liaison between a population and health care providers; not always a true peer</td>
<td>Ability to build a bridge between health providers and individuals not already in care</td>
<td>Peers may become absorbed into health provider system and lose peer qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Educator</strong></td>
<td>Educational course with discussion time</td>
<td>Access to information, recognition that there are others in same situation</td>
<td>Short-term intervention; does not provide ongoing support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Support Group**

The support group model can be approached in two different ways: led by a professional or by a peer. To facilitate and provide a welcoming forum for engaged discussion, groups typically include no more than 10 – 15 individuals and meet on a regular schedule, for example, at least once a month (Heisler 2006). Depending on the structure of the group, participants may be part of the same group that meets together regularly or may be able to participate on a drop-in basis. Some groups offer mutual support to a mixed membership while others are targeted for a specific subset (e.g., gender, condition) (Campbell, Leaver 2003). Participating in a peer support group can offer individuals the opportunity to share coping strategies with others currently managing the same situation. The group meetings can also serve as an entry point for a one-on-one discussion with either the professional or peer leader.

**Peer Mentor**

In the peer mentor model, the mentor typically meets one-on-one with the individual. For instance, a peer mentor may be assigned to a group of individuals in a clinical treatment setting, or the individual may choose a peer mentor from among a group of trained peer supporters. In all models, the peer mentor’s role is to provide a positive example of someone who has experienced the same or similar situation/issues. Peer mentors receive training on communication skills, available resources and steps to take in the event a situation is beyond their level of training (Heisler 2007). Of the various programs that use the peer mentor approach, some programs employ the mentors and some operate via volunteer personnel.
Community Health Worker

The community health worker model uses an individual, typically employed by a health care provider, to act as a liaison between an individual and the health care provider. Though the community health worker may not share a specific condition or situation, he or she should share a culture with the target population (Perez-Escamilla et al 2008). For example, a community health worker could be someone with a military background who may no longer be in the service or may have minimal combat experience that provides support for those coping with combat-related stress. The community health worker approach can provide a means to overcome barriers to care access, such as language or distrust of medical professionals (Heisler 2007). The focus in this model is typically less about the peer support, and more targeted on education, prevention and awareness (CHW Study 2007).

Peer Educator

The peer educator model uses an educational platform wherein one to two peers lead a short course on condition or situation management and incorporate an interactive discussion period (Campbell, Leaver 2003). Each course may be approximately 6 weeks long and be small enough (10 – 15 individuals) so that group dialogue can take place. Many peer-to-peer programs also use phone and Internet support to supplement face-to-face meetings and to enable geographically isolated service members and families to connect with each other and access services and resources (Heisler 2007). These technologies have both benefits and drawbacks. When individuals do not meet face-to-face, body and facial cues that might otherwise inform diagnosis, provide context or raise an alert are lost. While anonymity of online interaction may encourage disclosure, it complicates tracking, referrals and follow-up. Moreover, some communities still do not have easy Internet access and may be in need of services.

Methodology

For this effort, we focused on peer support programs that could be effectively applied to active duty service members, including activated National Guard and Reserve. Information was compiled through a literature review, internet-based research, and peer support stakeholder interviews conducted from October 2009 and January 2010 (Appendix B). We identified several programs that consistently had applicability to and potential for lessons learned for the military environment (Figure 3).

2 Two additional peer support programs were identified after this main report was complete: Vets4Vets, and Vet-2-Vet (New Jersey). These programs are summarized in Appendix H and were considered in drawing the Appendix H conclusions.
More detailed information on these programs can be found in Appendix A.

In compiling the research, we noted several limitations. Information on our target population — active duty service members — is limited. As such, we examined programs for audiences with similar cultural characteristics. The peer support programs on which our findings are based are those aimed at law enforcement personnel, first responders and veterans.

Much of the evidence identifying the proven success of key elements centers on anecdotal data. Although useful, this data is limited because it cannot provide a verified assessment of an element. The empirical evidence that does exist is limited to randomized control and quasi-experimental trials between including and not including peer support, which makes it difficult to identify successful specific programmatic elements. Further, peer support is often a component of a larger program; deducing the effectiveness of that single component versus the impacts of the rest of a program is often not included in the literature.

Finally, most of the available research has not revealed or taken into account the participating individual’s point of view, which could divulge additional benefits of peer support or suggest improvements for elements already in place.

Based on the limited available evidence, we identified:

- Elements repeatedly confirmed to be central to the success of peer support efforts.
- Methods peer-to-peer programs use to address various concerns in diverse environments.
- Methods effective in populations with needs similar to those of the military community.

By aligning the literature-based peer support elements with the methods from existing programs that address issues and audiences similar to the military, we were able to isolate the findings on peer support discussed in the next section.

Findings

Research indicates that effective peer-to-peer programs share several critical elements. These critical elements are important throughout the program life cycle, from planning and preparation through implementation and finally program maintenance and adaptation.

Adequate Planning and Preparation

As discussed earlier, the benefits of peer support can be applied to a range of goals across vastly different settings. It is critical for the implementing organization to identify the needs of the target population and set specific program goals to meet those needs (Grauwiler, Barocas, Mills 2008). These identified needs can be used to shape the role of the peer supporter. Programs that develop comprehensive processes and policies are able to hold individuals, both peer supporters and participating individuals, accountable and responsible for performance (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler, et al 2008, Grauwiler, Barocas, Mills 2008). Even for a volunteer-based program, it is beneficial to have prepared clearly articulated policies to avoid confusion. Production of a program manual can enable
replication and facilitate model fidelity monitoring between program sites (Campbell, Leaver 2003). In the military environment, this would include service-specific doctrine. A written job description for the peer supporter enables all stakeholders to have a view into what is and what is not within the scope of the peer supporter’s responsibilities. Involving non-peer staff (e.g., medical or administrative personnel) in defining the role of the peer supporter can help to avoid confusion in the future and establish peer-to-peer program buy-in (Chinman, Lucksted, Gresen et al 2008). A clearly defined peer supporter role can also enhance the development of and scope the peer selection screening criteria and peer supporter training needs. Taking the time to define these elements in advance of launching a program can eliminate confusion in the future.

CLEARLY ARTICULATED POLICIES

Those involved in peer support may have multiple roles within an organization; for example, they might have shared and non-shared relationships (e.g., a peer leader in one group could be a participant in another group). To assist both the peer leader and the participant(s), two crucial steps have been identified: establishing clear role boundaries and defining the level(s) of confidentiality (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al. 2002).

Role Boundaries

Role boundaries define a professional relationship and create clarity, safety and predictability for the individual and the peer supporter (Grenier 2007). These boundaries set limits on the interactions between the individual and the peer supporter (who is not a therapist) for a beneficial relationship. When a peer supporter is chosen from a group of individuals who know each other, there is the possibility that those who are not chosen may be resentful (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler, et al 2008). When the peer supporter has a connection to the individuals outside of the peer-to-peer interaction, dual roles can be present. The individuals may also feel that confidentiality is at risk (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008). For this reason, some programs (POPPA, Cop 2 Cop) provide peer support only between individuals who do not know one another.
Confidentiality

Regardless of whether the individual is known to the supporter, confidentiality is an essential tenet for allowing the individual to overcome apprehensions about stigma and negative repercussions and to freely discuss his or her concerns. Confidentiality policies should be frequently discussed and detailed in writing for all parties involved in the peer support program. Protection should be in place for the peer supporter as well as the individual participant (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al 2002). Figure 4 provides some examples of measures that programs undertake to provide a confidential environment. If peer supporters share information learned about an individual “outside of service setting,” it could diminish trust in the system (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al 2002). The violation of trust by one peer supporter could potentially discredit an entire peer-to-peer program.

While confidentiality must be respected, it is not limitless. Most programs have conditions under which the individual’s right to confidentiality will be broken. In most peer-to-peer programs, these include situations where individuals pose a threat to themselves or a threat to specific people. Other programs, such as the California National Guard Peer Support Program, include additional limits on admitted child, spouse and elder abuse and other violations of criminal laws (e.g., Uniform Code of Military Justice).
SYSTEMATIC SCREENING AND DEFINED SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PEER SUPPORTERS

At the crux of a peer-to-peer program is the interaction between the trained peers offering support (peer supporters) and the service members receiving peer support (individual participants). Adequate screening for a peer supporter is critical. Effective peer supporters typically possess a range of skills and competencies across key knowledge domains. Commonly desired traits are superb communication and listening skills, demonstrated leadership ability or potential, ability to stay calm under pressure, and previous experience or training. Figure 5 provides the selection criteria of the CDC Deployment Safety and Resiliency Team and Figure 6 provides that of the California National Guard Peer Support Persons. The draft list of competencies for VA Peer Support Technicians is provided in Appendix C.

