



Introduction to Forensic Peer Mentoring: Function, Capacity Building, and Training

This product accompanies the Southeast MHTTC's 4-Part Series on Forensic Peer Mentoring, '**Ready for Re-entry**'. Access the on-demand recordings from the training series using the links provided below.

- [Forensic Peer Mentor Overview](#)
- [Putting Stakes in the Ground](#)
- [Forensic Peer Mentor Training](#)
- [Forensic Peer Mentor Services Model in Action](#)

Intended Audience:

This print media resource is aimed at mental health practitioners who are interested in learning more about forensic peer mentors or those interested in implementing forensic peer services within their organization.

Acknowledgement:

We would like to thank and recognize the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network (GMHCN) for leading this training series and providing invaluable education and awareness to our community.



GEORGIA
MENTAL
HEALTH
CONSUMER
NETWORK



Overview: Current State of Incarceration in Southeast Region¹⁻⁸

The following table provides an overview of the current state of incarceration in the Southeast region. Each state has thousands of individuals currently incarcerated who could benefit from receiving access to mental health care and transitional support through programs such as forensic peer mentoring.

State	# of Individuals Incarcerated	Most Represented Demographic (%)	Served by State Mental Health Services** N(%)
Georgia	50,674 (Dec. '23)	56% Black Male	481 (0.4%)
Florida	85,174 (June '23)	45.4% Black Male	1,675 (1.2%)
Alabama	27,130 (Dec. '23)	51% Black Male	809 (1.2%)
Tennessee	19,007 (June '23)	58% Black*	1,955 (3.4%)
South Carolina	15,997 (June '23)	56% Black Male	985 (1.1%)
North Carolina	31,339 (Dec. '23)	48% Black Male	574 (0.6%)
Mississippi	21,345 (Dec. '23)	57% Black Male	stat. not available
Kentucky	19,574 (Dec. '22)	76% White*	657 (0.6%)

* *Statistic not available by gender disaggregation*

** *Represents individuals served, not only individuals with mental health diagnosis*

Facilitators for Re-Entry⁹⁻¹⁰

Access to the following resources allow for individuals to thrive after release.



Access to Housing



Access to Education



Access to Transportation



Finding & Maintaining Employment



Increased Community Support



Access to Substance Use Treatment



Access to Medical & Mental Health Care



Improving Life Skills

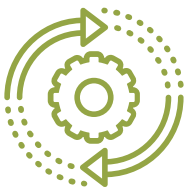
Forensic Peer Mentor Overview

What is the difference between a Peer Mentor and a Forensic Peer Mentor?

A **peer mentor** is an individual in long-term recovery with lived experience from mental health disorders and/or substance use. Peer mentors work with individuals to provide support in their day-to-day life by providing examples and experiences from their own lives to demonstrate how one can continue making progress.

A **forensic peer mentor** (FPM) is an individual who is in long-term recovery with lived experience of mental health and/or substance use **ALONG WITH** experience in the criminal justice system. Forensic peer mentors work with individuals within **3-18 months** of their release date or tentative parole month to provide support. This can occur either within the assigned facility, an external reporting center, or in the community after release.¹¹⁻¹²

- Current states employing forensic peer mentors include New York, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and more recently California (Nov. '23).



- ***They provide support to individuals to ease transition after exiting prison.***
 - Some forensic peer mentor programs allow support to begin while the individual remains incarcerated.



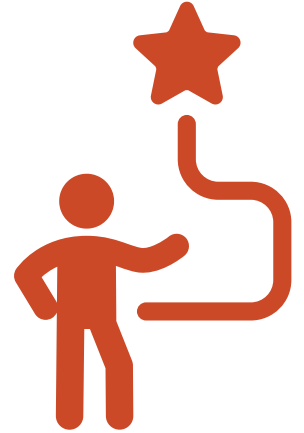
- ***They connect peers to community resources including:***
 - Transportation
 - Health services
 - Other common barriers to re-entry.



- ***They educate and assist others in finding their pathway to recovery.***
 - Forensic peer mentors use education and tools to encourage and promote recovery.
 - Data driven and evidence based around the importance of lived experience.

Key Roles of a Forensic Peer Mentor

- Be a beacon of hope as individuals transition back into their community.
- Provide education & support one's efforts to continue building their life.
- Help individuals find their voice and know that they are supported.



It is important to note that utilizing and providing forensic peer mentor services is an example for a social model of recovery and is *not* replacement for clinical care.

Who Should Serve as a Forensic Peer Mentor?

- Individuals who are able to work well **within** the justice system.
- Individuals who are able to help others navigate **difficult** environments and situations.
- Individuals who can demonstrate and teach recovery skills.
- Individuals who are able to support others in making their own decisions.

