

Lived Experience as Expertise:

Considerations in the Development of Advisory Groups of
People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty



Region of Waterloo

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Planning, Policy & Program Administration

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People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty

By

Social Planning, Policy, and Program Administration
Regional Municipality of Waterloo



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Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre (KDCHC), KDCHC supports the facilitation of the Homelessness Advisory Group (HAG)

http://www.kdchc.org/?page_id=10.

See Appendix A for the Homelessness Advisory Group's Terms of Reference.

Opportunities Waterloo Region (Opportunities)

Opportunities co-founded, facilitated the development of, and continues to support the group called Awareness of Low Income Voices (ALIV(e)) - <http://www.owr.ca/>

STEP Home Participant Advisory Group (PAG)

The PAG serves to inform STEP Home. For more information on STEP Home

<http://socialservices.regionofwaterloo.ca/encommunityprogramssupportsstephome.asp>.

See Appendix B for the Participant Advisory Group Description.

Shelters to Housing Stability Program, Charles St. Men's Hostel

The Shelters to Housing Stability program operating out of The Charles St. Men's Hostel facilitates an ad-hoc peer support and advisory group

www.houseoffriendship.org

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Checklist

The checklist to follow offers important key points to consider in the development of an advisory group of people with lived experience. Note that this list is not exhaustive. Detailed information is included within the manual itself.

Preparation (Page 8)

- Have you completed a local scan to determine if there are similar groups functioning in your community?
- Have you developed a draft purpose, vision, goals and possible group activities for the group to discuss?
- Have you considered what role the advisory group will have in your agency or organization?
- Have you considered group member honorariums?

Recruitment (Page 8)

- Have you decided how to recruit members? (e.g., by invitation, open call, snowballing)
- Have you met face to face with potential group members and provided them with information?

The First Meeting (Page 10)

- Have you prepared a meeting agenda with scheduled break times?
- Have you prepared handouts of the draft purpose, vision, goals and potential activities for the group?
- Have you reminded group members of the meeting a day or two in advance?
- Have you provided bus tickets or arranged rides to assist with transportation to the meeting?
- Have you asked group members for their contact information?
- Have you discussed logistics such as meeting duration, frequency, preference of time and day to meet, etc.?
- Have you created group guidelines with the group?
- Have you provided for fuel and parking expenses for those who drive?

Facilitation (Page 13)

- Do you have a chair that possesses the skills necessary to facilitate an inclusive and effective meeting?
- Have you consulted the group about what chair arrangement they would prefer? (i.e., external chair, participant chair, rotating chair, co-chair – refer to page 14)

Logistics: Group Membership, Numbers and Location (Page 18)

- Have you considered the need to represent diverse perspectives?
- Have you considered the amount of time and physical space required to optimize group discussion and decision making?
- Have you considered the accessibility of the physical space?
- Have you determined if the meeting location is accessible by transit?
- Does your group include an appropriate number of people?
- Is the location comfortable, familiar and welcoming to group members?

Food (Page 21)

- Have you considered providing food at group meetings?
- Have you considered healthy food options?

Documentation (Page 22)

- Have you formally recorded decisions and input from the group?
- Have you kept a record of the groups accomplishments and achievements?

How Does a Group Remain Strong Over Time? (Page 24)

- Have you created ways for members to increase their sense of ownership in the group?
- Have you emphasized to members that their perspectives and expertise are valued?
- Have you celebrated accomplishments?

Why Has This Manual Been Developed?

This manual has been developed for use by individuals, organizations, community groups and all orders of government interested in establishing an advisory group of people with lived experience of homelessness and/or poverty (referred to from here on in as *advisory group of people with lived experience*).

The manual has been informed from a variety of sources, including:

- Four interviews with people in Waterloo Region who have experience developing and/or facilitating advisory groups for people with lived experience.
- The author's experience developing and facilitating an advisory group for people with lived experience called the STEP Home (Support to End Persistent Homelessness) Participant Advisory Group.
- Brief literature review.

The literature review revealed that there are limited resources and information available that explore the logistics associated with developing and facilitating an advisory group for people with lived experience. The intention of this manual is to enhance the available knowledge and resources.

This manual is in no way exhaustive of all techniques, ideas and promising practices related to this topic nor is it intended to provide a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, it presents a number of issues to consider in the development of an advisory group of people with lived experience.

