



Rooted in Wisdom, Rising in Action: Peer Support Drives us to Know Better and Do Better

ACRC 70th ANNUAL CONFERENCE –
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www.togetherthevoice.org



AGENDA

- Introductions – Why this workshop?
- Overview of Systems of Care and Peer Support
- Family Peer Support
- Youth Peer Support
- Integrating Peer Support
- Learning from Wisdom Panel
- Rising in Action: Designing Your Own Process
- Wrap-up





SYSTEMS OF CARE/PEER SUPPORT



History: *The Impact of Family Voice*

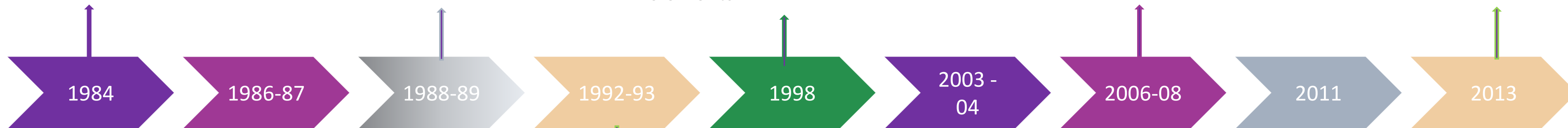
- Congress funded the **Child & Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)**
- CASSP and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) **established the first Research and Training Center on Family Support** and Children's Mental Health at PSU

- **First Federal Funding** for Family-Run Organizations
- **Next Steps Conference**
- **Federation of Families for CMH Incorporated**

In 1998 family advocates, wraparound trainers, providers, and researchers gathered at Duke University and debated the definition and **core components of the wraparound model**, identifying 10 essential elements

- **Youth MOVE National established**
- **Youth MOVE National incorporated**
- **First Youth MOVE chapter**

- **FREDLA** was established by 16 family organizations



- **PSU hosted 5 regional Families as Allies Conferences**

- **SAMHSA authorized by Congress**
- **Children's Mental Health Initiative (CMHI) funding for 4 sites**

- **National youth development board formed**
- **President's New Freedom Commission defined *family-driven care***

- **Certification Commission Formed for Parent Peer Support Providers**

System of Care Components



- ***Guiding philosophy***
A set of **shared** values and principles that provide the foundation for service systems and the services they provide.
- ***Array of services and supports***
Interventions with children, youth, and families at the service delivery level that are **consistent with SOC values and principles** (Stroul, 2002, 2015, 2021).
- ***Supportive infrastructure***
Governance structures; financing for a wide range of services and supports; partnerships among child-serving agencies, providers, families, and youth; provider networks; and capacity for planning, evaluation, work-force development, and quality improvement.



System of Care Core Values and Guiding Principles

Family- and Youth-Driven
Community Based
Culturally/Linguistically Competent

Guiding Principles

Comprehensive array of services and supports

Individualized, strengths-based services and supports

Evidence-based practices and practice-based evidence

Trauma-informed

Least restrictive natural environment

(Strouil, Blau, & Larson 2021)

Partnerships with families and youth

Interagency collaboration

Care coordination

Physical health-mental health integration

Developmentally appropriate services and supports

Public health approach

Mental health equity

Data-driven and accountability

Rights protection and advocacy

Youth- and Family-Driven Is the North Star



- **Family Inclusion & Involvement Is Key** to creating a shared, common goal to support the youth and their family achieve and maintain optimal functioning.
- SOC philosophy and structure facilitates a core understanding of what youth and family-driven means and the partnership, common language, and shared relationship and accountability that are required and can be achieved.
- Family and youth voices strengthen and improve residential experience and outcomes.

Definition for Family and Youth Peer Support Specialists

YPSS: A young adult who has lived experience with mental health and/or substance use as a youth and is practicing wellness related to those experiences.

FPSS: A parent or adult caregiver who has the primary responsibility and experience of raising a young person with complex behavioral health needs and/or system involvement and has supported that young person in their journey.





