
Pearls Among Peers: A Conversation with Peer Leaders

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Abstract

Six North American leaders in the field of peer counselling were interviewed about their perspectives on training and program issues, future trends, and needed research areas. The leaders' responses showed both similarities and differences and covered a broad range of concerns. These included the need for standards, cautions and concerns regarding training, differences between professional and peer counselling, the role of peer counselling in creating a caring society, and the expansion of peer counselling systems to the work force, senior citizens and Native communities.

Résumé

Six chefs de file dans le domaine du counseling par les pairs ont été interviewés sur leurs perspectives de l'entraînement, les programmes, les directions futures, et les besoins de la recherche dans ce domaine. Leurs réponses montrent des similarités remarquables et couvrent un large éventail de préoccupations telles que le besoin de normes, la différenciation entre le conseiller professionnel et le conseiller par les pairs, la relation entre le counseling par les pairs et la création d'une société humanitaire, et l'expansion des systèmes de counseling par les pairs dans le milieu du travail, des personnes âgées, et les communautés autochtones.

The emergence of peer counselling as a major force in the delivery of helping services has stemmed in large part from the work of early leaders or pioneers in the field. Over the years, other leaders have emerged, often developing variations and successful adaptations of the early pioneers' ideas. Leadership in peer counselling has broadened considerably and several persons have achieved national and international prominence as trainers, authors and researchers. The purpose of this article is to provide a forum for expressing the thinking, vision and ideas of leaders in the field of peer counselling.

Seven peer counselling leaders were asked to share their perspectives on the evolution of peer counselling, the major concerns associated with the field and the future direction of the movement. All seven leaders were contacted by mail prior to a telephone interview to determine their willingness to participate in the interview and to provide them with a general idea of the interview purpose and questions. Six leaders, Barbara Varenhorst, Tom Erney, Trevor Cole, Rey Carr, Judith Tindall and Ron Jorgenson agreed to participate in the interview system.

Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and was taped and transcribed. The material which follows this introduction has been selected and edited from transcripts of the interviews. The meaning and intention of their responses is faithfully reproduced. Preceding each response to the first question we provide a brief description of each

leader's present status and stature within the field. At the conclusion of the interview section we provide a selected bibliography as well as the contact addresses of each of the interview participants.

Dr. Rey Carr is a Professor in Counsellor Education at the University of Victoria and Director of the Peer Counselling Project. Dr. Carr travels across Canada lecturing, consulting and conducting peer counselling workshops for trainers. He has written many articles on peer counselling and is the co-author, along with Greg Saunders, of Canada's most widely used peer training resource. Dr. Carr's work in peer counselling has been nationally recognized and has received awards from the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association.

CJC: *How did you first get involved with peer counselling?*

Rey Carr: I was conducting an evaluation across the country of counselling services in schools and I learned that when students have concerns, worries, or frustrations, they turn to their friends for understanding and assistance. Peer helping seemed like a vast natural resource that lay untapped and had tremendous potential for empowering students. It seemed like building on peer relations and interaction would be an efficient and effective method for achieving counselling service goals. At the same time I knew the role that the need for autonomy plays in adolescent development, so I thought students would be interested in creating their own ways of helping themselves and others. These ideas were confirmed in workshops I took with Barbara Varenhorst and Tom Erney; and I started to carry out work in this direction first with Greg Saunders, who did his master's thesis on training peer counsellors, and then later with another colleague, Vance Peavy, who was already working on an adult peer helping manual.

Dr. Barbara Varenhorst presently works in Palo Alto, California and is one of the most highly respected people in the field. She is the president-elect of the National Peer Helpers Association (NPHA) and is chairman of its research committee. She is the past president of the California Peer Counselling Association and is its current vice-president, as well as the chairperson of its advisory committee. She is presently phasing out of her role as director of the peer counselling program in the Palo Alto school district, a position she has held since she began the program twenty years ago. She continues to instruct trainers of peer counsellors and has been very active in bringing peer counselling into churches. Her extensive publications are probably the most cited in the field and she recently revised her peer counsellor training curriculum to include a spiritual component. Her current interest is in starting a regional centre for California in Santa Clara County's Office of Education; a centre for

training, consultation, resources, and research, which she hopes can become a national model.

CJC: *Dr. Varenhorst, how did you first become involved with peer counselling?*

Barbara Varenhorst: I first recognized the need to develop a peer counselling program when I attempted to develop an exemplary guidance program for California. While interviewing students about what future guidance they needed, I heard that students were more likely to turn to their friends for assistance than to a school counsellor who was a stranger or was too busy to see them. I discovered that many young people wanted to help their friends, but didn't know how. At first I didn't want to hear this; but as I listened, I realized that during adolescence, it's normal and important to turn to peers for help in our further development. And recognizing that that's a part of nature, I thought, well, why not teach them how to be more helpful to their friends. So I went to the literature to search for some models and the only thing I found were tutoring programs or college-age big sister, big brother programs. Since there wasn't anything really going on in this area, I thought, well, why not start a program? And that's what led me to start my program.

Ron Jorgenson from Victoria, British Columbia is known for his work as a peer counsellor advocate, consultant and trainer in cross cultural settings and Native communities. He has taught at the annual Peer Counselling Institute at the University of Victoria and was a co-leader for Canada's first Native Peer Counselling Leaders training workshop. His interest lies in adapting peer counselling concepts to special groups, particularly Native people. He consults with organizations across the country on community development and his work in integrating peer concepts with Native traditions and customs keeps him active as a trainer and speaker.

CJC: *How did your interest in peer counselling come about?*

Ron Jorgenson: I had taken a peer counselling training course as part of my graduate training in education. I was wondering how I could make this process of peer counselling less something which comes out of an institution, and more something which effectively reflects what's part of our human endeavour and particularly, the cultural endeavour of Native people? How can I modify peer counselling, as I've learned it, into a model that can work in the community? How can I bring language and symbols into play that will speak clearly to Native people about the principles, values, and ideas that are involved in the peer counselling process?

