

## Peer Support - Making a Difference



The **Peer Support Program** of the South Central Behavioral Health Network is a team of consumers hired and trained to provide comfort and support to mental health consumers in crisis in the psychiatric emergency departments at Yale-New Haven Hospital and the Hospital of Saint Raphael. As individuals in recovery from mental illness and/or addictions themselves, the Peers are able to utilize their own experiences to serve as role models for people earlier in their recovery. Additional goals of the program are to provide a meaningful employment experience to consumers in recovery as well as to enhance communication between staff and consumers. As a DMHAS-funded service of the South Central Behavioral Health Network, the Peer Support Program reflects DMHAS' single overarching strategic goal: developing and maintaining a value-driven, recovery oriented system of care.

*"At that moment, I saw her make a connection between getting better and me! I represented recovery and in that moment, she saw that her recovery was within her reach..."*

### In the words of one Peer:

The six peers of the Team are trained to work alongside the hospital staff to enhance the services provided in the ED. The Peers strive to meet the needs of each individual consumer. They assist an average of 30 patients a week at each hospital by providing:

- *Basic necessities* such as blankets, towels, soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, donated clothing, and hospital gowns.
- Meal trays, ice water, ginger ale or extra sandwiches when needed.
- *Companionship*, through sitting together, sharing magazines, or playing cards. **As part of this process, peers also talk with consumers. In this context, they are trained to listen empathically, to discuss recovery and treatment options, and to share their own stories of recovery to provide inspiration and hope.**
- *Information* regarding patient rights, policies, and procedures.
- *Support* in helping consumers to understand the typical chain of events in emergency rooms. This includes encouraging clients to participate in decisions regarding their treatment and to let staff members know their specific needs and preferences. As part of this process, peers act as a liaison to the staff, sharing important information related to safety and treatment.



### Three Program Goals

The program goals are threefold:

- 1) *to improve the experience of consumers seeking services in psychiatric crisis*
- 2) *to assist the staff in meeting patients' basic needs*
- 3) *to provide meaningful employment for consumers in recovery.*