Multiple stakeholders have to be considered in the screening process of a peer support program (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008). POPPA administrative staff, a psychological health professional and a current peer supporter screen potential volunteers of the POPPA program.

One benefit of peer-to-peer support is the opportunity for the individual participant to be able to look to the peer supporter as a positive role model. Therefore, based on observations from researchers, a peer supporter should be stable and in recovery for any psychological health and substance abuse issues (Solomon 2004, Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008).

Recovery programs for individuals with physical injuries (ACA-NPN) try to match individuals to peer supporters who have sustained similar physical injuries, so they can best provide knowledge-based support to individuals. Similarly, experiential knowledge gained from past experience with the mental health delivery system can provide a peer supporter with additional credibility when engaging an individual who may be struggling, and provide firsthand answers and referral to services (Solomon 2004). To ensure this credibility, some recovery-based programs (OSISS, VA PST) require past experience with a psychological health issue in their definition of a peer.

Figure 5. CDC DSRT Team Member Selection Criteria

- Able to deal with ambiguous situations
- Possess and routinely apply analytical skills
- Communicate in concise but caring manner
- Decisive
- Firm but flexible
- Learns quickly and easily
- Reputation as “good listener”
- Observant of behavior and processes
- Persuasive without being overbearing
- Rugged
- Sensitive to nuances of situations and people
- Consistently manage stress effectively
- Able to identify teaching moments
- Experience negotiating successfully
- Able to recover quickly from illness, change or misfortune; “buoyant”

Source: CDC Deployment Safety and Resiliency Team Member Training Presentation

Figure 6. California National Guard Peer Support Persons Selection Criteria

- PSPs should be chosen from volunteers who are currently in good standing with their unit and who have received recommendations from their superiors and/or peers.
- Considerations for selection of PSP candidates include, but are not limited to: previous education and training, resolved traumatic experience, and desirable interpersonal qualities, such as maturity, judgment and personal and professional credibility.

Source: California National Guard Peer Support Guidelines
LEVERAGING BENEFITS FROM UNIQUENESS OF PEER STATUS

Benefits of peer support identified in the research are experiential learning, social support and self-empowerment. For the benefits to be realized, peer supporters must be willing to be open and honest about their experiences and journey to recovery. This genuine communication enables the participants to realize maximum benefits. Research and anecdotal evidence validates this approach.

For example, in four randomized studies and three quasi-experimental design studies conducted in the mental health community, essentially the same services were delivered by a peer with an acknowledged psychological health issue and by another non-peer provider. Participants showed the same or better outcomes from the peer-delivered services (Solomon 2004). This is attributed to the ability of a peer to share firsthand knowledge of coping with the problems the participants are facing as discussed above. If peers did not willingly share their own experiences with participants, through individual choice or program design, the peer-to-peer program would lack this experiential learning benefit (Solomon 2004, Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008).

Social support has been shown to increase resilience by moderating the impact of a potentially stressful event and having someone to talk with in order to prevent maladaptive response (Grenier 2007). It has also been demonstrated as a mechanism for reinforcing positive behavior change (Groh, Jason, Keys 2008). Individuals under duress from stress or other conditions may begin to withdraw from social situations or may have a limited support network. Participating in a peer-to-peer program broadens an individual’s support network (Solomon 2004). Individuals may develop friendships with other participants that expand beyond the formal program. These relationships provide additional sources of support in times of need for physical assistance (e.g., a ride to work) or emotional assistance (e.g., someone who will listen). Peer-to-peer programs that provide sustained contact will facilitate opportunities for the development of stronger relationships and strengthen a participant’s social support network.

The concept of empowerment is central to the use of peers. By learning from peers who are “like me,” participants build their view of what is possible for them. Peer supporters provide education and support that is easier to accept than if a medical professional or supervisor is “telling you what to do.” Participation in a peer program also gives individuals the opportunity to take care of each other and empowers them to be a part of the solution by helping others. This desire to help one another is a motivating force in both veteran and law enforcement peer-to-peer programs (POPPA, VA PST). The peer supporters gain value from helping others with their problems. In four pre- and post- test studies in the mental health community, hospitalizations for peer case manager aides were reduced (Solomon 2004). Interestingly, key components for realizing the empowerment benefit are that participants voluntarily choose to attend, and that the program itself is controlled by the peer. Programs that require mandatory participation lose the self-determination and commitment that comes from voluntary participation. Studies in which participants were randomly assigned to participate in peer programs had a low return.
rate and a lack of commitment (Solomon 2004). Investigators observe that they also see lower empowerment in individuals when the program is controlled by non-peers (Solomon 2004).

ENABLING CONTINUED LEARNING

Training

Training is a critical aspect for ensuring consistency and confidence in peer supporters. As mentioned earlier, specific training needs should be developed in association with the defined role of the peer supporter within the peer-to-peer program. Some programs have developed or adapted their own training program while others use external training programs (Appendix D). Two highly regarded training programs are the Georgia Peer Support Certification Project and the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance on-site training (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008).

Peer support training typically consists of content-based training on relevant topics and procedural training on relevant skills (Chinman, Hamilton, Butler et al 2008). Topic-based training can include information on stress-related injuries, substance abuse, confidentiality, boundaries, ethics, available referral resources and other subjects. Skills-based training can include topics such as effective listening, crisis procedures and how to facilitate a support group. Several programs (CNG, VA PST, POPPA) use role play to allow peer supporters to enact scenarios and practice how to respond in challenging peer interactions. Even less formal volunteer-based programs would benefit from training on leadership, organizational and listening skills (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al 2002).

In the most robust programs, training is not a one-time occurrence, but additional training (e.g., annual) is provided to refresh peer supporters on their skills and to enable sharing of lessons learned. Peer supporters can also learn by “provid[ing] support to one another as peers” (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al 2002). Although there is little research evidence, it logically follows that peer supporters would themselves find peer support beneficial. Some peer-to-peer programs have conference calls (Vet-to-Vet) and newsletters (ACA-NPN) and others have Internet groups to facilitate discussion and strength-building between peer supporters.

Data Collection and Outcomes

It is critical for programs to collect data on the effectiveness of the program and the peer supporter. If they are not performing effectively, it is necessary to determine if the cause is an individual or systemic. This data could then be aggregated to determine best practices (Chinman, Lucksted, Gresen et al 2008). Programs can also informally monitor how individuals are doing. If the monitoring indicates that an individual is not doing well, then someone from the program can check in with that person (Salzer, Berkey, Dodson, et al 2002). By collecting process and impact evaluations, data programs can “address gaps in empirical knowledge … [and] also assist in advancing the potential of this unique peer-based intervention to the next level” (Grauwiler, Barocas, Mills 2008).

Few peer-to-peer programs have published studies on outcome measures and effectiveness. In general, these studies look to reconcile measures of participant satisfaction, program structure and health outcomes (Appendix E). Figure 7 provides details on the Vet-to-Vet peer support survey.


Identification of Best Practices in Peer Support: Executive Summary and Background Paper

June, 2010

13

Discussion of Actionable Options

In both formal and informal programs, the military community already applies the theory of peer support in many ways. For example, through the Army Wounded Warriors Program (AW2) and DCoE’s Real Warriors Campaign, service members volunteer to share their own stories, which can encourage others to seek help or to understand that they are not alone. The new Master Trainer Resilience (MRT) program, part of the Army Comprehensive Soldier Fitness initiative, is reinforcing the strengthening of individual resilience skills and sharing those coping mechanisms with fellow service members to increase overall strength. A behavior currently used by service members to cope with stress is informal naturally occurring social support. In fact, the majority of active duty service members state that they talk with family members or friends to cope with stress. Some of the key components for peer support are highlighted in Figure 8.

As a result of reviewing existing peer-to-peer support programs inside and outside of the military as well as literature pertaining to peer support methods and practices, and building on the findings previously identified, we have outlined some potential options for how the military community could continue to offer peer support. In discussing these options, we frame each approach to address a specific need for the military community: full spectrum operational stress, suicide prevention and recovery. Because these needs intersect, there is some crossover in the discussion of ideas offered below. Moreover, these ideas are not intended to be mutually exclusive; a comprehensive peer-to-peer program could include several components designed to address different needs, or elements of peer support could be enhanced in existing programs. Several of the example peer-to-peer program models we reviewed had multiple program components to address the needs of their target audiences (See Appendix F).
Numerous existing programs and command structures established at different locations within the services already contribute to addressing the identified needs. Our discussion acknowledges the existing programs, but does not address their integration with peer-to-peer support. To do so, a more thorough review at the service level would be required. Peer support is not a therapy or treatment program, and thus requires surrounding resources and programs for those in need of additional care. Some peer-to-peer programs operate independently from health care systems to serve individuals who have a “distrust of the system” or are concerned that a program associated with their employer will negatively affect their career. However, other peer-to-peer programs operate within or in close collaboration with a specific treatment facility or system. Both types of programs can use shared experiences of peers to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to use the existing health resources available to them, and peers can help individuals successfully navigate through the system. Embedded programs can build trust in the system, and peers can serve as liaisons so that the military health system better understands patient needs. These embedded programs alleviate some of the concerns about external peer-to-peer programs that might allow a service member’s needs to go unheeded if information is not shared for follow-up, or the situation is not adequately addressed. The peer support program options discussed below enable the existence of a peer program within the military structure, which would allow a service member to seek and receive care within the military health system.

