

HOWIE THE HARP PEER ADVOCACY CENTER
STARR PROGRAM

(STEPS TO A RENEWED REALITY)

FORENSIC PEER SPECIALIST TRAINING
PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTIONS

Training Team

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Howie The Harp Peer Advocacy Center
STARR Program



HOWIE THE HARP PEER ADVOCACY CENTER
STARR PROGRAM
(STEPS TO A RENEWED REALITY)

History of Howie the Harp Peer Advocacy Center

- Founded in 1995 following the death of Howie the Harp, founder of the Peer Specialist Training Program
- Staffed by consumers
- STARR program staffed by consumers with histories of incarceration

MISSION OF CENTER

- To train, place and provide support services to consumers interested in working in human services
- To provide technical assistance and support to promote the recruitment, hiring, integration, retention and advance of consumer staff in the workplace

History of STARR Program

- Founded in 2000 with funding from the New York State Office of Mental Health to provide human services training, internship, placement and post placement support services
- Targeted Population: Individuals with an Axis 1 diagnosis and a history of incarceration in jail or prison

History Continued

- Meet the anticipated need and demand for trained peer staff in newly funded jail diversion and jail reentry programs
- Since 2002, 220 individuals admitted to program and 144 have graduated (65%)
- 79 placements, 20 graduates currently completing internships ; 7 not placed due to physical disability (70% placement rate)
- 43 graduates working 1 year or more (60%)
- 6 graduates in supervisory positions

Why a Separate Program?

- Balanced the risks of additional stigmatization and discrimination by providers, employers and other consumers with the unique needs of consumers with histories of incarceration and substance abuse.
- Consumers with histories of incarceration asked for it!

Staffing

- All staff have histories of mental illness, substance abuse and incarceration.
- Staff must be comfortable disclosing their experiences to service recipients and stakeholders.

Program Model

- Program model contains components of the following employment programs for individuals with disabilities and non-traditional students:
 - ✓ Supported Employment
 - ✓ Specialized community college training programs for displaced, unemployed, under employed and recent re-entry to work force

Supported Employment Components

- Competitive Employment
- Emphasis on person's preferences for type and amount of work
- Follow along supports from mental health and vocational specialists to maintain job or transition to another one

Community College Components

- Emphasis on adult based learning strategies
- Emphasis on work readiness and literacy
- Training curriculum designed to prepare graduates for placement in entry and mid level positions
- Work experience integrated into classroom training

Service Delivery Models

- Peer provided psychiatric rehabilitation services
- Strength Based Model emphasizing assets vs. deficits
- Peer Support Services
- Service Coordination between all service providers (mental health, criminal justice and housing, substance abuse, etc.)

Employment Services Provided

- Intensive in class training
- 3-6 month supervised internship
- Placement
- Post placement services
 - Career Club
 - Employment Counseling
 - Job Coaching
 - Career Development

Movement through program like recovery is not necessarily a linear process

Recruitment Process

- Ongoing recruitment process targeting re-entry, diversion, housing and other programs providing services to consumers with histories of incarceration
- Self-Referral
- Strategic partnerships with several agencies; CASES, Project Renewal, Goodwill Industries and The Bridge

Application Process

- Telephone Intake
- Attendance at Orientation
- Completion of Application with required documentation
- Panel Interview
- Confirmation that applicant is currently receiving mental health/substance abuse services
- Confirmation of parole/probation status (must be in good standing)

Why Have a Distinct Forensic Peer Specialist Training Program?

- Consumers with histories of incarceration need special emphasis on recovery and self-help
- Need for intensive coordination between criminal justice and mental health agencies
- Need to openly confront impact of incarceration between attitudes and behaviors

Admissions Criteria

- Axis 1 Diagnosis
- Strong belief in recovery and commitment to working
- History of incarceration in jail or prison
- Six months clean time
- Stable housing
- Receiving mental health services
- Insight into relationship between mental illness and involvement in the criminal justice system
- Compliance with conditions with parole, probation, etc.

**GED or high school diploma not required but recommended*

Admissions Criteria Continued

There are no automatic disqualifiers from consideration for admission to program

This includes but is not limited to the nature of previous conviction, currently on parole or probation.

Convicted Sex Offenders: Not automatically rejected for admissions. Advised at interview that it unlikely that Center will be able to place him/her in any human services position unless it is one working with other sex offenders.

LI

Admissions decisions are made on a case by case basis!

No cookie cutter approach to admissions process.

Program strives to be flexible enough to admit trainees who would benefit from the training program and are committed to working with consumers with histories of incarceration.

Forensic Peer Specialist Training Program Curriculum

Goals:

- Assist trainees in coming to terms with and recovering from mental health conditions, criminal justice and trauma histories
(*Personal Transformation and Change*)
- Assist trainees in identifying and utilize transferable skills (e.g. street smarts)
- Prepare trainees for entry level positions in human services
- Acquisition of work readiness and job retention skills
- Resolution of all outstanding criminal justice and personal issues impacting on potential employment and job retention

Core Disciplines of Curriculum

- Self-help and Recovery
- Human Services Roles and Responsibilities
- Work Readiness
- Navigating the Criminal Justice System
- Professional Ethics/Making a Successful Transition from Consumer to Provider

Classroom Training Environment

Since most trainees have limited or no college experience and express sense of "loss" over not having attended or completed college, the Center works hard to create a "*college like*" learning environment avoiding the "usual" set up for training programs for mental health consumers.

