

PEER SUPPORT PRACTICE

PURPOSE

The purpose of this practice note (PN 24.01) is to:

1. identify the distinctive aspects of the role of peer workers working with other professional and support roles in the health, disability and social services sectors
2. encourage Tautoko Tāne peer workers to apply these aspects more consciously in their day-to-day practice
3. inform the development and presentation of Purposeful Peer Support Aotearoa (PPSA) education and training programmes

CONTEXT

1. Service Integration

We are not alone in our quest for providing effective support and healing services for male survivors of sexual abuse. Inevitably we will work with other professional and support workers to provide the wrap-around services that are needed to co-create an effective healing pathway for male survivors on their journey towards wellbeing. Indeed, peer workers in general will often work across and within different service sectors and contexts to make their unique lived experience contributions in these spaces.

For these service collaborations to be effective, it is important that both peer workers and their service collaborators are clear about, and respectful of, the particular aspects of the peer worker role that contribute to “enabling the wellbeing of male survivors”. And it is also important that those role aspects are clearly evident in the support provided by the peer worker.

2. Purposeful Peer Support Aotearoa (PPSA)

The PPSA Framework was initially developed by Tautoko Tāne Aotearoa to enable and support the provision of purposeful peer support services for male survivors of sexual violence. However, the principles and practices contained in the Framework can be applied in any setting where peer support is offered.

To enable and assist peer workers and their managers in the application of Purposeful Peer Support in their day-to-day work, PPSA education and training

programmes, both for Tautoko Tāne and other PPSA users, need to integrate and reinforce the key elements of this practice note.

Recently PPSA Principles and Practices, PPSA Groupworks and PPSA Reflective Practice programmes have been updated to include the advice and understandings presented in this practice note.

3. Current demand for Tautoko Tāne peer support services.

Tautoko Tāne has developed a national network of 11 service centres situated from Northland to Otago. As the network has grown, so too has awareness of, and engagement with our member organisations (TMO) in the wider community.

Demand from male survivors continues to grow, and the needs that men present with are often both high and urgent.

However, our funding has not grown in line with this demand and consequentially our resources are constrained, resulting in many of our member organisations carrying very high and potentially unsafe client loads with a limited number of peer workers available to meet these high and urgent needs.

There is a risk that, in the face of this growing pressure, the focus of peer workers on the interpersonal process at the heart of peer practice is diluted in favour of more practical task-oriented work that is required to manage survivor demand for a timely service response. This practice note highlights some key aspects of the peer worker role that should be protected in managing our response to a surge in service demands.

4. Peer drift

“Peer drift” refers to the potential for peer workers to be pulled into working in ways that are not wholly consistent with the core intent and practice of purposeful peer support. In particular, the many tasks that peer workers engage in to support survivors, and which can be an integral part of developing and sustaining their peer relationship, can assume a level of intensity or importance that detracts from the focus on providing purposeful peer support – the development of the meaningful peer relationships that support survivors in moving towards wellbeing.

When peer drift occurs in a collaborative service environment where peer workers are working with or alongside other professionals and/or support workers, it can have the effect of diminishing the potential contribution of the peer worker to the extent that their role is seen as less important or sublimated to other roles. And when this happens it can reinforce the unhelpful and uncollaborative view of peer workers as having limited capability to contribute effectively to the healing journey of survivors.

5. Focus on wellbeing outcomes

The Tautoko Tāne PPSA Framework is deliberately wellbeing centred and focused to deliver on our shared purpose – “enabling the wellbeing of male survivors of sexual abuse (violence or harm)”. The effective application of our Wellbeing Framework, Tō Tātou Anga Whaiora, is central to the achievement of that outcome.

The purpose of our Wellbeing Framework is two-fold:

- It enables and supports all Tautoko Tāne peer workers and their managers to develop and sustain an appropriate level of personal wellbeing to assure the provision of safe, ethical and high-quality support services to male survivors, and
- It provides an important focus for our peer work with survivors; an essential guide for peer workers in supporting a survivor in his healing journey “towards wellbeing”.

The Wellbeing Framework can help peer workers to identify wellbeing challenges (issues and roadblocks) and wellbeing opportunities (existing and potential strengths and resources for development). Our PPSA Principles and Practice and GroupWorks training programmes include guidance for using the framework in this manner.

Having a current, documented wellbeing focus for the survivors we are working with is important for several reasons:

- It provides a focus for the peer worker and survivor to work purposefully together towards a wellbeing outcome
- It supports a peer worker in staying on track and not succumbing to peer drift in their practice
- It provides evidence that we are doing what we say we do – enabling the wellbeing of male survivors of sexual violence

It is important to recognise the evolutionary nature of applying our PPSA wellbeing focus as an element of purposeful peer support practice and to appreciate the challenges in discerning and documenting a wellbeing focus for a survivor you are working with. And to appreciate that unless peer workers have completed and activated their own wellbeing plans, they will only have a limited understanding of the wellbeing plan parameters and therefore a constrained ability to guide a survivor in eliciting and planning their wellbeing focus.

