Chapter 3

THE PEER COUNSELLING / PEER HELPING MODEL

"You have not lived
until you have done something for someone
who can never repay you"
John Bunyan
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INTRODUCTION

The underlying rationale for implementing peer counselling programmes is based on the fact that students approach other students when they are experiencing difficulties and concerns (de Jager, 1995). According to Carr (1981) teenagers have in the past been ignored as a positive source of help to their peers. Such teenagers can be trained to facilitate effective decision-making, covering virtually all developmental aspects of peers. Students seek out peers for assistance with both personal and social problems as these are shared experientially "... with less social distance and less dependence" between helper and helpee (Giddan & Austin, cited in Bowen, McEachern, Pearn & Kerr, 1985, p. 45). This support is often a spontaneous action which occurs naturally and in an unplanned manner (Keller, 1999). Many students, however, report that they do not know what to do to assist the friends that approach them for help (Varenhorst, cited in Carr, 1988).

To empower students with the skills and the knowledge to support their peers, attention should be given to a number of aspects such as the selection of the peer counsellors; the content of the training programme and supervision sessions; service delivery and logistics; duties and programme evaluation.

SELECTION OF PEER COUNSELLORS

Peer counselling/helping is based on the assumption that individuals, as "... natural helpers", provide spontaneous and informal support to peers (Keller, 1999, p. 20). Such 'natural helpers' may be targeted for selection and eventually trained as peer counsellors.

Recruitment

Recruitment is an important aspect that needs to be carefully planned when starting a peer counselling programme (de Rosenroll, 1986a). Recruitment is conducted through a variety of advertising approaches namely posters and flyers, bulletins, school assemblies, announcements, campus media, word-of-mouth messages, memos to faculty, selection polls, staff meetings, programme speakers, in-class recruiting, lunches, peer counselling events and information sessions. Direct recruitment by means of recommendations from faculty members, counsellors and peers also takes place (Carr, 1981; de Rosenroll, 1986a; Lawson, 1989; Nassar & Collins-Eaglin, 1994; Robinson et al., 1991).

Criteria for preliminary selection

Downe et al. (1986) identified three criteria frequently used for the selection of peer counsellors. These are (1) likeness to the target group; (2) recommendations from management and teaching staff; and (3) psychometric testing. Downe et al. (1986) also stated that a single criteria for selection of peer counsellors may not be sufficient in all circumstances and suggested that a combination of certain features of each criteria should be applied. Additional criteria for selection are also suggested by other researchers namely that the applicant must fit with the "[d]emographic needs" of the clients that would make use of the peer counselling services (Greenstone, Dunn & Leviton, cited in Keller, 1999, p. 21) and competency in English (Letsebe 1984). The rationale for Letsebe's suggestion was that her training was conducted in English which, in South Africa, is often the peer helpers' second or

third language. Competency in English is also a criteria for selection for the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme and therefore relevant to this study.

Lawson (1989) stated that the characteristics and attitudes normally associated with a helping personality are usually the criteria for the selection of peer counsellors. Although grade point average and faculty recommendations are important, the personal characteristics of applicants play an important role in selection. The characteristics which are sought in prospective peer counsellors are:

- the desire and ability to help others; altruism, warmth and empathy; ability to care for and maintain relationships; sensitivity, friendliness and trustworthiness; patience and stability; and a high regard for confidentiality.
- good interpersonal communication skills; active listening skills, positive attending behaviour, questioning and problem-solving skills; a non-judgmental attitude; strong leadership traits; maturity; and the ability to handle conflict.
- congruency and genuineness; ability to express feelings and opinions openly (self-disclosure); flexibility; responsibility and reliability; an openness to experiences and a willingness towards continued development of self-awareness.
- participation in extra-curricular activities and in other peer help related activities.
- no previous record of substance abuse.
- an ability and willingness to be trained; ability to learn from training; receptiveness to the development of self-knowledge; ability to develop and to apply helping skills; ability to accept and undergo supervision and to fulfill the peer counselling roles and functions; knowledge about the community to be served.
- absence of any severe emotional problems that could interfere with peer counsellors' ability to be trained and to render a service to the student population (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Carr, 1981; de Rosenroll & Moyer, 1983; Keller, 1999; Lawson, 1989; McCarthy et al., 1975).