Full Spectrum Operational Stress

The nature of the work required of service members and the environment in which they operate can lead to increased stress levels. Deployment into theater — away from loved ones and serving in locations where life-threatening situations are likely to occur — can further exacerbate the ability to manage stress levels. Operational stress may result from a particular traumatic incident or be a gradual response to increased stress. As such, ongoing support and provision of resources following critical incidents are necessary for assisting those who are managing operational stress. Table 2 highlights some of the key components for doing so.

One method for addressing the full spectrum operational stress needs of active duty service members via peer support would be to select a peer supporter from within a unit. In this model, the peer supporters could either volunteer or be assigned. In either case, they should be screened and selected for suitability and then must be trained, knowledgeable and held accountable in their role. The availability and accessibility of a peer supporter throughout the deployment cycle would provide sustained relationship contact and bolster the ability of the peer supporter to relate to the service members, both on and off the battlefield. Identifying those individuals with the interpersonal skills to be a peer supporter — the ability to engage and connect with a service member — is vital to the success of a program addressing operational stress. An individual must be able to relate to and feel comfortable actively reaching out to the peer supporter.
Table 2. Needs and Potential Actionable Options for Peer Support to Address Full Spectrum Operational Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Components of Need</th>
<th>Potential Actionable Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustained support throughout service</strong></td>
<td>A volunteer or assigned member of the unit is embedded in the unit through the deployment life cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification of those needing additional support</strong></td>
<td>Embedded member should have an understanding of normal reactions to abnormal circumstances and actively reach out to service members who may not be currently using services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow-through to additional services if needed</strong></td>
<td>Peer supporter could serve as a liaison with chaplains, leadership and health community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preference for different modes or anonymity</strong></td>
<td>Depending on resources, peer supporters could offer multiple options: one-on-one, group, hotline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sustained relationship or contact with a peer supporter over time has significant benefits. Such contact enables a peer supporter to detect changes in an individual who may be having a difficult reaction to a particular stressor. A peer supporter could provide outreach to those who may not realize they could benefit from having someone with whom to talk. The peer supporter would be trained to identify an extreme reaction to the unusual circumstances service members may face on a day-to-day basis. Through their social relationships, peer supporters may learn of events (e.g., death of a buddy, disciplinary hearing, divorce, etc.) that may be difficult for individuals to cope with and know to reach out to them at that time.

In many cases, the individuals who become peer supporters are those who already are unofficially filling this role. They are known as persons who will always listen. A formal peer-to-peer program would provide recognition for the work these individuals are already doing and would train them to enhance their natural ability to provide positive support. As a designated point person, the peer supporter could serve as a liaison with chaplains, unit leadership and the military health community. As a trusted advisor to their peers, peer supporters can influence individuals to seek additional help. The ongoing relationship between the individual and the peer supporter within the same unit provides several of the benefits mentioned above, but can also lead to confusion on boundaries. The articulation of program policies would help to establish clear boundary roles and expectations. Strong and clear confidentiality agreements would also be needed so that the peer supporter is seen as someone trustworthy to whom a service member can turn.

Because individuals’ needs vary, a one-time peer-to-peer interaction might be sufficient for an individual to receive the necessary support and information to cope with his or her situation or to be referred to additional services. In other instances, individuals may benefit from ongoing discussions about changes in their situation. To diminish the burden on peer supporters and not limit their effectiveness, the peer support services would require an administrative structure (training, oversight, etc.) and access to the

Figure 9. Using Peers in Combating Operational Stress

- In the CDC’s DSRT program, an individual from each unit is trained in psychological first aid to monitor and assess the state of his or her co-workers during deployment.
- In the CNG Peer Support Program, trained individuals are available to meet with fellow service members at drill and during deployment.
- The U.K. TRiM program uses peers to screen individuals who may need additional testing or services following a traumatic incident.
psychological health team. Figure 9 provides examples of how some programs are currently using peers to address full-spectrum operational stress.

This cadre of trained peer supporters could also be used to provide peer support through additional channels, depending on the operational environment. For example, they could lead a monthly support group, staff a hotline or facilitate an online community. These options could be made available in theater (a hotline could be accessed via a DSN line) or elsewhere and would provide other ways for individuals to connect with a trained peer supporter. Additional modalities would provide access to the peer-to-peer program to those individuals who are uncomfortable talking with someone they know. A list of peer supporters would allow individuals to seek out a supporter who is known or unknown to them depending on their needs, and to access a back-up when their peer supporter is unavailable (e.g., reassignment). With multiple peer supporters available, an individual could seek one who is “more like them” if the unit embedded peer supporter is not a good fit (e.g., female service member wanting to speak with another female). This additional level of anonymity or disassociation may be a valuable way to encourage those who may otherwise not take action at all.

Peer supporters are also in a unique position to respond following a traumatic incident. They have a baseline familiarity with the members of their unit. They are seen as trustworthy and credible, which are traits that a trauma stress response team engaging with individuals after an incident has occurred may not have. Some programs use an embedded peer supporter as a touchstone within that unit to coordinate with the trauma stress response team.

**Suicide Prevention**

Comprehensive suicide prevention programs include ongoing prevention strategies and resources for intervening at time of crisis or suicidal ideation. Addressing the needs of operational stress would indirectly contribute to suicide prevention by providing ongoing support, encouraging assistance seeking and strengthening resilience. Several of the peer support programs created to address suicide prevention also handle operational stress and vice versa. This allows individuals to reach out to the program for assistance when they are in sub-crisis or crisis mode, thereby increasing the number of people contacting the program and raising awareness of and familiarity with the program. This is critical for suicide prevention, because an individual in crisis should already be aware of the program. Some programs use peers as gatekeepers who can recognize an individual at risk and immediately transfer them to trained counselors. Peer supporter training must include suicide-prevention-specific communication skills so peer supporters are able to change an individual's course of action while they access additional help. Figure 10 provides examples of how programs are currently using peers to aid in suicide prevention. Table 3 highlights some of the key components of the needs and actionable options using peer support to aid in suicide prevention.
By providing additional suicide prevention training to peer supporters, they will be better positioned to assist chaplains and unit commanders in identifying potential crises and connecting individuals in need to the required resources.

Individuals in crisis may need access to resources immediately, regardless of the time of day or their location (e.g., home, a base or on deployment), and thus many suicide prevention programs employ a hotline model (See Figure 11). The help lines are staffed with volunteer peers (such as law enforcement officers and veterans) to provide instant credibility and to encourage the individual to open up. The individuals seeking assistance know when they log on or pick up the phone that the person with whom they are speaking has been through similar experiences.

**Recovery**

Following a visible or invisible injury, service members may have difficulty during the healing and rehabilitation process, while reintegrating, and possibly while carving out a new role for themselves in either military or civilian life. A peer support program to address recovery would focus on injured active duty service members. Although it would be based in the military community, it could also have civilian community counterparts because recovery often takes place among family and in civilian life. Those recovering from an injury are part of a subset of service members who have not only served, but have visible and/or invisible wounds as a reminder of that service. Peers who have gone through and successfully thrived in similar experiences can provide a level of experiential knowledge that family and loved ones cannot provide.

One option for a peer-to-peer program focused on recovery and recovery-related issues would be to develop the program directly within the MTFs where the service members are receiving care. In this case, the program and peer supporter(s) would coordinate with the medical staff on recovery. As there are MTFs throughout the country, and a service member participating in this program may be returning to a more civilian-focused life, the peer supporters and program leaders should be aware of additional available resources, both military and in the civilian community. Table 4 highlights some of the key components of the needs and actionable options using peer support to aid in recovery.
Table 4. Needs and Potential Actionable Options for Peer Support to Aid in Recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Components of Need</th>
<th>Potential Actionable Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coordination with medical team for accessibility and integrated recovery</strong></td>
<td>Utilize trained patient volunteers (or hire former patients) at MTFs, particularly those with long-term rehabilitation and treatment facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit from those who have been through the recovery process</strong></td>
<td>Peer supporters would be further along/advanced in their rehabilitation and/or recovery to provide the appropriate mentor level for other patients and experiential knowledge of how to access resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow-through is needed to ensure successful road to recovery</strong></td>
<td>Peer mentors could provide a point of contact throughout their next transition back into service, into veteran status, and/or into the civilian community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The peer supporters in the MTFs could be volunteers among long-term patients (particularly those in long-term rehabilitation and treatment facilities) or past patients who return as an employed extension of the medical team. If peer supporters are volunteer patients (or former patients), their tenure in the facility is also a benefit, as their institutional knowledge would allow them to provide a more comprehensive resource for the individuals. In either case, the peer supporters should be at advanced stages in recovery or rehabilitation so that they are able to act as mentors to the individuals, demonstrating an example of success post-injury (e.g., re-learn to drive a car and continue to be independent after multiple limb loss).

