"Older Adult Peer Support: Our Time Has Come"
Robert Walker
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
Mental Health Symposium 2024
Friday, May 17

[2024/05/17 14:28] Elektra Panthar: Hello everyone.
Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.
Some speakers may be using a text teleprompter tool for some or all of their presentation.
Transcriptionists will fill in any gaps and support the Question & Answer section at the end.
A little explanation about this service.
Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.
Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.
You will see the transcription in local chat.
Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.
The transcriptionists are:
Elektra Panthar
Shaerken Changeheart
The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.
The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:
RW: Robert Walker

[2024/05/17 14:30] Coughran Mayo: Good day!
I am Coughran Mayo, and I am a long time participant in Second life, dating back to early in 2007.
I am also a long time supporter and board member of Virtual Ability.
In RL I run a consulting business that specializes in, among other areas of focus, not for profit groups.
I have found the development and growth of Virtual Ability to be a remarkable effort, and applaud Gentle Heron and all of the members of the Virtual Ability team for their wonderful, and successful work.
Second Life allows us to mingle and socialize with people from around the world.
This may seem casual or trivial to some, but I believe it has never been more important in our fractious world to spend time with people who we may think are not that much like us, so we can learn how much alike we actually are.
Second Life allows us to provide ongoing and sometimes very focused and deliberate support to one another, based on our compassion and often our own experiences.
And, importantly, Second Life allows us to learn from and educate one another.
In this spirit, It is my pleasure to introduce our next presenter.

Much of my professional career was spent working in the field of addictions and the values of peer support fill the history of this field,
including the impact of Alcoholics Anonymous, now nearly 90 years old, up to today, where peer support services are becoming ever more prominent in the design of modern service delivery systems.
I am very excited to introduce, and to hear from Robert Walker, who will talk with us today about a short-term, evidence-based model of peer support for older adults.
The model has been piloted with older adults and caregivers of older adults with Alzheimer's Disease.
Again, this is particularly relevant to many of us – my own father had Alzheimer's for 5 years before his death.
Robert Walker's work focuses on the development and expansion of the peer specialist workforce in the state of Massachusetts,
in his work with the Office of Recovery and Empowerment for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health.
Appropriately, He is a person with lived experience of having dealt with a personal mental health challenge,
Rob has developed the training used in Massachusetts and across the country for older adult peers, is a certified older adult peer specialist,
and is Co-Chair of the MA Older Adult Behavioral Health Collaborative.
Rob's research interests involve peer interventions and older adult behavioral health issues.
Please welcome Robert Walker to the stage.

[2024/05/17 14:34] Elektra Panthar: RW: Thank you for that introduction!
I hope the presentation will be longer than my introduction :)
Full disclosure none of the 4 people there are me
The title is: Is There An App for Aging?
This combines two worlds close to me, technology and older adults
When I was asked to do this, the hardest part was trying to pick an avatar
I had a 20 something surfer dude, but people at VAI hinted that maybe something more dressed up was better
So I thought I'm not ashamed of being an older adult so this is close to RL me

AGENDA
COVID, Technology, and Older Adults
The Digital Divide
Affordability and access to new technology
Scientific evidence exploring attitudes towards technologies
Important considerations in building a tech training for older adults

I'll talk about what happened 4 years ago - for me COVID brought technology to the forefront and normalized the use of technology in the general population
I'll talk about differences, the haves and have nots
Also I'll talk about some of our experience with peer support and older adults, and how to use technology with older adults
I come with a couple of lived expertise - I'm 76 years old so I'm starting to have an older adult lived experience, and I have a long history of bipolar disorder

Remember Before COVID?
Peer Support was done face-to-face

Training was done in-person
Not many of us were allowed to work remotely
No one believed folks with a diagnosis, especially older adults, could use technology
All medical appointments and therapy were in-person

Peer support that government paid for was all face to face, and almost all training
The one pet peeve of mine was that not many of us were allowed to work remotely
Before everyone said that people can't work from home, they need people looking over their shoulder
Before COVID I tried getting an accommodation in the workplace and they kinda laughed in my face
And now I work from home 100%
Another issue is that no one believed folks with a mental health diagnoses, especially older adults, couldn't use technology
I think older adults themselves didn't think they could
We mentioned ageism earlier, the misconceptions about being older or a youth
But there's also internalized ageism
Where people start to believe the stereotypes
Another big difference was about medical and therapy had to be in person
I remember my relative having to go at an appointment while the weather was inclement , she was frail and with limited mobility. It was dangerous
I'll talk about some of the myths about aging , and about post COVID

True or False?
Older adults don't use smartphones.