PEER SUPPORT PRACTICE ESSENTIALS

What we mean by purposeful peer support is well documented in our guidelines and publications and amplified in our PPSA education and training programmes.

Many of the PPSA principles and practices will be similar to those of other professional and support services (e.g., Equity Fairness & Inclusion or Working with Trauma). However, the detailed practice statements that support each PPSA principle¹ provide some important differentiation from these other services, in terms of the particular practice of a peer worker.



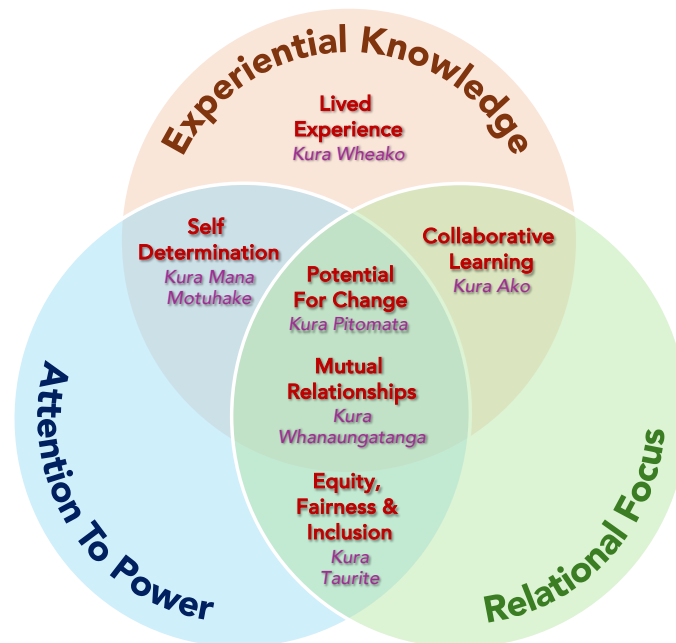
In contrast to other forms of “help” or “support” provided in health, disability and/or social services, peer support has an explicit focus on the connections between people, and encourages authentic two-way relationships that allow for mutual learning and shared responsibility – this represents our **relational focus**, and requires paying **attention to power** dynamics. Another key aspect of peer support is exploring how we make sense of our experiences – transforming our raw lived experience into **experiential knowledge** which acknowledges our strengths and the ways in which experiences have impacted us in relationships.

In addition, purposeful peer support has a **wellbeing focus** – taking a holistic view of the survivor’s wellbeing and appreciating the interconnections between the five pou in our Wellbeing Framework.

¹ See these in full at the end of this practice note

While we may undertake a range of activities with peers, our peer support role is about applying these four elements in particular.

The diagram below shows how the three focus elements also frame and integrate the six Principles of the PPSA framework and remind us that the overarching purpose of PPSA is the focus on wellbeing – both for our peer workers and their peers



Integrating the Six Principles of Purposeful Peer Support Aotearoa

Experiential Knowledge encompasses:

- Direct lived experience of challenges aligned to those of the people being supported
- The worldview/s formed from the sense or meaning we make of our lived experiences (which can change over time)

Relational Focus includes:

- Facilitating mutual, reciprocal relationships where both parties are able to learn and to grow
- Explicit attention to the ways in which we affect and influence each other

Attention to Power includes:

- Honouring the basis of lived experience roles in human and civil rights activism and advocacy (Lived Experience /
- Staying mindful of power and privilege dynamics, and working to mitigate any imbalances between us

Wellbeing Focus includes:

- Identifying a survivor's wellbeing strengths – the existing and emerging qualities and resources they bring that can be nurtured and further strengthened
- Identifying a survivor's wellbeing challenges – issues, struggles and roadblocks

The overlaps between these elements imply some other important differences between peer support practice and that of other professional and/or support roles.

In peer support:

- **Purposeful self-disclosure** of direct lived experiences occurs, in the context of a reciprocal relationship
- **Boundaries** can be more flexible than in other professions, and dual/multiple roles can be more common
- **Risk** is primarily managed through relationship, not by either party assuming power and/or sole responsibility for outcomes; and our **duty of care** is not just to an individual but to the relationships involved
- We develop an ability to **hold multiple truths**, to both support and to challenge our own worldview and a peer's worldview
- **New and shared understandings** are co-created within the peer support relationship, which can have a powerful impact on supporting holistic wellbeing

GUIDANCE FOR PEER SUPPORT PRACTICE

These guidance notes are provided to support peer workers in applying the four essential aspects of peer support in the way they engage with survivors. Accepting that the implementation of purposeful peer support as a relatively new framework is somewhat evolutionary, this guidance is focussed on areas of practice where there is an immediate opportunity to make a difference.