This peer relationship also has benefits to the peer supporters, because they are able to reinforce their own progress and recovery through helping someone else. The role of the peer must be clearly defined to not overstep boundaries and to establish that the peer is not a counselor or a member of the treatment team. Without these steps, a peer could potentially become simply another staff member and lose his or her desired peer qualities.

Further, a recovery-based peer-to-peer program could potentially provide stability in a transitional period (e.g., return to active duty status, or reintegration into civilian community). The social connections of the peer network may be the only contact injured service members have with other military peers once they transition. Figure 12 provides examples of how programs are currently using peers to aid in the recovery of injured service members.

**Figure 12. Using Peers in Recovery**

- Treatment team — VA hires veterans as peer support technicians to be a part of the case management team for veterans with psychological health issues.
- Education — Vet to Vet is a consumer/provider partnership where trained veterans lead educational group sessions at facilities that offer VA mental health services.
- Social Support through transition — The Canadian OSISS Peer Support Network is a joint program that serves active duty and veteran service members. The OSISS Peer Support Coordinator is often times the only constant for service members who change doctors, counselors and sometimes medications and treatment plans through the recovery process.
Final Thoughts

Several considerations should be taken into account when developing a peer-to-peer support program that would be most applicable to the military environment. A working group of experts could review the peer support actionable options to verify applicability in the military setting and explore areas such as how peer-to-peer support would accommodate the diverse nature of the military, including varied ranks, gender and job requirements. Though all service members are in the military, the cultural distinctions among and within the services are vast. The panel could include representation from the different services and levels of command. This is particularly important as peer support requires active participation and initiative from peers. The panel may need to consider separate working groups for each service that would allow the flexibility to develop individualized peer-to-peer programs following basic guidelines and recommendations of essential elements. Service-specific groups could allow review of existing initiatives, programs and training offerings that can be coordinated and integrated with the peer-to-peer program.

As the process evolves, the function and composition of the group should also change. Peer support program and medical directors can offer guidance on the tactile elements of developing policies and procedures, training protocols and performance measures, including the integration with existing military health assessments and data collection efforts. Upon the development of any program, the organizers must integrate the flexibility to respond to lessons learned, participant and peer supporter feedback, and changes in need. It is important to remember that peer support can be a valuable tool to reach disenfranchised individuals through common bonds, but it may not be for everyone. Even with a best-in-class program, there may be individuals who choose to not participate in a peer-to-peer program.
## Appendix A: List of Reviewed Peer-to-Peer Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementer</th>
<th>Program Name</th>
<th>Primary Model</th>
<th>Program Web Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. California National Guard (CNG)</td>
<td>Peer-to-Peer Program</td>
<td>Embedded trained team member</td>
<td><a href="http://www.calguard.ca.gov/J1/Pages/Peer_support.aspx">http://www.calguard.ca.gov/J1/Pages/Peer_support.aspx</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Canadian Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS)</td>
<td>Regional peer coordinators</td>
<td><a href="http://www.osiss.ca/">http://www.osiss.ca/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CDC Workforce and Responder Resiliency Team</td>
<td>Deployment Safety and Resiliency Team (DSRT)</td>
<td>Embedded trained team member</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cdc.gov/news/2009/05/dsrt/">http://www.cdc.gov/news/2009/05/dsrt/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Department of Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Peer Support Technicians (PST)</td>
<td>Member of treatment team</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/docs/phlag5.pdf">http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/docs/phlag5.pdf</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Non-profit - Veterans</td>
<td>Vet-to-Vet</td>
<td>In-person veteran support groups</td>
<td><a href="http://www.vet2vetusa.org/">http://www.vet2vetusa.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Department of Veterans Affairs – Vet Center</td>
<td>Readjustment Counseling Services</td>
<td>Provide outreach and counseling at small community based Vet Centers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/">http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: Interview List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) Program</td>
<td>LTC Stéphane Grenier</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California National Guard — Peer-to-Peer Support Program</td>
<td>Mr. Jon Wilson</td>
<td>Executive Officer of J1 Manpower and Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDC Workforce and Responder Resiliency Team, Deployment Safety and Resiliency Team (DSRT)</td>
<td>Dr. Richard Klomp</td>
<td>Behavioral Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan National Guard, Buddy to Buddy program</td>
<td>COL James D. Bartolacci</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance, Inc. (POPPA)</td>
<td>Mr. Bill Genet</td>
<td>President and Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAND Corporation, Pittsburgh VA VISN-4 Mental Illness, Research, and Clinical Center</td>
<td>Dr. Matthew Chinman</td>
<td>Behavioral Scientist, Health Science Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Health Administration, Mental Health Group</td>
<td>Mr. Dan O’Brien-Mazza</td>
<td>National Director, Peer Support Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet-to-Vet</td>
<td>Mr. Moe Armstrong</td>
<td>Director of Recovery Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Draft Peer Support Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Domain</th>
<th>Skills and Competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Stigma</td>
<td>Managing internalized stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing environmental stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Skills</td>
<td>Effective listening and asking questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication styles (passive/aggressive/assertive) and verbal and nonverbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Competence</td>
<td>Understand how ethnicity, race, spirituality, gender, sexual orientation, local community and other subcultures may influence recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Facilitation Skills</td>
<td>Understanding group dynamics and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing how to use support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Crisis and Emergency Situations</td>
<td>Early warning signs of illness' symptoms worsening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis prevention, using resources early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crisis interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An understanding of suicide prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to work through challenging situations with veterans who are under the influence of substances, angry, in psychosis or a non-verbal state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal safety issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Support Principles</td>
<td>Being a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instilling hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being an advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing principal duties of peer support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development &amp; Workplace Skills</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boundary issues and dual relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to work effectively with professionals on an interdisciplinary team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery Tools</td>
<td>Solving problems using solution-focused strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telling your personal recovery story, being mindful of who you are addressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participating in self-help groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching others how to manage self-talk and combat negative self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery Principles</td>
<td>Overview of psycho-social rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Components of recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stages of recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer support role in psycho-social rehabilitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Different Illnesses</td>
<td>Major psychiatric conditions in DSM IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addictive disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-occurring disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medications and side effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33 Critical Competencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Appendix D: Peer-to-Peer Program Training Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Initial Training</th>
<th>Curriculum Development</th>
<th>Availability of Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDC DSRT</td>
<td>Employee Volunteer: 4-day training with resiliency component (e.g., Psychological First Aid, Stress Management and Coping, Peer Support, Assessment and Proper Referral Protocols) and a safety component (e.g., customized versions of Disaster Site Worker training)</td>
<td>CSTS at USUHS – Dr. Dave Benedek adapted materials from military to civil service</td>
<td>Training presentation available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNG</td>
<td>Employee Volunteer: Three 8-hour days, including discussion of listening skills, personality types, substance abuse, and others and interactive role playing; annual update training</td>
<td>Developed with involvement of a former police chief, influenced by Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) model</td>
<td>Training presentation available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI NG</td>
<td>Employee Volunteer: Two 8-hour training days on communication skills and community resources</td>
<td>Developed by team from MI ARNG and University of Michigan and Michigan State University</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSISS</td>
<td>Employee: Required 2-week training on critical skills development and knowledge on peer support as well as available resources; Quarterly workshops for ongoing professional development Volunteer: 3-day peer support training program on skills development, less focus on administrative policies and procedures</td>
<td>Developed by multi-disciplinary team at Veterans Affairs Canada and St. Anne’s Hospital</td>
<td>Training manual acquired from program director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPPA</td>
<td>Volunteer: Required 8-day training on communication skills, available resources for referral. Expected commitment of 2 years</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRiM</td>
<td>Employee Volunteer: 2- to 4-day training combines didactic teaching and role play to cover psychological first aid (incident management, psycho educational briefings) and screening for additional need</td>
<td>Developed by Royal Marines command and assessed by Cranfield University to be of good quality</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA PST</td>
<td>Employee: List of qualifying external trainings that develop required competencies</td>
<td>Dependent on training</td>
<td>Dependent on training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Developed by</td>
<td>Training materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet-to-Vet</td>
<td>Volunteer/Employee: Four weekly 45-minute classes and ongoing observation and feedback; co-facilitate two meetings. Expected commitment of 1 year</td>
<td>Developed by team from VHA and Veterans, Errera Community Care Center, and VISN 1 MIRECC. Uses materials from Mental Illness Anonymous</td>
<td>Training manual available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet Center</td>
<td>Employee: Training on assessment and counseling techniques for PTSD, sexual trauma, group and families and training in administrative areas such as clinical record keeping and VA benefits and discharge process</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

