

Peer Support Roles in Criminal Justice Settings

The term recovery can be defined as “a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential” (SAMHSA, 2012). Peer support is a highly effective way of supporting the recovery of individuals with behavioral health challenges who are involved in the criminal justice system.



Peer support has been defined as “offering help, based on the shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment between people in similar situations” (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001). The belief that recovery is possible for individuals with behavioral health challenges is fundamental to peer support, as is the concept of the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between individuals with similar life experiences. Individuals who have experienced mental illness, substance use disorders, and trauma have a unique capacity to

support each other based on these shared experiences. Research shows the effectiveness of peer support on many levels, including increasing engagement in treatment and recovery, promoting a sense of hope and self-empowerment, improving social functioning and overall quality of life, and decreasing hospitalizations (Davidson, Bellamy, Guy, & Miller, 2012).

In order to serve in many of the peer support roles discussed during this webinar, individuals will typically be asked to self-identify as a person in recovery from mental illness, substance use disorders, or trauma. In some roles that involve mentoring veterans, military service is often considered the primary shared experience and may be all that is required for individuals providing support to fellow veterans. In other roles involving family support, the shared experience of having a family member in recovery may be all that is required for individuals providing support to other family members. In addition to these experiences, individuals providing peer support in criminal justice settings should also have the shared experience of having been involved in the criminal justice system. The experience with the criminal justice system impacts an individual’s life in many ways and it is best understood by individuals who have experienced it.

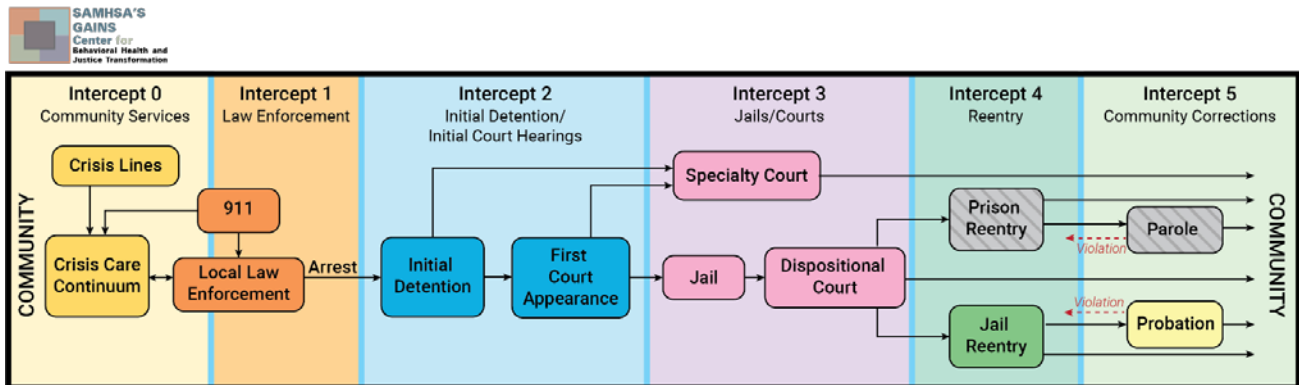
Peer support, by its nature, involves engaging and supporting individuals at various stages on their paths to recovery. Peer support services provided in the community to deter criminal justice involvement or to ease reentry after incarceration differ significantly from peer support services provided in incarcerated settings. Understanding the many different peer support roles in criminal justice settings and the similarities and differences between all of these roles can be challenging.

Federal and state behavioral health and criminal justice agencies, policymakers, community-based organizations, insurance providers, and peer organizations have sought guidance on the topic.

In May 2017, SAMHSA convened a group of national experts to discuss the current status of peer support in criminal justice settings. A natural product of this meeting was the development of a glossary of peer support roles for people with behavioral health challenges involved in the justice system. The chart below lists some common titles for peer supports delivered in the justice system and describes the roles, responsibilities, and key characteristics associated with each.

| Title | Roles and Responsibilities | Key Characteristics |
|--|---|--|
| Peer Specialists and Peer Support Specialists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide 1-on-1 peer support, facilitate support groups, share experiences, linkage to services and resources, advocacy, training and supervision. • Perform a wide range of tasks to support individuals in living their own lives and directing their own treatment and recovery process. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery from diagnosis of mental illness is the primary shared experience • Provides peer support services in wide variety of public and private settings including justice settings • Typically paid but may be volunteer positions • Training and certification is available and may be required • Many of the services are reimbursable from third party sources |
| Peer Recovery Coaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide 1-on-1 peer support, facilitate support groups, guide and mentor individuals seeking to achieve and sustain long-term recovery from substance use disorder, and enhance their quality of life. • Perform a wide range of tasks to support individuals in identifying and developing their own recovery goals, recovery pathways, and recovery plans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery from substance use disorder is the primary shared experience • Provides peer support services in wide variety of public and private settings including justice settings • Typically paid but may be volunteer positions • Training and certification is available and may be required • Some services may be reimbursable from third party sources |
| Peer Mentors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build 1-on-1 relationships, providing encouragement, motivation, and support to individuals seeking to establish or strengthen their recovery. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery from diagnosis of mental illness and/or substance use disorder is shared experience • Provides peer support services in wide variety of public and private settings including justice settings • Typically volunteer positions but they may be paid • Training is available and is recommended but often not required |
| Veteran Mentors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor fellow veterans by offering support with accessing treatment, securing housing, obtaining employment, furthering education, accessing transportation, applying for benefits, contesting discharge status, and connecting with other services and resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military service is the primary shared experience • Typically volunteer positions but they may be paid • Training available (e.g. NADCP's Justice for Vets Mentor Corps Boot Camp) • Provides mentoring in Veteran Treatment Courts and other veteran services organizations • Services provided are not reimbursable from third party sources |
| Peer Navigators and Bridgers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help individuals understand system processes and how to effectively navigate systems to obtain services needed and access helpful resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery from diagnosis of mental illness is the primary shared experience • May be either paid or volunteer positions • Available in various settings, including justice settings • Frequently work with individuals during transition periods • Services may be reimbursable from third party sources |
| Family Support Specialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and information to family members of individuals with behavioral health conditions, and facilitate support groups. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having family member with behavioral health challenges (mental, substance use, or co-occurring disorders) is primary shared experience • May be either paid or volunteer positions • Training encouraged but may not be required • Provides support to families including those with loved ones who are justice-involved |
| Forensic Peer Specialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A term often used to describe the work of providing peer support services to justice-involved individuals. Forensic Peer Specialists have significant knowledge of both behavioral health and the justice system. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support services delivered exclusively to individuals involved in the criminal justice system • Lived experience with the justice system is highly preferred and training is encouraged • Typically paid but may be volunteer positions • Services may be reimbursable from third party sources |