Stuart (1994) advocated the use of resilient adolescents as "... an untapped resource for peer

counseling programs" (p. 48). Resilient adolescents are students who have experienced and have overcome traumatic and abusive situations and who have emerged with a resiliency which enables them to cope with pressure. Typical characteristics of such students are empathy; above average social skills; increased responsibility; motivation to achieve; social maturity and a well developed value system. These characteristics are also found in natural helpers. Carr (1981) supported this view and is of the opinion that students who experience developmental problems could be of specific help to others struggling with similar concerns.

The ability and willingness to be trained and to learn from the training in such a manner that the theoretical training can be applied in practise, as well as the willingness to commit to regular supervision for on-going development and training, is important for the Unisa context and for peer helpers participating in this study. These peer helpers are rendering a service to a diverse group of students who vary in terms of race, age, gender, experience and career direction. Each client brings to the counselling session different challenges and demands. The peer helpers should therefore be willing to conduct self-directed learning activities to broaden their individual knowledge basis in such a manner that a quality service can be rendered to the broader student population.

Procedures and strategies used for selection

A variety of procedures and strategies are used to select the individual applicants who claim to possess the characteristics and attitudes mentioned previously. These include:
- interviews to screen applicants with regard to their strengths, weaknesses, interests and experience in helping
- completion of written application forms
- recommendations or nominations by fellow students, peer counsellors, as well as teachers, lecturers and professional counsellors. These can be based on personal characteristics such as warmth, caring and respect, or on grade point averages
- self-nominations

- empirical nominations based on techniques such as socio-grammatic analysis and objective criteria (Bowen et al., 1985; Bowman, 1986; Carr, 1988; Corn & Moore, 1992; Downe et al., 1986; Keller, 1999; Lawson, 1989; Morrill et al., 1987).

Bowman (1986) cautioned that many of these selection procedures and strategies demand a lot of effort from the supervisors but do not necessarily ensure or guarantee that the most appropriate peer counsellors are selected.

According to Keller (1999) programme organisers assess the helping characteristics and attitudes of the applicants with rating scales and checklists to rank their recommendations. This assessment is usually followed by individual and small group interviews, role playing exercises or even short written assignments. The interviews and role play exercises are aimed at assessing the applicant's helping characteristics and attitudes, while the written assignments, on the other hand, focus on exploring the applicant's interests and motivations for wanting to become a peer counsellor.

Final selection

The final selection of suitable peer counsellors may take place only after the core training has been completed (Keller, 1999; Lawson, 1989). The basis of this final selection could focus on the trainer and trainee evaluation of aspects such as attendance of the training programme and active participation in the experiential training exercises. During the final selection individual peer counsellors may also be assigned to specific helping roles as well as to a variety of functions.

PEER COUNSELLOR TRAINING

Varenhorst (1984) provided the following summary of the early training models developed to teach students basic human relations skills:

Table 4: Early Peer Counsellor Training Models

Training model	Detail and focus
Truax and Carkhuff (1967)	The researchers identified essential qualities believed to be "... related to the degree of positive change in clients" (p. 725). Scales were developed to measure these qualities. A model was designed which focussed on the training of adult professionals and/or adult lay counsellors. Critique against this model focussed on the lack of clarity on the training procedures; the lack of use of control groups; the fact that outcomes were not specified clearly and not researched thoroughly; that outcomes that were measured lacked validity; and that inadequate systematic follow-up studies were conducted.
G.M. Gazda (1973)	Gazda adapted Carkhuff's model and compiled a manual for elementary and secondary education. This model was aimed at trainers ranging from teachers and administrators to school psychologists and counsellors. The model focussed on the training in listening and communication skills and included extensive exercises. Critique against this model focussed on the fact that the model contained too many educational terms and that this created a problem when used with adolescents and other groups who were unfamiliar with these terms.
A.E. Ivey (1971, 1973)	Ivey translated the "... verbal behaviours of the Carkhuff model into behavioural response categories" (p. 726) to make the model more teachable. Ivey also formalised and added the aspect of "... attending behaviour" (p. 726). He emphasised that qualities such as "... warmth, positive regard and empathy" (p. 726) cannot be taught directly but stated that paraprofessionals can be taught to become "... more warmer [sic] and more empathetic" (p. 726). The model consisted of two clear approaches namely (1) an emphasis on training each skill separately, and (2) "... self-observations on video-tape" (p. 726). This model has been widely used in elementary and junior high schools and for the training of counsellors and senior medical students.
Danish and Hauer's Helping Skills Model (1973)	This model focussed on three components of training, namely: (1) the development of an understanding of the skills being taught (knowledge component); (2) observing others demonstrating the skills (modelling component); and (3) the opportunity to demonstrate the skill in practise (practical component). The skills were taught in a "... block building principle" (p. 727) where each session is based on the successful completion of the previous one. The training also included behavioural checklists and feedback from trainers and peers to determine whether specific levels of expertise have been reached.

