

## 1. WHAT IS PEER HELPING;

### 1.1 Peer Helper:

A peer helper is a registered student at the Göteborg University who has been selected and trained to facilitate the social and emotional integration of particularly first year students and to promote wellness amongst the general student population.

### 1.2 Peer Helping

Peer helping is typically characterized by the following components:

- Peer helpers are volunteers, but may receive some type of compensation for their involvement
- The peer helpers receive need-based, goal-directed and experiential skill training from <sup>1</sup>certified trainers
- The peer helpers are supervised on a regular basis and
- The more experience the peers have, the more they may be employed as ‘peer leaders’, involved in the selection, training, and supervision of other peers.

## 2 Vision, Aims and Objectives of the Peer Help Programme

The vision, aims and objectives of this project are in line with the report by National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket) on Student Perspective as well as the university aims in terms of continuous need for creating a learning environment that includes social and physical wellbeing in order to increase the chances of success for all students.

2.1 The **vision** of the Peer Help Programme is *to be a dynamic support system for students by students.*

In order to achieve this vision the Programme aims at:

- the provision of an integrated and inclusive student-to-student service
- the use of the potential of selected students to assist their fellow students
- the use of material resources by peer helpers and by their ‘clientele’
- creating opportunities and improving self-help skills that have a positive influence on peer helpers, the student community and the communities they come from
- making sure that all direct and indirect peer helper involvement is supported by a quality assurance/control system

2.3 The **objectives** of the project are:

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<sup>1</sup> A Certified Peer Trainer is an individual who has been certified as being competent to train peer helpers and to design and implement peer helping programs. Certification is based on the quality and extent of experience as a trainer as well as the degree of involvement in effective peer programs Opportunity for extensive (basic and advanced) training is provided through regional, national, or local workshops.

- to train Peer Helpers in the skills of communication, teamwork, negotiation and creative thinking
- to provide the Division of Student Affairs and staff with a useful channel of communication concerning student issues
- to build the capacity of the existing support services to all students,

### **3 Recruitment and Selection of Peer Helpers**

Recruitment and selection of peer helpers take place annually.

#### **3.1 Recruitment procedures include the following:**

- Advertisements and/or letters inviting student to apply for peer help programme are posted on the campus notice boards and on the e-mail system
- Student Counsellors, faculty staff and senior peer helpers are formally invited to submit the names of individuals whom they regard as potential peer helpers, based on set criteria

**3.2 Selection** is an open process. Applicants and recommended individuals complete and submit a 'showing interest form' in which they provide biographical details and a motivation for applying, together with a short CV that reflects previous involvement in help intended actions. Applicants who appear to meet selection criteria are invited to individual interviews conducted by members of the project. A variety of preset and locally determined questions are asked. Decisions are based on the following considerations:

- Number of vacancies
- The philosophy on who should be a peer helper and who not?
- Academic record: the academically achieving students do not always make the best peer helpers, though, they are not automatically excluded; the same applies to peer helpers that struggle academically. Care is taken though, that students who get selected, are not academic or financial risks for the institution

### **4 Peer Helper Training**

#### **4.1 Basic Training**

The *basic course description* of the peer help training programme reflects the aim and nature of peer helping, namely the transference of skills. Trainees explore the following core communication and people helping knowledge and skills that research pointed out as being crucial to peer helper training: attending (i.e. non-verbal and verbal communication styles), empathic listening and responding, questioning skills, feedback, decision-making and problem-solving, value clarification and ethics, confidentiality and referral.

Students who wish to be part of the Peer Help Programme have to attend ALL training sessions. Follow-up training commences after the core training and continues throughout the peer helper term.

## **4.2 Training Methodology**

The *methodology* of both the basic and follow-up training is based on the experiential learning model. Training methods are interactive and experiential and include debriefing and feedback. Sessions include role rehearsal, homework and practical assignments, which are to be reflected in a personal portfolio, developed and maintained by each participant (compulsory)

## **5 Peer Helper Supervision**

Peer helpers have regular and ongoing monitoring and supervision and continuing opportunities for learning. Supervisors (Study Counsellors trained to train peer-helpers) focus on maintaining a quality relationship with the peer helpers in order to help monitoring, dealing with confidentiality and making referrals to professionals.

## **6 Peer Helper Portfolios**

Peer helpers are encouraged to develop and maintain portfolios, which reflect their learning and provide evidence of how they use the knowledge and skills gained during their basic and follow-up training. Portfolios are to provide evidence that peer helpers understand concepts and have begun to integrate them into their own behaviours. Portfolio management is furthermore regarded as a tool to develop self-reliant, multi-skilled peer helpers who take responsibility for their own, continued learning and development. Their individual portfolios eventually form part of their final evaluation at the end of their peer helper terms.

## **7 Certification**

A letter of attendance is issued to all students who attended the basic training programme, while a certificate of recognition is issued by Göteborg University each term to peer helpers who have worked as peer-helpers at least two hours per week, attended follow-up training sessions and who have submitted comprehensive portfolios

## **8 Code of conduct**

In addition to the General Student Regulations of Göteborg University, the Peer Helper Code of Conduct is a guide, developed by peer helpers themselves, which peer helpers must follow.

## **9 Evaluation and Research**

Evaluation helps programme leaders to determine whether the programme has the effect that they had hoped it would. Consistent and on-going evaluation therefore forms a part of the Programme and the relevant procedures are put in place before the start of the Programme. Evaluation is used to document program-related activities and services. It is done to assess the process, impact and outcome of the program with reference to its goals, and objectives. Evaluation data are used to examine the effect of the program and to determine whether and how the program needs to be revised. The evaluation plan may include four components:

### **10.1 Process Evaluation**

Process evaluation provides a picture of what happened in connection with the program and its comparison with the standards set. This type of evaluation determines the degree to which the program has been successful in achieving its goals and objectives. Process data includes information in such areas as number of peer helpers and helpers involved;

program staffing and organization; selection procedures; nature and extent of training; amount and types of services provided; and other program-related activities.

## 10.2 Impact Evaluation

Impact evaluation typically assesses the effect of the Programme on both peer helpers and those who have received assistance and services from peer helpers within set periods of time. Impact evaluation is aimed at finding out the effectiveness in such areas as student knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills or behaviours. These assessments are mostly qualitative (oral or verbal inputs, open-ended questionnaires, opinion surveys, focus group outcomes, etc.). The qualitative assessments are supported by several quantitative comparisons of the effect of the programme.

## 10.3 Outcome evaluation

Outcome evaluation assesses long-term changes to the peer helper, those they serve, and the community. Examples of societal benefits are is to show lower health risks, improved employment rates and improved leadership skills.

The effectiveness of these evaluation procedures is constantly monitored and the implementation of other/adapted/modified models investigated by in depth research.

## 11 Conclusion:

The Peer Help Programme aims to give a creative and exciting response to the challenges of the process of changes in Higher Education: it strives to clarify how students fit in and participate in the university structures, procedures and goals. It aims at providing a strategy that changes education from *something that is done to students* to *a co-operative enterprise*. It represents an effort to look with new eyes at the academic as well as the social well being of our fast growing, diverse student population.

This Peer Helping Programme is, above all, a useful tool in the hands of those who care about students; it provides people with tools that give them the positive strength of character that creates good relationships between human beings.