

## **IPS Peer Specialists**

Peer specialist refers to members of the IPS unit who have similar life experiences to people who receive IPS services. The duties of peer specialists vary by program location. What is common among peer specialists is that they share how they overcame obstacles to achieve their own career goals, and how they continue to move forward in their own recovery. IPS specialists (the practitioners responsible for helping people with education, finding and keeping jobs), and peer specialists have similar duties. But even though they may sometimes work on the same tasks, they do their work from different perspectives. Some IPS specialists also have lived experiences similar to those served and share the strategies that helped them.

“Peers break down barriers. When consumers hear my story (where I was and what happened, and where I am now) we have common ground so the person can gain strength and hope that they too can achieve their goals and dreams. Working can be stressful in early recovery – we can discuss any concerns and obstacles in their way and how we can get through them together. Sometimes, just another person on their side to listen to them and say, ‘We will get through this’ can motivate and bring problems into perspective. I, as a peer specialist, am just another person within their support system hoping to see them succeed.”

Diana McSheffrey, IPS peer specialist

This document includes examples of IPS peer specialists’ job duties, examples of a day in the working life of an IPS peer specialist, explanations of how IPS peers can be effective, and two sample job descriptions.

### **Examples of IPS peer specialist job duties**

- Attend and participate in mental health treatment meetings and IPS unit meetings.
- Discuss goals for employment and education with people. Help people explore career choices.
- Request services and make referrals for services that people need. For example, referrals for housing services or counseling, based on the person's preferences.
- Help people consider disclosing a disability (or other personal information) to employers and whether to ask for a job accommodation.
- Teach wellness management strategies.
- Engage people who are new to the program, or people who have missed appointments.
- Help people identify different options for money management.
- Teach people how to use available transportation.
- Share personal stories to inspire others.
- Assist in gathering identification documentation for employment.
- Discuss social situations at work.
- Assist with completing job applications and submitting resumes.
- Meet with working people to talk about their jobs.
- Discuss different ways to save paychecks for long-term goals or to budget income.
- Provide ongoing supports after the employment specialist is no longer involved.

### **Two examples of how IPS peer specialists spent a working day**

#### Example 1:

1. Went with a jobseeker to cash a check from state Vocational Rehabilitation to purchase a bus pass and identification. Then accompanied him to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get a non-driver's identification card. Then went to the bus station to buy a bus pass.
2. Went with someone to the Social Security Administration office to get a replacement Social Security card (identification).
3. Met with a new worker to review how to use a new cell phone to call and text. Saved the IPS team member's contact information in his phone.
4. Attended a mental health treatment team meeting along with other members of the IPS unit. The peer and IPS specialists discuss how to help people achieve their employment goals with the mental health practitioners. At this meeting, the peer shared information about someone's new position.

#### Example 2:

1. Caught up on emails and writing notes from meetings with consumers.
2. Picked up a consumer, helped him get a bus pass, walked around a garden center while providing supportive listening around his housing and mental health. Discussed how he would like to prepare for paid employment and working with his employment specialist again.
3. Met consumer at the mall. Provided check in and assisted consumer in filling

- out applications at the mall.
4. Met consumer at home and checked in with her after she was hospitalized. Discussed what is required by her commitment. Provided supportive listening when speaking about medications and how to advocate for herself.
  5. Met consumer at home. Went over what he would like to work on with Employment Specialist and what he could work on with me. He would like to work on going back to college. We went over what documents he would need to file for FAFSA (Federal Application for Free Student Aid). Discussed boundaries around our relationship and how to communicate without using offensive words towards women.
  6. Worked on writing notes about meetings. Checked email.

For more information about what IPS peer specialists do, see pages 5-7 for job descriptions for peer positions at two agencies.

### **Reasons to include peer specialists on the IPS team**

People may be more comfortable sharing information with a peer specialist whom they think has been in similar situations and will be less likely to judge them. Peers can help people engage in IPS by explaining how IPS is different than out-of-date vocational programs that many people want to avoid. They also engage people by sharing hopeful stories.

“The peer specialist helped me regain my self worth through motivating me to go back to work.”

