

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND REHABILITATION SCIENCES
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Doctoral Capstone Project

Developing Tools for Peer Support: Applications, Matching, and Staff Resources

by

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M.A., Teachers College – Columbia University, 2021

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Occupational Therapy

2025

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to provide a foundation, support, and resources in developing a peer support program. An application, questionnaires, and interviews for peer mentors along with checklists and surveys to collect interest and experiences, were developed for the matching process. A Staff Supervisor Resource Guide was created to provide information for JEVS staff members assisting with the program. Each area of this project was designed in collaboration with the JEVS team with various levels of feedback to determine use and relevance to the program. Results of post-training interviews showed an impact in confidence and skill set after participating in peer support training. Additionally, all materials were created to match peer mentors with potential mentees, however time constraints and feedback for more interaction with peers limited the fulfillment of mentor-mentee pairs. Lastly, a staff supervisor guide was developed, however the guide needs further development before distribution.

Introduction

Peer support is a concept that involves individuals who share lived experiences guiding others in numerous areas of life through empathic listening and understanding. It is a reciprocal process to provide deliberate and purposeful insight (Penney, 2018; Shaw et al., 2020). Core concepts of peer support such as relationship building, setting goals, overcoming barriers, social interaction, as well as others, can provide physical, social, and psychological benefits for individuals with an Intellectual or Developmental Disability (IDD) (Kramer et al., 2017; Shaw et al., 2020). Previous peer support programs involved the peer support specialist (mentor), the peer receiving support (mentee), and a peer support specialist supervisor (supervisor) (Kramer et al., 2017; Stefancic et al., 2021). This project focused on the development of the application process for peer mentors and methods to evaluate the characteristics needed for peer support specialists, such as the attributes, skills, commitment, lived experiences and self-efficacy needed for readiness to participate as a peer mentor. Additionally, this project also explored and developed the beginning stages of matching peers with their mentors. The final area of development was a resource guide for staff supervisors outlining the supervisor's role in peer support and the necessary tools to provide appropriate supervision to the mentors. The purpose of this project was to develop three components of a peer support program within the JEVS Independence Network (JEVS) (*Independence Network*, 2024), where a member with IDD participated in the role as a mentor for a new or incoming JEVS member in the role of the mentee, with supervision facilitated by a JEVS staff member.

Literature Review

Screening Characteristics

There are certain characteristics and skills required to become a successful peer mentor. There are skills that can be taught and learned through a training process, while other attributes a person may already have. For example, a shared, lived experience between the mentor and mentee is imperative (Shaw et al., 2020). This means that the mentor is supporting their mentee through an experience they have previously encountered. Additionally, participating in this type of program requires various time commitments, including attending all portions of the training, being actively involved with the mentee, and upkeeping with changes in the program to encourage participation. It is important to be available at the times and days of the trainings and continuously engaged in the mentor role (Marks et al., 2019). These are some of the important attributes needed to be successful in providing peer support.

In addition to those listed previously, there are a plethora of skills to be learned through training for a person that is willing and motivated to participate (Marks et al., 2019), as identified through a self-selection process at JEVS, where members expressed their desire to be a peer mentor. Thompson et al. (2018) evaluated several contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes to successful peer mentoring for college students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Some identified areas include communication skills, social interaction abilities, problem solving skills, and how to identify personal strengths. Furthermore, Loeper & Schwartz (2023) identified peer mentor skills needed for success in these roles including problem solving skills, skills needed to identify safety concerns, responding to unpredictable behaviors, persevering through uncomfortable situations, and validating emotions. Communication and social interaction skills are needed to build rapport between peers while openly and appropriately expressing thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Thompson et al., 2018). A mentor's role in problem solving is important for finding strategies to assist their peer in challenging situations, such as providing resources to

manage tasks, schedules, and managing conflict (Thompson et al., 2018). Additionally, recognize safety concerns and challenging behaviors is important to promote welcoming environments while ensuring no harm or difficult situations will arise for the peer, the mentor, or anyone in the community (Loeper & Schwartz, 2023). These characteristics and skills are important when considering becoming a peer mentor.

Matching Process

The skills and characteristics of potential mentors and mentees guide the matching process. Existing peer support programs such as Community Autism Peer Specialist (CAPS) (Shea et al., 2022), Project TEAM (Teens making Environment and Activity Modifications) (Kramer et al., 2017), and other peer support studies approached the matching process in similar ways, including consideration of similar diagnosis, shared interests, and demographic information (Shaw et al., 2020). The CAPS program matches peers based on availability, shared interests, gender preferences, where the individuals are located, transportation, and accessibility (Shea et al., 2022). Another peer support program, Project TEAM, provides pairings through the mentor's expertise and lived experiences related to their mentee's goals (Kramer et al., 2017). A community-based peer mentor study for those with IDD matched peers based on diagnosis, conversation style, and shared interests (Schwartz & Hwang, 2022).

