



Recruitment and Retention of the Peer Workforce

A series of six regional gatherings were held to learn about the recruitment and retention experiences of Certified Peer Specialists and other peer workers across Massachusetts. The first event was held on August 11, 2015 in the Southeast with five additional events held between March – May 2016, see last page of report for flyer with dates and locations.

This second year of Community Voice Gatherings was sponsored by the Department of Mental Health and produced by The Transformation Center in collaboration Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs) and other regional partners. The series was intended to add to our understanding of:

- 1) Recruitment: how and why people enter the field of peer support and
- 2) Retention: what influences workers' decisions to leave or to remain in the field as well as their satisfaction with working in a peer support role.

Community Dialogue & Reporting

Each gathering began with registration, coffee and refreshments at 9:45 with events ending at 3:00. Participants were welcomed by Deborah Delman, Executive Director of The Transformation Center, and by a representative from DMH. Members of the Board of Directors shared their appreciation for the strengths and needs of the peer workforce and vision of how to contribute to the region's peer support movement.

The morning session was devoted to topic of Workforce Recruitment and Retention through multiple dialogues held at the same time. Small group discussions were organized around the same set of questions and facilitated by Transformation Center staff and volunteers. Each facilitated group included 4-7 participants and a note-taker prepared ahead of time. Groups reported back to the full gathering before lunch.

Lunch was provided on site by local caterers and was successful at keeping almost all participants in each region engaged and present for the afternoon. After the meal, a brainstorming session was held to elicit ideas and hopes for a 2017 Peer Workforce/Volunteer Ongoing Education Conference. Responses were energetic and sustained for at least 30 minutes at each gathering. Comments were noted and compiled in a separate report.

In the afternoon, five breakout groups were held on topics related to attracting, developing and sustaining a successful peer workforce.

1. *Peer Workforce/Volunteer Ongoing Education Conference 2017*
2. *Cultural Sensitivity, Access & Inclusion*
3. *CPS Code of Ethics in Different Environments*
4. *Developing a Peer Worker/Volunteer Advocacy Voice in MA*
5. *Mental Health & Substance Use Workforce Development*

The themes and recommendations contained in this report are distilled from extensive and often verbatim notes taken at the six events. Data was not gathered or analyzed with quantifiable precision, however, given the large amount of quantitative information gathered by note-takers with a range of skills and approaches. All of the data was reviewed and reported here by a team of Transformation Center staff experienced in grass-roots organizing, qualitative data analysis and program/policy assessment.

Participation

Attendance at all six Community Voice Gatherings totaled about 255 individuals. Information reported in this section is from the 310 who registered ahead of time.

310 Individuals Registered

- 72 Southeast
- 46 Central
- 68 Boston
- 39 West
- 43 Northeast
- 42 Metro Suburban

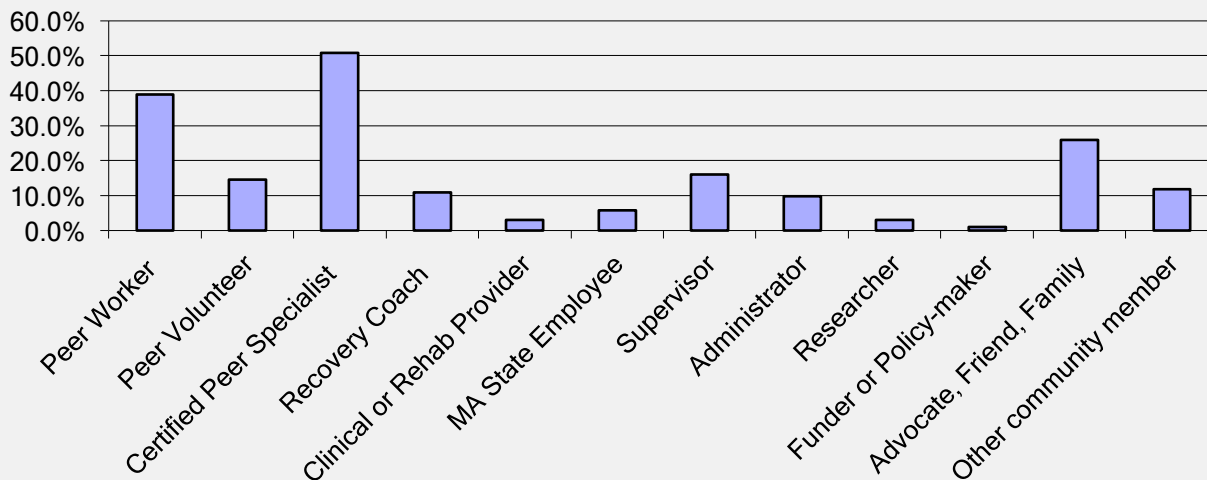
Response Percent Response Count

How would you describe yourself?

