

Youth Peer Services

Information for Service Providers

Many youth and young adults face complicated challenges as they transition to adulthood and current events are posing unprecedented challenges for them. Youth aging out of foster care and those with behavioral health conditions have a unique set of needs that may go unmet without support and guidance.

Youth peer services offer a unique opportunity to support youth and young adults who are transitioning to adulthood. As young adults move from the child to the adult system or graduate from system involvement, youth peers provide a “bridge” to support the transition. Youth peers provide youth-centered support to navigate systems and resources necessary to achieve and sustain wellness, guided by their own lived experience in the child and adult systems.

Youth Peer Services Defined

Youth peer services are provided directly to an individual young person or to a number of young people in the community. Direct youth peer support is a formal service in which the youth peer providing the service and the youth receiving it have specified roles and responsibilities.

Youth peer services are provided in multiple types of settings and the role of the peer varies. Generally, the role of a youth peer includes the following:

- Provide one-on-one support and encouragement through stories of hope, recovery, and healing;
- Assist with setting goals and identifying positive environments and social connections;
- Advocate for active youth engagement in team meetings and services;
- Facilitate group meetings of youth and young adults; and
- Advocate for youth voice and the value of lived experience within agencies, communities, and systems.

An Integrated Approach

Peer supporters often work as part of a multidisciplinary team to maximize a peer’s value for individuals receiving services. These teams may consist of both clinical and non-clinical services and should include linkage to community supports as well. Each team member provides a separate service or function, and the team works in a non-segregated and cohesive fashion, to complement each other’s distinct discipline.

Benefits to Youth and Young Adults

Although most research on the benefits of peer services have focused on adults, there are some research studies that show the positive impact of youth peer services across multiple areas.

- Youth peer services increase hope and belief in the possibility of recovery, empowerment and self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-management of difficulties, and positive social connections and engagement.¹

¹ Peer Support Services: State of the Science: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/state-of-the-science-articles-2018-amp-plus>

- Young people with mental health conditions with access to peer advocates, as compared to those who lacked such access, had more favorable views regarding access to services, appropriateness of and participation in services, and higher overall/global satisfaction.²
- Youth and young adults with mental health conditions are more likely to turn to their peers for help and express a desire to have peer support services available to them.³ Additionally, a study found that youth who had access to peer services were more satisfied with their services than youth who did not.⁴

The Role of Service Providers

The role of a youth peer support specialist is determined by the individual needs of those they serve, the needs of the agency that employs them, and the environment in which the services are provided.

Generally, the role of the service provider includes the following:

- Determine what population to serve and how to implement youth peer support services for them, which could be within an existing program or a standalone service;
- Define the role of peers within the organization and develop a job description to delineate responsibilities and role within the treatment team;
- Establish relationships/partnerships with funders of youth peer support services;
- Recruit, hire, and provide ongoing supervision, coaching and individualized support to build confidence and greater independence.

Training and Certification

Lived experience is the foundation of peer-to-peer support services. Credentialing and competency examination for Certified Recovery Peer Specialists (CRPS) through the Florida Certification Board (FCB) are critical to a peer supporter's successful outcome. The Youth designation for CRPS is relatively new in Florida and provides an opportunity to expand this service for youth and young adults.

Funding for Youth Peer Services

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) issued guidance for states in 2013 on how to establish peer support services as a Medicaid benefit for children, youth, and young adults with significant behavioral health conditions.⁵ Youth peer support services are covered under Florida Medicaid/Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF). These services may also be paid for on an individual or program-specific basis through other funding sources, such as Community Based Care agencies or local funding.

❖ Florida Medicaid

² Peer Support Services: State of the Science: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/state-of-the-science-articles-2018-amp-plus>

³ Peer Support Services for Youth and Young Adults Who Experience Serious Mental Health Conditions: State of the Science: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/state-of-the-science-articles-2018-amp-plus>

⁴ Natl. Institute of Health: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24522553>

⁵ SAMHSA-HRSA - Peer Providers: <https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/workforce/team-members/peer-providers>

- Peer Services are an “In Lieu Of Service” (ILOS) offered by some managed care plans. Providers should reach out to plans to determine if a recipient’s plan would cover that service. Peer support for some services is also covered by Florida Medicaid as a required benefit.
- Florida Medicaid uses the term, “Certified Recovery Peer Specialists,” and certification is necessary for reimbursement.
 - For more information about Peer Support Services, see Florida Medicaid’s policy for Behavioral Health Community Support Services which can be found here: <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/review/Specific/59G-4.031.pdf>
 - The Fee Schedule for Behavioral Health Community Support Services can be found here: https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/review/Reimbursement/2020-01-01_Fee_Sched_Billing_Codes/Community_Behavioral_Health_Services_Fee_Schedule_2020.pdf

❖ Department of Children and Families

- The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) covers services provided by and programs that include Certified Peer Recovery Specialists. These services are designed to support and coach an adult or child and family to regain or develop skills to live, work and learn successfully in the community. More information about SAMH covered services can be found at: <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?ID=65E-14.021>
- The Managing Entities (MEs) and Community Based Care (CBC) Lead Agencies may be willing to partner at the community level to implement or expand youth peer support services.
 - Detailed information about MEs can be found here: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/managing-entities/>
 - Detailed information about CBCs can be found here: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/community-based-care/lead-agency-map.shtml>

Resources

1. Association for Children’s Mental Health: Short interview with children’s mental health provider: <http://www.acmh-mi.org/youth-peer-support-videos-just-released/>
2. Youth Peer Support - Youth MOVE: <https://youthmovenational.org/youth-peer-support/>
3. *Decision Points in Your Agency: What to Consider When Working With Youth Peers*: Pathways RTC, Portland State University: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/webinars-2020#decision>
4. Florida Dept. of Children and Families (DCF):
 - Florida Peer Services Handbook: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/publications/docs/peer-services/DCF-Peer-Guidance.pdf>
 - DCF - Peer specialist training and technical assistance: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/training-technical-assistance.shtml>
5. Florida Certification Board: Certified Recovery Peer Specialist-Youth (CRPS-Y) designation and certification process: <https://flcertificationboard.org/certifications/certified-recovery-peers-specialist/>
6. Youth Peer Support in a Mental Health Context: Ontario Center of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health: http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca/sites/default/files/resource/EIS_Youth_Peer_Support.pdf
7. *Practice Brief: Supporting the Youth Peer Workforce* (2/26/20): Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network: <https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/MHTTC-Supporting-Youth-Peer-Workforce.pdf>