Varenhorst (1984, pp. 725 - 727)

De Rosenroll and Moyer (1983) listed two current training models often used for the training of peer counsellors namely:

- *Curriculum Guide for Student Peer Counseling Training* compiled by Barbara Varenhorst (1981)
- *The Peer Counselling Starter Kit* compiled by R.A. Carr and G.A. Saunders (1980).

Minimum training time and duration of sessions

There are considerable differences in the literature about the minimum time required for peer counselling training. Some researchers regarded approximately six to sixteen hours as being the minimum (Bowman, 1986; Corn & Moore, 1992) while others suggested between thirty to fifty hours (Carr, 1981; Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Keller, 1999).

A range of different opinions have also been expressed about the duration of each session. According to Keller (1999) the training time per session ranged from between forty five minutes to three hours each. These training sessions occur either weekly or monthly, or alternatively over a period of one to three full days. A variety of factors such as the maturity level of the trainees, the goals of the programme, as well as the envisaged role and function of these trainees will, however, determine the duration of the sessions as well as the training period (Keller 1999).

Size of the training group

Another issue that requires attention is the size of the training group. Keller (1999) listed a variety of sources advocating the selection of smaller groups for training purposes. These sources indicated groups ranging from six to fifteen trainees at a time. The rationale for this is that such a group is "... more manageable, dynamic, interactive and compatible with a variety of training activities" (p. 22).

Bowman (1986), who focussed on the training of middle graders, suggested that smaller groups of about 6 trainees should be trained during the first year of implementation of the programme. In following years, and once the programme has been established, more students, but limited to eight, can be accommodated. This is echoed by Corn and Moore, (1992) who also advocated the training of smaller groups (6 - 10 students).

Myrick (cited in Keller, 1999) suggested that a longer training period should be allowed for if the size of the training groups extended to between eighteen and twenty four trainees. The motivation is to give all the trainees an opportunity to practise their skills under the supervision of the trainer. Another option with larger groups could be to subdivide the group and to train the smaller groups separately (Tindal & Salmon-White, cited in Keller, 1999).

Core training content

According to Keller (1999) and Morrill et al. (1987) the peer counselling training programme should be designed to fit the context in terms of user needs and to prepare the peer counsellors for the problems and concerns that they will have to deal with in a specific setting.

The training programmes may consist of different parts. The first part includes approximately twelve sessions which focusses on basic helping and communication skills and includes a combination of didactic and experiential learning exercises. The second part focusses on advanced training pertaining to specialised areas of concern and can be described as "supervised practicum" (de Jager, 1995, p. 6). Campbell (cited in Morrill et al., 1987) also suggested that the peer counselling programme should be designed in such a way that it not only fits the unique setting, but also matches the style of the programme coordinator.

Carr (1981, p. 6) advocated that "... a student-centered" rather than an "... agenda-centered" approach to training should be followed. Although the focus during training should be on the training process throughout the programme, the trainers should also remain sensitive to the

needs of the trainees. Carr felt that it is imperative that "... neither the structure nor the process act as a barrier to truly understanding and fully relating to our student trainees"(p. 6). This coincides with the study conducted by Rapmund (2000) which emphasised the necessity of freedom within structure.

The first part of the training sessions usually focus on the following topics and is offered in a logical and systematic sequence:

- an overview of the scope of peer counselling; an exploration of the nature and qualities of the helping relationship; creating non-threatening environments; positive ways to begin and end helping relationships

- awareness and understanding of self and others; confronting; congruency and genuineness; and the importance of values

- verbal and non-verbal attending; effective listening and communication skills; roadblocks to effective communication; warmth and empathy; skilful questioning and empathic responding skills; reflection and paraphrasing; positive and negative feedback and self-disclosure

- problem-solving and decision-making; and goal setting

- ethics, confidentiality and trust; procedures for referral to other sources of help; awareness of cross-cultural contexts; and independence of the helpee

- knowledge about other available resources (on-campus and in communities)

- provisional planning for peer counsellor activities and projects

- discussion of additional training topics and issues (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Bowman, 1986; de Jager, 1995; Downe et al., 1986; Keller, 1999; McIntyre, Thomas & Borgen, 1982).

