

# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experiences: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

## **PRESENTATION OUTLINE:**

1. Background on Peer Leaders
2. Theoretical Considerations
3. Results from the 2015-16 Canadian Survey of Peer Leaders
4. Connecting Theory, Research, and Practice

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# Background on Peer Leaders

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

Who are the Peer Leaders on your  
campus?

How are Peer Leaders used on your  
campus?

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

**The literature clearly points out that peers are important conduits in terms of:**

- ❑ **Transition to college** (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002; Crissman Ishler, 2002; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Paul & Brier, 2001; Schlossberg, 1981),
- ❑ **Aid in social and emotional development** (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Guon, 1988; Harmon, 2006),
- ❑ **Help promote leadership and career skills development** (Astin, 1993; Astin & Kent, Gardner, 2010; 1983; Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1988; Schuh & Lavery, 1983).

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

**The literature clearly points out that peers:**

- ❑ **Promote learning and academic performance** (Astin, 1993; Donahue, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996),
- ❑ **Assist in persistence and retention** (Bean, 1985; Braxton, 2002; Potts, Schultz & Foust, 2003-4; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1993).
- ❑ **Impact satisfaction with college** (Astin, 1993; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002),

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# Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

- Recent research has demonstrated that student involvement through peer leadership yields measurable returns.
- For example, peer mentors reported increases in their ability to manage groups, empathize with students, and facilitate learning (Bunting, Dye, Pinnegar, & Robinson, 2012; Harmon, 2006; Kenedy, Monty, & Lambert-Drache, 2012).

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# Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

- Peer Leaders have demonstrated/reported improvements in:
  - communication and presentation skills;
  - leadership abilities;
  - integrative and applied learning;
  - higher-order thinking skills;
  - knowledge of campus resources;
  - interaction with faculty, staff, and peers;
  - critical thinking;
  - problem solving;
  - ability to work under pressure;
  - and interpersonal skills

(Astin, 1993; Bunting et al., 2012; Newton & Ender, 2010; Russel & Skinkle, 1990; Wawrzynski & Beverly, 2012).

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# Framework of Intersectional Concentric Solidarity: Benefits for Peer Leaders

- Peer leaders have also demonstrated increases in:
  - factual knowledge,
  - helping others,
  - friendships,
  - personal growth,
  - positive regard for instructor skills,
  - personal responsibility, and
  - decision making

(Bandura, Millard, Johnson, Stewart, & Bartoloemei, 2003; Bunting et al., 2012; Kenedy & Skipper, 2012).

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# Peer Leadership: Theoretical Considerations

