

## **PEER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Have you ever wondered how you could use your experiences as a tool for employment? Have you ever thought about how your experiences could help others? Did you know that you are gaining valuable knowledge that can have an impact on the mental health system here in Wisconsin as well as have an impact in peoples' lives? Have you considered getting paid for what you may be currently doing as a volunteer? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then becoming a peer specialist may be an employment choice for you!

You may be thinking..."Well, if I become a peer specialist, where could I work?" Once trained as a peer specialist, work opportunities are endless. A peer specialist could work in a variety of settings within the mental health community and system. For example, a peer specialist could work in:

- Outpatient/Inpatient Settings
- Case Management Services
- Crisis Services
- Consumer Operated Organizations
- Drop-in Centers.

These are just a few examples of where peer specialists are needed. That's right...there is a need for peer specialists! How come there is a need? Because we (consumers) have expressed that we benefit from peer support. In fact, peer support is an essential part of our recovery! That is why we are asking and have asked the mental health system (county and state-wide) to create opportunities for peer employment and consumer-run services.

Still interested in becoming a peer specialist?? GOOD...because WE NEED YOU!!!

Read below on how a person can become trained to be a peer specialist...

### **Peer Specialist Training**

Last year I had the opportunity to attend a Peer Employment Workforce Training in Phoenix, Arizona which enabled me to become certified to develop a peer employment workforce that includes educating, preparing mental health consumers to work as peer specialists in the mental health system. The training was held by META Services, Inc. which is a non-profit organization that is committed to creating opportunities and environments that empower people to live in recovery, to succeed in accomplishing their goals, to reconnect to themselves, others and to have meaning an purpose in life.

To become a peer specialist, according to the META curriculum, a person would need to complete 70 hours of training that is delivered over 5 weeks. This may seem like a lot of hours and dedication; however, once a person graduates from the training, she/he will then become a certified peer specialist. The curriculum includes the following areas:

- Recovery
- The Power of Peer Support
- Developing Self-esteem (Self-Is-Steam) and Managing Self Talk
- Community, Culture and Environment
- Meaning and Purpose
- Emotional Intelligence
- Telling Your Personal Story
- Employment as a Path to Recovery
- Communication Skills
- Conflict Resolution
- Recovery from Trauma
- Substance Abuse
- Being with People in Challenging Situations
- Peer Support in Action, Partnering with Professionals

and, is taught in a classroom-like structure. The structure of the classroom is very similar to that of a person attending a university or college. There will be tests and quizzes, reading assignments and homework. Grades will be based on the results of those tests and quizzes as well as attendance and participation.

The only requirements for the training are:

- Mental health lived experience
- Completion a wellness/crisis plan
- Desire to attend.

After completion, a graduation event will take place to celebrate the hard work and dedication.

This may seem like a lot but remember META, Inc. designed this curriculum with having a career as a peer specialist in mind. This is an employment opportunity and the possibilities of what a person could do with this certification are endless.

If interested in the training, please contact me at: (work) 414-481-2449, (cell) 414-708-8287 or by e-mail at [cerna\\_75@yahoo.com](mailto:cerna_75@yahoo.com) GEP has not determined when and where the training will take place; but, we will keep you posted!!! Thank You and I look forward to hearing from you,  
Carmen Cerna, Technical Assistance Coordinator, GEP.