To further ensure a student-centred approach within the peer counselling training programme, Carr (1981) held individual meetings with trainees after approximately thirty hours of training had taken place. During these sessions trainees received feedback about their performance during training; discussed the context or setting that the trainees preferred to work in; and

evaluated the readiness of the trainees to participate in specific projects. This provided trainees with the opportunity to volunteer to undergo training again, should they feel that they have not mastered some of the skills effectively.

Structure of the training sessions

The peer counselling training sessions usually follow a specific structure:

- Revision and the discussion of unfinished or old business; discussion of concerns; caring and sharing opportunities; and discussion of homework
- Overview of the learning outcomes or objectives of each session thus creating an awareness of the study session
- Warm-up exercises or energisers
- Short lecturette focussing on a specific skill
- Demonstration or modelling of the skills
- Practise and application of skills in role-play exercises (experiential learning)
- Debriefing discussion
- Closure and summary of proceedings
- Short period to allow students to make journal notes (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Carr, 1981; de Jager, 1995; de Rosenroll & Dey, 1990; Keller, 1999; McCarthy et al., 1975; McIntyre et al., 1982).

Bowman (1986, p. 224) emphasised that a balance between "... skill practice and concept building" is important to ensure the successful training of peer counsellors.

Additional training

A variety of issues can be dealt with in the advanced or additional training modules. These included the following:

Table 5: Summary of advanced / additional training issues

• crisis intervention and suicide prevention • family issues; relationship problems ; and divorce • emotional issues such as depression; death and bereavement; coping with terminal illness • drug and alcohol abuse • dealing with peer pressure • issues focussing on sexuality such as intimacy; sexually transmitted diseases; birth control; HIV/Aids counselling; sexual abuse and harassment; child abuse • confidentiality and trust	• life skills training focussing on developing assertive behaviour; managing stress; building self-confidence and self-esteem; self-awareness and understanding • academic and study skills; and student orientation • the implementation, management and expansion of the peer counselling centres; the utilisation of community resources • problem-solving and goal structuring • management of conflict and confronting skills

(Bowman, 1986; Carr, 1988; Corn & Moore, 1992; Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Keller, 1999; McCarthy et al., 1975; Nassar & Collins-Eaglin, 1994).

Bowman (1986) cautioned that trainers should not attempt to include all these topics in one programme as it would extend the training period over a number of years.

Some of the issues mentioned above can be viewed as sensitive, and Gougeon (1989) cautioned that training in such issues could be controversial. Gougeon stated that project leaders might feel uncomfortable about providing the necessary training, lack the knowledge or confidence to provide such training, or feel that these areas should not be dealt with by peer counsellors. To address these issues Gougeon provided guidelines for the inclusion of special topics in the training of peer counsellors, namely:

•   Peer counsellors should have received a minimum of at least 30 hours of training in basic helping skills before being introduced to special issues training.

•   The special issues to be focussed on should be those that the peer counsellors are most likely to encounter during service delivery.

•   Peer counsellors should participate in the decision on which special issues are to be included in the training.

- Special issues can also be identified through information gained from community sources.

- The need for training in special issues may also develop as the peer counsellors continue to render a service. It is imperative that programme coordinators remain open to these developments as these could be pointers for future programme development.

- Guest speakers can be invited to add special insight into special issues. Programme coordinators should, however, monitor the selection of these individuals carefully.

Experiential techniques and activities

Carr (1981) emphasised that the training model should be based on experiential learning aimed at systematically promoting skills development in practice. Keller (1999, p. 25) cited D'Andrea and Salovey and stated that experiential learning activities such as "... role play exercises; group discussions; didactical presentations; step wise development of skills; integration of skills and video-recorded training" all form part of a successful training programme.

A wide selection of experiential training techniques and activities are available for peer counsellor training and supervision. These include: energisers such as ice breakers and social games; exercises to promote group cohesion; role play and fish bowl exercises; written and audio-visual case studies; small group exercises and group discussions; problem-solving exercises; written assignments and exercises; workbooks containing work sheets as well as space for personal notes; opportunities to reflect on individual performance during individual or group exercises as well as on counselling experiences; and demonstration of skills development via audio- and video-tape recordings (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Gougeon, 1989; Keller, 1999).

Role play exercises are conducted in pairs of two trainees (dyads) or groups of three trainees (triads) who alternate the roles of peer counsellor / helper; helpee / client and observer. The

rationale for alternating these roles is to allow the trainees to (1) gain experience in each of these roles and to become sensitive to the role that peer counsellors would play as helpers; (2) gain an understanding of what the helping relationship entails; (3) facilitate discussions based on individual helping experiences; and (4) promote reflection in order to develop self-knowledge (Keller, 1999; McIntyre et al., 1982).

