

Recovery Support Specialists, Peer Delivered Services (RSSs)

~ General Information about Certification Exam and Recovery University ~

In 2009, DMHAS awarded Advocacy Unlimited a grant to develop a training course, Recovery University, and a Certification Exam to certify persons with psychiatric disabilities and co-occurring disorders to provide peer support as Recovery Support Specialists, Peer Delivered Services (RSSs).

Possible Employment Opportunities for Recovery Support Specialists: There are two new Medicaid initiatives that will offer employment opportunities for people who become certified RSS workers. Initially, only a few RSS jobs will be needed for these Medicaid funded services, but we expect this may increase over time. These initiatives include:

- **Mental Health Waiver (Also called the WISE¹ Program)** – this DMHAS-operated program is designed to help divert and discharge people with serious mental illness from nursing homes. The initiative will need RSS staff to work in three (3) types of programs. The first two program types involve a team approach to supporting people in recovery -- these are Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, and Community Support Program (CSP) teams. RSS staff would work along side other team members.

The third type of care that will require RSS workers in the WISE Program is called “Peer Support.” Peer Support will be provided as a “step-down” after a person is discharged from an ACT or CSP team. In each of these three (3) programs (i.e., ACT, CSP and Peer Support), RSS workers would receive supervision from a licensed clinician.

- **Money Follows the Person (MFP)** – this Medicaid program is operated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and is also designed to help discharge people with mental illness from nursing homes. MFP will pay for the same types of services provided by RSS workers as the WISE Program.

Both WISE and MFP cover services provided in the participant's home or in other community settings.

Recovery Support Specialists, Peer Delivered Services: RSS is a position that acknowledges the importance of peer support to recovery. Initially, RSSs will work as a member of a treatment team employed by an accredited provider of services to persons moving from nursing homes into independent living. Eventually, RSS services may be provided on a stand-alone basis.

It is required that all RSSs “have experienced a significant behavioral health condition to the extent that it interfered with one or more major life functions and required treatment for at least one year.”

¹ WISE an acronym for “Working for Integration, Support and Empowerment.”

Certification Exam: All applicants for employment as an RSS must pass a new Certification Exam developed and administered by Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.

Our first certification exam will be September 12, 2009 at 11am at CVH, Page Hall, in room 217. We are currently scheduling three other locations, on the same date and time, to hold the certification test.

Applicants for employment will also need to meet any other requirements established by Medicaid and/or individual employers, and certification is not a guarantee of employment. Passing the Certification Exam is not a guarantee of employment.

Recovery University: Recovery University is a free ten week, 60-hour training course created and taught by AU to prepare peers for the Certification Exam. AU will offer at least two different sessions of Recovery University.

The first one will begin on June 6, 2009 and run for ten weeks. The classes will be from 11a to 3pm in a location that will be determined. The first class is June 6, 2009 and the last class is August 29, 2009.

“Testing Out:” Peers with training and work experience may apply to AU for permission to take the Certification Exam without attending Recovery University. Applicants who do not pass the Exam may choose to apply for the next session of Recovery University.

Please view the Testing Out criteria and submit three letters of reference with your other documentation to be considered for certification without taking the RSS Exam.

We will offer refresher training days on August 24, 2009 and on September 2, 2009 to help prepare individuals that are applying to “test out” and would like to prepare for the certification test. We will hold these two classes at CVH, Page Hall, in room 217. We are currently scheduling two other classes on September 9th and 10th, in other locations.

Certification Exam Competency Areas:

1. Effective, Empathetic Communication Skills
2. Legal and Ethical Practice, Boundaries, Client Rights
3. Introduction to Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Co-Occurring Disorders
4. Principles of Psychiatric Rehabilitation
5. Medicaid Mental Health Waiver/Money Follows the Person
6. Using Your Recovery Story, Role of Peer Supports on Teams, Recovery Culture
7. Role Challenges, Conflict Resolution, Self Care
8. Recovery Planning and Documentation
9. Entitlements and Benefits Management
10. Cultural Awareness

