



Via Hope Peer Specialist Readiness for Training Guide

Thank you for your interest in attending Via Hope's Certified Peer Specialist training. This note is intended to familiarize you with the field of peer support, the peer specialist training and certification process, and things to consider before you make the decision to apply for this training. Please review this information so that you make an informed decision about submitting an application.

What are Peer Support and Peer Support Services?

One definition of peer support is the act of people who have had similar experiences with mental health challenges giving each other encouragement, hope, assistance, guidance, and understanding that aids in recovery. It can be done anytime or anywhere when two or more peers are in a mutual, supportive relationship.

Peer support services are programs, discussions, events, groups, etc. within the mental health system that are led by people in recovery and based on the philosophy of peer support. They typically take place within the structure of an agency or organization and are provided as a service by a trained peer specialist.

Who are Certified Peer Specialists?

A Via Hope Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) is an individual in recovery who has been trained to effectively use his/her recovery story to help other individuals with their recovery. A CPS has progressed in his/her own recovery and has taken training and passed a certification exam demonstrating that she or he has mastered a set of competencies related to peer support. Certified Peer Specialists may work in any organizational setting – public or private mental health, peer-run organizations, criminal justice, education, juvenile corrections, or veterans services for example – although the majority of the CPSs trained in Texas work for either community mental health centers or state hospitals.

Via Hope Peer Specialist Training and Certification

Via Hope provides a training and certification program for peer specialists. The Via Hope Peer Specialist Training requires 40 hours over five days, and covers topics such as the Role of Peer Support in Recovery, Effective Listening, Ethics, and Using Your Recovery Story as a Recovery Tool. The curriculum is structured to train Texas peer specialists in skills and content universal to peer support issues as well as to provide an understanding of the resources and systems unique to our state.

Via Hope invests in people and organizations who want to re-envision mental health, through workforce development, community building, system transformation, and leadership development.



The Via Hope CPS training program is specifically designed for those who want to work or volunteer in this field. The application process for peer specialist training includes a written application and two letters of reference. The letters of reference should be from individuals that can speak to your ability to effectively share your experience in recovery with others, relate to people, and partner with colleagues. The application process is designed to determine whether the applicant has substantial experience with his or her own recovery and is a suitable candidate for a position as a peer specialist; and as such will benefit from the training. Working as a certified peer specialist is a very rewarding position, but like any direct support position it can also be somewhat stressful and is not for everyone.

Demand for the Basic Peer Specialist Certification Training typically exceeds our capacity, so the program uses a priority system to determine who is selected. Successful applicants will generally have worked as a peer specialist (in a paid or volunteer capacity) for at least a few months prior to applying for the Certification training.

Considerations about the Training

Here are some points to consider as you make your decision about attending this training:

- You must attend the full six days of training. If you miss four class hours or more for any reason, you will have to retake the entire class.
- Training is highly interactive and requires activities that involve working in small groups, role playing, and public readings.
- You will be expected to participate in discussions and role play exercises using elements of your own recovery story. You need to be comfortable sharing your recovery story with others. You will also be listening to the recovery stories of others.
- If you do not live in the location of the training, you will be out of town for six days and nights.
- The course is designed to include frequent, short breaks, but is very intensive and requires considerable energy to stay focused and alert.

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Cost of Training: \$650.00

The training package includes the trainers, all training materials and lunch during each day's training. Dinner is not provided. It is also the responsibility of training participants to arrange travel to and from the city where the training is held. Via Hope tries to ensure that finances are not a barrier to anyone participating in the training. The registration represents only one half of the cost of the training. Most people attending the training have an employer who can cover the registration and other expenses. If you are currently employed, please make sure your employer will provide the time away from work before applying. We are unable to compensate individuals for any lost wages due to taking time off from work.

The Testing and Certification Process

In addition to taking the training, an individual must pass a written exam to be certified. The exam is administered on the morning after the last day of training. Individuals are notified approximately three weeks after taking the exam whether they have passed the exam and are recognized by Via Hope as Certified Peer Specialists. Individuals who pass the exam are certified for a period of two years. To renew their certification, Via Hope Certified Peer Specialists are required to complete 20 hours of continuing education units (CEUs) every two years. Please refer to the Policy and Procedure Manual on our website for additional information about CEU requirements.

Next Steps

The Certified Peer Specialist application is posted on the Via Hope website during application periods for specific trainings. The next deadline date is included on the application. Please note that we do not accept late applications. If you have questions about the training, contact us at info@viahope.org.

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