

# CO-DESIGNING WORKPLACE PEER SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS: A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

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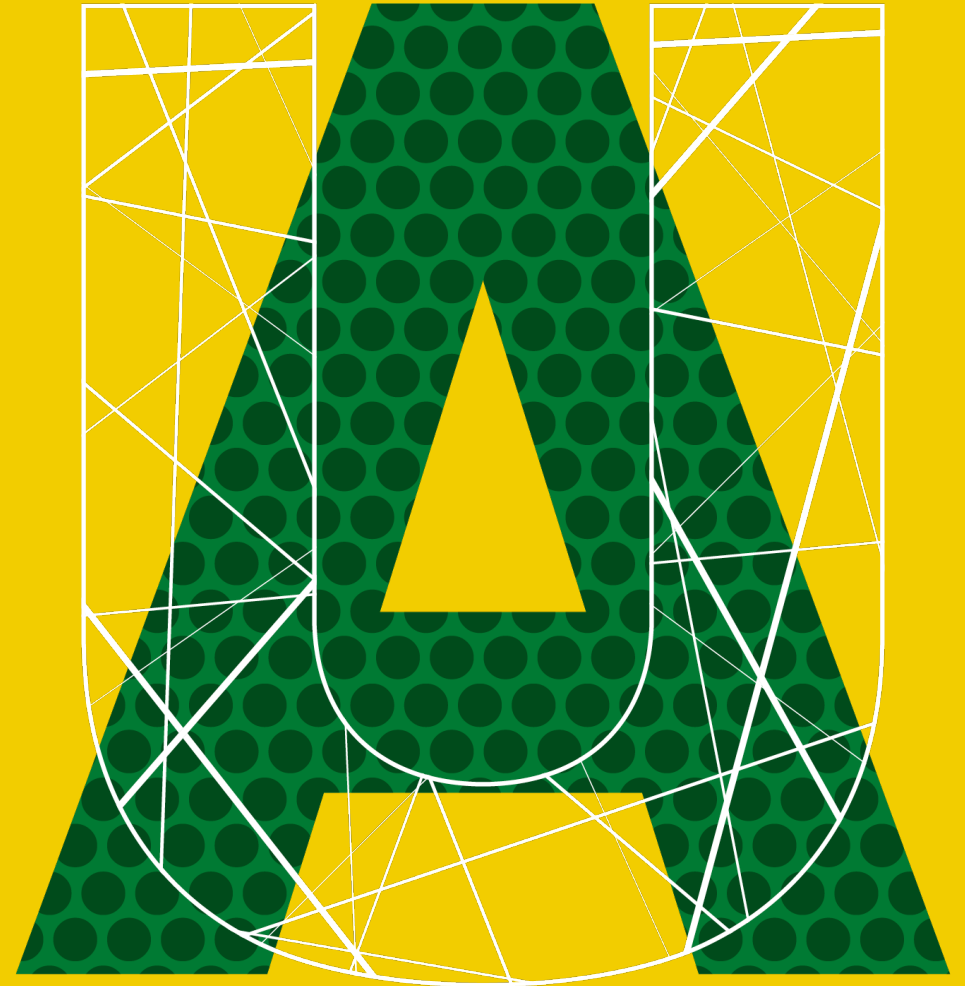
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# Background

- In Canada, 70 to 90% of people with serious mental illness are unemployed, compared to 7.1% in the general population .
- People with serious mental illness are capable and willing to contribute meaningfully to the workforce. However,
  - A vast majority experience employment marginalization and hazardous work environments; having challenges in job retention and career progression.
- Support from the healthcare system or Supported Employment services is often time-limited → Peer support can be a promising solution in facilitating successful employment

**Initial Small-Scale PAR**

*Identifying Employment Barriers*



**10 Co-Researchers**

*"Get a Job, Keep the Job" Study*

**Co-Design a Peer Mentorship Program**

*Developing Solutions*



*Designing Peer Mentor Workshops*

*Scaling Up the Action*

**Large-Scale Implementation**

*Launching a Peer Support Network*



*Building a Peer Support Movement*

**Small Scale**

**Growing Impact**

**Large Scale**

# The Co-design Project

- Context: This project builds on a previous participatory action research (PAR) initiative in which a collaborative group of people with lived experience of serious mental illness planned a peer support initiative (**Hear Us**) for individuals seeking to re-enter or remain in the workforce (Thomas, 2023).
- **Purpose:** Empower Hear Us members as co-researchers (Lived-experience Researchers; LE researchers) in **co-designing a mentorship program** that provides peer support focused on *finding and maintaining* employment for people with serious mental illness.

