



Peer Professional Employment Guide

**Created by the Recovery and Resiliency Team of Pennsylvania
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Introduction

Our goal in developing this Peer Professional Employment Guide is to provide a source of advice and inspiration for peer support professionals, both experienced and inexperienced alike. Much like the profession itself, we hope to utilize and build on the knowledge of those who have walked this path before us. This guide details important aspects of the role, like developing boundaries, self-care, and maintaining your credentials. You will find information to improve your practice as a peer support professional, hopefully lowering stress levels and allowing more room for joy in your life. As peer professionals ourselves, we all know how helpful input like this can be. This is intended to be a general guide on the role of a peer professional. This in no way supersedes any information provided to you by your employer.

Getting Hired

Congratulations! You are now a certified peer support professional. Now it is time to find a position. Finding a job as a peer support professional will be easier if you know where to look. Many peer support programs offer employment assistance by holding job fairs during or shortly following training. Other resources include the county mental health office, [CareerLink](#), [Indeed](#), [Pennsylvania Peer Support Coalition \(PAPSC\)](#), local community support programs, recovery centers, drop-in centers, and the [Office of Vocational Rehabilitation](#).

Applying for a job and securing an interview can be intimidating. Here are some tips to help guide you in the process.

- Develop an updated, professional resume listing any additional certifications and professional trainings you may have recently received such as Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), Mental First Aide, Professional Storytelling, and Motivational Interviewing.
- Make a list of professional references to share with potential employers. Make sure it is readily available. Be sure to include contacts you made during your training if possible.
- Prepare an “elevator speech.” A short, personal introduction is great for an interview or a job fair.

- Have a script ready for speaking with a potential employer on the phone. Make sure to include what type of position you are looking for, the hours you are available to work and any additional questions you may want to ask.

Most people think of an interview as an opportunity for an employer to get to know a potential employee. It is also a chance for you, the applicant, to learn as much as possible about the position and the company. Remember, you are going to be a valuable member of a team. It is critical that the position be a right fit for you as well as the company. Some suggested questions that you may ask are:

What are my responsibilities? What is a typical day like? Will there be expectations of on-call duties? What is the starting wage? Will there be pay increases? What are the hours, such as (set shift, per diem, full time, part time)? What, if any, benefits are offered? How do peers contact me? Will I receive a work cell? Am I required to have my own vehicle? Will I have use of a company vehicle? If I must use my personal vehicle, what is the mileage reimbursement policy?

Be sure to ask your supervisor about:

- Training and orientation schedules for the company.
- Opportunities for shadowing.
- Documentation and goal planning.
- Continuing education, growth, and development. What is paid and what is supported?

Onboarding

You have the job! What is next?

Your first few weeks will be quite different compared to what you will be doing day to day. Company-specific training and meeting your supervisors and co-workers will take time. Some things you will learn about or want to ask about are:

1. Training Expectations

Company specific policies, processes, and procedures

Learning Technology- Many providers utilize electronic health records (EHR). Common computer programs used within the field include scheduling applications, Zoom, and email management systems.

Documentation- A peer supporters' role will require keeping track of encounters according to company policy and state regulations. The PAPSC has a few resources that may be helpful. Resources can be found at this link under various headings on the page. Please take time to explore.

<https://papeersupportcoalition.org/resources/>

2. Supervision

You will meet with your supervisor once a week, following at least six hours of shadowing. Some organizations will also require regular team meetings.

As a reminder it is always better to ask for additional support and supervision as soon as you need it. Waiting until the problem becomes a crisis is never advisable.

“Each agency has its own orientation trainings, shadowing and documentation practice that are required before jumping into the position. Sometimes this can seem like a lot of new information, but supervisors are aware of this and are committed to helping each employee through this process. Please ask questions. There are no bad or stupid questions.” - Eric A. Bigelow, Behavioral Health Director, Salisbury Behavioral Health

Setting Expectations

You have completed the onboarding process and are ready to get down to work. It is key to find a balance between your professional responsibilities and what your peers expect from you. What is your role as a peer professional? What boundaries do you need to set in the relationships you will have with your peers? What is the difference between supporting someone and helping them?

The number one question to keep in mind is, “Am I more invested in helping this person than they are in helping themselves?” The answer should always be no. This may feel wrong or go against your instincts. Of course, you will want to help your peers in any way possible, but you can only help a person who wants to help themselves. It may be in your nature to want to fix other people's problems, to take away their pain, and to make their lives better. However, it is not your job to fix anyone. It is your responsibility to give them the tools and support they need to restore themselves.

The difference between helping someone and supporting them is simple. When you ask someone, “How can I help you?” You are automatically putting yourself in a position of superiority. You are saying, “You are broken. I can fix you.” When you support someone, you are choosing to stand by them as an equal.

You are offering them your experience as an example of what worked for you and as a suggested path to what may benefit them.

Setting boundaries between helping someone and supporting them may be the most challenging part of the job. When in doubt utilize your resources. Speak to your supervisor. Talk it out with a colleague. Ask yourself what you needed when you were in a comparable situation. Did you need to be fixed or did you need to be heard, and given the tools to start building the life you deserve for yourself?

“Do not expect all of your time with your peers to be perfect or always go as planned. You will not always have all of the answers as to the best way to build a relationship with your peer. Sometimes it will feel natural and easy, but sometimes all of your efforts will feel like they are not making the difference you had hoped. Please be aware that not all CPS’s and peers will be a good match and that’s okay and it’s not your fault. Talk to your supervisor but also feel free to use your fellow CPS coworkers as a resource. “ Eric A. Bigelow, Behavioral Health Director, Salisbury Behavioral Health

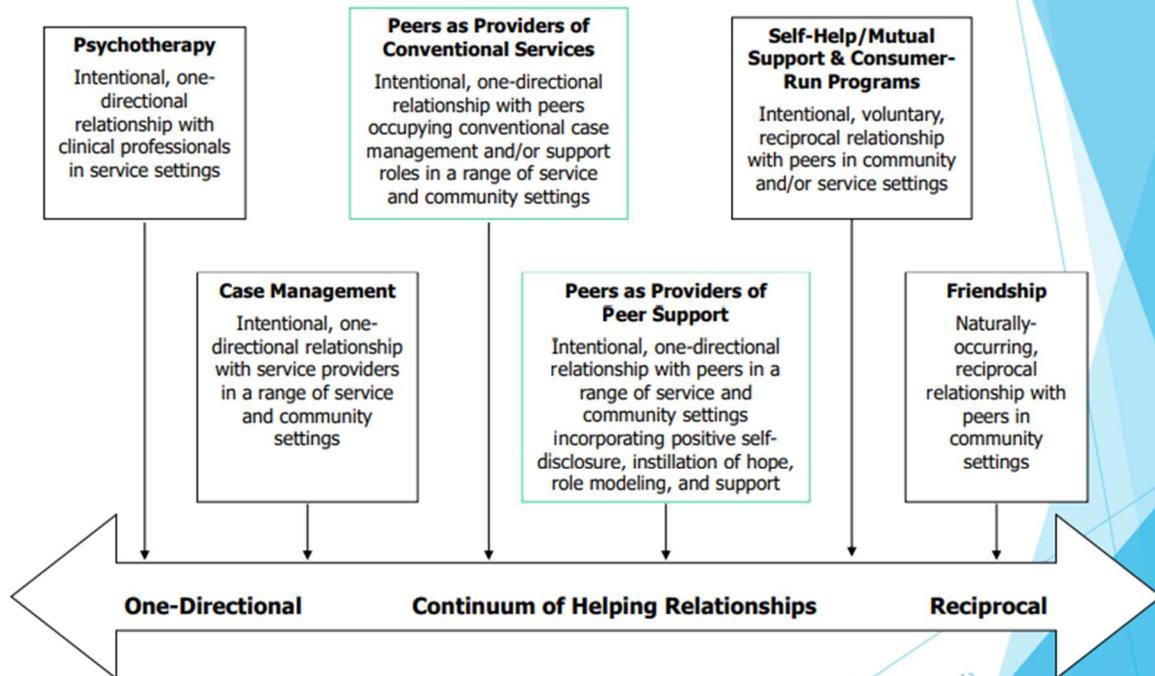
Ethics and Boundaries

As peer supporters it is important to balance a level of professionalism along with being accessible. The Pennsylvania Certification Board Code of Ethics can be referenced at any time and should be used to guide your peer support practice.

<https://www.pacertboard.org/ethics>

The relationship between a peer professional and their peer is unique. The professional is responsible for maintaining healthy boundaries in the partnership. Maintaining healthy boundaries will ensure the peer receives appropriate support making the connection a healing one. The image on the following page shows a continuum of some helping relationships we see within the behavioral health field.

A Continuum of Helping Relationships



Davidson, L.; Chinman, M.; Sells, D.; & Rowe, M.: Peer support among adults with serious mental illness: A report from the field. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 2006, 32: 443-450.

Supervision

You will meet with your supervisor each week to review the progress you have made with your peers and discuss any concerns you may have. Your supervisor may offer supplementary resources, make suggestions, or advise you on your next move. They will also give you updates from your employer and provide support in meeting professional goals. Team meetings may be held routinely offering additional guidance. Supervision will help you align yourself with recovery-oriented values and ensure that you are working with your peers according to ethical guidelines.

You may find that you need assistance from your supervisor that does not directly pertain to caseload management. You may need to reach out to them if you are sick or in need of a day off to tend to your own emotional or practical needs. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or unsure of your next step with a peer that may be a sign that you should contact your supervisor.

Additionally, if you feel the peer may be a danger to themselves or others, this would be a crucial time to contact your supervisor and follow their guidance, along with your employer's protocols.

“There might come a time when you may want to give up. For those who are new to this position it can feel overwhelming at times, especially in your first few weeks and months. Sometimes a Peer Support Specialist just needs a short break or a chance to take a deep breath. Please talk to your supervisor because accommodations can likely be made. Do not wait until supervision if something is troublesome. Everything you are doing is new to you. Be kind to yourself and talk to your supervisor.”
- Eric A. Bigelow, Behavioral Health Director, Salisbury Behavioral Health

Managing Self

When working as a peer professional you will find yourself supporting individuals one-on-one, without a supervisor directly overseeing your work. You may find that you organize most of your day or week, scheduling meetings with your peers at times that are convenient for both of you. This can be a new experience for some peer professionals. Therefore, it is important to be mindful and to stay focused while managing your responsibilities and obligations.

A few questions to ask yourself when planning your day and scheduling appointments are: Does your employer expect you to spend a specific amount of time with participants each week? Are certain breaks mandatory? Are you able to schedule peers that live near each other geographically on the same day of the week?

You may find that your new co-workers have tips for how they meet these expectations. Furthermore, maintaining your calendar, digital or hard copy, is essential. Some peer professionals find it useful to schedule breaks into their day. If you have a peer who is going through a particularly rough time you may find yourself needing a more significant break after meeting with them. This can be planned for in your schedule as well.

Having the motivation to work independently comes from routine self-care. Utilize this guide, your local resources, available trainings, and the support of your colleagues to shape how you approach self-management in this role.

Self-Care

Self-care is not just for after work. It is one of the most valuable skills a peer supporter utilizes. Employing wellness tools can be a way to relieve stress and rejuvenate. Forging relationships with other peer workers is crucial. Most counties have support meetings or groups for peer workers to connect and share. There are also online spaces for peer interaction such as social media sites.

Taking care of one's own needs should be a priority. The risk for potential burnout is real. As a peer professional you are a model for recovery. Therefore, "walking the walk" is part of the job. Maintaining self-awareness and using your recovery tools is critical. Developing and utilizing your own WRAP for work is a fantastic way to plan your self-care. Finding personal time during the workday is also essential. If you wait until you get home to do your self-care you may feel as if you never left work. There are strategies that can be built into a workday that many find helpful. These include listening to music or taking a short walk while on break.

Everyone needs support and peer workers are no different. Occasionally struggles in your personal life arise and roll over into your work. Sometimes a situation may be more appropriate to bring to your personal support team such as a therapist or friend. That said, you should always feel comfortable telling your supervisor if you are going through a challenging time. Remember that telling your supervisor what your needs are can be helpful for them to best support you.

Continuing Education & Professional Development

Each day that you spend working with your peers is an opportunity to advance your own recovery. The possibilities for furthering your personal and professional education are limitless. Organizations such as the PAPSC, the Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), and your local county mental health office offer numerous training courses and continuing education classes.

The Pennsylvania Certification Board requires peer and recovery specialists to acquire at least 36 continuing education units (CEU's) every two years for recertification. Twenty-four CEU's must specifically focus on peer support or another recovery-based practice. Three CEU's must be in ethics, and the last nine are electives and can be any type of education or training you choose.

Some widely attended trainings that you might want to consider attending are Youth & Young Adult, Forensic, and Veterans. As you become more comfortable in your role as a peer or recovery specialist, you may discover that you would like to participate in advocacy and community organizations. Joining groups like your local Community Support Program (CSP) will enable you to find partnerships to advocate for behavioral healthcare and connect with other community members locally. Remember, you can visit the PAPSC website, connect with your supervisor, or reach out to your county's Recovery Support Coordinator for more information on continuing education.

A Day in the Life

The following are testimonials based on the experience of other professional peer supporters to offer you a personal perspective about the job.

"Most importantly, I support the peers that are set up to work with me. One of my duties is to select the peers from a referral list for each individual team member who will be supporting them. I am the trainer for new members of the team. Part of my job is supporting my supervisor in understanding the PS position. This includes researching the regulations set by the state and our MCO which is Magellan. I have recently joined some committees. The first one I joined is the PA Peer Support Coalition as a Board member. We are also required to be involved with at least one subcommittee. When I first became a member of the Board, I was on the Conference committee. After the conference was over, I joined the Advocacy subcommittee. I became a member of the Older Adult MH Planning Council (which is part of OMHSAS), and I am involved in the System Integration and COAPS subcommittees. Within this council I have assisted in choosing the 20 priorities for the coming years, as part of the Advancing the Call for Change Initiative in the Commonwealth. In the beginning of my career, I was involved w/ the initial Call for Change State Initiative. And lastly, I have been involved with some of the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion focus groups/work groups. One is a Peer Parents Support work group and the other is a Socialization Program work group. I do not have a typical day. So, here is a composite..."

1. Start most days with: Opening my computer and opening all the apps I will need for the day. I put in my start time, check my phone to see if there are texts to respond to or phone calls I need to make.
2. Have visits w/ peers in the community, at their home, at the office, or on video.
3. In between visits I do administrative work such as...rechecking the phone, responding to emails, readings, trainings, supporting other team members, finishing some documentation in the EHR and working on projects (setting up referrals w/ a team member, group prep, discussing w/ my supervisor any new ideas I have to support peers and any work needed to do related to committees I am on).
4. Every hour or so, I get up, move around, look outside, or go outside when possible. On occasion, I do check my personal phone.
5. I make sure to end my day by checking my calendar to update what has been taken care of and making sure to continue listing what has not been taken care of to do in the future. I also put in my times and completely close the workday by SHUTTING DOWN & CLOSING MY COMPUTER.” **Donna Giordano CPS**

“On the days where I meet with peers, I will typically just travel from peer to peer - whether at their home or somewhere in the community. If I need anything to prepare for my day, like printing out paperwork or resource information, I will start at the office before my first appointment. No day is ever the same and can change on the fly. I might have planned to start at a peer's home, but they might have called me to say they would rather meet at a park to go for a walk while we discuss and work on goals. Sometimes I might arrive at a peer's home only to learn that they are feeling sick, or they have forgotten and are not home.

As you gain experience as a CPS, problem solving this kind of change of plan or managing your time to accommodate them becomes second nature. It can be a little stressful and frustrating, especially when you are just starting. It was important for me to be patient with myself and learn to take these things in stride. It helped me to establish with peers how long they wanted to meet for an appointment, not just the day, location, and start time. This helped me to schedule the rest of my day. I am also careful to schedule my day with time to decompress between. While it might take only 10 minutes to get from one appointment or another, for example, I always plan for a little more time. That way if an appointment runs longer than planned, or it was one that was difficult emotionally or for my own recovery, I have that little bit of extra time to practice my own self-care and coping skills before I meet with my next peer. And if an appointment ends earlier than expected, or a peer cancels or no-shows, I have time to arrange something different.

There are frustrating moments for sure. Sometimes peers seem to care less about their own goals than you do, and that can be the most frustrating thing. Then there are days when a peer finishes a step in their goals, and you can see the positive impact that has on their confidence and hope.” **Victoria Perini CPS/S**

“As the director of a peer support program, my responsibilities vary widely from day to day. I oversee the daily workings of the program and the supervisors. I monitor the state (OHMSAS) and MCO regulatory changes, income/expenses, caseload management, communication throughout the levels of the company, marketing, hiring, and the billing/documentation (among various other duties). As a CPS I work with several different peers and support them while they work to achieve their self-described goals. This can also vary widely and knowing this, being flexible and adaptable to the current situation is imperative. Monitoring my own wellness and including self-care is essential to my success. Being a self-starter and organization is also necessary to create a schedule that not only is conducive to best outcomes for peers, but also works in conjunction with my other responsibilities and my personal life.” **Jennifer Yahner BSN, CPS/S**

Statewide Resources

CareerLink <https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov/jponline/>

Indeed Job Search <https://www.indeed.com/>

Magellan Behavioral Health of PA <https://www.magellanofpa.com/>

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/ovr/Pages/default.aspx>

PA Peer Support Coalition <https://papeersupportcoalition.org>

Pennsylvania Certification Board <https://www.pacertboard.org/>

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers’ Association <https://pmhca.wildapricot.org/>

Resources By County

Bucks County

Bucks Human Services Connect Hub

55 E. Court Street, 1st Floor

Doylestown, PA 18901

215-348-6201

TheHub@buckscounty.org

Bucks County Department of Behavioral Health/Developmental Programs

55 E. Court Street

Doylestown, PA 18901

215-444-2800

<https://buckscounty.gov/315/Behavioral-Health>

Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc.

55 E. Court Street

Doylestown, PA 18901

215-444-2700

www.bcdac.org

Bucks County Free Library (7 Branch County Library System)

150 S. Pine Street

Doylestown, PA 18901

215-348-9081

<https://buckslib.org/>

Bucks County Community College

215-968-8000

www.bucks.edu

NAMI of Bucks County

1432 Easton Road, Suite 2D

Warrington, PA 18976

215-343-3055

www.namibuckspa.org

Community Support Program of Bucks County

www.cspbucks.org

PA CareerLink Bucks

4800 E. Street Road, Suite 50

Treose, PA 19053

267-580-3501

info@buckscareerlink.org

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

484-250-4340 Voice

484-250-4357 TTY

The Wardrobe

careerwardrobe.org

bucks@wardrobepa.org

215-568-6693 x22

Cambria County

Career Link

<https://pacareerlink.pa.gov>

248 Main St Suite 100

Johnstown, PA 15901

814-534-2500

Fax: 814-534-2512

Ebensburg, PA location: 814-419-8646

EARN Cambria County

814-509-0734

540 Central Ave Johnstown PA 15902

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College

<https://www.pennhighlands.edu>

Student Success Center 814-262-6451

studentsuccess@pennhighlands.edu

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)

www.dli.pa.gov

727 Goucher St. Section 10 Johnstown, PA 15905

814-255-6771

Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies

(Adult Employment & Training Services, Job Coaching, GED Preparation)

<https://www.gogoodwill.org>

540 Central Ave. Johnstown PA 15902

814-536-3536 ext 296

Cambria County Library System (Includes 14 locations)

Cclsys.org

Cambria County Library, Johnstown: 248 Main St. Johnstown, PA 15901

Email: campub@cclsys.org

814-536-5131

Highland Community Library, Richland: 330 Schoolhouse Rd. Johnstown, PA 15904

Email: highland@cclsys.org

814-266-5610

Peer Empowerment Network

<https://www.pendropincenter.org>

514 Somerset St. Johnstown, PA 15902

814-539-2724

Senior Community Service Employment Program

239 Main St. Suite 410 Johnstown, PA 15901

814-536-0691

Manpower of Johnstown

Manpowercentralpa.com

Johnstown.pa@manpower.com

248 Main St., Suite 100 Johnstown, PA 15901

814-266-2364

Johnstown Unemployment Office

445 Schoolhouse Rd. Johnstown, PA 15904

814-533-2493

Lehigh and Northampton Counties

Community Action Lehigh Valley

1337 East 5th Street
Bethlehem, PA 18015
610-691-5620

<https://www.communityactionlv.org/>

Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living

713 North 13th Street
Allentown, PA 18102
610-770-9781

<https://lvcil.org/services/>

PA CareerLink® Lehigh Valley

555 Union Boulevard
Allentown, PA 18109
610-437-5627
TTY: 610-437-0741

<https://careerlinklehighvalley.org/>

Allentown Employment & Training Center

718 Hamilton Street
Allentown, PA 18101
610-799-1205

PA CareerLink® Lehigh Valley at St. Luke's Sacred Heart

325 North 5th Street
Allentown, PA 18102
610-440-4430

Bethlehem Employment & Training Center

502 East 4th Street
Bethlehem, PA 18015
610-868-7800, ext. 224

Via of the Lehigh Valley

336 W. Spruce Street
Bethlehem, PA 18018
610-317-8000

Via@ViaNet.org

Via-Community Employment Services

1020 S. Cedar Crest Boulevard
Allentown, PA 18103
610-628-2326

Allentown Public Library

1210 Hamilton St.
Allentown, PA 18102
610 820-2400

<http://www.allentownpl.org/>

Bethlehem Area Public Library

11 West Church Street
Bethlehem, PA 18018
610 867-3761

<https://www.bapl.org/>

The Perfect Fit

609 West Hamilton Street, Suite LL200
Allentown, PA 18101
610 871-5060

<https://www.ywcaallentown.org/what-were-doing/perfect-fit/>

The Literacy Center

1132 Hamilton Street, Suite 300
Allentown, PA 18101
610 435-0680 ext.804

<https://theliteracycenter-lv.org/>

Montgomery County

CareerLink Montgomery County

Human Services Center

1430 DeKalb Street

Norristown, PA 19401

610-270-3429

<https://www.montcopa.org/2114/PA-CareerLink-Montgomery-County>

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

1430 DeKalb Street

Norristown, PA 19401

610-270-3429 - Dial 711 for TTY-based Telecommunications Relay Services

www.montcopa.org/1347/Links-Resources

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

1875 New Hope St

Norristown, PA 19401

484-250-4340

www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/ovr/Pages/default.aspx

montgomery.pa.networkofcare.org/mh/services/index.aspx

Montgomery County Community College: Continuing Ed and Training

340 Dekalb Pike

Blue Bell, PA 19422

215- 641-6551

www.mc3.edu/resources-for/workforce-development

Good Will Job Services

<https://www.yourgoodwill.org/grow/employment-services>

Contact: Sue Soderberg

717-394-0647

Community Support Program

pjohnson@hopeworxinc.org

1210 Stanbridge St., Suite 600

Norristown, PA 19401

[610-270-3685](tel:610-270-3685)

Montgomery County Department of Behavioral Health

<https://www.montcopa.org/1219/Mental-Health>

P.O. Box 311

Norristown, PA 19404-0311

[610-278-3000](tel:610-278-3000)

Montgomery County Dept. Health & Human Services Office of Drug & Alcohol

P.O. Box 311

Norristown, PA. 19404-0311

610- 278-3642

<https://www.montcopa.org/1339/Drug-Alcohol>

Notes