

Families as peer workers: A toolkit for professionals

A guide and resource kit to support the integration of a peer workforce within early childhood intervention organisations

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Foreword

A commitment to family-centred practice is the cornerstone of the National Guidelines Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention (ECIA, 2016), which encode the principles professionals use to guide and improve their family-centred practice. However, relying on the role of professionals to increase family-centredness, without addressing the dynamic role that families can play in this practice, under-utilises families' potential to contribute actively to the parent-professional partnership. We need to identify and develop new ways to harness the involvement of families since ultimately it is they who will make the deepest impact on their child's development throughout their child's life.

Peer work is one important way we can activate family engagement. When peer work is done well, it has the potential to create a mindset shift through the sharing of personal experiences and perspectives. The use of paid peer work in early childhood intervention (ECI) is not widely prevalent yet it is precisely at this time that families would benefit from systematic connection with knowledgeable peers.

Employing paid peer workers offers families a vital opportunity to connect with other families and provides a complementary role to the professionals who work in ECI. They are a trusted and sustainable resource which is currently untapped. In this Toolkit, along with the other resources we have produced through our Innovative Workforce Fund Project, we share our experience of incorporating paid peer workers in ECI to inform the wider disability sector of the value a peer workforce brings to all stakeholders. Our vision is for a time when the role of paid peer workers and peer networks will be seen as equally important as the role of professionals. We hope that this work will stimulate others to this end.

Plumtree would like to express our deep appreciation to the National Disability Service, which administers the IWF, for the opportunity to undertake this important project. In particular, we thank Vanessa Robinson, the project's coach, whose continuing insight and feedback has been invaluable; Kim Windsor, the expert adviser from Windsor and Associates; Janet Meagher AM, National Mental Health Commission, who shared her immense expertise in the mental health sector with such generosity and who has been vital to the project's success; the Centre of Disability Studies at the University of Sydney, who helped to outline and administer the research design, and Rani Dibley, CEO of Hunter Prelude, the project's pilot partner, who has supported the project and provided her knowledge and guidance so enthusiastically.

This project would not have been possible without the input and assistance of the Plumtree staff and community. To Plumtree's allied health professional and educator staff, who have patiently endured organisational changes and challenges, and who have reflected so honestly on their experiences with peer workers, we offer our heartfelt gratitude. It is your open and constructive advice that has allowed us to prepare this toolkit and its resources so that others may benefit from your experiences. Thank you also goes to Plumtree's peer workers, who have been asked to reflect, to examine, and to interrogate their experiences as peer workers for the advantage of other potential peer workers and families. Plumtree's families themselves offered their precious free time to consider their interactions with peer workers, and we are deeply appreciative of their dedication to give of their time to support this project. Finally, we thank the staff of Hunter Prelude who made time in their busy schedules to give us their ongoing insights and feedback on the potential of peer work in their organisation.

Sylvana Mahmic,

CEO, Plumtree Children's Services, Inc.



Background

In Australia, a new movement is afoot. It draws on the extensive experiences of the mental health sector, and translates these experiences to the disability and, more specifically, to the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) sectors.

This movement is the integration of paid peer workers into existing ECI services and organisations to support the parents of children with disability and developmental delay who access the service.

Over the past number of decades, there has been a concerted effort globally in the mental health sector to incorporate and pay those with shared lived experiences to augment, supplement, and complement traditional professional treatment to enhance client recovery (Repper & Carter, 2011). In the mental health sector, the benefits of peer workers, defined as people with a lived, personal experience who are trained and employed to support others (their peers) who face similar challenges, are well evidenced. These paid peers are proven to increase the hope and optimism of clients, to promote holistic and inclusive services and approaches, to decrease social isolation, to encourage the active participation of service users, to develop self-management and coping strategies, and to foster strengths-based approaches to recovery (Ashton et al., 2013; Bradstreet, 2006).

Although the disability sector has used unpaid peer support positively to influence both individuals with disability and their parents (Bray et al., 2017; Carter et al., 2015; Power, Bartlett & Hall, 2016), it has yet to take full advantage of the kinds of benefits that a systematic engagement of a paid peer workforce offers. Recently, however, parents of young children with developmental delay and disability have begun to be employed by existing ECI organisations to support their

peers, other parents of children with disability and developmental delay. In ECI, parent peer workers can fulfil unique and distinct roles that offer benefits to the peer workers themselves, to the organisations which employ them, to the allied health professionals and educators with whom they work, and to the service users or families who they support.

In 2017, the Australian Government established the Innovative Workforce Fund (IWF) to foster the development, expansion and communication of innovative workforce practices in the disability sector to support the Australia-wide rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS provides individualised funding packages to assist individuals with disabilities in Australia. AU\$4 million was allocated to the IWF to fund projects that explored innovative workforce practices that would answer the need in the disability sector to re-examine existing workforce structures and practices to reflect changes in the sector in the wake of the NDIS rollout. The IWF funded 29 organisations Australia-wide to undertake projects over two rounds of funding. Plumtree Children's Services, Inc. (Plumtree) secured funding in Round 2 to research and document the use of paid peer work in ECI. This project undertook to offer organisations a better understanding of how they might attract new and suitable workers to the sector, to demonstrate how peer workers are an untapped potential NDIS workforce to complement and support specialist staff in the ECI sector, and to offer an alternative to the 'expert' model.

For over thirty years, Plumtree has provided support for young children (aged 0 to 8 years) with a developmental delay or disability, and their families, who live in the Inner West or South East of Sydney. Plumtree is committed to family-centred partnerships, which respect and embrace diversity, promote inclusion, and provide practical services (including education, therapy, and information and training) to families. As a mother to a young man with disability, Plumtree's CEO, Sylvana Mahmic, has fostered at Plumtree a culture which nurtures family and parental leadership, and encourages innovation in achieving quality, authentic partnerships with families.

Since 2015, Plumtree has been developing its innovative and award-winning Now and Next program, the aim of which is to build the capacity of parents and carers of young children with developmental delays and disability to be powerful agents of change. This work was rooted in action research commenced in 2013, which involved staff and families. The unique Now and Next program develops participants' skills to formulate, implement and ultimately achieve positive outcomes for their children, their family, and themselves, within an evidence- and strengths-based framework.

Now and Next is facilitated by parents, for parents. By providing a safe, supportive environment in which participants can share their stories, expertise, and knowledge with each other, Now and Next enables its participants to build a strong network of educated and empowered leaders who have confidence in their self-worth and competency. It has also afforded Plumtree the opportunity to employ paid peer workers and to experience firsthand the benefits and challenges associated with integrating peer workers into an existing ECI service.

Whilst its peer workforce was initially established in response to a need for peer facilitators for Now and Next, Plumtree has since recognised the broader potential of a peer workforce in

the ECI sector, in which attracting and retaining allied health professionals and educators is increasingly challenging. With the NDIS rollout in Australia, the current traditional allied health workforce is unlikely to meet demand for allied health services. The peer workforce also offers a complementary and necessary link to the support families provide each other, especially in the early years. Since 2015, then, Plumtree has increasingly identified and maximised the many benefits that peer workers can offer to families and the allied health workforce. Thus, Plumtree's peer workers now facilitate many new peer-led service delivery options to build family capacity and have also offered services in multiple languages to ensure culturally-sensitive service options are offered to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families who might otherwise be excluded. It is in this context of an active peer workforce that Plumtree has undertaken this project.

As part of its IWF funding, Plumtree committed to researching and documenting its experiences employing peer workers in ECI. This toolkit is one outcome of that research and documentation. The toolkit is underpinned and supported by an extensive literature review (primarily considering the mental health sector research); a summary literature review situating mental health research findings within the ECI and disability contexts; a formal and independent research report, undertaken by the University of Sydney's Centre for Disability Studies which details and analyses the voices and experiences of the stakeholders involved in Plumtree's peer worker movement, with recommendations for future implementations of the model; a Knowledge Translation Plan which addresses the ways in which Plumtree's research can best be translated into practical and accessible knowledge for all stakeholders, and various resources, which have been appended to this Toolkit.

How to Use this Toolkit

This toolkit offers you a broad introduction to paid peer work. It will help you to understand the benefits of peer workers and why you might like consider a peer workforce.

This toolkit helps you to assess your cultural readiness for peer workers. It outlines the ways in which you can make an integration of a peer workforce into an existing organisation a success. It also offers practical guidelines and tips to maximise the benefits, and minimise the challenges, of integrating a peer workforce into existing organisations. Ultimately, peer workers have the potential to benefit significantly all stakeholders in the ECI sector, and we hope that this Toolkit offers practical, achievable steps to allow you and your organisation to participate in the peer work movement.

The toolkit is intended as a guide and resource booklet for ECI organisations interested in engaging a peer workforce. It also includes resources to support all stakeholders in the process, including management, non-peer staff, families, and potential peer workers.

This toolkit is a compendium of resources, tips and guidelines which will not only help your organisation to decide if peer workers are appropriate for you, but will also identify the core principles required for the successful integration of peer workers into your organisation.

This toolkit isn't intended to provide you with specific answers to every question you might have, since these answers will be dependent on your organisational culture, structure, and needs. Instead, it has been designed to identify the questions and concerns that you might like to consider before you decide to incorporate peer workers into your organisation, and to give you a checklist of considerations you should address to make the integration of peer workers into your staff successful.

Some sections of this toolkit are written for the consideration of your organisation's management and/or board. Others are directed at your existing non-peer staff. There are also resources for the families with whom you work, and for peer workers you may potentially employ. The resources appended to the toolkit are for you to reproduce and distribute both internally and externally as needed, or for your reference as you move forward with employing a peer workforce.

In the toolkit, the symbol ∞ indicates that there is such a reproducible resource in the appendices.

Definitions

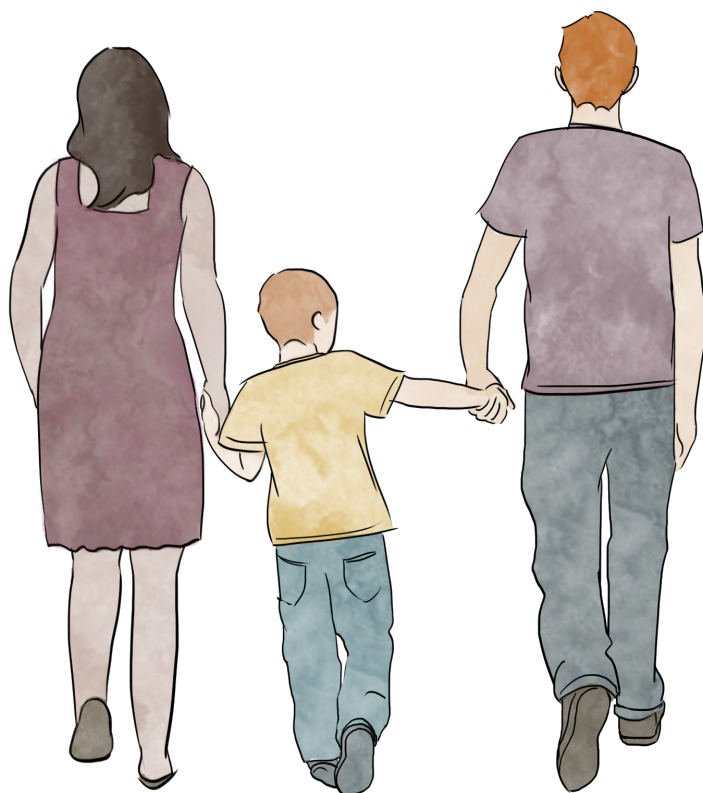
In this toolkit, we use the term 'peer worker' to refer to the parents and carers of children with developmental delay and disability, who are paid to work in a variety of roles alongside allied health staff, educators and others within ECI organisations. Peer workers are employed to draw deliberately and specifically on their lived experience to inform their roles and to work with families and ECI organisations.

