PEER MENTORING TIP SHEET

OVERVIEW

Peer mentoring is a powerful tool to support incarcerated or previously incarcerated individuals returning to the community. Peer mentors can connect on a deeper level because they have shared the experiences of their mentees. The role of the peer mentor is to provide guidance, encouragement, and support to their mentee and help them acclimate to their new environment. Peer mentors may solve some barriers to providing and sustaining successful reintegration. This document is divided into four major sections: implementation, managing peer mentoring programs, tips for peer mentoring, and samples of strategies to implement during the three stages of PROWD. This tip sheet is a resource to implement and continually improve the practice of peer mentoring.

Implementing Peer Mentoring Programs

Individual and Group Peer Mentoring:
- Consider the capacity and resources available within the prison or reentry center.
- While individual peer mentoring is often the ideal approach for personalized support, it may not always be feasible due to limited staff and resources.
- Explore the potential for group peer mentoring, where a peer mentor can work with a small group of participants with similar needs or goals.
- Tailor the approach to the specific needs and resources of the facility.

Peer Mentor Training:
- The effectiveness of a peer mentoring program heavily relies on the quality of training provided to peer mentors in the PROWD program.

- All peer mentors should undergo comprehensive training, which includes but is not limited to the following:
  - Communication Skills: Enhance active listening, empathy, and effective communication.
  - Crisis Management: Provide guidance to handle challenges or crises within the prison environment.
  - Cultural Sensitivity: Promote an understanding of diverse backgrounds and experiences among incarcerated individuals in the PROWD program.
  - Mentoring Techniques: Teach mentoring skills, goal setting, and practical support methods.
  - Boundaries and Confidentiality: Emphasize the importance of maintaining appropriate boundaries and respecting confidentiality.
  - Conflict Resolution: Equip peer mentors with conflict resolution strategies for managing interpersonal issues among participants.

Pre-release Training for Graduates:
- Peer mentors who enter a prison or residential reentry center must complete volunteer training at their identified correctional institution.
- This pre-release training ensures they are prepared for their roles and responsibilities as mentors once they reenter society.
- Coordinate with prison officials to facilitate this training and ensure a smooth transition for future peer mentors.
- Have graduates of PROWD enroll in volunteer training before their release.

Management of Peer Mentoring Programs

Ongoing Support and Supervision:
- Establish a system for ongoing support and supervision of peer mentors within the PROWD program.
- Provide mentors with regular opportunities to debrief and share their experience.

- Create a peer mentor support network where mentors can learn from each other and address challenges collectively.
- Designate a program coordinator or supervisor to oversee the peer mentoring program and offer guidance to mentors.

Evaluation and Improvement:
- Regularly assess the effectiveness of the peer mentoring program through participant feedback, mentor assessments, and outcomes data.
- Make necessary adjustments and improvements to the program based on evaluations and feedback.
- Solicit input from both mentors and participants to ensure their voices are heard in the program's development and refinement.

Considering these factors while implementing and managing PROWD peer mentoring programs within federal correctional facilities can enhance their impact, improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals, and contribute to the successful reentry of program graduates into society. Collaboration between correctional staff, mentoring organizations, and community partners is crucial for the success of the peer mentoring program.

Guidance for Peer Mentors

Build Trust and Rapport:
- Be a good listener and show empathy.
- Be respectful, nonjudgmental, and understanding of their experiences.
- Share your own experiences when appropriate to establish a connection.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect boundaries.

Understand the Unique Challenges:
- Recognize and recall the challenges individuals face upon reentry, such as stigma, limited resources, and employment barriers.

- Be aware of the specific challenges related to recovery from substance use disorder, including triggers and cravings.

Set Realistic Goals:
- Help individuals identify achievable weekly, short-term, and long-term SMART goals.
- Break down goals into smaller, manageable steps.
- Monitor progress and celebrate successes together.

