

The Disabling Bullet Project: A Trainer's Manual

PURPOSE OF THE TRAINER'S MANUAL

Mentor programs have been used widely to foster academic and vocational success in a variety of settings, including schools, outreach programs, job training sites, and hospitals. In addition, mentoring programs may be particularly useful in assisting individuals in adjusting to various forms of disability. The impact of mentoring can be especially powerful when the mentor is also a peer. In fact, in a study of individuals with newly-acquired spinal cord injury, peer-mentoring was mentioned as influential in promoting personal change (Hammel, 1999).

This manual was based on four years of experience conducting a peer-mentoring program among individuals with violently-acquired spinal cord injuries (VASCI). It is intended to be a resource for individuals who are interested in implementing a peer-mentoring program. Similar to a "teacher's manual," this manual can be used in tandem with the companion **Peer Mentor Training Manual** to train individuals with VASCI to become mentors for individuals with newer injuries, or for those who have had difficulty dealing with their injuries. Although this manual offers suggestions for a peer-mentor model based on the needs of young people with spinal cord injuries as a result of gunshot trauma, we strongly believe that many sites (including hospitals, centers for independent living, youth centers, and schools) working with a variety of populations (list examples?) could benefit from this training tool.

This trainer's manual should not be considered as an inflexible tool that must be used in the same manner across different environments and circumstances. Rather, we have included information about what we have learned while developing this program in the hope that this knowledge can be used as a starting point for others to use as they see fit.

Although this may be your first exposure to this manual, it has already gone through many revisions: We have expanded and modified sections, clarified examples, and in general honed its contents to reflect feedback from the individuals who participated in the training. We anticipate that incorporating new insights and lessons learned from future implementations can and should lead to further revisions of and additions to program content. Ultimately, we recognize that sites often differ in important ways, and we encourage you to adapt this manual to better suit the needs of your particular site. It is our hope, in fact, that this is precisely what happens.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The Disabling Bullet Project was developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), in collaboration with Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital. Prior to the development of this project, Schwab had already been encouraging the development of informal relationships between their new and former patients with violently-acquired spinal cord injuries (VASCI). Schwab recognized the positive impact of these relationships and suggested to a UIC researcher that a more formal program with training and supervision be developed. The university researcher wrote a grant to the Department of Education, and the Disabling Bullet Project was born. A UIC research group proceeded to pilot the project at three hospital sites, including Schwab, National Rehabilitation Hospital, and Oak Forest Hospital. The lessons learned from these implementations are represented in the following manual.

Peer-mentors are dedicated to helping others. They offer emotional support, words of advice, and information about community resources. Typically, they are able to help others because they can share their own unique life experiences and knowledge. For the Disabling Bullet Project, young people with VASCI have been trained to mentor individuals who have recently acquired a spinal cord injury as a result of violence. These peer mentors have been paired with individuals with newer injuries (mentees) in a hospital setting, and help them to "learn the ropes" in adjusting both emotionally and physically to their injuries. Through the provision of information, role modeling, and social support, peer mentors become an additional resource to facilitate the rehabilitation and community reintegration of their mentees. The procedures that follow provide an outline of the steps that were used in implementing the Disabling Bullet Project peer-mentoring program at three rehabilitation hospitals, Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital (Chicago, IL), Oak Forest Hospital (Oak Forest, IL), and National Rehabilitation Hospital (Washington, D.C.). The steps are presented in a chronological sequence, although it is anticipated that there may be some overlap between them. As indicated earlier, these procedures should be viewed as guidelines that can be modified based upon the characteristics of your particular site.

GETTING STARTED

I. Identifying a peer-mentor supervisor

Initiating and maintaining a program that involves peer mentors works best when a hospital staff member is designated to oversee the work, progress, and responsibilities of those working on the project. The peer-mentor supervisor is someone who:

- Recruits and trains mentors
- Identifies and assigns mentees to project mentors
- Coordinates the activities of the mentors

- Provides advice, feedback, and information to mentors regarding their relationships with their mentees at weekly meetings with the mentors

Given the central role of the peer-mentor supervisor, it is important to identify someone for the job who:

- Is a hospital staff member who has clinical experience working with individuals with spinal cord injuries (for example, a social worker, psychologist, or a physical or occupational therapist)
- Demonstrates commitment to the goals of the project
- Has the time and resources available to supervise and oversee the work-related activities of the Peer-Mentors (typically between four to six hours weekly)

In previous implementations, the position of peer mentor supervisor has been effectively held by a social worker or occupational therapist, although it is certainly feasible that other professionals within the hospital could serve in this role as well.