Using the Sequential Intercept Model to Explore Peer Support Roles in Criminal Justice Settings



The Sequential Intercept Model helps communities develop a comprehensive picture of how people with behavioral health disorders flow through the criminal justice system along six distinct intercept points: (0) Community Services, (1) Law Enforcement, (2) Initial Detention and Initial Court Hearings, (3) Jails and Courts, (4) Reentry, and (5) Community Corrections. It is often used by communities as a strategic planning tool to assess available resources, determine gaps in services, and plan for community change. Below is an overview of some of the peer support roles that exist at each of the six intercepts.

Intercept 0: Community Services

Prior to becoming involved in the criminal justice system individuals with untreated mental or substance use disorders may be engaged in the treatment and recovery process. Peer support activities at this intercept include general and targeted public outreach and engagement efforts, operating warm lines and crisis lines, serving on mobile crisis outreach teams, working in crisis stabilization units and respites or as a navigator or bridge in hospital emergency departments, serving on Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, facilitating support groups, and providing a variety of peer support services in the community.

Intercept 1: Law Enforcement

Individuals in distress or crisis as a result of mental or substance use disorders who are encountered by law enforcement can be assisted into treatment and engaged in recovery through peer support services. Peer support activities at this intercept include involvement in Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and related training, co-responding with law enforcement and emergency services, and coordinating outreach and engagement efforts to follow up with individuals identified as being at risk for involuntary hospitalization and/or further involvement in the criminal justice system.

Intercept 2: Initial Detention/Initial Court Hearings

In situations where decisions are made to arrest individuals with mental or substance use disorders and charge them with specific crimes, peer support can help individuals process what has happened and prepare for what is coming next. Peer support activities at this intercept include explaining the arrest, detention, and arraignment processes; helping to ensure that the individual feels safe and respected; and giving the individual hope that they can recover from mental and substance use disorders and cope with criminal justice system involvement.

Intercept 3: Jails/Courts

After arrest, charges, and arraignment, additional opportunities exist to divert individuals with mental and substance use disorders from the criminal justice system. Many mental health, drug/recovery, and other

problem-solving courts use peer support services. Peer support activities at this intercept include providing forensic peer support services on treatment court teams or Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) teams. In jails and prisons, peer support, particularly mentoring and facilitating support groups, is increasingly being made available to support individuals with mental and substance use disorders.

Intercept 4: Reentry

Individuals completing their sentences and transitioning from incarceration to the community are often facing significant challenges. Peer support is an important component of reducing relapse and recidivism. During reentry, peer support provides assistance with treatment planning and system navigation (accessing housing, employment, benefits, etc.). When begun prior to release, peer support activities include preparing individuals in jails and prisons to develop plans and identify resources to ensure uninterrupted treatment and connection with a recovery community.

Intercept 5: Community Corrections

Individuals who are placed on probation or parole benefit from peer support to assist them with understanding and adhering to the provisions and conditions of their probation or parole and to balance such responsibilities with sustaining treatment and recovery. Peer support providers work with both the individual as well as community corrections officers to access resources and services including housing, employment, and benefits.

Best Practices for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Peer Support Staff in Criminal Justice Settings

1. Build relationships with local peer-run organizations and recovery community organizations to learn about the availability of existing peer support services and how to access them. To find out more about these organizations, contact the GAINS Center (gains@prainc.com).
2. Begin by establishing a leadership or supervisory-type position within your agency or organization and filling that position first.
3. Explore existing practice standards, core competencies, training programs, certification opportunities and requirements, and job descriptions to inform the hiring process.
4. Avoid charging fees to peers for applications, training, and background checks.
5. Prioritize experience with the criminal justice system. Hire more than one peer staff member whenever possible.
6. Set clear and realistic expectations related to job duties and performance, and review those expectations with peer staff prior to hiring.
7. Encourage and support self-care.
8. Engage peer staff in comprehensive training and encourage peer staff to pursue opportunities for continuing education, skill building, and growth with the agency or organization.
9. Ensure that compensation for peer staff is adequate and reflects the value and effectiveness of the work.

10. Explain the value and effectiveness of peer support services and obtain buy-in from non-peer staff to create a welcoming and supportive environment.
11. Work with your criminal justice system partners to ensure their clear understanding of the purpose and role of peers.
12. Develop mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the peer support services being provided.

References

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. Retrieved from <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//PEP12-RECDEF/PEP12-RECDEF.pdf>

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