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RESOURCE CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS

(for The Peer Conference, Centre of
Excellence in Peer Support, Tuesday, 30
October 2012)

Some questions to stimulate our deeper thinking about peer support work

1. What does 'support' actually mean in the context of peer support? (are we there to help? inspire? assist? walk alongside? connect? learn together? ...)
2. Are we fundamentally different to other support workers? If so, how exactly? How do we ensure we don't replicate the relationships consumers might have with other support workers?
3. Are we fundamentally different to other peer workers (like advocates, information officers, recovery specialists, ...)? If so, how exactly?
4. How do we stay 'peer'?
 - Do we talk about the fact that being a paid worker puts us in a position of power? What happens if we don't talk about this? Are there things we can actively do that change the power back to being more peer? (Do we ever want this power?)
 - What does it mean for peer support workers to be portrayed as 'role models' for other consumers? Does this make us less 'peer', and somehow 'better than'? What if this is what services expect? What if this is what the consumer expects? What if this makes us feel good? (This can be especially difficult to navigate as we expand our own sense of personal strength and expertise)
5. What are our own support needs?
6. Do we have any responsibility to maintain connections with other peer support workers? With a broader peer worker community? How can we do this?
7. What are our responsibilities to the services we work for? Can these conflict with our responsibilities to the peers we are working with? Can either of these roles conflict with our responsibilities to ourselves?
8. Can anyone be a peer support worker? What characteristics are important?
9. How exactly do we know if we are doing our job well?
- 10. What is it that only we can do?**