A working person

“The peer or employment specialist who has a lived experience of mental illness understands what it's like to have apprehension about returning to work and how a person may have trepidation regarding the entire social service system. It can help bridge the gap when there is a professional with lived experience, whether that person is a doctor, therapist, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, or any other service provider. There is more than empathy when the other person can say, “When I experienced that...” The shared experience results in a unique kind of partnership.”

Justin Meckes  
IPS Specialist (with previous work experience as  
a Peer Specialist)

Peers help practitioners use a strengths-based perspective. They help other IPS team members view issues from their client's perspectives. For example, if a person isn't returning calls, a peer could remind the team that the person may not be ignoring them, but just having a bad day.

"Peers help teams to remember to follow through with zero exclusion criteria by helping them to open up to other ways of thinking about things. We offer a real world perspective and take the opportunity to remind the team where a consumer might be coming from considering their situation."

Erika Ritchie, Peer Specialist

"Having a peer specialist has made our IPS team stronger by making sure that we are identifying each individual's strengths and providing strengths-based services. The peer specialist ensures that the individuals in our IPS program are reminded of their strengths and that the team is also reminded of those strengths. We are more aware of the importance of the impact of everything we say and do with the participant and to our team. Our team is stronger when we are all positive."

Renee Homolka, IPS Supervisor

Including peer specialist positions on the IPS unit shows that the social service system is leading by example.

"Chrysalis Vocational Peer Specialists help keep our agency focused on recovery and continue to remind staff of the power of employment. Peer Specialists take a holistic to approaching consumer's vocational goals. Our IPS team is so much stronger because of our Peer Specialists."

Dani Rischall, Executive Director

Peers are a constant reminder of success as people are moving through the vocational process. When people begin to doubt themselves they have opportunities to interact with someone else who has struggled but was successful.

"Our peer mentor has been a wonderful addition to the IPS team. She is able to provide positive influences for our IPS consumers who may benefit from an extra person to talk with. I believe that our IPS consumers have greatly benefited from our peer mentor's encouragement, attention, and kindness."

Jennifer Evanick, IPS Specialist



## Job Announcement – Vocational Peer Specialist

Chrysalis, Inc., a non-profit agency that provides vocational support services to individuals with mental health challenges, is currently hiring for a **Part time or Full time** hourly position of **Vocational Peer Specialist**. Please indicate if you would like part or full time.

**Job Summary:** The Vocational Peer Specialist is responsible for providing direct peer to peer support and advocacy to individuals receiving services and facilitates peer run groups. The Vocational Peer Specialist helps to facilitate a positive and appropriate group environment. Also, provides one on one coaching and encouragement for consumers who are working on their vocational goals. The Peer Specialist performs a wide range of tasks to assist consumers through their wellness and recovery journey. Peer Specialists function as role models demonstrating techniques in recovery and in ongoing coping skills through:

- Assisting with teaching and educating the consumer on problem solving techniques when symptoms increase around their vocational goals.
- Facilitating on-site peer –run groups
- Teaching consumers how to identify and work through negative self-talk and ways to overcome fears
- Assisting with building social skills in the community and teaching self-advocacy skills all to support success within the workplace and in the community
- Assisting consumers in obtaining services that suit the individual's recovery needs
- Teaching problem solving techniques
- Teaching consumer how to identify and combat negative self-talk and how to identify and overcome fears
- Assisting consumers in building social skills in the community that will enhance integration opportunities
- Lending their unique insight into mental illness and what makes recovery possible
- Attending treatment team and crisis plan development meetings to promote consumer's use of self-directed recovery tools
- Informing consumers about community and natural supports and how to utilize these in the recovery process
- Assisting consumers in developing empowerment skills through self-advocacy and stigma-busting activities
- Attending Chrysalis Peer Support and staff meetings

### Essential Qualifications:

1. Certified Peer Specialist
2. High School Diploma/GED
3. Willingness to share personal experiences
4. Two years of experience in community mental health
5. Knowledge of mental health diagnosis, symptoms, and treatments
6. Knowledge of federal and state laws governing the handling of confidential information

7. Ability to evaluate, make recommendations and problem solve about mental health concerns
8. Ability to work independently and interact effectively with consumers, employers, staff, and community members
9. Excellent verbal & written communication skills, highly organized
10. Strong commitment to principles of recovery and consumers' participation in their own service planning
11. Ability to create and maintain professional boundaries
12. Highly computer literate (i.e. in Microsoft Word, Excel, & PowerPoint)
13. Access to a car, auto insurance, valid driver's license, and willingness to use your vehicle for work.