Gainforth et al. (2019) explored the matching process for peer support for those with spinal cord injury both in a hospital and in a community setting. Although this is different than IDD, both populations share unique experiences that peers can understand who went through similar situations. They found 11 important characteristics to matching peers for effective support programs. Some characteristics of note included understanding each other, availability to interact, shared abilities, experiencing similar challenges, knowledge about needs and resources,

and similar lifestyle goals. Their findings emphasize the importance of matching peers based on lived experiences, lifestyles, and shared interests rather than traditional demographic characteristics (Gainforth et al., 2019). Additionally, Schwartz et al. (2020) examined an approach to peer mentoring from the stakeholder perspective and displayed similar findings to previous research. They found that stakeholders of peer support programs benefited from pairs matched on similar interests and experiences to create opportunities for enjoyment in the mentoring process as well as having areas to build relationships through bonding over shared concepts. Stakeholders additionally suggested matching peers based on similar communication style, preferences and interpersonal interaction styles, with the potential for mentors to become comfortable and adaptable to various communication styles. Through each of these aspects to the matching process, the authors suggested providing pairings with a trial period to determine if the match is a good fit for providing and receiving support (Schwartz et al., 2020). The characteristics to successful peer-matching provide insight into what action should be taken in creating a matching process for the JEVS peer support program.

Supervisor's Role

In peer support, a supervisor acts as a guide to the peer support specialist to assist them in their roles by providing support and resources as needed (Foglesong et al., 2022; Forbes et al., 2022; Kramer et al., 2017; Stefancic et al., 2021). As important as the mentor-mentee relationship is to success in peer support programs, the supervisor is an asset to the success of the program and the mentor fulfilling their roles. As peer mentors are as independent as desired, Schwartz & Hwang (2022) found that they too can benefit from support and resources. These findings indicate that a supervisor assists in providing scripts and worksheets for mentors to utilize, reviewing content and activities, assisting with scheduling and logistics, offering

suggestions for support, and discussing different interpersonal interactions, observed behaviors, and problem-solving techniques. Support needs may be unique to each peer, but supervisors provide much needed resources and assistance to ensure the success of the peer support process.

To provide peer support services and supervision for peer mentors, the National Association of Peer Supporters (NAPS) outlined National Practice Guidelines for Peer Specialists and Supervisors (NPG-S) (Foglesong et al., 2022). Table 1 (Appendix A) outlines the NAPS core values and corresponding guidelines for peer support. The NPG-S is in place to prevent supervisors from minimizing, marginalizing, stigmatizing, and undermining the peer mentors. Additionally, the guidelines provide peer mentors and supervisors an understanding of the core values of peer support (*National Association of Peer Supporters*, 2019). Abiding by the guidelines allows for appropriate support and supervision that promotes engagement, connection, and encouragement (Foglesong et al., 2022).

Specific programs found success in peer mentoring through supervisor involvement in the process. Kramer et al. (2017) explored the feasibility of an e-mentoring program and highlighted the importance of direct peer mentor supervisors. They found providing peer mentors with supervisors led to higher rates of attendance, more engagement, and mentors meeting objectives more frequently. Additionally, as the program progressed, mentors did not require as much direct support as initially needed, showing the importance of the supervisors' role in peer mentor development. The researchers suggested that explicit supervisor training is important to provide effective support and strategies to the peer mentors. Suggestions included, but were not limited to, recognizing shared interests, utilizing and recognizing communication cues, and strategies on how to progressively decrease level of assistance throughout interactions (Kramer et al., 2017).

Previous research varies between utilizing peer supervisors, as in a supervisor who also shares lived experiences, versus non-peer supervisors. Forbes et al. (2022) explored the experiences of peer supporters who were supervised by non-peers. The supervisor's effectiveness was dependent on how they engaged in their roles. Supporters expressed that the most prominent area was the supervisors' attitude and the role it played in how they supervised. Other areas included the supervisors' level of engagement and if they provided facilitative and supportive environments for support. Peer supporters preferred supervisors that share lived experiences as they share with their peer. This preference ensured that the supervisor can mentor and coach the supporter to be a better peer counselor based on an understanding of experiences (Forbes et al., 2022).

Additional research by Stefancic et al. (2021) found that peer support specialists may benefit from having at least one supervisor for their own support. They explored the supervisors' role and the importance of having at least one, but potentially multiple, supervisors actively involved in the program. They suggested that availability of multiple supervisors allowed for increased responsiveness and varying perspectives on how to approach different situations. Identified strategies for the supervisors included having both formal and informal meetings between the peer mentor and the supervisor. Having frequent meetings or informal check-ins allowed for the supervisor to gain a greater understanding of the peer relationship as well as the opportunity to provide feedback and guidance. Furthermore, peer supporters looked for input from the supervisors in areas of performance, highlighting skills, successes, and their level of engagement with their peer (Stefancic et al., 2021). Allowing space to follow these strategies enhanced participation within peer support programs for all parties involved and encouraged the continuation of relationship building throughout the support process.