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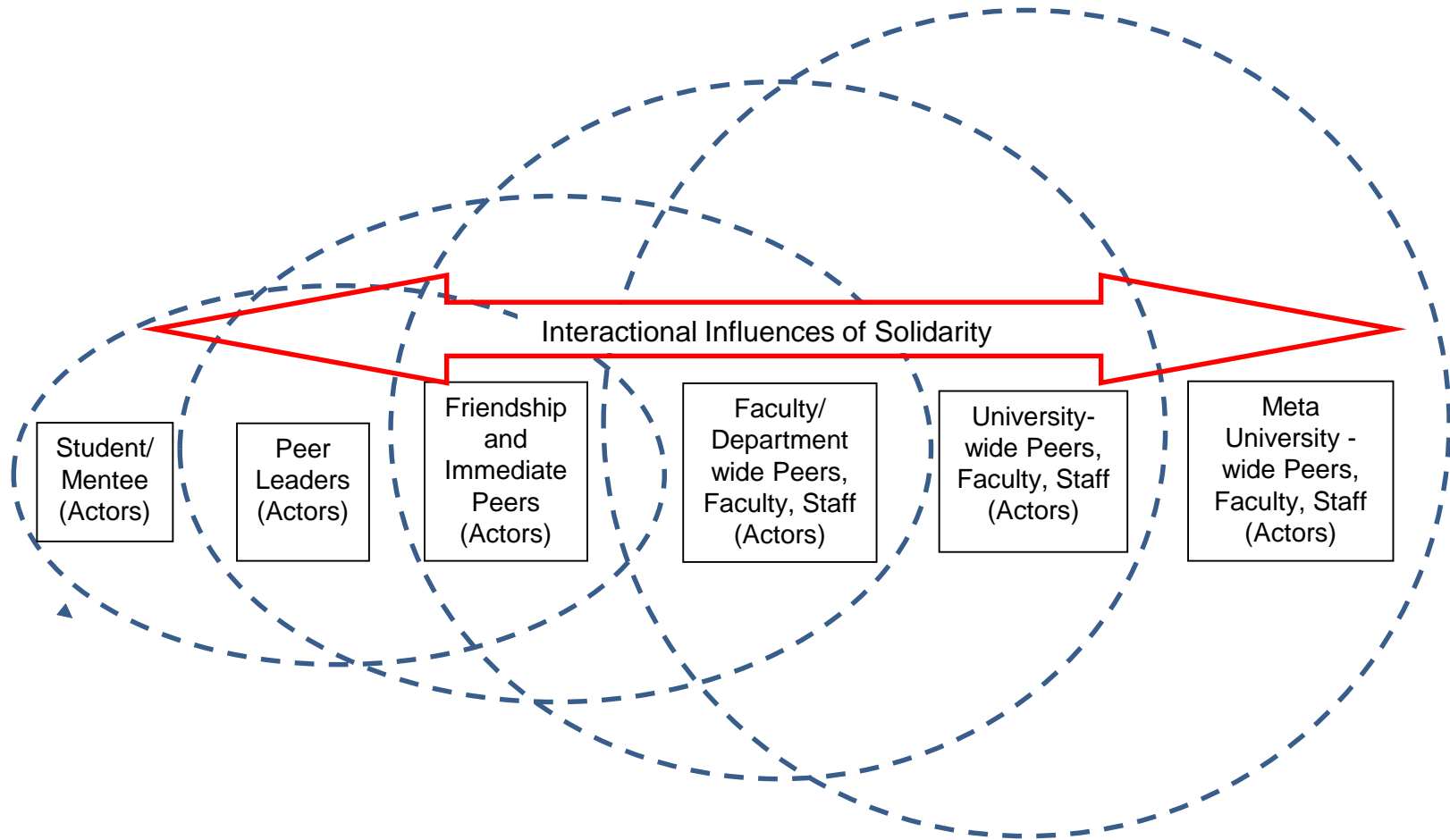


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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

How have you seen peer leaders engage with different levels of community on your campus?

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# How are students experiencing intersectional solidarity?

## Results from Canadian Survey of Peer Leaders – 2015-16

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# 2015-16 Canadian Survey of Peer Leadership

## Methodology

- Administered to Canadian Universities between January 2015 and January 2016
- 10 Institutions participated
- Yielded 538 useful responses (students indicated having participated in at least one peer leadership experience during their university or college experience)
- Online questionnaire asking students to report structural characteristics of peer leadership experiences and to self report increases in key outcome areas





# 2015-16 Canadian Survey of Peer Leadership

## Participating Institutions

Cape Breton University  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Thompson Rivers University  
University of Guelph  
University of Ottawa  
University of the Fraser Valley  
University of Toronto – Mississauga  
University of Toronto – Scarborough  
University of Toronto – St. George  
York University

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# Types of Peer Leader Experiences: Most Commonly Reported (n = 482)

Peer Leader Experience	Freq.	%
Academic: Peer mentor	236	49.0
Student clubs, societies or social organisations	184	38.2
Campus activities	162	33.6
Orientation (e.g., new student, extended, or summer orientation)	142	29.5
First-year experience	130	27.0
Academic: Peer tutor	104	21.6
Community service or service-learning	87	18.1
Academic: Other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant) (please specify)	70	14.5
Future/Prospective students ambassador	69	14.3
Academic: Peer advisor	65	13.5



