

# Understanding the Peer Role in Recovery-Focused Justice Systems

Randy Anderson RCPF / LADC – Bold North Recovery

Jesse Heffernan RCPF - Helios Recovery Services



# Creating a Courageous Space

- A Courageous space encourages dialogue. Recognizing difference and holding each person accountable to do the work of sharing experiences and coming to new understandings - a feat that's often hard, and typically uncomfortable.



# Objectives

- Provide information about the differences between a Peer/Coach, a sponsor, and a counselor.
- More clearly define the roles and responsibilities of a Peer/Coach in Recovery-Focused Justice Systems
- Provide education about the Basics of implementing a Peer/Coach support program in Recovery-Focused Justice Systems



# Who am I?

- Write down a list of how you would describe yourself: This can include your name, age, race, gender, orientation, ethnicity, hobbies, goals, travels, hopes, dreams, etc
- Write a list of all the groups and or roles you feel represent you.
- Of these 2 lists, identify the 5 most important ones and write them down
- Use these to introduce yourself to someone you don't know!





# Peer Support History

- The modern peer support movement began to organize in the 1970's
- Thousands of patient/inmates were released into the community
- The funds that had been spent on hospitals and asylums did not follow them into those communities
- Communities were unable to provide care and often did not want the ex-patient/survivors living in their towns and cities.



# Peer Support History

- Ex-patients began to meet in small groups.
- Developed self-help groups
- Talked about their experiences in the mental health system • Began to organize around change.
- Some wanted nothing to do with the system.
- Others wanted to build a better system of care



# Peer Roles

Peers are strictly restorative, non-punitive supports

- Mutual peer support (non coercive, non punitive)
- Change agents
- Remaining 'in' but not 'of' the system



# What is Peer/Coaching Support?

- Encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences
- This mutuality between a peer support worker and person in or seeking recovery promotes connection and inspires hope.
- Peer support offers a level of acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships (Mead & McNeil, 2006).
- By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.





# Power of Peer Support

SAMHSA: Peer support workers are people who have been successful in the recovery process who help others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse. Peer support services can effectively extend the reach of treatment beyond the clinical setting into the everyday environment of those seeking a successful, sustained recovery process. - SAMHSA



# Power of Peer Support in Systems

Living proof recovery exists

Experiential experts

Normalizes conversation



# Power of Peer Support in Systems

A physician working in the emergency department only sees individuals experiencing overdose at their worst moment. That physician assumes the patient dies, moves away, or ends up in jail.

They never see the patient live successfully in recovery.



# Power of Peer Support in Systems

Stigma can often be a result of fear-based ignorance. Having direct access to experiential experts is helpful in addressing this ignorance.

As part of the continuum of care, peers can be accessed directly when providers in physical and mental/behavioral health have questions. Peers can draw on their lived experience to inform these team members. They can help with things such as nonstigmatizing language, change in perspective, etc.





# Power of Peer Support in Justice Systems

Peers working in all different settings allow direct access to themselves from medical staff, correctional institution staff, law enforcement, religious leaders, community members, etc.

This direct access allows for conversation to ensue. The more uncomfortable conversations occur, the more those conversations become normalized in society.



# Audience Participation Time

- What is a Sponsor?
- What are the roles & responsibilities of a Sponsor?
- What skills should a successful Sponsor possess?



# Sponsor

- What is a Sponsor?
  - A person who familiarizes themselves with the 12-Step approach and works their way through the steps may be able and willing to help guide newcomers and those looking for extra support.
- What are the roles & responsibilities of a Sponsor?
  - Has been sober at least a year
  - Has worked the 12 steps at least once
  - Actively works with their own sponsor
  - Regularly attends meetings
  - Lives a life that you want to live
  - What skills should a successful Sponsor possess?
  - Isn't afraid to give you the difficult truths
  - Extensive knowledge and understanding of the steps
  - Identify warning signs of relapse (return to use, recurrence of symptoms)



# Audience Participation Time

- What is a Counselor?
- What are the roles & responsibilities of a Counselor?
- What skills should a successful Counselor possess?





# Counselor

- What is a Counselor?
  - Alcohol and drug counselors provide counseling for people who experience addiction as well as other related behavioral problems. They provide treatment and support to help the client recover from addiction or modify problem behaviors.
- What are the roles & responsibilities of a Counselor?
  - Managing all aspects of a case from date of entry to date of discharge.
  - Evaluating patients' physical and mental behaviors.
  - Developing appropriate treatment and recovery plans.
  - Facilitating individual and group therapy sessions.
  - Monitoring patients over time to assess treatment progress.
  - Collaborating with psychiatrists, doctors, nurses, social workers, and departments of correction.
  - Identifying behaviors that interfere with treatment and recovery.
- What skills should a successful Counselor possess?
  - Good listening skills
  - Formal education
  - Excellent communication skills



# Audience Participation Time

- What is a Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) / Recovery Coach (RC)?
- What are the roles & responsibilities of a PRS / RC?
- What skills should a successful PRS / RC possess?



