



Crestwood Recovery Resilience Solutions

What It Takes: Wisdom of Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors.

By Dr. Lori Ashcraft

What is the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.)?

We started with a segment from an interview with Founder Steve Harrington describing one of his psychiatric hospitalizations and the discovery that peer support offered him hope, which he thought he had lost through his earlier treatment. It was a nice introduction to the gentle spirit and strong conviction of the man who founded an association by and for peer supporters, with the vision of ensuring that peer support providers were embedded throughout behavioral health so that peer support would be available for everyone who finds themselves in the mental health system.

Steve and a small group of peer specialists started N.A.P.S. in 2004 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They created a newsletter and did a survey and outreach to peer specialists across the country regarding the workforce. Starting in 2007, Steve held the first, and for many years the only, annual national conference specifically for peer specialists in cities around the U.S. During Steve's tenure, the organization changed its name to the International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS) to recognize the many international members who were joining. It also received a grant from SAMHSA to create an advanced level curriculum for peer specialists as part of the Recovery to Practice initiative. Under Steve's direction, the organization had a task force that developed, gained national consensus for, and issued National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters in 2013.

Steve directed the organization's activities from 2004 through 2015, when he had a career ending stroke. He passed away in 2021. More about the history of iNAPS, which was renamed N.A.P.S. in 2020 can be found in an Appendix of the book, "What it Takes: Wisdom of Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors". N.A.P.S. has held (with the exception of the year of COVID in 2020) annual conferences every year since 2007. In 2023, they held their 16th annual peer specialist conference in Norfolk, VA.

What is the National Peer Workforce and Supervision Workgroup?

The original National Peer Workforce and Supervision Workgroup (which we refer to as “the workgroup”) of the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.) included Rita Cronise who coordinated the task force and development of the original National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters (NPG). Rita was first joined by Jonathan P. Edwards, Dana Foglesong, Jessica Wolf, and Martha Barbone (then Director of NAPS). Later Joanne Forbes and Gita Enders contributed Supervision Resources to the effort as the 2019 revision of the National Practice Guidelines took shape to include the role of the supervisor. (NPG-S). Others who played a role in the development and release of the NPG-S included Ivana Bond, Kelsey (Stang) Knowles, and Mike Weaver.

A smaller group of the workgroup went on to co-edit the book, “*What it Takes: Wisdom of Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors*”. More on that later in this blog.

What else did the National Peer Workforce and Supervision Workgroup Accomplish?

Joanne and Rita had been meeting regularly during the analysis of Joanne’s doctoral work. They met every Monday morning from 9-10 am for what they affectionately named the “Code and Coffee” time because Joanne was doing qualitative research on the subject of peer specialists being supervised by non-peer supervisors.

The current workgroup of four, which is Jonathan, Joanne, Gita, and Rita came together to meet regularly while planning for and delivering the N.A.P.S. Supervision Learning Collaborative as well as multiple workshops and webinars based on the National Practice Guidelines, Supervision, the development and dissemination of Five Function Model of Supervision that Jonathan has been offering since 2016.

A research study on the model will soon to be published in the American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation based on the Five Function Model. All of the workgroup members have authored and/or peer reviewed journal articles related to peer support over the past few years, and the group has a new workshop series called No-Nothing-None based on training that Joanne had done across the country with Ike Powell about the three critical questions that need to be asked about the supervision of peer support workers. Jonathan and Jessica Wolf (who was also instrumental in the development of the NPG-S) have also collaborated on a workshop on Microaggression.

Joanne completed her doctoral work on the experiences of peer specialists being supervised by non-peer supervisors and two months later, Jonathan completed his doctoral work on the satisfaction of peer specialists in the workforce. Links to both of their doctoral work is available at the end of this blog.

What Impact has the CMS Decision Had on Supervision of Peer Specialists?

Joanne's doctoral work was largely in response to the 2007 CMS guidance to states on Medicaid reimbursement for evidence-based peer support services. The decision that the peer workforce needed to be supervised by "competent mental health professionals, as defined by each state" led to complexities in implementing peer support in that, while recognizing the need for reliable supervision, defaulted to clinical models of supervision which perpetuated a watering down of true peer support given its oversight by nonpeer supervisors.

Throughout Joanne's research, the peer specialists that were interviewed all voiced a preference for receiving supervision from a more experienced practitioner of peer support rather than someone with a clinical background. This preference has been seen throughout the workforce ever since the 2007 decision, and it was one of the main reasons for the revision to the National Practice Guidelines to include the role of the supervision in helping peer support workers to uphold the fidelity and core values of peer support practice.

What About the Book?