Guidance is offered on:

1. Using your **Wellbeing Focus** and the Wellbeing Framework concepts to identify a wellbeing objective
2. Fine tuning your **Attention to Power** by considering some common power dynamics that may arise
3. Using the **Experiential Knowledge** gained from your lived experience to help a survivor in making sense and meaning from their current situation and their own lived experience of trauma, distress and adversity

4. Applying your **Relational Focus** to demonstrate the peer support approach to connection and engagement

Effective peer support practice expects that these themes and concepts will be explicitly discussed and explored with survivors, even if you are working on practical tasks together when you meet. These conversations or exchanges need not be lengthy, and can be woven in as other tasks are being attended to.

1. Documenting the initial Wellbeing objective

Identifying a Wellbeing objective to begin with helps pave the way for making sense and meaning as it can provide a context or theme for our Experiential Knowledge conversations.

It is important that the Wellbeing objective is uncovered and agreed upon with the survivor, and not assumed and imposed by the worker. This may take some time and more than one meeting to establish.

However, it should be possible to record a provisional Wellbeing objective from the first documented meeting – based on the peer worker's:

- initial understanding of the survivor's situation, and
- knowledge of the Wellbeing Framework

This approach allows us to have up-to-date documentation in place, while holding the provisional Wellbeing objective lightly. Be prepared to change or round out the documentation to reflect new, shared objectives and understandings as your connection with the survivor develops and deepens over time.

2. The importance of attending to power

Power is a rich topic to explore in peer conversations. There are always themes in a survivor's experience to do with how power is/was at play in their lives and how it was used and misused.

How might the survivor change their sense of personal power to reflect a more balanced and equitable way of being in their community? This sort of conversation can help clarify initial Wellbeing objectives and develop them over time.

The peer worker also needs to remain mindful of their own stance in the relationship (*Practising Self Awareness*), avoiding any tendency to take on too much responsibility for the survivor's outcomes. Taking charge, giving advice, telling survivors what they must do, without sharing the responsibility and accountabilities between you, are examples of how we may not be attending well to the power dynamics in our peer relationships.

3. Using experiential knowledge

Draw on your *Reflective Listening* skills to explore together how the survivor is feeling about his situation. Is he angry? Resentful? Scared? Numb? Ashamed? Overwhelmed? Put a name together to the dominant emotion involved.

Purposeful sharing of your own experiences that have had similar impacts can help to deepen the conversation about how the survivor is experiencing himself at the moment. For instance, have you ever had a time when you felt similarly to the survivor?

With his permission, share a little of that experience to let him know what that's been like in your life, letting him know that looking for what is similar and different between us is part of what we do in peer support, to make sense of our experiences and to examine the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

4. Applying a relational focus

Explore with the survivor how his situation and the way he's feeling about it impact on his relationships, including with himself e.g., when we're having trouble holding big feelings, we sometimes want to numb them as a way of coping.

Purposeful sharing of personal story may also be useful here, see above.

Explicitly noticing and naming the impact we are having on each other in the peer support relationship and with others, is another way we bring this aspect of peer practice to life (applying the PPSA principles of *Mutual Relationships* and *Collaborative Learning*).

APPENDIX One: PPSA Principles in practice

Experiential Knowledge

Kura Wheako

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We believe there is value in what we have learned from our experiences in life. It is possible to develop strengths in the face of adversity.
- We also acknowledge that our life experiences shape our view of the world, as well as how we think about and behave in relationship to others.
- We share stories from our lives thoughtfully, with purpose and in ways that are useful for each of us.

Mutual Relationships

Kura Whanaungatanga

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We take time to get to know each other, what is important to each of us, and what we have in common.
- We also expect we will see some things differently: we pay attention to power dynamics in our relationships so our differences do not divide us.
- We acknowledge a mutual sense of responsibility for the relationship. Together we create a connection that has value for each of us.

Potential for Change

Kura Pitomata

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We believe that positive change towards wellbeing is possible for everyone.
- We focus on people's strengths and encourage each other to have dreams and goals that are personally meaningful.
- We expect there will be setbacks at times, but we know from experience that new growth often arises out of tough times. We support people to understand that life challenges can be opportunities for learning and growing.

Collaborative Learning

Kura Ako

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We acknowledge the way we influence each other through the relationship of peer support. We both learn from each other and share our own learning, creating new understandings as a result.
- Through our interactions, each of us continues to grow our self-awareness and our understanding of our own journey.
- We each grow our ability to be in meaningful relationships with others.

Self Determination

Kura Mana Motuhake

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We value the right of people to make their own choices and decisions about what they want in life and how to achieve it.
- We encourage each person to find their own path to living a life of meaning and purpose.
- We believe that when individuals are free to grow and flourish, we can all benefit and thrive collectively.

Equity, Fairness & Inclusion

Kura Taurite

What this principle looks like in practice:

- We are mindful of how power imbalances can affect people, particularly survivors of sexual violence.
- We think about our own attitudes and strive to address any prejudice or bias we may hold, or that we encounter. This includes working to identify and address imbalances or unfairness within systems.
- We welcome and value the diverse experiences and viewpoints that people bring. We respect privacy and confidentiality and use supportive and respectful language when talking to and about others.