



Guidance and Counseling Psychoeducation and Peer-Counselor Training in a Junior Secondary School Without a School Counselor

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ABSTRACT

The absence of a Guidance and Counseling (GC) teacher at SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan has prevented the school from providing formal GC services, leaving students with very limited understanding of the nature, functions, and benefits of such services. At the same time, students feel more comfortable sharing personal concerns with peers who have not been equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to provide appropriate initial support. This community engagement program aimed to optimize the role of peers through GC psychoeducation and peer-counselor training. Conducted in July 2026, the program consisted of five stages: need assessment, preparation, GC psychoeducation through classroom guidance involving 26 eighth- and ninth-grade students in one 90-minute session, peer-counselor training for 12 students across three sessions comprising material delivery, simulation, and individual counseling practice, and evaluation and reflection. Evaluation used two non-test instruments: an indicator-based achievement checklist for the psychoeducation session and an observation rubric covering eight basic counseling skills with three rating categories. All seven psychoeducation indicators were achieved, including students' understanding of the definition, objectives, functions, principles, service areas, and stages of GC, accompanied by a good level of participation. In the peer-counselor training, five skills were rated good building rapport, attending, active listening, empathy, and closing counseling whereas three skills remained in the fair category: exploring problems, providing feedback, and helping counselees formulate solutions. The program made an initial contribution by establishing a trained peer-support system that functions as a source of first-line assistance and a referral link rather than as a substitute for professional GC services.

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counseling (GC) is an integral component of the education system that helps students achieve optimal personal, social, academic, and career development through preventive, remedial, developmental, and maintenance functions (Prayitno & Amti, 2018). Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 111 of 2014 emphasizes that GC services are needed to

develop students' life competencies through functions of understanding, facilitation, adjustment, and placement (Kemendikbud, 2014). This need is particularly important at the junior secondary level because students are in early adolescence, a period characterized by rapid physical, emotional, moral, and social changes that require appropriate support (Santrock, 2019; Wati et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the provision of GC services in schools continues to face several challenges, including the absence of dedicated GC teachers or school counselors (Wahyudi, Neviyarni, & Firman, 2021). As a result, GC services cannot be delivered optimally, and students may lack information needed to understand the purposes, functions, and benefits of counseling services (Fadillah & Hanif, 2025). Consequently, many students still hold misconceptions, such as viewing GC as a service intended only for students with problems, which discourages them from seeking support (Aisyah et al., 2022). This issue is not unique to Indonesia. Cross-national systematic reviews show that adolescents often delay or avoid professional help because of stigma, concerns about confidentiality, and limited service literacy, while preferring informal sources of support in their immediate environment (Radez et al., 2021; Rickwood et al., 2005). Where schools lack counselors, the gap between students' needs and available services becomes even wider.

A similar situation was identified at SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan. Initial observations and coordination with the school by students from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Widya Mandira Catholic University who were undertaking the Community Service Program Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN) showed that the school did not have a GC teacher. More specifically, the partner school's initial condition was as follows: 52 students were enrolled across three classes; none of the school's 10 teachers had an academic background in GC; and no classical, group, or individual GC services were being implemented. These conditions contributed to students' limited knowledge of the nature, functions, and benefits of GC and the absence of a systematic psychosocial support mechanism when students encountered problems.

Interviews with school personnel and several students indicated that students more often shared their problems with peers whom they described as friends to confide in than with teachers. The concerns most frequently discussed involved peer relationships, including interpersonal conflict and bullying, particularly verbal bullying, as well as difficulty maintaining learning motivation. Bullying and peer conflict were also among the most frequently cited reasons for not approaching teachers. This situation suggests that students feel safer with, and place greater trust in, peers of similar age and circumstances. This finding is consistent with research showing that adolescents tend to disclose their problems more openly to peers than to adults (Radez et al., 2021). Peers therefore have substantial potential to be empowered as a source of support and first-line assistance within the school environment.

