



# Certified Peer Support Specialist

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## PROVIDER TOOLKIT



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# Who would benefit from utilizing the **Toolkit**?

For organizations who already employ Certified Peer Support Specialists.

For organizations *thinking* about employing Certified Peer Support Specialists.

For organizations who have decided to employ Certified Peer Support Specialists and would like to know how to introduce them successfully into the workplace.



# Who are Certified Peer Support Specialists and what do they do?



Peer support has existed for decades, both formally and informally, in clubhouses, drop-in centers, and consumer-run organizations. Since the 1990s, increased attention has been paid to the importance and potential of expanding mental health staffing patterns to include “consumers as providers” within mental health service settings. Peer support is the term commonly used to refer to all of the activities that peer specialists perform.

An individual providing peer support is not automatically a Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS). Peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care provided by a CPSS. A CPSS is a family member and/or individual who has self-identified as having received or is presently receiving behavioral

health services. Additionally, a CPSS has successfully completed formal training recognized by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) and is employed by a DMH Certified Provider. These individuals use their lived experience in combination with skills training to support peers and/or family members with similar experiences.

CPSSs support their peers both individually and in groups. Under general supervision, a CPSS performs a wide range of tasks to assist individuals to regain control of their lives and their own recovery and resiliency process. CPSSs provide varying supports, some of which might be offered by others in the behavioral health system, but CPSSs contribute something unique. They are living proof that recovery is possible. CPSSs share lived experiences and are willing to share their stories to benefit others. A CPSS also is a model of personal recovery and ongoing coping skills.

A CPSS is qualified to help others in many capacities. The exact roles, responsibilities and/or activities of a CPSS will be determined by the employer, depending on need and the lived experience of the CPSS. It should be noted that peer support involves face to face contact with one or more individuals. If a CPSS is assigned a task that does not involve working with individuals receiving services/peers, they are not providing peer support.

***“Peer Support is my personal commitment to share with others, who may have intellectual or developmental disabilities, drug/alcohol issues, or mental health conditions, the benefits and wisdom of acting for recovery and management of that condition. It is an affirmation that we people with mental health and/or behavioral or physical health limitations are not alone - I am with you, and we belong in the community.”***

***Chris Marcell  
CPSS***

# Who are Certified Peer Support Specialists and what do they do?

Although roles vary in organizations, it is generally recognized that Certified Peer Support Specialists participate in the following:

- Use personal recovery experience as a tool
- Provide family and community education
- Serve as a role model and mentor
- Provide support and encouragement to peers
- Navigate/link individuals to community resources such as housing, social services, education and employment assistance, health services, etc.
- Lead recovery education and activities
- Develop a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) that focuses on strategies for reaching personal goals, crisis planning, and relapse prevention
- Facilitate peer support groups
- Provide opportunities for socialization in the community
- Provide outreach to people who have frequent inpatient hospitalizations
- Provide outreach to people who have failed to engage with the behavioral health system
- Assist individuals to develop and implement a person-centered individual service plan
- Support individuals through the intake process
- Educate individuals on changes in health care reform
- Help individuals understand their benefits
- Help individuals who seek SSI/SSDI benefits by taking them through the SOAR process
- Support people through discharge
- Follow up after discharge (in-person, when needed)
- Empower others by helping them identify their strengths, supports, resources and skills
- Work as a wraparound facilitator

## Certified Peer Support Specialists do not:

- Give clinical advice
- Tell a person how to lead his/her life in recovery
- Replace other mental health professionals, but rather complement an array of mental health support services
- Diagnose or offer medical advice or advise about medications
- Tell people what they should or should not do

*The CPSS program has proven to be a very valuable asset to our provision of services. The program is openly received by treatment teams and clients are often referred to the program by our physicians, NPs, and therapists. Our clients often comment that it is, "really nice to have someone we can go to that knows exactly where we are coming from because they have been there as well." The benefit is remarkable. We see positive outcomes from the service on a daily basis.*

*Sheila Murphree,  
Peer Support Specialist Supervisor  
Region III Mental Health Center  
Tupelo, MS*

# What Does the Research Say About Peer Support?

Several studies have provided evidence that individuals providing peer support have a positive impact on individuals receiving services, the CPSS as well as the organization.

