

Support for Peer Integration into Behavioral Health Organizations

Kim Govak | June 12, 2023



PWI & EPOC Team at Advocates for Human Potential (AHP)



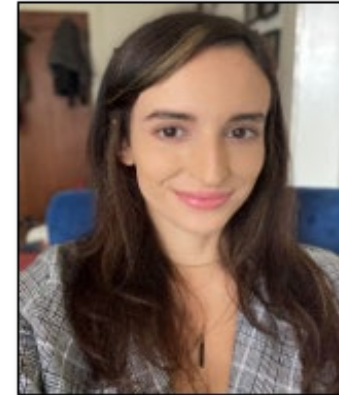
Kathleen West
Project Director



Tammy Bernstein
Deputy Project Director



Kate Cox
Operations Manager



Kayla Halsey
Data Manager



Caitlin Storm
Quality Assurance



Brett Hall
Grantee Coach Lead



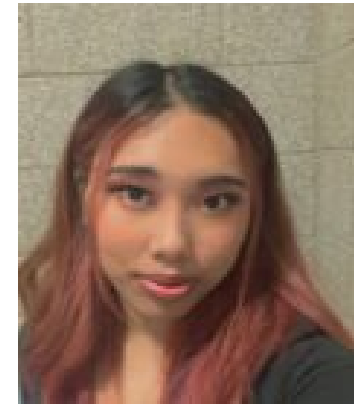
Rosy Larios
Grantee Coach



Neyat Tefery
Grantee Coach
& Ops Specialist



Raven Nash
Grantee Coach



Vic Walker
Operations Specialist

Kimberly Govak

Born and raised in Paterson, New Jersey, Kimberly is a woman in long-term recovery since 2006. She became interested in working in the recovery field, with a special interest in nonclinical recovery support, on her educational path toward clinical practice. She is a National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) and has been trained in Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT). Kimberly has had the honor of being the director of a regional recovery community organization (RCO) in southern New Jersey and has trained many individuals to embark upon careers within the recovery support sector.

Kimberly has received various awards for her commitment to advocacy and working toward solutions in the community, including an NCADD-NJ (now NCARR-BH) Advocacy Leader award and the Courage and Compassion Outstanding Peer Leadership award from the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addictions Agencies (NJAMHAA).





Learning Objectives

Upon completion of today's webinar, participants will:

- **Understand the different types of employment opportunities for peers who have obtained certification.**
- **Learn about CEU opportunities for keeping the certification current.**
- **Gain tips on interviewing for a job post certification and navigating the workplace once hired.**
- **Learn about support needed through recovery and integration into behavioral health organizations.**

Peer Workers Enhance the Support Team



Introduction

Peer recovery workers who have obtained certification have various career and employment opportunities that let them use their lived experience and expertise to support others in their recovery journey.

What Is a Peer Support Worker?

A peer support worker is a person who has lived experience with mental health concerns or substance use disorder or is a family member or an ally who combines their experience with specialized job training to help others.



Types of Peer Support Workers

Peer Recovery Specialists/Peer Support Specialists

- Work in diverse settings.
- Provide one-on-one support, advocacy, and guidance.
- Share their personal experiences of recovery and wellness.
- Facilitate support groups, conduct outreach, and collaborate.

Peer Recovery Coaches

- Serve as mentors and guides for people in recovery.
- Offer practical help in social determinants of health.
- Collaborate with participants to develop recovery or wellness plans.

Types of Peer Support Workers

Peer Advocates

- Promote the rights and needs of people in recovery.
- Engage in policy advocacy, community organizing, and systemic change efforts.
- Work with organizations, government agencies, and community groups to influence policy and promote recovery.

