

Introducing the Alameda County Accelerated Peer Specialist program (ACAPS)

The California Association of Mental Health Peer-Run Organizations (CAMHPRO) has been awarded a contract from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) for a new program, the Alameda County Accelerated Peer Specialist program (ACAPS). The purpose of ACAPS is to provide training, placement, and support for peers in Alameda County's public mental health system.

CAMHPRO is excited to collaborate with so many Alameda County community based agencies as well as Alameda County Behavioral Health Services (ACBHS) in this venture. As the lead agency, CAMHPRO will partner with the Pool of Consumer Champions (POCC), Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (ACBHCS); La Familia; Best NOW!/Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients; the Berkeley Drop-In Center and Reaching Across, Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients; Peers Envisioning and Engaging Recovery Services (PEERS); and Bay Area Community Services (BACS).

The goal of ACAPS is engagement, training and placement in Alameda County's public mental health system of skilled peer specialists who bring a wide array of lived experience to their work. Over the course of eighteen months the innovative ACAPS program will a) provide accelerated training that focuses on peer specialist skills, case management, motivational health coaching for self-care, and peer support for emotional distress/psychiatric crisis and suicide prevention, b) deliver placement and career support services for participants to ensure retention, career development and effective long-term integration of ACAPS peers within the public mental health system, and (c) ensure that all key activities of ACAPS are based on consumer-driven values and a recovery focus.

ACAPS will offer a three-part training program that includes 1) 60-hour Introductory Peer Specialist Intensive to be provided by Best NOW! 2) Three-day Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) training provided by PEERS, and 3) *Growing Through* (aka Peer Crisis Support), a 40-hour advanced skills training in peer support for people experiencing crisis, distress and suicidality provided by Dignity Recovery Action! Intl. These trainings will be offered to three (3) different cohorts.

Following the training program, ACAPS will place 40 people with lived experience in programs throughout Alameda County. These are: 15 peers at La Familia's peer respite, Alameda County's first peer respite that is scheduled to open soon; two (2) peers at drop in centers in southern and northern Alameda County run by Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients; 20 peers at the Pool of Consumer Champions (POCC), a consumer run program

of ACBHCS; six (6) peers placed in different programs of Bay Area Community Services (BACS), one being a residential crisis facility.

Peer support services are a best practice. Research has shown that peer support services reduce hospitalizations and hospital days, improve client functioning, increase client satisfaction, reduce family concerns, alleviate depression and other symptoms, and enhance client self-advocacy.ⁱ ACAPS vision is to substantially increase the number of peer providers working in Alameda County's public mental health system, and create the impetus for ACBHCS to continue hiring and retaining peers in the workforce.

ⁱ Chinman et al, Peer Services for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness: Assessing the Evidence, *Psychiatric Services* 65: 429-441, 2014.