My interest in peer counselling was aroused by a need that I saw with young people in the Native communities, as a way of helping them to

provide support for each other and as an opportunity of averting crisis. The critical incident was when I saw a group of four young people at one o'clock in the morning, all of whom were drunk. One of them was going to commit suicide, and the other three were supporting him, refusing to allow him to commit suicide.

Dr. Tom Earney is a counsellor in private practice in Gainesville, Florida, and has been involved in peer counselling for seventeen years as a trainer of peers and trainers, as an advocate, and finally, as a consultant. He is the co-author of one of the most widely used training guides on peer facilitation and he has acted as a catalyst for the development of peer programs across the United States. In addition, he assisted, as well as appeared in, a pioneering film documenting peer facilitation. Dr. Erney spends considerable time travelling throughout North America lecturing and training and is an active advocate of Skills for Living training for children and adolescents. As a trainer, he is presently working with peer projects which involve inner city schools in Dade County and with training school counsellors in neighbouring school districts. For the last six years he has worked with Hospice, training people to help those who face cancer. His most exciting work recently was a workshop in which 40 students were trained to work in the AIDS network in Key West which claims the highest death rate per capita due to AIDS in the United States.

CJC: *How did you become involved with peer helping?*

Tom Erney: I was originally drawn to the concept of peer counselling out of my frustration in dealing with drug-using adolescents. I was interested in helping them change their lives, but when they returned to the street they would often go back to self-destructive behaviours. I finally experienced success when I had them bring in their peers and I worked with the entire group. Eventually I began to train some of these young people to co-lead new groups with me and I watched again the impact and the ripple effect in the drug scene and in the school. So you could say that my ability to make a difference came from my frustration as a school counsellor.

Dr. Judith Tindall is a counsellor and consultant in private practice in St. Charles, Missouri. She is an author, consultant, and trainer in peer counselling and is a Board member and chairperson of the committee on Program Standards and Ethics for the National Peer Helpers' Association. She has been involved in the peer counselling movement since the 1960s. She is the co-author, along with Dean Gray, of a well-known beginning peer training manual. Dr. Tindall is the sole author of an advanced manual, and she has just completed a training book for pre-adolescents.

CJC: *How did you begin your involvement in peer counselling?*

Judith Tindall: Twenty years ago, while working as a counsellor in a junior high school, I developed my own peer counselling program to meet the exhausting amount of work I faced in trying to run an extensive counselling program. I felt overwhelmed by the needs of students of that era. I thought that if counsellors could give away their skills to the lay community, they would have more impact on the student population. It was lonely at first because only a junior college in the St. Louis area had a peer counselling program and there was very little written in the literature. Later I learned that Barbara Varenhorst was operating a peer counselling program in California.

Dr. Trevor Cole is an elementary school counsellor for the Cowichan School District in Duncan, British Columbia. He is a consultant, trainer and advocate for elementary peer counselling programs and is an instructor for the Peer Counselling Institute at the University of Victoria. Dr. Cole is the author of Canada's leading peer training manual for elementary and middle school students.

CJC: *How did you first become involved in peer counselling?*

Trevor Cole: I was introduced to peer counselling by Walt Godfrey while I was working as a senior high school counsellor and we felt that peer counselling would be a great advantage in our multi-ethnic East Vancouver secondary school. Since then I feel fortunate enough to have been able to introduce the peer counselling concept to staff and students at the elementary grades. Recently I have been able to work with senior high students again, but in a community-based peer counselling program.

CJC: *What would each of you describe as your significant contributions to the field of peer counselling? What are you most proud of?*

Rey Carr: I'm not sure how significant they are, but at least three things have been very satisfying to accomplish: the establishment of the Canadian peer counselling network, the development of the Peer Counsellor newsletter as an extension of that network and the recent work that Greg (Saunders) and David (de Rosenroll) and I have done to establish a system for certifying the quality of peer counsellor trainers.

On a more theoretical level I think that I have been very successful at learning how to enter a system and help them get interested in a new idea, adopt an innovation and then help that idea stick rather than just become a fad and drop out. I am very proud of how my colleagues and I have learned how change takes place and how to help people manage change in their work environments. We have developed almost a technology of change, and how to bring it about. So I think the thing that I have become very proud of is our ability to foster that system to

help people go from not knowing anything about peer counselling, to having a really high quality peer counselling program.

But probably the thing which gives me the greatest pride occurs when I can arrange for local peer counsellors to help me conduct a workshop for prospective trainers. When I hear the peer counsellors talk about their experiences in front of this group, often exploding myths about a young person's ability to help or providing candid and direct answers to the same questions I have been asked, I feel most proud that I am associated with this caring system. I'll never forget the time I went to the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association conference in Calgary to co-lead a peer counselling session with Doug McIntyre and Trevor Cole (two senior high peer program leaders in Vancouver). Doug and Trevor had arranged for peer counsellors from Vancouver to attend the session. One student answered a question from the audience (about 300 people) on how peer counselling had affected her relations with her own family, and when she described how it had improved her relations with her father, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

Barbara Varenhorst: I do believe that I started one of the first peer counselling programs in the (United States) and I have maintained, enriched, and expanded the program over twenty years. It was not a program that I used just to acquire further professional advancement. It is a program that I believe in with my whole life, and I think that the Palo Alto program is a model for the whole country.

I am proud of the peer counselling curriculum guide that I have written: it is helpful and adaptable to many people and situations. I am also proud of my book, *Real Friends*, because it is helpful to kids who haven't received peer counselling. I also developed the theological concept to accompany peer counselling and the book I wrote, *Training Teenagers for Peer Ministry*, fits with my basic philosophy of being of service to other people and helping.

