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| -. | ReportFrom the office of the…Associate Vice-President (Services) |
| To: | Members of the Executive Board  |
| From: | Martino Salciccioli, Associate Vice-President (Services)Graeme Noble, Vice-President (Administration) |
| Subject: | MSU Student Health Education Centre (SHEC) Review |
| Date: | March 25, 2021 |

#### Introduction

Dear Members of the Executive Board,

The following report is a review of the McMaster Students Union (MSU) Student Health Education Centre (SHEC) service conducted by the Associate Vice-President (Services). This report will critically examine SHEC by looking at the Service’s mission, history, structure, and engagement. The report also takes a look at similar initiatives at other post-secondary institutions to compare and contrast MSU SHEC to provide context for its evaluation. After displaying all the aforementioned information, the report is concluded with recommendations made by myself, the committee, and the Vice-President (Administration).

**Service Overview**

##### Mandate and History

MSU SHEC is one of several Peer-Support Services offered by the MSU. As stated in **Operating Policy – MSU Student Health Education Centre (SHEC)**, the purpose of this Service is:

*“To engage the MSU community around a wide variety of health-related topics including, but not limited to, the following four major strategic priorities through all programming and campaigns:* ***(1.1)***

*Sexual & Reproductive Wellbeing;* ***(1.1.1)***

*Empowered Bodies;* ***(1.1.2)***

*Substance Use; and* ***(1.1.3)***

*Mental Wellbeing* ***(1.1.4)****.*

*To provide free material resources in support of the strategic priorities;* ***(1.2)***

*To provide anonymous peer support, health information, and help navigating external support resources for McMaster students concerning all areas of student health, including the social determinants of health (i.e.* [sic] *race and ethnicity, financial security, disability or chronic illness, etc.).* ***(1.3)”***

To achieve its purpose, MSU SHEC is responsible for upholding and maintaining the following Operating Parameters:

*“All services offered by SHEC shall operate under a non-profit, anti-oppressive framework and be made available to the entire McMaster community;* ***(2.2)***

*SHEC shall provide anonymous, confidential, non-denominational, and care-focused peer support covering topics and concerns related to student health;* ***(2.3)***

*SHEC shall organize and run educational programming on campus;* ***(2.4)***

*SHEC shall provide informal referrals to other care providers both within and outside of the McMaster community.”* ***(2.5)***

MSU SHEC does fantastic work creating safe(r) and inclusive spaces for all folks through their events, educational campaigns, and peer-support hours. They provide numerous resources to students and are able to help them feel comfortable accessing personal products and supplies in accessible and confidential ways.

##### Service Structure

The MSU Student Health Education Centre is a student-led Peer-Support Service. The Service is overseen by one Part-Time Manager who is the SHEC Coordinator. Along with the Coordinator, volunteer executives are hired to make up the SHEC Executive Team. The Executive team then hires volunteers to help the Service achieve its mission and fulfill its operating parameters. Along with the Coordinator the Executive Team positions are as follows: the Volunteer Coordinator, Promotions Coordinator, Events and Outreach Co-Executives, and Resources & Advocacy Co-Executives.

The SHEC Coordinator is responsible for overseeing all activities of MSU SHEC, performing duties outlined in the SHEC Coordinator job description, and ensure that all executives are fulfilling their responsibilities as well.

The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for scheduling and tracking all volunteer shifts, developing a community of support amongst volunteers and the executive team through recurring social events, working with the SHEC Coordinator to organize volunteer training in September and January, organizing and distributing additional training materials, when necessary (i.e., monthly, bimonthly, etc.), and offering support, when needed, and maintain open channels of communication with the entire volunteer team.

The Promotions Coordinator is responsible for overseeing all online and print promotions of MSU SHEC services, acting as the liaison with the Underground Media + Design to ensure all promotions are completed, and acting as the liaison with other on-campus partners for advertising purposes.

The Events and Outreach Co-Executives are responsible for managing all activities of the Events and Outreach Committee together, such as planning and implementing events to educate the McMaster community on issues pertaining to student health as they relate to the strategic priorities of the Service, creating and organizing events/workshops, and collaborating with other on- and off-campus services to arrange accessible student outreach opportunities.

The Resources & Advocacy Co-Executives are responsible for managing all activities of the Resources and Advocacy Committee together, such as planning and implementing practical informational campaigns to educate the McMaster community on topics pertaining to student health as they relate to the strategic priorities of the Service, creating and organizing campaigns/projects, as well as reviewing, maintaining, and contribute to the online and physical resource collection to ensure that MSU SHEC has an up-to-date resource directory.

There are numerous roles on the SHEC Executive Team that play a vital role in allowing this Service to deliver its mission to the McMaster community. With so many hardworking individuals making up this team, it is evident why MSU SHEC is able to continuously do great work for students.

