

Youth Peer Support Workers

“Nothing about us, without us.”

YPSWs are 18-30 year olds who use their **lived experience receiving & navigating mental health or substance use services to instill hope, promote belonging & support young people** with mental health needs to reach their personal life goals.

YPSWs help **agencies become better** at meeting young people’s needs. YPSWs work in many settings: case management, outreach, drop-in, residential, vocational, navigation & bridging programs.

“Peer” can mean different things depending on context. Each agency may **define peer** qualifications slightly differently in terms of age (i.e., same-age, near-age) and lived experiences (i.e., diagnosis-specific, system involvement).

YPSW Benefits^a

- Inspired a sense of hope for the future
- Increase knowledge about services
- Help expand social circle
- Support youth voice
- Self-esteem, self-efficacy, empowerment
- Improved quality of life, decreased symptoms, isolation & hospitalizations



YPSW Role^b

- Practice cultural responsiveness
- Role model & promote self-care & wellness
- Build relationships & collaborate
- Mentor & support young person’s vision
- Demonstrate safe, professional, & ethical behavior
- Advocacy to ensure services integrate youth voice & choice

^a Davidson et al., 2012; Gopalan et al., 2017; Radigan et al., 2014; Repper & Carter, 2011

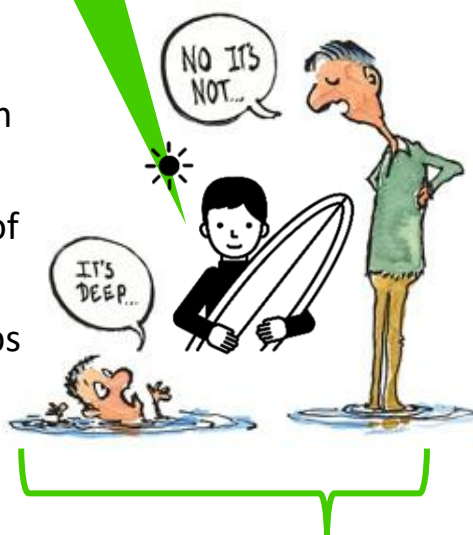
^b Informed by Massachusetts Young Adult Peer Mentor Model

I may not have been in *your* shoes, but I've been to the *same* shoe store.

Transitioning to adulthood is challenging.

- Need to navigate changes in multiple life domains
- Figuring out “who I am” as an individual
- Feeling misunderstood, out of place & unheard in services
- Exploring career, relationships & searching for belonging
- Learning independence & taking risks

I get you.



Adult providers don't always get it.

- Well-intentioned, but can be inflexible
- Trained to treat mental health symptoms
- Mistakes nostalgia for lived experience
- Sees self as expert
- Avoids communicating using tech & social media

YPSWs fill this Critical Gap

- *YPSWs uniquely relate to young adults based on their personal experience*
- *YPSWs complete New Mexico's Adult Peer Training Program & also complete the Youth Peer Support Worker training and endorsement*
- *YPSWs collaborate with non-peer (e.g., case managers) & peer staff (e.g., Adult Peer & Family Peer Support Workers) to support young person's goals.*

Integrating YPSWs

- Start integration where either adult peer support or transition-to-adulthood best-practices are already in place.
- YPSW integration works best if organization prepares for & has a steering committee overseeing integration.
- To learn more, contact a CYFD Youth Coordinator, <http://bhs.nmsu.edu>