Ron Jorgenson: I feel best about having been able to bring peer counselling into the Native community, and to bring it into a form that found its acceptance within the Native community. And out of that I have been able to see a couple of programs in particular that have developed and flourished and have had an impact on their community in ways that I am sure no one had ever envisaged.

Tom Erney: I think the most important contribution I believe that I have made is in the whole issue of awareness and visibility. My books and the peer movie, along with the speeches and the workshops and my travels throughout North America and more and more in Europe have contributed to helping people see the concept. Once they are exposed to it, it is so much common sense, that we just do not get much resistance from the vast, vast majority of people. I think that what I am proudest of

is much more personal and that is, the influence that the concept has had in my daughter's life. She was a peer counsellor when she was in junior high and now she is a college freshman who is majoring in education and is planning to become a teacher and then go on to become a counsellor.

Judith Tindall: I think the most exciting thing for me is the young people I trained maybe fifteen years ago coming back to me and saying they are now professional counsellors! I also see people from previous training groups who are not professional counsellors and they will come back and say "that was the most helpful kind of learning that I ever had." I also feel very good about the fact that in the late sixties and early seventies, when things were not real conducive for peer counselling, that I was able to start a program, and was able to accomplish some of the early research in peer helping. I think I was most proud, though, of the first national conference that we held in St. Charles last year which put together a group of people from all over the country. They were really excited about the peer helping movement, and their enthusiasm helped me feel like all the time and effort over the years was worth it.

Trevor Cole: Having come from a secondary school where I worked with peer counsellors and going into elementary schools, I wondered if this age level of kids could handle peer counselling. As I wandered down the hall of one of my elementary schools, I saw a class of grade sevens reading to grade ones, and I recognized that cross-age tutoring has been happening for a long time at the elementary level. It occurred to me that the students could learn empathy and problem-solving skills. So, I feel best about being somewhat of a pioneer at getting peer counselling going at the elementary level. I also feel good about a training manual I produced for elementary teachers and counsellors which has been requested and distributed across the country. I guess that I feel most proud when I see some of our elementary peer counsellors who are now at high school, walking to school with some of the special needs kids who have just been integrated into the local high school. I also get a good feeling when these peer counsellors refer friends who they believe are experiencing problems. There's no doubt that elementary peer counselling extends my service and I feel very good about their contribution to making elementary school a safe and caring environment.

CJC: *What are some of the unresolved issues associated with peer counselling?*

Rey Carr: One issue is the difficulty that people have doing evaluation in peer counselling. The movement itself is pretty much practitioner-oriented and a lot of practitioners recognize the importance of evaluation, but don't have the skill or models to do evaluations. Another issue concerns the "professionalization" of peer counselling. Two often professionals who initiate peer programs think that principles of profes-

sional service should apply to peer counsellors. Instead of building on the existing skills, trainers sometimes minimize what peers bring to training. I think some professionals have not been able to resolve the difference between peer helping with its “mutuality” orientation (and wide variety of helping actions) and professional helping with its “client” orientation and circumscribed helping behaviours. Program standards are also an unresolved issue. I am concerned that persons who volunteer to be peer counsellors may not be provided with the highest standard of training and supervision they deserve to have. I think we need standards and I think a certification system may be a way to resolve this situation.

Barbara Varenhorst: We need a clearer understanding of the purpose and underlying philosophy of peer counselling. There are a conglomeration of different names that we go by. I think that the standards for what constitutes a legitimate program is an unresolved issue. And I believe that certainly one of the critical issues right now is liability. To what extent is the organization or school liable for what peer counsellors do? I suppose another one of the unresolved issues is the education of the public as to what we are about.

Ron Jorgenson: Peer counselling is an imaginative process, and while there are guidelines as to its use, it also involves learning to dance with the process. We must become aware of the process of change so that we can teach it, and we must develop an application of the model that reflects the needs in the area which it's being brought into. Each community has a culture of its own. And so we are ultimately in a process of having to blend peer counselling with the symbols and values and knowledge we have about the community in which we are working. Trainers lack sufficient exposure to either counselling skills or just being in a peer counselling setting to understand what it is that this form is all about. I think it is important that as we are working with peer counselling trainers we are not victimizing those leaders. For example, if I give you the impression that I know and you do not, then it means that you have to come to me to learn and I become the one who has the power. We create a power hierarchy which is fostered by the trainers. What we really need is co-operative learning. Part of this problem is due to trainers coming out of institutions which have power structures and being *sent* to learn about peer counselling.

Tom Erney: My belief is that the unresolved issues associated with peers are really no different than the unresolved issues related to the counselling field in general: ethical issues, confidentiality, who's selected (for training), the training that they receive, what kind of training, the balance between didactic and experiential, the whole supervision process. How much intensive supervision does someone need when they are

being trained, and what about once they are in the field? What about ongoing supervision? The other unresolved issue, a major one, is the resistance within educational systems. Specifically, how do you promote administrative acceptance? How do we go about helping administrators see what they can't see? Once we are on the school campus and they see the impact, then we have no problem demonstrating the effectiveness. But it's that initial acceptance.

Judith Tindall: Well, one of them is, of course, ethics and standards. I really believe that the whole area needs ethical guidelines and some standards for basic training, for application of skills training, and for supervision. I'm very concerned about the fact that throughout the country some of our students are doing peer helping activities and going through a half-day's training. The National Peer Helper's Association is working on three different documents: a statement of ethics for peer helpers, a statement of ethics for trainers or facilitators, and minimum program standards for both training and supervision. Another area I am very concerned about is that when a program is in existence, I think there needs to be very, very good advanced training and supervision of those people serving as peer helpers, no matter what their age. If counsellors would train lay people with helping skills, the lay helpers could be more effective with their own families, co-workers and friends. Another area that I think is still an unresolved area is the acceptance of peer counselling by the mental health profession. I do believe that it is accepted by many of them, but I don't think it is accepted by the whole mental health community. I am also concerned with those responsible for conducting a program in terms of their role in evaluation. They need to do program evaluation to see if the program accomplished its goals and to evaluate each peer helper's skill learning. Unless the professionals involved in peer helping do ongoing evaluation, their programs will not improve and they may possibly even be dropped.