Greater quality of life	Klein et al., 1998
Improvement in psychiatric symptoms, and decreased hospitalization	Galanter, 1988
Improved social functioning and reduced substance abuse	Klein, Cnaan et al., 1998; Whitecraft et al., 2006)
Larger social support network	Rappaport et al., 1992
Individuals served by mental health team that include CPSS demonstrated greater progress in terms of quality of life and an overall reduction in the number of major life problems experienced. They also reported more frequent contact with the case manager	Felton et al, 1995
Enhanced self-esteem and social functional	Markowitz, DeMasi, Knight, & Solka, 1996
Decreased hospitalization or shortened length of hospital stay for both peer provider services and peer providers themselves	Solomon 2004
Decreased length of hospital stays, and lower service costs overall	Dumont & Jones, 2002
Peer providers can increase empowerment, decrease substance use, reduce days in the hospital, and increase use of outpatient services, at least as long as the peer support continues	Davidson, L., Chinman, M. , Sells, D., & Rowe, M. (2006)
Better treatment engagement	Craig et al., 2004; Sells et al., 2006; Felton et al., 1995
Reduced hospitalizations, reduced use of crisis services, improved symptoms, larger social support networks, and improved quality of life, as well as strengthening the recovery of the people providing the peer services	Eiken, S., & Campbell, J. 2008

Peer support was recognized by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as an evidence-based practice in 2007.

# Where can Certified Peer Specialists be Employed?

Certified Peer Support Specialists are an integral part of treatment teams in the public mental health system including inpatient care, community-based services, consumer run services and in a wide variety of roles. Peer Support happens in various settings to include but not limited to, the community, organizations, or a peer's home. The list of settings in which peers are employed include but are not limited to, the following:

Inpatient and Outpatient Care	Prison and Forensic areas	Drop In Centers
Residential Programs	Assertive Community Treatment Teams	Primary Residential Treatment Programs
Homeless Programs	Psychosocial Rehabilitation Programs	Advocacy Agencies
Partial Hospitalization	Day Programs	Home Health Services
Rehabilitation Programs	Court Diversion Programs	Crisis Services
Emergency Rooms	Community Recovery Centers	
Transition Age Services	Making A Plan (MAP) Teams	

*“Peer Support helps me utilize my experience and knowledge to help others. As a peer, I am able to form relationships with people as we relate to one another on our past experiences, challenges, and obstacles... “been there, done that.” As a peer support specialist, I provide support, joy, love, and hope.”*

**Tonja Smith, CPSS**  
Mississippi Children's Home Services



*“Peer Support is a chance to give back what was so freely given to me. It is a humbling reminder of where I was and how far I have come. It is especially humbling on those days when I wonder if I have changed at all, what I looked like, remember how hopeless I felt and then see where I am today. It immediately turns self-pity into gratitude. I value the opportunity to see that spark of hope in another's eyes. It's amazing.”*

**Stephanie Stout, CPSS**  
Region IV Mental Health Services



# What About Training for Certified Peer Support Specialists?

The CPSS Training is four days of classroom training, excluding a pre-training online requirement, followed by a written examination. The base CPSS curriculum was developed by Ike Powell and Larry Fricks of the nationally and internationally recognized Appalachian Consulting Group (ACG). Larry Fricks' recovery story was published by HarperCollins in the New York Time's bestselling book *Strong at the Broken Places* by Richard M. Cohen. The CPSS training provides acknowledgement that a peer has met a set of requirements necessary to provide support to individuals with mental health, substance abuse, and/or family members. The training prepares CPSSs to promote hope, personal responsibility, empowerment, education, and self-determination in the communities in which they serve.

