



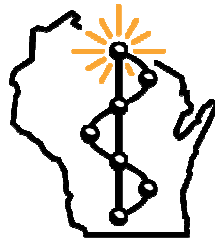
Wisconsin
Peer Specialists

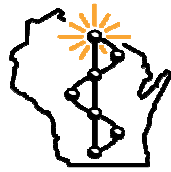
Improve Outcomes



Employer Guide

How to successfully hire and support Certified Peer Specialists





Peer Specialists
Igniting Recovery

As Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialists we offer a unique and important role in the Mental Health Recovery Process...

We are professionals and work from a strength-based perspective and embody the belief that recovery is possible.

Peer Specialists provide the uniquely targeted insight into certain aspects of mental health that only someone who has “been there” can formulate and convey. Peer Specialists are qualified not only by their personal experiences, but also by their training, which is specifically designed to facilitate the mental health recovery of their peers.

We can provide an atmosphere of recovery that is “more real.” The informal nature of our contacts makes an individual feel more comfortable and at ease when talking with us. The informal, open nature of the peer specialist is a great advantage. We are an important addition to the team assisting individuals who are working through their recovery process.

Consumers say with amazement “You get me!” It does help to have had similar challenges, desires and feelings. And knowing that we really “know” and have survived is a plus.

National research has shown that hiring and promoting/supporting Peer Specialist Services in your business or organization reduces hospitalization and emergency room crisis visits in consumers by over 40%. Individuals who work with Certified Peer Specialists stay in recovery longer. Their goal is to promote wellness, independent living, self-direction, recovery focus, enhancing the skill and ability of consumers to meet their chosen goals.

Thank you to Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialists, Ardyth Krause, Laurel Bowers and Gail Herger for their assistance and valuable input in the development of this important message to employers.



**Thank you for your interest in the
Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Employment Initiative**

History...

In 1996, Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson formed the Blue Ribbon Commission on Mental Health. This body was charged with examining how Wisconsin's mental health services could be improved. This Commission recommended that Wisconsin services should focus on the recovery process. These recommendations underscore the importance of providing Peer Specialist services to consumers.

Wisconsin recognizes Peer Specialists in the Comprehensive Community Services Rule and is working to incorporate this provider position throughout the service system. Through a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, funding was available to develop a Certified Peer Specialist program in Wisconsin. The Peer Specialist Committee was formed through the Wisconsin Recovery Implementation Task Force (RITF) to develop and implement the steps necessary to have a certification program and begin an employment initiative to have Certified Peer Specialist hired onto mental health recovery teams in the public and private sectors.

In 2009 the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services agreed to hold the certification for Peer Specialists. This certification states that a person has passed the approved training and certification exam. Certified Peer Specialists are also required to complete continuing education hours based on the program's core competencies in order to maintain their certification. All Certified Peer Specialists agree to adhere to the program Code of Conduct.

What Certified Peer Specialists Do

A Certified Peer Specialist is a person who has not only lived the experience of mental illness but also has had formal training in the peer specialist model of mental health supports. They use their unique set of recovery experiences in combination with solid skills training to support peers who have mental illness. Peer Specialists actively incorporate peer support into their work while working within an agencies team support structure as a defined part of the recovery team.

A Certified Peer Specialist is a job title within the agency of employment where the role of a peer specialist is specific to the lived experience of that specialist and how that experience is utilized to help others move forward on their recovery journey.

The Role of the Certified Peer Specialist is varied and can take on several forms of support and assistance. Although roles may vary in service agencies, it is generally recognized that Certified Peer Specialists provide the following services:

- Use personal recovery experience as a tool
- Provide information about mental health resources
- Assist in identifying and supporting consumers in crisis
- Facilitate self-direction and goal setting
- Communicate effectively with other treatment providers

Understanding the role of the Certified Peer Specialists

All employers should have a copy of the Code of Conduct that CPSs are bound to. This document is included in this packet as well as the general Wisconsin job description for CPSs. This job description describes the roles and functions of a CPS and allows for employment environmental differences.

The CPS engages and encourages mental health service recipients in recovery, and the CPS provides program participants with a sense of belonging, supportive relationships, valued roles and community. The goal is to promote wellness, independent living, self-direction, recovery focus, enhancing the skill and ability of program participants to meet their chosen goals. CPSs work from a strength based perspective and embody the belief that recovery is possible. In most situations the CPS must be supervised by a qualified mental health professional as defined under Medical Assistance.

CPSs are staff who serves individuals who have been assessed as having potential positive outcomes by working with a CPS. This role is professional in nature and supports are delivered by the CPS. CPSs actively use peer support to engage with the participant. CPSs utilize their personal journey as part of the process of peer support but never allow their journey to become the center of the relationship with the participant.

CPSs use their unique set of recovery experiences in combination with solid skills based training to support peers who have experienced mental illness. They work within the team environment to assist people in their work towards their goals. It is strongly suggested that CPSs inform program participants of their duty to report issues of potential harm to the participant. It is the expectation for all Wisconsin CPSs that they contact the supervisor if there is concern about health or safety issues. CPSs are not legal mandated reporters but work under the understanding that supervisors usually are.

Certified Peer Specialists require clinical supervision.

Prepping Staff for inclusion of Certified Peer Specialists

An important step when considering employing CPSs within an agency is to actively prepare existing staff for this change. The CPS has had training, experiences and passed a competency based exam that have prepared them to work in this capacity. Some staff may be uncomfortable for many reasons with this change. Honoring these feelings and working towards a fact based understanding of the role of the CPS can be helpful with this. One fear that existing staff across Wisconsin have explored is that they are concerned that the CPS is a cheaper and less educated clinician. The Peer Specialist model is clear that CPSs are not clinicians and should not work outside of their scope of expertise. The role of the CPS is different and not intended to replace solid clinical practice.

Another potential concern for existing staff may be related to stigma and discomfort at working with someone who self identifies their mental health issues. This may be due to personal or professional experiences or the belief that CPSs won't be held to a similar standard as the rest of the team. CPSs are expected to be responsible for their own recovery and accountable to themselves, program participants and supervisors. Stigma may be overcome by working directly with the CPS and gaining new perspective on the value of the role. Once again, honoring the concerns and working with staff to overcome these concerns is effective.

Sharing with staff the Code of Conduct, job description and other educational products may be helpful in educating staff to be inclusive of a new position within the team. The CPS will work

with program participants and staff in a manner that incorporates the policies of the Peer Specialist program and the responsibilities of all staff based on agency policy.

Confidentiality of the CPS

Even though employers are already aware of the legal requirement of confidentiality, the Certified Peer Specialist is a newly created position and with it comes additional issues to be aware of.

Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) are employees of an agency who actively work to support program participants. An identified issue is the records of the CPS who may have been served within the agency where they are now employed. It is essential for employers to seal the records of the CPS once they become employed. This is important for several reasons. Other staff of programs may indulge in natural curiosity about the history of the CPS when the person's records are confidential in nature. Another reason is for the CPSs comfort level in feeling included as part of the staff. When their treatment history is available to all staff it may create a power imbalance that is not productive to the team environment. This is even more of an issue in rural environments in which the employing agency may be the only treatment option in certain communities.

CPSs by definition have the lived experience of mental health issues and other staff may want to know the persons diagnosis or history. The Supervisor of the CPS should not release this type of information but suggest the staff person ask the CPS directly. Choice about sharing this type of information is critical to the successful inclusion of CPSs in an employment environment.

Living Wage and Benefits/Benefits Counseling

The Certified Peer Specialist is a professional position.

The national average for a starting wage for a CPS is \$13.50 per hour. The national average of hours worked as a CPS is 20-25 hours per week. There are CPS that do work full time if it is agreeable to both the employer and the CPS to meet the needs of the organization/agency. It is important that the CPS remain healthy and in recovery in order to work effectively with Peers.