It is important to carefully consider the unique preferences and needs of the group and community before taking any action. Avoid making assumptions about the needs, preferences or interests of group members by always asking questions and inviting feedback.

Although this manual has been written from the lens of the development of advisory groups of people with lived experience of *homelessness and/or poverty*, some of the techniques, ideas, and promising practices may be transferrable to other advisory groups including people with a variety of lived experience (e.g. people with mental health issues, developmental disabilities, youth, etc).

Why Develop an Advisory Group with Lived Experience?

An advisory group of people with lived experience can be instrumental to forming recommendations and offering solutions related to homelessness and/or poverty. These contributions serve to strengthen the local community while improving the quality of life for group members.

Expertise can be gained in a number of ways. Most commonly, a person is considered to be an “expert” on a topic area because they have completed a certain level of formal education or training or have extensive work and/or research experience in a particular area.

An equally significant type of expertise is held by people who have lived experience of a particular issue. They are intimately familiar with many of the issues and hold valuable perspectives about how to tackle them. Additional benefits of establishing advisory groups that consist of people with lived experience of homelessness and/or poverty include:

- The voices of people who have experienced homelessness are traditionally missing from the planning and program and policy development process.
- It is important that the “systems, services, programs and policies that impact and address homelessness include and are accountable to people experiencing homelessness”. (Sakamoto, et al., 2008).
- People who are marginalized are resourceful and have strengths and assets that must be acknowledged in human service and policy making (Sakamoto, et al., 2008).
- Policies developed from a middle class mindset for people who have their basic needs met are not necessarily effective for people experiencing poverty or homelessness (National Council on Welfare, 2011).
- People with lived experience can offer local solutions and are aware of what would work in their community (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2006).
- Those who experience homelessness can feel powerless and are sometimes not taken seriously by those in society who hold power – advisory groups can provide a starting point for turning those dynamics around and empowering people (Buck, et al., 2004).
- Advisory groups of people with lived experience of homelessness can provide strength to a cause.
- Advisory groups provide a forum for peers to interact, reducing isolation and supporting personal growth and leadership development opportunities.

What Is The Process For Developing a Group With Lived Experience?

Factors to consider before initiating a group include:

- Considering the level of resources (time, money, staff and volunteers) available to develop and provide on-going support of an advisory group. Taking stock of the level of resources available may also help to determine the purpose, vision, goals and potential activities that can be undertaken by the group.
- Considering the needs and interests of the organization that is hosting the advisory group. What purpose does this organization hope the advisory group will serve? What is the group's sphere of influence?
- Scanning the community to determine if similar groups have already been developed. The community scan can also be a way to strengthen connections and opportunities for collaboration between various groups.

Membership Recruitment

Three options to consider in the recruitment of members to an advisory group of people with lived experience include *by invitation, open call or the snowball approach*.

By Invitation

Extend personal invitations to possible group members. Group members are often identified through existing networks and community agencies.

Membership Considerations:

- Diversity - Ensure diverse backgrounds and experiences are represented. This can bring unique insights and ideas.
- Intention - Group members should have a keen interest and passion for having their voices heard, working collaboratively with others in the group, and in supporting others who have undergone or are going through similar circumstances and experiences as themselves.

Recruitment Process:

- Be prepared before inviting potential group members, it is important to have a draft purpose, vision, goals and activities so people can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.
- Work collaboratively with local agencies to select possible members.

- Personally invite and meet face-to-face with possible Advisory group members (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2009).
- The recruitment process can be open and on-going, or time-limited with parameters.

Benefits to Recruitment by Invitation:

- It may help to ensure the inclusion of people who may not have otherwise self-recognized as being able to contribute to such a group.
- It may be an opportunity to emphasize to potential group members the value of their experience and participation.
- If group participants are involved in recruitment (at a later stage) it is an opportunity to build ownership of the group by sharing responsibility for, and control over, who is able to participate.

Drawback To Recruitment by Invitation:

It is at the discretion of organizations to choose possible members. In so doing, people who appear to have insight and perspectives regarding issues related to homelessness may be invited ahead of those who may not have made such an impression. This could lead to a lack of diversity in opinions and further marginalize some community members.

Open Call

Advertise for group members throughout the community via community agencies, websites, list-serves, bulletin boards, churches, community groups, etc. Accept whoever comes forward.