Provide Information and Resources:
- Familiarize yourself with local resources, reentry programs, job placement services, and addiction recovery resources to have a better understanding of the barriers within the community.
- Understand the roles of case managers and other PROWD program staff to ensure you stay within the peer mentor's scope of work.

Promote Recovery:
- Understand the stages of recovery and be prepared to offer support at each stage.
- Encourage individuals to attend support groups, therapy, or counseling as needed.
- Discuss relapse prevention strategies and coping mechanisms.

Foster Self-Empowerment:
- Encourage individuals to make decisions and take ownership of their reentry and recovery processes.
- Help them identify and utilize their strengths and abilities.
- Promote self-advocacy and problem-solving skills.

Maintain Boundaries:
- Clearly define your role and responsibilities as a peer mentor.
- Avoid crossing boundaries.

- Seek supervision or guidance from program coordinators or mentors if you encounter challenging situations.

Be Patient and Flexible:
- Understand that progress may be slow, and setbacks can occur.
- Adapt your mentoring approach based on the individual's needs and readiness for change.
- Continuously reassess and adjust goals as circumstances change.

Practice Self-Care:
- Take care of your own physical and emotional well-being.
- Seek support from supervisors, peers, or mentors when needed.
- Recognize the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Remember that your role as a peer mentor is essential in helping individuals successfully reenter society and maintain their recovery journey. Your support and guidance can significantly impact their lives and contribute to their overall success.

Strategies of Execution

PROWD Stage 1:

Peer mentoring is a proven strategy for retaining participants. Grantees should pair participants from the graduating cohort with new participants and start a peer mentoring program where they can meet at least once weekly during non-class times. Grantees may also request to invite graduates from the first cohort to speak to the new class or provide group mentoring as a class session.

PROWD Stage 2:

Peer mentoring has proven beneficial during periods of transition. Peer mentors with lived experience can more easily develop trust and a personal story on navigating reentry successfully. Grantees should work with the RRCs to create a peer mentoring program with successful graduates from previous cohorts residing in the RRC or participants in PROWD stage 3 to mentor new participants at the RRC. The earlier this intervention, the better. Peer mentors and mentees may meet at

the RRCs or off-site. Grantees should maintain a record of these meetings and may be required to share this information with the RRCs.

PROWD Stage 3:
Peer mentoring by persons with lived experience has proven helpful for both the mentor and the mentee. These connections foster a feeling of value and commitment to the program and increase the likelihood of retaining participants to complete the program and beyond. Grantees should recruit successful participants in PROWD stage three to mentor new participants entering this stage.

Resources

[Facilitating Successful Reentry Through Peer Recovery Support Services](#) There is a growing body of research on how peers can influence reentry outcomes—either negatively or positively. Peer recovery support services (PRSS) programs use the power of peers—persons with the lived experience of addiction, recovery, and successful reentry—to help individuals successfully transition back to the community and prevent recidivism.

The [National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens Peer 2 Peer Program](#) provides a comprehensive mentoring approach. Mentoring is a formal relationship with mutually agreed-upon goals defined by both parties. Through Peer 2 Peer mentoring relationships, returning citizens are guided toward stability, a change in behavior, and a change in thinking.

[Peer-Focused Prison Reentry Programs - Which Peer Characteristics Matter Most?](#) Over the past two decades, recidivism rates have remained relatively stable, leading practitioners to explore innovative reentry solutions. One reentry model, based on the concept of peer mentorship, received renewed attention. Unfortunately, little is known about which peer characteristics make mentors most effective in prison. This study uses participant observation and semi-structured interviews embedded with survey questions to understand which "peer" characteristics prison staff, peer mentors, and mentees perceive as the most important. Analysis of survey data suggests that a credible peer with a history of incarceration is perceived as the most essential characteristic for peer mentors in a reentry context.

[How to Write SMART Goals](#) is a comprehensive guide on how to write SMART goals. This guide also helps understand what SMART goals are and provides examples and a template.