

Peer Support Worker

Current Landscape of Peer Support Workers

2024



**A quick overview
about The University of Tokyo Hospital Program
for Peer Support Worker Training**

Problem-Solving Oriented Training Program for Advanced Medical Personnel,
University of Tokyo “TICPOC (Trauma-Informed Care, Co-Production and
Organizational Change)” Project

【Funding and conceptual support】

University of Tokyo Graduate School of Medicine, The Center for
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Human behavioral science for subjectification

Interaction-based & rule- / story-based understanding of the brain & the world
Department of Neuropsychiatry, University of Tokyo Hospital

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Introduction

For everyone who has shown interest in this booklet

We began accepting peer support workers as our colleagues in the Department of Neuropsychiatry, The University of Tokyo Hospital in 2017, and we now have four peer support workers in hospital wards, Day hospital, Recovery center, Occupational Therapy Room and education departments. This booklet provides information about the services they offer in our department and how we conduct our program for peer support worker training (TICPOC D-1 course).

* TICPOC → <https://co-production-training.net/>

This booklet is intended for people who are interested in this field, including current and aspiring peer support workers, and those who want to collaborate with peer support workers in the fields of healthcare, welfare, government administration, and education.

Through roundtable discussions with graduates of this training program and input from professionals who work alongside peer support workers in our department, we hope this booklet will serve as an opportunity for readers to reflect on their own organizational practices and initiate dialogue within their own settings.

In addition, we hope this booklet serves as a first step for those who are considering bringing peer support workers into their organization.

Definition of “peer support workers” in this booklet

This booklet defines “peer support workers” as people who enter into an employment agreement with an organization to contribute to its users’ recovery by tapping into their own experiences with mental disorders and mental illness and the use of mental health services, as well as the perspectives they have gained from these experiences.



Feature 1 Learning in Practice

A Roundtable Discussion with Program Graduates



Fujiwara Yuki
(Working at a
Community Activity Support Center)

Yamada Yuuki
(Working at a
Public Health Center)

Seto Maki
(Working at a
Community Activity Support Center)

Sasaki Rie
(Facilitator of the Roundtable Discussion,
Senior Peer Support Worker
for this Training Program)

This training program began in the 2019 academic year. In a roundtable discussion, graduates who learned with and from one another through this program were invited to share their thoughts and feelings during the training, as well as their reflections on the process of mutual learning.

How We Felt When We Applied for This Training Program

Sasaki: Thank you all for coming today. As part of this roundtable discussion among graduates of this training program, I would like to ask you about some of your experiences during the training. To begin with, could you tell us how you felt at the time when you applied for this program?

Fujiwara: I work as a peer support worker, while also holding a qualification as a psychiatric social worker. Many professionals rely on their professional qualifications in their work. Meanwhile, peer support workers often seem to have an inherent sense of the meaning and value of their role.

At the time, I felt that I belonged to neither group, and I often struggled with the question of “Who am I?”

I had only attended another peer support course once or twice, and I did not really understand what peer support was. When I talked to my supervisor at work about

wanting to learn more, they told me, “There’s a program for that,” and gave me the flyer for this training. My supervisor and I then worked together to refine my motivation for applying.

Seto: Like Fujiwara, I am someone with lived experience of disability and hold a qualification as a psychiatric social worker. At the time, I was struggling with my professional identity and wanted to think about how I would like to work in the future, which led me to apply. I was not working as a peer support worker then; I had been hired simply as a support staff member. In that context, I gradually began to see people referred to as peer support workers becoming more active. Watching them work with such vitality, I felt a sense of admiration—and, to be honest, a bit of envy. I had disclosed my lived experience as a person with a disability, but I felt that I was not yet able to make full use of that self-disclosure in

my work. At the same time, I had never participated in any peer supporter training programs. As a result, I did not yet understand what peer support workers value in their work. Wanting to learn about these things, I decided to apply for this program.

Yamada: I had aspired to become a welfare professional, but I was not able to do so. At the same time, I was thinking that I might want to pursue a path as a peer

support worker, yet I found myself in a kind of limbo after completing my studies in social welfare at university, unsure of what to do next. I remember applying for this program during that period of uncertainty. My motivation was to further develop myself as someone with lived experience and to begin to think about peer support seriously and what it could mean for me going forward. It was with those aspirations in mind that I applied for this training program.

Learning Experiences Over the One-Year Program

Sasaki: Thank you all for sharing how you felt at the time you applied. Now, could you tell us about your impressions of actually learning together through this training program?

