

PEER SUPPORT: ADAPTING FOR PROGRAM GROWTH

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DEFINITION, BACKGROUND, AND OBJECTIVES

Peer Support (PS) is the emotional and practical support between two family caregivers who share the common experience of being a partner in care at the Stollery Children's Hospital. COVID restrictions halted the program in 2020.

The pause gave us an opportunity to evaluate, adapt, and plan for the future.

The PS Program began in 2015 as the [Family Bedside Orientation Program](#).

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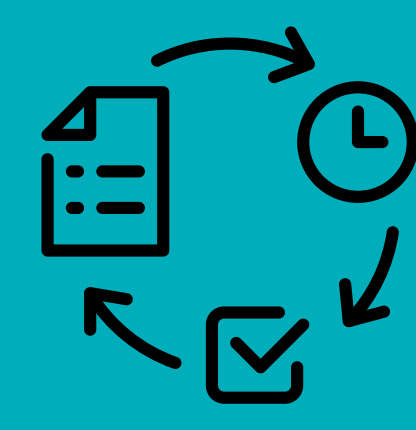


At the Stollery Children's Hospital, volunteers with lived experience connect with family caregivers where they are at, to reduce isolation, validate emotions, and to support them to be empowered as members of their child's care team, however is most meaningful to them.



SUCCESSSES

- PS Groups are offered based on feedback from family caregivers
- Consistent branding and contact information for all program areas supports referral process and program awareness throughout the hospital
- Targeting program expansion to areas with existing staff champions and existing volunteers
 - NICU
 - Fetal Echo and Cardiology
 - Palliative care and bereavement
- Increase in geographical reach
 - greater volunteer recruitment opportunities
 - connecting rural families from up to 450 km away from the hospitals.



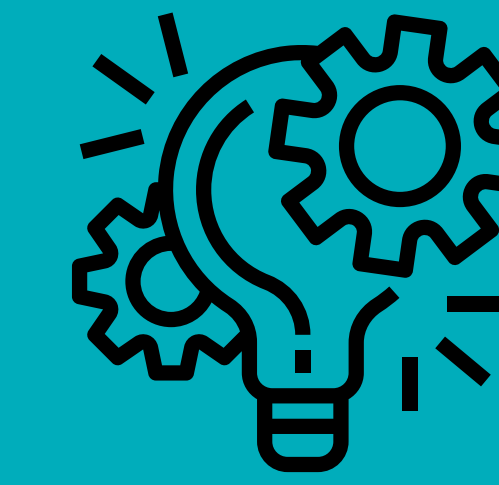
CHALLENGES

- Historical methods were limited to
 - 1:1 In-person bedside
 - in-person unit-specific parent groups
- Volunteer retention & program consistency
- PS staff capacity
- Inconsistent knowledge, awareness & acceptance of PS program
- Demand is greater than PS program capacity
- Program evaluation & tracking was inconsistent
- Volunteer training only offered in-person



A Peer Partner volunteer connects with a parent at the David Schiff NICU

While other people in my life had experienced being hospitalized, no one really understood how difficult it was to parent a child in hospital. It was lonely and overwhelming for me. It is rewarding to know that I support other parents to feel seen, heard, and connected. Volunteering has also helped me to normalize those environments that still play a part in my life. – Kate H, Peer Partner



ADAPTATIONS

- PS staff obtained additional training
- Redesigned volunteer training
 - aligned with national standards of practice (Centre For Innovation in Peer Support)
 - focused on scope and role, and readiness vs. willingness.
 - offering virtual training (8-hour course)
 - cohort feedback shaped training program
- Approved phone-based PS model
- Planning programs based on feedback from inpatient families
- 3 part-time staff (totaling 1.0 FTE)

Peer support helps caregivers to learn from the experiences of other families and to feel less alone. Shared ideas and information can help family caregivers feel validated and prepared to meet their children's needs more efficiently, and with greater confidence and hope.



MOVING FORWARD 2024

- Comprehensive options to meet families' needs: phone-based, virtual and in-person PS options
- Expanding volunteer recruitment
- Program evaluation with volunteers & those receiving PS
- Community of Practice
 - creating community
 - program evaluation
 - team building
 - professional development