See Appendix A for the Disabling Bullet Project Peer-Mentor Supervisor Job Description

II. Recruiting peer-mentors

- Consult with staff members who have a good deal of contact with VASCI patients and compile a list of names and phone numbers of potential peer-mentors. Trust and listen to the recommendations you get from your contacts: Some may know potential peer-mentors fairly well and thus can provide valuable insight. Keep in mind that good mentors are often individuals who are visible even before the project begins, and thus can be contacted easily.
- If recruitment from within your site is not appropriate, or does not lead to the selection of a sufficient number of viable candidates to fill the peer-mentoring positions, the following approaches may prove helpful as well:
 - o Use "snowball" techniques, such as getting referrals from peer-mentor candidates as they are interviewed
 - o Participate in local disability job fairs
 - o Distribute flyers to disability-related organizations and agencies
 - o Advertise by using local forms of media - the radio, newspaper, and television

III. Screening peer-mentors

Keep in mind who you are looking for and what their qualifications should be. For instance, peer-mentors should:

- Have had a violently-acquired spinal cord injury for at least two years
- Have completed their rehabilitation and be medically stable
- Be making positive gains in their lives in the areas of employment, education, recreation, and/or independent living
- Have accepted their disability
- Be able to listen to others, empathize, and be willing to share their experiences about living life with a disability
- Not be involved in gangs or illegal activities

See Appendix B for the Disabling Bullet Project Peer-Mentor Job Description

IV. Applying for the peer-mentor position

- Have potential peer-mentors complete an application that includes questions about their:
 - Injury
 - Rehabilitation experience
 - Reactions to their disability
 - Qualifications (for example, interpersonal skills and work history)
 - References
 - Availability
- Find out if additional application materials are required by your site, especially if peer-mentors are being hired as employees or will be working as volunteers.

See Appendix C for the Disabling Bullet Project Peer-Mentor Application

V. Interviewing peer-mentors

- Interview each applicant and ask questions similar to those on the employment application. It is important to hear how applicants talk about their lives and their disability. It is also important to observe their listening skills.
- Ask interviewees more generally about their thoughts concerning mentorship.
- Share the peer-mentor job description with each applicant and ask if they have any questions or comments.

VI. Hiring peer-mentors

- Throughout the hiring process, share your impressions with other key staff who have regular contact with VASCI patients. They may know some of the applicants and their perspectives can be informative.
- Notify all applicants as soon as possible about your hiring decisions. Whether they are being hired or not, highlight their strengths and recommend other positions within your site or other sites that they may be qualified for.
- Keep in mind additional hiring procedures at your site. These may include a physical examination, criminal background check, and a drug screening.

VII. Training peer-mentors

The Disabling Bullet **Peer Mentor Training Manual** is the main tool for training peer-mentors. It includes chapters and sessions on:

- The importance of mentors
- Disability awareness
- Building and fostering effective helping relationships
- Supervision
- Community resources

Throughout the manual, there are exercises and role-plays that aim to engage peer-mentors in the training sessions. "Tips" are also inserted in the instructors' manual in order to facilitate the training and encourage participation from peer-mentors. "Tips" for the instructor are clearly distinguishable by the letter "**I**" (for "Instructor"):

Example:

I: "What is a mentor?" Go around the room and encourage participants' responses before proceeding to the next page.

In our experience, we have found that training works best in a group setting. In addition, training is enhanced when group discussion is encouraged, rather than adopting a lecture-oriented format. (The tips included throughout the trainer's manual often note effective times to solicit discussion.) Further, it is often effective to include in the training individuals who are already experienced peer mentors, as they can assist in answering questions, share their experiences, and model appropriate mentoring skills and behaviors for trainees.

Our experience suggests that training also works best when it is conducted over several days or sessions (e.g., five days, with three- or four-hour sessions per day). This allows ample time for discussion for each chapter, and provides trainees with more opportunity to assimilate important information. In addition, peer mentor trainees can ask questions during sessions about things that might have been unclear during previous sessions.

In the past, training has been conducted by peer mentor supervisors along with project staff from the university and a current peer-mentor from another site. Although it may be helpful to have co-leaders, the availability of only one trainer should not significantly compromise training: A training style that encourages participation often results in the trainees naturally assuming facilitator roles.

Please note that there may be situations when new peer-mentors need to be hired after the project has begun (e.g., an original peer mentor may leave his or her position to take another job). In such situations, it may be necessary to train new peer-mentors in an individual format to ensure that they acquire the requisite skills before beginning their relationships with their mentees. If more than one new peer-mentor is hired around the same time, a small-group training format may be both effective and efficient. Individual sites are encouraged to adapt these training guidelines to their own unique circumstances.

MAINTAINING PEER-MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

I. Supervising/Providing support:

Peer mentoring can often be a dynamic process that leads to novel or specific situations, depending on the circumstances of a given mentee. While training provides peer mentors with a solid foundation for addressing such situations, it is also true that it is impossible to predict and thus train for every imaginable outcome. Ongoing supervision with the peer-mentor supervisor is intended to address the unique issues that arise within each peer mentor/mentee relationship, and to keep the peer-mentor supervisor informed about the details of the developing peer-mentor/mentee relationships.

The peer-mentor supervisor should have weekly contact with mentors regarding their relationships with each mentee. This contact can be in the form of one-to-one meetings, or the supervisor and peer-mentors can meet together as a group. The group approach may be more advantageous, as it often encourages group discussion and personal growth. A group approach may provide peer-mentors with valuable learning opportunities, as they can freely ask questions and offer suggestions to each other. This provides them yet another opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and learn from each others' experiences as well as their own.

