

· F O U N D R Y ·

# Peer Support Services

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# Introduction

**Peer support is based on the idea that those who have experienced adversity can provide support, encouragement, hope and mentorship to others facing similar situations, encouraging them to continue their journey to wellness.**

The Ministry of Health identifies client-centred care as the first of eight priorities for the British Columbia health care system and strives to place the client voice at the forefront of the health care system.<sup>1</sup> Building on this, Foundry is committed to working together with youth, families/caregivers and communities to support meaningful engagement ensuring that services are youth- and family-centred, collaborative and empowering. Grounded in these values, Foundry identifies youth and their families/caregivers as partners both in the development and the delivery of services.

Youth and Family Peer Support Workers are paid positions that are an integral part of the care team and offer a variety of peer-based services. Peer support within the Foundry service model focuses on creating opportunities for those with lived and living experience to recognize themselves as experts in the field of youth and family wellness and to develop mutually beneficial relationships. Youth and family peer support within Foundry centres are integrated across all service streams including social services, physical and sexual health, mental health and substance use support.

Peer-led services offer a sustainable catalyst for empowerment and place those who have taken the path towards recovery at the forefront of service delivery and innovation. Based on the tenets of equality, Foundry is dedicated to creating opportunities for youth and families/caregivers to have a voice in the services that are in place to support them and recognizes peer support services as companion services with clinical care.<sup>2</sup>

**Peer support services are also offered virtually, through the provincial virtual services team and in most Foundry centres.**

For more information, please see the “Virtual Services” section of the [Service Model Guide](#).

**Foundry’s work includes ensuring we create culturally safe and respectful environments for equity-denied groups including IBPOC (Indigenous, Black and People of Colour) communities.**

We recognize our role and responsibility as a white settler organization in calling out and dismantling colonialism and racism in the work we do.

Our journey includes committing to the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action, the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and the recommendations of the report “In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care”

**“My mental illness used to be my greatest source of shame. Through working as a peer support worker, I realized that it is one of my greatest sources of compassion and wisdom.”**

Youth Peer Support Worker

# Foundry’s Approach to Peer Support

Peer Support Workers are uniquely positioned to enhance the experience of young people and families/caregivers, including how they access health care and social services. Peer Support Workers may:

- Connect with young people and families/caregivers in Foundry waiting rooms to provide support and answer questions;
- Help young people and families/caregivers find the services and resources they need, at Foundry or in their community (also known as peer navigation);
- Provide 1:1 non-clinical emotional and social support;
- Facilitate and bridge connections in meetings between families/caregivers and service providers;
- Assist young people and families/caregivers with community resources and attending appointments;
- Co-facilitate health and wellness groups;
- Support young people and families/caregivers in advocating for their own needs;
- Lead or co-facilitate education sessions;
- Provide Take Home Naloxone Training;
- Support youth in Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT); and
- Facilitate substance use focused support groups for youth.

As with all Foundry services, in peer support, an integrated team of service providers work alongside each other. Services are linked and coordinated, with everyone communicating and sharing information to provide a seamless experience for youth and families/caregivers.

**When building our peer support program, youth and family peers had different perspectives and preferences for the title of their role.**

Youth peers chose **Youth Peer Support Worker** – it felt more in alignment with the advocacy and social justice perspective of peer support work.

Family peers chose **Family Peer Supporter** – it felt more in alignment with the focus of caregiver support.

You may find both titles used throughout Foundry’s communication and training materials.

## Foundry’s definition of family

At Foundry, **family** is defined uniquely by each young person and can include anyone supporting or advocating for their wellness. Family, whether by birth, choice or circumstance, holds a significant role in supporting a young person by fostering a sense of belonging and hope through their shared experience.

# Youth Peer Support Services

**Youth Peer Support Workers (YPS) are key members of the Foundry interdisciplinary team, with impacts that extend well beyond service delivery. When YPS are truly integrated, youth are recognized as experts and partners in youth wellness, leading to a better understanding of youth recovery and wellness.**

Ultimately, this sets the stage for leaders and young people to work in unison to develop services and supports in their community that best reflect the needs of youth and their families/caregivers. In return, YPS empower young people to recognize their potential, offering a sense of meaning and purpose. Working in peer support can be a stepping stone to longer-term employment or career aspirations.

## **Guiding values for youth peer support:**

- Belief in the maturity and capability of youth;
- Commitment to taking youth as they are instead of how you want them to be;
- Empowerment of youth to find strategies that work for them;
- Recognition of youth as experts in their own lives and recovery;
- Valuing lived experience as the foundation of youth peer support and as the main connecting piece between peers;
- Openness to listening to and learning from other young people; and
- Knowledge that, by coming together with a common experience, you are not alone.

**“As a youth accessing peer services, there are many conversations I have been able to have with peers that my other supports don’t understand. I have a peer support worker on my team who is able to talk to me about my mental health from a perspective of having been through it before. It helps me to know that someone understands what I am going through, is doing well in their journey, and shares a similar diagnosis with me. Peers make things feel less isolating, and make me feel like I belong, like I am no different from others in this world. I just have different experiences.”**

Experience of a youth accessing peer support services

## **Youth Peer Support Training**

Through collaboration with peers and young people across the province, a peer support training program was completed, piloted, evaluated and revised to incorporate feedback. The goal of the training is to provide young people with the core skills needed to provide effective peer support in an integrated health care setting. The YPS training explores a range of topics that affect young people, including identity, relationships, self-disclosure, confidentiality, crisis situations, goal setting and more. Following this training, YPS trainees are meant to complete a 30-hour practicum that will prepare them for hands-on youth peer support work.