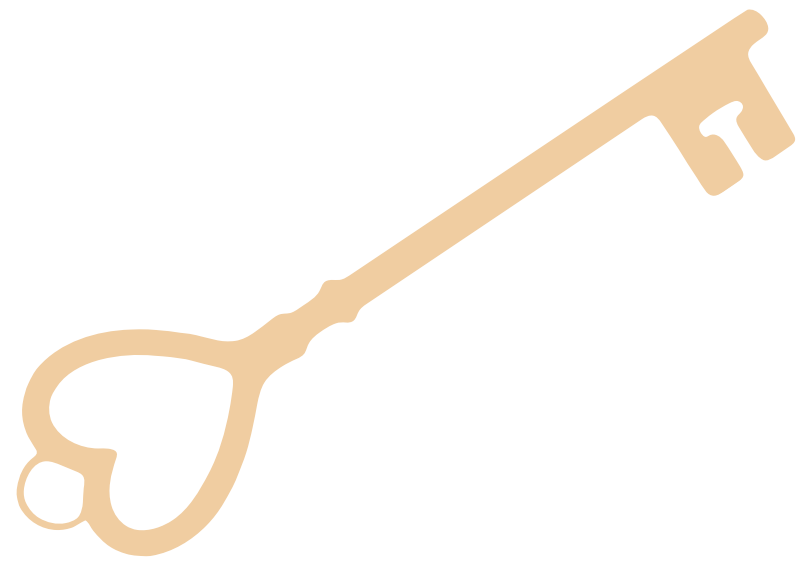
PEER SUPPORT - FAMILY



CORE BELIEF

We believe that **ALL** families have strengths, are resilient, and deserve non-judgmental support





KEY VALUES

- ✦ Families have choices
- ✦ Families are equal partners
- ✦ Family voice is heard
- ✦ Family expertise is valued

Family Driven Care in PRACTICE – Hiring Family Peer Support Specialists

Family Peer Support Specialists became part of the workforce approximately 30 years ago, as a logical and transformational way to implement family-driven care.

While a few residential programs adopted this practice 25 years ago, it has not become commonly accepted in residential...
Until now!



Family Peer Support Specialist Role

Family Peer Support Specialists (FPSS) offer a variety of formal and informal strength-based services and support to parents and caregivers raising a child, youth, or young adult who is experiencing social, emotional, educational, developmental, justice involvement, child welfare involvement, homelessness, substance use, and/or behavioral challenges.

These specialists are uniquely qualified to assist families due to their personal lived experience as primary caregivers of children, youths, or young adults with similar needs, challenges, and system involvement.



