

**Peer Specialist**  
**(Sample Job Description)**

**MENTAL HEALTH  
PROGRAM**

**MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** The Peer Specialist (PS) is an active member of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Program/Team) and provides peer support services to clients with serious mental illnesses in the \_\_\_\_\_ (Service Line.) Under supervision of the \_\_\_\_\_ (supervisor's title) the Peer Specialist will function as a role model to peers; exhibiting competency in personal recovery and use of coping skills; serve as a consumer advocate, providing consumer information and peer support for clients in outpatient and inpatient settings. The PS performs a wide range of tasks to assist peers of all ages, from young adult to old age, in regaining independence within the community and mastery over their own recovery process. Recovery resources such as booklets, tapes, pamphlets and other written materials will be utilized by the Peer Specialist in the provision of services.

Using a formal goal setting process, the PS will:

- Assist clients in articulating personal goals for recovery through the use of one-to-one and group sessions. During these sessions the PS will support clients in identifying and creating goals and developing recovery plans with the skills, strengths, supports and resources to aid them in achieving those goals
- Assist clients in working with their case manager or treatment team in determining the steps he/she needs to take in order to achieve these goals and self-directed recovery.
- Assist clients in setting up and sustaining self-help (mutual support) groups, as well as means of locating and joining existing groups.
- Utilize tools such as the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) to assist clients in creating their own individual wellness and recovery plans.
- Independently or with periodic assistance of higher graded treatment team members, utilize and teach problem solving techniques with individuals and groups; discussions will be utilized where clients will share common problems in daily living and methods they have employed to manage and cope with these problems. As one who has availed themselves to mental health services, the PS will share their own experiences and what skills, strengths, supports and resources they use. As much as possible, the PS will share their own recovery story and as the facilitator of these sessions, will demonstrate how they have directed their own recovery.
- Use ongoing individual and group sessions to teach clients how to identify and combat negative self-talk and how to identify and overcome fears by providing a forum which allows group members and PS to share their experiences. By using

identified literature, media, etc. clients will gain hope, learn to identify their strengths and combat negative self-talk.

- Support clients' vocational choices and assist them in choosing a job that matches their strengths, overcoming job-related anxiety by reviewing job applications, and providing interview tips.
- Assist clients in building social skills in the community that will enhance job acquisition and tenure

Utilizing their recovery experience, the PS will:

- Teach and role model the value of every individual's recovery experience.
- Assist the client in obtaining decent and affordable housing of his/her choice in the most integrated, independent, and least intrusive or restrictive environment by taking them out to view housing, either driving them or riding with them on public transportation.
- The PS models effective coping techniques and self-help strategies.
- Serve as a recovery agent by providing and advocating for any effective recovery based services that will aid the client in daily living.
- Assist in obtaining services that suit that individual's recovery needs by providing names of staff, community resources and groups that may be useful. Inform clients about community and natural supports and how to use these in the recovery process. Community resources may include but not limited to: social security office, Department of Family and Children services, local YMCA, Library, restaurants, clients' service organizations, apartment complexes and other types of housing, etc.
- Assist clients in developing empowerment skills and combating stigma through self-advocacy. This will be accomplished through regular meetings, individual or group sessions. Through the use of role playing/modeling techniques the PS provides opportunities for others to show/demonstrate how they have handled similar problems, how to present themselves in certain situations, or how to handle problems that may arise in interactions with others.
- With assistance from the Program Coordinator/Team Leader, the Peer Specialist will work with the clients and other treatment team staff to develop a treatment/recovery plan based on each client's identified goals. Treatment/Recovery Plans will be reviewed and signed by the Coordinator/Team Leader and other participating treatment team staff. The PS will document the following on the client's treatment/recovery plan:
  - a. identified person-centered strengths, needs, abilities, and recovery goals
  - b. interventions to assist the client with reaching their goals for recovery
  - c. progress made toward goals

The PS will maintain a working knowledge of current trends and developments in the mental health field by reading books, journals, and other relevant materials. The PS will continue to share recovery materials with others at continuing education seminars and other venues to be developed to support recovery-oriented services; and attend continuing education seminars and other in-service training when offered.

