

PEER MENTOR ESCORT TO CARE

PEER MENTOR ESCORT TO CARE is an individual level intervention designed to help current clients—women recently released from a correctional facility, including HIV+ women—to successfully navigate the community network of health and social services. It also provides temporary employment and job preparation to former clients who serve as peer mentors. The key characteristics of Peer Mentor Escort to Care are: the immediate connection established between the agency and clients upon their release; the training and support system offered to the peer mentors; and the trusting relationship that develops between the client and peer.

CURRENT ACTIVITY SETTING

Community-Based Service Organization for Women with Criminal Justice Histories, Reentry Services

- ✓ Directly links the client to medical care
- ✓ Gets the client in a conversation about starting medical care
- Brings the agency closer to where HIV+ people are so that the conversation can begin

I. DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ To ensure that clients don't relapse or disengage from health and social services during the critical time after release
- ▶ To help clients make healthy life choices
- ▶ To provide greater support of clients' case management goals
- ▶ To help formerly incarcerated women obtain employment and gain work experience as peer mentors in a supportive environment

POPULATION SERVED

- ▶ Women with criminal justice involvement

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Formerly incarcerated women gain work experience by supporting other women who have been recently discharged from a correctional facility as escorts to and from appointments for medical and social services.



QUICK NOTES:

Development / First steps

- ▶▶ The agency identifies funding sources and a program manager for Peer Mentor Escort to Care.
- ▶▶ The program manager develops a nine-month-long training institute, which has three aims:
 - To provide peer mentors with a working knowledge of community resources and the health and social issues faced by agency clients
 - To provide support and professional development to former agency clients
 - To staff a peer escort service for newly released clients that will help them engage in health and social services within the community.
- ▶▶ The program manager prepares a job description for the peer mentor positions and interviews applicants.
- ▶▶ Selected applicants are offered a nine-month paid position with a 20 - 30 hour work week.
- ▶▶ The program manager, on an ongoing basis, interviews interested agency clients, some of whom apply after using the Peer Mentor Escort to Care themselves.

The Training of Peer Mentors

First Two Weeks: Orientation

- ▶▶ The curriculum covers rule establishment and administrative expectations, such as filling out timesheets properly, appropriate dress code, and professional behavior.
- ▶▶ A supervisory relationship between peer mentors and the manager is established.
- ▶▶ The program manager introduces peers to the agency’s services and discusses the local network of social service agencies.
- ▶▶ Peer mentors then visit agencies (e.g., shelters, vocational services, and housing and family programs) to familiarize themselves with the resources available to clients.
- ▶▶ At the end of orientation, peer mentors are introduced to a clinical consultant who will meet with them on a weekly basis. Independent and group supervision meetings are established.

Beyond Orientation: Support Training and Supervision for Peer Mentors

- ▶▶ Aided by the program manager, peers select and enroll in brief training courses that appeal to their strengths and interests and may help them reach their program goals. The trainings are offered by the agency and other local service providers. Course topics may include computer literacy, case management, harm reduction, HIV confidentiality, and domestic violence.
- ▶▶ The agency also trains the peers to use the agency-wide database in which staff logs the services provided to clients.
- ▶▶ Administrative supervision of peers by the program manager is ongoing and includes medical advocacy training, conflict resolution and negotiation, “Medical 101,” (a course specific to HIV+ women’s health) and the peer’s role as an advocate.
- ▶▶ Problem solving in the workplace is also covered.
- ▶▶ Clinical supervision occurs weekly with the clinical consultant. The sessions include mental health training, problem-solving “on the job” difficulties, and discussions about “triggers,” transference, and counter-transference.

Escort Training

- ▶▶ Peer mentors begin to escort clients after completing the two-week orientation. The types of escorts vary and may require different skills. Peer mentors receive orientations to each new type of escort by “shadowing,” or accompanying, another peer mentor who is experienced in that kind of escort on assignment.
- ▶▶ After completing the escort, the newly oriented peer mentor returns to the agency to discuss the experience with the program manager. Together, they determine whether or not the peer mentor is ready to conduct an escort alone.