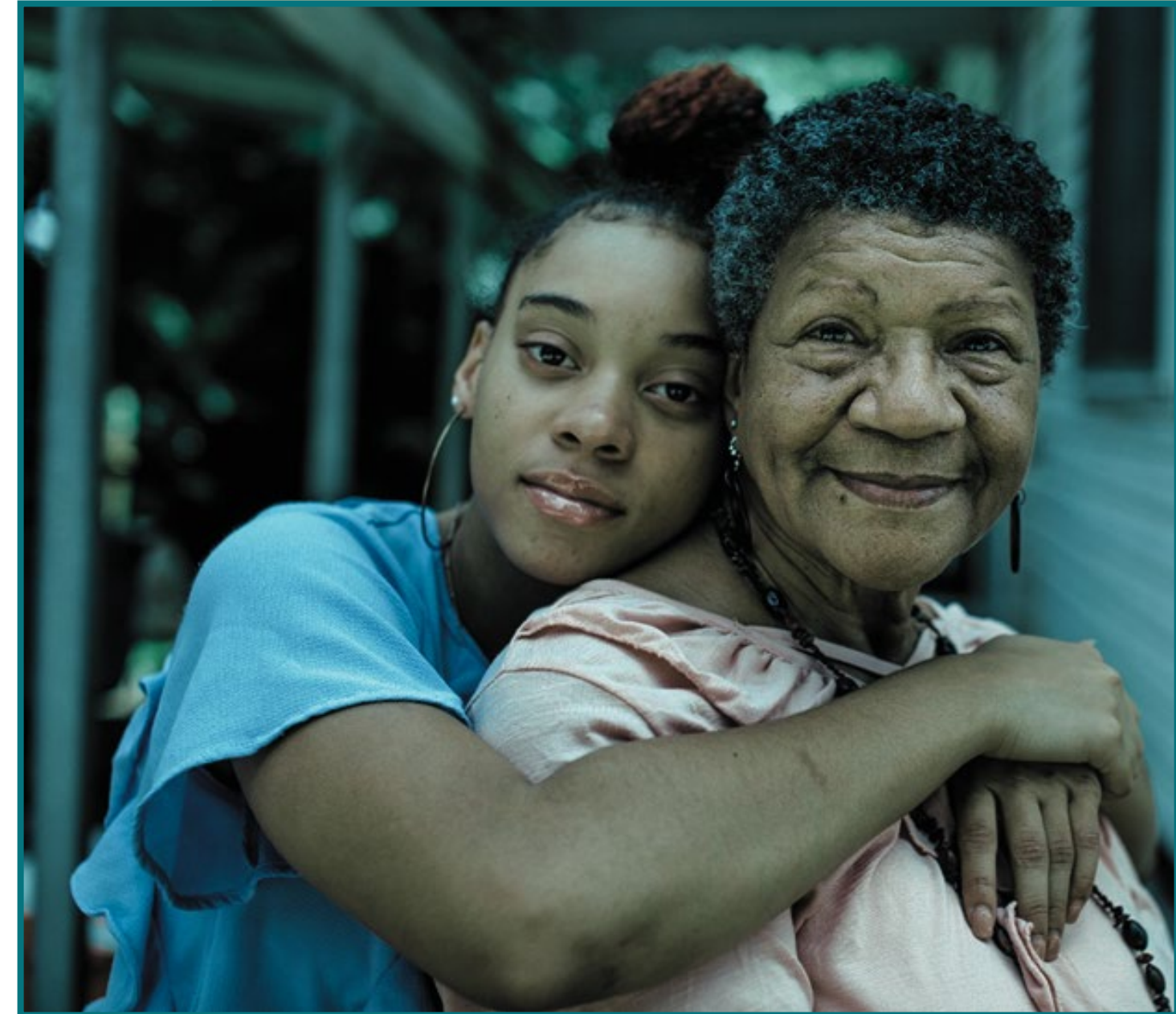
Foundation of Family Peer Support Services

Advocate for family and organization

Education and Skill Development for family and organization

Support - both physical and emotional
- for family

Bring families together - build a community of on-going natural support



Promoting Family Voice



VALUE OF HIRING FAMILY PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS


Bringing family peer support specialists onto staff offers transformational opportunities to implement family driven care, develop creative and effective engagement strategies, embed the practice deeply in the organization, become more truly equitable, and maximize the benefits family members bring to residential practice.



Scope of Practice - Families

- Holistically focused & stigma busters
- Engage, Empower & Provide **HOPE**
- Provide emotional and instrumental support
- Guidance, interpreters & service navigators
- Address families' diverse needs and foster individualized pathways to opportunities and success for them and their children
- Excellent listener
- Resourceful
- Authentic voice
- Collaborators
- Help families discover strengths and how to use them in navigating their way through the world

- Culture and transformational shift within the organization
- Acceptance
- Open partnership
- Reduces blame and shame
- The organization becomes more trauma-informed - a supportive environment where active listening promotes relationships centered on trust
- Practice & System change influencer
- Policy shaper
- Infuse family perspective across organization
- Create equity by attuning to each family's unique needs, regardless of nationality, race, gender, language, and disability (OHECC, 2021)



Scope of Practice - Organizational

Impact on Staff of Integrating Family Peer Support Specialists

- ✦ Staff members feel empowered and view their role as supporting, teaching, coaching, and partnering rather than controlling.
- ✦ Staff better understand the importance of listening to families, learning their perspectives, and allowing them to be experts in their own lives.
- ✦ Families become more confident and learn skills related to decision-making, leadership, and self-determination.
- ✦ Staff spend more time proactively teaching and focusing on the positive, rather than reacting to the negative.
- ✦ There is less tension; everyone is more satisfied.



