

Culturally Safe Workplaces for Living Experience Peer Workers

Harm Reduction Victoria
APSU

VAADA Conference 2023





Acknowledgements



Ice Breaker

Think of a time in
your life when you
felt like this.

Who is Harm Reduction Victoria?

Our Values

- Nothing About Us Without Us-
Meaningful involvement of people
who use drugs
- Inclusion
- Partnerships & Collaboration
- Excellence
- Human Rights
- Community Ownership &
Accountability

Our Mission

HRV's mission is to be a **drug user-based and user-governed organisation**.

We promote a **harm reduction** approach to drug use, with a philosophy of **self-determination** and **empowerment**.

HRV aims to provide a **voice** for drug users, and to address the **health** and **social justice** issues experienced by **drug users**.

Our Practice

- Harm Reduction
- Health Promotion
- Peer Education



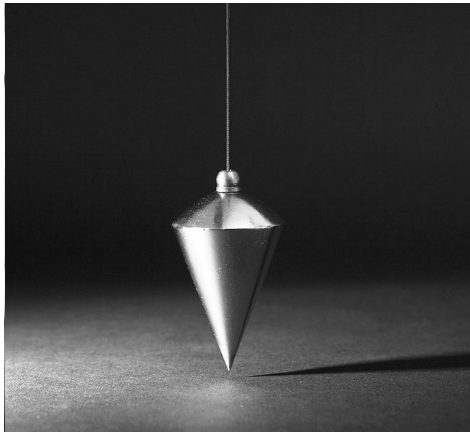
We are people who use drugs.

What's the Fuse Initiatives Project?



- Fuse Initiatives aims to create thriving Living Experience workforce of People Who Use Drugs that are supported, valued and sustained.
- Continues and builds on HRVic's previous workforce development and support work for our community's peer workers.
- Partnership between HRVic and APSU
- Funded by the new Lived and Living Experience Branch of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division in the Victorian Department of health.
- In 2017, the Reducing Harmful Drug Use Through Peer Led Networks (RDHUPLN) initiative funded 6 organisations to develop peer-led projects for naloxone use/ overdose prevention and other localised drug related issues.

The FUSE Initiatives team



Matthew Plumb

Policy Officer
FUSE Initiatives
Harm Reduction
Victoria



Amelia Berg

Project Worker
Fuse Initiatives
Association of
Participating Service
Users



Christian Vega

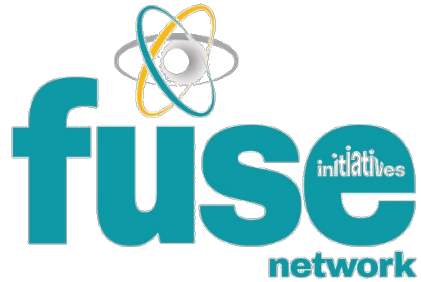
Workplace Integration
Lead, FUSE
Initiatives,
Harm Reduction
Victoria



Nadia Gavin

Fearless Leader,
FUSE Initiatives,
Harm Reduction
Victoria

How will the Fuse Initiatives Project work?



Supervision and support interventions to Living Experience Peer Workers

Monthly network meetings

Ongoing connection for Living Experience Peer Workers across all their employers in Victoria



Development and delivery of training for Living Experience Peer Workers

Establishing an induction process for baseline skills & knowledge of Living Experience Peer Workers

Creation of tools and resources to support Living Experience Peer Workers



Development of a Workforce Strategy for the Victorian Living Experience Workforce

Development and delivery of organizational readiness training and resources for Employers

Working with sector partners to ensure supportive working conditions for Living Experience Workers

Strategy for the Victorian Living Experience Workforce



A black and white photograph of a young plant seedling with two leaves emerging from dark, textured soil. The seedling is positioned on the left side of the frame. The background is dark and out of focus.

Cultural Safety

A collection of overlapping geometric shapes, including triangles and diamonds, in teal, yellow, and grey colors, scattered across the background.

“

An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.

It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.

”

R Williams, 1999

Cultural Safety – what does it mean for our work practice?
Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health

Reflective Discussion: Cultural Safety and You

“An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.”

