TIP SHEET

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Assessing Readiness to Become a Parent Peer Support Provider

In the last decade, two factors have had a major impact on the parent peer support[1] workforce in children's behavioral health. First, there is growing recognition of the value of parent peer support and the ways in which it can benefit families and children.[2] Second, an increasing number of states have made parent peer support a Medicaid billable service, requiring higher levels of accountability.[3] These factors have reinforced the need for a trained and qualified parent peer support workforce. National and state core competencies have been developed and in addition to the availability of National Certification for Parent Support Providers through the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, states are implementing credentialing standards of their own. A key question that is often asked is, ***"How can you tell when a parent is ready to become a parent peer support provider (PPSP)?"***

Importance of Lived Experience and Minimum Qualifications

Perhaps the most important criterion for a PPSP is "lived experience" or the real life skill of raising or having raised a child with behavioral health needs, and navigating complex child-serving systems. Without lived experience, it is not authentic peer support. However, while lived experience is a necessary criterion, it is not the only standard required for a PPSP. In order to demonstrate a basic level of readiness, a parent being considered for a PPSP position requires some minimum qualifications in addition to lived experience, including:

- High school diploma/GED;
- Experience navigating at least one child serving system directly related to their child's behavioral health challenges, such as mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, or education;
- Ability to recognize that lived experience (positive and negative) has fostered their personal growth;
- Capacity to think beyond their personal family's needs to understand the perspective and needs of other families, as well as the needs of the agency or system; and
- Willingness to work flexible hours including nights and weekends when parents are available to meet and participate in activities.

Necessary Qualities and Characteristics of a PPSP

The role of a PPSP centers on connecting – on a personal level – with families and not everyone with lived experience is suited to become a PPSP. Certain characteristics are necessary for a PPSP to be able to relate to the families they serve, and possessing these qualities are often the deciding factors in assessing one's readiness to become a PPSP. They include:

- **Self-awareness:** a clear understanding of where they are in their personal journey with their child and family and a balanced perspective on where they have been on their journey.

- **Self-disclosure:** comfort with sharing parts of their lived experience at appropriate times to support a family.
- **Strength-based:** finding strengths in families regardless of challenges.
- **Enthusiasm and passion:** finding purpose and value in their work and a desire to have a positive impact through their work.
- **Values relationships:** focused on building positive, collaborative partnerships with both families and professionals; non-adversarial; and understanding that positive relationships enhance their leadership role.
- **Team player attitude:** working for the benefit of the whole rather than for their personal gain or benefit.
- **Empowers others**: modeling and coaching families to develop the skills needed to do for themselves rather than fostering dependency.
- **Willingness to learn**: eagerness to try new things and develop new skills.
- **Prepared to acknowledge an error:** overcoming and learning from mistakes.
- **Ability to accept suggestions**: capacity to understand and use constructive feedback.
- **Honesty and genuineness**: forthcoming without making excuses or fabricating explanations.
- **Open-mindedness**: ability to look at situations from different viewpoints and acknowledge differences in families and beliefs.
- **Genuine respect for others:** respect the rights and dignity of others.
- **Belief in resiliency and recovery**: instills hope in others.
- **Reliability and dependability**: commitment to getting the job done.
- **Accepting differences:** non-judgmental and tolerant of diverse attitudes, opinions, and values of others.
- **Flexibility**: adapts to day-to-day changes and unexpected occurrences.

Knowledge and Skills for PPSPs

Knowledge and skills are equally important for PPSPs. Often a parent who may apply to become a PPSP has not had previous work experience in the behavioral health field, or may not have worked for many years and does not have the skills or knowledge required of a PPSP. With training and supervision, these can be acquired over time. A PPSP does not need to come to the job with full knowledge and skills, but must have the potential and desire to learn to:

- Identify and share appropriate resources and information based on the individual needs of a youth and family;
- Organize work effectively;
- Manage time efficiently;
- Communicate clearly;
- Problem solve;
- Work with diverse cultures;
- Utilize creativity;
- Model positive and collaborative behaviors;
- Understand other perspectives and advocate effectively;
- Adhere to the organization's policies and procedures;
- Understand and abide by code of ethics, including HIPAA and confidentiality;
- Disclose any potential conflicts of interest;
- Maintain professional boundaries, behavior, and appearance;
- Perform basic office duties which may include computer skills; and
- Practice self-care.