Reflection on experiences is therefore critical to determine what has been learnt and is the training activity that most students prefer (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Keller, 1999; McCarthy et al., 1975; McIntyre et al., 1982). Students can make reflective notes in journals or notebooks and these can focus on field experiences; feelings about training; personal assessments of their performance during counselling sessions; and any other peer counselling concern. These activities all add to the development of self-knowledge, supplement the basic training and supervision and promote the total learning experience (Carr, 1988; Keller, 1999).

PEER COUNSELLING SUPERVISION

Regular supervision is an important training aspect for peer counsellors and is provided on an on-going basis in some programmes (McIntyre et al., 1982). Supervision creates an opportunity for the peer counsellors to deal with concerns about their functioning and to receive feedback, support and encouragement from the project leaders. It is furthermore an opportunity for "... discussing strategies, reinforcing skills, considering referrals, and providing group support" (p. 32). A direct benefit of regular supervision sessions is the continued fostering of group cohesion (Blain & Brusko, 1985).

A variety of individuals can provide support and supervision to the peer counsellors. These include peer counsellor trainers / group leaders; helping professionals; peer counsellors themselves; counselling psychology students on a master's and doctoral level; and other suitably trained resource staff (Keller, 1999; McIntyre et al., 1982; Osborn & Cassidy, 2001). Lewis and Lewis (1996) conducted research in the Washington State district and found a

disconcerting incidence of suicides amongst adolescents in schools where the peer counselling programmes are supervised by non-counselling personnel. Lewis and Lewis (1996, p. 312) stated emphatically that "... school officials should seriously consider the potential dangers that may be associated with assigning supervision of peer helping programmes to anyone other than a master's level counselor or other similarly trained mental health professional".

This is of particular importance for the South African context where some student counsellors supervising peer counselling programmes at tertiary institutions, have not been trained on a master's or equivalent level. Having appropriately trained individuals to supervise peer counsellors is especially important for peer counselling programmes which address problems beyond the basic academic and developmental issues (Lewis & Lewis, 1996). With the increase of HIV infected students on South African campuses and the trend of peer counselling services to get involved in HIV care and counselling, supervision by appropriately trained individuals becomes crucial.

The current situation in South Africa, therefore, also highlights the importance of utilising other means of monitoring the growth, development and functions of peer counsellors / helpers on an on-going basis.

Functions and mechanisms of supervision

Keller (1999) consulted a number of researchers and provided a summary of the functions of supervision, namely to:

- create opportunities to share and discuss peer counsellor experiences and individual progress. This includes discussions focussing on the peer counselling roles, functions and perceptions; reflections on role plays and case work scenarios; reflection on and discussion of counselling skills and responses, which all promote positive group cohesion.

- discuss and explore critical concerns such as ethics; to determine boundaries for peer counselling roles and functions; and to discuss user frequency and types of problems dealt with.

- discuss the procedure of effective referrals and to assist peer counsellors to recognise when issues and problem areas are beyond the scope of their training and capabilities; to stipulate clear boundaries with regard to the peer counselling relationship; and to inform trainees about other sources of help on campus or in communities.

- provide general information; and to discuss additional training focussing on further skills development.

- provide support to peer counsellors with other counselling activities and projects.

- receive feedback from supervisors and project leaders with regard to "... the impact of the peer counselling programme, peer counsellor performance and programme activities" (p. 31).

In addition to the interactive discussion in one-on-one and group contexts, Keller (1999) furthermore provided a list of other mechanisms and strategies that can be used to conduct supervision namely by: direct supervision where the supervisor silently observes the functioning of peer counsellors during counselling sessions; reviewing video and tape-recordings of counselling sessions; presenting special issues or life skills training either weekly or monthly; inviting guest speakers, who are experts in their fields, to offer additional training; providing peer counsellors with training materials and other notes on referral sources on campus and in communities; and by arranging visits to other helping services to broaden the knowledge base of peer counsellors.

Support for the peer counsellors themselves

The importance of support for the peer counsellors themselves is also critical. Robinson et al. (1991) cautioned project leaders that although the peer counselling centre can be visited by

"... openly troubled students" (p. 39), they must guard against making these students their sole responsibility. The peer counsellors dealing with such students also need support and mechanisms should be put in place to get feedback on how the peer counsellors are coping themselves. Carr (1993) supported this view and stated that such support is especially critical during the implementation phase of the programme.