Trevor Cole: I think that one unresolved issue is the lack of acceptance of peer counselling by parents and teachers and their perception that because peer counsellors are called peer counsellors they are "mini-therapists." They have a hard time understanding that what we are doing is training kids to care, to be caring individuals and to help other kids think through their own problems, not make decisions for them. So they have a mind set about the word "counsellor" and whether a child of grade six can, in actual fact, help others. I think that what happens is that we do not give kids enough credit, even at that age. Adults don't feel children are old enough to deal with others in an empathic way. I have taught grade three students listening skills and found that it worked really well.

CJC: *What research would you like to see undertaken in the field of peer counselling?*

Rey Carr: I would say one of the most important areas for research is examining the impact of peer counselling on the clients of peer counsellors, that is, their friends, the people that they know, that they interact with in a helping or caring fashion. On a more general level, research would be valuable on the ways in which the peer counsellors impact the organizational or social system in which they operate. And that's a really difficult research question to answer because of our limitations in knowing how to go about doing that kind of research. The study by Ailsa Edge in Vernon, British Columbia, which we published through the Peer Counselling Project, contributed greatly to our understanding about this area, and I would like to see her work extended to more programs.

Barbara Varenhorst: Very little has actually been done in the research area. And one of the things I think we need first are instruments to measure the kind of thing that we are trying to do. Second we need some way in which we can measure the impact on the people that we serve in the program: the counselees. But more than that, I would like to see some long-term, long-range research. A very, very minimal amount has been done in terms of what are the long-term effects on the people who have been trained and on those who have received the services. Do we know whether we are rescuing kids who might take a different path in their lives? And I am a great believer that those who are trained will make better parents, will make better marriages, even will be more successful on their jobs. I also think that we need to begin to do some research on differential training. If we measure students in terms of their relative skills, could we create different kinds of training for students who want to be peer counsellors?

Ron Jorgenson: I think there are some needs around basic communication skills as prerequisite to being trainers. And I would like to see more research around that. Is it possible to identify what the skills are that make good trainers? I think we need to know more about how a trainer's knowledge about what's going on in that community relates to the success of programs when they go back into the community to be set up. I'm not sure as trainers we are encouraging the acquisition of that knowledge about where my community is at right now, prior to coming into the training. This may be the main reason for failure of a program.

Tom Erney: I guess if I were to recommend specific areas, I think one of them would be the longitudinal impact on the peer counsellors themselves. What are they like as marriage partners? What are they like as parents? Do they feel more personally fulfilled, more capable, more empowered in those roles? Another area would be the impact that peer counselling has upon adolescents who are self-abusive, primarily in the area of drugs. I would also like to know more about the impact on the helpees over varying lengths of exposure to peer counselling.

Judith Tindall: I think some more formalized research definitely needs to be done to validate different training activities, but there also needs to be program evaluation to see if, in fact, the program accomplished its goals. We need two levels of inquiry: local evaluation and academic research. I think there is a great wealth of research that needs to be done in terms of the impact on the helpee. In other words, those constituents that our peer helpers are supposed to be helping: are they, in fact, making a difference, now and in the future?

CJC: *What kind of training should a peer counsellor trainer have before initiating a peer program?*

Rey Carr: Inspirational training! I think there are several crucial ingredients in training. They should have training which encourages their own personal awareness, personal skills and personal resources. Their training must model the training skills they are expected to use with others and they should be able to demonstrate their skills in their everyday interactions with people. The training they receive should have a strong experiential component where they can have opportunities to solicit and receive feedback and coaching. Most importantly the training should empower them to build on and support their own resources. There should be a level of competency in training that would enable people to be certified to be trainers. Students or peer counsellors or potential peer counsellors should be able to expect that when a person, normally an adult, starts a peer counselling program, the person has had systematic or comprehensive training to be able to start that program and also be able to supervise it. I think there is a need for a certification system and a set of standards for trainers. Peer counselling programs do not need to be the same, but at least trainers should have some type of training which has kind of a standard quality to it.

Barbara Varenhorst: Well, I believe that a trainer needs to be exposed experientially to what he or she is going to be teaching to a peer student. And I also feel that they need the skills of how to deal with groups experientially. Many people don't know how to teach in an experiential mode and not make it a group counselling session. So the utilization of the group dynamic in a teaching mode is an important trainer need. A trainer also needs to know how to use what people say and experience to teach them something. Interestingly enough, I think a trainer needs real skill in giving direction. I'm incredibly impressed at how inept people are in direction giving. I also think trainers need to have a clear understanding of what counselling is, what the helping relationship is and is not, and when and where peer counselling is or is not appropriate and, when it is appropriate, when and how to refer.

Ron Jorgenson: I think that there is a necessity for some basic skills. I believe that they should take a peer counselling course as a participant

before they ever come back around to take it as a training process. In other words, they should go through the program at least twice, once to experience it and the next time to learn about what it was that they experienced. I think another need for trainers is an intimate knowledge of their community. I see that people who are coming in to be trainers need to have a lot of their human development work and awareness of self already in place. For me personally, part of what's involved in peer counselling has to do with spirituality. It has to do with community. It has to do with creating connection between one person and another. And while there are practical skills involved in that process, there is a spiritual communion that takes place. I think the acknowledgement of it, and the creation of places where it can be fostered or discussed or dealt with, in some aspects, is something that should take place in the context of peer counselling training. I don't mean to institutionalize it in any way, or determine the form. But I think that there is something in each of us that responds and we need to give that response-ability permission to be there. And certainly, that is what peer counselling is about — giving people permission to work with their material and to work towards their own engagement in the problem-solving process. And without being overt about it, I think that somehow we need to give acceptability to the spirituality aspect.

