

# Hiring Peer Specialists to Work in Mental Health Settings: Opportunities and Challenges

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*Presented by:*

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Drop-In Center; and  
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*Community Care Recovery Institute's*  
2007-2008

Teleconference/Webinar Series



# Community Care

Community Care Behavioral Health Organization (Community Care), a non-profit, federally tax-exempt, behavioral health managed care organization (BH-MCO), manages behavioral health services for nearly one million members in Pennsylvania whose health coverage is sponsored through Medicaid, Medicare and commercial plans. It is a subsidiary of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

# About Community Care Recovery Institute

Under contract with Community Care, Pat Deegan, Ph.D. & Associates and Advocates for Human Potential provide consultation and training to support the initiative implementing recovery-oriented, consumer-directed services in the communities it serves, known as the Community Care Recovery Institute ([www.recoverylearning.com](http://www.recoverylearning.com)).

# Training Abstract

Many states now have initiatives designed to promote the quality and expansion of recovery practices within their county mental health programs, by training and certifying peer specialists to work within provider agencies. These are exciting opportunities for providers, their consumers, and for the peer specialists. It is also challenging for both the providers as employers and the specialists as their employees.

This webinar will look at peer specialist employment from a variety of perspectives to address the challenges, barriers, successes and areas for improvement. Presenters include providers and consumers who are employed in the social service system.

# Event Speakers

**Leslie Young** is a licensed master's level social worker who has worked in the community mental health field for 30 years. She has also worked as an instructor and provided training and consultation for the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare.

Leslie was the Director of a large urban Community Support program for Wyandot Center in Kansas City, Kansas, where she collaborated with the University of Kansas on several research and pilot projects. The program is recognized for its fidelity with several Evidence Based practices; collaboration with the local consumer run organization; and for providing leadership within the state of Kansas in hiring Peer Specialists and offering and developing peer support services.

Last year Leslie left her job as the Director of the Community Support Services to work as a consultant to Wyandot Center to further develop their Peer Support services and oversee the establishment of the country's first Shared Decision-Making Project, developed by Pat Deegan.

## Event Speakers (cont'd)

**James Kindler** works full time as the Assistant Coordinator for New Horizons Drop In Center. His personal experience has given him a good understanding of recovery principles and the behavioral health service delivery system. Consequently, James plays important roles as both an advocate for individuals as well as a systems advocate. He truly enjoys helping to make the recovery transition easier for others. James' success in returning back to work and getting off of social security gives him self-esteem which he works diligently to foster in others.

## Event Speakers (cont'd)

**Jennifer Mullins** is currently the Community Support Program (CSP) Supervisor at Transitional Services, Inc (TSI) based in Homestead, PA. She has been able to use her 16 years of both personal and professional experience in recovery toward creation of the Certified Peer Specialist at TSI. In addition to supervising a team of four Peer Specialists, including two Certified Peer Specialists, Jennifer coordinates enrichment activities; a literacy program; the Ready to Work program; and serves on multiple committees inside and outside of the agency.

## Teleconference/Webinar Agenda

- 12:00 *Welcome – **John Lee**, Senior Director, Community Care Behavioral Health Organization*
- 12:10 *Logistics – **Pam Rainer**, LMSW, Senior Program Associate, Advocates for Human Potential*
- 12:15 *Presentation by: **Leslie Young**, LSCSW, Consultant, Wyandot Center; **James Kindler**, Assistant Coordinator, New Horizons Drop-In Center; and **Jennifer Mullins**, BS, Community Support Program Supervisor, Transitional Services, Inc.*
- 1:10 *Question & Answer Session*
- 1:30 *Conclude Teleconference*

# Preparing the Work Place

- Identifying Concerns/Issues that Existing Staff may have
- Clarifying Roles
- Unique Contribution of Peer Specialists
- Disclosure/Shared Experiences
- Dual Relationship Issues

# Peer Specialist Job Training

- Orientation to Mental Health System
- Orientation to Agency – Organization, Policies and Culture
- Basic Training Offered to all Employees
- Continuing Ed/Professional Development
- Training Specific to Peer Support Role

# Dual Relationship Issues

- Policies should be written for all staff – not targeted to Peer Specialists
- Should not prevent hiring of people who are service recipients
- Should provide clear guidance to staff who have pre-existing personal, therapeutic, family, or business relationships
- Procedure should establish safeguards to staff who have dual relationships
- Provide protection to consumers from exploitation

# Unique Challenges for Peer Providers

- Staff who were raised and live in the communities that they work in have increased potential for dual relationships
- Staff that previously or currently receive services where they are employed have increased potential for dual relationships
- Staff that are members of Consumer Run/Operated programs have increased potential for dual relationships

# Boundaries

- Work creates changes in relationships
- Peer to Peer
- Consumer to Provider
- Peer Providers have increased sensitivities regarding needs of consumers that can complicate limit setting
- Limits set by professionals may be perceived as barriers to needed supports
- Protecting personal time

