



A GUIDE FOR STATE AND COUNTY SYSTEMS

The Lived-Experience Workforce

What these roles share, and how state and county systems can build on it

Share+Solve • shareandsolve.app

01

One workforce, many names

Across behavioral health, juvenile justice, and community health, a growing set of jobs hires people for what they have lived through. Youth and family peer supporters, recovery coaches, credible messengers, and community health workers go by different titles and sit in different systems.

Each role grew up on its own, so each is often funded, credentialed, and supervised on its own. That can mean duplicated effort, thin supervision, and young people who start over with a stranger every time they cross from one system to another.

Different titles. The same kind of trust.



The roles at a glance

Titles and definitions vary by state and program. These are the roles this guide covers, described in the words of the agencies that define them where possible.

Youth peer supporter

A young adult with lived experience of behavioral health challenges who supports young people going through something similar.¹

Family peer supporter

A parent or caregiver who has navigated services for a child or family member with behavioral health challenges, and now supports other families.¹

Recovery coach / peer recovery supporter

A person in recovery from a mental health or substance use disorder who supports others in theirs. In Ohio, recovery coaches fall under the adult peer certification, which uses one title for peer specialists, recovery coaches, and peer supporters.¹ Other states may have a separate recovery coach credential.

Credible messenger

A mentor with “similar life experiences and backgrounds” to the young people served, usually youth involved with the justice system.²

Community health worker

A “trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served,” who connects people to health and social services.³

¹ Ohio Department of Behavioral Health, Peer Supporters (certification pages). dbh.ohio.gov/community-partners/peer-supporters

² Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Credible Messenger and Lived Experience Mentoring Programs, Evidence Review, November 2024. ojjdp.ojp.gov

³ American Public Health Association, Community Health Workers Section. apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers



What they share

The details differ. The core of the work doesn't.



Lived experience as the qualification

Each role hires for what a person has been through, not only what they have studied. For community health workers, that usually means shared community experience rather than a behavioral health history.



Work built on relationships

The service is the relationship: showing up, following through, and staying connected over time.



Trust where systems struggle

They reach people who have learned not to trust institutions, because they come from the same places and have walked similar paths.



The same risks

Burnout, and roles that drift toward whatever the system needs that day. In a national study of peer recovery support specialists, satisfaction with supervisor and organizational support was linked to lower burnout.¹

¹ Krueger, D., Zerden, L., Jensen, T., & Lombardi, B. (2026). Burnout and Job Satisfaction among U.S. Peer Recovery Support Specialists. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 62(2), 208–218. doi.org/10.1007/s10597-025-01515-3



Where they differ: people and places

The biggest differences are who each role serves and where the work happens.

ROLE	WHO THEY SERVE	WHERE THEY USUALLY WORK
Youth peer supporter	Young people with behavioral health challenges	Behavioral health agencies, youth-serving programs, schools
Family peer supporter	Parents and caregivers of children and youth with behavioral health challenges	Treatment teams, family-run organizations
Recovery coach	Adults in recovery from mental health or substance use disorders	Treatment and recovery programs, community settings
Credible messenger	Young people involved with, or at risk of involvement with, the justice system	Community organizations working alongside juvenile justice agencies
Community health worker	Community members facing barriers to health and social services	Clinics, health systems, public health, community organizations

Settings are typical, not fixed. Your state or county may place these roles elsewhere.

Where they differ: credentials and funding

Here the differences are sharpest, and they vary most by state. Ohio is shown as one example.

ROLE	HOW IT'S CREDENTIALIAED (OHIO EXAMPLE)	COMMON FUNDING
Youth, family, and adult peer supporters	State certification: Certified Youth Peer Supporter, Certified Family Peer Supporter, and Certified Peer Recovery Supporter, from the Department of Behavioral Health. ¹	Medicaid, where the state covers it. In Ohio, behavioral health peer support is a Medicaid service delivered by certified peer supporters. ² Grants.
Credible messenger	Credentialing varies; many programs rely on their own training rather than a state credential.	Justice and violence-prevention grants, such as federal juvenile justice mentoring grants and local government grants to community organizations. ³
Community health worker	State certificate from the Ohio Board of Nursing. ⁴	Varies. Medicare pays for some CHW services under practitioner supervision. ⁵ Medicaid coverage depends on the state.

Rules vary by state and change over time. In Ohio, recovery coaches fall under the adult peer certification; other states may have a separate recovery coach credential.

¹ Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15.1 (2022). ² Ohio Administrative Code 5160-27-14 (2024). ⁴ Ohio Revised Code 4723.82. All at codes.ohio.gov
³ OJJDP, Mentoring program page, FY 2024 awards, ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/mentoring; D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, Credible Messenger Initiative grant awards (2016), dysr.dc.gov
⁵ CMS, Calendar Year 2024 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Final Rule fact sheet (Community Health Integration services), cms.gov

Using the overlap: shared supervision and infrastructure

Supervision is where these roles most often fall short, and where sharing helps most.

1 Common supervision standards

Set expectations that apply across roles: regular scheduled supervision, reflective support, and a clear path for safety concerns at any hour.

2 Supervisors who understand lived-experience work

Look for supervisors who know how these roles differ from clinical work. Some states set specific qualifications.

3 Shared tools and documentation

One secure, organization-provided channel instead of personal phones, and one approach to contact records, check-ins, and reporting. Supervisors can see caseloads, check-ins, and flagged concerns, and records stay with the program when staff move on.

4 Shared wellness supports

The emotional weight of this work is similar across roles. Peer consultation groups and wellness time can be built once and shared.