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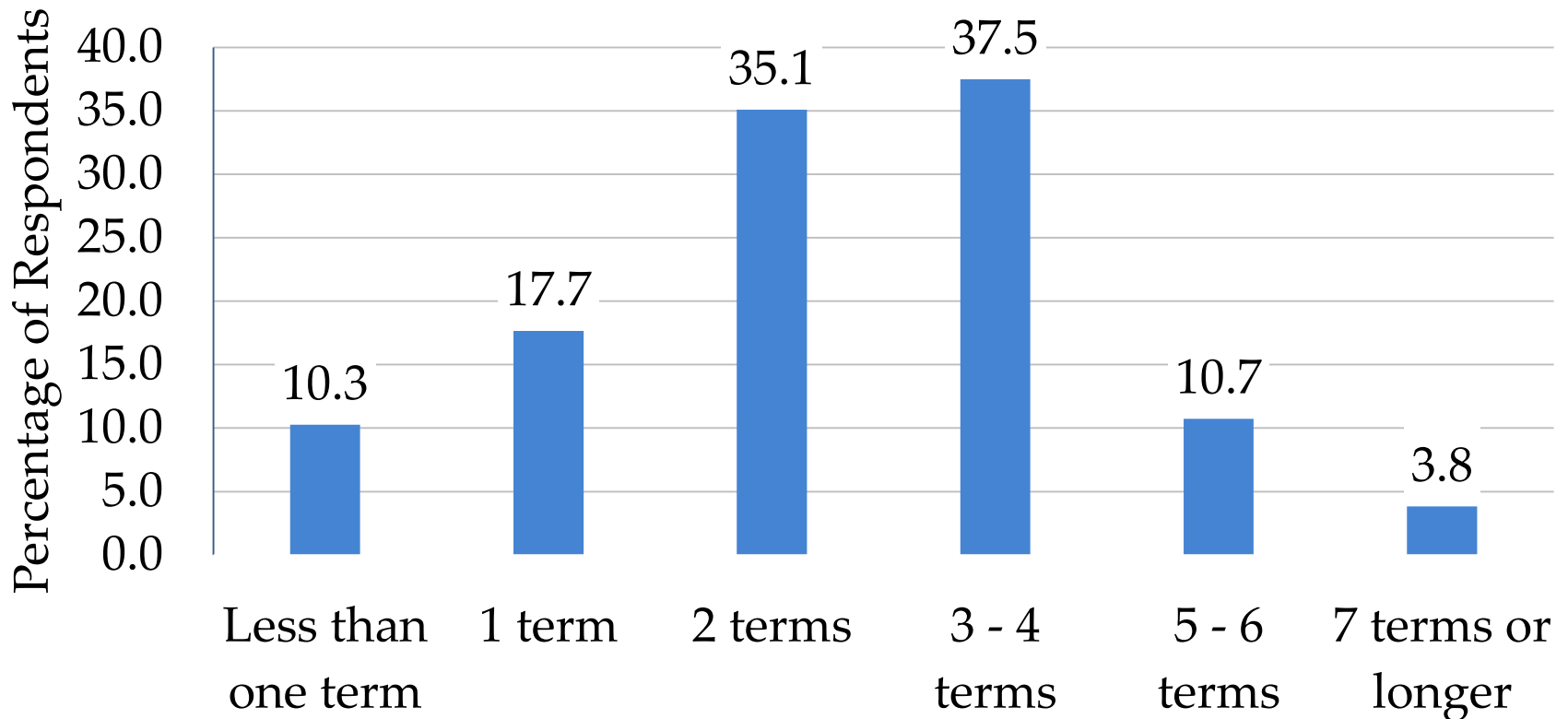
# Types of Peer Leader Experiences: Experience with longest service (n = 419)

Peer Leader Experience	Freq.	%
Academic: Peer mentor	144	29.9
Student clubs, societies or social organisations	62	12.9
Academic: Peer tutor	47	9.8
Housing and Residential Life	29	6.0
Academic: Other (e.g., teaching assistant, lab assistant) (please specify)	26	5.4
Student government	21	4.4
Other (please specify)	19	3.9
Academic: Peer educator	17	3.5
First-year experience	15	3.1
Orientation	14	2.9



# Types of Peer Leader Experiences: Experience with longest service (n = 482)

How long have you served in this position?



# Investment of Time and Energy – Benefits and Balance

## Evidence of Engagement

- 2/3 of all peer leaders have held 1-2 PL positions at one time
- 7 in 10 peer leaders have held 1-3 PL positions total
- More than 60% of all peer leaders spend 10 hours or less per week on PL duties