In the study conducted by Lewis and Lewis (1996) many participants raised concerns about the time and effort that it takes to provide, not only ongoing support and supervision for the peer counsellors themselves, but also the huge input required to manage such a programme. It is suggested that mechanisms should be put into place to allow peer counsellors to work closely with programme supervisors, thus creating the opportunity to be observed on a regular basis. This will enable the programme supervisors to detect peer counsellors-at-risk at an early stage.

It is envisaged that the requirement of portfolios within the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme and the emphasis on regular reflection on experiences, will result in a mechanism, namely the portfolio, which will facilitate close collaboration between project leaders and individual peer helpers. It is hoped that such collaboration will provide a reciprocal feedback loop and also allow project leaders to closely monitor individual peer helpers.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOGISTICS

Peer counsellors render a variety of services in colleges and university contexts, namely through walk-in-services as opposed to making specific appointments; by managing telephone hot lines; by providing general information about the institution; and by supporting peers with personal matters (Lawson, 1989).

Support is also provided outside of the peer counselling centres namely during team sport events to support fellow students who, for example, have not been selected for teams, or who seem lonely and without any friends. According to Carr (1981) this fosters the informal and

spontaneous nature of peer helping and allows the peer helpers to develop and hone their skills.

During service delivery peer counsellors can be required to keep daily logs to monitor the quality of the service rendered. Statistical information in the form of monthly statistics, mid-year and year-end reports can also be required. Peer counsellors can also be expected to attend individual or group meetings with the programme leader which can take place on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis. The aims of these meetings is to ensure the continuance of programme development as well as to monitor the achievement of goals (Lawson, 1989).

PEER COUNSELLOR DUTIES

Salovey and D' Andrea (1984, p. 263)) conducted research amongst 200 college and university counselling services and published a list of the types of problems which are often brought to peer counsellors. These ranged from the most to the least frequently encountered, namely:

Table 6: Summary of types of problems that peer counsellors deal with

1	Academic difficulties	4	Career / Future anxieties	7	Monetary problems
2	Friendship relationships	5	Depression	8	Sexual problems
3	Romantic relationships	6	Parental difficulties	9	Suicide

According to D'Andrea (1987) peer counsellors are not often approached with sensitive issues such as suicide and sexuality, although depression is often broached with them.

The following general duties of peer counsellors at higher education level have been found in the literature consulted: (1) assistance with the selection of major subjects and other courses; (2) clarification and explanation of the institution's policies and procedures; (3) student

orientation and adjustment to higher education; (4) peer support in residences; (5) crisis counselling; (8) self-help groups focussed on special interests; and (9) referral sources to professional counsellors (Frisz, 1986; and Keller, 1999).

According to the research conducted by Osborn and Cassidy (2001) one of the major drawbacks of rendering a service in the peer counselling centre is the long duty periods with only a few clients coming for help. To address this problem, Osborn and Cassidy (2001) suggested that direct assignments should be given to the peer counsellors which could be completed during the "down times" (p. 105) in the peer help office, thus encouraging the peer counsellors to use the available resources more effectively and alleviate the frustration of waiting for clients to contact them for help. Duties that could be conducted during the times of low user frequency would include materials development in the form of leaflets and Internet searches related to career development.

This is of particular importance for peer help programmes in general, and for the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme specifically, where the number of students on campus fluctuates daily and the user frequency of the peer help service varies considerably. Self-directed learning activities can be conducted when the user frequency is low.

PERSONAL GROWTH OF THE PEER COUNSELLORS

Peer counselling programmes have proven to be beneficial, not only to the target groups that they support, but the peer counsellors themselves also gained from the training they received (Blain & Brusko,1985; Bowman, 1986; Carr, 1988; de Rosenroll, 1986b; Downe et al., 1986; Foster-Harrison, 1995; Gougeon, 1989; Lawson, 1989; McCarthy et al., 1975; Osborn & Cassidy, 2001; Robinson et al., 1991). A number of researchers have listed the following as areas of growth:

Table 7: Summary of areas of peer counsellor growth

• altruism • decrease in depression • "... enhanced psycho-social maturity" (Hampton & Norman, 1997) • increased ability to cope with difficult situations and developing a non-judgmental attitude • increased ability to form friendships, improved relationship with parents and others and the development of more nurturing relationships • increased development in positive behaviour such as assertiveness, dealing with peer pressure, and the reduction of anxiety in social situations • improved listening skills	• increased opportunities for role trial for professions such as teaching, counselling and mental health • increased practical communication and helping skills • increased self-definition, self-awareness and self-knowledge; and improved self-esteem • awareness of personal feelings and insight into individual functioning and issues • intellectual and personal growth • positive decision-making skills • appreciation for diversity within the group • enhanced confidence • improved academic performance • improved job hunting skills

(Carr, 1988; Corn & Moore, 1992; D'Andrea, 1987; de Rosenroll, 1986b; de Rosenroll & Moyer, 1983; Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Garcia, Metha, Perfect & McWhirter, cited in Osborn & Cassidy, 2001; Gougeon, 1989; Hampton & Norman, 1997; Keller, cited in Osborn & Cassidy, 2001; Osborn & Cassidy, 2001; Robinson et al., 1991; Varenhorst, cited in Osborn & Cassidy, 2001).

According to Lyons (cited in D'Andrea, 1987, p. 45) the benefits that peer counsellors gain from participating in peer counselling programmes provide them with not only opportunities for learning new skills, but also allow them to practise what they have learnt.

Puchkoff and Font-Padron (1990) stated that although it is a known fact that "... participation in peer-counseling programs may help student counselors to develop personal and vocational skills that are transferable to a wide range of work settings", little research has been conducted about this issue. This motivated Puchkoff and Font-Padron to conduct research to determine which personal and vocational skills are developed as a result of participation in peer help programmes on the one hand, and which of these skills, on the other hand, can be transferred to a work setting. Although the response rate on their questionnaires was low and

prevented any generalisations, important results were achieved, namely that:

- participation in the peer counselling programme was rated as "... one of the most valuable growth experiences during [the] college years" (p. 571).

- skills acquired as a result of participation in the programme were helpful both on a personal developmental level as well as in the development of job-related skills.

- the skills developed through participation in the programme could be used at university and college level, during work interviews and in current posts.

- by participating in the programme, peer counsellors gained experience and a taste of what their future careers would entail.

It is clear from the research cited that peer counsellors experience growth as a result of participation in peer counselling programmes. The fundamental research question for this study is whether the process of portfolio development allows peer counsellors/helpers to monitor such individual growth and development.

PROGRAMME EVALUATION

From the literature consulted for this study it appeared as if peer help programme evaluation is an area of concern for a number of leaders in this field (Carr, cited in Carr, Yanishewski & de Rosenroll, 1989; Frisz & Lane, 1987; Lawson, 1989; Morrill et al., 1987). According to Frisz and Lane (1987) the counselling profession has not put much effort into systematically evaluating its services. The evaluations that have been done, however, were described by Frisz and Lane, as of a "... poor quality" (p. 241). Despite the fact that it can be difficult to evaluate peer help programmes (Morrill et al., 1987), evaluation is essential to determine programme effectiveness, both for the benefit of the clients as well as for the institutions (Frisz & Lane, 1987). Evaluations were also viewed as critical for accountability and for the maintenance of peer counselling programmes (Frisz & Lane, 1987; and Morrill et al., 1987).

Carr (1988) conducted a survey amongst 650 peer programmes in Canada and found that

less than 12% of these programmes conducted any systematic evaluations. More than 80% of the participants in this survey stated that although they regarded evaluations as important, they lacked a model to conduct such a process.

According to Altmann et al. (1986, p. 86) programme evaluation is critical to provide a "... feedback loop" and to generate information to enable the project coordinators to amend and to adjust procedures to ensure that desired outcomes are reached. Morey et al. (1989) emphasised that in order to improve the effectiveness of peer counselling programmes, greater understanding should be developed for the issues that students broach with the peer counsellors on the one hand, as well as the level of satisfaction that these students gain from the services that they have received. The feedback that such evaluations provide can, in turn, be used to improve the training and supervision of peer counsellors - thus acting as the 'feedback loop' that Altmann et al. (1986) proposed.

Peer counselling programme evaluations focus mostly on three areas namely the assessment of:
- the effect on the peer counsellors themselves
- the integration of skills and knowledge used in the peer counselling process
- the outcomes of peer counselling and the effect on the institution (Altmann et al., 1986; Downe et al., 1986; Henriksen, 1991; Keller, 1999).