Henceforth, the allied health, educator and other workforce members traditionally employed within ECI organisations will be referred to as 'non-peer' staff. 'Non-peer' is a deliberately broad term to describe workers, since it intends to encompass the allied health professionals, educators, social workers, family key workers, psychologists, and associated therapists and professionals who might constitute an ECI team. We have thus adopted this terminology to capture the breadth of our workforce in a way that simply using 'allied health professionals' does not.

We acknowledge that labelling this broad workforce as 'non-peer' is not ideal, since defining any group negatively, by what they are not, implies a deficit that is not applicable or intended here. At this time, however, we were unable to find a more inclusive or descriptive

term that would differentiate this team from their peer worker colleagues whilst still embracing and encompassing the broad diversity of ECI staff. We hope that, as research into peer workers in our sector continues, a more apposite term for our non-peer teams emerges.

Whilst non-peer workers may share a lived experience with the families with whom they work, they are not usually consumers of the services they also provide, nor are they employed to draw specifically and explicitly on their shared lived experience in their work with families, unlike their peer colleagues. It is a reality in the ECI sector that many of its ostensibly 'non-peer' team may indeed have a lived experience with disability and developmental delay, whether their own, their child's, or a family member's. However, in their employed capacity, the 'non-peer worker' group does not purposely reference this lived experience. Indeed, for 'non-peer workers' there is often an expectation of personal distance between worker and family.



Why Peer Workers?

Peer workers are different to non-peer staff like traditional allied health providers and educators because of their lived experience. The core feature of a peer worker is a person with a lived, personal experience who is then trained and employed to support others (their peers) who face similar challenges and experiences (Bradstreet & Pratt, 2010).

Broadly, a peer worker is differentiated from a non-peer worker because they are 'an individual who shares common characteristics with the "targeted" group or individual, allowing him/her to relate to, and empathise with, that individual on a level that a non-peer would not be able to do' (Doull et al., 2005, p. 247).

In ECI, this element of shared lived experience fosters between parents a level of shared trust and compassion, which in turn offers families a very different experience of ECI services than the current primarily expert model. Trust between families and peer workers is bolstered in this context because peer workers are simultaneously providers and consumers of services (Davidson et al., 1999). Families recognise that this 'consumer-provider' aspect has important implications for the role that peer workers have in impacting service design and delivery.

Parents of children with disability are now being employed as peer workers in ECI organisations in New South Wales, Australia, as an innovative workforce to supplement and complement existing traditional non-peer staff for the benefit of families and non-peer workers alike.

Peer workers offer many benefits to the families with whom you work and to your existing staff, not least of which is that they bring a unique expertise to your service: the intimate knowledge of a lived experience. Peer workers can work in many ways to support your organisations, staff, and service users or families. The model of peer work is also proven to be incredibly empowering for the peer workers themselves.

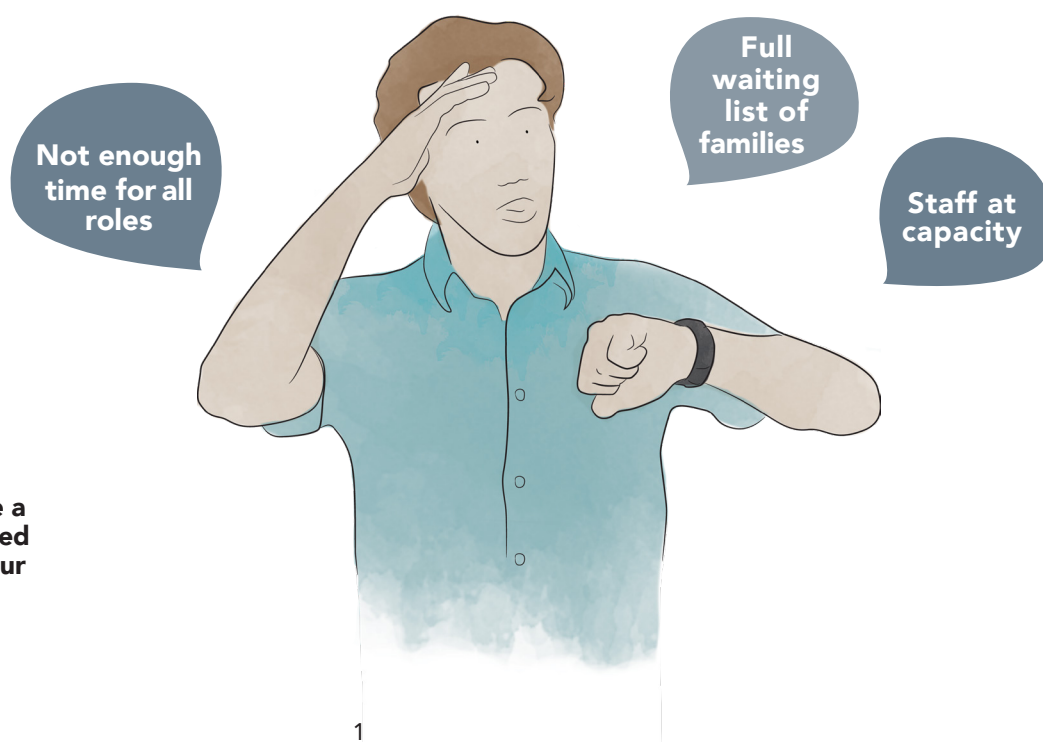
Importantly, peer workers share your vision and values to provide high quality family-centred, strengths-based, culturally responsive, inclusive and individualised support and services to the children and families with whom you work.

We recognise that at times there are professionals working in ECI who also have a lived experience of disability, either themselves, or as a sibling, or as a parent or carer.

Peer workers are an untapped workforce right in your community that is proven to decrease family isolation and parental over-dependence on non-peer staff.

Some questions which may help you to decide if peer workers might offer benefits to the families with whom you work, or your staff, include:

- Is your non-peer team over-committed, especially with the rollout of individual funding packages (like the National Disability Insurance Scheme in Australia)?
- Do you have a long waiting list of parents wanting services and supports for their child with a developmental delay or disability?
- Do the parents, carers and families who use your service rely heavily on your non-peer staff to help them to envision and strategise goals, to decide on priorities, and to engage in planning for their child?
- Do you have roles in your service that need filling, but your current non-peer staff don't have the capacity, skills, or desire to fill?
- Are you familiar with the benefits of a strong family network, but find that your parents are disconnected or that your parent community is disjointed and isolated?



Peer workers are a potential untapped workforce for your organisation.

What Benefits Can Peer Workers Offer Your Organisation?

- Peer workers are an **economic** and **innovative solution** to relieve pressure from over-stretched professional, non-peer staff.
- Peer workers fill a void in your organisation, **bridging the gap** between professional and parent, allowing your non-peer staff to do what they do best more effectively and efficiently.
- Peer workers are best positioned to encourage the families with whom you work to **activate** their own **agency** in their child's future, **increasing the impact** and decreasing the workload of your non-peer staff.
- Peer workers use the **lived experiences** that they share with your client families to **complement** the therapeutic work your non-peer staff do with the families with whom they work.
- Peer workers can work side-by-side with your existing non-peer staff to support families with their vision and goal setting. Peer workers bridge the gap between your non-peer staff's explicit, professional knowledge, and the experiences of families. They can **translate** your staff's extensive professional knowledge into accessible and relevant family-friendly information, saving your non-peer staff considerable time.
- Peer workers can be recruited from particular Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, to provide **culturally specific, sensitive and relevant services** to the CALD families with whom you work.
- Peer workers allow you to show tangibly your commitment to family-centred practice: 'walk the walk' by employing peer workers.
- Peer workers can fulfil both unique **complementary** roles as well as **supplementary** roles within your organisation.
- Peer workers **nurture** and **sustain innovation** through an intimate understanding of family needs; innovation in turns drives best practice.
- Peer workers help you to maintain a streamlined, single-source and trusted relationship between your organisation and your client parents.
- Peer workers can **positively influence service design** to become more needs-satisfying, more responsive, and more time economic for parents and professional non-peer staff alike.
- Peer workers are proven to **foster a connected and active community** that improves the lives of service users, and the quality of life for the families with whom you work and your staff alike.
- Peer workers have been shown to **empower other parents**. Empowered parent clients translate to an empowered staff.

Employ peer workers and ensure that your work has the greatest positive impact!



Cultural Checklist:

Are Peer Workers for You?

Peer workers can offer exciting and innovative solutions to some of the challenges inherent in the ECI and disability sectors. But including peers in any existing organisation is a complicated and demanding business, and employing peer workers may not be appropriate or suitable for all organisations.

This section will assist you to understand the cultural context necessary for the integration of peer workers, and to weigh up whether you are a cultural fit for a peer workforce.

So how do you know if peer workers are for you?

Whilst the integration of peer workers into ECI organisations is in its infancy, it is well evidenced in the mental health sector. Based on extensive research conducted over decades in that sector, and on our own experiences employing peer workers, we know that the culture of an organisation often predetermines the success of utilising a peer workforce.

The successful integration of peer workers into an existing organisation is predicated on the prevailing organisational culture of the service

(Chinman et al., 2014).



Based on our research, we've prepared this 'cultural checklist' to see if your organisation is best placed to welcome peer workers. Your reflections on these questions will help you to decide if peer workers are an appropriate solution for your organisation.

In the first place, we suggest that you answer the following questions within your management team. However, we also strongly suggest inviting your existing non-peer staff to express their views on your organisation's cultural context, using these questions as broad prompts for discussion. Bringing your existing staff along on the journey towards a decision about incorporating peer workers is vital to the ultimate success of integrating a peer workforce into your organisation, should you decide to do so.

Ask yourself, broadly speaking:

> Is my organisation flexible?

Peer workers often require a rethink and remodel of your organisational structure – would you be willing to adjust and adapt to a new workforce? How open-minded and receptive will your existing non-peer staff be to the idea of incorporating parents to complement their roles? What are your comfort levels with regards to systemic change? How open are your staff to exploring and rethinking how things are done, and what best practice looks like?

> Do I have excellent communication with and between my staff?

Peer workers represent a substantial change to the status quo, and successful integration requires clear communication with your existing staff, who will no doubt have questions and concerns, and who need your help to understand fully the benefits they will enjoy.

> Is our organisational model suitable for peer workers?

For example:

- ~ Is there an existing team into which peer workers could be incorporated?
- ~ How collaborative is our existing organisation?
- ~ How does management communicate to staff?
- ~ Do I have a board to convince?
- ~ Do I need cost-benefit analyses to go ahead?
- ~ Are we ready for scaling up our business and our organisation?

- ~ Do we have a physical space in which our peer workers can operate?

> Are we self-reflective and ready to reflect on our family-centred practice?

Are we ready to scrutinise our current practice and ask ourselves:

- ~ Are we truly family-centred?
- ~ Do we 'walk the walk' when it comes to our belief that our families are our partners? Do we respect and give credibility to our families' knowledge and expertise?
- ~ Are we committed to helping our families become leaders for themselves in a community of families, and leaders for the sector?
- ~ Do we have confidence in our parents as leaders who have talents and skills to offer our sector? Perhaps we already employ 'peers' and people with lived experience expertise in disability!
- ~ Are we ready to live family-centredness in our organisation by paying for that peer expertise?

