



Peer Support Network Application Guide

Peer Supporters are the life of our program and we encourage all interested students to apply to volunteer with us! This guide encompasses all the key information to help you understand what is expected of our volunteers, what to expect from the application process, and frequently asked questions. If after reading through this short guide you still have questions concerning any piece of the application process to the Peer Support Network (PSN), please email mcgillpsnvolunteers@gmail.com and we will get back to you shortly.

For the 2014-2015 academic year, our volunteer application deadline is 11pm on Sunday, February 23rd 2014. However, we encourage you to apply as early as possible! Whenever you are ready to apply, the application form can be found [here](#) or on our website at studentsinmind.ca

About PSN

The Peer Support Network is a student-led program at McGill which aims to provide a safe space for students to access immediate support from peers during drop-in sessions on campus. PSN is a paraprofessional service--it does not diagnose or treat mental illness. It is solely intended to provide short-term support to students in need of assistance and to increase student awareness of services available on campus. Student volunteers provide welcoming, confidential, and empathetic peer-based support using active listening, resource referral, information guidance, and practical assistance.

Our hope is that by providing social support and informing both students of McGill services and McGill services of student needs, we can reduce stigma in seeking help and promote a mentally healthy community here on campus. By seeking help from peers, students don't have to feel alone in times of difficulty and can be given appropriate support, resources, and referrals if necessary, to help cope with their situation. By understanding the reasons for why students are in distress, more informed health promotion and prevention efforts could be taken to target the issues faced by students at-hand. This program will help students improve overall mental health and stability during their years at McGill University.

Eligibility

Before you apply, ensure that you fulfill all three of our eligibility requirements:

- ☐ A currently registered McGill student of at least 18 years of age by August 2014
- ☐ Available to volunteer with PSN for the entire 2014-2015 academic year
- ☐ Expectation of availability for volunteer training in late August and early September of 2014

Commitment Requirements

In late August and early September 2014, volunteers must be able to attend all 30 hours of training sessions. The purpose of this training is to best equip each volunteer with the necessary tools and resources in providing peer support.

The training sessions will take place in the two weeks leading up to classes and are mandatory for volunteers. A full list of training sessions, date and times will be released closer their occurrence. Training sessions will cover topics including but not limited to; academic advising, active listening, addictions, eating disorders, ethical conduct, gender identity and sexuality, graduate and undergraduate student issues, grievance and loss, self-care, student mental health and suicidality, student services, students with disabilities, race, culture and oppression, and transgender issues.

Once training is complete, volunteers for the Peer Support Network will be expected to commit a minimum of five hours a month working in the drop-in space. The space will be open on campus at least two evenings a week. Specific volunteer schedules will be arranged on a monthly basis and volunteer hours will be flexible to accommodate everyone's various other commitments.

Volunteer Responsibilities

As a PSN volunteer, you will be expected to fulfill all of the following responsibilities:

- Attend all training sessions
- Attend shifts assigned to you. In the event that they are unable to attend a shift, a volunteer must attempt to ensure that the shift is covered
- Adhere to the PSN's Confidentiality Policy and Emergency Procedures
- Provide an open and respectful space where the peer feels heard
- Ensure that the student's dignity is respected
- Provide a place where the peer can work out their own solutions to what he/she is going through
- Provide referrals to appropriate resources to the peer when necessary
- Fill out any necessary paperwork
- Minimum commitment of 5 hours a month

Volunteer Profile

Peer Support Network volunteers are a diverse group of students committed to providing peer support, information, and referrals to the McGill student community. There is no typical volunteer profile. We hope our Peer Supporters will come from all walks of life, ranging from first years to graduate students, psychology majors to math majors, and those with extensive crisis experience to those without.

Although volunteer diversity is a key consideration during the selection process, successful applicants tend to exhibit the following characteristics:

- Empathy
- Maturity
- Excellent interpersonal skills
- Ability to quickly establish rapport with total strangers
- Enthusiasm about mental health and stigma reduction
- Reliability
- Open Mindedness
- Conscientiousness
- Compassion
- Ability to remain calm during emergency situations

- Ability to work individually as well as part of a team
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality
- Appreciation of diverse lifestyles and points of view

Application Process

The following gives you a brief outline of what you can expect from the entire application process. Selecting only few students from such an astounding array of talent and interest is always a challenge but we will thoroughly consider all applications submitted.

Date	Timeline
February 23rd 2014	Application Deadline
March 1st 2014	Selection of Candidates for Interviews
March 22nd-23rd 2014	Interviews
March 24th 2014	Selection of PSN Volunteers

FAQs

Q: I don't have any experience. I've never worked at a crisis centre or related mental health organization. Can I still apply?

Absolutely! The Peer Support Network is not a counselling program – that is beyond the scope of our role on McGill campus and the services that we offer. Most of our current volunteers came to us with no background in crisis work. “Peer Support” is exactly what it sounds like: We are seeking *peers* (not counsellors) who can provide *support* (not counselling). Whatever you need to know we will teach you. Bring with you a keen sense of compassion and eagerness to help, and we'll do the rest.

Q: Wow, a counselling program? I'm interested in becoming a professional counsellor. Sign me up!

The Peer Support Network is not a counselling program. We do not train counsellors, nor do we conduct any variant of professional practice. Peer Supporters are trained to provide emotional support, identify key issues, help the client develop an action plan, and then refer on to specific community resources. That being said, PSN may be a useful stepping-stone for McGill students interested in pursuing counselling as a career. Volunteering with us is a great way to gain

relevant experience, or figure out if this is really what you want to do.

Q: I'm not a psychology or social work major. I'm not interested in professional counselling or related careers. Is this program still right for me?

Yes! Diversity lies at the heart of our service. While it's true that many of our volunteers are interested in counselling-related careers, many are either still figuring out their career path or interested in subjects completely unrelated to counselling! The skills learned from volunteering with Peer Support Network such as active listening, providing emotional support, and working as part of a team are indispensable for any career.

Q: Are the hours flexible? What if I can only volunteer for one term?

Yes, shift hours are flexible. The Peer Support Network understands that the life of a student means constant schedule changes, extracurricular commitments, and unexpected events. Shift hours can be easily changed throughout the year if needed. It is expected however, that all volunteers will be available for a full academic year. This is both out of practicality and respect for unsuccessful applicants.