**“We call upon all governments and health services providers to provide education for youth about 2SLGBTQQIA health.”**

Call for Justice 18.31, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

# Family Peer Support Services

**Family Peer Support (FPS) is the empowered relationship of caregivers helping caregivers, offered by families/caregivers with direct experience in supporting a youth or young adult with mental health or substance use challenges.**

**FPS includes peer-led services which may include mentoring and connection to other families/caregivers, as well as navigation of health care and other systems. FPS has been recognized by families/caregivers as being one of the most valued services that Foundry offers and is the highest priority when implementing family inclusive services at a centre. For more information on family inclusive services, please see “Tools and Resources” on page 10.**

One major value of FPS is providing services based on self-disclosed understanding that comes from a shared experience. FPS is a different designation from a family services worker or a therapist, who might have lived experience but do not bring it into their professional practice. FPS offers hope through a recovery-oriented framework, providing services to families/caregivers that integrates alongside the work of the clinical care team.

FPS are integral members of the Foundry care team, assisting in the delivery of Foundry centre services and offering support with service navigation, education and resources, while providing individualized peer-based practical, emotional and social supports. Delivering services in alignment with Foundry’s service model, the FPS promote wholistic family health and well-being by fostering the development of respectful, collaborative relationships with families/caregivers, youth and service providers.

## **Family Peer Supporters focus their scope of practice and services on the following competencies:**

- Hope;
- Interpersonal relationships;
- Resiliency and coping;
- Self-awareness and confidence;
- Lived experience;
- Supports recovery planning;
- Communication;
- Initiative and commitment;
- Critical thinking;
- Ethics and reliability;
- Problem solving and supporting others through challenges; and
- Cultural safety and humility.

Foundry centre FPS staff have aligned with CMHA-Calgary and Peer Support Canada's peer support competencies and principles to frame their scope of practice. These competencies provide a framework to expand knowledge, skills and attitudes around the FPS core deliverables provided in service delivery. FPS competencies are built through training, mentoring, self-assessment, awareness and reflective practice.

### **Features of family peer support:**

- Trained support person with lived and living experience;
- Integrated care team member in paid staff position;
- Primary focus on hope, support and connection for the family/caregiver on their family wellness recovery journey;
- Offering practical, emotional and social non- clinical services based on a wholistic recovery-focused model;
- Providing services to families/caregivers by offering guidance and mentorship in the areas of information, education, navigation, resources and skill development;
- Engaging families/caregivers as expert partners in their identified wellness goals; and
- Working collaboratively, acting as a bridge between family/caregiver, youth, centre staff and community partners.

**“Recovery-oriented practice acknowledges the unique nature of each person’s journey of wellness and everyone’s right to find their own way to living a life of value and purpose in the community of their choice. A recovery orientation encourages everyone to take charge of improving their own mental health and well-being and understands the very exercise of this ability to be an important contributor to achieving well-being.”**

P.E. Deegan<sup>3</sup>



## Family Peer Support Training

In collaboration with peers in the FPS Community of Practice, a family peer support training program was developed, piloted and evaluated in December 2022. The goal of the training is to provide Family Peer Supporters with the core skills and competencies needed to provide effective peer support in an integrated health care setting.

The FPS training explores a range of topics that affect families/ caregivers, including wellness strategies and tools, relationships, self-disclosure, confidentiality, crisis situations, trauma, loss and family resilience, cultural agility, safety and humility principles, goal setting and more. Following the pilot training, FPS trainees will continue to develop their skills and a clear scope of practice through supervision, mentorship and attending the monthly FPS Community of Practice.

**“We call upon child welfare agencies to engage in education regarding the realities and perspectives of 2SLGBTQQIA youth; to provide 2SLGBTQQIA competency training to parents and caregivers, especially to parents of trans children and in communities outside of urban centres; to engage in and provide education for parents, foster families, and other youth service providers regarding the particular barriers to safety for 2SLGBTQQIA youth.”**

Call for Justice 18.32, The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls



**We have learned an incredible amount over the past few years and have just begun to scratch the surface in formalizing the roles that youth and family peer support can play in supporting client care. Opportunities for evaluation and research are also untapped, and Foundry strives to lead the way in the years to come.**

# Tools and Resources

Visit [The Foundry Learning Centre](#) to access these tools and resources.

- Peer Support Overview
- Peer Support Standards
- Peer Support Practice Profile
- Peer Support Orientation Guide
- Foundry Centre Advisory Toolkit: Building and Supporting Youth and Family Advisories
- More resources in the Family Inclusive Services section of the [Service Model Guide](#)

## References

- 1 Ministry of Health. Setting Priorities for the B.C. Health System. 2014. Available at: [health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2014/Setting-priorities-BC-Health-Feb14.pdf](http://health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2014/Setting-priorities-BC-Health-Feb14.pdf)
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- 3 Deegan PE. Recovery as a Self-directed Process of Healing and Transformation. Occupational Therapy in Mental Health. 2002;17:3-4, 5-21. Available at: [tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J004v17n03\\_02](http://tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J004v17n03_02)

**“Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their Indigenous origin or identity.”**

Article 2, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



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[info@foundrybc.ca](mailto:info@foundrybc.ca) | [foundrybc.ca](https://foundrybc.ca)

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