Role of Occupational Therapy

With the identified need and the impact on the stakeholders, occupational therapy (OT) is a multifaceted profession of highly skilled individuals to address the need to develop a peer support program for JEVS. OT plays a role in promoting an individual's health, wellness, and safety while ensuring they have the capacity to care for themselves while they are supporting others (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). JEVS services currently strive to promote social, community, peer group, and leisure participation, social and emotional health promotion and maintenance, and volunteer participation (*Independence Network*, 2024), all of which are occupations addressed through OT that were addressed throughout the program and within the community (AOTA, 2020). The network provides a full complement of employment supports including job search, development, coaching, and career advancement (*Independence Network*, 2024). Peer mentors with OT guidance can help those seeking job experiences to build confidence in work related skills and understand the value of employment to independent living. These areas are within OT scope of practice to assist in fulfilling occupational independence (AOTA, 2020). Research shows that adults with IDD living in group homes or community settings spend much of their time unoccupied (Qian et al., 2015, as cited in Johnson et al., 2019). Social interaction is important to successful, healthy living (*Social determinants of health*, n.d.) while maintaining strong physical and social environments to achieve health and well-being (*Healthy people 2030 framework*, n.d.) through independent living within a community.

In developing a peer support program, OT has the skillset to recognize client factors (i.e., characteristics and capacities) and performance skills (i.e., social, motor, or processing skills) (AOTA, 2020) to determine a person fit to be a peer mentor. This skillset allows OT practitioners

to assist in determining an individual's strengths, needs, interests, and preferences to address concerns with transitioning to adulthood and help develop goals to achieve through peer support (Johnson et al., 2019). Additionally, OT's identify routines, habits, and interests (AOTA, 2020) that provide insight into matching mentors with their mentees. Young adults with IDD experience disparities in social participation and community engagement. Adequate engagement with peers of similar backgrounds and interests increase social and community participation, increase their health and well-being, and lower occurrences of unoccupied time or social isolation (Amado et al., 2013, as cited in Johnson et al., 2019; Brucker, 2015, as cited in Johnson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it is within OT scope of practice to advocate for resources and outside assistance and provide staff education to ensure continuation and longevity of the program through sustainability efforts (AOTA, 2020; Umeda et al., 2017, as cited in Johnson et al., 2019). The role of OT in this process ensures the staff and supervisors have the skills to support peer group participation, with information on how to, and who to, consult within the community and outside organizations (Umeda et al., 2017, as cited in Johnson et al., 2019). It is important for staff and supervisors to be educated on how to sustain the program through supporting participants, ensuring safety for all parties involved, and recognizing challenging situations.

Methods

The peer support program at JEVS provided individuals with IDD who are currently involved or joining the community the opportunity to connect with members with the purpose of providing support for successful transition to independent living. It also provided an opportunity to connect with outside communities to expand support to others who were not joining JEVS but were looking to grow independent living skills and connect with peers. The peer support program

took place at JEVS locations in Narberth, PA, Collingswood, NJ, and Ambler, PA in collaboration with a team of two Temple University OT Doctoral Capstone Students, a group of JEVS staff employees, and one JEVS member consultant who is a trained peer support specialist through the previously mentioned CAPS program (Shea et al., 2022). For this project, one OT student designed and implemented portions of the program that contributed to recruitment, commitment, collecting information and interests, lived experience and current skill set, reflections and self-efficacy, peer matching, and role delineation. All areas of the project acted in part of preliminary steps before participating in peer mentor training or secondary steps following peer mentor training, with additional information developed to support overall peer support program development.

Program Development: Procedures for Peer Mentors

To initiate the peer support process, the team met twice weekly to discuss planning, timeline, and logistics to recruit participants and gather interest, hold an interest meeting, collect applications, and interview peer mentors. It is noted that applications and interviews were not intended to screen out potential mentors, but rather to gain a sense of commitment, determine each individual's availability to attend peer support training sessions, and learn about their lived experiences, current skill sets, and interests.

Prior to beginning peer support outreach, the OT students met twice weekly for four weeks with varying groups of JEVS members in the Narberth, PA and Collingswood, NJ locations to build rapport with members, relay an understanding of peer support, and collect verbal interest in learning more about the program. Recurring members attended weekly events to participate in group-based activities and gain an insight into peer support skills that would then be addressed in training.

The OT student developing this project designed a flyer (Appendix B) to outreach to JEVS members about the peer support program. This flyer included information about peer support, why it is important, and what the role would entail. Following distribution of this flyer, and nominations of JEVS members from staff to become peer mentors, the team held a meeting for all JEVS members interested in becoming peer mentors. For those committed to the program, with feedback and collaboration from the team, the OT student created an application (Appendix C) for mentors to gather information on their demographics, schedule availability, and why they wanted to participate. Collecting demographic information provided future opportunities for matching peers based on similar age, gender, geographic location, time living independently, etc.