The book, "What it Takes: Wisdom of Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors" was one of the workgroup's recent "passion projects." The idea for the book was based on gathering experiences from the field of peer support and supervision. The book is intended to guide the practice of peer support and supervision, and it is based on topics by presenters at five of the annual national conferences for Peer Specialists (2016-2021), hosted by the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.). The workgroup provided a template with standard headings to fill in and 45 presenters agreed to contribute a 5-page narrative based on the topic of their presentation. Research and reference material were also included.

Who Was the Book Written For?

The target audience, much like the NPG-S, is supervisors of peer support workers who seek to improve their practice of supervision through peer-informed approaches to collaborative supervision across the spectrum of workplace settings and recent innovations.

The book is also appropriate for state directors of mental health programs, agency administrators, program coordinators, peer support practitioners, non-peer co-workers and colleagues, and anyone interested in entering or learning more about the peer support workforce. We have seen a number of N.A.P.S. members give the book away during advocacy efforts with state and national representatives who are making legislative decisions related to the peer support workforce. We have been inspired by the ways in which the book has been used to bring greater legitimacy to the workforce.

How Long is the Book?

The book is 485 pages divided into 13 chapters. There are five major parts:

1. Understanding Peer Support in Behavioral Health
2. Peer Support Values and Standards
3. The Practice of Peer Support
4. Successful Supervision
5. Special Interests

There are also Appendixes that provide Biographies for all 45 of the contributors, A Short History of N.A.P.S. and Tributes to Leaders of the Peer Support Movement and Allies who have passed on, such as Steve Harrington and Bill Anthony. George Ebert, Ed Knight, Darby Penney, Jacki McKinney, and Sally Zinman.

What Was the Process for Developing the Book?

The project was created by the workgroup as “next project” in the group’s goals. The idea of making it a fundraiser for N.A.P.S. came about as the group discussed reaching out to those who had previously presented at N.A.P.S. conferences. The ability to access these experts existed because of past conferences.

The members of the workgroup (co-editors) are largely people who work in academic settings seeking additional publications for their professional resumes. The 45 contributors were largely peer practitioners and/or supervisors who could gain additional exposure and recognition for the innovative work they are doing. Editors and contributors all agreed to donate their time and expertise to develop the book on behalf of N.A.P.S. with all proceeds going to the ongoing efforts of the association.

The workgroup members (co-editors) came together to do the outreach, review, editing, and assembly of the book. There were a number of contributors, such as Celia Brown who wrote the Foreword of the book, Gayle Bluebird and Lori Ashcraft, who wrote for multiple parts. Lori, in particular contributed a complete chapter and a moving tribute to Bill Anthony of the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University who was her co-writer for many years. She included reflections from many people in Bill’s life who could speak to the contributions that he had made. She also contributed much of the original History of N.A.P.S. that was contained in the Appendix of the book.

Why Was the Book Needed?

There is no other known text of this kind. This is an invaluable resource by peer specialists and supervisors for specialists and supervisors. It offers an honest opportunity to make a contribution that speaks to “nothing about us without us.”. It offers an overview of recovery; the history of peer support, values and standards; the arts; supervision; inclusion of peer services in behavioral health₄

and other special interests. The workgroup felt it was important to create an opportunity for the voice of the workforce to be heard in a new and different way.

The book was originally accepted by an Academic Publisher, but the co-editors and N.A.P.S. decided not to go with a recognized publisher, in part because the academic publisher was not “in tune” with the peer support workforce. By not going with an academic publisher the group was able to bring the price down from close to \$100 per copy to \$25 per copy, to make it more accessible to peer specialists as well as to allow the 45 contributors the ability to retain the rights to their works. The book was published through Amazon with significant guidance and assistance from Kelsey Stang (Knowles) and Mae Murray.

How Successful Has the Book Been?

At the most recent N.A.P.S. National Conference, they shared that 801 books have been sold and \$6720 has been raised for the organization so far. The Kindle version of the book sells for \$12.99 and the paperback version sells for \$26.99, with the opportunity to purchase for \$20 at the national conference.

What Are Some of the Drawbacks of the Book?

Jonathan and Rita were featured on a podcast episode of Keris Myrick’s Unapologetically Black Unicorns, where they described on criticism of the book, that mirrors the historic homogeneity of N.A.P.S., is the lack of black contributors. In a review of the demographic data about the organization that was gathered in 2014 from 608 people from 44 states, the race/ethnicity of the respondents was 74.4% White/Caucasian, 15.5% Black/African American, and 9.7% Latinx. Similar racial demographics are seen in surveys of the workforce even today.

In reexamining our own work, we believe there is a call for action by associations such as N.A.P.S., as well as agencies and organizations throughout behavioral health care about being more intentional about serving the underserved communities by including People of Color as well as those in the LGBTQIA community as peer specialists and promoting them to positions of leadership.

What Are We Seeing Happening to Peer Specialists in Clinical Settings?