*Employee*: Employed by program and within job description to provide peer support

*Employee Volunteer*: Employed by program, but not within primary job description to provide peer support

*Volunteer*: Not employed by program
## Appendix E: Peer-to-Peer Program Outcome Evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Evaluation Level</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Overall Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| OSISS   | • Effectiveness of department coordination  
          • Peer Support Network (PSN) sustainability  
          • Program management and governance  
          • PSN support of their peers | Review of program documentation; Focus groups with peer supporters; Interviews with other stakeholders | Program Assessment | Chief Review Services 2005:  
• Program is meeting the needs of service members and veterans with operational stress injuries  
• Peer coordinators are effective in getting peers to recognize injury, moderate frustration and seek treatment  
• Program currently key element of social support structure and only PH consistent support through transition from active duty to veteran status |
| TRIM    | • Attitude to stress and mental health problems  
          • Occupational health and efficiency  
          • Psychological morbidity | Surveys and sampling of 1:1 informational interviews | 2004-07 – cluster randomized parallel group; 12 Royal naval vessels (6 trained, 6 not trained) | Findings not yet published |
| Vet-to-Vet | • Sociodemographic Data  
            • Participation and leadership in peer support  
            • Satisfaction  
            • Recovery-based measures include:  
              ▪ Recovery orientation  
              ▪ Spirituality  
              ▪ Engagement | Self-reported Survey of 1,847 participants and leaders from 38 programs | No control group or baseline data; Individuals were participating in Vet-to-Vet or other peer support program | Barber et al 2008:  
• Overall satisfaction between “moderately” and “quite” satisfied  
• Strong correlation between satisfaction of group leader and general satisfaction of group  
• Moderate correlation between overall satisfaction and frequency of participation and duration of participation |
| Vet Center | • Operational review of services provided at Vet Centers | Review of program documentation; Site visits to 14 Vet Centers | Program Assessment | Office of Inspector General 2008:  
• Vet Centers provide distinctive service and meet responsibilities by making social and psychological services available to veterans |
### Appendix F: Identified Components of Peer-to-Peer Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Individual Mentoring</th>
<th>Support Groups</th>
<th>Trauma Response Teams</th>
<th>Community Education and Outreach</th>
<th>Family Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACA NPN</td>
<td>Certified Peer Visitors</td>
<td>ACA NPN Support Group Leaders; Amputee Communicators Forum</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>ACA Volunteer Outreach Team</td>
<td>Certified Peer Visitors; Parent Support Network</td>
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<td>CDC DSRT</td>
<td>DSRT members provide support during deployment</td>
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<td>DSRT members trained in psychological first aid</td>
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<td>CNG</td>
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<td>Peer Support Persons trained in critical incident response</td>
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<td>Cop 2 Cop</td>
<td>Cop 2 Cop Helpline and Field Support</td>
<td>Cop 2 Cop Wounded Officer Support Group</td>
<td>Cop 2 Cop CISM de-briefing teams</td>
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<td>MI NG</td>
<td>Buddy-to-Buddy veteran volunteers</td>
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<td>OSCAR</td>
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<td>OSISS</td>
<td>OSISS Peer Support Network of Coordinators and Volunteers</td>
<td>OSISS Peer Support Coordinator facilitated groups</td>
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<td>OSISS Speakers Bureau and awareness training</td>
<td>OSISS Family Peer Support Coordinators</td>
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<td>POPPA</td>
<td>POPPA Peer Support Officers</td>
<td>POPPA Officer Support Groups</td>
<td>POPPA Critical Incident Responders</td>
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<td>POPPA Family Support Groups</td>
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<td>TAPS³</td>
<td>TAPS 24/7 call center and Peer Mentors</td>
<td>Support groups at regional and national events</td>
<td>Trained crisis response professionals</td>
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<td>Good Grief Camp for youth</td>
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<td>TRiM</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>TRiM Practitioners</td>
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³ TAPS programs are primarily designed for families, casualty officers and caregivers grieving the death of a military service member.
<table>
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<th>Support Groups</th>
<th>Trauma Response Teams</th>
<th>Community Education and Outreach</th>
<th>Family Support</th>
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<td>Patient outreach</td>
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<td>Group readjustment counseling</td>
<td>Military sexual trauma counseling</td>
<td>Outreach and community education</td>
<td>Marital and family counseling</td>
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Appendix G: Bibliography


**PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS:**

**Amputee Coalition of America National Peer Network (ACA NPN)**


**California National Guard**

California National Guard Peer-to-Peer Program. Available at: [http://www.calguard.ca.gov/j1/Pages/Peer_support.aspx](http://www.calguard.ca.gov/j1/Pages/Peer_support.aspx) Accessed on February 2, 2010.


**CDC Deployment Safety and Resilience Training (DSRT)**

Klomp, R. Traumatic Stress and Resiliency at the Unit/Team Level. Presented at the 2008 DoD Warrior Resiliency Conference.


**Cop 2 Cop**


**Michigan National Guard Buddy-to-Buddy Program**


**Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR)**


Operational Stress Injury Social Support Program (OSISS)


Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance (POPPA)


Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)


Trauma Risk Management (TRiM)


Greenberg, N., Interview with Counseling at Work Magazine. Summer 2006.


U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Peer Support Technicians


Vet-to-Vet


Vet Center Readjustment Counseling Services


*ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED AFTER THE MAIN REVIEW WAS COMPLETE:

Vets4Vets
http://www.vets4vets.us/

Vets4Vets is an independent non-profit organization founded in 2005 with the goal of establishing a nationwide, free, peer support community for Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans. They train volunteer peer counselors through free weekend workshops. Optionally, this is followed by a weeklong leader training seminar in Tucson, Arizona leading to Certification as a Vets4Vets Peer Support Leader.

Vet-2-Vet NJ

Vet-2-Vet program New Jersey was founded about five years ago, primarily as a telephone hot line counseling service for veterans. They expanded to also provide counseling services within the state of New Jersey, and also train combat veterans to serve as volunteer peer counselors “since they can best understand the strains that veterans feel upon returning home.”

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) first partnered with the State’s Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) five years ago to create the Vet-2-Vet program, which managed 3,200 cases in 2009. The program is only funded by the programs on a year-to-year basis.
Appendix H: Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) Resilience and Prevention (R&P) Team Addendum

ADDENDUM TO “IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN PEER SUPPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND PAPER”

DCoE R&P Team
13 April, 2010

The larger report identified five elements as essential to successful peer-to-peer programs:

1. Adequate planning and preparation
2. Clearly articulated policies
3. Systematic screening for peer supporters, with defined selection criteria
4. Leverage benefits from peer status
5. Enable continued learning through structured training

In addition, the literature review and examination of exemplar programs points to several underlying features or “key ingredients” that appear to account for the special effectiveness of peer support interventions. These are (1) social support, (2) experiential knowledge, (3) trust, (4) confidentiality, and (5) easy access.

Social Support

Among others, Solomon (2004) points out that an important element in the effectiveness of peer support programs is social support, and in particular social support from peers. Social support from work peers is thought to include emotional support, information and advice, practical assistance, and help in understanding or interpreting events (Grauwiler, Barocas & Mills 2008; House 1981). There is ample evidence now that peer social support and cohesion function as protective factors for troops exposed to combat-related stressors, protecting against post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other stress-related mental health problems (e.g., King, King & Fairbank, 1998; Solomon & Mikulincer 1990). Social support from peers in the period shortly after traumatic stress exposure has also proven to be a protective factor for U.S. soldiers exposed to sexual assaults and other trauma (Martin, Rosen, Durand, Knudson & Stretch 2000). A meta-analysis of studies conducted with trauma-exposed adults further confirms the value of social support as a protective factor against PTSD (Brewin, Andrews & Valentine 2000). In several studies with Vietnam veterans, Stretch (1985; 1991) found that returning veterans who experienced greater peer social support showed less PTSD than those who for various reasons were more isolated from their fellow soldiers. Griffith (2007) summarizes research from multiple studies, indicating that cohesion in military units is associated with continued good performance under stressful conditions and further points out that cohesion in military units largely reflects social support from peers and leaders. Bartone (2000) also reports that horizontal cohesion (peer support), as well as hardness, functioned as a moderator of the effects of combat exposure on PTSD symptoms for U.S. forces who served in the Gulf War. In this study, PTSD symptoms and unit cohesion in troops were
measured within 3 months after their return from deployment. Together, these findings suggest that to the extent peer-to-peer support programs actually increase social support from peers, they are likely to benefit troops in coping with operational stress and reducing stress-related mental health symptoms.

