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Annotated Bibliography

ACI (12/9/2019). *Peer Support in Youth Mental Health-DR. Magenta Simmons*. (Video). Vimeo.

<https://vimeo.com/378223815>

This presentation by Magenta Simmons, PhD. of Orygen, a peer-led services provider for youth in Australia, focuses on three research projects she and her colleagues conducted on the subject of youth peer support workers. Simmons and her colleagues examined the issues, challenges, and benefits of peer support services both on the recipients of services, the workers themselves, the agency, and the non-peer staff. This work is not without challenges, however. Researchers identified role confusion or diffusion, professional stigma, boundary issues, and lack of support for youth peer workers, as challenges that need to be overcome in order for youth peer support to be implemented.

Simmons and her colleagues provide data and evidence that was lacking in youth-specific peer support at the time of their research. This research has the potential to change the way that mental healthcare is approached for young people but also the way that youth peer workers are trained and supervised. Their suggestions for how to improve the experience of youth peer workers, especially those new to the field, could help improve not only the field, but also the peers who receive services from the agencies that employ youth peer workers.

Bunts, W. (n.d.) *Youth Mobile Response Services: An Investment to Decriminalize Mental Health*. (PDF). The Center for Law and Social Policy. https://www.clasp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Youth20Mobile20Response20Services_0.pdf

In her report for The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), Whitney Bunts presents the importance of implementing mobile response services for youth. She cites the prevalence of police violence when responding to mental health crises, especially in communities of color. She provides suggestions for how to best implement peer-led mobile crisis units for young people in order to combat the racial injustice perpetuated by both law enforcement and the mental healthcare establishment throughout American history. She highlights best practices from regions that have implemented such a mobile response program as evidence of its efficacy.

Bunts' report would be a valuable resource for any community considering a mobile crisis response program for youth, or in communities with high rates of police-violence against individuals experiencing mental health crises. Her suggestions are straight-forward, focusing on peer support over police response, Medicaid funding, sufficient training, sufficient support structures post-crisis, and services provided under a harm reduction framework. All of these are significant changes to make to the way that mental health is addressed in society.

Davis, K., Chilla, S., Nghia, D. (2022). *Youth and Young Adult Peer Support: Expanding Community-Driven Mental Health Resources*. (PDF). Mental Health America. <https://mhanational.org/research-reports/youth-and-young-adult-peer-support-expanding-community-driven-mental-health>

In this report from Mental Health America, the authors present necessary changes for how teen and young adult mental health should be addressed. They point to peer support as a key

component to filling in gaps within the mental healthcare system. Teens and young adults are primed to turn to one another for support and advice, so the authors believe that peer support by teens and young adults for teens and young adults will be an effective remedy to what is lacking in mental health treatment. They provide suggestions as to how to improve peer support for this population.

The suggestions provided in this report establish a clear roadmap for how to improve youth and young adult mental health. The authors' emphasis on peer support and especially the training of young people to provide peer support is a valuable tool in this approach to mental health. Facilitating non-clinical treatment that is culturally sensitive and implemented in a style that is more familiar to young people has the potential to address a growing problem in mental healthcare.

Young adult and teen support groups - substance abuse recovery - full circle program. Full Circle. (n.d.). <https://fullcircleprogram.com/>

Full Circle is a peer-based substance abuse and mental health recovery program for teens and young adults. They offer programming for teens aged 12-17, and young adults aged 18-25. They market themselves as a safe and sober place to have fun. Their services can function as stand-alone recovery, or as an after-care program for individuals who have just exited inpatient treatment. Their young adult services fill in a gap that is left by other treatment options. Providing recovery services, by peers to the young adult cohort is a valuable resource for those in recovery who are too old to connect with other teens, but too young to connect with other adults.

The model established by Full Circle could be implemented for any number of peer support services. It is also scalable based on the fact that their programming is available in multiple states. Providing peer services to the young adult age group as well as teens would allow for a smooth transition between the two types of groups and facilitate further escalation to adult services. Starting peer recovery at an early age could prove to be a valuable indicator of future success in recovery.

