

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF RESPECT

Transcom's Position Statement on Employee Self-Disclosure in Health and Social Service Workplaces

As members of the Massachusetts Transformation Committee (Transcom), we support the vision of a statewide network of activities and services driven by the wisdom and needs of people with mental health, addiction and trauma-related challenges. We believe that when people share their personal stories, it is inspiring, builds relationships, and gives new meaning and value to painful experiences. Personal accounts and research confirm that as more peer workers are integrated into treatment settings, outcomes improve. When people are in an active relationship with those who have faced similar challenges, both parties are more able to sustain their efforts at recovery, professional development, healing and personal growth.

TRANSCOM'S COMMITMENT

While recognizing that this perspective might be new for many, we endorse workplaces and policies that view voluntary, personal disclosure within the context of helping relationships in a positive light. Transcom is committed to the ongoing development of respectful interactions within all work environments. We look forward to a time when the disclosure of mental health, addiction and trauma-related diagnoses by an employee is not associated with negative consequences such as shame and discrimination.

OUR PURPOSE

This statement is intended to encourage organizations to fully support and value all staff that wish to share from their diverse life experiences. By promoting responsible and open exchange, we hope to inspire inclusion and a culture of respect for people with all types of difficulties, not only within the health and social service workforce, but also within society as a whole.

An open environment where personal struggles are shared is necessary to the success of peer workers, who, by definition, disclose that they live meaningful lives with mental health, substance use and trauma-related challenges. The success of this new workforce is particularly vital at a time when a limited understanding of the skills, values and expertise of peer workers threaten the integrity of Certified Peer Specialists and other peer worker roles.

We are encouraged by the leadership of organizations who have worked with these issues and who support and recruit employees who disclose a variety of challenges and diagnosis. We hope that this statement stimulates energetic dialogue in every workplace about policies and practices related to personal disclosure.

THE WORKFORCE OF PEOPLE IN RECOVERY

We honor the strength and resilience of peer support pioneers in the workforce. Pioneers include peer workers who were the first to work in the system and workers in other roles who were the first to disclose in their organizations. Many of these leaders continue to contribute to more inclusive, open, and empowering work environments.

Many individuals in the workforce have lived experiences of recovery from a variety of circumstances and many do not feel comfortable or welcome to share their expertise. We recognize that agency leaders are at various stages of awareness about the benefits and responsibilities of a work culture which values the recovery experience of people who have dealt with mental health, addiction and trauma-related challenges. Advocating for the support of personal disclosure means confronting long-standing practice standards that advise against personal sharing; practices and principles which are still promoted by many organizations and professional schools.

INTEGRITY OF THE PEER WORKFORCE

Education and experience with the recovery model and the impact of sharing personal information is essential for disclosure to be effective. The number of people who are trained and guided by the Certified Peer Specialist Code of Ethics does not meet the demand for CPS services. While disclosure by other behavioral health professionals can be developed as a resource, it is not accurate to assume that disclosure by professionals trained in traditional models of care is adequate for implementing recovery-oriented practices. Personal sharing by staff trained in traditional models of care is not a substitute for the work of peer providers.

LOOKING FORWARD

Disclosure by employees of a mental health, addiction or trauma related experience can be a complicated issue at every point in the service system, including for those who provide and use services, supervisors and funders as well as teachers and students in professional training programs. The sharing of human difficulties by staff helps to create a system where these experiences are not seen solely as those of “clients”. As with any communication in the workplace, we expect that decisions about disclosure will be considered thoughtfully and be based foremost on the needs of the people who are using services. In all cases, we expect that self-disclosure will continue to be a choice that is personal and voluntary.

Original statement endorsed February 23, 2007

Revised statement endorsed unanimously by members of Transcom

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