Tom Erney: I think the issue of quality control in training is an important one. From my perspective, I would think there needs to be a training minimum of 30 to 40 hours in the peer model or a variety of peer models. Trainers need real experiential training with someone who has had experience running the peer program. In addition to that, they need to have read at least three or four of the books that are out, as well as a variety of articles. They need to do a practicum or internship where they would be able to work with somebody who is already in the field, who has been doing training for a minimum of two to three years. It's important for potential trainers to be highly motivated and highly interested, but, again, good intentions are not enough, they're just not enough anymore. The concept is valid, but if the implementation is poor then it tarnishes the perspective and the view of the concept in general.

Judith Tindall: In general, I think that since trainers need to be able to organize activities, groups of people, and time, they need organizing skills. They also need to be able to train others. And while some counsellors are great counsellors, they can't train others in those skills. They need good training and teaching skills. They also need to understand the difference between group counselling and training. They may need, themselves, to go through a peer counsellor training program. They need to have good public relation skills in order to sell the program to school staffs, the community, and parents. One of the characteristics

of the trainer I feel is necessary is intellectual curiosity; trainers need to be looking for new training, new ways to do things. They need to be fit physically, because it's hard work to run a program. I think they need to have a pragmatic outlook, because very often, that is what is needed to get the job done. I feel that they need to always have an optimistic attitude and they need to be very skilled at problem-solving. If something is not working, then they need to have a "let's try something else" attitude.

I also believe that they need to be a professional and personal role model to the people that they are training. Specifically, if one of the things that you are teaching is confidentiality, I think you need to model that as a professional. Trainers need to really understand their own value system, group skills, communication skills and how to teach them. They must understand themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, and they need good listening and assertiveness skills.

Trevor Cole: I think the trainer's training needs would depend on the level at which they are working. I think people who are working with adults or teenagers should have undertaken a form of peer counselling training where they have gone through the skills, they have internalized the skills, and they have been able to deal with teaching those skills to others. At the elementary level, I don't think that experience is as necessary. I think that what most teachers get in their teacher preparation programs in university such as classroom management and discipline and communication skills is sufficient at the elementary level. Given the amount of skill teachers have, they could pick up a book on communication skills or an elementary peer counselling manual and get enough information to teach upper elementary kids peer counselling skills. However, it would be good for teachers to do a training program simply for the implementation part, because that is where some programs fall down. They may want to do the program in the school and they may have some basic skills at an elementary level to do it, but sometimes they foul up the implementation by not understanding the politics or the systems of the school. They need to understand the culture and the special needs of the school. They need to be able to look at culture or special needs and anticipate the problems and solutions for either one before implementing a program.

CJC: *With your experience as trainers of peer counsellor trainers, what would you say were the most difficult things for prospective trainers to learn?*

Rey Carr: The most difficult thing that trainers have to deal with is learning the process of training rather than just the content of it. And in that process, trying to be able to react spontaneously as well as learning how to use the resources of the trainees, either individually or collectively, to solve whatever problem or discuss whatever concern that

comes up rather than the trainers being the solution provider. Moving from teaching into facilitating I would say is probably the most difficult thing for trainers, particularly those who come from an education or school background. That is one ingredient. Related to that is their ability to understand the training process itself, not just the content of training, that is, not just the individual lessons or the sessions that they are presenting, but the process people are going through in trying to learn the material or coming to grip with the skills.

Barbara Varenhorst: Basically, one of the toughest things for trainers to learn interestingly enough is that even though their heads say they believe in the potential of peer counselling, a lot of people come to training who don't really believe it. They put up all kinds of objections that people will not be able to do this or kids will not be able to do that. So gaining the basic understanding of the potential is one of the hard things. Another one is to feel comfortable with expressing feelings, to hear feelings. It is just incredible to me how we can program people by our reaction to them. We never change people's behaviour just through intellectual information. You've got to touch their emotions. And that means that you have got to be comfortable in doing that and they have got to be comfortable in working with emotions. That's very hard to teach and it is very hard for people, especially adults to learn at this stage.

I also find it very hard to teach and very hard for trainers to learn how to lead group discussion. The training most people receive in this area is limited. It is also difficult to teach trainers how to give constructive feedback so that you don't have people just experience something, you use the experience to teach them something from it. Giving constructive feedback with courage and doing it kindly so that people don't feel put down, but feel that they have learned something; this process is hard for prospective trainers to learn.

Ron Jorgenson: For me, one of the most important, yet difficult things for trainers to learn is how to adapt programs, how to take a model or program and alter it to fit the back-home community. That means looking for the symbols and looking for the language, looking for the communication processes that naturally occur and trying to look at how these can be integrated into the peer counselling process. I think that many people move too quickly in that process. They come for training and sometimes there is an understanding that when they return from training, they must put the program in place by the next weekend. I don't think programs that are going to last will drop into place that quickly. I think there is a process of engaging people, of engaging the peer group in the school or other setting, engaging the administration, and engaging the participants long before the program itself actually goes into place. There must be a familiarity with the process and

program so that there is a relationship to the program before it ever gets under way. And it is not just a relationship with the participants, it is a relationship that the entire community has. Setting up the program takes time. We live in a world of disposable experiences; we have them today, we get rid of them tomorrow, and we go on to new ones. And they often lack depth. Peer counselling is not a disposable experience; peer counselling is a life experience.

Another thing which is difficult for trainers to learn is to let go. Sometimes we hang on to the form too tightly; we learn it as step one, step two, step three, and step four, etc., and we cling to this form. And while we should know what the process is, we also need to know when to let go of the process. Being able to provide the enthusiasm, love, and support when the going gets tough, when the nights seem long and you seem alone, not to give up, to hang in there with it, and to believe in it, these are difficult things for prospective trainers.

