



Northwest (HHS Region 10)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# Decision Points in Your Agency: What to Consider When Working with Youth Peers

## Youth Peer Support Webinar Series



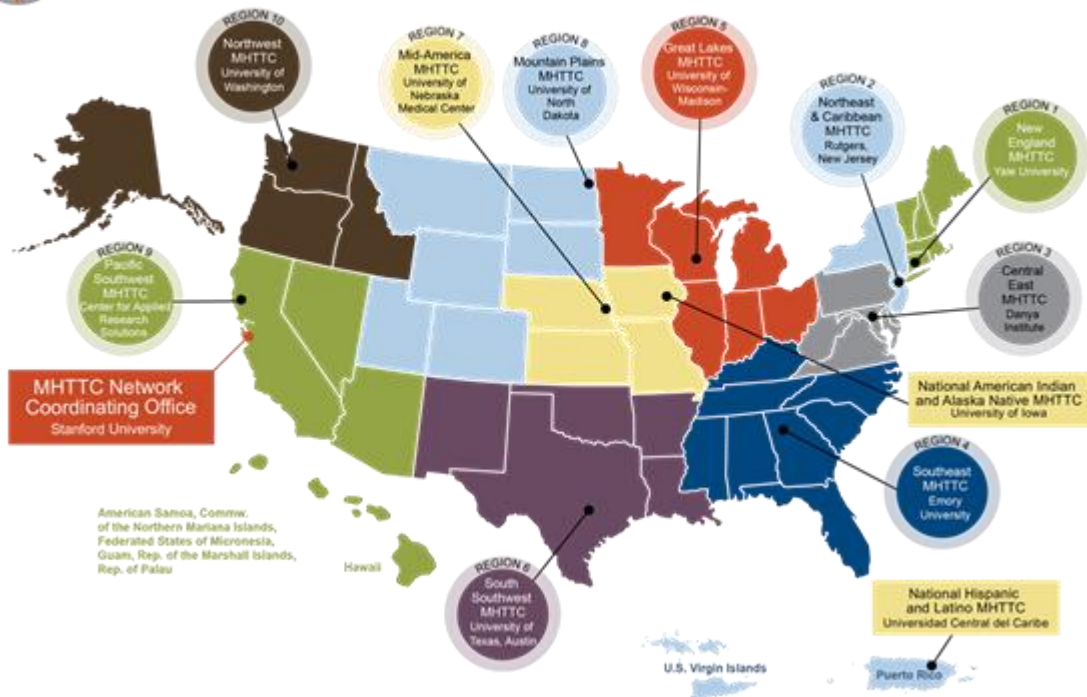


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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

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# Northwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

## Our Role

Provide training and technical assistance (TA) in evidence-based practices (EBP) to behavioral health and primary care providers, and school and social service staff whose work has the potential to improve behavioral health outcomes for individuals with or at risk of developing serious mental illness in SAMHSA's Region 10 (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington).

## Our Goals

- Heighten awareness, knowledge, and skills of the workforce addressing the needs of individuals with mental illness
  - Accelerate adoption and implementation of mental health-related EBPs across Region 10
  - Foster alliances among culturally diverse mental health providers, policy makers, family members, and clients
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The use of affirming language inspires hope and advances recovery.

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LANGUAGE MATTERS.

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**Words have power.**

**PEOPLE FIRST.**

The MHTTC uses affirming language to promote the promises of recovery by advancing evidence-based and culturally informed practices.

# Today's Trainers



Caitlin Baird is a Project Manager and Trainer with Pathways RTC at Portland State University. Caitlin has experience working directly with transition-aged youth and young adults as a peer support specialist and as a supervisor for peer support specialists in wraparound and other mental health settings.



Maria Hermsen-Kritz is a Research Assistant with Pathways RTC at Portland State University. She has experience providing peer support for transition-aged youth, supervising youth peer support specialists, and managing a youth drop-in center program.



# Agenda

- Agenda
- Learning Objectives
- Polls
- Introduction: Why does it matter?
- First things first: defining the role
- Logistical decisions
- Anything else?
- Questions?
- Wrap-up

# Learning Objectives

After today's webinar, you will be able to:

- Understand the importance of settling certain decision points before implementing youth peer services at your agency
- Identify which decision points are important to consider in implementing youth peer services, and
- Recognize the various factors to weigh in making these decisions

# Polls

- Who is on the call?
- Where is your agency at in the process of implementing youth peer services?



# Introduction

Why does it matter?

# Why does it matter?

- Preempt challenges around implementation of youth peer services
  - Role clarity
  - Friction with non-peer colleagues
  - Need for specific professional development and peer support

# Why does it matter?

- Establish role clarity for both youth peer staff and their non-peer colleagues
  - Existing staff may be wary about youth peer support and how it fits in to existing structures
  - Existing staff may have unaddressed stigma around working with people with lived experience
  - Research has shown that youth peer staff are often unclear on what their own role entails

# Why does it matter?

- Prevent burnout/prepare youth peer staff for demands of the job
  - Establish clear expectations around strategic sharing and vicarious trauma
  - Preempt issues around boundaries (with clients, with coworkers, work/life balance) through clear role definition

# **First things first: Defining the Role**

What does “youth peer” mean in your agency’s context?