OHIO EXAMPLE

Ohio requires certified peer supporters to be supervised by someone with two years of peer services experience plus required training, or by a licensed clinician who completes specified training.¹ Community health workers work under different rules: health-related activities happen under the supervision of a health professional.²

¹ Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15.1. codes.ohio.gov

² Ohio Revised Code 4723.82. codes.ohio.gov

Using the overlap: recruitment and career pathways

People with lived experience often find this work through word of mouth, one role at a time. A system can do better.

1 Recruit together

Coordinate outreach across agencies, so a candidate who isn't the right fit for one role hears about the others.

2 Map the training

Build a simple crosswalk showing which trainings count toward which credentials in your state, and where they overlap.

3 Build ladders

Create visible steps from entry roles into senior peer, lead, and supervisor positions that don't require leaving lived-experience work.

4 Pay attention to pay

Compare pay and hours across similar roles. Large gaps push people toward whichever role pays best, not whichever fits best.

A person can move between roles, but each move means meeting that role's own requirements. Experience in one role doesn't transfer a credential for another.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL)

For example, a county might hold one hiring event for youth peer supporters, family peer supporters, and credible messenger programs. Candidates could learn about each role, and what it requires, in a single visit, and agencies could refer people to one another.

Using the overlap: braided funding

Few lived-experience programs run on a single funding source. Braiding lets several sources support one program while each stays accountable for its own share.

Braiding

Braiding occurs when “multiple funding streams separately and simultaneously provide specific services.”¹ Each source is tracked on its own.

Blending

Blending occurs when “dollars from multiple funding streams combine to create a single ‘pot’ of commingled dollars.”¹ It works only where each source allows it.

Before you braid

- Know what each source allows, who can deliver it, and what it requires you to document.
- Track time and activity by funding source from day one, not at reporting time.
- Keep role and credential clear, so each service is delivered by someone that source allows.
- Coordinate across agencies before braiding, since braiding “may require interagency coordination and collaboration.”¹

Funding and billing rules vary by state and by funder. This page is general information, not billing or legal advice.



Ready to plan how your program is funded? Blueprints, step-by-step toolkits for program leaders, are at shareandsolve.app/#blueprints.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, Blending, Braiding, and Sequencing. dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/bbs

Using the overlap: partnerships across systems

Young people rarely stay in one system. A young person leaving a juvenile court program may need behavioral health support next, and too often that means starting over with a stranger.

Partnerships can let a trusted relationship carry across the handoff.

1 Warm handoffs

The worker a young person already trusts introduces the next one, in person when possible, before the first one steps back.

2 Referral agreements

Written agreements between agencies spell out who refers, who follows up, and how quickly.

3 Consent-based information sharing

The young person, and a parent or guardian where required, agree to what is shared and with whom. Privacy rules vary by system and state.

4 Joint training and case reviews

Staff from different systems train together and review shared cases, so each understands the other's role.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS

A federal evidence review found that mentoring programs using a credible messenger strategy “can have meaningful potential for reducing recidivism and adverse outcomes in youth.”¹

¹ OJJDP, Credible Messenger and Lived Experience Mentoring Programs, Evidence Review, November 2024.
ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/credible-messenger-and-lived-experience-mentoring-programs-evidence-review

What not to blur

Sharing infrastructure is not the same as treating these jobs as interchangeable. Each role keeps its own scope, credential, and supervision rules.

Signs the lines are blurring

- One role regularly covers another's work because it's short-staffed.
- Services are billed or reported under a role whose credential the worker doesn't hold.
- Lived-experience staff are asked to do clinical tasks outside their scope.
- Job descriptions are copied from one role to another with a new title.
- Supervisors oversee a role without knowing its requirements.

Why it matters

Blurred roles put workers in positions they aren't trained or credentialed for, create billing and compliance risk, and weaken the very thing that makes each role work: a clear, honest relationship with the people served.

EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL)

For example, a county might find that a short-staffed program has asked its youth peer supporters to take on family peer support. Rather than let that continue, the county could help the program recruit family peer supporters or partner with an agency that employs them, so each role stays within its own scope.

Questions for your system

Use these to start a conversation across agencies. The more you can answer yes, the more your system is building on the overlap.

-
- ☐ Do you know how many people work in each lived-experience role in your state or county, and where?
 -
 - ☐ Do supervisors of these roles meet your state's requirements, and have training specific to lived-experience work?
 -
 - ☐ Is there a shared approach to documentation and reporting across agencies that fund these roles?
 -
 - ☐ Can a candidate learn about all related roles and credentials in one place?
 -
 - ☐ Is there a career path into senior and supervisory roles that doesn't require leaving lived-experience work?
 -
 - ☐ When funding is braided, is each source tracked separately and matched to allowed services?
 -
 - ☐ When a young person moves between systems, is there a warm handoff and a written referral agreement?
 -
 - ☐ Do job descriptions, billing, and supervision keep each role's scope and credential distinct?
 -

ABOUT

Share+Solve and Peer Bridge

Share+Solve and Peer Bridge help organizations run their own youth peer support programs. They don't replace your peer supporters, your training, or your program. They give the work you already do a safe, supervised home.

Built for youth peer support, and designed to fit other supervised, lived-experience roles.

Share+Solve

Where peers and young people connect: messaging, check-ins, goals, and meet-ups, with a one-tap 988 call button on the home screen.

Peer Bridge

Where supervisors see the whole program: caseloads, check-ins, escalations, and program-level reporting.

Private conversations between peers and young people stay between them. Your organization controls its program data, and deletion requests are handled through the platform.

Built by John Dellick, MBA, a nationally recognized peer support professional with nearly a decade in youth peer support and behavioral health.



shareandsolve.app

© 2026 JTD Company Ltd. All rights reserved. You're welcome to share this resource in its complete, unaltered form.

This resource is for general information and is not legal advice. Talk with your organization's counsel about your specific obligations.