# Recovery Coach / Peer Specialist

- What is a Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) / Recovery Coach (RC)?
  - According to the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR), is a person that promotes recovery and removes barriers and obstacles to recovery, serving as a personal guide and mentor for people seeking or already in recovery from an addiction to alcohol and or other drugs.





# Recovery Coach / Peer Specialist

A Recovery Coach is

- A person who helps remove personal and environmental obstacles to recovery
- Links the newly recovering person to the recovering community
- Serves as a personal guide and mentor in the management of personal and family recovery.
- Such supports are generated by mobilizing resources within the recovery community, or provided by the recovery coach where such natural support networks are lacking.





# Wisconsin Recovery Coach / Peer Specialist

- There are two types of certified peer specialists in Wisconsin.
  - Certified peer specialist: An individual with experience in the mental health and substance use services system trained to provide support to others struggling to find a path to recovery.
  - Certified parent peer specialist: An individual with experience raising a child with behavioral health challenges trained to utilize their experience navigating services in support of other parents.
  - Certification is awarded after successful completion of a training course and passage of an exam.



# Peers in Courts

Roles of Peers/Coaches in courts is to support people in court-based programs by:

- Providing person-centered, strength-based support to build recovery and resilience
- Providing relationship-focused support and role-modeling based on lived experience  
Advocating for the individual in stressful and urgent situations and in respect for their rights
- Assisting individuals with understanding and navigating the Justice System
- Supporting individuals to achieve their goals, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential (Abdenour & Sepulveda, 2022)
- Advocate for client in court and in staffing meetings



# Peers in Courts

Roles of Peers/Coaches in courts is to support people in court-based programs by:

- Provide peer support based on peer's lived experience, knowledge of resources, and connections to the recovery community
- Bridge the gap between case manager and client and also Judge and client
- Engage participants at orientation and give information about the program
- Help create or maintain an Alumni Group
- Provide one on one sessions with the client in the office, field, or on the phone





# Peers in Courts: Learning from the field

- Total Family Care Coalition (TFCC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit and designated Lead Contact for Children and Families in the District of Columbia.)
- In the juvenile justice system, TFCC peer specialists coach parents in supporting a child with behavioral health challenges and assist courts in identifying opportunities of restorative justice.
- The primary function of the Recovery Peer Specialist is to assist jail diversion program participants with community reentry and engagement in continuing treatment and services.





# Peers in Courts: Learning from the field

- The New Mexico Office of the Courts has a department of therapeutic justice and a statewide program manager — a peer himself — focusing on alumni and peer support initiatives for treatment courts. The program manager supports and develops tools for alumni groups to get started and become sustained.



# Peers in Courts: Learning from the field

- For years, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has reaped the benefits of Certified Peers within Oklahoma's Specialty Courts as evidenced by the following: increased engagement rates, decrease in recidivism, reduced substance use and higher recovery rates, increased employment, decreased arrests and incarcerations, and increased consumer satisfaction (100% of those reported to "Strongly Agree" with service satisfaction surveys received support from a certified peer).



# Peers in Courts: Next Steps

- Connect with local or regional Recovery Centers with an existing Peer or Coach Program
- Educate TX Teams on Peer and Coaching Role
- Determine number of Peers/Coaches needed for your community TX Court
- Write Peers/Coach contract into annual budget
- Create referral process
- Set expectation that the peer is providing team – based care with clinical and other staff



# Peers in Courts: Next Steps

- Base the success on restorative, non-punitive approaches
- Look for improvement in quality-of-life vs abstinence only
- Treat substance use as an illness and the addicted person as a patient.





# Imagining a Restorative Wellness Court

- Completion of Initial Stabilization Phase (2 or 3): Once a client has achieved an observable and consistent baseline of sobriety, the court could support a restorative process where the client can take responsibility for the wrongdoing that prompted the referral to the wellness court.



# Imagining a Restorative Wellness Court

- Completion of Phase 3-4: As the client and court's priorities shift from intensive treatment to more long-term social and economic stabilization, the court could support a process that allows for a restorative conversation between the client and his/her family (perhaps through a family group conference).



# Imagining a Restorative Wellness Court

- **Nearing Graduation:** As the client prepares for completion of the drug court program, the court should support a final restorative process for the client: making amends to him/herself.



# Imagining a Restorative Wellness Court

- Nearing Graduation: As the client prepares for completion of the drug court program, the court should support a final restorative process for the client: making amends to him/herself.
- The client may also elect to participate in a Peer or Coach training





# Questions



# Resource Links

- [Connecticut Center for Addiction Recovery](#)
- [National Assoc of Peers](#)
- [Peer Recovery Center of Excellence](#)
- [Live & Learn Inc](#)
- [State Certification Directory](#)
- [Peer Recovery Orgs](#)
- [Adventure Recovery](#)
- [Wildflower Alliance](#)
- [National Empowerment Center](#)
- [Peer Support Resources](#)



Randy Anderson RCPF / LADC – Bold North Recovery  
info@boldnorthrecovery.com

Jesse Heffernan RCPF - Helios Recovery  
jheffernan@heliosrecovery.com