Checklist to Assess Qualifications

The following **checklist** can be used as part of a PPSP readiness assessment or training application process:

- ☐ I am a biological, adoptive, foster, or relative caregiver who is raising or has raised a child with emotional, social, behavioral, mental and/or substance use challenges.
- ☐ The child I provide/provided care for currently receives or has received at least one service for children with emotional, social, behavioral, mental and/or substance use challenges.
- ☐ I completed a minimum high school education and can provide a copy of my diploma or transcript; or I have completed my GED coursework and can provide a copy of my GED Certificate.
- ☐ I understand that the role of a PPSP requires a flexible schedule and working some evenings and weekends based on the needs of the families I serve and the expectations established by the hiring agency.
- ☐ I understand that reliable transportation is required for this position and agree to maintain reliable transportation and appropriate insurance coverage.

Interview Questions to Assess Readiness

The key to a successful interview is to reduce the level of stress for a parent applying to be a PPSP. Some organizations provide questions in advance to help reduce anxiety and allow candidates to prepare. Interviews can be conducted in the form of a conversation rather than a formal question and answer format. In this way, a candidate is more at ease, and their personal qualities can shine through. Some organizations also make it a practice to invite other PPSPs or family members the organization serves to participate in the interview process.

The following questions can be used to ascertain readiness or as part of the PPSP application process:

1. Why do you want to become a PPSP?
2. Describe services that your child has received or is receiving and how you were involved.
3. Describe any volunteer work you have done and ways it might support your work as a PPSP.
4. What qualities make you a good candidate to work with other parents and caregivers of children with behavioral, emotional, mental health and substance use challenges?
5. Why do you think it is important for PPSPs to share their lived experience?
6. What does family-driven and youth-guided mean to you?
7. Briefly, describe the most valuable assistance or support you received as a parent/caregiver.
8. What are some of the advantages to parents/caregivers partnering with their child's provider(s)?
9. What are some of the challenges parents/caregivers may experience when partnering with their child's provider(s)?
10. How have you used both positive and negative lived-experiences to foster personal growth?
11. Share an example of when you successfully advocated for your child.
12. Share an example of when you were able to assist another family in advocating for the needs of their child.
13. Share an example of a time when you effectively resolved conflict with a provider, co-worker or another parent.

In addition to these questions, it is helpful to ask scenario questions to assess whether a candidate will provide a solution oriented approach. Scenarios can be a good way to see how someone thinks and reacts and can be an effective tool to assess a parent's readiness to become a PPSP. Focus on a candidate's social skills and evaluate their ability to relate to others during the interview, as building relationships is foundational for peer support. Look for potential rather than skills. Skills can be acquired; personal qualities cannot.

Resources

Kentucky Family Peer Support Specialist Introduction Packet

TA Network Learning Community for Family Leaders: Assessing the Readiness of Family Members to Become Parent Peer Support Providers

Meaningful Parent Leadership: A Guide for Success (© April 2010 FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention [CBCAP])

Issue Brief: Family-To-Family Peer Support: Models and Evaluation Outcomes Roundtable for Children and Families October 2011

[1] This role has many names throughout the country including Family Peer Support Provider, Family Support Provider, and Peer Support Specialist.

[2] Joint CMCS and SAMHSA Informational Bulletin: Coverage of Behavioral Health Services for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Significant Mental Health Conditions, May 7, 2013 https://www.medicaid.gov/Federal-Policy-Guidance/Downloads/CIB-05-07-2013.pdf

[3] OPEN MINDS Market Intelligence Report, June 24, 2014, "Which States Reimburse For Collaborative Documentation By Peer Support Specialists?" https://www.openminds.com/wp-content/uploads/indres/MktIntelReport_reimbursement-peer-services_062414-837am-lm.pdf

ABOUT THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK FOR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, partners with states and communities to develop the most effective and sustainable systems of care possible for the benefit of children and youth with behavioral health needs and their families. We provide technical assistance and support across the nation to state and local agencies, including youth and family leadership and organizations.

ABOUT FREDLA

This resource was produced by the Family Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA) in its role as a core partner of the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth and Family Mental Health (NTTAC), operated by the National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch.