



Strategies to Assist Parent Peer Support Implementation in the Wraparound Workforce

By Joe Anne Hust

How are Parent Peer Support Partners working in Wraparound different from traditional Parent Peer Support Partners? The universal qualification of “lived experience” is generally the same. The title may be the same, Parent Support Partner or Family/Parent Partner. They might also do many of the same things, the most important being providing parent peer support to ensure no parent has to go through their journey alone. The differences are not only that they work in a Wraparound environment, but how they provide peer support, and the specificity of the skill level involved.

A Parent Peer Support Partner is a parent who is raising or has raised a child with emotional or behavioral challenges and can articulate the understanding of their experience with another parent. Generally, a Parent Peer Support Partner is hired because of their lived experience. Parent Peer Support Partners are called by many names. The first word is generally parent, family, or peer. This is usually paired with: partner, support, specialist, advocate, or coordinator.

Traditional Parent Peer Support Partners provide peer-to-peer support to the parent, support the parent to advocate for themselves, and connect the parent to resources. They are usually employed by a family support/run organization and able to work independently with the parent because they are not tied to a specific program. Additionally, some traditional Parent Peer Support Partners provide direct service and support interventions to the parent and are able to bill Medicaid. Peer support happens separately but concurrent with other services. They could be employed by a family support/run organization or a mental health provider organization.

The role of the Parent Peer Support Partner working in Wraparound closely aligns with the values and qualifications of a traditional Parent Peer Support Partner and is taken to the next level. The Wraparound Parent Peer Support Partner supports the parent and the Wraparound process. This requires them to be knowledgeable in peer support skills and Wraparound implementation. They work one-on-one with the parent to provide parent peer support while collaborating closely with the care coordinator to ensure the process flows seamlessly with open communication. In some models, the roles are paired. The goal is for the parent to be able to maximize the services and supports provided through the Wraparound process to the best of their ability while supporting them toward self-efficacy. The Wraparound Parent Peer Support Partner could be employed by a family support/run organization, a provider organization, or a county or state. They work both independently with the parent and concurrently with the care coordinator.

NWIC's Model of Parent Peer Support

Parent Peer Support represents an important enhancement to the Wraparound model. At a national level, Parent Peer Support in the children's system is gaining more attention with the implementation of the National Federation of Families Certified Parent Support Provider process and several states are utilizing Medicaid waivers to include parent peer support as a billable service. As Wraparound has expanded, a number of projects have added parent peer support to their process but implementation of this model is widely varied. While many sing the praises of family partners in Wraparound, outcomes are still anecdotal. The challenge has been the lack of a specific model for the role of parent peer support in Wraparound.

Building from Implementation Science, The National Wraparound Implementation Center (NWIC) embarked on the process of developing a comprehensive training, coaching, and certification model that represents best thinking for how an integrated parent peer support model can work within the Wraparound environment. The Parent Peer Support Partner training, coaching, and certification model was designed to enhance NWIC's Wraparound model and includes an evaluation component so that those sites interested in building this feature in their Wraparound implementation have a reliable set of guidelines.

The Parent Peer Support Partner in NWIC's model supports the parent and the Wraparound process. They bring a different set of skills than the care coordinator with their personal story as their most significant tool. The Parent Peer Support Partner ensures the parent is a fully informed member of the Wraparound team and able to utilize the process to the best of their ability. NWIC's Parent Peer Support Partner material is not intended as a substitute for other parent peer support models that may exist within other community programs but may serve to inform those models.

NWIC's Parent Peer Support Partner model closely aligns with its care coordination model. Participants attend Wraparound training and Parent Peer Support Partner role specific training. Over the course of 12 to 24 months, coaching involves office and field observations, document reviews, coaching/supervision observations and other requirements needed to receive certification. Only coaches or supervisors are certified. An extensive curriculum was developed along with Wraparound Practice Improvement Tools for Parent Peer Support Partners.

What is Needed for Successful Implementation of Parent Peer Support Partners in the Wraparound Workforce?