Training Faculty

Recruitment Process

The Center recruits and hires trainers to conduct the training modules who have experience and expertise in any of the core disciplines

Training Faculty-Recruitment Process *continued*

- Prospective trainers are required to provide an outline of training modules
- Training Consultants must have some experience working with the population
- Trainers are asked to attend an annual meeting at Center to review and assess training
- Provide feedback on progress of trainee
- In addition, trainers are asked to provide three test questions for final exam

Internship Phase

The internship is an extension of the in class training

- ❖ The Center utilizes “job matching” strategies in developing internship sites and placing interns
- ❖ Interns go through a “normalizing process” of sending out a resume and being called for an interview
- ❖ Internship assignments usually last for three months, however can be extended to six months for various reasons, particularly if employment becomes a possibility
- ❖ Range from 8 to 24 hours per week

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM TIMELINE

3 RD MONTH IN CLASSROOM INCLUDES INTERVIEWING SKILLS TRAINING	BEGIN INTERNSHIP DISCUSSIONS
4 TH MONTH	CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS
5 TH MONTH	BEGIN PLACEMENTS
6 TH MONTH	CLASS PLACED
1 ST . MONTH ON INTERNSHIP	STAFF MAKES INTIAL SITE- VISITS
45 DAYS INTO INTERNSHIP	STAFF MAKES 2 ND SITE-VISIT SITE- SUPERVISOR COMPLETES PERFORMANCE EVALUATION
60 TH DAY ON INTERNSHIP	ASSESS EMPLOYMENT AVAILABILITY- INTERN BEGINS PLACEMENT ACTIVITY

Internship Placement Policy

- The internship is an extension of the classroom experience
- Agency must designate a supervisor and supervisor must attend supervisor's workshop
- Supervisor must provide detailed job description
- Cooperate with the scheduling of site visits
- Complete performance evaluations

Permanent Placement Strategies

- Vacant positions are posted
- Trainees/Graduates have the opportunity to utilize computer lab and other office machines to apply for positions
- Trainee/Graduate attends weekly Career Club meetings to explore and discuss employment opportunities
- Staff provides job search assistance

Center staff utilizes "Job Matching" as a placement strategy

PLACEMENTS

Our graduates are currently working in reentry, sentence alternatives and jail diversion programs within the New York city area

- Goodwill Industries Project Care and Community
- CASES
- The Bridge, Inc. Bedford Hills Project
- Project Renewal
- Bronx TASC
- Rikers Island Brad H. Discharge Project
- New York City LINKS Programs

Job Retention Services and Strategies

Center provides on-going support to all working graduates

- Staff provides job coaching services
- Staff will mediate conflicts at the request of the employer or graduate
- Staff will assist consumer in requesting reasonable accommodations

Ongoing Obstacles to the Inclusion of Peers in Workforce

- Stigma and discrimination
- Staff Resistance
- Human Resources hiring policies
- State and Local Clearance Requirements
- Lack of Institutional Will and Preparedness for the Inclusion of Peer Staff
- Lack of Competitive Wages and Benefits
- Unresolved personal and family issues

Strategies for Overcoming Obstacles

- Commitment on the part of all stakeholders to the inclusion and integration of peer staff in the workplace (funding, contracting, collaboration)
- Staff education and training (easing out naysayers)
- Clear, visible and consistent support from all staff
- Identification and mitigation institutional barriers and develop policies that promote diversity
- Creation of Career Ladders
- Establish and maintain linkages to support peer staff

Recipe For Developing Your Training Program

- Identify key stakeholders in your community including consumers, families, victims rights organizations, mental health care providers, criminal justice agencies and peer run programs
- Convene focus groups assessing the potential demand for the training and graduates of the training
- Identify and contact potential funding sources; state Voc Rehab agencies, local and state departments of health

STARR PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

- The STARR Program provides technical assistance to providers interested in developing competencies in the following areas:
 - Developing Peer Specialist Training Programs
 - Integrating Peer Staff in the Workplace
 - Effective Strategies for Supervising Peer Staff

TRANSITIONS PROJECT

- The training was created as a result of a request from NYS Office of Mental Health Forensic Services
- Focuses on the felony convicted male mental health consumer
- Training was designed to enhance services provided to consumers reentering the community from prison
- Goal of the training is to sensitize mental health providers to the issues facing consumers released from prison
- Assists agencies in navigating the Parole and Probation systems
- Targets executive and administrative staff i.e. *decision makers*
- Offers information about and introduces providers to the incarceration experience
- Focuses on mental health treatment within the prison system, the culture of prison and behaviors which often result from long prison sentences

WOMEN IN TRANSITION PROJECT

- After three years of training mental health programs throughout NYS, and reviewing the resulting evaluations the need for a training focusing on the needs of women consumers of mental health services in the criminal justice system and their very different needs upon reentry became very apparent
- In 2004, the Center collaborated with NYS Office of Mental Health again
- As a result of focus groups held using both consumers and providers, work began to develop a training to address the needs of women returning to the community from jails and prison
- Designed both for decision makers and direct providers of services to the population
- Focuses on both felony convicted women as well as women who have multiple misdemeanor convictions resulting in numerous jail stays throughout their lives
- Focuses on issues such as family reintegration, navigating the Agency for Children's Services (ACS)
- Medical and Mental Health issues as well as the incarceration experiences and resulting behaviors
- Assists providers in navigating the Parole and Probation systems

RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDED TRAINING

- Persons In Recovery as Partners in Planning and Implementing Jail Diversion and Reentry Programs
mrtmcc@earthlink.net
- Spectrum Project-The Clinical Impact of Doing Time
mlrotter@yahoo.com
- Howie the Harp Peer Advocacy Center Technical Assistance Project
(212)865-0775
www.communityaccess.org