[2024/05/17 14:46] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): FALSE!
[2024/05/17 14:46] Marcus Llewellyn: Very false
[2024/05/17 14:46] Widget Whiteberry: False. This older adult does
[2024/05/17 14:46] Petlove Petshop: depends what you consider old
[2024/05/17 14:46] Gentle Heron: I don't because we have no coverage where I live
[2024/05/17 14:47] TheResistor Resident: Depends on previous lifestyle

[2024/05/17 14:46] Elektra Panthar: RW: FALSE
Studies show more older adults than ever have adopted smartphones — 42%, according to Pew — and 67% say they have Internet access.
At the same time, only a quarter of adults over 65 say they feel confident about using electronics to go online.
These statistics need updating, it must be even higher now
Older adults are using technology and getting better at it

True or False?
Older adults don't use social media.

[2024/05/17 14:48] James Atlloud (Lloud Laffer): I'm older and I'm using social media right now - in fact my hands are soaking in it.
[2024/05/17 14:48] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): "it depends"
My mother won't get on any social media period.
[2024/05/17 14:48] Gentle Heron: The kids say Facebook is for older adults
[2024/05/17 14:48] Marcus Llewellyn: Facebook is all older adults. lol

[2024/05/17 14:48] TheResistor Resident: Older adults, especially with mental problems, don't have the money here

[2024/05/17 14:48] Elektra Panthar: RW: FALSE
Over half of older adults use social media.
They are most active on Facebook compared to other social media platforms, and a majority report using the platform at least once a week.
https://www.asaging.org/web-seminars/technology-face-isolation—myths-and-facts-about-seniors-technology-usage
Only 4% of older adults are on Twitter, probably fewer now that's X
FB and FB groups are a great way for older adults to get unstructured peer support
Similar to what happens here in VAI I think
Older adults keep in touch, organize around a hobby, a skill, a language, anything you can think of, there's a FB group for it
FB are an informal way of peer support (although without privacy)

True or false?
Older adults aren't gamers.
[2024/05/17 14:52] Marcus Llewellyn: false
[2024/05/17 14:52] Elektra Panthar: false
[2024/05/17 14:52] Brian Aviator: false
[2024/05/17 14:52] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): so false
[2024/05/17 14:52] James Atlloud (Lloud Laffer): I need a new Xbox controller
[2024/05/17 14:52] Elektra Panthar: I have 60-something gamer friends
[2024/05/17 14:52] Marcus Llewellyn: I need a new XBox. :)
SL leans to an older demographic. ;)
[2024/05/17 14:54] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): I have a 69yo neighbour who loves MechWarrior 5
Very nice, mild-mannered gentleman but once he's playing that game he's something else entirely
[2024/05/17 14:53] Elektra Panthar: RW: you are pros!
FALSE
40% of adults aged 50-64 play games
23% of adults 65 years and older play games
https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2008/12/07/adults-and-video-games/
Older adult gamers play games as a serious hobby - if you look on YouTube there's the Gaming Grandma channel, she has many followers and she's close to 80
[2024/05/17 14:54] Gentle Heron:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzkY7wa8Ksxv4M5NyUYgTmA
[2024/05/17 14:55] Brian Aviator: WOW Grandma streams on Twitch
https://www.twitch.tv/wowgrandma78/about
[2024/05/17 14:55] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): I get a kick out of watching her playing Skyrim

[2024/05/17 14:55] Elektra Panthar: RW: For adults of all ages, a lot of unstructured peer support happens in gaming
While they play in the game and in Discord servers
It's great that you have people checking on you, on your well being

What Motivates Older Adults to Use Technology

Connection to family/ friends
Health services and maintenance
Entertainment and hobbies
Activities for independence (maintaining finances, paying bills, etc.)