## General requirements overview for participation and completion of CPSS Training

REQUIREMENTS	DESCRIPTION
Legal Representative	If applicable, the legal representative must sign the application in addition to the applicant.
Residency	Applicants must be a resident of Mississippi.
Self-Disclosure	Applicants must self-identify as current or former recipient of mental health and/or substance abuse services.
Employment	Must be currently employed in Mississippi's "mental health system," as defined in Chapter One. For some applicants, employment may not occur until after successful completion of Peer Support Specialist Professional Training.
Education	The applicant must provide documentation of a minimum of a high school diploma, GED certificate or be at least sixteen (16) years of age and enrolled in a GED program or enrolled in school. Demonstrate proficiency in reading and writing
Ethics	All applicants must read and abide by the DMH Peer Support Specialist Professional Principles of Ethical and Professional Conduct.
Experience	The applicant must be a current or former recipient of mental health, substance abuse services. Have a serious mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder. Self-identify as a current or former consumer of mental health or substance abuse services. Applicant must, within the last three years (not necessarily consecutively), have a minimum of 250 hours of paid or volunteer work or activities in a support or advisory role with adults or transition-aged youth diagnosed with a serious mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder. One year of college or educational experience (within the last three years) can be substituted for the work experience. All experience must be gained prior to applying for certification.
Reference	Applicant must submit two Reference Forms. The references must attest to the individual's ability to perform the role of a Certified Peer Support Specialist Professional.
Exam/Training	Successful completion of Certified Peer Support Specialist Professional Training, as prescribed by DMH. Proficiency for successful completion of Peer Support Specialist Professional examination is 75%.



# How do I **promote** a peer culture and give peers support?

Key to successful implementation of CPSSs in service delivery roles is the understanding of what creates recovery and how to build environment conducive to recovery. This role is not interchangeable with traditional staff that works from the perspective of their training and status as licensed health care providers. CPSSs work from the perspective of “having been there.” Through their lived experience with recovery, CPSSs lend unique insight into mental illness, substance abuse, and what makes recovery possible.

The new and unique position of a CPSS can present challenges not previously encountered, by the individual and/or the organization. Some peers will have a sporadic employment history or no previous employment at all. Others will have no previous employment experience in the mental health system. The role as a CPSS could be the first paid role he/she has ever had, or had since his/her diagnosis. It may take some time to get into the routine of working and developing a solid work ethic. CPSSs may need to develop team skills such as giving and receiving feedback, setting boundaries and exploring their own qualities and strengths. A supportive organization can reduce the risk of negative impact experienced by a CPSS and create a foundation for an effective team that embraces the role of peers.

## Ingredients to inclusion of Certified Peer Support Specialists

- Encourage ongoing recovery self-management using tools like a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)
- Guard against the soft discrimination of low expectations like assuming peer workers cannot understand and practice important concepts like confidentiality
- Provide choice to CPSSs whether to receive services from the employing agency
- Involve staff in the decision to employ peers to promote “buy-in”
- Promote work accountability. CPSSs should not be treated differently than other staff after any issues of documented ADA accommodations are resolved upon hiring
- Involve all staff in understanding the principles and values of peer support services, competencies taught the peer workforce, and their code of ethics
- Provide clear job and service descriptions that allow peers to use their strength-based recovery experience and share that openly with those they serve
- Share CPSS Code of Ethics, job description and other materials with staff to educate them about the role and values of CPSSs bring to them
- Encourage existing staff to share concerns

Source SAMHSA



*Without CPSSs we would not have been able to transform our previous outdated, acute, episodic approaches to treatment into a new paradigm of care offering a more comprehensive, chronic care approach based on a Recovery-Resiliency Oriented Systems of Care (R-ROSC). We now realize what a vital gap in our previous ability to offer comprehensive, person-center services the CPSS program fills. We are proud of our new CPSSs. Their level of enthusiasm, confidence, and compassion for what they do is commendable. It is evident that their training has prepared them well for their new roles by offering them a sound understanding of the basic principles of the R-ROSC, instilling knowledge of how to carry out their new responsibilities, and by helping them develop an appreciation of their ethical and professional responsibilities. Without our new CPSS program, Region One would not have been able to offer mental health and substance abuse treatment services to the individuals we serve that are person-centered and that meet a broad spectrum of the needs in all areas of life.*

*Karen Corley, Executive Director  
Region One Mental Health Center  
Clarksdale, MS*



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