This potential is grounded in similarities in age, status, experience, and emotional bonds, which make peer relationships an effective channel of psychological support during adolescence (Santrock, 2019). Empowering peers through the establishment and training of peer counselors can therefore support GC provision, particularly in schools that do not have a GC teacher, such as SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan. Peer counselors can help other students strengthen character, improve social relationships, address academic and psychological concerns, and make appropriate decisions (Yuliasari, 2020). Peer counseling itself refers to assistance provided by trained peers to help individuals work through problems and support their personal development (Arifin et al., 2025), without replacing professional counselors (Lejap et al., 2025).

Previous community engagement programs have shown that peer-counselor training can improve students' capacity and skills in supporting their peers. Salmiati et al. (2018) found that training involving lectures, role play, focus group discussion, simulation, and mentoring improved students' understanding and skills in helping peers address problems. Kusumawaty et al. (2020) reported improvements in participants' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor capacities following peer-counselor capacity building. Peer-counselor training can also help schools identify student problems earlier and foster a culture of mutual care (Arifin et al., 2025). International evidence both supports and qualifies these findings. King and Fazel (2021) concluded that the benefits of school-based peer interventions are most consistently observed among students trained as helpers, whereas evidence of benefits for recipients remains less robust. Aladağ and Tezer (2009) similarly

showed that peer-helping training significantly improved trainees' helping skills and self-growth, while [Curtin et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Widnall et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasized that program success depends heavily on training quality, ongoing support, and a supportive school climate.

Most previous community engagement initiatives, however, have been implemented in schools that already had GC services or have focused directly on peer-counselor training. The present program differs in three respects. First, it targeted a school with no GC teacher and therefore no established service structure within which peer counselors could operate, unlike the settings described by [Salmiati et al. \(2018\)](#), [Kusumawaty et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Arifin et al. \(2025\)](#). Second, training was not provided immediately; it was preceded by GC psychoeducation through classroom guidance to provide a conceptual foundation so that students first understood the roles, responsibilities, and limits of peer counselors. Third, the training concluded with directly supervised individual counseling practice and a follow-up session rather than ending with simulation alone. The integration of these three elements constitutes the distinctive feature of this program.

In response to these conditions, the KKN team from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program proposed strengthening peer support through GC psychoeducation and peer-counselor training. Operationally, the program was designed to achieve three measurable outcomes: (1) all seven indicators of students' understanding of basic GC concepts would be achieved by the end of the psychoeducation session; (2) at least five of eight basic counseling skills would reach the good category by the end of counseling practice; and (3) a trained peer-counselor group would be established and prepared to provide initial support and referral assistance at school. Accordingly, this article describes the implementation process and outcomes of the program as a strategy for strengthening psychosocial support services in a school without a GC teacher.

METHOD

The program combined psychoeducation through classroom guidance with peer-counseling training. This combination was selected to address the partner school's needs, particularly students' limited understanding of GC services and their lack of basic counseling skills in the absence of a GC teacher. The partner institution was SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan, located in Nekmese Village, South Amarasi District, Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. The psychoeducation component was designed to increase students' knowledge of basic GC concepts, whereas the training component aimed to develop basic peer-counseling skills through direct learning experiences in counseling practice.

The target participants were eighth- and ninth-grade students at SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan. Participation at each stage was defined consistently as follows: 26 students took part in the GC psychoeducation session, while 12 of these students participated in peer-counselor training, simulation, and individual counseling practice. The 12 trainees were selected based on willingness to participate, engagement during classroom guidance, and recommendations from homeroom teachers. The program was conducted in July 2026 and included initial observation and coordination with the school (July 14, 2026), GC psychoeducation (July 17, 2026), peer-counselor training combined with simulation and the first counseling practice (July 21, 2026), a second counseling practice (July 28, 2026), and follow-up counseling (July 29, 2026).

The duration and facilitator roles for each session were organized as follows. The psychoeducation session was conducted once for 90 minutes, with one university student serving as the presenter and three others assisting the class by facilitating questions and answers and recording observational data. Peer-counselor training lasted 120 minutes and was divided into four material segments, each delivered by one student trainer (Trainers 1-4), with each trainer responsible for one cluster of skills. Simulation and individual counseling practice lasted 90 minutes at each meeting, with a mentoring ratio of one student facilitator to three participants. The field supervisor served as the program supervisor by validating the materials, monitoring practice sessions, and providing final feedback after each session. PowerPoint slides displayed on a smartboard were used as instructional media. The materials covered basic GC concepts definition, objectives, functions, principles, service areas, and stages as well as peer-counselor topics, including the definition and characteristics of peer counselors, basic counseling skills such

as attending, active listening, empathy, questioning, reflection, and summarizing, and ethics and confidentiality in counseling.

Program implementation began with a need assessment, followed by preparation, GC psychoeducation through classroom guidance, peer-counselor training, and evaluation. The term need assessment is used consistently throughout this manuscript. The implementation flow is presented in Figure 1.

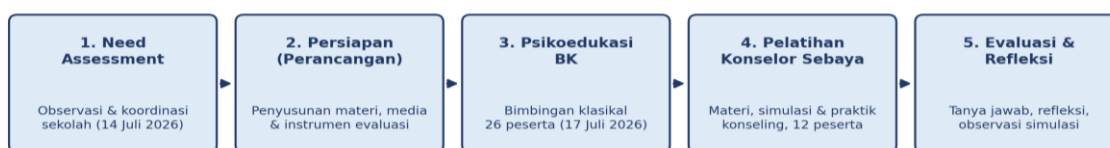


Figure 1. Stages of the Community Engagement Program

The stages are described below.

1. Need Assessment (Initial Needs Assessment)

This stage served as the starting point for the entire program because an effective intervention should be grounded in actual field conditions rather than assumptions. Through direct observation and coordination with the principal, the team mapped the school's conditions, student characteristics, and the underlying problems affecting GC services, including the absence of a GC teacher. These baseline data served two purposes: they informed the design of contextually relevant materials and provided a reference point for comparison during evaluation.

2. Preparation (Program Design)

Based on the need-assessment findings, the preparation stage translated field data into a concrete intervention plan. Psychoeducation and training materials were adapted to the level of understanding of eighth- and ninth-grade students, while presentation media and practice sheets were prepared to ensure systematic delivery. Evaluation instruments were also developed at this stage so that indicators of success were established before the intervention began.

3. GC Psychoeducation (Classroom Guidance)

This stage was positioned as the knowledge foundation before students were trained as peer counselors because counseling skills cannot be developed without an adequate conceptual understanding. The material was delivered using a varied-lecture approach combining presentation, question-and-answer, and discussion activities, as one-way instruction is less effective in promoting active adolescent participation (Aprilia et al., 2020). Establishing basic GC understanding among the 26 students began to address the information gap created by the absence of a GC teacher.

4. Peer-Counselor Training (Strengthening Counseling Skills)

This stage logically extended the GC psychoeducation by translating conceptual understanding into practical skills. Training covered the concept and characteristics of peer counselors, attending, active listening, empathy, questioning skills, reflection, summarizing, ethics, and confidentiality. Peer counseling was selected because the absence of a GC teacher created a need for support resources that were psychologically closer to other students. The training concluded with simulation and individual counseling practice involving 12 students. Simulation scenarios were developed from the problems most frequently identified during the need assessment: learning difficulties, peer conflict, and communication problems with parents. Participants were divided into six pairs. In the first round, one student acted as the peer counselor and the other as the counselee; roles were then reversed in the second round so that every participant experienced both positions. Each pair was supervised by a student trainer who used an observation rubric and provided immediate feedback after each round.

5. Evaluation and Reflection

As the final stage, evaluation assessed the extent to which the objectives formulated during the need assessment had been achieved. Three evaluation techniques were used concurrently: question-and-answer sessions, participant reflection, and observation of the simulation. This triangulation was intended to prevent conclusions about program achievement from relying on

a single source of evidence and to provide an empirical basis for recommendations regarding program sustainability at the partner school.

The instrument description below was originally placed in the Results and Discussion section. In response to reviewer comments regarding the clarity of indicators, rubrics, and category criteria, it was moved to the Method section so that readers could understand the assessment basis before the results were presented. Achievement data were collected using two non-test instruments developed during the preparation stage, consistent with the principle that success indicators should be established before the intervention. Both instruments were designed so that their results correspond directly to Tables 1 and 2.