One Organization's Experience





PEER SUPPORT - YOUTH



Youth Peer Support



A service model in which youth and young adults receive assistance from young adults who have lived experiences similar to their own. It is designed to help youth navigate challenges, build relationships, and develop skills for self-advocacy and decision making.

Youth peer support aims to **promote hope, confidence** and **self-efficacy** among youth, particularly, but not exclusively, those facing emotional or behavioral challenges.

(Mental Health America, 2026)



THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF YOUTH PEER SUPPORT

Peer support goes back centuries as early as 1784, when people with lived experience were intentionally included in care because of their empathy and understanding.

It continued evolving informally wherever communities supported each other through shared experience.



THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT Continued...

The *Psychiatric Survivor Movement* of the 1960s–70s challenged dehumanizing psychiatric practices and pushed for rights and autonomy.

This movement helped shift systems toward recovery-based care and inspired peer support as a recognized approach.



Why is **Youth Peer support** important within out of home care?

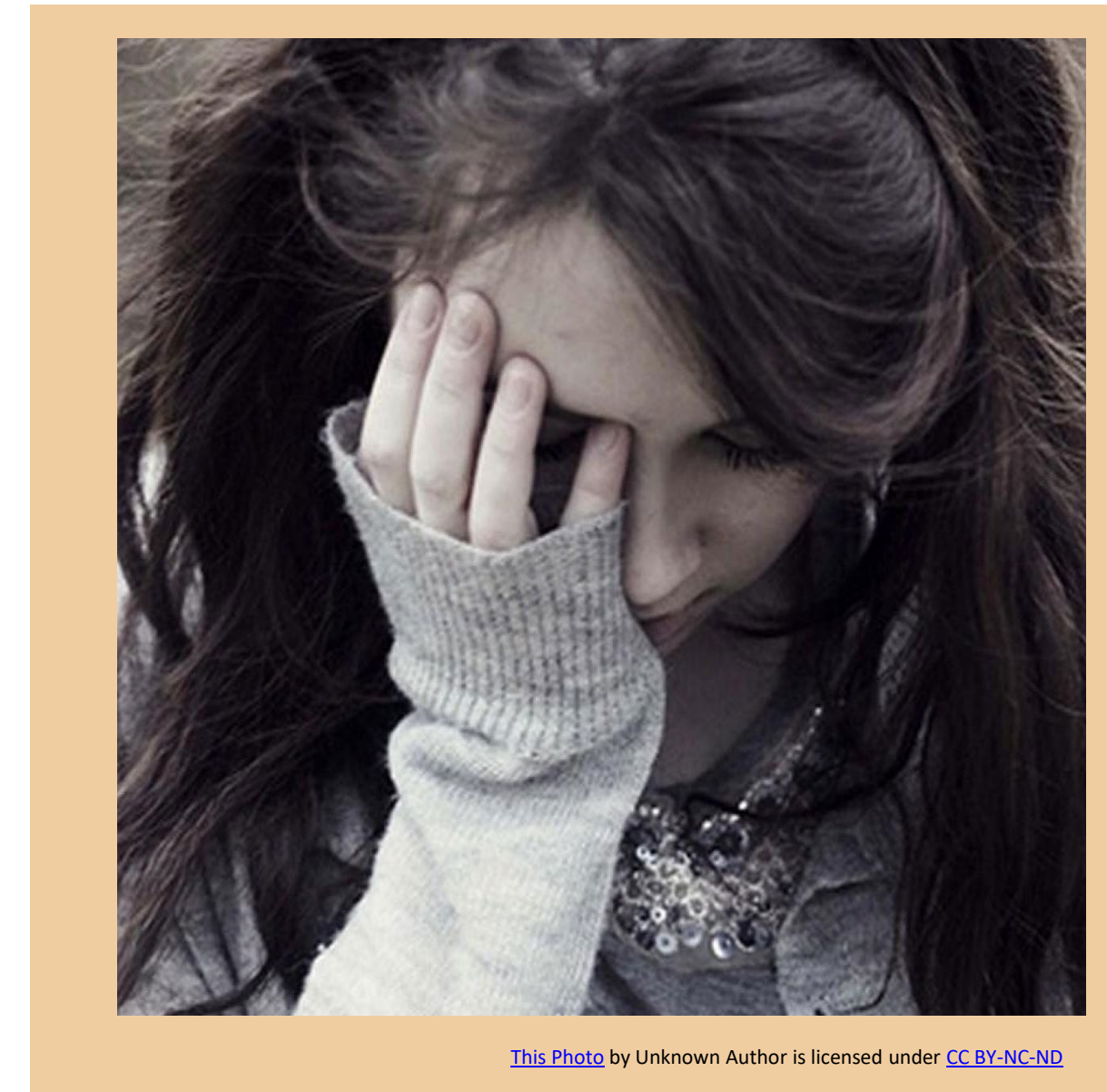
- ✦ Out of home care is not just a placement; it is a lived experience shaped by loss, disruption, and power imbalance.
- ✦ Youth in Out-of-Home Care often experience separation from family, culture, community, and identity.
- ✦ Traditional systems prioritize compliance and adult decision-making over youth voice.
- ✦ Youth peer support centers shared lived experience, restoring dignity, agency, and belonging.
- ✦ Peer relationships validate youth experiences without clinical judgment or system authority.