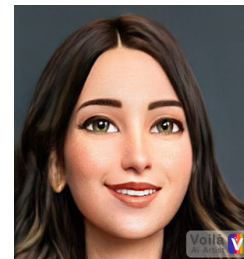
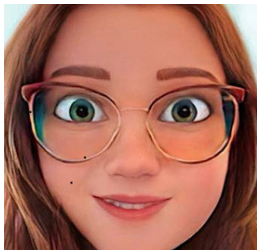
# The team...



## We are HEAR US

It stands for **H**elping, **E**ducating, **A**dvocating, and **R**elating to other's needs.

We are **U**nited to make a difference and provide **S**upport for peers and employers

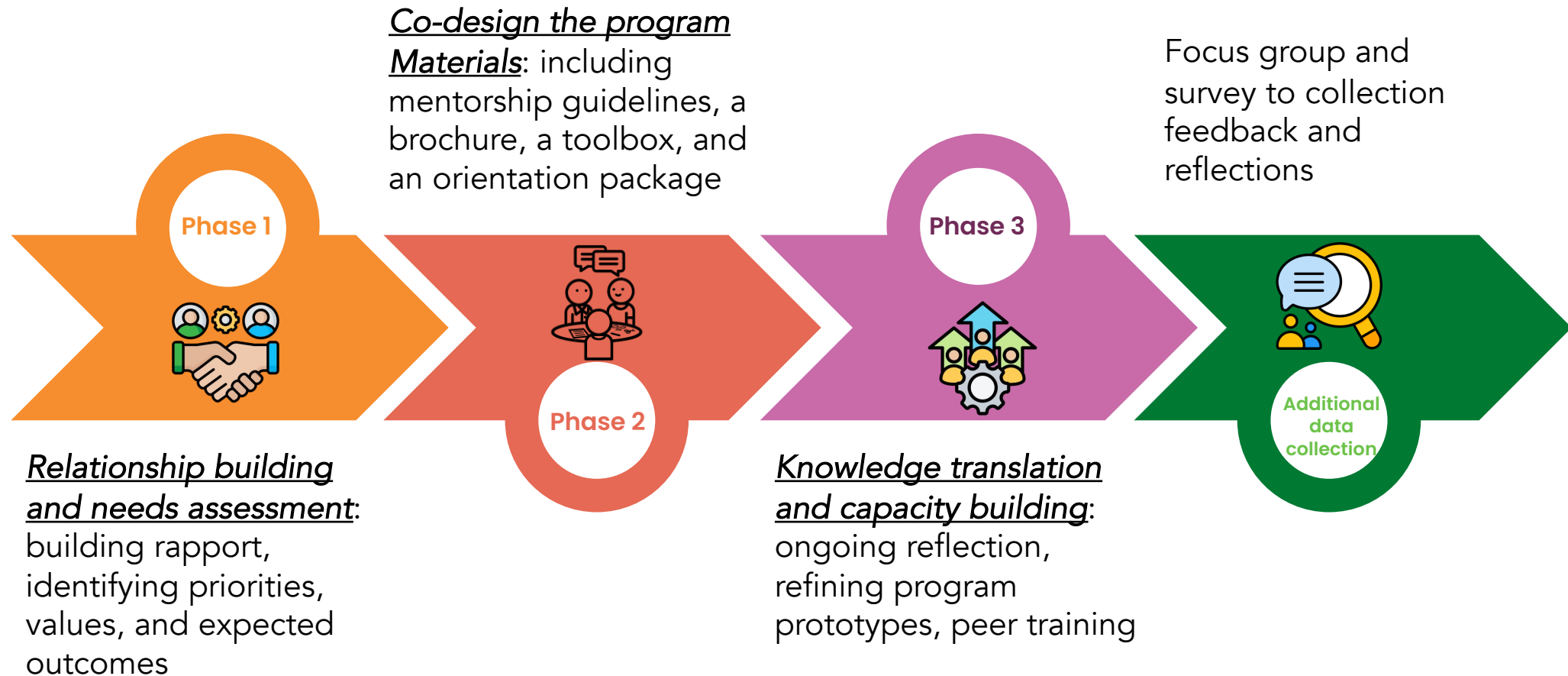


# Participatory Co-Design

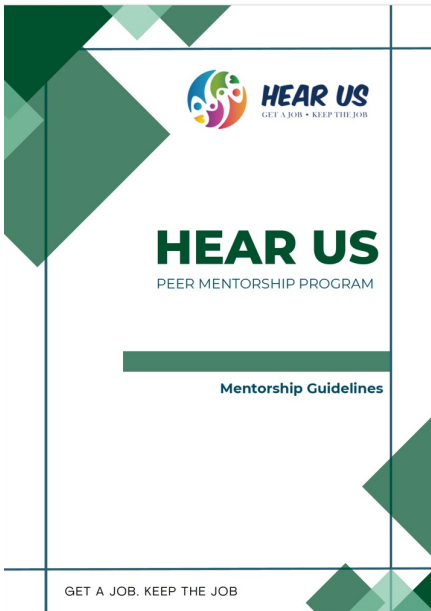
- A collaborative approach where researchers and interest-holders **share power in defining problems, generating knowledge, and developing solutions.**
  - Co-planning, co-designing, co-conducting, co-evaluating, and co-disseminating knowledge
  - Co-researchers shape the entire research process - goals, methods, outputs, and evaluation. (process matters as much as outcomes)
  - Relationships are part of the methodology

