

Peer Bridger Programs

Hope • Choice • Empowerment • Wellness

Background

The OptumHealth® Pierce Regional Support Network/Recovery Innovations Peer Bridger Program, in operation since July 2010, has supported 125 individuals. Participation in this voluntary program assists adults during the critical transition period following discharge from a psychiatric inpatient setting.

The goal of the program is to significantly decrease the need for re-hospitalization by supporting participants through their transition from a hospital setting back into community life. The program covers individuals who do not have coverage to pay for their care, and are not enrolled in mental health services. The clinical history for this population is characterized by multiple psychiatric hospitalizations and high support needs requiring a more intensive level of attention. Many of the participants experience homelessness and unemployment issues.

Program Design

This innovative program is run by Recovery Innovations, Inc., a non-profit provider of mental health and peer-support training and consultation services. OptumHealth Pierce Regional Support Network selected Recovery Innovations for its recovery-focused programs, practices, and philosophy.

Over 50 percent of the Pierce Recovery Innovations staff are peers. Based on their own personal journeys of recovery, these Peer Bridgers are uniquely qualified to promote hope and encouragement to participants who are negotiating their own recovery. They serve as examples to individuals in crisis that with the right supports, they too can begin or continue their own successful journey to recovery. Their shared experience enables peers to work with individuals in recovery to self-identify the concerns in their lives. This allows them to express their own wellness needs, and gives them the opportunity to drive their own wellness plan and services.

Program Values and Services

The services provided are fully based in recovery principles. From the first contact made with the participant the focus is on the values of:

- Hope
- Choice
- Empowerment
- Wellness

Peers offer participants three primary service interventions:

- Engagement in an individualized and positive relationship with the participant
- Assistance in creating linkages to a range of community-based services and natural supports
- Modeling community adjustment and wellness self-management skills

Peer support starts in the hospital with the peer creating a trust relationship and planning for discharge. Following discharge, peers work as a bridge to provide support and linkages to mental health, physical health and social services. Support is offered in each person's home environment and community. Peers work to reduce the many obstacles that people with a mental illness and no coverage for health services face upon discharge from the hospital and in their daily lives.



Peer Bridgers

Peer Bridgers are trained Peer Support Specialists who have personally dealt with a major mental health condition and are successfully managing their recovery. They have overcome many of the challenges facing people with mental illnesses discharged from the hospital, making them uniquely qualified to support consumers on their recovery journey.

The Peer Bridger's work is based on a core set of values that include:

- Building empowering relationships
- Promoting personal responsibility
- Building individual resilience
- Establishing meaningful societal roles
- Developing natural supports
- Supporting freedom of choice
- Redefining crises as learning opportunities

The role of the Peer Bridger is to help engage the person in the recovery process and support and encourage him or her in the transition back into the community. This includes working with the individual to:

- Develop a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)
- Teach/learn wellness self-management skills
- Schedule appointments with mental health providers
- Access medications
- Apply for benefits
- Identify and link up with community services
- Expand natural support networks
- Write Advance Directive plans
- Access other supports and social services

Outcomes

For the initial cohort of 125 participants served, a total of 202 hospitalizations occurred in the one year prior to the program initiation. Among participants averaging one year since entering the program, only 30 have had hospital admissions, accounting for 42 total hospitalizations.

This has resulted in a 76.0 percent reduction in the number of people hospitalized, and a 79.2 percent reduction in overall hospitalizations. After subtracting the cost of the program, the resulting cost savings is over \$550,000.

Planned Outcomes

Over 70% of the participants will not need re-hospitalization.

Over 85% of the participants will express satisfaction with the program.

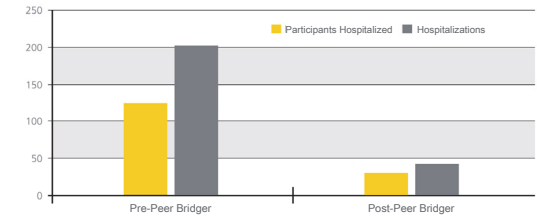
Participants will report an increase in social supports and social connectedness and improvement in level of functioning as measured by the Recovery Self Assessment (RSA).

Actual Outcomes

79.2% did not need re-hospitalization.

100% of participants who completed the program have expressed satisfaction.

Participants who completed the program reported an increase in all areas and an improvement of their level of functioning.



Next Steps

In this program Peer Bridgers address and strive to meet the self-identified concerns of the participants that are often overlooked in other models of care. In this context participants experience a level of mutual support and empowerment that is not readily available through services provided in traditional mental health treatment centers.

This program has shown significant progress in reducing the number of hospitalizations and positive satisfaction among participants.

The program has also impacted the local community by assisting those with mental illness and restricted coverage for services to become better able to live in the community and receive the care they need.

OptumHealth welcomes this type of partnership with community resources and believes that this type of program can serve as a model for other communities.