



Wisconsin Peer Fellowship 2023 Report

The Power of Grassroots Workforce
Development & Wisconsin Peer Support

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Introduction

In September 2022, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services announced an important opportunity for organizations working directly with underserved populations to provide TA (Technical Assistance) to community-based behavioral health professionals.

In response to this funding opportunity, SOAR Case Management proposed and was awarded funding for a TA forum with a focus on peer specialists from historically marginalized communities with intersectional identities: The Wisconsin Peer Fellowship.

The Relationship Between Funder Goals and Community Impact

There were three main goals that DHS hoped to achieve through Technical Assistance forums like Wisconsin Peer Fellowship:

- Promote & develop competencies within the behavioral health workforce in identifying unmet needs for mental health/substance use services among people from underserved communities
- Improve the service delivery system to expand access to people in underserved communities
- Develop behavioral health workforce competencies in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion

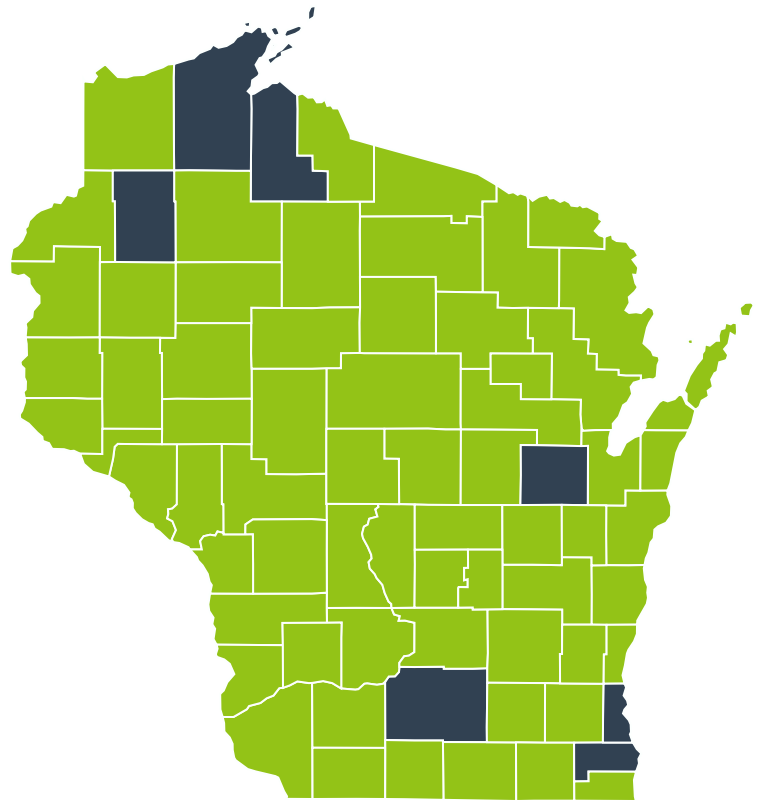
Bridging the Gap Between Peer Support Skill-Development & Grassroots Community Building

One of the main focuses of the TA forum was to invite participants to claim their power as experts in the field through direct experience within peer-facilitated, mutual co-learning spaces. Participants would also contribute to the creation of core competencies developed for the project, and participate in the creation of this white paper.

This requirement that participants have intersectional identities was meant to move towards centering those most impacted by existing systemic inequities and oppression as identified in the 2019 Wisconsin Behavioral Health System Gaps Report (Vigna, A.J., Connor, T. 2019).

