Supervising Peers

A love story

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Peer support
Triple Aim

IHI Triple Aim

- Population Health
- Experience of Care
- Per Capita Cost
Peers:

ADHS/DBHS policy and procedures chapter 400 section 404:

- **Peer**: An individual who is, or has been, a recipient of behavioral health services and has an experience of recovery to share.

- **Peer/Recovery Support Specialist Qualifications**: Individuals seeking certification and employment as Peer/Recovery Support Specialists must: (1) Self-identify as a “peer”; and (2) Meet the requirements to function as a behavioral health paraprofessional, behavioral health technician, or behavioral health professional.
There is an attitude that there are serious inherent problems with hiring peers. "Staff will relapse. Expertise and talent drain away. Remaining staff burn out."
Great supervisors are an organization’s best protection against devastating turnover. Research has been emphasizing for decades that great employees stay or leave based on the relationship with their direct supervisor. In fact, the quality of that relationship usually outweighs money and mission when staff choose whether to stay or leave. As the emerging workforce of adult, parent, and youth peer support evolves, so must the skill set of the supervisor.
3 basic strategies for successful support of a peer team:

1. Provide a recovery-oriented workplace.

2. Show a commitment to peer support in all roles and at all levels.

3. Provide high quality supervision in a supportive environment.
Strategies: 1. Provide a recovery-oriented workplace.
Recovery - oriented workplace:

- Culture: pervasive belief that people with mental health and substance use issues can and will recover
- Diversity valued
- EAP including mental health care
- Provides all-employee communication regarding equal opportunity employment, the reasonable accommodation policy of the American’s with Disabilities Act, health and wellness programs
- Promotes an accepting, anti-discrimination, anti-stigmatizing climate in the workplace.
- Fights the "Us vs. Them" attitude
Peers - clients and staff are treated according to the 9 principles of recovery:

- 1. Respect
- 2. Persons in recovery choose services and are included in program decisions and program development efforts
- 3. Focus on individual as a whole person, while including and/or developing natural supports
- 4. Empower individuals taking steps towards independence and allowing risk taking without fear of failure
- 5. Integration, collaboration, and participation with the community of one’s choice
9 principles continued:

- 6. Partnership between individuals, staff, and family members/natural supports for shared decision making with a foundation of trust
- 7. Persons in recovery define their own success
- 8. Strengths-based, flexible, responsive services reflective of an individual’s cultural preferences
- 9. Hope is the foundation for the journey towards recovery
Recovery is lived and breathed

- People in recovery are recruited and supported in meaningful participation at all levels of the organization and are participants in service provision, evaluation, budgeting, and governance.

- Eliminate stigma and discrimination through new hire orientation and ongoing staff sensitivity training.

- The organization joins those they serve in raising awareness and actively combating stigma in the community.

- The organization encourages people in recovery to participate and take on leadership roles in local and regional advocacy groups.

- Community mental health and addictions professionals are well-informed and educate the community about the reality of recovery.
Awareness exercise

- Different groups are asked to stand in front of the rest of the participants. For example, all Latino/a individuals stand in front of the room. The group then answers four questions:
  - What is wonderful about being Latino/a?
  - What term do you never want to be called again?
  - How can the participants that are listening be helpful to Latino/a people?
  - Do you feel heard?

After the group in front of the other participants answers the questions, another group is selected to gather together and answer the questions. This exercise is affirming and provides an opportunity for individuals to draw on their own experiences, their own stories, etc. This tends to be a good exercise for building common ground and bonding groups.
2. Show commitment to peer support in all roles and at all levels.

- Hire more than one peer provider. This offers opportunities for networking and support, prevents isolation and burnout, and fosters long-term retention.
- Provide good pay and competitive benefits.
- Provide competitive leave/ PTO/ EIT
- Creatively use peer supports throughout organization, not just in traditional peer roles
- Provide space and time for peer team to be together
- Publicly recognize peer providers’ contribution to the organization.
- Provide training and educational opportunities for peer providers to grow and be promoted along a career path of their choice.
PROMOTE PEERS
3. Provide quality supervision in a supportive environment

- Supportive supervisor at every stage of employment. Supervisor should:
  - Have a lived experience as peer or family member or support person
  - Be compassionate and a champion of peer support
  - Be able to advocate tirelessly for peers within organization
  - Be very knowledgeable about laws that apply
PROMOTE PEERS
ADA: definition of “disability” and reasonable accommodations