255 responses, people could check more than one role

Certified Peer Specialist (CPS)	50%	128
Peer Worker	40%	101
Advocate, Friend, Family	25%	63
Peer Volunteer	15%	37
Other community member	12%	30
Recovery Coach	10%	25
Supervisor	16%	42
Administrator	10%	25
MA State Employee	7%	19
Clinical or Rehab Provider	4%	10
Researcher	3%	7
Funder or Policy-maker	1%	3
Details? (youth mentor, substance use advocate, etc....)		111

How would you describe yourself (can check more than one)?



The largest number of people registered and attended the Southeast and Boston events. People could identify as having more than one role. It is worth noting that over a third of those that registered shared details about their role and their interest in peer support.

Overall, half said they were “Certified Peer Specialists” and a quarter were “Advocate, Friend, Family”. The Northeast (68%) and Central MA (62%) had higher percentages of CPSs than the average. The Northeast had a smaller percentage (11%) register as “Advocate, Friend, Family”.

“Supervisor” was 16% of statewide registrations with Western MA attracting far more at 24%. Central MA (7%) and Metro Suburban (5%) had fewer than average. Only 4% of statewide registrations identified as “Clinical or Rehab Provider”.

“Volunteer” made up 15% of statewide registrations with Boston having more than average (20%) and Central (10%) and Western MA (3%) fewer.

At least one “Recovery Coach” registered for each event with 10% statewide. Western MA had a larger than average percent (22%) and Central MA a smaller percent (2%).

Recruitment

How did you find out about the job? How did you get the word out that you were hiring?

Participants, including a small number of employers at most gatherings, discussed a range of ways that they found out about jobs, publicized job openings and recruited applicants.

The majority of participants found out about openings by word-of-mouth and at peer support gatherings. Some employers actively recruited through the peer support network in their area.

In every region a number of workers said that their relationship to the hiring agency was a key factor in knowing about job opportunities. Many were actively recruited for their position while volunteering and/or receiving services at the agency. Clinical providers and peer workers encouraged people to apply for the CPS program or develop their peer support skills in other ways. Some peer workers moved from a traditional role to a peer support position.

The Transformation Center’s CPS training played a crucial role for many people seeking a job. The MA Leadership Academy and other organizational connections also lead people to jobs.

Online advertising and other web-based resources were a significant resource for job seekers. The Transformation Center’s peer job listings, social media, Craig’s list, RLCs and other agency online openings were also mentioned.

A smaller number of participants said that vocational support programs helped them find employment.

In Western MA the interview and hiring process was discussed with some detail.

Why did you want to apply? What keeps you from applying for peer worker jobs?

What made you take/not take the job?

What makes you want to volunteer?

Significant majorities of people across the state were drawn to the intangible values and benefits of peer support work. We heard over and over that despite very low wages, limited hours, and an uncertain future, people entered the field because peer support is valuable and satisfying.

Passion and purpose

Confidence in mutuality and peer support

Good fit, being true to one's self

Touched by the CPS training, drawn to the community and peer-run organizations

Determination to be an agent of change

Personal satisfaction and support

Did the job look appealing in terms of pay? Other benefits?

People grappled with evaluating wages and benefits in both recruitment and retention. Most workers considered whether the job offered professional development and a career ladder to sustainable employment. Peer support work sometimes functioned as a stepping-stone into a higher paying job and, occasionally, to an entirely different field.

Most volunteers said they were exploring their skills and the role. Volunteering and work with limited or variable hours were a good fit for many. These voices tended to be new to the field or to employment of any kind, or people returning to work after unemployment or disability. Some wanted a flexible schedule and a limited range of responsibilities and expectations. A number of people said that they needed a position that allowed them to continue on social security and disability benefits.

The uncertain career path and low wages for peer support positions in the majority of agencies, however, did not deter participants from pursuing work that was uniquely suited to their passion, purpose, values and lived experience. It is important to note, of course, that people who have left the field or were not comfortable with a job that identified them as someone with lived experience would be unlikely to attend a Community Voice Gathering.

Retention

Why do peer workers stay on the job?

Why do they leave? Are there trends?

How does it matter whether the staff has worked with peer specialists or not?

What is needed to retain the workforce?

People working in the field stayed for the same reasons they were interested in applying: Peer support is valuable and satisfying. A few comments from the perspective of people who have been employed:

A large number of peer workers said they were the lowest paid staff on their team and did not have a sense of stability or security. Many were expected to spend their own money on the job or maintain a car or cell phone, a hardship that employers did not always acknowledge.