The team collected additional information about each individual's lived experiences, communication preferences, current understanding of peer support and what skills they are looking to gain through peer support through individual interviews between peer mentors, an OT student, and the JEVS member consultant prior to training. Sample scenario questions were also included in the interview to gain an understanding how potential mentors approach a variety of situations that could occur with their peers (Appendix D).

Following participation in peer mentor training, the OT student and JEVS member consultant performed individual post-training interviews for mentors. These conversations (Appendix E) provided insight into individuals' self-efficacy and self-confidence after training, as well as their perceptions of their current skillset and overall thoughts on the training sessions.

Program Development: Procedures for Peer Mentees

The OT student designed a second flyer to recruit potential mentees (Appendix F) for community outreach through JEVS with information describing peer support and what the program entailed. In collaboration with the team, the OT student created a mentee application

(Appendix G) to collect demographics and background information to learn about those interested in peer support and how to best support them.

Program Development: Procedures for the Matching Process

The OT student developed an activity/hobby-based interest checklist (Appendix H), a lived experience questionnaire (Appendix I), and a matching preference survey (Appendix J) as supplements to prepare for the matching process of peers. The intent of these materials was to provide as many shared characteristics as possible between peers to match them on common, lived experiences.

Program Development: Procedures for the Staff Supervisor Resource Guide

The OT student developed an information resource guide for JEVS staff members acting in the role of peer support supervisors. This document defined peer support, explained the role of the supervisor and how staff can best support peer mentors and mentees through the guidelines outlined by NAPS (Foglesong et al., 2022). Additional resources were also provided to supplement topics addressed in peer support training to support situations or challenges that could arise in peer support.

Program Evaluation

To determine if the program design and materials adequately met the needs of JEVS, consistent feedback from members and staff provided the most accurate and relevant information. The team held informal meetings and check-ins to collect feedback from individuals and groups throughout the program development process. The team of JEVS staff and the JEVS member consultant reviewed paperwork for mentors and mentees prior to administration. This was to ensure understanding of what was being asked of the population.

The pre- and post-training interviews were conducted to evaluate peer mentors' self-perceptions of their skillset, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and overall knowledge of peer support before and after participation in training sessions. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions in individual interviews with an OT student and the JEVS member consultant. Information was reviewed and divided into areas to explore progress and experience.

Results

A total of 18 JEVS members committed to participating in the peer support program. 17 of the 18 peer mentors completed the trainings and all 17 expressed that they improved in their skills and confidence in peer support from participating in the training. Three main areas of evaluation were derived from qualitative data analysis including: skill set, self-efficacy, and overall confidence in peer support.

Skill Set

A common area of concern expressed by peer mentors prior to training was how to effectively communicate with mentees and set boundaries. Post-training interviews revealed 15 out of 17 mentors expressing self-improvement in their abilities to set boundaries and effectively communicate with others. Within effective communication, four peer mentors specifically mentioned improvements in their active listening skills. Other areas of self-expressed skill improvement to note included learning new tasks, team building, exploring new strengths and interests, goal setting, acknowledging judgment and biases, speaking up for oneself and self-advocating, coping skills, patience, and helping people in new and challenging situations.

Self-efficacy

Peer mentors were asked to use one word or phrase to describe themselves after training. All 17 responses reflected a positive outlook on oneself, outlined in Table 2 (Appendix K).

Mentors were also questioned about their perceptions of their abilities to use the skills they learned following the training. Eight of the 17 peer mentors expressed they were able to use their skills to interact with new people in social situations. Three mentors shared they could somewhat use their skills, but it is still a new process, where one mentor felt they were unsure, but it is helpful to have experiences to try. Five peer mentors indicated they could not yet use the new skills, or their natural conversations feel the same, but they understand the knowledge from the training they now have to succeed in peer support.

Confidence

Each of the 17 peer mentors expressed some level of confidence after training. Table 3 (Appendix L) outlines peer mentors' responses when asked if they feel more confident in their role. Areas of confidence included self-confidence within themselves, their abilities to provide peer support, or their overall knowledge of peer support.

Success Stories & Testimonials

One peer mentor stated that "Everything was great. I thought it was cool how everything in the training came together in the event. It was a neat experience and hopefully we can do more and grow together." This peer mentor also expressed that they felt more confident in their role as a peer mentor and that they "want to see how else I can improve because I am more aware of what I can do" (J.E., 2025).

Another peer mentor expressed some hesitation during the pre-training interview and questioned if they could drop-out of the trainings if they began to feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable. This peer mentor completed the training, and in the post-training interview, when asked to provide a word or phrase to describe themselves after training, they felt "More confident

about myself”. They also stated that “I had a really fun experience doing it with everybody and learning about new things. I’m glad I did it and that I was nominated” (S.M., 2025).

