

6

SESSION

**Using lived experience
to help others**

6.1 Introduction

Shared personal experiences are a key element of peer-based programs and services because of their contribution to the establishment of peer-to-peer relationships. Similar life experiences help to “open doors” and “build bridges” between the peer supporters and the peers. Equally, reflecting upon one’s own lived experience and creating narratives of past events can assist the peers in looking at the past – and the present – from a different perspective, attributing certain events a different meaning and finding their way to the changes in their own life. However, if we are to get the most out of it and keep the practice safe for both the peer supporter and the peer, all parties involved-including the professionals involved in organising services and supervision-must be acutely aware of those aspects that will be helpful in achieving these goals and those that should be avoided.

6.2 Learning outcomes

- Understand the value of own lived experience in peer support
- Know the potential benefits of sharing lived experience
- Consider the difficulties of sharing experience
- Analyse the ways in which a person can reassess and attribute new meanings to past events
- Familiarise with aspects relevant to sharing experience effectively

6.3 Training session plan

DURATION

2,5 h

MATERIALS

- ATL Trainer Curriculum
- JCS Manual (it includes worksheets, case scenarios and self-assessment exercises)
- Worksheets and case scenario
- Stationery (paper in different sizes, cardboard, pens, pencils, markers, sticky notes, etc.)
- Flipchart/whiteboard
- Power Point presentations of the contents (optional)
- Computer (optional)
- Projector/TV (optional)



CONCEPTUAL CONTENTS

- ATL Trainer Curriculum, Unit 8, Using own life experience to help others
- JCS Manual, Unit 6, Using own life experience to help others

ACTIVITY 1	Re-writing one's story
DURATION	30 min
WORKSHEET REFERENCE	N/A
PROCEDURE	<p>Arrange for the group to watch a recovery story told in first person by someone who overcame homelessness. For this purpose, you can search for a suitable video in your own language. Procure for the video to be relatively short (up to 10-15 min) and to transmit the transformation from the protagonist's point of view on his own experiences over time.</p> <p>After the group has watched the story, invite the participants to reflect upon it. the process the protagonist might have gone through to see/ formulate the story in the way he/she does in the video, ii. the effect that hearing personal recovery stories has on other people, not involved in the story.</p> <p>You can ask the participants the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that (person's name) has always had the same view on the events in his/her life? • What might have motivated him/her to change view or see certain events from a different perspective? • How did it feel to hear this recovery story? • What effect does hearing other people's recovery stories have on you? • Draw common conclusions and procure to make the participants see how sharing one's story narrated in first person: • Can help people to reassess their experience and take control over it. • Allows people to reflect upon past events over time, see them from a different perspective, and realise how much their life has changed ever since.
ALTERNATIVES/TIPS	As an alternative to playing a video, you could consider arranging for someone to visit the session and share his/her story with the group.



ACTIVITY 2	Letter to myself												
DURATION	40 min												
WORKSHEET REFERENCE	JCS Manual, Unit 6, Worksheet 1 “Letter to myself”												
PROCEDURE	<p>Ask the participants to look back at the challenges they overcame at some point in their lives, and to write a short letter to congratulate themselves for it and point out strengths that led them to fight those difficulties. They may concentrate on one particular challenge or may choose to bring up several of them.</p> <p>Let them know that they can think of relatively small challenges and difficulties, which are also an important part of our everyday lives and dealing with them frequently leads to solving bigger and more complex problems. Pointing this out, may keep the participants from struggling with the activity, because of e.g. getting a feeling that their biggest life challenge(s) are still unresolved.</p> <p>Once everyone is done with the writing, invite the participants to share their letters, focusing especially on the identified strengths. In case the group has difficulties with identifying their strengths, you may suggest a list of strengths that many of them will likely have developed over time but might not realise it, e.g.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>Coping skills</td> <td>Motivation</td> <td>Perseverance</td> <td>Self-sufficiency</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Care for others</td> <td>Social intelligence</td> <td>Interpersonal skills</td> <td>Technical job skills</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Courage</td> <td>Kindness</td> <td>Spirituality</td> <td>Authenticity</td> </tr> </table> <p>Draw common conclusions based on the aspects the participants consider in their letters. Discuss the significance of having a solid understanding of our strengths and achievements when we want to support other people in their recovery by sharing our experience.</p> <p>You can use the following questions to deepen the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we sufficiently acknowledge our own role in our history of overcoming adversities or do we tend to give all the credit to third persons? • Do we tend to belittle our achievements over time? If so, why? Do the challenges and problems that have been solved seem to have less importance? If so, why? 	Coping skills	Motivation	Perseverance	Self-sufficiency	Care for others	Social intelligence	Interpersonal skills	Technical job skills	Courage	Kindness	Spirituality	Authenticity
Coping skills	Motivation	Perseverance	Self-sufficiency										
Care for others	Social intelligence	Interpersonal skills	Technical job skills										
Courage	Kindness	Spirituality	Authenticity										

ALTERNATIVES/TIPS	<p>As an alternative, instead of the challenges, you may ask the participants to think of achievements they made throughout their lives that are meaningful to them.</p> <p>Before or after this activity, you could encourage the group to conduct a self-evaluation of different strengths of character, through the Values in Action survey, developed by psychologists and researchers, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, available in more than 20 languages.</p>
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ACTIVITY 3	Experience sharing role play
DURATION	40 min
WORKSHEET REFERENCE	JCS Manual, Unit 6, Worksheet 2 “Experience sharing role play”
PROCEDURE	<p>Discuss with the participants relevant aspects to sharing one’s own experience effectively, consider jointly the possible difficulties (a PowerPoint presentation can be prepared to carry out this activity).</p> <p>Ask the participants to pair up. One will take up the role of a peer supporter and the other will act as a peer that receives help. The latter asks the peer supporter for advice on a determined matter and asks him/her to share his/her experience. The peer worker shall try to share his/her experience on the topic, following the basic rules. Then the roles switch.</p> <p>The handout contains a list of possible topics.</p> <p>In plenary, discuss with the participants the different impact the process might have had on them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -How did it feel to provide/receive peer support? • Was it challenging to share your experience on the issue in question? Why? • Did you feel uncomfortable? What made you feel that way?