➤ **Are we innovators?**

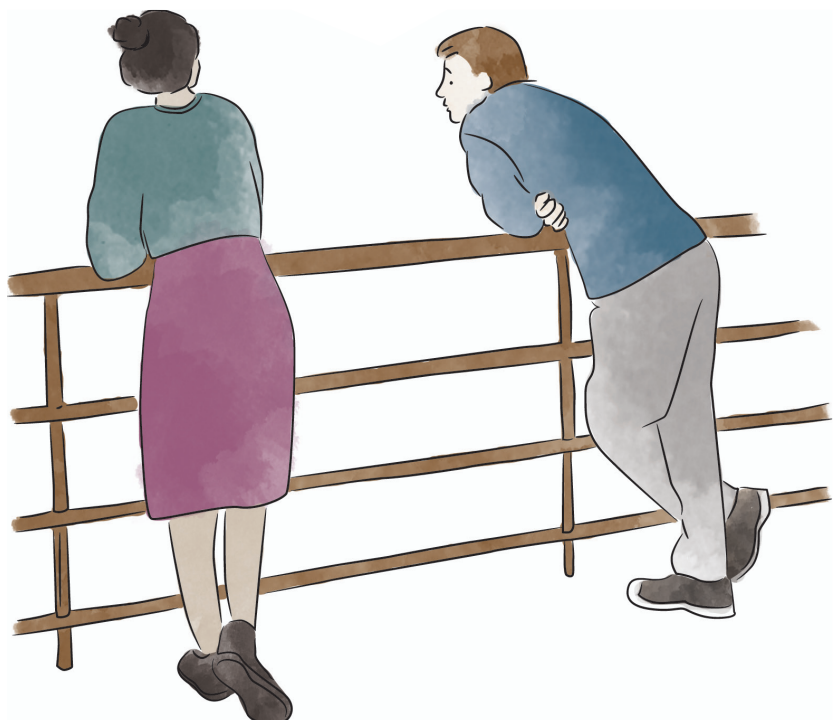
Using parents as peer workers in ECI is an innovative and progressive model that is still in its preliminary stages. If you have a curiosity for exploring new ideas, and if you enjoy trialing groundbreaking innovations, then peer workers might be for you!

- **Do we have 'early adopter' innovative non-peer staff members** who can liaise between peer workers and existing non-peer staff, and who can act as champions and leaders for a peer workforce? The idea of having a non-peer staff member 'advocate' and 'go-to' aids the ease with which peer workers can be integrated into your organisation; consider if you have someone on staff who might be appropriate for this role.

➤ **Do we already have experience with parent-to-parent models of support?**

You may have explored or developed your own models of parent-to-parent support and may be ready to build on past experiences. Maybe you have hosted initiatives such as My Time, which provide this kind of support, or have an active parent or parent community who are engaged in your organisation, or you may have already employed a parent in this role in the past.

So... are you ready? Are peer workers for you?



Benefits for Service Users and Families

Whilst the benefits of employing peer workers are many, and those benefits positively impact the peer workers themselves, your existing non-peer staff, as well as your service more broadly, it is the families – the parents to whose children you provide services – that will profit most from having peer workers to support them.

For families, the advantages of having peer workers on staff include:

- Peer workers **share the lived experiences** of the families with whom you work: they parent children with disability and developmental delay just like the families which your organisation supports. Families often feel increased **trust** in peer workers, who bring their own experience to support families, and families respond to the genuine **empathy, compassion, and understanding** that are offered by peer workers.
- Peer workers often act in a **complementary role** to your allied health staff and educators. Because their role is different, they can **support** families to make decisions, give **guidance** and advice, and simply chat with families in unique and **different ways** than your non-peer staff are able to do.
- Although peer workers are motivated by the best interest of your child, they are your parents' peers, not the children's. So, although they will not provide specific therapies or clinical advice for the children in your service, they are well positioned to **support families holistically**.
- Peer workers can help you to manage families' competing needs, since they understand intimately the delicate juggling act needed to **balance** a child's needs, with a family's, and with a parent's personal needs.
- Peer workers are best placed to act as an **intermediary** between parents and their child's clinical and therapeutic non-peer workers. Peer workers can help families with whom you work to **apply** the professional knowledge of your non-peer team to what they know about the unique profile of their child. Peer workers help families to understand the significance of professional knowledge to their individual circumstances.

- Being supported by a peer worker can **maximise the impact** of the therapeutic interventions provided by your non-peer staff. By helping families to foster a **positive**, growth mindset, by assisting them to develop an understanding of **goal setting** and planning, and by providing them with a safety net and **community** upon which they can rely for **credible** and **relevant support**, peer workers complement a child's therapy in a family-centred, holistic and dynamic way.
- Having peer workers on staff is proven to **foster a richer parent community**. Peer workers help to **decrease the social isolation** it is likely that the families with whom you work are experiencing by helping you to nurture a dynamic and active community to which each family belongs.
- Peer workers provide families with **connection**. Peer workers can become a parent's **mentor, advocate, friend**, or simply someone to give them advice from a '**consumer**' perspective. Peer workers provide quality and positive relationships.
- Peer workers provide a **message of hope** for the future for families: they are tangible evidence of lived optimism, vision, and meaningful achievement.
- Peers workers can be recruited from particular CALD communities, to provide **culturally specific, sensitive and relevant services** to those families who might otherwise struggle to access services and support.

We have prepared a resource that you can distribute to the families with whom you work, introducing peer workers, and explaining their benefits to them.

See, ∞ Appendix 1 External Resource: Why Peer Workers? Benefits for Families.

Peer workers help to decrease the social isolation it is likely that the families with whom you work are experiencing by helping you to nurture a dynamic and active community to which each family belongs.



Benefits for your Staff

The response to, and perception of, peer workers from existing professional, non-peer staff is one aspect of employing peer workers that is less well documented in the mental health and disability sectors.

Whilst good outcomes are discussed at length in the literature for both service users (families) and the peer workers themselves, the impact (positive or negative) on non-peer staff is a less studied aspect.

Although Bradstreet and Pratt (2010) report that in Scotland 'wider service system staff were mostly very positive and appreciative of the role [of the peer worker], seeing it as complementing the overall goal of supporting ... service users' (p. 38), they also note that 'there were some staff who were resistant or sceptical about the role' (p. 38). Our research in the ECI sector echoes Bradstreet and Pratt's conclusions in that a general positivity and receptivity to peer workers is tempered by certain, specific concerns (O'Brien, Taylor & Riches, 2018).

It is vital, then, that your existing non-peer staff are fully conversant with the potential benefits they might enjoy with the integration of peer workers into the team.

This section of the toolkit will outline the benefits that your non-peer staff may enjoy, and pairs with ∞ Appendix 3 Internal Resource: Welcoming Peer Workers into your ECI Organisation. We suggest that you make the Internal Resource in Appendix 3 available to your existing non-peer staff as a reference.

Benefits that peer workers might offer your existing non-peer staff include:

- **Relieving pressure** from non-peer staff in a variety of ways. Peer workers can adopt a variety of supporting roles. These roles might be tangible, such as a therapy assistant to make visuals for clients, but they might equally be less concrete, such as supporting a family's emotional needs (for example, providing ideas for a positive vision of the future), or helping parents to set goals and plan for goal implementation.
- Acting as a medium, **bridge**, or 'go-between', **between professionals and parents**, allowing non-peer staff to concentrate on their core business, while peer workers support parents in the implementation or daily application of professional advice.
- Encouraging families to **activate their own agency** through seeing the model of peer workers. Increased agency can equate to an **increase** in your non-peer staff's **impact** and a **decrease** in their **workload**.
- **Empowering families** by sharing lived experiences to complement the therapeutic work that your non-peer staff do with families. Empowered parents make your staff's job easier and more enjoyable.
- Dedicating the necessary time to achieve labour-intensive outcomes, such as translating therapeutic advice and explicit, extensive professional knowledge into accessible and relevant family-friendly information, saving considerable time.
- Fostering a **connected** and **active community** that improves the lives of service users and the quality of life for families, and **decreases social isolation**.



Addressing Existing Staff Concerns

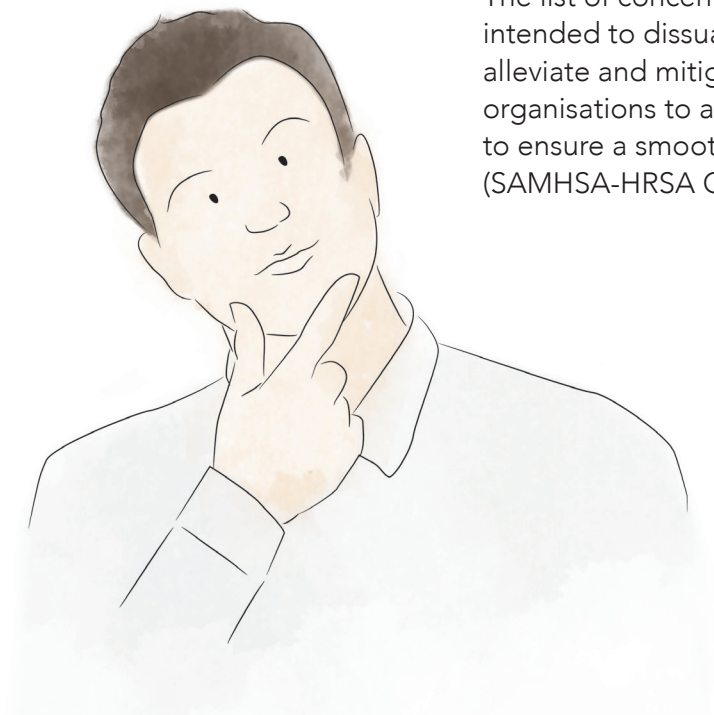
Employing paid peer workers is undoubtedly an innovative and valuable process, but experience and evidence suggests that your existing non-peer staff may have some concerns about how peer workers will work with and for your organisations (O'Brien, Taylor & Riches, 2018).

In this section, we have listed some of the concerns that non-peer staff have voiced when the idea of employing peer workers is first proposed.

Like the previous section, this list also informs part of ∞ [Appendix 3 Internal Resource: Welcoming Peer Workers into your ECI Organisation](#).

Distributing Appendix 3 to your non-peer staff may help to assuage their concerns, since they will know that you have preemptively considered some of the questions and uncertainties that they may have.

The list of concerns provided here is not exhaustive, nor is it intended to dissuade you from undertaking the necessary steps to alleviate and mitigate your staff's concerns. But it is important for organisations to address and consider these concerns proactively, to ensure a smooth and successful integration of peer workers (SAMHSA-HRSA CIHS, 2016).



Consider that your existing non-peer staff may be:

➤ Worrying about boundaries.

The peer workers you employ will most likely have been recruited from families with whom your non-peer staff currently works, or have worked with in the past. So, what happens if a peer worker colleague also is one of your non-peer staff's clients? And how do peer workers know their own boundaries when it's possible that they know or are friends with other families in the community? Indeed, what makes them unique is the relationships that they have within your community!

We suggest that you proactively address these issues because they are prevalent concerns for non-peer staff. Remind staff that a peer worker's influences and ties to the community are key reasons for their employment, making them distinct from traditional, non-peer staff. Implement policies to support peer workers to understand their boundaries. Ask your existing non-peer staff to help you to establish a process or policy to address the situation of a peer worker being both a consumer and a provider in your service.

Share ∞ [Appendix 4 Internal Resource: Setting The Boundaries with your non-peer staff](#) (which is a reference resource for incoming peer workers), to assure them that part of the peer workers' training will be in establishing and maintaining boundaries with other families. Our experience suggests that if non-peer staff know that peer workers are given resources to ensure that they understand that their role is a non-clinical one, and that their advice to families is not clinical or therapeutic in nature, it will help them to feel more comfortable with the concept of peer workers.

➤ Thinking about job descriptions and roles.

Each peer worker should have an individualised job description based on a standard peer worker job description template (see ∞ [Appendix 6 Internal Resource: Template Job Description](#)). Best practice suggests that your non-peer staff

should be given the opportunity to help you to formulate this template (Davidson et al., 2012). Having a detailed job description not only supports peer workers to understand their role in your organisation, it also proactively addresses any potential conflict of interest issues.

➤ Wondering about privacy and confidentiality issues.

