



# Journey to the Peer Working Group and its Initiatives ...

Prepared for M.A.P.S.  
Alberta Capital Region

Annual Collaboration Showcase - Wednesday, October 13, 2021



Anonymous  
Author from  
the Living  
Library  
who shares  
their  
experience  
through  
poetry ...

## Path of Pain


What did I do?  
Where did I go wrong?  
What have I become?  
I make them all angry  
All I can say is sorry but nothing can fix the pain  
why must it be me?  
why is it me? Does it have to be?

Life is worth living  
However, mine is not  
I can never keep those around me happy  
Thus, I can't be happy  
Sadness and Decay  
Please take my heart away  
I hate my forgiving ability.  
I hate myself.

I feel the pain  
slowly tearing me apart  
A soulless creature breaking my heart  
It's all my fault  
I am nothing but insignificant  
My life goes on...

Another Day Another Night  
Another Heartbreak in Sight  
it hits and kills  
Breaking me slowly  
I'm sorry.





Sorry for who I am  
Sorry for what I have done  
I have no tears to cry  
Nor happiness to fly  
Sadness engulfs me and takes me away  
All I can say is sorry

Take me away... to a far away place  
So, I can suffer for what I've done  
Tie me up with ropes and chains  
Punishment for what I have done  
Give me the pain, no mercy  
Kill me, do it now

And yet you still care  
Why do you care?  
I'm not worth it  
All I am is worthless, nothing

Heartbreak  
Heart shatter  
Soul break  
Soul shatter  
Break me away slowly  
make me feel the pain  
**HATE ME!**  
for I am insignificant  
And nothing.

I am heartbroken  
I am in despair  
Why do you even care?  
All I bring with me is darkness and despair

## Lost... and... Alone

What is this feeling?  
This mysterious longing?  
Why must I feel it now?  
Why did it take me so long?  
The love and light that once remained...  
Now banishes and shuts me out, was I too vain?  
The ones I trusted to stay by my side...  
They all left without a goodbye.  
Now I stand alone with only the few who survived.  
Yet I can feel them slipping away like the sands of time...  
Now I stand alone.  
With all the pain, fear, and loneliness only to hold my hand....  
I'm Scared  
I'm Alone  
I'm Afraid  
Someone?  
Anyone?  
Please?  
help  
before it has become too late...

# A call for help ...



**A lot of unknowns**



# The seed was planted and a community garden began to grow



<https://mapsab.ca/journey-maps/community-mental-health-action-plan-journey-map/>

- *collaboration and collective work*
- *community organizations and key government decision makers in a regional conversation*
- *informed by the experiences of health professionals, volunteers, families and people with lived experience of mental health concerns, illness and use of the mental health system*
- *continuers to be expanded to include lived experience leadership*
- *community concern*
- *maximize collective resources, respond to existing gaps*
- *foster innovative approaches and identify a continuum of integrated supports and services*
- *easier access to services for individuals and families struggling with poor mental health, mental illness and addiction.*



**A Heart Based Creative Approach to Collaborative Planning was agreed upon for this Community Health Action Plan**



## Supporting the Inclusion of Lived Experience In Our Work

- *In 2020, the Evidence Foundation Leadership Team and the Living Library Working Group focused on the inclusion of lived experience as evidence*
- *Developed a foundational structure*
- *Believed recent and current experiences navigating and using the mental health system could inform practice and influence policy*
- *Guidelines for ethical practice as a Living Library were created*
- *Opportunities for sharing personal stories were sought and were successful*
- *Art which conveyed personal experience was assembled*
- *Learned that The Wellness Network was interested in providing the same kind of support*
- *Resulted in a joint effort to support people with lived experience sharing their stories*
- *Living Hope: A Community Plan To Prevent Suicide in Edmonton, also joined the efforts*
- *Great example of collaboration*
- *Reduced duplication*
- *Able to hire dedicated support to this initiative*
- *Creating a stronger body of evidence to support mental health systems change*









**Collaboration started in 2020 with the Community Mental Health Action Plan and the Wellness Network**

**Then Living Hope, a community plan to prevent suicide, also joined in on the efforts**





## **Lived Experience with Living Hope's Contributions**

- **Lived experience members are on multiple Living Hope Committees**
  - **Living Hope has a high risk populations Subcommittee**
  - **Lived experience members identify themselves as a high risk population**
  - **Wesley joined the Peer Working Group after connecting with e4c**
- 





# Poem by Wesley

## Save Your Soul

I woke up amped, pumped, ready to go,  
Whether this means life or death only time will show.  
Am I prepping to improve and grow,  
Or to finally deal the ultimate blow?  
I am full of power am I ready for life,  
Can I stop stabbing myself with this shame-soaked  
knife?  
Chaos flows angrily through my veins,  
Will I see gains or succumb to the pains,  
The moon is brightest before it wanes.