#### Internal Research

##### Student Engagement

A total of 30 responses were received for the MSU SHEC survey. When analyzing the following data please recognize that this is not a holistic view of the Service from the perspective of MSU members considering 30­ individuals only comprises less than 0.1% of all undergraduate students. The following figures represent data which was accumulated through survey responses:

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**Figure 1:** I feel that MSU SHEC advocates for a campus that addresses and educates students on:

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**Figure 2:** I feel that MSU SHEC hosts events that are:

**Figure 3:** I have accessed the MSU SHEC space for the following reasons:

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**Figure 4:** I feel that MSU SHEC provides a safe(r) space for folks who are:

By analyzing the data, students who have interacted with MSU SHEC clearly understand the value of the Service. Looking to **Figure 1**, students were asked to rank if they feel MSU SHEC advocates for a campus that addresses and educates folks on Empowered Bodies, Mental Wellbeing, Sexual & Reproductive Wellbeing, and Substance Use & Harm Reduction. These are the major strategic priorities for MSU SHEC campaigns, students were asked to provide their perspective on these priorities to see if they feel MSU SHEC is addressing these areas in there programming. Majority of responses indicate that students agree/strongly agree with the various statements and feel that MSU SHEC advocates for these priorities in their programming, there were few folks that strongly disagreed with the Substance Use/Harm Reduction option. **Figure 2** asks students to state their opinion on if they feel MSU SHEC’s events are Educational, Engaging, Interesting, Inclusive, Organized, Well-Promoted, and Reflective of the Diverse community MSU SHEC caters towards. Many of these factors had positive reception with students selecting agree/strongly agree. The one factor with the most “disagree” selected was “Well-Promoted”, however, it is not an alarming percentage, and it is evident that MSU SHEC has great success with promoting their events. **Figure 3** asks students to state why they have chosen to access the MSU SHEC space. The options which focused on various types of events and MSU SHEC’s educational resources seemed to have the most retention among students, indicating that their events and resources are being effectively utilized. However, the one-on-one peer support option received no agree/strongly agree responses and appeared to have a high number of responders selecting “disagree”/”strongly disagree”. It is interesting to see this type of engagement with a Service that offers one-on-one peer support, however, it is important to consider two things. Firstly, the number of responses received on this survey does not reflect the number of students engaging with the service each day/school year. Second, it is worth considering the communities that the other Peer-Support Services offered by the MSU (PCC, WGEN, and Maccess) cater to. While MSU SHEC is an all-encompassing peer support services, folks who are seeking peer support for specific reasons may be more drawn to other services and their peer support volunteers. Regardless of these factors this response is something that should be taken into consideration when finding ways to adapt MSU SHEC and improve it for students. **Figure 4** asks students to rank if they feel MSU SHEC provides a safe(r) space for folks in various communities such as BIPoC folks, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, drug users, disabled folks, low-income individuals, survivors, disabled folks, and young parents. While there was a high number of responders who indicated “unsure” for each option, each of the listed factors received agree/strongly agree responses more than any other choice. Finally, **Figure 5** asks students if they feel MSU SHEC adds value to the McMaster community and 100% of responders selected agree/strongly agree equally. It is great to see that students recognize and understand the value of this Service.

##### Volunteer Engagement & Retention

A total of 42 responses were received for the MSU SHEC Volunteer survey. This survey has some of the highest involvement seen this year considering it is from current and former volunteers it will be very useful when considering recommendations. The following figures represent data which were accumulated through survey responses:

**Figure 6:** I feel that I have received adequate training for what I experience within my volunteer role as it relates to:





**Figure 8:** When on-shift I feel adequately supported by the following individuals:

**Figure 7:** I feel that the MSU SHEC service is appropriately:

Many of the questions that were asked to students (such as the questions in **Figures 2, 3, and 4**) were also asked to volunteers, and it worth noting that volunteers shared very similar opinions and sentiments. In **Figures 6, 7, and 8**, each provides a glimpse into volunteer perspectives on the Service that were not echoed elsewhere in other surveys. These specific tables held shed light on why specific recommendations are made at the end of the report. Looking at **Figure 6**, volunteers were asked if they feel they have received adequate training for what is experienced within their volunteer role as it relates to a variety of factors including Anti-Oppressive Practices, Mental Wellness, Safe(r) Sex Resources, and Substance Use/Harm Reduction (among many other training topics listed in the table). Many responders most agreed/strongly agreed that their peer-support training adequately prepared them to deal with these scenarios. There were few volunteers that selected “disagree” and, while the number is low, it indicates that some volunteers did not feel adequately trained to deal with these situations. Volunteers should be given training that prepares them well for all situations faced in their role. While it is great to see that volunteers feel they are most adequately trained, it may be worth reevaluating the adequacy for the future, especially considering how different this school year has been, so that the next time volunteers are asked this question all factors receive a agree/strongly agree response. **Figure 7**, asked volunteers if they feel the Service is adequately funded, staffed, and supported. Looking at this table it is clear that volunteers agree with each of these factors, with few folks disagreeing with the staffed and supported aspect. It is great to see a positive engagement with this question considering the students union should be focused on ensuring our peer support services are able to help students. In any situation, support for volunteers should have no bounds and it is important that the MSU finds ways to support our hardworking volunteers. When looking at **Figure 8**, SHEC volunteers clearly feel well-supported by one another, comparing that to **Figure 7**, there seems to be a strong sense of support that volunteers feel associated with the Service. It is great to see the strong communal support from within and outside the Service, this is something that should be continued, maintained, and encouraged in ways that will not produce burnout from volunteers.