Yamada: Not only in this training, but in general, I’m the type of person who wants to have what I learn gradually become part of how I think. I view it as similar to how food is absorbed into the body—what I learn slowly enters and becomes part of my own set of values.

To be honest, reflecting does not come easily to me. I don’t immediately recall specific learning experiences that left a strong impression.

However, one change I clearly noticed through the learning process was in my use of language. For example, I became aware of expressions and vocabulary that I hadn’t paid much attention to before, and learning about them left a strong impression on me. I also feel that I developed a certain toughness—the capacity to think, hesitate, and struggle with uncertainty.

Fujiwara: It’s kind of like strength training.

Seto: You often described it as strength training, didn’t you, Sasaki? I really feel that we all worked hard over the course of the year, steadily continuing such “training.” As I mentioned earlier, I had never formally studied peer support or recovery before, but learning over a full year gave me a sense of confidence. I was able to internalize what peer support workers value, and I feel that this is now reflected in my daily work and practice.

Since I was working while attending the training, I think it gave me opportunities both to apply what I learned to my job and to reflect on my day-to-day practice. At first, I was worried about whether I could balance work and

the training, but little by little I found my rhythm, and the training became well integrated into my life. Over time, I became increasingly absorbed in the learning and started to find it enjoyable—that was a big part of the experience for me. I also had the cooperation and support of my family, which made a big difference too.

Fujiwara: After each lecture, we would reflect during the following week on what we had felt and experienced, right? It was like relearning, or perhaps “loosening up” our learning. Having that kind of time really helped the learning take root.

One thing that stood out to me as a meaningful learning experience was hearing that “peer support workers are companions who are just a little further along.” I found this to be an approachable and easy-to-understand way of putting it, without sounding stiff or formal. I also feel that it has helped me explain my own role more clearly in my workplace.

I feel that I’m now able to convey those ideas in my workplace. I’ve also become better at checking whether I’m truly engaging appropriately with the person themselves (the service user), and whether I might be imposing peer support rather than offering it. I’ve started paying more attention to my own condition when interacting with service users and reflecting on myself more carefully.

During the training, the support from my workplace was also significant, which makes me feel strongly that I want to give something back in return. That said, there were definitely times when thinking so much during the practicum and training gave me a headache (laughs).

Sasaki: We very much welcome your honest impressions. Thank you. Are there any other thoughts or experiences from the training that you’d like to share?

Changes Through Learning Together

Seto: At the start of the training program, in addition to trainees who were peer support workers, there were also many allied health professionals—such as nurses and psychologists—appearing on the screen in the online sessions, which made me very nervous. (*To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the lectures were conducted in a hybrid format combining online and in-person sessions for several years starting in 2020.)

At the time, I felt a certain self-defensiveness in relation to psychological and social welfare professionals, and because I also lacked confidence in myself, my sense of tension was quite strong. However, as we repeatedly learned about a single theme together with everyone present during the lectures, that defensiveness gradually began to ease.

One positive outcome was that, because of our differing areas of expertise, we were able to bring various perspectives into discussions and learn about a wide range of viewpoints. In addition, although peer support workers and psychological or social welfare professionals have different areas of expertise, I came to recognize that we share similar underlying motivations and values. Consequently, my sense of defensiveness eventually disappeared, and I began to feel something like a sense of comradeship—or being part of a team.

In my current job, I sometimes work in collaboration with other community-based organizations, so I feel that having learned together with people from different professions in this training has been directly useful in my work.

Fujiwara: I really relate to how Seto described feeling at the beginning of the training. In my case, I ended up



crying during the very first session, and I remember giving my final reflections for that first lecture while in tears. At that time, I felt as though I was the only one who couldn't keep up, and I thought, "Can I really continue this for a whole year? Maybe this is too much for me..."

Everyone else seemed truly amazing, and perhaps because of the name "the University of Tokyo," I felt overwhelmed—as though I was surrounded by extraordinary people. But when I actually met everyone during the practicum, they all turned out to be very approachable and kind. Looking back, I realize that I had carried within myself both a belief that peer experiences could not be understood by anyone other than peers and something like a sense of hostility toward other professions.

Now, I've become much more conscious about truly listening to others. I try to remind myself to listen carefully first, to really hear someone out until the end. I think I've become better at pausing and waiting—both when interacting with service users and during meetings at work.

I've also started to notice moments when, simply by observing service users, I can think, "This is what natural, spontaneously occurring peer support looks like."