When we are born we have two lives,  
The inside and the out,  
Until one gets cut down and we find ourselves without.  
I look deep inside and see nothing but a hole,  
It's time to despair for I've lost my soul.  
Rage fills the void I cannot avoid  
The red covers the fact that something's been destroyed.  
Fury finds its purpose and pours out the hole,  
Destroys good around me, a secondary toll.  
More and more leaves 'til my grief takes it all,  
Throw the rest away I'm so desperate to fall.  
The feelings explode I'm dying for this to end,  
The note is written I need only press send.  
You mustn't let your soul be taken away,  
Lest you find yourself at the end of your last day.



If we don't have enough life for the body and mind,  
How do we choose which to leave behind?  
Do we save the body and lose the mind?  
Numb the brain and continue the grind.  
Or do we save what's inside at the cost of the body,  
This is when our future planning gets a little bit shoddy.  
To knock down the wall let the mind be itself,  
Stable as a snow globe knocked off the top shelf.  
No reprieve from the pain and eleven out of twelve,  
Into emotions and memories you have chosen to delve.  
If there's too much there you might find yourself a gun  
When the games are done and the hole inside has won.  
The lesson you've learned is half a life is not whole,  
It's hard to survive without part of your soul.



**In 2020 an Agreement between Community Mental Health Action Plan and the Wellness Network enabled the Recruitment of a Part Time Peer Facilitator**

**(Michelle Black, Peer Navigator of the Wellness Network accepted the position of Peer Working Group Facilitator in January 2021)**





## In January 2021 a Peer Facilitator was chosen to lead the efforts of this Peer Working Group



### Michelle Black

PEER NAVIGATOR AND FACILITATOR FOR THE WELLNESS NETWORK

<https://youtu.be/4N6TljmJwQ>



Michelle Black has learned to live a full and meaningful life even with a Bipolar diagnosis. Now she is giving back ...

She maintains Peer Roles such as: **Peer Navigator** for the Wellness Network, a member of the **Recovery College** Steering Committee and a Facilitator for the following courses: **Wellness Recovery Action Plan® (WRAP®)**, **Mental Wellness Recovery Group (MWRG)** and **Do What You Love and Love What You Do**.

Michelle has a love for being a guitar and mandolin instructor and has sometimes used her talents when facilitating.

She has over 10 years of being a Bipolar Advocate by presenting her wellness journey of recovery. By learning and growing from lived experiences with Bipolar, she has developed a strong sense of resiliency.

Michelle has learned that she is more than her diagnosis, she is a daughter, sister, spouse, mother and auntie. She is a community member, employee, advocate, friend, and a peer with lived experience of recovery. She is a singer and song writer, musician, artist, poet and most recently an author.

She now likes to say ... "I may have Bipolar, but it doesn't have me!" She also believes it stands for Beautiful Person.








**Community Mental Health Action Plan has, to date, supported ...**

**The development of the Peer Working Group  
(made up of independent peers and agency  
representatives)**

**The Peer Support Circle (a safe place for individuals  
who shared their lived experience in the community  
and professional settings, to meet and receive support  
from one another)**





**There was an interest in developing training and professional development opportunities and building further social connections for members.**

**The Peer Working Group is attended by representatives of other mental health peer led strategies as well.**

## **This is a Fine Example of Collaboration**

**We have reduced duplication and have been able to hire dedicated support to assist individuals with lived experience navigating and using the mental health system to share their stories.**

**We have been able to create a stronger body of evidence to support mental health system change.**









**There were Deliverables Developed in 2020 for the Proposed Peer Working Group. The Peer Working Group took on these deliverables which was the foundation of the initiatives that the Peer Working Group focused on and developed over the past year.**

- Community Mental Health Action Plan, Wellness Network Recovery College at e4c, and Living Hope came together to collaborate on the Peer Working Group.
- Prior to starting the group guidelines and deliverables for the initiative were developed.
- The Peer Working Group will operate as a new initiative under the Wellness Network Recovery College.
- Community Mental Health Action Plan and the Wellness Network would match funds to establish the Peer working group and recruit a Peer Facilitator for 12 months.