# Some preliminary considerations

- How many peers will you hire?
- What population will they serve?
- What does “youth peer” mean in the context of your agency?

# How will you define a “youth peer?”

- Age range
- What do you consider “lived experience?”
  - System involvement (which system[s]?); mental health challenges; residential experience; ACEs; substance use; etc?
  - What kind of lived experience is relatable to the young people you are serving?
  - How will you determine this in your recruitment and hiring process?
- Demographic questions: reflecting the demographics of your youth population

# What is in the job description?

- What are the specific tasks involved in the position?
  - One-on-one support, attending team meetings outreach, advocacy, serving on committees and councils, leading groups, entering case notes?
- What are the qualifications?
  - Think about how requirements like driver's license, owning a car, GED or high school diploma or background checks might disqualify potential peers



# What is in the job description?

- Do staff need to be certified as peers before hiring, or can they be hired and then receive certification?
  - Who will pay? Considerations in terms of sustainability for the agency, as well as accessibility for potential youth peer employees

# How does the YPSS fit into the existing team structure?

It is important to define not only the youth peer's role, but how existing team members' roles may change as a result of adding youth peers to the team. For example, colleagues of youth peers may be charged with new responsibilities such as:

- Receiving referrals for youth peer support
- Connecting young people to YPSSs
- Coordinating services with YPSSs
- Uplifting YP voice at team meetings

# How does the YPSS fit into the existing team structure?

- How will youth be matched with YPSSs?
  - Are youth assigned to a youth peer - by whom, and on what basis? Does the youth peer play a role? Does the youth have a say?
- What does communication look like between youth peers and other team members - caseworkers, therapists, etc?

## How does the YPSS fit into the existing team structure?

Importantly: how will you ensure that there is a clear understanding of shifts in existing roles and the definition of the youth peer role when implementing youth peer services? What steps can be taken to prevent stigma, resentment, role overlap and confusion? How can you establish an **agency culture** that supports youth peer support?

# What are the rules and boundaries specific to the youth peer role?

- Is texting allowed? Is social media?
  - Will YPSSs be provided agency phones, and have agency specific social media pages? Will these be monitored?
- Are peers allowed to drive young people? What policies will you put in place on this?
- Where are YPSSs allowed to meet with young people? (at the agency, in public, in youth's homes, at system settings, etc.?)

**Supervision,  
logistics and  
ongoing support**

# Job Classification and Structure

- Job classification
  - Will you create a new job classification for peers, or find an already existing role with an analogous classification?
- Full-time, or part-time
  - Is this standard across the role, or might it vary from employee to employee?
- Pay considerations

# In house, or outsource?

Is there a peer agency you can outsource supervision and hiring to?

- What might the advantages, and disadvantages of such a move be?



# How will supervision work?

- Best practices state that youth peers should be supervised by someone with experience in youth peer support - in the absence of this, how will you handle supervision?
- If you choose not to partner with a peer agency for hiring, you may still choose to partner for supervision
  - Split supervision: peer supervision by peer agency and more org specific supervision (scheduling, working with team, etc.) by an in-house supervisor

# How will supervision work?

- How will supervision be structured?
- What training will supervisors of YPSS receive?

# What sort of ongoing training and coaching will you provide?

- Beyond any state-required certifications for youth peers, what skills and values does your agency prioritize instilling in your youth peer staff?
  - Some things to consider: suicide intervention trainings, Trauma-Informed care trainings, Collaborative Problem Solving, motivational interviewing, etc.

# What else?

Is there anything we have missed? What questions has your agency weighed when implementing youth peer services?

# Common Scenarios

# Scenario #1

A youth peer support specialist is struggling to support a young person who is experiencing suicidal ideation, and who has a mental health diagnosis. The youth peer support specialist contacts their peer supervisor, who shares resources with the youth peer, encourages them to normalize and share some of their own experience, and create a safety plan with the youth. With this advice, the youth peer connects with the youth without contacting their clinical supervisor.

# Questions to Consider

- How would your agency respond to this?
- What are some practices/policies that can help strengthen communication?

# Scenario #2

You have been tasked with hiring your agency's first peer support specialists. In order to save money, you are only considering applicants who already have your state's peer certification. This has seriously limited your pool of candidates, most of whom do not have lived experience as a young adult in systems.



# Questions to Consider

- What can you do to expand your pool of applicants?
- How can you attract more people with relevant lived experience?

# Scenario #3

You currently have one full-time peer support specialist. They are currently at capacity and you have a waiting list of youth. They also only serve a narrow population. Given your resources, you either have the option to keep them on at full-time or reduce them to half-time and hire another half-time peer support specialist.

# Questions to Consider

- What is the majority of the population you are serving?
- Does your agency have adequate resources for maintaining peer support?
- How will you maintain employee retention?

**Questions?**

# Get in Touch!



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# Thank you!



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