A third peer mentor expressed in their pre-training conversation having difficulty communicating with others prior to participating in the training. When asked what skill they felt more confident in post-training, they stated “Effective communication. I have trouble communicating so this training helped me learn more to help me talk to not just the mentee but everyone” (S.D., 2025).

Discussion

This project developed an application process to guide the matching of mentors and mentees, as well as a training for a peer support program. The application process gathered information about peer mentors, including their availability, commitment, skill set and self-efficacy. Determining mentor availability and commitment to the program was important to actively participate in peer support (Marks et al., 2019) with 17 out of 18 peer mentors completing the training program. The application process also provided insight into both mentor and mentee schedules to match peers based on mutual availability. Similar to prior research that identified the feasibility of another peer support program, providing support when there are limited scheduling conflicts contributes to practicality and satisfaction in the program (Shea et al., 2022).

Looking at peer support skills a person already had versus what they could learn through training sessions helped to guide the training program to target all necessary skills needed for peer support (Shaw et al., 2020). The pre-training interviews gave insight into each peer mentor’s view on their current skill-set and what areas they felt needed improvement through training. Previous peer support programs found communication, social interaction, problem-solving, and

boundary setting skills (Loeper & Schwartz, 2023; Thompson et al., 2018) important to have when providing peer support. Post-training interviews revealed that all peer mentors identified self-improvement in one or more of these areas, showing increased self-efficacy and overall confidence in their abilities to provide peer support. This will help to guide future mentor-mentee matching pairs through the increased abilities to interact with others in social situations and build meaningful relationships (Schwartz et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The materials developed for peer support were all reviewed through multiple rounds of feedback from JEVS staff and the JEVS member consultant to determine their use in the program. The mentor recruitment flyer was a successful tool to outreach to the JEVS community and engage members in joining an interest meeting. The applications provided for peer mentors were successfully used to collect background information and scheduling commitments.

With 18 peer mentors participating in the training, there was no guarantee that every mentor would be paired with a mentee. A “Socializing With a Purpose” event was held for mentors to practice their skills and to recruit mentees to the program. Newer members to the JEVS community from the Ambler, PA location served as the mentees for this event. The provided mentee application to collect information from those participating was not utilized due to time constraints.

Many aspects went into developing the matching process for mentors and mentees, including the interest checklist, lived-experience questionnaire, and matching preference survey. Originally, an objective to match mentors and mentees included diagnosis based on prior research in mental health populations. However, after feedback and further consideration, this was removed to avoid stigma and bias, as it is not relevant to the JEVS population. Additionally,

due to time constraints, the OT student developed all materials to match mentors and mentees, but the final pairings were not complete by the end of this program development phase. Future events and more social interaction time will allow for the matching process to be put in place.

To help support the program, seven JEVS staff members assisted in the process. The OT student developed a Staff Supervisor Resource Guide with definitions, information on a staff supervisors' role in peer support, peer support guidelines, and various resources to support peer mentors with their mentees. After multiple requests for feedback and meetings, there inevitably was not enough time to complete this process or collaborate with staff and therefore the staff supervisor guide was not utilized.

Pre- and post-training interviews provided qualitative data with thoughts and insights directly from mentors. Useful outcomes from these individualized conversations showed the impact of peer support and how peer mentors developed their skills and overall mindset. Evaluated self-perception of skill improvement, self-efficacy, and self-confidence gave insight into the importance and positive impact peer support and community engagement had for individuals with IDD. Direct perceptions from peer mentors will allow outside community partners to see first-hand what the program entailed and the mentors' experiences. Additionally, this information left an impact for future peer mentor cohorts to see how participating in this program can make a difference.

Sustainability & Future Plans

Upon the completion of this project, all created documents were shared in a Google Drive for JEVS staff to access and use as they see fit moving forward in the peer support program. Blank copies of each form were provided to be reused in the future, with editing access to adjust as the needs change for program and the population. Copies of the post-training interview

testimonials were also provided to share the impact of peer support for outreach to the community and the future of the program.

Based on feedback from peer mentors, a future recommendation for upcoming “Socializing With a Purpose” events is for more time with potential mentees to interact and to get to know each other. This would also aid in the matching process to pair mentors and mentees based on as many shared interests and experiences as possible. There is also a need for a staff training session or manual. Current staff assisting in the initiative participated in the peer mentor trainings, however given the circumstances surrounding the Staff Supervisor Resource Guide not being completed, staff would benefit from a more supervisor-focused training. A further recommendation would be to use current materials and post-training interview outcomes to outreach to the community to expand peer support and its benefits to others outside of the JEVS community.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Core Values and Corresponding Guidelines for Peer Support