Now a lot happens via telehealth, for health services
A lot of people pay bills and other services strictly online
There are apps that help people manage their chronic illness
I have an app for diabetes where I can upload my sugar levels, get in touch with the doctor etc. It reduces hospitalization

Older Adults' Attitudes Toward Technology
Perceived ease of learning (Older Adults)
Apprehensive when clear instructions or assistance are not present in the learning process
Social influence (Older adults + and younger adults -)

One of the important pieces of teaching technology to older adults is having the right approach
One of the best ways adults learn is that they want practical knowledge, for a specific thing
You teach specific tasks
We use the "I, we, you" approach
First I show you how I do it, then we do it together, then you do it yourself
This works for many different technologies and services

Peer Support and Older Adults
Peer support has been around for a long time, it probably started with Alcoholics Anonymous where they supported each other
In the US in the 1990s peer support has started being reimbursed from Medicaid
Each state did it in a different way but it spread
Now we start to pay attention with older adults and those with serious mental health illness - this way older adults can keep their independence

What do other adult peers share?
Closer in Age
Wisdom
Loss
Similar mental health obstacles
Physical Illness
Shared interests and hobbies

What's the secret sauce in this? They are closer in age. Most interns are in their early 20s so there's an age divide there. With peer support people can share memories, wisdom, lived experience
Another shared experience for older adults is loss - aging can be looked at as a series of losses - life roles, health, loved ones, mental health
They also share similar physical and mental health obstacles
Also shared interests

Evidence based practices
Reminiscence Therapy

Life Review
Psychoeducation
Mindfulness
Acceptance

What works with older adults? these approaches have been effective
We submitted an article about the preliminary findings about this, hasn't been approved yet
Reminiscence Therapy /narrative therapy is helping them look back at their life journey to make sense of it
There are exercises to do to help them - think of your life as a book. what would be the title of the major chapters in your story?
Depending on the time you have available you can go in depth
They can find values in their life- the purpose is to write the next chapter with that newly gained perspective
Life review - I like to do this : pretend you just got notified you won the Nobel peace price. who would you pick to present you, and what would you like them to say?

Cycle education: this is what happens as you age, sometimes you forget things, it's normal aging
Some vision and hearing loss
It's not time to panic, it's normal aging
We do a lot of mindfulness work, to set the tone and keep your mind quiet
We use radical acceptance, it works well. we talk about forgetting things that are not the end of the world, and find solutions. For example a way to keep your glasses around your neck if you always lose them
These are all evidence based interventions that have gotten great results
Also they had great result with older adult peer supporters

Anecdotal findings
Tech helps us reach more older adults
Older adults are reinventing themselves
Older adults are using technology to sign up for benefits

Tech really helps older adults reinventing themselves
They use technology to sign up for benefits too
For programs
Food assistance
Paper: Older adults with existing depression show resilience during the pandemic

Supporting Older Adults Remotely (SOAR)
SOAR meets requirements to be a Certified Older Adult Peer Specialist
Combines five evidence-based psychosocial interventions:
 1) psychoeducation, which improves knowledge about older adult mental health and normal age-related changes and connection to age-related resources,
 (2) older adult peer support, which has been shown to improve self-management of late-life mental and physical health issues, social support, and feelings of hope and optimism,
 (3) tools to offset cognitive challenges; and
 (4 & 5) life review and acceptance and commitment therapy, which have both been shown to promote resilience in late life.

When people are more engaged and active, it offsets aging effects
I would need a 2 hour presentation to discuss about all of this! but I encourage you to write me
[2024/05/17 15:19] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: Email me if you have questions.
[2024/05/17 15:20] Elektra Panthar: Rob Walker, CPS, COAPS
Robwalker732@gmail.com

[2024/05/17 15:19] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): Please preface chat ?'s with Q: or ?: so we can differentiate between audience questions and audience discussion (both are encouraged!).

[2024/05/17 15:19] Polaris Grayson: QUESTION Do you think tribal knowledge has shrunk as the evolution of skillsets has evolved as time has passed and documentation has improved?
[2024/05/17 15:21] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: Tribal knowledge. I think probably so. Technology unites us as well as separates us
[2024/05/17 15:21] Polaris Grayson: ty

[2024/05/17 15:21] Stealth (Cicero Kit): comment: I have seen a lot of people in their 70s and 80s using apps such as Merlin and Seek to have more fulfilling experiences outdoors

