

Peer Support & The Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative

Supporting empowerment, connection, and resilience in Wisconsin.

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Access to Independence – Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative



A little about Brittyn Calyx

- Peer Specialist Program Communications Assistant (interim point-of-contact for Initiative)
- WI Certified Peer Specialist since 2014
- Experience working in peer-run organizations, peer-run respites, institutions, and community-based peer support settings
- Queer, non-binary trans woman (pronouns: she/her/hers or xe/xem/xyr)
- Parent of a toddler
- Post-9/11 WI Army National Guard veteran who has navigated trauma and moral injury
- Lover of birds, opossums, Star Wars, and board games



A photograph of two young women sitting and talking. The woman on the left has long dark hair and is wearing a black and white patterned top. The woman on the right has brown hair tied back and is wearing a black and white striped shirt, resting her head on her hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing a yellow wall and a sign with the number '12'.

What is peer support?




Peer Support Principles: An overview

- Center **mutuality** and genuine **relationships** of support
- Utilize the sharing of one's own story to **connect** and hold **hope**
- Recognize the validity of **many pathways** to self-defined recovery/wellness/life of meaning
- Aim to understand the role trauma and moral injury can play in people's lives (**trauma-informed**)
- Advocate a **person-centered** (or self-directed) approach rather than one-size-fits-all solutions



Peer Support Principles (continued):

- Connects with others from a place of **curiosity**
- Recognized those seeking support as the **experts in their own lives and experiences**
- Offers support based in the recognition of personal **strengths**/assets rather than defects, deficits, or diagnoses centered in pathology
- Places the principle of **self-determination** in a foremost position when navigating ethical questions



What is meant by “person- centered?”

- Centering the wishes, goals, and expertise of the people we support
- Honoring self-determination first and foremost
- Eschewing one-size-fits-all approaches to support or advocacy
- Practicing cultural humility and responsiveness
- Adopting anti-oppression, equity and justice frameworks for supports
- Respecting how people make meaning of their own experiences
- Using the language and terminology preferred by the person you're supporting
- Trusting the person we support to define “crisis” (and determine appropriate response) for themselves
- Offering inclusive and accessible services

Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative: Origins

Wisconsin
Peer Specialists





Vision to Action

“Consumer” movements and those with lived experience advocated for greater access to peer support, and the creation of a professional role.

- The Initiative was launched in 2006 by the Recovery Implementation Task Force (RITF)
- Funding secured from a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, and contract established with Access to Independence (Access) to get started
- Access partnered with the RITF, DHS, and stakeholders to develop Core Competencies, a Code of Ethics, and Scope of Practice for WI Certified Peer Specialists (2007-2009)
- Training protocols and statewide competency-based examination processes were established, in partnership with UW-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education



Certified Peer Specialist Developments in Wisconsin

- Today, there are at least 910 CPS in Wisconsin (many more have been trained and certified throughout the Initiative's history)
- WI CPS work in a variety of settings, not all connected to Medicaid funding (peer-run respites, peer-run organizations, fee-for-service, etc.)
- CPS trainers working within DOC brought trainings and peer specialists services to people incarcerated in maximum and medium-security prisons in WI, and these incarcerated CPS now provide unique supports to their peers
- CPS adapt to the conditions and crisis of COVID-19, offering essential services both in-person and virtually in many workplaces



Certified Parent Peer Specialists (CPPS)

- In February 2011, a separate design committee was developed with leaders in the parent support community to build a system that reflects the challenges and opportunities in supporting parents of children and youth navigating mental health and substance use.
- In partnership with Access and DHS, this committee developed guiding documents for CPPS. The training protocol and the competency-based exam were launched in 2018.



Certified Parent Peer Specialists Today

Today there are 54 CPPS in Wisconsin. This is an emerging but important professional role in WI, and trainings and exams were rolled out in 2019.

