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# TRANSITIONS RTC

THE LEARNING & WORKING  
DURING THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD  
REHABILITATION RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER

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## Effectively Employing Young Adult Peer Providers: A Toolkit

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# Toolkit Chapters

- I. Background
  - II. Young Adults in the Peer Provider Role
  - III. Conceptualizing & Structuring YA Peer Role in Your Agency
  - IV. An Organizational Culture that Supports Young Adult Peers
  - V. Recruiting, Hiring & Training Young Adult Peers
  - VI. Effective Supervision for Young Adult Peers
  - VII. Addressing Significant Job Difficulties Using the ADA's Reasonable Accommodation Framework
  - VIII. Preparing and Engaging Non-peer Staff
  - IX. Infrastructure and Framework
- Appendices & Organization Self-Assessments

# What Informed the Toolkit?

- Multi-dimensional experiences of co-authors
- Through Transitions RTC: SAMHSA/NIDILRR grant
- Existing & own research
- Advisory board
- Many focus groups & other meetings with young adult peers & employers over the last 3 years



# Unique Qualities of Young Adult Peers

- Use their own resiliency story with youth & young adult clients (and their families) strategically
- In various phases of their own transition to adulthood
- Can be peers in a variety of ways, not simply sharing a diagnosis
- Are role models/exemplars
- Advocate on behalf of client & capacity to communicate (shift from more clinical to less/non-clinical language depending on context)
- Often focused on “engagement”
- Engage in “mutuality” & FUN!



# Challenges to Integrating YA Peer Role

- Young people in role tend to lack of work experience
- Lack of role clarity & role confusion on multiple levels
- Work itself is highly complex & challenging
- Fundamental Discrepancies between:
  - Peer v. Non-Peer Approaches: Recovery v. Clinical
  - Youth/Young Adult v. Middle-aged/Older Adult Approaches
- New non-peer staff responsibilities, including supervisors



# Establishing an Organizational Culture

1. Value peer support

2. Understand the experience & culture of today's young adults

3. Recognize & actively address workplace stigma

4. Embrace legal obligations to not discriminate against employees with disabilities

5. Diversity of person, perspective, & experience

6. Use a positive [young adult] development approach to treatment & services

7. Self-determination & dignity of risk

8. Employee access to wellness tools, supports & services

# Recruiting, Hiring & Training YA Peers

1. Define “Peer” in your provider context
2. Describe key functions of the YA peer position
3. Establish job qualifications
4. Written job description for the peer provider role
5. Young adult peer job classification and pay
6. Find & attract successful YA peer provider candidates
7. Interviewing young adult peer candidates
8. Other things to consider in the process of identifying, recruiting, & interviewing young adult peer provider candidates

# Recruiting YA Peers

- ❖ **Clear job descriptions & recruiting notices**
  - In writing, with some detail
- ❖ **Salary/benefits & career path** recognition as part of job classification
- ❖ **All staff are recruiters** to the degree they value the peer role
- ❖ **Connect**
  - Peer and advocacy groups
  - Vocational training programs
  - Colleges, universities, certification programs
- ❖ **Internet trends, social media, look to young adults**





# YA Peer Job *Qualifications*

## ❖ **Primary**

- Lived experience
- Capacity for peer support
- Capacity for advocacy
- Professional and ethical conduct

## ❖ **Direct services job criteria tend to screen out young adults with SMHC, often optimal candidates, because of:**

- Insufficient educational background
- **Criminal history**
  - **Avoid exclusions unless legally mandate**
- **Only consider as a factor in relation to essential job functions**

## ❖ **Classification- new one suggested**



# Interviewing YA Peer Candidates

## ❖ Basic Questions

- Review the job description with the YA peer candidate
- Advise candidate that they must be able to talk about their recovery
- Make clear that it is essential that the candidate be able to serve as a role model of recovery
- Ask about prior work history

## ❖ Questions that can screen out good & eligible candidates

- Disability topics not related to job functions;
- **Criminal, if necessary ask later in the process- don't ask but if do later in the process**
- Educational- ask later in process

# YA Peer Training: On-Going Process Integrated into Supervision

- ❖ Supervision is where training is at!
- ❖ Specific Guides for Training YA Peers are limited
- ❖ Motivational interviewing, active listening, confidentiality & self-discovery
- ❖ “Self-Disclosure” vs. Strategic Storytelling vs. Role Modeling
- ❖ Philosophy & practice behind Strategic Storytelling is helpful as an intervention technique:
  - **CHOOSE** your purpose & general content
  - **CHOOSE** your audience & what you want your story to do to this audience
  - **Storyteller CLAIMs** the meaning, associated feelings & significance of story

# Effective Supervision of YA Peers

## Unique Role of Supervisor

- ❖ **Facilitator & Supporter** of YA Peers in developing strong working alliances with their clients
- ❖ **Champion & Advocate** for the YA Peer Role in your context
- ❖ **Role Model & Coach** YA Peers
- ❖ **Remain aware & conscious of well-being** as you would with any employee – but with the knowledge of the unique challenges of being a YA Peer (e.g., stigma & exclusion)



# Essential Supervision Topics



# Use Reflective Supervision Practices

- ❖ **Collaboration.** Both agree to participate in a respectful, mutual relationship (working alliance) where both learn & grow.
  - Either may be the expert on a topic being discussed.
  - This is a non-hierarchical relationship
- ❖ **Regular.** Mutually agreed upon time that is dedicated & protected for Supervision.
- ❖ **Reflective.** Focus on YA Peers own observations of & reflections upon their interactions & relationships with YA clients
  - Mutuality is inherent in this process!
  - Gain self-awareness thru the process!