Continuing Education (CEUs)



Continuing Education (CEUs)

Certified peers must continue professional development and ensure that they stay current on best practices and emerging trends in the field. Here are common sources of CEU opportunities for peers:

- State Certification Boards, Professional Associations and Organizations

Online Training Platforms

- SAMHSA's Peer Recovery Center of Excellence: <https://www.samhsa.gov/peer-recovery-center-of-excellence>
- National Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC): <https://www.naadac.org/>
- Mental Health America (MHA): <https://www.mhanational.org/>
- National Recovery Institute, Faces & Voices of Recovery: <https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/services/nri/>

Other

- Local Training Educational Institutions, Conferences, Workshops
- Note: According to the DHCS Medi-Cal, in California, peer support specialists must complete 20 hours of continuing education every two years, <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Pages/Medi-Cal-Peer-Support-Services-Specialist-Program-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx>

Interviewing for Employment and Navigating the Workplace



Considerations When Interviewing for Employment

Certified peers should consider these key areas when interviewing for a peer support position at an organization or program:

Lived Experience and Recovery Journey

- How has your personal experience with mental health and/or substance use challenges influenced your decision to pursue a career as a peer support specialist?

Knowledge of Peer Support Principles and Practices

- How familiar are you with the principles of peer support and recovery-oriented practices?

Understanding of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

- How would you describe your understanding of mental health and/or substance use disorders and their impact on individual lives?

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

- How do you establish trust and build rapport with individuals seeking peer support services?

Considerations When Interviewing for Employment

Boundaries and Ethics

- How do you maintain appropriate boundaries in your role as a peer support specialist?
- What steps do you take to ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of individuals you support?

Collaborative and Teamwork Skills

- How do you work collaboratively with other professionals, such as counselors, therapists, case managers, or other providers, to support the overall well-being of individuals?

Self-Care and Wellness Practices

- How do you prioritize self-care and maintain your own well-being while providing support to others?

Commitment to Continuous Learning and Growth

- How do you stay updated on emerging trends, research, and best practices in the field of peer support?
- Can you provide examples of how you have pursued professional development or engaged in ongoing learning related to your role as a peer support specialist?

Navigating the Workplace

These tips and resources can help peers better understand the roles and responsibilities of peer specialists, navigate the workplace effectively, and support recovery during employment.

Peer Specialist Training Programs

- Many states and organizations offer training programs specifically designed for peer specialists.

Certification Bodies and Professional Associations

- Certification bodies and professional associations for peer specialists often provide resources, guidelines, and codes of ethics that outline the roles and responsibilities of peer specialists.

Supervision and Mentorships

- Seek opportunities for supervision and mentorship from experienced peer specialists or supervisors in the workplace or professional network.
- Use regular supervision for guidance, support, and feedback; a mentor can offer insights based on experience.

Peer Support Networks

- Use peer support networks to connect with other peers, share experiences, seek advice, and learn.

Navigating the Workplace

Continuing Education and Professional Development

- Stay updated on the latest research, practices, and trends in the field of peer support.

Self-Reflection and Self-Care

- Regularly reflect on one's own experiences, challenges, and growth as a peer specialist.
- Engage in self-care practices that support personal well-being and recovery.

Seek Feedback and Advocate for Self

- Request feedback from supervisors, colleagues, and individuals supported.
- Actively seek opportunities for growth and improvement, and advocate for the resources and support you need to fulfill your role effectively.

Reflect on Boundaries and Ethics

- Continuously review and reinforce your understanding of professional boundaries and ethical considerations in peer support.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2022). *Peer support workers for those in recovery*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers>

Peer Integration



Integrated Peer Support Workers

- Reduce symptoms and hospitalizations.
- Decrease lengths of hospital stays and costs of services.
- Reduce the use of acute services.
- Increase engagement in outpatient treatment, care planning, and self-care.
- Increase social support and participation in the community.
- Improve well-being, self-esteem, and social functioning.
- Encourage more thorough and longer-lasting recoveries.
- Increase rates of family unification.

MHA, 2023

Navigating the Workplace

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Ways to Support Peers



Ways to Support Peers to Thrive

- Peer work role and boundaries
- Hiring practices
- Work–life balance
- Welcoming, supportive environment
- Training support

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive

According to a New Hampshire study conducted in 2020:

Peer support specialists offering mental health and substance use support services have been shown to reduce stigma, hospitalizations, and health care costs. However, as peer support specialists are part of a fast-growing mental health and substance use workforce in innovative integrated care settings, they encounter various challenges in their new roles and tasks.

Almeida et al., 2020

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Role Clarity

- Clarify peer-professional and clinical roles and boundaries.
- Define clear handoffs and workflows.
- Educate clinicians about peer specialist work.

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Hiring Practices

- Recovery time alone is not the most important measure of peer success.
- Peers should be secure in their own recovery and at ease with supporting somebody else.
- Peers should develop interview questions, select interviewees, and ask and interpret interview questions.
- Peers should recruit and interview to explore recovery issues.
- Peers seek candidates with passion, empathy, and a desire to serve others.
- Peers look for red flags, such as not knowing potential reoccurrence triggers or how to keep dedicated self-care time and not owning boundaries.
- Supervisors can be peers or members.

Almeida et al., 2020

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Welcoming Environment and Work–Life Balance

- **Welcoming environment:** Employers can ensure that peers are positioned to succeed by preparing the clinical team to welcome and support them.
- **Education and awareness:** Integrated peers can help address stigma, but peers do report stigma with having a mental health condition or substance use disorder as the top challenge. Education and focused activities with peers and clinicians can help pave the way.
- **Work–life balance:** Promoting work–life balance helps avoid burnout.

Almeida et al., 2020

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Training Needs

- Training on self-care is reported as the top training need.
- Also important are:
 - Coping with vicarious trauma.
 - Working with people experiencing homelessness.
 - Providing trauma-informed care.
 - Knowing resources and strategies are available for working with perpetrators.

Almeida et al., 2020

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Create Peer-Friendly Workplaces

Peer-friendly workplaces:

1. Ensure role clarity.
2. Provide ongoing supervision.
3. Support certification and provide opportunities.
4. Address training needs.

Almeida et al., 2020

Ways to Support Peers to Thrive: Create Peer-Friendly Cultures

Peer-friendly cultures:

1. Provide a supportive, inclusive environment.
2. Develop policies and practices to support integrated teams.
3. Address stigma and discrimination in the workplace.
4. Focus on self-care and wellness.

Almeida et al., 2020

The Importance of Role Clarity

- Role clarity ensures that the peer understands the scope of their role.
- It also ensures that clinical colleagues understand the scope of the role, so they don't misinterpret or make assumptions in referrals.

White, W. (2006)

Nurture and Sustain the Peers

- This transformational role can be demanding and complicated, so a supportive work environment and culture ensures peers can excel.
- Avoiding secondary trauma and burnout are key to peers sustaining their roles.

Be Alert for Signs of Compassion Fatigue

- Reduced feelings of sympathy or empathy
- Depression
- Feelings of irritability, anger, or anxiety
- Hypersensitivity or complete insensitivity to emotional material
- Overidentification with certain participants
- Impaired decision-making
- Problems in personal relationships
- Poor work–life balance
- Chronic lateness, increased absenteeism from work
- Increased addictive behaviors
- Others?

Ligenza, 2018

Summary

- The benefits of integrating peer specialists are well worth the investment in systems and people to ensure that suitable peers are hired and colleagues understand the peer role.
- Ensure success by establishing systems to ensure that the integrated peers and existing staff perform to their potential and best serve the participants.
- Improved participant care can result by more cohesive support through the peer and clinical teams.
- The team can thrive due to alleviated capacity burdens and increased understanding of patient needs.

Peer Core Competency Takeaways

- **Recovery-oriented**: Peer workers hold out hope to those they serve, partnering with them to envision and achieve a meaningful and purposeful life. Peer workers help those they serve identify and build on strengths and empower them to choose for themselves, recognizing that there are multiple pathways to recovery.
- **Person-centered**: Peer recovery support services are always directed by the person participating in services. Peer recovery support is personalized to align with the specific hopes, goals, and preferences of the people being served and to respond to specific needs these people identify to the peer worker.
- **Voluntary**: Peer workers are partners with or consultants to those they serve. They do not dictate the types of services provided or the elements of recovery plans that will guide their work with peers. Participation in peer recovery support services is always contingent on peer choice.
- **Relationship-focused**: The relationship between the peer worker and the peer is the foundation on which peer recovery support services and support are provided. The relationship between the peer worker and peer is respectful, trusting, empathetic, collaborative, and mutual.
- **Trauma-informed**: Peer recovery support utilizes a strength-based framework that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

SAMHSA, 2022



Thank You

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