Peer Support and Advocacy in Ohio

Jack Cameron, MPA - Executive Director, Ohio Empowerment Coalition
Jody Morgan, Director of Consumer Affairs, Ohio Empowerment Coalition
What is Peer Support?

- Peer support links people living with a chronic conditions together. People with a common illness are able to share knowledge and experiences - including some that many health workers do not have.

- Peer support is frequent, ongoing, accessible and flexible. Peer support can take many forms - phone calls, text messaging, group meetings, home visits, going for walks together, and even grocery shopping. It complements and enhances other health care services by creating the emotional, social and practical assistance necessary for managing the disease and staying healthy.
Definition of a Peer Supporter

- **SAMHSA Definition:**
  
  A peer provider (e.g., certified peer specialist, peer support specialist, recovery coach) is a person who uses his or her lived experience of recovery from mental illness and/or addiction, plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in behavioral health settings to promote mind-body recovery and resiliency.
What do Peer Supporters do?

- **SAMHSA Description:**

In primary care, peer support services have traditionally been limited to an informal or volunteer role of connecting people living with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, in sharing knowledge and experiences with each other. More recently, peer support roles have evolved to include community health workers, peer coaches, and more. **Peer Support in Primary Care Settings** focuses around four core functions and enhances primary care by providing self-management around chronic conditions.

In integrated health, an emerging key role for peer providers are interventions that result in the activation of whole health self-management by those in recovery from behavioral health and chronic health conditions (Druss et al. 2010; Brekke et al. 2012). Growing national recognition of this critical role of self-management to promote resiliency and whole health resulted in creating a federally-funded peer-delivered training called **Whole Health Action Management (WHAM)** developed by the SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions operated by the **National Council for Behavioral Health**.
Four Core Functions of Peer Support

- **Assistance in daily management**
  Peer supporters use their own experiences with diet, physical activity and medicine adherence in helping people figure out how to manage diabetes in their daily lives. They can also help in identifying key resources, such as where to buy healthy foods or pleasant and convenient locations for exercise.

- **Social and emotional support**
  Through empathetic listening and encouragement, peer supporters are an integral part of helping patients to cope with social or emotional barriers and to stay motivated to reach their goals.

- **Linkages to clinical care and community resources**
  Peer supporters can help bridge the gap between the patients and health professionals and encourage individuals to seek out clinical and community resources when it is appropriate.

- **Ongoing support, extended over time**
  Peer supporters successfully keep patients engaged by providing proactive, flexible, and continual long-term follow-up.
Definition of Advocacy

The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.

- Advocate
  - An advocate is a person who, with explicit authority, represents another person’s interests.
- Informal Advocate
  - A friend or family member who is nominated by a client as their personal advocate. This is more like a support person.
- Systems Advocate
  - An organization or professional advocate who can act for a disadvantaged individual or group of individuals in an institutional setting.
- Legal Advocate
  - A nominated advocate whose role has legal status, for example holding and Enduring Power of Attorney.
What is Advocating?

- **Advocacy** is a political process by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.

- This can be done on the local, county or state level.

- Advocacy can include many activities that a person may undertake including public speaking or the filing of an amicus brief.

- **Lobbying** is also a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to legislators on an issue which plays a significant role in modern politics. Research has started to address how advocacy groups are using social media to facilitate engagement and action.
Topics of Advocacy:

- Questioning the way a policy is administered
- Target political systems or politicians “because they (systems) are not responding to people’s needs“ and may not be inclusive and engaging
- Propose policy solutions
- Open up space for public argumentation.
- Budget advocacy: Budget advocacy enables citizens and social action groups to compel the government to be more alert to the needs and aspirations of people in general and the deprived sections of the community.
- **Health advocacy:** Health advocacy supports and promotes patient’s health care rights as well as enhance community health and policy initiatives that focus on the availability, safety and quality of care.
- Ideological advocacy: in this approach, groups fight, sometimes during protests, to advance their ideas in the decision-making circles.
- Interest-group advocacy: lobbying is the main tool used by interest groups doing mass advocacy. It is a form of action that does not always succeed at influencing political decision-makers as it requires resources and organization to be effective.
- Legislative advocacy: legislative advocacy is the “reliance on the state or federal legislative process” as part of a strategy to create change.
- Mass advocacy: is any type of action taken by large groups (petitions, demonstrations, etc.)
- Special Education Advocacy: is advocacy with a "specific focus on the educational rights of students with disabilities."
How Can Peer Supporters Advocate?

It has been said that all politics are local. As such, advocacy starts at home, in your home town, city, or county. You don’t have to be anywhere near Washington, D.C. to be an advocate.

- Stay informed on local issues by watching the news, reading the local papers, and following social media. Most importantly, attend community political functions to meet your local elected leaders.

- Be proactive in building relationships; don’t wait for an emergency to get to know your local leaders. Introduce yourself and explain your role within the community. Once you build relationships with your local leaders, you can work to make sure they understand what it is you do and your perspective on proposed policies and plans affecting our profession and the people we serve.

- Build professional relationships with other agencies. Attend other public agency meetings and interact with people in those communities.
What is Involved in Advocacy?

Advocacy may involve speaking, acting or writing on behalf of an individual (or group) who has limited ability to exercise his/her rights. Advocacy is a mechanism to facilitate client rights, and you may be requested to support the client in exercising his/her rights.

Examples of rights you could be asked to support include:

- The right to privacy and confidentiality;
- The right to respect and dignity;
- The right to quality services;
- The right to information to inform decision making;
- The right to choice and control;
- The right to make and resolve complaints;
- The right to nondiscriminatory service; and
- The right to protection of legal and human rights, and freedom from abuse and neglect.
Advocacy Checklist

- The client has given written permission for you to act on his or her behalf;
- You always act in the best interests of the client;
- You encourage the client to provide feedback to you about the services they are receiving;
- You advise the service about any changes in client circumstances and any concerns about changing client needs;
- You are prepared to relinquish the role of advocate should the client wish this;
- You advise the service about any changes in client circumstances and any concerns about changing client needs;
- You are prepared to relinquish the role of advocate should the client wish this;
- You avoid representing them in circumstances where there may be a conflict of interest; and
- You do not act as an interpreter for the client while acting in an advocacy role.
Advocacy 101

- Decide on a topic you wish to advocate. Make this something you are truly passionate about.

- Research the topic you are passionate about. Advocacy starts with knowledge. Learn everything you can to be well informed about your cause.

- Find other groups/people that advocate for the same things you do. Do an online search for advocacy message boards or meet groups that have the same passion as you. Having a support system is essential for an advocate.

- Get your information out there, write letters to the newspaper, Congressmen and organizations in your area to help support your cause. Both the websites for the U.S. House of Representatives and the National Write Your Congressman have ways to write in and have your voice heard.
Contact Information

Ohio Empowerment Coalition

www.ohioempowerment.org

614.310.8054

Jack Cameron - jcameron@ohioempowerment.org

Jody Morgan - jmorgan@ohioempowerment.org