

Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver Peer Counseling

Panel Discussion

‘Volunteerism’

Engaging with Aging

1. Definition

- Senior Peer Counseling provides senior citizens with a senior-aged (peer) counselor providing assistance with emotional support and encouragement to those who are experiencing life changes that often accompany aging. Personal services provided to senior clients include assistance in dealing with grief, loss, physical limitations, financial issues, debilitating depression, loneliness and isolation.

2. About JSA and Peer Counseling in BC

- JSA is volunteer driven without any CEO or large bureaucratic infrastructure
- It is a double edged sword...volunteers like myself micro manage much of the activities.
- It can be very time consuming and there is a danger of over-managing.

3. Peer Counseling as a Helping Procedure

- Peer Counseling is a methodology designed to help seniors cope better and find solutions to their problems themselves.
- Not meant to be a therapeutic intervention in a clinical relationship
- The service is FREE; no income testing: no bureaucratic red tape to establish eligibility

4. Selecting Peer Counselors and their Training

- Recruiting-advertising, word of mouth, our brochure
- About 80% complete the vigorous training course
- Training program consists of 5 hours sessions over 11 weeks for a total of of 55 hours

5. Clientele, Assigning and Boundaries

- Clients are interviewed for not less than an hour by our professional staff
- Try to match up clients and counselors who have similar interests
- Boundaries for Peer counselors and clients are a critical issue

6. Measuring Success-Clients and Counselors

- For Clients
 - Systemic changes - \$
- For Peer Counselors
 - Volunteers probably get as much out of their involvement as do the clients

7. Interesting Statistics

- 39 trained senior peer counselors
- 19 trained friendly visitors and telephone callers
- What is the cost of our service?
- Not all Jewish clients wish to have a Jewish Senior Peer Counselor

8. Successes and Challenges

- JSA is dedicated to provide programs and services for and by seniors that directly address the emotional support that they crave
- Ongoing financial security is a day to day challenge
- We need to stay relevant and ensure our niche does not belong to another service provider
- Retaining volunteers is another on- going challenge
- Recruiting motivated volunteer Board members who have time to become involved
- To paraphrase a TED quotation: we need to recruit and to train dedicated people as volunteers who will be as passionate about our programs and services as we are.

9. Perke Avot

- “Wisdom of our Fathers”
 - a call to action
 - Volunteers can do it

Kenneth Levitt

Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver

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