Transforming Community Mental Healthcare: How to Grow the Youth & Young Adult Peer Support Workforce

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Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research
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Who we are & what brought us together

• Antonia Barba
• Michelle Munson
• Vanessa Klodnick
Many paths, we are ALL needed:

We’re not here to tell people that they’re doing youth/young adult peer support right/wrong, we’re here to share our perspectives in leading youth & young adult program development & implementation.

Observations & Tools:

We’re going to share our observations + tools we’ve built to address some of the challenges that youth/young adult peers face in community mental health settings. We will also share what has worked well.
Indigenous Peoples Acknowledgement

Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land

Illinois:
- Kaskaskia
- Kiikaapoi (Kickapoo)
- Meskwaki
- Myaamia
- Niuchí
- Očhéthi Šakówiŋ
- Osage
- Peoria
- Potawatomi
- Sauk

Massachusetts:
- Agawam
- Eastern Nehantick
- Massachusett
- Massacoes
- Moehegan
- Mohican
- Nahaganset
- Naumkeag
- Nauset

New York:
- Abenaki
- Canarsie
- Cayuga
- Delaware
- Erie
- Laurentians
- Lekawe (Rockaway)
- Lenapehoking
- Massapequas
- Matinecock
- Merrick
- Metoac
- Mohawk
- Mohican
- Munsee Lenape
- Nissaquogue
- Oneida
- Onondaga
- Poospatuck
- Schaghticoke
- Secateogue
- Seneca
- Setalcott
- Unkechaug
- Wappinger
- Quinnipiack
- Saukigo
- Tunxis
- Wampanoag
- Western Nahantick
- Wompanoag

Texas:
- Alabama-Coushatta
- Anadarko
- Apache
- Arapaho
- Biloxi
- Caddo
- Cherokee
- Cheyenne
- Chickasaw
- Coahuiltecan
- Comanche
- Delaware
- Hainai
- Jumano
- Karankawa
- Kichai
- Kiowa
- Kickapoo
- Pakana Muskogee
- Potawatomi
Objectives

**History**
Describe history of youth & young adult peer support & key principles drawing from child peer mentoring and adult peer support models.

**Tensions**
Identify critical elements of youth & young adult peer support & their tension(s) with current community mental health settings.

**Best-Practice**
Discuss emerging best practices for supporting and growing the youth & young adult peer workforce.
What is Youth/Young Adult Peer Support?

Young Person
- Struggling in multiple domains
- Establishing identity, not necessarily keen on integrating “mental illness”
- Feeling misunderstood
- Feeling out of place
- Wealth of strengths that often go unnoticed

Adult Provider Professional
- Well-intentioned
- Trained to treat mental health symptoms within ‘the system’
- Embedded hierarchy
- Feels like has been there, but often really hasn’t

Cartoon from: http://www.noetic.org/education/worldview/curriculum
Adult Mental Health
Near-Age Youth/Young Adult Peer Support
Child & Adolescent Mental Health
Peer Principles & Practices

These are present within & across peer roles in child & adult settings

- Mutuality through co-creation, co-caring, co-sharing, co-collaboration, & co-healing
- Respect & shared responsibility for healing & wellness
- Connection, belonging, & community
- Mentoring, guidance, role modeling, & navigation
- Strategic use of self & authenticity
- “Nothing about us without us”
- Deep self-knowledge & growth through self-reflection
Youth Peers provide a unique invaluable perspective & support through which young people often feel more connected, less alone, more willing to open up & try new skills with someone who is not in a position of power over them but who walks alongside them & supports their self-determination & goals.

Young Adult Peer Mentoring — Children's Behavioral Health Knowledge Center (cbhknowledge.center)
“I may not have been in your shoes, but I’ve been to the same shoe store RECENTLY.”
“Peerness” is much more than lived/living experience with mental illness.

Mutual Relatability: Peer providers must be relatable & willing to relate.

- Current life experiences
- Interests & hobbies
- Strengths, talents & challenges
- Goals, hopes & dreams
- Identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, religion)
- Childhood experiences
- Neighborhood & Community
- Family & social network
- Values
(Re)Defining/Thinking Role of Expert

Peers are experts.

- Peers in “expert” role must navigate hierarchy rooted in the medical model (1 helper/expert & 1 help seeker/non-expert)
- All actions are goal-oriented & must be documented in relation to medical necessity

I didn’t study: __________________________
I’ve lived/am living: ______________________

Peer Support is Social Change.