**Experiential Knowledge**

Experiential knowledge refers to the knowledge base of the peer supporter, which is derived from actual experience. Peer supporters who have similar experiences to those being supported, whether soldiers, police officers, firemen or recovering alcoholics, have greater credibility as “experts” in dealing with the problems and challenges faced by the client (Salzer and Associates 2002; Grauwiler, Barocas & Mills 2008). Having similar experiences and backgrounds also contributes to the sense of social cohesion through a process of social identification in which the client more readily sees the peer supporter as “like me” (Hogg 1992).

**Trust**

Trust is an essential element of successful mental health intervention. Good evidence from a national Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) study indicates that military veterans with mental health problems trust peer counselors more than traditional hospital staff to help them (Chinman et al 2008). What is trust, and how is it established between strangers? A classic and highly influential theory on trust (Rotter 1971) describes trust as generalized expectancies that a person is (1) honest, (2) unselfish — not going to take advantage of me, and (3) reliable, or “knows his stuff.” In the peer support arena, peers are more likely to win trust quickly because of their common experience base, which suggests that the counselor “knows what he or she is talking about.” Having a good knowledge base regarding available services and how to obtain them also contributes to credibility and trust. Moreover, it is important for the peer counselor to be seen as honest and truthful, and unselfishly motivated. In regard to the latter, volunteer peer counselors may have an advantage over paid employees in rapidly establishing trust, because there is no question of their being motivated by financial gain. The approach for example of the Vets-4-Vets program puts a very high emphasis on maintaining privacy and confidentiality of any information shared in the group sessions, with the recognition that confidentiality is critical to developing trust, without which veterans will not discuss their experiences or concerns.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is mentioned at several points in the larger report, but deserves greater emphasis. It appears that several of the peer-to-peer counseling programs reviewed require signed legal agreements in the beginning sessions, for example, to clarify the limits of confidentiality. This can be a positive step in establishing clear expectations, one of the recommendations made in the larger report. However, it should be recognized that this can also work against establishing trust in the peer support relationship, if the client sees it as an indicator that information provided might be disclosed to third parties without his or her permission. In his white paper on stigma and mental health in Army veterans of OEF and OIF, Sgt Brandi reflects on the success of the post-Vietnam storefront “walk-in, drop-in” centers for Vietnam veterans (unpublished white paper, 2009). Brandi points out that a veteran walking into a center would not be asked to complete any paperwork for the first five or six visits. This was believed essential for establishing a relationship of trust and confidentiality with the veteran. Paperwork or forms to fill out were mentioned only after a basic level of trust was established with the veteran.

According to a National Public Radio Report (Shapiro 2007), the first Vet Centers were started over 30 years ago by Vietnam veterans. The Vet Center Web site indicates that Congress established the
program in 1979 as community-based veteran support centers under the VA. There are currently 232 Vet Centers in all 50 states and territories providing a range of counseling services with a staff “many of which are combat veterans themselves.” (www.vetcenter.va.gov) The VA peer-to-peer model used in the Vet Centers was not included in this report. However, a follow-up analysis on this model could be useful because these peer-to-peer programs include clinical and non-clinical issues.

**Easy Access**

Ease of access, both in terms of physical location as well as hours of operation, is an important consideration in the success of peer support programs. Considering the fears and stigma that veterans often attach to seeking mental health support, access must be as easy and convenient as possible to encourage numerous veterans to participate in such a program. Easy access is part of the reason for the success of the Vet Centers; they are community based, as opposed to being located in the VA hospitals. Some of the programs reviewed in the larger report provide services during limited hours only (for example, California National Guard “buddy to buddy” program operates only Monday through Friday). Regardless of how well other aspects of the peer support program are resourced and managed, if access is difficult for the target population, it will be difficult for the program to succeed. Many available peer support telephone help lines seek to be available 24/7 (eg, NJ Vet-2-Vet). This certainly makes access easier, but the lack of face-to-face contact in a telephone call may impede the development of trust with the peer counselor.

**Limits of Research and Metrics**

A final observation on the limits of research and metrics: However potentially valuable they may be for assessing the efficacy of a program or intervention, the use of survey instruments and other measures in peer support programs runs the risk of damaging the trust that is essential for success, and could even drive away clients by adding to their fears about evaluation and loss of confidentiality. Especially in voluntary programs, such measures may be counter-productive vis-à-vis the primary goals of the program. Other metrics of success should be sought that do not carry the same risks. For example, programs could track the simple number of initial visits, number of return or follow-up visits, and number of referrals to other programs without ever recording personal or privacy data. The Hippocratic Oath also applies to the use of metrics in treatment programs... first of all, do no harm.

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4 Note: Information on the Vet Center Readjustment Counseling Services program was added into the April 27, 2010 version of the paper at DCoE’s request.
REFERENCES


BRIEF SUMMARIES OF 12 PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMS EXAMINED FOR “IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN PEER SUPPORT BACKGROUND PAPER”

1. Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) — National Peer Network (NPN)

ACA’s stated mission is “to reach out to and empower people affected by limb loss to achieve their full potential through education, support and advocacy, and to promote limb loss prevention... Peer-to-Peer support is one of the elemental programs within this organization.

http://www.amputee-coalition.org/npn_about.html

ACA currently has volunteer regional representatives who are experienced support group leaders. These volunteers are located throughout the United States and communicate with groups in regions varying in size and usually including between six to nine surrounding states. Regional representatives have knowledge of new groups and special group activities forming in their region (e.g., sports, socials, lectures, educational) and identify special interest support groups on request. Information specialists, the outreach coordinator and regional representatives offer referrals to amputee support groups located nearest to the inquirer’s location.

The NPN involves support groups and individual peer visitors (more than 1,000 civilian and military visitors have been trained since 2001), providing emotional, educational and advocacy assistance in an effort to empower those who have lost limbs to lead the most fulfilling life they can achieve. ACA has also created the Parent Support Network, with a Parent Peer Visitor Program designed to provide education and emotional support to the parents of children with limb loss/difference. In addition to written materials and resources, amputee support groups provide a place for new amputees and their families to connect with others who have overcome similar challenges. There, they can learn healthy coping strategies and practice skills in a supportive environment, among others who have experienced similar challenges and frustrations and found solutions that work for them. For those amputees who cannot make use of the in-person support groups, the Amputee Communicator Forum provides a virtual Internet support group discussion board maintained for the sole use of the amputees.

ACA conducts a yearly workshop for the Support Group leaders. The workshop is designed to function as a support group so that the leaders can discuss and learn about the issues they have or may encounter. Training and certification is also an essential element of the Peer Visitor program. A certified peer visitor, a person with limb loss or difference or a family member must pass a Peer Visitor Training Seminar, show that he or she has successfully adjusted to the loss, and demonstrate a positive attitude. They learn what their role will be, and how they can best fulfill that role for the amputee they will be supporting. In addition, there is also an Internet discussion board for the peer visitors to go and discuss issues and find support at anytime as a form of care for the caregivers as well.

2. California National Guard — Peer-to-Peer Support Program

“The goal of peer support is to provide all California National Guard members with the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible peer support through times of personal or professional crises and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties.”
The Peer-to-Peer program was established in February 2005 in an attempt to ensure that California National Guard members had someone from whom they could get emotional and practical support in the event that mission or daily stressors became too much to handle alone. A Peer Support Person (PSP) is a member of the National Guard who volunteers to serve in that position. PSPs are enlisted men and women, warrant officers or commissioned officers, who are specifically trained to provide emotional and practical support at the first sign of need, before any problems are compounded. They are colleagues, not counselors or therapists. Over the course of 3 days, PSPs receive “critical incident” training, as well as training in grief management, substance abuse suicide intervention, communication and listening skills, ethics, and problem assessment and problem solving, including situational scenario training.

Units are encouraged to train as many PSPs as they feel are qualified for the work. Guard members have the right to refuse the support of the peer; however, the regulations defining the program are readily available to ensure that boundaries are not crossed. Rules of confidentiality are detailed in the manual and specify that anonymity will be preserved as much as possible, except when a member presents a risk to himself or herself or others, or has violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

3. Canadian Department of National Defense and Veterans Affairs — Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS)

“The mission of the Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) program is to establish, develop and improve social support programs for Canadian Forces members, veterans and their families affected by operational stress; and provide education and training in the Canadian Forces community to create an understanding and acceptance of Operational Stress injuries.”

The Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) Program is a joint Department of National Defence (DND) and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Program designed to address some of the many dimensions of Operational Stress Injuries (OSIs). VAC co-manages the OSISS Program at the national level. OSISS was created in May 2001. The Program is an initiative of the Chief of Military Personnel (CMP) and is under the direction of the Director of the DND-VAC Centre.

