



Helping Organizations Provide Peer Support to Parents with Mental Illness

Anne Valentine, Robert Walker, and Joanne Nicholson · August 2022

The National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities researched peer support programs for parents with mental illness. Peer support programs are programs where people help each other. The peer support programs the researchers studied were ones where parents with mental illness help other parents with mental illness. The researchers looked at what helps organizations to provide good peer support programs.

Background

Between 2008 and 2014 there were about 2.8 million people who reported that they were parents and also that they had a mental illness. We know peer support can be helpful for people with mental illness, even if they don't have children. People who are parents and also have a mental illness are likely to relate better to the experiences of people like them, people who are parents with mental illness. They understand what it is like to get services and balance a family in their recovery.

What They Did

The researchers interviewed twenty-two people. The people interviewed included:

- People working on mental health in the state government
- People from organizations that pay for mental health services
- Staff that focus on families
- Staff that had previously run peer support programs
- Peer support staff
- People with mental illness

The researchers asked what organizations need to support peer support staff.

What They Learned

Peer support programs were more successful when these four conditions were present:

1. The program has a clear purpose and peer support staff are included in the organization.



2. Peer support staff are fully included in the behavioral health team along with the medical professionals.



3. Organizations address stigma against people with mental illness. Stigma is when people are viewed in a negative way or treated differently.



4. Organizations make sure peer support staff are valued in the organization.







Reference

Valentine, A., Walker, R. & Nicholson, J. (2022). Key considerations in building the organizational capacity to implement peer supports for parents with mental illness, *Advances in Mental Health*, 20(1), 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2021.2012089>

How to Cite This Research Summary

National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities. (2022). Helping Organizations Provide Peer Support to Parents with Mental Illness. Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

Contact Us

-  heller.brandeis.edu/parents-with-disabilities
-  [@NatRCPD](https://twitter.com/NatRCPD)
-  facebook.com/nrcpd
-  centerforparents@brandeis.edu