“Being together for the purpose of being known. It is the sharing of responsibility and effort so we can enjoy the experience of being part of something bigger than ourselves. Moving toward is being together for the purpose of being fulfilled.” [Intentional Peer Support]
Near-Age Youth Peers role is 2-fold

**Supporter.**
Individual peer support to young people

**Disrupter.**
Influence team, program, agency & community

- Must be clear about these expectations in hiring process
- Must provide support, including training, supervision (individual & group), & ongoing professional development
- Org must be willing to change
TENSION: PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PEER ROLES

Billable Service
- Certification process
- Evidence-based practice
- Peer is expert/has power
- Regulated

Advocacy & Change
- Mutual informal support
- Unregulated
- Historically grew from mutual validation of inhumane treatment
- Shared power

Formal paid support provider to identified “help seeker”
A Comprehensive Approach to Youth Peer Support

- EMBED PEERS INTO ALL YOUTH-SERVING SERVING SYSTEMS
  - Mental health services
  - Youth mental health spaces
  - Other youth service systems

- GO WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND THEIR TIME
  - School & community organizations
  - Virtual & text Interest-based

- TRAIN ALL YOUNG PEOPLE
  - General support skills
  - Peer-led Wellness Education

Davis, Chilla, & Do (2022). Youth and Young Adult Peer Support: Expanding Community-Driven Mental Health Resources.
Continuum of Safely Sharing means...

Balancing:

Authentic  [ ]  Strategic

Real Stigma  [ ]  Expectations to "Share"  [ ]  What feels right/wrong in moment
Peers are often subject to ableism, ageism, & racism

1. Young, often first professional job.

2. Mental health living experience & real instability of transitioning to adulthood.

3. If agency hires relatable peers to their clients, they’re likely also individuals who identify as racial & ethnic minorities + may have experienced complex trauma, poverty, housing instability, system involvement, etc.
LET'S INTEGRATE YOUTH PEERS.
LET'S CREATE A YOUNG ADULT PEER MENTOR PROGRAM.

This is a grant is a great opportunity to develop new services and programming. Peers will be able to reach our clients in a whole new way!

This is so needed! Focus on engaging our most vulnerable teen & YA clients. Partner with and support the programs experiencing significant challenges.
Could someone from your team tell their story of struggle for 200 of our closest board members & donors???

We're sorry, we can't increase wages for your staff unless they have a degree.

Can you provide a detailed rationale for why you are supervising this way?

Why aren't you meeting your deliverables? Find a way to make it work!
Ongoing professional development for supervisors

Amending Job Titles

Improve organizational readiness

Ongoing professional development for supervisors

Mutual support & learning spaces

Multiprong Supervision & Support
• **Organizational commitment**, plan, & implementation facilitation necessary for successful youth peer integration.

• **Prepare collateral providers** + programs to understand peer role, activities & contribution.

• **Leverage the YAPM Media Library** — Children's Behavioral Health Knowledge Center (cbhknowledge.center)
Model for Thriving Young Adult Peer Support Providers

- Training
- Individual Supervision
- Peers-4-Peers Group
- Group Supervision
**Professional & Emotional Support**

Creating spaces for processing/validation/emotional support + learning/sharing resources/growing for:

- #1 most requested support from youth/young adult peers
- Beneficial to have for peers & a separate space for supervisors of peers.
- Ideally facilitated; at least monthly; could be virtual
- Must have resources + dedicated sponsor time
Re-define “Peer.”

Value “Bring your full self to the work.”

Be who you are. Know yourself.

calling all team members.

I am learning who I am.

I matter.

I am unique.

I belong.

My mental health condition is 1 part of me.
Disclosure: Increasing Safety / Support

Crux of taking the job: “You’re a stigmatized identity.”

Strive for in program/org:
1. Peers do not have to disclose ‘on demand’
2. Helps organizations value mutuality & sharing in all roles - not just peer roles

Increasing safety/support:
1. Job Titles & Clarity of Role (i.e., BTG)
2. Model and Support Strategic Sharing (manage organizations expectations)
Organizational focus on wellness for all

Promote wellness plans in place for all staff. Make wellness part of supervision & agency culture (e.g., CEO talks about wellness plan)

Recognize REAL Problematic Narratives:

- Must share living experience (as opposed to solely lived) + expectations to “be well” all of the time (in high burnout healthcare settings).

- Asked to share about mental health & related struggles, but not supported (or worse...shamed, reprimanded, etc.) when mental health struggles arise
Supervisors need training, support, & professional development.

• Most supervisors do not have experience in peer roles.

• Importance of modeling strategic sharing, wellness, advocacy & navigating sticky situations + facilitating hard conversations, addressing conflict, discrimination, & abuse between non-peer colleagues & peers.

• Mentoring, coaching & modeling must be supported, understood or endorsed by agency.
You are part of a movement to redefine how mental health agencies meet young people’s needs.
Take Action

• Reflect on today’s webinar. What is something that you can integrate into your practice or program?

• What might get in the way of that? (b/c that’s where you start.)

• Who are allies in your org that you would need to involve to support a thriving peer workforce?
Thoughts? Questions? Want to learn more?

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