In 2001, a small group of veterans set up a peer support network composed of staff and volunteers. The network grew and now includes a separate network supporting the families of serving Canadian forces members and veterans suffering from operational stress injuries. These networks operate from a number of regional sites across southern and eastern Canada. The Peer Support Coordinators (PSC) and Peer Support volunteers have experienced and recovered from an OSI and reach out to help others experiencing a similar situation. The PSCs are trained, paid employees of the DND/VAC Centre working throughout Canada. There is a similar family-focused program in which a family PSC is employed to aid the family members of those suffering from OSIs and is often a family member of an OSI sufferer. This program attempts to be both a sympathetic ear and a practical means of support. Through outreach and education, it connects those who are suffering to the resources that can help them. In addition to the paid coordinators, a group of peer support volunteers, who are trained veterans and usually recovering
from an OSI, work under the direction of the paid coordinators as they continue to heal while reaching out to help empower others.

Using general selection criteria, PSCs are selected by medical and mental health authorities, in particular the Operational Trauma and Stress Support Centre (OTSSC) and the VAC OSI clinics. Rather than simply asking for volunteers, mental health personnel are asked to identify suitable candidates based on their medical situation, their knowledge of the impact of OSIs and available resources, and their interpersonal and social skills. The selection of family PSCs is similar, but does not include the medical evaluation component. The client is called a Peer and can be anyone who is suffering from or living with someone who is suffering from an OSI. The program provides immediate outreach in person, by phone or e-mail. Because the PSCs and volunteers have themselves dealt with an OSI, mental health is a key component on both sides of the peer network. Signed medical approval is required to ensure that participants will not be put at risk for additional harm to themselves as a result of their participation. Although numerous measures are taken to ensure a client’s privacy and sense of trust, including identification by number, not name and the use of nonmilitary commercial Web sites for all data and Web interaction, confidentiality cannot be maintained in cases of child abuse or neglect, the threat of harm to oneself or others, or a court order or subpoena.

4. CDC Workforce and Responder Resiliency Team — Deployment Safety and Resiliency Team (DSRT)

“The concept for DSRT is not to provide mental therapy, but knowledgeable peer support. You don’t have to be a therapist to be a DSRT.” (Dave Benedek)

“In this approach, we carefully select and train non-mental health professionals to deploy with CDC teams. These individuals have a specific mandate to assess and address the physical and emotional health, safety and resiliency of their team members in the field...” (Richard Klomp)

http://www.cdc.gov/news/2009/05/dsrt/ (This is a link to an article about DSRT research.)

The role of the peer supporter is to apply basic concepts of psychological first aid to build resiliency among colleagues while in the field. The peer supporter receives training in psychological first aid, including the concepts of safety, calming, connectedness, self-efficacy and hope and optimism. The peer supporter makes physical and psychological safety assessments and calms and stabilizes distressed persons while offering practical assistance such as linking the person in crisis with collaborative services. The CDC sent a small number of peer supporters who had received the 4-day training session along with the teams going into the field during the H1N1 pandemic. Two of them reported that they had been able to apply the knowledge gained during training.

5. Department of Veterans Affairs — Peer Support Technician

An employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Peer Support Technician (PST) has been hired because he or she possesses a unique set of skills and life experiences that allows him or her to empathize with and fully support veterans who are dealing with serious mental illness. They serve as models of the recovery process and as counselors and conduits to information and additional community support resources and services. These veteran hires are professional members of the client
veteran’s treatment team working in the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center (PRRC) and the Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (MH RRTP).

http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/docs/phlag5.pdf (This is a link to a job application form used to apply for the PST position.)

6. Michigan National Guard — Buddy-to-Buddy Program

“The Buddy-to-Buddy program is part of the Welcome Back Veterans initiative sponsored by Major League Baseball Charities and the McCormick Foundation to raise public awareness about the issues facing today’s veterans and their families, and to raise funds to support programs and services that these veterans need as they reintegrate back to civilian life.... Behind the program is a simple concept: military service is unlike any other human experience. No one knows more about the issues facing a veteran — in combat or on the home front — than another veteran.”

http://www.buddytobuddy.org

The Buddy-to-Buddy program was developed by a team of military service members, veterans, veteran advocates and health care professionals from the University of Michigan and Michigan State University to train Michigan veterans to help veterans of the war in Afghanistan and war in Iraq adjust to life outside the military community. Anyone can call the Buddy-to-Buddy program to refer a veteran or service member, or service members and veterans themselves can call the program. From family concerns to financial struggles and emotional challenges, trained Buddy-to-Buddy volunteer veterans are available to listen and to help the veterans of the two wars access the community resources and care they need.

This program is not a 24-hour crisis or assistance line, but rather a weekday referral service. Volunteers answer the phones for a few hours a week, and the goal is to provide information on where to seek additional counseling, or to suggest where advice or services can be found to help with financial, educational, legal or employment issues or questions. The advisors strive to respond to all inquiries within 24 hours.

7. New Jersey Law Enforcement — Cop 2 Cop

“Cop 2 Cop is a program funded by a grant from the New Jersey State Department of Personnel and presented by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ)/University Behavioral HealthCare (UBHC). It is run as a partnership between the Department of Human Services and UMDNJ and UBHC.”

“Cop 2 Cop is the first program of its kind in the nation legislated into law to focus on suicide prevention and mental health support for law enforcement officers.”

http://www.cop2coponline.com/

The Cop 2 Cop program is a 24-hour confidential crisis intervention hotline service staffed by retired officers who are licensed clinical social workers and specially trained mental health professionals, and
volunteer retired officers who are trained as peer supporters. Cop 2 Cop also has volunteer peer supporters who are trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). These teams are trained to respond to police officers who are having marital problems and difficulty dealing with family; legal, financial or other personal matters; alcohol abuse; and trauma following a shooting or other stressful incident, including shakes, tremors, panic attacks, nightmares, anxiety and depression. Confidentiality is maintained whenever possible unless the officer presents a clear and present danger to himself or herself or others. In the field they aim to empower officers to watch out for each other and encourage them to question, persuade, refer (QPR) for assistance and not hesitate to call for help when needed.

8. Non-profit Law Enforcement — Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance (POPPA)

“With start-up funding from the City Council in 1996, the PBA, and the NYPD, Bill Genet contracted a counseling and psychotherapy group to train the first class of cops who volunteered to become Peer Support Officers (PSOs) in New York City.”

“As a direct result of the September 11th attack of the World Trade Center, the POPPA Organization deployed its volunteer Critical Incident Stress teams and recruited additional volunteers in the mental health professions. The POPPA Organization also coordinated the deployment of more than 600 volunteer counselors who came to New York from across the United States and abroad. Volunteers urged fellow cops to join small groups of officers in “defusing” sessions. Trained Peer Support Officers and mental health professionals ensured that officers in these groups had a supportive environment simply to describe their activities at Ground Zero. Two or three months later, “debriefing” sessions allowed officers to discuss feelings emerging from their Ground Zero experiences. In late September 2001, the POPPA Organization counseled about 100 officers each day. Calls to its helpline increased by 300 percent. By September 11, 2002, the POPPA Organization had defused or debriefed more than 5,000 officers.”

http://www.poppainc.com/

The Police Peer Assistance Program runs 24/7 and is confidential and free of charge. POPPA maintains assistance lines for both active duty and retired New York police officers and their families. Its mission is to help prevent and reduce incidents of marital problems, substance abuse, suicide as well as existing psychological disorders among its officers and their families. POPPA tries to maintain a large group of PSOs who are available throughout the New York City boroughs 24 hours a day, every day, to go to and meet with officers who contact the POPPA through its helpline. Donations are accepted to help keep the program running.

9. Non-profit Military Families — Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

TAPS consists of a peer network made up of people who have the shared experience of the death of a loved one, and are now at a place where they are willing to reach out to others. They have dedicated their time to provide a personal perspective and heartfelt care for grieving family members regardless of the cause of death. They provide a one-on-one connection in whatever manner is most comfortable to the bereaved, whether telephone, e-mail, or personal visits. The goal is to provide someone who will spend time and listen, and share their experience and their compassion.

http://www.taps.org/about.aspx
TAPS was founded in 1994, by Bonnie Carroll after her husband was killed in an Army plane crash. The developed program’s mission is to provide comfort and a sense of community 24 hours a day to anyone who has experienced the loss of a military loved one. TAPS provides peer-based support, crisis care, casualty casework assistance, and grief and trauma resources. It has established a community chat room on the Internet where people can go to share their feelings at anytime. Volunteer Peer Mentors must complete a training program consisting of an online self-study course followed by a classroom session. The mentors should be beyond the 1-year anniversary of their loved one’s loss and ready to reach out to others in strength. The program is composed of strong yet informal emotional social support component that consists of someone to listen and empathize as well as a formal advocacy and referral function.