Benefit To Open Call:

- Potential group members are given the power to self-identify and indicate interest.

Drawbacks To Open Call:

- Barriers such as literacy and mobility issues may prevent people from learning about such opportunities. Additionally, a person may simply not see or hear about the opportunity.
- Some people may not yet have a sense of their potential to contribute to the community, and may require encouragement from someone they trust (e.g., direct support worker).

Snowball Approach

The snowball recruitment technique has members or potential members suggest others who might be willing or appropriate to participate in the group.

Benefits To Snowball Approach:

It is possible to include members of groups that are hidden or hard to reach (e.g., people experiencing homelessness)

Drawbacks To Snowball Approach;

It is not possible to control who or how many people will be asked to participate.

The First Meeting

The first meeting is very important because it can set precedence for the group going forward. It is an opportunity for the group to have concrete input into the direction and purpose as well as to find commonalities and shared interests. This meeting is also important to developing group cohesion and trust (Corey & Corey, 2002).

Consider the following when preparing for the first meeting:

- The first meeting should be presented as an introductory meeting to gain further information where no commitment is required.
- Begin the meeting by welcoming people and talking about the group's purpose. Stress the importance of hearing from people with lived experience.
- Create opportunities for formal and informal connections. That is, group members can get to know each other through formal discussion about interests and the purpose of the group as well as through more informal opportunities such as mingling at the beginning of the meeting and at break times.
- Be prepared - it will be helpful to have drafts of the purpose, vision, goals and activities. These drafts can act as a springboard for discussion about the purpose and function of the group.
- Be flexible and avoid attachment to ideas included in the draft documents as group members may have new and different perspectives. Differing viewpoints may help the group to develop new and important ways of making a difference in the community.
- Be mindful that some group members may have never attended such meetings before. With this in mind, it is important for the chair to be flexible with group proceedings.
- Consider using a "Parking Lot". This involves acknowledging and recording ideas

that do not directly pertain to the discussion at hand so that they can be otherwise addressed or revisited at a future meeting. Ideas can be recorded by the chair or group members on blank flip chart paper available in the meeting room (Live to Learn Inc., 2010).

- Allow time on the agenda to review housekeeping items such as the location of fire exits, washrooms, break areas, etc.

Group Guidelines

Consider the following:

- Group guidelines are explicit expectations that group members hold about acceptable ways to interact during meetings and can help members to move a group process along (Corey & Corey, 2002).
- Group members should have input and make decisions about the group guidelines early in the group's development. This ensures that the group has responsibility and ownership over acceptable ways of interacting in the group.
- On one hand, advisory groups of people with lived experience need to be inclusive of people with active substance use issues or disruptive behaviours. On the other hand, there is a need to provide a safe and comfortable environment for *all* group members. Some examples of group guidelines which may help the group to achieve this balance include:
 - Have an open mind
 - Respect each other's personal experiences
 - Avoid belittling or talking down to people
 - Avoid using hostile language (swearing *at* each other)
 - Violent or aggressive behaviour is never appropriate in the group.

Communication With Group Members

Consider the following:

- It is important for the group chair or facilitator from the host organization to maintain on-going and consistent communication with group members outside of regularly scheduled meetings. This informal contact can also serve as a way to obtain feedback and suggestions about group process, agenda items, or other issues of importance to members.
- Have a way to contact people to remind them about meetings or other activities associated with the group.
- Take the time to find creative ways of contacting members who do not have a

phone or address in order to avoid exclusion from group proceedings and the opportunity for valuable input (e.g., alternative contact person or contact through a free voicemail service).

- Ensure contact information remains confidential.

What are Some Facilitation Considerations?

Role of the Meeting Chair

There are a number of options when it comes to facilitating advisory group meetings of people with lived experience. Each of these options has benefits and drawbacks.