1. Be clear about the model

For those providers that elect to build Parent Peer Support Partners into their Wraparound implementation there are several things to consider that will influence future sustainability. Some questions to consider are:

- Will Parent Peer Support Partners be employed by a Wraparound provider or a Family Service Organization?

- Will Parent Peer Support Partners be paired with care coordinator in a dyad model or accessed independently?
- Who will provide training, coaching, and supervision?

2. Be clear about the funding

Parent Peer Support Partners dependent solely on Medicaid funding are very difficult to sustain. Grant funding is time limited. Sustainability is often tied to blended funding which includes several funding streams. The Family-Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA) is an excellent resource for funding mechanisms for family support.

3. Be clear about the qualifications

Not everyone qualifies for the role. A Parent Peer Support Partner is a parent who has raised or is raising a child with emotional or behavioral challenges and is willing to share their story in hope that it will help another parent. Lived experience in more than one system is helpful – mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice.

4. Be clear about recruiting

Word of mouth seems to be the most effective venue for recruitment but the best resource is the families being served, especially if they have experienced Wraparound. There may be a need to exchange lived experience for educational requirements. A sample job posting for a Wraparound Parent Peer Support Partner might read:

I am the parent of a child with emotional or behavioral challenges and have learned to navigate the system with my own child. I am able to use my own lived experience to support another parent and provide hope and guidance to other families through similar challenging circumstances. I stand committed to ensuring that other parents have a voice in their child's care and are active participants in the healing process. Having experienced the stigma and isolation that raising a child with mental health challenges brings, I am able to connect other parents to resources and supports that build on their strengths and interest.

5. Be clear about how to support and maintain the role

Support and self-care is essential. Decide early on how you will manage this as Parent Peer Support Partners may still be experiencing challenges at home. The old adage is “never just hire one” as they can be co-opted without the right supports. Too many Parent Peer Support Partners have been turned into just another helper without the right support.

6. Be clear about supervision and a career ladder

Parent Peer Support Partners may have been hired without much thought given to who will supervise them. Ideally, it would be a seasoned parent peer support partner. If that option is not available, the supervisor should have the ability to make decisions and be knowledgeable about the role of the Wraparound Parent Peer Support Partner.

A career ladder creates opportunities for Parent Peer Support Partners to advance without the need to become a care coordinator or case manager. It allows them to maintain the “essence” of their role as a family member. Consider Parent Peer Support Partner leads, managers, or directors.

7. Be prepared for occasional challenges

There are many reasons why Parent Peer Support Partners add value to Wraparound. They are able to engage parents in a way that others cannot because of their personal experience but it is personal. They are hired because of their personal experience. It is not logical to ask them “not to take things personally.” Programs hiring Parent Peer Support Partners may need to balance accommodations with accountability.

Lessons Learned

- Parent Peer Support Partners are not role models for parents.
- Parent Peer Support Partners will need training and coaching in their role. Be careful not to assume intuitional skills are enough.
- Be sure that the role of the Parent Peer Support Partner is clearly defined
- Parent Peer Support Partners are at risk of up at the bottom of the ladder if there are staff hierarchies between care coordinators and Parent Peer Support Partners

Conclusion

Parent Peer Support Partners is an important enhancement to the Wraparound model. In Wraparound, sites that elect to incorporate parent peer support it is important that this is done in a way that enhances the Wraparound model and that those individuals responsible are well supported with the tools necessary to provide peer support as intended. This requires an investment of training and coaching to assure that Parent Peer Support Partners have the right skills base. In effect, it requires an investment similar to that made to build a skilled workforce of wraparound care coordinators.

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Resources

- The National Wraparound Implementation Center: www.nwic.org
- The National Wraparound Initiative: www.nwi.pdx.edu
- The Institute for Innovation and Implementation: www.theinstitute.umaryland.edu
- *The Resource Guide to Wraparound* and the National Wraparound Initiative (NWI): www.wrapinfo.org
- Other Wraparound resources: www.paperboat.com