- CPPS trainings continue to be offered statewide, and we are learning lessons from the pilot period for an effective expansion of this professional role
- Now that the CPS curriculum has been revised and updated, work will begin on a similarly revised CPPS curriculum




Important Past, Ongoing, and Upcoming Projects

Supporting Employers in the Successful Implementation of CPS/CPPS Services

In January 2020, an updated Employer Guidance document was shared for employers of CPS and CPPS, respectively, to support them in onboarding CPS/CPPS and supporting their work.

Various areas were edited, clarified, and expanded upon, including:

- The professional role and scope of CPS and CPPS
- Supporting professional peer support workers in a workplace that seeks to honor equity, lived experience, recovery-oriented service models, and trauma-informed approaches
- Connecting employers to helpful resources relating to recruiting, hiring, and supervision of CPS/CPPS
- Ensuring that employer guidance is consistent with revised CPS curriculum and the core documents to which CPS and CPPS are expected to adhere



Implementing a Revised Curriculum

A Revised WI Certified Peer Specialist Curriculum has recently been published.

It further clarifies the role, supports skill-development, and effective, adult learning.

- Offers a core framework for understanding the role of a CPS through four key elements: Connecting, Exploring, Supporting, and Planning
- Centers the OARS (open questions, affirmations, reflective listening, summary) communication framework
- Improves on core pieces, including: trauma-informed peer support, cultural responsiveness, peer-based approaches to suicide and self-harm, multiple pathways to recovery, ethics and boundaries considerations, and more...

86% of CPS trained in the revised curriculum so far have gone on to pass (on their first attempt) the state-approved CPS exam to become certified.

Communities of Practice

In March of 2020, a CPS & CPPS Community of Practice was launched.

Soon after, a Supervisors of CPS & CPPS Community of Practice was started.

Communities of Practice are a place for people in CPS/CPSP roles or supervisors of CPS/CPSP to explore topics and practice skills relevant to their work, learn from each other, and grow as leaders in the field.

Learn more: <https://www.wicps.org/communities-of-practice/>

Past Communities of Practice, including the supervisors-specific ones, can be viewed here: <https://www.wicps.org/webinars/>



Equity and Justice Initiatives

Access to Independence staff working on the Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative and Tara Wilhelmi, CPS Trainer, CPS, CPPS of EOTO, LLC have partnered to implement supports within the Initiative that serve to advance equity and justice.

The Wisconsin Peer Specialist Employment Initiative places a great deal of importance on addressing historic disparities related to this Initiative. We seek to support greater access to training, employment, and educational opportunities for current and aspiring Certified Peer Specialists and Certified Parent Peer Specialists belonging to marginalized and oppressed identities.





Equity and Justice (continued)

- 4 “community-specific” Certified Peer Specialist trainings have been/are being held in 2021 for LGBTQ+ communities, Black communities, Formerly Incarcerated communities, and Indigenous communities
- Tara Wilhelmi of EOTO, LLC is facilitating networking sessions, skill development workshops, and study opportunities specific to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Certified Peer Specialists and Certified Parent Peer Specialists both current and aspiring
- Important demographics data are being collected to identify inequities or barriers to accessing training, certification, and employment as a CPS/CPPS in Wisconsin

Watch an interview with Tara Wilhelmi of EOTO, LLC here to learn more about equity and justice initiatives regarding those in peer specialist roles:

<https://www.facebook.com/434089090467818/videos/298260231675327>



Resources:

Initiative website: <http://wicps.org>

Trainings: <https://www.wicps.org/trainings/>

Interested in sponsoring a training?
<https://www.wicps.org/private-funded-trainings/>

Equity & Justice at WIPSEI:
<https://www.wicps.org/equity-and-justice/>

CPS Employer Guidance: https://www.wicps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/employer_guide_CPS_2020-.pdf

CPPS Employer Guidance: https://www.wicps.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/employer_guide_CPPS_Jan-2020.pdf



Questions? Reflections?

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Or join our email contact list: <https://www.wicps.org/join-our-email-contact-list/>