Halsall, T., Daley, M., Hawke, L., Henderson, J., Matheson, K. (2022) “You can kind of just feel the power behind what someone’s saying” a participatory-realist evaluation of peer support for young people coping with complex mental health and substance use challenges. *BMC Health Services Research* (22:1358). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-022-08743-3>

Halsall et al., present a study they conducted to examine a peer support service (Transitional Age Youth) for youth living with complex challenges with mental health, physical health, and/or substance use issues. They wanted to get a better understanding of how and why peer support might be helpful in addressing these concerns. They used a hybrid realist-participatory approach to explore issues and theoretical assumptions. The authors found that there were two primary outcomes from this service; client engagement improved alongside the ability to help individuals along in their own path through recovery.

The use of participatory research in this study gives a glimpse into the experience of receiving youth peer support services. The overarching themes of feeling empowered in one’s own recovery and the sense of hope that recovery is possible through observing others with lived experience who model recovery, demonstrate the benefits of peer support for young people. The

theoretical analysis used in this study imparts validity within academia while the content of their focus groups presents first-person insights into the real world impact of these services.

Stevens, M., Farlas, J.C., Mindel, C., D'Amico, F., Evans-Lacko, S. (2022). Pilot evaluation to assess the effectiveness of youth peer community support via the Kooth online mental wellbeing website. *BMC Public Health* (22:1903). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14223-4>

Stevens et al., explore the efficacy of Kooth, an online resource for youth mental health based in the U.K. that combines peer support with more traditional counseling in one platform. Users can contribute stories of lived experience, connect via forums, and take part in well-being activities provided on the platform. Posts are carefully monitored and moderated. Users can also access clinicians through Kooth. The authors assessed several outcomes from using Kooth. Through qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis, they looked at its impact on psychological distress, well-being, and social relationships.

This research, while limited to one online service, shows that there is promise in digital peer-to-peer mental health support services. Based on the article's findings, more research is needed, but the authors provide evidence for the efficacy of Kooth and online services like it. Kooth's platform is novel and perfectly suited to the population they serve, so this research can provide a roadmap for the further development of this type of peer support.

Tawa, K., Kim, E., Howdershelt, M. (July 28th, 2023) Giving the Young People What They Want: A Policy Framework for Youth Peer Support. (PDF). *The Center for Law and Social*

Policy. <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/giving-the-young-people-what-they-want-a-policy-framework-for-youth-peer-support/>

Tawa et al., present a basic background on peer support, address the contrast between adult and youth peer support, and propose changes in policy that will facilitate improvements in youth peer support. The primary focus is to allow young people to access services that differ from the clinical model, are provided by peers their age who are certified, and available across the continuum of care.

The framework proposed in this report is detailed and novel. Their proposal to train and certify young people under the age of eighteen to become peer support specialists addresses issues present in the traditional clinical model of mental healthcare, and issues inherent in utilizing adult peer support specialists in work with young people. Having youth who are certified and able to attain a stable career in peer support could have a substantial impact. Making peer support an entry level option for individuals who may fear that they cannot find a career due to their mental health struggles, could bring hope to a vulnerable population.

Turuba, R., Toddington, C., Tymoschuk, M., Amarasekera, A., Howard, A.M., Brockmann, V., Tallon, C., Irving, S., Matthias, S., Henderson, J.L., Barbic, S. (2023) “A peer support worker can really be there supporting the youth throughout the whole process”: a qualitative study exploring the role of peer support in providing substance use services to youth. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 20(118). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-023-00853-3>

This article from the Harm Reduction Journal provides an overview of the work youth peer support workers play in addressing substance use issues in young people (aged 12 to 24) in British Columbia, Canada. They provide a basic background on youth peer support, look at the

experiences of youth peer support workers, and present the barriers faced by these workers. The authors used a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to explore this field. Their analysis found three primary themes in the experiences of youth peer support workers; peer support workers support youth throughout the whole recovery process, they provide youth with individualized care, and they help bridge the gap between other services and supports.

The article presents a basic definition of youth peer support in the realm of substance use recovery and highlights both the benefits and limitations of the field. While peer support workers fit a unique role in youth recovery from substance use problems, there is a need for more effective implementation of this work into the traditional substance use treatment models. Their suggestions for how to best do this are helpful in highlighting how youth peer support can work in concert with traditional treatment.