According to the national research and surveys to CPS, there are valid reasons for the 20-25 hour scheduling. These include:

- The CPS needs to maintain a balance of self-care and work in order to effectively provide services to others.
- The majority of CPS have SSI/SSDI Benefits that are affected by earnings. For many CPS, part time employment is necessary for some period of time in order to balance the effects of their disability, their on-going recovery, and their financial situation.

Employees (CPS) are advised to request ongoing Work Incentives Benefits Counseling in order to have the information needed for making informed choices about work and earnings. If a CPS is going to work full-time the employer should provide information to the CPS for transitioning from SSI/SSDI to private employer based benefits, if available, and be aware of the Work Incentive Programs provided to individuals with disabilities.

Medical Leave and other possible complications

There are no indicators that CPS require more 'sick days' or take above average time off for medical reasons (based on surveys in Wisconsin).

Employers will need to plan, as with any employee, for who will take over the responsibilities of the CPS should they need to take time off.

Considerations:

- Is there more than one CPS on staff?
- How will the consumers needs be met if the CPS has to take an extended leave?
- Can the employer partner with another agency/organization to provide CPS services during their CPSs leave of absence?
- Does the employer have a plan in place for working with the CPS to transition back into the workplace once they feel well enough to return?

Keeping the lines of communication open and discussing these possibilities can be a positive, effective way to plan for continuation of services.

The CPS does not require 'special treatment' but equitable treatment when medical or personal situations arise.

Rural Community Employment - Overall Considerations

Thank you to Andrew MacGregor, Program Director of Ashland Community Support Program and Val Levno, Program Director of Bayfield Community Support Program, for providing assistance in this area.

The factors to consider when employing a Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) in a rural setting are not that different from more urban areas. The primary consideration is one of establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Issues specific to both employers and employees will follow.

A significant issue faced by service providers in rural settings is transportation and the travel time/distance that is required to help participants access services. Employers need to consider the appropriate way to address these questions.

- Employees must have access to reliable transportation (either their own or an agency vehicle). If employees are required to use their own vehicle to transport people to appointments, then they should be reimbursed in a fair and equitable way. Are they able to be covered under the agency's liability policy? Do they have access to auto insurance, even if they do not own a vehicle?
- The travel time and distance required to help participants access services needs to be factored in to the time that a CPS works for the agency. If they employee has a specific number of hours allotted to work on a weekly or monthly basis, that should be factored in to their work schedule.
- Rural areas often have limited options for recreation or socialization. These options often involve having to budget for an outlay of expenses that is later reimbursed by the

employer. How can agencies hiring CPSs assist people that may live on a fixed income plan for these occurrences?

Rural Certified Peer Specialist Issues

CPS working in a rural area may have to deal with stigma from past episodes of their mental illness. How can they separate themselves from past experiences and be seen as the professional that they are now?

A person that was once viewed by other people (consumers and professionals) as a participant in mental health services is now considered a professional. Other consumers can adopt a negative view of the CPS now that they are working as an employee of the agency. How does someone navigate that change?

People living in rural communities often have limited options for service providers. It may be that you work for the agency that has provided you supports over the years.

How do you provide services to a participant that sees a provider with whom you have had conflicts?

Employer Issues and questions to consider

- The base of eligible employees for the position of CPS may be limited. Do you hire people that you currently support and how do you negotiate the dual roles of provider and employer?
- How can you ensure the CPS that you hire that the position they have been hired for is something they can count on for income? Rural areas often don't have enough job opportunities for someone to find other work to make ends meet.
- Where will the CPS be stationed in the agency to ensure that their interactions with consumers are private and confidential? How can the employer help the CPS to feel a part of the team?

Where Certified Peer Specialists are employed include...

