Forensic Peer Support

The role of the forensic peer within the Sequential Intercept Model
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Stepping Up is a National Initiative to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails
Stepping Up is a coalition of people on the frontlines of this issue—from those living with mental illnesses to those working in the criminal justice and behavioral health systems who have experienced struggles and successes that highlight the impact of the problem and the complexities of addressing it.
The Sequential Intercept Model provides a conceptual framework for communities to use when considering the interface between the criminal justice and mental health systems as they address concerns about criminalization of people with mental illness. The model envisions a series of points of interception at which an intervention can be made to prevent individuals from entering or penetrating deeper into the criminal justice system.
Forensic Peer Support within the Sequential Intercept Model

(SAMHSA’s GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation)
Intercept 1: Law enforcement and emergency services

At this first and critically important intercept, innovative law enforcement agencies are exploring the possibility of having peers accompany them on certain calls.

Warm lines offer around the clock access to peers lending to creating empathetic connections to individuals in crisis.

At sub-acute care facilities, forensic peers are being utilized on the floor to help assist with transition to care.

Forensic peers are also being used at community access and transition points. These sites are designed to bridge the gap between inpatient and crisis services, providing triage, assessment, intervention and support.
Forensic Peer Supports and the Sequential Intercept Model
(SAMHSA’s GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation)
In those instances where booking is unavoidable, individuals enter the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office jail system – the 4th largest booking institute in the country.

At Central intake, individuals are screened and classified by CHS. Assessments are performed and the jail data link is utilized to identify those individuals who are determined to have a serious mental illness.

In those cases where it is deemed appropriate, Forensic Peers are there to work with individuals that can be released at initial appearance and connected with behavioral health support services rather than remain incarcerated while awaiting their next court date.
Forensic Peer Supports and the Sequential Intercept Model

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Intercept 3: Jail and Courts

- Forensic Peer Supports provide valuable input in the specialty courts, working with legal and clinical teams to construct viable and effective alternatives to prosecution and incarceration.
- Forensic Peers also utilized through inpatient treatment facilities which are often directives of the specialty courts.
- In post adjudicated cases, peers work collaboratively with service agencies to assist individuals with compliance to supervision terms.
- Forensic Peers are often able to visit individuals in jail while they await court dates and sentencing. Their perspective appreciated.
- Forensic Peers also serve as navigators for those released from jail, often connecting them with greatly needed resources within the community.
Forensic Peer Supports and the Sequential Intercept Model
(SAMHSA’s GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation)
In cases where incarceration is unavoidable, Forensic Peers meet with individuals behind bars whenever possible to provide assistance and guidance regarding plans for reentry.

- Forensic Peers work with individuals just prior to, and after, release to make sure a plan is in place to give the individual the best chances of success at not recidivating.
- Prior to release, peers assist individuals with applications for benefits such as SSI/SSDI which shortens the length of time between release and receipt of benefits.
- On the day of release, forensic peers are available, when necessary, to pick individuals up and give them a familiar face at the gate.
- In most cases, within 24 hours of release, forensic peers assist individuals in making sure that their AHCCCS benefits are live, that they have an EBT card (if eligible) as well as a Lifeline Assistance “Obama” phone. They also make sure they connect with their probation/parole officer and a member from their clinical team. An application for MVD Identification is also submitted.
Forensic Peer Supports and the Sequential Intercept Model
(SAMHSA’s GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation)
After release, Forensic Peers help individuals connect, and stay connected, with their parole/probation officer.

Forensic Peers are often in the process of completing their own community supervision or probation periods.

In many cases, Forensic Peers have completed their parole/probation terms and serve as positive role models showing that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Forensic Peers help individuals learn positive pro social behavior and get them engaged in meaningful activities in the community.

Forensic Peers help teach individuals about changes in technology and trends that have occurred while incarcerated.

Forensic Peers are invaluable in helping identify resources within the community including jobs and housing which come with their own challenges when one has a felony background.

Forensic Peers have maintained their freedom and model hope for a future free of incarceration.
Forensic Peer Support

- Forensic Peer Supports have a shared experience with the population they serve.
- Forensic Peer Supports have successfully navigated the myriad of challenges faced by those who find themselves at the intersection of behavioral health and criminal justice systems.
- Forensic Peers are present at each of the Sequential Intercepts providing a continuity of service to those needing help.
Forensic Peer Specialists

Model recovery and instill hope.
Thank You