All peer workers are bound by the same privacy and confidentiality standards as all other staff. In this, peer workers are just like existing non-peer staff members. We suggest that you discuss with your existing staff what kinds of access your peer workers have to client details, and assure them that peer workers will receive the same induction as other non-peer staff, as well as the level of training around privacy and confidentiality that is appropriate to their specific role.

➤ Worried about job security in the face of a changing sector.

It is possible that your non-peer staff will be concerned about how integrating peer workers into your team will affect their jobs and roles. Ultimately, peer workers do not challenge the importance or currency of the allied health workforce, whose professional knowledge will remain relevant and vital to the sector. It is nevertheless fundamental to remind non-peer staff that peer workers are being employed to work in partnership with them and to offer complementary, supplementary but distinct services to families.

➤ Questioning the evidence base for the benefits of using parents as peer workers.

Although employing peer workers is a relatively new concept in the ECI and disability sectors, globally the mental health sector has been paying peer workers to work alongside health professionals for decades. There is an enormous body of research arising from the mental health sector documenting not only the benefits, but also the challenges and the conditions for success, of integrating a peer workforce into an

existing organisation. This research helps us to assert with confidence that peer workers can be tremendously beneficial to the clients who have access to them, and to the professionals whom they support (Heyworth, 2018).

➤ **Thinking about the practicalities.**

In Australia, all peer workers complete a Working With Children Check, sign an employment contract, and are offered the same kinds of induction and training that all staff undertake. In New South Wales, Australia, all peer workers in an ECI setting are also mandatory reporters for child protection requirements. You should investigate what is necessary in your specific location and legislation and provide appropriate training and support to incoming peer workers. Ensure that your non-peer staff know what training will be given to peer workers in this regard.

You might also like to decide with your non-peer staff whether peer workers will be integrated into your physical work environment, or if they will have a designated work space if that choice is available to you: proactively tackling this kind of practical consideration will help your non-peer staff to feel satisfied that you are addressing the issues that will directly affect them.

➤ **Pondering how they will keep abreast of any changes to or within your organisation's peer workforce.**

Reassure your staff that you know the value of regular and preemptive communication with them, especially in the preliminary stages of implementation. Regular communication from you will keep them updated. Examples might include introducing new peer workers to the team in the same way other new employees are introduced, or having designated times for discussions at team meetings.

➤ **Questioning whether peer workers will really help them.**

Undoubtedly, your non-peer staff may find initially that they need to talk with the families with whom they work about the role of peer workers in your organisation and that this may occupy some additional time for them. It may also not be appropriate for peer workers to help your non-peer staff to support their most complex families. Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that there will be many ways in which peer workers can support your non-peer staff and help them to impact families as outlined above.

➤ **Considering how the peers have been recruited.**

Peer workers are most often recruited from potential parent leaders from the families accessing your organisation's services. Encourage your existing staff to think of parents who might be suitable: those who are inspiring leaders, amazing advocates, eloquent communicators. The best recommendations for peer workers will come from your existing non-peer staff, and empowering them to recruit gives them an active role in the recruitment process.

➤ **Wondering how they can help.**

Research shows that peer workers succeed when they have an advocate or a champion from the non-peer staff (Davidson et al., 2012), who can liaise between peer and non-peer teams, and who can guide and support your peer team. Promote this role to your existing staff and see who is interested in being an 'early adopter'.

7

The Roles of Peer Workers

Peer workers have the potential to fulfil a variety of possible roles in any ECI organisation.

Broadly speaking, paid peer workers' job descriptions have usually fallen into three main, overlapping categories (Chinman et al., 2014):

- 1** Management and the individual together develop an individualised job description from a template, that captures the peer worker's skills, interests and responsibilities,
- 2** Delivery of activities alongside, or with the input of, traditional or non-peer staff and workers, and
- 3** Provision of traditional services (like therapy assistance) aided by the insight informed by a lived experience.

The peer worker role that has been most extensively researched is the support role, in which peer workers adopt a formalised peer support worker function, perhaps offering workshops, facilitating education programs, and working directly with parent peers.

But the role of peer workers is not limited to this support role. There are many other roles that peer workers might take on to support your organisation, your staff, and your service users and families.

Just think: many parents had blossoming careers before becoming parents, which they might have paused to care for their child with disability. Maybe parents in your community have skills in Information Technology, or Accountancy, or Event Management. Maybe there are journalists, project managers, academics, marketers, or photographers in the parent community... Once you know the parents with whom you work and their skillsets, strengths and interests, roles will organically emerge to suit them.

The roles parents might fulfil as peer workers are limited only by your vision!

Peer workers are already working in ECI in New South Wales, Australia, as workshop facilitators, support therapists, graphic designers, administration and reception staff, researchers, bloggers, grant writers, and event managers.

What can parents do for you?

Some roles which peer workers are already fulfilling in other ECI organisations are:

> Workshop facilitation:

Many workshops on goal-setting, visioning, planning, parenting, and support are best delivered by peers, those with a shared lived experience, who have an intimate understanding of the challenges and joys of parenting children with disabilities, and have the personal testimony and credibility to make your advice matter. Peer workers often make excellent facilitators because they come to their work with the passion, enthusiasm and knowledge fueled by their own lives and experiences.

> Support therapists:

In the current ECI climate, our allied health teams are so often over-stretched between providing therapy and key-worker support to families, ensuring the smooth roll-out of the NDIS (in Australia) and other funding packages, and sustaining the multitude of other responsibilities that are incumbent upon our non-peer staff. With the right support and training, peer workers can work as excellent support therapists, bringing authentic empathy and a unique knowledge set to their work.

> Administration:

Need administrative jobs done, or an admin role filled? Many parents will have skills and expertise in administration that they bring from their previous careers. Enrich the depth of your community by employing peers from within the families with whom you work, who will perform administrative tasks with a genuine and personal commitment to the wellbeing of clients and of your organisation.

> Graphic Design:

Rolling out a new program? Need a new look for an existing service? Graphic designers make your visuals appealing and accessible to new and existing families alike. Use parents' creative talent and expertise as an illustrator, visualiser, or in multimedia, design, or art to increase your organisational reach or profitability.



➤ Research:

Parents with research skills are currently putting organisations in the international spotlight by conducting innovative and cutting-edge research projects for ECI services, influencing the direction and shape of best practice in the ECI sector worldwide.

➤ Grant Writing:

Do you have a pioneering research project that just needs a superlative funding application to help it launch? Peer workers are currently writing grant applications and securing tens of thousands of dollars to advance research in our sector: why not get involved too?

➤ Blogging and content writing:

The authenticity of a lived experience mixed with strong written communication skills means compelling reading for families and professionals alike. Many parents have rich stories to tell which resonate deeply with other families and which can help families to find their own agency and connectedness.

➤ Marketing:

Increase your public relations, advertising and marketing success!

➤ Technology consultants:

Incorporate the latest technology into your existing programs. Use parents to educate staff in the most effective ways of using technology to support the families with whom you work.

➤ Event Management:

Who organised your community Christmas party last year, or the opening of your new preschool, or the launch of your latest initiative? Why not a parent, who comes to event management with an intimate understanding of the needs and desire of parents and their children, disabled or not.

Once you know the parents with whom your work and their skillsets, strengths and interests, roles will organically emerge to suit them.

This is only a small selection of what is already happening in other ECI organisations.

Now it's your time to harness the talents of parents.

The only limit is your ingenuity!



What Next?

Guidelines, Resources and Tips for You and Your Staff



Welcoming Peer Workers into Your ECI Organisation

Employing peer workers within an ECI Service is undoubtedly an equally exciting and daunting process. This section has been designed to draw your attention to some potential issues that you should consider and address as integral to the process.

Of course, some issues may be self-evident in your specific context, but this list of potential concerns arises from a research project aimed specifically to make the integration of peer workers more efficient and positive for all.

Tips to Integrate Peer Workers into Your Existing Staff Successfully

Issues to consider:

➤ Privacy and confidentiality

When peer workers are recruited from existing client users, they will be known to and among your community. Think about how that preexisting dynamic might change relationships between the new peer worker, other parents, and your non-peer staff.

All peer workers should be bound by the same privacy and confidentiality standards as all other staff, but proactively decide what kinds of access your peer workers have to your server and client details.

As with any change, the introduction of peer workers into your existing organisation will not all be 'smooth sailing'. Be prepared for fluctuations, and the normal ups and downs you would expect to experience as major changes occur.

> Practicalities

Understanding the practical implications of employing peer workers before you embark on the journey is vital to your success. For example, we encourage you to think about:

- ~ What kinds of professional standards you will require of your peer workers.
- ~ Whether they will be required to attend some or all staff meeting and training.
- ~ How about first aid training?
- ~ Whether peer workers will be expected to operate in shared staff spaces, or will they work in designate physical spaces? And what impacts might peer workers have on shared spaces? Will your non-peer staff feel comfortable discussing families when peer workers are present? And how could you circumvent such conflicts?

> Employment conditions

As peer workers are paid employees it is necessary to give due consideration to their employment conditions as you would with any other potential employee. Think about:

- ~ Whether they will need a Working With Children Check (or other child protection check) regardless of their access to children, and what your local legislation requires.
- ~ Checking your local legislation to understand whether peer workers fall within the definition of 'mandatory reporters' for child protection and safety purposes. For example, in New South Wales (Australia), employees of organisations supporting children and their families (like ECI services) are considered mandatory reporters. How will you train your new peer workers to understand their child protection reporting responsibilities?
- ~ What employment conditions will peer workers have? Considering pay rates is obviously paramount to the fiscal viability and sustainability of employing peer workers. For example, if you are in Australia, will you supplement the SCHADS (Social, Community, Home Care & Disability Services) industry rate?

Find a suitable hourly pay scale and budget accordingly, remembering that you want to offer sufficient pay rates to retain your new workers.

> Job Description

Job descriptions are an effective way for both non-peer and peer staff to understand the roles of peer workers, and how peer workers complement and supplement existing non-peer staff. Based on evidence from the mental health sector, we recommend that you actively involve your existing non-peer staff in the development of a template, 'general' job description for peer workers (or, at the very least, engage in extensive consultation with your non-peer staff). This process often allows non-peer staff to express concerns and understand the specific roles of peer workers within your organisation before the peer workers begin.

Equally, our experience, alongside evidence from the mental health sector, indicates that each peer worker should be given the opportunity to work together with management to individualise this general job description to incorporate their specific skills and interests, and to form a job description that is meaningful and relevant to each person.

We have provided you with a job description template, to give you an idea of the scope, depth and breadth of a peer worker job description. Obviously, you will want to modify the template to suit your organisational structure and your specific job description format so that it accords with other staff members' job descriptions (see ∞ [Appendix 6 Internal Resource: Template Job Description](#)).

> My parent is now a peer worker!

Because it is likely that your peer workers will be recruited from your client base, you need to address how you will negotiate existing relationships.

Make sure that the non-peer staff who work with the parent's child are included in the discussion about that parent's potential employment. Discuss whether the parent and staff will continue to work together, or how you will resolve the boundaries

in their relationship (when is the parent a parent, and when are they a peer worker? When is your staff member the child's therapist, and when are they a colleague?).

> Induction and training

Peer workers often need role-specific upskilling and training (for example, in workshop facilitation), but as a member of staff in your organisation, what other types of training might be relevant and specific to peer workers?

Examine your current staff induction packages and decide whether these are relevant, appropriate, and adequate for peer workers. Are there modifications that can easily be made to tailor your existing induction for peer workers (for example, removing detailed induction protocols for key workers)?

Systematising your induction and training from the outset (whether integrated with non-peer staff or differentiated for peer workers) both alleviates existing staff concerns and is best practice for peer workers.

> Organisation

If you are employing more than one peer worker, or intend to employ multiple peer workers over time, consider issues of organisation.

Will you have a peer leader to direct a peer worker team?