Forensic peer mentors serve as role models demonstrating a successful path after incarceration in the following ways:



Emotional & wellness support; strengths-based and recovery focused



Re-invigorating goals and dreams



Essential Support (i.e. transportation, housing)

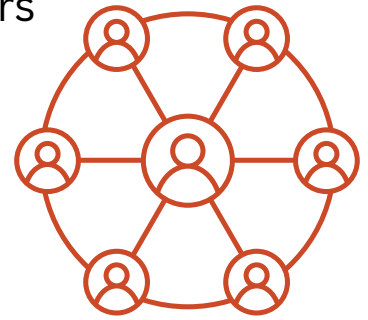


Linking to resources that aid re-integration

Forensic peer mentors provide individuals returning to their community with education, resources, and hope.

Putting Stakes in the Ground: Building Community Stakeholders

The first step is to identify stakeholders (e.g., social workers or ministries within the criminal justice system) and begin building those relationships.



Helpful Tips to Building Stakeholder Relationships

- **Most important tenet:** Build TRUST. Without trust there can be no effective movement and results.
- Be supportive of the stakeholder's events and projects. The relationship should be **mutually beneficial**.
- Be adaptable and move towards finding support and energy for the forensic peer mentoring initiative.
- Build relationships with other agencies to increase access to resources and support services such as transportation, housing, and substance use/mental health care.
- Develop relationships with government officials. They are important stakeholders in supporting and potentially influencing funding avenues for the forensic peer program.
- Speak with recovery-oriented organizations that may not be providing forensic peer mentoring services to change the narrative and increase exposure.
- Build relationships within the media to increase exposure and communicate results.

Collecting and Presenting Data is KEY!



- Use data driven results to demonstrate the need and benefit (e.g., the number of referrals, employment status, re-entry rate, usage of state hospitals, etc).
- Remember: **data drives funding!**

Training Forensic Peer Mentors

It is important to understand the role that the environment may play in eliciting a behavior, whether positive or negative, legal or illegal.

Behavior = Person x Environment

- **Crime Desistance** – advocates for a pro-social community. Desistance is generally understood to mean the reduction in criminal behavior that occurs after a person reaches adulthood. The concept was introduced by Professor Fergus McNeill.
 - Desistance from crime relies on brain development, functioning, and stress response. Understanding these factors as well as supportive facilitators may help reduce the chance of recidivism.

Physical

Physical and psychological changes associated with maturation or aging.

Social

Connections and bonding including social institutions and bridging capital.

Identity

How one sees or labels self, how others see or label the individual, the result of consequences and effects.

Forms of Simultaneous Rehabilitation

Psychological

Develop the skills, capacities, attributes, and motivation of the individual to change.

Social

A willingness to support people back into the social body or community.

Moral

The state and community owe a retributive debt to end punishment.

Judicial

Record restriction/expungement, occupational re-qualification to fully restore citizenship.

Training Forensic Peer Mentors

WHO?

WHEN?

HOW?

- Individuals who have lived experience in jail or prison AND are already certified as a peer specialist may be eligible to complete the required Forensic Peer Mentoring training.
- The training length is approximately 40 hours - 8 hours for 5 days (typically in one week).
- Trainees may attend sessions facilitated by representatives from the Peer-run organization, the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, the Department of Corrections, and/or the Department of Community Supervision.
- The training covers correctional cultural competence and prepares forensic peer mentors for “returning” to the criminal justice system in a professional capacity.
- The training provides instruction on ways to serve as a role model and promote recovery and wellness for those transitioning back into the community. The training may also include education on local, state, and federal resources, linkage, and care coordination.
- A vital component of the training includes a focus on self-care.

References

1. Office of Information Technology Data Management Section. Inmate Statistical Profile All Active Inmates.
2. Florida Department of Corrections. Annual Report - Florida Department of Corrections.
3. Research and Planning Division. ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS Monthly Statistical Report for December 2023.
4. Tennessee Department of Correction. Tennessee Department of Correction Annual Report - 2023.
5. South Carolina Department of Corrections Resource and Information Management. THE SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS - FAQs.
6. Office of Research and Planning D of C. DAC RESEARCH AND PLANNING Automated System Query. A. S. Q. Select System. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://webapps.doc.state.nc.us/apps/asqExt/ASQ>.
7. Mississippi Department of Corrections. Mississippi Department of Corrections - Fact Sheet.
8. Kentucky Department of Corrections Annual Report 2022.
9. Yuxhnenko D, Blackwood N, Fazel S. Risk factors for recidivism in individuals receiving community sentences: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *CNS Spectrums*. 2019;25(2):252-263. doi:10.1017/s1092852919001056
10. Garland M, Fudge M, Walsh M, et al. Coordination to Reduce Barriers to Reentry: lessons learned from COVID-19 and beyond - REPORT TO CONGRESS FROM THE REENTRY COORDINATION COUNCIL.
11. Peer mentoring. GMHCN. Accessed April 3, 2024. <https://www.gmhcn.org/peer-mentoring-forensic-peer-mentor>.
12. Nix R, Washington A, Zellous T. Integrating Court Liaisons and Forensic Peer Mentors into Treatment Courts and Judicial Processes.