# Continuous Reflection upon Peer “Relational Processes” in Supervision

Collaboration

Trust

Created by Márcio Duarte  
from Noun Project

Authenticity

**WORKING  
ALLIANCE**

Companionship

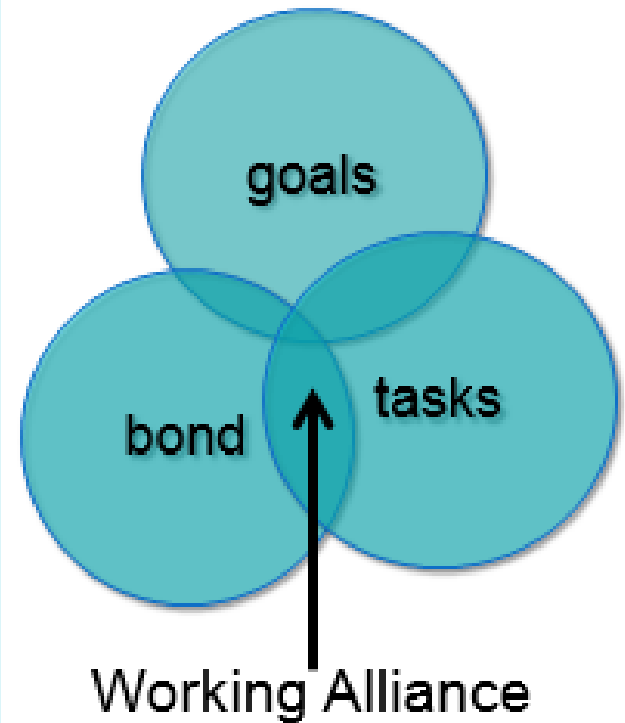
Empathy



(Adapted from Spencer, 2006)

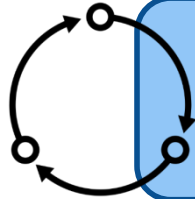
# Building Strong “Working Alliances” between Supervisor & YA Peers

- ❖ Increases likelihood that a YA Peer will **discuss on-the-job struggles**
- ❖ Increases likelihood that YA Peer will feel comfortable discussing the **pros & cons** of supervisor suggestions & directives.
- ❖ Excellent **opportunity for modeling** relationship building skills with YA Peers on how to work with YA clients





# Alliance Building = Parallel Processes



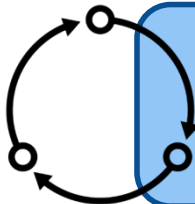
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**Relationships between  
YA TPMs & Clients**

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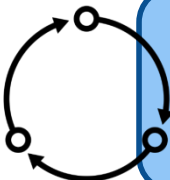
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**Relationship between  
Supervisor & YA TPM**

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Created by Christopher Holm-Hansen  
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**Relationships between YA TPMs  
& Colleagues (Peer & Non-Peer)**



# Establish & Reinforce Professional Standards

- ❖ **Draft a Commitment letter that acknowledges the following:**
  - Romantic relationships, sex, & physical fighting with clients are forbidden
  - Giving clients money or providing housing is forbidden
  - Understand that YA Peers work on a team & will be sharing information with the team. **YA Peers are not allowed to keep client secrets.**
  - Adhere to agency communication best-practices (e.g., social media & texting policies)
  - Report all community-run-ins with clients to supervisor
  - Understand & able to enact crisis protocols
  - Provide at least 2 weeks notice about leaving position
- ❖ **Review this information systematically with YA Peers!!**
- ❖ **What YA Peers share with their YA clients is their choice.** Clients are not bound to HIPAA confidentiality rules.

# Supervisors Need Support & Clinical Supervision!!!

- ❖ Supervisors benefit from participating in regular **individual &/or group supervision**.
- ❖ It's key to have someone to **process** your experiences with!
- ❖ Agency **administration** must recognize this need!
- ❖ If not offered formally, **seek out mentorship** from an individual with experience supervising individuals with lived mental health experience.



# ACCOMMODATIONS!!

## ADDRESSING WORK DIFFICULTIES & IMPROVING RETENTION

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**Reasonable Accommodations:** Modifications or adjustments to ordinary business operations toward supporting a *qualified* employee with a disability perform *essential* job functions,

Such as flexibility re/hours,  
extra training/supervision, time off.