ACTIVITY 3	Case scenario analysis
DURATION	30-40 min
WORKSHEET REFERENCE	Story of Irina
PROCEDURE	Read the case scenario to the group or ask one of the participants to read it aloud. Ask participants to respond collectively to the questions or do it in small groups. In this case, then, ask each group to share their conclusions.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

At the end of the session, ask reflection questions, such as: "How do you think today's session brings you closer to becoming a peer supporter? Then invite participants to note what caught their attention, what they have learned and what they want to keep as a point of reference from today's session, as well as to ask any related questions.

6.4 Bibliography

- Scottish Recovery Network, Fundación INTRAS et al., [Peer2peer. Vocational Training course](#), 2015

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SESSION

worksheets and case scenario



Accommodating a travelling **life**



Worksheet 1 – Letter to myself

Look back at the challenges you overcame at some point in your life. It can be anything — from the relatively small challenges to the most complex ones. You may concentrate on one particular challenge or may choose to refer to several. Think about your strengths that played a role in overcoming these challenges.

Then, write a short letter congratulating yourself for overcoming the difficulties and pointing out the strengths that led you to fight through them.

Worksheet 2 – Experience sharing role play

Together with another colleague, role play a conversation between a peer supporter and a peer, based on the situations below.

As a peer supporter, you might be asked to share your experience in relation to situations similar to the ones below. You may not have direct, first-person experience with some of these situations; however, you will be able to understand the person's position and offer your insight to your partner.

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CASE SCENARIO – Story of Irina

Irina was born in Russia 62 years ago. She moved to Finland with her family when she was 7 years old. At first, she was bullied because she didn't understand the language. After one year she learned Finnish and made some friends. When she was 10, her mother gave birth to twins. The family's life was quite normal. The mother stayed at home with the kids and the father worked hard. When Irina was 14 years old, her father died in an accident. Her mother became a single parent and their family had difficulties making ends meet. On several occasions her mother became depressed and Irina took care of her brothers. She isolated from her peers and found comfort in her two cats.

After 3 years, Irina's mother decided to move back to Russia. Irina wasn't familiar with Russian culture and preferred to stay in Finland. As she was studying and was almost an adult, her mother let her stay in Finland. Irina studied and became a maths teacher. She got married at the age of 27. Her marriage was happy but a cause of sadness was that they were not able to have any children. After almost three decades of marriage her husband passed away and she remained alone, with no family in Finland. She was on good terms with her brothers living in Russia but they rarely saw each other; their contact was mainly over the telephone.

Irina became a client of social services after she had been threatened with eviction from her apartment. The reason for the eviction was the poor condition and untidiness of the apartment. An unpleasant smell had been coming out of the apartment, on the stairwell for a long time. It turned out that Irina owned 8 cats and she was not able to take proper care of them. The animals were taken to the Animal Shelter. Irina protested against this and said that the cats are all she had. She behaved in a confused and aggressive manner.

Irina's apartment was full of all sorts of objects. She had been storing newspapers for years. Dirty clothes and textiles were everywhere. Irina could not sleep in her own bed which was covered with piles of objects. Instead, she slept in an armchair. She didn't seem to care for the poor conditions of the apartment. She didn't allow anyone to clean the apartment.

Daniel, the social worker assigned to Irina's case, tried to build a relationship of trust with her, but she wasn't receptive to this help. He suspected that Irina faced mental health problems but there were no records of former mental health treatments. Nothing appointed to substance abuse.

A neighbour told Daniel that Irina's husband had passed away a few years earlier. They didn't seem to have had many friends or relatives but seemed to enjoy their life together. He was surprised to hear that there were eight cats in Irina's apartment as he had only known about three cats. He confessed that he hadn't been seeing Irina quite as often as he had used to before.

Daniel has been trying to prevent Irina's eviction and the property owner was willing to negotiate as long as the apartment was kept clean and Irina got help. Irina refused to turn to mental health services and have the apartment cleaned. Finally, the health and social services authorities considered that Irina was at imminent risk of representing danger to herself, and arranged for her to be compulsorily transferred to a psychiatric ward to get medical help. Thanks to the treatment, Irina's mental condition improved; she started to look at her situation with clarity and experienced a great shame. She returned to her apartment. Even though her physical condition is good, her survival at home seems uncertain and she forgets to take her medicine, sometimes. Irina's brothers have promised to come to visit her as soon as possible but it might take some time. One of her neighbours checks on her once a week. Still, Irina feels lonely and depressed. She misses her husband and her cats.

Questions for reflection

1. Why had Irina's situation got so critical?
2. What can be done so that Irina's problems are not recurring and she does not become homeless?
3. What kind of social networks may she need?
4. What kind of services may she need?
5. Who is/are the key person/people that might help her?
6. Could she benefit from peer support? As a peer supporter, what could be your role in helping Irina?



Accommodating a travelling **life**

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end of session

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