### **Knowledge Required by the Position**

- a. Knowledge of the Recovery process and the ability to facilitate recovery using established standardized mental health processes.
- b. Knowledge and skill to teach and engage in basic problem solving strategies to support individual clients in self-directed recovery.
- c. Knowledge of the signs and symptoms of mental illness (i.e. auditory and visual hallucinations, aggressive talk and behavior, thoughts of self-harm or harm towards others, isolation) and the ability to assist the client to address symptoms using strategies such as positive self-talk.
- d. Knowledge and skill sufficient to use community resources necessary for independent living and ability to teach those skills to other individuals with severe mental illness. Community resources may include but are not limited to: social security office, Department of Family and Children services, local YMCA, Library, restaurants, clients' service organizations, housing providers, etc. The PS may accompany clients to community resources to assist them in accessing these resources.
- e. Knowledge of how to establish and sustain self-help (mutual support) and educational groups by soliciting input from the mental health consumers on their strengths and interests.
- f. A valid driver's license is required as some driving and/or transportation may be required to take clients to medical appointments, job sites, social activities and other community resources.

### **SUPERVISORY CONTROLS:**

The Peer Specialist is administratively assigned to the \_\_\_\_\_ (Program) in the \_\_\_\_\_ (Department or Service Line) and will receive supervision from the Coordinator/Team Leader of the program. The supervisor provides continuing assignments and indicates generally what is to be done, i.e., setting up group or individual meetings, reviewing job applications, etc. The incumbent is expected to handle routine duties independently and is expected to establish common priorities for his/her assignments. Group teaching and facilitation work may be performed with the assistance of the supervisor or other mental health treatment team members. Work is reviewed by supervisor to ensure that it is technically correct and that it conforms to established policies and previously given instructions. Assignments that are routine and repetitive are not reviewed by the supervisor unless there are problems. Work that is new or requires deviations from previous assignments is discussed with the supervisor who provides detailed instructions

on how work is to be accomplished, or assigns another team member to assist. The incumbent will follow all legal and medical policies as mandated by the VA and the \_\_\_\_\_ Service Line.

**GUIDELINES:**

Established procedures and specific guidelines are available to the incumbent to cover the work assignment. Guidelines are applicable and specific to most situations. Incumbent will use judgment in determining the appropriate guide or instruction to fit the circumstances and in determining what information is required. In situations where the guidelines are not applicable; do not exist or are unclear the incumbent refers the problem to the coordinator. Administration has provided and will continue to update a Bibliography of Recovery literature and the program will select appropriate literature that focuses on Recovery and how to teach clients in their recovery process.

**COMPLEXITY:**

The work involves providing support services for the client that requires assisting them in establishing goals and mechanisms to reach those goals. Decisions on establishing goals and formal action plans will always be made in conjunction with the client and case manager/treatment team and reviewed with the supervisor. Decisions regarding what needs to be done involve choices that require a simple analysis such as organizing facts in narrative or logical order and comparing them to past solutions in similar cases or to applicable criteria. Actions to be taken or responses to be made, such as advice to the client differs depending on the facts of the situation.

**SCOPE AND EFFECT:**

The Peer Specialist assists and guides clients toward the identification and achievement of specific goals defined by the client and specified in the Individual Treatment Plan (ITP). The work involves a variety of routine, standardized tasks that facilitate work performed by higher level providers. Work performed by the incumbent will promote community socialization, recovery, self-advocacy, self-help, and development of natural supports.

**PHYSICAL DEMANDS:**

The work is primarily sedentary. Typically, the employee will sit to do the work. However, there may be some walking; standing; bending; carrying of light items such as books, papers, etc; accessing transportation and driving a government car or van.

**WORK ENVIRONMENT:**

Work will be performed in a wide range of settings, including the medical center; in client, group or family homes; in community-based outpatient settings, community agencies; or in transport vehicles (public or government). Work areas are often noisy, irregular and unpredictable and can be stressful at times. Clients demonstrate varying levels of recovery and symptoms.