Some issues for consideration that relate to all facilitation options include:

- The position of chair carries a high level of responsibility as well as a great deal of power within the group itself. A chair has the power to help people contribute to discussion or to develop an atmosphere where people are not heard. For example, the chair has the ability to steer a group discussion in a way that supports his or her own personal opinions and ideas while silencing others. The group should carefully select a chair whose values support the inclusion and ideas of all group members.
- Although complete objectivity may not be possible, the chair should intentionally strive to be as objective and inclusive as possible despite personal preferences and opinions.
- The role of meeting chair is one that requires a certain degree of skill and personal qualities which include: listening, facilitation and organizational skills, patience, humility, and conflict resolution. Therefore, it is important that the meeting chair has the opportunity to develop interpersonal and professional skills in these areas to ensure a positive group climate. Training in leadership and facilitation can serve to develop and enhance the skills. On resource that offers more information about these skills and qualities can be found at:
<http://www.omafr.gov.on.ca/english/rural/facts/95-073.htm#role>
- It is the role of the chair to manage group dynamics.
 - Where further training is required but unavailable, a participant chair may opt to have staff from the host agency assist in managing group dynamics.
 - While group members should not be pushed beyond their comfort level when it comes to participating, a degree of encouragement can be very helpful. The key is to find the balance in order to maximize participation and

inclusion of all group members.

- Conflict is an inevitable group dynamic that needs to be addressed effectively (Corey & Corey, 2002). If handled well, conflict can be the impetus to growth and progress. Conflict often occurs when there are differing perspectives and expectations between group members. Conflict resolution training can be helpful for chairs with limited experience in this area.
- Having group guidelines can help to manage group dynamics.
- Ensure that a list of counselling or support resources is available in the event that painful emotions arise during a group meeting.

Chair Options

The following includes a list of four meeting chair options including external chair, participant chair, rotating chair and co-chair, along with the benefits and drawbacks of each. The decision regarding which chair option to select needs to be made collaboratively with group members.

External Chair

Description

An external chair does not have lived experience of homelessness and is traditionally not part of the peer group of the group members. This type of chair role may be assumed by a staff person or volunteer from the organization hosting the meetings, a consultant or someone who is connected in some other way.

Benefits to an External Chair:

- May be more easily able to act as a neutral facilitator due to having a different connection to issues related to homelessness.
- May be someone who is already skilled in group facilitation.
- May stress the importance of a participatory group process, which could lead to increased member inclusion.

Drawbacks to an External Chair:

- Issues of power and control. For many years, experts with formal education and training as well as agency staff have spoken “for” and made decisions “on behalf of” people with lived experience (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2006). Having an external chair may perpetuate this power dynamic.

- In situations where the chair is required to speak on behalf of the group in the community (e.g., presentations, delegations to program or local government leaders, etc.) they do not have the credibility of having lived experience, and there may be a 'lost' opportunity to include the voice of lived experience.

Participant Chair

Description

A participant chair is someone who has lived experience of homelessness who is also part of the advisory group.

Often, the participant chair is someone who volunteers to act as the meeting chair and/or is nominated and voted in by other group members. The participant chair has the same responsibilities as the external chair. An important consideration is that a participant who moves into a chair position can no longer act in the role of participant. The former participant shifts their focus to creating an environment that encourages input from other group members.

Benefits to a Participant Chair:

- A shift in the usual power dynamic. This can be a significant way to meaningfully give a voice to those who have traditionally been silenced.
- Offers an opportunity for the development of skills in facilitation and leadership which could be transferrable to other aspects of the person's life such as employment and volunteering.
- Lends credibility to the group if the chair is ever speaking on behalf of the group in the community.

Drawbacks to a Participant Chair:

- May be difficult to be neutral/objective. This is a particular risk when the chair has direct personal experience with the topics of discussion.
- Can no longer act in the role of participant.

Rotating Chair

Description

Rotating chairs refers to a process whereby two or more participants take turns chairing meetings. For example, one person may chair for a few meetings and then another person chairs for the next few meetings. Rotating chairs can be external, participants, or a combination of both.

Benefits to a Rotating Chair:

- Expands the opportunity to develop facilitation and leadership skills to several members.
- A variety of voices and perspectives are represented through the role.
- Consistency of the group is more easily maintained if, for some reason, there is transition with one of the rotating chairs.
- Rotating chairs allows group members the opportunity to experience both leading and participating.

Drawbacks to a Rotating Chair:

- Can interrupt group cohesion and trust.
- Can be time consuming to train and support multiple people to develop the necessary facilitation skills. Training can also be expensive if outsourced

Co-Chair

Description

A co-chair arrangement may include two group participants or a group participant and an external chair. Co-chairs work together to develop agendas, complete meeting minutes, and facilitate group meetings. This role may also involve one co-chair that takes the lead while the other helps to manage group dynamics and ensure equal participation (Corey & Corey, 2002).

