



20 Pillars of Success for Peer Specialists

1. **Clear Job Description:** While people in recovery working in the mental health system as service providers is not new, many traditional staff do not understand the peer specialist's role and responsibilities and, at times, may not accept them as equal partners in an agency because of their limited formal education. The program is strengthened when the job description defines specific duties that focus on peer specialists using their recovery experience to help others move on with their lives.
2. **Job-related Competencies:** The program is strengthened when the competencies required for certification relate directly to the duties as outlined in the job description.
3. **Skills-based Training Program:** The program is strengthened when training relates directly to the competencies and skills necessary to do the peer specialist duties as outlined in the job description.
4. **Competencies-based Testing Process:** The program is strengthened when the testing process accurately measures the degree to which the participants have mastered the competencies related to the job description.
5. **Employment Related Certification:** The program is strengthened when the certification is recognized by the key players in the state mental health system (or other applicable body) and certification leads directly to employment possibilities as a certified peer specialist. Therefore, there needs to be employment positions that require certification.
6. **On-Going Continuing Education:** The program is strengthened when there is an on-going continuing education program that exposes the peer specialists to the most recent research and innovations in mental health, up-dates the skills needed to do their jobs and provides opportunities to share successes and learn from each other.
7. **Professional Advancement Opportunities:** Because many peer specialists have had their formal education interrupted by their illness and entry level peer specialist jobs often pay low salaries, programs are strengthened when there are opportunities for professional advancement. Some mental health agencies encourage and support their peer specialists working toward the United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association's (USPRA) Psychosocial Rehabilitation Practitioner Certification (CPRP). Some states are working with local community colleges to offer college credit for the peer specialist certification training and continuing education.
8. **Multiple Training Sessions Commitment:** The program is strengthened when the state or system makes an early commitment to multiple training sessions and schedules these over the first 1-2 years of the program. This demonstrates a commitment to train a workforce of peer providers and provides an opportunity for agencies and individuals to schedule their training needs early on.



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9. **Local Train-the-Trainer Program:** The program is strengthened when there is a means of identifying and training local peer specialists to play major roles as trainers in future trainings. Several states have their own group of peer specialist trainers to conduct the training, testing and certification program.
10. **Local Sustainable Funding:** The program is strengthened when states commit sufficient financial resources to underwrite the expenses of the program. This is crucial to its long-term stability and can be done in a variety of ways, i.e. Medicaid re-imbursement for services, re-allocation of block grant money, state and federal grants.
11. **Unifying Symbols and Celebrations:** The program is strengthened when the state creates symbols and celebrations that give a sense of identity and significance to be a peer specialist and unifies the peer specialists across the state. In one state, every CPS gets a tote bag, T-shirt and cap with the state's Peer Specialist symbol on them. One of the CPS's created a book mark with the state's Peer Specialist symbol and a description of the Five Stages in the Recovery Process on it. When people pass the certification test, they are given a framed certificate in a formal, graduation-style ceremony at the state office in which the certificates are given out by a top state mental health official.
12. **Networking and Information Exchange:** The program is strengthened when there is an opportunity for the peer specialists to network and interchange ideas on a regular basis. One state has an interactive web-page and brings CPS's together on a quarterly basis.
13. **Expanded Employment Opportunities:** The program is strengthened when CPS's are not pigeon-holed into a limited number of employment situations, but have a variety of positions in which to work. For example, in one state CPS's can work for local community health centers in Peer Support programs, on Assertive Community Treatment Teams, on Community Support Teams, or as a Community Support Individual. They can work in psychiatric hospitals as a peer specialist. They can work for the Mental Health Consumer Network as peer mentors to people being discharged from the psychiatric hospital into the community, as Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) trainers, Double Trouble in Recovery (DTR) trainers, peer-wellness trainers or on a peer team in a respite/wellness center. The program is strengthened when there are a lot of options for peer specialists.
14. **Research and Evaluation Component:** Because the peer specialist program may be a new program, its successes and strengths need to be documented in order to validate its usefulness as a provider of quality services. Several states' programs have partnered with major research universities to do this.
15. **Multiple Disciplines Partnerships:** The program is strengthened when it is in partnership with a variety of disciplines.
16. **Strong Consumer Movement:** The program is strengthened when it is related to a strong state-wide consumer movement.



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17. **Multi-level System Support:** The program is strengthened when all levels of the system (policy makers, administration, human resources, providers, consumers, and other stakeholders) are engaged in early conversations about the implementation of the program.
18. **Equal Treatment as Employees:** The program is strengthened when Peer Specialists have clear performance expectations and accountability standards, and are treated as equals of the other employees of the system. As with any employee, good communication, clear written expectations, and special accommodations for disabilities or special circumstances when appropriate go a long way toward success.
19. **Non-Peer Staff Training:** The program is greatly strengthened when non-Peer staff is trained on the role of Peer Specialists, the philosophy of recovery, and the benefits of working with this new workforce.
20. **Media and Technology:** The program is strengthened when a system utilizes existing and emerging media and technology to continue the education of Peer Specialists and non-Peer staff, and enhances communication through system-wide networking media.