

PEERS SUPPORTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT RECOVERY

Youth Peer Support

“They have been through what I have been through . . . no judgement!”

“She gave me hope and helped me to believe in myself.”

“They help me stay grounded in my recovery and go back to school and live a better life.”

What is Youth Peer Support?

Youth peer support (YPS) connects youth and young adults with mental health conditions or substance use disorders with young adults who have experienced similar challenges and completed specialized training to learn how to use their experience to support others. Like adult peer support, YPS encompasses a range of activities and interactions focused on promoting connection, inspiring hope, and supporting young people with mental or substance use disorders to set their own goals and take steps toward building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.

What does a Youth Peer Support Worker do?

Youth peer support workers practice in many different systems and settings, including clubhouses; recovery centers; Wraparound programs; drop-in centers; prevention, treatment, and recovery programs; schools; child welfare and homeless service programs; and juvenile justice and adult corrections systems. YYA peer support services vary in terms of structure and intensity, and may include peers engaging in the following activities:

-  Providing one-on-one coaching and advocacy
-  Facilitating youth peer support and leadership groups
-  Encouraging young people’s active participation in treatment
-  Helping youth navigate services and supports
-  Coordinating community events for young people
-  Strategically sharing personal stories to promote hope and recovery
-  Participating in public policy discussions and systems change initiatives¹
-  Serving as a bridge between service providers and practitioners and the young person²
-  Connecting a young person to other community-based services and supports³
-  Helping young people seeking services to feel less outnumbered when they meet with adults

How does Youth Peer Support Help?

Peer support is based on the idea that individuals who have experienced and overcome an adversity can serve as a source of support, encouragement, and hope to others experiencing similar situations, and may also be in a unique position to promote engagement in services.⁴

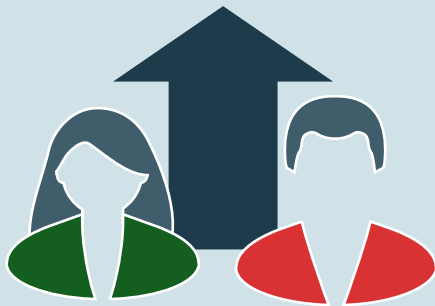
YPS offers young people developmentally appropriate opportunities to gain information, skills, and connection to resources, improve help-seeking behavior, and foster trusting and supportive relationships with people of their own generation who recently experienced similar challenges.⁵ Peer support workers who are still young themselves may better understand what it is like to be a young person now. They may have recent firsthand experience with the services and systems as the young people they support. In contrast, older peer support workers involvement with youth service systems may be more distant or less relevant. Additionally, YPS service models are typically more focused on supporting young people’s connections with school, peers, and family and connecting them with early intervention programming, treatment, and services than service models developed to support older adults.

Does Youth Peer Support Make a Difference?

Research shows that young people are more likely to turn to their peers for help before they turn to professionals. It makes sense that, when asked, young people express a strong desire for peer support services to be available to them.⁶

The research on how YPS benefits young people is ongoing, but early findings are promising. Studies suggest that young people who had access to YPS were more satisfied with services than were those who did not have access to YPS.⁷

In addition, YPS is likely to offer many of the same benefits as peer support in general, including—



Increased self-esteem and confidence⁸



Increased social support and functioning⁹



Decreased substance use and depression¹⁰



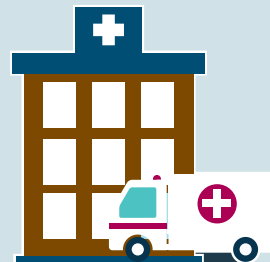
Decreased psychotic symptoms¹¹



Increased engagement in self-care and wellness¹²



Increased sense of hope and inspiration¹³



Reduced hospital admission rates¹⁴



Increased sense of control over one's life¹⁵



Increased empathy and acceptance¹⁶

C4 Innovations developed this resource with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It was built under the Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS) project, contract number HHSS2832012000351/HHSS28342002T. CAPT Wanda Finch and Amy Smith served as the Contracting Officer Representatives. This resource was prepared by Brie Masseli, Johanna Bergan, Valerie Gold, Kristin Thorp, and Becca Olson.

Please share your thoughts, feedback, and questions about this publication by emailing BRSSSTACS@c4innovates.com. Your feedback will help SAMHSA develop future products.

Notes

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