## Over-Engagement?

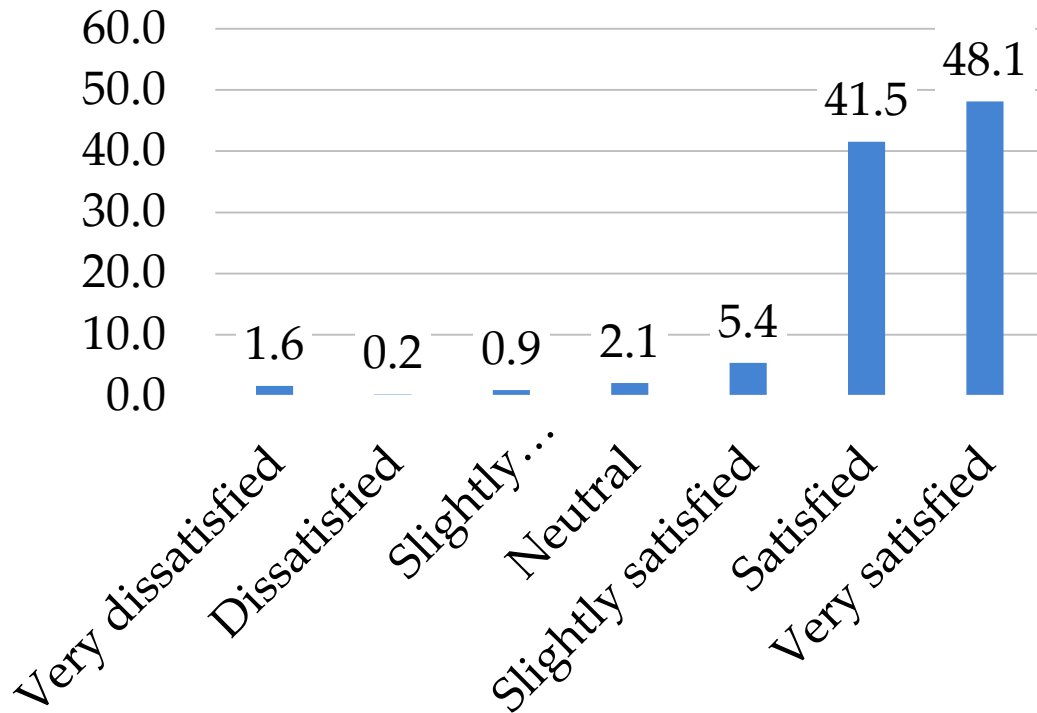
- 1 in 10 have held 8 or more PL positions
- 10% reported spending 20 hours or more per week.
- Slightly less than 4% spend 30 or more hours per week.



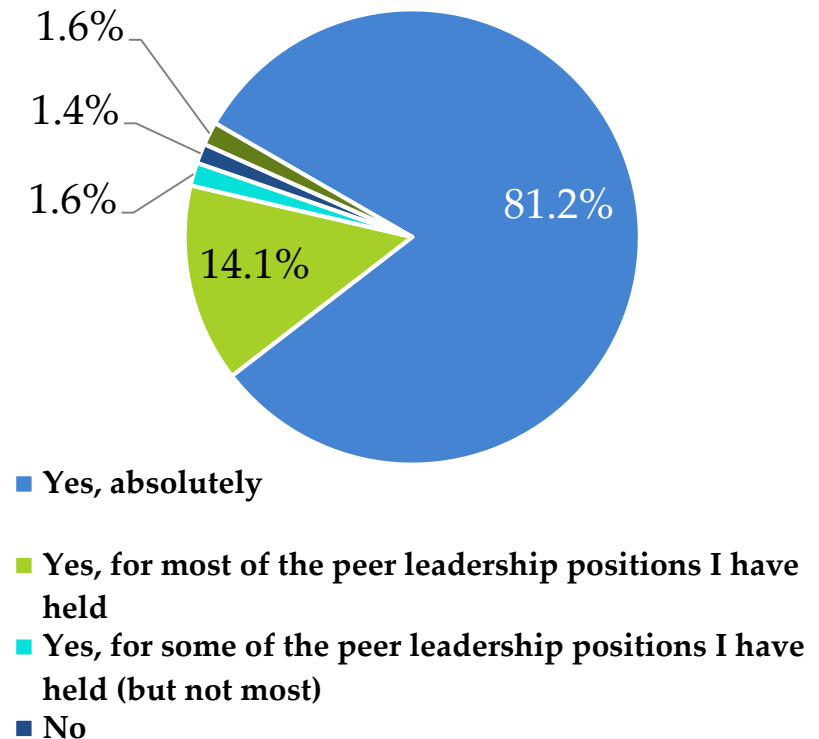


# Peer Leaders See the Benefits

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your peer leadership experiences?