- 
- 
- The significant majority of members of the Peer Working Group will be Peers with lived experience.
  - Peers will be financially compensated for their time and contribution to the Peer Working Group.
  - The Peer Working Group can develop a Peer Support Circle for people working in a Peer capacity.
  - Members will have access to additional training opportunities at no cost or very low cost.

- 
- 
- Peers will have opportunities to co-develop and co-create new educational resource for Peer development.
  - Work towards a sustainable model to maintain the Peer Working Group.
  - Offer a Peer perspective and advice to planning and development within the Wellness Network Recovery College.

**In September 2020, A Peer Working Group Start Up Document was prepared by David Prodan and was shared with the new Peer Working Group Members**

**Let us take a closer look at this presentation ...**







## About the Peer Working Group

- Three partners – the Living Library of the Community Mental Health Action Plan, the Wellness Network and Living Hope, Edmonton Suicide Prevention Strategy – recognized that people sharing their personal mental health experiences for the betterment of our community could benefit by receiving peer support.
- They met with a group of people with lived experience to discuss this idea and received support for the co-development of such a group.

# Introduction to the Peer Working Group


## Vision

Individuals who share their lived experience with others to inform, educate, advocate, and so on, towards positive changes in the mental health system. These individuals will feel supported and cared for in their roles.

The life experience of individuals is included, valued, and used for the betterment of the mental health system.

The approach is based on the following values:

- Dignity
- Compassion
- Equality
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Quality
- Evidence-based
- Comprehensive



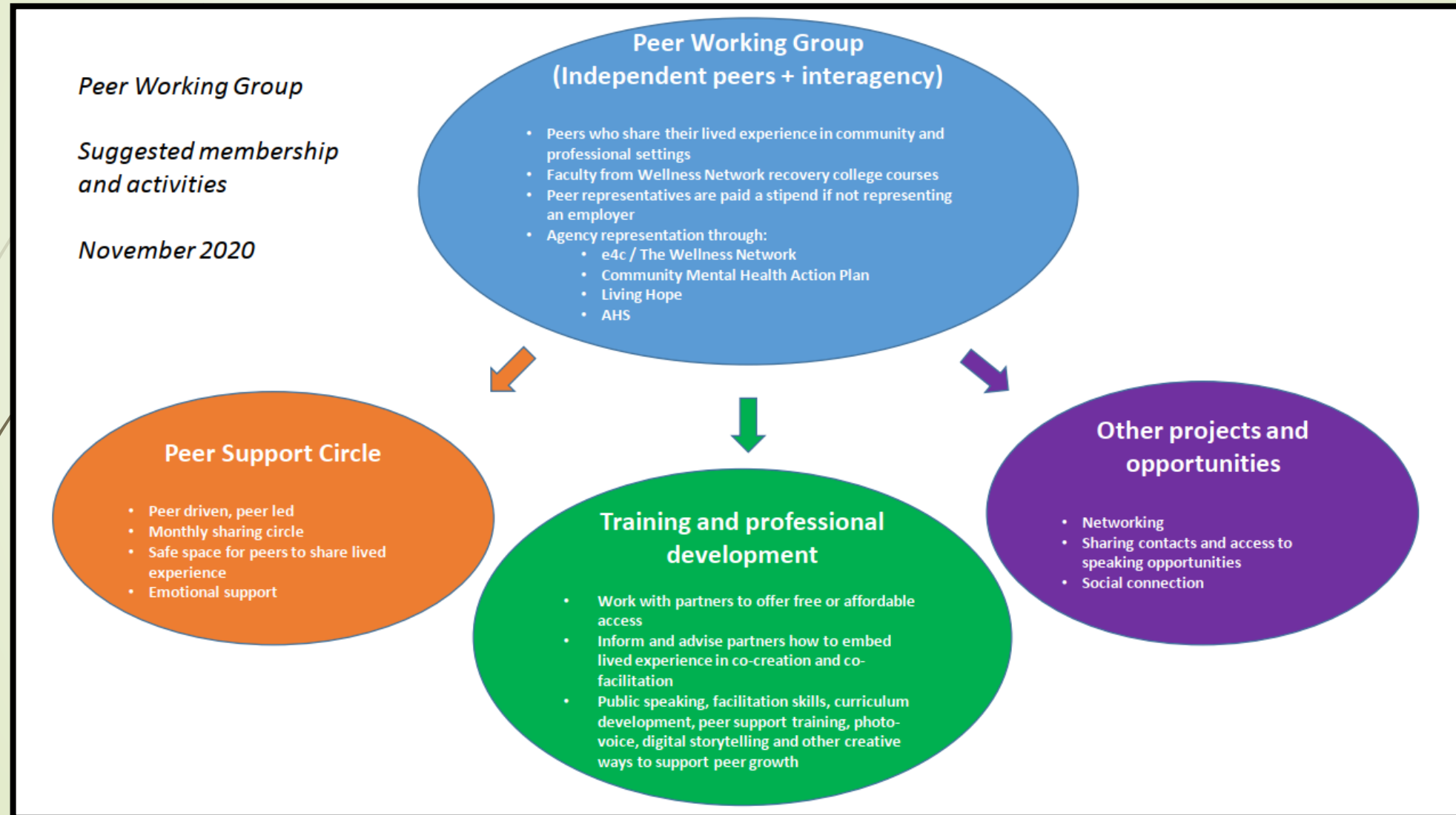
It was initially proposed that the membership of the Peer Working Group Consist of:

- The Wellness Network – Course Facilitators and WN Coordinator
- Living Library – Independent Peers
- Living Hope – Independent Peers
- FAMI – Independent Peers
- AHS – Peer Support Workers
- Mental Health Copilots – Community Volunteers

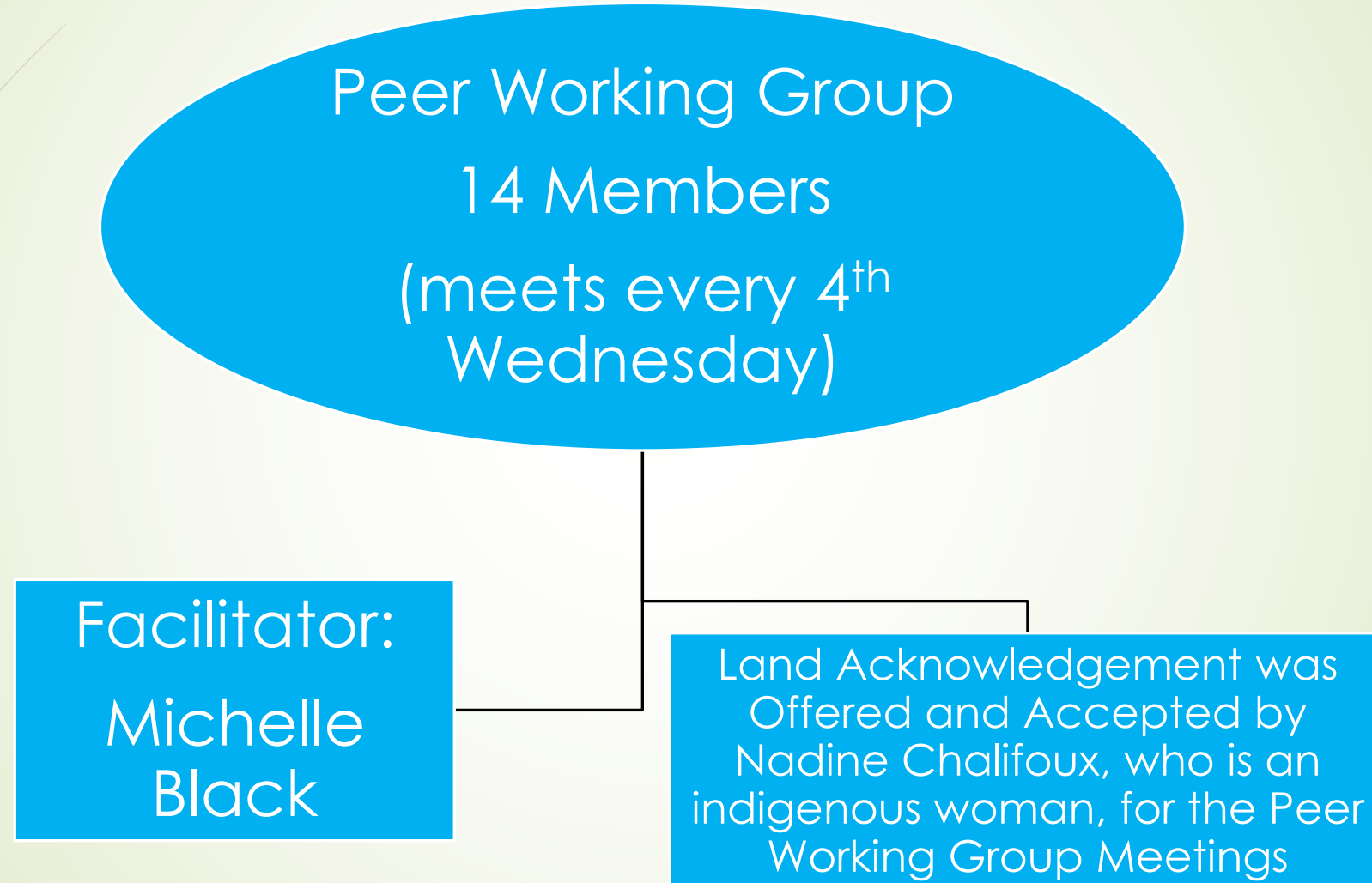
The working group has also grown to include peer representation from peers from Imagine Institute, Independent Peers, etc.