Benefits to a Co-Chair:

- Can increase group member participation with the addition of a second person to tune into group dynamics and ensure that all voices are heard.
- Can reduce the workload for a single chair as the creation of agendas, minutes and follow-up items are shared.
- Allows for uninterrupted continuity of role should one person not be able to attend a meeting (Corey & Corey, 2002).

Drawbacks to a Co-Chair:

- Requires a high degree of coordination between co-chairs to ensure organized meetings.
- Increases likelihood of conflicting ideas about the group's purpose and direction.
- A rivalry between co-chairs could develop.

What Are Some of the Logistical Considerations?

In the development phase of creating an advisory group of people with lived experience, it is important to intentionally consider logistics. This includes the ideal number of group members, location of meetings, transportation, meeting frequency, meeting time, food, membership term, closed versus open group, documentation, and honorariums. Skillfully addressing logistical considerations can lead to the establishment of a group that is more accessible, effective and inclusive.

Proposed logistical considerations should remain flexible until the group has been consulted on their specific needs and preferences. Once the group begins to meet, regular check-ins about logistics can help to ensure that the changing preferences of group members are acknowledged and acted upon.

Numbers

The number of members in a group can alter dynamics and have an impact on the degree of inclusion.

Consider the following:

- Be intentional about including as diverse a group of people as possible.
- If membership is left open, group numbers can fluctuate, which will impact group dynamics.
- The amount of time and space allotted for group members to speak and be meaningfully engaged in discussion and decision-making.
- Generally speaking, it has been found that the ideal number of members ranges from 6-12.
- The length of the meeting and physical limitations should be a consideration. For a larger group, it may be necessary to meet for a longer period of time in order to have time for everyone to be meaningfully included.
- For smaller groups and those that have been reduced in number, it may be helpful to recruit new members.

Location

Accessibility and convenience are two important considerations when determining a location.

Consider the following:

- The meeting space should be accessible for people who have difficulty managing stairs or who use a mobility device such as a scooter, walker or wheelchair.
- Consider the accessibility of transit. For example, is the location on a major bus route? Will group members need to invest a significant amount of time and effort to attend meetings?
- In some instances, it may make the most sense to go to where participants are, rather than asking them to meet at a specific location.
- Group members are more likely to be flexible with meeting location as long as the building is easily accessible, comfortable, familiar, and welcoming.
- Consistency of building and meeting room location within a building is generally considered to be favourable. However, in areas with larger geographical boundaries, it may be preferable to alternate meeting locations to promote equitability for members from across the community.

Transportation

Consider the following:

- Whenever possible, bus tickets for transportation to and from meetings or offering rides for people who do not live close to bus routes should be provided.
- If a group member has a vehicle and drives to a meeting, fuel and parking costs should be reimbursed.
- If there are not enough financial or other resources to permit assistance with travel, it may be necessary to seek additional funding to cover these costs. It has been stated that transportation can be a significant barrier to participation in an advisory group for people with lived experience.

Meeting Frequency

Consider the following:

- What is the purpose of the group? The purpose and type of activities may dictate how frequently the group meets.

- It may be necessary for the group to meet more frequently when there are pressing, time-sensitive issues.
- Given that one of the purposes of an advisory group of people with lived experience is to offer local solutions, it is likely necessary to meet on a consistent basis to give on-going opportunity for input and direction.
- Once per month is a typical meeting frequency for advisory groups of people with lived experience.
- Meeting more often necessitates additional planning support from the host agency and additional resources.
- Meeting bi-monthly can interrupt consistency and group dynamics, particularly if a group member misses a meeting – it will be four months between meetings for this group member.

Time

Consider the following:

- Typically, early morning meeting times are not preferred for advisory groups of people with lived experience. It is recommended to hold the introductory meeting in the afternoon or evening and discuss meeting time preferences with the group at that time.
- Meeting at a meal time (i.e., lunch or dinner) has been found effective (see Food).
- Ensure that the meeting is long enough to move through agenda items without feeling rushed.
- Advisory group meetings are commonly two to three hours in length, including between 30 to 60 minutes allotted for mingling, breaks, eating and/or smoking.
- It may be helpful to have a break after each hour.
- It is important to show people that their time is valuable by ensuring that meetings start on time, breaks happen when they are supposed to and that the meeting ends on time.