Would you recommend being a peer leader to other students?



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# Outcomes of Peer Leader Experiences: Connecting Peer Leaders to Community

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**Over  
90%**

of Peer Leaders reported **increased**

- **Relationships with people at work**
- **Meaningful interactions with peers**



**Developing Connections with Peers**

# Increased Relationships and Meaningful Interactions

**“Being a peer leader has helped me make friends and feel as if I am a member of my university's community. I believe everyone should at least try being a peer leader once throughout their university or college experience.”**

**“But it has been amazing and I have deepened friendships and made meaningful connections with others. Some students have said that I have made a large impact on their university experiences...”**

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# Over 70%

of Peer Leaders reported **increased** amounts of meaningful interaction with:

- Professors or teaching staff
- Staff members



## Meaningful Interaction with Educators

# Meaningful Interactions with Faculty Members and Others

**“Being a peer leader has connected me with my peers, my faculty, and, in general, my school. In an ever more disconnected world, being a peer leader has helped me create lasting relationships... I have become more active in student engagement on campus because of being a peer leader, ”**

**“All my peers know I'm the one who gets things done and they expect nothing less. My professors are all aware of my position and also expect the best from... In some instances I wonder if professors are more lenient with me since I carry extra responsibility. ”**

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# Between 70-96%

of Peer Leaders reported **increased** :

- Knowledge of campus resources
- Feeling of belonging and being welcome at institution
- Desire to stay at institution and graduate
- Feeling of contribution to campus community



## Connection to Campus Community

## Knowledge of Campus Resources and a connection to the Institution

**“Because I feel more connected and engaged at my university I'm more motivated to do well in my classes - perhaps in part too because I've been expected to continue to do well”**

**“However, I knew which resources would be able to help me and I was able to use it effectively. I also had more friends on campus... ”**

**“Greatly improved relationships with professors, department assistants, etc - I feel this has positively affected my grades.”**

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# Over 85%

of Peer Leaders reported increased:

- Knowledge of
- Understanding of
- Interaction with

people from backgrounds different from their own

## Solidarity through Difference

# Knowledge and understanding of people with different backgrounds

“Being an international student myself, I know how difficult it is to adjust to a new culture while at the same time adjusting to a new academic life and lifestyle. The main reason I applied for this position was to help international students with this transition as much as possible.”

“[Motivation to become a Peer Leader was the] Passion for the LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty at my university and a profound sense of disappointment in available resources.”

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# Reconsidering Peer Leadership: Theoretical Considerations

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experience: Theoretical and Research-Based Perspectives

## What does this all mean?

- ❑ Data from Canadian Survey of Peer Leaders
- ❑ Theoretical framework
  - ❑ Social Web – Concentric Circles – Simmel or intersecting?
  - ❑ Community or Solidarity – Durkheim & Blau
  - ❑ Cross-categorical thinking – Kegan
- ❑ How does this understanding extend the theory?

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# Connecting Theory to Research to Practice

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experiences: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

Based on the information just shown,  
what do we learn about how we can  
better improve structures of Peer  
Leadership Experiences?

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experiences: Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

**How can we structure Peer Leadership experiences that facilitate the underlying factors that lead to improvement in Peer Leader development?**

- ❑ Selection
  - ❑ Early opportunity to set the stage for experience
  - ❑ Consider who is and who is not receiving opportunity for experience
- ❑ Training
  - ❑ Emphasize the expectations that the peer leadership experience is more than just a transactional experience
  - ❑ Provide training on skills and competencies with an eye beyond accomplishing tasks at hand
  - ❑ Teach relational skills (e.g. communication, listening, leadership)

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# Canadian and International Peer Leader Experiences:

## Intersectional Circles of Solidarity and Influence

**How can we structure Peer Leadership experiences that facilitate the underlying factors that lead to improvement in Peer Leader development?**

- ❑ Supervision
  - ❑ Opportunities to reflect on connections
  - ❑ Integrative learning
  - ❑ Ask yourself: “How are the lessons learned in this experience connected to other learning experiences for our Peer Leaders?”
  
- ❑ Assessment and evaluation
  - ❑ Include measures of success beyond “job tasks”
  - ❑ Share results with Peer Leaders

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# Thank You!

## Questions/Comments?

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# Canadian Network Meeting

Monday, 13 Feb., 6-7 pm

Marriott M102