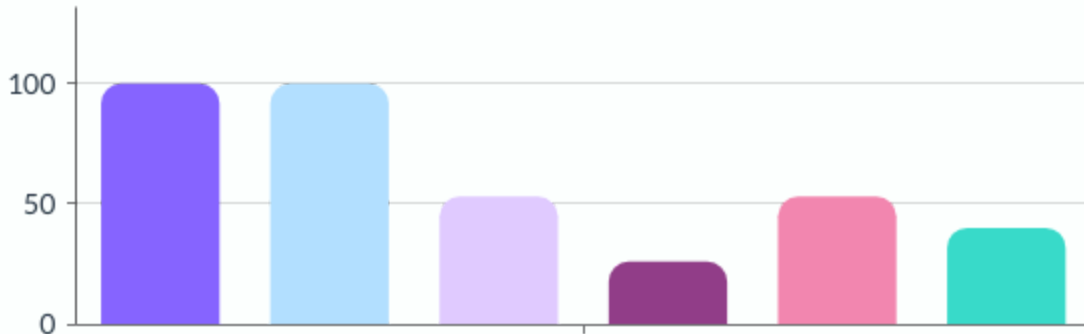
The figure to the right illustrates a geographical breakdown of where participants were located. Participants resided within the following counties across the state of Wisconsin:

Ashland, Bayfield, Dane, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Racine & Washburn



Nothing About Us Without Us

Highlighting Participant's Voices



■ 100%

of WPF participants identified CPS (certified peer specialists) or working in a direct peer service role

■ 100%

of WPF participants identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)

■ 53%

of WPF participants identified as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc.)

■ 26%

of WPF participants identified as people with disabilities

■ 53%

of WPF participants identified as people with lived experiences of incarceration

■ 40%

of WPF participants identified as people with lived experiences related to other aspects of marginalizations and/or oppressions

Creating Competencies, For Us By Us

To begin the process of creating the first draft of the WPF Core Competencies, a small-scale environmental scan took place and 12 state and national-level relevant documents were reviewed.

Through this scan certain themes were identified such as a history of systemic oppression, distrust of existing behavioral healthcare systems, the need for specific adaptations in order to engage unique communities, and the importance of communities designing their own solutions.

These themes were used as the basis for the core competencies themselves as well as the shaping of the TA forum, which took place across 7 months from May to November 2023.

Core Competencies

Community Engagement & Co-Creation

We intentionally build relationships (peer support, interpersonal/social, communal and organizational) with historically excluded groups. We center the hopes, wants and needs of those most impacted by systems.

Cultivating & Executing Strategy

We move collectively within our work and within our lives. We build alliance & solidarity. Within the Wisconsin workforce, our individual workplaces, in direct service relationships and our personal relationships.

Harm Reduction

We understand peer support best practices through a lens of harm reduction. Harm reduction is about our right to bodily autonomy and collective liberation. It is about the choices available to us when harm has occurred. This includes boundaries, limits, repair & transformative justice.

Systemic Skepticism & Change

We understand the importance of centering care, joy & solidarity within the peer support movement, our work and our everyday lives. We hold one another in community as we navigate social change.

Self-Inquiry

We practice self-inquiry, social accountability and mindfulness. We are relational beings, made to love, share, grieve and grow alongside one another. The identities & experiences we hold influence how we show up.

Redistributing Power in Relationships

We pursue being in right relationship, and have the power to reclaim what has been lost, together. We explore where power is and who holds it, and actively redistribute power by creating equity within our relationships.

The Forum At-A-Glance

In the spirit of peer support movement and history, this project was designed to reflect values of self-determination, choice & mutuality. Fellowship is defined as "community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience", or a "company of equals".

Rather than a series of intensive teaching spaces, each session of the TA forum was a co-facilitated space with a specific discussion focus, and was split into two pieces.

In the first piece, a monthly plenary session, the participants collectively explored a specific core competency to look at how it could be applied both in their work building community and their work as peer specialists.

In the second piece, a monthly small-group session, participants were asked to reflect on the plenary session and how the topic had shown up in their work and personal lives in the time between the plenary session and the small group.

The fellowship was encouraged to continue exploring and practicing these core competencies to discover how they could be further applied in order to grow their skills at providing effective peer support and relational skills.

Conclusion

While the focus of the TA forum was providing peer support services, it was crucial to expand that beyond professionalized peer support services. This allowed for the centering of grassroots peer support, community building, activist movements, and interpersonal relationships development which served to enrich the space and knowledge shared.

Participants Wisconsin Peer Fellowship collectively embarked on a project which was built by and for our own communities (co-created). These skills are necessary to build solidarity & create change within and outside of systems.



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