[2024/05/17 15:21] Gentle Heron: QUESTION which are better for older adults, gender separate or gender mixed support groups? Why?
[2024/05/17 15:21] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: gender separate or gender mixed groups. I think it depends on the topic.
I've found, traditionally ... especially men from the generation that grew up in the 30s and 40s really don't want to talk about feelings.
Some of the groups around feelings; trauma; depression sometimes better when they are not mixed groups.
On the flip of that -- with groups it's all about the marketing of the group.
If you went to Senior Center "doing a mental health group, anyone wanna join" you'll only get 1 or 2 people joining.
Say I'm going to do a group on "loss" -- there's less stigma on that.
Everyone lucky enough to get older experiences loss.
[2024/05/17 15:24] Itico (Itico Spectre): Comment: I've found the best way to talk with older adults (men especially) is best to do it around the pool table or whatnot.
Birdwatching!
[2024/05/17 15:24] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: Yes! absolutely!
Peer support is 100% meeting people where they are.
Also helping older adults feel in control of their lives
People want to meet over tea? great
Around the pool table? Great!
Giving back people agency is important.

[2024/05/17 15:25] Cooter Coorara: My apologies for arriving late. Did you touch on the topic of we older folks who led full active lives, and then suddenly find themselves in an adult home and they've (me) given up on life? The home has no activities whatsoever for

the men. It's a small home, around thirty, most with some level of dementia. I'm the only lucid one here.
What advice would you have?
[2024/05/17 15:26] Gentle Heron: (((Cooter)))
[2024/05/17 15:26] Cooter Coorara: I live on Second Life.
[2024/05/17 15:26] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: Wow. I'm sorry that's happening.
This online community and the online activities, I can ... remember people who were used to going outside to their regular AA 12-step groups.
When covid hit people were all housebound.
These support groups sprang up around the world.
Instead of going local now, you could connect with 12-step meetings across the world 24/7

[2024/05/17 15:25] Gentle Heron: please explain agency
[2024/05/17 15:28] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: Agency. The ability to make your own decisions.
Maybe lots of people here in this world understand about how important it is to make your own choices
From simple ones to more complicated ones
Older adults tend to fear and experience is lack of control over their life
Nurses tell 'em what to do; they have memory losses so they get put in a care home
Make your own decisions even if they are not the best decisions
The ability to fail

[2024/05/17 15:29] Gentle Heron: We heard in the previous session to let kids be kids. Should we let elders be elders? What does that actually mean?
[2024/05/17 15:30] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: elders be elders? what's that mean? I think I just covered it.
I'll tell you a story real quick.
My mother-in-law in early 80s
Her son was taking care of her
He was worried about her gaining weight and eating cake for dessert.
I think, Why not? Why try to control what may have been the last of her enjoyment left
Let older adults dress as they like
Eat as they like.
Smoke as long as they don't burn the place down.
Let elders be kids.
[2024/05/17 15:31] Gentle Heron: I'm an elder, and sometimes I think it's fun to be (like a) kid.
[2024/05/17 15:31] Brian Aviator: Isn't that one of the advantages of being an older adult? We can do whatever we want :)
[2024/05/17 15:31] Elektra Panthar: ((this hits hard. My grandma passed from an undiagnosed stomach cancer and when we emptied her flat we found lots of bags of chips she hid from my mom))
[2024/05/17 15:32] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: That's awesome about the chips -- the crisps.

[2024/05/17 15:32] Widget Whiteberry: In your experience, is there much use of zoom or skype to stay in touch with old friends?

[2024/05/17 15:32] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: older adults are learning how to use Zoom.
With a coach, with someone there to help them sometimes
Older adults are capable
Zoom, Facetime ...
When Covid hit ... in my state, all the nursing facilities, all the older adult homes, care-giver homes -- visitors weren't allowed to go in and see the elders.
We had a bunch of charities buy iPads
The elders used the iPads to communicate with their families.
They became quite good at it.

[2024/05/17 15:33] Widget Whiteberry: I notice on my calls with others of my peers, we all help each other. Much like early days of using voice in SL.
[2024/05/17 15:35] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): RW: yes, that's true!

