



## Construction Industry Peer Support Program Peer Supporter Candidate Introduction

### Background

Construction Safety Nova Scotia's mission is to achieve a positive occupational health and safety culture within the Nova Scotia construction industry – this includes a focus on mental health and psychological health and safety.

Construction workers have been identified as one of the top three occupational groups at an increased risk of suicide and overall poor mental health. Stigma surrounding mental health continues to exist in male dominated industries where traditional social expectations around masculinity prevail. When we pair this with other industry-specific factors such as poor working conditions, extended periods away from home, physical demands, seasonal employment, economic uncertainty, and low levels of mental health literacy, we begin to understand why the industry has been identified as such.

### Objective

Historically, health and safety has been centered around the physical aspect of the terms. We aim to break through this dated perception and shine light on the mental and psychological aspects. We will use our position and influence within Nova Scotia's construction industry to begin the conversation, and maintain it through training, advocacy, and innovation; ultimately creating structures that put the conversation back in the hands of the workers and support a gradual cultural shift in the construction sector around attitudes toward mental health.

### This document will help you gain a basic understanding of the following:

1. Why are we pursuing peer support?
2. What is peer support?
3. What do peer supporters do?
4. Should I become a peer supporter?
5. How will my involvement affect/involve my employer?
6. How do I become a peer supporter?

### 1. Why are we pursuing peer support?

Social support is one of the most effective prevention strategies for maintaining mental health. It can play a huge role in keeping small problems from becoming big ones. It can moderate the effects of life challenging events and has a positive impact on mental health outcomes. Peer support can complement therapy and medication to add a third, critical tool for helping people with a mental health condition or serve as an individual tool for those experiencing a mental health challenge.

Research shows that lack of social support is the single most significant factor in developing a mental health problem following a hardship. We seek to implement an industry-specific peer support program that will allow construction workers to share their experiences with mental

health while connecting with a community of social and emotional support. The outlet should serve to help dismantle self stigma, promote recovery and aid in suicide prevention.

In addition to the benefits of regular peer support meetings, investing in peer support training opportunities for construction workers with lived experience will help build a valuable skill set, contributing to mental health awareness and support on construction sites.

## 2. What is peer support?

Peer support describes a relationship that includes social and emotional support between people who share a common experience. In this case, we will focus on construction workers and mental health.

Peer Support Is	Peer Support Is <u>Not</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self determination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice-giving</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathy – lived experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sympathy – imagining what it must be like</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person-centered social and emotional support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness-centered therapy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recovery-based dialogue (hope)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversharing</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource navigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting on behalf of the peer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the peer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working through my own stuff</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging that everyone’s recovery journey is different</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insisting that everyone recovers the same way I do</li> </ul>

### Philosophy of Peer Support:

The philosophy of peer support is that individuals have within themselves the knowledge of what is best for them and a strong desire to find a path towards improved health. The peer supporter provides support to that person as they search for that inner knowledge and re-ignite that hopeful desire. Peer support is based on relationships in which each person is considered equal within the relationship and self-determination is highly respected. Peer support is focused on health and wellbeing rather than on illness and disability. In all types of peer support relationships, empathetic understanding and experiential learning is shared in a non-judgmental and supportive manner.

### Goals of Peer Support:

Peer support strives for wellness of the whole person through empowering relationships, engagement in meaningful activities, and nurturing the ability to experience happiness and chart a path to wellness. While volunteers will be required to participate under the CSNS program, they will also be encouraged to use their training to identify opportunities and engage in peer support activities in their workplace in a manner that aligns with peer support core values.

