# Being In and Of the System: Managing the Tension as a Peer Worker in the Mental Health System

Allan Strong SSW, RSSW May 24, 2018 Annual Meeting and Educational Day OCSWSSW

#### Agenda

- Peer support worker what does that mean?
  —Some personal reflections, experience, and
  - research
- What is the tension ?
  Why does this matter?
- What do we do?
  - Should we do anything?

# What is Peer Support

....it as any organized support provided by and for people with mental health problems or illnesses.

Making the case for peer support. MHCC ,2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2016)

# What is Peer Support?

"Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on the key principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what is helpful"

> (Defining Peer Support: Mead, S. 2003 – www.mhepinc.org)

# What is Peer Support?

Individuals that share a life experience coming together to provide support, share resources and to share information

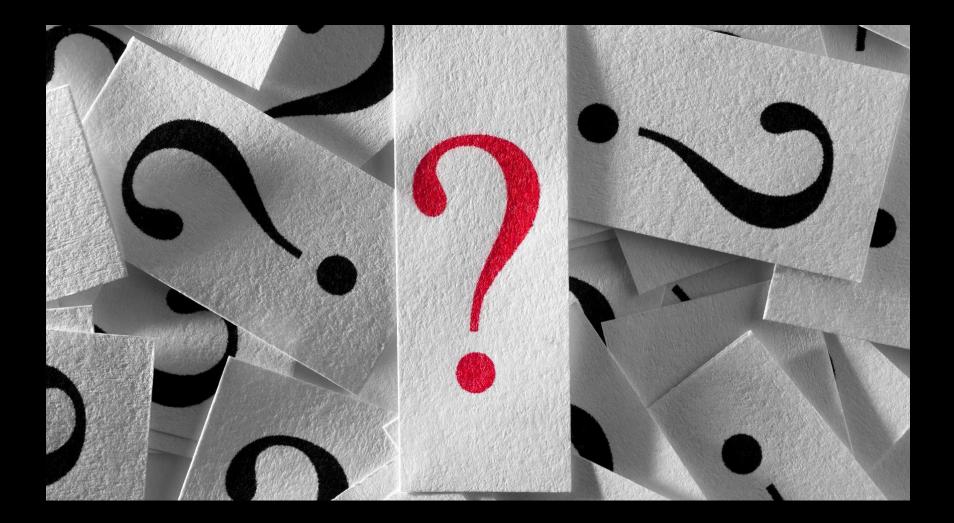
Examples: A.A. , N.A. Bereaved Families of Ontario, Cancer support groups, etc.



#### A Peer Worker is ...

Someone whose principal function is to use their lived experience as the lens for their interactions with clients when providing services and supports

#### What does that mean?



#### What is known

 Challenges for peer workers – lack of clarity in their role, boundaries, fear from others, supervision and mentoring

 Challenges for others with peer workers – lack of clarity about roles, how is peer work different, boundaries

# What is known

- Supervision is seen as important but:
  - No clear definition of what supervision is
  - No understanding of who is the ideal person to provide supervision
  - Don't know if supervision is effective

#### What is known

 Concern that peer workers will get "co-opted", meaning that they will lose the unique perspective that they bring

# Being in but not of the system



# The tension

 How does a peer worker make use of their lived experience in a way that does not "do harm" to themselves or others

• What "hat" does a peer worker wear at any particular time while providing support

# Question

 How does the College, the social work and social service work professions support its members that are peer workers?

# Comments/Questions?