# Managing Symptoms in the Workplace

- Are symptoms interfering with the ability to work?
- Are certain behaviors/emotional responses being misinterpreted as symptoms?
- Do Peer Providers have adequate access to services/supports?
- Does agency provide individualized, creative accommodations?
- ADA/FMLA (Americans with Disabilities Act/Family Medical Leave Act)

# Workplace Supports For Peer Providers

- Routine access to other Peer Providers in agency
- Access to state and national organizations that support Peer Providers
- Avoid “tokenism” or isolating experiences
- Wellness/Recovery plans
- Involvement of Peer Providers in creating positive workplace environment

# Unique Issues For Supervisors

- All employees bring personal experiences to the workplace
- All employees have stress/illnesses/family that impact work performance
- Many employees engage in “off-hours” activities that would be of concern if known
- There are current employees who have not disclosed their psychiatric diagnosis

# More Issues For Supervisors

- Peer Providers may need support and guidance related to the need to prove worth in the work environment
- Separate treatment and work
- Remove any barriers to receiving appropriate treatment
- Appropriate use of disclosure – using the Peer Providers expertise in the recovery process
- Support for lived experience and modeling recovery

# Peer Perspective on How Employers Can Help Peer Specialists Succeed

- Value our lived experience and how we can contribute to your workforce
- Encourage and appreciate our efforts
- Train other staff about mental illness
- Understand our resources may be limited at first (i.e. work or dress clothes)
- Help us (and all employees) strike a balance between being productive, contributing employees and too much stress on the job
- Pay us a living wage

# Peer Perspective on How Employers Can Help Peer Specialists Succeed (con'td)

- Help us understand how our wages will affect our benefits
- Be patient while we learn new skills (i.e. computer skills)
- Provide a smoking area outside, if possible
- Provide a quiet area or break room
- Provide constructive feedback
- Understand use of eligible sick days
- Recognize our strengths and that our work will help advance the recovery movement

# Peer Perspective on How Employers Can Help Peer Specialists Succeed (con'td)

- See us as individuals – help reduce stigma
- Recognize other talents and consider us for other jobs in your organization
- Promote non-discrimination throughout your organization
- Include us in all areas
- Promote a work environment that strengthens our recovery and the recovery of everyone that you serve

# Workplace Transformation

- Organizational culture shift
- Embrace recovery and psychiatric rehabilitation approach principles
- Policy & procedure changes
- Intensive staff training in recovery concepts
- 2 levels of Peer Specialist staff

# Team Building for Success

- Developed a CSP Team culture & motto
- Supervisor's open-door policy
- Access to all levels of supervision if needed
- Plan for more frequent supervision times
- Development of a team Wellness plan
- Transparency in all decision making that would affect the Peer Specialist team

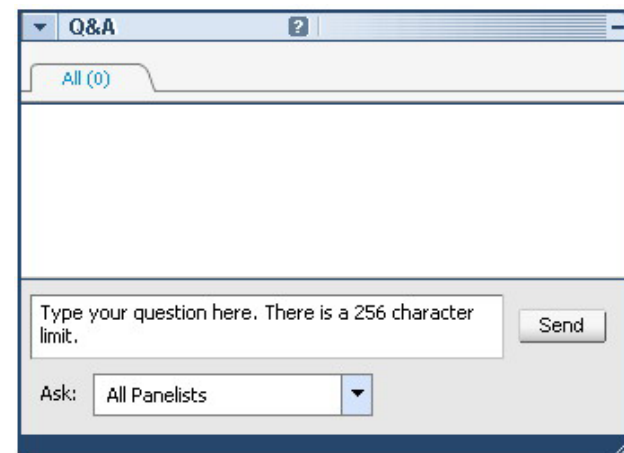
# Submitting Questions

Questions may be submitted on the web site or asked live during the Q&A portion of the teleconference. To submit or pose a question:

Live question: Click on the “Raise Hand” icon and the operator will queue you into the call. You must have a telephone icon next to your name on the attendee list to ask a live question.

Web: Click on the Question Mark icon (?) on the floating toolbar (as shown at the right). This will open the Q&A window on your system only. Type your question into the small dialog box and click the Send Button.

Q&A icon



# Following the Teleconference

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[www.recoverylearning.com](http://www.recoverylearning.com) and for this presentation you may also find the archive at [www.ccbh.com](http://www.ccbh.com)

Please complete the **evaluation form** which you will receive electronically following the teleconference. Your feedback is very important in helping develop future teleconference presentations.

You may download a **Training Certificate** from the What's New section of the *Community Care Recovery Institute Web Site*:  
[www.recoverylearning.com](http://www.recoverylearning.com)

# For More Information

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***Thank you for participating in today's teleconference.***