[2024/05/17 15:35] Gentle Heron: Any last questions for Rob?
Let's give Rob a big round of applause and thanks
[2024/05/17 15:35] Lyr Lobo: Many thanks to our wonderful transcribers and moderators *cheers* You are wonderful!
Great sessions and content
[2024/05/17 15:35] Cooter Coorara: Thank you Rob!
[2024/05/17 15:35] Elektra Panthar: ♫♪♫♪ Applauds ♫♪♫♪
[2024/05/17 15:35] Brian Aviator: Thank you so much Rob for a great presentation.
[2024/05/17 15:35] TheResistor Resident: :)
[2024/05/17 15:36] James Atlloud (Lloud Laffer): Another great symposium!
Congratulations speakers and organizers.
[2024/05/17 15:36] Mook Wheeler: Thank you Robert, this was wonderful and powerful.
[2024/05/17 15:36] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): Thank you Rob, wonderful thoughts you've brought to us.
[2024/05/17 15:36] Gentle Heron: Thank you Rob, this was great. There are a lot of older people in SL..
[2024/05/17 15:36] Elektra Panthar: Thank you very much
[2024/05/17 15:37] Brian Aviator: As someone from the state of MA I am pleased to see that the Department of Mental Health has such wonderful forward thinking people among its ranks.
[2024/05/17 15:37] Rhiannon Chatnoir: I am also in MA
[2024/05/17 15:36] AmarisPop Resident: Thank you I enjoyed myself

[2024/05/17 15:37] Gentle Heron: We have come to the end of an enlightening day, and I wish to express my thanks for all we have experienced.
We have all learned so much from our presenters.
I want to thank each of them for braving entrance into a new (to them) world for this conference.
Thank you Anne, Esther, Fola, Tiago, Rose, Valerie, Jess and Rob.
What a wealth of information you have shared today.
Thank you to our audience for sharing this conference with us. Without you and our wonderful presenters, the conference would not exist.

I want to especially thank all the Virtual Ability community members who volunteered and contributed to today's success.

Our greeters are the first contact with the Virtual Ability community for many attendees. Thanks to Gemma Cleanslate for organizing the greeters, and to Zip, Pecos, Faith, Carla, Lorin, Stepinwolf, Adro, and Linn for greeting our guests.

Thanks to our behind-the-scenes streaming team: Marcus, Rhiannon and James. Great teamwork, guys.

Thank you to those who helped orient our presenters who were new to Second Life: Mook, iSkye and Itico.

Thanks to the Virtual Ability community members who helped introduce the presenters: Karla, Itico, Zzri, Sandar, Roxksie, Twisty, and Coughran.

Everyone who stood up in front of our audience today deserves another round of applause.

[2024/05/17 15:39] Lyr Lobo: /me cheers and applauds them

[2024/05/17 15:39] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb):

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[2024/05/17 15:39] Shaerken Changeheart (ChangeheartShaerken Resident): /me cheers all the standers and speakers!

[2024/05/17 15:39] Elektra Panthar: ♫♪♫♪ Applauds ♪♫♪♫

[2024/05/17 15:39] Brian Aviator: Congratulations to the presenters and the VAI team for a great day of sessions!

[2024/05/17 15:39] Eme Capalini: yay

[2024/05/17 15:39] Roxksie Logan: ◈ Applause ◈

[2024/05/17 15:39] Gentle Heron: Special thanks and icepacks for their RL non-avatar wrists to our excellent transcriptionists: Elektra, Shae, and Max.

Thank you to Mook and iSkye and Eme for their support and hard work throughout the months leading up to today.

And all the unnamed folks who stood by as back up. You are our foundation.

A reminder that we will archive the text chat and the videos of individual sessions for future review or if anyone missed a session.

A quick invitation to visit the poster sets on Healthinfo Island (to our west) for additional information about mental illness, especially in the context of climate change.

A notecard about this month's Healthinfo Island poster sets is in the blue sign on the left of the stage.

Please stay healthy, everyone. Let's continue to enjoy our virtual world together.

[2024/05/17 15:41] Eme Capalini: Congrats to Gentle for all her hard work too!

[2024/05/17 15:41] Widget Whiteberry: Great thanks to you Gentle, and to your crew.

[2024/05/17 15:41] Roxksie Logan: Thank you Gentle

[2024/05/17 15:41] Mook Wheeler: ♫•:*¨¨*:•♫ APPLAUSE ♫•:*¨¨*:•♫

[2024/05/17 15:41] Roxksie Logan: ◈ Applause ◈

[2024/05/17 15:41] jillianfearless Resident: claps