Challenges of Out-of-Home Care

- ***Youth don't have a say in where they live***
-This leads to a lack of empowerment and autonomy.
- ***Youth are separated from family and friends for months, and even years, at a time***
-This can lead to depression and anxiety.
- ***Youth are in a very vulnerable position***
-Everyone involved has a responsibility to be a safe person for youth and earn their trust.

-Youth are often confused, exhausted, or even angry after Out-of-Home Care, and support can help them navigate this in a healthy way.



Overcoming Challenges to Engaging Youth



- ***Give youth opportunities for their concerns and voices to be heard***
 - Youth Empowerment is ESSENTIAL to engaging youth - they need to be heard and respected.
- ***Be available to Youth***
 - This is the most difficult time of their lives - be empathetic, understanding, and the support they need!
- ***Offer Peer-to-Peer Support and Youth Empowerment Organizations***
 - Peer-to-Peer Support provides youth with space to feel comfortable talking about their experiences.



YOUTH-GUIDED CARE

- ✦ **Youth-Guided** means that young people have the right to be **empowered, educated, and given a decision-making role** in the care of their own lives.
- ✦ This includes giving young people a **sustainable voice**, and the focus should be towards creating a safe environment enabling a young person to **gain self-sustainability** in accordance with their culture and beliefs.
- ✦ Through the eyes of a youth-guided approach, we are aware that there is a continuum of power and choice that young people should have based on their understanding and maturity in this **strengths-based change process**.
- ✦ Youth-guided also means that this process should be **fun and worthwhile**.

A Few Examples of Youth-Guided Care



- Youth provided training/support to lead own treatment team meetings
- **Hiring of youth advocates** (meaningful peer roles throughout the organization)
- Youth advocates are on EVERY program committee/workgroup
- Working directly with youth; supporting them in planning meetings
- Providing youth mentors (home community)
- Youth advisory group – meaningful
- Providing leadership training for all youth
- Skills training embedded everywhere



Improving and Implementing

- ✦ Establish paid and **clearly defined** youth peer roles.
- ✦ Provide **trauma-informed, non-clinical** supervision.
- ✦ **Involve youth** in program design and evaluation.
- ✦ **Integrate peer support** into transitions and discharge planning.
- ✦ **Align policies** to protect **not** silence youth voice.