Yamada: Learning together with a wide range of people—other trainees, psychological and social welfare professionals, and those in senior positions who were already practicing as peer support workers—gave me a sense of awareness, or rather, the feeling that my own "antenna" had become sharper. Perhaps it's a matter of sensitivity. In my case, for better or worse, I tend to be quite tolerant. That sense of looseness is both a strength and a weakness for me.

Through the training, I also had opportunities to reflect on how words that I might simply brush off—even when directed at myself—can, in certain situations, become sharp weapons.

When I was a trainee, I did not yet have practical experience as a peer support worker, so being able to enter the field while drawing on the stories and experiences of those who were already practicing was extremely valuable. I feel that what I learned here is very much alive in my current work.

Beyond this training itself, something I've been thinking about recently is that my generation has received the

baton from senior peer staff who began paving the way at a time when the term "peer support worker" did not yet exist, and people were referred to as "service user staff." In those days, senior peer staff had no formal training programs; they accumulated experience through trial and error across various practices. They had to start by creating what would be passed on to the next generation, and in many cases, they also might have had to carve out new paths themselves.

A Message to Future Colleagues

Sasaki: Thank you all for sharing what you each experienced through the training. Finally, could you share a message for those who may be considering taking on this kind of learning challenge?

Fujiwara: If you have even a slight interest in becoming a peer support worker and feel like you'd like to learn more, I think taking part in a training program is a good option. I feel that this program suits people who have their own questions—people who can wonder, "What does this mean?" or "If that's the case, then this is something I'm curious about...." It's a chance to learn with curiosity and eagerness. And the training is free of charge too.

I believe that peer support itself is embedded in the learning here, so I hope people can jump into the learning with a sense of safety and reassurance.

Seto: Whether you are hoping to become a peer support worker in the future, or you are already working in a support role but feeling uncertain about how you work, I think that spending a full year learning together with peers about peer support and recovery can lead to a sense of confidence. Looking back, it really feels like it was a very rich and precious time. I truly hope people will engage in the learning proactively.

Yamada: There are other training programs and learning opportunities related to peer support work, but compared to things like completing graduate school or obtaining professional qualifications, I think the hurdle to completing this training is relatively low. There were many written assignments, but there were no exams like you would have at school. And as Fujiwara mentioned earlier, it's a place where, if you don't understand

Through training programs like this one, we have received that baton. I believe our generation is one that can make practice better when necessary, strengthen it further, open up new paths, and also solidify the paths that already exist. It was with these thoughts in mind that I undertook this training, and I am now working as a peer support worker.

something, you can work toward understanding it together with others. There's a strong sense of safety in that.

Rather than learning in order to obtain something specific, my impression is that this is a place to learn how to obtain something—to learn how to reach out and grasp what you need. It feels very foundational, a place where you build the base for thinking.

Sasaki: So it's like learning together how to swim on your own as a peer support worker—making sure not to drown along the way (laughs).

Yamada: Yes, exactly. It's about gaining the most basic capacities—like learning how to swim—in order to reach something. It's more like getting a starting point for thinking. Completing the training really feels like the starting line.

Sasaki: So perhaps it's like everyone—trainees and staff alike—exploring together how to cultivate the field, or how to swim in this world, and then after the training ends, determining what kind of crops will grow is up to each individual. But for that year, everyone is pursuing learning together so that a good harvest can truly be achieved.

Yamada / Seto: That's exactly how we feel.

Fujiwara: Good fertilizer and healthy soil are important, after all.

Sasaki: Thank you all very much for sharing such valuable stories today. Let's continue to share and learn from one another going forward as well.

A Roundtable Discussion with Professionals Working Alongside Peer Support Workers



S (Day Hospital Staff)

I (Recovery Center Staff)

In this training program, participants learn together with support professionals. In this roundtable discussion, we asked about the experience of learning together through the program, and how that learning is being applied in participants' day-to-day work in practice.

A Presence That Brings Hope

Could you tell us about what has been positive, as well as any challenges, in working together with peer support workers?

S: Throughout my experience as a mental health professional, this department was the first place where I had the opportunity to work together with peer support workers, so that felt very fresh and new to me.

What stood out to me when observing peer support workers working on the ward was how they were present with patients facing situations they had never experienced before—patients who did not know what to do, or who felt confused because they could

not see what lay ahead.