Food

Consider the following:

- Food can be a great way of honouring people's time and effort.
- Eating food together can help to build collaborative relationships as well as increase cohesion between group members (Ziegler, 2010).
- Providing food at an advisory group meeting of people with lived experience can meet a very real need for some group members who may be living in poverty.
- Whenever possible, the host agency should cover the cost of food. In cases where this is not possible, some groups have organized a potluck. However, it is important to be mindful that some members may not have the resources to contribute food. As such, the chair and/or co-chair may choose to bring an extra food dish.
- Consider offering healthy food options for people.

Membership Term

Consider the following:

- Determining a membership term may be helpful for some groups. A term is a set amount of time that people are able to be members of the group.
- Membership terms can help to increase diversity of input and ideas generated in an advisory group by ensuring some turnover in membership.
- On the other hand, membership terms can interrupt group cohesion and consistency and may detract from members' sense of commitment to the group.
- A staggered term can be helpful in ensuring that there are some group members who can carry group consistency forward with new members.

Open versus Closed Group

Consider the following:

- An open group is one where people are able to join at any time. An advantage of keeping the group open is that people will be able to come forward on their own terms when they feel ready to participate. This could prevent people from missing the opportunity altogether and helps to increase inclusion and diversity. On the other hand, an open group could make it more difficult for group members to develop cohesion and trust without consistency in membership.

- A closed group is one that has determined a maximum number of participants and is not open for additional members to join, except for at pre-determined intervals (e.g., once per year). This could be advantageous to increasing group cohesion, but may limit opportunities for flexibility in participation.

Documentation

Consider the following:

- Recording any decisions or input from advisory group meetings can be vital to ensuring the unique perspectives and ideas of members are heard by the community. Documentation (e.g., minutes or summary notes) should be made available to the group as well as to people they are advising.
- In many situations, the host agency or government body records minutes. It is important to make all efforts to record information in an objective manner.
- In some instances, hand-written notes are taken during the meeting and typed out later while some groups record minutes during the meeting on a laptop.
- In addition to recording minutes, it may be necessary to write correspondence with regard to policy recommendations or advice about program development or direction. The group may also wish to write proposals. It is important to ensure the voice of the group members are accurately reflected throughout these processes.
- If the group reaches goals or takes action it may be helpful to keep a record of the group's achievements to acknowledge and promote what the group's purpose and accomplishments are over time.

Honorariums

Consider the following:

- Honorariums can be essential to the development and on-going maintenance of an advisory group of people with lived experience. An honorarium consists of money given to a person in recognition of the time they have volunteered or a service they have provided.
- Honorariums can be a great way of honouring the time and efforts of participants.
- When agency or government staff attend a meeting, they are paid as part of their salary to be there. Unlike most people attending meetings, those with lived experience are likely not paid to attend meetings where they provide valuable contributions (Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, 2006). Honorariums can help

to fill this gap.

- When providing an honorarium, consider doing so in cash as many people with lived experience do not have a bank account and may need to resort to using expensive cheque-cashing businesses.
- Gift certificates can also be used as an alternative to cash.
- If current resources do not permit for honorariums, consider seeking out additional funding sources.
- A possible drawback could be that people may be interested in attending the meeting primarily because of the honorarium. While this may be the initial draw in some instances, over time people may develop a passion for making a difference in their community.

How Can Members Collaborate and Connect With Other Groups?

- Collaboration and connection are vital to a building a resilient community (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2010). As such, advisory groups of people with lived experience should strive to connect with and support one another.
- It is important to do your research and avoid duplicating the work another advisory group in the community is doing. Rather, seek opportunities to collaborate or support activities that are already happening.
- Consider asking members from the group to attend other local advisory group meetings to share updates, insights and ideas.

How Does a Group Remain Strong Over Time?