“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members”.

- Coretta Scott King

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS



“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be.” – Rosalynn Carter



The Foundation of a Community of Practice for Peer Specialist

It begins with leadership that recognizes lived experience's importance and value. When leaders understand the significance of lived experience, they may be willing to:

- Expand the Peer Specialist workforce
- Identify the needs of the workforce
- Allocate funds so that the workforce is more equipped to serve youth and families who are receiving behavioral and mental health services

Cultivating a Workforce that Respects and Values Each Other's Roles

The Family/Youth Peer Support role is not interchangeable with traditional staff that works from the perspective of their training and status as licensed health care providers.



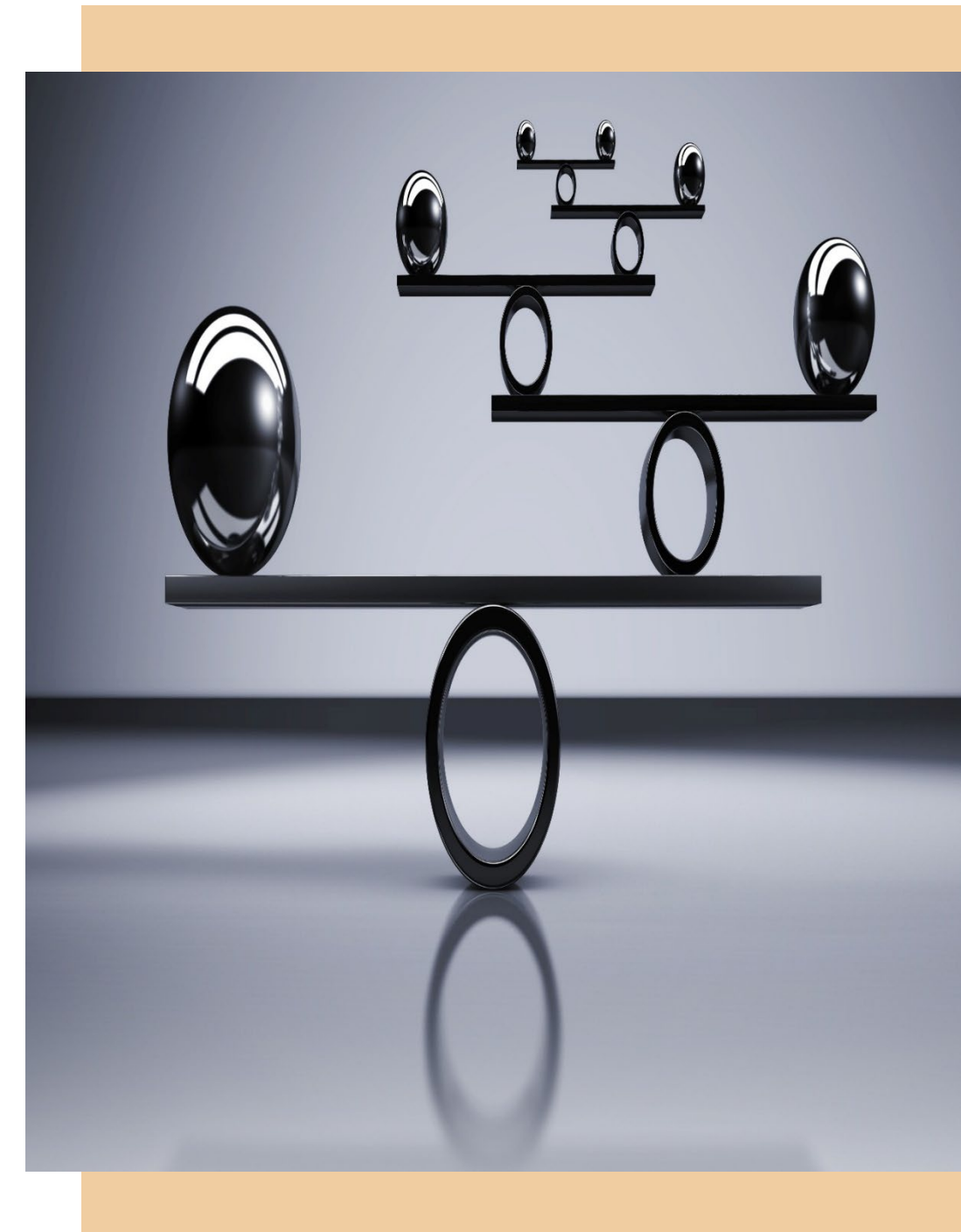
Organizational Readiness

- Established infrastructure
- Cultural readiness
- Clarify role
- Hiring strategies
- Recruitment
- Training
- Supervision and Supports
- Strategies to sustain Peer Support Specialists



Foundation of Integration

- Organizational Readiness and clear understanding of Family/Youth-Driven and Positive Youth Development Approaches
- Creating a culture that is welcoming and supportive for Peers
- Educate staff initially and offer continued trainings for all new hires
- Leadership is in support of peer work and models that for the rest of the staff and the community



They're here!



- Introduced at all levels
- Designated workstation
- Peers are consulted, included and informed
- Ongoing education and training opportunities

Providing Supervision

Providing supervision by a peer with extensive knowledge of peer work can ensure:

- Fidelity of the Peer role
- Comfortability for Peers
- Encourages Peers to advocate, without fear of retaliation
- Possibility of advancement for peers



Children's Home Wyoming Conference Inc. "CHOWC"



- Choose an experienced leader in family engagement to lead the charge.
- Collaborate with a trusted community family partner for consultation/advisement.
- Gain support and feedback from all levels of agency.
- Created an entire division in the agency with Family Partners and Family Partner Supervisor.