Peer counselling programme assessment and peer counsellor evaluation are conducted by the following instruments:

Table 8: Summary of peer counsellor and peer programme evaluation instruments

Peer counsellor evaluation	Peer programme assessment
• listing strengths and weaknesses • feedback from other sources • checklists • personality and self-appraisal inventories • questionnaires • case-studies and anecdotal reports • interviews • log books and diaries • facilitative-skills checklists • video and audio recordings to assess the integration and application of knowledge and skills during the helping process	• recording of statistics • pre and post test methods • completion of evaluation forms or questionnaires by peer counsellors and tutors • user survey reports • self-reporting methods (such as month end and mid-year reports, and case studies) • interviews with tutors and peer counsellors • letters of recommendation • statistics on percentage of students passing

(Altmann et al., 1986; Carr, 1988; Keller, 1999; Lawson, 1989; Morrill et al., 1987).

According to Morrill et al. (1987) many of the methods used to evaluate peer helping programmes are often based on subjective interpretations. More reliable and objective methods would include the collating of statistics on the number of students reached and the types of cases dealt with.

Downe et al. (1986) stated that evaluation instruments should only be designed once the needs of a specific setting have been determined. The evaluation instruments can then be used to determine whether the identified needs were indeed met. A number of peer counselling instruments have been developed to conduct evaluative research (Altmann et al., 1986, and Morey et al., 1993). These are:

* *The Peer Counseling Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire (PCCSQ)* designed by Morey and Miller (1987) to measure overall satisfaction with the peer counselling service.

* *The Peer Counseling Helping Style Questionnaire (PCHSQ)* designed by Morey and Miller (1988) to assess students' preferences with regard to helping styles.

- *The Peer Counsellors Effectiveness Inventory for Individuals (PCEII),* and *The Peer Counsellor Group Effectiveness Inventory (PCGEI)*, both developed by McIntyre, Thomas and Borgen (1982).

According to Foster-Harrison (1995) both formative and summative evaluation should be instituted. Formative evaluation should start as soon as the students begin rendering a service and should be integral to the learning process. Summative evaluation should be conducted at the end of each module to determine whether outcomes have been reached, as well as after completion of the whole course.

In the absence of objective means to evaluate peer counselling programmes, Blain and Brusko (1985) relied on subjective evidence to confirm the successes of their programme. This subjective evidence included the following:

- an annual increase in the number and quality of the students that are recommended by faculties to become peer counsellors.
- the evidence that peer counsellors continued to major in helping professions after their peer counselling experience in college.
- an annual increase in student referrals from staff members.
- positive comments with regard to peer counselling interventions from counsellees, parents and staff, and
- administrative and financial support for the programme from management.

In summary, it therefore seems as if confusion still exists on how peer help programmes as well as peer counsellors themselves should be evaluated. There also does not seem to be consensus on what would constitute a comprehensive evaluation programme. This aspect is therefore clearly an issue that would require future research.

CONCLUSION

Peer counselling / helping is based on the premise that students contact fellow students when they are experiencing problems and concerns. To empower these 'natural helpers' to assist their peers, a number of aspects should receive attention namely: the selection of suitable helpers by means of specific recruitment and selection techniques; training based on a comprehensive core training programme which empowers them with basic helping and communication skills; and supplementing the core training with advanced training focussing on special issues. The training also requires regular supervision by suitably trained staff members. The aims of the supervision sessions are to reinforce skills and provide a platform to discuss peer counsellor concerns and problems. Once trained, the peer counsellors render a variety of services ranging from managing a walk-in service to providing informal off-campus support. The final aspect that needs attention is evaluation, a process through which a 'feedback loop' is created which allows programme coordinators to adapt their training and supervision programmes.

Through participation in the programme the peer counsellors grow and develop important skills. Peer helping is therefore also about empowerment:

> The peer model empowers school counsellors and it empowers students; it empowers them individually and it empowers them collectively in the system. Peer work broadens the impact counsellors can have on young people, their families and the educational system (Erney,cited in Carr et al., 1989, p. 24).

Peer counselling is therefore a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved in the programme:

> We all benefit from this power. Peer counsellors gain in self-esteem and confidence; students gain more support from other students; the school community gains a caring environment; and professionals gain better contact with the silent majority (Cole, cited in Carr et al., 1989, p. 26).

It is evident that peer helpers themselves gain from participating in peer help activities. There is, however, a gap in the literature specifically in demonstrating how peer helpers themselves can monitor the personal growth and development which results through participation in the programme and how they can use such information for their own career development. The aim of this study is therefore to demonstrate how the participants, who act as peer helpers within the Unisa Peer Help Volunteer Programme, use portfolios as career tools to fill this gap.