



## About Kentucky Peer Support Specialist Training

*Kentucky Peer Specialist Training* is an initiative of the Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities in partnership with the Empowerment Team's peer support services in Northern Kentucky – Recovery Network and the P.I.E.R.

**This is a five-day training program focusing on providing peer support for people mental disorders with an optional five day follow-up substance use disorder peer support training.** The KY Peer Support Specialist Trainings are designed to prepare adults with psychiatric disabilities or adults with co-occurring substance use disorders to work as Peer Specialists in the Kentucky public mental health and state psychiatric hospital system. A Peer Specialist is an adult with a psychiatric disability or co-occurring mental and substance use disorder that completes the training program(s) provided by the Kentucky Division of Behavioral Health and passes both a written and an oral test. Kentucky Peer Specialists provide peer support, which is defined as the social and emotional support provided by persons with a mental health condition to others sharing a similar mental health condition to bring about a desired social or personal change.

The job of a Peer Specialist is not to replace current clinical mental health staff, but to offer additional and/or alternative options to help people in their efforts to recover.

**Eligibility Requirements:** The applicant must possess, at a minimum, a high school diploma or GED equivalent and meet the criteria listed below.

- \* Have a primary diagnosis of mental illness for which he/she has received treatment and a strong desire to identify himself/herself as a person with mental illness (current or former consumer of mental health services). The primary diagnosis of any applicant may not be addictive disease, although addictive disease may be a secondary diagnosis.
- \* Demonstrate strong reading comprehension and written communication skills as indicated by his/her responses on the short-essay form.
- \* Demonstrated experience with leadership and advocacy in the field of mental health, as well as the ability to demonstrate efforts at self-directed recovery.

**Recovery and Peer Support:** Recovery from mental and substance use disorders is not only possible but expected. *The President's New Freedom Commission Report (2003) envisioned "a future when everyone with a mental illness will recover, a future when mental illnesses can be prevented or cured, a future when mental illnesses are detected early, and a future when everyone with a mental and/or substance use disorder at any stage of life has access to effective treatment and supports—essentials for living, working, learning, and participating fully in the community." The report also outlines a plan to transform mental health care in America to promote a recovery-oriented service system. Peer support is an important element in this transformation process.*

Peer support is the social and emotional support provided by persons with a mental health condition to others sharing a similar mental health condition to bring about a desired social or personal change. Peer support is an emerging evidence-based practice that helps people to recover from a mental and/or substance use disorder with assistance from someone who has experienced mental and/or substance use disorder and recovery.

### Peer support:

- Is recovery-oriented and consumer driven.
- Provides significant benefits to peers receiving services, providing services and the mh systems that utilize peer services.
- Improves consumers' ability to live, work, learn and participate fully in their communities.
- Is cost effective and results in fewer hospitalizations, reduced substance abuse, increased rates of employment, and improved illness management.
- Creates a culture of recovery and improves the effectiveness of service outcomes.
- Provides a mechanism for outreach to individuals who have been alienated from traditional services.

The Peer Specialist Service is a structured and scheduled therapeutic activity with an individual client or group, provided by a trained, self-identified consumer of mental health services. A Peer Specialist guides clients toward the identification and achievement of specific goals defined by the client and specified in the Treatment Plan.

*The Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) supports consumer-driven recovery-oriented services. DBH provides Kentucky Peer Specialist Training opportunities and has developed a committee to review and analyze data to evaluate current program effectiveness. DBH supports establishing a Medicaid-defined peer support service to be incorporated in the Community Mental Health Center Regulation and Incorporated Manual.*