Do you have a non-peer staff member who could act as a peer worker sponsor or champion? As noted above, best practice from the mental health sector indicates that nominating an innovative, 'early adopter' non-peer staff member to liaise between peer and non-peer staff, and to act as peer advocate and champion, increases the overall success and ease of integrating peer workers into existing structures.

> Communication

The key to the successful introduction of peer workers is to communicate with your existing non-peer staff proactively and explicitly: convey clearly what peer workers are; what roles they will have;

what induction and training they will receive, and by which standards they are bound. To facilitate communication with your staff, consider:

- ~ Beginning any introduction to peer workers by delivering a formal workshop outlining the benefits of peer workers to the staff themselves, to the peer workers, and to your client families. This kind of proactive and formal consultation is crucial to involving your staff;
- ~ Involving your staff in a cultural assessment (see the earlier [Section 3](#)) to assess your organisational suitability to adopt the peer worker model;
- ~ Consulting with your staff about which roles they think might suit peer workers both as a team, and as individual candidates. This process might include involving your staff in drafting the general job description for your new peer workforce, as described above;
- ~ Incorporating your staff into your recruitment technique by inviting them to nominate or to reflect on which parents would make good peer workers;
- ~ Conferring with staff about the other matters raised in this toolkit (for example, with regards to training and induction);
- ~ Showing your staff the other resources in this suite (especially the resource for incoming peer workers, 'Setting the Boundaries: A tip sheet for beginning peer workers') to demonstrate that you have considered many of the issues about which they might be concerned, and
- ~ Being honest and transparent about the possible limitations, and any 'teething problems' you foresee.

> Recruitment

In the next section, we outline a new way to help you to recruit peer workers. We call it the 'Reverse Recruitment Technique', and it is an individual and strengths-led process (see [Section 9](#)).

Recruiting Peer Workers:

The Reverse Recruitment Technique

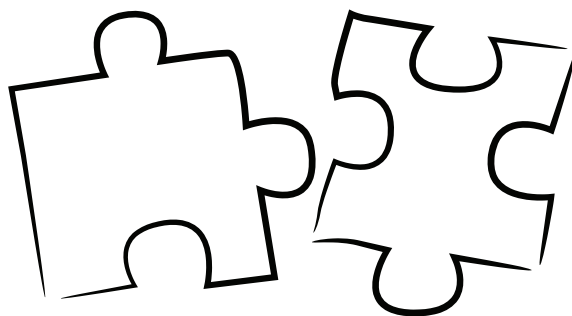
Although utilising a peer workforce is in its infancy in the ECI sector, it is well attested in the mental health sector.

Based on extensive research conducted over decades in that sector, and on the documented experiences of employing peer workers in the ECI sector, we have designed a 'reverse recruitment technique' that results in a successful, motivated, and committed peer workforce.

Traditionally, recruitment begins with a role. That role is advertised, interest and applications are sought, Curricula Vitae are read, interviews conducted, and the most suitable candidate is employed to fill the role.

Reverse recruitment is different.

Reverse recruitment asks that you consider the individual from a strengths-based perspective: it is not role driven. It is based on the theory of a 'leadership pipeline', in which existing leaders identify new and emerging leaders (Heyworth, Mahmic & Janson, 2017).



-
- 1 Reverse recruitment starts with a person's – a parent's or carer's – participation in your service or organisation.
 - 2 All staff (including non-peer staff, management, and any existing peer workers) who interact deeply with families should be familiar with the broad criteria matrix listing what makes a quality peer worker (see below).
 - 3 Staff are encouraged to notice examples of organic and demonstrated potential for family and parental leadership when interacting with their families, through the lens of this criteria matrix for peer workers. Staff are invited to nominate potential peer workers to management for consideration.
 - 4 Potential parent leaders are invited to speak to management about the peer workforce, and for management to gain an understanding of the parent's unique skills, desires, and dream roles.
 - 5 Management considers potential roles for each individual peer worker by working to strengths and by harnessing existing skills. Remember that roles may already exist, or that they might fill a void in your organisation yet unfilled, or be a hitherto unknown or unrecognised role.
 - 6 Management and the individual together develop an individualised job description from a template, that captures the peer worker's skills, interests and responsibilities.
-

It is important that all parties understand that identification as a potential peer worker may not equal an offer of employment.

It is also possible that you will want to advertise the concept of peer workers to families. Or, you may want to give potential parent leaders some material to read about becoming a peer worker. We've prepared a resource for you to reproduce and distribute to parents on the benefits of peer employment to them. You can find it at ∞ [Appendix 2 External Resource: Would You Like to Be a Peer Worker?](#)

Management gains an understanding of the parent's unique skills, desires, and dream roles.

Criteria Matrix

On the following page is a template criteria matrix for identifying potential peer workers. It can be modified and developed to suit your organisation's specific context, but a strengths-based and family-leadership approach are foundational to the model.

Does the potential peer worker...	Comments
Recognise that a family's agency is critical for their children's development?	
Show a profound engagement with the content and ideas you discuss together?	
Actively support other parents with similar lived experiences? Are they a parent leader in your community?	
Have the respect and friendship of other parents with similar lived experiences? Are they relatable and accessible to other parents?	
Show an active interest in social media and virtual communities?	
Actively contribute to discussions, rather than always passively receiving advice and instruction?	
Have excellent communication skills (are they confident in their presentation)?	
Exhibit good organisational skills (are they always prepared, do they always bring the requisite materials, etc.)?	
Have a record of good attendance and responsiveness?	
Demonstrate a deep understanding of how to set goals, and of how to break goals down practically to implement them in their actions?	
Demonstrate an interest in the key concepts informing best practice in ECI?	
Other strengths I would like to mention are:	
Additional comments:	

Setting the Boundaries

It is vital for your peer workers to be clear about the scope of their role in your organisation, especially if they are working directly with families.

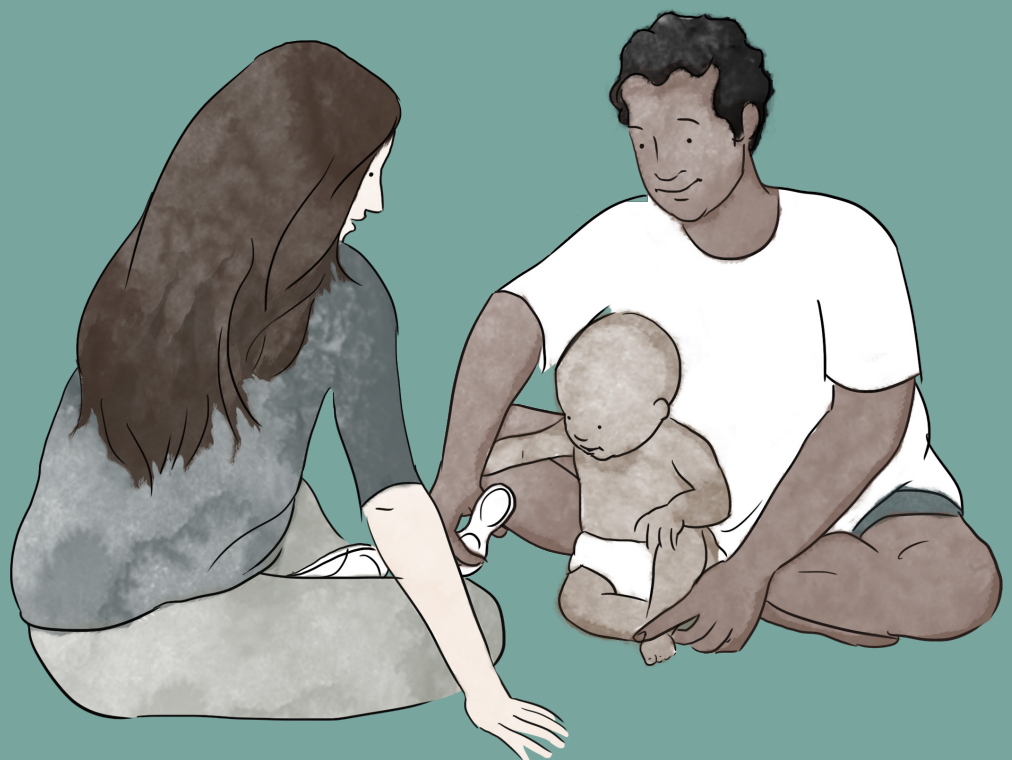
Research suggests that establishing boundaries from the outset is important to the successful integration of a peer workforce.

Giving your new peer workers a well-defined explanation of what kinds of interactions with families are appropriate to their role, and what lies within (and without) their job description, ensures that both they themselves, and your broader non-peer staff, feel comfortable and supported with respect to their responsibilities (Repper & Carter, 2011).

What makes peer workers so effective in their interactions with families, is their potential to encourage high-trust, low-distance relationships with families (Janson, 2018). As Davidson et al. (1999) point out, what makes paid peer workers unique and special is their access to a 'consumer' point of view, and their shared lived experiences which foster empathy, mutual support and acceptance in the families they assist. However, although it is important to preserve what makes peers workers unique and resist the urge to 'professionalise' peer workers: peer workers are most effective when they do not simply approximate or replace traditional non-peer staff (Davidson et al., 1999). It is equally important to address issues of boundaries (Repper & Carter, 2011). Precisely because peer workers work best when they have the opportunity to share their lived experiences and disclose their personal journeys, it is important for you to be proactive in your risk management by 'setting the boundaries' for your peer staff (Repper & Carter, 2011).

The Resource at [∞ Appendix 4](#) should be distributed to peer workers as part of their employment so that they understand the purpose and limitations of their role.

Appendices



Why Peer Workers?

Benefits for Families

As you work with us over the coming months, you'll see some new faces at our service, as we welcome peer workers into our organisation. We have employed peer workers as trained and knowledgeable staff members to help you and your families.

Our new qualified and skilled peer workers are parents and carers of children with developmental delay and disability, who are paid to work in a variety of roles alongside our allied health staff and educators. Our peer workers share your lived experience: they have walked in your shoes!

When you work with a peer worker you might:



Research shows that these are benefits of peer work for families.

Would You Like to Be a Peer Worker?



Right now there are parents of children with developmental delay and disability just like you, who are being employed (that means paid!) in a variety of roles to use the unique knowledge and expertise that comes from that lived experience to make a difference to Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Often, peer workers use the skills and interests they have from their own personal and professional lives in combination with their lived experience to forge unique, exciting, and fulfilling roles within ECI organisations.

Interested? Talk to us!

Join the parents who are already being paid to be workshop facilitators, support therapists, receptionists, graphic designers, researchers, grant writers, bloggers, and event managers in their child's ECI service.

Be part of an exciting new movement and contribute to your community. Rekindle your professional skills in the most flexible and empathetic work environment available. Learn new skills, change pace, change career! And take advantage of the unique expertise your experience as a parent of a child with disability or development delay gives you.

'Having a peer worker who is the same as me -- a parent of child with special needs was -- very empowering. I kept thinking: she is dealing with similar issues at home but [is] still standing here helping other parents and families. If she can do this, why not me? I can achieve more than I think myself capable of! That gave me a whole new thought about [the] meaning of my life.' -- MB, Peer Worker

Here are some of the benefits you can expect from peer work:

Peer work is an opportunity

for you to re-enter or participate in the workforce in the most flexible and understanding of work environments. Often your peer work can be casual, part-time, remote, and dictated by your and your family's circumstances. The level of commitment you make – how many hours, where you work, and when – depends entirely on you and your ECI management.

Just as importantly, peer work allows you to 'give back'

to the community, and to support others walking a similar journey to you. It offers you a paid role that is meaningful and relevant to your life now, and which takes into consideration the unique expertise and knowledge you have amassed as you've parented a child with disability.

You have unique talents

and skills: Utilise your gifts to change lives, not least of which your own! Reawaken your talents and engage your intellect.

Peer work allows you to connect with your peers,

access and activate your own support network, and create a dynamic community. Peer work decreases your sense of isolation, and increases your self-worth, self-esteem, and self-knowledge.