<p>Core Value #1: Peer Support is Voluntary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Supporters do not force others to participate, they respect the rights of others, advocate for choice • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Encourage peer supporters in promoting individuals' choices while creating safe environments, explore supporters' choices, provide guidance when supporters are advocating
<p>Core Value #2: Peer Supporters are Hopeful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Share stories of personal experiences, model appropriate behaviors and boundaries • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Demonstrate confidence in supporters' abilities to share experiences, provide ways to further develop sharing skills, model self-care and boundaries
<p>Core Value #3: Peer Supporters are Open Minded</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Embrace differences, respect an individual's choices, connect with others where they are in life • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: View differences as an opportunity for learning, learn <i>with</i> the peers, respect supporters' approaches based on personal experiences
<p>Core Value #4: Peer Supporters are Empathetic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Listen with emotional sensitivity, practice effective, non-judgmental listening skills • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Practice effective listening skills, provide time, space, coaching, and feedback for supporters to learn this skill
<p>Core Value #5: Peer Supporters are Respectful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Embrace diversity, encourage others to explore differences, practice patience, treat each person with dignity, embrace full range of experiences, strengths, and approaches • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: View peer support as relating to many views, gain awareness of world views (stigmas, biases, stereotypes), practice cultural humility, be open to feedback
<p>Core Value #6: Peer Supporters Facilitate Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Recognize injustices and understand how they affect people, act as an advocate, facilitate change, encourage others to overcome challenges, use supportive language • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Model advocacy for peer supporters, coach peer supporters on how to respect an individuals' rights when facing an injustice, build on lived experience, advocate for peer supporters, assist others in understanding peer support and supporters' roles
<p>Core Value #7: Peer Supporters are Honest and Direct</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Respect privacy and confidentiality, engage when desired, have honest discussions, be compassionate, build relationships on trust, respect, honesty, and integrity • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Establish boundaries and clear expectations, promote responsibility and accountability, build trust and integrity through honest and respectful communication
<p>Core Value #8: Peer Support is Mutual and Reciprocal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Learn from peers being supported, encourage peers to give and receive, respect and honor the peer relationship • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Ask peer supporters how they best receive feedback and direction, encourage collaborative learning, ask for input in decision-making, welcome feedback from supporters
<p>Core Value #9: Peer Support is Equally Shared Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Peers are equal, language should reflect a mutual relationship, do not exercise or express power over peer, do not diagnose or offer medical services • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Educate supporters on the concept of power, reinforce roles and non-clinical nature of peer support, consider how all histories affect relationships, create safe environments
<p>Core Value #10: Peer Support is Strengths-Focused</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Encourage others to identify strengths and focus on strengths not deficits, use experiences to demonstrate using strengths, explore meaningful dreams and goals, do not fix or do what others cannot do for themselves • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Model a strengths-based focus, encourage supporters to develop their own meaningful goals, encourage supporters to use a strengths-based approach themselves and evaluate own performance
<p>Core Value #11: Peer Support is Transparent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Set clear expectations of peer relationship, use clear, understandable, judgment-free, supportive, respectful language, provide support in professional but personal manner • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Familiarize peer supporters with their roles, explain the supervisors' role, describe benefits of a supporter-supervisor relationship, use clear and plain language
<p>Core Value #12: Peer Support is Person-Driven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Peer Supporter Guidelines</u>: Encourage peers to make their own decisions, offer options and encourage others to try new things when appropriate, help peers learn from mistakes, encourage resilience and personal growth • <u>Supervisor Guidelines</u>: Provide environment for peer supporters to move beyond their comfort zones and learn from mistakes, frame unexpected encounters opportunities for growth, assist peer supporters in identifying own areas of personal growth and developing own goals, recognize when issues a supporter brings to the supervisor are beyond the role of the supervisor and suggest appropriate, constructive ways to resolve

Adapted from National Association of Peer Supporters, 2019

Appendix B

THE JEVS INDEPENDENCE NETWORK IS LOOKING FOR MEMBERS INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A PEER SUPPORT INITIATIVE!

What is Peer Support?

Peer Support refers to sharing lived experiences with others to offer guidance, share coping strategies, and support. Peer support can happen when we *Socialize with a Purpose*. This is where we use social interaction as a tool with a specific goal to provide mutual support, share coping strategies, and learn from each other.

What would I have to do?

- Complete an application
- Participate in training with for about 2 hours per week, over 5 weeks
- Participate in 2 group check-in meetings per month
- Commit to being paired with a peer mentee for at least 6 months
- Participate with your peer mentee in a *Socializing with a Purpose* gathering once a month

Why is this important?

- Peer support is a chance to share all of your accomplishments around independent life with someone who hopes to be independent in the future
- It is a way to pay it forward and make a positive difference in the lives of others
- This is an opportunity to help others take their next steps with the support of people who understand and can share lived experience

Who would I be supporting?

- Individuals preparing to graduate from high school or college
- Adults interested in independence but nervous about next steps
- New program members
- Community members who may not join the program but would benefit from new social connections

If you are interested in learning more

- Reach out to Jill, Natalie, or Marc
- Attend an interest meeting via Zoom on 3/4/25
- Fill out an application (mentor support time could be used)

Appendix C

PEER SUPPORT INITIATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating!

