

**To: NC PSS Workgroup**

**From: Peer Justice Initiative (PJI)**

**Re: NC Forensic Peer Support Credentialing**

**Date: 4/6/21**

Dear Members of the NCPSS Workgroup,

Thank you for reviewing this request and progress update on efforts from the Peer Justice Initiative to design a specialty credential with associated training, oversight, code of ethics, and qualifications for NC Forensic Peer Support Specialists.

As a large group of NC PSS with lived experience in prison re-entry, along with allies, have worked together for a year and a half to research, assimilate, evaluate and design a credential that is values based, demonstrates high standards and has stringent quality assurance measures to ensure the role of Forensic Peer Support maintains integrity. As you know, there are many barriers in place for formerly incarcerated Peer Support Specialists to obtain meaningful employment, have the accessibility to serve people in federal and state prisons and jails, and build trust and credibility within the Criminal Justice System and Behavioral Health System. PJI recognizes that the “stakes are high” and one misstep, from an improperly trained or supervised FPS could be the demise of this role for many years to come.

**Peer Justice Initiative**

The Peer Justice Initiative (PJI) Coalition is comprised of NC CPSS that have experience with the criminal and/or juvenile justice systems that are committed to advancing the intentional and authentic use of forensically trained and credentialed PSS throughout all “intercepts” of the Sequential Intercept Model of (criminal) justice systems. PJI is also comprised of allies that work within the Criminal Justice System and/or family members of currently or formerly incarcerated individuals. Currently, PJI has 160 members that span all regions, sexual orientations, races, ages, ethnicities and gender identifies throughout NC. A “core group” has been selected by PJI to represent the Coalition’s interests and decisions. PJI believes very strongly in “Nothing About Us, Without Us” and that reformation efforts around diversion, incarceration and re-entry must be led by people that are directly impacted by these issues. This is inclusive of the establishment of the Forensic Peer Support role and credential in NC. Lastly, PJI is inclusive of any individual, with or without forensic lived experience, to participate. Monthly open access virtual meetings are held and specialty meetings for specific topics or decisions are scheduled as needed.

**PJI has been organized for several purposes:**

1) Elevate the voices and expertise of CPSS that have been directly involved in criminal and juvenile justice systems,

2) Advance awareness, credibility and career ladders for CPSS that have previous “justice” system involvement,

3) Create training and credentialing for Forensic Peer Support in NC,

4) Utilize the wisdom of formerly incarcerated and returning citizens to impact policy and reform efforts,

5) Establish an inventory of existing NC programs, initiatives, jails, prisons, and courts that currently utilize NCCPSS with previous justice involvement,

6) Create funding streams and increase the number of initiatives in NC focused on the use of forensic peer support for pre-arrest, pre-booking, pre-trial, pre-sentencing, post arrest/booking/sentencing, re-entry, specialty wellness/recovery courts, etc.

**Forensic Peer Support Credentialing**

***“Forensic Peer Support Specialists use their own lived experiences of justice involvement and mental health and/or substance use recovery to support others, inspire hope, and promote wellness within all intercepts of the (criminal) justice system.”* (Peer Justice Initiative, 2020)**

As indicated by PJI’s membership, NC CPSS’s with lived (criminal) justice experience are currently working in environments throughout the state, as Peer Support Specialists, in Wellness and Recovery Courts, Felony Diversion, MAT within jails, facilitating classes, providing support in jails and prisons, and supporting re-entry while incarcerated and upon release. NC CPSS with this lived experience work with Stepping Up Initiatives, Criminal Justice Services, local, statewide and national Re-Entry Councils, FIT programs, returning citizen organizations, housing, and are actively engaged in policy work such as “Ban the Box.”

Other states, such as Texas, Pennsylvania and Georgia, to name a few, have robust Forensic Peer Support initiatives funding and related policies. SAMHSA has recognized Forensic Peer Support, using the Pennsylvania curricula, as a national credential. In NC, the workforce of CPSS with lived criminal justice experience represents a passionate, skilled and committed perspective that must be valued, recognized and utilized for reform, prevention and re-entry efforts.

Among the priority areas of PJI is to establish a NC Forensic Peer Support credential. A national FPS training, developed by the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Association (PMHCA), Drexel University, PA Mental Health and Justice Center of Excellence, and PA Department of Corrections, was funded and endorsed by SAMHSA. This resulted in a 3-day training and national FPS credential. Each state develops their own requirements for a state recognized credential and PVNC and PJI are intending to guide the development of the credentialing requirements for NC.

**PJI Progress**

Peer Justice Initiative has made much progress since its inception. It has had two groups of 40 PSS with lived felony and prison experience trained utilizing the PA/Drexel curricula. The group of 40 spans the geography of NC, from the coast to the mountains, and is a diverse representation relative to age, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. All FPS trained students are also in recovery from mental health and/or substance use disorders and are currently employed within the criminal justice system in at least one of the five interceptions. They also represent a group that is actively involved in criminal justice reform efforts, local committee representation, and activism.

PJI has made the following decisions regarding FPS qualifications:

Eligibility Requirements for NC FPS:

1. A person who:
2. Identifies as being in mental health recovery (SUD is included); AND
3. Has lived criminal justice experience (themselves, not as a family member) in ALL FIVE INTERCEPTS; AND
4. Has been a NCCPSS for at least TWO YEARS; AND
5. Has TWO YEARS experiences in CJS as a volunteer or paid supporter; AND
6. Has at least THREE YEARS post-release (can be continuing on probation or parole); AND
7. Has a REASONABLE DEGREE OF STABILITY

Training opportunities are offered through a competitive application process that includes the following:

1. Application
2. Two Character References
3. Interview

All applicants are reviewed by the credentialing committee with consideration given to individuals with unique stories and circumstances. A great emphasis is placed on the requirement that an FPS has lived experience in BOTH MH/SUD and all five interceptions. Demonstrated character and stability post re-entry is also among the criteria to be accepted into the training.