Peer work is proven to build leadership and knowledge.

Strengthen and expand your existing knowledge and skills, and learn many new ones. Whether you're interested in disability services as a permanent career change, or whether you need a stepping-stone to help you re-enter the workforce in years to come, peer work fosters transferrable and valuable skills within a supportive and understanding work environment.

Peer work has been shown to be mutually empowering:

empower other parents, whilst being empowered in the process.

Be an innovator! Peer work is still in its infancy in the ECI sector, although it has been proven effective for decades in the mental health sector. With the benefits that a peer workforce offers to families, children, the peer workers themselves, and the teams and organisations in which they belong, peer workers have the potential to make a positive and significant impact across the Disability sector. This is your opportunity to be part of something so much bigger!

Take this opportunity to develop and learn new

skills. Peer workers are given professional development and training, which will open up new opportunities for your working future.



Contact your Early Childhood Intervention Organisation today to register your interest!

© 2018 Plumtree Children's Services, Inc. This resource is supported by a grant offered under the Innovative Workforce Fund, administered by the National Disability Services (NDS) with funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The opinions or analysis expressed in this resource are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department, the Minister for Social Services or NDS, and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of government policy.

Welcoming Peer Workers

into your Early Childhood Intervention Organisation (ECI): Information for staff

By exploring whether to employ peer workers, your organisation is considering becoming part of an innovative and visionary approach that utilises the skills and strengths of peers to complement your role, and to help families to be more effective and empowered.



In the ECI context, 'peer workers' are parents and carers of children with developmental delay and disability, who are paid to work in a variety of complementary and supplementary roles alongside allied health staff and educators within ECI organisations. Some peer workers are employed to support families directly; their advice to families is non-clinical and non-therapeutic. Instead, they use their lived experience to help support families. Other peer workers may take on roles that do not require them to work with families, like graphic designers, bloggers, and technology specialists. Whatever their specific role, peer workers are already being employed successfully in other ECI services to complement your own roles, and to empower families. Their presence has been proven to foster community, increase family agency, and complement your responsibilities.

No doubt you will have questions, perhaps even concerns, that are important and have been echoed by many others in your position. This resource will outline some of the primary benefits you will experience from having peer workers as colleagues, as well as listing some common concerns that management will be addressing as part of your formal introduction to peer workers. This resource has been prepared using research from the mental health sector globally, which has been utilising peer workers for decades, and from the documented experiences of other ECI organisations.

Peer workers are parents who are paid to work in a variety of complementary and supplementary roles alongside you.

Benefits for Staff and Families



In ECI, peer workers are employed in a variety of complementary and supplementary roles. They share your vision and values to provide high quality family-centred, strengths-based, culturally responsive, inclusive, and individualised support and services to the children and families with whom you work.

Evidence shows that together, peer workers and non-peer staff (like allied health professionals and educators), can work to...

Support families.

Peer workers use the lived experiences that they share with families to complement the therapeutic work that you do with families. Peer workers have been shown to empower other parents. Empowered parents make your job easier and more enjoyable.

Decrease the social isolation of families and promote community and connectedness.

Peer workers are proven to foster a connected and active community that improves the lives of your service users, and the quality of life for families.

Achieve better family outcomes.

Peer workers can work alongside professional staff in a variety of ways. Perhaps you need a therapy assistant, or feel like families need more time to have someone listen to their experiences? Perhaps the families with whom you work need help in goal setting and forward planning, whether to access funding or more generally? These are just some tangible ways in which peer workers can benefit families to achieve better outcomes, and support you to make a difference to families.

Help families to understand and implement your clinical advice and interventions.

Peer workers can help families to implement the strategies you suggest into their day-to-day lives. Peer workers use their lived experiences to amplify your message to families, allowing you the time to concentrate on what you do best more effectively and efficiently.

Assist families to become more independent and decrease their dependency on you.

Peer workers encourage families to activate their own agency through their own example. Increased family agency means your impact is increased and your workload is decreased.

Support families to define goals for their child more independently.

Peer workers can work side-by-side with you to support families with their vision and goal setting. Peer workers can take the time you don't have to translate your explicit and extensive professional knowledge, into accessible and relevant family-friendly information, saving you considerable time.

Reach all families.

Peers workers can be recruited from particular culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, to provide culturally specific, sensitive and relevant services to the CALD families with whom you work, and who might otherwise struggle to access services and support.

Benefits of Peer Workers

Peer workers complement your therapeutic work with lived experiences.

Peer workers encourage your families to activate their own agency through their own example.

Peer workers can act as a medium between professionals and parents.

Peer workers relieve pressure from professional staff.

On partnering with a peer worker to support a young mother of a child with significant development delay, one occupational therapist noted that 'this mother was so grateful to talk with another parent, so grateful to hear she was not alone, so grateful to talk with someone who could offer hope and gentle humour. Compassion and insight. A powerful combination'.

-- NK, Occupational Therapist

On working closely with a peer worker to support her journey of parenting a young child with autism, one mother said that, 'I was able to be more honest and open with the peer workers, expressing my feelings and worries and also my small achievements because I knew that the peer worker would understand and truly care about the things I shared. In many ways, we had the same challenges and it was very comforting to have another person who could acknowledge the struggles and then try to help you with the solutions'.--KD, Parent

Concerns You Might Have

Peer workers are paid employees, just like you. They therefore have the same rights and responsibilities as all other employees. Peer workers are given the requisite training appropriate to their role, and they are bound by the same confidentiality and privacy requirements as all other employees.

The following is a list of concerns that some professionals may have about paid peer workers. Don't be deterred by the number of concerns listed here: not all of these concerns will necessarily be relevant to you or your context, some may not concern you at all, and ultimately you can be reassured that your organisation is aware of potential challenges and will be prepared to work with you to resolve any concerns you might have.

Thinking about confidentiality?

All peer workers are bound by the same privacy and confidentiality standards as all other staff. In this, they are just like you. Your management will ascertain what policies and procedures will best ensure the confidentiality and privacy of families. For example, peer workers may be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement, or agree to a code of conduct. They will be made familiar with policies and procedures relating to child protection, mandatory reporting, and other pertinent issues.

Thinking about protecting children?

All peer workers are subject to the same checks and balances required by your local legislation for child protection and safety purposes. For example, in New South Wales (Australia), employees of organisations supporting children and their families (like ECI services) are considered mandatory reporters, so peer workers will be trained in mandatory reporting and child protection. Your management will determine the right arrangement for your environment to ensure the safety of children as a foremost priority.

Thinking about job descriptions and roles?

Each peer worker has an individualised job description based on the standard peer worker job description template that you have helped (or will help) to formulate. Having a detailed job description supports peer workers to understand their role in your organisation, as well as proactively addressing any potential conflict of interest issues.

Worrying about boundaries?

It's natural for you to feel this concern. Your peer workers will most likely have been recruited from your existing client families, so what happens if a peer worker colleague is also one of your clients? And how do peer workers know their own boundaries when it's possible that they know, or are friends, with other families in the community? Your management will establish a process for the former scenario, and rest assured that part of the peers' training is in establishing and maintaining boundaries with other families. In addition, peer workers are given resources to ensure that they understand that their role is a non-clinical one, and that their advice to families is not clinical or therapeutic in nature: that is your area of expertise!

Questioning the evidence base for the benefits of using peer workers?

Although employing peer workers is a relatively new concept in the ECI and disability sectors, globally the mental health sector has been paying peer workers to work alongside health professionals for decades. There is an enormous body of research arising from the mental health sector from Australia and abroad, documenting not only the benefits, but also the challenges and the conditions for success, of integrating a peer workforce into an existing organisation. This research helps us to assert with confidence that peer workers can be tremendously beneficial to the clients who have access to them, and to the professionals whom they support. There is also emerging research in Australia regarding the use of peer workers in ECI (Heyworth, 2018; Heyworth & Mahmic, 2018; O'Brien, Taylor & Riches, 2018).

Thinking about the practicalities?

All peer workers have signed an employment contract, and they are offered the same kinds of induction and training that all staff undertake. Your management will ensure that each peer worker receives the appropriate training to suit their specific role. Your management will also discuss whether peer workers will be integrated into your physical work environment, or if they will have a designated work space.

Pondering how you will keep abreast of any changes to or within your organisation's peer workforce?

Your management team know the value of regular and preemptive communication with you, especially in the early stages of implementation. Regular communication from them will keep you updated.

Wondering what the peer workers will actually do?

Peer workers can fulfil both complementary and supplementary roles in your organisation. Some peer workers might work directly with you in a non-clinical, but complementary role (remember that training will be provided relevant to that role). Other peer workers will have supplementary roles, such as in accounts, in your relationships team, or as a graphic designer, or writing grants. Those peer workers will similarly be given the relevant training and induction for their supplementary role. Peer workers can adopt a variety of roles: training and induction will be organised to suit these individual roles, just as is appropriate for all employees.

**Questioning whether
peer workers will really help
you?**

You may find initially that you need to talk with the families with whom you work about the role of peer workers in your organisation, or that it is not appropriate for peer workers to help you to support the most complex families. Nevertheless, there will be many ways in which peer workers can support you and help you to impact families as outlined above. Your management and the preferences and needs of the individual families with whom you work will help to determine if peer workers are suitable to support you in your role, and in what roles they might be most effective.

**Considering how peers have
been recruited?**

Peer workers are most often recruited from potential parent leaders from your organisation's families. Can you think of a parent who is an inspiring leader, an amazing advocate, and an eloquent communicator? The best recommendations for peer workers come from you.

**Wondering how you can
help?**

Research shows that peer workers succeed when they have an advocate or a champion from the non-peer staff, who can liaise between peer and non-peer teams, and who can guide and support your peer Team. Are you interested in this role?

Your management has committed to involve you throughout the entire process of integrating peer workers into your organisation, which will help you to achieve clarity about the role and purpose of peer workers in your service. This resource, and the toolkit from which it is taken, should help all stakeholders to achieve that clarity and understanding.

Peer workers can offer exciting and innovative solutions to some of the challenges inherent in our sector. Whilst incorporating peer workers into ECI organisations is a relatively new approach, it is well demonstrated in other sectors.

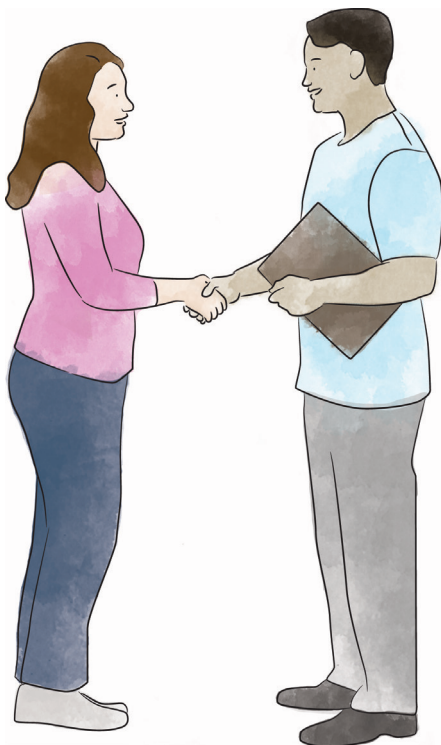
Setting the Boundaries

A tip sheet for peer workers beginning to work with families in ECI

Congratulations! By becoming a peer worker, you have taken the opportunity to contribute to the disability sector in a way that is meaningful and relevant to you, to use your existing skills or, potentially, to upskill and reskill, and to be part of an active and dynamic community.

What do you need to know now?

This 'tip sheet' sets out answers to some of the questions that other new peer workers have asked when they were in your position. It will help you not only to understand your role as a peer worker, but also might prompt other questions that you didn't know you had.