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

Name:

Age:

Phone:

Email:

Gender Identity:

The Human Rights Campaign defines gender identity as one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

**Preferred
Pronouns:**

The Human Rights Campaign describes pronouns as the words we use to refer to ourselves and others. Examples of pronouns are: She/Her, He/Him, They/Them, Ze/Zir, Ey/Eim, and more.

JEVS Independence Network Program:

Narberth

Collingswood

Ambler

**# of Years Lived
Independently:**

**# of Years
affiliated with
JEVS:**

Are there any times or days during the week you are consistently **NOT** available? (working, volunteering, clubs, etc.) Use the box below to place an X in times you are **NOT** available. If your schedule varies each week, but you know how many hours and/or the times of day per week you are **NOT** available, please write in the lines below.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Why do you want to participate in the Peer Support Initiative?



Appendix D

Do you have experience working with others? What was your experience? Were you one-on-one with a person or with a group? This can be volunteer, work, or a school experience. (Ex: group volunteer, camp counselor, school social group, etc.)

Do you have any boundaries around communication? Do you have any concerns about communicating in certain ways? (meeting in person, talking on the phone, video calls, etc.)

In your own words, what does it mean to be a peer supporter?

What skills are you looking to gain through participating in the peer support initiative? (ex: boundary setting, communication skills, etc.)

Peer support example:

Your mentee comes to you saying they are having a difficult time making new friends. They go to events, but when they are there, they keep to themselves and only talk to others if they are asked a question. As a peer supporter, how would you help your mentee in these situations? What would you tell them to help them start to make new friends?

Peer support example:

You are having a conversation with your mentee and they are upset about something that happened. You want to help them through it, but you do not understand the situation. What can you do next? Who can you contact or tell your mentee to talk to?

Appendix E

- 1) Tell me a skill you felt you improved on from participating in training

- 2) Tell me a skill you learned that you didn't think you would learn about in training

- 3) Tell me a skill you thought you knew, but now you feel more confident in from training

- 4) What is one word or phrase you would use to describe yourself now after training?

- 5) Did you find you were able to use your skills after training to build conversations and interact with new people?

- 6) Do you feel more confident in your role as a peer supporter after participating in the training?

- 7) What part(s) of training did you find most helpful?

- 8) Was there anything you think could have been included in the training to help benefit your learning or been better overall?

Overall comments:

Appendix F



Peer Support Initiative

Looking for a Supportive Friend? Do you have dreams about living on your own, having a meaningful career, and living a full life?

The JEVS Independence Network community would love to meet you!

Are you a young adult with a disability who could benefit from connecting with someone who understands? We're offering the opportunity to be matched with a peer support partner to share experiences, offer guidance, and build meaningful connections with peers.

Who Can Join?

Young adults with disabilities/ neurodivergences over the age of 21 and interested in increased independence and new connections.

What is Peer Support?

Peer support is all about connecting with someone who shares similar experiences and challenges. A peer support partner is here to listen, to help you consider and navigate your next steps, and celebrate your successes!

Why Join?

- Build new friendships
- Share and receive support
- Gain valuable insight and advice
- Feel heard and understood
- Empower each other!

How It Works:

- 1) Complete and submit an application
- 2) Be matched with a peer support partner who shares similar interests and experiences
- 3) Start connecting at monthly "Socializing with a Purpose" gatherings, and support each other through regularly scheduled check-ins.

Sign Up Today!

For more information, questions, or to sign up, contact: Jill Gromen, Director of JEVS Independence Network at: jill.gromen@jevs.org

Let's build a supportive community together!

Appendix G

PEER SUPPORT INITIATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating!

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

If you are interested in speaking with a JEVS staff member via phone or Zoom call to provide your information, please contact _____ at _____.

Name:

Age:

Do you have a Legal Guardian? Yes No

Phone:

Email:

Gender Identity:

The Human Rights Campaign defines gender identity as one's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Preferred Pronouns:

The Human Rights Campaign describes pronouns as the words we use to refer to ourselves and others. Examples of pronouns are: She/Her, He/Him, They/Them, Ze/Zir, Ey/Eim, and more.

Have you ever lived independently? _____

How did you find out about the Peer Support Initiative?

- Email
- Newsletter
- Friend/Family
- School
- Current JEVS Member
- Community Event

Why do you want to participate in this initiative? (ex: socialize in a group, make connections, learn new skills, etc.)

What is your vision for your future? What are you hoping to do in the next few years? (Ex: live independently, go to college, get a job, etc.)

When you are feeling strong or difficult emotions, what are some things that help you feel better? What can your peer supporter do to best support you during these times?

Please share any additional information you would like us to know about you below. If there is no further information, please write "N/A".