First, the Guidance and Counseling Psychoeducation Achievement Evaluation Sheet (reference for Table 1) was a checklist covering seven evaluation aspects: understanding of GC, the objectives of GC, the functions of GC, GC principles, GC service areas, stages of GC services, and participant engagement. Each aspect included an operational achievement indicator assessed by facilitators through direct observation and question-and-answer sessions. The categories were defined as follows: an aspect was rated Achieved when at least three randomly selected participants could correctly explain the relevant indicator without assistance and no misconceptions conflicting with the material were identified; it was rated Not Achieved when either requirement was not met. Participant engagement used a separate descriptive classification based on frequency of involvement: Good when more than half of participants engaged in discussion or questions and answers, Fair when between one-quarter and one-half participated, and Poor when fewer than one-quarter participated. This indicator-based checklist format is commonly used in psychoeducation-oriented community engagement evaluation because it enables objective assessment of program objectives without requiring a standardized test instrument (Anjar, 2017).

Second, the Basic Counseling Skills Observation Sheet/Rubric (reference for Table 2) was a structured observation rubric adapting eight indicators of basic counseling skills: building rapport, attending, active listening, empathy, exploring problems, providing feedback, helping formulate solutions, and closing counseling. The rubric drew on the framework for developing basic counseling-skills instruments for counselor trainees (Anjar, 2017) and Carkhuff's basic helping-skills framework (Carkhuff, 2009; Laela et al., 2023). Each indicator was observed by a student trainer or facilitator during simulation and individual counseling practice and rated using three categories. The descriptors were: Good when the participant consistently demonstrated the target behavior in both practice rounds without facilitator prompting; Fair when the behavior appeared inconsistently or only after a prompt; and Poor when the behavior did not appear even after prompting. The category reported in Table 2 is the modal category, representing the category achieved by the largest number of participants for that indicator. Categorical rubric-based observation of this type is commonly used in community engagement reporting (Alfarisi et al., 2025).

It should be noted that both instruments were categorical and did not use a quantitative scale such as a Likert instrument with a pre-test–post-test design. This choice reflected the limited duration of the KKN program and the absence of a standardized instrument at the partner school. Consequently, gains in participants' understanding and skills are reported as achievement of predefined indicators rather than as changes in numerical scores. This limitation is addressed in the Conclusion and informs the recommendation to use scaled instruments in a subsequent program cycle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The psychoeducation session took place in an active classroom atmosphere. Students participated in the full sequence of activities, and several voluntarily took notes without being asked. The psychoeducation activity is shown in Figure 2. Based on observation and evaluation through question-and-answer sessions using the achievement evaluation sheet described in the Method section, students demonstrated improved understanding of GC services. Baseline data from the need-assessment stage showed that none of the seven understanding indicators had been achieved: students were unable to explain the definition, objectives, functions, principles, service areas, or stages of GC services, and some believed that GC was intended only for students with problems.

After the psychoeducation session, all seven indicators were rated as achieved. A comparison of the initial and post-session conditions, together with the assessment criteria, is presented in Table 1.



Figure 2. Implementation of the GC Psychoeducation Activity

Table 1. Achievement of Guidance and Counseling Psychoeducation Outcomes (n = 26)

Aspect Evaluated	Achievement Indicator	Assessment Basis (descriptor)	Initial Condition	Result
Understanding of GC	Participants can explain the meaning of GC	Randomly selected participants explain the meaning of GC without assistance; no misconceptions are identified	Not achieved	Achieved
Objectives of GC	Participants understand the objectives of GC services	Participants correctly state at least two objectives of GC services	Not achieved	Achieved
Functions of GC GC principles	Participants can identify the functions of GC	Participants state at least two of the four GC functions	Not achieved	Achieved
	Participants understand the importance of confidentiality	Participants explain why confidentiality must be maintained in counseling	Not achieved	Achieved
GC service areas	Participants know the areas of GC services	Participants identify at least two service areas (personal, social, academic, career)	Not achieved	Achieved
Stages of GC services	Participants understand the stages of GC services	Participants correctly sequence the opening, core, and closing stages of counseling	Not achieved	Achieved
Participant engagement	Participants actively engage in discussion and question-and-answer activities	Good: >50% of participants engaged; Fair: 25–50%; Poor: <25%	Not yet observed	Good

Table 1 shows that the GC psychoeducation activity achieved all of the predefined indicators. After the session, students were able to explain the definition, objectives, functions, principles, service areas, and stages of GC and demonstrated good participation in discussion and question-and-answer activities. These findings indicate that classroom-guidance psychoeducation not only strengthened students' understanding but also corrected the misconception that GC services are intended only for students with problems. Students began to recognize that GC services are available to all students to support personal, social, academic, and career development.