Generally, do you feel your workplace is culturally safe?
What contributes to your cultural safety at work?

Do you think these are as accessible, affordable, and/or applicable for Lived & Living Experience Peer Workers as they are for you?

Peer Work

In my experience....

- Cultural Safety is a peer super power
- Our capacity is unique
- Our workplaces are enhanced by our employment

However...

- The world is not a culturally safe place for us
- Stigma and discrimination will greatly diminish our capability
- Peers require specialised support and professional development
- Some safety and workplace protections are not currently available to us



Shifting Landscape: Lived & Living Experience

Peers

Lived & Living Experience Workers

Central to all levels of Australia's BBV/STI response

Increasingly recognised workforce in Victorian Mental Health & Wellbeing Division.

Response to the emergence of HIV in Australia

Response to Mental Health Royal Commission Recommendations

Over 40 years of experience and achievements

New and still being worked out.

Envisioned, defined & developed by the 8 HIV key affected communities

Currently being shaped by Department & Service Providers

Harnesses the affinity between community members

Draws a person's experience of AOD and/or Mental Health issues, and services

Often surrounded by other peers, both in community and at work

Often work alone or in very small unique teams.

Shifting Landscape:

When we asked the FUSE network what their preferred term is, they nominated:

HARM REDUCTION PEER WORKERS

And defined it as:

Harm Reduction Peer Workers are people with living experience of drug use and overdose risk who are employed in harm reduction roles which promote the health and well being of people who use drugs. These workers are accepted by their local community; a worker cannot just call themselves one.

We're still waiting for you



Stigma kills, yet is so normalised



“I find that V’s care and treatment by [health service staff] was influenced by drug-use stigma, and that this causally contributed to [their] passing.”

Coroner Simon McGregor,
Finding Into Death With Inquest
30 January 2023

In the context of other behaviours, Coroner McGregor was referring to this statement:

“I thought she was just withdrawing.”

How does your organization intend to respond to this attitude when it is expressed in your workplace?

We work unprotected from discrimination

501. The World Health Organisation has described people who use injectable drugs as the most stigmatised community on the basis of their health condition.⁷⁰⁷

- Harm reduction peer workers are not currently protected by anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation
- The criminalisation of drug use further compounds peer workers' vulnerability to bullying, harassment, and discrimination.
- We speak the same language as our service users. But we still have professional conduct and boundaries. Prejudice often informs complaints, and our working conditions can change as a result .

How can your organization make up for the lack of workplace protections for harm reduction peer workers?

VIDEO: Hackers leak Medibank customer data after ransom deadline passed

Posted Thu 10 Nov 2022 at 7:15pm



The only reason... that this is so shameful, that the hackers get to use words like a “naughty” list is because of the [stigmatizing] narrative we have about people who use drugs- and it is not right, not fair, and not necessary.



Silence ≠ Support

Because the stigma and prejudice against drug use is both ubiquitous and entrenched it is reasonable to assume that nowhere is safe for us.

Therefore, it is an obligation of service providers that seek to engage us to be proactive communicating cultural safety.

Tips:

- Make the workplace an Enabling Environment, stickers, posters, pamphlets can project welcome and safety
- Calendar days (IDUD, Overdose Day, World Hepatitis Day)
- Training for workers (Anti-stigma, Cultural Safety, FUSE readiness)
- Public statements in response to public incidents/events

Activity

Think of a service user you recently engaged with at work.
Now imagine this...

You don't see them again for 6 months.

But in July, you open a work email and it's from your management team welcoming new staff starting this week. One of the people mentioned is the service user, though their previous connection to the service is not.

How would you or your workplace have to change in order for this to be a positive experience?

You later find out that the role your former client has is as your team leader.

**How would you react to this?
Would this be likely/unlikely? Why/not?**

Summary

- Harm Reduction Peer Workers are in workplaces right now
- More of us are coming
- We need safe workplaces
- The world is not safe for us
- Workplaces must be proactive in:
 - Challenging drug use stigma
 - Providing anti-discrimination protection
 - Being vocally supportive of us and our community
- This work can start right now



Thank you

We look forward to working together.

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