Tom Erney: I think the most difficult thing is learning to trust the process of counselling and training. What I try to help them to do is trust the process of the human experience. Creating an atmosphere (and I believe so much in Carl Rogers' work) is the necessary and sufficient condition for the quality of the relationship in training. It's like the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. The letter of the law is the content. Most trainers I have ever worked with know the content of what needs to happen. They understand the content and that it can be written in any book. But the spirit of training, the process of training that takes place, that is another thing. You must have a sense of trust and faith in young people or whomever you are working with. You can't make them into good peer helpers and peer counsellors; you can't force that. But what you can do is create an atmosphere. And then that process (if you do a good job at creating the atmosphere) will lead to the desired outcome almost all of the time. School counsellors have so much pressure on them to produce, to be cost effective and time management effective that I think it's very hard for them to create this atmosphere for young people.

I think the second difficult part for trainers to learn is the supervision process. You can't focus just on what is wrong in supervision, who is struggling, who has a problem, who has a question. You must also look at what has gone well. I know this approach is hard for school counsellors because most of the ones I have trained have never had a supervisor act or model this type of supervision. Negative feedback may be necessary, but we need balance between what is wrong and what can be done differently.

Judith Tindall: One of the most difficult things for trainers to learn (and it was difficult for me to learn also) is to keep the program manageable. We start out, all of us, very enthusiastic, wanting to solve

problems. Typically we start a program too large. We then do not have the time or resources to supervise adequately or evaluate the program correctly. The second thing I find difficult is that a lot of times trainers want to do it all by themselves. They may need to get some help. Another thing that I think is somewhat difficult for trainers when they first start is really being able to trust peer helpers, so that they can do the job. They need to trust their training process. Once they have worked with the peer helpers, it is not an issue.

Trevor Cole: A major difficulty for trainers is their eagerness to grab onto skill-building exercises and minimize the implementation process. And then the program falls flat on its face. Successfully managing the political process, selecting a program goal and establishing strategies to reach that goal are sometimes ignored because of the attractiveness of the skill training. Trainers may take too much control and direction. They need to model the problem-solving process for kids and give back control of the program to them. The way the kids take ownership, they feel it's their program, and they take on the role of initiating or becoming self-starters in servicing the needs of their program.

CJC: *What do each of you see in the future for peer counselling? In what direction do you see the "movement" going?*

Rey Carr: I think the future holds greater potential now for applying peer counselling principles in the workplace and helping workers help each other. Young peer counsellors, as they grow older, will expect peer helping programs in the workplace. These trained peer counsellors with their expectations may have a widespread effect on the whole of society, making it a truly caring place to live. I think there will be a greater use of peer counsellors by a variety of professional helping services and that the rather academic distinctions between self-help, support groups and peer counselling will fade as our society increases its commitment to prevention as well as treatment.

Barbara Varenhorst: I think that peer counselling will become a concept that opens up many people's understanding of the capabilities of how we can work together and utilize human resources to help one another. Peer counselling will move into something that is seen as an integral part of people's development at all ages. It will no longer be just an innovative program or an extra-curricular program, or just some kind of new program to try. To achieve this we need a shoring up of fragmented aspects of peer counselling. I think the movement right now is to standardize a lot of what's going on so that people will have some guidelines to direct them in utilizing this kind of counselling.

Ron Jorgenson: Certainly the most optimistic scenario is some massive change in human dynamics, a releasing of creative potential within

each of us. I see it in a very practical way as being a tool for humanizing institutional settings that have become empty forms. Peer counselling fosters that new dynamic and revitalizes the relationship between people and institutions. We will recognize that peer counselling is in some cases a program to bring into a particular place for use, but in a lot of places it's just a release of my humanness, and my ability to be human, and my ability to be with people, and play with people, and communicate with people, and to be more expressive. I see it as continuing to grow. I feel like peer counselling is a part of a ground swell of change that's taking place. In that sense, I believe that every person has the potential of becoming a peer counsellor. Every person has the potential of helping others to become peer counsellors.

Tom Erney: My sense is that there will be more and more acceptance by various populations and all age groups: in business, in medical care, in lots of areas that we haven't traditionally looked at peer influence being that great, at least in a structured way. I think especially of the elderly. As the population, especially in North America, becomes older in general, over the next twenty to forty years, we are going to see more and more peer work being done among the elderly in retirement communities and in the whole medical arena. This will also be a focus for cancer patients. But I think what you are going to see is people within the medical community (physicians, nurses, and other people with their limited time and resources) training volunteers and lay personnel in an outreach effort to work with old people who are struggling with a variety of medical situations. I think the second thing is that we'll see more and more peer teaching and cross-age teaching. The third thing we're going to see with peer is more focus on the Skills for Living curriculum as a basic course that students will be required to take in more and more school systems. And then the follow-up course will be sort of the service/learning component and it will include peer (counselling). So then people will use that in a real meaningful way such as hospitals and retirement centres and juvenile detention centres and runaway shelters with a *big emphasis upon prevention*. That's been happening, but I think it's going to go that way as well as a way of nurturing people when they are struggling with whatever conflict or confusion they're experiencing.

I think we're going to demystify terms like peer counselling, peer helping, peer consulting. Peer is going to be seen more and more as just a normal, natural part of the human interaction process. But it's going to be in a structured way for a while where we really structure it and train some people and then see the impact of that so that it will be much more accepted generally.

Judith Tindall: I see the whole peer counselling movement as expanding. I see it expanding downward in the schools to the elementary level. I see it expanding in many different applications in the schools, every-

thing from tutoring to health educators, to direct helping of other students, to conflict resolution, a variety of roles. I see it also expanding in business and industry, through employee assistance programs where they have volunteers that will work with employees in trouble. I see it expanding to churches, in terms of peer ministry programs. And I see it expanding to the elderly. The other possible areas that I see and have heard of it being used are in prisons and in working with youth in trouble. The end result will be a larger population learning basic helping skills which will impact a healthier society. So, I really believe the movement is going to expand.