This graphic was developed identifying the priorities set out by the Peer Working Group



Michelle Black created a flowchart to show the work that the Peer Working Group is now working on as of September 2021 ...



Peer Support Circle  
16 peers invited so far  
(meets every 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Wednesday)

It is still open to peers who  
do peer-related work

Peer Support Circle  
Subcommittee  
9 Members  
(meets every 4<sup>th</sup>  
Wednesday)

Facilitator:  
Michelle Black



*Free  
Peer Support  
Circle*

INDIVIDUALS  
WORKING IN  
PEER SUPPORT  
GET STRETCHED  
TO THEIR  
LIMITS, THIS IS A  
SAFE SPACE TO  
REGAIN OUR  
STRENGTH AND  
HELP OUR  
MENTAL  
HEALTH

**DO YOU WORK IN THE  
FIELD OF PEER SUPPORT?**

**THIS PEER SUPPORT CIRCLE IS FOR YOU!!!**

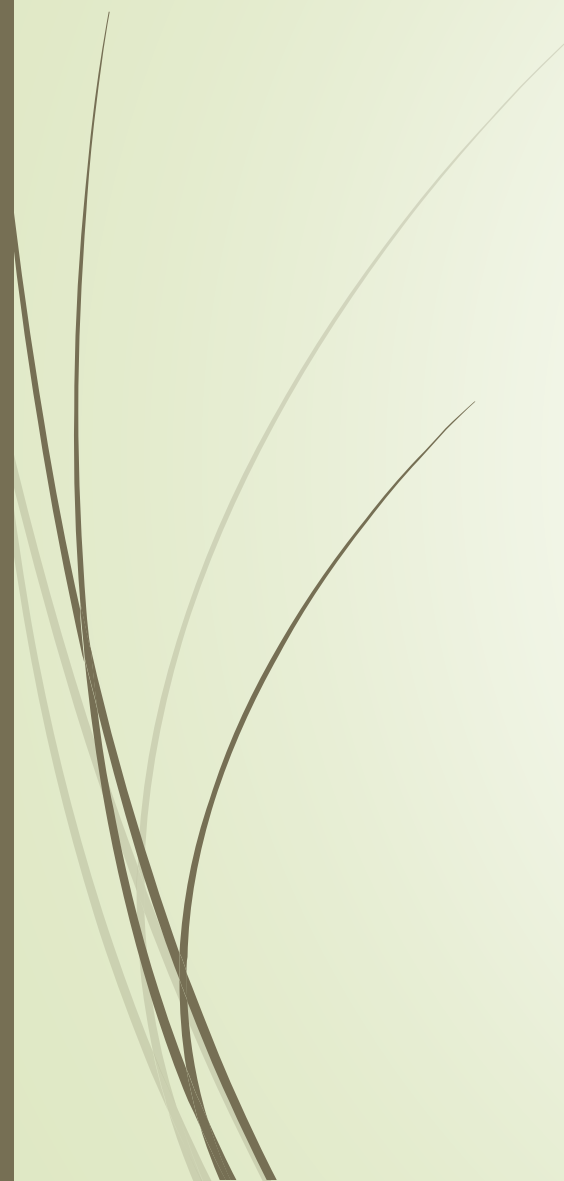

It is offered on a voluntary basis and is an emotional support group for people who share lived experience in peer-related work. This is a safe space for peers to share their experience as peer workers.