#### External Research

Research was conducted to see if other post-secondary institutions offered services/clubs like MSU SHEC and if they had any unique qualities that could be adapted for MSU SHEC. Numerous institutions, such as the University of Western Ontario, offer clubs (at Western, it is called Active Minds Western) that focus on reducing stigma around mental illness and encouraging conversations about mental health, while the MSU does not have a Service solely dedicated to this, each of our Peer-Support Services (especially MSU SHEC) encourage and support these conversations while also diminishing stigma. Active Minds Western runs events and campaigns to enable these discussions, like what MSU SHEC already does with educational and advocacy events. Some institutions offer services that directly resemble MSU SHEC. For instance, at York University, they have an organization called the Peer Health Education Team, which focuses on promotion and health education through various sub-committees that address the same topics as MSU SHEC, including those focused on substance use, sexual health, and stress management. However, their advocacy does not seem to go beyond these factors, nor does it appear that this club offers peer support like MSU SHEC does. Based on the research conducted at these institutions and other schools, it is evident that MSU SHEC is not exclusive in offering safe(r)-sex supplies and mental wellbeing/harm reduction resources to university students. This seems to be a universal campus experience and it is great to see that these resources are accessible. One thing that makes MSU SHEC unique is the work they do for young parents and pregnant folks, as well as offering one-on-one drop-in peer support. MSU SHEC provides a necessary service that is also individualized for students with diverse identities in need of specific support. Based on what other post-secondary institutions are doing to support student health, MSU SHEC should continue in doing this amazing work and advocate to make resources continually accessible to students.

#### Final Thoughts

##### Concluding Remarks

It is evident that MSU SHEC does great work for students and is a great Service offered by the MSU. MSU members see a value in MSU SHEC and feel that it creates a safe(r) space for numerous students of differing identities. The following recommendations are made to continue this positive trend for MSU SHEC. Similar to the previous reports for the MSU EFRT and WGEN, the first recommendation should be to investigate opportunities to increase support for SHEC volunteers. The volunteers for this Service continually work hard to offer peer support to students and it is important that there are protocols in place for volunteers who have given support to receive support for themselves afterwards. It is crucial for the MSU to investigate avenues to offering support for volunteers. Furthermore, the MSU should investigate opportunities for establishing external funding and formal relationships with community partners to help increase SHEC’s outreach potential so that they can receive sponsorships which can help to improve their free resources and materials for students. Should the MSU receive additional funding, opportunities for volunteer/executive honoraria would ensure members of the Service felt sufficient compensation for the completion of their duties. For the fourth recommendation, the MSU should evaluate the current adequacy of peer-support training for volunteers. Considering how this past school year has been like no other, it is worth reassessing the current structure of volunteer peer-support training and adapting the training that is given to be more up to date with how our Services are operating and how they will continue to operate in the future. Moreover, the MSU should work to establish a clearer and more direct referral system from MSU SHEC volunteers to other community partners, it is evidently known that this Service refers students to University partners but a more concrete system outlining volunteer’s ability to refer students to resources off-campus. Finally, considering how much work is put into each of our Peer-Support Services, it may be beneficial for the MSU to investigate the possibility of hiring a full-time staff who works to support our Peer-Support Services and volunteers. While this is currently the responsibility of the VP (Administration), it may be beneficial to investigate hiring an individual whose sole responsibility is ensuring the support and upkeep of Peer-Support Services, this individual can report to the VP (Administration) and Executive Board just as a PTM would, but their job would focus directly on supporting Services such as MSU SHEC.

##### Recommendations

1. The MSU should investigate opportunities to increase support for SHEC Volunteers (i.e., trauma/crisis support protocols, and relationships with SWC and community partners).
2. The MSU should investigate opportunities for establishing sources of external funding (i.e., sponsorships, etc.) to provide additional support for MSU SHEC staff and operations.
3. The MSU and SHEC should work to establish formal connections with community partners (i.e., SACHA).
4. The MSU and MSU SHEC should evaluate the current adequacy of peer-support training for volunteers.
5. The MSU and MSU SHEC should establish a clear and direct referral system from Service volunteers to community partners.
6. The MSU should investigate the potential for a permanent full-time staff to support Peer-Support Services.

Warm Regards,

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