'For me, peer work is a win-win: I get paid to work in a meaningful role that will ultimately make me more employable in the future, and I get to feel the satisfaction and fulfilment of giving back to my community. Peer work is an opportunity for me to use my lived experience to make a difference to others who are on a similar path.'

-- MH (Peer Worker)

Golden Rules



To start with, there are some 'Golden Rules' that should frame all of your interactions with the families with whom you work. These are:

- 1 **Be open-minded**, because there is no right and wrong, just open dialogue to support and empower families and their children.
- 2 **Be proactive** and encourage families to nurture this skill for themselves also.
- 3 **Remember what's possible** when we learn together. Families will build their own feelings of competence and self-efficacy if they feel that they can teach you too!
- 4 **Be courteous and kind** and listen carefully and with respect to family experiences and preferences.
- 5 **Remember privacy** and never share anything about the families with whom you work, including photos or stories, without their express permission. Always ask a family's permission to discuss their situation with anyone else, even with the allied health professionals in your organisation.
- 6 **Support families** to share their opinions and to be leaders for themselves and for their families. Your knowledge is important, but so is the knowledge and experience families bring.
- 7 **Your role is non-clinical**, so you need to understand and respect the boundaries between clinical and non-clinical advice. Evidencing your own experiences can be helpful as an example to illustrate a principle (for example, here's an example of when I looked at my child's strengths and what happened). But, evidencing your own experiences to advise families on a specific therapeutic or clinical pathway (for example, this therapy worked for my child, so I recommend it for you) becomes clinical advice.

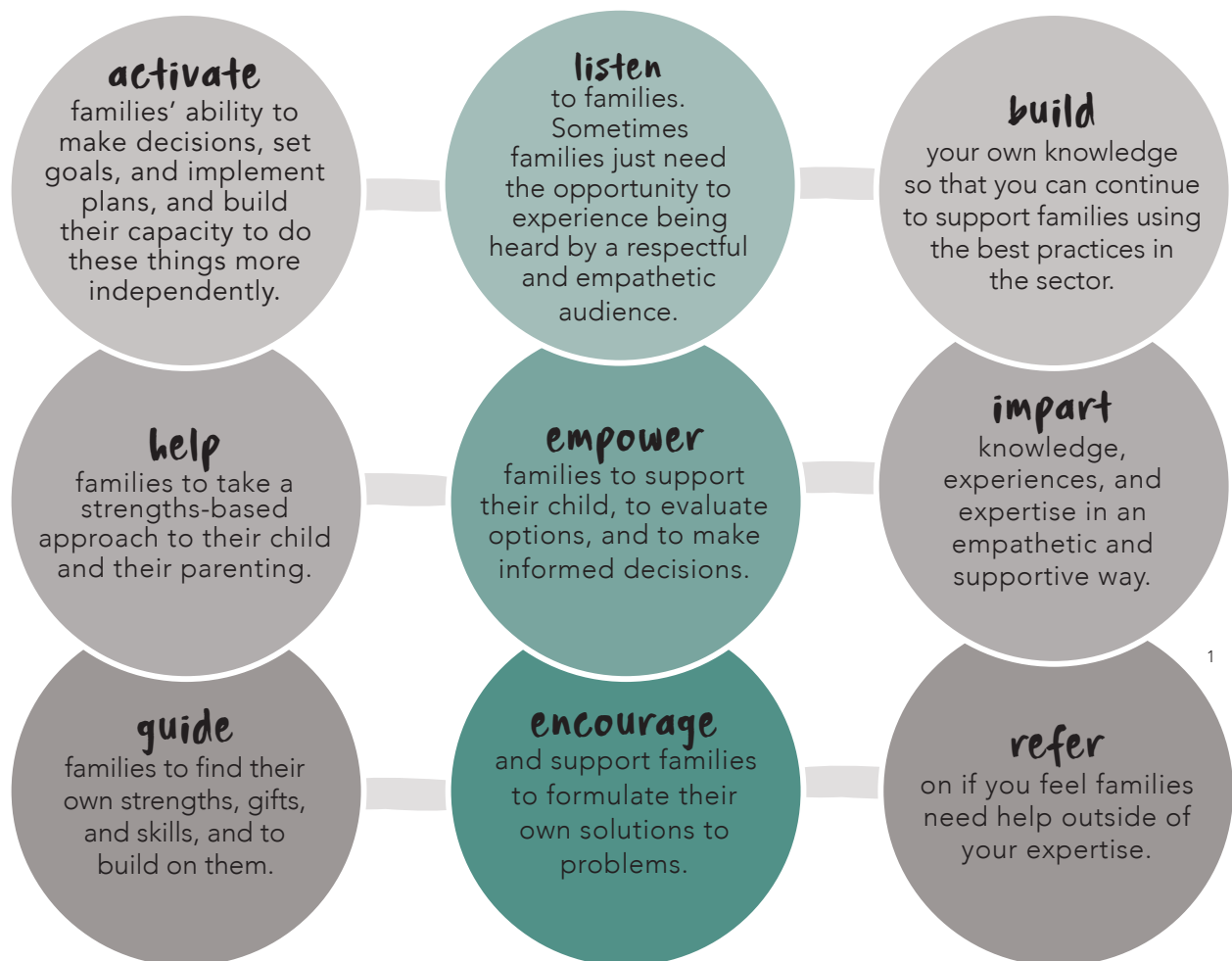
The knowledge you bring as a peer worker is important, but so is the knowledge and experience that all families bring.

How do I Respond?

The families you work with might ask you for more information about their child's disability or development, about available services, about the quality of a therapist or medical specialist, or about strategies that might help them to parent their child more effectively.

Sometimes you might not be best positioned to answer their questions, nor are you expected to have all the answers. Remember that you are supported by an organisation that can provide help if you can't. Don't hesitate to refer families to other members in your organisation, if their questions are outside your expertise or experience.

Your role is to...



¹ The lists and table in this resource have been based on those in: ECII Intervention Resources. (2012). *The Key Worker: Resources for Early Childhood Intervention Professionals*. Malvern, VIC: Noah's Ark Inc., pp. 32-34.


How do I Fulfil My Role?

If you're working directly with families it might seem hard at times to fulfil your role without 'crossing the line' into clinical advice.

Remember that your primary role when you work with families is to offer the relevant information to allow families to make informed choices.

Be transparent with the families with whom you work: if you're talking with them and listening to them as an employed peer worker, make sure that they understand you are wearing your 'peer worker hat'. If, however, you're talking and listening to families as a private party (perhaps as a parent or a friend), ensure that you make explicit that you're wearing your 'parent hat'. Peer workers, by definition, have two hats, so it is vital that families know which hat you're wearing at any given time.

Here's a list of questions you might ask the families with whom you will be working, to help them to consider their options. These questions don't require you to offer specific clinical advice. Ask families to:

- 
- Think about their child's strengths and how these could be utilised to improve their child's development.
 - Reflect on their own and their family's strengths, and on what they're doing already that's working well.
 - Think about how their vision relates to the interventions and other activities they are undertaking for their child.
 - Contemplate the impact of their family's wellbeing and resilience, and consider how these can be strengthened if necessary.
 - Consider talking to the professionals they trust if they need clinical guidance.

And remember, refer families to the allied health professional, educator staff, and other team members in your organisation if you're unsure or feel unable to assist a family.

What are the Limits of My Role?

As a peer worker, it is vital to be mindful of the things you can do to make a difference to families, as well as acknowledging the limits to your role.

We can...	We can't...
Be respectful	Know what is best for other families
Offer alternatives and choices	Make choices for other parents
Offer another view	Impose our views
Be encouraging	Enforce our own preferences
Change our beliefs	Impose our beliefs on others
Encourage change	Control processes or outcomes

Remember, if in doubt, you can always ask your peer champion (or the non-peer staff member whose role it is to act your liaison and support person) – they are there to share their experience and knowledge, and to guide you if you are unsure.

Peer workers cannot provide:

- clinical advice (refer to your allied health and education team),
- assessment or diagnosis of children,
- legal advice,
- financial advice,
- family planning,
- medical advice,
- genetic counselling,
- sexual assault or family violence counselling or support, or
- drug or alcohol counselling or support.

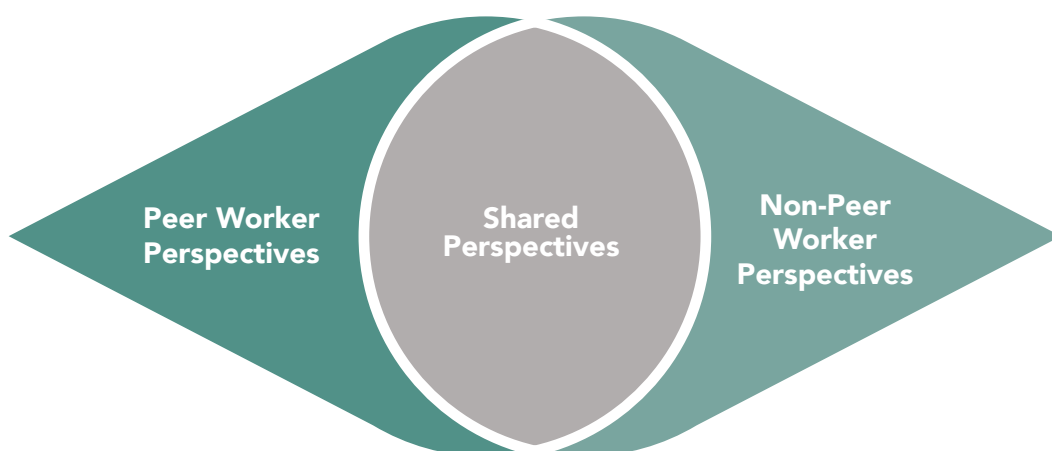
Understanding Peer and Non-Peer Roles

Peer workers and allied health professionals often work side-by-side in complementary roles. It is important to remember that peer workers and non-peer staff all have the same goals for families: all come to their work with families with aligned values and core principles.

Peer workers and non-peer staff work in balance, each with specific but harmonious and interdependent responsibilities. This alignment means that the perspectives of peer workers and non-peer staff will often overlap. Nevertheless, peer workers are not clinicians, nor are they junior therapists or therapy assistants (although that is one job description that they might adopt). Peer workers form a distinct, specialised workforce that complements rather than duplicates the

early intervention workforce. It is precisely a peer worker's status as a peer, with a shared lived experience, and their position as both a consumer and a provider of services, that allows a peer worker to offer the benefits that they do to the families with whom they work. By necessity, then, a peer worker's perspectives will also differ subtly from their non-peer colleagues'.

This resource aims to clarify the perspectives within which non-peer and peer staff operate, to explain the important overlaps between these perspectives, to highlight the shared values between peer workers and non-peer professionals, and to elucidate the necessary differences between the roles.



Peer workers and non-peer staff work in balance, each with specific but harmonious and interdependent responsibilities.

Peer and Non-Peer Worker Perspectives in Early Childhood Intervention

Peer Worker Perspectives	Shared Perspectives	Non-Peer Worker Perspectives
Work is guided by an understanding of a necessary level of mutuality and reciprocity between the peer worker and the peer.	Unconditional positive regard for the individual being served.	Non-peer workers in the role of assessing and supporting participants with a focus on diagnosis, assessment, identification of strengths, interventions, therapies and treatments. Often both parents and professionals approach the relationship with an expectation that the professional will adopt the role of the expert in the partnership.
Focus on learning together to build family capacity rather than assessing or prescribing help.	A desire to support the child's and the family's achievement of their human potential.	Focus predominantly on supporting the child's development, using family-centred practices, including professionals learning about the child from their family.
Emphasis on sharing and exploring life experiences where both peer worker and parent share personal experiences and perspectives.	The importance of connection, finding common ground, and respect.	Emphasis on exploring participants' experiences, with less expectation for the non-peer worker to share their personal experiences.
There are many ways to understand the experience of children's disability and developmental delay, so that disability can be experienced through differing paradigms (social model of disability; medical model of disability; cultural; spiritual; natural variation of human experience, etc.).	A commitment to support the child and family in making meaning of their experience.	The educational, developmental and therapeutic approach is the fundamental framework for intervention and service delivery, underpinned by family-centred practices.
Trained to be advocates for and with parents. Advocacy may include speaking up about parents, families, and children's needs and goals, and/or coaching parents in speaking for themselves and their families.	Both non-peer and peer workers strive to listen carefully to the needs, preferences, goals and aspirations of families.	Many are trained in therapeutic or educational oriented practices for children, which are strengths-based, family-centred, and aimed at supporting children in achieving their unique goals.