Consider the following:

- Ensure all group members have a stake or some ownership in the group.
- Group members should be reminded that their perspectives and expertise are valued. Communicate this to the group over and over again.
- Support the group to feel a sense of accomplishment by tackling action items (both small and large) together. This sense of gratification can provide the group with the momentum needed for continued action.
- Celebrate accomplishments. Take time to note and celebrate small and larger goals that the group has achieved.
- Acknowledge and welcome new participants, and thank and acknowledge group members who leave the group.
- Maintain the connection to the program, organization or community that the group is functioning within. An advisory group is strengthened by making presentations or communicating in other ways to the organization they are working within. Presentations help clarify purpose and provide opportunities for group consensus and clarification of role.

Conclusion

It is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing advisory groups of people with lived experience. The unique needs of the broader community combined with the expertise, preferences, and passions of the group members must be considered throughout the planning, development and maintenance phases of such a group. Once the group is established, collaborative decision-making and flexibility are instrumental to ensuring that members can affect deep-seeded social change.

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Appendix A

Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre Committee:

Homelessness Advisory Committee

Terms of Reference

People experiencing homelessness are a priority group of KDCHC. Our work serving this priority group should be advised by the experience and knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness.

Purpose

The purpose of the Homelessness Advisory Group will be to:

1. Advise the development of relevant, effective community programs.
2. Help KDCHC increase access to healthcare.
3. Increase KDCHC's understanding of issues affecting people experiencing homelessness.

Key Activities

1. Review information about KDCHC's work with people experiencing homelessness.
2. Advise KDCHC about how to do outreach and link with other services and organizations serving people experiencing homelessness.
3. Brainstorm, plan and advise the development of new community programs that address the determinants of health.
4. Receive information about ongoing programs and provide advice.
5. Advise KDCHC in order to help ensure there is access to medical services for people experiencing homelessness.
6. Provide information to KDCHC about issues faced by people experiencing homelessness.
7. Provide informed advice to relevant parties about homelessness issues.

Reporting Relationship/Accountability

The advisory committee will be supported and facilitated by the KDCHC community development worker. The Committee is accountable to the KDCHC's executive director, through the community development worker.

Resources

The advisory group will meet on a regular basis at the KDCHC. The committee will be supported by staff who will provide: meeting planning, facilitation, follow-up and related action. Other staff and volunteers may also be involved in supporting and facilitating the group. Group members can be reimbursed for transportation and childcare. Any additional funds required for supporting the work of the group must be pre-approved the executive director.

Timelines

The group will be formed in November, 2000, and will continue as a standing committee of the organization.

Membership & Term

The group will be made up of people who have lived experience with homelessness, and are able to inform KDCHC about issues that affect people experiencing homelessness. Other volunteers may join the group, but members with lived experience of homelessness will make up 50% plus one of all members, and all key decisions will be made by 50% plus one of members with lived experience

Meetings

- The group will meet regularly, at an interval to be determined by the group.
- Minutes of all meetings will be prepared by staff or a volunteer, and approved by the group.
- Agendas for meetings will be developed and approved by the group.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the group will be based on the question, Are we meeting, or have we met our goals? Why or why not? The group will evaluate its own work as a group and individually. Staff and any relevant volunteers involved will also evaluate the committee's overall contribution to the work of KDCHC.

Appendix B



STEP Home Participant Advisory Group (PAG)

Description and Purpose:

The STEP Home Participant Advisory Group is made up of people who have experienced persistent homelessness at some point in their lives and have made use of the supports of STEP Home programs. Participant Advisory Group members are seen as experts about persistent homelessness and other life experiences. The group gives opinions and shares experiences that will direct the future of STEP Home programs. The group will also be involved in other activities related to STEP Home and homelessness:

Possible Activities:

- Talking about and planning for the future direction of STEP Home programs.
- Talking about, problem-solving, and addressing any road blocks experienced in STEP Home.
- Discussing issues with other systems related to homelessness (e.g., health, social services, and corrections).
- Being connected and sharing ideas with other community groups that are made up of people who have experienced homelessness (e.g., HAG).
- Creating community resource materials (e.g., pamphlets).
- Giving feedback on reports and/or documents.
- Public speaking about homelessness throughout the community (e.g., schools, churches, all levels of government).
- Engage in awareness-raising about issues and services.

Membership and Term:

- The PAG will be made up of 10 people with lived experience of homelessness who are past or current participants of a STEP Home program. In addition to the 10 people, there will be an external chair/co-chair as well as a recorder and other visitors as invited by the PAG.
- Members of the PAG will have a 2 year term with the option to extend their term twice by one year.