# The Co-design process

September 2023 – August 2024; bi-weekly meeting



# Program Outcomes



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HEAR US

**Mission**  
Our mission is to strive to be a healthy, thriving community that is peer-focused on people's strengths and abilities, to have a platform for sharing success stories of lived experiences, and to provide support for peers and employers.

**Vision**  
Our vision is that workplaces will be equitable for everyone.

**OUR CORE VALUES**  
P.E.E.R.S

Peer Focused  
Empathy  
Equity  
Respect  
Strength-Based Approach

**What We are Offering is Peer Mentorship**

Working together as peers to understand each other's needs and provide support you need at work.

**Topics:**

- Safe place to speak to a peer mentor who understands what you are going through
- How to self-advocate (speak up for yourself) and communicate your wants and needs with employers and colleagues
- Provides a list of resources and connections to programs/services-based on your wants and needs (e.g., Resume and interview preparation)
- Develop:
  - Personal and professional goals
  - Wellness strategies

**Our Story**

HEAR US - stands for Helping, Educating, Advocating, and Relating to others' needs. We are United to make a difference and provide Support for peers and employers.

**OUR TEAM**  
Meet Michelle

Hi, for vul stre Inc "I me per M Af me ne ho ev shi qu I u M Hi, aca vol con cor me hea nee can ign

**Meet Mary**

Mary is a compassionate peer support staff. She recently joined HEAR US and is a key member of our team. She is passionate about helping peers receive the support they need to maintain their wellness.

**What are the next steps?**

Scan and fill out the Google Form and we will reach out to you shortly!

Contact us at [hearusservices@gmail.com](mailto:hearusservices@gmail.com) if you have any questions

Peer mentorship program offered to peers in the workforce

Edmonton

<https://www.hearusservices.ca/>

[hearusservices@gmail.com](mailto:hearusservices@gmail.com)

1. Advocacy tool
2. Coping strategies
3. Crisis resources
4. Goal setting
5. Personal development
6. Resume and interview preparation
7. Self-care
8. Workplace disclosure and accommodations

# Co-researchers' experience of the co-design process (process outcomes)



## THEME 1: Mutual Learning

Reciprocal knowledge exchange between co-researchers

*"They learn a lot from us, and we learn from them. They did all the typing and designing and met with us to discuss the work. We were able to revise things right away!!!"*



## THEME 2: Mobilizing motivation through shared goals

Enhancing commitment and engagement

*"I think because I have invested my time fully in Hear Us, others are committed as well."*



## THEME 3: Empowerment through lived experience

Reinforcing self-efficacy and advocacy

*"My suggestions were used in all of the work we did. I know I had quite a few suggestions and the outcome turned out great. [The team members] valued my input and suggestions and came up with a great resource document."*

# Conclusion

## Get a job! Keep the job!

This innovative initiative is the first of its kind to provide tailored workplace peer support for individuals with serious mental illness.



Peer support

Workplace peer mentorship for people with lived experience

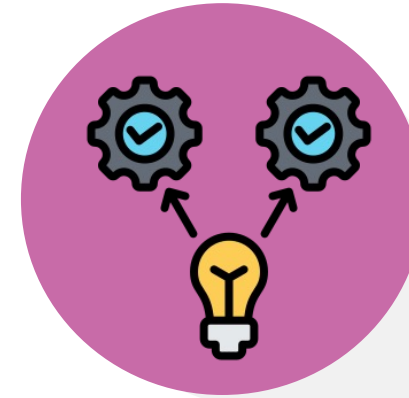
Building evidence on peer support workers enhance outcomes in employment settings



Co-design

Co-design in a recovery-oriented practice

Voice heard; empowered, experiential knowledge valued,



Looking forward

Research, practice, and policy implications

Participatory methodology as an “intervention” development; inclusive policies value lived experience contributions

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**Key reflection on sustainability:** Beyond funding, what networks, capacities, and supports must be in place to sustain this grassroots initiative?



**Thank you!**

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<https://www.hearusservices.ca/>