# ADA Reasonable Accommodations

- ❖ Even when mitigated by treatment
- ❖ When to take action
  - Request
    - No particular communication method required of employee
  - “Other obvious”
- ❖ RA Threshold Standards – legally required
  - **Reasonableness:**
    - Will it address the issue, and the likelihood of doing so
  - **Undue Hardship:** Will the suggested accommodation put an *Undue Hardship* on the organization (productivity, quality, impact on other staff)?
    - Leave- With Return to Work programs based on “evidence-based practices (e.g., CBT), will lessen potential of undue hardship
  - **Interactive Process**

# Personalized Accommodations® Process

## Part I. Questions to be addressed in this order:

1. What are the job's primary functions/tasks?
2. What primary functions/tasks is the peer is having difficulty with?
3. What are the challenges and barriers to successful execution of these functions/tasks?
4. What [type(s) of] accommodations might help the peer to perform these functions/tasks?
5. What is the most effective and reasonable accommodations(s)?

### Part II. **Independent** Preparation by employee and/or supervisor:

- Review of questions
- Information gathering

### Part III. **Co-party** Interactive Dialogue Elements:

- ADA rules of interactivity
- Principles of solution focused negotiation
- Strengths/Needs analysis

### Part IV. Establish RA

- Implement RA
- Monitor & change as needed
- Evaluate process

Toolkit pp. 71-77

# Staff Awareness of Opportunities & Responsibilities

- ❖ **Company-wide use of Effective & Efficient RA Assessment Process**
  - Clearly & structured- *forms*
  - Focus on process of interaction & information assessment, while lowering emotional content and blaming
- ❖ **Providers need to educate/train staff on the American Disabilities Act (ADA), particularly the concept & *practice* of RAs**
  - Supervisors have confidence to address rather than ignore
- ❖ **Transparency in RA Request & Assessment Process**
  - Clear to all staff
  - Many young adult peers would rather stop showing up to work instead of discussing on-the-job struggles.

Toolkit pp. 77-78

# Educating, Training & Changing Attitudes of Non-Peer Staff

## ❖ How is my job going to change?

- Not radically
- Need to work with and consider peer perspective, comfortable with differences of opinion (clashes)
- Supportive of peers in daily work
- When to refer clients to peers

## ❖ Required trainings

- The peer role, person-first language, myths of mental illness, etc.
- Active role for lived experience- peers and managers of peers

## ❖ Integrate Team Building Activities

- Co-learning & cross training
- Opportunities for informal interaction

Toolkit pp. 80-84



# Organizational Infrastructure

- Committed & strong leadership
- Strong organizational communications that endorse the young adult peer role
- Connecting & working with human resources (HR)
- Effective staff hiring & accountability practices
- Young adult peers influencing policy & practice



# Young Adult Peers Influencing Policy & Practice

- ❖ **Young adult peers can have the most influence on organizational planning when they:**
  - Make up a significant portion of the service provider workforce in relation to other professional groups
  - Are educated on the best & evidence based practices;
  - Are active participants on relevant committees & workgroups
  - Are in an organizational leadership roles
  
- ❖ **Young adult integration into organizational leadership**
  - Centralize peer education
  - Peer in senior management
  - Adult and YA peers working together
  - Build relationships with peer run organizations

# Toolkit Takeaways: Recruiting & Hiring

1. Establish YA peer provider job qualifications, functions and pay grade before starting the hiring process and in collaboration with HR. [Chapter 5]
2. Avoid job qualification exclusions related to criminal history; do not inquire about criminal history on job application or at the first interview. [Chapter 5]
3. Orientation and training for YA peers should clarify organizational policies, including those on communications, absences, accommodations, and health benefits. [Chapter 5]

# Toolkit Takeaways: Preparation for the YA Peer Provider Role

1. All staff should understand the purpose and unique qualities of the young adult peer role via orientation, training, teambuilding and supervision. [Chapters 1, 3, 8]
2. Agency staff must understand the unique developmental experiences of young adults in today's society. [Chapter 4]
3. Organizational leadership must proactively address stigma and prevent discrimination toward young adult employees diagnosed with mental conditions. [Chapters 4, 8, 9]

# Toolkit Takeaways: Practice

1. Individualized & regular supervision that is reflective and addresses career and skill development, wellness, & relationship development is essential for YA on-the-job peer success. [Chapter 6]
2. When a supervisor is considering an accommodation or job support for a peer, start by identifying the job functions the person is having trouble with before focusing on the person's mental health status and symptoms. [Chapter 7]
3. Team building activities such as cross training, co-learning and mentoring are important approaches toward YA peers and non-peer staff developing high quality working relationships. [Chapter 8]

# Thank you!

# Questions?

# Comments?

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- Klodnick, V. V., Sabella, K., Brenner, C. J., Krzos, I. M., Ellison, M. L., Kaiser, S. M., ... & Fagan, M. A. (2015). Perspectives of Young Emerging Adults With Serious Mental Health Conditions on Vocational Peer Mentors. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 23(4), 226-237.

## Strategic Storytelling:

- **Strategic Sharing Workbook: Youth Voice in Advocacy.** Portland State Pathways Research & Training Center. Accessible at: <http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf>
- **Strategic Sharing: Telling your story in a way that is meaningful, effective, and safe.** Casey Family Programs. Accessible at: [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/download/StrategicSharing.pdf)