Peer Worker Perspectives	Shared Perspectives	Non-Peer Worker Perspectives
Peer workers are members of a socially isolated community. As such they are keenly attuned to the languages or practices that best respect and value children and families. Peer workers are best positioned to coach and support families to effect respectful inclusion for themselves, their families, and their children.	Together, non-peer and peer workers strive to create a culture of inclusion and respect throughout the early childhood intervention and disability sectors and in the broader community.	Professionals who have not self-disclosed a personal connection to or history with disability, as non-peer workers, do not explicitly draw on any insight of lived experience in their work with families, despite their commitment to respect the value of the lived experience.
Peer workers are, by definition, both consumers and providers of services to families. As such they have unique insight into increasing parental agency and leadership by coaching parents to embrace their unique role as the expert in their child, and by helping parents to establish and retain respectful partnerships with clinicians.	Together, non-peer and peer workers endeavor to support parents to lead their family's progress and accept their 'natural authority' ¹ as experts in their child.	Non-peer workers focus on participating with families in genuine partnerships to maximise the benefits of early intervention, as is best practice.

¹ Kendrick, M. J. (1995). The natural authority of families. Crucial Times. Brisbane, Australia.

² Deegan, P. (2017, June 21). Peer specialists are not clinicians. PDA Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.patdeegan.com/blog/posts/peer-specialists-are-not-clinicians>. We thank Dr Deegan for giving us permission to use her table and amend it for the ECI context (see www.patdeegan.com).

Family Story

A family is referred to an ECI organisation for intervention within a key worker model, after the diagnosis of their youngest child, Marie, with autism and intellectual disability. Marie, who is five, is not yet speaking or using AAC or key word signing to aid her communication. The family is offered a speech pathologist, Amal, to work with Marie, and as the family's key worker. Marie's parents feel overwhelmed, isolated and ill equipped to understand Marie's needs, and they are further concerned that they are neglecting Marie's brothers because they are spending so much of their family time supporting Marie.



Amal invites Brigid, a peer worker, to work alongside her to support Marie's family. Brigid cannot provide any clinical advice on Marie's therapy needs. However, as a mother of her own daughter with autism, Brigid has a deep common lived experience which she can share with Marie's parents. She works directly with Marie's parents to connect them with other families in the autism community, linking them to local support groups and using her own knowledge to direct them to resources that will empower them in their journey with autism.

Marie's parents take comfort from having the time to express their emotions and worries to Brigid. They express their hope that they will progressively understand their daughter more, just as Brigid has learned to understand her own daughter. Over time, they begin to feel less isolated as they become increasingly connected to the autism community. Moreover, as Amal works directly with Marie, Brigid helps Marie's parents to learn how to utilise their informal supports and set attainable goals for their family. In this way, Marie's parents gradually feel in control of their family dynamic, and begin to use their friends and family to allow them to spend more dedicated time with Marie's brothers, easing one of their primary concerns.

Template Job Description

Peer Worker, Position Description

Job Family	Family Support
Workforce Capability Framework Level	
Reporting to	
Directly Supervising	
Date prepared	

Position Purpose:

The Peer Worker is responsible for facilitating the engagement of services and supports to the family members of a child with a developmental delay or disability. The primary role of the position is: to support the family members in connecting with *<insert your organisation here>* services, as well as to other services and supports available in the community; to assist families in building their confidence to manage the needs of their child, and to aid families to build meaningful connections with the community. The services offered by the Peer Worker are not time limited.

Core Requirements, Peer Worker

Note that the Capability Requirements are based on the Community Sector Workforce Capability Framework (Victoria, 2010)



Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectations ^t	Key Performance Indicators
Community and inter-agency relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Utilises own community networks. ➤ Contributes to staff forums and meetings about key community issues. ➤ Maintains basic awareness of current community issues and knowledge of relevant organisations. ➤ Demonstrates commitment to social justice and social inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Shares information gained in the community with the team. ➤ Demonstrates knowledge of <insert your organisation here>'s services and resources. ➤ Demonstrates knowledge of the service system in <insert your organisation here>'s service delivery areas. ➤ Demonstrates positive relationships with other organisations who are providing a service to <insert your organisation here> families, such as schools and childcare centres. ➤ Promotes peer networks and community networks, online support networks and groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provides families with accurate information about services, activities and networks in the community. ➤ Contributes information about the service system, in relation to family support, in meetings with colleagues, and helps maintain up to date information resources.
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Demonstrates punctuality and meets agreed schedules and timelines. ➤ Behaves ethically and seeks assistance with ethical dilemmas. ➤ Takes responsibility for work outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Keeps up to date with progress notes, calendars and time sheets. ➤ Keeps families informed when unavoidably running late. ➤ Discusses ethical issues within appropriate contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Documentation is up to date by the end of each week, at least 80% of the time. ➤ In interactions with families and the community, conducts self at all times in a professional manner and follows through on agreed actions.

Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectations	Key Performance Indicators
Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Demonstrates common sense, and uses established strategies to solve routine problems. ➤ Contributes to ideas for improved ways of working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Follows through with agreed tasks. ➤ Contributes constructively to joint problem solving. ➤ Takes part in conversations about procedures and best practice. ➤ Speaks respectfully about families at all times. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engages constructively in problem solving within the team.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Actively listens to colleagues and families and passes on relevant information accurately and appropriately. ➤ Provides accurate written information. ➤ Provides accurate written information in formats appropriate to the task. ➤ Participates actively in staff meetings and shares information to improve work environment and outcomes. ➤ Demonstrates active listening and asks appropriate questions when interacting with colleagues and families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Progress notes are clear, concise and relevant. ➤ Keeps Manager aware of any child or family needs that may require additional service. ➤ All verbal communication shows respect for the listener, whether families or staff. ➤ Develops clear ways to explain unfamiliar concepts to families. ➤ Utilises visual ways of communicating messages as needed. ➤ Explains the core philosophy of <insert your organisation here> and how <insert your organisation here> can support families. ➤ Forms positive working relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Makes active use of all channels of communication within <insert your organisation here>, in support of effective service provision and teamwork. ➤ Participates in the development and/or trialling of new ways to communicate more effectively with families.

Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectations ^t	Key Performance Indicators
Leadership and teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintains enthusiasm and understands own role in achieving organisational mission. ➤ Follows work plan and prioritises key tasks. ➤ Considers the views of others and aims for group cohesion. ➤ Values diversity in team and supports colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Presents own point of view in team discussions, while respecting the different views of others. ➤ Helps to identify the common ground when views differ. ➤ Asks others of their input and shows willingness to learn from others. ➤ Honestly evaluates and communicates own leadership skills and potential with supervisor and/or manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Makes positive contributions to teamwork and team spirit at all relevant levels: e.g., with co-workers, whole team.
Resources, assets and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Takes care when using and maintaining equipment and resources. ➤ Uses resources appropriately and supports organisations sustainability protocols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Takes responsibility for identifying new resources are needed or when consumables are running low. ➤ Avoids unnecessary printing and creates digital documents whenever possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develops and/or implements new ideas for using resources effectively.
Service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Applies organisational practice models, procedures and relevant legislation when working with clients. ➤ Supports families to achieve their goals or aspirations through provision of quality service. ➤ Demonstrates sensitivity and respect for diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develops positive relationships with families based on trust and respect. ➤ Invites families to talk about their culture and beliefs, rather than making assumptions. ➤ Follows protocols developed for specific programs. ➤ Co-facilitates group and workshop programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <Insert your organisation here> families, including families waiting for a Key Worker, feel well connected with other families and with the organisation.

Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectations ^t	Key Performance Indicators
Service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respects client confidentiality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provides planning sessions for families, either as part of broader workshop delivery or as a standalone service. ➤ Promotes the <insert your organisation here> services offered. ➤ Connects families with other <insert your organisation here> families through various channels and coordinates the <insert your organisation here> families' online community group. ➤ Acts as a point of contact for families waiting for a Key Worker. ➤ Empowers families in how to work with professionals, including as they begin to work with their Key Worker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Through peer workers, families have a positive experience of planning and understand how planning can help them to work towards their own goals for their family.
Program management and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintains awareness of policies and applies procedures to daily work activities. ➤ Performs own role and responsibilities efficiently to contribute to program and project outcomes. ➤ Records relevant data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Knows where to access policy documents: refers to policies as needed. ➤ Provides feedback on policy documents as part of regular reviews. ➤ Asks when unsure about required procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Utilises <insert your organisation here>'s policies and procedures in the course of working with families, and feeds back any gaps in existing procedures. ➤ Handles complaints according to procedures.

Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectationst	Key Performance Indicators
Program management and policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Records complaints and assists with reviewing feedback on program outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Notifies CEO or Manager about any complaints. Reassures the person making the complaint that their feedback is valued and that a Manger will contact them. 	
Change management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintains a positive approach to change and adapts to new or different ways of working. ➤ Takes advantage of opportunities for learning and growing skills. ➤ Identifies opportunities to do things better, develops ideas with others and assists with the implementation of changes. ➤ Uses technology and software applications effectively in accordance with task requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Keeps CEO or Manager appraised of concerns in relation to change. ➤ Contributes to constructive discussions of change within the workplace. ➤ Helps the team to understand how change may be affecting their families. ➤ Maintains a reassuring manner when discussing change with families. ➤ Identifies relevant professional development opportunities and keeps CEO or Manager informed of own professional development needs. ➤ Contributes to the team's developing understanding of how to use technology effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Articulates own needs in relation to changes in the organisation and the sector, and takes steps to address them. ➤ Articulates families' needs in relation to changes in the organisation and the sector, and contributes to problem solving around this. ➤ Uses technology effectively.

Key Responsibility Areas	Capability Requirements	Specific Expectations ^t	Key Performance Indicators
Governance and compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensures that own work meets the organisation's quality requirements. ➤ Contributes to identification of OHS risks and hazards, and ensures safety in own work context. ➤ Is aware of relevant legislation and licensing requirements and ensures compliance in work practices, including with regards to child protection considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Seeks feedback from peers and Manager. ➤ Contributes to team discussions about maintaining quality of service. ➤ Keeps work area free from hazards. ➤ Reports any hazards observed in any working environment to Manager. ➤ Notifies Manager or CEO immediately of any risks to own person encountered in the workplace, including in the homes of families or in the community. ➤ Understands how relevant legislation, particularly in relation to Disability Standards and Protection of Children and Young People, applies in our context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Works actively to maintain safe work spaces for staff and families.

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Plumtree is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support for children aged birth to 8 years old with a developmental delay or disability. Our vision is a society where children with developmental delay and their families are supported to have a full life in the community.

At Plumtree, we believe that every child has a right to participate in family and community life. Our purpose is to empower families to make this happen.

Our passionate, culturally diverse team of specialists work from the heart in a caring environment where families no longer feel isolated, but instead feel respected and informed.

We offer a range of tailored, family and community focused services including Education, Therapy, Information and Training.

We also create innovative, research based approaches and resources to assist families to take control of their own learning to achieve positive outcomes.

**Visit our webpage and join the Plumtree mailing list of Facebook page to find out about our services, workshops and events
www.plumtree.org.au.**



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