Peer Mentor – Client Escort Scenario

- ▶▶ An agency staff member fills out an official request form and gives it to the program manager. The request documents where the client is going and the time of the appointment(s).
- ▶▶ The program manager reviews the request, determines the appropriate number of peers for the appointment (some may need two if the location or time of the appointment is unsafe for solitary women), and delegates the assignment. Escort assignments

include meeting clients when they are released from a correctional facility, supporting clients while they obtain medical benefits or go to appointments with parole/probation officers, medical providers, apartment viewings, family court for family visitation, or the Department of Motor Vehicles to obtain photo identification.

- ▶▶ The peer mentor learns more about the client's situation (release date, medical history, housing, etc.) from the staff member who made the request.
- ▶▶ The peer mentor has a "case conference" with the program manager to assess what will be needed for the escort. When necessary, transportation and lunch money are provided for the peer and client.
- ▶▶ After the case conference, the peer sets up a time and location to meet the client.
- ▶▶ Throughout the escort, the peer demonstrates an attitude of positive encouragement and may serve as an advocate for the client in certain situations (helping, for example, to facilitate communication with clinicians and service providers).
- ▶▶ After completing the assignment, the peer mentor writes "progress notes" from the escort in the agency's database. The client's case manager places a copy of these notes in the client's confidential file.
- ▶▶ The peer reports to the program manager on the dynamics of the escort: what went smoothly, what was challenging, etc.
- ▶▶ The peer may discuss certain escort situations with the clinical supervisor during their weekly meeting.

Peer Mentor Professional Development

- ▶▶ While peers are gaining skills as mentors, the case manager provides professional development counseling for job placement. This counseling includes:
 - Discussing the peer's transition out of the program at the end of nine months
 - Drafting a resume and set of cover letters that document the skills and experience acquired through the peer mentor training
 - Encouraging the peer to review job postings, attend job interviews, and select appropriate job attire
- ▶▶ As peers near the end of their nine-month training, their clinical support is increased to help prevent behavior-related relapses.
- ▶▶ Each peer participates in an exit interview with the manager before leaving.

PROMOTION OF ACTIVITY

- ▶▶ Incarcerated clients find out about the service from their discharge planner.
- ▶▶ Post-release clients learn of the service from their case manager or counselor.
- ▶▶ The agency offers a weekly "new client orientation session" for recently released clients.
- ▶▶ Word of mouth from other clients

II. LOGISTICS

STAFF REQUIRED

- ▶▶ A director of reentry services is responsible for securing funding and contracting management.
- ▶▶ A program manager of peer mentor services administers support and supervision to the program, recruits peers, and serves as the ongoing professional development coordinator.
- ▶▶ Peer mentors

TRAINING & SKILLS

- ▶▶ Agency staff must have supervisory experience, strong communication skills, and knowledge of correctional systems and community resources. All involved staff must be flexible and patient.
- ▶▶ Peer mentors must have criminal justice histories. They also need to demonstrate the requisite stability to fulfill the

requirements of employment and an interest in doing social service work. The mentors must complete a two-week orientation and participate in ongoing training.

PLACE OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ The professional development takes place at the agency, where the peer mentors have access to workstations and computers.
- ▶ The escort routes and destinations are established and determined by individual client needs.

FREQUENCY OF ACTIVITY

- ▶ Each peer mentor works Monday - Friday, 20 - 30 hours a week.
- ▶ The mentors attend weekly and bi-weekly supervision meetings.
- ▶ Agency clients request escorts about ten times in their first post-release month, then once a week, on average, for nine - 12 months.

OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS

Clinical consultant

SUPPORT SERVICES

Training resources provided by the community

CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- ▶ Well-structured agency support system for peer mentors
- ▶ High-functioning agency administrative system
- ▶ Approval from funding sources
- ▶ Existence of relevant training resources in the community that the mentors can use

III. STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES

STRENGTHS

- ▶ The client places high value on the relationship with the peer mentors.
- ▶ The mentors support clients in a way that other direct service staff cannot.
- ▶ Clients feel supported and want to give support back.
- ▶ Clients respond well to the sensitivity and understanding of the peers.
- ▶ Peer mentors are provided with a unique experience in job readiness.

WEAKNESSES

- ▶ There is high mentor turnover due to new employment, the nine month position cycle, and burnout.
- ▶ Training the mentors while they do their job is difficult for the agency to manage.
- ▶ Since the peer mentors are learning on the job, they may occasionally be unprofessional or allow a client to miss an appointment.
- ▶ Agency staff may afford the peer mentors graces that aren't common in the workplace, which may leave some with unrealistic expectations.

DIFFICULTIES FOR CLIENTS

- ▶ The peer mentors often have limited formal education experience.
- ▶ Personal and professional boundaries are sometimes not clearly established between the peer mentor and the client.

DIFFICULTIES FOR STAFF

- ▶ Working with peer mentors requires the staff to make difficult decisions in order to strike a balance between treating them as clients (who need a great deal of support) and as employees (who are held to certain expectations).
- ▶ It is difficult to draw clear, professional boundaries between the agency and peer mentors during the professional development process.
- ▶ There is high turnover of peer mentors.

OBSTACLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Insufficient funding for the director, manager, and consultant positions

ACTIVITY NOT SUITED FOR

N/A

IV. OUTCOMES

EVALUATION

- ▶ The agency conducts quarterly client-satisfaction surveys and program evaluations and solicits feedback through client advisory boards.
- ▶ Case manager collects feedback from peer mentors on each client case.
- ▶ The case manager logs requests for service by the clients.
- ▶ The peer mentors complete progress notes following each escort.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Clients who use peer escorts have increased their use of services at the agency and within the broader community more than clients who do not use peer escorts.
- ▶ Client feedback suggests that the peer mentor program is integral to their success in navigating the health care system.
- ▶ Client evaluations have shown that, after receiving peer mentor services, clients are better connected to primary medical care and gynecological care, less reliant on emergency room care, and better prepared to self-advocate during medical appointments.
- ▶ Both clients and peers report an increase in clients' capacity to stay at appointment sites when they are scared, tired, and want to leave.
- ▶ There is an increase in client requests for the service.
- ▶ There is an increase in the number of current, full-time staff members at the agency who are former peer mentors.

UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- ▶ Currently incarcerated individuals who have not had previous contact with the agency are increasingly requesting peer mentor escorts when they are discharged.
- ▶ Clients benefit from seeing someone who had been incarcerated holding a successful position as their peer mentor.

“CONNECTING TO CARE” ELEMENTS OF ACTIVITY

- ▶▶ The peer mentor physically brings the client to care during a critical time in the client’s transition back into the community.
- ▶▶ The advocacy that the mentor provides helps to facilitate the client’s transition from a correctional facility to a healthier life in the community.
- ▶▶ Clients benefit from seeing someone who, like themselves, has been incarcerated and is now in a successful position as their peer mentor.
- ▶▶ The peer mentor, who is trained in medical advocacy, knows what questions to ask or how to coach the client to ask of medical providers.
- ▶▶ The connection with the peer mentor occurs before the client can return to a potentially unhealthy environment.
- ▶▶ Having a peer mentor with experience navigating the system of social service and health care and the ability to prepare the client for what to expect during appointments is really helpful in alleviating fears of the client.
- ▶▶ Clients begin to “see themselves in the peer mentor.” The peer mentor is someone who “has done it and is successful.”

KEEP IN MIND...

- ▶▶ The more you support the peer mentors, the better the delivery of services to the clients.
- ▶▶ Be clear in your expectations of the peer mentors.
- ▶▶ Remember that the quality of the mentors depends on the quality of the supervision they receive.
- ▶▶ Be client-centered when developing the peer mentor training curriculum.
- ▶▶ Assume nothing!