What we see happening in the peer support workforce is akin to the colonization of native peoples in that the “mental health system” usurps and coopts native peer support and commodifies it, tailoring it to the needs and comfort zone of the existing clinical institution and infrastructure. This has led to the dilution and will lead to the eventual erasure of some of the most cherished core values of peer support. Hence the complexities within the workforce and accompanying dissension around the meaning of peer support is and how it works.

What is Next for the Peer Support Workforce?

The workforce has been working on a number of workshops and projects as well as continuing to collaborate with N.A.P.S. At this time, there is no Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for people who use their lived experience to work with others. Currently, peer support workers are classified as social workers or community health workers, neither of which require having lived experience as a requirement for their work. Identifying what is unique about the peer support workforce is a key step toward identifying wages and practices that align with the emotional burden of the lived experience workforce. N.A.P.S. has been working with the U.S. Dept. of Labor on a Standard Occupational Classification for peer specialists which will mean better tracking data and outcomes of the workforce. Members of the workgroup have also been involved in SAMHSA's work toward model standards for peer support certification, outreach to organizational leadership on the importance of the peer workforce for behavioral healthcare organizations, recognizing the need for greater outreach to marginalized communities to recruit peer specialists into the workforce from communities of color, LGBTQIA, and other underserved populations, the development of training, technical assistance, and other efforts related to the further promotion of the peer support workforce and its supervision.

Co-Editors:

Rita Cronise, MS, ALWF

Faculty Rutgers University, Academy of Peer Services, Co-Director PeerTAC, and former Director of Operations for N.A.P.S.

Rita Cronise has over two decades of experience in training peer specialists at the local, state, and national level. She coordinated development of the National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters through the National Association of Peer Supporters (N.A.P.S.) and later served with Lori Ashcraft as Co-Director of the National Association until taking a full time faculty position at Rutgers University. In that position, Rita helped develop the Academy of Peer Services, which is the online training program used in the peer specialist certification in New York State. She currently serves as Co-Director of a technical assistance center known as PeerTAC. She is pleased to be one of the four editors for the N.A.P.S. book, "What it Takes: Wisdom from Peer Specialists and Supervisors." All proceeds from the book go to the National Association. Rita is a frequent lecturer on peer support values, practices, and supervision.

Jonathan P. Edwards, Ph.D., LCSW, ACSW, NYCPS

Faculty Columbia School of Social Work, Program Consultant at the New York City Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevent, Care, and Treatment, and former Board Member of N.A.P.S.

Jonathan P. Edwards is a social scientist, public health professional, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Certified Peer Specialist, Certified Personal Medicine Coach, university professor, and person in long-term recovery. Dr. Edwards is widely known in the United States for his significant contributions to the peer support and the social work professions including workforce development, supervision, implementation, and research. In addition to leading one of the largest peer support workforces within the New York City Hospital system, he recently published a study on job satisfaction; contributed to the development of National Practice Guidelines for Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors; and served on several technical expert panels to develop national model standards for peer support certification, as well as a national recovery research agenda. Dr. Edwards earned Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) at Graduate Center of CUNY and his Master of Social Work degree at Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. Dr. Edwards has co-authored many peer-reviewed articles, several book chapters, and co-edited "What It Takes: Wisdom from Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors" which was published earlier this year. He has received numerous awards including the Brenden Nugent Leadership and Empowerment Award presented by the Alliance for Rights and Recovery (formerly New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services) at their recent annual conference.

Gita Enders, LMSW, MA, NYCPS

Director of Peer Services, NYC Health + Hospitals Office of Behavioral Health, with extensive experience as a supervisor of peer specialists with lived experience as a peer specialist. Board Member, Baltic Street Wellness Solutions

Gita Enders shares with her peers the lived experience of a mental health challenge. She currently holds the position of Director of Peer Services in the NYC Health + Hospitals / Office of Behavioral Health, where she oversees numerous health care delivery system activities and concerns impacting individuals who use mental health, substance use, and co-occurring treatment services, and provides oversight to the NYC H+H Peer Academy. Prior to joining NYC H+H, Gita provided services ranging from board membership to directing training at peer-run agencies in Arizona. She presents locally and nationally on programming and supervision, and consults on the development of training curricula. Gita is a Licensed Master Social Worker; she has a Master's degree in creative writing, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and is a NYS Certified Peer Specialist (NYCPS). She is co-editor of the book, "What it Takes: Wisdom from Peer Support Specialists & Supervisors," and sits on the Board of Baltic Street Wellness Solutions.

Joanne Forbes, Ph.D., CPRP

Founding Board Member Baltic Street Wellness Solutions, peer-run organization in NYC, Researcher, Educator, Advocate, and Author

Dr. Forbes consults nationally on system transformation and peer support service delivery, training,

and supervision. Her research on peer supervision is a seminal work in the field. She is the author of the book, *Madness: Heroes Returning from the Front Lines* and co-editor of *What It Takes: Wisdom from Peer Supporters and Supervisors*

Books by the Co-Editors

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