Participant engagement also contributed to achievement of the psychoeducation objectives. Although only some students asked questions, the questions reflected curiosity and developing understanding. For example, one participant asked why problems disclosed to a counselor should not be shared with others, while another asked whether students who were not experiencing problems could still meet with a GC teacher. Questions about confidentiality and the stages of counseling services suggested that students were beginning to understand core GC principles. This finding is consistent with Putri et al. (2025), who reported that classroom-guidance services can improve students' understanding by creating opportunities for active participation in learning and reflection.

Improved understanding was also supported by the varied-lecture method, which combined presentation, discussion, and question-and-answer activities (Aprilia et al., 2020). This approach allowed participants both to receive information and to clarify the material through direct interaction with facilitators. The finding is consistent with Siswanti et al. (2025), who showed that interactively delivered psychoeducation can improve participants' understanding and awareness. The psychoeducation objective was therefore achieved by strengthening students' literacy regarding GC services as a foundation before peer-counselor training. This is also consistent with the community engagement program reported by Lejap et al. (2025), which identified understanding of basic counseling concepts as an important prerequisite for skills training.

In contrast to the classroom session, peer-counselor training required more personal involvement. Participants appeared serious when practicing the counselor role and were willing to repeat exercises after receiving facilitator feedback. Documentation of the training is presented in Figures 3.



Figure 3. Training sessions conducted by Trainers 1-4.

Observations showed that all participants were able to take part in the training and simulation activities. Most participants could establish initial rapport, open conversations naturally, demonstrate attending behavior, listen actively, show empathy, and encourage counselees to express their concerns. However, several participants still experienced difficulty exploring problems in greater depth through open-ended questions, providing appropriate feedback, and helping counselees independently identify alternative solutions. A summary of participants' achievement of basic counseling skills is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Achievement of Basic Peer-Counseling Skills (n = 12)

Skill Assessed	Observation Result	Number of participants in category (n = 12)	Modal Category
Building rapport	Able to establish an initial relationship with the counselee	12 of 12 (100%)	Good
Attending	Demonstrates attention to the counselee	12 of 12 (100%)	Good
Active listening	Listens actively	12 of 12 (100%)	Good
Empathy	Demonstrates an empathic attitude	12 of 12 (100%)	Good
Exploring problems	Still requires practice	5 of 12 (41.66%)	Fair
Providing feedback	Not yet consistent	4 of 12 (33.33%)	Fair
Helping formulate solutions	Still requires guidance	5 of 12 (41.66%)	Fair
Closing counseling	Able to end the counseling session appropriately	12 of 12 (100%)	Good

Table 2 indicates that participants demonstrated good mastery of most basic counseling skills, including building rapport, opening conversations, attending, active listening, and empathy. These competencies are fundamental to counseling because they help create a warm, safe, and trusting relationship in which counsees feel comfortable disclosing their concerns. In contrast, exploring problems through open-ended questions, providing feedback, and facilitating counsees' identification of alternative solutions remained in the fair category. This pattern suggests that basic communication skills may be more readily developed during introductory training, whereas exploration and problem-solving skills require more intensive practice and continued experience. This interpretation is consistent with helping-skills theory, in which attending and responding represent foundational phases that may be acquired relatively quickly, while personalizing and initiating require longer-term support (Carkhuff, 2009; Laela et al., 2023).

Participants' skill development was supported by a training approach that combined material presentation, simulation, counseling practice, and direct mentoring. This finding is consistent with Salmiati et al. (2018), who reported that peer-counselor training using lectures, simulation, role play, practice, and reflection improved participants' knowledge and skills in providing initial assistance to peers. International evidence further supports this pattern. Aladağ and Tezer (2009) reported that peer-helping training significantly improved participants' helping skills compared with a comparison group, while Hart et al. (2020) showed that structured adolescent training improved both the quality of peer support and trainees' ability to direct peers toward more appropriate sources of help. Curtin et al. (2024) further noted that the success of peer programs depends on the sense of empowerment developed among trained participants and on a school climate that supports attention to mental-health issues.