- All senior managers publicly support the division and Family Partners.
- Lunch and Learns to set culture and build skills and philosophy.
- Clearly defined roles, communication, and expectations set with staff on how they will interact with the Family Partner.
- Continuous reminders and support to get Family Partners fully integrated. Family Partners attend meetings, weekly team meetings, etc.

Core Competencies – Family Peer Support Specialists



- ✓ Professional Responsibilities
- ✓ System Knowledge and Navigation
- ✓ Resources and Natural Supports
- ✓ Resiliency and Wellness
- ✓ Effecting Change

Core Competencies – Youth Peer Support Specialists



- ✓ Professional Foundations
- ✓ Engagement with Youth
- ✓ Supporting Youth Outcomes
- ✓ Crisis Management
- ✓ Professional Collaboration and Development
- ✓ Leadership and Advocacy

Competency- Based Training



- ✦ Regardless of the certification your state employs or the role or program that your organization implements, it is critical that the *practice of peer support reflect and support the core competencies.*
- ✦ All Peer Support Providers *must* have a standard level of competency that can be built upon for specific roles or positions.
 - Additional training based on program parameters, system-specific, or contract requirements



CERTIFICATION

Peer support certification tends to happen in one of three ways:

1. State uses the national certification exam from [Federation of Families](#)
2. State uses an identified training, **plus** the national certification exam from Federation of Families
3. State uses its own certification process, including identified training, exam, renewal process, etc.

NOTE: There isn't a national certification process for youth peers

Other certifications – Those required by agency or funder, CPR, specific treatment modalities (educational purposes or implementation, such as wraparound).

Federation of Families - <https://www.ffcmh.org/certification>



Bringing Family and Youth Peers Into the Center of Care



- ✦ Integration isn't an add-on — it's a shift toward relationships, dignity, and shared power.
- ✦ Peer roles strengthen systems by grounding them in lived experience, cultural responsiveness, and authentic connection.