Rather than pushing or trying to motivate patients, peer support workers seemed to be a presence that gently offered hope. Being able to truly understand how significant such a presence can be has become a valuable asset for me as a clinician. Of course, explanations from doctors about a patient's condition or their future outlook carry a great deal of authority and persuasiveness. However, separate from that, I believe the words and presence of peer support workers hold a very important and unique meaning.



Changes in Language Used in the Staff Room

S: One positive change has been that peer support has become more deeply embedded in the Day Hospital. Just as importantly, I also feel it was a very good thing that peer support workers began spending time in the staff room with us. Their presence seemed to change the stance of medical professionals—both consciously and unconsciously. We found ourselves softening our casual language, or pausing to consider how certain words might sound when spoken aloud.

It also brought to the surface things that we, as healthcare professionals, might otherwise take for granted or treat perfunctorily.

Furthermore, this has also created opportunities to re-examine the existing perspectives and assumptions held by medical professionals.

However, one concern—or challenge—I have is whether, without realizing it, especially in casual conversations or small talk, we may have hurt peer support workers. There have been peer support workers who have actually spoken up about such experiences, and I find that remarkable. My impression is that many of them are very skilled at putting experiences into words, including negative feelings, and that they value expression itself.

At the same time, I sometimes wonder whether there are moments when they hold back their feelings and take them home unresolved, feeling troubled. However, it also feels strange for us to step in and

“support” them in the same way we would support service users. I would like us to support one another as colleagues and peers, but I’m not

entirely sure what that should look like. I hope this is something we can continue to explore through open and honest communication going forward.

When you mention concerns about language used by medical staff and the possibility of causing hurt, are you referring to situations in which people are evaluated or spoken about primarily in terms of diagnoses or symptoms, rather than their personal backgrounds or feelings—and that this kind of language or perspective may be what hurts peer support workers?

S: That is certainly part of it. I also think there are moments when how we, as professionals, view patients as people becomes apparent. For example, when we are thinking about a person's rehabilitation goals during the course of providing support, there may be times when we ourselves feel distressed and speak honestly about those feelings to other staff members.

In such moments, peer support workers may listen while strongly connecting what they hear to their own lived experiences—and at the same time, they may be hurt by what is said. I believe peer support workers have learned ways of handling these situations, and we too have a responsibility to remain mindful every day of the respect we owe to patients. That is why I would genuinely welcome it if, even over seemingly small matters, peer support workers could let us know whenever they feel a sense of discomfort. Of course, I fully understand that doing so requires courage. Ideally, I hope we can create an atmosphere where people can speak up about these things without hesitation.

Do you ever feel there are challenges, Ms. I?

I: Yes, I find myself thinking about challenges that overlap with what has already been mentioned. Between peer support workers and medical professionals, there is, unavoidably, a sense in which we can feel like a kind of threat to one another. Even if that sense may fade with familiarity, there can be awkward defensiveness on both sides, especially at the beginning, and moments that feel almost adversarial may arise even without intention.

When I reflect on where this comes from, it relates to what was mentioned earlier. Even in casual conversation, we may worry, “If I say this, might it hurt someone?” From a psychological or clinical standpoint, certain terms are professional language that we use quite naturally, but from the perspective of peer support workers, those same words might carry

negative connotations. Imagining that, we may shrink back internally, becoming tense and guarded on our own.

I think things would be very different once we have worked together long enough to feel at ease and to be able to ask openly about these matters.



Being Mode

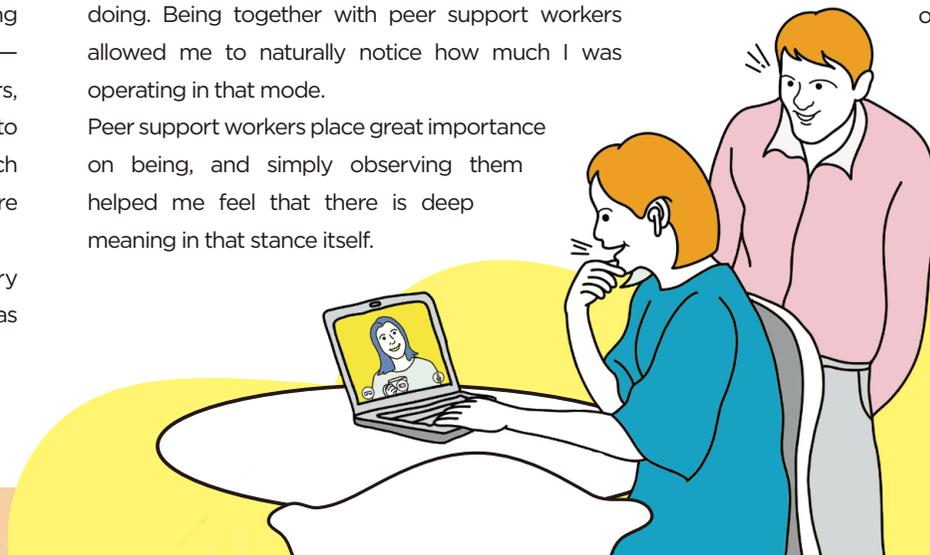
Could you also share what you have felt through learning together in the peer support worker training program?