- Crisis Services
- In and Outpatient Care
- Veteran's Hospitals
- Supported Living Arrangements
- Prisons and Forensic Areas
- CRS-Community Recovery Services
- Homeless Shelters

- Community Resource Centers
- Drop In Centers and Clubhouses
- CSP-Community Support Program
- CCS-Comprehensive Community Services
- ADRC's-Aging and Disability Resource Center
- Independent Living Centers
- Family Care

Billable Services

The Certified Peer Specialist Services can be billed under several areas for Medical Assistance (MA.) A few of these include:

- Assisting consumers in the development of a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) as part of Recovery Planning
- Specific skill training for the consumer including the areas of communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, assertiveness, conflict resolution.
- Working with consumers in activities related to pre-employment preparation. Skills assessment, anxiety reduction, education about workplace etiquette, arranging transportation.
- Offering effective recovery-based services
- Assisting consumers in finding self-help groups
- Assisting consumers in obtaining services that suit that individual's recovery needs
- Teaching problem solving techniques
- Teaching consumers how to identify and combat negative self-talk and how to identify and overcome fears
- Assisting consumers in building social skills in the community that will enhance integration opportunities
- Lending their unique insight into mental illness and what makes recovery possible
- Attending treatment team and crisis plan development meetings to promote consumer's use of self-directed recovery tools
- Informing consumers about community and natural supports and how to utilize these in the recovery process
- Assisting consumers in developing empowerment skills through self-advocacy and stigma-busting activities

Employer Testimonials

Autumn West is a 20 bed Safe Haven in Milwaukee. A Safe Haven is an alternative shelter for persons with severe mental illness and other debilitating behavioral conditions who are homeless and have been unwilling or unable to participate in housing or supportive services. The program is HUD funded and provides a safe environment, meals, 24/7 resident managers and a case manager. We started with one volunteer peer specialist in December of 2006. I met Mary at a Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force meeting and invited her to visit Autumn West and brainstorm about how to incorporate peer specialists into the Autumn West Program. Mary then started to visit on a regular basis and get to know the residents and staff of the program. Mary had recently finished her training as a peer specialist and we began to explore how to incorporate the specialists into our program. Mary easily related to the residents because she had many similar experiences including mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse recovery. Mary became a regular fixture at Autumn West on Sunday evenings. She planned events, brought special treats and encouraged warm conversations and sharing's. Residents looked forward to Mary's visits. Through a relationship with Our Space, eventually we were able to add another peer specialist. In January of this year the peer specialists were hired by community Advocates to work at Autumn West, the peer specialist are now part of our team and participate in staffings. The specialists conduct recovery groups, assist residents with WRAP plans, organize, and participate in outings.

Recently a resident that I was meeting with informed me that he thought he may have Bi Polar disorder. When I asked why he thought this he said that he had attended a group lead by a specialist. The group was about symptoms and the resident believed he experienced these symptoms. A referral was then made for psychiatric care. The peer specialists are valuable members of our team and help residents and our staff to decrease the stigma and move people into recovery.

Jeanne Lowry
Division Director, Behavioral Health/ Homeless Outreach
Community Advocates
Milwaukee, WI

Over the past five years at **Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA)**, I have had the privilege of working closely with our Peer Support Specialists (PSS). As MHA employees, they meet individually with program participants, lead our support group, participate in family nights, co-facilitate our Nurturing Parenting and Wellness Recovery class and operate our Specialized Family Resource Center. With their personal experiences and wisdom, they have added an invaluable component to our agency. Their depth of understanding, honesty and encouragement has allowed them to form very powerful relationships with our program participants. I have witnessed the lifesaving impact our PSS's have made on many. PSS's will always be part of our recovery team; our good work cannot be done without them.

Kristina Finnel, MSW, APSW
President/CEO Mental Health America of Wisconsin
Milwaukee, WI

Grassroots Empowerment Project... I have had the opportunity to work with Peer Specialists as Members of the Board of Directors and employees in my roles as Executive Director of Grassroots Empowerment Project. These individuals bring richness to our organization in the following ways:

- A stronger focus on recovery within our workplace. Building a more supportive working environment for all
- Improved accountability to the mission of our organization-consumer empowerment
- A change in the communication style-from just discussion to true dialog
- An equally shared vision and values for the success of our organization
- An ability to resolve differences and conflict in a respectful and honest manner
- This has had a positive impact on the way we work within the community and has strengthened our commitment to the following:
 - True collaboration
 - Respect for differences
 - Engaging in dialogue
 - Share Power
 - Mutual support

I have found that my own professional and personal development has been enriched because I work directly with Peer Specialists and their absolute commitment to recovery for all.