10. Non-profit Veterans — Vet-to-Vet

“Our motto is Gladly Teach, Gladly Learn. We Leave No Veteran Behind!”

Vet to Vet is a consumer/provider partnership program that utilizes veterans in recovery in a peer-counseling capacity to help other veterans. Vet to Vet is administered by veterans who themselves have been consumers of VA mental-health services... Vet to Vet is a support meeting for Vets — Veterans helping other veterans.

http://www.vet2vetusa.org/

Vet to Vet is a program started by Moe Armstrong, a Vietnam Veteran who himself suffered from mental illness as a result of the war, and who sought relief in alcohol and drugs. He began the Vet to Vet program because he knows the pain and difficulties of not being able to make others understand. Vet to Vet started as an addiction recovery program based on peer-to-peer understanding, counseling and education and support. It has since has expanded to address a broader range of problems and reactions, including PTSD and depression. The peer supporters are themselves vets who have experienced a range of adjustment problems. The program seeks to provide free, daily classes using accepted mental health resources and materials on how to live with stress, and for example how to break free from addiction in a safe supportive environment.

From their web site:

“Vet to Vet is a consumer/provider partnership program that utilizes veterans in recovery in a peer-counseling capacity to help other veterans. Vet to Vet is administered by veterans who themselves have been consumers of VA mental-health services.

Vet to Vet provides a six-week, peer-facilitator training program that teaches veterans how to facilitate peer group sessions and introduce program learning topics.

“Vet to Vet is based on the concept of mutual help. Each One Reach One Teach One. We are group of people with mental illness or psychiatric conditions who happen to be veterans. We provide training on how to establish ongoing peer support at your site. Our materials cost you nothing. We are dedicated to helping other veterans and all people who have psychiatric conditions establish meaningful lives in the community.
Vet to Vet is dedicated to the concept that people who share psychiatric experiences and/or conditions can be of help to ourselves and our system.

1. Vet to Vet support meeting consists of a semi-structured curriculum with regular meetings.

2. The principal focus of Vet to Vet is on the unique experience of the people in our mental health programs, and how we can learn to live with problems posed by mental illness and/or an addiction.

3. Vet to Vet support meetings are peer-to-peer in orientation and are therefore led and guided by people in recovery themselves.

4. Vet to Vet is based on a partnership with the mental health system in which the mental health system provides facilities and support for Peer Educators.

5. An important feature of the partnership between Vet to Vet and the mental health system is collaborative-clinical supervision through which the mental health professionals and Vet to Vet group leaders hold regular consultative meetings.

6. Vet to Vet meetings are held in facilities made available by the mental health system to provide optimal access to services.

7. The program operates on a voluntary basis, however the value of the Vet to Vet group leaders’ contribution to the program may be acknowledged financially when possible and appropriate.

8. The role of the Vet to Vet group leaders is independent of their role as receivers of treatment.

11. UK Royal Navy and Armed Forces — Project Trauma Risk Management (TRiM)

“It is culture change at the grass roots level so that people accept that stress is an inevitable part of military service, that it is not anything to be ashamed of, is not per se a professional mental health problem, and that coming forward and seeking the help that is available (from padres, colleagues, medical officers and others) can be done without shame.”

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/research/trim/background.html

http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/research/trim/index.html (This is a link to a research report conducted by the King’s Center for Military Health Research.)

http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/TrainingAndAdventure/CopingWithTraumaFollowingMilitaryOperations.htm (This link provides more information regarding the TRiM program.)

Within the Royal Marines, TRiM practitioners are non-medical military members embedded within all units who are specially trained and educated in methods of assessing the psychological needs of military personnel after exposure to a potentially traumatic event. They are trained to be alert to signs of higher
than usual levels of stress, and after traumatic events, they ensure that the psychological needs of personnel involved in the event are assessed and managed, including referrals to additional support as soon as possible. Service members thought to be at risk are interviewed informally 3 days after a particularly difficult event and then again 1 month later. Should the interview reveal potential problems, the goal is to get immediate additional support for the stressed service member. TRiM aims to remove the stigma attached to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and have it viewed as a mental injury that can be healed in time if treated appropriately.

12. US Navy/US Marine Corps — Operational Stress Control and Readiness (OSCAR) Peer Mentors

“This MARADMIN outlines the planned expansion of OSCAR Program capabilities in the Marine divisions to the company level through implementation of operational stress control and readiness (OSCAR) extenders and OSCAR peer mentors.”

http://www.marines.mil/news/messages/Pages/MARADMIN0667-09.aspx (This link leads to a Marine Corps directive laying out the guidelines under which Operational Stress Control Peer Mentors are created and utilized.)

In military terms, the program is developed so that units include embedded mental health professionals, referred to as “OSCAR extenders.” They include chaplains, corpsman and religious program specialists who function as technicians and peer mentors and deploy into the theater to boost unit resilience and readiness. They continue to be a part of the unit when they return to garrison. Their goal is to help minimize the impact of stress-related issues for Marines and Sailors by catching problems as early as possible and providing the best intervention. It is expected that these changes will be implemented by 2011. Initial training for the OSCAR supporters is supplied by a HQMC mobile training team working in coordination with mental health providers and leaders. Training for peer personnel participating in this program will range between 4 and 5 half-days. The directive is very specific and detailed in laying out the relationships among and between the participants, but does not address how the program has been received to date. To warrant such a wide and deep expansion, it can be concluded that it must have been sufficiently well received.

Vets4Vets
http://www.vets4vets.us/

Vets4Vets is an independent non-profit organization founded in 2005 with the goal of establishing a nationwide, free peer support community for Iraq and Afghanistan era veterans. They train volunteer peer counselors through free weekend workshops. Optionally, this is followed by a (free) weeklong leader training seminar in Tucson, Arizona leading to Certification as a Vets4Vets Peer Support Leader.

From their web site:

Mission
Vets4Vets is a non-partisan organization dedicated to helping Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans to heal from the psychological injuries of war through the use of peer support.
Vision
Our primary goal is to help Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans understand the value of peer support and to regularly use peer support to express their emotions, manage their challenges and ease their reintegration into society. Our vision is that anytime a veteran needs to talk with someone who really understands, a local Vets4Vets peer support group is available at no cost. We envision Vets4Vets being a common name in the minds of all veterans as a place where they, and their comrades, can go to heal.

We Believe:

- Sharing personal experiences with those who have shared similar experiences is a powerful healing tool.
- Peer support does not require professionals.
- Peer support can take place in many formats including weekend workshops, one-on-one and in small or large groups.
- By taking equal and uninterrupted turns we benefit by both listening and speaking.
- By expressing the feelings associated with our experiences, we help each other heal.
- In providing an environment that is confidential, safe, and accepting.
- Taking part in positive community action, of their choosing, empowers veterans to further promote healing and reach out to other veterans.

Vet-2-Vet NJ

Vet-2-Vet program New Jersey was founded in 2005, primarily as a telephone hot line counseling service for veterans. The hot line (1-866-VETS-NJ-4) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and the telephone counselors are themselves veterans who have experienced a range of problems and challenges, including combat wounds. The program has expanded to include some counseling services within the state of New Jersey, and also to train combat veterans to serve as volunteer peer counselors “since they can best understand the strains that veterans feel upon returning home.”

From the UMDNJ web site:

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) has partnered with the State’s Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) to create the Vet-2-Vet program, which managed 3,200 cases in 2009. The program is only funded by the programs on a year-to-year basis.

University Behavioral HealthCare at UMDNJ – in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs – launched Vet-2-Vet, a toll-free confidential helpline designed as an early intervention for veterans suffering from psychological or emotional distress and in need of help assimilating back into civilian life. Today, a veteran in this country is twice as likely to commit suicide as someone who has never served, and on average, one returning veteran commits suicide each day. Since the launch of Vet-2-Vet, no National Guard member from New Jersey is known to have taken this drastic step.

Vet-2-Vet employs combat veterans as peer counselors whose experience uniquely qualifies them to understand the rigors of combat and challenges of returning home. Another distinctive feature of the
helpline is that it is also available to family members of military veterans. Last year alone, Vet-2-Vet
of the helpline is that it is also available to family members of military veterans. Last year alone, Vet-
2-Vet managed more than 3,200 calls. Most callers served in Iraq or Afghanistan and are troubled by
anxiety, depression, aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, or simply the
challenges of reintegrating into civilian life.

http://www.umdnj.edu/cgi-
bin/cgiwrap/hpappweb/newsroom.cgi?headline=UMDNJ+Experts+Available+to+Discuss+Lifesaving+V
eterans'+Helpline+

-The New Jersey Vet-2-Vet program does not appear to have its own web site. It is unclear how
telephone counselors are selected, or what special training they may receive.