Battle Buddies After Service: The Significance of Peer Support
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NAMI 2016 National Convention
Denver, CO
Marsden McGuire, MD
Why Implement Peer Support?

- President’s New Freedom Commission (2003) called for the transformation of mental health services to a patient-centered, recovery-oriented system of care.
- VHA Mental Health (2004) developed a strategic plan to implement the concepts of the New Freedom Commission and developed the Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services section to spearhead the transformation.
- Mental Health developed the Uniform Mental Health Services Handbook (2008), which reaffirmed VHA’s commitment to a transformed mental health system of care.
- If recovery is the goal, the most transformative effort is the implementation of peer support. Peers demonstrate on a daily basis that recovery is achievable.
Effectiveness of Peer Support

• A variety of studies outside VA show that peer support services lead to
  – Less inpatient use
  – Greater satisfaction with life
  – Greater hopefulness
  – Better treatment engagement
  – Improvement in mental health symptoms
  – Reduced costs of care
  – Enhanced self-esteem and social functioning

• Research within VA is in its early phase; findings are similar to non-VA studies.
  – Peers positively influenced Veterans’ involvement in their own care and increased their social relationships.
  – Supplements existing treatments and increases access.
  – Emphasizes recovery by focusing on meaningful life roles and community reintegration.
VHA Peer Specialists – Legislative Assistance

- **Public Law 110-387: Qualifications**
  - Be a Veteran with an Other than Dishonorable Discharge.
  - Be in recovery from a mental health condition for at least a year.
  - Be trained and certified by a VA-approved or State-approved not-for-profit certification organization.

- **Public Law 111-163: Certification**
  - VA must contract with a not-for-profit organization to provide certification training.
  - Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) was awarded the first contract.
  - Recovery Innovations (RI) has been awarded the current contract.

- **White House Executive Order, August 2012**
  - VA must hire and train 800 peer specialists by December 2013.

- **White House Executive Action, August 2015**
  - VA must establish 25 pilot site to provide peer support in Primary Care.
Development of VHA Peer Support Workforce

- **2006**: Approximately 128 Peer Support Technicians first hired in VA.
- **2008**: First Director of Peer Support hired.
- **2009**: Process of developing new classification for Peer Specialists initiated.
- **2012**: Approximately 150 more Peer Support Technicians hired in VA.
- **2012**: Executive Order to hire 800 Peer Specialists.
- **2013**: 956 Peer Specialists on board.
- **2015**: 1,095 Peer Specialists on board.
- Each VAMC and Very Large CBOC must have at least 2 Peer Specialists.
- In addition to the minimum of two per facility, each VISN has been allocated a quota of Peer Specialists based on the total number of Veterans in a catchment area that have mental health conditions.
What Do Peer Specialists Do?

- They serve as role models by sharing their personal recovery stories, showing that recovery from mental illness is possible.
- They teach goal setting, problem solving, symptom management skills, and a variety of recovery tools.
- They empower by helping Veterans identify their strengths, supports, resources, and skills.
- They advocate by working to eliminate the stigma of mental illness within and outside the walls of VA.
- They act as community liaisons by identifying social supports in the community.
- Promote wellness and act as navigators between mental health and primary care.
## Where Are Peer Specialists Working?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Number of Peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless/HUD-VASH</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Center</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH Residential Rehab Treatment Program</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use Disorder</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH Intensive Care Manage</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where We Are Going

- Primary Care pilots
- Community outreach (Clay Hunt Act Sec. 5)
- Collaborations with DoD
- Research and program evaluation efforts
- Quality improvement
- Ongoing training for Peer Specialists and supervisors
- Federal Interagency Task Force Peer Workforce Collaboration
- Collaborations with Congress and White House as warranted
Questions
Dana Niemela, MSW
Manager of Veterans Services & Employment First
Denver Department of Human Services
www.denvergov.org/veterans
Peer Support for Outreach and Engagement

Dana L Niemela, MSW
Director of Community Outreach & Engagement
30,000’ (13,776’) View

- Program overview
- Need for peer support
- Staffing solutions
- Community solutions
- Wrap-Up
Program Overview

• Denver County Veteran Services
  • Prioritizing homeless and at-risk services
    • Community Resource Navigation
    • Benefits Acquisition
    • Employment Case Management
  • Rely strongly on community partnerships
Need for Peer Support

• John’s Story
Staffing solutions

• Office of Behavioral Health
• Position Development with HR
• Challenges
• Alternatives
Community Solutions

• PARTNERSHIPS
  • Who does it?
  • Who does it well?
  • Who’s willing to collaborate?

• Support your partners
  • What is their mission?
  • What are their needs?
  • How can you support them to achieve their goals?
Wrap Up

• It works!
• Funding doesn’t have to limit you
• Get creative... get out of the box
Daniel Williams
Chair, NAMI Veterans & Military Council
Peer Support Specialist / Veterans Treatment Court
Birmingham VA Medical Center
Battle Buddies After Service: The Significance of Peer Support

By Daniel Williams
VA Peer Support Specialist
NAMI National Veterans and Military Council Chair
What is PEER Support? Who is it For?

- A Peer Specialist is a fellow Veteran who has had similar experiences with mental illness and/or addiction and who helps and encourages other Veterans through assistance, guidance, and understanding to aid in recovery.

This is for-

• The “Tribe”/ID issues
• The Family's
• The Co workers
• The Process
• The Peer Support
The Tribe

• The Tribe is what we as veterans need and want and look for. Something to belong to or be apart of.
• The Tribe make up has been around for 200,000 years and we as people have lived in different ones to make us stronger as a population.

The Tribe make up
• Hunting
• Warfare
• Law Enforcement
• Fire Fighters
• Sports
• Gyms
• Family
Identity Crisis Stages

1. Worry/ Apprehension
2. Excitement
3. Apathetic
   • Indifferent
   • Detached
   • Unmotivated
   • Angry
   • Bitter
4. Depression
5. Sink or Swim/ Fight or Flight
6. Putting in the work
Peer Support Role

• To help with each stage
• Find a tribe that works for you
• Help with the stages of the Identity Crisis
• Support your path to recovery
• Stand beside you and help get back on track and have that sense of purpose again.
The Peer Specialist’s Creed

“I am a Peer Specialist. I will use lived experience with emotional and psychological pain to assist others with similar difficulties. I will support those whom I serve by helping them regain their lives by promoting recovery and inspiring hope for a change. I will promote self-determination, personal responsibility, and self empowerment through education, commitment, and follow through. I will leave no one behind. I will assist others in regaining control of their own lives and encourage Veterans to see themselves through their capabilities, not their limitations. I will support any Veteran, of any era, to the best of my abilities with honor, courage, and commitment.”