Paving New Ground

Peers Working in In-Patient Settings

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May 2013
Helpful Definitions:

• **Consumer:** Current or former patient diagnosed with a mental illness

• **Peer:** A person who has equal standing with another or others, and has had similar experiences as another

• **Peer Specialist:**
  Most common term used for self-disclosed consumers who deliver recovery-oriented services. Most often they have specialized training and sometimes a certification

  *(Bluebird, 2004)*
Definition of Peer Support:

Peer Support is not like clinical support, nor is it just about being friends. Peer support helps people to understand each other because they’ve been there, shared similar experiences, and can model for each other a willingness to learn and grow

(Mead & MacNeil, 2003)
Providing Empathy:

One of the key benefits of peer support as opposed to other forms of mental health services is the greater perceived empathy that Peer Specialists have for the people they support.
Rationales Cont’d:

- Peers can serve as role models, communicators, mediators, advocates, teachers and legal protectors.

- Peers provide support from a perspective of experiential rather than professional authority.

- First hand experiences provide unique insights and interpretations of situations.

- Peers, hired as staff at all levels, promote movement towards an organizational culture shift.
Typical Peer Specialist Duties:

– Participate in Recovery (treatment) team meetings at request of client
– Facilitate peer support groups and recovery groups
– Provide individual peer support
– Address minor complaints and grievances
– Help develop hospital policies with language that is sensitive to recovery
Inpatient Peer Support Role:

• Assisting and orienting people who are being admitted
  – Create admissions comfort bag
  – Screen for safety of items
  – Larger goodie bags for persons being discharged
• Addressing minor complaints and grievances
• Helping people advocate for themselves
• Documentation on records
• Discharge Planning
Example of Peer Roles in Support and Recovery:

One core function of Peer Specialists is facilitating Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) a personal monitoring program in which an individual develops techniques and strategies for reducing symptoms, as well as ongoing management and prevention of symptoms.

(www.mentalhealthrecovery.com/vtrecovery.html)
Crisis Intervention:

- First level De-escalation
- Debriefing
- Personal safety plans
- Focus on Trauma
- Intensive work with individuals
- Cultural differences considered
- Comfort Rooms
Comfort Room Examples:

Western State Hospital
Tacoma, WA

Zen Room, Ft. Lauderdale Hospital, FL
Peer Roles in Mental Health Settings:

*Individual Benefits*

- Empathy and support
- Sharing what works/Strategies for recovery
- Empowerment
- Holistic/non-medical approach
- Knowing their rights
- Easier to relate to someone who “has been there”

*(Campbell and Leaver, 2003; Clay, 2005)*
Peer Roles in Mental Health Settings: *Staff* Benefits

- Potential to be a force for positive change
- Education for mental health professionals about living with a mental illness and potential for recovery
- Vital and valued on treatment teams
- Staff attitudes toward clients become more positive
- Reduced workload

*(Campbell and Leaver, 2003; Clay, 2005)*
Challenges to Success:

- Staff not trained adequately
- Using Peers as tokens
- Peer filling traditional role- not recovery role
- Staff afraid that peer will become ill
- Peer overworks
- Boundary Issues
Specialized Peer Positions:

- Inpatient Drop In Center
- Debriefing
- Peer-Bridger
- Emergency Rooms
- Crisis Alternatives
- Trauma Peer Specialist
- Admissions/Discharge Specialist
- Forensic Peer Specialist
Qualifications Desired:

• Self-Disclosed current or past recipient of mental health services
• Stable in recovery for over a year
• Bachelors Degree preferred
• Excellent communication and writing skills
• Previous work history
• Successful completion of Peer Specialist training and certification when possible*
Peer Hiring Process:

• Stage One
  – Develop Job Requirements
  – Application Submission and Review
    • Cover Letter
    • Resume
    • Standardized Application
    • Peer Related Narrative Questions

• Stage Two
  – Informal first contact
  – Optional second informal contact

• Stage Three
  – Formal Interview: 3 different interviewers with minimum of 1 supervisor

• Stage Four
  – Reference Checks
  – Background Check
Creative Strategies: Arts, Humor and Alternative Healing:

• Introduce journaling (purchase individual journals at Dollar Store)

• Recovery Videos (Mary Ellen Copeland and others)

• Reading materials—consumer written books plus others

• Painting pillow cases or tee shirts for art exhibits

• Pet Therapy

• Horticulture Programs

• Talent Shows

• Display of client’s artwork for enhancing environment
Lessons Learned:

- Preparation of staff is critical
- Staff need to understand the principles of recovery
- Job descriptions developed prior to hiring
- Allowances should be made for flexibility and later revisions of position
- Positions should be placed at appropriate levels of supervision; whenever possible supervisors should be peers
- Support Groups available
- More than one Peer Specialist should be hired for any given setting
From a Peer Drop-In Center Director in Florida:

“For as long as I’ve been here, since 2002, there have been no safety incidents. We have 100-150 people come every day who claim it as their favorite place. They play pool, watch TV, hang out with their peers and have choices about what they want to do”

(Ilisa Smukler, Director, Forest Park DIC and Patient Advocate, GEO Care, Inc. /South Florida State Hospital, in Bluebird, 2008)
A Mental Health Provider Perspective:

“Peers have helped us transform our organization making it recovery oriented in design and in service delivery. Our peer employees have helped us achieve and maintain a new way of being with people that does not require seclusion and restraint interventions.”

(Lori Ashcraft, Director Recovery Education Center, Recovery Innovations, Phoenix, Arizona)
“What is most important is that the person hired is a ‘good fit’. ‘Good fit’ is the capacity that any employee has to navigate a work environment in order to maximize their effectiveness.”

(Tony Riccetelli, CEO, Worcester State Hospital, Worcester, MA)
This DVD and Guidebook were made possible by SAMHSA’s Center for Mental Health Services through its contract with the National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) located at the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD).

Please Contact Ashley Welton at (302)255-2745 for a copy of either resource free of charge.
Resources/Bibliography

**Comfort Rooms**
- Bluebird, G. (Summer/Fall 2002). *Comfort and communication help minimize conflicts*, *Networks*, p.18. Alexandria, VA: National Technical Assistance Center, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
- Bluebird, G. (Spring 2005) *Comfort Rooms: reducing the need for seclusion and restraint*, *Residential Group Home Quarterly Vol. 5 No.4, p5*

**Consumer Roles in Mental Health Settings**


**Dialogues and Communication**


• SAMHSA, (2000). *Participatory Dialogues, A guide to organizing interactive discussions on mental health issues among consumers, providers and family members, On line: http://store.mentalhealth.org/consumersurvivor/publications.aspx (SMA))-3472*

Guidelines for Hiring Peer Specialists

- Salzer, M.S., & Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania Best Practices Team (2002). Consume Delivered Services as a Best Practice I Mental Health Care and the Development of Practice Guidelines. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills, 7, 355-382. (Available by contacting pennrrtc@mail.med.upenn.edu)

Legislation and Advocacy

**Peer Support Resources**

- 108
- Copeland, Mary Ellen, MS, MA. *Wellness Recovery Action Plan*. Online at: www.mentalhealthrecovery.com

**Stories and Experiences**

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