I: Yes. What was most positive about learning together—if I were to put it in just one sentence—would be this: While participating for three years, meeting the trainees has made me genuinely want to work together with them. Many of them have such warm hearts; their words are full of spirit; they are sincere and trustworthy.

I am also responsible for our department’s Recovery Center, where many service users have goals such as

returning to work or school. Because of that, I often find myself in a “doing” mode—thinking that I need to bring about some kind of change, or wondering about the therapeutic significance of what we are doing. Being together with peer support workers allowed me to naturally notice how much I was operating in that mode.

Peer support workers place great importance on being, and simply observing them helped me feel that there is deep meaning in that stance itself.



A Sense of Safety

S: Above all, the atmosphere of the learning space is incredibly warm, isn't it?

It's something you rarely get to experience elsewhere (laughs).

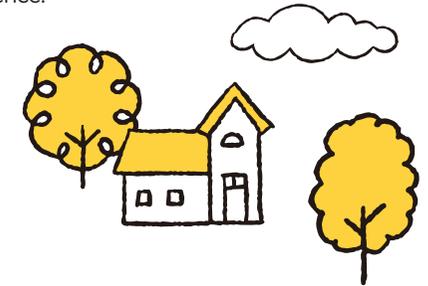
Even though the participants may change from time to time, this peer support worker training program consistently has that kind of atmosphere.

A place that truly offers a sense of safety is like this program.

I also learned a great deal from the way the initial check-ins and the overall flow of the sessions were designed. For example, taking time each time to

discuss participation guidelines together, or intentionally pausing to listen carefully to everyone's perspectives—these practices are woven throughout the program.

Being able to glimpse such thoughtful and detailed considerations has itself been a valuable learning experience.



Positive Impacts on Support Practice

S: Listening to everyone's discussions also makes me realize that even among people in the same profession, experiences, values, and ways of feeling can differ greatly. When I think about it, this may seem obvious, but it has helped me reaffirm the importance of the individual—that each person is truly different.

This has been very useful in my actual support work.

For example, when a member(service user) of the Day Hospital says, “I want to get a job,” I now find myself not only thinking about the concrete steps and procedures involved in job hunting, but also paying closer attention to the feelings behind that desire to

work. Even if the hope sounds similar on the surface, I naturally assume that the underlying motivations and feelings differ from person to person, and I feel that my perspective has broadened significantly. As a support provider, I still share information that is useful as a standard model, but I feel it has become easier to talk about more than just those options—to have conversations about what the members themselves truly want. As a result, even if they decide to continue challenging themselves, I've come to think that we can simply pause and consider together again what they would like to do at that point. Even when medical professionals feel concerned about a choice a service user has made, I think we've become better able to speak honestly about those concerns and, for example, suggest checking in more frequently—perhaps on a weekly basis at first—so that we can stay aligned with what the person wants to pursue and support them in doing their best.

Training Program

The Department of Neuropsychiatry, The University of Tokyo Hospital launched an initiative to foster peer support workers in FY2019. This initiative was undertaken as a Problem-Solving Oriented Training Program for Advanced Medical Personnel, University of Tokyo "TICPOC (Trauma-Informed Care, Co-Production and Organisational Change)" Project. The program is aimed at peer support workers who empathize with the value of patients who shared similar experiences and can thus assist their subjective decision-making.

Aims of the program

This program provides a place of learning with a focus on the philosophy of recovery and peer support, which forms the foundation of peer support work.

Through the learning process, participants become capable of incorporating the philosophy into their own behavior and way of thinking. By the time they complete the course, they are expected to have solid foundation for offering practical support based on the concept of recovery and peer support at their respective places of work.



Focuses of training program

Based on the value of service users, the program aims to nurture human resources capable of providing support in collaboration with other specialists in the field of mental health social work.

Three core elements are required to gain a work stance oriented to the value of patients.