Appendix H

★ INTEREST CHECKLIST ★

Name: _____

№	Activities	I like to do this	I do not like this	I am interested in trying this
1	Cooking or baking			
2	Reading books			
3	Watching TV shows or movies			
4	Watching sports			
5	Playing video or computer games			
6	Playing board games			
7	Playing card games			
8	Listening to music			
9	Going to the movies			
10	Going out to eat			
11	Shopping (for clothes, shoes, décor...)			
12	Painting			
13	Doing puzzles			
14	Crafting or jewelry making			
15	Dancing			
16	Exercising			
17	Going for walks			
18	Photography			
19	Traveling			
20	Gardening			

Appendix I

Lived Experience Questionnaire

This form will be used to help us match mentors and mentees. Responses will not be shared with other mentors/mentees participating.

1. Your Name:

2. What was your experience after high school? Check all answers that describe you.

If none of the suggested answers apply, please select "other" and write your response.

Check all that apply.

- I went to college then lived independently I went to a transition program
- I started working/volunteering
- I completed a college program
- I did some college then left
- I lived at home after high school then lived independently
- I joined the JEVS program right after high school
- I lived at home after high school then joined the JEVS program

Other: _____

3. What is your current living situation like? Check all answers that describe you. If none of the suggested answers apply, please select "other" and write your response.

Check all that apply.

- I live alone
- I live with roommates
- I live with pets
- I live at home with parents or extended family

Other: _____

4. How do you commute/travel from place to place? (ex: to work, a friend's house, the mall, etc.) Check all answers that describe you.
If none of the suggested answers apply, please select "other" and write your response.

Check all that apply.

- Train
- Bus
- I drive a car
- Uber/Lyft, other rideshare
- Walk
- I depend on a family member or friend to drive me everywhere

Other: _____

Appendix J

Speed Friending

List your Top 3 people you spoke to throughout the event that you feel you could build further connections with. Please answer honestly. Responses will not be shared with other mentors/mentees participating.

Your Name:

First Person:

Why did you list this person as your first choice? Were you comfortable talking to them? Do you have any shared interests? Was there an easy flow of the conversation? Did you have a lot to talk about?

Second Person:

Why did you list this person as your second choice? Were you comfortable talking to them? Do you have any shared interests? Was there an easy flow of the conversation? Did you have a lot to talk about?

Third Person:

Why did you list this person as your third choice? Were you comfortable talking to them? Do you have any shared interests? Was there an easy flow of the conversation? Did you have a lot to talk about?

Appendix K

Table 2

What is one word or phrase you would use to describe yourself now after training?

“Accomplished, ready” (A.G., 2025).
“Humbled, more accepting of my faults of communicating with others and finding ways to improve those skills, aware of own faults” (A.M., 2025).
“More knowledgeable” (B.R., 2025).
“Experienced” (J.B., 2025a).
“Confident and when talking to mentees I feel like I can do this I didn’t think before I could do it” (J.B., 2025b).
“Achievable, I was able to achieve so much and have fun with it” (J.E., 2025).
“Proud, because I accomplished it” (J.S., 2025).
“Positive” (K.B., 2025).
“Improving” (K.M., 2025).
“Open-minded” (L.K., 2025).
“Responsible because I was able to commit to something” (N.W., 2025).
“More independent, confident, more flexible, trustworthy” (P.C., 2025).
“I have all the material to prepare but I need to go back over it to really feel prepared but I’m happy with it and it’s what I need” (R.J.W., 2025).
“Experienced” (S.B., 2025).
“I feel like: ‘The student surpasses the teacher’ – I was in best buddies and now I have this experience” (S.D., 2025).
“More confident about myself” (S.M., 2025).
“More adapt to mentoring role” (Z.P., 2025).

Appendix L

Table 3

Do you feel more confident in your role as a peer supporter after participating in the training?

“I do! Because now I know what to expect in the new program and I have a better understanding of what I will be doing” (A.G., 2025).
“Absolutely. Before I felt more go with the flow but now feels more a basis than just feelings, easier to feel confident in using skills” (A.M., 2025).
“Yes, because I didn’t know what I was getting myself into but now I feel more confident after training” (B.R., 2025).
“I think so, not because my abilities are higher but because I’m not in this alone and it is a team effort” (J.B., 2025a).
“One thousand percent yes definitely” (J.B., 2025b).
“70% / 30% I want to see how else I can improve because I am more aware of what I can do” (J.E., 2025).
“A little but we’ll see day by day” (J.S., 2025).
“Yes” (K.B., 2025).
“Yes” (K.M., 2025).
“More than I did in the beginning” (L.K., 2025).
“I’m not sure because I didn’t know much about it. I gained confidence in my ability to do it” (N.W., 2025).
“I do, yes” (P.C., 2025).
“Yes, just from having all the materials” (R.J.W., 2025).
“Yes. I feel more patient with people. I don’t assume they don’t want to talk or are mad at me or don’t like me. They’re just new and need to get comfortable” (S.B., 2025).
“I feel like: ‘The student surpasses the teacher’ – I was in best buddies and now I have this experience” (S.D., 2025).
“For sure! My whole family is so proud me” (S.M., 2025).
“Yes, I do” (Z.P., 2025).