Molly Cisco, Executive Director

Madison, WI

Consumer Testimonials

Peer Support....What a wonderful way to share all the things I wish I would have known before I even knew recovery was possible. Carol J. Slovachek, CPS

My Peer Specialist has a large knowledge base of regulations and resources and she never makes things intimidating or condescending. Peer Specialists are very valuable. ...Mark Y.

Having a Peer Specialist is very important to my recovery. We work as a team to set goals and be successful. I am able to live more independently and go to school and work.

...Anne B.



General Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Job/Position Description

(This Job/ Position Description is to give an idea of some of the functions a Certified Peer Specialist could perform. Tailoring would be necessary to fit the unique mission.)

Title of Position: Certified Peer Specialist (Paid Evidence Based Practice Position)

Job Summary: The Peer Specialist engages and encourages mental health service recipients in recovery, and the peer specialists provide service recipients with a sense of belonging, supportive relationships, valued roles and community. The goal is to promote wellness, independent living, self direction, recovery focus, enhancing the skill and ability of service recipients to meet their chosen goals. The Peer Specialist works with service recipients as equals except in having more recovery experience and training, looking for and empowering signs of wellness and recovery, encouraging strength perspective and self-direction. Peer Specialists are examples of recovery, meaning previous first-hand experience with some parts of what the service recipients are experiencing at the time support services are needed. In some programs, the Peer Specialist must be supervised by a qualified mental health professional.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:

Providing Support

The Peer Specialist will:

- Identify as a person in mental health recovery.
- Understand their role and fully participate as an integral part of the professional Recovery Team.
- Be mindful of the ethics, boundary, power and control issues unique to Peer Specialists.
- Establish rapport with the service recipients.
- Provide information as to the purpose of peer support and recovery models.
- Provide service recipients with very clear definitions of recovery and its components.
- Intentionally share their Recovery Story as appropriate to assist service recipients, providing hope and help in changing patterns and behaviors.
- Provide respect for the service recipients, for example, in viewing what traditionally is labeled “resistance” as “self direction”, and honor the person for taking charge of their own life.
- Set mutually acceptable boundaries with the service recipient, especially about “help” and “safety”; continue to ask if these are the same or changing.
- Be well informed about trauma, and explore with service recipients their experiences and support these individuals in getting appropriate resources to help.
- Have his/her own Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) or another recovery plan done and in current use.
- Be able to assist service recipients with constructing their own Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP, or another recovery plan.)
- Help persons in crisis explore options that may be beneficial to their recovery and to maintaining stability.
- Provide culturally sensitive and age specific services. Continue to increase knowledge in this area.
- Surround service recipients in recovery, wellness, and hope.
- Focus positively with service recipients on emotional growth, strengths, and life (recovery) goals.

- Encourage service recipients to become self-directed, focus on their strengths, exercise use of natural supports and view themselves as helpful, not just helped.
- Use active listening skills.
- Provide resources that are beneficial to recovery.
- Understand rights and overcome stigma.

Communicating with Supervisors and Interacting with Staff

Peer Specialists will:

- Understand and utilize the established supervisory hierarchy to communicate needs, ask questions (especially about ethics, boundaries, and confidentiality), mention concerns, etc.
- Provide education to staff on recovery reminding them that recovery is possible, and that peer support has become an Evidence Based Practice.
- Accurately complete and punctually turn in time sheets.
- Accurately, respectfully, punctually complete all required documentation.
- Work with service recipients and staff in a manner that incorporates the policies of the Peer Specialist Program and the responsibilities of the staff based on their policies.
- Begin work with service recipients stating that talk of harm to self or others cannot be kept confidential. Report threats to harm self or others immediately to the staff in charge.