Trauma-informed care

Offering support with in-depth knowledge about the possibility of trauma

Co-production

Peers and specialists working together for co-creation

Organizational change

Transforming an organization to put these concepts into practice

For more details

TICPOC

Search

Program contents

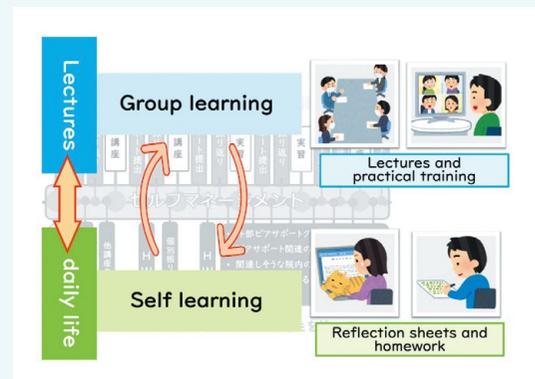
The program features dialog-based lectures and practical training at the University of Tokyo Hospital, using a variety of learning resources and environment.



One year for fostering (growing the root system for) the concept and philosophy of recovery and peer support within yourself

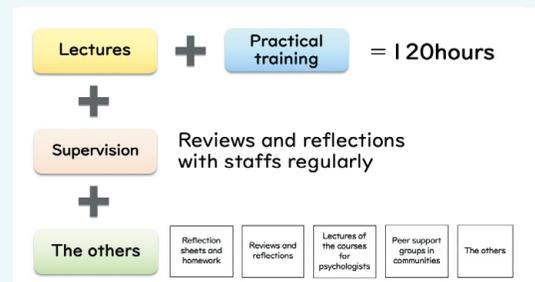
Examples of lectures in this program

- History of right to movement and peer support
- What is peer support?
- Thinking about self-disclosure
- Recovery-oriented use of words
- Thinking about rights
- Self-care and self-management

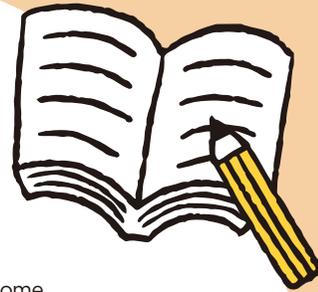


Practical training at the University of Tokyo Hospital

- Cross-functional collaboration practical training at a hospital ward (about two weekdays per week for one month)
- Community collaboration practical training at the Day Hospital/Recovery Center (about two weekdays per week for one month)
- Transition from senior peer support worker to supervisor, and cross-functional review



Voices of Program Graduates



• Graduate: Matsuzaki •

Even without consciously trying to apply it, what I learned has become part of me. When I look back on the many things I learned through the peer support worker training program, that is honestly how I feel. The one year I spent in the program was an incredibly fulfilling time, both in the lectures and in the practicum. I thought deeply—again and again—about peer support and related topics, reflected on them extensively, and put those thoughts into words. At the time of application, I wrote an essay expressing my desire to become a peer support worker. Even now, I occasionally return to that essay, rereading it and reaffirming my original intentions.

The training included not only lectures but also practicum opportunities. I was able to spend time in settings such as the Day hospital, the Recovery center, and hospital wards, where I had many opportunities to interact with service users and patients. I am currently working as a peer support worker in a transitional group home, where I am involved in a wide range of daily support tasks. I feel that the interactions I experienced during the training created the foundation for building relationships with the group home residents. Not only the practicum itself, but all of the wide-ranging learning from the peer support worker training program has formed the groundwork for building positive relationships with the people I support.

Since graduating from university, I don't think I've ever studied as intensively as I did during that one year. I learned not only about peer support, but also many things that are essential for me to understand as a working member of society.

One of those was the use of language. This is a bit embarrassing to admit, but in the early stages of the training, I spoke rather casually without much awareness. At that time, a staff member advised me, "Especially in the early stages before a relationship has been established, it's best to speak politely and carefully, regardless of the other person's age, so as not to make anyone feel uncomfortable." By paying attention to this advice, I have since become more mindful in my choice of words—including what is often called "recovery-oriented language"—which has been extremely helpful when meeting one-on-one with service users.

During the training, there were times when I cried over my own shortcomings. There were also moments when I stretched myself too far, trying to live up to the expectations of the staff, to the point that my calves ached and I felt like running away. And yet, I can also say that it was precisely because I pushed myself that I was able to grow.

I sometimes refer to this experience in my heart as "TICPOC University."

