

Peer Support Specialist Times

"Recovery and healing happen in relationship." - PSL for the 21st Century

Are we evolving or revolving? Running in circles or rising to a new level?

By Lori Ashcraft



In behavioral health circles (pun intended) we often talk about **revolving doors**. This is a disparaging term we apply to distressing situations of unsuccessful treatment efforts that results in people returning often to our programs, trying to get relief from their pain.

When people pass through our "revolving door" voluntarily or otherwise, our disappointment and frustration with our failed treatment methods sometimes tempts us to blame them for the treatment failure. We may want to see the problem as being their fault. We may call them names like treatment resistant, uncooperative, non-compliant. We may say they are drug-seeking, manipulative, and have no insight. We may say that they got themselves stuck in the revolving door, but we know better. It's tempting and convenient to blame them and certainly a lot easier than fixing the problem, **which can't be fixed until we take a hard look at our programs and ask ourselves what we need to do differently.**

Let's think of it this way: You and I are going into a store that has a revolving door. We wait until an opening appears and we jump in it and exit the other side. Now, let's catch our breath, jump in again and exit to the outside once more. We can do this several times, but no matter how often we do this **we will always come out at the same place on each side of the door.** In other

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Are we evolving or revolving?

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words, we will be going in circles and not really getting anywhere.

Now, let's you and I get on an escalator in order to



get to the next floor up. We get on at one level and exit at a higher level. We are not going in circles but rising to another level. There's a saying, often attributed to Albert Einstein, that says, "*We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that we used when we created them*" or "*You cannot solve a problem with the same mind that created it*". **In other words, let's stop going through the revolving door and get on an escalator!!!**

So how do we do this? How do we stop running in circles and rise to a new level of problem solving? This will be different for all of us but the first steps will be the same, no matter where we are in our evolutionary process. And unlike other first steps in most processes, this first step may be the hardest step, so we just have to approach it with discipline and intention and maybe a prayer. This step requires us to stop name calling (yes, clinicians, peers, doctors and nurses get called names too) and join with each other, clinicians, doctors, nurses, peer support specialists, and people being served, and through a shared sense or responsibility, begin to find better answers. **This means sincerely listening to each other without judgment, and with the intention of really understanding each other's point of view.**

CMPSS Specialization

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Training for Parent, Caregiver, Family Member Peers-Supporting Family Resilience

40 hours [32 CES available upon request]

The "Supporting Family Resilience" course is a fun, skill-based, and highly interactive workshop for individuals providing specialized peer-to-peer family member and caregiver support services. This 40-hour learning experience will prepare and equip participants with the latest generation of knowledge, skills, and tools for providing, promoting, and empowering family resilience.



CMPSS Specialization Training for Justice Involved Peers—Recovery, Resilience, and Reintegration

40 hours

This dynamic 40-hour, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how to provide person-centered support to individuals with justice involvement experiences.



The Puzzle of Specialty Courts: Piecing it Together through Peer Support

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By Gloriana Hunter



It started with a puzzle. Not the kind you dump out of a box, but one made of people—each holding a piece of something bigger than they realized.

I was facilitating **Recovery, Resilience, and Reintegration**, an advanced specialty training for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) who work with people who are justice-involved.

One of our exercises focused on identifying the specialty courts in the CMPSS's counties. Specialty courts are courts that focus on helping people who are facing challenges like mental health issues, substance use, or veterans' needs—offering support and services instead of just punishment.

I gave them a checklist of county courts published by the state and thought it would be a quick check-in. After all, many of the CMPSS's had worked with people involved in the justice system. I expected this part to be easy.

But it wasn't.

What I found instead was that everyone in the room had only parts of the story. Some knew a little about mental health court, one had heard of veterans' court. One person had supported someone in drug court, but didn't know it was a specialty court. The information was scattered—like puzzle pieces spread out on a table. The group started realizing that everyone had small pieces of information—but no one had the full picture.

So we kept talking. Looking at the court names. Asking questions. Telling stories. Bit by bit, the pieces fell into place.

Someone remembered that a treatment program was connected to a court. Another clarified what a community court actually did. We even discovered that a new community court was about to open. They had all heard of it, but because it had a confusing name, no one knew it was a court at all. **By the end, the puzzle was complete.** The group had mapped out the specialty courts in their counties and understood what each one did.

It was a powerful moment. The CMPSS's in the room now had a deeper understanding—not just of the courts, but of how much stronger we are when we share knowledge and work together. **We may all hold different pieces, but when we bring them together, we create something stronger. Something clearer. Something that can truly change lives.**

Recovery Practices for Ethics and Law for Peer Support

6 hours [6 CES available upon request]

This fun six-hour dynamic, skill-based, and wholly interactive course will provide participants with an understanding of how the recovery movement and principles became the foundation for peer support ethical codes as well as many laws regulating behavior healthcare and psychiatric treatment.



CRRS Update

Program Update – Peer Support Training Initiatives

Since April 1, our team has made significant progress in delivering high-impact training programs across California, with a focus on expanding the capacity and skill sets of Peer Support Specialists working in various behavioral health settings.



We have successfully completed **three Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) Certification trainings**, including **one onsite training in Orange County**.

These sessions have supported peer specialists in meeting the California Department of Health Care Services requirements for certification and helped

prepare them for roles in a wide range of behavioral health environments. The trainings combined foundational competencies with real-world applications to ensure that participants are well-equipped to deliver peer-based services that align with state and county standards.

In addition to CMPSS certification trainings, we conducted a **40-hour Recovery Responders training for Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH)**.

This intensive training was designed to prepare peers to provide immediate and culturally responsive support during crises, with a focus on trauma-informed care, communication skills, and ethical engagement. The training received positive feedback for its depth and relevance to front-line peer work.

We also led **three Suicide Peer-Vention trainings for Los Angeles County DMH**, focusing on early identification, peer-centered intervention strategies, and collaboration with clinical teams. These trainings emphasized lived experience as a critical asset in suicide prevention efforts and were tailored to reflect the unique role peers play in building hope and connection.

Our commitment to organizational resilience and peer workforce sustainability was demonstrated through the completion of **four Resilience Culture Playbook trainings—two for Los Angeles County DMH leadership and two specifically tailored for their Peer**

Support Specialists. These sessions focused on cultivating a culture of resilience, psychological safety, and reflective practice within peer teams and larger systems of care. Participants learned practical strategies to foster well-being, reduce burnout, and enhance collective impact.

In Stanislaus County, we delivered one **Recovery Practices for Leaders training** to Behavioral Health Services. This training was targeted at supervisors and program managers, equipping them with tools to support recovery-oriented supervision, values-based leadership, and integration of peer roles into multidisciplinary teams.

In addition to core certification and county-specific training efforts, we have expanded our offerings to include specialization courses under the CMPSS framework. We completed two CMPSS specialization tracks: one focused on **Peer Services for Justice-Involved Persons** and the other on **Parent, Caregiver, and Family Member Peers**. These specialized trainings were designed to deepen the knowledge and capacity of peer specialists working in complex systems and with diverse populations, further aligning services with community needs and county objectives.

These accomplishments reflect our ongoing commitment to advancing the peer workforce in California through high-quality, responsive, and values-driven training. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with counties and agencies to build a strong, skilled, and supported peer community.

- Jim Ritchie, CRRS Director of Operations

Viva La Evolution!

A podcast on Growth, Resilience, and Transformation

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