

Introducing the Arkansas Peer Specialist Program

By Kyle Brewer, BS, PRPS, NAADAC Peer Specialist Program Manager

For the first time in the State of Arkansas, individuals with lived experience have direct involvement in the development and administration of a peer support credentialing program. The Arkansas Peer Specialist Program (APSP) is a collaborative effort between NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and the State of Arkansas that streamlines each step of the credentialing process for peers, producing highly trained and knowledgeable peer specialists and creating a one-stop shop for all peer credentialing needs.

APSP is an innovative three-tiered credentialing process developed with involvement of peers at every level of the application and certification process that provides peers the opportunity to progress through the core, advanced, and supervision levels of the Arkansas Model. Through this model, peers can climb the career ladder hold the Arkansas Core Peer Recovery Specialist (PR) credential, the Arkansas Advanced Peer Recovery Specialist (APR) credential, and the Arkansas Peer Recovery Peer Supervisor (PRPS) credential. Each level of this career ladder has its own training, education, experience, and supervision requirements designed to produce highly trained and knowledgeable peer specialists.

Before 2017, peer recovery for substance use disorders was virtually non-existent in Arkansas. Peers generally only found available work in treatment centers where they were met with the lack of understanding of the non-clinical role, leading to improper job descriptions and the underutilization of peer services. Within a year, as the opioid epidemic exponentially grew, the peer recovery field also grew. Arkansas used federal funding that was provided to help combat the opioid epidemic and overall rise in substance use and misuse to support development of the Arkansas Peer Model, which was developed by a small group of recovering individuals who envisioned dynamic change within our behavioral health system. Over the course of one year, peer specialists—with a range of experience in recovery and knowledge of the behavioral health system—gathered with other professionals to develop a training manual for required core peer training. The manual was adapted from the Appalachian Consulting Group and includes many of the same stories and strengths.

In November 2018, 18 peer specialists became certified as trainers. Subsequently, the first core training for the Arkansas Model was offered in March 2019 and included two separate classes for a total of 50 participants. However, since substance use peer services were relatively new, the need for appropriate supervision became evident; the unique, non-clinical role based off of a relationship of equality and mutuality needed a supervision counterpart. In July 2020, 10 seasoned peer specialists—who had progressed through the core and advanced levels of the Arkansas Model—completed the Arkansas Peer Supervision training and became the first 10 Peer Recovery Peer Supervisors in Arkansas. Currently, peer at each level of the Arkansas Model are required to have experience and supervision hours approved by a Peer Recovery Peer Supervisor (PRPS).



As this comprehensive peer career ladder developed, it became clear that it required an innovative and well-developed system to certify and supervise each level. So, in January 2021, the State of Arkansas partnered with NAADAC to develop and provide the application and certification process—as well as implement a supervision system and peer ethics review process—for all three levels of the Arkansas Model. This partnership led to the birth of the Arkansas Peer Specialist Program as it is known and utilized today.

APSP is currently offering peers in Arkansas the one-time opportunity to transfer their current training, education, work experience and supervision hours directly to the APSP and become appropriately credentialed without additional testing through June 30, 2021. NAADAC is excited about the growth of qualified, credentialed, and supervised peers in Arkansas, and looks forward to help expand the program so that it can be replicated in other states to better standardize and develop a high level of training, education, and state credentialing structures for peers across the country.

To learn more about the Arkansas Peer Specialist Program, including information about test waiver and test acceptance offers, please visit www.naadac.org/arkansas-peer-specialist-program or contact Kyle Brewer, BS, PRPS, NAADAC Peer Specialist Program Manager, at kbrewer@naadac.org.



Kyle Brewer, BS, PRPS, is the Peer Specialist Program Manager for NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals. He works for NAADAC remotely from Little Rock, AR, managing the Arkansas Peer Specialist Program Grant. He oversees the development and implementation of an innovative three-tier credentialing process (Core, Advanced, Supervision) for the Arkansas Peer Support Model. Brewer earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Addiction Studies from the University of Central Arkansas in 2013. He went on to use his lived experience with drug and alcohol addiction to become a Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist, where he led the implementation of this

position in an emergency department at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Most recently, he became one of the first ten Certified Peer Support Supervisors in Arkansas. He also serves on numerous committees and boards to develop and strengthen the Arkansas Model and improve peer support services across the United States.