If there is anyone who is hesitating about applying, I sincerely hope they will take on the challenge.

Going forward, I want to continue practicing my own unique form of peer support, grounded in what I learned here, while cherishing the subtle emotional nuances of each individual I support.

Finally, the bonds I was able to form with the staff and all those involved, as well as the time we shared together, are precious treasures in my life.

• Graduate: Aoki •

I am currently working in the mental health welfare field, primarily practicing peer support with people who have experienced mental distress, focusing on "connecting with one another as human beings." Before taking this course, my own image of peer support was vague. Rather than speaking from my own experience, there were times when I conveyed other people's definitions of peer support as if they were my own.

During the course, we repeatedly engaged in discussions on a wide range of topics related to peer support. By reflecting on my own experiences from many different angles, I gained numerous insights. Learning together with peers about things I genuinely wanted to understand was exciting, and at the same time, there were moments when unfamiliar aspects of myself came into view and I felt uneasy. Through these experiences, our shared learning deepened.

The lectures were held online (*Note), but during the autumn practicum, I was able to meet in person for the first time with peers I had previously known only through online interactions. Being able to meet face to face and share our thoughts directly was truly precious, and it is something I still feel grateful for today.

(*Note)

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the lectures were conducted online. The program is currently delivered in a hybrid format, combining in-person and online sessions.

After completing the course, I encountered a new perspective: the idea that "anxiety has value." For example, labeling someone based on preconceived notions—thinking, "This person is like this"—can bring a sense of reassurance to oneself. However, people are constantly changing, and I believe that they cannot be so easily defined. Refraining from labeling others can generate anxiety within oneself, and when we feel anxious, we are often driven by the urge to resolve that anxiety as quickly as possible.

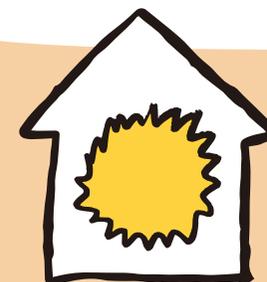
At one point, I began to wonder whether anxiety might contain important meanings or feelings for me, hidden beneath the surface. In order to explore this, I took time to carefully sit with and feel various forms of anxiety. As a result, I realized that the events connected to those feelings were things I had experienced in the past. Since then, anxiety has come to hold value for me; it is no longer something to be simply eliminated. This shift in perspective was supported by the concepts of recovery that I learned during the course.

To those who are just beginning to learn about peer support, by cultivating the field of your own experiences together with peers, I believe you will gain many insights that are uniquely your own. At the very least, through relationships with others, I was able to notice some small but deeply important things. At the same time, I also experienced anxiety. Yet, by continuing to trust—together with my peers—the subtle but certain sense of direction indicated by those feelings, I have come this far.

Your life experiences, too, have surely not been woven by you alone. So I encourage you, from time to time, to look back on them. It seems to me that peer support has already been

taking shape within you. Experiences do not lie, and it is precisely for that reason

that I believe there is such importance in "connecting with one another as human beings."



Reflections from Professionals Who Learned Together in This Training Program



I felt it was extremely important to be able to talk about ethics and about what kind of professional I want to be. When these conversations are grounded in specific situations—such as moments when I feel hurt or unsettled—they seem to deepen my own understanding and strengthen my resolve for the future.

(Participant in Session 07, “Professional Ethics in the Workplace”
– Nurse)

The idea that self-disclosure by peer support workers is itself a form of professional expertise resonated deeply with me. Self-disclosure by peer support workers should not be used to guide service users in a direction determined by healthcare professionals, but rather to connect with and support the service users’ own hopes.

(Participant in Session 13, “Thinking About Self-Disclosure”
– Psychologist)



Learning that advocacy is one of the core responsibilities of peer support workers has deepened my respect for them even further. Putting into words things that one would rather not say requires a great deal of emotional and physical energy, and I truly admire that effort. Knowing that there are people who continue to do this work makes me feel that I too must speak up when it is necessary and beneficial for my clients. It made me feel that I cannot afford to give in to discouragement.

(Participant in Session 21, “Thinking About Rights”
– Psychologist)



The phrase “the regeneration of hope and living each day with joy” deeply moved me. I would like to start by reflecting on my own experiences of recovery and the things that helped me along that journey.