- An individual with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

- Reasonable accommodations: Modification to the job application process, the work environment, or job that will enable the qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions and enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.
Accommodations: questions to ask

• What limitations is the employee with a mental health impairment experiencing?
• How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee’s job performance?
• What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
• What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
• Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee with a mental health impairment to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
• Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding mental health impairments?
Recruitment and hiring process

- Peer supervisor recruits and hires with input from peers.
- All applicants welcome.
- Clear job descriptions and expectations.
- New hires: explain ADA and offer accommodations: “What would help you do your job better?”
Orientation:

- Recovery principles and peer program explained to ALL new hires
- ADA and accommodations explained to all staff.
After the hire: coaching and mentoring

- New peer staff work with a peer mentor and coach (include as many team members as possible)
  - Peer staff gains leadership skills.
  - Develop and continue accommodations.
  - Cross training if at all possible.
Working wellness:

- Supporting, Identifying and accommodating:
  - What wellness looks like
  - Triggers
  - Warning signs
  - Action plans
  - Continuous training for all staff
  - Frequent team meetings and individual supervision.
  - Team encouraged to support each other.
  - Don’t let problems go unaddressed.
When a challenge occurs:

- Continue compassionate supervision.
- Leave, paid or unpaid without retribution.
- EAP process in place.
- Problem-solving to promote job retention and maintain productivity
Away from work:

- Supervisor contact (if desired)
- Peer contact (if desired)
- Plan for return to work.
Return to work:

- Peer to peer counseling.
- Intensive supervision.
- Encouragement and support.
- If necessary, exit with dignity.
Accommodations:

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement,
- Provide day-to-day guidance and feedback,
- Provide written job instructions via email,
- Develop clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting performance standards,
- Schedule consistent meetings with employee to set goals and review progress,
- Allow for open communication,
- Establish written long term and short term goals,
- Develop strategies to deal with conflict,
- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation,
- Educate all employees on their right to accommodations,
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers and supervisors,
Accommodations:

- Allow flexible work environment:
  - Flexible scheduling
  - Modified break schedule
  - Leave for counseling
  - Work from home/Flexi-place
- Encourage the use of stress management techniques to deal with frustration
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow flexible breaks
- Refer to employee assistance program (EAP)
“I feel very supported by my fellow peers and my supervisor is encouraging and knowledgeable.”
“Being a Peer Support Specialist is the best job I have ever had. My co-workers and supervisor are very supportive and it's okay to have a bad day.”
My Peer Support co-workers are the biggest blessing of all. It feels so empowering to know they’ve got my back!”
“I know every day that when I am struggling with my symptoms I will receive support on the job. My supervisor gives me encouragement and answers my question during the day. She is understanding, and extremely knowledgeable of the needs of peers including myself.”
“I feel that I am so blessed to have been hired here at WYGC, and having so many supportive, helpful and the most wonderful people I’ve ever met working with me. Pinch me! I must be dreaming.”
“Being supervised by a peer is the best. When you're having a bad day or have been triggered by a client with a history similar to yours they are there as your support. They understand triggers and can truly empathize. They remind you how far you have come. :)”
“I attribute my happiness at my job to the amazing team of peers that I work with. They support me on my very best days by telling me that I’m doing a great job and saying thank you often. More importantly support comes in abundance on my very worst days when they remind me that I am here because of the struggles I have overcome and that it is okay to acknowledge when I am having a rough time. I truly feel I have finally found the place I belong!”
I find that I am getting support in my position all the way from the top person in this company, down to and including my fellow Peer Supports. The supervision I have received is dynamic. I have asked questions or for advice and all my inquiries have been answered in a very timely manner. I can only say this, we have a Peer Support Team, not a Peer Support Office. I am happy to be here and I feel very comfortable and proud to be working with people like these that are here. Thanks everyone!
In my job as a peer support specialist, I have been supported beyond belief. I have never kept a job longer than three months and I have worked as a peer support for a little over a year and a half. When I come to work, I am greeted with support, understanding, and surrounded by people who know what I go through. I have never worked at a job where it is ok to be me and not have to put up a front. When I am upset, I feel no shame at work and find it so easy to let my coworkers and my supervisor know. I love the saying my supervisor Katy has about hiring a man without a leg and asking him not to limp. When I am “limping”, I am met with the understanding and caring nature of my fellow peer supports.
To all peer supports:
Thank you

“This is my dream job”