Trevor Cole: As more schools feel the impact of our changing society and the demands placed upon the system by the future curriculum, I think we can no longer get away with teaching simply curriculum to kids. We need to have a holistic view of education for our children. If kids feel okay about themselves, they will feel okay about learning. We can't separate the two, so we have to have the support services as an integral part of education. Peer counselling enables students to generate plans and choose, to work co-operatively with each other, to increase their capacity to care and participate in community, to develop a personal set of communicating and helping skills, and to develop a capacity to change. These last five concepts are important for all children in our system, so I see peer counselling skills being taught to all kids in schools with those wishing to continue to help actually becoming peer helpers.

CJC: *Since the audience for this article will be mostly practicing counsellors, what would you like them to know (or say to them) about peer counselling?*

Rey Carr: I would like to say that peer counselling is not a different or new type of counselling: it is a different way of organizing the delivery of counselling services. It is a much more efficient way of providing counselling services. Counsellors can have a much greater effect on a larger number of clients or potential clients than they could possibly have if they were just seeing people on an individual or small group basis. Counsellors might see peer programs as time-consuming, but this is a little misleading because the pay off is reaching and empowering more clients. The pay off is long-term.

Another key ingredient is to understand that students are a natural resource. The selection, recruiting, skill training, supervision, program development and continuation all must build on the natural resources that are present. It can't be a professional program applied to the peer group. Training, for example, must build on the existing skills of volunteers, not deplete the resources volunteers bring to training. And that is true whether you are talking about dentists setting up a peer counselling program for each other or you are talking about adults

doing one for kids in an elementary school. It has to build on the natural skills, and the interactions, and the qualities of the social interactions of the people in the peer group. It is facilitating the potential of helping *within* the social system.

One other thing I would like to say is that my involvement in peer counselling has provided me with the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment of anything I have been associated with in my professional career. I have found it to be exciting and interesting to write about, and to interact with other people about. And it has provided me with not only a great deal of career satisfaction, but personal satisfaction as well. I am really proud to be associated with the movement itself, and the other people who are also writing and working and training in the field.

Barbara Varenhorst: I would like counsellors to know that this is a powerful way of providing life-long intervention and help to whatever population they are working with. It is a powerful way of establishing a remarkable relationship with the people that you are working with, in coming to know them in a way that is far deeper than one normally finds in the usual channel of counselling. When we work with people on an individual basis, we usually get to know them from a problem orientation and on a one-to-one basis. With peer counselling you get to see them in their interactions with other people.

I also feel that it is a tremendous extension of human resources; that we as counsellors can't possibly meet the needs of people just working with them in our usual channels. In giving away our expertise and in training others we are educating them with respect to the psychology of human behaviour, so that they understand why people act the way they act. And motivating them to care about one another is a vast extension of our services. It is a legitimate use of our knowledge and our training to train others to live more effectively. Peer counselling provides a great sense of satisfaction. And you begin to see results! Many people who are counsellors don't often see results. It enhances the role of the counsellor in their own setting.

Another point I want to emphasize is that because there are so many self-help groups we may underestimate the importance of motivating people to be other-oriented. So many of our problems and our concerns and our ills are really resolved when we begin to learn how to enter into the lives of others. To be able to give to them without expecting anything back, that's really caring about people. I believe that most people do want to care about people, but they do not know how. Peer counselling can do that for so many, whether they are the aged, they are afflicted physically, or the adolescent.

I would really like to see more done in cross-age counselling which is not exactly peer, but to take the isolated adolescent and the isolated aged person, and get them together to serve one another. There has been

a lot of documentation about when we know we are of service to others, how important it is to our own sense of contribution and well being. So, to me, peer counselling is certainly one of the extensive inexpensive ways of meeting the needs of many, many people.

Ron Jorgenson: First of all, when we work with another person, we work with another culture, and each of us has a culture of our own. Some of the things that come out of that have to be my willingness to learn from, my recognition that my way is not *the* way. It is important to spend time not practicing (noncounselling ways); just being with another person as a person, not as a counsellor. If we are going to establish the kind of trust-building that is necessary, then the more that we can extend ourselves into the experience of the people we are working with, the more that trust is going to be well grounded. We have lost meaning through institutionalization of our culture and peer counselling can restore that meaning.

Peer counselling has always been with us, and in some ways we simply just lost sight of it. By naming it, calling it “peer counselling,” talking about it, practicing it, and going back through the steps that lead up to the model, these processes recover what it is that as human beings we have the capacity for doing and certainly have done in the past.

Tom Erney: Empowerment is the key word for me. The peer model empowers school counsellors and it empowers students; it empowers them individually and it empowers them collectively in the system. Peer work broadens the impact counsellors can have on young people, their families and the educational system. Most school counsellors (and I was a school counsellor for ten years) are not having near the impact they could have on young people. I wish they understood that peer takes less time in the long run. When counsellors say they don’t have time to do peer, my response is that if you don’t have time, then that’s the very reason you need to be doing peer counselling.

The peer model impacts the entire learning climate of the school. Young people serve as role models in structured and informal ways. It is not the structured things we do at school that I think are the most impactful; I think it is much, much more. Just being there in the system allows young people to connect with each other. And so what peer does is help young people know how to form connections in a time in this culture where most young people feel very disconnected from themselves and from other people.

It is critical now, especially in schools, for us to help young people move from conflict and confusion and from despair and powerlessness to empowerment. I don’t believe young people are apathetic. I often hear that when I talk to adults, teachers, parents and school counsellors. I believe young people are overwhelmed, not apathetic. It looks like apathy, but what is underneath that is that they have just been

overwhelmed with conflict and confusion in trying to decide what is worth their time and energy. The peer model empowers them to be. It teaches them to sort things out. It teaches them the process to use in their lives and in other people's lives. This is the ripple effect.