**Join this Peer driven and Peer led support circle:**

**When:** Every second Wednesday of the Month  
**Time:** 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm  
**Where:** Zoom

**Contact:** Michelle Black, Peer Facilitator  
(587) 991-0057 or email [mblack@e4calberta.org](mailto:mblack@e4calberta.org)





## Peer Support Circle For Suicide Attempt Survivors

(survey is being sent  
out to see if there is a  
need for this group)

Suicide Attempt  
Survivors  
Subcommittee  
6 Members  
(meets every 4<sup>th</sup>  
Monday)

Facilitator:  
Suzanne  
Cunningham

Co-Facilitator:  
Wesley Jones



# Training and Professional Development



```
graph TD; A([Training and Professional Development]) --- B[Digital Storytelling  
Funded by the Wellness Network (e4c)  
(Mon & Fri 2020)]; A --- C[Peer Support Training  
Funded by the Wellness Network (e4c)  
(Spring 2021)]; A --- D[Rising Strong After Setbacks  
Wellness Plan During COVID Program from the Wellness Network  
(Spring 2021)]; A --- E[QPR Training  
Offered by the Imagine Institute  
(Aug & Sep 2021)];
```

Digital Storytelling  
Funded by the Wellness  
Network (e4c)  
(Mon & Fri 2020)

Peer Support Training  
Funded by the Wellness  
Network (e4c)  
(Spring 2021)

Rising Strong After  
Setbacks  
Wellness Plan During  
COVID Program from  
the Wellness Network  
(Spring 2021)

QPR Training  
Offered by the  
Imagine Institute  
(Aug & Sep 2021)


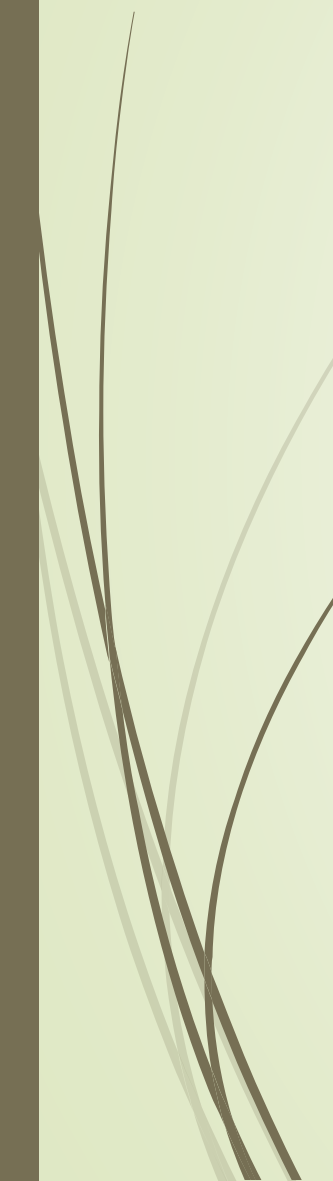


# Other Projects and Opportunities

Working on a Map for  
Peer Led Resources

Collaborative work  
with 211 to add Peer  
Led Services



- 
- 
- The Peer Working Group, Facilitated by Michelle Black is continuing to meet the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of every month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.
  - The Peer Support Circle Subcommittee, Facilitated by Michelle Black is continuing to meet every 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of every month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.
  - The Peer Support Circle, Facilitated by Michelle Black continues to run every 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.
  - The Suicide Attempt Survivors Subcommittee, facilitated by Suzanne Cunningham and co-facilitated by Wesley Jones (with the assistance of Michelle Black, when needed) continues to run every 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of the Month from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

## Peer Working Group – Outcomes to Date (2020/2021)

- A vital well established Peer Working Group
- Recruitment of a Peer Facilitator
- A regular Peer Support Circle for people working in a Peer role in Edmonton
- A Peer Support Circle Subcommittee to help plan the Peer Support Circles
- Involvement in Peer training opportunities including Digital Storytelling and Peer Support Training
- Development of a Suicide Attempt Survivors Subcommittee planning and developing an initiative to support suicide attempt survivors

- **Following the success of the Peer Working Group Initiative, the three collaborating organizations are committed to continue the collaboration and support of this peer work.**
- **The ongoing success and sustainability of this Peer Working Group can be attributed to the dedication and commitment of the peer community.**



**SUSTAINABILITY**

**It has been quite an honour to be part of this initiative and we are very proud of the work the Peer Working Group has accomplished and is still continuing to do ...**





***“From the Darkness  
came the Light ...  
The seeds have been  
planted,  
our communities are  
growing and blossoming,  
all because ...  
we believed it was  
Possible”***

**Michelle Black**