Others, however, said the income was an economic win for them. People across the state were aware that peer specialists at DMH were paid significantly more than a comparable role at a private non-profit agency. Some RLC workers also felt satisfied that their pay was adequate and valued their work. For people who earned a living wage as a full-time peer worker, the income and benefits changed their lives, allowing them to come off financial benefits. Others worked part time with a pay scale that gave them hope for a stable future without social security and disability.

Aside from pay, the most significant variable in retaining employees was the respect and understanding peer workers experienced from the organization overall and from their coworkers day-to-day.

It was particularly important whether participants felt support from their supervisors and opportunities to collaborate with other peer workers.

Workers at Recovery Learning Communities and other peer-run organizations seemed to voice more satisfaction with organizational, cultural and inter-personal variables than people working in clinical settings.

Some people talked about specific tasks and policies that impacted their decision to stay on the job or to leave. Participants in the Northeast were particularly clear about the tension they felt trying to work within the CPS Code of Ethics in clinical settings.

A number of people said that a lack of clarity or an overwhelming workload made the job difficult or unsustainable.

Improving Recruitment and Retention

Themes from the Community Voice Gatherings provide a framework for how to attract and sustain a satisfied and skilled peer support workforce. We heard from a relatively small sample of participants that did not necessarily represent the field of peer support. These voices, however, are clear and consistent with national findings and lead us to the following recommendations:

RECRUITMENT: Uses strategies and technologies that speak directly to the values and needs of desirable applicants.

Participants identified the following reasons they apply. Job openings, program descriptions and tasks that reflect these beliefs and values will be attractive to people seeking peer support positions.

- Passion and purpose
- Confidence in mutuality and peer support

- Good fit, being true to one's self
- Touched by the CPS training, drawn to the community and peer-run organizations
- Determination to be an agent of change
- Personal satisfaction and support

Participants at CVG events identified peer support gatherings and people and organization that they trust as their primary source of information about job openings. Websites of organizations known to the peer support community, including RLCs, The Transformation Center, MA state job listings and provider agencies, social media and job search sites are often used to search for jobs.

Addressing these common issues would improve the recruitment and search process:

- *Get a service that will match the jobs with the peer workers.*
- *There are lots of hoops to jump for CORI.*
- *Having a car and a driver's license is a big issue.*

RETENTION: Agency leaders communicate their commitment to funding and resources that promote and expand the peer support workforce.

RETENTION: Program managers and supervisors use integrity to implement policies and program decisions that protect peer support.

It is no surprise to find that people want funding and respect for their commitment to and practice of peer support. If employers want to retain and nurture a skilled workforce including peer specialists, recovery coaches, youth mentors, they must commit, over and over, to honoring the values and ideals that attract people to peer support and advocacy. Organizations can increase the value created by this unique talents and drive of this new workforce. Funding, policy and program decisions that promote and protect the peer support workforce need to be communicated clearly by leaders and implemented with integrity.

These concerns and needs of the peer workforce in MA are also consistent with national issues. Hearing from the field at Community Voice Gatherings adds urgency and vivid detail to policy changes already proposed by advocacy organizations and peer support leaders across the state.

Please Join Us!

THE TRANSFORMATION CENTER INVITES YOU TO THE 2nd SERIES OF REGIONAL COMMUNITY VOICE GATHERINGS



**Peer Support:
A Profession on the Move
Making Waves Toward
The Future**

Discussion will include:

- Retaining Certified Peer Specialists in the Workforce
- Peer Workforce Continuing Education Conference in 2017
- Cultural Sensitivity, Access & Inclusion
- CPS Code of Ethics in Different Environments
- Developing a Peer Advocacy Voice in Massachusetts

Who should attend: Peer Workers & Volunteers, Certified Peer Specialists, Recovery Coaches, RLC & RSC Members, CPS Supervisors, Allies, Providers & Supporters

To Register go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CommunityVoiceGatherings>

Community Voice Gatherings will take place on these dates in these locations:

All gatherings will be held from 10:30-3:00 (Registration & Coffee 9:45)

Southeast: November 11th Ricki Silva Gym, Taunton State Hospital, Taunton

Central: March 17th Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem Square, Worcester

Metro Boston: March 31st SEIU 1199 Union Hall, 150 Mt. Vernon St., Dorchester

Western: April 28th South Hadley Public Library, 3 Canal St., South Hadley

Northeast: May 6th Haverhill Public Library, 99 Main St., Haverhill

Metro Suburban: May 13th Arlington Library, 700 Massachusetts Ave, Arlington