



Ontario Peer Development Initiative: Our history and the evolution of our mission, vision and values

Our history

"I recall a friend of mine saying, 'they don't tell you that when you get out you're going to have no friends, no money, no job and you're going to live in this crummy place'. One of the huge difficulties of getting out of hospital is that - depending on how long your stay has been - you're likely to be absolutely disconnected from everything. This means that your friends will likely be gone, your family may be gone, you won't have a job and there is a high likelihood that you will be poor."

David Reville, Psychiatric Survivor and Consultant
(from OPDI's 'From Madhouse to Our House' film, 2005)

The 1970's and the 1980's saw the beginning of a new vision for mental illness recovery through community support. The hope was that people with mental illness could be treated in general hospitals - by their own family doctor - and mental hospitals could be used for specialized and more complex services. This process was called Deinstitutionalization.

Part of this new vision was the belief that consumers (those with direct experience within the mental health system) could support one another and create changes in their communities and the mental health system as a whole. The problem was a serious underestimation of the kind of community support people needed.

In Ontario, as a result of groundbreaking reports such as the Toward a Shared Direction in Ontario (1987) and Building Community Support for People (Graham Report, 1988), funding was directed to the first Consumer Survivor Initiative (CSI) in 1991. With a staff of six (three consumer/survivors and three non-consumers), the Consumer Survivor Development Initiative (CSDI) began its operations in the spring of that year.

CSDI was a project designed to tap the skills and knowledge of people who had direct experience in the mental health services system, and provide them with support and employment opportunities.

By the middle of June 1991, funding decisions had been made, supporting 42 programs across Ontario.

By 1992, 81 full time equivalent positions had been created by the projects with a total of 307 people employed. Three quarters of this group had been on social assistance prior to this employment.

In 1993 CSDI became fully operated by consumer/survivors. In 1996, the newly-elected government released 23.5 million dollars to enhance community mental health. This Community Investment Fund led to the formation of 24 additional CSIs. With these new changes, the role of CSDI began to change as well.



CSDI was developed to support CSIs and build a consumer/survivor sector. Its existence provided key support to the reform process underway at the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

In 1998, CSDI started an advisory committee that in turn evolved into a Board of Directors and in 2001, CSDI changed its name to the Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI) and incorporated.

There are now approximately 60 CSIs in Ontario - each one different.

The community mental health system has evolved since 1991, creating a need to once again examine OPDI's role in relation to the current needs of its stakeholders, CSIs and Peer Support Organizations (PSO).

In 2006, OPDI revitalized its mission, vision and values and confirmed its role within the health care transformation process as a provincial voice for consumer/survivor organizations.

Our mission

Ontario Peer Development Initiative's mission is to acquire, understand and amplify the unique and distinct voice of consumer/survivor organizations across Ontario. The experiential expertise of our peers will shape the mental health system to achieve a valued, recovery-oriented, community-base approach to support.

Our vision

OPDI strives to provide a strong, cohesive and unified voice for consumer/survivor organizations in Ontario. It will use its resources to develop quality, valued and responsive supports and services to meet the needs of its membership. Informed by an open and inclusive consultative process and building on networking opportunities, OPDI will capture the perspective of its member groups and promote the uniqueness and worth of peer support and consumer/survivor organizations in the continuum of mental health care. In this way, OPDI will promote equitable funding and the expansion of peer-driven services in communities across the province.

OPDI will keep member groups informed of changes in legislation, policies and advocate on their behalf at the provincial level. Informed by the issues and concerns of stakeholders, OPDI through its policies, education and advocacy, will seek to promote recovery-oriented service design and delivery to respond to the needs and priorities of service users - based on what they define as meaningful. OPDI will be known as an authoritative and trusted voice on consumer/survivor issues across the system. OPDI will work collaboratively and in partnership with government and other stakeholders to improve regional coordination and promote positive changes for consumers.

As a provincially focused consumer/survivor organization OPDI will serve as a best practice model for capturing and amplifying the consumer voice and promoting its value as an essential and respected perspective. OPDI will be seen as a model of organizational excellence and will share its learning with other consumer/survivor organizations to strengthen the community as a whole.



