

Status for Peer Support Workers (PSW) in Sweden

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Introduction

The Swedish Partnership for Mental Health, NSPH, is a network of organizations for patients, users and family carers in the mental health field. We see ourselves – patients, users and next of kin – as a resource that is both essential and indispensable for the development of health care, support and treatment in society.

How is the status of education and/or training for PSWs in Sweden?

The NSPH peer support model includes recruitment, training, implementation, coordination and supervision. Peer supporters can be employed by public or private organizations, and by the user movement. The important thing is that the principals and the user movement have a structured collaboration on the activities: the user movement provides continuous support, training and experience-based supervision to the peer supporters. The experience-based guidance plays an important role – both during the implementation phase and in the ongoing work. Through support and dialogue with patient, user and relative associations, the peer supporters' special knowledge and methodology are maintained. The NSPH model also includes training and continuous support for the organizations that implement Peer support. NSPH educates local NSPH organizations to be the partners training PSWs and collaborating with workplaces that want to start with Peer support in their operations. The funding of NSPH and the Peer support implementation program comes from the Swedish government. The funding of local NSPH for the implementation of Peer support comes from either municipality or regional parties, or as a joint investment.

The 5- week training program includes both theoretical lessons and practical exercises, individually and in groups. We have divided the different elements of the training based on the following categories:

- Working as a peer supporter
- Society-oriented subjects
- Work tools
- Attitude and approach

NSPH also provides further training for PSWs as their work continues and develops. NSPH has a model where we support the local user movement in training for the trainers / supervisors, in order to be self-sufficient in training Peer support workers from a local need.

In addition to this NSPH also train the staff who will be working with a PSW, in order to clarify the role and tasks of a PSW.

Since 2012, NSPH has visited the Netherlands, Great Britain and New Zealand, interviewing various staff groups, managers, HR (personnel administration), peer supporters and users/patients, and participating in the practical everyday life of a peer

supporter. We have translated training programs into Swedish and integrated the collected international experiences and knowledge with our own, in what now constitutes our method and training manual. We have also taken on board experiences from the trials that began in some locations in Sweden, during the time of our own mapping. These experiences show that implementation is not easy to carry out without solid training of both peer supporters and the organization's staff as well as the local user movement. Continuous follow-up through further training, supervision and methodological support for all actors has also proven to be necessary. It is of particular importance that the local user movement and the activities together plan for training efforts, implementation and employment of peer supporters. A mutual understanding and respect for each other's competence and roles lays the foundation for the greatest possible synergy and benefit for the user / patient.

How are PSW viewed in Sweden?

There has been various articles and interviews (TV, radio, conferences, etc.) about Peer support over the years and there is a constant, positive response regarding the ongoing implementation of Peer support in Sweden.

We currently have about 120-130 paid PSWs working in psychiatric teams (out- and in-patient care), FACT-teams, substance abuse treatment teams, forensic psychiatry, housing support, activity houses, elementary school and high school etc.

Any changes in the near future?

NSPH have been funded for 3 years (starting 2026) to develop 3 new educational programs. One for PSWs working within forensic psychiatry settings, and the other 2 with a focus on suicide prevention and LGBTQUI issues.

NSPH are also preparing an application to gain status as “National competence center” for Peer Support from the Swedish government.

Conclusion

Peer support in Sweden started as an initiative from the user movement and it is still the user movement as NSPH, that recruit and train PSWs, provide methodological support to organizations implementing peer support and further develops the method.

Peer support is slowly but steadily growing and gaining recognition within psychiatry and municipal care but also in new fields, such a schools.

Literature

- NSPH and Peer Support (in Swedish): <https://nsph.se/att-leva-med-psyisk-ohalsa/projekt/peer-support/>
- Method and training manual (in Swedish): <https://nsphvastragotaland.se/material/>
- What is peer support? (in Swedish) https://nsphvastragotaland.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/NSPH_reportagebok_webb-1.pdf
- Peer support in school (in Swedish): <https://nsphvastragotaland.se/inslag-om-peer-support-inom-skola-i-sveriges-radio-p1/>
- Articles and evaluation on Peer Support in Swedish: <https://nsphvastragotaland.se/material/rapporter-om-peer-support/>
- Primary Care Peer-Supported Internet-Mediated Psychological Treatment for Adults With Anxiety Disorders: Mixed Methods Study: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32815819/>
- Peer support workers' role and expertise and interprofessional learning in mental health care: a scoping review: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13561820.2021.2014796#abstract>
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