(Participant in Session 02, “What Is Recovery?”
– Occupational Therapist)



A Column by a Senior Peer Support Worker



Yuki Kawamura (Senior Peer Support Worker)

In this peer support worker training program, participants engage in learning as peer support workers over the course of one year. I am involved as a course facilitator and also take part in the session reflection discussions. In my regular work, I am employed at another organization as a psychiatric social worker, and I also work from the position of being a person with lived experience of mental disability.

Among those who take part in this training are people who are already working as peer support workers, primarily in welfare and healthcare settings within the mental health field, as well as people who have an interest in peer support work. Some participants are very familiar with peer support as part of their everyday practice, while others may not have previously experienced peer support as something near to them, yet are working in roles as peer support workers.

One distinctive feature of this course is that, rather than concentrating intensively on learning the necessary curriculum for being a peer support worker over a short period of time, it is designed to span an entire year. Through their daily work and activities, together with the lectures and reflection sessions, participants are encouraged to connect what they are thinking about intellectually with their own actions in practice.

The lectures are attended not only by trainees and staff, but also by professionals from other disciplines working within the hospital, peer support workers employed in the hospital, and graduates of the program. People from a wide range of positions learn together. Because of this diversity, participants are able to learn what professionals in roles other than peer support workers value in their work, as well as to encounter perspectives and values that differ from those of peer support workers.

As someone who learns alongside the participants in this way, I truly feel that I am learning a great deal from everyone's experiences. Each participant comes from a different field and holds different values as a professional. By bringing together their thoughts and experiences and learning from one another, the course becomes a time to deepen one's own understanding of the values of peer support, as well as to reflect on one's work as a psychiatric social worker with lived experience, and to consider how these insights can be applied in practice.

I believe that "peer support" itself is at the foundation of this course. Upon this underlying foundation, participants learn about the work—that is, what it means to work as a peer support worker. For those who began working as peer support workers without having had much experience of peer support beforehand, this course may provide opportunities to experience peer support through relationships with fellow peer support workers and co-learners, and to gain a sense of safety that allows them to take on new challenges with confidence.

Last year, we held a reunion that included graduates of the program, and all graduates to date took part. It became a lively space for meaningful exchange and connection. I feel very fortunate that, through this course, participants are able to meet peers with whom they can think together and struggle together. In the 2024 academic year, the course welcomed its sixth cohort. Being able to stay connected with fellow learners after the program ends, and to continue learning together, is a great source of joy.



Toshihiko Nishimura (Senior Peer Support Worker)

I am often asked, "How is this training program different from other peer support training programs?"

There are several possible answers to that question, but if I were to respond, I would say, "This program aims to look a little further ahead."

Of course, the program includes learning that is immediately useful for working as a peer support worker. At the same time, however, the structure of the course—consisting of both lectures and practicum—is designed with an emphasis on acquiring knowledge and experiences that are likely to become meaningful and useful in the future.

First, in the lecture component, we address topics that many peer support workers in Japan (also referred to as peer supporters or peer staff) may not be very familiar with in their day-to-day work. These include topics such as advocacy, trauma-informed care, and co-production. At first glance, these may seem like concepts or forms of knowledge that are not directly applicable to the practical tasks peer support workers are currently engaged in. However, I believe that the role of peer support workers should continue to expand in the future. From the perspective of considering the future potential and necessity of peer support workers, I think it is extremely important to begin deepening our understanding of these topics now.

Second, in the practicum component, trainees are placed in medical settings where the structures of support are clearly defined. One of the goals of the practicum is to encourage trainees to think, from their own perspectives, about the future positioning of peer support workers. Whether working in healthcare or in welfare settings, peer support workers inevitably find themselves working within frameworks that differ somewhat from their own values.

I hope that this experience becomes an opportunity for trainees to consider what stance peer support workers might take within medical and welfare systems, what roles they can assume, and how they can contribute meaningfully within those frameworks.

Third, throughout the training as a whole, we place a strong emphasis on cultivating within each participant a rich "soil" of values and principles that can serve as a foundation for them as peer support workers. I believe that, at some point, anyone working as a peer support worker will encounter difficulties or obstacles. When that happens, we hope they will be able to recall the values of peer support and return to the core principles that matter most. For this reason, we devote considerable time to thinking about and learning together around values and principles.

It may be difficult to fully absorb and internalize everything covered during the one-year training period. However, if, in the future, while working as a peer support worker, someone finds themselves thinking, "Ah, so this is what we were learning about back then," I believe that would be a truly meaningful outcome.

I see peer support work as a profession that will continue to grow and develop in the years to come. Our aim is to offer a training program that allows participants to take home seeds—seeds that will bloom at some point in the future.