Currently what excites me most about peer is the impact it has and the potential it has to build community: a community of caring among young people. It balances against the current trend toward individualism which has been prevalent through the last twenty to thirty years in our culture. Throughout North America that sense of rugged individualism has really caused a great deal of human disconnectedness, a lot of human suffering, and a lack of understanding that we are our brother's keeper. For me, the peer model is the one that best demonstrates in concrete form those aspects of true community. The peer communities are inclusive, not exclusive, for they invite people in from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs. A true community is realistic and balanced. It brings in a variety of perspectives, beliefs, and viewpoints, and thoughtfully considers them, and therefore, gets closer to the truth. A true community is contemplative, or meditative, that there is time to be, to balance the outward stare with the inward glance. And there is time to go inward with a peer training model. Young people are, in almost no other place in North America, really invited to be very reflective in their own inner lives. They do a lot of looking at the outer world, of what kind of clothes people have, and how much money. We are in the head, but there is not a lot of reflection.

Another aspect of true community is that it is a safe place. It is a place to heal, and I think if we need anything at the current stage in our culture, it is sanctuary. Young people need sanctuary. They need a place to heal from all of the conflict and confusion, and myriad of alternatives and options and uncertainty that is out there. The exciting part about peer work is that whether it is in schools, hospitals, retirement centres, or the business community, it is a time where people can feel safe, reflective and meditative, and become clearer about what is important to them. It can help us consider which things are image and which things are substance; it helps us stay on track. And I think that is the gift that peer counselling offers now.

Judith Tindall: I have been involved in the mental health field since 1965 as a school counsellor and guidance director, and now in full-time private practice. Looking back over all my years of working in the mental health field, in terms of counselling, consulting, and training, I would say being in a peer helping program is probably one of the most exciting activities that I have been involved with. And I think part of that is because you are working the prevention area by teaching them basic helping skills that you know yourself. Prevention and intervention can help improve the school climate and also can impact peer helpers in

a positive, healthy manner. It also gives the trainer energy to work with students in a proactive manner. The peer helper movement is a tool to assist in humanizing schools. I would like to encourage counsellors to get involved and gain new energy and excitement.

Trevor Cole: A lot of counsellors in both elementary and secondary schools feel snowed under by their work loads. By adding peer counselling to their list, it becomes another burden demanding their time. What counsellors do not realize is that if they would train kids, then the kids would be going out and they would be helping the counsellors in a preventive way, and, therefore, give them more time back. What I want to say to counsellors is it may seem like a lot of work initially, but you get that back ten-fold as your year goes along.

As an advocate of peer counselling, I would like to caution counsellors that it is not a panacea for all the ills of the school. If we look at some basic notions about what it does, then that is the important process. Kids are still going to be kids. Just because we train kids in some skills, it does not mean they give up being kids. We have got to understand that kind of thing, that it is not the be all and end all of everything, but it is one heck of a step in making school a caring place. I guess the point that I am trying to make is that it is not going to solve all the problems of the school, but what we are doing is making a caring environment and teaching kids to be co-operative with each other, to get along. And that kind of awareness really goes a long way.

CJC: *You've had a chance to read the other leader's responses to the interview questions. What are your reactions or impressions?*

Trevor Cole: As I read the responses, I was impressed by the feeling the contributors had for kids. They were all advocates for peer counselling, yet what came through was their advocacy for kids and their belief that kids can make a difference. Another common thread was the importance they gave to recognizing and using the power of peers in positive and constructive ways. We all benefit from this power. Peer counsellors gain in self-esteem and confidence; students gain more support from other students; the school community gains a caring environment; and professionals gain better contact with the silent majority. This interview and the other leader's comments confirmed my belief in the peer counselling process!

Barbara Varenhorst: A strong thread that ran throughout our responses about peer counselling is that we are weak in such things as evaluation and research and lack sufficient guidelines for standards and training requirements. Yet because we have experienced the evidence directly, we know this program changes lives, empowers caring and concern which ultimately effects homes, schools and communities. With

such evidence, we believe that peer counselling now is, and will be in the future, a powerful force that taps human needs and uses all human resources, recreating a commitment to living with one another in helpfulness and community.

Judith Tindall: The series of interviews demonstrates the degree to which a new wave—peer counselling, peer teaching, peer coaching, peer advocacy, peer support—has impacted both our countries. It is becoming more popular in schools, churches, institutions, agencies and businesses. Professional counsellors now need to rethink some of their priorities. They need to get involved in training others in peer counselling skills. There is no better way to help others than giving away our helping skills.

Ron Jorgenson: Reflecting on the comments of my peers, I am grateful for sharing in the process. The dialogue suggests to me that, while we may work as trainers of trainers, there is a significant benefit in our coming together to be revitalized, refocused and reminded of issues not often recognized in our work. Several points stood out as highlights: the affirmation and belief in people's capacity for self-help; the collective willingness to empower others; the focus on training people how to care for each other; the distinction between local evaluation and academic research; the concern about the long-term impact on helpees; and the need for group management skills for trainers. My participation in this exercise has strengthened by belief in peer counselling and has empowered me to continue my work of empowering others.

Tom Erney: As I read the responses of my peers, I was most impressed by our collective perspective that what is so desperately needed in today's world is a process of teaching individuals how to live a life that is both self-enhancing and socially constructive. Human connections are vital to our individual development and to our collective development in a pluralistic world. Our vision is seeking to understand and aid rather than destroy each other.

Rey Carr: I am really struck by the similarities in our outlooks toward the future as well as the similarities in how we all got involved in peer work. I was impressed with how important peer work has become in our professional and personal lives. I hadn't realized the extent to which we had become a peer group, reading each other's work, growing from each other's ideas and different perspectives, and gaining support and encouragement from each other. When Groucho Marx said he wouldn't want to be a member of any organization that would allow someone like him to be a member, I'm sure he wasn't talking about this group.

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