ACRC/BBI RESOURCES



TIP SHEETS, POSITION PAPERS, ARTICLES



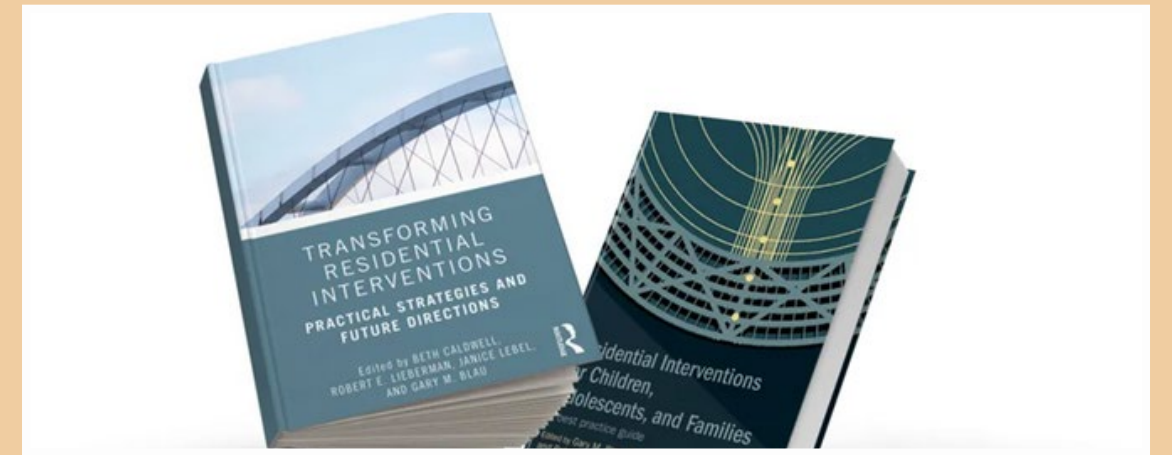
<https://togetherthevoice.org/bbi/document-library/> - sort for "Family Driven Youth Guided Care"



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT



<https://togetherthevoice.org/bbi/family-engagement-toolkit/>



BOOKS



<https://bit.ly/BBIBook1>



<https://bit.ly/BBIBook2>

Resources

- Federation of Families - <https://www.ffcmh.org/>
- Family Run Executive Directors Leadership Association (FREDLA) - <https://www.fredla.org/>
- Applying the Principles of FDC at the community level - https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/49bf42_df95a20954a444e0a86b1e1bdb990739.pdf
- Family Alignment: The first 30 Days Checklist - https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/files/FamilyAlignment_First30DaysChecklist.pdf
- The Caregiver Perspective - [https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Caregiver%20Perspective%20Survey_English%20\(CTAC\).pdf](https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Caregiver%20Perspective%20Survey_English%20(CTAC).pdf)
- The Evolution of the System Of Care Approach - <https://wraparoundohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/The-Evolution-of-the-SOC-Approach-FINAL-5-27-20211.pdf>
- Strategies to increase family-driven service experience - [https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Strategies%20to%20Increase%20Service%20Experience%20\(CTAC\)%20%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Strategies%20to%20Increase%20Service%20Experience%20(CTAC)%20%20(1).pdf)
- National Training & Technical Assistance Center - www.nttamentalhealth.org
- Reframing Language - https://www.ffcmh.org/_files/ugd/49bf42_88b916b5bfad47288c08c33625039ad5.pdf
- The Caregiver Perspective survey - [https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Caregiver%20Perspective%20Survey_English%20\(CTAC\).pdf](https://www.ctacny.org/uploads/Family%20Driven%20Care%20files/FDC%20Caregiver%20Perspective%20Survey_English%20(CTAC).pdf)



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A BIG

Thank you



**To the Family Peer
Support Specialists**

&

**Change Agents who have
participated in the planning for this
preconference!**

THANK YOU!