### Peer Support Core Values:

Mutuality	Dignity	Self Determination	Personal Integrity
We value the empathy that comes from	We honour and respect the intrinsic	We honour an individual’s autonomy and inherent right to	We value interpersonal relationships that honour authenticity,

shared experience.	worth of all individuals.	make their own choices as they determine their path to health and wellbeing.	trust, respect, and ethical behavior that uphold our Code of Conduct.
<b>Trust</b>	<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	<b>Social Inclusion</b>	<b>Lifelong Learning</b>
We are honest, reliable, and accountable for our actions.	We value health, wellbeing, and the power of hope for ourselves and others.	We respect diversity and value social justice.	We value personal growth through professional and personal development.

**3. What do peer supporters do?**

Peer supporters carefully leverage their lived experience to connect, listen, relate to and support someone in a similar situation.

The CSNS construction industry peer support program will take a virtual and/or in-person approach to a group peer support structure. Peer supporters trained under this program will be responsible to facilitate scheduled peer support sessions in a manner that reflects the principles of practice and provided training and aligns with the policies and framework defined in the program.

Peer supporters under this program may also be engaged to facilitate scheduled mental health literacy and awareness sessions for peers in the industry. The basis and structure for these sessions will be determined collaboratively by CSNS and the peer supporters. The goal of these sessions is to create an open learning and networking environment that promotes mental health literacy and individual growth.

**4. Should I become a peer supporter?**

- Do you work in the construction industry?
- Have you encountered adversity in your life? (Adversity takes many forms, including struggles with depression, anxiety, addiction, work challenges, physical health, gender, sexuality, etc.)
- Have your experiences with adversity given you insight and increased capacity for compassion towards others?
- Are you prepared to be open about your journey and leverage your lived experiences to provide support to someone who is facing similar challenges?
- Are you in a state of positive well-being and recovery?
- Are you comfortable with group facilitation and/or public speaking?

*If you answered yes to these questions, you may be an ideal candidate. Complete the screening survey to formally apply.*

## 5. How will my involvement affect/involve my employer?

- **Time away from work:** Peer support training may require some time away from work. Skills training typically consists of 18 hours of instructor-led sessions. The exact structure of the training will be determined with input from successful candidates. Some independent study is also required prior to instructor-led training sessions. Group facilitation skills and other relevant training will also be required. All reasonable efforts will be made to minimize this impact where possible.
- **Employer letter of support:** As training and participation may require time away from regularly scheduled work, applicants may be required to submit a letter of support from their employer confirming the applicant will be granted the time required to participate in training, meetings, and community of practice or planning sessions.
- **Donating meeting space:** Successful applicants will be encouraged to request meeting space from their employers to host peer support meetings or mental health literacy and awareness sessions.
- **Adding value to the team:** Having a trained peer supporter on staff adds value to the team and workplace. While peer supporters will be required to participate in the CSNS program, they are also encouraged to apply their training within their workplace where appropriate.
- **Cultural impact:** In addition to the value added to individual workplaces, the employer has an opportunity to support overall culture change in the construction sector by encouraging and supporting their workplace mental health champions participation in this inaugural program.
- **Industry recognition:** Employers who are supportive of this venture for their employee(s) and the industry will be included in Construction Safety Nova Scotia's newsletter and related media, showcasing their company values to the industry, and positioning themselves as a valued partner and advocate for mental health awareness in construction.

## 6. How do I become a peer supporter?

1. Review the peer supporter candidate introduction.
2. Complete the candidate screening survey.
3. If selected, CSNS will reach out to schedule a screening meeting.
4. Successful candidates will complete a one-hour online module designed to help individuals understand what peer support is and assess whether it is something they truly want to do. This module also serves as a pre-requisite to formal training. If upon completion of the module you feel peer support facilitation is not for you, you may withdraw your application.
5. Successful candidates who choose to continue will be formally trained in peer support skills and facilitation through a certified body. This training will be funded by CSNS.
6. Trained peer supporters will be oriented to the peer support program. Additional training and community of practice meetings with fellow peer supporters will be required periodically.
7. Further details regarding program administration will be given to successful candidates.

**Thank you for your interest in CSNS's Mental Health Initiatives!**

Still have questions? Please let us know so we can include them in future versions of this document.

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