This finding is also supported by Lejap et al. (2025), who reported that basic counseling-skills training improved participants' ability to communicate empathically, listen actively, and provide initial psychological support to peers. The present program indicates that participants acquired a foundation of basic skills for serving as peer counselors, although continued mentoring remains necessary.

At the end of the program, evaluation and reflection were conducted to identify what students had learned and how they perceived the overall activities. These sessions took place immediately after the GC psychoeducation and peer-counselor training and involved question-and-answer activities and participant reflections. Most students were able to answer the questions posed, actively sought clarification on material they had not fully understood, and, in several cases, took notes on their own initiative. Although visible enthusiasm appeared somewhat more prominent among female students, the overall pattern suggested interest and curiosity about GC. These observations provided qualitative indications of student engagement and understanding of the training content.

Participants' reflections were also positive and highlighted the importance of empathy, attentive listening, and supportive communication in peer counseling. One participant stated, "I learned that GC services are very important at school and that becoming a counselor requires not only the ability to speak, but also the ability to listen with empathy. In this way, I can help a counselee understand the problem and identify an appropriate solution." Another participant explained, "From this activity, I learned that a counselor needs to provide motivation and support, listen carefully, and ask questions that help the counselee think and express the problem so that possible solutions can be identified." Students reported being pleased to acquire new knowledge and skills that could help them support their peers. They also recognized that helping a peer involves more than finding solutions; it requires listening, caring, and demonstrating empathy. The data collected through the question-and-answer and reflection sessions informed the preparation of Tables 1 and 2.

For SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan, which does not have a GC teacher, developing students with basic knowledge and skills as peer counselors represents an important first step toward establishing a peer-support system. However, the scope of this contribution needs to be stated carefully. Peer counselors do not, and cannot, replace professional GC teachers; their role is limited to providing initial support, listening, and connecting peers who need further assistance with homeroom teachers, the principal, or professional services outside the school. This limitation

is not merely an ethical consideration but is also supported by empirical evidence. King and Fazel (2021) found that the benefits of peer interventions are most consistently observed among students who are trained, while effects on recipients remain insufficiently established. Pointon-Haas et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that peer support complements service capacity rather than substitutes for it. The American School Counselor Association (2026) further stresses that peer-support programs should operate with counselor training and supervision and clear referral protocols. Continued peer-counselor training is therefore necessary to strengthen participants' competencies and support meaningful contributions to GC provision at the school.

CONCLUSION

The community engagement program combining Guidance and Counseling (GC) psychoeducation and peer-counselor training at SMP Swasta Kristen 1 Amarasi Selatan demonstrated progress in students' understanding of GC and their acquisition of basic peer-counseling skills. Among the 26 psychoeducation participants, all seven indicators of basic GC understanding were rated as achieved following the program, compared with none at baseline. Among the 12 peer-counselor trainees, five of eight assessed skills (62.5%) building rapport, attending, active listening, empathy, and closing counseling had a modal rating of Good, whereas problem exploration, providing feedback, and helping formulate solutions (37.5%) remained in the Fair category. All trainees attained a good rating in basic communication skills, although nine (75%) still required support in problem exploration. Classroom guidance using varied instructional methods, together with simulations, counseling practice, and mentoring, supported students' recognition of GC as a developmental service for all students and provided an initial foundation for a school-based peer-support system in the absence of a GC teacher. However, these findings should be interpreted within the limitations of categorical, observation-based evaluation, a small training cohort from one school, an implementation period of approximately two weeks, and the absence of direct assessment of outcomes for counselees; consequently, the magnitude, generalizability, and sustainability of the observed changes remain uncertain. Future program cycles should incorporate validated pre-test and post-test measures, longer-term follow-up, and assessment of counselee outcomes, while the school should establish a formal peer-counselor structure with teacher coordination, written referral procedures, and regular refresher training focused on skills requiring further development. Advocacy for the appointment of a qualified GC teacher is also essential to ensure that peer support complements professional counseling services.

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