If using a group supervision format, particular attention should be paid to maintaining confidentiality with regard to mentees' information. As important as it is in general, the concept of confidentiality becomes particularly important when using a group format, as it must be clear to peer mentors that any information learned about other mentees must not be discussed outside of group supervision (e.g., in public areas within the site, such as a cafeteria or recreation room). The training manual includes useful information and exercises that address confidentiality: This should be considered an area of special relevance during training.

In the past, peer mentor supervision has been conducted within a group format, and this was accomplished without significant risk to the confidentiality of mentees. This was achieved by stressing the importance of confidentiality during training, and by offering frequent reminders of confidentiality during supervision sessions.

II. Tracking progress on mentees' goals:

It is strongly recommended that a "contact sheet" be completed for every contact a peer-mentor has with a mentee. This sheet provides documentation regarding the date, duration, and type of contact that is being made. In addition, it allows for the identification and tracking of issues being discussed and goals being set with each mentee. The peer-mentor should be responsible for completing contact sheets, and contact sheets should be referred to during supervision. These sheets are beneficial in terms of allowing the supervisor to monitor mentor-mentee contacts, as well as allowing mentors to note their interactions with each mentee in order to track progress. For these reasons, it may be most helpful for mentors to keep copies of these completed sheets in a binder to allow them to refer to them as needed.

See Appendix D for Contact Sheet

III. Strengthening the job skills of peer-mentors:

For many peer-mentors in the Disabling Bullet Project, being a peer-mentor was their first real job experience. We found that the peer-mentor supervisor and other support staff needed to teach, build, and reinforce certain job skills (including being on time for meetings, calling when sick or late, completing required paperwork, and abiding by dress codes). Responsibilities, expectations, and consequences should be made clear as early as

possible in order to minimize misinterpretation and ambiguity, and mentors may need to be reminded of these job requirements occasionally.

EVALUATING THE PEER-MENTORS

Every three to six months, the peer-mentor supervisor should formally evaluate peer-mentors. The purpose of this evaluation is to:

- Provide feedback to mentors regarding their performance in such areas as:
 - Attendance at project-related meetings
 - Completing appropriate paperwork thoroughly and on time
 - Following through on peer-mentor supervisor recommendations
 - Developing positive and productive relationships with mentees on their caseload
 - Demonstrating competency regarding issues of mentee confidentiality and safety
 - Following site regulations

- Receive feedback from the mentors regarding their impressions of how the program is going, and what aspects may need to be refined, improved, or strengthened.

See Appendix E for Peer-Mentor Evaluation Form

EVALUATING THE PEER-MENTOR PROGRAM

Evaluation is essential whenever a new program is developed and implemented. It allows for the identification of program strengths and weaknesses. An evaluation of a peer-mentor program can be conducted in a number of ways, using a combination of methods and sources. Your evaluation should serve your particular site and resources. The evaluation tools that we have used are listed below:

- **Interviews** - Periodic interviews could be conducted with 1) peer-mentors, 2) mentees, and 3) staff. We have developed a number of interviews to assess the effectiveness of the Disabling Bullet Project with these three groups.

See Appendix F for Peer-Mentor, Mentee, and Staff Interviews

- **Measures** - Measures in the areas of community integration, disability identity, goal-setting, and social support can also be used to assess change over time within both mentees and peer-mentors. Contingent upon your site's priorities, other measures might assess for general psychological functioning (e.g., depression and anxiety) and characteristics that are related to motivation (e.g., self-efficacy, hope, locus of control, and/or optimism). We urge you to find (or develop) measures that are most applicable for your site.

• **Observations** - Observation of the peer-mentor and mentee interactions by the project supervisor and other staff can provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the program.

FUNDING:

An unavoidable issue for many programs is how to sustain the provision of valuable services to a target population. Projects with modest operating costs - including this peer mentoring program - nevertheless often require ongoing financial resources provided through external sources. Although a detailed discussion of how to secure funding is beyond the scope of this outline, we have provided below a list of websites that may prove helpful should your site wish to seek outside funding.

- Finding Funders:
 - <http://fdncenter.org/funders/>

- Grant writing:
 - http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm
 - <http://www.actionforchange.org/getstarted/howto-grants.html>
 - <http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm>

- Fundraising:
 - <http://www.actionforchange.org/getstarted/howto-fundraise.html>

Need to get websites here- let's talk about this- there are grant-writing websites and funding clearinghouses we can list. Perhaps we can briefly outline types of funding people can go for, including broadly federal and foundation. We can provide some direction regarding what each of these types of funding require (ie, federal requires more research)?

CONCLUSION:

It is our hope that this manual will provide an informative guide with which to structure an educational and effective training program for peer mentors with VASCI, while also allowing enough flexibility for individuals trainers to modify it as you deem necessary for your own needs. We wish you the best in your efforts!

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The Disabling Bullet Website:
http://www.uic.edu/orgs/empower/dis_bullet.htm