Implementing an Inclusive Peer Support Plan for an Academic Unit: Aspirations, Challenges and Progress to Date

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Introductions – Marianne Baernholdt

Yolonda Childs  Linda Beeber  Cheryl Giscombe  Shielda Rodgers
Introductions - The Leaders of the Carolina Peer Support Collaborative

Ed Fisher

Pat Tang

Samantha Luu

Hannah Barker
Administrators were meeting frequently
Issue of stress in staff, students & faculty raised
Dean noted importance
Task group formed
Plan drafted
Anatomy of a Disaster

Plan is Grounded in Social Support Research

- Social support (informational, instrumental, emotional, social) results in better health & resilience during crises.
- Knowing you have support is better than actually using support.
- Natural supports are the best.
- In a crisis, more diversity in supporters is associated with better outcomes.
Plan Applies Social Support Research

- **Inclusive** --- staff, faculty, students & administrators (system is only as strong as its weakest link)
- **Structural** (knowing is more important than using)
- **Functional:** provides all 4 types of social support (multiple types = strength in a crisis)
- **Diverse:** connects people from different silos (diversity = strength)
Plan Meets Individual Needs

- Allows for “opt” out of activity but not out of belonging
- Stigma – everyone belongs
- Emphasizes peer support (not professional)
- De-emphasizes social and professional silos
Structure

Advisory Group
(now part of the Levine Wellness Advisory Board)
9 people

- 2 Undergraduate: 1 student and 1 faculty
- 2 MSN/DNP: 1 student & 1 faculty
- 2 PhD: 1 student and 1 faculty
- 1 staff
- 1 faculty
- 1 Administration
- 3 Houses Clinical Groups 7-8 students
- 2 Houses Clinical Groups 7-8 students
- 1 House Cohorts (5-10 students)
- 1 House with 14 Staff & Faculty Pods of 10
- 1 House with 1 Pod (15 people)
Structural Support: Pods and Pod Leaders

- Everyone belongs to a pod
- Pod leaders asked to plan one organizing activity
- Advisory team supports the pod leaders (periodic check-ins and cheerleading)
Functional Support: Informational

- Training offered to all (live, group, synchronous and self-paced asynchronous)
  - Crisis, stress and resilience
  - Principles of being a peer supporter
  - Listening, responding and empathic interaction skills
  - Responding to a peer in crisis
  - Resources
Functional Support: Instrumental

- Need-based groups
  - Exchange of information (e.g., what to do on a phone call with a parent far away; updates on travel restrictions & school openings)
  - Practical solutions for common problems (e.g., how to get a COVID vaccination for a parent; how to keep kids busy when you have a zoom meeting)
  - Venting frustrations
  - Sharing sadness and loss
Functional Support: Emotional

- **Pods**: a continuous avenue to receive peer support; stable membership
- **Need-based groups**: created to meet issues that emerge; time-limited; variable membership
- **Listening sessions**: Event or group; as-need basis (e.g., Black Lives Matter protests; assault on the US Capitol) – Shielda will discuss later
Functional Support: Social

- Pods: the initial pod activity introduced people to new contacts
- Additional pod-based social activities if pod desired
- “Diversion” groups – build peer ties through shared interests (new)
- “Pop-ups” and event-related gatherings (wellness walking competition; new)
Preparation for Launch

- Worked with SON media team to develop the message
- Focus groups --- students, staff & faculty
- Presented the plan and asked for feedback
  - (+) Understood the need
  - (+) Emphasized importance of natural helpers chosen by the person
  - (+) Variety is needed
  - (-) Wary of confidences being breeched
  - (-) Wary of being forced to be with others who people they do not like or trust
Preparation for Launch

- Reached out to the group that was forming on campus
- Began meeting and getting
  - Informational support
  - Instrumental support
  - Emotional support
- This became the Carolina Peer Support Network (Ed and Samantha will present later)
- Advised us on the plan
Preparation for Launch

- Approval of the plan by administration
  - Getting buy-in (some were reluctant or too overwhelmed)
- Setting up the pods
  - Recruiting pod leaders & providing support
- Setting up training sessions (3) & incentives
  - Carolina Peer Support Collaborative supplied resources
- Setting up need-based groups
Launch – Shielda Rodgers

- September 28, 2020 – formal launch
- Peer support training sessions
- Organization of pods and initial pod activities
- Need-based groups
Launch – Shielda Rodgers

- Listening sessions
- Meeting regularly with the Carolina Peer Support Collaborative
- Evaluations by Qualtrics
Functional Support: Emotional

• Pods: One instance of a pod leader providing emotional support and referral to appropriate help within the SON
• Need-based groups (2)
  • Faculty with international family members
  • Parenting during COVID
• Event-based Listening sessions
Functional Support: Socializing

- Some pods continued beyond their initial activity
  - Group walks (separately connected by phone)
  - Walking buddies
  - First Monday of the month coffee
  - Friday wine and cheese
  - Halloween costume party
- We are launching “diversion” groups—books, cooking, movies
Lessons Learned – Marianne Baernhol

• Top down sanctioning was crucial
• Adaptiveness, flexibility allowed us to meet needs as they emerged (listening sessions became very important)
• Regular communication back to administration is essential
Lessons Learned – Marianne Baernholdt

• Pods were variable --- depended on the energy of the pod leaders and the chemistry (synergy) of the pod members
• Not everyone will participate (structural belonging without expectations is an important aspect)
• Natural supports were the first line (more active than the built support --- remote work may have accelerated this)
Lessons Learned – Marianne Baernholdt

- Shifted to new types of groups – community building; safe spaces; joy and fun; shared interests
- We have the structure in place should we need to go back to crisis management
- Peer support for the peer supporters (mutual support within the four framers; Carolina Peer Support Collaborative)
Sustainment of the Program – Cheryl Giscombe

Structural changes:

Peer Support Advisory group will merge with the Levine Advisory Committee (efficiency; shared missions; stigma)

One guiding group will coordinate ongoing activities
Sustainment of the Program – Cheryl Giscombe

Functional changes:
Merging peer support into Levine Wellness Activities
Coordinating peer support activities with Office of Inclusive Excellence
Will develop re-training (booster) plan and ongoing evaluation
Continue to build ties with the Carolina Peer Support Collaborative
Peer Support and Resource Sharing - The Carolina Peer Support Collaborative

Ed Fisher  
Samantha Luu
Carolina Peer Support Collaborative

- College of Arts and Science
- Dean of Students
- Graduate School
- Employee Forum
- Center for Faculty Excellence
- Student Government and Mental Health Coalition
- Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health
- CAPS
- Carolina Center for Public Service
- Carolina Covenant
- Carolina COVID Student Services Core
- Faculty Council
- Peer2Peer
- Student Wellness
- Student Life and Leadership
- Carolina Away
- Carolina Housing
- Schools of Business, Law, Social Work
Strategies

1. Not a single program or intervention
2. Wide variety of peer support – individual, group, mutual, formal, informal
3. Peer support for staff, students, and faculty
4. Ownership of programs within schools, departments, offices, units
5. Core provides resources, consultation, assistance in training, etc.
6. Where possible, integration of peer support into existing channels
7. Address racism, inequity, and COVID-19
8. Facilitate cross campus exchange through Carolina Peer Support Collaborative
Influence of School of Nursing on Others in CPSC

- Sharing and creating resources collaboratively
- Reinforcement of:
  - Mutual support/pods
  - Need-based and affinity-based support
  - Support for faculty, students, and staff
  - Importance of centralized organization for coordination and sustainability
Panel Reflections
Questions?
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