**Forensic Peer Support Training**

*Numerous curricula and various states were consulted with by PJI to make an informed decision about whether an existing curriculum would meet NC’s needs, or whether a NC specific curriculum should be established. The longest standing FPS curricula was developed by the PMHCO in partnership with Drexel University. It is the curricula that most states have used and/or expanded upon to establish a training in their own state. This curriculum is recognized and endorsed by SAMHSA. For these reasons, PJI decided to spend a year going through this training to determine if it is sufficient for a NC Credential. In conjunction with NC approved PS training, this curriculum does meet the needs of FPS in NC. However, additional on-going professional development courses may be added by PJI.*

**Training Description:**

This training is a comprehensive and realistic approach to facilitate peer support and advocacy within the criminal justice system. Using a dialogue-driven process, participants are given opportunities to develop their voice and connect with others. Grounded in the recovery philosophy, peer support principles and guided exercises using the Sequential Intercept Model this training is designed to focus participants on the system and culture of criminal involvement. The mutual learning process uses lived experiences to identifying real-life hurdles as a tool to develop “doable” action steps to overcome them.

**Learning Objectives:**

Be the end of this training participants will be able to:

* Define the role of peer support within the criminal justice system
* Discuss the critical skills required for effective peer support within the criminal justice
* Demonstrate use of the Sequential Intercept approach in support of justice involved individuals
* Identify the resources needed to effectively engage and navigate the criminal justice system
* Practice developing plans to address the challenges and impact of the culture of incarceration on behavior

The 3-day FPS training teaches:

1. The disparity and over representation of people who have mental health challenges who are CJ (criminal justice) involved
2. The 11 steps of the criminal justice process
3. The Sequential intercept model (The 5 points of the criminal justice process where people can be intercepted for diversion programs and how the deeper into the system the person gets the less chance for diversion)
4. How to partner with courts, judges, DA’s, other stakeholders etc. to create diversionary programs
5. How to best serve on CJABS (criminal justice advisory boards)
6. How to best use lived experience with the CJ system to support those with mental illness

**DAY ONE: FPS Foundations**

Ethics in Forensic PS and CJS

What and Why FPS and the Intersection between MH/SUD and CJS

Impact of CJ experience

Trauma Informed Lens

FPS and the Cross Systems Involvement

SIM

Homework

**DAY TWO: Penetrating the Intercepts**

SIM Workbook and Examining Each Intercept

Intercept 1: Law Enforcement, Emergency Services and First Responders

Intercept 2: Initial Detention and Initial Hearing

Intercept 3: Courts, Jails and Prisons

**DAY THREE: The Journey Continues**

Intercept 4: Community Re-Entry

Intercept 5: Corrections/Community Supports

Peer Support and the SIM: Brining it Together

**NC Training of Trainers:**

A training of trainer (ToT) will be provided in NC after the completion of the second FPS training. Among the ToT requirements is successful completion of the 3-day FPS training and NC trainers will be selected from participants in the two NC classes. A select group of Advanced Level Facilitators will then be selected to ensure in state capacity for sustainability and workforce development.

There are some very strict criteria for becoming a Forensic Peer Support Specialist in PA. (Each state can set their own requirements) Even stricter criteria for teaching it. *The credential is nationally recognized by SAMHSA.* PMHCA, OMHSAS and Drexel have created the fidelity for the required standards that each trainer must adhere to:

1. Minimum two Certified Trainers per class (must be at least one Advanced Level Facilitators with another trainer to provide the Train-the-Trainer Course).
2. Optimal class size 20, Max 25 participants per class (Very experiential training).
3. CPS or CRS certification is a prerequisite to attending training.
4. The FPS Curriculum (PMHCA, OMHSAS and Drexel University of Medicine) must be cited.
5. Evaluations Must be completed and turned in to PMHCA. (That is how PMHCA tracks the number of individuals receiving the certification).
6. To become an FPS trainer a CPS/CRS must have already received the FPS certificate from the three-day FPS training.
7. To become an Advanced Level Facilitator (ALF) the FPS Trainer must then co-facilitate a 3-day Train-the-Trainer class with another ALF.
8. All trainers are required to contact PMHCA about any scheduled trainings and provide copies of sign-in sheets and evaluations afterwards. We also like to advertise the trainings if possible.

**PJI’s Request**

PJI respectfully requests from the NC PSS Workgroup and NCDMHDDSAS endorsement for the process, decisions, curricula, ethics and standards that has been established by PJI that will designate its FPS training and process as the NC CFPS training and will recognize trainees as NC CFPS. PJI welcomes the opportunity to partner with the NC PSS Workgroup moving forward to ensure that the standards are upheld, and the two entities are working in concert for the mutually shared and beneficial vision of building a robust, effective FPS workforce in NC. Additionally, PJI welcomes representation from NC PSS Workgroup as a part of PJI’s efforts in further designing the credential as well as reform efforts required for FPS to employed in each intercept throughout NC.

Again, thank you for your support and we look forward to working together.

Peer Justice Initiative Core Team Members

Amanda Martin Jennifer Aviles

Charlyne Boyette Pamala Goodine

Earl Owens III Lauren Garvie

James Searcy Lisa Wentworth