Hours: Part Time 20 hours, Full Time 40 hours

Pay:

Available: Immediately

Please submit a cover letter AND resume to:

Dani Rischall

Chrysalis, Inc. 1342 Dewey Ct. Madison, WI 53703

Or [rischall@workwithchrysalis.org](mailto:rischall@workwithchrysalis.org)

Call (608) 256-3102 with questions

## Locust Street Resource Center Position Description



**Position:** Wellness Mentor  
**Program:** Recovery Care  
**Classification:** Non-Exempt  
**Under Direction of:** Recovery Care Program Manager

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### **Qualifications:**

- High School Diploma or GED – Required
- Must be 21 years of age
- Must be self-identified as a person in recovery
- Must possess or be actively working toward Certified Recovery Support Specialist (CRSS) status
- Interest/willingness to work with individuals recovering from mental illness
- Good written & verbal communication skills
- Ability to establish & maintain collaborative working relationships with other providers
- Willingness & ability to provide transportation to agency consumers as needed
- Must have reliable transportation, valid driver's license and proof of auto insurance
- Must pass required background checks

### **Benefit Package for Full-time Employee:**

- Vacation Time: 11.36 hours/month or 17 days/year for the 1<sup>st</sup> year of employment  
14.66 hours/month or 22 days/year the 2<sup>nd</sup> year & after of employment
- Personal Time: 6 Personal Days/year, accrued at 4 hours/month
- Sick Time: 12 days/year, accrued at 8 hours/month
- Funeral Leave: up to 2 days for immediate family (3 days if funeral is out of state)
- Holidays: 10 per year
- Insurance: - Malpractice coverage - Group Life  
Insurance (term)  
- Group Health Insurance - 401k Retirement

Plan

- Dental Coverage (optional)

- Workman's Comp.

- Travel & Expense Reimbursement

**Position:** Wellness Mentor

**Program:** Recovery Care

**Classification:** Non-Exempt

**Page 2**

**Position Description:**

This position serves as part of a treatment team that provides individual & group supports with persons working to achieve wellness. This is an individual involved in their own recovery experience who is able to assist others in that process. The Recovery Specialist/Wellness Mentor assists others with recovery strategies, sharing like experiences, instilling hope, demonstrating empathy, offering community resources and serving as a role model. This position would provide employment supports for individuals involved in the agency employment program, facilitate or assist with WRAP training and assist with crisis supports & strategies for individuals experiencing an emotional crisis. The Wellness Mentor actively participates as a Team member to ensure consistent service delivery, shared decision making and continuity of care.

**Position Expectations:**

- Interact with consumers in a caring, professional and responsive manner (agency mission)
- Interact with consumers in a fashion that is respectful and sensitive to cultural differences
- Deliver services in a fashion that promotes concepts of recovery & CRSS core functions
- Willing/able to self-identify as a person in recovery
- Provide engagement & outreach activities to identify & address any obstacles to treatment
- Provide services in a natural setting
- Promote individual choice, self-determination & natural supports
- Promote a wellness-focused approach to recovery
- Identify consumers' strengths, resiliencies & challenges to recovery and work together to develop skills, evaluate options & consider consequences
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with consumers & staff
- Assist consumers access needed or desired services, benefits or resources
- Work schedule may vary to include evening or weekend hours to meet consumer need



- Meet expectations for the provision of billable services
- Complete required documentation within established timeframes
- Seek supervision/guidance regarding policies, procedures, expectations as needed
- Attend all required meetings & trainings and actively participate in weekly team meetings
- Record and submit timesheets per established guidelines
- Abide by HIPAA Requirements & the Mental Health Confidentiality Act
- Ensure best practices are followed by adhering to agency policies and procedures

Date: 9/3/2012

Effective

7/1/2013

Revised:

