

Peer Support Tip Sheet: Active Citizenship

This tip sheet was created as a very brief introduction Active Citizenship, with much text taken from The Troublemaker's Teaparty: A Manual for Effective Citizen Action by Charles Dobson (New Society Publishers). To learn more about the theory and practice of being an active citizen, give us a call. PeerNetBC offers training sessions throughout the year.

What is Active Citizenship?

There is no universally accepted definition of Active Citizenship and no standard model of what an active citizen is. But there is general agreement that it refers to the involvement of individuals in public life and affairs. This can take place at local, national and international levels. The term is used especially at local level to refer to citizens who become actively involved in the life of their communities tackling problems or bringing about change or resisting unwanted change. Active citizens are those who develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to make informed decisions about their communities and workplaces with the aim of improving the quality of life in these. At a local level it active citizens may be involved in creating greenways or setting up a childcare co-op. At national level it can move from voting to being involved in campaigning pressure groups to being a member of a political party. At international level the global active citizen may be involved in movements to promote sustainability or fair trade, to reduce poverty or eliminate slavery.

Why do we need more Active Citizens?

To increase livability in your community: Portland, Oregon regularly receives the honour of most livable city in the USA and, not coincidentally, Portland is a city whose government engages its citizens at many levels of decision making.

To be healthier: Active citizenship is a rarely recognized health benefit. The World Health Organization notes that only 25% of our health status comes from health care. The rest comes from the effects of adequate education and income, a clean environment, secure housing and employment, control over decisions affecting our lives, and a social support network. In fact, many of the strongest advocates for more active citizenship are beginning to come from health care providers.

To solve large public issues: When it comes to legislated change, it will only come when a majority of the electorate, the voters, shows that it cares about the issue.

To solve local issues: If you want to have the city install a stop sign in your neighbourhood, it is up to you to speak up! Nobody else knows about this issue except you and your neighbours.

What skills and qualities should Active Citizens possess?

Whether you are a group leader or a volunteer participant in a movement, there are some skills and qualities that may be helpful. PeerNetBC offers training in the following:

- 🌀 understanding the stages of group development
- 🌀 navigating through conflict
- 🌀 communication skills
- 🌀 icebreakers, energizers and teambuilding
- 🌀 engaging marginalized communities
- 🌀 safety and boundaries

For more information, give us a call or send an email to info@peernetbc.com.

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