Demonstrating Confidentiality

Peer Specialists will:

- Be familiar with Wisconsin documents relating to confidentiality. Be very knowledgeable of all confidentiality directives from your own agency.
- Maintain the utmost confidence concerning all verbal and written information whether obtained from service recipients or otherwise.
- Be knowledgeable of information that should not be kept in confidence: threats to harm self or others, and know how to handle these situations.

PREFERRED TRAINING/SKILLS:

- Group facilitation or co-facilitation experience.
- Both completion of Wellness Recovery Action Plan or another plan for self, and also knowledge of how to run a group assisting service recipients in how to write their own Wellness Recovery Action Plan, or another plan.
- Basic knowledge of how to assist service recipients with locating community resources (employment, housing, health, peer delivered services including 12 step groups, etc).
- Work or volunteer experience providing peer support.



Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Code of Conduct

For Mental Health and Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Peer Delivered Services

The following principles will guide Peer Specialists in their various role relationships and levels of responsibility in which they function professionally.

1. The primary responsibility of Peer Specialists is to help service recipients understand recovery and achieve their own recovery needs, wants, and goals. Peer Specialists will be guided by the principle of self-determination for each service recipient.
2. Peer Specialists will conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own recovery and will maintain personal standards that are respectful to self and community.
3. Peer Specialists will be open to share with service recipients and Coworkers their stories of hope and recovery and will likewise be able to identify and describe the supports that promote their recovery and resilience.
4. Peer Specialists have a duty to inform service recipients when first discussing confidentiality that contemplated or actual harm to self or others cannot be kept confidential. Peer Specialists have a duty to accurately inform service recipients regarding the degree to which information will be shared with other team members, based on their agency policy and job description. Peer Specialists have a duty to inform appropriate staff members immediately about any person's possible harm to self or others or abuse from caregivers.
5. Peer Specialists will never intimidate, threaten, harass, use undue influence, physical force or verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to the service recipients they support.
6. Peer Specialists will not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate in any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, disability, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or state.
7. Peer Specialists will advocate with service recipients so that individuals may make their own decisions when partnering with professionals.
8. Peer Specialists will never engage in any sexual/intimate activities with service recipients they support. While a service recipient is receiving services from a Peer Specialist, the Peer Specialist will not enter into a relationship or commitment that conflict with the support needs of the service recipient.



Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Code of Conduct

9. Peer Specialists shall only provide service and support within the hours, days and locations that are authorized by the agency with which they work.
10. Peer Specialists will keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery, and openly share this knowledge with their coworkers and service recipients. Peer Specialists will refrain from sharing advice or opinions outside their scope of practice with service recipients.
11. Peer Specialists will utilize supervision and abide by the standards for supervision established by their employer. The Peer Specialist will seek supervision to assist them in providing recovery oriented services to service recipients.
12. Peer Specialists will not accept gifts of money or items of significant value from those they serve. Peer Specialists do not loan or give money to service recipients.
13. Peer Specialists will not discuss their employment situation in a negative manner with any service recipient.
14. Peer Specialists will protect the welfare of all service recipients by ensuring that all their conduct will not constitute physical or psychological abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Peer Specialists will provide trauma informed care at all times.
15. Peer Specialists will, at all times, respect the rights, dignity, privacy and confidentiality of those they support.

Revised November 19, 2010

Approved by the Peer Specialist Committee of the WI Recovery Implementation Task Force

Resources

For information or additional copies of this publication please contact:

Alice F. Pauser, CPS
WI Peer Specialist Program Coordinator
Access to Independence, Inc.
3810 Milwaukee St.
Madison, WI 53714
1-800-362-9877 ext 224 or alicep@accesstoind.org

Resources:

Journal of Participatory Medicine [Promoting Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Services through a Peer Specialist Employer Learning Community](#) May 9, 2011

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services www.cms.gov